

Whitsunday Voices Short Story Competition

Grades 9-10

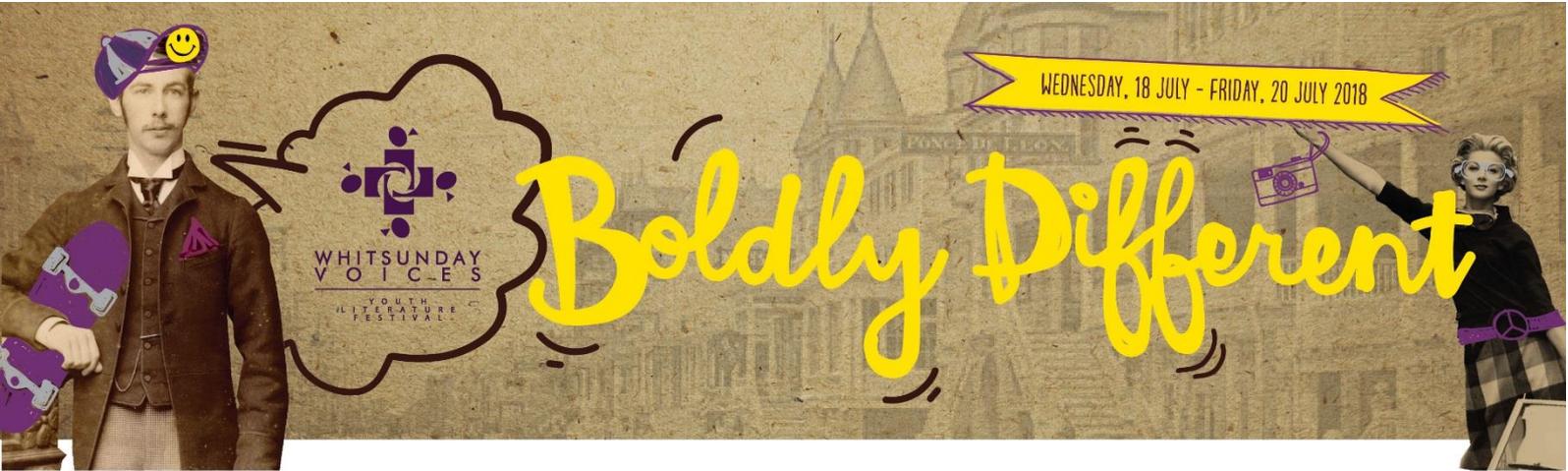
Highly Commended

Bianca Fisher for

To Live With Purpose

Undoubtedly, my work load has changed over the years. I swam with the souls of millions of vulnerable, young men when the bayonets were drawn in the once glossy fields of Europe, and again when the tanks marched and the skies rumbled and the sirens screamed, "So much for a war to end all wars." Now, once again, my work load increases, although in a somewhat different place this time. Perhaps, I ponder each time this happens, they will learn this time. But time and time again they astound me in their ability to defy logic and reason. I find myself contemplating whether or not I give them too much credit – until a human like Rasha Eid catches my attention.

Slight, elfin girl. Finely boned. Certainly, she was little, but her soul was heavy. I first encountered her in Al-Raqqah during a Russian air strike. The wee girl clung to her father, while her father clung to life. *Breaths become shallow, eyelids flutter shut, pulse grows weaker, until nothing.* I tickled his soul free and carried it far away, while Rasha Eid lay clutching her father's corpse. She hadn't liked planes anyway. Particularly when they steal her father's life.

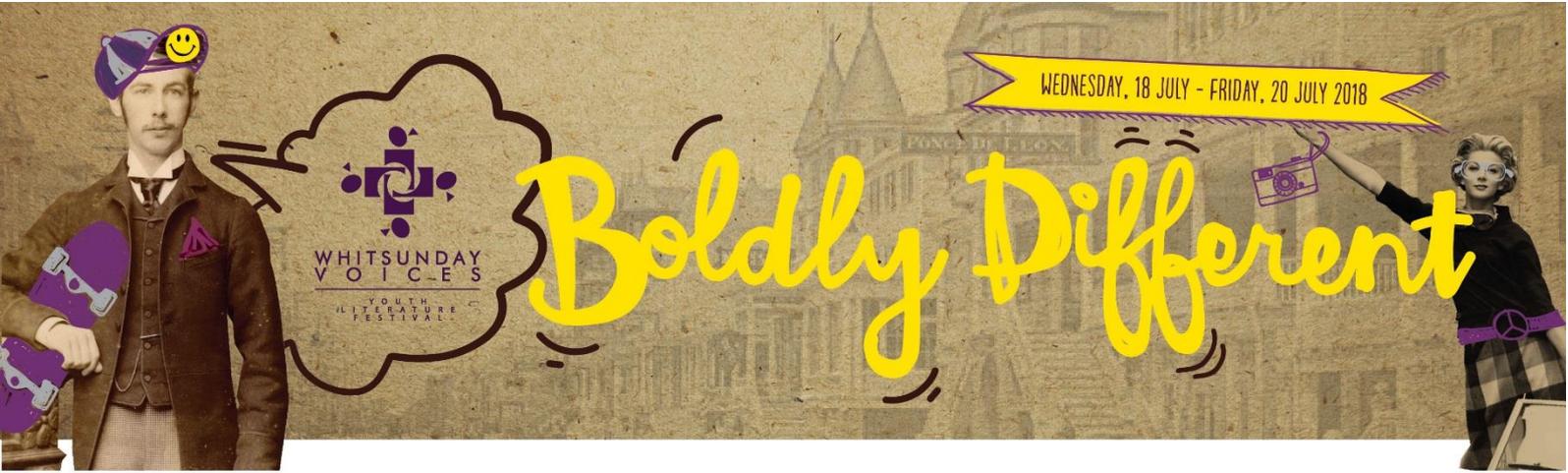


After Heavy bombardment, Rasha and her family fled to a neighbouring village where I saw her again, in passing. I was very busy that day. She hid underground, while the skies above swam with planes and the earth shattered in every direction and the humans screamed because at least screaming meant that they were alive. I drifted away with the souls of many – men, women, children, the weak and frail, the mangled and torn. They are all the same once their soul has gone: equal. Equal and cold.

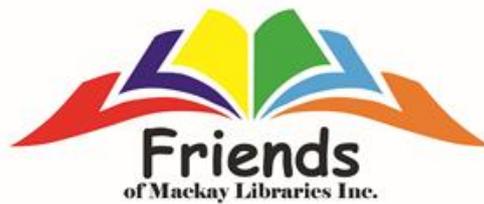
My third encounter with Rasha was on her journey to collect food for her family. Being so small, she went easily undetected. The trek comprised of sneaking through the remaining buildings and mounds of rubble, to the food source located at the edge of the town, whilst being careful to evade IS forces and other such dangers. If she were to be caught stealing food, it is indisputable that she would be shot – starving people are easier to oppress than fed. Indeed, compliance is the ultimate duty to be adhered by. After all, subservience cannot be achieved through fear, as long as there is hope. Humans are peculiar like that. I observed as Rasha embraced her mother, before murmuring in her ear, “Ma'a as salama.”

The young girl crept noiselessly through the streets, weaving through debris and crowds of tormented eyes, until finally she came to the supply truck which held the army's rations. She stayed hidden behind a rather large mound of rubble and listened for the soldier's distinctive barks. Once she was sure that they had gone, she swiftly snatched a small sack of grain and shoved it under her shirt. Indeed, Rasha was a mouse – or at least, she was forced to live like one; constantly scurrying inside at even the slightest twinge of danger in the air, stealing mere morsels of food to survive. If Rasha was a mouse, then IS were the hunting dogs. As she dashed to her haven of rubble, she heard something that made her numb with fear.

“Nazra, alfata! Look, the girl!” Rasha promptly turned and raced through the streets, whilst the dreadful sound of soldier's boots trailing behind her and their abrasive voices filled her ears. Her chest heaved as she ran, faster and faster, knowing that slowing down would lead to an unfortunate fate. Rasha was a mouse, but not all mice can outrun dogs. As the soldiers shouting got louder, Rasha knew she had no other choice than to hide.



She noticed a building ahead, which housed ruins that, after being destroyed in previous air strikes, provided a gap that only a mouse could hide in. Rasha crawled into her tiny mousehole and sat with her knees to her chin, tears streaming down her face and a relentless image of her deceased father appeared in her mind over and over and over. As she listened to the thud of the soldier's heavy boots, she promised herself that she would not have the same fate as her father, she would not become another victim, another soul taken. And who am I to break that promise? So, when the soldiers discovered and shot her, I did not take away her soul. And when she lay amongst dirt and crimson blood, I did not take away her soul. She had a determination to live that I have rarely seen, and I knew Rasha would one day do remarkable things. So, until that day, I sit and watch as Rasha Eid survives, and it fills me with a warmth that I intend to keep.



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