



# Electronic Candle

## THE IMMENSE POWER OF THE WRITTEN WORD

Welcome to Electronic Candle, a compilation of writing produced by members of Amnesty Creative Writers.

Amnesty Creative Writers is a forum for writers of all abilities and backgrounds to inspire each other in our pursuit of writing about human rights and its complex interplay with politics, social issues and human behaviour. It's a space for Amnesty members to experiment with different forms of writing, fiction or non-fiction, within a supportive group, to share, learn and nurture our writing passions.

Above all to utilise the immense power of the written word, to inform, provoke debate and ultimately entertain.

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Characters within stories are the currency of writers. Distinct from stereotypes, characters have a unique depth and complexity, and yet often as in real life, certain traits emerge, readily identifiable with a particular group.

If I were to write the story of an Amnesty activist, one of the defining characteristics would undoubtedly be the ability to routinely dig into their creative tool box to find ingenious ways of communicating a potent message. Ideas, opinions and passion are the props that sustain activists, responding to social and political events and keeping the fire burning for those absent from news headlines.

Creative writing is one such tool, touching our emotions and imagination, affording us a glimpse of another's world, another's perspective or another's distress.

In this compilation I've brought together a range of writing genres and themes, reflecting the events and issues that captured the imagination of Amnesty activists and shared the fruits of their labour with the group.

The nature of compilations means that all additions to our steadily increasing pool of writing

cannot be included. However, many pieces have been shared at conferences and local events and taken into schools as a platform to facilitate discussion. We hope to continue working with Amnesty activists and groups in the future.

We always welcome new members, but for anyone daunted by the prospect of putting pen to paper, writing need not be convoluted and littered with hidden meanings. It can be simple, make a point or express an emotion. It can be personal, cathartic or

## AMNESTY CREATIVE WRITERS

*Sunita Crowley*

*“A space to share, learn and be inspired.”*

Two years ago, on a whim during a London conference, having completed a couple of creative writing courses, the idea of an Amnesty writers group took shape. Originally named London Amnesty Writers Forum, my aim was to seek out writers from within the ranks of the Amnesty membership, to encourage new writers to put pen to paper and to provide a space to share, learn and inspire each other.

simply convey a message which may otherwise slip by the wayside, hidden amongst the general chatter of daily conversation or consigned to the deep recesses of our minds. On a page, those few words and ideas can be reflected upon, returned to and on occasion shared.

We hope you enjoy this collection.

*We have many ideas for future writing projects. Please get in touch if you would like to get involved.*

## THIS IS DIGNITY

I won't cry for Natalia. She was too brave.  
I will mourn and regret. She was courageous.

So rather I will celebrate her life, her work,  
Feel glad that even in the darkest night, a candle  
Always ends up getting lit, and just enough  
For somebody to see what's going on,  
And take up pen and paper, and record it.

"Everything that happens is recorded in the mind  
Of God." Simon Wiesenthal said that. So wise.  
But law, democracy, and justice can not rely  
On just the mind of God.

Natalia called on all of you – the leaders,  
Politicians, self-important public servants,  
To hold yourselves responsible, to do the proper thing,  
And value life, a single person's life, if it be  
Friend or foe, and to respect it, give it rights,  
Allow it dignity.  
They are the ones who failed, the ones who saw  
The democratic death, and sit there still,  
Unmoveable, dehumanised.

So I will celebrate Natalia as a symbol, a life  
Lived out in stress and danger, and always watched,  
Accounted for, a target.

Here they tell us we are free to be ourselves,  
"Because you're worth it!" – But I look  
Over my shoulder, see a camera, a form to fill,  
And wonder if we too will face that prisoner fate.

If those who write the truth are faced with death,  
If those who speak against injustice, and all those  
Who want a better world and shout that out,  
If all those people become targets, not our nation's models  
Democracy has died and all we cherish  
Will just seep and slip away unchallenged.

I stand up for Natalia.  
I shout her name, rejoice  
That she was strong enough  
To write, record, be named.

---

*Tribute to Natalia Estemirova who died for freedom*

*Janice Davis  
Bromley & Orpington  
2009*

## CALL FROM A CHILD SOLDIER

Mamá! – Where are you?  
I miss you at night  
it's so dark in the jungle  
and I don't want to fight

Mamá! - I'm so sorry  
for all I have done  
if I did behave badly  
if I have been a bad son

Mamá! – When they took me  
I heard your screams  
and the fear in your face  
I still see it in my dreams

Mamá! I could not say  
how long I've been here  
is it weeks or months?  
- it could be a year

Mamá! The jungle  
is hot, dark and wet.  
At least we can smoke  
that makes us forget

Mamá! I have sinned!  
at first I was thrilled  
but the thrill turned to horror  
- when I saw I had killed

Mamá! Where are you?  
are you alive, are you well?  
I have asked many times  
- but no one can tell

Mamá! I miss you  
I want to go home!  
But they won't let me go  
- I feel often alone

Mamá! I must go now  
marching on through the wild,  
I'm a guerrilla soldier  
- but I'm only a child

---

*Lene Guercke*  
2010

### THE HELL OF SHELL

The Niger Delta is an erupting volcano  
Of noise, grime, and never-ending light

Huge gas flares burn next to villages  
Layers of black dust lie on school buildings

Oily waste deposits seep through waterways  
The constant hissing noise of gas heat  
Drowns village music-makers  
Their only sound a silent percussive agony

Dust and soot settles in people's homes  
Acrid smells of burning penetrates hair and clothes  
Infiltrates the meagre stores of grain

No meagre profit for the Nigerian Government  
A six hundred billion dollar boost to funds

No meagre profit for Shell and its shareholders  
The greedy grabbers of wealth in this burning hell

---

*Ann Garrett Ashley*  
*Beckenham*  
*2010*

## THE TRAFFICKING BUSINESS GAME

It's a game to some  
Who love the fun  
Who wheel and deal  
Who love to steal  
The innocent child  
False documents filed  
Who make a claim  
Without any shame

Who make a profit  
Before we can stop it

Who leave that child  
To be defiled  
Under the bodies  
Of sexual beasts  
Devouring their feasts

Innocents' alarmed  
Purity harmed

It's up to us all  
A wake-up call  
To feel the shame  
To shoulder the blame  
To stop the game  
To save the poor  
To secure the law

To end the business  
Of profit and gain  
At expense of pain  
To create alarm  
To stop the harm

And end the sick fun  
Of the trafficking run

---

*Ann Garrett Ashley  
Beckenham  
2010*

I guess there have always been street children. There has even been reference to street children in ancient Rome. We are just more aware of them now, or at least, we know now that it is a global phenomenon, especially as urbanisation has increased. We have always been aware of the orphans and beggar children on our own doorstep even if we, or the society we live in, chose to ignore them.

It is not just an issue in the developing world. Charles Dickens wrote about the street children of London in 'Oliver Twist'. Today there are over 100,000 reported run-away children under the age of sixteen each year in the UK - and many of these finish up living for a time on the street. We just do not call them street children.

The vast majority of children who leave their homes for the streets are running away from situations they find intolerable or impossible. There are three immediate reasons for children coming to the street - they are sent there by their families to earn money and become detached; they are running away from physical, sexual or emotional

abuse; or they have been neglected, abandoned or orphaned without extended family support to care for them. In 1993 a street children organisation in Mumbai carried out a simple questionnaire with a thousand street children in the city. Most of the questions were factual, but the last one was, "If you had just one wish, what would it be?" 90% of the children answered, "To have a family who loved me."

## "NOBODY EVER LISTENED TO ME..."

*David Maidment*

A researcher, after each session with a child on the street, tried to offer some suggestion or help. After one four hour interview with a teenager whose life seemed totally wrecked, the researcher could not think what to say and apologised profusely that she could offer no help. The girl replied:

*"You've already helped me. You're the first person in my life who's ever listened to me."*

*UK - Railway Children*

And why are they there? Are they the 'Dick Whittingtons' of this age, seeking the 'pavements of gold' of the world's mega cities? Perhaps a few children are lured to the bright lights of Bollywood in Mumbai, or what they perceive to be their earning potential in Mexico City or Rio or Nairobi, but they are soon disillusioned.

*Extract from a forthcoming book on Street Children by David Maidment*

*Children's Rights Adviser  
AIUK*

## LIKE WATER ON STONE

I saw a brave man in Rangoon,  
 He was holding a flag and singing a tune  
 He sang "Release Aung San Suu Kyi!  
 And give us our democracy"

*[Chorus]*

***Well here's to you, though you're unknown.  
 Working just like water on stone.***

I saw a woman in Afghanistan  
 Fighting for the same rights as any man  
 To go alone into the street  
 And make her own choice who she meets  
*[Chorus]*

I saw a British man today  
 Talking 'bout his time in Guantanamo Bay  
 To the crowd I heard him say  
 "That was not the true American Way"  
*[Chorus]*

The action of a single drop  
 May have no impact on the rock  
 But the steady stream flowing day after day  
 Wears even the hardest stone away

I saw a woman from Beijing,  
 Who went out to the square to sing  
 She sang of freedom and gave thanks  
 To those who stood up to the tanks  
*[Chorus]*

I saw a million souls like me  
 Who are more free to play and sing  
 And with our music make the choice  
 To give the voiceless back a voice

*Well here's to us, though we're unknown.  
 Working just like water on stone [x2]*

Free Aung San Suu Kyi...

---

*Glenn Bassett (aka Amnesty Busker)  
 Listen to Glenn performing his song on [You Tube](#)  
 Performed at the London Region Amnesty Conference 2009*



My parents lived at the interface between two worlds, the one they came from – the barrios, and the one they aspired to. I was only a child and didn't realise that every passing day took me a little bit further away from my shantytown pals. My dad was happy to take along my cousins, whenever he drove us to the beach, and I can still remember their faces, diffident or even fearful, out of respect that we had invited them to get into this kind of transport that their own parents couldn't afford. My best friend was one of my more distant cousins, Pablo.

I remember those magical times, when we ran across the soft sand, and threw ourselves into the waves shouting and waving, overcome with exhilaration and that irresistible feeling of freedom, so exclusive to the innocence of childhood.

This sea, like this land, was ours, and we felt it in the very depths of our flesh, at the very heart of ourselves.

But like everything else, this carefree life had to end one day.

The day I said goodbye to our apartment in El Paraiso, my cousins also came to

take part in the occasion. But, this time, my dad didn't offer to take them in the car.

Somehow, Pablo saw the truth. The expression in those big eyes is still engraved in my memory.

Confronted with that look, words are meaningless. There is no political argument that could ever wipe out, or even diminish, the simple message it gave out.

## TYRANNY OF THE VOID

*Arthur Jarov*

*“This sea, like this land, was ours ...  
we felt it in the very depths of our flesh....”*

We would run towards that blue expanse that stretched as far as we could see, towards a sea that welcomed us as if we were its own. We just became one with it, in a fusion that was both natural and ancient, just like thousands of generations of native people who lived on these shores for over sixteen thousand years.

Dario was never to see Pablo again

*Extract from a forthcoming  
French novel by Arthur Jarov*

*Translated into English by  
Janice Davis 2010*

## FAREWELL GUANTANAMO

*Kareem is the last prisoner at Guantanamo bay. But on the day of his release  
who's actually in charge?*

*Excerpt from the first draft of a black comedy*

Sound effects: Keys jingle and cell door opens

Kareem: **(Screams)** Ahhhh.  
**(confused)** What is this lie?  
This.. This.. .. orange ghost.

Guard: Calm down Kareem. It's only me.

Kareem: PG? What on earth are you playing at? **(slow)** That suit.... Where's your guards uniform? **(pause/suspicious)** And when did you grow that beard?

Guard: D'you like it? Dyed it black too.  
L'Oreal were doing a grrrreat offer.

Kareem: **(Groans)**

Guard: **(respectful)** Anyway Kareem.  
Salam al ekum. May Allah be with you on this most auspicious day of your release

Kareem: Have they been making you watch Ali Baba and the forty thieves on that cultural awareness course again?

Guard: Thief of Baghdad actually.

Kareem: Ah yes. That will be the one with George Bush in the leading role.

### Pause

Anyway, why are you so happy?  
Makeovers and reinventions are over rated. And just in case you

weren't aware of it, your new look isn't de-rigueur at the moment. In fact, it never was.

Guard: **(slow)** Oh I dunno Kareem....  
Something about all you guys singing that same old song together.

### Pause

Anyway, I've got a surprise for you.

Kareem: Not a visit from MI6 disguised as my lawyer again?

Guard: Ow, you know that's not allowed.

Kareem: You mean like torture, extraordinary rendition, imprisonment without trial

Guard: Ah, yes. Sorry about that. New president gives his sincerest apologies and hopes that we can all work together to bring about a peaceful resolution to this horrible mess. And in the meantime, if there's anything we can do to make your last day more comfortable, please don't hesitate to contact one of the guards. That's me by the way.

Sound: Slow clapping

Kareem: Well done PG. Word perfect.  
I received that memo too.

*The beginning of an unfinished play*

On Friday 7<sup>th</sup> May, I awoke at 8am with a sense of foreboding. Three hours earlier, eyes glued to the top left hand corner of the TV, I watched the triple digit numbers within the blue box glide effortlessly into poll position. Despite the initial valiant efforts of Sunderland, the super efficient labour wards were in fact simply lulling us into a false sense of security. A grown up equivalent of the cushion, shielding our eyes from the inevitable.

Except it wasn't quite the inevitable. The Tory landslide was thwarted, not by Nick Clegg, but by Labour party supporters who, however much they felt betrayed by the outgoing government, never quite forgot the compassion of Maggie and simultaneously shunned the Lib Dems regarding them suspiciously as a party for the trendy middle class. And the end result? A seemingly ideologically unhappy pairing. A coalition named and renamed by Twitterers 'LibDem Con' morphed into 'Con Lib

So how did we enter this twilight zone? John Kampfner, in his compelling book 'Freedom for Sale,' points us in the direction of pacts between citizens and the state. Citizens complicit in the erosion of our public freedoms in return for private freedoms, most notably making 'loads money.' In Britain, the pact was sealed following 9/11, the perfect guise to ratchet up Orwell's prophesied surveillance society. And very few of us protested.

For many years I've been appalled at the 'I'm alright Jack' attitude prevalent in many communities and organisations. 'Why would anyone complain about stop and search or detention without charge unless there was something to hide?' says the person secure in the knowledge that they are divorced from any community that could be or has been targeted.

Of course the red corner did make some positive advances, but to quote John Kampfner

*“A coalition named and renamed by Twitterers ...  
... the final consensus ... ConDemNation.”*

Dems' and the final consensus by the democratic Twittersphere was, and remains, ConDemNation.

But, anyone able to defy expectation, having been tarnished with the worst excesses of it's predecessor is guaranteed to intrigue. The cynic in me would argue that the government in its honeymoon period is calming the potential rabble rousers and softening the blow for the harsh cuts to come. However, civil liberties seems poised to cross off the reds from its dance card in favour of the philanthropic millionaires.

once again, *“civil liberties were reduced to a lobby group, rather than at the core of its political project.”*

So here's a sobering thought. Maybe the new coalition has saved us from further erosion of our liberties. Maybe the coalition has saved New Labour from morphing into a completely unrecognisable beast. Maybe the coalition has saved us from becoming a ConDemd Nation. We wait and see.

*Extracts from a piece written following the 2010 election: views of the author have changed!*

### TYPES OF WRITING

The list is endless

- Poetry
- Short Stories
- Novels
- Plays
- Monologues
- Songs
- Comedy
- Non-fiction
- Testimonies
- Reviews
- etc .....

## WHAT GOES ON AT MEETINGS?

2011 ushers in a new 3 monthly rolling programme.

**Month 1: Writing within the session** using prompts and techniques such as free flow writing. No requirement to share your work, we simply provide a space to write.

**Month 2: Reading pieces of our own work.** Members encouraged to critique, but feedback given only if requested.

**Month 3: Supporting the writing process.** An opportunity to pool and share knowledge and ideas gained from writing courses and personal experience of the writing process. eg. how to critique (not criticise), creative writing techniques in non-fiction. In the future, a space to invite speakers – we may have twisted Dan Jones’ arm to share his writing tips.

*“New and established writers –all welcome”*

### JOIN US

- Amnesty members
- Anyone with opinions, ideas or stories who wants to put pen to paper
- New and established writers– all welcome

*Please contact us if you wish to attend a meeting*

## MEETINGS AND CONTACTS

**Where do we meet:** Human Rights Action Centre

**When do we meet:** 3rd Thursday of every month 7pm-9pm

**After each meeting:** Continue the discussion in the pub

**Website:** [AmnestyCreativeWriters.wordpress.com](http://AmnestyCreativeWriters.wordpress.com)

**Contact Us:** [AmnestyCreativeWriters@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:AmnestyCreativeWriters@hotmail.co.uk)

### FOLLOW US ON:

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AMNESTY  
CREATIVE  
WRITERS

*Thanks to all writers who have attended meetings and participated in this endeavour*

*Thanks to Janice for suggesting the title of this of this compilation!*