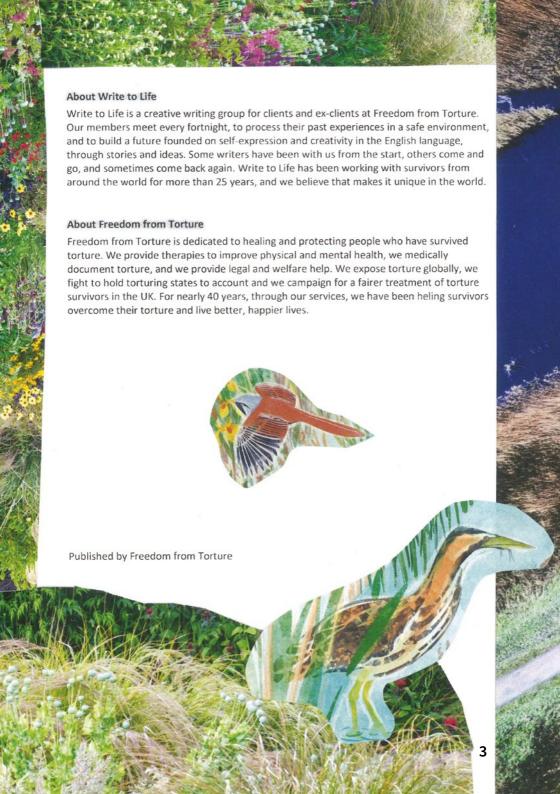


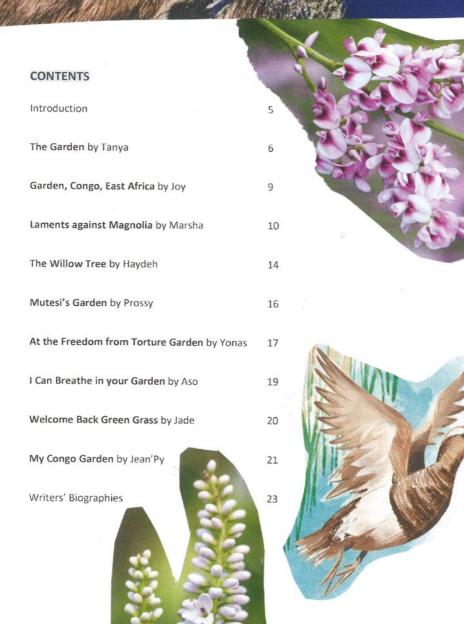
Issue 6

CARDENS

FREDOM SURVIVORS. REBUILDING LIVES TO THE LIVES







An Introduction to 'Gardens'

May 2024

There are a few things that people on every continent have in common.

Food, obviously. We all need to eat, and for many immigrants, cooking is not only a pleasure but a lifeline. You can measure the inclusivity of Britain by our supermarkets, which definitely have ready meals from more places than any other country's. And you can plot the waves of immigration through the history of the takeaways in even the smallest town.

And as we all need to eat, somebody needs to grow the fruit and vegetables; so gardening is also an international language. In a community garden, people with no words in common can share their expertise along with their produce, between the companionable tending of their plots.

Many members of Write to Life grew up on farms, or produced their own food back home, in climates where hot sun and rich soil turbocharged the plants, and now speak sorrowfully of the difficulty of coaxing anything to ripen in our damp and dismal climate (Jade's tomatoes being a resilient exception).

Joy and Prossy have written of these gardens back home, while Jean'Py imagines his arriving here in London, with miraculous results.

The plants that grow in gardens are our living cousins, and like us they have a cycle of birth and death, of hardship and disease and the resilience and life force that resist them. So gardens also provide a rich crop of metaphors for creative writing and healing.

That's the thinking behind our Horticultural Therapy project here at Freedom from Torture: a space where those too traumatised to speak, or not yet able to find the right words, garden alongside each other and then come together afterwards to share how it feels with expert clinician gardeners. Tanya writes movingly of her membership of the group, which led her eventually to us at Write to Life.

That living, changing nature of the plants around us can make them feel like friends; both Marsha and Haydeh write of the trees that have accompanied their lives here.

And all the qualities one might hope from a friend, all the blessings and gifts a garden can offer, are summed up in Yonas's and Aso's pieces, both about the garden at the heart of our lives and work, here at Freedom from Torture.

THE GARDEN

By Tanya

Tiny droplets of water glistened on the leaves. There had been showers early that morning As I stood there, looking at the garden Fingers curled round a steaming coffee cup thoughts chased each other through my mind It's our gardening group today.

I was happy as I tugged on my wellingtons and inspected my gloves for holes, ready to work.

Summer.

We had been away for six weeks.

Now we were back in full force.

The garden was a pitiful sight

Leafless trees

Sun-scorched earth

Dead branches begging to be lopped

Fallen leaves and animal droppings the carpet under my feet.

We cleared the garden wheeling the debris to the compost heap pruning the trees and mowing the grass The smell filled my lungs To a girl nurtured on a farm this was heaven.

We made rows dug holes burying seeds in the dark earth. How does it feel to be buried so deep? That's how we feel in our dark nights of the soul But we watered the seeds, And within a week, green shoots sprouted. Tenderly and carefully, we untangled the weeds strangling the new life Taking care not to damage their roots.

The raindrops added moisture
The dead leaves rich food.
The seeds became plants
Some parted from their siblings
to grow independently
Others twined, drooping against sticks.

Standing there, leaning on the hoe, resting my eyes on the new beauty I remembered my grandmother Nora back home how she had taught me companion farming.

She would look for a big tree
Prop some sturdy twigs around it
Dig holes and plant pumpkins, runner beans and tomatoes.

Squinting up at her, wrapped in her apron, pockets stuffed with seeds I would laugh and ask her why she was doing that?

She said nothing, but her eyes twinkled.

It was my cue to learn.

Sure enough, as soon as the plants emerged, they would twine themselves on the twigs propped against the tree which lent them its age and wisdom, shaded them from the sun hoarded its moisture for them.

So they grew, entwining their roots around the tree as I was entwined with Nora.

Many years later, I found out that in our group coming from different countries, we shared the same experience Cut down, wrenched from our roots and our mother tree we were empty husks, rattling together
But a seed remained

Planted in fertile soil, watered, pruned and propped under the protective canopy of Freedom from Torture we grew to know each other fully We fed each other, body and soul with tears for raindrops on the journey of healing.

We sat and shared the produce from the garden our voices echoing, sometimes in laughter sometimes with shared weeping

Till the dark night of the soul became day and sunlight turned the tears to rainbows.

GARDEN, CONGO, EAST AFRICA

By Joy

Very sunny, hot like sunset, clouds like dark, mixed like a rainbow.

Noise of birds, singing like a rhythm, like music, like a lollypop song.

Sitting on the grass, on my mat, grass is hot, warm damp whispering.

I can smell all the ripe fruit on the trees, mangoes, bananas, pears, orange.

Some fruits are falling with the leaves, falling where I am, silently onto the grass.

I eat the fruit fresh sweet water in my mouth.

The noise of the birds, and the flowers and the small breeze.

The flowers in the bushes, the roses flower, pink flower, yellow flower.

All the flowers, and near me, lavender, with its purple spikes, drowsy smell.

I put some lavender in a bag, here, it reminds me of the garden.

LAMENTS AGAINST MAGNOLIA

By Marsha

1.Growth

Winter:
A pondering mind halting on the edge.
A magical transition of the festival of Life.

Last autumn, your leafy debris, twirling down, brought me grief, exposing the world outside my window. English winter clings from toes to head.

I turned to you: feminine and enduring, ancient piece of nature But saw no end to this frosty misery.

I'd missed your dormant shoots armoured in tough bark. What are they? Tender branch tips or flower buds?

A foraging flock of blue tits startle the glum winter sky, flit about in your upside-down chandelier, seeking ambrosia or perhaps early worms. Skeleton branches banish grey darkness, ignore fenced-up boundaries. bring spring to my heart without recourse to warm weather, birdsong or the clear blue sky.

After dark, your countless luminant bulbs brighten restful nights beside my windowsill.

2. Falling

What are you?
Living by made-up rules!
Beetles were your
loyal friends with benefits
before bees
even existed to burrow into you.

That glorious display of moon pink scallop shells, ready to reveal precious pearls, sugar-sweet drops luring both birds and bees.

When the rain comes your flowers ride the tortuous polar winds they don't fight, they simply go with it into wu wei mood.

Crowding like rushed lunch-hour Tesco shoppers.
Falling dense as snowflakes.

The furious wind in the lifeless dark sings a song from a deep sea.

Restless, repeated and never-ending waves of wind throb on my window pane.

In the morning, I see a tropical sparkly seashore, drawn on the garden floor. By the end of the week, looking down your lonely pink petals are lost angel wings.

No hope or promise of return to the sky.

3. The dream ends

Finally, winter fades like it always does, its misty sighs are left behind. Your collateral damage: a pile of transient buds and petals, rotting on barren urban patches.

My garden is settling now, No more stunts, no showing off. Your nutrients flow to the burgeoning branches crowding up to breathe another year. Sporadic petals still hang on riddled with age spots and decay. Your prime pink blush might have been an iridescent dream.

The sacred sugar pots are out of commission till another season. Shards of lime green foliage flap against the wind like thousands of tiny butterflies.

The united front of spring brings back your protective shield against my outer world. I sweep the garden floor, pretend nothing has been happening here, in my cold back garden.

THE WILLOW TREE

By Haydeh

'The song of life will never surrender to the silence of death'

About six years ago I bought a small, young willow tree. It should have been planted in the garden to grow well.

I thought, if I replant it in the garden, then when I leave this flat I can't take the tree with me.

Therefore, instead of putting it in the garden, I planted it in quite a big pot. I put the pot with my beautiful willow tree in front of the sitting-room window.

The tree grew well and stayed green for years, giving a pleasant and refreshing view from my sitting room. I kept watering it regularly, weeding it, and every year I put some fresh compost in the pot.

Last summer I noticed that the tree was tilting to one side and its branches were expanding beyond the view from the window.

Once I tried to move the pot and pull it more to the middle of the window's sightline. It was too heavy and massive for me to move it even a bit, so I left it there.

A few days later, I had a number of visitors. I asked two strong men to move the pot for me. They tried hard but couldn't move the willow tree. They pushed and pulled, but it did not help at all.

Then, they tilted it; and they noticed that a root had grown out from the hole at the bottom of the pot, through the gap between the cement slabs, and penetrated into the earth beneath.

The pot's restrained space limited the tree's ability to grow. But the clever tree found a way to survive by pushing just one root through the hole and into the earth, to get the food and nutrients and extra water it needed, when I hadn't given it enough.

Heft the pot where it was, so as not to disturb the resilient willow tree.

It reminds me of living in a cell in prison. The small place and walls were there to suppress my life and my hopes, in order to break me down. But like my willow tree, my beliefs and determination helped me to survive. Even by seeing just a small part of the sky and the day's light through the pint-sized cell window, I had hope that life would never die.

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MUTESI'S GARDEN

A True Story

By Prossy

Once upon a time, in the poor village of Kinama, there was a forgotten garden of flowers deep in the forest. In its prime it was a vibrant tapestry of colours, filled with the sweet scent of blooming flowers. But as time passed, it fell into neglect, its beauty fading away like a forgotten memory.

One day, a curious young lady named Mutesi stumbled upon the garden while collecting firewood in the forest. Despite its overgrown paths and tangled bushes, she saw its potential, with determination sparkling in her eyes. Mutesi decided to bring the garden back to life.

Armed with her gardening tools and an unwavering spirit, Mutesi began her quest. She spent hours clearing away the weeds, gently bending to the soil and carefully planting seeds.

Each day, she went to watch with anticipation as tiny green shoots emerged from the earth, reaching towards the sunlight.

As seasons changed, so did the garden. Spring brought a riot of colourful blooms. Summer bathed the garden in golden sunlight: the leaves turned fiery and the rainy season transformed the garden into a magical wonderland.

Word of Mutesi's work spread throughout the whole village, drawing people from far and wide to witness the beauty of the forgotten garden. But for Mutesi, the true beauty of the garden lay not in its flowers but in the joy it brought to others.

And as she tended to her beloved garden, she discovered that sometimes the most beautiful things are found in unexpected places. Mutesi continued with her loving attention to her garden of flowers.

AT THE FREEDOM FROM TORTURE GARDEN

By Yonas

We can live in harmony with our natural environment. Colours of green from a cool palette, presenting a calm spirit of the city. The opportunity to enjoy its unspoilt nature, to provide a haven for relaxation, recuperation and recreation. A place to strengthen mental health and wellbeing. The journey to an enchanted, life-changing sanctuary. The healing power of nature at the Freedom from Torture garden.

A sanctuary for survivors,
a safe space for anyone going through
their journey of recovery
making their mental health a priority
a welcoming place for those seeking safety.
Refugees and asylum seekers
create a culture of welcoming...
Belonging is beneficial to everyone.
Gardening is our therapy and
makes a positive change for
sanctuary-seekers like us.
At Freedom from Torture's garden

We are dreamers, believers and creatives.
This lifts our spirits and hopes, heals our minds and hearts.
A place of sanctuary and peace.
Fill it with sunshine.
The rain will fall, the wind is gently blowing.
Spring is here!
Everything is growing.
We take care of our garden, we harvest joy: a reward so sweet at the Freedom from Torture garden.

A true sanctuary for survivors

I CAN BREATHE IN YOUR GARDEN

by Aso

I am in your garden

blue stones and pebbles inside the fountain catch the corners of my eyes, Small colourful fish jump happily over the sun, which glitters in the small pond. Dry leaves and flowers slowly fall down from branches Before they reach the ground, they will turn green again and fly with the breeze

I can breathe in your garden.

The reflection of the tree lies inside the quiet pond, Petals detach above, exhaling a scent which mingles with the smell of the grass, of pondweed and fish I smell something in your garden...

Birds tweeting and frogs croaking...

A grumpy gardener loudly wheezing, his wheelbarrow rolling and squeaking I am alone, sitting on the old wooden bench, eating an apple like Adam did in heaven, it is tasty, sweet and sour fighting fiercely inside my mouth.

I can breathe alone in your garden, in your garden for refugees, in this new windy, wet garden.
I feel safe, despite the gardener's barking dog.
This earth is cool and fresh.
I ran from cruelty to be a friend of this free nature
I ran from saws, scissors,
I ran from axes and scythes.
I want to breathe in your garden.

The muddy soil sticks to my shoes, but I feel free to walk.

There are green leaves still on the top of the trees

They are strong, desiring to stay, but they cannot cling on forever,
sooner or later they will fall down to the pond,
Just as I fell down from a dry and hot land and become a refugee in this silent and peaceful
garden, this freezing garden.

Thank you, dear gardener, for letting me breathe in you lovely, cold garden

WELCOME BACK GREEN GRASS

By Jade

Standing at the window watching Green grass coming out, We have both been hiding from the winter.

Under my window birds enjoying the day. Trees with tiny leaves, Their last year's leaves had run away with the snow.

Soil, black but very hard.
I go outside and plant tomatoes
I hope they will grow up and out, the rain is good for them.

I like to hear the rain against my window. Light fingers tips, then drumming louder and louder, the tomatoes are ripe and wiggling their leaves.

The next afternoon, the sun is out and the tomatoes are ripe and red the leaves are bigger and open.

I pick a tomato and eat it.
It tastes fresh and juicy.
I thank the tomatoes, thank you.

MY CONGO GARDEN

By Jean'Py

Last summer, sitting on the sofa watching a movie with my kids. A postman knocks on my front door.

What a surprising day! It arrives in a decorative box. Tear off the sellotape - here it is My Congo Garden.

The first shock the vivid green grass floods the whole room. My glorious Congo Garden.

The fountain waters the olive tree, fills the pond with fish. and the soil with abundant healthy vegetables. My fertile Congo Garden.

Seated on my Congo Garden's chair I stretch my feet out on the table In absolute silence. My peaceful Congo Garden.

Listening to the lively chatter of the birds, healing flows inside me. Relaxed Congo's fragrance through the trees. My healing Congo Garden.

What a delightful moment! I now could put it in my pocket. Walk everywhere with it all over London.

My personal Congo Garden.

In the bus, underground or train it becomes my everyday companion I could not live without you. My lovely Congo Garden

WRITERS' BIOGRAPHIES

Haydeh

Haydeh is from Iran and was imprisoned for political reasons. Living in England as a refugee has shown her new aspects of life. Studying at university, working as a school teacher and joining the Write to Life group has given her the motivation and enthusiasm to learn more about literature and music.

Jade

Jade was born in East Africa, studied journalism and worked as a sports reporter. After members of her family were killed and her own life was threatened, Jade was forced to flee and arrived in the UK in 2001. She joined Write to Life fourteen years ago. Jade volunteers at the Refugee Council, published her first collection, *Moving A Country*, in 2013, and regularly recites her work in the UK.

Marsha

Marsha is from Bangladesh, where she worked as a journalist. During the last decade in the UK, she has been forced to identify herself as an asylum seeker, foreigner, job snatcher and public liability - whereas Marsha relentlessly regains her identity as a resilient and compassionate thinker and activist, and is grateful for the life she has made in the UK. She worked with Guardian journalist and writer Simon Hattenstone in the 'Refugee Journalism Project 2018-2019', and regularly contributes to FFT online publications. In 2023, she was published in 'Welcome to Britain: An Anthology of Poems and Short Fiction', and has also been published by Exiled Writers Ink and the Guardian. She has performed in charity events with NW Live Arts, Together Productions, and the V&A - and for the fundraising events of several charities working for the wellbeing of refugees and immigrants in the UK.

Tanya

Tanya was born in Zimbabwe, where she was a primary school teacher for fifteen years. Tanya and her family started speaking out against the regime in 1999, when it was becoming more and more oppressive and violent. Some of her family were killed and maimed as a result of their protests and Tanya was forced to flee. She arrived in the UK in 2013 and was referred to Freedom from Torture in 2017. Tanya loves nature, gardening and writing.

Yonas

Yonas was studying biomedicine at university in East Africa when he joined a protest meeting. He was arrested, tortured and imprisoned for a year. When he was temporarily released, he grasped the opportunity to escape to the UK, arriving in 2002. In 2022, he finally received British citizen which means he has the security of family life here with his partner and two children. He joined Write to Life in 2017. A lifelong writer, he is passionate about writing.

Joy

Joy is originally from The Democratic Republic of Congo. SHe has been a member of Write to Life since 2015, regularly writes poems and prose and is an enthusiastic singer and writer. She is also a member of the Sing for Freedom choir. She loves laughing wither her friends, but likes learning even more. She lives in London with her beautiful children.

Jean'Py

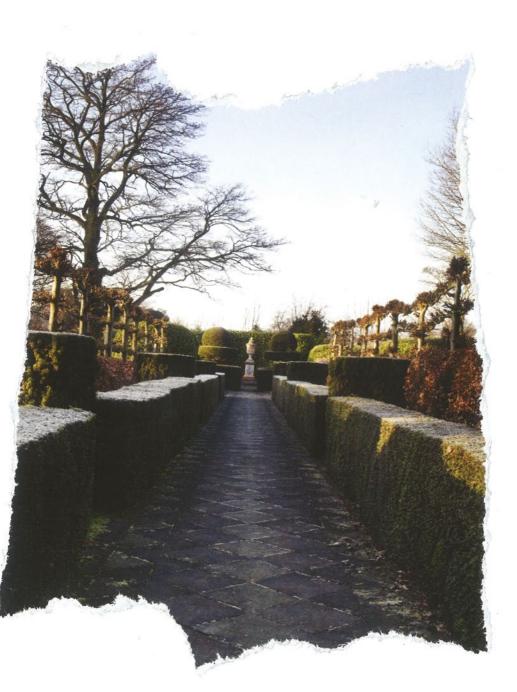
I did not come here by choice. I didn't even know I was coming to the UK. I just had to choose between death and survival. Now that I'm here, writing at FFT has helped me build my confidence and rebuild my life. When I read my work to an audience, or see it in print, it makes me feel I have, after all, something to offer the world.

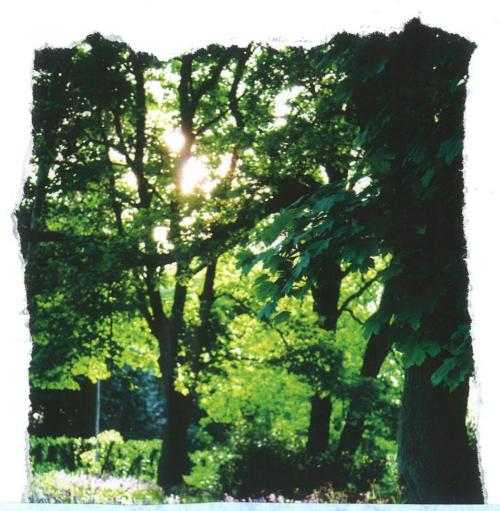
Aso

Aso is from Iraq.

Prossy

Prossy is from Burundi. After fleeing with the help of a stranger, she ended up locked in a house in London for three and half years before she escaped. Prossy thanks Write to Life for giving her the moral support to become who she is now, and helping her with new life in London and to feel comfortable in her home. When she joined the group at least her tears stopped, although sometimes they still fall.





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