

GATWICK DETAINEES WELFARE GROUP



GDWG at 25

The third edition of our GDWG 25th Birthday newsletters comes at a time when we stand in solidarity with all those in the #BlackLivesMatter movement calling out systemic racism such as that manifest by immigration detention. It comes at a time of suffering and loss with our community having lost loved ones, people acutely fearful unable to observe social distancing in detention, people released from detention during lockdown facing acute hardship and everyone experiencing very different lives and ways of sustaining relationships. Moving to giving people phone support, to home-working, to post-detention support is the unexpected backdrop to this edition and you will read of the poetry group our visitors have turned to online to sustain them and of how it feels to 'solitary walk' in Canada. Also inside are accounts of some of our activity before lockdown including a trip to parliament, a birthday photo project, Jumblebee, how it was to visit face to face, and to volunteer in the office. Thanks to everyone who contributed to this newsletter. Thanks to all our community for your extraordinary hard work at this time of need, to all the visitors who returned to help us give phone support because they were so moved by the plight of people 'locked up in lockdown'. You'll find a great deal of hope in these pages. Thank you for your support. Stay safe and well.

Anna Pincus
Director, GDWG

Refugee Tales Online

Refugee Tales 3rd to 5th July will be an online festival and you will find the programme on our website www.refugeetales.org. You can expect new tales by Christy Lefteri, Simon Smith, Dina Nayeri and Robert Macfarlane, music from around the world including new compositions inspired by our work. Hosts this year include Raymond Antrobus and Patrick Gale. Tales in the first person by people with lived experience will be heard and Kasonga will give a talk. Ridy who is part of our self-advocacy parliamentary project will be in discussion with Shami Chakrabarti. There will be walking but it will follow government guidelines at the time and may be solitary and responsible socially distanced walking. Whether we are permitted to undertake walking at home, in our locality, or further away, we shall be reflecting on the theme of 'bridges' on our walks. How appropriate this theme seems for GDWG with our visitors so frequently a bridge from detention to life outside; crossing between two worlds. If you join our online events and walk, we shall be asking you to take photos of bridges and to reflect on the theme. And the beauty of this year's manifestation of Refugee Tales is that people can join us from all over the world. There is no cap on numbers. Our message can spread. Please keep the dates!

25th Birthday Photo Project

By Simon Way

It was on a trip to Copenhagen in April 2019 that I saw a press photo exhibition showcasing the lives of people in detention. The state didn't know what to

do with them and they were stuck in an endless cycle of bureaucracy. What also really stuck with me was some children had been almost entirely brought up in detention. On returning to the UK I was compelled to learn more about what situation here. You hear headlines, but the people behind the headlines are all individual; all with a story and none just a statistic. Even less known about are the selfless people working tirelessly with these individuals to support them through this dire situation. A voice for those whose voices are not heard.

So, I ended up meeting Anna and her inspiring staff team at the Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group and began shooting portraits and hearing the stories they have had working with people in detention. The stories varied enormously but the underlying theme was human kindness, a willingness to try and do good in an environment where it is far from easy and really seeing the person they are trying to help. I take my hat off to all of them, I am inspired by the level of



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determination, guts and belief that their work will act as a tool for change.

The resulting thirteen portraits with excerpts from my meetings with the subjects of the photo shoots appear in the 2019 Annual Review of GDWG. I hope you enjoy the series! *Photos by Simon Way* (<https://www.simonway.co.uk>)

Another Kind of Journey

By Ann Locke

I returned from walking the Camino de Santiago in 2014 - something I had wanted to do for a long time. My husband and friends had helped me achieve this, for which I was very grateful.

After a few months of attaining this achievement, I was plunged into a state of depression and anxiety which lasted four years. I wasn't able to answer emails or engage in all the things that had been important to me. I couldn't talk to friends or leave the house. Shopping was awful; I didn't know what to buy or to cook. I didn't function as I had before. I had been involved with GDWG since it began and knew it was a wonderful charity with wonderful people, being voices for those whose voices were not usually heard in detention. I had a sense of shame about who I was. How could I - a middle-class woman with so much going for me - feel depressed and anxious compared to the young men in detention who had lost family, friends and hope?

Medication didn't help me; I went for talking therapy. At the time, I didn't think this was helping either, but as I gradually, after four years, came out of the

depression, I realised that it had helped after all.

I needed to write and thank the friends and family who hadn't given up on me. I especially wanted to thank GDWG for gently encouraging me back. (I am not yet ready to return to visiting but hope to visit one day soon).

As this charity, with its dedicated staff and volunteers, celebrates 25 years of serving people in detention and sometimes their families too, we must remember to be kind to ourselves, have fun, relax, garden, walk a dog, etc. This particularly applies to the office staff who are daily witnesses to the suffering of those detained and also to the Refugee Tales organisers; the fundraisers; the Trustees to name just some of the people involved in this exceptional charity.

I would like to offer my personal congratulations to GDWG on 25 years of supporting people who have been



marginalised and forgotten - but not by us. It's a sad truth that the need for GDWG is unlikely to diminish, but we have the commitment and the talent to carry on with our work.

Note to readers: *Ann is undertaking a 25 Challenge for GDWG in our birthday year and she and her dog, Teddy, are dancing 25 dances in 25 days. If you would like to support her fundraising, here is the link <https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/ann-locke>*

Dancing, Baking, Painting, Cycling, Walking, and On Tour Too!

by Anna Pincus

Ann and Teddy are dancing 25 dances in 25 days. They are dancing the sword dance, flamenco dancing, dancing the jive, doing a clog dance, a maypole dance and many more. They were featured in the Surrey Mirror! We've laughed and been amazed and impressed by the range of 25 challenges our supporters are undertaking for us.

One person is making 25 items of scrubs for the NHS, people are walking, jogging, cycling, an artist is painting 25 pictures, a volunteer is visiting 25 museums all over the world by undertaking virtual tours of them. We have gardeners undertaking gardening projects and 25 cakes being baked. Do you have an idea? Do you know someone who might? Do you have time to set up a Just Giving page and fundraise for us? Know someone who might? Know someone who might donate to one of the pages looking for support? Please help if you can.

We don't wish to be doing this work in another 25 years! Have some

fun now and make a brilliant difference to the charity. We know that behind the fun is hard work and tenacity and we appreciate every gesture of support from every person generous with their time to help us keep making a difference. Every £10 you raise enables us to give phone credit to someone in detention. £30 is a supermarket voucher for someone who is destitute. Please support our Birthday Ambassadors. Here are links to some of the pages:

www.justgiving.com/fundraising/eileen-sutherland3

www.justgiving.com/fundraising/moiramacrae

www.justgiving.com/fundraising/25museums

<https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/andybarnes72>

<https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/stephen-collis1>

Thoughts on Working From Home

By Marygold Lewis

Hello, my name is Marygold, and I'm sure a lot of you reading this will know me from the office. I thought it would be nice to share my thoughts about my experience of working from home so far. To be honest, I had never worked from home before this, despite my long working career, including many years on computers. I always like the idea of leaving the house behind and going to the office, where the work can be accomplished efficiently and with the added benefit of the camaraderie one has in the office environment. Now,

however, for very good reasons, I and millions of other people around the world, have no choice but to work from home.

After a couple of weeks, I got into a good rhythm, and started the day with yoga and my Buddhist practice of chanting. Now once I sit down with my laptop, I feel energised and ready to go. Because of the nature of our work, there are new challenges every day. For instance, at the moment, there are people still being detained at Brook House, and we want to do our best to help them in these uncertain times. We have decided to give phone cards twice a month to help people better reach their loved ones. We are also keeping close contact with the volunteer visitors, many of whom have agreed to continue supporting by telephone, as it is no longer possible to visit in person. In addition, we are organising Zoom meetings for the local support groups, which now have the advantage of no longer being geographically restricted. Most of us have dedicated phones, and I really enjoy talking to visitors and seeing how they are doing.

Of course, one of the great advantages of working from home is being able to get up, make a cosy cup of tea, eat lunch at my convenience and, most important of all, be here all the time for my very demanding and frankly, senile cat, Feather. She is thrilled with this arrangement. The other advantage is that I no longer have to face traffic and a sometimes fraught commute by car to the office, thereby saving on petrol money, adding commuting time to productive work time, and taking away

the exhaustion of the drive to and from work.

I think the most crucial thing though, is that we are now supporting people outside detention whilst also showing continuity in our support for people who are still in detention. We speak to people for as long as they wish, and assure them that there are people who still care in these incredibly volatile times. The vulnerability of people in detention is all the more pronounced right now, and we need to be there to give support no matter what the situation. I am reminded every day that it is a privilege to even have a home from which to work.

May we all, all of us, stay safe!



Jumblebee

By Daniel Eichner

There are many things I will never fully comprehend about humanity. Their capacity for cruelty and injustice. Their beautiful diversity of character, motivation, and humour. But the Jumblebee auction which we held in March held many more surprises for me.

One of the most fascinating things about the auction, especially from my privileged perspective of being able to see all the bids, was noting which items were furiously fought over, and which less so. My expectations on this count were regularly subverted. These bidding wars happened at different times as well. Some items had a flurry of interest early on, and then nary a bid for the next three weeks. Others went 'bidless' for most of the auction, and then in the last few days had several people fighting over them.

However, interesting though the process itself was, more than anything the auction was heart-warming. Not because of the £5,500 raised - though that is wonderful, especially in these unpredictable times. Not because of the awareness raised either, though the increase in social media engagement is great, as are the comments on the various Facebook and Reddit groups the auction was posted on, saying that they hadn't heard of GDWG and would follow us from now on.

No, what truly warmed this weary heart was how collective the effort was. Staff, trustees, visitors, Refugee Tales walkers, advocacy & support volunteers, the Royal Society of Literature, and other supporters all contributed, whether by sharing our original request for lots, donating a lot themselves, bidding on items, or spreading the word about the

auction. We were given signed books by authors, paintings by artists, ceramic works by potters. We received a wide variety of donations from practitioners of yoga, McTimoney chiropractic, the Alexander Technique, and equine therapy to name but a few. There were lots from biodynamic farms, cathedrals, vintage car lovers, restaurants, comedy clubs, shops, football clubs, gardens, and universities. This was truly a community effort, and the auction could not have been nearly as effective without the support of so many wonderful and generous people. The range and breadth of support was astonishing, and I have already had people saying they are willing to donate lots next time, if we want to do it again. I might take a holiday before the next one!

My Experience as an Office Volunteer

By Jen Marsh

Since my time volunteering in refugee camps in both Lesbos and Dunkirk a few years ago; I was moved to volunteer with GDWG as I was seeking ways to support back home on a more long-term basis. Despite having witnessed first-hand overseas the horrors and trauma that people are facing due to inhumane immigration policies; I didn't have much knowledge about the inhumane system back here in my own country. So last year,



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I spent some time volunteering in the office at GDWG, with the intention of eventually becoming a visitor for people in detention.

My days in the office were usually spent completing a variety of tasks, such as checking and responding to faxes and emails. These were frequently requests for clothing, or for phone credit for people who were detained, and who didn't have access to even these basics. Occasionally, I might be chasing up other matters, and most days I would have a list of people to call in detention and check in on, to see how they were doing and offer support in ways which we were able to provide.

It could sometimes be challenging emotionally at times; listening to the circumstances of people detained, and perhaps in some ways it might be even more difficult over the phone, listening to someone who may be in distress and sitting with the feeling that you can't do as much as you wish. However, the support from Daniel, Karris and Marygold was always really reassuring, and I felt extremely supported by the team and able to share any issues that may come up. I found the energy in the office to be compassionate, hardworking and supportive, and despite the nature of work everyone is doing, there were moments of laughter, too.

My time at GDWG has broadened my knowledge of the work GDWG, how important it is, and it has given me a bit more insight into just a few of the challenges people in detention are facing, and these were challenges even before the pandemic! It's my hope that there will one day be a

time when detention is no longer required, but for now the service GDWG provide couldn't be more needed.

Book Review of 'The Old Ways'

by Robert Macfarlane

By Mary Barrett

When I was asked to write a review of a book by Robert Macfarlane I had to confess that I had not read anything by him. This is an omission by someone who thinks of themselves as a serious reader, too often drawn to fiction and maybe passing by something I would have classified as 'nature' or travel writing. How wrong I was. I found 'The Old Ways' compelling and brilliant, addressing many questions about our past and how we are shaped by the landscape and our place in the world.

The Old Ways is a story of walking around a thousand miles along ancient paths looking for the past but finding answers to contemporary questions; Macfarlane is searching for the ways we are shaped by our landscape. As he says in his Author's Note - 'this book could not have been written by sitting still. The relationship between paths, walking and the imagination is its subject, and much of its



thinking was therefore done - was only possible - while on foot.'

The book starts and finishes on The Downs. Macfarlane's inspirations and what he calls 'his guiding spirit' of the book is the poet Edward Thomas who unceasingly walked the paths and roads of southern England. Thomas loved the evidence on a chalk landscape of human mark making: tumuli, long barrow and chalk pits, dew ponds - testifying to a landscape that was commemorative:

Roads go on
While we forget, and are
Forgotten like a star
That shoots and is gone.

From the Downs, Macfarlane walks on tidal channels in Essex, to the northern isles of Scotland and the Cairngorms. His roaming takes him abroad, to Ramallah, to the pilgrim routes of northern Spain and to the icy and terrifying mountains of Tibet.

Along the way he seeks inspiration from friends and experts who walk with him in person or memory. Some of these companions are charmingly eccentric, totally absorbed in the minutiae of a particular landscape. However it is pretty clear that Macfarlane's greatest joy is to walk alone.

I found so much in this book that moved me, but I think that more than anything in this time when I cannot walk more than a couple of miles from home it is his understanding that although we think we are most affected by landscapes when we are in them or on them, it is 'those places that live on in memory long after they have withdrawn in actuality, and such



places - retreated to most often when we are most remote from them' - are among the most important landscapes we possess.

'The Old Ways' by Robert Macfarlane is published by Penguin (2013)

The Power of Reflective Listening

By Anne Jakins

Several decades ago my teaching career took an unexpected turn when I became the manager of a large secondary school department for students with learning needs. Making the curriculum accessible and providing learning support was relatively straightforward compared to the complex social problems the students used to talk to me about. It would have been overwhelming and inappropriate to give advice, but reflective listening skills helped to clarify the thoughts and feelings of the speaker and often provided them with a way forward.

During the current situation when face to face visits are not possible, we are having to rely on phone calls to support people in detention. In these circumstances reflective listening can be used as an effective tool in good communication. I am currently supporting a man from

Iraq who is in Brook House and who I have never met in person.

When having a conversation with anyone under stress, I have always in the past relied heavily on watching key changes in facial expressions and using good eye contact and body language to deliver interest and concern. Now I rely on reflective listening. This gives both participants a chance to understand the thoughts and feelings being discussed. The paraphrased feedback is reflected back to the speaker to help with clarity of thought and understanding. It demonstrates that the listener is attentive and builds empathy, respect and reassurance.

Reflective listening can also be used to enable the speaker to decide a course of action without receiving direct advice and it promotes problem solving and conflict management by carefully keeping the focus on the needs of the other person. Phrases are used such as: 'It sounds like ...' 'I get a sense that...' 'Help me understand...On the one hand...and on the other...'

The elements of reflective listening and active engagement along with empathy and acceptance are likely to help develop a positive trusting relationship between two people. As one of the volunteers at GDWG, I know this is something to which we all aspire.

Locked up in a locked Down Country

By Kasonga

Both in detention lockup and pandemic lockdown, people are at risk of

death. Locked up under immigration power at this time of the virus, my friend in detention has trouble understanding why detention is necessary. Since he does not even have access to natural and fresh air, doing simple physical exercise or receiving adequate health care, my friend in detention cannot accept the inhumanity of being detained at this time. If I accept the pandemic lockdown, I learn how to manage my physical environment and the resulting psychological deficit. But, how can a person locked up in the immigration removal centre experience the COVID-19 lockdown and what does it mean to him?

I remember someone in detention telling me: *"why are they detaining me when they know they cannot provide me with adequate health care if I get the coronavirus?"* Another one said: *"why are they holding me when there are travel restrictions in my country?"* And a high-risk patient with known underlying severe health issues, who was asked to adopt the shielding practice in a small cell without sight and fresh air, said to me: *"how can I practice self-isolation in this place? In reality, the shielding practice will never work"*

When the news came from Brook House that one inmate transferred from prison tested positive for COVID-19, I received a text from a frustrated person in detention stating: *"I could not sleep overnight because of the invisible threat. We are human if people outside mentally disturbed because of the virus, what about us who are locked up in a lockdown country?"*. We heard the cries but the Home Office did not act on them and chose not to empty

detention centres as Spain, for example, did.

People remain in detention because they are migrants, but COVID-19 is borderless. The Coronavirus does not recognise country borders, nationalities, race; people are vulnerable worldwide. Those who are detained after having served a prison sentence take the state lockdown as a triple punishment and those who are detained directly in detention take it as a double punishment. But their common denominator is that they all feel the fear of being treated like prisoners who deserve to be locked down indefinitely. Indefinite detention is mental torture but lockdown is experienced as a death sentence as hope dies in immigration detention. I am in solidarity with all in these awful and uncertain COVID-19 times.

Personal Reflections on Visiting - in the 25th Year of GDWG

By Chris Nichols

2 years of my 4 year's visiting was spent visiting one person whose case dragged on for a long time. At his 5th bail hearing he WAS finally released on bail.

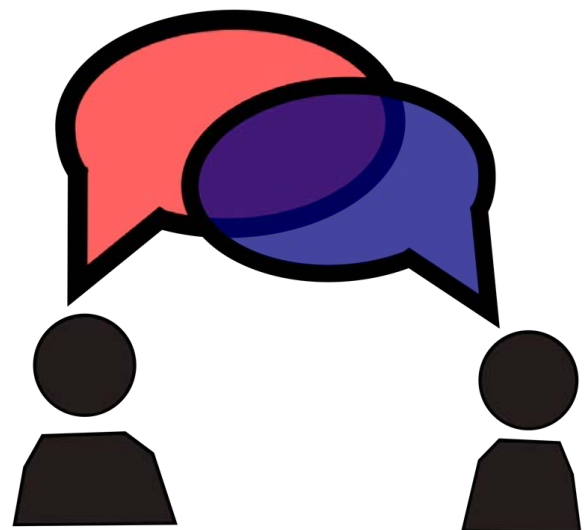
Naturally over two years we'd become close and I've continued to do what I can to help him since his release. This has ranged from support with information to try and ameliorate the virtual destitution endured by bailed detainees, to supporting him with his unlawful detention case, which he amazingly but justly won. Thankfully the damages sum can supplement his meagre government allowance.

The most moving moment of our Brook House meetings was when he was able to

be reunited with his adolescent son, who he'd been out of touch with for 7 years and who I'd luckily been able to find for him after some research. Tragically, his son committed suicide just 2 years later, at 18 years of age, and one of the saddest things I've ever had to do was to address his funeral on behalf of his devastated dad.

I was honoured a few years ago when my friend invited me to his Islamic wedding, where despite me being the sole non-believer, I was warmly welcomed. Sadly, though, even that happy situation for my friend was destroyed when his bride was refused entry back into the UK after visiting her mother overseas.

My friend's courage and fortitude in the midst of the many tragedies that have befallen him truly inspires me. I see how much strength his community and its religion give him. The whole process of visiting and becoming so close to my friend and the other people in detention I have visited is a great gift to me from GDWG. It continues to open my eyes to the reality of stories and injustices I would



have otherwise been oblivious of, but it also inspires me by giving me the opportunity to witness stories of great fortitude and hope too amid the hardship and pain. Mostly though I will always be profoundly grateful to my friend, GDWG and the other detainees I have visited for their gift to me of connecting me to and encouraging my humanity, in this world where circumstances all too often conspire to crush it.



Walking Inside

By Stephen Collis

I suppose like most people, I sometimes walk alone, and I sometimes walk with others. Naturally, both kinds of walking occur outdoors, but walking alone is a little like walking inside: I sometimes lose conscious contact with where I am, sinking into my thoughts, which rapidly become the 'where' of where I am. Walking with others, by contrast, is a mobile conversation, and the sharing of stories becomes the path we walk together. We notice everything around us –the landscape, the birds, the horizon– and we notice each other, our companions on the way, alternating in the roles of story tellers and attentive listeners.

The coronavirus outbreak has meant many things, but one of those things is that now I only walk alone, only walk inside. And I've never before felt how confining that inside can be. I commented on the particular qualities of this limitation on twitter recently:



As an academic and writer, the next project is always on my mind: the next speaking or reading engagement, the next research trip, the next essay, poem, or book I am working on. Everything tilts towards the unfolding process. It's an incredible privilege to do this of course–to live in a state of constant anticipation, plotting and planning the path ahead. Part of what I had been anticipating this spring was a talk I was going to give, to be called 'Walker's Tales: Mobility as Method.' I was going to begin by saying something about my current research and my interest in how we might connect the concept of the climate's 'tipping point' with the idea of the border–especially in terms of how both discourses compel us to think the future: the changing climate, in the coming decades, will drive countless more people towards national borders, and so how we think of the border and the refugee now is setting patterns and practices in place that will play out in new and even more difficult ways in the years to come. So my research now, I was going to say, involves the threading together of questions of temporality and movement, climate and borders, the future–and what it might be like to walk there.

But of course, I won't be able to give this talk anytime soon.

Instead, I will spend the coming months walking inside. I will continue to reflect on what it might be like to walk in the future,

but I will do so with a new sense of what that is already like for many of the people it is my privilege to walk with every year as part of Refugee Tales—people who have experienced immigration detention, who live under the threat of deportation, and who have already taken long walks inside, but who have had to live with a diminished sense of what the future they are walking into might bring, and when, if ever, their confinement—inside—will end.

Of course, we are often counselled to 'stay in the moment,' and to 'be present.' Good advice. But we also inevitably look towards the moments and presents yet to come. It turns out, we are anticipatory beings, and need to glance along the path ahead. For the time being, we are all learning how to live with indefiniteness, with not knowing when this will end and when something new can begin again. And so we are all indefinitely walking inside.

When we do at last emerge, and we find each other again, and joyfully we walk outside together, telling each other tales of our confinement and escape, we absolutely must finally find a way to bring those with us who have for so much longer lived lives of social quarantine. We must walk outside with them. We must not let them be sent back into isolation, uncertainty, and indefiniteness. We must walk together into our anticipatory futures.

Far From Being Isolated

Avril Loveless, GDWG Visitor and Trustee

'Staying Alive: Real poems for unreal times' is the title of a poetry collection edited by Neil Astley in 2002. It seems apt



for our times. Since 2nd April, a group of visitors have been meeting through 'Zoom' to share poetry with each other. Daniel had suggested that there might be ways in which we could share time together during the 'lockdown' period, including poetry, board games and music. Poetry seemed to meet our needs and interests most. We 'gather' on Zoom each Thursday afternoon and spend nearly an hour gently sharing, reading, listening and commenting on our poetry selections.

It is a pleasure to be part of the group. Our choices cover an impressive range of topics, tastes, periods and purposes. Some of the poems speak to our experiences of these times from a yearning for open spaces to reflections on time. Observations of Springtime and nature echo experiences of local walks. There have been memories of school days and poems of distant lands, poignant poems, funny poems, and some

recitations from memory of poetry learned with mother. Since our first session we have listened to over 40 poems and our selections cover many centuries, countries and cultures - from Rumi to Rosen. We are far from being isolated.

A Visit to Parliament

by Isobel Sutherland

On Friday 6th March, our Experts-By-Experience advocacy group had the opportunity to experience a tour around the Houses of Parliament. The tour was kindly arranged by Rosie Duffield, MP for Canterbury. Suzanne Bold, who works for Rosie Duffield, became our very knowledgeable tour guide for the afternoon. We would like to express a special thanks to Rosie, Suzanne and all their office team. Thank you for providing us with an afternoon we shall never forget.

Our Experts-By-Experience group was formed last year in response to an ever changing political climate. It is formed of 12 people who have lived experience of detention, alongside mentors who include volunteers, office staff and trustees. The advocacy group is still in its formative stages; as a collective, the principles, values and objectives of the group are constantly being discussed and re-evaluated. The decisions are all made by our experts. One of our main objectives decided upon was to persuade people in power (MPs) to vote for change on detention matters.

After the group met at St Margaret's Lothbury we travelled to Portcullis House. We should also say a special thanks to Rector Jeremy and the community of St

Margaret's Lothbury for their warmth and hospitality. As we travelled on the underground, there was a sense of anticipation and excitement in the air. We arrived at busy Westminster station. It was a warm Spring day and we saw street performers, traffic whizzing by, and people in a hurry. When we saw the imposing Houses of Parliament, one member of the group commented on the beauty of the building whilst thinking about who had been inside: the Queen, Nelson Mandela, and presidents from all over the world. We all took a moment to gather our thoughts and then inside we went. We went through the entrance at Portcullis House which was slightly nerve-racking because of the security checks and armed guards. We got through, Suzanne met us and the tour began.



It was absolutely fantastic! As a group, I think it's fair to say we felt like we saw every single tunnel, twist and turn in the entire building. We saw the very grand robing room where Ridy took a liking to the regal chairs. We walked through the Central Lobby, where we admired the huge statues. And through to the Royal Gallery where we saw beautiful paintings being displayed. It really was

brehtaking. Everyone loved the antiquity of the place.

Each room we went into, and every corridor we we walked down, I thought to myself "if only the walls could talk!" We were all curious to find out which were the rooms where decisions were made and where were laws scrutinised. One of our group loved the high ceilings which did make you feel like a very noble person as you walked through.

The sheer magnificence of the buildings was incredible and as a group, everyone said how lovely it was to experience the grandeur of the palace together. Afterwards the group said the tour had been a wonderful opportunity, and one person said they couldn't really believe they had stepped foot inside the building. It meant so much to participate in this tour with everyone, and I felt privileged to be part of it.

The group had lots of special moments as the tour went on but I think a particular favourite moment was standing in the House of Commons chamber altogether. Everyone felt excited about standing in such a famous setting. It did feel surreal being somewhere that has been seen on the television and internet so many times before. The microphones that hung down from the ceiling, along with the cameras carefully positioned around the room added to this surreal feeling. We were also able to take on the same stance as leader of the opposition in exactly the same place. This was very fun and Ridy performed a fantastic reenactment that made the rest of us laugh!

The tour concluded with a visit to the terrace that overlooked the River Thames and Tower Bridge. It would be fair to say that the afternoon felt profound, impressive and interesting. It was wonderful to experience as a group. We reflected on our thoughts of the day and Ray said how amazing it was to stand in Westminster Hall and how moving he found the whole experience. Ray hoped that next time we do this, we can meet politicians and call for change ourselves.

The tour was amazing and the building was beautiful. However, I'm a firm believer in the well known quote "A place is only as good as the people you know in it. It's the people that make the place." I'm not talking about the people who work inside Houses of Parliament, I am talking about the people who I shared that day with. The most positive community of people has been formed and no matter what challenges each new day brings, these people I know display the most resilience and kindness I've ever seen. The power really does belong to the people.

Goldsmiths Creative Writing Workshops

Our thanks to Goldsmiths, University of London where two creative writing sessions were held for our visitors. Thanks, too, to writer Anna Sayburn who held a follow-up session at our office. The workshops inspired some great writing and here is an example by Daniel who is Senior Advocacy Co-ordinator for GDWG:

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Although we had many intriguing
conversations, dear REDACTED,
What puzzles me most, even a year later,
is your hair.
The shape and style were unfamiliar to
me, you see, and seemed to defy physical
laws.
When we first met, you gave an awkward,
toothy grin,
But as you spoke, your soft, melodious
voice played tones
On those protruding piano keys that I had
not heard before.
Dappled light played across your face in
that sunless place,
My first hint that your response to
detention was different to most.
You mentioned your case only briefly,
fulfilling a superficial obligation before
getting to
The things that mattered – you knew that I
shared your love of philosophy and
theology.
And so we outlasted the sun, discussing
the questions of millennia past,
Forcing me to pick my way home in the
dark, though at least I could.

In that shadowed hall that stilled hearts,
numbing them with despair,
Or maybe caused them to race anxiously,
and shriek in pain,
Yours beat its regular rhythm.
With a quiet smile you asked me of my
faith,
And did not react when I said I had none.
The following week, discussing the
despair of current affairs
Before moving to the comfort of
questions metaphysical,
You gently teased me for my lack of
belief,
But stopped when you recognised the
Melancholy yearning I have for a faith

Like your own, confident, compassionate,
and complete.
As the months went by, the shadows that
danced across your
Face morphed into darker creatures,
Yet your faith did not waver, your
devotion to
A god in whose plan you had complete
Trust.

Eventually you were released, as you
should have been long before.
Months later, I was invited to your
wedding.
There, I met your welcoming family,
Laughing uproariously at jokes in a
tongue both
Sparkling and incomprehensible.
You introduced me as
The only person to visit you in 'that
place'.
Its name is still verboten.
Its name is still verboten.

By Daniel Eichner

Goldsmiths
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

Confessions Of a Would-be Visitor

By Stephen Klein

I have very little to say about my
experience as a visitor as I have not
visited Brook House yet. Perhaps that
should be the end of this article, but, as
you can see, it is not. I will, instead, start
with my one experience of
the organisation:- my interview. "Tell me,
why do you want to visit Brook House."
The inevitable interview question. The

one we all prepare for. I had two prepared answers, one professional and one personal. The personal one first. I am a refugee. Well... actually, no, I am not, but I am the son of refugees. My mother was a German Jewish refugee. She arrived in England in 1938 on a domestic service visa and became a maid in the home of a wealthy Surrey doctor. This was one of the few ways she could get into England. Remember, our friends in the Daily Mail proudly quoted a magistrate in that year: "The way stateless Jews and Germans are pouring in from every port of this country is becoming an outrage. I intend to enforce the law to the fullest." The Mail also produced headlines like "Hurrah for the Black shirts." My parents married in 1941 because my mother was German and my father was Czech. Without marrying him and taking his citizenship, she would have been interned on the Isle of Man as an enemy alien. The generation earlier were less lucky. My mother's parents, already in their sixties were on the last sealed train out of Germany in 1941 and went to the US with only the items they could carry. My father's parents did not get admitted anywhere so his mother died in Theresienstadt and his father was killed in the gas chambers of Auschwitz.

This means that I identify, not with the 'indigenous population' of Britain, 'indigenous' although I was born in Reading, but with all the refugees and migrants who had to struggle to get here and have worked so hard to make this place their home and have contributed so much. There is a history of the families of immigrants wanting to pull up the drawbridge behind them and this is always shameful. That is why, my interviewers, on a personal basis I want to

visit for the Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group.

Why, on a professional basis, do I want to visit for GDWG? I have just retired as a Mental Health Social Worker. For many years I worked for the Mental Health Act Commission, a precursor to the CQC. I was an inspector of secure psychiatric hospitals and learned very quickly the awful power of closed institutions. As an inspector I had the right to enter at any time of day or night. For a time I led the team that inspected Broadmoor high secure psychiatric hospital. On one occasion we did an unannounced visit at 2 a.m. We did not find very much. All the patients were asleep and none of the staff were. There was a radio system so by the time we got to the wards everyone knew we were on our way. However, a few days later a patient came up to me and said 'we heard you was in on Tuesday. We like that. It keeps them on their toes.' I know that being a volunteer at Brook House is not the same as being an inspector. But I am convinced that closed institutions are dangerous and that the more outside visibility there is, the less easy it is for staff to be abusive. I don't want to be an inspector anymore. I want to listen to some very lonely people and try to help them to feel less isolated. I am frustrated that the lockdown means that I can't do my 'job' and that those in detention feel more isolated and abandoned than ever.

How Walking with GDWG Speaks to my Own Work

By Margarita Novikova

I started walking in solidarity with refugees in 2020, right after I found GDWG online. As an artist who makes

oral history online, I research the possibilities of combining storytelling with different activities like cooking, embroidering, - and of course, walking. I watched the "28 Tales for 28 Days" online collection of stories; its concept is close to what I am doing when working with collections of human stories. My interest in the noble purpose of GDWG brought me to the wet Oxford walk on the 15th of February and to Farnham in March, before the Covid lockdown.

We have all been forced to move to the virtual world where the virtual online [Be Heard Museum](#) exists. It's an online interactive storytelling platform I run aiming to make ordinary people listened to. It seems that the idea of preserving real stories in a virtual form makes the platform relevant today.

A few years ago, I decided to focus on recording the voices of people narrating their experiences and to preserve them in the form of clickable engaging stories. As a video artist, in 2011 I was offered by my then collaborator to invent a genre, more intriguing than just a documentary, to capture more than 50 testimonies of former Soviet people. I arranged them in the form of interactive documentary. That collection of individual stories made me realise how important is it, to listen to the voices of those who are normally underrepresented. Since then, I consider making people heard to be very meaningful and precious. This brought me to creating [Be Heard Museum](#) ([beheard.art](#)). Today, it consists of a few interactive storytelling projects, often dedicated to the theme of migration: in 2016 I myself became a migrant.

I implemented myself in the [project about the "special" belongings of the migrants](#) via my own migrant's suitcase which I bought in Moscow to bring my stuff to London. In the project, I filled it by imaginary items belonging to the others. They were eight people arrived in different time in the UK from El Salvador, Kyrgyzstan, Spain, Ukraine, Poland, India, Thailand, and Russia (the last immigrant was the only refugee in this project). This became my degree work at the University of the Arts London; for the exhibition, I also produced an eight-channel sound composition built from the snippets on the narrations, combined with a video projection into the "implicated suitcase".

The idea of speaking about the "important objects" arose from my collaboration with a Dutch psychologist Jacques van Hoof. His charity [Proment Foundation](#) aims to help migrants and local people in Nijmegen, the Netherlands, to understand each other instead of getting scared of what is unknown. They start communicating by telling the stories of their "important items".

Another of my migration-related projects is an online interactive archive of the community project [Destination East Finchley](#) led by Martin primary school and celebrating diversity and migration in the area. The core of the archive is a collection of the migrants' stories recorded by the pupils; one can hear them by [clicking on an interactive map](#).

It seems we are going to travel on an online map for a while. Even the Refugee Tales 2020 are getting a new form instead of the usual large scale community walks.

Black Lives Matter

By Karris Hamilton

GDWG stand in solidarity with all fighting for justice for George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Aubery and all who have lost their lives to police brutality.

Here in the UK, 37 people have lost their lives in immigration detention and a further 14 have died in prison under immigration powers, [according to Inquest](#). See this report from [Medical Justice in 2016](#) that found there is a lack of transparency and accountability around death in detention as there is no central or coordinated oversight and monitoring of deaths.

In 1993 [Joy Gardner was killed after a violent deportation attempt](#). Five police officers raided her home to 'detain and remove' Joy and her 5 year old son. Three of the police officers were tried on manslaughter charges in 1995 and they were all acquitted.

No one was charged for the [death of Jimmy Mubenga](#), a man who died in 2010 after telling guards he couldn't breathe when being restrained on a flight during an enforced removal.

Just last year [Oscar Okwurime died whilst detained at Harmondsworth IRC](#), we are still awaiting the outcome of the investigation into his death.

In 2017 [BBC Panorama uncovered abuse at Brook House IRC](#), showing video footage of staff physically and verbally abusing people in detention. The Crown Prosecution Service considered an investigation carried out by Sussex police,

and decided not to charge the abusive staff members. There is now an ongoing [public inquiry](#) into the abuse only after much legal pressure from the victims and their legal teams.

These incidents here, in the US and across the world are not isolated. They are a manifestation of systemic racism and state brutality. We must continue to fight against these systems that oppress people of colour the world over. We cannot and will not be silent.

Events Coming Up:

Thanks to many of you who have signed up for our Refugee Tales online events in July. Refugee Tales raises awareness of the work of Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group. If you'd like to register to join our events 3rd to 5th July, book below:

3rd July - [Click here to book](#)

4th July - [Click here to book](#)

5th July - [Click here to book](#)

A Tribute to Anne Parsons

We have been saddened by the news that much valued visitor and friend to GDWG, Anne Parsons, sadly passed away in May. Anne was a visitor with GDWG for many years, in addition to prison visiting in Brixton Prison, and she visited with dedication. Anne was an active member of her St Aidan's church community as was her late husband Deacon Joe. Anne brought laughter, sensitivity, kindness, generosity and great listening skills to every visit. She often called the office asking to visit if we weren't quick enough to offer her someone new to see! No person in crisis offered a situation that was too challenging for Anne and she welcomed every interaction whilst always maintaining a resolute opposition to systemic injustice. She always went 'the extra mile' for the people she visited and stayed in contact with many people after detention. Every conversation with Anne brought sparkle to our lives. We send our heartfelt condolences to her family and to her friend Brian.



A photo of Anne Parsons as a young girl when she had to leave her family in London to be evacuated to Kettering.



