

‘TENACITY TO DO IT,’

The tenacity to create one
recipe of uncorrected proof



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Eilish Kelly

Forward

Someone I knew once said, "We are not born with courage, we must find it".

The stories and poems you are about to read are written by women who have found courage in abundance. They have survived childhood fractured by the conflict on this Island. Many of them witnessed the grief and sorrow of a mother at the loss of her husband or son/s, while feeling deeply the loss of a father or brother/s themselves. Some of the women have endured violent and controlling relationships, but all of them have poured into their stories and poems an understanding of each other, their family, community and the world around them.

As readers, I hope you will see, what I can see clearly in this publication - that it is important to honour that in ourselves that is the source of our wisdom and our strength. "My continuing passion is to part a curtain, that invisible shadow that falls between people, the veil of indifference to each other's presence, each other's wonder and each other's human plight" ~ Eudora Welty.

Eilish Kelly – Creative Writing Tutor



Mary Kate Quinn, Andrée Murphy

Introduction

Relatives for Justice (RFJ) was founded in April 1991 when a number of bereaved families affected by the conflict came together to support one another. Instrumental in the formation of the organization were key figures that had, on a voluntary basis, been active for the previous 2 decades such as Monsignor Raymond Murray, Clara Reilly, Peter Madden, the law practice partner of the late Pat Finucane, and the late human rights lawyer Rosemary Nelson both subsequently murdered.

Relatives for Justice is a world recognised NGO working with and providing support to relatives of people bereaved, and injured, by the conflict across the North of Ireland including border regions in the 26 counties. RFJ identifies and attempts to address the needs of those who have suffered loss and injury; this is achieved through one to one contacts, self-help, group support, outreach and befriending, counselling support and therapy work, welfare and legal advocacy.

As relatives and survivors we all need to have our experiences heard and valued. In terms of conflict



From left to right: Maura McCafferty, Mary McKenna, Gemma Mac Eoin, Carmel Quinn, Helen Largey, Rita Bonner.

resolution this will also allow those most marginalised to realise the pivotal role and vital contribution that they bring to the creation of a new society based upon equality, respect and above all where human rights are secured. This work highlights and attempts to address outstanding human rights abuses. Our primary objective in this area of work is to assist in the bringing about of a more human rights-based culture in order to safeguard and protect human rights for all.

The Peace III SEUPB Transitional Legacies Project supports individuals and families to express their experience of their conflict related bereavement or injury in a supportive and safe environment. This project records those experiences and develop models of best practice in delivery of victim centred transitional justice mechanisms. This particular project would not have been possible without this funding.

This project was carried out over a five month period with seven women, who have been directly bereaved or injured during the conflict in Ireland.

The purpose of this project was to address experiences where female victims have not had a voice and have felt silenced. The aim was to develop

and facilitate their narrative through the medium of Creative Writing. In essence promoting an understanding of women's experiences of the conflict. In addition providing a safe environment for them to release their potential thereby expanding their ability to put in to words lost memories through short stories and poems.

The outcome of the project is this book, 'Tenacity to do it – the tenacity to create one recipe of uncorrected proof'. This book elegantly highlights the lived experiences of women. Whilst every story or poem is unique and personal to the individual, these seven women provide a snapshot to daily life of women living through conflict. Bearing witness to these stories allows us a greater understanding of the experiences of the individuals involved and that of their wider community. It is worth noting the process these women allowed RFJ to facilitate involved openness, transparency, empathy and understanding but above all respect for others. From that background we trust you will enjoy the read.

Andrée Murphy – Deputy Director

Mary Kate Quinn – Transitional Legacies Project Worker



RITA BONNER

When I heard about the creative writing class I thought I would give it a try. I wrote a few poems but never had the confidence to let anyone read them. I was apprehensive at first, then settled into the class and found it was the best decision I had made. Through poetry I found an outlet to express my emotions and feelings, this was my therapy. As a group we supported and encouraged, we laughed and cried, but most of all respected each other. As our tutor would say "there is no right or wrong way". Her easy manner and guidance helped to give us the freedom to write without fear of ridicule.



Are they waiting until we are gone?

Are they waiting until we are gone?
Do they think it will die with us?
They are so wrong.

Our families will fight
To set the truth free,
It will be passed onto them
As it was to me.

Justice will be done
Just wait and see,
You cannot hide the truth,
Not for eternity.

You slandered his good name
To hide what you did!
You murdered my brother,
My mammy's big son.

Not content in killing one
You tortured and slandered her other son.
Then we are told, we have to move on,
If it was your brother would you not right this wrong?

We have to visit the past to make sure peace will last.
Visit it often, feel a families pain
And DO NOT let this happen EVER again.



The Brown Suit

I bought that little suit
Just three weeks previous,
Trousers too long for his five year old legs.

I set about turning them up
Hemmed and ready to wear,
The tiny waist coat, the colour brown.

Save it for Sunday
His mum did say,
Ah no, let him wear it was my cry.

Holiday just ending,
He put the suit on.
He was just gorgeous,
His name, wee John.

He would run and play,
He was mischievous and bright,
My little godson, the light of my life.

Everything was crammed into five lovely years,
Then all the laughter turned into despair and tears.

I am glad he wore it,
Even just for one day,
"Our wee John"
Now with the angels he does play.

Anger

Anger runs deep,
It eats you up,
You cannot sleep.

Mind goes racing,
Tummy churning,
Your heart is pacing,
Your face is burning.

You bottle it inside,
When you want to scream and shout,
I'm so bloody angry,
I want to let it out.

I would need to go to a mountain,
Where others could not hear.
I would squeal and vent my anger,
I wouldn't need to hold back,
The anger would tumble out.

With clenched fists,
Frustrated tears,
The anger held back for so many years,
Maybe then I could be free,
With all that anger out of me.



GEMMA MAC EOIN

I joined the creative writing class with an open mind, not knowing what to expect but wanting to gain something. The first thing it did was made me realise that I had a wonderful, beautiful imagination. This filled me with excitement. I felt I was growing again, being free to have this imagination meant I was no more a sheep, no more part of anything that could tie up my mind. A freedom to explore.

I have met wonderful women who have inspired me. We have laughed, shared memories and cried together. We are all unique but similar. The freedom of mind I have has opened up many memories I blocked out long ago. The chance to write about the horror stories of my life, getting them trapped on paper, sharing these to all is liberating. Once you have trapped your horror it cannot escape. Do not be afraid, I have remembered many great memories. Memories of love, laughter, fun and the warm days of sunshine. Maybe one day, these too I will share with you but for now I keep them in my red velvet box, just for me.



Torture

Another kick, punch, slap.
You listen to them shouting,
Silently, you are screaming.

Threw back in your cell.
"Thank God I will get a rest".
You gently remove the loose hair
That's been pulled from your head.
Silently, you are screaming.

The pain is not easing.
Cannot sleep.
Mind is racing, thinking of family.
Just do not moan, in a few days you will be home.
Silently, I am crying.

I listen to the cries of others.
Cries of body and mind.
No one on the outside can hear us, one day,
justice we will find.
Silently, I am screaming.

Thinking of these beatings,
has it harmed my unborn child?
Handcuffed to a cop, on a hospital trolley I lay.
All sorts of tests are done.

WILL MY BABY DIE?
This one, I cannot forget nor will I forgive.
INSIDE I SCREAM.
YOU HAVE MADE YOURSELF AN ENEMY EVEN MORE.

Gaza

The sound of a Mother's cry,
these are my children, they have died.
Playing innocently with the sand,
Murdered by the enemy's hand.

Broken hearts are left behind,
to get shelter that they cannot find.
Homes left in heaps of rubble,
a flood of Blood run's to the Sea.

A Mother screams 'how can this be'?
'Allah there's nothing left for me!'
How many more have to die
before the world opens their eyes?

We are the ones with the right to return,
It's our land, our homes and loved ones you have taken.
We live in despair but with a glimmer of hope,
If you think we will give up, you are mistaken.



Rebirth

A long time ago in a land far away, lived a woman who had no time for anyone or anything except her family. She had cut herself off from the world and lived a simple, solitary life in a small hamlet. This is how she thought she could survive the cruel world she had run away from.

At the weekends her sons and grandchildren would visit. This would be time of joy for her. She knew she could love them and receive love back. An unconditional love that has no end. All sitting around the open fire, telling stories and laughing.

Sundays is what she disliked as they would pack up their belongings and head back to the city to prepare for the working week. She would smile and wave them off, longing for the next time they arrive. Each night they would ring her, make sure she was ok and that she had all that she needed. 'Of course I am fine, I have everything I need. Just hearing your voices is enough for me'. Hearing their voices was always enough for her, knowing they were safe and doing well set her heart at ease.

She would then settle herself in front of the large window and wait for the large black crow to come and sit on the lonely willow tree. The tree sat right in the middle of the local farmer's field. (I must point out, this tree is known as the fairy tree, no farmer would ever think of pulling it out as the fairies would curse them, so it has stood for hundreds of years). The crow fascinated her. Every night at 9pm, no earlier, no later, she would watch how he guarded the tree. No other bird could land near the tree, nor dared any animal go near the tree.

She would often wake to the dawn chorus after nodding off during the watch.

One night she had settled down to her routine of watching the lonely willow tree, the clock struck 9pm, then the clock struck 10pm. What happened to the crow? Where did it go? She decided to stay up all night to see if the crow would come back to its branch.

As the clock struck midnight she peered out at the willow tree, which looked so alone. This tree reminded her of herself. Surrounded by people but very alone. She wondered why she felt like that. All her life she felt that she was being punished because the people that she had loved, she had also lost. Violence was a common feature in her life. What had she done to deserve this?

She rubbed her eyes, 'do I see fire'? Surely not, she thought to herself, it must be the tiredness. Again, she peered through the large window, 'yes! There is a fire at the willow tree!'

She ran to the door, ran as fast as she could to the tree to be stunned as the bottom of the tree was glowing! It was an inviting glow, a warm appealing glow that filled her eyes. She sat down beside it. It seemed like only a minute of time had passed but twilight was appearing in the night's sky.

She never told anyone, not even her family.

This glow appeared night after night. She continued to go down to the willow tree to sit beside its warmth.

It became precious to her, she longed for the glow to appear, to bathe in the warmth, the love and the rest.

Her life began to change, she became more open, made friends and began to help in the local community.

One evening as she waited for the willow tree to glow she began to think of how her life has transformed. Her bitterness which she clung on to had disappeared, she had let go of her twisted thoughts and revenge and hate. Oh how free she felt, life was good.

A farmer was passing the next day and saw her laying under the willow tree. There was nothing to be done. She had achieved her goal in life to rid herself of her hate and bitterness. It was now her time to rest.

On the day she was to be buried beside her soul mate, her family could not believe what they saw. The little church was crowded with people. They told the mourning family stories of their mother, how she brought them love and taught them how to forgive.

Hearing this, the sons began to weep, their mother had found peace in her mind and soul.

You see, the crow she saw every night was her, eaten with hatred and bitterness. When the crow left and the glow arrived that is when she saw her soul, her heart and her peace of mind. As she sat each night with her inner self she was cleansed. It was time for her to go home.



Glow, Crow and the willow tree.

Gemma Mac Eoin



CARMEL QUINN

When I was a child I had always loved to read poetry but this had long been forgotten as I entered adulthood.

When I joined the creative writing class in R.F.J I had one ambition; to write a short story my mother had told me when I was a child.

Like so many people I thought that talent was for someone else. We have been encouraged by a wonderful tutor, to leave all misconceptions behind that we all had talent but we needed to open our minds as we did when we were children.

And so I began writing poems, stories, putting little long forgotten moments onto paper.

The beautiful women I have shared this experience with have supported, encouraged, laughed and shed a few tears with me, our lives journeys have been so similar as women we have had so much to cope with that we had forgotten to look at the skills and experiences we have acquired as we have gone through life.

Over these last few months these skills and experiences have now become writing skills and for this we have our tutor Eilish to thank.

These pieces of work, 'snippets of my life'. They might not be of the same quality of Seamus Heaney or Thomas Hardy but they are mine. I hope you enjoy reading them as I have had a wonderful and healing journey getting to the place where I could put them onto paper.

Letting go

30 Feet long, 12 Feet wide,
So many memories trapped inside.
Days at the beach
Then at night snug and warm,
Oh how I wished those days would go on.

The years fly so quickly,
My babies all grow,
But still to that safe place, I continued to go.

The windows fell out,
The roof began to leak,
I repaired them with vigor,
Memories of my mummy trying to keep.

Donegal winters,
Too much snow,
Finally did the damage,
I had to let go.

That New Year's Day when I said goodbye,
My heart was sore
But I did not cry.

Donegal still holds my heart
And there I make new memories
With a new start.

My family all around me,
I look at them with pride.
The years may have gone
But they are still by my side.

Making more beautiful memories
To keep out the rain
And so to Donegal we return,
Again and again and again.



My Time

In the silence of the night the ticking of the clock could be heard. To my seven year old reasoning, I thought it might get louder when night came. I could never hear it in the day.

This was my time, in a busy household, always full to bursting with people. Always noisy, laughter, chatter, arguments, tears. I was the last in the pecking order, with my siblings totalling eight, I seemed to go unnoticed. Not in a neglected way but I was the shy quiet one, the fragile one, the baby.

Then at the end of the school week when everyone else had gone to bed, quietly down the stairs we would go, my mummy holding my hand. Just the two of us alone in the living room in the middle of the night. I would curl up on the chair beside the fire. The only light coming from the kitchen, casting shadows on the brightly coloured lino floor.

I would lose myself in the wonder of the embers, all kinds of faces and shapes would appear. And then the sweet smell would drift through the door, dipped bread frying in the pan, accompanied by a mug of tea. The taste and comfort of that treat could never be found in any five star restaurant.

Just me and my whole world sitting by the fire. Perhaps it was the childhood magic, awake when the whole world was asleep. Or maybe it was the total security I felt. I was unaware of the war knocking on the door, I was unaware that my mother was unable to sleep. And so I was her comfort, her company when the house was still.

This was my time but this was also the time when she also felt safe and found a little peace.



The New Shoes

The rain had stopped and the sun appeared in the sky, as I looked up I could see a beautiful rainbow that seemed to go on forever.

I was ten years old, the year 1930 and yet after all these years the memories are crystal clear.

It was a Saturday morning but I did not have the time to myself. This was the hungry thirties, before the N.H.S or benefits, so I had a job. I looked after a 10 month old baby while his mother went to work. I was paid a few pennies which I give to my mother. Most ten year olds now would not have any idea of how to look after a baby but coming from very large families we had to grow up very quickly.

So I collected my charge, put him in his pram and off we went, down the Crumlin road, past Carlisle Circus - destination City Hall.

I loved going to the City Hall. The large grand building and beautiful gardens were a stark contrast to our street with the overcrowded two by two houses and not a garden in sight. I longed for open space and green fields. My mother often said it was the country blood in

me as my father was from a small village in Cookstown, Co. Tyrone. Like so many people at the turn of the century, he had come to Belfast seeking work.

As I made my way along the entrance of this grand building, I side-stepped the puddles left from the earlier downpour. With the holes at the bottom of my shoes, I was trying to avoid getting my feet wet. Then suddenly from nowhere a bicycle appeared, hit the puddle and the water splashed all over me. As I began to brush the dirty water from my dress with great dignity, the man stopped and got off his bike. I noticed he was wearing a scarf that I recognised, the students from the local university all wore them and so my posture became very upright. I thought that he would just go on about his business. Even at such a young age I was aware of the unjust class system in my country but he was not like the other students I had met on my weekly travels to the City Hall.

I still remember the kindness in his face. He seemed a man to me then but looking back, he was just a boy.

He immediately apologised for ruining my shoes and socks then asked if I would be staying long in town.

I told him I usually stayed an hour or so and at this he apologised again and was gone.

I sat on the grass playing with the baby; loving the freedom of such a huge space and time past quickly. The sun had dried my dress, so I thought it was time I was making my way back home. I lifted little Michael to put him into his pram and just as I was about to leave I heard someone call. I looked up and saw the young man waving at me telling me to wait. I was slightly apprehensive as to why he would come back. He had a parcel in his hand and held it out to me, "I am really sorry for ruining your shoes and socks. Please except this as a way of me recompensing you". My mother had always warned me to never accept anything for nothing. "We might be poor" she would say "but we have our dignity and pride". I told him it was alright, he did not need to worry. He insisted that I take the parcel and so a little reluctantly, I accepted and thanked him.

As he got on his bike to leave he turned and looked back at me and said; "your red hair is beautiful, the color of my mother's", with this he was gone. I sat down again on the grass and opened the package. I could not believe my eyes. The stranger had bought me a brand new pair of leather patent shoes and lace socks.

I ran all the way home only pausing for a few seconds to leave the baby off with his mother. I ran in our front door with the parcel tightly in my hands shouting for my mother. She was sitting at the table by the window and I noticed she had been crying. She wiped away the tears, and smiled at me "what has you so excited"? She asked. I began telling her the whole episode. She sat listening with great interest, she could not believe it when she saw the shoes! She turned and smiled at me

and said; "Mary love, we will be eating like kings tonight. God always finds a way to put food on our table".

The shoes were retrieved from the pawn shop every Saturday for Sunday Mass. For that one day a week I felt like a Princess. Then on a Monday back they went. We had many a good meal on those shoes but I often wondered why the young man had shown such kindness.

Many theories had been suggested over the years, "maybe his mother had died and I looked like her" was my younger sister's theory. My mother's reply to this was, "maybe it was just human kindness, there are more good people in the world than bad".

I often thought about that young man as I became a mother myself. He had noticed the holes in my shoes and acted out of kindness and compassion. I always remembered him in my prayers and hoped life had treated him kindly.

This is a true story told to me by my mother. I loved to hear it over and over again when I was a child. Sadly my mother passed away three months short of her 80th birthday on 20th March 2000. She was a strong, kind, dignified woman who never lost her faith in mankind even though life did not treat her kindly. She never became embittered, she was a wonderful mother and grandmother who always said; "love and kindness costs nothing".

Maybe the young man who had shown such kindness to her did not realize what effect it would have. There are always lessons to be learned in life, small acts of kindness go a long way.

Carmel Quinn

HELEN LARGEY

I used to be an avid reader, a trait I inherited from my father but recently I lost the concentration and interest to read from beginning to end. When the invitation came to join a creative writing class I thought why not, it might help me regain my love of reading. Little did I realise that I would produce and read my own stories.

I could never have found a more inspiring group of people to grow with and a Captain who steered us demandingly with love and encouragement. There have been many tears and lots of laughter as our memories got closer to the bone. But then a warrior never shows his heart until the axe reveals it. There is a story in each of us, the best ones are written from the heart, for me the best is yet to come. My stories are like the dreams I have for my children – so I ask you 'tread softly on my dreams.....'



The Circles of my Life

The colours of my life, young and old,
Some stories never told;
The hurt, the pain, the shame.
The life as a wife with no name.
Keep moving.

The hands that cared, now withered and bare,
The wisdom that comes with age at some stage.
Keep moving.

The energy that used to fill now sits still,
The wrinkles now etched on skin,
More years behind than in front.
Keep moving.

Helen Largey





The Red Box

And there it sat on my kitchen table. That red box which had haunted my childhood as to what lay within its tempting cover of velvet, inviting me to have a sneak inside. Oh how I wished I could have snatched that box and took it away with my childish clutch to a darkened corner of my grandmother's house and seek the treasure within, and yet, here it was right in front of me and I required no-one's permission to free the contents within.

So why did I hesitate? What was it that prevented me? I no longer had that childlike imagination believing that pearls and diamonds twinkled and shone – no longer had that childlike clutch now that I was a grandmother. Oh, how my memories came flooding back to me of weekly trips to my grandmother's and how my mother fussed about my dress and hair with instructions to only speak when spoken to. I didn't mind going with my mother to visit her mother but I sensed something in my mother's behaviour that she and I had to be presentable and perfect for this thin, fragile old lady who I felt no connection too.

But on the journey home my mother's tense clasp on my hand felt more relaxed and I was treated to ice-cream, my payment for being good. When bedtime

came and I recalled the granny visit my mind would always wonder about the red box and the contents there in. What could possibly be in the beautiful red velvety box that grandmother kept high on the shelf out of reach from me. I was never invited to have a look even though half my visit was spent staring and willing the box to fall off the shelf and display its insides to me.

As I grew older my weekly visits became less but my mother continued her visits – daughterly duty I guess. I remembered strained conversations between the two of them and wondered why my mother bothered. When my grandmother left this world the red box left too. I was told grandmother went to heaven so I figured the red box went there too – so I was right granny had treasure but she had taken it with her.

I forgot all about the box from that day, no longer wondering or caring about the contents. Then as my mother became thin and fragile my daughterly duties commenced. I had many conversations with my own mother, some funny, some sad. I did enquire about my grandmother and her strange ways. My mother confided in me that she was born out of wedlock and placed in a home.

My granny went on to meet and marry a widower who had three young children but they barely gave her a second thought when she became old and less able. I asked my mother why then did she put up with the cantankerous old lady who had given her up. My mother's reply was that granny was her mother for all the rights and wrongs of it and she needed to feel accepted by her as her daughter. I felt angry at this – my mother was the most loving and caring person I knew however knowing this about her I had to accept her reasons.

And so my daughterly duties continued until my own mother went to heaven. I missed her terribly. During the clearance of her home I found it in a darkened corner of her wardrobe.

There it was – the red box – not as red and velvety as I had remembered when a child – but I knew it instantly. I did not have the childish impulse to grab it and hide in a dark corner to seek out those diamonds and pearls.

I lifted it tentatively treating it as a fragile gift. And so here it was on my kitchen table. The doorbell rang. I knew it would be my children with their children. I rose from the table opened the door and we all flooded into

the kitchen. Everyone saw the red box – not on a shelf – not hidden in a wardrobe but reachable and for all to see. "What is it mum?" "What's inside nana?" "I don't know", I replied. "Well, let's have a look!" everyone cried. So I returned to my chair and placed my hands on the lid of the box hesitating – should I share the delights inside or keep them for myself? I looked around at expectant faces staring back at me. What was I to do? Slowly I raised my hands, a smile spread across my face. I looked back at them all.

I eased the lid off and felt slightly disappointed, no diamonds or pearls awaited me. But more precious contents were there – photos of my mother as a baby, a baby blanket with my mother's name stitched into it, photos of her as a young woman and with her children. My mother's life was in the box – my grandmother had accepted her as her daughter. I shared the precious treasure of the box to those around me. I only hoped my mother had viewed the contents for herself.



Synopsis

I commenced this creative writing class because of my love for reading; books, poems or short stories. I have a love of words you see – the power to inspire or indeed to hurt.

The group of women who attend are a caring and encouraging lot that belies their strength of character as is evident in the writings. The most recent piece of writing that we have been requested to produce is either a story or poem relating to a piece of our life. The tutor describes it as: look at your life as a cake, cut a slice and let me look at and taste that piece of cake.

No, it's not that the work we have completed to date is rubbish – in fact we all have pieces that are good enough to be published in a booklet that will put our work out to the public for praise or criticism – as people will do.

There are many slices of my life-cake, too many for one short story. My life could be written in two books at least. The one stipulation to this piece is when completed, it has to be put to bed. For instance, we have to invite the reader to feel the hurt, pain and shame we experienced. Like sitting with your trusted friend over a cuppa and telling your story; getting it

off your chest so to speak. Putting it to bed, laying it to rest, forgetting about it, ultimately moving on and not letting the event impact you, making you stronger and hopefully more positive.

There are some events in my life that I am not ready to put on paper and to 'move on' from just yet but there are many I could write about; some sad, some funny, some showing strength, some showing when I was on the floor and had to claw my way back. Stories we all have within ourselves. But who wants to bare their soul?

It goes without saying the birth of my children were my happiest days, three boys and three girls. I myself am the fourth eldest in a row of fifteen children. Our house could be crazy at times with eleven girls and four boys. I could of course write about funny times we had. When, like everyone else, we had nothing. Sad times during the conflict and the impact at the loss of a loved one in the family.

How I once met a guy at the age of fifteen, he sixteen, dated for a while only to meet up again thirty-two years later and are now together.

Do you want to hear about my divorce? How I nearly lost my home? Or how I brought my children up almost



singlehandedly? Or maybe you would like to know about my wedding day and why my parents didn't attend because the groom 'kicked with the other foot'? Or my estranged relationship with my mother who was granny by name but not by nature. My mother had her own issues that were never ever discussed. She never let anyone get close – the word 'fart' in our house was a bad word.

Oh, I know! Maybe I should tell you about when I was the secretary of our street committee. We organised a street party for the kids, the first one ever held. Or maybe when I was a Union rep and was asked by the facilitator to give a speech to all those attending the conference, mine was about carers leave. The fact the government had left the decision to grant carers leave to the discretion of the boss. I could never avail of this as the HR person justified that decision by stating I could not be treated any different from the rest of my work colleagues. Things became so unbearable I jumped because I knew the HR person was working night and day to have me pushed.

Wait. I should tell you the story about my daughter having to go to England for scoliosis surgery and the head consultant informing myself and two others he

had taken advice from a colleague's friend (who was Irish) on how to deal with the Irish. Now that's a story for another day.

Here, I know, how about a story about my one true friend. I moved into the house next door and she and I shared everything for ten years or more. A minor argument occurred that she took harder than I thought. Her husband dies, I supported her. My daughter died, her godchild, but I never saw her. An opportunity presented itself for us to re-connect but she never took it, which left me feeling sad.

My stories are built like layers of skin, each layer you peel off, you will find another story. Some layers of my skin are tougher than others – no amount of moisturiser will soften it. The deeper you go the deeper the story. There are layers of my life I have let go of, there are some I wish I had retained. There are some people who have entered my life, some didn't stay long, and there were a few I wished had stayed longer.

I have not completed this story as requested but I have poured the ingredients of a life-cake into the mixing bowl. I just haven't baked it yet.





MAURA M^CCAFFERTY

When I got news that Relatives for Justice were running a creative writing class I jumped at the chance to join it. On the first night our tutor asked each one of us why we had come. My reply; I wanted to do something for me, it was time for me to find my space.

Over the weeks everyone in the class has opened up. Sometimes for me, I felt that I was being forced to go back too far in my life and remember things that had happened to me in childhood. Eilish said that to be a good writer you had to find yourself first, recapture feelings and experiences.

Over my life there has been good and bad times and I always coped by finding closure and moving on. The group have been amazing and we have all come a long way together. Sharing our writings of sorrow, joy and aspirations. For me, being able to write poetry was something amazing.

It will be with great sadness to end our sessions together for we have bonded together as a group and hopefully we can arrange to meet up at least once a week indefinitely.

A big thank you to Relatives for Justice for organising the class and a big thank you to Eilish who has been a great inspiration to us all, has opened our minds and given us the confidence to enjoy writing and sharing.



You push me to the brink

You push and push me to the brink,
As I fill the kettle at the sink.
You tap your fingers on the table top,
the noise is irritating.

You give me no time to answer questions,
You interrupt most conversations.
I have tried and tried to be patient
But like the kettle slowly boiling,
My anger takes me to another place.

I lift a plate and throw it at you
And as it shatters on the wall above you,
The dumb look on your face brings me back
down from that place.
Turning around smiling as I do,
Would you like your tea now?

Rush

Rush, rush, rush,
That is all I seem to be doing,
Worrying about everyone's problems and woes
Along with my own.

In my thought zone there is time to love,
Time to feel sorrow,
Times to comfort,
Times to really get angry,
Glorious times to make-up,
All experiences of life's precious gifts.

Slow up, slow up,
Has to be the order of the day,
Times for things I want to do and care for,
It is my time, so I am not going to delay.



Lost Community

Started off in one room in tenement downtown,
Added rooms as child after child came, busy street, old market nearby.
Everyone called in and shouted 'Hi'.
Doors never shut, teapot on stove, not much money, but every day was sunny.

Redevelopment raised its ugly head,
Family life was never going to be the same.
Stayed as long as they could, finally had to move,
Chose a terrace house up the road.

Never seeing doors closed before,
This mystery haunted the old man.
What secrets lurked behind the green, red, brown doors?
Why did they hide behind closed doors?

A lifetime of ups and downs,
Remembering the friendliness, happiness and joys.
Evaporating into sadness and loneliness,
Yearning until his dying day,
Cursing the rows of ever-ending closed doors.

Maura M^cCafferty



MARY M^cKENNA

Why did I choose creative writing? Well I don't know. It was mentioned to me so I signed up for it and to be truthful, I am so glad I did. I am a very nervous person but the teacher put us all at ease as soon as we sat down. It was a great group of people, we all got on so well. One true thing that was said – 'don't think it, ink it!' That has helped me a lot.

Who am I?

Sometimes I sit and wonder,
Who am I?
Why am I here?
Where do I belong?

For a fleeting moment I am up above the clouds,
Looking down at me.
Why am I here?

Then I stop and think,
I am here because I am meant to be.

I am a daughter,
A sister,
A mother,
Soon to be grandmother,
A friend.
And then I realise,
I am me.

Mary M^cKenna



I remember

I remember my mammy telling us about this woman. She had come to her very worried. Her husband had bought her some Oxo cubes and told her it made a lovely stew. She had followed the instructions on the box, 'just add water'. I suppose you don't believe everything it says on the tin so to speak!

I remember sitting in class one day when my teacher asked us all to stand up in front of the class. We all had to read our stories we had written the night previous as homework. One by one we stood in front of the class and read them aloud. We all read our stories quite quickly except for one girl. She told the best story ever! We were all in total shock! When she finished our teacher said that it was quite good and she would have believed her if she had turned the page once. We all just laughed.

I had two older brothers and a brother and two younger sisters. Me being the oldest girl - I was my mother's chum. I went everywhere with her. My sister who isn't much younger than me was a 'daddy's girl'. I remember when I was young I always went to my granny's house with my mother. She lived just around the corner from us. On a Sunday my granny baked all day, I can still smell the aroma of cinnamon and apples,

onion and mince. Granny's house was like a safe haven, always made to feel loved and special. She was a small woman whilst my granda was a tall man. I used to think they were miss-matched as they had two different personalities. My granny was happy and she always sang whereas my granda was a sort of arrogant man, but they were happy. Their garden was always full of flowers, strawberries and rhubarb. Maybe that's who I take my gardening and baking skills after. Maybe that's the way the universe works. It just keeps repeating everything, over and over again.

I remember way back, a long time ago. I was waiting on a train to bring me home. I was in deep thought about everything and nothing. I noticed a little girl with who I assumed to be her mother. She was so beautiful, long golden ringlets but she also looked as if she were lost in thought. Her mother began using sign-language to her. Slowly a smile came across the little girl's face. A train arrived at the station, an elderly couple got off and the little girl ran towards them with her arms outstretched and a smile that lit up the whole platform. I thought to myself.... What a wonderful world.



Shore

As I sit and often wonder, as it seems I always do.
I think about it often,
what makes it silver, green and blue?
The colours really are so stunning,
it can really transfix you.

Without a word it can make you sit and stare,
It seems to go on forever, you just sit and glare.
If I dare to wonder, how many souls it's taken and didn't care.

But there is something magical and it draws you in and near,
To explore its deep and beating heart, with fish and birds alike.
The reef's and boats are all part of it,
The waves that come ashore make it most inviting,
You want more and more.

BERNADETTE MARKEY

I joined the creative writing group to do something creative. It was my ambition to write my life story and to meet the girls from Belfast. I achieved all of these. It was a wonderful experience. I enjoyed it. We shared our experiences, and life stories. We shared our tears and laughter, which to me is precious.

Colour Awash

A perfect sheet of white paper,
a pallet of watercolours,
A brush to make a stroke,
that's all you need to take note.

The country where I live has been inspiration to me,
Fields of brown and green and light shining through
the trees.

To paint landscapes I did go,
without my backpack and boots.
Only a sheet of paper, a brush in hand did flow.

Colours were awash of sea, land and sky.
Then I added birds, fences and hedges, you could
almost see them grow.
Clouds of blue and grey, clouds pink and blue.
Light and fluffy, like marshmallows in the sky.

I drew swans upon the lake, with wave's to-and-fro,
Bushes hanging down, with reflections of my soul.



My Pet Robin

A slight white blanket on the ground,
Upon a red breast stands,
I watched closely each morning,
Then decided he was mine.

I put some breadcrumbs by the door
And checked for the mark of his feet,
Yes, he came each day,
For his banquet he wanted to eat.

I put the crumbs inside the door to invite him to feast,
He accepted it kindly
And that is how we did meet.

He became my little friend, with a visit every day,
He would stay a little while,
Then off he would go to play.

He began to watch me closely,
To get to know my chores,
He would sit on the washing line,
Before I would hang the clothes.

When I went outside, he would sneak behind,
To get inside my home to see what he could find.
He became a little daring
And tried to get closer each day
But I gave him a gentle push
And sent him on his way.

Truth Denied

Disbelief denies me from my tears.
How can this be? No its not. What?
The hustle and bustle begins,
Preparation has me occupied,
So I just carry on, the truth denied.

My physical and mental I cannot feel,
Just the emptiness inside of me.
Suddenly I cry and roar,
He is gone, here no more.
She is gone, here no more.
You have left me one by one.
Two of my siblings gone.

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An tAontas Eorpach
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