Rain Against the Glass

A selection of stories and poems from the Here & Now Arts Health and Well-being Festival for Older people 'Your Life, Your Gift, Your Story' project

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Arts Care 😽







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 Cares' Here & Now Coordinator Clare – **clare@artscare.co.uk**

Project Introduction - Your Life, Your Gift, Your Story

This creative writing project engaged participants from South West Age Partnership (SWAP) and Ballywalter Seniors Group. It was facilitated by Arts Care artist Deirdre Cartmill.

The project began with a series of creative writing sessions in which participants were empowered to find their writing voice, and share real life memories and create stories and poems.

In the final sessions they chose a piece of writing and prepared it beautifully to give as a gift to someone they love. Their writing became a way to share their life and their story with others.

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









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Introduction

Your Life, Your Gift, Your Story invited participants to capture their life, their experiences and their memories in words.

I worked with two groups - South West Agewell Partnership (SWAP) and Ballywalter Seniors Group. In these creative writing sessions, they wrote about the unforgettable moments, the joyful moments, and the moments when things were tough but they survived.

They wrote about loved ones, captured memories of growing up in quieter times, wrote from the perspective of that childhood innocence, and shared memories of those they've lost.

From family days on the beach, to being chased when delivering telegrams, or being a teenager drinking in the local graveyard, they captured the times when they laughed, the times when they cried, the surprising moments, and the moments that have stayed with them over a lifetime.

In the final weeks of the project, they chose a piece of writing and prepared it beautifully to give as a gift to someone they love leaving a card for a father or mother, sharing a memory with a son or daughter, or creating a special gift for a friend in hospital.

Writing became a way to share their life and their story as a gift to others. Through this booklet, they are gifting these powerful moments to you.

Deirdre Cartmill

Rain Against the Glass

I needed to talk to you today, to hear your voice, but the suffocating silence shook me, took me back to the piercing pitch of sirens searching for your body floating, face down, on Lough Erne.

So I sit staring out the window that you used to look in through and laugh and hear nothing but the drowning sound of rain against the glass

Frances

Dreaming

She sits on the long, brown sofa that has sat at the window since she was a child. Her parents bought it when she was five years old.

She is now eighty-nine.

She looks out across the lake, dreaming he is coming back.

The garden gives her strength but walking past his room, at night, she holds her breath.

The daylight turns into the darkness that comes when she walks in through the door.

Frances

October Fireworks

We always had a grand fireworks night at Halloween. Our friends and us would start early, buying fireworks for this grand night.

Halloween was approaching – time to count how many of each item we had. The living room fire was alight and no parents were about, as mummy was busy in the office. So we started to empty out our supply of fireworks. The hearth was good and roomy. The rockets were balanced up the side, with bangers on the hearth, along with the jumping jacks and volcanoes. The sparklers were set upright against the wall of the fireplace.

I can't recall how it happened but a rocket slid towards the fire. It set alight right away, with the backfire from it lighting one jumping jack, which then led to it spreading to all the rest of the fireworks. We had a fireworks display in the living room. Curtains were set alight, paint on the surrounding window was burning, and the room was full of gun smoke.

We opened a side door which led onto the road. The 4 o'clock bus was just stopped, waiting to turn onto the main road, when the driver saw the smoke billowing out. He stopped the bus and came to our rescue. All this happened and my mother was unaware of our fate. She almost collapsed.

Katrina

My Father

He could not fix a shelf or paint a wall. The tap stayed dripping loudly in the sink; but when he drove the lorry the engine spoke to him. He was the master navigator who loved pumps and pistons.

He leans over the pump outside the kitchen window, smiling as his eighty-year-old hands twist and turn more slowly now; yet he has fixed the pump so water flows into the grey basin he has laid out beneath the pipe.

My mother stands at the sink, looks out and mumbles, 'It doesn't take much to make him happy, standing there watching water fall into an auld basin.'

Yet, in his face, I see he knows the secret sounds of engines as they hum and purr along with him who stands there stooped, his hands on hips and watches, while she watches him.

Frances

Time Stood Still

I was about 9 years old at the time of my memory. My father was taking me into town and boy was I chuffed.

You see way back in the late fifties when you are the only girl in the family and your father was a football coach well you don't get much time to spend with him that was 'the boys' my brothers privilege and so hence the excitement.

We walked hand in hand me asking questions non stop and my Dad patiently answering. We walked passed fields, factories and houses but with my tongue going non stop and me staring up at this man, my hero, I didn't notice anything. I just wanted the walk to go on forever.

Suddenly my eyes slid up from his hand to his arm and I noticed how red the hairs on his arm looked, and I thought why didn't I have red hair, why have I got a nothing colour of hair? I squeezed his hand tighter and smiled up at him. Sixty years later when I remember that moment in time I still smile.

To quote a line from one of Seamus Heaney's poems, 'Never closer the whole rest of our lives.'

Catherine

Memory of Daddy I.M. John Willis

In 1954, when I was eight years old, my parents decided to buy a terraced house off the Donegall Road in Belfast. It faced the Bog Meadows, which was acceptable to my mother, as it had a country view, and I recall her say this in her unnecessary haughty style voice! Mummy heard how the Belfast people 'ran into each other's houses uninvited,' so our front door was the one in the street closed and locked, day and night.

In summertime, my father and I would go for our weekly walk, up the Donegall Road to Falls Road and then along the Shankhill Road and up to Woodvale Park. The Park was close to the Waterworks, and I remember Daddy telling me that the water for every house in Belfast was cleaned so that people could drink from the tap. We had a pump in our old house, and I loved it, as the spring water at Granny's always had wee flies on top of the bucket. Yuk.

I loved looking down on Woodvale Park and especially the shine and glistening gold on the slides. On one occasion I wanted to run ahead as I was sooo excited but Daddy said, 'No. Stay beside me.' I slowed down and that pleased him, and that taught me that I didn't have to rush straight in. I don't know how long we spent there, but it was never long enough – up the steps, sitting down on the cool slide and whoosh – I was down ready to do it all again. From the top of the slide, Daddy would tell me I could see all of Belfast. All I saw was smoke from chimneys and the Harland and Wolff cranes. Behind us was the Black Mountain, not exciting or interesting to me then.

Soon it was time to return home. I hoped Daddy would stop at the chip shop on the Falls Road. I knew not to ask, as it depended on whether he'd had overtime or not that week and could afford it. Money was tight. Yippie, we are in the chippy!! If my brother Victor (5 years older than me, and quite, studious, religious and odd to me) was with us, Daddy would order sausages, and he had battered fish with bread and butter and a mug of tea. I loved the chips, and sprinkled salt from the wonky salt cellar, that had to be banged on the table several times to make the salt appear. Then it was home time, and we made our way back to Glenmachan Street. On Broadway, my brother was ahead of us trotting backwards. 'I'm going to get home first,' he smugly sang. 'Watch the pole Victor,' I shouted. 'Daddy.' Just as Victor turned, he trotted straight into a thick wooden telegraph pole. He sank to the ground like a bag of coal off a lorry. He was out cold! Daddy took out his large handkerchief and held it to Victor's bleeding head wound. Then Victor came around. He was worried about his glasses – were they broken? I was laughing so much, I almost wet myself. I was nasty like that!!!

Mary

Gifts from Dad

My dad was born in Poland not far from Warsaw, the capital of Poland. He was a quiet man and very correct. He taught me to be courteous and polite to people.

Presenting food on the table it had to be potatoes, no skins, vegetables off to the side, and meat off centre. His habit every weekday morning when I travelled to work was to waken me up with a cup of tea and tell me my egg was on the boil, so the longer I took to arrive in the kitchen, the harder my egg would be. It was a good way to make me get a move on.

I was the oldest of 5 children. Dad spoiled each of us as we came along. The third child, a brother, went camping – well he camped up behind our home in a friend's garden. Dad, not content about him not having his breakfast, headed off early the next morning to the tent with a bowl of cornflakes and a bottle of milk, spoon included. We all had a laugh at that.

For some time he worked in Newtownards. He was very fond of us. He spoiled us with small gifts every week. Woolworths store was on his way back to the bus and he couldn't resist having a shop. Fridays were big spend day. He shopped in the store and brought us all some small present.

When I grew up, still in my teens, he would shop in Newtownards for me. He actually went into a ladies clothes shop and brought me a pair of nylons. I was taken aback! I'll always remember a beautiful green sparkly bracelet he gave me. I didn't ever see my mum and dad having a row. Dad just walked away and said nothing.

He lived in South America before settling in Northern Ireland, which he loved. I would sit on my dad's knee to hear stories of his travels. One particular story came back to me of his journey up the river to the Inca country. He described the river banks to me and how people lived on the river edge. A TV documentary I watched of this journey on this river brought back the memory of what my dad was trying to explain to me.

I had long, wavy hair, and I travelled to the neighbouring town on an errand. My wish was to have short hair. On the second visit to a hairdresser, she finally reluctantly cut my hair to shoulder length. I arrived home and confronted dad. Well he was so shocked to see my hair cut!! 'Your hair cut – no, no.' He burst into tears.

My dad taught me how to sew and measure seams.

The Pony, the Budgie and Mum

I always remember my mum being chased down the back yard by a pony. She was stabled at the top of our back. Our home had been a farm at one time and we had barns where Amber was kept. The stable had a half door; it must not have been securely closed. Mummy went up to say hello to her. The next moment mummy was tearing down into the kitchen, breathless, with Amber a few steps behind her. She was afraid of Amber when she was out of the stable. That caused some fun for us.

Mummy had a budgie, Peter. She always took Peter out into the garden in the cage. She lodged the cage between the branches of an apple tree. This particular afternoon, Peter was out for long enough. She went to bring Peter in. Guess what, no Peter. The cage door was open; Peter was gone. A search began, calling for him round the back, and outside on the hedges on the main road. The cage was taken out with us, as he might recognise it was his. But no way; Peter was gone. Mum was in tears for her wee Peter.

Katrina

Adventures Delivering Telegrams

Born into a Post Office family, Gran the postmistress was busy serving the public. Mum was running the home. I was the firstborn of five.

My brother was one and a half years younger than me. Mummy was busy with my brother, so my gran took me in hand.

After school I did my homework in the public side of the Post Office. After that I joined my gran in the office. I watched and learnt how she handled the public and carried out the transactions.

As the years rolled on, my second brother was born. My mother was due her fourth child. My gran passed away just before my sister was born. It was a difficult time. Mum was taken to hospital as the birth was going to be life or death for her or the baby. With no-one to rely on to run the business except myself, I was asked could I manage running it? So to help my mum I did, with the help of a retired Postmistress, a friend of my grans. I surprised myself; I didn't realise I could do it.

My bicycle came in handy delivering telegrams. Out in all weathers and cycling for a few miles, I delivered everywhere in our area, to farms, private houses, and also to Dunleath Estate. I went even further when the surrounding Post Offices were on a half day. I was chased by barking dogs that would nip your ankles; to save my ankles I put my feet up on the handlebars. I was told off by farm owners as I took shortcuts though their farmyards. When I think back now, I guess they didn't realise I was on my way to deliver a telegram!

I had a memorable event. I arrived at a cottage where an aged spinster lived. It was quiet with no-one around. I knocked the front door, waited, knocked again. Still no life around. A loud, angry voice called out, 'who's there?' I couldn't see anyone at ground level. Well, I stepped back, and out of the skylight was the lady of the cottage pointing a doubled barrelled shotgun at me! My voiced shaking, I answered, 'I have a telegram for you!' 'Leave it on the step,' she told me. I quickly returned to my car. I told my mother that I could have been shot and next time she should go. She just laughed.

Katrina

A Special Moment

The sun....shining in the Spanish afternoon. The air warm.....pleasant aromatic smell. We entered the Chiringuito, ordered refreshments, A table in the middle of the room, Tails of the tent flapping in the wind. I could hear the sea outside, glimpses of sunshine, it was very pleasant. Then our eyes locked and we looked into each other's souls, What a blissful moment, Hand in hand, fully connected, Not concerned about who might see us, the two became one. The moment broke; we rose and made our way to the exit, But the memory of that moment remains with me forever, As fresh as ever...but all those years ago. My late John and I.

Sally

My Happy Place San Francisco

January 2022 Richard and I were over the moon, as we had just received the news from his oncologist that after four years battling Hodgkin's Lymphoma, undergoing numerous chemotherapy treatments, biopsies and tests, he was in full remission from the cancer. Such wonderful news!!! Travel plans that had been put on hold due to the cancer and Covid were being discussed and getting Richard's strength built up after the gruelling treatments was our next goal.

Unfortunately, on 23rd March, Richard was rushed into hospital with a very high temperature and a pain in his right side. Due to Covid restrictions still being in place, I was not allowed to travel with him in the ambulance or get access to A&E, and had to rely on conversing with the surgeons via telephone. Richard was diagnosed with gallstones and sepsis. Despite all their best efforts and undergoing 2 major operations, the surgeons could not save Richard. One comfort was our two boys and I were able to be with Richard to the end; but after 44 years of marriage and Richard being my only boyfriend who I met when I was 14, I was heartbroken. I lost my soul mate, best friend and a wonderful husband and father. I thought how life can be so cruel, after his long hard fought battle with cancer it was sepsis that took him from me.

Since then, there has been many dark days but I draw on Richard's strength to carry on and in my mind I visit my 'Happy Place' San Francisco. Richard was in Boise on a trip, and his company arranged for me to fly out to San Francisco to meet up with Richard and the rest of the company director's wives for four days.

I was a bit worried about travelling that distance on my own, changing flights and terminals, and set off with mixed feelings. All went well with the travel and Richard met me off the plane, and my first memory of San Francisco was travelling over the Golden Gate bridge to our hotel. That evening we dined in a beautiful fish restaurant in Sausalito. Next morning, we set off on our exploration of San Francisco. First thing that caught my eye was the colourful cable cars, and what a unique experience to have a ride on these, the entertaining conductors, the bells ringing, jumping on and off at each stop.

Next visit was to Muir Woods and the beautiful walk through the gigantic redwoods then a visit to Alcatraz Island and a tour of the military prison. On the way back to the hotel Richard bought me a musical Cable Car ornament which plays 'I left my heart in San Francisco,' which I did. Such a happy magical weekend which I will never forget, and when the dark days appear I play the musical Cable Car ornament and think of my 'Happy Place'.

Sandra

Cloughey Beach

I can still feel the incredible joy when it was announced on a Sunday morning on a hot summer's day – we were going to drive the 5 miles to Cloughey Beach for the afternoon!

I watched impatiently as mammy made the sandwiches - egg and onion, and also ham sandwiches, my favourites. She always included a packet of biscuits too as a treat.

The slow journey in our green Morris Cowley seemed to take forever. The anticipation almost choked me.

When we finally arrived, we ran towards the sand dunes, only to be called back to carry some of the bags.

It seemed forever before we were finally allowed to get into the cold sea. I screamed out loud when my brother splashed me again and again. He thought it was funny, but I didn't. After a few deep breaths I started to paddle with no fear, only joy and excitement.

Jim thought that it was great fun to keep splashing me with the cold water. I certainly didn't agree!! We always fought anyway as I was 2 years younger than him, so he was the boss! The egg and onion and ham sandwiches tasted majestic, as Jim and I fought over them as per usual.

The time came to go home and I guerned, 'can we not go in one more time?' Unfortunately, there was not a hope, as we dripped home in the car wrapped in our wee towels.

When we finally got home we were starving, and mammy made fresh pancakes with butter and syrup. Jim and I fought over who was getting the next pancake while mammy tried to keep the peace.

What a day and what a memory!

Olive

Long Summer Days

I remember playing on the beach all day in the summertime. We took jam sandwiches and a bottle of lemonade. We swam, built forts, ran races, and explored all the rock pools.

My only bad experience was being stung by a jellyfish. I ran shivering all the way home, but my granny got me to bed and made me sweet, hot tea, and next morning I was fine. But from then on, I was very wary about swimming in the sea!

Sandra

Love Letter to Me

I love you because you are kind and generous to us.

You have a strong faith. Your pet hates are blasphemy and disrespect of your faith. You are worthy of God's love, and please stop feeling inadequate.

I love your wee, funny quips that lighten the mood. And everyone loves your smile.

You are a very strong lady, and not to be underestimated at any time

Mary

White Lie

My mother, Mabel, died in hospital at 7.45am on a sunny morning. I held her hand. I did not know then how definite, devastating - and final, death could be.

I had been called by the hospital at about 7am, and phoned my father George, who lived alone in the home they shared in Fintona, about eight miles from Omagh. I got no answer: he didn't hear the phone. He would have so wished to have shared his lifelong companion's final moments. But it was not to be. I never told him of my phone call; he would have felt so guilty!

I told a white lie, that I didn't have time to call before rushing to the hospital. I have regretted to this day that I did not ask the hospital to call him. Would it have made a difference? He passed away four years later - alone. I was on holiday in France.

Regrets, regrets.....

Harman

Mammy

I was only a child of 23 years old. My poor mammy was lying on her death bed. The agony inside me was horrendous. This couldn't be happening to my mammy.

I still feel the ache in my chest as I think of this. My breathing quickens almost to the point of smothering! How could it be - my mammy?

I ran up to the nurses and asked them to give mammy something for the pain. I was told that they couldn't give her any more medications. I felt stunned, almost demented.

I have spent a lifetime almost feeling jealous of people in their 60's and over talking about their mothers. How could this be?

I felt so abandoned when she moved on. I was only a child.

I have relived moments of watching her die all of my life.

I remember so many of her sayings and repeat them often.

My mammy used to say:-

- Don't be worried you silly old fool.
- God bless us (if she was shocked by something).
- If I cursed and said, 'Oh God' she would say, 'don't take the Lord's name in vain,' and sing, 'of ages past.'
- She also sang, 'oh it's nice to get up in the morning, but it's nicer to lie in your bed.'
- Lord take care of us this night and day (if she was shocked).

Olive

My Life

My life has been a rollercoaster of emotions. I am thankful for this in one way, as I have shared my experiences with many people and have helped them as I spoke.

My motto is, 'I embrace my traumas, as every trauma that I have come through, I came out the other side stronger and with new knowledge.' When I meet new people I can share my experiences with them, when appropriate of course.

The most memorable was when I was on a course, and just before the lunch, the tutor asked if anyone had any questions. I don't know where this came from, but I asked a question and started to cry. I talked about my sexual abuse from the age of 4 to 6 years old. It just tumbled out of me and I couldn't stop.

The room started to cry with me, except for the tutor, who was professional. So many girls came over to me during the lunch break to tell me their stories. First the girl who was sitting beside me in the room; this was followed by another one, and another one.

I was mesmerised, or astounded, or maybe both, when I listened to their stories. It was incredibly healing for us all, as there was a wonderful sense of relief that came out and floated around the atmosphere.

This was so healing, and I will never forget my new fellowship.

Olive

My Forever Friend

I have a friend, a happy, huggy, loving friend, whose arms open wide. His smile broadens and his blue eyes shine when he meets a friend. I challenge anyone to reject his instant charm and his infectious personality. You instantly know he cares about you. That is also the reason for his amazing success in life.

His life began in a violent home. His father returned from WW2 damaged, bitter and disillusioned. He became an alcoholic and an atheist, disappearing for periods of time. His poor mother was violently beaten for sending his son to church, maintaining there was NO GOD having experienced the carnage of war.

As a result my friend as a young boy ran away and became a street urchin in need of food and shelter. He was found by a football coach who became his benefactor and introduced him to football and boxing. That began his success, and he went on to be exceptionally good.

He became a football coach. With help, he became a docker. He rose through the ranks, eager to learn and spot chances for his own advancement. He spoke the language of the dockers yet he could understand management also.

This led him to become the arbitrator in strike situations. He was the voice of calm. His reputation became worldwide. His services were in great demand. He was well recompensed for his services. He educated himself to university level.

Now he has established his own businesses worldwide, building harbours and promoting a greener environment.

He has risen from rags to riches.

His heart is as big as ever, spreading happiness everywhere he goes. He is humble, extremely generous, and kind to all in need, tenderly remembering those of his past, yet he can negotiate with governments and sheiks in business, and gain their trust and respect.

I am honoured to call him my friend and my family's friend.....a friend for life.

Margaret

That Fateful Day

I'm a childless, disabled octogenarian widow who faced a very traumatic day yesterday, 29th November 2022.

You ask, 'What on earth could that have been?' When I was setting off in the bloom of youth, no driving test required to go on the road and not too much traffic, I never thought that this day would ever come, but yesterday it arrived.

How could such an event, whatever it was, cause such trauma? Was it a delayed reaction to being made extremely conscious of the fact that my driving career was finally coming to an end after having to stop pre-covid because of having experienced a distinct deterioration in my perception of speed and distance? I felt myself to be a huge hazard on the road, not only to myself but to other motorists. The irony was that I had experienced it on the road out to my "Therapy Bay' at the lake at Rossigh where a larger expanse of the lake is visible compared to other sites, which was at the end of a cul-de-sac. I felt that I was back again on the M1 doing about 90mph but on checking the speedometer, the speed was 40mph. That gave me the fright of my life!

Not to be able drive out to my favourite spot where the experience differed every time was too horrible to contemplate. Some days the lake was like a mirror, others choppy enough, but never too rough as there was an island opposite the shore; on others, the wind would be creating its own special music rustling in the trees; water hens, or swans with their cygnets swimming about, and other species of common birds bobbing up and down along the fisherman's track. But best of all, on a sunny afternoon when the sun was shining on the slightly rough water it seemed as though there were diamonds dancing on it. That all made the journey worthwhile.

Much as I loved the lake there were times when the energy of the sea called to me and I was able to answer that call, hop into my car and head off to Rossnowlagh beach. Oh to be able to stride along that beautiful beach again!

The question which had arisen concerned my driving licence. The expiry date was approaching, when I had the opportunity to renew or terminate. The decision was made to terminate it because to renew would only prolong the agony when the outcome would have to be the same further down the line.

So in the best interests of all, I'll never drive a car again.

But as one door closes, another one opens. What will it be behind it???

Sally

The Graveyard

lying, laughing against the round tower in Clones in the moonlight that reflects the tips of headstones so they look like they've been iced in white

drinking vodka out of jam jars held with frosted hands the voices in the street enter the graveyard of our drinking and draw us into the warm pub where we count out the price of a pint, sitting in a row of silence against the wall

there is a freedom, as deep as the grave, in drinking with the dead who neither judge nor listen to our foolish teenage talk

Frances























