

## Review of the Month

### Lend with Care



This month's £15 loan goes to Emma Ponce, a widow who has raised her

three children by herself and been able to send them to college. She lives in Cebu province, Philippines.

For the past thirty years, Emma has been operating a general store near her residence. She sells food items needed in everyday living.

Following an earlier loan, since repaid, Emma now offers more items such as rice, corn, animal feeds and vitamins, slippers and school supplies. She renovated her store in order to have more space to display all of her products. She is now earning average daily sales of 2,500 pesos (£37.17).

At the right side of the store, she has plans to open a barber shop. She still lacks funds to purchase the tools and equipment needed.

She is also engaged in a hog raising business. Both of her businesses are very important sources of income that helped Emma in providing for her children and let them all complete their higher education. Currently, she have one sow who recently gave birth to ten piglets.

To finance her businesses, Emma has been accessing loans from a local Cooperative. She has been a member since 2013 and has repaid several loans already. She has now requested another loan and agreed to repay it over twelve months. She will use the loan to purchase more stock to sell at her store such as rice, animal feeds and grocery items. She will also buy feeds to feed her pigs.

### World Press Freedom Day

This year's World Press Freedom Day theme "**Information as a Public Good**" serves as a call to affirm the importance of cherishing information as a public good, and exploring what can be done in the production, distribution and reception of content to strengthen journalism, and to advance transparency and empowerment. The theme is of urgent relevance to all countries across the world. It recognizes the changing communications system that is impacting on our health, our human rights, democracies and sustainable development.

To underline the importance of information within our online media environment, World Press Freedom Day 2021 will highlight three key topics:

- Steps to ensure the economic viability of news media;
- Mechanisms for ensuring transparency of Internet companies;

- Enhanced Media and Information Literacy (MIL) capacities that enable people to recognize and value, as well as defend and demand, journalism as a vital part of information as a public good.

World Press Freedom Day was proclaimed by the UN General Assembly in December 1993, following the recommendation of UNESCO's General Conference. Since then, 3 May, the anniversary of the Declaration of Windhoek is celebrated worldwide as World Press Freedom Day.

After 30 years, the historic connection made between the freedom to seek, impart and receive information and the public good remains as relevant as it was at the time of its signing.

May 3 acts as a reminder to governments of the need to respect their commitment to press freedom. It is also a day of reflection among media professionals about issues of press freedom and professional ethics. It is an opportunity to:

- celebrate the fundamental principles of press freedom;
- assess the state of press freedom throughout the world;
- defend the media from attacks on their independence;
- and pay tribute to journalists who have lost their lives in the line of duty.

## Influential Women: Mary Seacole (1805-1881)

Mary Jane Seacole (née Grant) was a British-Jamaican nurse, healer and businesswoman who set up the "British Hotel"; behind the lines during the Crimean War. She described this as "....comfortable quarters for sick and convalescent officers". She provided succour for wounded servicemen on the battlefield, nursing many of them back to health.



Mary Seacole did not have formal British nursing qualifications. Schools of nursing in England were

only set up after the Crimean war, the first being the (Florence) Nightingale Training School, in 1860 at St Thomas's Hospital in London. She came instead from a tradition of Jamaican and West African "doctresses" with knowledge and experience of tropical diseases, who used tools such as good hygiene, ventilation, warmth, hydration, rest, empathy, and good nutrition, along with care for the dying.

She was posthumously awarded the Jamaican Order of Merit in 1991. In 2004, she was voted the greatest black Briton.

Hoping to assist with nursing the wounded at the outbreak of the Crimean War, Seacole applied to the War Office to be included among the nursing contingent but was refused. She used her own resources to travel independently and set up her hotel. She became popular among service personnel, who raised money for her when she faced destitution after the war.

In 1857 a four-day Fundraising Gala took place on the banks of the River Thames, to honour Mary

Seacole. Crowds of about 80,000 attended, including veterans and their families as well as Royalty. After her death she was largely forgotten for almost a century. Her autobiography, **Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands** (1857), is one of the earliest autobiographies of a mixed-race woman.

Her name appears in an appendix to the UK Key Stage 2 National Curriculum, as an example of a significant Victorian historical figure. At the end of 2012, it was reported that Mary Seacole was to be removed from the National Curriculum. In January 2013 'Operation Black Vote' launched a petition to request Education Secretary Michael Gove to drop neither her (nor Olaudah Equiano) from the National Curriculum. Rev. Jesse Jackson and others wrote a letter to *The Times* protesting against the mooted removal of Mary Seacole. On 8 February 2013, the DfE opted to leave Seacole on the curriculum.

Why the 21st century controversy? School history, as we may well remember from our own education, is largely concerned with marking large scale political and military events. It features white men almost exclusively. There is little room for women. When the slice of pie offered to women is thin, competition for who gets it is intense. Florence Nightingale fits the Victorian ideal of a heroine, being white, wealthy, and well-connected. She suffered no racial prejudice and was able, after the war, to set up the first secular nurse training school. Her admirers want her to be the one woman remembered for work in the Crimea. Admirers of Mary Seacole state that she did her utmost, given the fact that she was turned down again and again by British authorities.

The answer to the controversy? We need a broader national curriculum with more room for women in it. We also need to recognise that when ordinary channels are blocked for women of colour, it takes bravery and tenacity of great order on their part to achieve.

Tessa Woodward

## Author of the Month Emma Donoghue



After watching the film 'Room' based on the book of the same name by Emma

Donoghue, I decided that I must read the book myself. I found it captivating, a powerful story of a mother and her young son, whose love lets them survive the impossible. It is narrated by 5 year old Jack and the way in which the author gets under his skin is extraordinary.

I had to read more of her books and I was amazed at the variety of her work. Donoghue's ability to get inside her characters is impressive, never more so than in 'Akin'. In this book, a 79 year old retired chemistry professor from New York has his life thrown into chaos when he takes his 11 year old great-nephew to France in the hope of uncovering his own mother's wartime secrets. Noah, the professor, has never met Michael, his great-nephew and there is a clash of generations, but also of life-styles and attitudes. The interplay between the two of them is central to the book. Noah is a childless and old-fashioned academic and Michael is a streetwise and sullen child, wedded to his smartphone. The writing is understated, frequently funny and thoughtful. The characterisations of Noah and Michael feel very convincing and real, - the book is a delight to read.

Women inspiring action, transforming lives

Donoghue also writes historical fiction, and **'The Wonder'** is an example, set in rural Ireland in the 1850s. An English nurse is summoned to a tiny village to observe what some people are claiming to be a miracle, namely an 11 year old girl who has survived without eating any food for months. Anna, the girl, has become a tourist attraction, and Lib, the nurse is hired alongside another nurse - a nun- to watch over Anna to report on whether the claim of miracle is valid. The book is atmospheric and thought-provoking, a vividly told story of love, faith and superstition.

Emma Donoghue has written many more books, and those I have read are beautifully written, thought-provoking and impossible to put down.

*Jan Tebbett*

### My baby: my opportunity?

The tragic killing of Julia James right on our doorstep, has brought the vulnerability of women onto the front pages again. Although her type of murder is rare, gender-based violence is not, and the opportunity must be seized to talk about it. The statistics are grim. Worldwide, one in three women will experience GBV at least once in her lifetime, the majority of perpetrators being a current or past partner.

Africa has the highest rates of violence against women in the world. I was the victim of an attack while I was there. In Tanzania I did some research on why adolescent girls were dropping out of school. I thought I knew about gender discrimination and GBV, but I was horrified at what I learned about the scale and systemic nature of it. Among the reasons for school drop-out were early marriage, pregnancy, sexual harassment and rape, in the home,

around the home, on the way to school, and *in* the school. In one school we uncovered systematic grooming of the new intake of secondary school girls. *All* the teachers were perpetrators, except for the Head and the sole female teacher at the school. But the Head was guilty by his silence on the matter.

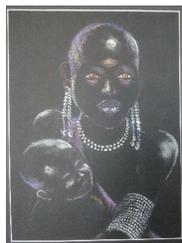
#### Some facts

- One in three women worldwide experience gender-based violence in their lifetime.
- One in seven women experienced GBV in the past year
- 137 women are killed by a family member every day
- 15 million adolescent girls experienced forced sex in the past year (2018)
- 82% of women parliamentarians have experienced psychological threats via social media
- In South Africa, 1 in 4 men in a survey admitted to committing rape

Statistics from UN Women and World Bank, 2018/2019

In too many societies and cultures, men are brought up to believe they have sexual rights over women, and particularly young girls.

I believe one of the answers is to change the discourse on masculinity, and the way it is expressed. To make it more acceptable for men to display feelings of sensitivity and vulnerability, and encourage them to find alternative non-violent ways to demonstrate pride in their masculinity or to express their anger and frustrations with life.



One place to begin is the baby in its mother's arms. I think every mother has the most amazing

opportunity to change the world for the better, through the way we raise our children: to raise them without gender-bias, in a manner which respects the opposite sex, so that girls experience equality and build their mental strength, and boys learn to eschew violence as a method of releasing their inner tensions.

"The Violence Paradox" is a fascinating documentary currently showing on BBC with psychologist Steven Pinker. It includes video footage demonstrating that babies as young as 9 months have a well-developed capacity for empathy, and it shows them making wise decisions based upon that emotion. It also makes the point that listening or reading stories fosters the building of empathy in children. Evidence from very young children removed from abusive parents shows the long-term damage done by early exposure to violence and neglect. Too many mothers, even victims of GBV, allow or encourage their sons to show aggression to other children. How different could the world be, if every mother thought about the adult she wishes her baby to become, and the values and behaviour she needs to instil to make that wish come true.

Where do we go from here? With our limited understanding and means, can we take action on such a global and deeply entrenched problem? What if we were to start a campaign with a simple message: "My baby: my opportunity"? I think it might be effective in certain African cultures, but we would never know the outcome as it would take a long time for the babies to grow up! In Britain and elsewhere, I don't know whether this is a useful way forward. What do you think?

*Joy Stephens*

**Women inspiring action, transforming lives**