

Fences (poem)

Written by Joel McKerrow, performed by Joel McKerrow and the Mysterious Few for their record "Welcome Home".

Listen to Fences performed by Joel McKerrow:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tdgqMH1bN8U>

The first fence that I've ever hated was the electric fence that I peed on as a child. It was not a fun day. There are, after all, only two types of people in this world. Those who learn from the others who have gone before them, and those who just have to go and pee on the fence themselves. I was always the latter.

And since then, I've never liked fences.

The second fence that I came to hate was during my teenage years. It was the corrugated iron variety standing tall behind my hotel in Vanuatu. The peak of a boy face over the top - I wondered who he was, and walked from hotel room past swimming pool, across lush green grass, and stood on tiptoes to see...the boy and his sister, standing knee high in rubbish and the scrimmage of desperation.

I leant on the fence. It cut my chest where lush green grass abruptly stopped and the dirt of an ugly city began. The grass is never greener on the other side, when it is we who keep the water to ourselves.

I have never liked fences.

Those things that separate us, stacked between us, built high to keep them out, to hold us in. But holding is not really the right word, fences do not hold us, they scare us into rigidity, into security, into a small space.

I have stood on the Palestinian side of the boarder, placed hands like a prayer on the mortar, where a boy showed me Banksy but he could not show me his girlfriend for she lived on the other side of the wall. Oh Palestine. Oh Israel. Oh Montagu. Of Capulet. Two households both alike in dignity, from ancient grudge break to new mutiny where civil blood makes civil hands unclean.

I have never liked fences.

I have walked in Berlin. The wall that was torn down. 25 years, the separation of mother from daughter, from child, from son. I have knelt in Dakar prison camp, hands torn by the barbed wire of genocide. I have stood in Belfast at the Peace wall. I do not know why we would ever call it a peace wall. No wall has ever been. Have you ever been to Wall Street?

Our fences are not always physical. The fence between top floor management and the beggars on the street, between the haves and the have nots, where the money is and where it is not, to the white picket fence is not as innocent as we once thought.

I've never liked fences.

The walls that are held up by both sides. The left and the right, white and black, men versus women, Christian versus atheist, versus Islam, pro life versus pro choice.

Our voices rise till we cannot hear the cries of those forgotten in the middle of it all. The pregnant teenager who just needs someone to love on them. We fight our wars and forget the people caught in the middle of it all.

I have picked up too many bodies, riddled with too many bullets that have been fired from my own gun, killed by my own gun, I am deafened by my own gun. Bullets do not discriminate by race or gender or political ideals. They say that it is not good to sit on the fence. But I am wondering if this is exactly where we should be, between force and retaliation, between us and them, and them and us, between the violence of our arguments, between the walls that demarcate what is mine from what is yours, my land from yours, your land from theirs, anywhere must be better than this.

So let us sit on the fence. Not twiddling thumbs with no opinion but with bandages for the broken. With chisel in hand, with hammer, and with axe, to swing, to swing, to swing until the wall is torn down.

I have never liked fence.