



Threads of Peace: Women's Stories on the Future of a Shared Island

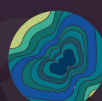
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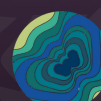
THE FALL'S
WOMEN CENTRE



An Roinn Gnóthaí
Eachtracha agus Trádála
Department of
Foreign Affairs and Trade
RECONCILIATION FUND



Women's
Collective
Ireland
Ronanstown



Women's
Collective
Ireland
Blayney Blades

Foreword

A chairde

This booklet is a collection of personal stories created by women from our island of Ireland. It shares the voices of ordinary women living through extraordinary times on this tiny island of ours, reflecting on their past and present while looking ahead to the future. Through their difficult experiences and hopes, it envisions a new Ireland — one that is inclusive, diverse, and shaped by the strength of women's voices.

The Falls Women's Centre, WCI Blayney Blades, Castleblayney and WCI Ronanstown Women's Group came together to collaborate on this project, united by a shared purpose. Our aim is to show that, as women, we can break down divisions and stand together in solidarity. By raising a collective voice, we affirm our commitment to building a new Ireland — one that values women's participation and recognises their vital role in peace building.

Falls Women's Centre would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to the following organisations and individuals: The Department of Foreign Affairs for their invaluable support in making this project possible; Lorraine Cunningham, Coordinator of WCI Blayney Blades; Sinead Mahon, Coordinator of WCI Ronanstown Women's Group, and Nancy Graham, Falls Women's Centre. We are grateful to the talented, energetic and inspiring tutors who led our groups on their creative writing journey: Maureen Boyle, Fiona Dowd and Tina McTiernan.

Most importantly, we extend our deepest gratitude to the women who so generously shared their stories. Your experiences have made it possible to create and share this meaningful piece of work. Together, we have produced something truly special — something that will continue to be seen, valued, and carried forward within our wider community. This booklet complements the Falls Women's Centre project, *"Women in Peace Building: No Woman Left Behind"* ensuring that our voices are reflected and preserved within its pages.

Go raibh maith agat

Susan Mc Crory

Managing Director

Falls Women's Centre

Background of Women's Groups

The Falls Women's Centre / Ionad Mhná na bhFál

The Falls Women's Centre / Ionad Mhná na bhFál is based in West Belfast and was established in 1982 by local women, for local women. Opening at the height of the conflict, the Centre has continually evolved to respond to the changing needs of the community. We draw on our extensive experience of working with women and their families most affected by poverty and disadvantage. Our work is grounded in the principles of empowerment, participation, inclusion, self-determination, partnership, equality, and social justice. As a women-only organisation, we are proud to be one of the first women-focused centres established in Belfast. Since our inception, we have worked to raise awareness across the community, public sector, and wider society on issues affecting women of all ages. A key strength of our organisation is our ability to provide a holistic, wraparound service for women. This includes childcare, education, advice, advocacy, lobbying, and campaigning. Through offering these integrated supports, we ensure that women can access the services they need in one place, enabling them to reach their full potential and improve both their own quality of life and that of their families.



WCI Blayney Blades Women's Group

WCI Blayney Blades Women's Group is based in Castleblayney Co. Monaghan and have been in operation for 31 years. We are committed to promoting the Holistic Development of women and their families so that they may develop their own potential and play an active role in their communities. Our main aim continues to promote and support the educational, emotional, and social development of women and their families through community development principles and practices. This is delivered through all our courses/events and ongoing classes in the local community and the wider area.

Having worked Cross Border Cross Community for over 30 years and completed many workshops/residentials and events with The Falls Women. We are delighted to be part of this amazing Shared Island Initiative while sharing the stories and events that transpired during the dark days on our Little Island

Ronanstown Women's CDP

Ronanstown Women's CDP is based in a three-bedroom house in a housing estate in Clondalkin. Our Kitchen is our classroom. We offer a wide range of programmes and support for women in a welcoming community setting. We provide childcare and community education. We have continued to grow and adapt to the changing needs of our community. In 2011, we joined with 16 other women groups to create a new national, feminist informed community education network. This group become the National Women's Collective of Community Women's Networks (NCCWN) which is now known as the Women's Collective Ireland (WCI). Joining WCI strengthened our commitment to community development, social justice and the vision of an Ireland where all women can flourish.

Over the past 40 years we have grown from a small women's group to being a strong part in the WCI, offering a full programme of activities. We offer both accredited and non-accredited courses, workshops and community events that encourage learning, personal development and greater involvement in community life.

WCI Ronanstown is committed to promoting equality within the organisation and throughout the wider community.



The background of the page is a solid light purple color. At the top and bottom, there are decorative borders with a repeating geometric pattern. In the center, there is a faint, light purple illustration of two children, a girl and a boy, standing in a field and holding hands. The girl is on the left, and the boy is on the right. They are both wearing dresses. The title 'CHAPTER ONE' is written in a large, bold, dark purple font across the middle of the page.

CHAPTER ONE

Growing Up: Our Childhood Past

The Beginning by Colette Trainor

From 1963 to 1969, I lived a very happy childhood. My parents were very poor but good parents. In 1964 October my brother Kieran arrived, he was a lovely child and a great friend. My father's mother came to live with us and I learned before my mother died, she plucked up the courage to leave my grandfather. They had been separated for years but at the end of his life they decided to live together. All I have been told he was a plumber and the lead got into his blood, and he took 'Mad hatters' disease', in other words he was diagnosed as being mad. It wasn't his fault, but my grandmother couldn't live with him.

All Day Out Playing by Tina Loughlin

Some of my fondest memories were in my Granny's house at Cammedagh Drive, there was a time when we lived with her because we were waiting on getting a new home. I think it was nearly two years which seemed to take forever but it didn't annoy me. I loved staying there. She was always baking or cooking: the best home-made vegetable soup, soda bread farls, apple pies, rhubarb pies and jams. There were loads of blackberry and raspberry bushes at the bottom of the street, we would go with our buckets and pick them. She grew rhubarb and she had her own apple trees, so there were always lovely treats to eat.

At the bottom of her street was a big grass hill that we would race up and down or roll down. We spent all day out playing and only went home when it was bedtime or supper time. Christmas was the best time; we got to spend the day with our cousins. The music would be on, adults having a wee drink, and my uncle always took out his false teeth and pulled faces to scare the younger kids, he always got the craic going. Eventually we got our new house, so we didn't get to see our friends as much. Not long after my Granny passed away and my aunt sold the house, but many happy times we had at no.24.

My Daddy by Kate Corrigan

Wrapped in warmth I learned to be
Loved for who I am wild and free
In eyes which shone with kindness bright
I found my worth, my guiding light.
Laughter echoed, tears dried,
My heart was home where love resided.
With every word I learned to love myself unheard
In my small hand, his fingers wrapped tight,
A safety net, a guiding light.
Through crowds and streets, we walked as one,
My Dad's hand, my heaven, never gone.

Home and Holiday by Lisa Hamilton

I remember our huge brown living room unit, and wallpaper always shades of brown. Sunday was washing day - clothes separated into piles. Time-consuming washing whites first, then light colours, then all dark colours. Topping up water, dragging wet washing into spinner, then great shake before traipsing up to garden to hang wet washing to dry and swap dried clothing to ironing pile for Sunday evening.

Fresh vegetables were wrapped in newspaper and so were chips from chippy. Heating came from a 3-bar gas fire in the living room only. Winter meant extra blankets and ice inside bedroom windows.

Bath time was a Sunday also, as I was only girl I got in bath first, then my brothers oldest to youngest. Next was hair brushing, my hair was long and it felt like my mum was brushing the skin off my scalp and I would be crying before first stroke of brush. I got my hair cut to shoulder length then.

12th of July was an exceptional holiday for us. We all got new clothes. New shoes, stayed up very late on 11th for street parties. Such community pride. Lot of friends stayed at our house. Loads of strangers lying all over our living room on 13th and we always went to Belfast Zoo.

Me and my brothers were very lucky because we got to travel to Scotland for a few weeks to see my Dad's family, which was a full day's travel. Train from York Street to Larne harbour. Stenaline boat till Stranraer, trains to Glasgow then bus to my Granny's. I loved travelling and loved seeing my family.

Growing Up in South Africa by Shahnaaz Khan

Up early in the morning, so excited to go swimming
but first we get yelled at, 'there is plenty of time to swim!'
Breakfast first, fresh coffee, toast, beans, eggs.
Then out we go to a beautiful summer day.
The huge tree as you walk out of the kitchen door,
smell of grass and dirt, the sound of many different birds.

It's a farm, huge! We go walking around, playing,
go to the workshop, game of darts with the radio playing.
As we walk, we find bugs, insects, even a snake...
Later we get into the pool, diving, swimming, playing.
Lying in the sun we get yelled at for being in the sun coz
we'll get darker than we already are. We do it anyway.

Race swimming, throw stones in the pool
and dive for them. Swimming's the highlight of the day,
beautiful flowers and plants all around.
Snacks, crisps and drinks as we go
Aunt and Uncle start making the fire for the barbecue,
preparing salads, meat, potatoes wrapped in foil to be thrown into the fire.

We're hungry and can't wait, gathering
garden tables and chairs so we can finally eat.
After all that swimming we have a huge appetite.
And as soon as we finish eating...It's back to the pool,
and again, we get yelled at, 'You can't swim just after eating!'
How long before we can go swimming again?

Our Home was Always Busy by Donna Bates

Our home was a home that smelled of stew and homemade soups. It would've taken half a day preparing the soup from growing the veg in the garden to cutting the onions to our fingers becoming red from all the cutting. There were always pots on the stove, no-one ever left our house hungry.

If the front door rapped you knew it was someone we didn't know, as everyone who knew us would've used the back door even though it was at the side. The fire was always blazing and I remember when I was younger, I would have put an old shoe on the fire to light the flames and keep them going. My aunt would've been a bargain hunter. She would've walked miles just to get something 50p cheaper. It used to annoy me though I find myself quite like her now.

My granny was disabled so in her later years we had to put her into bed in the living room. I remember always closing the living room door whenever my friends used to call for me, so they couldn't see the bed. One day they seen in. Everyone in the friend group tried to embarrass me about it, although I didn't put my head down. I held my fist up and they knew then not to name-call.

We didn't have much as kids as we had a mortgage to be paid and the running of the farm. Our garden was beautiful; I learned all my skills from my aunt. From an early age I knew the difference between a plant and a weed. She had great hands with lots of skills: cooking, cleaning, surviving in the winter conditions.

The condensation on the windows was like an art class. With no heating upstairs when you woke up you were like a dragon with the steam coming out of your mouth.

Our home was always busy, and everyone was welcome.

Back in the Day by Jean Denny

Women of the past had very hard lives. They had all the worry of keeping their children from getting involved with organisations such as paramilitaries. Because of their Roman Catholic religion, they weren't able to take the contraceptive pill leaving them that they had a lot of children. They hadn't got a very good education hence their only option was to work in factories and the likes. Women were a lot worse off back in the day because they had no washing machines or dishwashers to do the work for them. It was all done by hand washing and scrubbing and so on. The house we lived in had no bathroom, so it was a tin bath in the middle of the floor which had to be filled by hand as well. All this was hard physical work. Thank God things have changed.

Growing Up, Life Was Not Easy by Rabi Abubakar

Growing up in Africa in the 1980's and 90's life was not easy. We were innocent, no internet, no mobile phones and no social media – only one television in the house. We would all gather in the living room to watch news and watch some American comedy shows. My mother would make fire and all the children will gather around it. It was a good life.

My father was a judge; my mother was a full-time housewife. As a girl, I was helping my mam to take care of the house, cooking, cleaning, making the beds etc. I was being trained to be a housewife as many other girls in my community. Going to college wasn't in the plan but marriage was definite. I had so many suitors wanting to marry me since I was twelve years old. My father wanted to marry me up to an old man but my mother, who didn't go to school, insisted that I must at least be allowed finish secondary school. Many men young and old came to my father to ask for my hand in marriage and in our culture arranged marriage is very popular.

But at the age of seventeen I said to my dad, that no, I'm not going to marry the man you choose for me, I'm going to marry the man I love. He was not happy with me and he decided that he will not be involved in my life. I ran away from home at eighteen when I was forced to marry a person that he chose for me. Eventually I came back home and married my now husband living in Ireland now for 28 years and raised four sons.

Kintsugi by Ruth Grogan

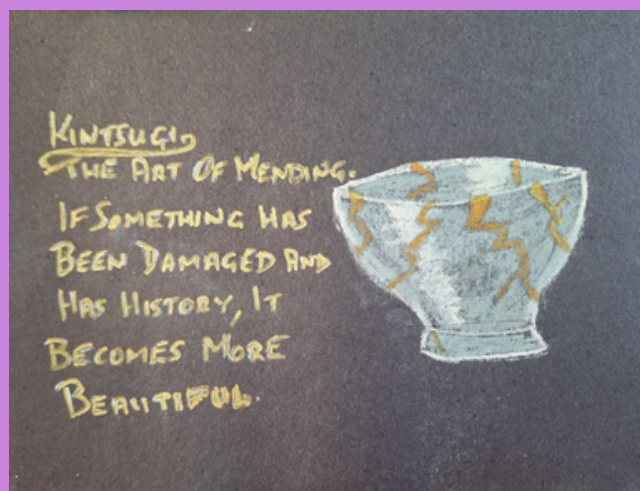
When I grew up in Northumberland there was little knowledge of The Troubles in Northern Ireland. On reflection. I guess it was taboo... not to be talked about... swept under the proverbial carpet.

Looking back.... How did I come to be in Ireland? In a nutshell, nearly fifty years ago I came to stay with my big sister (big in every sense of the word). I only intended to stay for a month. I was 21... Married at 20. Widowed at 21. She hugged me tight, pulling my head into her big ample bosom. "we'll mend your beautiful broken heart" she said.

I've been here ever since. We had lots of fun, expeditions, sorrow and sadness. I used to sit for hours, surrounded by dogs and cats, playing her vast collection of vinyl records. I loved all the Rebel songs and Ballads. Wolfe tones, Bothy Band, Planxty, Makem and Clancy. I hadn't a clue what rebel songs were! I simply loved the music and the words. I played them so much I got to know every word and drum beat. We used to go to the Wolfe Tones gigs at the Killeel Inn just outside Rathcoole and sing along with them. It was my friend who said I shouldn't let them hear my accent. I didn't know why.

But it was my accent that let me down. "You're from England" and I'd immediately defend myself and say No, Scotland. And that Celtic connection seemed to make it ok. Please don't judge me on my accent.

Picture by Ruth Grogan



My Mummy's Red Song Book by Fiona Magennis

Me and my mummy had a red song book
Every Saturday morning, we would take a look
When she opened her purse that was my cue
Another new song written on a beer mat
A song she had heard the night before
As she fundraised in the Felons doing the door
Shane with Jimmy and his Yamaha
Their greatest fan was my Ma
Called singers on a Friday night
While raising funds for our prisoners' plight
Songs about Ireland
Songs from her youth
Songs that told our history's truth

They filled her heart with love and Pride
Singing them she sometimes cried
Tom Williams and Billy Reid
She knew from her teenage years
Sang many times yet still with tears
Another new song to join the others
Some cheerful some sorrows from mothers
Like the Four Green Fields and Sweet Sixteen
Bunch of Thyme and Gentle Annie
Sadie's favourites she had so many
Tom William Ballad penned by her brother-in-law
Oglach Arder Corr
September 2nd 1942

Oh, how I wish for one more look
At mine and my mummy's red song book
What I would give that book to hold
Precious memories worth more than gold

Shelter by Mary Tolan

Buckets in hand, the barefoot clan escape.
Tiny spikes of grass and grit prick little toes,
boisterous yelps quiet as, gingerly,
they hit the shore of jagged pebbles

Slimy seaweed sets the pace
Cautious legs in rolled-up trousers
venturing to the rock pools,
for exploration and capture

Squealing, swooping seagulls,
just far enough away,
signal abundant prey
in warm sun-sparkled pools

Whilst watchful eyes scan placid puddles
And giddy minds plan artful traps.
Heedless shrimps hide in rippling water
And tiny soft crabs tip-toe on ebbing tides
All silently engrossed in daily survival
Til splashing feet and scooping hands blast their calm.

Triumphant squeals resound,
And Buckets overflow,
Time passed with untainted joy,
Oblivious to a ruthless realm.

Hunger drives them back,
The dispossessed restored.
toasty fires warm wrinkled toes,
fish and chips warm bellies and hearts.

A temporary respite
from Troubles at home.
While explosions maimed and neighbours died,
those days of oblivion were our shelter.

Common Sense by Jackie McLoughlin

Things I very much remember from my past as a child are vivid in my life now.

As a child I remember sayings and me Da's common sense, always using his common sense. We went to a beach one day. Ma and Da had a tiny butane gas and a pan and rashers and sausages, knives, forks, butter and bread but no plates. What did Dad do? He took the four hubcaps off his car, walked to the waters edge at the seaside, scrubbed the 4 hubcaps and we had our sausages and rashers on these common-sense plates.

This is just a snippet of one memory of my childhood. I can't see kids having these common-sense things today.



CHAPTER TWO

Life During The Conflict

One Day a Miracle Happened by Colette Trainor

The troubles started in 1969. I was a child. I didn't understand but I'm suffering now because of it. In my translation of it I think it's a fancy word for post-traumatic stress disorder. Medical professionals would disagree.

After having nursed my granny for twenty years she died in May 1974. She lay in my room in a hospital bed paralysed after having a stroke, it was my job to feed her every day. When she died, I missed her terrible, she was a lovely lady. My Father took it worse, chronic anxiety, in these days it was a big secret. Years later I was told by my father that the medication he was given was no good and he fought it himself. I regret not asking him how he did it but he always told me to be careful what I look at, listen to and say and I have always stuck to that core belief.

Eventually he got better and went back to work. I sat my 'O' levels that year, only got four and had to go back to school I had to get a job as we were living in poverty. In secondary school I was put in the lower class and the teacher classified us as being 'unteachable' they used to teach us makeup in classes and I loved it, it was my best years in school.

One day a miracle happened – a English and Math teacher came along and offered us extra classes after school. I eventually got 10 'O' levels shorthand and typing qualifications. I started working in Stormont castle buildings in February 1982. Little did I know it was a learning experience that I wasn't prepared for. However, I never got promoted but they paid for me to go Queens and I graduated in 4th July 1994 with a degree. I spent ten years in Stormont and seventeen years in Plaza building in Chichester St Belfast.

Her Face Remains Etched in My Memory by Jean Denny

Because of religion back then it was a hard time for all living in certain areas of the six counties especially for women whose husbands were interned. It was hard being put out of your home in the middle of the night because of bomb scares and getting you home searched by strange armed men in uniforms. It was tough.

I remember my Daddy rushing to unlock our elderly neighbour's door as she wouldn't be able to get there in time to avoid it being kicked in. I can still remember as a nine-year-old being brought to a neighbour's house . She was mourning the loss of her son with the coffin lid closed as he had been blown up in a bomb and was too badly injured for an open coffin. Her face remains etched in my memory.

The Good Days, The Bad Days, and the Ones In Between by Carmel Martin

I was five when it started, I can vaguely recall. The chaos on the streets was experienced by all. Saracens, land rovers, six-wheelers, and helicopters too, it wasn't long till they came into view. The army in khaki, boots, guns and their different coloured berets.

Our houses were raided, tossed about in our beds, red lights in our faces, they were counting each head. Homes were wrecked and families pulled apart. There was many a poor mother with a broken heart. Husbands, sons, daughters locked up in their jails or brought home in a coffin shut tight with nails.

Whistles and bin lids woke people in the still of the night, the army's raiding again – "Oh what a delight." Bullets and bombings seemed to come hand in hand, what the hell is happening to our own lovely wee land. Memories sitting on the doorstep, clothes soaked in vinegar and water, to stop the tear gas from burning our eyes. Buses, cars, lorries were all set on fire, all packed together like a huge burning pyre. Men, and women with children being stopped and searched in the street. "Can I have your name." I heard the soldiers repeat. As a child I would muse, if they give them their name, what names are they going to use?

God bless all the mothers keeping homes together, I'm sure they were at the end of their tether. Doing their best to give their children a childhood to remember. As a mother now myself, I'm glad it has ceased. All we want for our families is a life full of peace.

Picture by Carmel Martin



Acts of Survival by Paula Harrington

As a child, I would come in from school and the television would be on, tuned to the BBC. The newsreader would speak calmly about “today’s bombing up north.” The words floated through the room, half-heard, half-understood. In my young mind, it played like a movie—something distant, dramatic, but unreal. I never truly grasped that it was happening to real people, to children like me, living ordinary lives interrupted by violence. I didn’t understand that it was just up the road. Belfast, the Antrim Road, felt like another planet entirely.

It is only with age that I have come to realise how asleep I was. Watching films, documentaries, and hearing first-hand accounts as an adult, I now see clearly that it was all real. The danger, the fear, the loss—it was not abstract, not far away. It existed alongside my own childhood, close enough to touch, yet separated by an invisible line of experience and understanding.

Now, when I listen to the news and hear of bombings, killings, and fighting in places like Gaza or Ukraine, I see them with the eyes and heart of a grown person. I see the reality that war has never been far away, only unevenly distributed. I understand that children do not grow up the same everywhere, even on the same island.

In the South, our mothers warned us not to talk to strangers, not to get into unfamiliar cars. Fear existed, but it was contained, manageable, almost theoretical. In the North, children learned different lessons. They knew the dangers of incendiary devices. They recognised the sounds, the smells, the sudden silences. Mothers’ fears were not abstract but immediate—life and death fears. They feared doors being kicked in during the night, homes searched, family members questioned or taken away. They feared the moment someone left the house and the phone call that might come later.

Communities adapted in the only ways they could. Neighbours banged bin lids on the ground to warn of incoming forces, a raw, collective attempt to reclaim some control, to protect one another when official systems felt threatening rather than safe. These acts were about survival—about managing fear, sharing responsibility, and safeguarding each other in a world where powerlessness was a daily reality.

The lives lived in Northern Ireland during those years were shaped by a different kind of endurance. Families carried a constant weight, an awareness that safety was fragile and temporary. Looking back now, I understand that while we shared an island, we did not share the same childhood. And recognising that truth feels like finally waking up.

Where There's a Will, There's a Way by Martina Quinn

The border town of Castleblayney was not immune to violence and the problems associated with "The Troubles". A car bomb in 1976 shocked our community with the realization the "Troubles" were on our doorstep.

Living close to the border in Castleblayney during the troubles I saw first-hand the inconvenience of crossing the border. Everyday life was sometimes disrupted by closed roads, checkpoints and even long delays with road detours and closures.

During that period my mother and her friends boarded a minibus to Armagh each Saturday morning to do their weekly shopping as groceries were much cheaper across the border. This too had its challenges with checkpoints both North and South of the border one big difference being the Northern police had guns which was very scary. It was routine for the soldiers to enter the bus check all boxes and bags and even physically search the women. This was very intrusive and humiliating and it became the norm for us during this period.

The opportunity arose to study Commercial Floristry at Belfast College. I travelled to Belfast every Wednesday at 2.00.p.m. and returned at 10.00.p.m. I met a wonderful lady called Margaret who was of the Protestant faith on the first day. We developed a friendship which has lasted through the decades.

On that first day we decided that we would travel to Belfast together on a weekly basis and came up with a plan. I would park my car at her house in Armagh and travel to Belfast in her car as it had the English registration. During this time southern cars were being hijacked and burned out so it was extremely dangerous to bring my car.

The outward journey was always a tense one, but it was the return journey that scared me the most and remains in my deepest memory. Within the quiet of the night around 11.00 p.m. going through the main lit up checkpoints in the towns was manageable, but it was the quiet country roads in the stillness and darkness of the night when a dip light flashed you down that the fear surfaced. Entering the unknown and wondering if it was the soldiers, police or another more sinister source with the memory etched in my mind of the fate of the Miami Showband members.

I sat in dreaded silence and shaking only answering the many questions for example where I was coming from where I was going and what was my name and the purpose of my journey. The weekly fear and anxiousness are no less as I near home on the last few miles into the stretch of Carnagh forest, all the time looking out for bodies lurking in the ditches or a gun pointing at me and the painted faces of the army. A past filled with nightmare memories and now I can dare to dream.

From Heartbreak To Hope by Paula Bradley

Early 1970's. Church bells ringing out, announcing the marriage of a young man and woman pronouncing them as husband and wife! Wedding banquet over, appetites suitably satisfied, guests amply refreshed! The young man still a teenager, alongside his older brother proudly steps into his role as best man taking it very seriously. Conservative dress today in his tuxedo, the groovy dresser, sacrificing the flamboyant, colourful 70's trends, no flares, paisley shirts, cravats or platforms. Just for today! But still as handsome as ever, a charmer and a big hit with all the young ladies in the room. His fun-loving disposition, sense of humour and zest for life lit up the room as he delivered his best man's speech. Reminiscing about happy childhood memories of growing up with his big bro, filling the room with laughter..

Few knew that day how that a different fate awaited him. Perhaps led astray. His poor mother astray in the head, a local well known woman, had her finger on the pulse. People talked, she listened. Weeks ensued of sleepless nights, following him, challenging him, trying to advise him, make him see sense. Sadly to no avail. He had already taken an oath of allegiance, he was now a member of an organisation, sworn to secrecy! Did he really choose to join of his own accord? Was it due to peer pressure? Was he coerced into doing their bidding? Was he fearful for the consequences for his family? Was he terrified that he might become one of the so called disappeared?

We will never know. But one fateful evening later that year, an evening news bulletin was to drastically change his mother's life forever. There had been a massive explosion at a premises in their local town. The bomb had exploded prematurely and there was a vast number of fatalities. His mother froze, rooted to the spot! She recognised the car involved as the same vehicle that had picked her son up on numerous occasions. Her mother's instinct proved right. The bomb robbed her of her son and worse still as one of the bombers had been responsible for the massacre of so many innocent lives. The fall out was devastating, for her as a mother and the whole family. She did not support violence or terrorism in any way; she was now grieving the loss of her dear son but at the same time she was angry. A young naïve man, brain washed, used like a pawn, carrying out orders from up the ranks. A young life full of potential, his innocence snuffed out at the push of a button.

From Heartbreak To Hope by Paula Bradley (continued...)

In the days following the atrocity, she was approached by a local intermediary whose own son had already given freely of his life as a so-called martyr to the cause. According to him she should be proud of her son and owed it to him to give him a hero's military style funeral to recognise his bravery for the cause. He too was now a martyr and should be buried alongside other martyrs. When she refused to consent, he was disgusted and launched a tirade of abuse against her. She and her family had always firmly believed that violence was never going to be a solution to the conflict. She had fought hard to instil these values in her son. She was all the more determined now to adhere to her principles regardless of the consequences for her or her family.

A few days later her son's funeral took place. Absolutely heartbroken, she would never see her son walk down the aisle as a newlywed just like his brother had. Instead as the bell tolled on that dark day, in line with her wishes he was carried down the aisle out of the church where earlier that year he had been a best man, to his final resting place. Beside his own deceased family relatives.

Where There's a Will, There's a Way by Martina Quinn (continued)

The positive from that experience was how Margaret and I working together found a solution to our travel and safety problem. It might seem like a small issue but at that time it was massive. "Mighty oaks from little acorns grow" and if Margaret and I could work together to surmount a small problem then many people working together on small problems can learn to solve bigger ones. Going forward it would be a great place to live here on this little island of ours if more people like myself and Margaret could put their issues whether they be religious or political aside and try to live with mutual respect.

There are lots of things we can do to help bring communities together and if there is a willingness between the people to create a safer environment for us all to live in harmony then we will have a Shared Island to love and enjoy. My dream for our Shared Island is that many may have the same experience.

Kintsugi by Ruth Grogan

I met a man. We married. He was a bully... controlling. He left. Shortly after, I met another..not a bully... a man. We fell in Love.

Love ... my value then.

We got married 38 years later.

A real Dub, from the inner city. He knew everything about the Troubles, in fact everything about Irish history. He told me stories about fighting, bloodshed, guns and bombs and grief.

I'm not political. I can't argue... I'm the one who says sorry... I hate conflict ... I don't understand war. Why are people fighting so violently and for so long?

In the early days of our courting, I met his parents. His Dad, an Armchair republican. I was scared to talk. Please don't judge me. And he didn't, we became great friends.

We all cried when Jimmy died. Last year. We all had to help mend Annie's broken heart. She was all alone.

My Life Through a Masked Lens

by Mary Mo

Got a message last night
resulting in such a fright.
The mask was on too tight!
I wasn't able for a fight.
"Memories are made of this."

Memories which I thought had passed
of distant flags raised up the mast.
Dangerous times, how long will this feeling last?
Need to pull myself together fast.
"Memories are made of this."

Got a letter today in the post
from beyond the grave...trauma at its most.
Old friends agree and we don't boast.
Lives destroyed by their sickly host.
"Memories are made of this."

Memories that are old and new,
that saw lives torn by a deadly few.
Over the years I guess I knew,
All would be denied by this ghastly crew.
"Memories are made of this."

Got a call earlier on the phone,
I knew it was bad by the tone.
Another one gone now I feel alone,
my normal life masked to the very bone.
"Memories are made of this."

Memories, memories, how long will they stay,
etched in my mind forever and a day.
Many lives have ended where they lay,
Forgiveness and healing I strongly pray.
"Memories are made of this."

Got a message from deep within,
my true life will begin.
Weaknesses, anger and judgement shall not win.
Finally, acceptance and believing from kith and kin.
"Memories will be made of this."

Warchild by Bronagh Gregg

"War child!" that's what he called me!! Really? Me? "Give over" I said as I playfully shooed my husband away, to say as much is to laugh and ridicule the people lost to Syria, to Palestine, to... No! I'm no War child.

But it's funny because once said I couldn't unhear it and it sat in my mind a lonely flame that danced delicately, shining light on a road that I refused to visit. So, I squinted and I shied away from it, for it made me uncomfortable but inevitably it burned myself.

Until today, when the word now branded in my mind, teasing me and taunting me, saw me reach in and accept it's invitation to recall my younger self, the 8 year old me on that warm June day, when like the word on the street was starting to heat up and I see myself buckle the straps of my white leather T bar shoes, pull on the familiar handmade cardigan and join the others.

We're going to watch the bands today. That's what I thought anyway. It's great craic, everyone goes, the music really loud, my ears be ringing but it's that drum, that sound so primal it finds its way into the spaces of your heart, your feet follow its beat and the notes that fall from the whistle do more than whisper a story of truth, rebellion and freedom in your ear. It's great craic, I can't wait.

But we didn't go to the parade that day, it was a march instead. The usual colours and banners where on show, flying high on their own stage, unapologetically proud, demanding attention.

Only the noise was different, here it was heavier, angrier and the warning from all the adults start to make sense as I hear them say "You be careful, look after yourself, don't get into any trouble".

My head is spinning as my mother goes through the standard protocol "STAY BESIDE ME, DON'T GET LOST, STAY. BESIDE. ME" and with that we were off linked arm in arm singing "Go on home British soldiers, go on home" our feet finding their rhythm we marched past the rows of faceless army men, nothing more than English accents watching my childhood down the barrel of their guns and I hate them, for they hate me, I know it for they spit at me and they call me names.

I hate them so much that my feet crack the concrete, and I don't feel the pinching in my white leather T bar shoes anymore, my feet are on fire and we're chanting now "SS RUC, SS RUC"

Warchild by Bronagh Gregg (continued)

When somewhere behind me the unforgiving sound of a bomb goes off, a car bombs this time, not to be mistaken as a nail bomb, petrol bomb or blast bomb, over time you learn the difference, just as you learn to stay ahead of the stampede bearing down from the chaos behind.

So we run, knotted together we run, we slip through side streets, career corners and stretch the space between until we find the safety of our own street and I peel my whitened knuckles from her clammy palms unwilling to let me go, when I hear a joke, a jibe from all around from people refusing to show fear.

Peeler jeeps fly through the streets carrying black boots hard laced and ready to go. The tension is tight, it's crashing in on us from all sides, but I can't worry about that right now.

My brother's gone missing.

My brother, who only that morning sat with me in paisley print pyjamas, singing the theme tune to the Gummie bears with milk dripping from his chin, is gone.

Fear charges me, nothing but fear, I see my friends looking for their own older brothers and instinctively we know where they'll be.

With my cardigan now flying from my shoulders I round the corner in search of him and above the sirens, the static, the batons, the sticks and the bricks I hear the tremor and the relief from the mob of mothers as they find their sons and their daughters and welcome them home with a list of their threats if their big brave boys and girls aren't IN by the count of three, 1. 2.....

Belfast burned, it smoked and it smouldered but green netting and scaffolding jig sawed the city back together.

There's a reason why we don't revisit and recall this path of reckoning, instead we've built trendy new pubs and clubs and cute cafes where we drink from jam jars and vintage bottles but I can't be the only one that thinks "they'd make a pretty decent petrol bomb.

Women of The Conflict by Carmel Martin

Many women had to work two jobs. They also had to raise their children while their husbands were in jail. Many families had multiple family members imprisoned, sons, daughters, aunts, uncles, some even had their mothers jailed.

This was extra pressure; many women became the sole breadwinners for the family. Paying bills, putting food on the table, many a day she went without feeding her children. Providing food for the parcels that were brought up without fail to the jails every week. As for clothes, hand me downs were the norm. My youngest sister was lucky, by the time I'd finished with the hand me downs they were only fit for cleaning rags – so she would get her own clothes.

Mothers often had to clean up the wreckage left behind by British armed forces when they decided to kick down the door, doing a raid in the middle of the night or the wee hours of the morning. On many occasions someone would be lifted, if it was the mother, leaving the children to the care and mercy of her neighbours.

At funerals I remember seeing local women at the forefront, umbrellas in hand, ready to shield and protect the colour party from attack by the RUC, backed by the British army. I think these are the forgotten women of the Troubles.

Women of today still live under pressure. Sadly, too many women are experiencing abuse. In this day and age, women still need help and support. The Troubles have ceased but women's troubles continue.

A Testament Endured by Jackie Mulvenna

A testament endured is my resilience. It persists in the face of immense grief, political divide, and joy in showing what I write belongs to green, white and orange as much as red, white and blue: we all share this island. Despite the barricades of peacebuilding walls, dissident messages on school walls, teenage boys in constant fights, distrust of power sharing within government, we all share this island. So many questions, how to deal with the Troubles, and the failure of seeking justice for the traumas caused to victims. My own personal trauma too.

As I write I see that the old wounds hinder reconciliation. I see home, country and allegiance is often viewed as binary. But through life experience and constant shifting I see 'belonging' as something less fixed, more fluid. The map is complicated, but peace can be achieved.

SPLIT! by Mary Tolan

Innocent now, but in 1977 "SPLIT" meant something very different
Eight of us, matching outfits, hairdos (boys included) and attitude,
Leaving the community disco, high on dance moves and hormones,
Sizzling with expectation of a snog in the entry, and a warm hand home,
Till he yelled "Split!"

Avoiding bulky arms reaching from the silently gliding car
creeping to the kerb, hoping for a kill

"Split" meant sixteen legs sprinting, anywhere that wasn't there,
Meant screams and panic, panting breath visible in the cold air
Meant hammering hearts and blushing cheeks
Meant the best story for school tomorrow

They finished a loop and returned, but we were wily and brave
Jumping garden walls, hiding behind hedges and houses
Coming back together with nervous squeals of delight at our resourcefulness
No time for the snog, so handholding was our limit, making our way home
Thrilled to recount the tale amid loud laughs and feigned bravado
Only to spot it again, the dark, sleek, torpedo-like car, hiding menace
Detour agreed, and up the tree-lined avenue, voices quieted
Arriving home to flashing lights and anxious neighbours
They'd shot 5, non life-threatening, one my brother
The gun had jammed, so no kill tonight
But, story of the day for school!

Death squad they rumoured,
fun was what my fifteen-year-old brain registered.

Finding My Way, Then The Truth Unfolds by Lorraine Cunningham

Back in 1999 I started a course in The Drogheda Area Women's Network this was to change the path of my life forever. I had been working in haulage up until then and being introduced to this group of women was totally transforming. During the course I met with a lady called Ide Lenihan who was then the chairperson of DAWN. Ide approached me with an idea of coming to work with the women and coordinating the classes and the courses. I explained that I had worked in haulage and wasn't sure if I was the right person she was looking for. We met a few times and over lots of cups of teas we chatted about the role of the job. I accepted the role and totally immersed myself in working and supporting the women. One of the projects that was delivered was a cross-border project which was called "Peace and Reconciliation" this was all so new to me having been raised in Dublin we really only saw Northern Ireland on the news with lots of killings and bombings.

The idea of the project was to bring women from both sides of the border together and try and support them through sharing their stories while listening but really listening. The healing we hoped would come but we all knew that would take time a lot of time. Some of the stories were difficult to understand as the women from Northern Ireland were very fearful of each other and it would take a lot of work and listening to even gain a grain of trust. Over time some friendships were born and to this day some have remained good friends and visit each other on a regular basis. In 2003 we received some more funding from PEACE 11 to deliver another cross-border women's project. This project was to promote training and education while bringing the women together in a safe environment. Having built on our previous project the women were happy to reengage and felt safe. We had the use of a beautiful house in Downing's in Donegal and it was here that some of the most horrific stories were shared and most of the healing took place. The women wanted peace in their own heads and wanted to live as normal a life with their families as they could manage under such unthinkable circumstances.

Over the course of the project the women recognised that they needed time for themselves this had not been possible previously because of "THE TROUBLES".

CHAPTER THREE

The Future: Dare To Dream

The Troubles by Mary Smith

Having read or listened to the stories in this book I realised how much grief, pain and trauma the “Troubles” have caused. I was aware of people being killed and maimed in bombings and shootings. I thought this was dreadful but at the time I didn’t personally know anyone who was affected. Being young, free and single when I moved to Monaghan town in 1975 I became aware of how the “Troubles” might affect my social life.

Back then you could get away with having a yellow-coloured number plate on a southern registered car. I felt this helped me to blend in and I felt more at ease when I went to shop in Armagh. Petrol was cheaper across the border. Sometimes going across to fill the car on a tea break wasn’t the best idea, if you were unlucky enough to be pulled over at a British Army checkpoint. You never knew if you would be delayed by 10 minutes or much longer, you could arrive back late to work and to your ward sister’s wrath.

I socialised a lot in Dundalk in those days. I never wanted to take the long way round via Carrickmacross. Instead with our fingers crossed and our hearts in our mouths we went via Culloville hoping that the Republican Paramilitaries would not hijack the car in South Armagh.

A colleague of mine who lived near Dundalk was stopped one evening on her way to night duty with the intention of hijacking her car. To this day she doesn’t know if they recognised her or whether her nurse’s hat on the seat saved her but they let her go. How she had the strength to drive I don’t know.

I believe that people who really lived their religion would not plant bombs or carry out shootings. I sincerely admire and respect people who have had their lives changed for the worse by sectarian violence and who were magnanimous enough to forgive the people who committed the violence.

We Are One by Ruth Grogan

The rugged coastline around the island of Ireland is like a giant arm of a mother encompassing her beloved family. She's keeping them as safe as she can, but as we all know it's virtually impossible. Cracks and fissures appear over time. Land crashes into the churning waters. Worlds come tumbling down.

Storms come and cause chaos, massive turbulent waves bringing flotsam and jetsam. Some wanted, some unnecessary. Some dangerous. Some treasured... arguments. Fighting.

When the storms move on, peace descends. Life is as it should be. Happy, laughing, business as usual. The waves are gently lapping around the coastline. Birds dancing in the sea breeze.

We should be able to live life without storms. No more war. No more fighting. Our coastline is so strong, she can protect us from harm. As long as that arm is wrapped around us, we are safe. We are one.

Change by Tina Loughlin

Gone are the days of watching bombings on the news, and the deaths of innocents wrapped up in a war. But at the same time it can be a dangerous place, because the drugs have taken over our communities. There are gangland wars, and young people's lives are devastated by it.

The changes I have seen in Belfast throughout the years is obvious. Since the ceasefires, things have quietened down a lot, there is a lot less conflict, we are getting on with our lives in a more peaceful way. We interact more with our Protestant friends, and Belfast has become more multi-cultural. We see all types of religions and cultures living among us. There's a lot more artists, singers and bands that would never have come here during the Troubles. When Casement Park gets finished as a new stadium, we will have a lot of good things to look forward to.

Star by Jackie Mulvenna

My own star flows
from my children a culture grows
North stars
West stars
Armagh stars
Polish/Russian stars
Protestant star
Nigeria star
The multicultural flows through my home

Look Out For One Another by Mairéad Ní Bhroin

In our Shared Island future, I would wish for women to cooperate and look out for one another. I would wish for women North, South and the Borderlands to work together with their churches to ensure that women are given a greater role, shown more respect and treated with greater dignity. My vision is that women are allowed to make their own choices and their choices are respected with no shame attached. My vision sees women pressuring the police forces North and South to work together to ensure that every report of domestic violence, coercive control, stalking and sexual assault are acted upon quickly.

I would love to see the police forces co-operate by not allowing perpetrators time to intimidate and threaten women who are awaiting court appearances and barring orders while ensuring that the border would not provide an escape route for those avoiding prosecution.

Above all my vision is that when women report crimes they are believed and not forced to relive their traumas over and over in aggressive interview situations. My vision sees politicians allow women more say in how laws pertaining to such crimes are framed. My vision is that more women are appointed to the judiciary and judges are trained to take account of the physical, mental and emotional effects these crimes have on women. North South cooperation on these issues is vital because of differences in laws at the moment.

What if... by Bronagh Gregg

Ireland; it's a place that's raised on songs and stories, a place that's home to saints and scholars, a place so rich in magic and superstition that our bedtime stories were of great heroes like Cu Chulainn, Queen Maeve and Oisín and the ever-alluring Tír Na Nóg.

The stories are ingrained in me, they're a part of us all, a rich tapestry of tales and treasures that bind us all together and as I wrap my babies up in their words, I can't help but wonder, what if...

What if I told you their hearts live in you, what if I told you their strength, their courage and their pride gave birth to you, what if I told you...

We've all been waiting on you.

Peace by Rabi Abubakar

I find peace and tranquillity in my bedroom
The colour of the paint on the walls is warm and easy to look at
The design on the duvet covers and pillows, all beautiful.
I can see the gardens through the windows,
the frames of my favourite quotes on the wall.
Everything in the room makes me feel at home.

The Best Gift I Was Ever Given
by Bridie McCabe

I've traded a life of rush
For one with a slower pace
And my heart goes to mush
When I look at that little face.

Long walks in the park,
Picnics down by the lake
Then home before dark
For some tea and cake.

The books that we read
The stories that we've shared
Our prayers said before bed
Show that I care.

If there's one thing I'd like to say
A message to take away from this,
It's that I love you every day
And I seal my love with a kiss.

Show Me The Weather EVERYWHERE
by Leonora Ribeiro

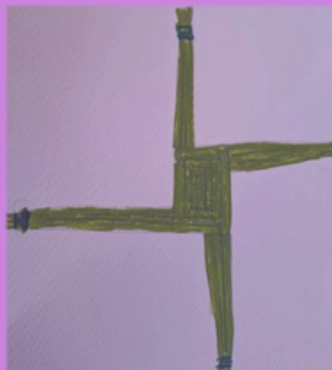
Is your storm not mine?

Do the droplets of rain
Feeding my crops
Not flow from your own
wild Sperrin tops?

Let us hunker down together
Warned and ready
for inevitable storms.

And as the scamall parts
Over our heads
The ghrian will reliably glow
Down on the many faces
that add to our ebb and flow

Our wounds and laughter lines
Will emerge alike
Show us the weather EVERYWHERE!



Time for Equality to Mean Exactly That **by Linda Molloy**

My own vision for the future of our country is to challenge the police force who are supposed to stand up for law and order, to take a stand against paramilitary groups. These groups are holding people to ransom within our communities; young people trapped in a culture of drug abuse and cannot break free. This is highlighted by the number of suicides in communities. Even though there are several cross-community groups working hard, there's still so much to be done.

It is time for rape cases to be taken seriously and the perpetrators to be suitably punished. It is time for young boys in education to be taught to have respect for women. For more opportunities in workplaces, for women to reach their full potential. They have so much more to give to society.

The culture of social media is isolating our young people. How sad it is to see them communicating through mobile devices and not interacting with each other. Gone are the days when children got so much pleasure playing outdoors, using their imagination. Inventing games, skipping ropes, hopscotch, swinging round lampposts. How happy and carefree they were in spite of the challenges of poverty. We need to encourage a culture of respect for each other, and to listen and compromise – especially through our youth. After all they are our future.

Use Your Voice by Anon

Use your voice, shout loud.
Use your voice, stand strong and proud.
Use your voice shout loud,
For justice, equality and freedom.
Our past, our present, our future,
We as women determine our journey.

The Beach by Ruth Grogan

After a long walk
We sit on the sandy beach
with a glass of wine and relax,
watching the changing colours of the evening sky.

Two exhausted dogs flat out by our feet.
The gentle lapping waves
The call of the seabirds
The sun says goodnight
The rising moon says hello

Picture by Ruth Grogan



A Good Example for the Rest of the World by Mary Smith

In my vision for a Shared Island, I feel we need to do more work to prepare for it. Right now I feel the political divide is still too large. Everyone has to want it.

It's great to be able to visit Northern Ireland nowadays and not be concerned about your Southern car sticking out. For so long it looked like peace was impossible in Northern Ireland.

But it happened and we are a good example for the rest of the world.

In the Shelter of Each Other, the People Live by Paula Bradley

We are currently 26 years on since the Good Friday Agreement. After the slaughter of two and half decades which claimed more than 3,500 lives progress has been made.

My eldest was born in June 1995, and I am pleased to say that my three children have grown up in a completely different climate. As a young woman in the 90's in post ceasefire times, I have been spared the stress and trauma suffered by women and mothers during the troubles. We are living in changed times. The fact that my daughter, a Roman Catholic young woman married a young Protestant man in June of this year 2025 is testimony to this. They can both move freely within both communities without threat and fear of intimidation.

In my opinion this newlywed couple are living proof that inclusivity and mutual respect are not just dream or hope but a tangible reality for a new shared future. I feel that the foundations have been laid, although there is still a great deal of work to be done. There are still bridges to be built between the communities on the Island of Ireland.

Ironically the troubles began with peaceful protests in the form of civil right marches. Today Ireland is ranked the 4th wealthiest country globally, yet many in our society are being denied basic human rights such as housing, healthcare, provision for children with special needs, respite for the parents of adults with learning difficulties to name but a few. My vision for a New Ireland is that we may be a voice for the marginalised in our society.

We need to be proactive in funding suitable rehabilitation programmes for those suffering from mental health issues, alcohol and substance abuse. In a New Ireland, migrants, refugees and asylum seekers need to be integrated into our society. They should be employed and welcomed into communities, encouraged to offer their skills and expertise wherever possible.

The elderly will be valued and respected. Treated with dignity especially when they require medical interventions and nursing care. They will feel safe in their own homes due to community watch and Gardai and PSNI presence particularly in rural areas.

In a New Ireland a greater emphasis would be placed on integrational behaviours, establishing healthy boundaries, encouraging a respectful attitude to the elderly while valuing their experience and wisdom.

Ar scáth a cheile a mhaireann na Daoine, In the shelter of each other, the people live.

I Dare to Dream by Catriona Goldhammer

What is the future of this island? Is it shiny and new or do we continue with old, dysfunctional ways, upholding the status quo, while we prevent ourselves from imagining what could be. I dream in my new adopted home of an exciting new Shared Island, where equity, justice and fairness for all is finally achieved... Where children play, women breathe, and men comprehend that a change to a supportive role isn't demeaning but uplifting and fulfilling.

I dream of a trip to Sligo without having to go via Dublin!

I dream of a world where 'land' isn't more precious than a human life. I hope one day to watch the news and see politicians doing what's best for everyone. Homes, education, health care normalised as the basis of a fair and just society and not just the privilege of a few.

I dare to dream and take my chances that a different and fairer way is possible.

So, lift your head and smile at the stranger walking towards you...don't be scared. Who knows, maybe they'll smile back. We can take that journey together to provide a beacon of hope for humanity – a safe and vibrant country for all.

Resilient Women Coming Through Tough Times to a Better Future by Jean Denny

These events had a huge impact on me and on all the families who were living through this hell. It has shaped my vision for what I want our Shared Island to be.

I want peace and for people to live side by side in mutual respect. Thank goodness women have a better life now with more labour-saving devices. I would love to see women supporting each other to enhance and enrich their lives through further education and training. Unfortunately, there is still a lot of violence in our communities. Much of it is happening inside the home in the form of domestic abuse both physical and mental.

Recognising how far we have come since my childhood I am happy to see people visiting Belfast and socialising in a safe and peaceful place. It is my hope that this will continue.

Ireland and Me by Sophie Gold

It was the August bank holiday of 2004 when our paths first crossed. I remember setting my eyes on you, Ireland, unsure of what you would mean to me. I wondered—who are you? What stories do you carry in your bones?
Would you be the place I call home, or would I have to forge one from your soil?

In those early days, I was homesick, aching for the familiar warmth of Nigeria, but you, Ireland, you embraced me in ways I never expected.

Your arms, gentle but firm, wrapped around my weary spirit, Lifting me out of the shadows of loneliness.

Though I battled depression, your love for me grew strong. Strong enough to carry me through the darkest nights. With every season, I bloomed a little more under your skies.

For each child I bore, you gave me back strength tenfold. Your soil, rich and ancient, accepted my roots as they burrowed deep, melding with your own, until I could no longer tell where I ended, and you began. You showed me love greater than I had dared to dream. A love that made me believe meeting you was no coincidence, but the work of God's hand, guiding me here.

My beloved Ireland, I speak these words from my heart: You've suffered in ways that still cause the ground to tremble. You have been scarred, hurt by hands that sought to tear you down. But through it all, you never crumbled. You stood, Ireland — strong, defiant, and full of grace.

And so, this is my prayer for you, my second homeland: Let healing wash over you like a mighty flood. Let the rivers run with peace, and the winds carry whispers of restoration.

Bring those who harmed you to justice, and turn your victims into victors, For your story is not one of defeat but of unyielding resilience.

Ireland, the time has come for you to rise. Lift your flag high, let it fly proud against the winds of history. Speak your truth boldly, and roar with the thunder of the storms you've survived. Shine like the lightning that splits the sky — brilliant and undeniable. It's time, Ireland, for you to step fully into your light.
May God bless you, always.

For now, you are not just the land I found, but the home I've built, the home that built me.

The Words Just Flowed by Breeda Greaney

I started Creative Writing not sure what to expect.
Ladies gathered our stories to unfold.
Trusting, sharing, laughing crying as we told our inner secrets
our tales of woe.
We all had different beginnings Nigeria, Scotland, Northern Ireland, Portugal and
the South.
But when women come together there really is no doubt
The words just flowed and poems were written from the heart.
Fiona I have to thank you I could see you were impressed.
All the talented ladies you helped express.
Love, hope, pride and feelings they had suppressed.

Go raibh maith agat

Kintsugi by Ruth Grogan

I'm an early bird. Mick wasn't. He is now! I wake at 5 "Let's go!" And we'd set
off into another unexplored wonderland.

But then in 2020, beginning of Covid... I had a stroke. My wonderful adventurous
life came to a grinding halt! My left side, paralysed.

Determination. Ambition. Perseverance. Dignity. Independence. All my values
then.

The physio was relentless. Painfully slow. I was like a naughty child... screaming
with frustration as I tried to put tiny pegs into tiny holes. I used to sit at night
trying to squeeze a clothes peg. Then... a Eureka moment, a few weeks later. I
did it! I opened my clothes peg. There was no stopping me... 6 weeks post-
stroke I was climbing my mountains! metaphorically and physically! Elation just
didn't describe my emotion then.

Now.... My stroke has left me with an embarrassing loss of the ability to form
sentences correctly and my emotional filter got damaged, so I cry, at the
slightest thing....but inside I am strong. I am blessed. I can get back to my art,
photography, writing our travelogues on Facebook, singing with the best choir in
the country and now I'm surrounded by the most wonderful group of women All
"Looking forward" to embarking on a new adventure.

Resilience.... Renewal.... Reconnected. Strength.

A Strong Woman Who Did Not Have a Voice

by Linda Molloy

Mother was the matriarch, her time from dawn to dusk taken up with washing, baking, knitting and sewing homemade clothes. Her escape route was the Church and the family were ruled by its laws. Daily mass, devotions, novenas and family rosary, and woe betide anyone who spoke out against the priests and nuns.

Mother was very close. We knew little of the person hidden behind the mask. She had been adopted as a child and only spoke fleetingly of this. I wish I could have had conversations with her. It was a case of children being seen but not heard. I know she was doing her best under the circumstances. Once she made a profound statement that all children should be attending integrated schools, things could be so different if they were not segregated. She could not afford long-term education for us. Everyone was forced to leave school at 14 or 15 and work would begin the following day. We were trapped in a cycle of poverty.

I wonder how it would be for her in today's world with all its mod cons. She was a strong person who did not have a voice. Brainwashed by the laws of the church, tied to a home with too many children and living in an era of few rights for women. How difficult it must have been to be told that her role in life was the procreation of children and to have no say in how her body was being used. To cower under a system where men are in charge and women must follow meekly behind.

In today's world women are beginning to take a stand. However, this seems to create a fear in men that they are somehow losing control. This is highlighted in the surge of violence towards women in general. They are still regarded as somehow inferior, and equal pay has still not come into effect. Even though women are holding down jobs they are still expected to be homemakers and organise childcare, look after elderly relatives, juggle their time...

The Only Way to Heal by Colette Trainor

When my father died, I was left destitute. I had been on unpaid leave for 6 months, eventually they did pay me, and this covered the cost of his funeral. I went back to work and met my current partner who was the best thing to happen to me.

I was later diagnosed with brain stem stroke to then later be told it was a misdiagnosis and the investigations are still in progress. After my illness I wouldn't leave the house for three years, till eventually I went down to Falls Women's Centre and they got me the help through their services like counselling, life coaching and various social outings.

It changed my life and I know use the tools they have taught me to love life to the full. My mental health has got worse but the difference now I have been taught by the centre how to deal with it. That train of thought gave me the confidence to know I would conquer everything. Although important to note I didn't do it on my own, it was the Falls Womens Centre and our lady and God who guided me to go to these. Believe in the positive power of the universe – and on another note it's my job to pray for everyone, because I believe everyone deserves the best in life and we are all entitled to it.

Letter to my Children by Carmel Martin

...Being your mother, and grandmother, I now understand that the Troubles, the bombings, the shootings, the killings and imprisonment, made me who I am. Forgive me, I am what I am, I am not perfect. I have made mistakes, thank God for that rubber on the end of a pencil. Only He knows I have made a few. But these are my mistakes, this is my life, not yours.

...Remember we are all equal. Women over the generations have fought long and hard, some have died to win the rights we have today. Always walk with your head up, never look down on anyone, nor let them look down on you. Hopefully before you're my age, life in this land will be sorted and settled for the better, with a peace that ripples through life for everyone.

Finding My Way, Then The Truth Unfolds by Lorraine Cunningham

In 2008 I left the DAWN to start working in Castleblayney with The Blayney Blades Women's Group. Blayney Blades had also worked on cross border projects and had their own very successful stories of working with the women. I continued to work with the women from The Falls, The Shankhill, The Newtownabbey Community Partnership, The Bendy Women Dungiven, The Roe Valley Women's Network, Galliagh Women and The Foyle Women's Network. It is a great privilege to work on this project with the Fall's Women and our counterparts in Ronanstown. These women have also supported us in our work south of the border with such high-profile projects as The Peace Heroines, "How To Defuse A Bomb The Project Children" and now this opportunity to bring more of the women and their hopes for the future together.

Myself and Blayney Blades going forward would like to work in a positive approach towards peace on this little island of ours. We must all be in agreement of how we see this actually working and how this would work best for both sides of the border. On April 10th 1998 the Good Friday Agreement was signed and The Women's Coalition who had lobbied for peace played a huge part in this. Going forward we need to keep the momentum going while continuing to work with all the women's groups both sides of the border, through mentoring and supporting one another. This project is just the start for a lot of women who live on the island of Ireland. It has been proven that women all over the world strive for peace on a daily basis. Once again going forward we must find a space where a peaceful little Island like ours can work for all of us while enabling all of us to have our **"Voice's Heard"**



Silence and Shame to Support and Strength by Mairéad Ní Bhroin

My “unchurched” mother drops me off and I take my place in the women’s aisle. I stare through a forest of headscarves and mantillas because a woman dare not show her tresses. Close by I hear the clinking of rosary beads and the murmur of whispered prayers. Ahead I gaze at the back of the celebrant enshrined inside the altar rails where no woman dare set foot. He utters prayers in Latin a language I don’t understand. In the silence I hear a soft rustle and through a haze of incense I notice Maria slowly rise and exit the church, her head is bent low, her face pale and strained, her eyes fearful.

As we stream from the church after mass the whispers start. “I wonder, is she?” “Surely not” “She couldn’t be, could she”? “Is there a boyfriend?” “This never happened at home did it”? “I always thought there was something funny going on there”. As a child at that time I know there is something off, something unspoken here and it isn’t good. Weeks later the news is confirmed. What are Maria’s choices now? There’s the trip to Dublin to a mother and baby home and the dreaded Magdalene Laundries or if she is lucky her mother could have “a late baby” and Maria gets to see and raise her baby in her own home posing as her sister. For Maria in this instance there is a hastily arranged wedding, a cream wedding dress and “we’ll say nothing” and “don’t ask questions”.

That childhood memory has lived with me for over fifty years. Looking back what haunts me most is that most of Maria’s critics were women. Mothers in most cases. So my vision for a Shared Island stems from that memory and the lack of solidarity among women at the time. It stems from the sense of shame women felt and were made to feel. It was always the woman’s fault.

I believe that women working together and supporting each other without being judgemental or critical of each other can close all the loopholes that currently exist. I believe my vision for our Shared Island can be achieved but only with women from North, South and the Border working together to make our Shared Island future one where women’s rights and safety are enshrined in strong laws and enforced robustly. My vision for our Shared Island future is to go from silence and shame to support and strength. Is tréise le chéile muid. We are stronger together.

Me Ma
by Carol Quinn

She was born in Dublin city
A place we all know well
She had 5 beautiful sisters
And a mum n dad aswell
Who was she ? ME MA

She grew up very fast
And off she goes to work at fourteen
Looking back at her past
She married v young and had 7
children
Who was she? ME MA

When women have no education
they are weak
When women are down trodden they
are meak
When women are poor they are sad
When women are sick they are
classed as mad
Who is she? ME MA

Her values she carried broke the
chain
She had common sense and a great
maths brain
She cleaned 3 jobs to keep the wolf
from the door
Some days she come home n be on
the floor
Who is she ? ME MA

She longed to go to Newry and got
there once
The excitement. The Xmas shopping
The troubles The war.
She prayed for peace and to her the
trip was so far.
Who was she? ME MA.

I wish I could hold her hand
I would take her on journeys across this
whole land.
United with me united on this island
Together again so proud so free.
Who is she? ME MA.

I hope I did her proud
I hope I am not too loud
I carry a lot of her values too
I miss her I do
We are not in this world forever
We need to be very clever
Let's all share
Let's all care
Let's all live
Let's all give
Who did her best? ME MA .

What I learnt along the way
Is we should RESPECT each other
So let's all share this ISLAND
And we can live together in PEACE.

Remember Women by Fiona Magennis

History has shown that women can often be disregarded in decision making and leadership roles. While there have been incredible changes, women still have to work harder, shout louder and campaign longer in relation to areas that impact most on their lives. When we talk about women in a United Ireland it should not be as a token gesture or a tick box exercise. The role of women and indeed their challenges has to be a fundamental aspect of New Ireland planning, where a safe channel is opened for discussion and debate. This space should invite a range of women from all religions and classes to be involved. Women from a whole range of different backgrounds and class, homemakers, academics, medical and caring professions and trade unions.

A Woman's place is where she wants it to be and structures should be in place to make this happen with choices. Economically women face challenges when they are unable to return to work due to childcare being unaffordable, therefore making it impossible to pursue a career and contribute to her household. Health remains a major challenge and most women would agree that female health issues are far behind in terms of research and treatments. It is shocking to learn that in 2025 mothers who suffer with post-partum still do not have a dedicated support facility where mum and baby are both cared for.

All identities in a United Ireland must be respected. Ireland is changing and has become more diverse. Women from both communities have suffered and experience the very same issues: poor health, child poverty and lack of opportunity to pursue their goals and dreams. They must use their voices and collectively they will be stronger.

Da Valera's Ireland was not a welcoming space for women; they were governed both by the State and the Catholic Church. We must learn from the mistakes of the past and ensure that all voices are heard and all not only have an invite to the table but also feel welcomed.

Mammy Alpha by Leonora Ribeiro

The safest place for me
Is in your company

I long to bask in your inextinguishable glow

My belly full of cobbler,
My mind racing with the movie of our lives
As you pour from your lota vase of stories
I will never not want more

Eventually I'll have to leave the den,
Yet filled by your affirmations
I forge ever closer to myself

Huddled in the sanctuary of our very own Farthing wood
How did we end up in this here tent wagon?
So, well shielded from Jupiter's unrelenting storm

I'll tell you how,
you could walk the globe with a lit candle,
But you wouldn't find
a being that matched the wit and power
of my Mammy Alpha

Strong Women, Building Peace

