





COVER IMAGE

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EDITOR

Gayle Kennedy

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CONTACT

E: info@artsaccesaaustralia.org W; www.meetingplaceforum.org W: www.artsaccessaustralia.org





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LETTER FROM THE CHAIR BELINDA LOCKE

Welcome to Writing Place, the first magazine produced by Arts Access Australia to showcase the work of d/Deaf and disabled artists. This online magazine has been launched as part of Meeting Place 2020, the leading national forum for arts and disability in Australia.

of 'Creating Space', Writing Place is a way of creating a space to profile the excellent work of d/Deaf and disabled writers.

A competitive selection of entries were received through an open call out and included fiction, non-fiction, short stories, essays and poems. The work of ten exceptional writers has been selected for inclusion: Jamila Main, CB Mako, Anna Jacobson, Heidi Everett, Becky Van Leeuwen, Simone Busch, Daley Rangi, Kai Ash, Amy Tingay, Emily Dash. Collectively their writings touch on personal and political aspects of taking and creating space as disabled people, experiences of life during the COVID-19 pandemic, accessibility in online environments, connection to nature, intersectional identities, speaking up and also being excluded or erased from the mainstream narrative.

Thank you to all of the artists for sharing their rich stories and perspectives, and to Gayle Kennedy, Editor of Writing Place, for her role in the curation and leadership of this publication.

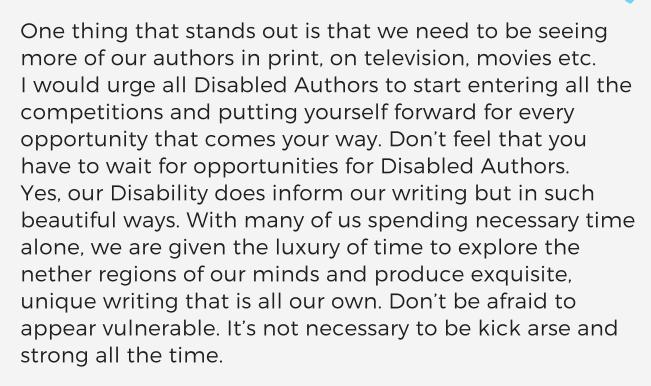
We hope you enjoy the magazine!

EDITOR'S NOTE GAYLE KENNEDY

Probably one of the most difficult assignments I've had was narrowing down the final 10 poems and stories to be included in the inaugural Writing Place publication. Such outstanding writing!

From the beautiful, and ethereal to the practical and gut wrenching, I think we have arrived at a good

overview of the consistently great writing that exists within the Disability Community right now.



Don't let all this talent remain untapped. Get out your pens, word processors, videos, tape machines whatever you use and get writing. We need the world to read our writing but importantly, we need to read it ourselves. We are the only ones that can truly do ourselves justice.

Happy writing.

UNCLENCH BY JAMILA MAIN



Every

time

П

speak up

my

jaw

unclenches

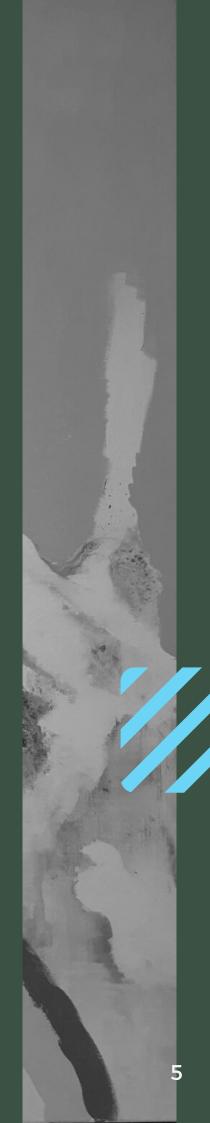
a little

ABOUT JAMILA MAIN

Jamila Main is a trained actor and self-taught playwright living and working on unceded Peramangk and Kaurna land in South Australia. Jamila performs across stage and screen, most recently as Leen in the acclaimed Aleppo. A Portrait of Absence (Adelaide Festival, 2020). In 2020 Jamila was commissioned to write an article on online theatre and accessibility for ArtsHub, and Jamila's monologue Anika was featured in STCSA and ActNow's digital theatre project Decameron 2.0.

Jamila is currently developing a durational performance piece, How Long Can This Last? pursuing the pain-free space of live performance, with Emma Valente as director/dramaturg in the 2020 Adhocracy program.

Jamila's new play How to Eat Rabbit was developed during the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic and a reading of the play was livestreamed and is available on YouTube.





CREATING SPACE BY EMILY DASH

Creating space means so many different things to different people. Living as a disabled person, I am well-versed in creating space for myself and others. For as long as I can remember, I have been fighting for my right to take up space - for my body to be properly seen and treated with respect, for my voice to be heard and listened to, to feel safe in public and private places.

As an artist, I feel a responsibility to create space for opportunities to make work and for diverse stories to emerge. I am used to the hustle, trying to stake a claim on an industry that remains inaccessible to me and my community - along with so many others. Never has this felt more urgent or meaningful than in 2020, for more reasons than one.

But then the speed of life changed overnight. As the world and our industry seemed to come to a standstill, like many I was left scrambling to figure out what came next. It turned out to be a time of transformation and questioning every facet of my identity. My tendency towards compromised health meant that my self-isolation started earlier and lasted longer than most, and with the situation so unstable I still spend most of my time inside.

My changing relationship to physical space took on a new meaning, and transformed my emotional landscape as well. In every sense of the word, boundaries were drawn and reset. Whether my deepest ethical principles and ingrained habits or my closest relationships, everything I had once clung to for security was put under a microscope. Incidentally some, like my decade-long commitment to vegetarianism, have been thrown out completely. Others

have changed irrevocably, like the sad slow burn of friendships in which all that remains is the memory of what you used to be.

My passion for life as an artist remains constant, but the form and content of my arts practice shifts to wherever opportunity knocks. As always, artists adapt - we are the first to embrace and advocate for new ideas, sometimes out of necessity and especially when you face other barriers. We must remember that all hope is never lost for us. Within the tumult, there are glimmers of hope.

While it is far from a panacea and presents its own unique challenges, the move towards online platforms may be a move towards a more accessible society. It has meant that people who might be traditionally excluded can engage meaningfully with the wider arts industry - through online performances, for example. If we can harness these means to help us find new voices and lift them up, perhaps we can take hold of an exciting opportunity: to create beautiful spaces from this darkness.





ABOUT EMILY DASH

Emily Dash is a NSW-based freelance writer, actor and producer who works across theatre and screen. Her debut short film "I Am Not A Work of Art" was part of Metro Screen's 2015 Screenability program. Her second film Can You See Me Theatre's "The Cards I'm Dealt" (2015) was shortlisted for Tropfest Short Film Festival 2016. Emily wrote and starred in both these works.

She also co-wrote and starred in Johanna Garvin's short film "The Milky Pop Kid" (2017), which was Highly Commended for Writing at the Sydney Film Festival 2017. She was the sole writer of "Groundhog Night", which she also starred in, which was directed by Genevieve Clay-Smith for Bus Stop Films and is part of the Sydney Film Festival 2020. Emily is scriptwriter and project manager for Maitree House. She also participated in AFTRS State Talent Camp 2019 with "Pearly Gates", was selected for the upcoming AFTRS National Talent Camp 2020, and Screen Australia SBS Digital Originals 2020 with "Freewheelers".

Emily did a writing and research internship with Matchbox Pictures in 2017, from which she was credited as a consultant on ABC drama "The Heights". As a 2018/19 PACT Resident Artist, she created her own play "Freefall" (2019). Selected theatre credits include "Chrysalis" (2017) for Midnight Feast Theatre, staged reading of "The Normal Heart" (2017) at Darlinghurst Theatre Company, and "CONNECT" (2016) for Red Door Arts and Ever After Theatre.



old bird with an Elvis hairstyle and Bjork's voice, probably sitting on a highwire across the street. At that time of morning, magpie spirit travels where light doesn't, so it reached into the darkness of my lounge room, to the pit of the floor where I laid for the past three months, and navigated the maze to my heart like it was running water.

Many of us know what terminal sadness feels like: it's like realising they don't make light globes any more, so you resort to candles and when the candles have all melted, you wait for the stars and when the stars don't come out, you hold the memory of light, which like all universal laws, eventually separates out so far you can't hold the atoms together anymore. It takes far less energy to let go than to hold on.

I'd not considered magpie's much before this morning, and one thing I've learnt about the mental health system is that it doesn't have time for magpies either. In fact the only time I've heard a skerrick of magpie was an Indigenous duty nurse who asked me 'how my spirit was'. The out of place question shocked me. This clinic stunk of disinfectant, pheromones and a hundred thousand tonnes of fax paper. This was no place for such truth. His out of place question unearthed tears trapped in bedrock. I answered: 'broken'. My case worker hurried me out of the room to the waiting psychiatrist, unaware of the light that had flickered.

Magpies haven't been to University; they breathe the universe. Where 2000mg of antipsychotic juice and twenty years of case workers hadn't put so much a dent in my armour, a magpie swooped in and stirred the air in my cells in one song. I listened to her; more powerful than U2 yet

less tangible than clouds. This magpie was doing what it did every morning and every evening of its life, yet for the first time in such a long time, I felt her heartbeat of life. She will never know.

The mental health system focuses on symptoms needing treatment, the grief and grieving. It loves to deep dive in dark matter, seeking out asteroids to explode and neutrinos to study and harness. We become conditioned to believe our redemption, our recovery, is learning metaphysical hieroglyphics with the rosetta stone buried somewhere deep in our psyche under geological layers of metamorphic rock.

Magpie teaches us that healing space is indeed hidden in dark matter, but like fish in the sea, we cannot see what holds us until we come out of the water.



ABOUT HEIDI EVERETT

Heidi Everett is a Melbourne multimedia artist and producer with living experience of schizophrenia and aspergers with thirty years in the mental health system.

Heidi founded and directs Schizy Inc, Mojo Film Festival and Qualia Theatre, enabling many people with diverse mental health space and resources to tell their stories and affect real change. Heidi and magpie live and work on Wurundjeri land of the Woi wurrung people.



SACRED SPACE BY BECKY VAN LEEUWEN

Sustenance; the breeze Raindrops through trees Wind in curly hair Sun in the deck chair

Words for a wandering soul Waves that auspiciously roll With a quaint reminder Of what is now behind her

These memories could be Her sacred space Her one and only Clearing place

Do you like living In that ever kind Sacred dreamtime Of your mind?

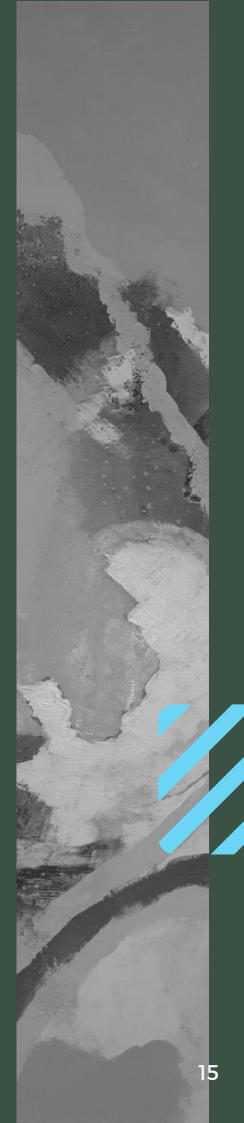
ABOUT BECKY VAN LEEUWEN

Becky Van Leeuwen is the Creative Writer in Residence at No Strings Attached Theatre of Disability and the tutor for the writing group there.

She is a freelance poet and writer and author of the book "Authenticity" published by Brighton Design.

She is an active women's mental health advocate due to her personal experience. She has attended Flinders and UTAS, studying everything she could think of including history, English, policy, legal studies, sociology and linguistics, just to name a few.

Becky is deeply interested in writing as a healing art and writing in tune with the environment. Becky identifies as having a mental health condition that arose out of trauma.





HOW I KNOW I'M INVITED BY KAI ASH

I know I'm invited when the event website includes an ordered list of what to expect on arrival. An agenda that doesn't just say 'lunchtime' but explains the sort of space in which lunch will take place - whether there will be shared tables, food available for purchase (along with type and cost) and whether mixing between attendees and speakers will be encouraged.

I know I'm invited when there is a well labelled map of the event location, provided in advance and in a printable format.

I know I'm invited when the toilets on that map are labelled with information rather than designation: this one contains sanitary bins, this one a urinal, this one is single occupant, this one's shared.

I know I'm invited when I'm asked for my preferred name rather than the one on my birth certificate.

I know I'm invited when there is a quiet smoker-free space near at hand, where I will be able to sit in silence and breathe and recover. Sometimes this is a park, sometimes a garden, sometimes a nook with a pot plant growing bravely in the shade. More important than its appearance is its scent, its light and the quality of its sound.

I know I'm invited when participation is encouraged, but no one is shamed for hanging back. When there are options to put myself out there, but they are just that - options. Yes, you can present. Yes, you can pitch your work. But it is not required. You can share, but you don't have to.

I know I'm invited when the price is no more than I earn in a week. When the after-event wine comes in only two varieties: white and red. When the dress code is comfort and no one's wearing matching outfits. When I'm asked what I'm interested in and not what I do.

I know I'm welcome when I arrive and see that some people are older and some are younger, some lighter and some darker, some in sleek new clothing, some decidedly rumpled. When I see that some people are leaning on objects while others can't keep their feet still.

I know I am welcome when my arrival in unremarkable. I am simply another variation to add to the growing tapestry of this space.



ABOUT KAI ASH

Kai is a trans autistic writer with an interest in gender and neurodiversity. Kai recently moved back to Brisbane after two years in Melbourne, where Kai was shortlisted for the Lord Mayor's Creative Writing Awards 2020.



NOT TOKEN, NOR SOFT-SPOKEN
BY DALEY RANGI

i read of a young girl, murdered by her mother
this girl had autism, and not the first, yet another
to be killed in desperation, denying aspiration
of a better existence, and the piece de resistance
they mourned not for the girl, but for the mum who strangled
it must have been 'so hard' to deal with a mind you see as
'mangled'

it feels adverse dictum, to not cry for the victim as someone with autism, this causes a great schism but there ain't no aneurism in exploring ableism so, in fifty lines or less, god i hope we'll unpack and progress, at least that's the scope concurring conceptions of autistic disorder a tall order indeed, in fact, i'm right on the border of just annoying the shit out of you with cadence and verse but i should lay out the facts first, the benign and perverse with my neurodiversity, see, i'm obsessed with the rhyme to make sense of adversity, the boundaries we climb as i freshen this reading session with my poetic procession not quite my profession, i do offer concession will hearing the depth of my trauma, make you warmer, indeed, a reformer, to read this text and imagine the performer spit out the stings from the wasps that may swarm her or him, or they, would you pay to hear the words of this insidious informer of deformed things this rock orchestra of truth where i'm playing the strings

hello, it's me, one of those fabled disabled, labelled and stabled you've enabled the stereotype, and tabled the hype so maybe you think me an autistic sadistic with a mystical mind or a savant genius ingeniously saving lives, may i remind you it's hard to have a brain thicker than an archive when you're a bundle of anxiety just tryna survive you assume that i'm all miserable if visibly risible when I'm really just pissed at y'all ignoring the invisible i'm not the one sharpening the bread knife cutting off the crusts, manifesting the divisible on a whim, like a sim you shove us into care boy a good chunk of the time it's just abuse, so beware its grim, to plug us into your black and white matrix try your best to find a fix, chip this round block into square try as you might, you shan't repair what ain't broken i ain't your token nor soft-spoken i'm running out of lines to recite sublime rhyme may have missed the point, thesis gone awry the message in is flux, so perhaps the new crux of my twominute rant is saying we can, instead of you saying we can't don't assume, just ask, it ain't a hard task if we lift up the mask, and our love we exchange so i reckon we arrange to go and make some change you've read my art, now go and do your part.

ABOUT DALEY RANGI

Daley Rangi is an eclectic multidisciplinary artist generating unpredictable and uncomfortable works through an intersectional lens.

Evading categorisation, and invading the status quo, their energies are focused on speaking truth to power and encouraging social change



CREATING SPACE BY AMY TINGAY

Creating space for hard things is something wisdom and resilience brings. Arts play a roll, as things take a toll, creating space is even more crucial; giving voice to those for whom choice is rarely granted.

Difficult conversations shed light on the dark corners of difference allowing others to see the commonality we all share; rather than division and fear.

Behind the hijab, nationality, wheelchair or neurodiversity are friends to be made and new knowledge laid bare. It is where ideas are planted and change begins to grow.

Take a moment, step back and see, creating space is beneficial to you and me; we are stronger together in our diverse humanity.

Equality is the pay off for people coming together, building relationships and being able to truly include those who are just looking for a place to have a say.

No, wait, it is more than that, we must first acknowledge yesterday. Colonisation is enmeshed in the difficult conversations, inequality, death and destruction of today.

Black lives matter. We are failing. People are dying in the cells and on the streets. Those in power, in both directions are protections that discourage change; fear reigns

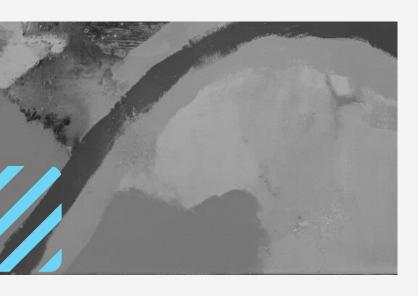
Prisons are bursting the judicial system is broken. Kids sent to juvenile detention for not doing homework, is just wrong. Ability overlooked, a system that will not bend, disability and race are not a factor; there is no bias at this end, people often decree.

Really? This is all one big mess, we need to get better; free the flag and the royal commission are two places to start. Acknowledge our mistakes then healing can start.

Anne Marie Smith died in squaller, surrounded by privilege; her life had meaning and her death does too. Learn her story so we can do better and follow through.

Power and privilege go hand in hand, but left unchecked tragedy can befall the most vulnerable; the voiceless, faceless many, for whom there is an assumption of safety. Yet silence does little to keep demons at bay, space allows the silence to be broken.

Injustice impacts so many; it's time to turn the tide. Take a stand, even in sitting with the tragedy of so much change. Be informed, collective pain can drive the evolution.



Education is key, create space and see that out of darkness comes knowledge and possibilities to learn. Solutions are not easy but the privilege of space is up to us.

When you live in the shadows of a world that excludes you, be it race, gender identity, disability, sexuality and so much more. Creating space is a must; complex connection helps strengthen our core. Enough is enough be silent no more.

You know beyond a reasonable doubt that many road heads down a beaten track, where you fight demons that haunt you. Yet the load is so much lighter if you just find space to breathe.

Acceptance flourishes when you find fabulous folk who celebrate difference and allow it to be. In all its glorious possibilities, of art, life, work and wonder. Difference is the strength of space created, so lets make thunder!

ABOUT AMY TINGAY

Amy Tingay is a queer poet, activist and wheelchair user from Melbourne. She is philosophical, with a background in social justice, activism and politics. Living with CP, chronic illness and pain. Amy channels many of her experiences and observations into her work.



JUMPING PUDDLES

BY SIMONE BUSCH

Magic happens for me when a set of double doors swings 'Open Sesame', revealing an Aladdin's treasure trove of books. I'm now officially in reading heaven. Every child seeks a place where they can dream and be themselves. I have just found mine - it's the school library. I'm goose-bumpy with joy to be allowed inside as reading is my ultimate pleasure. When we read, we travel the world by imagination alone and our disabilities are non-existent.

The stories we hear or read in our formative years leave lifelong impressions. Young readers want to identify with their literary heroes. Yet children with disabilities have very few positive characters within literature or the arts in general, to represent them. Feeling kinship with characters can transcend the page and help give disabled children the courage and strength to tackle the challenges of their daily life.

From an early age it is my dream to become a children's author and create space within my writing to feature characters with disabilities. Because in my own childhood literary role models, who were disabled like me, were almost non-existent.

In Australia, every 14 hours a child is born with Cerebral Palsy. I was one of those children. We deserve literary representation too.

A life with Cerebral Palsy diplegia is not an easy ride, yet with a positive attitude and wonderful family support, life can be vibrant, fun, and enriching. I feel that it's crucial not to let disability define you. CP is part of who I am. My disability is for always, there is no cure and no logical explanation for it.

But I am about so much more than my disabled body. Initially it's my love of books which fuels my desire to become an author that, and the guidance of a dedicated teacher. The mentor who changes my life by introducing me to the world of writing, is my fifth-grade teacher Mr Robinson. The class affectionately calls him Sir, and Sir is a published author.

He has a light brown beard and a love of literature. Every Friday before home time the class hushes as our teacher's deep voice fills the room when he reads to us. He alone transports thirty eager young minds to exciting new worlds. We are only nine years old, but Sir doesn't indulge us with children's books. Together we tackle Animal Farm and other modern classics, but none of these novels feature characters with disabilities. Although I cannot physically identify with these literary heroes, I cherish every story session and it is Mr Robinson himself who becomes a special role model to me.

Because of my Cerebral Palsy, I can choose to participate in physical education lessons on the oval or stay back in class. I stay, and for two hours each week my classroom becomes my own private literary space. Between his marking, Sir teaches me about creative writing techniques. After he explains how to use a thesaurus my vocabulary grows immeasurably. In fact, I wish for a thesaurus and a typewriter that Christmas. Yes, it was a Brother typewriter; I know I am a fossil!

Most kids conquer challenges like bike riding or roller blading, remember those moments? My test is learning to type. This proves difficult as I have poor co-ordination, but my writing dreams depend on me mastering the keys. After months of practice I do manage to type, in my own unique Simone style.

Mum takes me to see a local theatre production of Winnie the Pooh and I'm so starry eyed that I join the junior theatre group. Being part of this ensemble gives me much confidence and lovely friends too.

There aren't any roles tailored to my needs, but when I'm cast as an old woman. I use my walking sticks as props and totter, wobble, totter across the stage. This is actually my normal gait, but hey the audience doesn't know that. Sitting in the front row Mum and Dad hold their breath, until I successfully navigate the journey without falling over

With a few minor adjustments I've made the part fit my abilities and more importantly I have a go and love the experience.

Growing up my special parents offer their loving support and give me the opportunity to try many things. I believe that wherever possible it's crucial for disabled people to be involved within their local communities, pursuing interests like the arts.

Alas my own onstage career is brief, Nicole Kidman I will never be, but I do find my niche when the co-ordinator says,' I hear you like making up stories Simone can you write us a play for the six to nine-year old's?'

I've never written a script before, but I head off to my happy place, the school library, and borrow every book I can on

writing drama. I'd like to pay homage to the terrific librarians who always offer friendship, advice, and great reading material.

At home I type till my fingers ache. My plays stars wacky witches, Christmas puddings and blue bunyips, each one is performed in our local theatre, but none of these scripts feature characters with disabilities. Sadly, to this point I have no literary role models with disabilities.

I am twelve years old, almost thirteen when I read the book that represents so much more to me than the sum of its words. This novel gives me hope and changes everything. It is Alan Marshall's iconic autobiography I Can Jump Puddles. Reading this story is the first time I encounter a main character with a disability.

Alan Marshall has polio. He also uses walking sticks as I do, and he is a success. Alan Marshall becomes a prize-winning journalist and author. Fanfare, this proves to me that my dream of being a published author is achievable.

The title of his novel becomes my affirmation. When my legs are in pain and my physio session is not going well, Mum squeezes my hand and whispers 'but we can jump puddles' and usually we do.

Marshall's story makes me think and the next Halloween play I pen includes a flower seller who walks with sticks.

Guess who scores that role it's little me.

Throughout my teens and into adulthood I enter short story competitions in earnest. I strive to create the space

within my literary world to highlight ability within disability, that is an important distinction.

Please don't think I am being a cynic, but in recent times some television programs and books have included a token character in a wheelchair. Disabled people deserve better, deeper representation within the arts, than being the token to fill a diversity quota.

Worse still are the serials in which the once wheelchair bound character, jumps out of the wheelchair to make a miraculous recovery. Good luck to them, but real life for people with disabilities and their families isn't like that.

I endeavour to create realistic characters, people who have a disability, but whose lives are colourful and varied. Those of us with disabilities have, jobs, interests, relationships, and emotional needs just like any other able-bodied person and this is often glossed over in literature and the arts in general.

For my own stories I have written about a hearing-impaired teenager who performs a mime act with his hearing friend. Another character is a wheelchair bound young library student and she befriends a homeless man. These characters are disabled, but by exploring other aspects of their lives, readers can see them as real people, rather than just focusing on the fact that they are disabled.

When writing I make sure to end on a positive note, because living with a disability can be hard. Growing old with Cerebral Palsy is a struggle. I have severe nerve pain now and I can no longer leave the house without my wheelchair or assistance from others, but I think if we don't have bad

days, then we can't appreciate the good ones. Happiness is a choice we make.

My writing is the place where I create the space to depict the lives of people with disabilities. I want to ensure that disabled people, especially children, feel included within the world of literature and the arts. I hope they find meaningful stories to read that fill them with the courage to live their dreams. Because in my dreams I can still jump puddles.

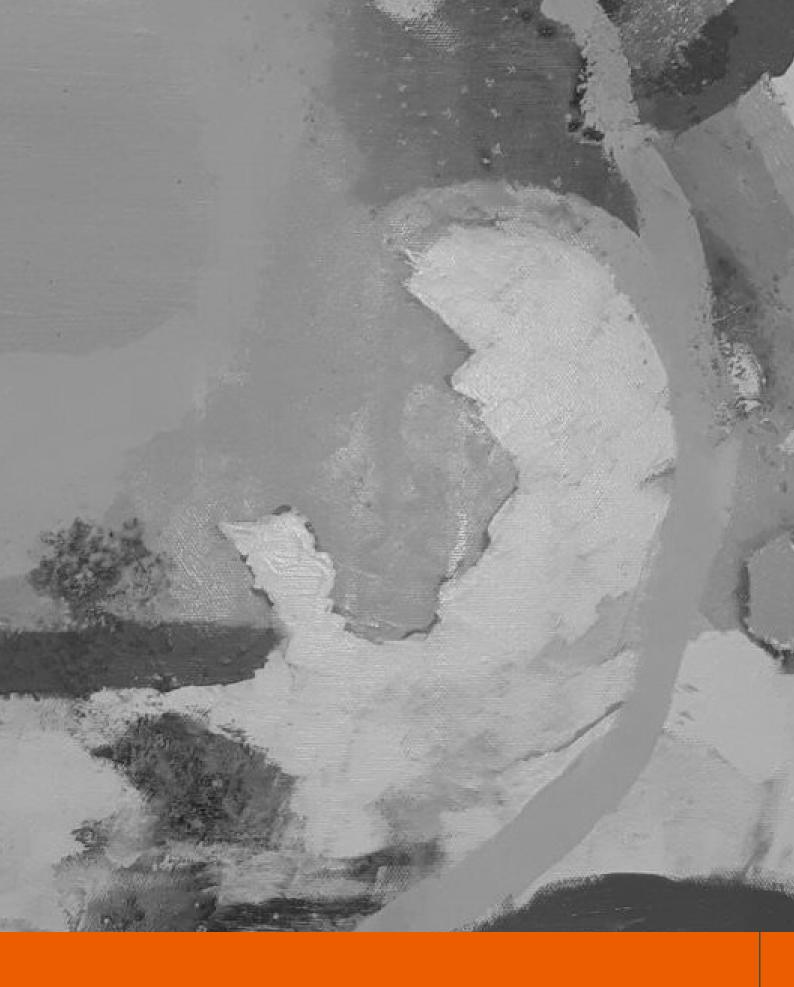




ABOUT SIMONE BUSCH

Simone Busch is a keen writer of short stories for children and adults. Her work was most recently featured in the anthology Allsorts by Hawkeye Publishing.

Simone has Cerebral Palsy, but she does not let her disability define her. Through her writing she strives to be a voice for the better representation of disabled people within literature and the arts. Simone believes that happiness is a choice we make.



HOW DO YOU WRITE? BY CB MAKO

How do you write when life is different? How do you find space in your head when you are deemed slow by your peers, but, at the same time, you're some kind of different fast when it comes to administrative, detailed work?

Even before you start writing, you know that you would not be delving into the mainstream narrative. You know that you would be writing what could be considered taboo to your culturally diverse group. You consider yourself a non-binary writer in a binary-minded, religious migrant community.

One day, in the far future, you would find yourself writing about difficult topics that no one seems is keen to publish: disability from a disabled person of colour, and the intersections of disability, racism, and ableism.

How do you write when you have mental health and hearing-impaired issues that you need medication and hearing devices? How do you write in a diverse writing group if they suddenly begin creating rules about what not to write? How do you write if you're not among the able-bodied, fully employed, writers of colour who have families and relatives that support them? You are a first-generation migrant, struggling without any assistance that you would have from an extended family.

How do you write when you are among disabled BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, Person of Colour) writers? When you are surrounded by kindred writers and you feel you are all erased from the narrative, excluded in the conversation, snubbed by other writing groups, and rejected in themebased editions among literary journals.

How. do you write when you are a parent to two children; sometimes three when your partner is like a 17-year-old in a 45-year-old body—and you are left to do most of the house chores while Metropolitan Melbourne is the only city in stage 4 lockdown in a pandemic?

How do you write when you are a carer of a disabled child? Or a child with cancer? Or a child with chronic illness? How do you write if your child has all three combinations and you're locked down in isolation? And how do you write when there are multiple medical and therapy appointments online?

How do you write when your local library has erased the history of the Aboriginal people on the unceded land on where you live? How do you write when your birth country had been colonised two hundred years before Naarm became Melbourne? And how do you write when your colonisers mostly focused on teaching you how to memorise prayers, novenas, and rosaries? You would never know how the patriarchy has deeply embedded itself into society. In the far future, your disassociation and distance from your own birth country would give you the perspective you need to write.

How do you write when you're hungry? When you write because you need the extra money to feed your family while everyone is in lockdown and school students in Metropolitan Melbourne are all studying from home?

Or, when the paycheck your partner brings home in minimum wage is already gone because of rent and utilities payments? How about when suddenly your child gets sick and eight years later, you are still struggling with the trauma of the ordeal, when all your savings evaporated?

How do you write on an empty stomach and at three o'clock in the morning, you wake up with a growling tummy? But you are co-sleeping with your child and you cannot move from the curled tiny body beside you, gripping you with entwined limbs, like a lifeline of tentacles while your child slept. 3:00 AM is supposedly the perfect time to write, when the house is quiet and everyone is asleep. Yet you find ourself catching up with chores from laundry, tidying-up toy boxes, and washing dishes. But in this silence—when you hear the hum of the fridge, the distant ticking of a wall clock, and the ringing in your ears—your mind is buzzing; the voices in your head are the loudest. Only then, finally, finally, you find time to write.

When you do write, you write like it is some top-secret topic. You consciously create a space. First, you hide the computer screen; you hide in the library; and you hide the journals where you scribbled your thoughts. You write with a digital pen from your smart phone; creating space in minutes and moments in between chores while waiting for your child at school during pick-up time. You write without telling anyone, even when you see people on social media gloating about their wordcounts; because you know the white, abled, and young writers get first spots to shortlists and writing competitions.

You, with a different skin colour, are automatically relegated to a separate category in writing competitions.

Judges consider you to be a 'migrant' writer, despite having gained Australian citizenship decades ago; thus, separating you and your writing from the main narrative.

And now, you're in another colonised land. Far, far away from your colonised birth country, you read works from diverse writers and authors from other colonised nations. You never had books written by BIPOC authors. You grew up in a house where there were several versions and sizes of the Bible—your parents were church volunteers—along with several sets of encyclopaedias, Time-Life books that focused mostly on geography, and hard-bound fairy tale books which looked like collectors' editions.

You make a conscious choice of decolonising your reading, with the books you buy or borrow from the library. As a writer, you read with gusto, yet slowly savouring every word, every page; because you grew up reading only fairy tales and religious, saintly-sanitised stories. You, with your dark skin, in your own birth country they consider you maitim, because meztisos and meztisas are white-passing and they don't even decolonise themselves thanks to the colloquial term 'colonial mentality'.

Only later, when you have migrated, you realised you haven't read a single book on feminism. You also realise, you grew up not even knowing what feminism was. For in a country with deeply entrenched patriarchal structures, despite women occupying corporate positions, despite the diaspora which would even claim your birth country was most matriarchal behind the scenes, the hold of patriarchal structures over the population are iron-clad

and absolute. Thus, when you write, your parents have already condemned you and your soul to hell for dishonouring the family, for heresy, for not reading religious, spiritual, and inspirational books.

And in the future, you would save what little discretionary money you have—thank goodness for Afterpay or Zip available in some online local bookshops; some author friends would even gift you their published books; some writers, who would cull their own burgeoning book shelves, would give you books you'd lust over but couldn't afford. And then, you find yourself building your own collection of books. You would savour these books and this—this would reflect your aesthetic. Books from Aileen Moreton-Robinson, Audre Lorde, Roxane Gay, Angela Y. Davis, Reni Eddo-Lodge, Sara N. Ahmed, N.K. Jemisin, and academics like Rukmini Pande and Kristine Aquino are on your accessible shelf. Creased books, underlined, bookmarked, with multiple yellow post-it notes sticking out from its pages, and margins riddled with your scribbled side notes. Because as a writer, you decided you would read with a pencil, and your pencils—cherished Palomino Blackwing 602—would be your bookmarks.

Other times when you have no money, you go to your multiple apps on your smart phone; apps from your different libraries—Melbourne Library, Maribyrnong Library, and your local Brimbank Library. In their various digital collections, you borrow both ebooks and audiobooks, all for free to download. And you, the writer, continue to have access to more books than you could imagine.

So, when you finally do find time, as you sort through your book collection—which ones you've already read and need to transfer important passages onto 5 x 7-inch index cards —you realise in your tiny rented home, with your narrow Ikea shelf, you have a TBR (to-be-read) shelf of books.

Thus, this is how you write. Surrounded by books which spark your imagination, while holed up at home for six months, from autumn to winter, with an immunocompromised child too unwell to go to anywhere, especially in a pandemic.



ABOUT CB MAKO

CB Mako is a founding member of the Disabled QBIPOC Collective. Winner of the Grace Marion Wilson Emerging Writers Competition, shortlisted for the Overland Fair Australia Prize, and long-listed for the inaugural Liminal Fiction Prize, cubbie has been published in The Suburban Review, The Victorian Writer, Peril Magazine, Djed Press, Overland, Liminal Fiction Prize Anthology (via Pantera Press, arriving in November 2020), and Growing Up Disabled in Australia (via Black Inc Books, arriving in February 2021).

CODE CRACKER BY ANNA JACOBSON

1.

When the forest calls, she makes friends with trees. Decodes the language of the scribbly gum in half an hour. She is taken away, trees' voices muffled through hospital balcony bars.

After six weeks she can no longer hear them. No longer remembers the secret language she'd learned from the scribbly gum moth. When doctors show her a picture of bark she cannot decipher, they let her go.

2.

'Our lemon tree is fruiting. We have too many.' I thank her, peer inside; four lemons the size of grapefruit.

My mother bakes fish with lemon and dill. I make a lemon tart sans short-crust base. We leave a communal lemon in the fridge for cups of tea: lemon and honey, lemon and ginger, lemon and mint.

The last lemon waits in the fruit bowl to become zest, sliced into quarters, squeezed, or preserved. Instead I sit at the table with ink and paper, draw it whole. I draw until it becomes something Other. I draw its talk. Stippled as a weathered ear, it listens to my pen on paper, bushels me its story. From the lemon I draw the tree. From the tree I draw the sky. From the sky I draw the scribbly gum moth—tree disappears into earth. Sharp pieces of sky bury back into skin, scribbly gum moth nestles within mind.

ABOUT ANNA JACOBSON

Anna Jacobson is a writer and artist from Brisbane.
Amnesia Findings (UQP, 2019) is her first full-length
poetry collection, which won the 2018 Thomas Shapcott
Poetry Prize. Anna's poetry chapbook *The Last Postman*
(Vagabond Press, 2018) is part of the deciBels 3 series.
Her website is www.annajacobson.com.au.