Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group

GDWG at 25

Welcome to the second of our GDWG 25th birthday editions of our newsletter. We are delighted that this edition features contributions from our friends who have lived experience of detention and I am sure you will enjoy their articles, poems, photographs and original artwork as much as I have.

We also hope you enjoyed this year's GDWG Christmas card featuring a mosaic of a tree using photographs taken on the Refugee Tales walk this summer. While on the theme of trees, look out for the poem reproduced in this edition that was formatted by the poet to create the image of a tree!

Mary Sutton

Development Manager and Project Support, GDWG

ItÕs hard, innit?

By Nami

After the journey of asylum seeking, the journey of language and culture stretches me a lot. For example, if you say to an English person 'Could you?', that is very different from 'Can you?' That always surprises me because the results could be so different. Also, because I find it difficult to say 'th', when I say 'I sink I like dis', people have a small smile. Similarly, I've found there is a difference between a 'punch' and a 'bunch' of flowers.

Still I am surprised about the miracle of the words.

I have just begun to review and contemplate my maternal languages and realize how small articles work in a language.

I say that but I do not quite know how!

I mean If I knew about the small articles, then the English language would not stretch me and make me try so many different English schools, teachers and methods.

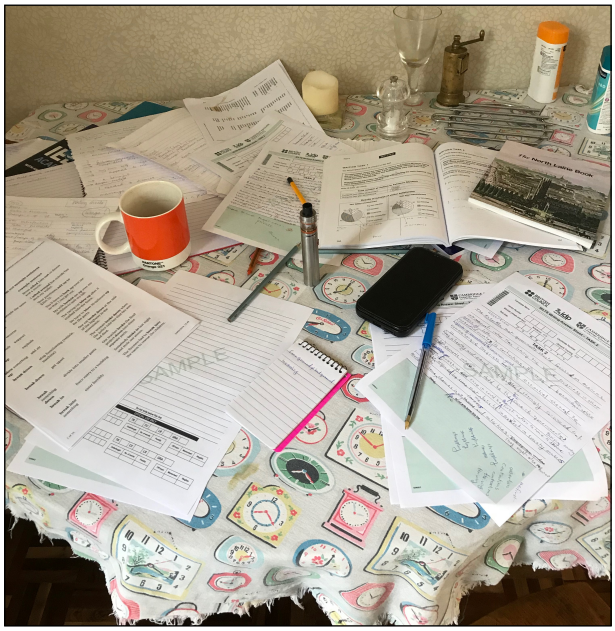
Anyway I am telling you about your own language!

The things that I find most difficult are small annoying things such as articles, and casual two section verbs. Why do we say 'The UK' but we don't say 'The Germany'? I think you all like 'THE' too much - the very thing we don't know how to use. We could fail our driving test because we do not know how to 'pull up', 'pull over' or 'pull away'.

I am always keen to speak about languages and find contradictions in them. The irregular theme in a language can make me both disappointed and make me smile. It will make me smile especially when I find a person who is struggling like me!

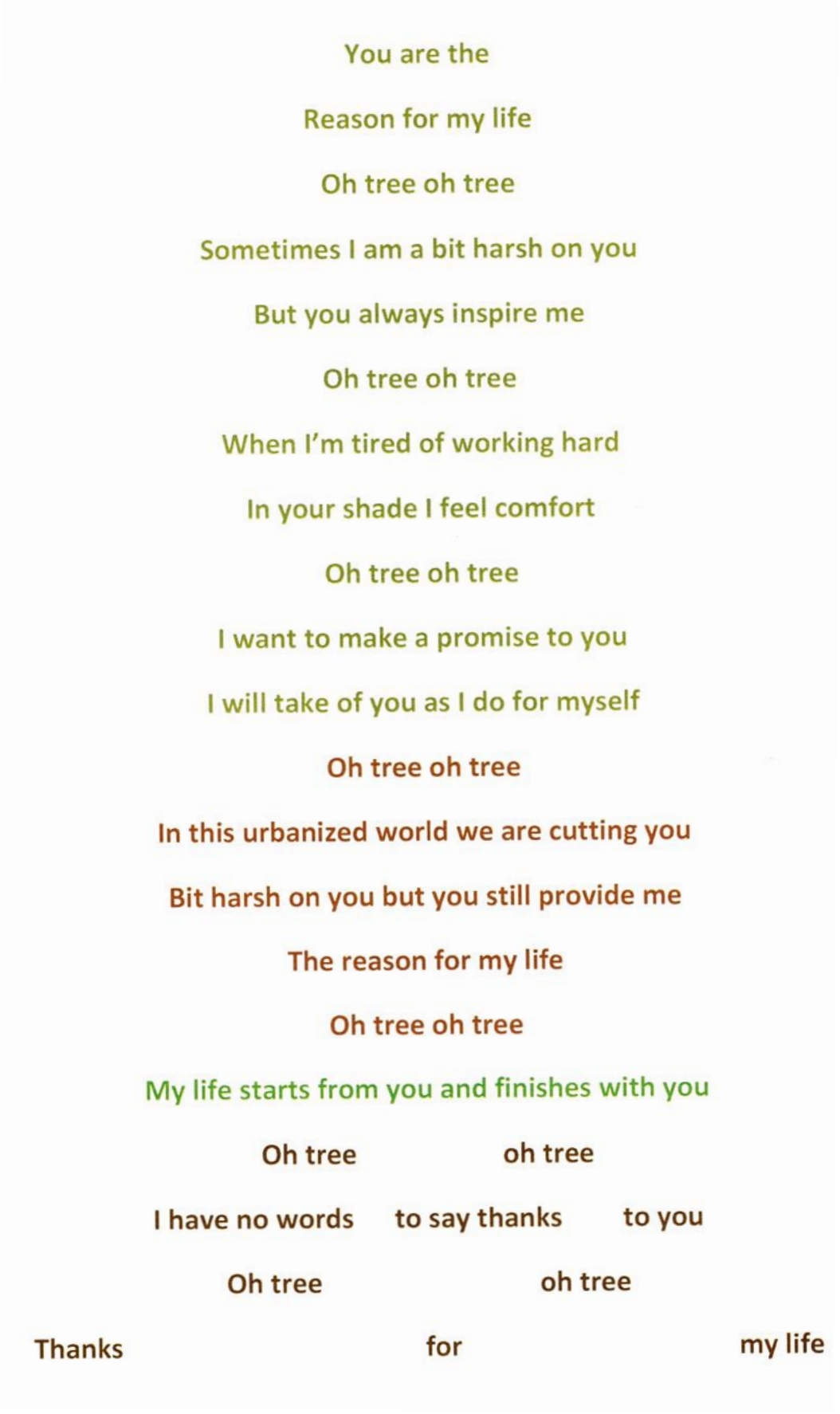
After the campaign to cease indefinite detention I do not mind if I would be the leader for the campaign to cease definite and indefinite articles.

I am not sharing all that I have to say about language, as I want to invite you to join us and speak in person!



Reasons for Life

By Muhammad Iqbal



You are the

Reason for my life

Oh tree oh tree

Sometimes I am a bit harsh on you

But you always inspire me

Oh tree oh tree

When I'm tired of working hard

In your shade I feel comfort

Oh tree oh tree

I want to make a promise to you

I will take of you as I do for myself

Oh tree oh tree

In this urbanized world we are cutting you

Bit harsh on you but you still provide me

The reason for my life

Oh tree oh tree

My life starts from you and finishes with you

Oh tree oh tree

I have no words to say thanks to you

Oh tree oh tree

Thanks for my life

Ubi! (translated - farm, allotment, garden): in Britain and back home

By Emmanuel (in conversation with Mary)

Emmanuel lives in the home of Kay, a ÔpensionerÕ. Kay and her older sister Ann rent double allotment plots. Their allotments are a family affair and many of KayÕs extended family of all ages, including Emmanuel, Erica (KayÕs step daughter), and Golden and Pauline (Ôalso pensionersÕ) work together at the allotment.

At the London Walk with Us in September I asked Emmanuel to tell me more.

What do you grow on the allotment?

Apart from tropical produce, we grow almost everything! Presently we are harvesting tomatoes & potatoes. All the produce is very, very good this year with the exception of the potatoes, sadly! I've yet to found out what happened to the potatoes! We grow carrots, pumpkins, runner beans, French beans, onions, leek, garlic, Brussel sprouts & squash. The strawberries turned out to be very good this year.

Who uses the produce?

Kay and the entire family use the vegetables and fruit we grow. All the allotment plot holders share produce among themselves. There is a community of friendship and love in 'Rosemary Allotment', a kind of family unit. Permit me to say it is a United Nations Organisation!

How often do you go to the allotment?

I go to the allotment two or three times a week. I would love to go everyday with the exception of Tuesday, which falls on my signing day to the Home offices.

How does going to the allotment help you?

Going to the allotment helps me in various ways. Not only does it help me to get outdoors to do things, it also makes me feel nostalgic. I remember how I used to go to the allotment with my grandparents back home. I would wake me up with the sound of a!cockerel early in the morning and my grandparents would get me ready to go to the allotment (ubi). We would walk about half an hour to the 'The Blue Lake Oguta' where we would use a canoe to paddle another hour to the farm land. We would work from early in the morning until sunset when the cockerel, hens and the chickens made their way to the hut.

Being a sensitive and emotional person, Rosemary Allotment helps me to engage in discussions with the 'pensioners' just like with my grand parents. The atmosphere in the allotment is fantastic! You engage with other plots holders or can just listen to the whispering of the birds. Less noise helps me to concentrate on the portion of work given to me. If anyone wants help from me, they refer to me as 'Governor'! It was Ann who gave

me that pet name. The allotment helps me to deal with my anxiety & depression.

What are some of your memories of helping your grandparents on their farm?

I ran errands for my grandparents just the way I run errands here in Rosemary Allotment. Though I think I was stubborn my grandparents could not help loving me. Their love for me was amazing.

I can!recall the first time I saw a European was at the farm (ubi). I was apprehensive! The European spoke in English I suppose and my grandparents responded in vernacular. 'What is happening here I must have thought'! My grandparents spent about ten minutes with the European and then the European departed into the jungle. My mood changed and I became silent & speechless. However my grandparents seemed to enjoy this latest adventure knowing that I would ask questions later on.

I loved to work in the construction of the irrigation channels from the farm to the canal which was the source of water to the farm. I also loved to work with the palm trees. Nothing is wasted with palm trees. They are used to construct huts for shade and when combined with mud they can be constructed into a place to live. This is different from Rosemary Allotment here in London where they use planks to construct a shelter for shade.

My grandparents also gossiped just like we gossip in Rosemary Allotment. For

instance, if I miss going to the allotment because of the Refugee Tales walk this is an open door to gossip! The next time I go to the allotment, I would liken it to parliament! Everyone wants to know all that happened on my Refugee Tales walk. How did I get to the meeting place? Did I meet with new people? Was Celia there?

When conversation on Rosemary Allotment turns to politics in Britain they rip the politicians into pieces! This is just like my grandparents who would monitor every single gossip in town. The most interesting part in the allotment is how they compare past years to the present time period and talk about how things have changed.

So the allotment is a place of memories, new and old?

Yes! One hundred percent! Unfortunately, I do not have photos of the ubi (allotment) back home which is sad. However I have photos of my work in Rosemary Allotment. One of the yearly events at the allotment that all the plot holders attend is fireworks night. We have fireworks and a huge bon-fire. All the allotment plot holders cook different kinds of foods to share.

Rosemary allotment makes me feel like a kid again! I feel a kind of satisfaction which I also liken to the Refugee Tales walk; that is, excitingly tired and relaxed.

Emmanuel's prize winning sunflower

Not just a run: it is a community

Raga summed up the sponsored half marathon she organised on behalf of her charity Green Kordofan in one word – 'community'. Raga's dedication is inspirational and her enthusiasm infectious so it isn't surprising that others are drawn to help. A local community café in Folkestone even offered free hot meals on the day of the half marathon. But running a half marathon to raise funds for Green Kordofan also shows the dedication and commitment of the participants especially when the weather is cold and wet – and this is precisely what Asme and Rashid did this year! Impressively, both Asme and Rashid finished the half marathon in less than two hours – 1 hour 50 mins and 1 hour 48 minutes respectively.

Friends from Refugee Tales have helped support Raga's charity over the years. Some, like Asme, Rashid and Kam (who was one of the first to run for Green Kordofan) have participated in sponsored events. Others, such as Osman and Celia travelled long distances to be there on the day to cheer on the runners. One friend from Refugee Tales donated the funds for a motorcycle that is now used by Green Kordofan workers in Sudan – a crucial means of transport.

(You can find out more about the amazing work that Green Kordofan are doing to support nearly 800 children, often unaccompanied minors, in the Yida Refugee Camp in South Sudan: https://www.greenkordofan.com)

Art Classes

By Gui Yang Lee

I went to art classes while I was in detention. Life is absolutely miserable in detention. Painting helped me escape from the reality of my situation. It helped to pass the time. But it gave me more than that. It made me feel that I can still do something good for myself. The process gave me a good feeling – a feeling of achievement. And it felt very good when other people looked at my paintings and said nice things about them. It made me feel a sense of success.! I valued myself.

Serendipity: an embroidererÕs fairy tale

Good English - will I ever have 'good English'? A language so full of idioms. I am a young man, an only son, a tailor, a refugee, and English is not my first language. English is maybe the richest language in vocabulary. But my language, Farsi or Persian, is maybe the most beautiful language. It is the language for poets.

Luck can come from tragedy: it's an ill wind that blows nobody any good. The good that blew to me is embroidery. People who suffer trauma have busy minds. Too busy. Not like a butterfly - but like a mass of angry insects. My head could explode! Here and now. Focus. In the present, but also in history. In the upper rooms of Hampton Court Palace - home to Henry the VIII a king with too many wives. Home, now, to the Royal School of Needlework (RSN). Some peace. Stitching keeps my mind still.

In death the body of Alan Kurdi briefly caught the world's attention. One family's three-year old tragedy became an emblem for the desperate plight of millions of Syrian refugees. And all asylum seekers and refugees. In Hampton Court some of the ladies who work at the RSN talked about the hopelessness. They would like to help - but what can you do, four storeys up in a palace? That week my friend rang them to ask: would you be willing to let an asylum seeker attend your day classes? They said "Yes".

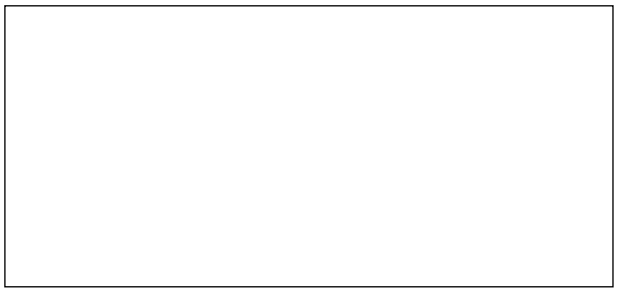
Finding myself in a UK detention centre left me numb. Despairing. Confused. Five months, the first stay. Two more stays over five more years of waiting. It makes you ashamed. Worthless. Your mind is busy. Your body is in prison. Outside, you have to sign. You can't work. You are worthless. Your mind is busy, afraid. Your body is outside the bars - but your mind is still in prison.

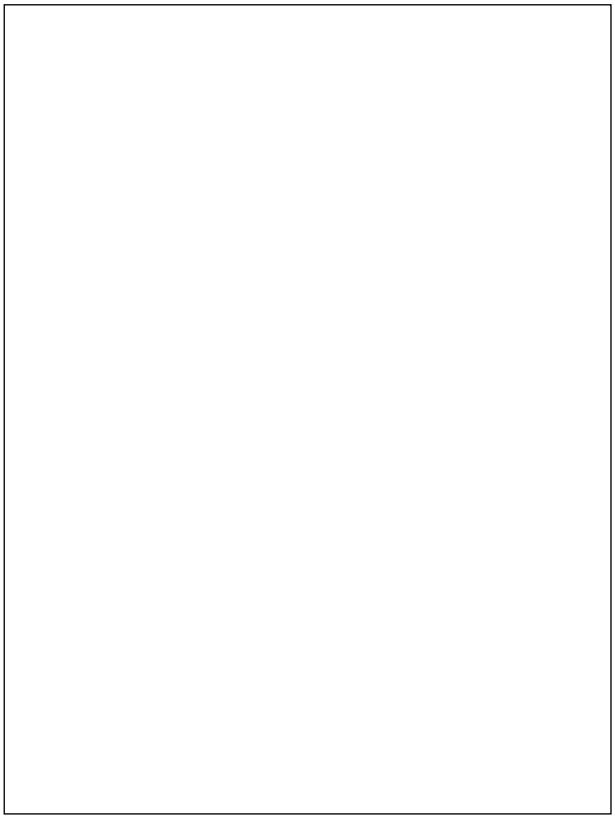
Valuable clothes are sometimes worn by the poor: a new set of vestments embroidered for a Benedictine Abbey to be ready for Christmas. Beautiful, beautiful clothes for monks who have taken their vows of poverty. A call from the RSN: "We know you can't work. So we can't pay you, but could you help us hem and line some chasubles and dalmatics?" Stitching quickly, my mind is calm - in those moments.

Things are rarely all bad. Even in bad places. In Brook House detention centre I met a monk. I'll call him Father John. I didn't know the world had monks, or nuns. But even without language you can sense kindness. The monk told me about the Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group and asked if I would like a visitor? Two came. First Anna. Then Lynne. They are so kind. The monk and the visitors. They were the start of good things in bad places.

Unintentionally my tale has become a Persian fairy tale. I went to Hampton Court every day for a week, approaching Christmas in 2017. The vestments were finished. They were sent to the Abbey. Each priest and deacon must have looked like King Solomon. In the New Year Lynne came to visit me. I talked to her about the vestments. About sewing. About my busy mind. She asked me, "Did you know Fr John is from that Abbey? Do you know the word serendipity? It means ÒGood luck in Þnding valuable things unintentionally?Ó I googled it. The word comes from a Persian fairy tale - The Three Princes of Serendip.

Serendipity: An embroidererÕs fairy tale was written by the embroiderer whose work was featured on last yearÕs GDWG Christmas card.! The photos below show a different handmade garment to the ones mentioned in his article in this newsletter but they still illustrate his skill for making beautiful garments.! The garment in this photo was commissioned by a priest.





Hopes for GDWGÕs new parliamentary group

By David

Immigration detention is one of the worst thing any human should endure in his or her life.

My name is David. The majority of us who are detained are not meant to be detained but because we do not have a voice, policy makers take advantage making laws that destroy the lives of people they are meant to protect. The UK government knows very well that this practice violates many international laws including human rights laws.!

In my own case I was detained for three and a half years and all in all I have been waiting for a decision on my case for ten years. Even after being released I feel I am still being detained because of the limits that are placed on me. One thing I would like to say to the policy makers is to take a look at this punishment and especially the impact of detention on my mental health. I was a healthy person but since detention my life has never been the same even though I try on a daily basis to be myself.

It has been my dream to go to school to study economic policy but the governmentÕs immigration policies have stopped me achieving my dream of becoming that Economist. It is so hard to understand why I can't study whilst waiting for a decision on my case.! Looking back today I could have achieved a lot in my life with education. Instead the prolonged asylum procedures, prohibition from working,