

Hand on Heart

photographs and words

A selection of poems and stories

Created by community groups at Northern Ireland Chest Heart and Stroke in Lisburn and Newtownards, in conjunction with Arts Care Project Artist Jason Parkes, as part of Here & Now Arts Health and Well-being Festival for Older people 2022/23.

Arts Care



Here & Now

The Art of Ageing Well





Here & Now Older People's
Health & Well-being Arts Festival 2022/23

Living Well - More Tales to Tell

Introduction to the Here & Now Arts and Well-being Festival for Older People's 2022/23

Arts Care have been delighted to host in partnership with the Public Health Agency the 12th 'Here & Now' Arts & Well-being Festival for Older people.

This annual Arts Festival offers a unique opportunity for older people over the age of 60 plus to participate in a series of arts activities led by our team of expert Arts & Health Artists. Our Artists have been inspired to deliver the best festival yet across Northern Ireland amidst the ongoing challenges of Covid-19 with a blended approach to delivery including online creative delivery.

The Festival this year was community based and the theme was - Living Well, More Tales to Tell.

Arts Care has delivered 24 projects to community groups Northern Ireland wide and in addition 20 Regional Zoom workshops giving opportunities for anyone over the age of 60 to participate in an Arts Care Zoom Dance, Music and Visual Art workshop.

If you would like further information on how to take part in the Festival, please contact Arts Care's Here & Now Coordinator Clare – clare@artscare.co.uk

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Visit the Arts Care website to view this project and the Here & Now exhibition online. www.artscare.co.uk - (from 1 May 2023)

Description of project:

I worked with a number of groups including people at NICHS Lisburn and Newtownards. There were many participants across my sessions with a core group based in Newtownards with whom most of the work here was done. We did a range of creative activities including photography, sketching, some drama exercises with storytelling at the centre of all of them. The aim wasn't to create visual artworks but I think we have some beautiful pieces all the same worth sharing. The sketch portraits were a really quick activity but there is just something about them that felt worth sharing. I asked the group also to take photographs of random things and we have ended up with a series of quite beautiful portraits of hands. Both these visual pieces have meaning beyond the mere image and reflect experiences related to the written pieces. We looked at life-finding importance in small seemingly inconsequential things-joy, sadness, frustration and as this is a group specifically for people who have had a stroke that was our main point of connection between each other. It is interesting that a group of people who get on so well, support each other so strongly and with such humour and fun may never have met each other without the stroke. The works stand for themselves but knowing a little of the context I think really highlights what the work is about. The project was primarily oral storytelling with the process and act of sharing stories and often quite raw and meaningful experiences at the heart. I had envisaged a story project but Poems emerged as the best way to record and present what we did. From the creative workshop activities and through discussions with the group I have pulled together what I hope is a selection of reflective pieces that convey and give voice to those stories that are sometimes hard to share. Some stories are either too private or personal to share or the kind that live in the moment but lose their essence when committed to paper but somehow preserving or distilling elements of this as poetry holds things in a way longer form writing doesn't always. There are some short funny stories included that are the tip of the iceberg really in terms of the number of stories the participants have in them. It is important to know that although some may appear to have a single voice they are all created through multiple contributions. The finished poems have been created through a collaborative process-sometimes from taking bits of conversation and sometimes through our storytelling and sometimes more formally. The group were so welcoming and it was a privilege to work with them.

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Participants:

Sadie

Ian

Margaret

Ian

Leo

Margaret

Norman

Harry

Yvonne

Tony

Ken

Geoffrey

Rhona

Sylvia

Ron

Sylvia

Ann

Brian

Lisa



Dust Catchers

I

Sometimes what takes you back
Takes you forward.
That could be a person or a place.
Or something you have kept with you
Through the years.
Something said or
Something that reminds you
Of who you are
Or who you were
Or who you could become.

Like a photograph,
Or a holiday memento,
An engagement ring,
A regimental badge,
Or my fathers watch.
His old books,
Passed on clothes,
that were swapped with a friend,
Baby socks,
A wee teddy bear,
Or a porcelain doll.
Odd things that we keep safe-
Sometimes in a drawer
Hung up on the wall
Or on a shelf
Brightening up the house
Or placed in an old suitcase
And shoved under the bed.
Or maybe we just keep memories
And the thoughts our head.

This is a list
Of things we collect
To recollect.

Dust Catchers

II

It can be all too easy
To forget yourself
When you are swept up
In the here and now-
Dealing with the everyday
Where work took our time.
Because occupation occupied
So much of our life.

Getting a home.
Bringing up a family.
Being good at what you did.
It is satisfying
Getting a job well done.
Getting a life well done.

We filled our days in different ways.
Looked forward to holidays.
We did what we had to do.
And did what we wanted
When we could.

When all that stops
When there is gap
When sound becomes silence
you have only yourself
to listen to.

So what do I do now?
Who am I now?
Am I myself or
somebody else?
Is that person I remember
still me?

Those may have been the days
but these are the days too.

Strong

We all have different difficulties:
Dealing with strong incredible pain
That takes grit.

Or with eyesight dimming
Or the sound echoing-
Hearing through the noise
Can feel impossible.

It is hard to explain
It is hard to understand
Everything is different
The world around is still the samebut
my life has changed.

You can't always see it straight-
That picture you had of yourself.
You can't quite find your voice again.
Not quite recognising either
is terrifying.

How would you describe that
To someone who doesn't know?

The sounds are there
but the words aren't.

The world is blurry.
It can be too busy
Too bright.
Too loud.

Sometimes a pain can cut through
everything with a sharpness
so intense
that nothing else exists.

Describing a self portrait

This is not a photograph.
It is a quick sketch.
It was never intended for show.
Some are like a Picasso painting.
Or one of those pictures
Made up of dots
But where the dots
Don't connect
The way they should
Or where you want them to.
There are faint and delicate lines.
It doesn't look like me.
Although there is a bit that does.
Its a scribble.
There is something there
The eyes aren't right.
My hands are wrong.
I've got the hair.
Is that me?

Stroke

You took the words from my mouth
And wiped the smile from my face

Everyday Frustrations

When I'm ready to go and I have to wait
No longer getting things the way I left them
Not being able to do as much as I used to
Not being able to do what I'd like to do.

A thousand small things-
Those everyday frustrations
that can get you riled up.

Tight inside.

Knowing its 'fight or flight'
doesn't make it any less stressful.
None of these things are that important
but they twist and knot inside everyone.

We also talk about lost freedoms
as well as the everyday frustrations
that were always there: Little things.

And so the conversation turns
to the small things we never thought about
that have now become big things to us.

Like signing your name

Like walking

Talking

Words

Like

These

Have become

Harder to

Reach

For.

And we talk about things that are even harder to grasp.
We talk about when the will is there but your hands are unwilling.

Then we sit calm, doing breathing exercises.
We hold our breath and let it out.

Sometimes

Sometimes talking about it helps
Sometimes taking your mind off it
 Sometimes focus
 Sometimes nothing
 Sometimes breathing
 Sometimes easing
 Sometimes getting out
 getting out of yourself
 getting out here
 doing something
 Sometimes meeting
 eating, sleeping
 sometimes stopping
 sometimes knowing
 showing
 getting it off your chest.
Getting to the heart of the matter
 getting to the start
 getting to the end.

Group Hug

Were you also struck with greetings?

The warmest welcome

The support of others

An arm to support me

A handshake

A friendly wave

Conversations between strangers

Strangers

becoming friends

A few moments each week

Where you are with others who understand

A little of what you've been through

They have maybe been there

And gone through the same trouble as you

Or something like it.

A cup of tea doesn't cure it

A conversation doesn't make you better

A hug doesn't take it away.

But it can help

it can be the difference

between coping and not coping.

Three point turn

When you are used to driving yourself you have
Some degree of control.
Taking my license
Felt like taking my life away.
It was like all those other things that had happened.
I could do so much myself
But that was taken away from me
That was out of my control.
Having a stroke isn't just medical.
All the things you have to deal with are hard.
It takes so much effort and will power
And all the support and all the work
And everything it takes to get as much
Of yourself back as you can is hard.
And then when you get over it and come to terms
With that-things like not being allowed to drive-
Even after all that. That is really difficult.

Then you have to remember
Sometimes doing a three point turn in the road
When you are stuck in a dead end
Or if its really narrow...if the flow has stopped...
If you are stuck...
It takes more adjustments than that.
Sometimes you need to not just keep trying
But get out of the car and take a different look...
Or get help from someone outside if its really tight.
Sometimes you can't do it all your self.

And you wonder if you will ever be allowed to drive again,
And like it was part of your life. The whole experience of
Recovering from a stroke can be like
The frustration of being stuck in traffic
Or forced down a dead end. Its like being forced into
Making a three point turn in your life.
It's difficult and takes more adjustments than you think.

Lost for words

Have you ever been lost for words?
Or perhaps you have lost words, like glasses
set down- I don't know where.

Tounge tip thoughts
That can be even further mislaid

Words
Stuck in your throat
Or choked back. Like tears.

Have you ever lost words like temper?
Or have you ever forgotten thoughts-
confused then pulled them out
like random letters jumbled in a scrabble bag.
Like a crossword without the clues.

When you can't always find the right word
When you find words and
You still have the sense of them
Just not the sentence.

The first time we met I was speechless
and you did all the talking.
Now it is the other way around.

But sometimes
What we feel doesn't need to be said
Or written down.

It is implied in the very act of us.
It is a sigh, a sign, a look, a touch.

We don't need lost words to tell us that.

Scent

Isn't it funny how some memories have a smell,
Like fresh baked bread
Or a particular brand of soap.
Wet grass, the beach, suncream, smoke.
Her perfume. His clean shaven face.
Dinner cooking. The streets after the rain.
Old blankets.

Some smells are like meeting again for the first time.

A Perfect Pint

Now I am not a Guinness Drinker, but I really enjoyed a glass even though I don't like the stuff at all. I don't drink Guinness. Never. My partner really likes it. So much so that we went on the tour of the brewery. It was fabulous tour. I really enjoyed it. It was very interesting the whole thing even though it wasn't something I'd really have been interested in. Now those of you who have been might know this already but for those that don't-at the end of the tour everyone gets a chance to have a pint in the gravity bar up at the top and enjoy the view. It's a 360 degree view across Dublin. My partner was obviously looking forward to this part most of all and through the whole tour he was anticipating the experience at the end of sitting down and having a taste of the stuff at the end. Not only his own pint but he was thinking he'd get double the fun and have mine as well. So he spent the whole tour thinking he was going to get two pints. Now when it came to it and we were at the end of the Tour with the amazing view and everything else I told him that I was going to try it and I said I'd have to give it ago just this once even though I don't like it. Now I really didn't like the taste of it at all. He asked me did I like it and I told him that it tasted horrible to me but I drunk the whole pint of it just the same. You should have seen his face and how he huffed. He kept on saying 'but you don't even like it' and I said 'awk, when your on the tour you just have to try it'. He's probably never forgiven me for him missing out on him having the two pints and I've never gone near the stuff since. Wouldn't touch the stuff, but I have to say I really enjoyed that Pint of Guinness that day. That was a very good afternoon. A great day.

The Jacket

15 years ago- it would have been my late mums 80th Birthday. We had all clubbed together and took her for a long weekend to London. And my Mother loved to shop. So we did a lot of shopping that weekend and she was looking for a new pair of boots. She didn't see any until we ended up in a big well known department store on Oxford Street and we were all busy looking. It was really big store and eventually she wandered down to the back and seemed to have found some boots at last. Now I was fiddling around at the front but eventually went down to the back and joined her. It was odd then because she was very quiet and called me over and whispered in my ear "There's a women there wearing exactly the same jacket as me. She is acting really strange with me. When I move-she moves and she won't let me past and I want to go and look at those other boots in there". Now I looked down where she was pointing and saw straight away that the whole wall along that side was mirrored. Maybe you had to be there but it was hilarious. My mother I have to say was not in any way loosing her marbles, she was as sharp as a tack. As soon as she realised she was doubled up laughing. The two of us left the shop laughing and walking up Oxford street I don't know what anyone else would have make of these two Eejits with tears running down their faces. And you know what London is like with so many people looking at us strangely. It was just so funny because it was so unlike my Mum and even saying "that woman is wearing the same jacket as me" after that had us laughing again. That story comes up again and again, so many times in our family when we get together and we are thinking about mum. For a long time I couldn't even tell that story because I couldn't speak for laughing. It was just so simple but so very funny.

First Through The Doors

The other day my wife and I were down getting a bit of shopping done over across the way and coming back out I noticed the new coffee place there and said to her “Look love-Tim Horton’s-It’s open” I said “look there’s somebody in there, come on and we’ll drive over and get ourselves a wee cup of coffee”. So as we drove over I noticed there was a barrier across half the entrance way. “That’s funny”, I said, “why is there only one barrier? We’ll just have to park and go in”. So we parked up and got out of the car and walked over, walked in the door and sat down. Then there was this workman fella there and he comes over and says “can I help you?” and I said “aye, could we have two cups of coffee please? And he says. “We’re not open yet-it doesn’t open until the 6th of March”. We were sitting there ready to go, you know. Really looking forward to a coffee and maybe one of those famous donuts. We laughed later though. It’s open now but we haven’t felt brave enough to venture back in yet. So even though we were the first customers through the doors we haven’t had a cup of their coffee yet we’re that scared. All the same, having been the first customers in, I was thinking maybe we should go to them and see if we could get a free cup maybe. I thought it was funny but my wife was mortified and told me not to tell anybody-ever. I’ve told you all now of course...

Journey

On Monday past just there, I phoned my friend and I said “Haven’t seen you for a while. How have you been keeping” and he says “Oh Norman, I’m in hospital- I’ve been in these last 9 days. I was at a party and I fell and broke my leg.

It was all my fault-I came out and fell over. The thing is I didn’t realise my leg was broken until about 2 days later but managed to drive myself to the hospital. I left the car in a nearby carpark. I didn’t know then that they would keep me in. I’m ok now but the only thing is I’m really worried about my car.

It’s been sitting in that street car-park outside now for over a week”. The car is his pride and joy, he takes great care of it. It’s a lovely old Mercedes-so I offered to go and lift it home for him. So he said ‘wouldn’t that be great. I’ve been worried someone might take a shine to the lovely alloy wheels or something”.

So I went over and collected the keys from him at the hospital and then drove it back to his house in Bangor for him. He lives in the centre of Bangor. So then I had to get myself back to the Ulster hospital. So I went to the bus station and asked to get the bus to the Ulster Hospital. What a Journey that was. Now there were only three people on the bus- including me, I was the third person.

Well after Bangor, it goes through Craigtantlet across the hills. Amazing views.

Then it takes you through upper Holywood. Goes through the Stormont Estate-right up through Massey Avenue. And your thinking, people would pay for this for all the scenic views. Right up past Stormont Castle it took us. Like a tourist, I was taking it all in. It was maybe half an hour or so. Like a private tour for the three people on this bus. Anyway it was great. Just something I didn’t expect.

You know, just an ordinary journey really but spectacular all the same.

Chips With Everything

I always remember our school trip to Belgium because of the food. We went to Ostend. The first night there we were all really excited, not just because we were in a new country but because we were given chips for our dinner-chips with Mayonnaise-we hadn't had that before and it was delicious. And they called them Frites there like in France. We all thought 'Oh this is brilliant!'. Then the next night we had chips and mayonnaise again and we were absolutely delighted. We couldn't believe our luck. Chips for tea two nights in a row. The thing is though after the third night we started to catch on. You guessed it, chips with mayonnaise again. And we were there for a fortnight and we were given chips every single night. That's all they gave you. By the end of the fortnight we were pretty scunnered with chips I can tell you.





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