

A YOUNG WRITER'S TAKE

The 2018 Braidwood Lions Young Writers Festival attracted over 270 entries from the local community. The Festival provided a chance for our young people to express their creativity and develop their writing skills. Entrants' pieces were judged by a panel of authors from our district with awards given for entries showing the most promise. Lucy Baumann-Lionet's story (below) and Zoe Cargill's poem on page 28 were among the award winning entries.

Homemade hostility

A short story by Lucy Baumann-Lionet

"Shh. Come on everybody, quiet please. Thank you." Will she ever leave us alone? "This is the third time I've had to ask now, Jayden. Hush. As a part of the syllabus, we are studying persuasion. Now, as you all watch this NGO campaign, think about the techniques they use to make you feel empathy for the refugees. Now what is an NGO?"

"Queue jumpers," I smirk to Jayden, who is sitting next to me. He laughs.

"Lachlan, could you please tell everyone what an NGO is?" She doesn't ask, she orders. Why can't she just leave me be? "Err, dunno." I snigger.

She sighs. "Well, if you had been listening for the past month you would know that it is a non-government organisation. Ok, let's watch."

Why is there war? People kill each other, and I don't know why. I wish that there could be peace and we could feel safe.

One day I woke up and got ready for school. I took my little brother and sister by the hand and we started on our journey. The trip to school often changes. Some days we can't go down the normal road because fighting has started there. Today is one of those days. I pull Rima and Samir closer to me and tell them a story. The story is about our father, when he used to take us to the park. That was before the fighting came here.

There is a deep, hollow rumbling sound that we have all learned to dread. The streets channel the energy, engulfing us in a swarm of sound and pain. My stomach turns upside down. Samir screams. I pull them to the ground and crouch over them, like a blanket. Everything turns red. My ears feel like they are screaming. I can feel the two little bodies underneath me. I start singing.

This was the day my school was bombed. I live in fear of events like this every day. Please help.

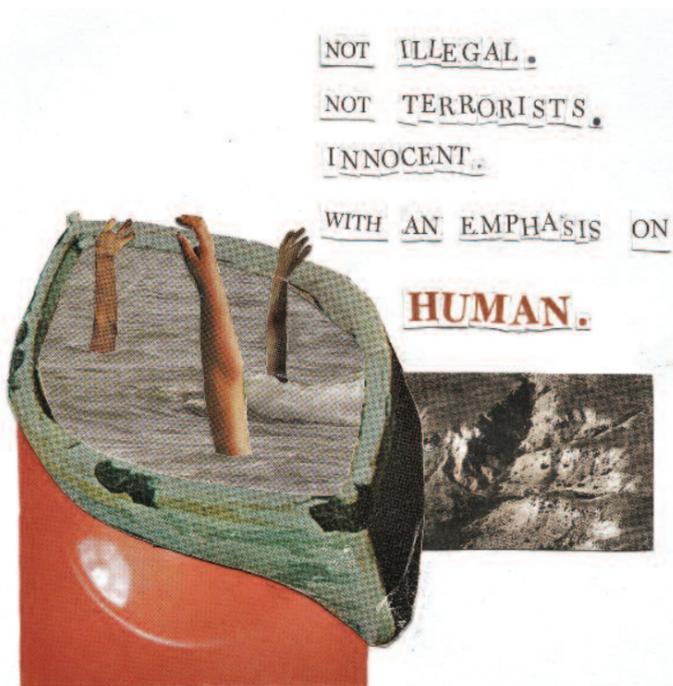
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No one's home. I chuck my bag down beside the door. I feel a satisfying relief as my sweaty wet back can finally breathe. "It's so bloody hot" I say out loud, as though that will make it cooler. The air from the open fridge is a pleasant greeting. "Mmmm. Nothing. Need Food. Why can't anyone in this house just get food?" I will have to have cornflakes. Over the bridge. Through the jungle. My finger follows the line of the 'Monkey Maze' on the back of the box. The V8 rumbles down the dirt driveway, then brakes. The robust door slams and heavy footfall come towards the house.

"How was school?" asks Mum. She doesn't really care, it's just a habit.

"Shit," I reply, and then look back to my bowl and soggy cereal.

"Lachlan don't use that language," she snaps.



"Well it was". It really was.
"Well, why was it so bad?" she asks insincerely.
"Just is. Always was and always will be." I don't look up from the drowning corn this time, instead I hit the surface of the bowl's content with my spoon. Milk splashes onto the table.
"Suit yourself then." She walks out of the room.
I pick up my bowl and make an effort to drag my toes on the lino floor. It squeaks, Mum hates that.
"Channel seven, channel seven" I mumble. That static noise is so annoying, I punch the channel button with my finger. Why can't I find it? "No, not SBS bullshit. It's that bloody refugee boy again."

Just want to be safe but we are never safe. I feel sad about leaving my home, my country, but we can no longer live like this.

Yeah, I get it. There is war and he can't go to school, but it's not my fault that his country's government is corrupt and stuff. I press the channel button again, nothing happens. Arrhh! It won't turn off. Remote must have run out of batteries or something. "I'm not listening to this crap." I get a packet of chips from the kitchen and go to my room. I can still hear him speaking but it's hard to understand him anyway because of the accent.

It's like the sky is always full of fireworks. I used to like fireworks; we would have them on very special occasions when we were celebrating. Now they only make me hurt. They mean explosions, buildings crumbling. They mean women, men and children being beaten. They mean waking up in the middle of the night cold with sweat. They mean death and pain. They mean war.

"Why are you watching this crap? Where is the remote?" Dad's home.

I shout back from my room, "It's on the couch". Dad has worked hard for this family, driving trucks all day. I don't think I want to be a truckie though, sitting on my arse for hours. I want to be a sparky, get an apprenticeship at the

ON A NATIONAL SHAME

end of the year. It pays well, enough to buy a cruiser and a bit of land.

"What have you done to it!" A deep bellow comes from the lounge room.

"It's not working. Have you broken it or something? I just want to watch the footy, how hard does it have to be?"

After Father was taken away, Mother has been preparing to leave. She has gathered up all the money, so we can go. Go somewhere where there isn't war. Many families have already left, fleeing in hope that it will save their children's lives. We have no lives here. In two days we will follow those who have already gone.

"Better not come to Australia," Dad says, staring at the dirty boy on the TV.

"Some people at school say you and Mum are racist, and I just copy what you say," I scoff as I walk into the lounge room and sink into the couch next to Dad, surrounded by ashy cigarette spots.

"I'm not racist; I just think we shouldn't let them into our country. They're probably terrorists and criminals, they'll take our jobs. Australians worked hard for what we've got, and we're not just going to give it all away to some poor towel-head, who hasn't worked at all.

"I'm not spending my taxpayer's money on their needs when we have our own problems to fix. Special houses, special classes at school, just send them back to where they came from, make their own government deal with them, I say."

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"Why can't we learn about something that matters? I can't wait till I leave this place." I lean over the back of my chair and tell Jayden who has been moved to sit behind me. Ms.'s eyes glare at me, I don't meet them.

"Lachlan" she says, "do you have something you would like to share with the class?"

"Tell her" whispers Jayden, with a smirk.

"Why can't we learn about something that matters, something that will be useful in our lives," I say proudly.

"I appreciate your concern about your education, Lachlan, but it is important to know how to analyse texts, and whilst doing this we are also learning a little bit about the world." She plays the video.

A young Australian woman in an orange shirt with VOLUNTEER written across her chest is standing in front of a concrete wall with rolled wire on top. She starts speaking.

"We once videoed a young refugee boy who came into our camp eager to tell his story. His family's dream, like many other refugees was to come here to Australia. Now, two years later in one of Australia's offshore detention centres, we have been reunited."

There is a soft gasp from the class, as the shot opens on the teenager sitting on a concrete floor in front of a barred window. His eyes are lifeless and his skin seems to be a similar tone to the walls.

We were so full of fear but also hope for a better life. Now we have none.

We have tried so hard to be here, taking overcrowded leaky boats, fighting pirates and starvation. It is nothing like we imagined, no welcoming faces, instead a concrete enclosure. We are now nothing more than criminals on a two-month term that has turned into a year. I do not understand. Australia is meant to be the lucky country, and this is all they can do for us?



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