

○ VOLUME 13 NUMBER 1, 2014

FOREWORD

**Writing Through Fences: Breaching the walls through a nourishing practice of resistance.**

**Janet Galbraith and members of WTF 2014**

*Writing Through Fences is primarily a writing group made up of people who are or have been directly affected by the Australian immigration industry. The name refers to the ability of writers and artists to reach beyond fences and walls that attempt to contain, define and silence them. The following poems have been included in this special issue in order for the voices of the writers and artists to breach the walls that would confine them, and to challenge those outside the fences to listen and re-connect.*

*Is it a human being that you see when you look at me? From the depths of my pain this question wells up, and I trust you will open the door to your soul and give me an honest answer (K 2014).*

This question, this demand that we engage with the effects of practices and policies that aim to criminalise, silence and dispose of people seeking refuge from war, persecution and poverty speaks to the heart of our group, Writing Through Fences. It speaks not only to the wounding effects of such policies and practices but to the fact that it is those outside the fences who need to examine their/our own souls.

Writing Through Fences is primarily a writing group made up of people who are or have been directly affected by the Australian immigration industry. The name refers to the ability of writers and artists to reach beyond fences and walls that attempt to contain, define and silence them. The name also situates this group within the long colonial practices of division of country, of displacement and incarceration characteristic of Australia's ongoing racist history. Writing Through Fences recognises that we live, create and are imprisoned on stolen lands.

Integrity of the writer/artist's voice is integral to WTF, thus each writer/artist plays an active and determining role in how the group evolves and whether, when, where and how work is published or presented. Arbitrary detention removes an individual's power to make decisions about their own lives—even the most intimate of matters—thus control over voice and representation are not only essential to the individual writer/artist but constitute a breach of the divisive and destructive aims of arbitrary detention. As these writers and artists voices breach the walls that would confine them, those outside the fences are challenged to listen and re-connect.

Throughout history, writing and art-making have been a matter of life and death. Some of these writers and artists have fled persecution and torture as a direct result of their creative work. The writers and artists of Writing Through Fences engage in acts of creation in order to remain alive, in order to survive. Through these creative acts they bear witness to the practices and policies that are played out on their bodies and psyches, practices and policies that would deny their very existence by presenting them as, what one young writer terms, 'the waste of population' (S 2014).

Over the past twelve months the group has grown into a strong community of creativity and support. It has become a place of refuge for many. Writing and art-making is an enlivening process where the practitioners are able to define and re-create selves that reach beyond and before the current violences they are experiencing, asserting their different experiences, personalities, styles, histories and literary traditions.

Creation is necessary in all times of destruction. It is necessary to ward off the killing effects of despair. It is necessary in order to assert humanity and sanity within an inhumane and insane system that actively attempts to destroy both of these.

You can find our work at <http://thearrivalists.tumblr.com/>. If you wish to support this group you can find *Friends of Writing Through Fences* at <https://www.facebook.com/friendsofWTF>.

Please note that names of writers have been changed in an attempt to provide some refuge from consequences of speaking.

**Janet Galbraith is a poet. She is the founder and co-ordinator of Writing Through Fences. Her work has been published in journals and literary magazines in Australia. Her first collection of poetry, 're-membering', was published by Walleah Press in 2013.**

POETRY

**Writing Through Fences (WTF):**

**Poems from detainees in detention centres**

**Janet Galbraith**

WTF Facilitator

**Squad of death**

This is not the life we deserve  
torture and death for us  
while you observe.  
Fire at me mate  
I have to die  
so you have something to deny.  
Watch me when I to the soil fall  
hit me with swords  
throw me down the wall.  
Isolate me  
let my wounds bleed  
so your cruel fantasies  
you can feed.  
Kill my countrymen  
batter my brothers  
lie about us  
as you cavort with others—  
who persecute and prosecute human beings.  
It is the loss of your own humanity we are seeing.

*Hossein Babaahmadi (formerly incarcerated in  
Manus Island IDC) and Janet Galbraith*

*(Each of us contributed lines that complimented each other  
– HB and JG).*

**My Shadow**

My shadow lives my life  
With strong-mindedness;  
Majestic in character and  
Sophisticated in fashion  
More spacious in capacity and  
Efficient in activity  
Than me and my own life  
Growing out of my strength  
It isolates me from my life  
And seduces my properties  
To maintain its own identity  
As if old enough in humanity  
To throw me away in waste container  
My shadow, that I throw in the earth  
Stretches my body in full  
Shearing the clothes from my body  
With only the skinny left over  
No one can recognize me

*R 2014*

### **When the World Slept**

I was writing  
when the rest of the world slept.  
The birds were singing,  
the weather was calm.  
While the stars were twinkling

I sat outside.  
Looking at the sky  
I suddenly thought:

How beautiful is Allah's creation'

*H (age 18)*

### **One Wish**

If I could have one wish  
I would wish to wake up one day and see that I am out of detention  
I would wish I could have fresh air like a growing rose  
I would wish the tears of my eyes could end  
I would wish I could know when I will be free and being detained is  
over  
I would wish I could have a kind person like a mother.

I would receive drops of happiness from the sky.  
My eyes would really enjoy the brightness of the moon  
the blue of the sky.  
The sun would shine for me all day.  
The clouds would send me birds to offer me their wings to fly.

I could thank the good friends that have been there for me  
supporting me in the most difficult moments—  
the friends who really care for me.

It could be a new day for me  
a day that I begin my happiness  
Life could teach me harsh moments  
but I would know  
I am the toughest  
and I am free.

*H (age 18, Christmas Island 2014)*

**A voice! A cry!**

A voice. A cry.  
From my heart.

Can you hear me?

I want to know one thing:  
Is this my resting place forever?  
Give peace to my heart  
I am weary. I am weary.  
Surely I am too stupid  
I am now in great darkness  
Now my life is in your hands  
I drink water with my tears.

Bring justice to me please.  
I have no choice but to be here.  
Let my cry and my voice  
Come to you.  
Answer me speedily  
For my days pass away like a smile  
And like a void  
My heart is struck down like grass.

I forget every thing  
My flesh clings to my bones.  
You know at this moment  
I eat ashes like food ... and  
mingle tears with my drink.  
My days are like an evening shadow  
Please hear my voice  
Which tells you  
My pain here.

*N (Nauru 2013/14)*

**Dear Bird Send My Message**

Send my humble greetings and love  
to people who are struggling  
days and night,  
who are in every street  
protesting,  
who are moving earth and heaven  
just to help us.

Dear bird send my message.

Send an image of my eyes—  
to Abbott—  
where tears  
are rolling like a river,  
send my heart  
full of sorrow,  
send my mind  
full of thoughts,  
send him images  
of why I came.

Dear bird send my message.

Send my emotions  
to Morrison  
who is enjoying my pain,  
who does not think  
that I am a human being  
like him,  
who thinks  
that I am just a number  
the waste of population.

Dear bird send my message.

Send my appreciation  
and gratitude  
to lawyers who fight  
for my freedom,  
who give me hope  
that someday  
I will be able  
to sleep.

*S (age 17, Christmas Island 2014)*

**My brothers**

*(for the First Nations People of Australia)*

My brother killed other people.  
I don't know why.

The people killed were dark skinned.  
They are dark skinned due to living in this climate.  
I don't know why the dark skin is seen as wrong.

I do know that in this country, Australia,  
everyday people fell down  
and they did not wake up.  
As the bullets touched them  
they fell down.

They did not wake up.

I know that the mother was pregnant with my brother.  
I know that the mother was also pregnant with me.

But my eyes are looking different.  
My soul is looking different.

I am looking at the bleeding blood of the dead bodies.  
I am looking at the bad happenings.  
I am feeling the pain.

The dead bodies tell many stories.  
The dead bodies leave many footprints.  
The dead bodies leave many histories.

I don't know if the dead bodies can feel this.  
But I feel this.

When I am walking the good way,  
the honest way,  
then my pain is crying.

Read my crying poem.

I can't give a life to these people  
but I can tell this story.

*G 2014 (written after hearing stories of the Frontier Wars)*

### **The Rose**

I saw a beautiful rose yesterday, living peacefully in all its natural beauty. I wanted to become like the rose—beautiful and natural. However, today the rose is not beautiful. I felt hatred. So, I ask myself, 'did the rose change'? The rose remains the same in its natural beauty, attracting bees, coming and going. I realised that when I have hateful feelings or when I am upset, nothing looks beautiful in the world. My view of the rose changed, it lost its beauty. I could not see its beauty any more because my mind and my view changed. At that moment, my mind restored and my thoughts cleared and I realised that the rose was still beautiful. The rose never changed. I understand now how the human life is vulnerable and ever-changing.

*G 2013 (still incarcerated after 5 years)*