



# *ANZ Musings*

May 2017 Issue No. 15

## Manus Lives Matters

*Sister Betty McMahon belongs to a lay liturgy group who support the men detained on Manus Island Detention Centre. The following statement was made by Walid Zazai, currently detained on Manus. He asked that it be read during the Palm Sunday Rally for Refugees.*

### **Palm Sunday Statement from Walid Zazai**

Hello everyone. My Name is Walid Zazai and I have been held against my will at Manus Island Detention Centre since January 2014. I was 20 when I had to flee Afghanistan and I was 20 when I was incarcerated. There has been much written about how horrible the detention centre is.



*A few of our Pakistani friends on Manus wearing MLM T-shirts. They have been waiting for years now, missing their families.*

In short, the food is terrible, the hygiene poor, there are putrid smells and sticky and oppressive heat, the rooms are tiny for many men, there is a lack of privacy, and daily we are treated like criminals. On top of this are all the things we have lost ...and things we have gained, by being here.

We have LOST...the ability to see our families – both the family we left, or for many of us also the family we were trying to reach. For some that has meant not seeing their parents or siblings, but for others it has meant not seeing their wife or their children. I have not had a punch in the arm by my brother, a hug by uncles, a kiss from my mum for nearly four years.

We have GAINED ...the unbelievable burden of our family mourning for us. We have gained maturity and an understanding of the world well beyond our years. Many of us sought the safety of Australia when we were just boys...and now we are men. Men with heavy hearts and knowledge of the worst of humanity.

We have LOST the ability to work. We cannot use our skills and our abilities. We cannot earn money. And this fact robs us of so many other things. We cannot support our families – and many of us on Manus should be the primary care giver of our families. All of us cannot even help our families put food on their tables. For four years we have wanted to help our families – yet cannot. But it is not just our families we want to help. This world is hurting.



So many people need help. We want to work to help widows and orphans and homeless people. We want to help. And financially and physically, we are not able to.

We have GAINED a rest ...a HORRIBLE and frustrating and heart breaking REST. For nearly four years we have not been able to do ANYTHING. The same nothing every day for nearly four years. A rest that has nearly driven us insane. We have LOST all, and any, form of privacy.

We have GAINED....nightmares of the horrors we have seen and experienced. We cry ourselves to sleep and we pretend we don't notice when our friends do the same. For nearly four years we have LOST the opportunity to study – to learn employment skills, or upskill so that we can find work when we are finally free.



*Assam El Sheikh in Lorengau police cell. He turned down \$30,000 to return voluntarily as he fears for his life.*

After nearly four years many of us have GAINED a dependence on medication to sleep. A dependence on medication to attempt to ease the anxiety that continually knocks on our souls and screams 'this is worse than before, you can't handle much more of this'. Here on Manus we have lost the ability to have physical love. For nearly four years some men have not been able to see their wives, or their fiancée. For the rest of us we have lost the opportunity to meet women who one day might become our wives. We all long for special smiles and tender hands and soft lips. We all long for love...and that opportunity has been stolen from us.

After four years we have GAINED the ability to see right through the lies, deceit, and indifference of the people in charge of making the policies that have held us here. The Australian government says they are stopping the boats and they are saving lives at sea. These are lies that cover the whole of the truth. People are still dying at sea. It is simply that Australia is pushing the boats out of its waters. But what they are really doing is slowly killing us day by day.



Recent cutbacks: Main Meal food rations. Fighting has broken out in the Mess because the men protest they are hungry. Some are asking friends in Australia to send them food.

Are our lives not worth saving?

We have LOST friends here.

We lost Reza Berati when he was murdered.

We lost Hamid Kehazei to a simple infection from a cut on his foot.

We lost Kamil Hussain who sadly drowned whilst swimming.

And most recently, during the celebration of Christmas, we lost Faysal Ishak Ahmed because his medical condition was given no care.

But...we have also lost friends we made with those who have worked at the detention facility.

Some kind workers have been ripped from their jobs because they treated us kindly.

And in 2017 we have lost friends who have either been forced, or made to sign deals to be sent back to their homelands. Sent back to danger ...back to the same situation they needed to flee. All of these friends we have lost because of a system that refuses to look at the people behind the problem.

And finally...we have GAINED a small but precious army of people who care.

Thank you to our advocates and friends.

Thank you to the people who act ...who are writing to their MP's and talking to their friends to share the injustice of this place.

Thank you to the religions who take the love for your neighbour seriously.

Thank you to the people who know the equality in humanity and act upon it. You have empowered us and given us a small voice.

Please let me finish by asking you to keep speaking for us, to yell for us, to scream for us. Please keep putting peaceful, but loud, democratic pressure on the people who hold our freedom in their hard hands.

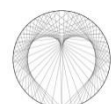
To the Australian Government ...please consider our lives as important and end the pain detention inflicts upon us. Please bring us to Australia. We will make it our home, we will give you our hearts and we, with every action, will show our thanks.

Thanks so much for listening. Take care.



Mohammad Imran, Rohingya, Manus, denied the right to live in his own country, given refugee status by UNHCR but still cannot find a place to live safely. Determined to stay hopeful.

Contribution from Betty McMahon RSCJ



## The Closure of Barat – My Final Obedience

Except of course, for the future awesome obedience to enter the community of the Trinity!

Ageing had been having its inevitable effects on the three of us in the Barat Community, Melbourne ie. Sisters Marie-Rose Droulers, Nickie Flipo and myself, but quite quickly the end occurred.

While Margot was in Sydney to visit family and attend the Post-Chapter Assembly in November 2016, our devoted Health Carer, Mrs Vicki Serle had managed to get accommodation for the other two until I returned on November 26<sup>th</sup>. What was my surprise when I arrived at Barat early in the morning after my night train journey from Sydney to be told by Nickie that Marie-Rose had to remain at St Catherine's Aged Care facility owing to on-going health problems.

So Nickie and I continued to operate as usual for about two weeks. Quite suddenly, as is usually the case, Vicki broke the news to Nickie that a bed was available for her in the same place. About a week of desperate packing and farewelling followed until the day of her departure from Barat. Being still in Melbourne, both Marie-Rose and Nickie had been able to return there to continue their process of detachment until recently when the key was turned in the lock for the last time. I'm not able to say how they felt, or the reactions of the Sacré Coeur Community (by then on holidays), but by now both have settled well into their new residence.

As this move of Nickie left Margot alone, Sister Judith McGowan was asked to come to be with her, and to begin the onerous task of tearing-up and clearing-out after many years of occupation in Barat by RSCJ.

Although Sydney had been mentioned as a possibility for Margot when Nickie heard of her destination, Vicki had put hEr on the waiting list to go to Corpus Christi where Sister Marita Fitzgerald had been for a couple of years. In any case I was to leave Barat, so had to clear my room and pack.

Suddenly we heard that a bed had become available at St James Villa, Sydney, but I was under the impression (being in a state of exhaustion by then) that I would stay at Mooramie Avenue for a time to begin with.

The next news was that Esme was coming to Melbourne on December 20<sup>th</sup> to see to certain necessary affairs relating to our leaving Barat, and to accompany me to Sydney on December 22<sup>nd</sup>. While I continued packing and farewelling friends, she and Judith were very

busy with the imminent procedures for closure. On December 22<sup>nd</sup> Judith farewelled Es and me as we left for the airport – my last sight of that dear place where I had been for eight years.

After a night at Mooramie and still in a dazed and wooden state, Nancy told me that Maureen, the Sydney Health Carer, would take me to St James at 10:30 am. This was my last obedience, and like many others before it, a shock. By 12 noon, I was sitting having lunch with the three men at my table, and wondering what I was doing in this big new community of unknown women and men. Of course, I was given a big welcome by Sister Joan Wister, and over the next few months, helped in many ways by RSCJ, family and friends, so all is well for the third member of the Barat Community. D. G.

Contribution from Margot Crowther RSCJ



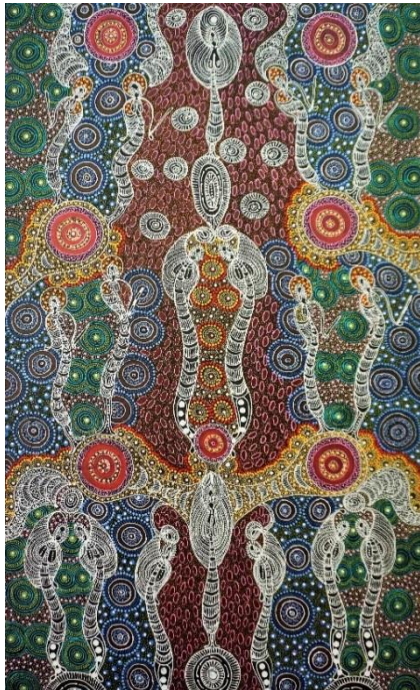
## Dreamtime Sisters

Last year two of our teachers, Alex Cashin and Graham Woodward were able to travel to Alice Springs to attend a conference on Indigenous Spirituality. In his talk “Deep Listening to the Spirit of Place” David Tacey said,

*We talk about our environmental crisis, but what we are experiencing is the crisis of human consciousness. We may need to re-enchant the world and rediscover its sacredness. Once we experience its sacredness, we might act differently toward it. If nothing is sacred, nothing matters. Matter doesn't matter unless we recognise the spiritual life of creation and restore what Michael Leunig calls 'the ecology of the soul'. ...*

*We can draw on indigenous visions for wisdom and inspiration, but the content of our cosmologies will have to be found in our own cultures, whether Christian, Jewish, Islamic, Buddhist, Hindu or others. It is important that our new interest in Aboriginal spirituality does not become parasitic; we can be inspired by the indigenous example, but we cannot steal or appropriate it.*

Our Principal, Kristin Sharpe, had asked Alex and Graham to take the opportunity to purchase a painting while they were in Alice Springs. They chose *Dreamtime Sisters* by Colleen Wallace Nungarrayi. While the painting has its own story, Alex and Graham were encouraged to add our own story to the painting. The paragraph below was written by Sarah Daff, our Director of Mission, to introduce the painting to the students.



Dreamtime Sisters  
Artist Colleen Wallace Nungarrayi

*The Dreamtime Sisters are three Eastern Arrente spirits that were present during creation and are said to be the ancestors of people who live on the land today. They are good spirits who look after the country, guarding and protecting special areas and sacred sites. These Dreamtime Sisters are similar to the Wisdom Women of the Sacred Heart. Just like these three Aboriginal ancestors, our Wisdom Women are responsible for the creation of Stuartholme, both in our tradition and the school we know today. The RSCJ Sisters, both past and present, continue to guard and protect us, just like the Dreamtime Sisters of the painting do with their people and land.*

Contribution from Rita Carroll RSCJ

