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 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
during 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)