Visiting the IBBY Italia Camp on the island of Lampedusa was an extraordinary experience. Thank you to everyone at the Biblioteca di Lampedusa per bambini e ragazzi for making me so welcome and allowing me to share their special space.

The library is a real achievement, a bright, creative dynamo in the heart of the town. I'm full of admiration for what the librarians and the volunteers achieve there.

OVERVIEW

Oct/Nov 2018
Working in the Library on the island of Lampedusa

October 2018
The Royal Society of Literature's VS Pritchett Prize

Sept 15th 2018
Banbury Literary Live

The Society of Authors Reading for Pleasure Award

Sept 2017 - April 2018
Writing and school visits

July 17th
West Cork Literary Festival

June 17th
Empowering Authors Conference

June 13th
Empathy Day

March 31st
Jewish Book Council review of Girl on a Plane

March 27th 2017
North Herts Schools Book Award

March 13th 2017
When I arrive I'm challenged _not_ to be busy, _not_ to perform as usual, but to observe, to learn instead. And I do. I see experienced practitioners slow everything down to a mindful observance that is entirely focused on each and every visitor. I read some wonderful picture books and use silent books (those without pictures) that make such sense in a community that doesn't speak a common language.

The camp is perfect for those who are happy not knowing what might unfold in the day ahead. For me, there are some magic moments. A family of four stand in the doorway, the father encouraging his wife and two small daughters inside. The mother sits down at one of the children’s tables and adjusts her headscarf. Her six-year old daughter clings to her mother’s dress sobbing, a picture of abject terror. I’m sitting nearby with a book open on my lap. The mother tries to calm her daughter and, as she begins to quieten she looks around. Her eyes light upon a balloon hanging from the ceiling. I

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Fish Short Story Competition
January 26th 2017
Thiththagalla School, Sri Lanka

January 10th 2017
Chailey School  Girl on a Plane Presentation and workshop

December: Netley Marsh
Empathy workshops

November: Girl on a Plane
Crossroadreview, US

October 21st: Girl on a Plane
Nominated for the 2017 CILIP Carnegie Medal.

September 22nd:
Roedean School Girl on a Plane Presentation

Sept 21st: Girl on a Plane
Teenreads review, USA

Sept 20th: Girl on a Plane review
Center for Children's Books, USA

Sept 19th: Girl on a Plane
Booklist Review, USA

September 13th 2016:
US edition of Girl On A Plane published

August 13th: Girl on a Plane
Edinburgh Festival Event, UK

August issue: Girl on a Plane
Review VOYA Magazine, USA

July 8th: Girl on a Plane
reviewSchool Library Journal, USA

June 4th 2016: Girl on a Plane
Hay Festival event, UK
touch her arm gently, and look at the balloon. She hesitates, doesn't know whether to trust me. Then she nods. I stand and quietly put out my hand. She slips hers into it. We collect the balloon. She takes it to her mother, who says something I can't understand to her. The little girl looks at me, approaches and places a small kiss on my cheek. I offer her my picture book. She takes it, sits down and starts to turn the pages. Later that day, she waves to me in the street. She's back in the library the following day.

Later, a 13 year-old boy, one of the young librarians, shows me the book review he's written. It's in the monthly magazine he makes with three friends.

There's a poem he's written in it too. I read it out loud. It's very good. He tells me soon he's going to the Scientifíco Lyceo, the secondary school in Palermo on the mainland, where he'll have to board.

I visit the primary school nearby - one of the three schools on the island - and take part in two workshops on gender and identity.
I listen to talks in the library in the evenings in Italian, two by the renowned anthropologist Marco Amie and another that makes a fascinating comparison between the experiences of immigration on the islands of Lampedusa and Lesbos in Greece.

When I have time, I read the island’s history, and am moved by its story. I explore the port…

visit the turtle hospital…
and am shocked by the amount of plastic recovered from so many of their stomachs.

I listen to a heart-breaking talk at the cemetery and visit many unmarked graves belonging to hundreds of
drowned refugees that didn't make it alive across the Mediterranean.

I visit the boat graveyard...
where boats are labelled with the date and the number of people who perished on them. Many have never been identified.

The heavy rain that falls during my visit seems immaterial, as the air from the sea is as soft as silk.

It’s a very intense, very concentrated experience - and a remarkably gentle one too.

One not easily forgotten.
I’m taking part in the International IBBY Camp (29th Oct - Nov 3rd) working in the Library on Lampedusa Island, both with those who volunteer all the year round in the Library and those who find it the first real place of culture and welcome in their journey across the Mediterranean.

More later ....

Delighted to hear that my latest short story, 'Cathy' has been longlisted for the 2018 V.S. Pritchett Short Story Prize - from over 700 entries!