

**Our Anthology
March 2016
Start360**



A big thank you

*To Russ and Louise for their time and
encouragement*

To our guest Clare Shaw

*To all the staff at Arvon and Lumb
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*To the staff at START360 for all their
support*

*Thanks to the generous support The
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opportunity*

Thanks for an amazing time

*Matthew, Louise, Michael, Christine,
Gary, Caoilean, Jolene, TJ & Jason*

Start360



Start360 is Northern Ireland’s leading provider of support services to young people, adult offenders and families in the community.

We provide a range of services and interventions in the areas of health, justice and employability.

Our mission statement is that ‘Change Starts Here’.

We have offices across Northern Ireland – in Belfast, Ballymena, Lurgan, Derry/Londonderry, Enniskillen, Glengormley and in the three prisons – Maghaberry, Magilligan and Hydebank College. We currently employ 120 people, delivering 26 services.

The McGrath Writers

The McGrath Writers provides opportunities for young people from cross-communities in Belfast to engage with creative writing. The project is generously supported by **The McGrath Trust** and delivered by Arvon, in partnership with **Start360** and The Belfast Inter-Schools Creative Writing Network.

Arvon



Arvon is one of the UK's leading creative writing charities. It produces residential and city-based creative writing courses and retreats led by highly respected authors. Founded in 1968, it has three writers' centres, in Devon, Shropshire and Yorkshire.

At the heart of Arvon is the desire to encourage anyone, regardless of their background, to find their voice through writing. About a third of its activities are with groups from schools, youth and community groups and arts organisations, many from the most disadvantaged communities in the UK.

Arvon offers a 'home for the imagination', where anyone, regardless of writing experience, can step away from their normal routine, immerse themselves in the creative process, be inspired by experienced writers and release their imaginative potential.

The Residential

The experience gave the young people an opportunity to get away from their chaotic lifestyles and learn to express themselves in a way they had not previously considered. It helped them develop confidence in their ability to write and in their own self-belief. They developed new ways of communicating and new attitudes towards how to deal with difficult situations.

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My Niece

She heard the words which made her world stand still “*Your daddy’s dead*”, every daughter’s greatest fear. Tears filled her eyes as she asked herself why, why’d he do it, why didn’t he tell her, he could have trusted her, she could have helped, why’s the world so cruel, one sleepless night now a lifetime. She couldn’t believe it, thinking this was just a sick nightmare or joke but sometimes the world is a bastard, it doesn’t care about some girl, we come from the earth and we will return to it, full circle. Ashes to Ashes, Dust to Dust. How one day can change everything, literally everything.

The runaway man, believed to be a coward, hiding from his debts. The unanswered text messages pleading him to come home. The empty car by the side of the road. Family, friends and strangers alike search the fields, the river and the forest which is normally alight with life is now still and silent in anticipation, waiting. As the moon overcomes the sun and the darkness drowns out the light, she is taken home, kicking and screaming, how do they expect her to sleep with her mind clouded with dark thoughts and one in particular, the unthinkable, the worst, the truth.

Her eyes open before she even knows she’s closed them, the clock by her beside read 4:00 in the morning and someone was by her bedside, her heart filled with hope but alas, the world is cruel, “*Your daddy killed himself*” said the voice she now recognised as her mother, cracking with emotion and her world stood still as the rest of the world didn’t skip a beat. As her heart breaks, she breaks. This is all a bad dream she tells herself, hurry up and wake up, please, wake up please, this can’t be real she says, closing her eyes to wake herself up but some nightmares are waking. Seconds felt like minutes, minutes like hours and hours felt like an eternity yet time stands still.

Family gathered, grief hanging in the air like a thunder cloud, dark and unforgiving, she blames herself. If I’d spent more time with him, he wouldn’t feel so alone. If I’d told him I loved him more, he wouldn’t feel hated. Her stomach churns, her throat burns and head spins as she rushes to the toilet. Morning sickness. He wouldn’t have done it if you’d told him her mind screams. Cruel irony, life gained as life is lost, the daughter soon to be a mother. She walks back down the stairs and everyone stares, thinking she was sick because of grief, no one knows. She takes her brother’s hand, too young to really understand, just told that God needed his daddy in heaven and that he is an angel. Every morning he asked when he was going to come back home.

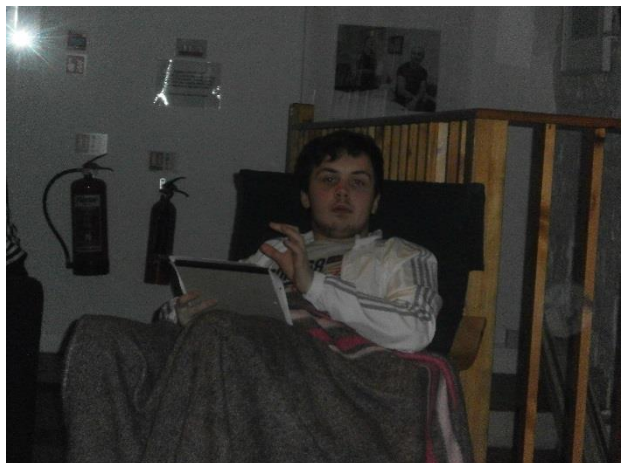
A sea of black fills the street, a flood of crying faces as far as the eye can see, the man who believed that no one cared now in the place of honour, on the shoulders of those who feel like they didn’t lose a brother, son or nephew but a limb. She hears a voice saying “*The women now*” the pallbearers change, daughter, sisters and fiancé alike, all those who at one point he had held up on his shoulders now returning the favour.

Funeral mass passes in tears and squeals, not a dry eye to be seen in the cathedral, even the priest misty eyed as he begs everyone present to seek help and talk to someone if they feel the darkness is beginning to become all consuming. A picture of his smiling face on top of the coffin, that breaks her, she remembers the day the photo was taken, a better time.

The coffin gets covered with roses, many red but two pure white for her and her brother, symbolic of lost innocence. When they began to fill the grave, she couldn't stand it anymore, she screams "*Stop it, he's not dead, that's not my daddy, he can't be dead*", trying to convince herself that this can't be real. She tries to jump into the grave after the coffin but is held by her grandfather, my father, a man who has spent 50 years on this world but that day looks as though he lived twice that, he outlived his first born, a fate every father fears. Her wee brother takes her hand, now the man of the house at age 8.

Four months pass in the blink of an eye yet feels like four years at the same time. She hears the beeps of machines, official sounding voices that she didn't recognise and two that she did. She turns and sees her mother and boyfriend smiling at her, he takes her hand, the wee notorious hard man now with tears in his eyes," *You did great, I love you*" he says to her and then she remembers. "*Where is he?*" she asks, her voice barely a whisper and then she hears a new sound, one that makes her heart leap, a baby crying, *her* baby crying, to her the most beautiful sound in existence. The doctor puts him into her arms and she finally understands the love only a mother can understand. A kiss on the forehead calms the baby down, he stops crying and looks up at the bearer of his life, his mommy. She looks him in the eyes for the first time, the most beautiful thing in this world and she cries, not tears of sorrow but of joy. He has her father's eyes.

By Matthew Dillon



Dark Enigma.

When the sun goes down, our secrets fly out. The moon frees our emotions, as if there had been an ice shielding them during the sun's hours, which melts into a liquid, letting our secrets and inner thoughts soar freely. The night contains anonymity; we believe its dark embrace will hold our secrets safely. Is the night to be trusted? Of course not! Its calming, dark enigma leads us into believing it is trustworthy; we fall into its dreamy clutches. However, morning appears and our wall of ice returns, empty: as our secrets are out in the open.

The Valley

The valley has a soul.
It can look, it can think, it can stare;
into your memories and daydreams.
It has a mind of its own,
an independent entity.
The valley has a soul.

The valley has a heart.
It can sing, it can feel, it can love;
just like a human being can.
It has a longing for adoration,
a partner to reside with.
The valley has a heart.

The valley has a mind.
It can analyse, it can perceive, it can think;
like a piece of superhuman intelligence.
It loves to ponder of the people inside it,
figuring out who they are.
The valley has a mind.



Cottage on the Hill

You are the cottage on the hill.
Your scenic beauty makes me feel calm,
I admire how you are so still.
Your tranquillity is unrivalled,
a peacefulness no one can kill;
the snow amongst your garden transforms you into a wonderland.
You are the cottage on the hill.

By Louise Shields



Baby For Sale No Previous Owner

It wasn't even a baby

It was.

It cut deep, it bled.

Tears washed it away

Despair scrapped it clean.

Alone, it's alone, leave me alone.

Bruised, scarred, raw

“Try again” they said.

Can't speak,

Vocal cords so strained they might snap, like me

I'm angry.

Don't tell anyone, tell everyone.

I'm a creator, but I can't create

I'm a nurturer, but I can't nurture.

Baby, baby, it was a tiny little baby

“Try again, it'll be fine next time” they said.

You were here

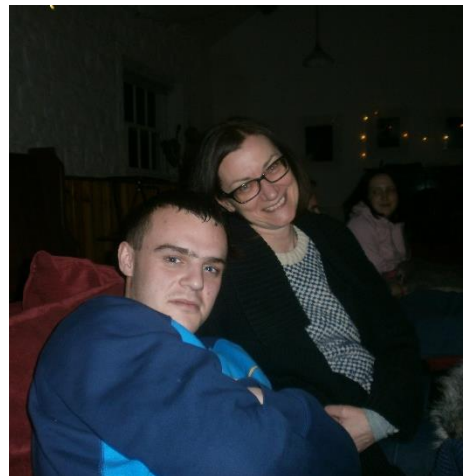
You were mine

You were loved.

And my tears fell like milk teeth, one by one

Baby for sale no previous owner

But still loved.



By Carmel Kernahan

My People

My people are the people of legends
My people are the people who don't
do it for the fame
My people are the people who don't
back down from danger
My people are the people who will
spend months searching for the
princess
My people are the people who are
bullied day in, day out
My people are anonymous, yet we all
know each other.
My people are the people who are
told to get a life.
We are gamers, and we don't need to
get a life,
We already have lives.
All we have to do is press start.

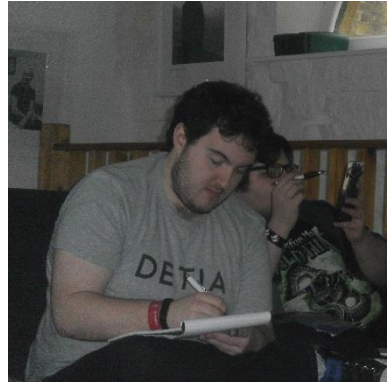


I'm Not The Monster.

I'm not the monster you think I am
I am the thing you're scared of
I know how you think; I know how you breathe
I know how you feel and I know how you walk
I know what you eat and I know when you sleep
I am the thing that is lurking under your bed
I am the shadow on your landing
I am the imaginary person following you home at night.
I am the reason why you look over your shoulder when you have your headphones in.
I am fear.
And I'm not the monster you think I am,
I'm worse.

6 Word Poems/Stories.

Grant my last request, dearly beloved.
Time will be irrelevant someday, Doctor.
Sanity can be cured, with time.
I'm proud of you son, Goodbye.



The Voice

The voice of laughter crashing across time, running around a prayer of wine.
Always cherish the time we have, the surprise of gathering information to cheat
the system.
To us, the cake represents fun and laughter and good times.
To me, the cake is a lie.

To live properly we must colonize our mind with thoughts, we must figure out
who we are, what we are, what we want. There must be peace of mind to form a
healthy relationship, either with the person we love or with the food we eat. We
must chase our dreams the way we want to, whether that be to dig a hole for
diamonds or trek the stars like heroes.

The fruit we bare can alarm us at first, but for our wings to flourish, we must
break the yellow atmosphere in the early morning of our lives.

By Michael O'Connor



TIME

I sit here motionless waiting on the claw.
waiting to be chosen.
I love my brothers and sisters.
I am same on the inside as I am on the outside.
Its crowded and cramped.

I am still I will never change.
I will always be the same.
I long for a good day. I know I won't last so,
I need to be chosen I need to be set free.

I don't want to go bad
I can't see or feel but I am always angry.
I don't want to be made fun off
I can't feel, I don't have feelings
I can't cry I don't want to upset others.
I am scared and fearful of what I will become
I don't want to be bad I am bright but I'll be
black in the future.

It's time I become what I want instead of others
changing me.

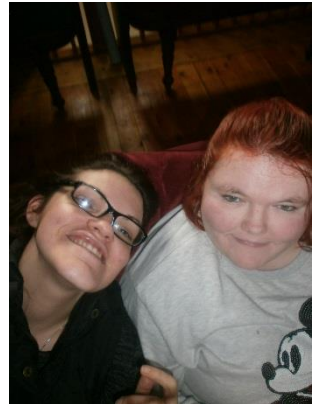
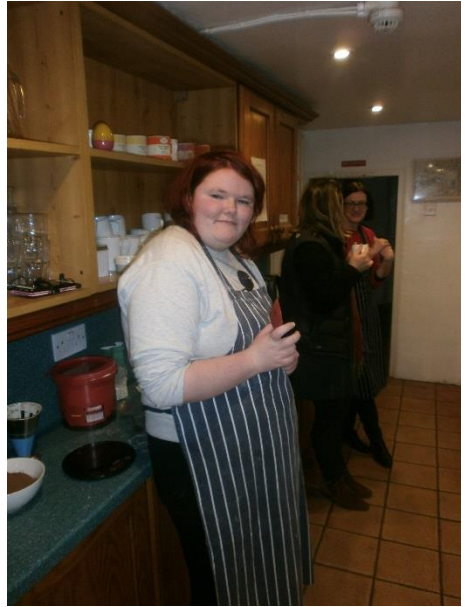
What I am is me.

I will be me no matter what you do in time.

I won't be shy I won't be scared.

I won't be angry.

I'll be who I want it will just take time.



Rich and powerful

A rich girl from Doagh walks past a busker every day to go to the shops she always smiles and puts money into his hat, "she won't love me I am poor" he thinks. At a 21st birthday party a jealous friend spikes her drink and she falls into a coma, the doctors tried everything to wake her but couldn't. The busker over hears her friend talking about what she did so he goes to the bedside and plays her a song. She opens her eyes and says "I knew you would be my hero".

By Christine Armstrong

Is violence the answer?

I'm standing at a bus stop in England waiting for the bus to the airport. I asked a group of young men "What time is the next bus please"?

Where are you from?

Belfast.

Off they went, What the fuck are you doing here, away back to your own country and shoot and bomb them. you Paddy bastard!!!!

Needless to say I got on the plane with a ripped shirt and jeans.

Of course his country is innocent of any blame!!! yeah right

Between 1845 and 1850 the population of Ireland went from 8 million to 4 million because the lives of so many people revolved around spuds and when the crop failed they were left to leave the country or die which millions did.

No help was offered despite cattle, pigs and poultry being transported to England.

One Lord said "nothing can interfere with the course of trade" This was a more indirect form of violence but violence all the same.

I believe that violence is wrong and counterproductive.

Some of the reasons are as follows:

I worked in a bar in Canada in the 80's and a friend of mine was shot dead, a girl I went to school with and the news travelled around the world. Throughout the course of the evening different people were asking about what happened, but one group got a bit feisty to put it mildly, with one idiot shouting "they should put a nuclear bomb in Dublin???" and blow the lot of you to fuck!! Now this is my family and friends he is talking about, this is your family and friends he is talking about. So I reached across the table and dragged him through the bar and kicked him up the steps into the street.

Do you think that helped his understanding of the problems we deal with at home? I don't think so!!!

We are living in a world of extreme violence. Let me ask you this?

Who benefits from these wars?

Arms dealers?

Who are the arms dealers?

I will tell you, USA, Saudis, France, Russia, Israel and Britain.

Is it a coincidence that these are the countries that are blowing Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq to pieces?

Is the world a safer place?

I don't think so!!!!

The rich are getting richer. Do you know that 62 people, not 62%, not 62,000 but 62 people own half the world's wealth?

Do you think these people are in harm's way?

I don't think so!!!!

Listening to our leaders will only lead us to destruction. We cannot sit back and let them feed us the bullshit that they are making the world a safer place. Millions of people are fleeing their homes, not because they are seeking a better future someplace else, it is simply fear.

So I say

Stand up!!!

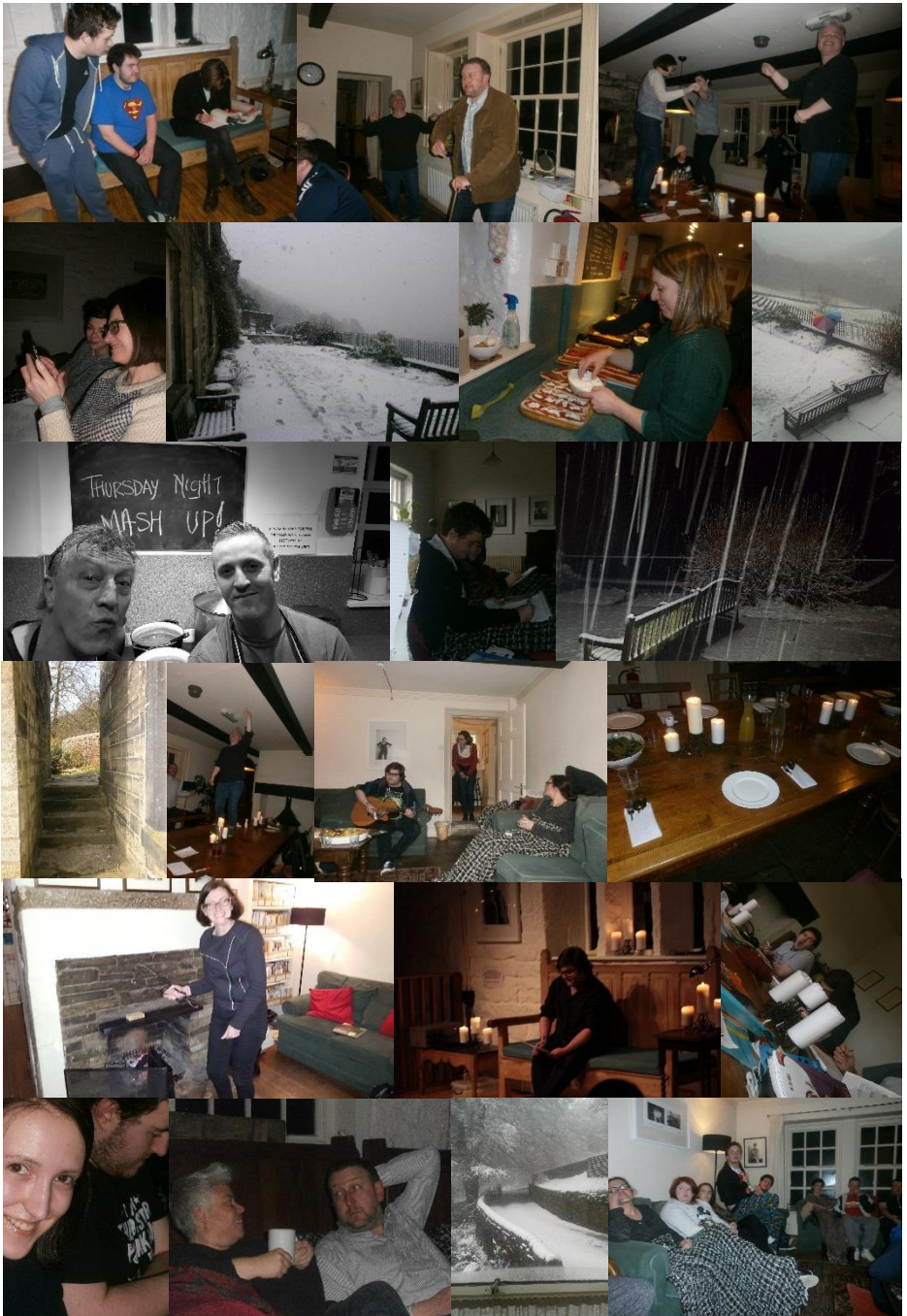
Speak out!!!

Bring power back to the people!!!

By Billy Wilson





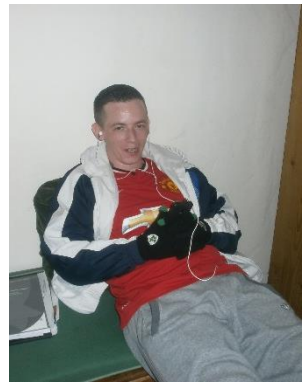


Walking Through the Forest

Walking down a steep hill feeling the stones under your shoes, birds chirping and singing from the tree tops. Hearing the wind blow the leaves off the trees and the wind hitting your face and body, making you shiver. Hearing the river flowing downhill hitting off the rocks and landing on the path in front of you. People shouting in the distance and dogs barking, whistles from their owners to come back. Then the rain starting to fall down after the thunder crackling above your head making you jump. Bending down and picking a bit of earth up with your fingers, very delicate and wet and slimy. Then head back to the car and the mayhem of cars, horns and screeching from the tyres, head showered after a day in the forest.

The Moon Children

The children from the baby kingdom,
there's chairs, down tins and moon music.
Butterfly lights fill the sky,
while bouncy fish swim the ground.
Rapid breezes explode into amazing spectacles,
and frozen men walk the moon!!



By Gary O'Hara



The Yorkshire Paradise

A few weeks before
Matt asked "do you want to go?"
I'm not too sure
I'll let you know

The trip was approaching
Trying to sort things out
Travelling and meeting new people
That's what life's about.

Day one was started
Off to Hill Street we go
Is this going to be good?
God will only know

Into the Fona Cab taxis
With another few
Straight up the motorway
Passing the Belfast Zoo

Walking to the airport entrance
Thirteen people strong
No need to worry
We'll all get along

Ready for take off
Into the bright blue sky
We weren't so certain
But we'll give it a try

Welcome to Manchester
Read the big blue sign
We were all confident
That we would reign

Yellow bus arrived
On the side "Pioneer"
Stopped off at a shop
That wasn't even dear

"Welcome to Arvon"
Said a little voice
"What food is there?"
You'll be spoilt for choice

"Pleased to meet you
What are your names?"
"Rosie, Jack and Jill"
Later on, we'll play some games

Tuesday morning began
Met the two tutors
If you want to type your work
Use the barn computers.

Welcome to Arvon
We're Russ and Lou
This week is exciting
It's all about you

Me, Carmel, Christine and Louise
Were all about to cook
I enjoyed every minute
After reading a book

Day three is here
Half way through
I'm going for a walk
We'll come with you

Our journey to the shop
A fifteen-minute stroll
I'm going to the graveyard -
"To the right", read the pole

Half way up the hill
Back to the shop
To get a litre of milk
With the silver top.

Wednesday evening
Arrived the mystery guest
After she performed
We thought she's the best

Day four is here
My work came to life
Louise said "you're a genius"
I said "that's right"

Who's making dinner?
Team Billy and Matt
Fresh organic sausages
We'll have some of that

Celebration evening
Was about to begin
If there was a best group award
No doubt, we would win

Into the barn to perform
Short story or poem
Spotlight shone centre stage
We were about to show them.

A brilliant display of talent
Emerged through our crowd
That was outstanding
Be happy and proud

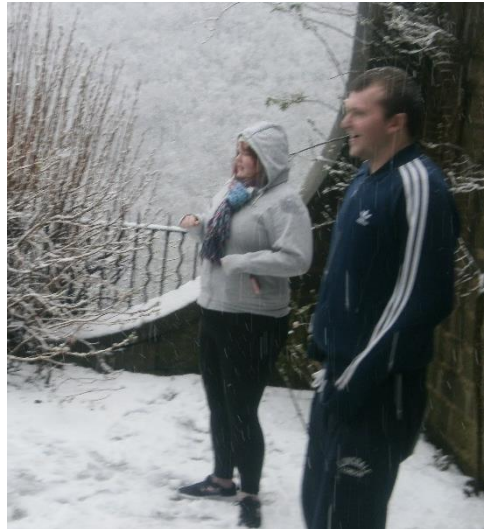
"Are you all ready?"
Time for our song
Rewriting Snow Patrol
Please sing along

The week was almost over
We said our final goodbye
We ate lunch on the bus
As snow fell from the sky

Manchester airport
Eleven miles to go
We're almost there
Fifteen minutes or so

Arrived three hours early
Around twenty past two
We were all thinking
What can we do?

Belfast international **cancelled**
On the electric board
What the hell is going on?
We were all scared.



Gate twenty-four for Belfast
We went to that gate
After about forty-five minutes
It couldn't be that late

Looked at the screen
It had a different destination
Went to what was happening
Full of frustration

We ran to the screen
Belfast gate three – closing
For around 30 seconds
We were all frozen

Run to gate three
Was our only plan
I.D and boarding passes
Ready in hand.

As we waited for our bags
There was a delay
We're back on home soil
It's really not our day

Got into the taxis
City Centre here we come
Everyone was tired
Just wanted to get home

Reality has kicked in again
A great holiday overall
We would love another one
Can hold our heads ten feet tall.



After Life

What is after life? No one knows.
The blue sky, the sunny days, everyone is free,
no more bills!

The word afterlife is a completely different word
with a different meaning for everyone.
A complete mystery with everyone having their
own guess and own opinion.

Where is afterlife? does anyone know? golden steps
and an endless walk, you see your friends
and family but you can't touch them.

Is there really an afterlife? who knows?
Afterlife for me is peace and the end of our journey.
So I'll leave it up to you, who or what is afterlife?

By Caoilean Nesbitt



6 Word Stories

- 1: She nearly convinced me I mattered
- 2: Let's get the fuck outta here
- 3: Sorry mate it's not your night
- 4: Untying that knot was absolutely horrendous
- 5: Your name still scalds my tongue
- 6: Your scent is my favourite perfume
- 7: I forgot to lock the door
- 8: When you arrived I change forever
- 9: Don't dare call me your stereotype
- 10: I only belong to one person



Who Am I?

Why do you keep looking at me?

I'm not the only one who can give you what you want...

My limbs are aching, I'm always on the move
I need to be moved, the boredom is killing me...

This crowded room is making me feel suffocated, I can't breathe
A change of scenery would be lovely!

No staring, no glaring or wandering eyes, just peace and quiet!

The sound of everlasting movement & noise is driving me to madness
I'm the one who is flying over the cuckoo's nest...

I know you need me, but I think it is time you looked elsewhere
My batteries are running out and need replaced...



WHO AM I?

By Matthew English

THE ENEMY WITHIN

The enemy within

It can consume you

It can control you

Penetrating on and on

Deeper and deeper

I sink

I sit on the floor

It's dark and there's no light

Except the faint glow of the

Street light shining in upon me

I look out at the dark sky and cry

Why, why, do I

Let you take over me?

I've fought you many times before

Shut up, shut up, shut up!

I want to grab a blade

I want to hurt and punish myself

But I don't deserve that

I deserve something else

I deserve something better



By Jolene Maguire

First Chapter of novel Marriage Laid to Rest

The First Notice!

Andrew and Mona arrive at Laura's ward again for a visit. Mona has asked the doctor if she has made any more progress since their last visit. He solely responds with a quick nod and strides off down the corridor. "Such a cocky asshole he is" Mona whispers "You know he's in the game for the money." Andrew sits down at Laura's side and so does Mona and they start to converse about basic shit like the weather, sports and work but after all the stale questions were out of the way they start to have a laugh and giggle at stupid things.

After the laughter has died down Mona casually says to Andrew "Andrew I apologise in advance if I'm being nosey here but Laura has never told me how you two actually met?" Andrew sat in his chair frozen for a moment he was trying to figure out where did this come from, he says under his breath "oh um, now you're asking me, emm oh yeah" his voice starts to pick up "you remember that old run down house that was half a mile down the road from you where old man Johnson lived?" Mona replies "yeah I do, used to be a lovely house and the backyard oh it was to die for" Andrew responds "well you obviously remember the big old Oak tree that stood there that the kids all played at?"

When Andrew mentioned the word *tree* Mona noticed that Laura's finger started to move like it was on some sort of trigger. She just ignored it and continued to listen to Andrew. "Laura loved that tree" Laura's finger triggered again "it was her favourite place to go" said Mona "she would always talk about it" Andrew looked at Mona smiling while she talked about her daughter and he followed with "well that tree", finger triggered again, "is where I fell in love with Laura" Andrew smiled.

At the final mention of the tree Laura starts to see a memory. It's sort of like when your mum brought out the old camera film and put in a projector. She sees a massive big oak tree in front of her, it's a beautiful warm day, the birds are singing and there's kids having the time of their lives, running around, bouncing up and down and even pushing each other on a tyre swing they made. Laura is with her friends Molly, Amy and Jack.

Laura senses that something isn't right about this memory. She starts to observe the memory and notices there's another boy with her friends. She can't figure out who it is and it keeps bugging her that she can't figure it out. Laura shouts over to Molly and asks her who the boy is and all Laura hears is a muffled grainy sound when Molly tried to say his name. She asks her again she still hears the same response.

Back in the ward Andrew is finishing off his story “and that is how we met each other Mona” with a cheeky grin to finish. Mona is amazed at what a beautiful story it was. It was time for them to go so Mona says her goodbyes to Laura and kisses her on the forehead. Andrew grabs her hand clasps it in his and kisses it and whispers in her ear “I Love You, I can wait till your better you’re going to be treated like a princess. I’ll see you in a few days” he gives her a final kiss on the lips and walks away.

By David “TJ” Thompson



Past,Present,Future

I am writing about the time I have experienced here and all the nice people I have met and what has still to come. I am now on my last day here and I hope all goes well. I have enjoyed meeting all the different people and all the games we played. It is my first experience of this type of residential and I find that putting my thoughts onto a piece of paper, what I can feel, what I touch and what I can see has really helped me come to terms with what happens in my life. I would like to be more clear in my thoughts but whether or not it works out is up to me. I know I can make this work. I need to make this work for my future. I would like to thank everyone here, you have all been very helpful regarding my past, present and future.

THANK YOU

By Jason Moore



Our Journey

Once upon a time,
in a land I can't recall
13 apprehensive travellers
found themselves in Heptonstall

With jotters in their hands
and pens behind their ears
They took a breath and made a choice
to challenge all their fears

Five days lay a head,
full of poetry and prose
Little did they know
that words would come in droves

First came morning papers
a chance to scream and shout
To get rid of all the shit
to let it all spill out

We were asked to pick our people
to gather to our side
Words that would describe them
to show our sense of pride

The swag bag made an appearance
to everyone's delight
Full of cauliflower computers
and farts taking flight

A character appeared in front of us
a story to be told
Of spaceships, Timelords, tigers
and kings in towers of gold



Our senses next were called upon
to give our lines some feeling
Donkey fur and candyfloss pink
left us with more than meaning

An object or two flew around
waiting to be captured
12 words is all it took
for the image to be mastered

We used the world around us
to surprise and inspire
Looking for answers and pictures
that would fan our creative fire

You've all made it to the end
and I couldn't be prouder
I'm going to stand up and talk of you
each time shouting louder

TJ, Jolene, Coailean,
and Gary, Michael, Matthew,
Christine, Louise and Jason
I want to say thank you.

By Ciara McAlinden

