

Tracy Ryan

Julieka

A daughter begins so small but soon
outgrows her mother

bigger than love can keep hold of

from bud to blossom
and even thorn
we've no control of

Out in the world, the future

Yet to a mother,
a grandmother,
a father, she's forever
– some part of her –
that little slip they watched over

We want respect for her

When she cries out we want to come to her
or for others to do the same if we can't be there

Not the cold shoulder, the sneer
the hard voice out of nowhere
that says Faking it

Not the indifferent she'll-be-right, the failure
to listen when someone says pain

is ten out of ten, what can it mean
if she's treated like nobody's daughter?

What sort of blight are we under?

CALL FOR POEMS

The Deaths in Custody Watch Committee (WA) and Curtin University are planning a series of commemorative actions in 2016 to mark the 25th anniversary of the *Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody*, which handed down its 339 recommendations on 15 April 1991.

Our program begins with a call for poems on deaths in custody, whether commemorating an individual who has died in custody or exploring why Aboriginal people continue to be imprisoned at disproportionate rates. In 1983, 16-year-old John Pat died in custody in Roebourne jail of injuries inflicted by five off-duty police officers. This was a formative moment for the movement to end deaths in custody. Since the Royal Commission, there have been more than three hundred Aboriginal deaths in custody. Rates of imprisonment are worse for Aboriginal women and even more so for Aboriginal juveniles. Nowhere is this seen more clearly than in Western Australia. On 4 August 2014 a young Aboriginal woman, 22-year-old Ms Dhu, died in the Port Hedland lockup after being imprisoned for unpaid fines.

This call for poems is supported by Aunty Carol Roe, grandmother of Ms Dhu, and Professors Kim Scott, Anna Haebich and Suvendrini Perera at Curtin University.

Please send your poems to dicwcwa@gmail.com.

Make your voice heard in the call to stop deaths in custody



John Kinsella

In Marapikurrinya: for Ms Dhu

The uniforms won't listen, ore heaped up,
long steel ships waiting to take country
away. They refuse to see themselves,
boots and all, march away

from all spirits. They laugh at body,
they laugh at words, but they
have no idea they are dead-in-themselves,
their faces dressed up for the cameras.

They kill with impunity. They are designed
that way. In another lock-up, I have
seen the body of a young Noongah bloke
tossed like a hessian sack, his bones

all busted, and the ring-a-ring-a-rosie
circle laughing and saying you deserve
what you get. The uniforms denied he was
in there, inside his own body. The sounds

that crept out were television – they all watched
American cop shows. It's all there for them –
the land dressed up as state or nation:
they fancy their long arms reaching out,

they fancy their long arms reaching
across tribal boundaries, heaping it all
into the belly of those long ships
or into trucks or train. To furnaces.

Stretching fences across stone and sand
and far into sea? Their magnificent
jurisdiction of brutality. They are their
own totems. They worship their 'order'.

I know that port. I have been in a house
where Nyangumarta and Yamaji
came together listening to Coloured Stone
and Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee.

And stories were told then, back
then, as the death-toll rises and those
hunting parties of the Old North
find their latest manifestation.

This reaches out to you, Ms Dhu,
and to all those from past and present
who hold you close, who won't see
you lost in the files of the 'deceased'.

You will outlive them all.
You will hold back the uniforms
from striking more and more of your people down.
You will be the beginning. You will never end.

