our view
This book is a record of a collaborative project between 21 teenagers from North and West Belfast, the artist Rita Duffy and youth worker Rory Doherty. Through images and recordings, this contemporary art project gives voice to individual young people who are living in post conflict Belfast. Often frank and unashamedly honest these are real stories that represent what life is like for many young adults, in this so called progressive society. This project was realised in collaboration with Play Resource and Quaker Service.

Quaker Service

Quaker Service is a family welfare charity which was pioneered and developed by The Religious Society of Friends. The charity’s ethos is guided by Quaker beliefs and values. Quaker Service aims to play a practical role in reducing violence, suffering and disadvantage and has been providing services which support, value and empower people since 1969.

Quaker Cottage is a cross-community family support day-care centre set up by Quaker Service in the early 1980’s. Quaker Cottage delivers therapeutic and practical support services for families from some of the most disadvantaged areas of north and west Belfast. The centre provides mothers and their children a safe caring environment in an atmosphere where they can openly express themselves without restraint.

The Teenage Project at Quaker Cottage is a cross-community initiative which has been engaging young people since 2003 in gaining valuable life skills, adopting healthy behaviour and developing a sense of purpose. The project promotes the values of elementary morality, personal well being of mind and body, skill development, confidence building and the concept of self worth. The young people take part in a wide range of activities and programmes encouraging personal growth and development.

Play Resource

Play Resource is the centre for arts, play and education based in Belfast with membership open to groups across Northern Ireland. Play Resource knows that young people’s confidence and self esteem are greatly enhanced by participating in the arts. By delivering the Creative Paths Arts Programme to groups it offers a unique journey of discovery for all those involved, and this art project is no exception! It is the result of an exciting partnership between Play Resource and Quaker Service, working with teenagers to enable them to use the arts as a way to explore what is important to them.

As a charity with over 25 years experience of providing resources, support and training for those working with children, young people and community groups, Play Resource collects waste materials from industry and recycles them into a free source of play, arts and creativity. For information or inspiration visit www.playresource.org

Interviews transcribed by Adrienne Reilly.
How often do young people allow themselves the time to reflect upon their lives? How often do young people listen to how they really feel? How often are young people given the opportunity to be heard? And how often do people really listen?

This book illustrates the lives of 21 young people from across North and West Belfast through text, drawings and photographs. The majority of those involved feel that they are rarely listened to by those around them. This majority feels left behind by the system; a system that has been put in place to support and benefit young lives. This ‘benefit’ system has obvious gaps, and many of these young people have fallen through, often leaving them with no qualifications and limited opportunities. They live in a society divided by peace walls where locked gates keep communities apart. To them, Belfast is a place of violence and divided lives. Happy lives seem to have been forgotten.

The young people in this book were given the opportunity to tell their story at Quaker Cottage, a cross-community centre that promotes peace and believes that violence, for any reason, is not the answer. At Quaker Cottage, everyone is equal. Everyone has the right to be respected, to be heard, and to feel safe. Pain, loss, and trauma are something most of these young people deal with on a daily basis and sharing their experiences, through storytelling, is not easy. Quaker Cottage provides a safe environment the youth need to reflect critically on their lives.

This project asked each young person to delve into their past, and put their experience into words and pictures. Through short interviews with Rita and myself, each individual was given the time, space and support necessary for their own story to be shared and captured. The writing process enabled the young people to reflect upon their lives, empowering them to become their own author. This, I felt, was an important aspect of our storytelling project. The translation process, from the first interview to the final editing, gave them a sense of control over their stories and lives that they hadn’t felt before.
The latest addition to our collection of Belfast Peace lines has been installed on a country lane way up on Divis Mountain, ironically on route to Quaker Cottage. Initially we considered an art project addressing that construction. The surreal metal wall, appropriately painted green, secures a field of grazing cattle it stands as a visual marker, reminding us of boundaries and divisions that lie within our community. We decided that this art project should not focus on obvious divisions experienced in Belfast it was more challenging and relevant to look at individuals lived experience. This process of witness and revelation required some other method of delivery and presented a deeper and more meaningful possibility for each person involved. This contemporary art project gave a small group of individuals an opportunity to speak and be heard.

The project began in October 2009 with Rory Doherty and twenty one young people from North and West Belfast we worked in collaboration three evenings a week at Quaker Cottage.

Arriving at Quaker Cottage I am always struck by the view, perched high above Belfast, the white house is set apart from the urban sprawl and in many senses it’s easier to see where you are. This is no ivory tower but it has for me and many others, been a place of support and creativity. I appreciate their support and willingness to help and facilitate this art project that takes inspiration from real lives, lived by real people in Belfast. This project takes its title “Our View” from the elevated location on the mountain and a belief that somewhere in the great flow of human interconnectivity other people here and beyond have faced the same experiences.

The workshops began as small creative explorations with basic drawing materials and plenty of chat. The sessions allowed me to meet and get to know the various personalities and Rory guided and assisted me throughout. We encouraged the group to draw and write down their thoughts and we created time lines, this was a challenge and for many the results were sporadic. It was apparent fairly quickly that all of the young people involved faced several serious challenges in their daily lives. We felt it was important that this art project meant something to these young people and structured what we were doing in accordance, creating a space where young voices could be heard. To make the process easier we began to tape the conversations with a view to transcribing the material at a later stage. The recordings were transcribed and edited I felt it was important to remain true to the original delivery of each interviewee and occasionally for clarity sake we decided to include the questions asked.

The individuals were given a printed transcript and encouraged to quietly read and respond. This was a very interesting stage and we began to discuss the possibilities of images. The stories were read out during a residential weekend and the collective effect was one of generating real courage and togetherness. Several people decided to add to their narratives issues and disclosures that they had previously been unable to access. During this time I realized the material we hadgathered was very powerful and in my role as an artist, leading this project I felt obligated to honor the trust and commitment the young people had put into the project. Having met the American artist Wendy Ewald two years ago and been inspired by her work, I decided in this instance we needed to find a good public location in the centre of Belfast. Literally, I found myself standing in that place.

With the assistance of a local developer we were permitted use of the Scottish Mutual Building, a handsome red sandstone building located right beside City Hall. The aim was to temporarily dress the building with a selection of large scale, sculptural portraits overprinted with quotations from their narratives, turning the façade into something poetic and relevant for our time.
I’m from Belfast, and I’m sixteen. When I was fifteen, I got put into foster care for five months, and then they moved me because I was drinking alcohol and staying out, and being bad and all. It was different, cuz like, my family...I was really close to them and all. Like, we were all in the same square, and then getting moved away...it was like weird, like. But then getting moved to the country, which was even worse.

I was living with my auntie for two years, and then I started absconding and drinking and all. She was a Christian and just couldn’t cope no more. I was living with my Mummy before that, and then when my Daddy died she got, like, depressed and all, and couldn’t look after me and my wee brother. I moved in with my aunt but then it just didn’t work. Staying out all night and all, and coming home drunk and stuff, and she just couldn’t cope no more. But it was actually...it all really started when I started running about with Emma. Not that she is to blame like, but I never used to drink and all until I ran about with her. So, I know she is not to blame like, but she didn’t help matters either.

Where I live now is really different like, because it’s in the country, and being from the city, it is really different. It’s really quiet and stuff, but like, I am always in the village anyway. When the social worker said it was outside Belfast I was getting moved to, I kinda like freaked out because it was so far away from school and friends and all. But if I hadn’t have moved there, I would never have met Ben and all. He has just turned twenty, and I’m sixteen, but I will be seventeen in July. I’m not supposed to be seeing him at the minute, because I had to go to a meeting...like a LAC review meeting...on Tuesday, and they says I am not allowed near him until there is a risk strategy meeting to see what the craic is, because I always stay out and all, because like he’s, like, harbouring me, so...

Because I stay in his house, and he is not making me stay, but he doesn’t tell me to go either. He doesn’t make me stay, but he is not encouraging me to go home either, and I am staying in his house when he knows I am not allowed, so he is ‘harbouring’ me in his house. Well, that’s the word the social worker uses, so that’s what I think it means. I’m gutted like, because he is only allowed to come down and see me, but my foster Mum is the one that brought it up in the meeting. For if she hadn’t have said that, I would still be able to go and see Ben. But she says, “I would prefer if Ben came down to the house”. But every time I ask her she says no, because Karl (the wee boy that lives there)...he functions at the age of a seven year old. Well, that’s what they say. And they says that if Ben is to come down I have to...I have to...get someone to mind Karl when Ben is in the house! And I was just like “Why? It never used to be like that!” I think she is just doing that to make things awkward, really like. Because it was never like that. She hates Ben like, but she probably doesn’t even know him.... It stresses me.

I have said to my social worker I wanted to move because I am not happy there, at all. And she says, “Well we will look into it”, and that was like four months ago. And I says to her on Tuesday that I am really not happy, and I know that I am not going to last there, so I will just keep like absconding and all until they put me somewhere else. But she says if I keep on absconding that I will end up in Rathgael or somewhere, cur no one else would take me because of a pattern of absconding. But I says I wouldn’t abscond if they would get me a different foster placement. So you can’t win. So I don’t know, it’s...it stresses me out, really like. See when you are talking about it and all, it puts your head away.

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I will get good in my English. I can get a C, and that is a pass. And in Maths I can get a C. I have two GCSE’s in IT already, and you only need six to get back. So two in Travel and Tourism, I have two in IT and if I get Maths and English then I can get back. But if I don’t get back, I will just go to Tech and do a course. I really want to be an Air Hostess.

Like Gerardine, my brothers partner, or Naomi my sister...her boyfriend Matt, he will text me or ring me, and say “Give your sister a ring...your Mummy is in hospital”. And automatically I just go mad like. Like you think, she doesn’t care about us, so why should I care about her? And it puts my head away. And then school and all I can’t concentrate and do work an’ all and then the teachers shout at me and I have to shout back and I get stressed out. And it’s not right like. I just go to school, and she just...well she just...well I don’t know if she cares...though I don’t think she does like.

I was in rehab twice trying to get you and we were brother back. She went in twice, and signed herself out twice, so she really doesn’t want us back. But she keeps playing on the fact. She goes, “Your Daddy died, and then a year later my sister died.” And I just am like, “Well that is my auntie and that is my Daddy, so do you know what I mean?” We all suffered for it like. But what she is doing is being selfish like. Her drinking is her way of coping like, but she has still got kids, do you know what I mean? Even though she hasn’t got them like, but she is still a Mummy so and so, she is just drinking like, herself to death. It is not fair on us either but...oh, I don’t know.

You feel sorry for her like, but it’s the fact that she’s got kids and one of them is in foster care. You think that she would at least try to get her back like...but she doesn’t. That’s what...like I don’t know...it makes you think she doesn’t care because she doesn’t even try. I mean like, if she was in rehab she could at least try. She was just being lazy and selfish like. But I can’t keep making excuses for her.

My sister Naomi...she has turned into an alcoholic like. She is really bad on the drink. Her son Fred is in my aunt’s care. Her daughter Sara is in her Daddys care and her other daughter Amy’s adopted. Naomi gave her up for adoption because when Amy was born, she was sick and had to be on steroids every day. And Naomi put her up for adoption because she couldn’t cope with having her steroids. And I was just like, “You are such a bad Mummy...you don’t do that like”. But I can’t talk. I haven’t got no kids like, but...aye, but she just goes...She makes a joke out of it. I go “Naomi you have a drink problem” and she goes “The only drink problem I have is that I have only got one mouth”. And you are just like going “That is not funny” because she thinks she is a jok.
I am at the tech down in the city centre, Belfast Metropolitan College, down on Brunswick Street near the Europa Hotel. I get out of school on Mondays to go to tech. I also go to school in North Belfast. Aye, I don’t like it. I’m in 4th, sorry 5th year. I’m fifteen. I used to go to St. Gabe’s up at the top of the Crumlin Road. It was a gift, we beaked of school every day after P.E. and all. That would be one of the best places I went to. St. Gabe’s was closing down. There was only 50 people left in it at the end of the year. Sometimes living in Ardoyne is good. Other times it can just be borin’ like. Ah, there’s loads of us, loads of boys and wee girls. We used to play like Tammy Knock an’ all, just for the fun of it.

Aye, tomorrow night we are going to the Christmas lights downtown. Just me and Eoin like, me mate Eoin from Ardoyne, even though he complains it’s shite and there’s never nothin’ to do if it’s just us two. All my mates from school will be down there anyway so... The bad thing is that there is always loads of cops all around the town. Cuz there is always... Protestants always go down too every year and there’s always big fights. So there’s loads of cops all around the town. We got chased last year, I don’t know. My mate got caught. I was in Victoria Square. I ran up to Victoria Square toilets, locked the door, and me mate got caught. They just took him up to his house and told his Mummy and he got grounded for two weeks. Cuz my mate threw a glass bottle at a jeep. One of them big ones, the ones you get from a juice man. Near hit the cop man so a cop man came running after us. So he got caught. The cops are fed up chasing people. I used to do it but I just got fed up an’ sit in the house now.
Me brother was in a bad mood when he came home from tech. I was only in and then I put a cd on and he kept sayin’, “That’s mine, that’s mine” and I threw it at him. Me Da started shouting, and I told my Da to go back up to Ligoniel. He said he was goin’ so I’m happy. We don’t get on, we never have. Never ever have. I just don’t like him. He’s a bore. He gets away with everything. The only reason he gets away with things is because he has ADHD, so me Ma and Da doesn’t do nothing. That’s not fair. I know it is some kind of sickness or something, and he has asthma and he’s older than me. Aye, last time I busted his whole eye open because he got on me nerves. Me Ma took his side then phoned me Da. Then me Da came down and he hit me, so I hit him. I always hit my Dad back, but. I just go out and have fun with me mates. He can’t say nothin’ cuz I don’t listen. I’ll be happy to move out of that house. I drink everything and anything. I don’t sniff glue. It’s easy to get joints in Ardoyne if you know who’s selling it. People got shot in the legs for selling it and all. There’s high consequences. It’s a big risk.

My Da he used to work in the butchers. He used to love going to work in the butchers. He used to work in the butchers when we were wee babies. He liked cookin’ bacon and all. I don’t like Christmas in that house. Last year, . . . Every time I go out me Ma goes, “You are not going out on Christmas day, you are going to be with the family.”’ The financial, money side of Christmas isn’t good. She still hasn’t got the money. I won’t get me jeans until after Christmas. I need to save up £13.50 so I can go down and get two pairs of jeans and a jumper. I have me shoes and all for Christmas. I really want a laptop for Christmas. I don’t like cooking in tech. I’m only doing it cuz after you do the cookin’ you can go to Victoria Square. When you walk around Victoria Square it makes you feel bad if you don’t have the money you want. My mate stole a pair of good jeans. He didn’t have enough money. He only got caught when he got halfway outside. A cop man took his phone number of his Mummy and his Ma had to come down. I hardly go out no more. I sit in the house just. It’s shite.
I am 17 and I was born in Glasgow, Scotland. We moved to Belfast because my Granny went through a lung operation with cancer. My Granny had cancer of the lung. She had been here for years. My Granny is Scottish. When my Daddy’s real Daddy died she just moved here with me Daddy and then she got married again.

We moved into the Shankhill estate, at the time we thought it would have been great. We got off to a really good start but shortly after that things started to go terribly wrong. I think it was one of the older houses on Malvern Way. I made a close friend and we got on really well. Her friend from my school started, like, making trouble between us and saying that I was a slapper behind her back and that there. For about six months we were fighting and slagging and all that there. It was really terrible and then it went on for about six months, maybe more. Then it finally come to an end when we both said, “Right, enough.” We just stopped calling each other names and slagging the family off and everything. It’s just not right. So we actually became friends.

It was like two weeks after my 15th birthday I was attacked. Me and my Mummy just moved into our house. Me and my friend just got money off my Mum and were going down to the shop to get some sweets. There is like this here wall. You know how some of them turn in at the side and it goes along and you can’t see anybody behind it. Well she was standing behind there with her friends. Just at the side of that Court House. We were walking up there to go to the garage and I was still in my uniform. She had hit me before, so my Daddy said, “Next time hit her back or I will hit you.” So I wasn’t going to have me Daddy hitting me so I hit her back this time cuz she hit me from behind. And then because I hit her back she got me with a blade in the neck, well a sharp object in the neck, and the head. I didn’t know what to think at the time. Ever since that happened to me my life hasn’t been the same. But it has helped me in the long run. It helped me open up. It has helped me speak more openly and all that there as well. Before that, ever happened I used to be a shy wee girl. I am not any more I just speak my mind.

Then they turned around and said no, “The worse you look the better it will be for you in court.” So they went up to her house and arrested her. Then she got out on parole. She got out on bail but she cut another wee girl in the throat, so she did. She was only, like, coming up for 15.

There was too much pressure on me at school. After that attack happened I was gettin’ bullied. I was gettin’ slagged. They were actually having elastic bands and putting paper on them and pinging them into the back of my legs... it was just constant bullying. It just got far too much and I couldn’t cope no more. And I just left, after Christmas time. Me Daddy wouldn’t move me. I asked him a couple of times to move me. But he was like you just got a year and half left, just stick it out. I was like, Daddy I can’t, I can’t stick it out, so I just left. I went for a job interview at Burger King and I got a job there. I moved to Scotland on my own. To get my own independence. When I first moved over to Scotland I moved in with me Auntie and then I got a job in Burger King. Yeah, I got paid every two weeks. I was coming out of work with a good bit of money every fortnight and she kept taking every bit of money off me. Sometimes she would leave me with 20 pound or 40 pound and I would put money on my bus pass to get home from work. She didn’t leave me money for toiletries, for women’s needs or nothing’ she took it all. But I eventually moved out of her house...
I was in work nearly about every day. At the time we were short staffed so I was in there every day on the till on my own, serving customers being busy. ‘Cos it was normally busy. So I was walking out of work with 600 pound every two weeks, that is with tax took off. I was on the lowest wage and I was coming out with more money than the manager was coming out with.

And then because sometimes I wouldn’t finish ‘til 11 o’clock at night and my bed and breakfast locked at 11 o’clock at night sometimes I was missing out. And because I was a worker I should have got an actual front door key. I never had the front door key and he wouldn’t give me one. So my Bed and Breakfast, the house was going to move me into a hostel. I went to see it and it was a mess and the dirt was like that thick.

The baby was alright. Then I moved out of her house into a hostel. And then I bumped in to a guy called Steven at the time. I went with him for a wee while and then I bumped into a guy called Mark. And then he actually moved over here with me. ‘Cos like when I was still going with Steven I overdosed over in Scotland because everything was getting too much for me. So I took what was it… 36-tab paracetamol at once and ended up in hospital over night. Then me Daddy came over like a week later and took me back.

Mark and I weren’t right for each other and I ended up breaking it off. I broke it off once and we got back. He was in hospital because he had something wrong with his stomach, he had pains in his stomach. And he had an argument with his Mummy on the phone because he moved over here with me and because he was in a bad mood with his Mummy so he proposed to me in the hospital. He got on one knee in the hospital, all the beds were full, and it was a plastic ring as well. But then eventually when he got paid he went out and got me another ring, a proper ring but it is hard to get it on him, ‘cos he throws as schizo….

He was born three months premature and they took him off his oxytocin an hour after he was born. And they put too much caffeine into him as well when he was first born and it mucked his head up and his growing speech is coming on really good now. He is not doing his tantrums as much but he is still doing it. If he doesn’t get what he wants he throws himself back off the table or the floor or whatever, he’s got a special helmet but it is hard to get it on him, ‘cos he throws as schizo….

Even if people say don’t live in the past, live in the present it is hard for me not to do that because there is so much that happened. It is not easy for me to try and just don’t think about it, when clearly I have to think about it. What me and my psychologist try to work on is trying to get, for me to try and just don’t think about it, when clearly I have to think about it. It is not easy and all.
Today is Thursday. I’m going out tomorrow...I’m all bizz. My Mummy’s boy is bringing us out. Me and his son. I haven’t got into as much trouble at school lately, and I haven’t been cheeky or anything. And I’ve been getting off dope, and shit like that, so he is bringing me out. And his son’s going to do his eleven plus, and that is why he is bringing him out. I have been trying to cut down. I’ve fags in my bag and all. I’ve been smoking since I was about P6. I don’t really drink that much...just vodka and WKD. WKD’s a Wee Kids Drink. That there is what everybody says it stands for...see? W.K.D. But it is not. We go up in the graveyard. It’s much better when you don’t know where you are going and all, and you are gripping on to people and you are going “where are you going?” I stay in my mate’s house nearly every Saturday.

Like, every one that lived on that street there got burnt out. That’s because there was a family feud going on. I run about with some of them, but My mate’s Da...he got stabbed. Yeah, we went up to the shop, and came back down, and we walked down the street and then he got stabbed. It was in the afternoon. I don’t know when it was, I was about ten or eleven.

He got asked to leave the street because there was so many fights, and then...what do you call it? One day a fight broke out between the families. That’s when everyone started pulling up, and it started. We seen all the cars coming in. We were at his aunties and his auntie lives up the street, and we walked on down. And then his daughter was out screaming, and then we walked into the street, and then we just seen him being stabbed.

They had hurling bats, and guns, and they had knives...big hatchets and all, and they had a chainsaw too...they had a chainsaw. Someone asked for the lend of a chainsaw, and he was just given it. He would have survived...only the cops wouldn’t let the ambulance into the street.

Things have calmed down.
R– What happens whenever you dig her, then? I’ve seen bruises on her arm...that time I went to visit her. Was that you?
A– The big massive one there? Yes I dig her.
R– You dig her, with what?
A– My fist. No, because see when she accuses me of stuff, and she still goes, “It was you, it was you?”
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R– How do you feel then, once you hit her?
A– Better.
R– Really?
A– I don’t know.
R– You feel better, then? So you hit her, and then what do you do?
A– I go in and put on music, and sing my wee heart out.
The next day she says “I’m sorry Alex, I’m sorry”. I’d be standing there going “So?” and she starts crying. I feel stupid, because she is hugging me and all, and kissing me, and I’d be like “Get away from me!”. It feels weird. And she goes “Ach, I love you, love”, I’d be standing there going “Get away from me”.
I walked out of school...because I am bored, and school is shit.
Susan seen me at the start of school, and then I turns and goes, “Do you want to run out of school?” and she went, “When will I see you? First class?”. And she said, “Why, what are you in?” And I went, “Oh, Science”. And she went, “Right!” and then she came and got me. She says “Are you coming Alex?” and I went “Yeah”. The teacher goes “Alex. Get back here right now!”. Here’s me, “No?”. I refused to go back into school. I know I am stupid.
I am supposed to work. You get locked in there. What do you call them? With filing cabinets in front of you...And they bring in your work and all, and they bring your dinner till you. I watch TV sometimes too, like. There is this here other room, but I have been in tutorials from, what? First year up. There is this here big flat screen TV in a different room. We watch TV. It’s about joyriding and all. That’s what you shouldn’t do and all...and stuff like that.
My Ma’s fella...I call him Soupy. He’s alright. I used to throw his clothes out the window, and his shoes and all...and used to go, “You are not coming back in this house again”. He just goes out and lifts them up and says “See when I come back in the house...?”. And I would say, “Come on, big boy...” He wouldn’t come up anywhere near me. I would beat him down the stairs.
Yeah, my Ma’s in love. She doesn’t know what the meaning of the word. Ach, I like him now because he gives me money.
R– What do you think the meaning of love is?
A– I don’t know. You’re are asking me!?
R– Tell me what love is, describe love.
A– It’s shit. I don’t know. She gives me money, and more money, and more money. That is all I want. I love money. I don’t want kids. No...see if i ever have a kid...? As soon as it pops, it’s going to be standing at my front door, and I am going to have it’s bags packed ready, and I will take it to wherever the Dad is. And if it won’t crawl or walk over, it is getting booted over. See if I...and that thing’s started burning!
Well...it’s kind of complicated where I live really. Eh...well...right. Now, I was born in a hospital in Glasgow, in Scotland. I lived there for ten years. Then I moved over here three...coming up to four years ago. When I moved over, I thought it was a nice place to live, but since I got to really know it I didn’t really like it. I went to my first High School over here, and everyone was just mean.

Once I just got used to the school, the school and the library board decided they were closing it down. So, I had to move to another school... which is the school I am going to now. It’s alright. It’s not the best of schools, but it’s alright. The teachers are kind of creepy though... just because I was this wee bit different. Because I was Scottish, everyone was calling me Scottish ‘B’s and Scottish ‘S’s and all. I just got sick and tired of it. The Social workers made me go to the school I’m going to now. It’s seven or eight miles from my Mum’s house. I didn’t want to go there, but my social workers said my Mum would be brought to court if I didn’t go...even though I wasn’t in my Mum’s care at the time. I was taken into foster care in March 2009, and I’ve had four different moves in nine months.

Well, my first set of foster care parents were evil. I didn’t like them. Well...basically when I went to Court, the Court says that I could go out on Saturdays with my sister Rachael. When I went to go out to meet her at swimmers, my foster parents wouldn’t let me go. They says that they’d had a call from the social workers to clarify it. I said “But I’ve got a letter from my lawyer here, stating it” and they wouldn’t let me go.

It all happened when I had just got home from school, and my Mummy was sitting in the living room. She couldn’t move. And my sister...she didn’t say a word. So I went up the stairs and my Daddy came out of the bathroom, and he was crying...and I have never seen my Daddy cry before. The worst part about it was that they made me go to school the next day. Yeah, I knew they were at court that day. But the social workers told my Mum that the only reason they were going to court was to see if we were going to Thornadale assessment centre, and that is what I thought court was for. That is what my Mummy and Daddy thought court was for. But then when I seen my Daddy coming out of the bathroom crying, and my sister came out of my bedroom crying...my little sister...I asked her what was wrong, and she says “Em...we’re going to get clothes packed because...em...we are going into foster care”.

I don’t know...they didn’t tell me why? Even when I asked my lawyer and all...she tried to explain it to me, but I just couldn’t understand, cuz they didn’t tell me anything. But at the time they were saying was “hygiene and cleanliness”, and hygiene and cleanliness is the same thing. My house was mostly clean all the time...it’s just that when we got back from school, the house was a mess. Well, when I got back, my wee sister was home, so she always messed up the house when she came in from school...because she was always in a temper. The social workers said they had been out every day for...well, once a week for about six months. We seen them twice in a year. They says to the judge that they were out once a week only, for six months. Yeah, and when the Judge heard that, he didn’t do nothing about it, and my Mummy and Daddy requested an independent...em...things...assessment. And we are still waiting on that. The judge said it has to be done by someone who didn’t know the family or nothing...someone who didn’t work for the social workers. We’re still waiting on that. I’m back with my Mummy. It feels strange after being in foster care for ages...from March to December. When I found out, I started crying, and I wouldn’t move out of the bathroom. But I locked myself in the bathroom. I wouldn’t move. My Mummy and my Daddy and everybody tried to get me to come out of the bathroom, but I just wouldn’t move. I was determined not to move, and then finally they got me out of the bathroom and Mummy made me take a bath and then get my stuff packed, and stuff. I got in at three o’clock and the social workers wanted us around at the for 4.30 p.m. so...I didn’t really have that much time. All I managed to get packed was two t-shirts, two pairs of pants, and my jammies. That was it. They had a cheek to even move us out of the house in the same day! Then again, the judge says to have at least a week in advance. That is what the law actually states...that kids should have a week in advance to say goodbye to their parents, family and friends and stuff before they are moved into foster care.

With all the stress of us going into care, my older sister...em...over dosed...twice. And was in the hospital twice and the social workers wouldn’t let me go see her. It still upsets me today thinking about it.

When I got to my foster carers, they seemed like nice people; but after a bout a week or so they just went...just evil. They wouldn’t let me do anything. They wouldn’t even let me go down town with my friends. I don’t know why...I was only supposed to be with my first set of foster carers for a week or two, but because they found out that I was going to be in foster care longer, they kept me for a few months. And then I want to a second set of foster carers that were actually nice people. I actually liked them...I am still in contact with them. I got moved to the coast.

I couldn’t even walk to see my friends...I had to get a train. The train was down at the bottom of the hill from where I lived. Any time I had to go to see my friends, I had to walk all the way down there, and get a train, and get off at Yorkgate and walk the all the way up to the Shankhill...and it was just really boring. By the time I got there, it was too late for any of my friends to come out. I was happy to leave my first set of foster carers, because I didn’t like them at all. I just got the second set of foster carers and have an overnight with them, before I actually moved in with them.

They picked me up after three bloomin’ hours! What do you call that...thingy...I can’t remember the name of it. It’s like, a meeting between the social workers. It was like a review...I’m not sure. But my lawyer was only told the day before about it, and she should have been told forty-eight hours in advance, so she could go to it...because all the lawyers were supposed to be there. She should have had forty-eight hours notice, and they didn’t give her that. And I just found out twenty minutes before it had happened. So, I had to go all the way down there, and I had to sit in there for three and a half hours.

I don’t know, she never speaks about it. He doesn’t speak about it either, I don’t really see him much.
I want to join the army, and then I want to be a lawyer when I come out of it. See...my life in Scotland was just a hellhole, basically. Well...primary five. Not only were the kids picking on me, but the teacher was picking on me too. And by the end of the year, the teacher was told to either go back to the college and learn, or get fired and never work with kids again. Me and my Daddy went up to the Education and Library Board over in Scotland and complained. And we didn’t know that they were doing anything about it, until about a week or so before the summer holiday. They had sent a guy undercover as a janitor, and I was wondering why he was hanging around my classroom a lot...and em...that is how I found out. He was recording everything the teacher was doing. I would go up and ask if I could go to the bathroom, and she would say no. And then someone else would ask to go to the toilet and she would let them. Or sometimes, she would even call me a mixed ‘B’. Even though she didn’t think that I heard her...I did. She called me that because my Mummy is from Glasgow and my Daddy is from Ayre. And she thinks that she is pure Glaswegian...when no one is pure any more. No one. Because everyone has something of someone in them from different parts of the world...because you never know who your ancestors were.

Once in P5, because I hadn’t finished the project that the teacher set out personally for each of us...I was doing wild cats. And you had to do it on your own, with no help from anybody else. Now, I was in P5 and she expected it to be a powerpoint and all. Then I didn’t know what to do, and because I hadn’t finished it, she kept me in at lunchtime. And my Daddy came in to hand me in money to go down town with my Mummy after school. It was at lunchtime and I heard him coughing and sneezing...because no one can cough or sneeze like my Daddy. So I knew it was him. I went from behind the billboard thingy, because our primary school was open plan...and I seen him, and he goes, “Why aren’t you outside?” and I goes “Because Mrs. Dean kept me in”, and he goes “Why did she keep you in?”, and I goes “Because I never finished that project”, and he goes “But I gave you a note?”! Then I goes, “I know, but she just kept me in. She wouldn’t let me go out at break or lunch!” and he goes, “Have you had your lunch?” and I was like, “No”. When the bell went, Mrs. Dean came out of the staff room and she seen my Daddy. She tried to let me go out at break or lunch!” and he goes, “Have you had your lunch?” and I was like, “No”. When the bell went, Mrs. Dean came out of the staff room and she seen my Daddy. She tried to let me go out at break or lunch!” and he goes, “Have you had your lunch?” and I was like, “No”.

Weeping - a drawing by Stella.

Next year is the real GCSE exams. See, the Christmas exams are just exams. All throughout the year we get mocks, and they go on our record. And then, next year it’s all proper exams. No more mocks. So...I want to do well in those.

My parents split up quite some time ago, but they are still together...if you know what I mean? They live in separate houses, but they are still together. Everybody just wants to move out of the Shunkhill Estate; because it’s such a crappy place...the worst place on the planet you could live. I can’t stand it. Well, there’s riots almost every night. People break into the Courthouse...yeah, they’ve set it on fire twice. Sorry, three times actually. Well the fire brigade and the police come. The police come to stop people from going into the Courthouse, and the firemen put the fire out. Catholics and Protestants rioting near the Happy Palace...it’s on the Crumlin Road.

I don’t even know why my Mummy needs to go into Thordale because she has raised a twenty-two year old, and a twenty-three year old. Thordale is a parenting assessment centre...it’s this place where they get assessed on how they cope with the kids, and their cleaning and their cooking. They give you help in what areas they think you need to progress in, and stuff like that. My Mummy doesn’t really tell me a lot about it...apart from that it’s a parenting process thing.

But my Mummy’s key worker went out to my house, and because my brother hasn’t cleaned up or finished putting the beds up or anything, we are not getting to go home on Monday...because Fiona says it’s not up to standard. My brother is not even going to lift a finger. He would rather stay at his girlfriend’s house than help us get home...and he is twenty-two, coming twenty-three, and he is a lazy bugger...and I don’t get on with him at all.

My Daddy is sitting up in his house, not bothered. There is eight of us, altogether. I reckon my life could be better. No fighting, and like...and if people just wised up a bit, all round. No one ever says sorry to anyone in my family.
Where was I born? Outside an elevator in the Royal. I swear to God. Cuz my Mummy told me. She was still wearing her clothes and coat and everything...and she had to take them off, and when I was born she still had her coat on. Here, do you know how I found out? I was sitting in the elevator and she goes, “Here Catriona, you were born out there?” and I turned round, and there was all wee lads laughing. And here was me...I was scundered. My whole face just went red. She told me in front of everybody. I was like...why didn’t she tell me in the house or something? My Mum is not a sensitive person. I don’t really talk to her. I don’t live with her. Cuz she took a stroke. She just took a stroke. She’s paralysed...left hand side. I don’t care. It’s her body. She deserves it. Everything she does just falls back on her...it’s karma. It doesn’t happen from nothing. She is a bitch to everyone. She is just selfish.

I have six sisters...I know; it’s a nightmare...and two brothers. So there is nine...ten. One is fostered but...some is fostered. She didn’t think nine was enough.

Well it was like...she was trying to get us up for school, but I wasn’t well and I went up to get the kids up for school, and she said to me, “Would you hand me that water?” and I handed her over the water, and I went out and I came back in and she had the glass still in her hand, and I went into bed. I heard a glass smashing, and like...her whole body was, you know, like going down.

And I was like...but I thought she was drunk. We thought she was drunk for a whole full day. And we didn’t bring her to the hospital until the next day. We had to lift her...completely lift her to the toilet and all. She couldn’t move. They says if she had’ve gotten here faster she could have been better, cuz like...her brain was burning away faster. So...

I thought she was drunk. See when I found out she was having a stroke? I was like...what’s that? I was twelve. Aye, I called my sister in, like. My big sister lived with us. Her and her boy lived with us. I called her in and she says, “She must be drunk” because she was drinking the night before, and that’s how she took it...because of her blood pressure. So we decided to leave her. In her bed.

It was funny, but...it is terrible. But it is really funny. See when she was in the hospital and all? She was talking, and her mouth was down like that. See when we talk about it? It’s just so funny. She even laughs at it. She was in the hospital all together for six months. She had broke her hip and collarbone for trying to get out of bed. Aye, she tried to get out of bed and all, to walk, because she didn’t want to be paralysed, and she wanted to look after us. But she took us back after she got out of hospital, but she couldn’t look after us...and I just went nuts. I used to go missing and all. Because I got away with it. I knew I could get away with it, so I did...and then I got took off her by the social workers.
I used to go to work with him every day. He used to be a milkman. He used to drop me off to go to school. Like, I used to put my uniform on to go out with him, and he used to drop me off to school. I used to hate milk, and I used to drop my milk. I didn't like it, and he used to give me another one... and I'd be like, "What are you doing? I don't like it!"

He died... and for my Mum, it was even worse. She doesn't like to talk about it, either. No... if I bring up something about my Daddy, she's like "I don't want to talk about it".

Aye, but there is always one of us that don't get on in the family. Well, I am always the one that doesn't get on. Because I'm just always nasty. I am nasty to my family, though. Ach, my Mummy is going to die soon. I went to a card reader, and she said she was getting better. But that is my personal feeling. She wants to die. That is all she does... sit in the house and cry. Well she is my Mummy. I love her, but I just can't stand her.

I got put into care, and then I got taken back out, and then my sister took me in. I hated it. It was only for a couple of days like, for just like... a punishment. I don't know... the social workers said it was a punishment. But I just laughed. I didn't think it was a punishment. I wasn't running away... as in running away. I was going out all night and not coming back home. Cuz I was enjoying myself too much and just didn't want to go home. When I came home and the peelers were out looking me... I was like, all right. And my whole family were standing there waiting for me, and I was like "Oh, I am going to get beat". I am surprised my Ma didn't hit me, actually. She hit me the day before I went. I hit her back, but. That's why I ran away. She hit me, and I pushed her, and she said, "Get out and don't come back". So I didn't. I was missing for like... three days, or something. And she said, "You were on the news" and all. And I said, "I don't care".

Me and my Mummy was never close. It was usually me and my Daddy. Yeah, he died when I was seven. It was always my younger sister close to my Mummy and me close to my Daddy. I don't even think she had feelings for me. It's like... we never got on, like. She brought me to the pictures on Saturday, and I was just so close from ripping her head off. Yeah, cuz my wee brothers were doing my head in, and I was slabbering at them, and she was slabbering at me. And I said, "Why did you have to have so many kids?" and she said, "Why did I have you? Why did I have to have you?" I was like, "You bitch". I was like "Don't even talk to me".

Yeah, I just wish she didn't have so many kids. Well, I do love my family. I do love it being big... but it's just annoying sometimes, with them all running around... just having them being there. I love my Mummy, but I don't think she loves me. Like, I say to her all the time, and she says "I don't love you" and I'm like, "Ah, fuck you". I don't know... I say to her all the time, because I was close to my Daddy, and she says, "I don't give a fuck who you are close to".

Friendship - from the work captured on a disposable camera.

Elvis tattoo - from the work captured on a disposable camera.

The lift - from the work captured on a disposable camera.
I live in Ardoyne. Em... but it’s really not that good. Because it’s really dirty and all. It’s just really noisy as well. The gig rig week in the summer is good. They have competitions, so they do. It’s really good. They play music too.

I was born in the Royal Hospital. I’m fourteen. I want to be...em... there’s a list. I want to be a dress designer, a photographer, or a chef. At the minute, all I’m doing is sketching dresses, so I am.

I was in a car crash a couple of years ago, and I had to get an operation so I did. I had my big intestines ripped and... and I had internal bleeding. Well, my granny was on the Sligo Road, and this car... You know the way it’s bendy? Well this car was going straight and my granny swerved, thinking she was going into a straight piece of land. But she never. She went into a ditch and she hit a wall or something. I can’t remember much about it. She had a couple of broken ribs. Yeah it was frightening... a wee bit. But I’m o.k. now... a wee bit. I just remember going to the hospital. A whole week in hospital. Yeah, and I really hate hospitals... going to them now.

Holy Cross was really really good. They put me up to my level and made sure I understood the work, and all. The protest was over by then. I think it is bad, to like, protest near a school. But I think protesting is good to get your point of view across... I think, so I do. But I think it is not necessary to get violent about it...

Yeah we done a cross community in P6 or P7. I think it started in P6. It... em... Peace Players. It’s like, international basketball. People from around the world... and we play basketball. And we went to a Spring Jam, which people... Catholics and Protestants... we all came together and played basketball. And we also done this day with Wheatfield. That’s the school across from Holy Cross. We played... em... went to a sports centre and played basketball. I thought it did work. I don’t see it as Protestant and Catholic, I just see it as a person. I don’t think it is them. It is just a person with different beliefs so it is. That is what I see it as.

I don’t really have that much friends, cuz like, I was really close to this wee girl, and she moved down South. Cuz, like, I am really shy, so I am. And she moved away, and I got really lonely. So I came up here to Quakers, and I made friends with a girl, and then we became really good friends.

I don’t really go out. I just don’t go out, so I don’t. I don’t know really... cuz I just don’t go out, so I don’t. I just sit in the house, so I do. I am not too sure why. Yeah, I watch TV. I have a TV in my room. I go up, and when Mummy and Daddy are watching TV downstairs, I watch TV upstairs and when they go to bed, I go downstairs and watch Sky.

Me and my Mummy fight, but. Yeah, we kill each other in the house. Oh, I’m a very bad tempered person. See when me and my Mummy are fighting? I slam every door in the house, really really loud, so they know that I am angry. I get angry when I’m told to do something I don’t want to do, but I am made to do it anyway.
I worry mostly about that. It’s em...my scar. It’s my scar, so it is. It’s across my stomach. It is that size...from there to there. It’s nearly invisible. It’s almost gone away. It is gone, but it’s like...it’s gone nearly my skin colour. They said if I have a child, I would get a free tummy tuck. Yeah, cuz see the way your stomach is up here? Your stomach is there, but my stomach is below that. Yeah, em...well, see before the car crash? I was really really confident, and then after...just not that confident, and that.

Afterwards I felt really shaky. You know, they never gave me no counselling about how I felt...so Mummy and Daddy is going to try and get me counselling, so they are...if they can. Because it is in my head, and sometimes I have bad dreams about it. Yeah, it’s going over and over in my head. Scary. It’s like happening, like I am sitting where I was, and it’s happening all over again. That whole day...in my dream.

My granny...she doesn’t talk about it, so she doesn’t. I don’t really talk to her about it, so I don’t. Cuz like...I like...know my family, so it would be easier to talk to strangers. It sounds weird, but because you don’t know them ones, counsellors would be easier to talk to. Maybe they could give me some advice on how to cope with it. And see there after a couple off...like, granddad died so he did. Like, a month after, so he did...a couple of weeks. I don’t know. He took a heart attack...I don’t really know. He just dropped dead, like some people do. And my granny died about a couple of weeks ago. She had cancer.

I don’t really talk in the house, so I don’t. Not much. I don’t really like talking that much. Before my car crash, I used to talk all the time. I even got shouted at by my Mum and Dad for talking too much, and then after I just didn’t talk that much, so I didn’t.

The money it hasn’t came through yet. I’m going to go to University to study Fashion Design, and I would like to go to Miami...travel the world. I’d like to live in London though, and buy a car. I won’t have to take out no student loans. Cuz my Mummy and Daddy says they take it out with interest or something.

At school the science teachers get us to write a page out of the book, and this girl just...she throws everything, and screams over the classroom. The teacher doesn’t say anything. He just sends her out. People who disrupt class annoy me, because I just want to get my work done, and I want to learn. It’s just like...the classes. They are just really, really boring sometimes.

At break and lunchtimes, I usually just bring a book and read, so I do. Or I draw...Dresses and clothes. I will bring it up because I took them out of the book and put them on the wall. I am taking French, because I want to go to Paris. I know, like, half of it so far, and I am really good at like saying “Hello, how are you?”

I want to move out of Northern Ireland. I want to travel the world and visit other places. I’ve lived in Northern Ireland all my life. It’s so cold here.
I was born in West Belfast is alright, it’s just like anywhere else you go. Well, maybe not because there is always a different atmosphere wherever you go. Like that, so em… I don’t know. I have lived there my whole life. People up there are different... different atmosphere completely, and then when you are down... I don’t know, you are probably just used to it. And you know everybody... you know what I mean?

I never went into the Protestant estate beside where I live... I couldn’t even walk through there. I would be scared in case I got jumped, or something. There does he trouble... like, I live at the top of the Glen Road. It’s quieter up there. Down the bottom part would be... would be louder, because there’s more kids. But up at the top it’s more like older people, if you get me? There is not as much kids, but it would be all older ones. But my brother and all... when he used to run about at the bottom of Lenadoon, he used to go down and they used to be throwing bricks and all... over to the other side, with all his mates.

I couldn’t be bothered with all that, though. I like it at school... I go to an integrated school. I’m like a teacher... I swear, I like... I don’t know. I just go on with them all, really dead well. Like, do you ever get that... where people hate school because they hate the teachers? Our school... see our teachers? They are so dead on. I swear. Like, I have never had a problem with one teacher in my school. You know the way you say, “I like him” and “I hate her” and all? I like all of them. I think that makes it a better atmosphere to go to school... do you know what I mean like... when you like the teachers?

It is probably because when I was younger... when I was in primary school, I didn’t get on with my teacher. I hated her. Really hated her. I used to have a different teacher every year, I hated the school. Because... mostly because just me being a messer, and messing about and all. And then I says to myself “I am going to go down a different road”.

School is brilliant... good. I’m doing Health and Social Care. I want to be a social worker, but like... Art. I’m really good at that, and my painting is coming on really well, I am told. And my teacher is saying to me about me going to Art College and all, so I don’t know what is going on at the minute.

My granny and all, and my Mummy... they used to say to me... we used to be sitting there and all, and like, they would say... because I remember there used to be this crowd that faced where my Granny lived. My granny used to live in a fold. And I was only in first year or something, and they used to stand smoking and all. I used to say, “Granny, oh that’s terrible” and she goes “You go to school and all, and you get a good job and all, and you don’t be running about like all them there ones out there!”. And I actually thought in my own mind that I never ever ever would smoke. Like, I never ever ever did smoke or anything, and I thought that was a really big thing and all, and really bad and all, and I thought “Oh my God that is terrible” and “I would never do that” and all, right?

It was always me, my Mummy and my granny. Do you know what I mean? It was always us three, like... before my wee brother came along. Because we were always in my granny’s house... always. And because my Mummy was the only girl, and she was the closest to her, and I was the closest grandchild. My granny had thirteen or fourteen grandchildren, and I was the closest like out of all of them. I was always there, like. Even my uncle used to call in, and he used to say to my granny, “You’d think she was my sister! You’d think she was your child!”: You know what I mean? Because I was really really dead close to her. And I think there was a wee bit of jealousy between my Mummy’s brothers and all, because she loved me so much. I don’t know... it was really really really close. And if I had’ve said to my granny, “Granny, I want these shoes”, she would have made it her business to get them for me.
My nanny got sort of, like sick...and she was on a...what do you call them? A rebuliser and an inhaler. And she had all this here stuff...you know like, stressers over her skin, and she had to put creams and all on. I used to sit there, and I used to do her legs and all for her, and put the cream on, and say “Right Granny, give me your feet and I’ll put them on the wee cushion” and I used to fill her wee legs up, and put them on the cushion and all. I used to think it was great. She had problems scratching off that...psoriasis. She had to go and use the sun beds in the hospital to try and get rid of it. But like...and then like, she couldn’t really walk away. Then she used to say...you know when she had a wee drink and all in her, and I used to be sitting there...she used to watch that there...I will never forget it. Showboat. She used to watch that every night. Showboat. She used to come in and turn it on and then we used to be sitting there, and she used to watch that, and then like...she used to say “Now when I die...”. I was going, “Granny, never mind all that there. Don’t be talking about that”. And she used to go “No, when I die...” and I go “Granny, you are never dying. You are not going to die until like...years and years away.

But she must have knew, and then...I don’t know. One night she was coming in her she fell and slipped. She was getting very very sick, so my Mummy comes down and says “Mummy, you don’t look very well...I’ll bring you over to the hospital” and she was like, “I’m alright, I’m alright”. But my Mummy was like “No. I need to bring you over to the hospital”. So my Mummy took her over to the hospital, and the doctor says “Nothing wrong with you...nothing wrong with you. You’ve a sore back...whatever”. So they let her out anywhere, and then my Mummy brought her up to our house, and she lay in a seat for a week. And my uncle came around and my Mummy was really worried and all and he phoned the ambulance...and the ambulance came out. But she was like...all white and all. She was just lying there. And I was like “That’s not right...that’s not right” and the hospital just kept sending her back saying “There’s nothing wrong with you. There is nothing wrong with you”. But I never knew...I was too young at the time, and I would have been down in the hospital screaming murder.

I was in this here wee shop...a wee holy shop. I was standing there, and I got this big thing going through my mind. It says “If you get her the present she’s dead, but if you don’t get her the present she is going to be alive”. I don’t know why that went through my mind. I don’t have a clue, but I just thought of it, and went “Oh my God...what am I thinking like that for?”

And then I got her it anyway, right? I just knew “I am thinking things and I don’t even know what I am talking about right?” So then I was on my way back and my Mummy’s boy came down to pick me up. But I knew there was something weird about. Something dodgy. There was something...like, the atmosphere or something...on the way up home. He was dead quiet or something, or he was...being...and then like, he caught up... and we had to go back again. He was dead quiet or something, or he was...being...and then like, he caught up... and we had to go back again. I remember looking out the window and seeing the other kids out playing...I wanted to go out but I wasn’t allowed. No one ever came round to my house, because they knew he was sick, and didn’t want to take anything to do with it. They probably knew my Mummy would get it sorted on her own...which she did.

I used to go to a youth club in my street and I remember stealing something...can’t remember what it was. And the woman from the youth club came to my house to rap on the door, and he answered. Then I remember getting sent to my room and not being allowed to go. I remember my Mummy coming in, and saying to me, “This will all be over soon”, because she knew herself it wasn’t normal. We ended up going down south to some house to stay, and I remember me and my Mummy running up the road really fast. He was chasing us up the street and we were running really fast, but he caught up... and we had to go back again. But it’s all-brief. I can remember getting hit when we went back. I can only remember wee tay bits. I was in the other room...I just knew she was getting hit. But then my Mummy finally got rid of him. We were so happy; we could get on with our lives.

I remember when I was younger...around seven. I wanted to see my Daddy, and my Mummy told me he was no good. But then I think she felt sorry for me, so she got in touch with him. One day, we went down to my granny’s house...where he was living at the time. I can’t really remember much, but I just remember my granny taking me out in her big silver car. I used to sit in the front with a cushion...I thought I was great. Me and my Mummy ended up going home, and then I just remember my granny and my Daddy coming up to my house one day, and I think my Mummy and Daddy got back then. I don’t remember him being a normal Dad. He would have hit my Mummy...but I can’t really remember, because my Mummy tried to hide things like that from me. I remember being out with my friends and getting called in really early and sent to bed, but I can’t remember what I done. I remember looking out the window and seeing the other kids out playing...I wanted to go out but I wasn’t allowed. No one ever came round to my house, because they knew he was sick, and didn’t want to take anything to do with it. They probably knew my Mummy would get it sorted on her own...which she did.

My Mummy met John a year before my granny died. Em...how could you put this? My granny and John didn’t get on very well, and I didn’t like him either. I don’t know why but, because I hardly knew him. I think it was just because it was always me and Mummy...and then it felt strange because I wasn’t used to it. I was used to her giving me all her full attention. It was really hard for me. John did try...but it just wasn’t happening. I got really annoyed, because I felt like I was getting put to the side...so I got a black taxi and went straight down to my granny’s. I ended up living down there because I couldn’t stick it. He turned me.

When my granny died, I moved back up to my house. My Mummy was so close to my granny she couldn’t cope anymore, and she started drinking. I think it was all the stress of John, and then my granny dying. It got to her. She was drinking on and off for two years. It was bad, the first year, cuz...she was drunk. I didn’t like seeing her drunk.
I live in a street with a big peace line...I grew up in it. It's all right like, but when I was growing up, there used to be a big hole at the top of the wall. People used to come down and put bricks through people's windows in the street, and throw big bricks over the wall. Like, we used to do bonfires at the top of the street, and they used to come over the wall and break them down and stuff...light them for us...before we were gonna light them.

I was always too scared to go up to the hole when I was a child. Cuz all the crowds that were older than us used to go up...and there used to be all sorts of fights and stuff because of it. They just used to go up...and there was always someone already there ready to fight like, so there was.

I just thought the peace line was a big wall. But, like, everyone else in the house is sectarian and all, except for me, cuz I've been going to groups like this for years. Mixing with people. They're all just bigots and racists. Like, my Da's the most racist person I've ever met in my life. He hates Protestants and black people...Muslims more than anything else. He's in the RA and thinks he's the shit. I've never met anyone who has hated Muslims more, I swear. Me and my brother just tell him to wise up. Like, he sits on the computer...on chat rooms from Muslim countries...sits there all night getting blocked, on the computer...just slabbeting about Muslims. Just cuz of their religion. It's just pathetic. Sad. He's never ever had an influence on me, but he's already had an influence on my wee brother. Like, my wee bother doesn't get it yet, but he's picked up not to like black people.

It got worse when I was about thirteen. I went into care and all...it was just mad. It put my head away. My Ma and Da insists that I was mad, and that's why I went into care, but I wasn't mad. I went mad because I went into care. It was care that turned me mad. My Da tried to say that my cousin tried to feel up my head case. She was in care for years, and she brought me out joyriding and took me out sniffing glue...took me out doing all sorts of things I'd never done before. I didn't want to do it, but she was like, "All them ones are doing it" and "This is class, this is class" and then I had a go too. It's just slabbering about Muslims. Just cuz of their religion. It's just pathetic. Sad. He's never ever had an influence on me, but he's already had an influence on my wee brother. Like, my wee bother doesn't get it yet, but he's picked up not to like black people.

I was living with my mate for about a month, and social services wouldn't give me my school uniform or nothing. And I couldn't go to school because I didn't have anything to wear. I had to stay off school for about a month and a half. And then I had to go back in, and everyone was like "Why were you not here for?" and I couldn't tell them like... "Now I'm in a home". Cuz like, I didn't get back into school until I got put into care. After they went to court and all. Got a court order, and they says, "You've no other choice now. You have to go up into this home". And then a couple of days later they gave me a uniform and says, "You have to go to school".

I think I went mad because of the of the people I was with, and what they were doing. Everything around me was just mad. There were rapists living next door, and people that were getting stabbed, and like...I was going out with someone for nine months...he was fifteen. Then I found out he was a paedophile, and I didn't even know. Until he got convicted of it...I swear to God. I mean, I went in and he was really, really nice, and he wasn't convicted yet, so that's why I wasn't told about it. But then he went to court and got convicted of it...and that's when my social worker came up to me and says, "You have to drop your boy". I says, "Why...I've been going with him for ages". They says he got done for something. I was like "Why, what is it?". They says, "We can't really tell you". And I says I wasn't dropping him until they told me, and give me a good reason. They told me that he raped his wee brother and sister...I dunno...I went nuts.

There was another wee girl who moved into my unit as well...she was mental. She was a proper head case. She was in care for years, and she brought me out joyriding and took me out sniffing glue...took me out doing all sorts of things I'd never done before. I didn't want to do it, but she was like, "All them ones are doing it" and "This is class, this is class" and then I had a go too. It's just slabbering about Muslims. Just cuz of their religion. It's just pathetic. Sad. He's never ever had an influence on me, but he's already had an influence on my wee brother. Like, my wee bother doesn't get it yet, but he's picked up not to like black people.

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In the Children’s Home, I was in a really bad way…depressed, and self-harming and all. It was bad, like. But like…like, my Mummy says I wrecked her life, and all. I made her depressed, but they don’t know what they done to me either. I was cutting myself open in my sleep. Didn’t even know I was doing it.

When we’re fighting they always bring it back up. Like, I said to them I was sorry for what I done and all, but they don’t care. They don’t understand how much drugs I still take now. I get myself dragged up every single fucking weekend. Every weekend…without fail. Half the times I don’t even pay for it, but I still get dragged up. I just don’t like being…like, I’m stoned or else drunk, or else…like, I don’t like sitting the way I am now. I’d rather be stoned. It’s better. I just think too much about stuff when I’m not. Just…everything puts my head away. And when I’m stoned I don’t get angry, ever.

Like, all my best mates and all have had bad things happen to them in their lives too, and we all randomly fitted together. And me and my best mate are constantly getting stoned. I’d never sit on my own and get stoned. I’m dependent on it already. I’ve been dependent on it for about a year. Before that, I was just smoking it because everybody else was. The costs…the only thing bad about it is that is costs me too much money. I owe out about £140 next week. I love just going out and getting wiped out.

School told me I wasn’t going to get a GCSE to my name, and they told me I was going to be pregnant by the time I was fifteen…but I’ve got eleven GCSEs and I’m still not pregnant.

This country…I want to leave it. I want to go over and do computer software design in New Zealand hopefully, if all goes well. I don’t like Belfast. I don’t like the history here. My Da gets on like…the worst thing that’s happened to his life was living here, because it’s just too much trouble.

There is so much more things that have happened to me and I could be sitting all day talking about. Things you wouldn’t even imagine. I’ve seen things you wouldn’t see even in your nightmares.

Anyone else that hears me talking about my life have asked me how I cope, but coping is easy. The only time I couldn’t cope anymore was when I was seriously badly depressed, and I tried suicide. I don’t know what made me do it…I’ve never wanted anything to do with me. I was a crazy scumbag what my whole family hated. I got sorted with a drug they call ‘blues’, and loads of paracetamol. I sat in my room all day taking them. After every couple of blues and paracetamol, I felt more faint. I thought I was going to vomit so I stood up to go to the toilet and collapsed. I can’t remember anything after that. I woke up in the unit the next day with doctors there and a bucket of sick beside my bed. There was loads of it, but I couldn’t remember anything.

I got better, but after that scare I sort of wised up. Still took my drugs, but it wasn’t such a bad thing anymore. My Ma and Da…they don’t even do it. But I stopped absconding after that, so they began to see me again. Everything was a lot better. Beating the cunt out of that girl from my unit was the best thing I ever done because I’ve lived with my Ma and Da since that day.

I wish I could turn back time, and change everything, but what I done then has made me the person I am now.
I was born in 1993. In 1997, I got knocked down. I was just playing football, and the ball rolled over the road...and I just got knocked down. I think I was about four or five. I just scraped my head. I can’t remember none of it...I was so young, like.

Then, the same year I started nursery, so I did. Then in 1998, I started school...primary school on the Whiterock Road. In 2000, I learnt to cycle a bike, so I did. Then in 2003, I left. I was P6. Cuz I wasn’t too well. In 2004, I went to hospital, so I did...for a year. I just wasn’t well. My system wasn’t well.

Then in 2005, I went to school in the hospital itself...in Foster Green. Then about a year later, I went to Cedar Lodge, so I did...it’s in Landsdowne. In 2006, I went to Lourdes...it was brilliant, so it was. I really enjoyed it. I just went with a group, so I did. The baths? They were freezing, freezing, freezing cold. So cold...I was like, shivering, so I was.

In 2007, I done my Key Stage 3s and I got good grades. I got two 7s and a 6, so I did. Then in 2008, I was so upset, because my granny died. Aye. Of old age...she was about eighty-one, eighty-two. I was close to my granny...very, very close.

In 2009, I joined Quakers. It’s like...about getting out and all...forgetting about the hospital, and forgetting about my illness and all. A couple of months after, I didn’t go out and all...I was just fed up. I don’t know why. I didn’t go out, but coming up here...Basically you kind of had a chance to forget about the hospital, and forget your illness.

In P4, I used to get hit with folders, and pencils, and rubbers and all...and pens. And they used to hit me and all, and they used to jump on me and all. I just kept myself to myself. I tried to speak to the teachers. Yeah...and they said “Stop telling tattle tales” and something like that, and I just thought “What the hell? They are picking on me?” but the teachers just said “Stop telling tell-tales” and they wouldn’t do nothing about it. Stop telling tell-tales. They were talking a load of shite. I don’t like them.

My Mum went into the school and talked to them, so she did. They would just...but they didn’t do anything. It still went on, and they didn’t do anything. They thought I was the liar. No, I didn’t have any friends so I didn’t. They were firing things at me...They used to jump me and beat me and all. That stuff...physical stuff. I didn’t like it. I hated it. It just continued so it did. It done my head in. I got that scared that I couldn’t go to school, and I went on the beak. I was young so I was...young. I can’t remember what age. Yeah, I was seven, eight, nine? So I went out and just played and all...and then I went to the park. I used to sit in the park. Springhall Park. There were older ones there. They were sound. They didn’t even do anything about it. They were just sound, like. They were...they let you hang out with them. There was no messing...they weren’t bullying.
R: It must have been very hard for you in school... trying to get your education, and also being bullied as well. How did it make you feel?

C: Like shine. Yeah, really messes up your head.

R: And then...what happened from there?

C: I just got really fed up and just couldn’t... sometimes I barked school, because I was frightened to go into school for a couple of weeks. I didn’t go, and then I went back again. In P9, I told you I went to hospital. I got took out of there, so I did.

I heard voices in my head.

R: Right...and what sort of things were they saying?

C: Like everything...like, bullying me and all, and shouting at me and all. I didn’t like it.

R: Do you think the voices you were hearing...the bullying and shouting at you...it came from being bullied?

C: I reckon it was, yeah. Because I was so bullied. I didn’t...I didn’t like it. Also I think it was cause, my Mum was in and out of hostels, with me, my brother and sister. Because my Daddy was constantly drinking. I didn’t like it... He didn’t do anything with us, he didn’t take us out anywhere... All he done was drink everyday. He’s a different person when he’s drinking, its terrible. They have split up about nine months ago. Its brilliant now, because there’s no drinking, its terrible. They have split up about nine months ago. Its brilliant now, because there’s no drinking.

C: So every two weeks, or three weeks. After a few months...about four or five months, they said, “There is a place in the hospital to help me”. I was feeling really bad. I wasn’t feeling well. I wasn’t taking anything. They talked to me about stuff...about what happened, and what to do. Not once a week...about two weeks, so every two weeks, or three weeks. After a few months...about four or five months, they said, “There is a place for you”. I was feeling really bad. I wasn’t staying in bed...I was staying downstairs and all. I just didn’t want to go to school.

Yes, the voices are there all the time. They were constantly there, they were constantly...they are constantly there.

R: And are they still with you?

C: No...no.

R: And they are just angry voices? You know... destructive things?

C: Yes...yes.

I would just tell them to go away and piss off, but they didn’t go away. So...so...so, I went to the doctors and they put me on medication, so they did. The hospital put me on medication and other stuff. They just put me on these tablets to help me through it...so it would go away. I remember I was on about six or seven tablets trying to see what was right to help me.

I was in hospital for a whole year...It was ok. They had an activity rooms and all. They had a games room and all, and a dart room and all. There were there other people my age. Yeah, some people had autism and all, so they did...and other stuff.

Aye, it’s tough. My illness is not that bad, it’s like, there is schizophrenia, and there is paranoid schizophrenia. That is there for life. Mines is not for life...it’s just for a couple of months...a couple of years, I mean. But mines is not there forever. It’s only there for about five or ten years it’s there.

Yeah, coz I heard it all the time...the voices...so it was doing my head in, so it was.

My Mum used to be up to me every day, to talk to me, and all and stuff... ...see after six months? I could stay with my Mummy on Saturdays and Sundays, because she could cope with it. Then at a year, my Mummy says “I want to take him home, I want to cope with that. I want to try and take it away”. So my Mummy coped with that. It is nearly gone. It is gone already, but it is not gone yet.

R: Does it come back a wee bit sometimes?

C: I haven’t heard it for about a year and half...a year, so I haven’t. R: Right.

C: So, I’m still a bit paranoid.

R: Yeah, it must be very frightening.

C: It is.

Yeah, coz I have been to hospital. I got took out of there, so I did.

Then my Mummy went to the doctors, and they said they would transfer me to psychologist in the Royal Hospital. So I seen them ones for about six months, and they said, “There is a place in the hospital to help you”. The child psychologists like. They were good, they were...they were...they were good. They helped me, like, so they did. I was about eight or nine...ten even. They talked to me about stuff...about what happened, and what to do. Not once a week...about two weeks, so every two weeks, or three weeks. After a few months...about four or five months, they said, “There is a place for you”. I was feeling really bad. I wasn’t staying in bed...I was staying downstairs and all. I just didn’t want to go to school.

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C: It is.
Laura

At school I got bullied for half a year and stayed at home for half a year… and then what happened? I started Loughshore. It’s a resource centre. It’s not a school. It’s a centre where you just do education, but it’s not all about education. You don’t wear a uniform or anything, and you get transported there and back again. I liked normal school but I liked my old school the best. There wasn’t enough pupils in it, so it closed down. I want to go to tech and do child development.

So, 2009 has been a big year. The 7th of August, it was a big shock for me… I conceived on 4th July. It was scary, so it was. Me and my mate were texting my boyfriend, letting on I was pregnant to him, you know, winding him up. And then two days later, my Mummy done my tests and they kept coming up negative, but then one was positive. And you can’t get a fake positive, if you know what I mean, but you can get a fake negative. He was texting, saying, “You’re full of shite,” and all…”I want the pregnancy test,” and all. And I was like, “right.” So I was gonna bring down Sarah’s one, cuz she was pregnant. She had a wee baby there on 20th December.

So we went to Bryson House and it came up positive so we had to make an emergency appointment with the doctor, and then it came up negative. So then we had to go through my blood and had to wait four days until my results came back…but they said they’d tell us the results over the phone. When my Mummy phoned they says we have to come down. So that’s when my Mummy knew I was pregnant cuz they had to give me tablets and all.

Adoption or something? But my Mummy said if I was to give it up for adoption, she would adopt it and it’d be brought up as my wee brother or sister. But then, I couldn’t even cope with that. I just thought and thought and thought about it one day… and I says no. I says no. I can’t do it. That’s killing someone. And then now I’m all happy. I can’t wait, twelve weeks left.
When me and my boyfriend fell out it was hard. But we did stay in contact sometimes. And then, he asked me back. It’s kind of secretive. You’re not supposed to tell anyone. My Mum does not like him cuz he was on drugs. He took an overdose three times. And he gave me all that stuff last night... you know, his hospital wristbands and all... cuz he’s never showed anyone his wristbands before. He had all those wee tubes and those wee tablets and all, that he took, and he gave me them all last night. I just started crying and he said, “Don’t cry.” I says, “But you could’ve been dead.” And he says, “I know” and he hugged me and all that there. He wanted me back and couldn’t ask me. And then there was a time when I told him he was having nothing to do with the child. And it got to him. Put his head away.

But he needs to show my Mummy that he doesn’t take drugs anymore. He smokes blow, but nearly every wee lad does that so you can’t moan about that... It’s not like he’s a heavy smoker. He would smoke a joint now and again. He wouldn’t smoke it ‘round me. He hasn’t smoked it ‘round me. But he’s gonna have to show my Mummy that he doesn’t take drugs for her to believe. She’s gonna have to come to terms with him. She’s gonna have to like it or lump it. It’s our decision. Not hers.

He knows... I says to him, “When the child’s born I want you to take it at least three times a week, and one of the days is a weekend.” And he says, “That’s alright.” I says, “On a Saturday night,” and he says, “Not every Saturday night.” And he says, “That’s alright - you take it one Saturday and I’ll take it one Saturday.” Loads of people has told me my Mum will... they’ve all says, “Your Mummy’ll take over with that baby.” It’s not like I would want her to. I’d want her to mind it and all, just when I go out and all, but I don’t think I’ll want to go out. I don’t even like the smell of drink anymore. The only thing I really do is smoke. But if she takes over, I’ll move out. That’d be tough living in a hostel on your own with a baby.

I know loads of wee girls that’s done it and they say it’s far better without their Mummy around. School age Mothers pay for your child to go into a créche. If you want to stay on in further education they pay for créche and taxis and stuff. You get transport there and back with them. I am looking forward to us being both back together and being a family.

If it’s a wee boy, we want to bring him up as a deejay, cuz his Dad done deejaying and he loves that... he loves his music. Well I love music too but I wouldn’t be able to do all that. He’s tried to learn me before but I can’t do it. And if it’s a wee girl, we want to bring her up as a dancer... yeah or football.

He was all into football, but now he’s more into music. But I just don’t want it turning to drugs or anything. Hopefully by then, drugs aren’t even being mentioned. Hopefully by then, no one even talks about drugs then. He’s been through it all before and now his wee brother is turning to it. He turned to, like, blow. It’s everywhere, just everywhere. Nearly every wee lad smokes blow. Nearly every wee girl now too. Wee girls are almost worse than wee boys taking drugs.

And he actually calmed down and now he can’t wait either. But he already has a granddaughter.

I was on the pill but there were times that I might have missed it, and then I said I’d take two tomorrow and all. So, if anyone is taking the pill now, take it every day. Well it’s safer. Like... even put it in your makeup bag or something and then you won’t forget to take it. Or have an alarm set on your phone.

Laura's baby - from the work captured on a disposable camera.

Scan.

Motherhood - from the work captured on a disposable camera.

The only thing I’ve taken is speed and blues, and smoked grass... and that salvia. That’s it, only once. I’ve smoked grass a few times, blow a few times, salvia once, took speed once and blues once. That was all me this time last year.

Yeah, sure my Mummy took an overdose. She overdosed in July and we didn’t know. The only thing that’s keeping her up and running now... if I wasn’t pregnant, she’d be dead. Cuz of me and my brother... we were putting her head away. And then with my brother being really hard on drugs. That was putting her head away too. But now there’s only me and her in the house.

(Laura had a baby girl on the 24 March @ 2.34am weighing six pound half ounce)
I was born in Belfast. I am 18 years old. I live on Cliftonville Road, or the Oldpark. Ah, it’s good like. I was born in Ardoyne, like, and then I moved over when my Daddy died. He died on 22nd December 1993. He got buried on Christmas Eve. He died in work...in a work accident. He got knocked down. He was like a bricklayer. There was four of us. I was 2, my brother was 4, my other brother was 6 and my sister was 8. My Mum did good with us like. I can’t really remember any of it.

At the weekends I just walk about and go to football matches and all. I support Liverpool. I don’t play. I watch. I used to play football. I watch Cliftonville there just down the street from me. Have you heard of them, no? Football team Cliftonville...just about two minutes from my house.

There is no trouble anymore...not really. There used to be ‘round the corner at Torrence when the Protestants lived there but they don’t live there anymore. The Peace Line is knocked down. Aye, it’s knocked down now. There is houses being built there now. Well it’s just like a big wall. They just knocked it down and they are building houses at the back of me. It is right behind me, that Peace Line. The Peace Line is not there anymore, like. It’s all houses getting built like. Well the houses are not really done, they are only getting built now. They are nearly done like.

A big 12th of July march goes past Ardoyne …there are one of the feeder parades or something. Aye. There was trouble at this year’s march but see before that, there was never any trouble. There was trouble about five years ago. I used to go up to it. Well when it happened about five years ago, we would throw stones at peelers and all, just being stupid. There was, like, a blister on my back and the big water gun, like, it shot and busted it, and my t-shirt was stuck to my back. Someone took it off and the skin and all came off. I couldn’t move for about a week. All the skin came off. It was stinkin’ like. My Ma had to cut off my new football top...my France top. I only had it for about a week.

I don’t think it should be allowed. I mean they are walking past Catholics, marching and all. I’m not against it now but I don’t really care, to be honest like, where they are marching, like. It bothered me years ago like, but it doesn’t really bother me anymore.

There used to be trouble in it all the time. The Peace Line was taken away about three years ago and there was nothing there and now they are building houses now because the people have moved away...Aye. So it’s all-Catholic now. There used to be...there was a few Protestants living there, but they’re kind of old. But they have moved out now. It’s all new houses now.

Aye, they were put out like. Well, I wouldn’t say they were really put out but there was always rioting and all. The Protestants lived on Torrence Avenue. We used to throw stones like, when we were younger. But we didn’t do any big things to put them out. It was people in the area...all older people. I was only about 12 when they left. They weren’t really told to get out. They just all moved out...they just couldn’t take it anymore. They were getting their windows broken nearly every night. They couldn’t take it so they just moved.
I have left school now like, just. I was at tech but I left it. But I might be going back into it. I went to St. Gabriel's Sacred Heart and then St. Gabriel's. There was hardly anybody in it. When I left there there was only about 30 people in it. It got a bad reputation. I don't know...like years ago it used to be really mad and nobody went to it then it got closed, because it had a bad reputation about it.

I played for their football team like, which was good. Went to the Greenhill in Newcastle. I loved that school so I did. I did my GCSE's and failed them all. I wished I had've tried harder in school. I would like to be a football player. I know that is not going to happen. I don't actually know what I want to do like. I would just love to have a job. Well I don't know. Like. When I was in the placement, I was just washing dishes and all, and running back and forth to the shop. Cutting the food stuff and that was it. I did that for five months. They had you washing dishes, and cutting vegetables and all, like nothing...peeling potatoes and all so I wasn't really learning anything. I've did all that before.

A few years ago my Mum thought she had something on her neck, like a lump on her neck, and she went down the doctors. They were saying they didn't know what it was then, like, they found out it was a tumour and she had to go in and get it out. She was in the hospital for about two months afterwards. She can't swallow and all, but her swallow is coming back like. She can take just like wee sips of water and they have to feed her through a wee tube. It's mad like.

She never really told us she had a lump. But, like, it got bigger she said it was something on her neck. I thought it was going to be something like cancer. No, I don't think it was. They had to take it out of her neck, but I don't know what it was. She has a big scar down her neck. She can't talk or nothing but her voice is getting better.

I was scared when she was going in for the operation. I didn't know what was going to happen like. But it went well like, so it did. That was ages ago like, and she still can't swallow. She goes up to the hospital for about two days a week for therapy and all, speech therapy...and to swallow and all. Her left side, her left arm like, she can't move it. She can't move it as much as her right arm. It's like, you know, and her eye is like a bit down there you know, because it is on that side. She says she doesn't really care as long as she is living.

I do stuff for her if she asks me to do the dishes or go to the shop and all for her. But like, she can do stuff on her own like, so she can. I was going to bring her for dinner but she can't eat. So I'm going to buy her something like. Sometimes we go to the pub like. We would go to the bar and play pool and have a drink. The first drink I took I was about 14.

Yeah, I used to smoke dope, but it melts your head like. I don't take any drugs and all...just drink. It's been that long since...I can't even remember. I haven't smoked in ages...in about three years. I never really bought it. Just if people had it. I would never have bought it off people. Some people did, but I wouldn't buy it like nearly every day. I smoked it when I went to school sometimes. You can just buy it from anybody in the street. You can get it in two minutes.

R– You're 18, you can vote. Are you going to vote?
Ro– Why, what does it do when you vote? Just say you vote for someone and they win what happens?
R– They get in to represent you then.
Ro– And what do they do?
R– Well they are supposed to make the laws and rules and bring jobs and fix things a bit better.
Ro– I know who they are and all but I don't know what they do. None of my family vote. I think my Granny votes but that is about it.

I just like living. Just family and all. I get on well with my sister. Aye. She does my head in sometimes like.
I was born in the Royal Hospital and I have lived in Dundonald, Shankhill...just different bits of the Shankhill, and then up here. No... Highfield and then Shankhill, and then Springmartin. It goes like...Springmartin and then a wee street, and down a bit is Highfield. It’s alright. It’s nice and quiet. Well sometimes it’s quiet...it depends.

It is quiet but it’s really...everyone in it’s really noisy and all, and just knows everyone’s business. But I live facing the big bushes...at the end of the road. It’s ok because the people and all. They’re not, like, bad people. But just them bushes just...I don’t know...they are just so dark. Dark scares me.

I live facing there as soon as you turn the corner...I live there. It is a wee bit scary just. I don’t know. Just because in the summer the Catholics used to come down and they used to riot...down the hill. Near the lane that we come up to Quaker Cottage. Just on Halloween they were throwing fireworks over and all...and people were firing them back.

Quaker Cottage Lane...you know the way they have built a new peace line there? It has been there for a wee good while. It’s just where the police station is and they just continued it on. I don’t know. It’s only the police station for a wee bit and then its just the other side. I don’t know what’s behind it, but it is not the police station. The Catholics and all...they climb up on the trees. How do they get in those trees? I don’t know. I don’t know where they live...Whiterock or something. And one time there was a hole in the peace wall, and they kept on sticking their heads through and all. No...cuz someone put a hole in the peace wall, and the Catholics were sticking their head through the peace wall...making faces and all through the wall. People were throwing stuff at it. I don’t know...I think they were Catholics. They were shouting stuff over. Some of my family married Catholics, but...I don’t really judge people by religion.
They are very bitchy in my school, because it is an all girls school. Good teachers. It is a good school like...good education. And do you see this morning? Some wee girl got knocked down by a teacher going to school. She was walking across the road, and the teacher knocked her down...and the teacher was five months pregnant. The wee girl...she only has a sprained ankle, and cuts and bruises, but the teacher had to go to the hospital and all, because she was five months pregnant. And the whole shock of it...and she has post traumatic stress or something. Post traumatic stress everyone said it was...I don't even know what it is. Stress? In shock and didn't know it was going happen or something, and under pressure...not under pressure. I don't know.

A couple of years ago, there was a big waterfall down at the bottle. The people from my area made a big waterfall...and there was Catholics at the top. They were throwing wheels down, on fire and all, and then the police came...and they skid-da-delled round the corner on two wheels and near toppled.

At the weekends, I used to go up the mountain. I went a couple of times...I went about four times with my friends, just. One time, I walked my dog up...me and my sister, and my brother and my friends. One time, do you know the way you can drive up to the very bottom of Springmartin Road, and go up that way, and then you go up the hill till the other side of the mountain? Well, we went up there before...me and Mummy’s ex-boyfriend, and my Daddy, and all my wee brother’s cousins. We went up, and we walked up the other side of the hill, and there was barbed wire at the top of the mountain. You have to climb over to get over the mountain...and there is an army base and all down behind. That isn’t there anymore, so we just walked down that way. It is a nice mountain though, isn’t it? It is nice...nice and sparkly. Whenever you look down there from Quakers, all you see is that peace wall, and the police station.

I want to go to University to study music and drama. Then hopefully have a job with music. I would like to have my own family someday, but after Uni… I don’t want any distractions. I don’t want to move away from the area I live in… I like it there.

I went on holidays to Salou for two weeks, and I came home and my big husky was away. Someone stole it. My Daddy’s friend was looking after it and I came back and someone had stolen it...a proper husky. Like an Eskimo’s dog. My Daddy got it for me. My Daddy walked it...I never got him back. I got a rottweiler. I used to go on holidays every year. I was meant to go this year, but about two days before we were meant to go, my Daddy had to go into hospital. We were meant to go to Benidorm for two weeks in July, but my Daddy...he was up all night and he couldn’t sleep, and he went to the hospital the next day. He had to stay in hospital because he had to get his appendix out.

12th July? Nothing really happens on the 12th July. I don’t know, because I go to watch the bands. We go till the field. Just passed the Kings Hall...just straight down the road of the Kings Hall. I don’t know where it is. It’s about eighteen miles but you walk it. You walk along with the band. My friend’s brothers are in the bands. I wouldn’t mind being in a band. I don’t know...just a band that plays all different types of music. I would just like to be in a band that plays catchy music, like songs people would like...like pop music.
I live in Belfast. I am 16. I don’t know what to say but...I now live in Grosvenor. I lived in Ballymurphy. I was born in the New Lodge but I was moved. I always moved about like. Newlodge, Springfield, Poleglass, Lenadoon, and then to me Granny’s and then to Ballymurphy. I didn’t even really realise it like, I was a kid. Dunno ‘cos when we lived in Poleglass my Mummy swapped with my aunt and uncle because they weren’t allowed to live in the Springfield no more. ‘Cos my family was put out of the Springfield years ago, they weren’t allowed in it. I have had the most memories in Ballymurphy. I stayed in my friend’s house one night and we went to bed, but like we woke up. Well her Mummy, my friends Mummy, woke us up the next morning and said like, “There is a bomb downstairs.” Someone planted two pipe bombs in, like, under the front door and she lifted them and didn’t know what they were. Then her son came and told her and we all had to get out of the house and the whole street was closed down. And the cops and all and the big robot came. That was only like, in the summer. That wasn’t too long ago. Yeah ‘cos, like, it was a family feud and my friend’s Dad was murdered on the street. No that wasn’t anything to do with the feud, it was someone else who planted the bomb. I didn’t live there when my friend’s Dad was murdered but I went to school with her. I heard about it like, but I was there another time when the shots were fired at a man right up the street from me. What do you call it, five shots got fired and I didn’t hear one thing. Then one day I woke up and the cops were all over the street. I woke up one day and there was a JCB tractor through another house and the cops were everywhere. People stole it out of the Whitewell when the park was getting built and they drove it through the house of the family who used to live there. They burnt the house and they knocked the house down. R– What is your best subject?
C– I really don’t have a best subject. I just say that but once I get into school I just sit there and do nothin’. I was never really made to go to school. When I went to school I messed about and did nothing because I knew I would have got away with it. But when I look back now, I’m 16 and supposed to be doing my GCSE’s. I wish my Mummy would have had a bit of discipline with me and made me go to school. But when I moved in with my Granny last year, they made me go to school but because I missed so much course work I just decided to mess about. And now I’m not even going to school. I haven’t even got a GCSE or nothing behind me or nothing...
R– What are you interested in?
C– Nothing...that sounds dead childish.
R– Okay, what do you dream about when you are in bed with your eyes closed and you think about the world? What are the things that make you feel it is worth living, it is going to be good.
C– The weekends. Going out with your mates. Having a laugh. One night last summer it was raining and a wee lad I know pulled up in a car and his girl was in the car. They weren’t drinking they were just getting a pizza but me and my mate were drinking and we got into the car and he reversed and hit another car. He like, just spun off in ‘till Turf Lodge and got out to check the car and then drove on. We were going down the Monagh by-pass like, just straight down and just crashed clean into these railings. And like, the car was like that there and the bonnet and all was smashed up. I had to climb out of the backseat. I wasn’t even wearing a seat belt; my mate couldn’t get her seat belt off. I went clean up against the door and my whole leg and all was bruised and when climbing out my shoe came off. I was running across the road with one shoe on and I was totally in shock and it was just totally mad that night.
It was the scariest time of my life. I swear, I only had one shoe on and I made my mate give me her other shoe when we were running. I had her running up and down, you know where the Glen Road is? Through all them there streets, thinking there was people coming after us, in gardens and everything, hiding behind wheelie bins. There was no one even after us. Then we went down to her aunt’s house, well you call her her aunt but it is her cousin’s really but...she’s also like a fortune teller or something. She rang us a taxi and we got home. She is like one of them there people that read things and all, so I don’t like being around her. Oh Jesus, it was just like...I can remember getting in home and ripping all my clothes off and putting them in the wash and throwing all the shoes in the bin. Havin’ to go down town and all just to buy the shoes because I thought the cops were coming to get me. I swear...

We got up at eight o’clock in the morning and walked down to where the crash was. Eight o’clock in the morning, I have never been up that early. We walked down to where the crash was to see the railings and all the railings were just completely down. Like, ah it is just terrible. Even the taxi man said whoever was in that car was lucky to be alive, and the bonnet and all was all squashed up and the car was sat like that. R– And have you done it since? C– No (laughing)...maybe twice. R– You done it twice in someone else’s car? C– No, just going out for spins. R– Going out for spins with someone who has taken someone else’s car? C– No, it’s their own car. But I says I would never get into a car and do that again. But...

Oh no, don’t even start me on that story. I swear, I still shake thinking about it. I swear, that was the scariest time ever. That was even scarier than that car. I don’t know why, but it was so scary. Me and my mate went to this house party and like, it was like, it was just mid. Like, this wee lad got chased to the house by a helicopter for crashing his Dad’s car. And what do you call it, the cops came to the door. And the whole back was surrounded, like the cops were all over their house, because you can’t get in their shed because there is like a garage and all... it was like, the whole back was just like...The next street was all surrounded by cops and there was loads of cops out the front. They were bootin’ and bootin’ and bootin’ the door. And they were going, “We’re not going until youse open the door. And I was shaking and everything and I was going, “Youse ones please open the door.” They were like, “No they will go away.” Dad never ever sees them things on television, the big things? I thought they were, I thought they were going to put the door through and all and I thought they were going to come up and arrest me.

R– You were there? C– Yeah, I thought they were going to come and arrest me, I don’t know why. I went down to my Mummy saying, “That’s your door, will you open the door?” His Mummy was in bed and she didn’t get up. She was already awake but I was so scared I was rapping the door. She knew the police were at her door. Yeah, and I was rapping the door and I was like, “Will you open the door to them police?” She said, “No, just leave it they’ll go away.” And I was standing there. Does this sound crazy or what? Oh Jesus...

R– Wait a minute, he had taken his Dad’s car? C– Yes this wee lad took his Daddy’s car and went for a spin and crashed up. Then the helicopter followed him to the house. They just followed him, em what do you call it, and he came to the house. Then the cops came to the door and they were bootin’ and bootin’ at the door. Oh God, it was the scariest time. I thought they were really coming in, you wanted to hear the boot. And I was picturing them just going boom and banging up the stairs, you know their big boots and all. And I was...I swear I was so scared, it was terrible.

Oh Jesus, it was just terrible. I don’t understand why they went away. See, if it was me and I was a cop I would have put the doors out. I really would have.

I don’t live with my Mum. I live with my gran and grandad, but at the weekends I stay at my friend’s house. When I do stupid things like gettin’ into a car I feel as if I’ve let my gran and grannad down and I would hate them to be disappointed. It’s terrible. I don’t know...I would be more terrified of them finding out than my Mummy.

I remember the first time I got took off my Mummy. I was out with my friends drinking and when I went home the police were outside the door. They asked me, was I drinking? And I said, “No.” Then like 10 minutes later, they booted the door in and came and took us off my Mummy. We were all holding on to her screaming no and they were like pulling us of her, and when I was outside fighting with the cops the cop grabbed me and put me up against or behind my back. I was about thirteen or something.

My Mummy’s was over being hit the cop saying, “Get your hands off!” The cop was like, “Move away or you’ll get arrested.” I was crying saying, “Just go, just go, it will be okay.” It’s so sad when you think about it. I was in the back of the jeep with my wee brother and sisters and everyone was crying, “I want my Mummy!” I knew I had to be the big one, again. I was saying, “It will be okay, don’t worry, we’re going to go to grannys house just for a wee while.” My sister climbed out through the front of the jeep and started running down the street, and people in the street were shouting, “Run, run! They’ll not get you.” But they did and we went to the police station. I was crying for my Mummy and they said I couldn’t go home. Then my wee sister started doing her hip hop dancing and all the cops started gathering around her while she was doing head spins and baby freeze.

Me and my Mummy always had fights, like, proper scraps. I just couldn’t live with her anymore because every time we had a fight I went out drinking and doing what I had to do. I remember one night my Mum’s boyfriend hit my wee sister and I was just sick of it...so I hit him. Like, I was only eight at the time and my wee sister was only six or seven. I said to my wee sister, “Come on, we’re going.” We walked from Lenanadown to the Grouseman, to my grannys. Like, we were only young and my Mummy didn’t give two fuck about us. Like, she is supposed to be my Mummy and let two wee girls walk all that way, anything could have happened to us.

I always said I was never going to end up like my Mummy, but when we had fights I was going down the same path she went. So I decided to live with my gran. I still drink when I’m living with my gran but I don’t have the same problems. So when I was getting drunk I was tryin’ to make the problems go away, but now when I’m drinkin’ I’m just going out to have a good time. I think if I still lived with my Mummy I would be out doing stupid stuff because I know I would give away with it. I know this sounds stupid but I remember lying in bed at night at my grannys’ thinking about my brother and sisters. There wasn’t many stars or aeroplanes in the sky. It was hard thinking about them and wondering if they were okay. My wee sister has big blue eyes and I used to picture them and sometimes cry myself to sleep.

I used to do stupid things. I don’t really talk about all that. I really don’t...that does my head in. All the stuff. I do.

Sounds like I’m wее hood or somethin’, doesn’t it? I don’t take drugs. No, definitely not, that’s one thing I don’t. I don’t see any point in them, they kill people. My mate’s brother died there at Halloween from taking drugs. He just took drugs and overdosed. I don’t understand... Blues. They are like yellows. They are like these ones that make you suicidal and all. I know loads of people hang themselves, all over drugs. So I wouldn’t touch it, I wouldn’t really.

See after that our crash, me and my friends were totally freaked out. The cops are always at her door and the cops came and we run up her attic, locked the door and were sitting there and we were really, we thought we were getting lifted an’ all. Yeah, this was it for us because the cops were at the door...no more...and we were sitting and we were shaking we were going, “I’ll get in the cupboard and you can lock it,” and I was like, “No, I’ll get in the cupboard and you can lock it and you can go.”

She dropped her phone and she said, “Oh, the cops are definitely going to come now because they can hear the phone.” Oh God, see when I look back we were so stupid like, because, well it does seem that we were not right. We were jumping over each other and over the blanket as if the cops couldn’t see us. We were just so stupid, just acting so stupid over the stupid thing.

That was stupid. I regret it. I was going to tell my grannys but I didn’t. I know that they didn’t have my fingerprints or saliva. I know people who knew about all that stuff and they said I wouldn’t get caught. See because the area I’m in, people expect to see you doing stuff that your not supposed to be doing. So sometimes you just feel like doing what their expecting...I don’t know.
I am from the Woodvale. It’s good craic, good clubs for partying if you don’t like drinking there’s wee churches like. I’m 17. At the weekends it depends, football, back ‘till club for drink and carry out with me mates, or go to ‘till the club later. The club’s in Heather Street.

The weekends are good. Aye, such a laugh. Gettin’ a carry out, sittin’ in my mates house playing music and goin’ mad, get a few wee girls in. It depends what mood I’m in…vodka, WKD, beers. WKD if you are in the mood to chill out. Vodka makes you go mad. Dance like fuck and shout like fuck. In the house.

I like the Woodvale, oh aye, God’s land. Oh aye, the craic you get. Course it is, it’s only certain bits of Woodvale like. No one can get better than us.

Like, people who lives next door to us, neighbours, paramilitaries and all them ones. Paramilitaries are dead on. They don’t come to your door unless you start something. Once, there was a fight broke out, and they did fuck all. I have seen others in trouble with paramilitaries. They gave them a beating.

Not bad like, they should have got worse. Because of the stuff they had been doing…drug dealing, everything. The police wouldn’t do nothing.

I’m glad there’s paramilitaries down there. You feel safer in your community and you don’t have to worry about the other side coming in and wrecking your houses. I mean like Catholics…aye or foreigners…aye coming in and wrecking the houses. The paramilitaries stop that from happening. Aye, not stop it like but try and do their best. It takes the police about two hours to come and by that time the place is probably burnt down.

I’ve seen them rioting an’ all before that. Aye, good craic, such a laugh. Gettin’ in ‘till the police. They come into people’s houses for fuck all an’ then start giving us abuse and then shout your Ma’s a slut and all this crap. Then shout over the wee microphone, aye, such and such is a tout and all this. Aye, they say they are looking for stuff to do with a crime and then they don’t find nothin’ and then they try to leave. Cops, they intimidate us to try and get in ‘till them. Aye, like a certain name. No this person who they say is giving information is a fucking header, he wouldn’t. We throw bricks and from bricks to burnt out cars and from burnt out cars to petrol bombs.

My Ma knew we were rioting. She minds now like, but when all the riots were happening in our area she didn’t care ‘cos she knew what they were up to’.

A couple of years ago, all the parades getting stopped like in Whiterock, down in Springfield. Bands walk up without playing a tune, and they wouldn’t let us through the gates so a shooting happened. Two men came out of Highfield Estate with two guns and shot at them and ran back in. They shot at the peelers, for not letting us walk up the route. There was a big riot, a couple of lamp posts got cut down, a couple of gates got cut off to. The peelers were shooting at us, with plastic rounds.

The peelers aren’t too bad in our area now like. I still don’t like them, but other people get on with them more than they used to.
Rioting with Catholics…it happens like but not all the time…it depends, if there is like a band season a good lot of riots happen up there. Catholics go out because they see Ardoyne as their road and Protestants shouldn’t be allowed to walk down it. I reckon they should be allowed, it’s a free country. Aye, they should be allowed to play a song. Aye, but sure they all walk through the town during St. Paddy’s Day. What else…walk through the town, they think the town is their’s too. It belongs to everyone who lives in Belfast and from abroad.

If they were to walk down the Shankill…wearing a Celtic Tops or shouting kill all.huns, orange bastards, drive them in ‘till the sea and all that crap, they would be in for it. I know plenty of Catholics that walk down the Shankill. In a band that is different, the Shankhill is full of Prods, Ardoyne is mixed. The Whitrock is mixed. The Whitrock is from just the side of Highfield right down ‘till Springfield. Sure Catholics walk down the Cramlin Road and nothing gets said ‘till them. They should just let them walk where ever they want, Protestants and Catholics.

I like some Catholics from Ardoyne and dislike some others. It depends, it is just like Catholics and Protestants are all the same…you have wanker Prods and some wanker Taigs, and some dead on Taigs and some dead on Prods. I suppose that’s the same where ever you go isn’t it? When I was in the band I just couldn’t be annoyed learning the flute so I left. Aye, I just said that’s me left. I just enjoy being in the Lodge. I have been in the Lodge from when I was five. It’s a good laugh. Such craic you get. Just everyone gets…a drinking den more or less.

I prefer the army like. Aye, I got turned away because of my arm. I broke my arm when I was younger and they said my arm is too weak and it is not going to go back the way it was. So I tried to join the army and they said nah. If I had joined the army I would drive the tanks about, like drive through from one place ‘till another and shoot away in the war. It’s a good career, always out doors, and a good laugh, always in foreign countries, good pay. I just like being outdoors. I don’t care, sitting in a wee trench shooting, sure they are not getting shot for nothing.
I was born in Belfast. I have three brothers and two sisters but they live in England and they are older, and they have wee kids an’ all. But I just got in touch with them two weeks ago or something through Facebook, we lost contact for like years and years.

They’re me Daddy’s, they are not ‘till me Mummy. It was brilliant, ‘cos I was just like on Facebook. They said to me, “Is your Mummy called Anne?” because they were really close to my Mummy, and they said, “Is your Dad called Peter?” And I says yeah, because they lost contact with me Daddy and all…me Daddy didn’t even know he was a Granddad or nothin’. I says yeah and all…me Daddy was all happy and now he’s texting her and all and she wants me to go over. I don’t know how they lost touch. Because me Daddy moved over here and they live over in England they just stopped talking.

We get on all right, like I just go to me Daddy’s at the weekend and stay. I am 16 and at school doing child care and media studies. I want to be a nursery teacher.

Me Daddy has always like been a drinker, when he was with me Mummy that is what split them ones up mostly because he was just a big drinker. And then when he split up with my Mummy he just went downhill because everyone is dead from being an alcoholic. His Mummy died, and then his Daddy died, and then his brother died and his sister died. They all just died, and he has fell out with his brother and he has no one apart from us. That is what keeps him going. Every time he doesn’t answer the phone I get worried and all, and if he doesn’t answer for ages I phone the ambulance and all. I have done that twice or something and I have went over and found him lying at the bottom of the stairs. Because he lives in a flat. He is 45.

I was ringing his phone and someone answered and they says, “Your Daddy is lying at the bottom of the stairs.” All I heard was, “out cold” and I just burst into tears. I thought he was dead. I got the ambulance to go for him and they went for him and said he is alright he has broke his ribs or something. That is what he done, but I just panicked I was…
When my Daddy phoned me he said to me, “I’m cutting out the drink. I am completely off the vodka.” But I was wondering why so I says, “Why Daddy?” I knew he had a doctor’s appointment. I says, “What did they say to you and all?” He says, “They say my liver is getting worse, but it’s repairable.” I said, “Daddy that doesn’t matter. No more drink because it is not going to repair itself if you keep drinking.” I phoned David and I was crying and all. I tell him stuff like that ‘n all.

I just think, when he used to drink the vodka and all I used to say, “Daddy you have to wise up and all, you’ve got kids. You are drinking loads, and you’ve got kids, you have to think about us kids.” I says tell him, “If you can’t do it for yourself, do it for your kids.” He doesn’t work. Like he did have… he did work and he just doesn’t. I know, I just…I used to phone my Mummy crying and say, “Mummy he’s blocked and all.” Mummy used to want us to go home. But I didn’t want to leave him like that because I wouldn’t like to be left like that.

I used to sit and I used to cry. I used to think I was going to lose him and all every time he was brought into hospital. He used to live in a flat… he still lives in a flat. Every time he was blocked he used to fall down them stairs and I knew that would always happen to him. But one day he could fall down them stairs and it could be worse. His Mum died, and his sister and his brother. They all died through cancer. His Daddy died not too long ago too. That was the last person to die and then he found his brother, the brother he was closest too, he found him on Boxing Day. His brother died of a heart attack or something.

Then… his mate phoned him and said the wee girl he was going with a week before says, “Oh I haven’t heard from you, Sharon will you go down?” He goes, yeah I’ll go down and see if she is alright. He went down ‘till her house and he booted her door in and he went upstairs and she was lying dead and she had tablets beside her. And she had her phone and her battery was dead. But the night before he had a missed call from her and he blames it on himself, like he just… he blames it on himself because they had a fall out just before she died. They don’t know but that’s what… because of the tablets an’ all that is what they said, they think it was an overdose.

I know what happened to my Mummy, and I know how she felt and I would just say, “If you are going to get on like that, I don’t want to be with you.” Cos obviously Mummy loved him and she had two kids with him. That is what Mummy says when I used to go home and he used to be drunk the night before. “She says, "Katie that is not right. It is not meant to be you looking after your Daddy. You go over there and your Daddy looks after you.”

He does, he spoils me rotten. I like him a lot more knowing that he is not touching vodka because then he turns into a different person. But now he is just normal, he is just a normal Daddy now that he is off it. I know I don’t have to phone. I used to phone him every single night and check up on him. I would know when he was drunk by the way he talks. I am not responsible. It is his relationship with the vodka. I used to be embarrassed to bring anyone ‘till my Daddy’s house and all because of the way he was going on but now I bring my wee brother and all. I bring friends and all ‘till my Daddy’s.

I wish sometimes my Daddy would be back to normal. Taking me to the park like he used to when I was normal then but now I’m older. I want my Dad to protect me and not the other way around. I want my Daddy to still be here to see his grand kids or me or my brother get married. I see in bed sometimes when I’m there and hear him having a drink and wonder, “Could it be my fault? Am I not doing enough to get him through it?” When he goes off the drink I am so proud of him to have done that for himself.

I hope one day he will change.

Katie

He went ‘till rehab and he came out and he just wants to drink straight away again. My Daddy says, “If I asked you to stop something, Katie, you couldn’t go out and do it straight away. Katie it is just not like that.” Because he is so used to it. See when he was in rehab, he had to write stuff…”Dear Vodka, Dear Biff,” he calls it biff. And he says, it says, “Dear Biff, you have been there where I needed you, through the hard times, through the diffs and all that but then when you started to stay away I realized the bad effects that you had on me.” When I looked at it, he knows how I feel, but it is hard to understand. You just want to know why he keeps doing it. I don’t know but I would never let myself… I wouldn’t get addicted to it. I wouldn’t drink it loads and loads. He says he has just been drinking from when he was younger. He never talks about it.

My Mummy is ten years younger than him. He thought she was older and then my Mummy had, well I don’t know what age she was, but she had me when she was 17. After that, the only memory I have… it was the year Mummy’s wedding night and me Daddy was obviously drinking. It was just arguings over something silly. She wouldn’t go and get someone fags or something. And then my Daddy came up and started ripping his wedding clothes says, “I don’t even want to marry you. I don’t want to marry you.” I was lying there and I remember thinking that this is not what it is meant to be on your wedding night. I was thinking he is meant to be lying beside her, and instead I was lying beside her crying.

I was really young. I was about ten or something because I remember my brother only being a wee baby. He obviously had some problems with alcohol. He says he always has, but since they split up and then everyone dying that has made him pretty worse because he didn’t used to be like that. It was when he was in P6. I remember we were going on holiday and I didn’t know why. My Daddy was standing and waving at us. This was when he went behind Mummy’s back. My Daddy was waving and I was like, “Why is my Daddy not going?” And she was like Katie, “He’s lost his passport.” And I really didn’t know. Kids understand nothing.

I think vodka turns you into a completely different person. It turned my Daddy into a completely different person. He used to call my Mummy, calling her everything. It turned him into a completely different person.
I was born in Belfast in 1994. I have two brothers, and three sisters. My earliest memory... I remember my potty, randomly. I remember mine... like what it looked like and all. Mine was red. I had a wee teddy bear one. And then my sister had a blue one. In primary school we got a Victorian day thing and you had to dress up. I remember that. And we had to, like, write on chalkboards and put on, like, a dunce hat and all. It was good. I remember that.

My granny died when I was in P7. She took a heart attack or something. She was forty something... fifty something. It was sad.

R- So what do you like to do?

Just going to church and all. All different types of stuff. I would go to church on a Sunday, and then youth on a Friday night. In youth you would do stuff like play games and all, and someone would, like, preach... it's good. Cuz when I was, like, eleven, this woman on my street was giving out these wee leaflet things for her church, and me and my friends all went, just because we wanted to. And then, thing, we started going and then I became a Christian when I was thirteen, fourteen or something.

It was a big thing. I got baptized the same time as them. Other people went before me. They couldn't get a bath thing, the only thing they could get was, like, this hot tub thing. But it was, like, really tall, and like, there was two people in it on their knees and they had to lean back. It was funny. My photograph is awful. My sister's is of her coming out of the water. Her's looks cracker. They're sitting in my room.

Me and Marian moved house... well my Daddy moved house. Like, thing, not far from where I lived, like just to Highfield. And in our room, we're making a wall of photos and stuff. Her bed's there and there's a wall there... and my beds at the other side and there's a wall there. So she's doing her bit, and I'm doing mine. Mine looks better. It's with baby pictures and all.

I was nervous before I was baptized, but after it was good. My Mummy doesn't go to church. No, my Dad... he doesn't go. No, you don't have to get baptized. It's called the Abundant Life Church. It's your own choice. They get us on the bus. My brother used to go, but he stopped, so it's just me and Marian now. On a Sunday, we get picked up at half ten, cuz it starts at eleven, and then at night time we get picked up at about quarter past five cuz it starts at six, on Sunday. We go twice on a Sunday, morning and night. It finishes at about half twelve and then the night one finishes at about seven... half seven.

No, it's like, there's one church, but three locations. There's one in Belfast, one in Bradford and one in Leeds. Like, Bradford is like the main one. So people from like, Bradford would come over for the talk and stuff. Like, a different person every week. At church the band would do songs and stuff, and then there would be a preacher, and then a game, and food. I would do, like, the welcoming, and organize the food... and who's doing welcome. People would be at the doors welcoming you as you come in, helping you serve food and stuff... it's good. I only got some responsibilities a while ago. I used to do A.V. putting words on screen, but then I stopped that.

They have these charities that they help. They went and built a school over in Uganda. Cuz at night all these wee kids in Uganda were being kidnapped and forced to be child soldiers. And they were given rifles and stuff, and forced to kill their Mummy and Daddy and stuff. So, like, they've got a thing for that. And like, they have a charity to help people who have been brought into this country and other countries to be sex slaves and all. All different stuff, they have all these events and conferences and stuff, and they have a young people's one. So many thousands go there, it's so good.
I had to do this thing…and I was reading. We had to think of a product, and think of the packaging and stuff, and then present it. And I was presenting mine, and I’m like real shy and I could feel my voice going all funny. So I just stopped and I was like, “No miss, everybody’s looking at me.” And I says, “I don’t care…I’m not doing it.” And she threw me outside. So I phoned my Mummy and told my Mummy she was shouting at me cuz she came out and was fully screaming in my face and all. So I got my Mummy to phone the school and get me out of school and all. And then every time she wanted me to do it, I stayed off. But then I ended up doing it, because she had a wee man there with a camera videoing us doing it. And then it turned out that three weeks later, I ended up having to do it in the library.

I want to be an engineer, mechanical…so I’ll join the army. I dunno? I just liked that…I dunno. I just like it. I have loads of DVDs in the house about the army and all. I’ve been to army career days and all. I don’t really know, but it’s really good…and the money’s really good and all. Like, if you were to be an engineer in the army, you’d get, like, a free house, a free home and all…and…like everything’s free and all. I dunno? It’s hard to explain. I dunno what my church would think.

Do you ever see if you go to the bottom of the hill, the hill that brings you onto the Ballygomartin Road? Well I live on the Springmartin Road. There’s a wee hole in the wall, and people were peeking their heads through and people were throwing stones at them. I haven’t lived there for long though. I used to live down the Shankill… I dunno. I don’t know…we just randomly moved to Springmartin. It’s quieter there. Mummy already lived in Springmartin, and then we moved in with her. And then my granny followed us. Every time we move, she moves beside us. She never lives far from us. She goes on holiday with us every year. Like, every year me, Mirian, Jamie, my granny and my Daddy. But she buys me these, like, polo necks for Christmas and I’m like, “Granny, I don’t wear them!” And she gets me these jammies that are for age ten to eleven.

If I’m with my friends, I’m not shy. If I was with people I didn’t know, I’d be shy. And I couldn’t get up in front of loads of people and talk and stuff. In church…yeah, but that’s all right, but in school… in English…I can’t get up and read stuff out and all. Like…presentations and all.
I'm fifteen. I live on the Antrim Road. I moved there from the markets. It's alright, but I'd prefer to stay somewhere else really. I just don't like it up on the Antrim Road. It's the people. I just don't like the way they get on. Like, it's hard to explain really...like just some of them just get on like dicks but there are some other ones that is dead on.

I live with my Ma and Da...I've got a sister and a wee brother.

I used to go to Barney but I got thrown out for my behaviour. I was about twelve...in first year. I didn't last that long in Barney. I only lasted about a month. I was getting bullied in it for a while, then I had enough. Then I started fighting with people. I ended up getting put into the principal’s office one day. We had a disagreement, and I got fed up with him shouting at me and all. So I put the chair through his window. I ended up getting expelled because he said I could have seriously hurt other people around me, and I wasn’t thinkin’ about what I was doing. He even said it was a risk me being in the school. I explained to him about getting bullied and he wouldn’t listen to me, because he thought I was the one starting fights. But really I was only defending myself. He was calling me a liar. He said I endangered people, because it was on a high level...like, on a floor if you know what I mean, and there was people underneath it, walking through an’ all. He says I could have hurt someone. I could have done serious damage an’ all...’em that is how I got threw out. I got moved to Loughshore then because no other school would take me. That’s when I started getting involved with drugs.

I started smoking blow when I was only 12. At the time I thought it was good. But when I was trying to come off it I realised it was doing me more bad than good. I couldn’t stop smoking it. I was smoking it every day. I was trying to stop for two and three days at a time but it was no good. I felt really depressed and didn’t feel good when I was coming off it. I felt really sick and before going to school I used to be sick. When I was smoking it I didn’t think about things. I didn’t think about people who have died in my family, like my brother, my sister, my aunt... or my granny. I knew when I was smoking it I didn’t think about them, and when I was stoned I didn’t care about nothing or worry about nothing. But when I was stopping smoking everything built up even more, if you know what I mean? Me thinking about those that died and stuff going through my head. And when ever you go off it the blow just fucks up your head so it does.

If I want to get off it I can’t go for help, so I can’t, without me Ma knowing, d’you know what I mean? I don’t want her thinking, “He’s wee scumbag, he’s sitting there smoking blow an’ all,” so I don’t. I don’t want her thinking that there whenever I know I am not a scumbag I am far from it. We were raised in a good family an’ all that there. But I don’t want my Ma to know I was smoking blow, like she has caught me an’ all but she thinks I’ve stopped. But if I wanted help I couldn’t go and say it to her cuz I wouldn’t want her to know, so I wouldn’t.
My sister was the first to die in my family, but I didn’t really know her because I wasn’t born at the time. She died in a cot death. Then my brother died, like I remember the day he died. When I was being brought out of the school by my granny and aunt I knew there was something wrong, so I did. Then I found out he was in intensive care with serious burns and all. The morning before it happened that was the last time I seen him, because I didn’t see him in the hospital at all. Then I remember my aunt and granny coming out and telling me he was dead. I felt really upset, so I did. That was the only brother I had...

I still haven’t got over it, so I haven’t, even though it happened years ago like. I was about 4 or 5 at the time. People said I was too young to understand, but I did understand. It was the worst day of my life, so it was. I was really upset because everyone thought I didn’t know what was going on and that they were the only ones upset, but I was going through the worst of it like.

He was on a life support machine and after that the doctors said they couldn’t save him. He struck a lighter and it got caught to his car seat like I remember growing up with him, so I do. I will always remember him... He would have been around 13 years old now.

The next person to die was my granny. She had a heart attack on her stomach then it spread. Then she left hospital to get brought back to her house and I hated having to go and see her and all because I knew she was dying. I didn’t think she wanted anyone to see her like that. She was only about 50 something. I think she only died because I knew she was dying. I didn’t think she could have had brain damage. I can’t remember who turned the machine off.

There was nothing left in her that I would have recognised. I could still hear her breathing. I could still see her face, but it was just a shell.

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I was born in Belfast. I live on the Shankill. They took away all the waste grounds…what we used to mess about in. It was all cleared with all tarmac just on it…say about five or six years ago. We used to play football there, and all of a sudden they just built houses on it. Now we play football on the Norman Whiteside pitch. I used to live on the Shankhill Estate - a complete shithole.

We got chucked out of our house because of the Shankhill feud in 2000. I moved up to where I’m living now when I was eight. I just remember my Ma saying that we have to move. It was more or less a boot through the door. They all came in with balACLavas, so they did. We were just there watching tv and then all of a sudden we heard was a bang. That was the front door being put through. And these three men ran in and said “Youse better get out of your house Tonight, or youse are getting burnt out”. So we just grabbed our stuff and went up to our aunts, so we did. We stayed there for about…what was it? Two, three days. It’s the house facing where I am living now, so it is. That’s where I used to live. We moved five times.

I was scared at the time like, because I thought that something was going to happen to my Da…but nothing happened. But, years ago he was in another organization, so he was…and he had to get a kicking to get out of that there, so he did. But in case, like…you kinda go and say stuff about what was happening in that organization. It’s like a cautionary kicking. Aye, cuz then you’ll know what will come to you if you do tell stuff.

I joined my band last year. It’s the first band I’ve been in, so it is. I more or less joined them…well obviously for a drink and laugh, but because my brother and all was in it as well. That is why I joined them. To be honest, before I joined that band I had no interest in bands whatsoever. I didn’t really like them, but when you’re in them it’s brilliant, so it is…for the laugh and the craic you get from them. We have practises every Tuesday night, so we do. Aye. Because of the laugh you get and the craic when you are out marching…having a laugh, going out with wee girls and all going past. We’d shout, “Show us your growler” and they would shout it back.

R– Do you think it’s sectarian or do you worry any about it being divisive?
D– What do you mean like?
R– Well you know the way it’s kind of…there is a whole…some people like bands and some people really don’t. Tell me about that?
D– Is it sectarian do you mean?
I’m in the Shankill Fusiliers. One of my other mates is in the Pride of Ardoyne. Well, we started at East Belfast. We had to walk from Newtownards Road, Ballyhackamore. From there, right down Newtownards Road, up and over Albert Bridge Road, and then five minutes break…and walk straight into town. And did that there, then the whole way back again. Thank god there was someone there to give us a lift home. There was no way I was going to walk home.

It’s like eh…supposed to be anti-drink. I don’t know…well, first you have to be religious to get into the Black, and you have to be in the Orange Order for so many years or something. The Black’s the highest.

R– Can anyone join the band?
D– It depends, but…we have four wee girls, in the band, so we do.
R– And what about, Chinese or Asians?
D– Hahaha...
R– None? Ok…what about Catholics?
D– Some people would be mad about it like, but some…a small majority of them would be alright with it, so they will. Aye, but the Orange Order wouldn’t be too happy about it, but.

The Whiterock normally have a protest, so they do. I don’t know…I don’t pay no attention to them. No...see when you are walking past, and they start giving it all that there? You just turn around and laugh, and that’s it. We wouldn’t shout that there back when we’re playing in the bands. Because you have to walk down there, and the peelers are watching you. You have to just do your thing. Just walk past playing. We just piss ourselves laughing at them…you know what I mean?

We play loyalist tunes, about King Billy and all. He is the one that killed King James. That’s what I heard anyway. Eh, what was it? The Battle of the Boyne, wasn’t it? He just...he killed him. Haha. Well that there is more or less how bands started, cuz he marched in with his band, so he did.
Aye, that is what the bonfire is all about. We make wee houses and all in them... wee hats. Brilliant for a rainy day, so they are. You just stick big plastic sheets over them, so you do. You know the things they stick over the car? We stick that over the hut, so the water and all doesn’t get in. You wire electrics up to the lampost and bring your X-box or something. Take the wires out to a big massive extension lead. Plug that there into the thing... like, take the wires out of the plug, fiddle about with them, and stick it into the power line on the lampost... and that’s you away. You get your X-box going in the bonfire hut! Aye, there’s an X-box and tv in there. Seems a shame to burn it down. Well, what has to be done has to be done.

We probably start collecting for it about January or February. We collect crates and just scrap wood and tyres. We don’t light it till the 11th... on the Oldpark. Not the bottom half... do you know the protestant end... the other side. Then the youngest go home, and all the men and them all come out, and the big one gets lit. The craic at that fire is brilliant. The laugh you get. This here year was terrible, so it was. Our bonfire fell, so it did... it collapsed. It collapsed on us. Some dickheads lit it up one side, so they did... instead of lighting it all up all around it.

**R:** If your family is in difficulty, is there anybody from the band to help you?

**D:** No. They would just get a kicking cuz it’s none of their business.

**R:** So the guys who kicked the door in, have power over the bands?

**D:** Aye, just more or less because they are paramilitaries.

You have the Shankhill Fusiliers, Shankhill Protestant Boys, West Belfast Volunteers, Young Conway Volunteers, Britannia, Shankhill Star, Hillview, Sons of Ulster and Shankhill Road Defenders. My Ma hates me being in a band, because all I do is spend my money on drink when I’m out with the band, and I’m skint straight afterwards. Then wherever we are... if we are down in Carrick, we go to a bar down in Carrick. If we are down in Londonderry, we go to a bar in Londonderry. There is a parade coming up here in three weeks. Derry Day. I’m looking forward to that day there, like. Last year, that day there was unbelievable. One of the best days of my life. The Apprentice Boys... unbelievable. I swear to God, it was just brilliant. The craic on the way down on the bus... just unbelievable. Just a whole day of drinking and having a laugh. Unbelievable so it is. Singing on the bus, and then straight to a bar until the parade starts.

Have you ever been to Londonderry? Ship Quay Street, or something. Did you ever see in the middle of town, you have to go through this wee tunnel... like a memorial thing? That there is where we walk. It’s just past there. Nothing is said to us. I’m not scared in those sorts of situations. If anything happened, the band would back you up. If you are not in a band or lodge, you are not allowed to walk in to the ranks, so you’re not. That is the rules of the lodge. So if anyone walked into the ranks or started slapping someone, the whole band would get into them for disrupting the thing.

They are allowed to walk in front of a band to cross it, but not allowed to walk through the band. That’s what I mean. In front, or behind or whatever... but they’re not allowed to go through the middle.

I would love someone to hit me with a glass bottle. I would make a claim. If someone hit me with a glass bottle when I hadn’t done something wrong... just walking in a band, I’d just go to one of them there... what do you call them ones? Solicitors? And I’d just say... I don’t know the way it works. I would just bring down my Ma or something, so I would. I can’t recall anyone getting hit from our band anyway, but I think I was telling youse about my mates Da getting hit with a brick, or a golf ball. I don’t know what it was. Walking up past the Ardoyne shops. He didn’t go for a claim.

Somebody just fired something at him.

The kid’s bonfire gets built too. It gets burnt at about ten o’clock... no, about nine, so it does. Then the young’uns go home, and all the men and them all come out, and the big one gets lit. The craic at that fire is brilliant. The laugh you get this here year was terrible, so it was. Our bonfire fell, so it did... it collapsed. It collapsed on us. Some dickheads lit it up one side, so they did... instead of lighting it all up all around it.

**R:** So it is totally separate?

**D:** No. You in front of the band, nobody helps you. If your family is in difficulty, is there anybody from the band to help you? The band would back you up. If you are not in a band or lodge, you are not allowed to walk in to the ranks, so you’re not. That is the rules of the lodge. So if anyone walked into the ranks or started slapping someone, the whole band would get into them for disrupting the thing. They are allowed to walk in front of a band to cross it, but not allowed to walk through the band. That’s what I mean. In front, or behind or whatever... but they’re not allowed to go through the middle.

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I was born in Belfast and I live on the Shankill. It’s mad. People take drugs and all, and stuff like that…rioting and all…In Lanark Way. We riot for the craic…with bricks and all…glass bottles. Throwing bricks at each other. They throw them over to us, and we throw them back at them. The gate’s open, but see if one of us go near it again, they’ll just close. There’s like a camera, so the peelers can watch from wherever they are. We just throw them over it again. But I don’t do it no more. Mostly like…July and all, St. Patrick’s Day, and all that there.

I play the Playstation online…mates and all from Bulgaria. Aye. Then mates from Canada. Got loads of mates from everywhere…Spain. I’ve never met them. Just…you just go online, onto your player, and go to create message. Send message. It’ll just go to whoever you want to send it to. They’ve pictures and all, and I send pictures. Just ones of me…and all. Cuz they send me pictures. This man sent four pictures, and I’m like…alright…I get the point like…I’ve seen it.

Two Christmases ago I got a Playstation. I just play it cuz I like it. I only got it online last year. It’s far better than playing offline…know what I mean? Shooting people and all. It’s class. Shooting people from other countries and getting a bit of craic and all. They’d send you a message “Aye…you killed me. Haha. Very funny”. It’s funny. Shooting people.

I don’t go to sleep. I just sleep whenever I feel like it, for an hour, then get back up. It’s been happening for ages. I don’t go to sleep. It’s not that there. I just don’t like going to sleep. It takes out half of your day. Half of my day…you could be doing something in that time. sure. I don’t go to school cuz when I’m at school, I’m always getting into fights and all…getting suspended. Just go to school, they slagger, and they get whacked. I haven’t been going to school for the past nine months…aye…something like that. I’m going to join the army. You don’t need like…loads of qualifications for it. I don’t know, but you don’t need completely super goods qualifications. Just to get out there and start shooting people…

just want to stop terror and stuff. Blowing stuff up. My mate died…but I didn’t see him dead. But I saw the coffin and all. He got shot. But that’s not how he died. He had cancer. But he was in the army…I always yawn. And everybody says “are you tired” but I’m a yawn person. I just always yawn. I’ve two sisters and one brother. He’s only three…two. I’ve a brother-in-law. He’s on the Playstation. Online. He talks to me. My Mum has taken it away before, but I got it back. When I don’t have it…If she took it off me I’d go mad like, but I’d just go onto the computer after. Go mad first, then go onto the computer. I’d go insane. I’d go bonkers. I’d smash windows and all…I’ve already smashed a window before.

I don’t go mad in school. They say something to me, I hit them, then I get suspended. Teachers just say “go home”…three days. Come back. Go into the unit…this classroom with only a couple of other people who’ve just got suspended. Can’t go outside…and when school’s over, you have to wait for about five minutes before everybody gets out. The school’s crap.
R– Most people don’t like going to school, Bobby. They just don’t have a choice.
B– Aye, but I do.
R– You do? But sure you’ve to go to court soon about it.
B– Aye, but that’s alright…
R– What do you think’s going to happen then?
B– I don’t care.
R– Well, why do you think people have to go to school?
B– To get an education.
R– And why do you think an education is good?
B– Get a good job and get lots of money when you’re older.
R– So, is that not for you?
B– No. Just want to join the army, or be an ICT expert or DJ. I like computers and all. Wouldn’t want to design them like…but fix them maybe. I can’t write well, but I can read well, cuz I’m dyslexic. It’s just writing…it does my head in the way I write. It’s just…It’s just…I don’t bother writing. It’s the way I do my letters. Rs and Fs and all…Ds and Bs. Sometimes when I write B, I get my letters wrong and I have to go back.
R– You’re rubbing your eyes…are you tired now?
B– No, see, I always do that. It’s cuz I got up early today.
R– What time did you get up at?
B– About nine o’clock or something.
R– What time did you go to bed at?
B– About four…half four.

R– My Mummy doesn’t shout at me cuz I don’t go to school. She doesn’t now…she did. I just didn’t go to school…bad behaviour…in the house. Don’t go to school and bad behaviour in the house. No. Won’t go to school, and bad behaviour in the house.
I’ve got two social workers… and school counsellor. I’ve got Caps worker as well…we play pool and all. And then I’ve got…that’s it.
I’d like to be a football manager. I’d like to work for Tottenham. I’ve only missed like a year of school, pretty much like. All the ones in school say things about my Mummy…Slabber to me about my Mummy and Daddy. It does my head in. That’s all bullshit.
I just go mad… I don’t know? Don’t do what I’m told and all…I want to live my life the way I want to live it. Just…no rules, being able to do what ever I want…more or less.
I was born in Belfast. I don’t like school.

I don’t like my helper...my school assistant. I don’t like anybody in school. I got an assistant because I needed one, but I don’t like her. She’s annoying. She is at my back twenty-four-seven, and I am ready for smacking her. I was looking for a proper assistant that doesn’t do your head in. She’s in her twenties. She is there to help with general school work, but I’m sick and tired of her up my backside and I don’t want to be corrected all the time.

My Mum spoke to her, and I thought that she was going to give me a bit more free space. Free space? My bum cheeks! I tried to speak to my teachers about it, but they don’t understand. Well I’m hoping to smack some teacher and see if they understand, and if they don’t then…

R– Well if you smack a teacher, what are they going to understand? Because they’ll just understand that you are violent, and that you hit one of them in the face?

S– I am just going to laugh at them, and say aye you fairly listened. I fairly got your attention now…

R– Is there no other way to go around it?

S– I was going to ask? She is only new but she does my head in.

I go to an integrated school. Really boring. Nothing much to do. Teachers tell you off all the time, and constant torture by assistants and teachers telling you to stand out for nothing. There is obviously girls in my class. Girls are girls and boys are boys. I mix with the girls just the same as I mix with the boys.

One of the saddest days of my life was when my best mates Dad hung himself. He smoked some weed for a few minutes and just thought this was the end, so he smoked the last weed or…thing…thought “this is the last thing I wanted to do with my life” took a draw and just hung himself. I was about ten. He smoked weed for the last ten minutes of his life. Cuz I seen him doing everything. I was just standing there. I was like… I couldn’t believe what I was seeing. It was in the far distance. It was very hard to make out, but I could tell there was something going on. I could just see this wee rope…this big thick rope…hanging from a tree, and he just put his head into it and he just jumped and hung himself.

My mate wasn’t there. He would have flipped and fainted. It just caught the corner of my eye and I just thought “oh no what are you doing?”. I was just across the next street basically…like kind of next door basically. If you go...there is a wee alley-way and you turn that way, and that’s where I was.
When that happened, I cried my eyes out and told my friend. He cried his eyes...and he told his...and he cried his eyes out, and so on. I rung the police and told them there had been a suicidal...so an ambulance and all came.

I was thinking last week of what to write in my story. Trying to write a story about my life...but it is not worth it. Nine to ten...constant bullying, then I hate my assistant, then I seen a man hang himself, which was one of the biggest experiences of death in my life.

R– Can I suggest the fact that you are in Quaker Cottage Simon...maybe things are going to start looking up? We are going to get to go on a residential...

S– But I am only here for one year?

R– For one year? Who said that? Someone at Quakers will always be here for you...an ongoing thing. We’re only ever a phone call away Simon. Do you like coming to Quakers?

S– Yeah.

R– Trust me mate, you are in the books now. You need to think more positively. I can come up and pick you up in the van. Instead of saying, “I am only here for a year”, you should be saying, “happy days I am here for a full year and there will always be someone for me to talk to”.

S– How can you get back here?

R– Once you come to Quakers are you always on the books.

R– It’s like when you make a good friend, they don’t go away. How is your friend whose Dad killed himself?

S– He is feeling suicidal as well.

R– What age is he?

S– Same age as me. Thirteen.

R– And what advice would you give him?

S– About killing yourself? Think of all the bright sides. You have me, and my Ma and Jane on your side. Even though...even though we are not even from the same family, we treat each other as if we are brothers. We do everything together. I live on the Shankhill Road. It’s alright. I like where I live. I’m not moving. If Ma ever makes plans for me moving, I am never going to leave. I am just going to stay here. Sometimes I think it’s shit, and a black hole. So that is why I am always in the house playing playstation. It’s only at the weekends that I’m out. Some weekends I go to my Da’s, but sometimes I give it a miss because sometimes I need some time to myself.

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The process of storytelling as a means of self-evaluation and personal growth for the teenagers has been a journey into the unknown. The translation of a young person’s past into words and images has been a thought-provoking and cathartic process for all those involved. This project proved to be a worthwhile exercise that touched the lives of our storytellers and those listening, affecting them in some extraordinary ways.

“I was able to start telling a lot of personal things, things that I wasn’t able to tell anybody before. I felt a lot better because I wasn’t bottling everything up. I started to talk more openly at the cottage and at home.”

Sara, 18

“We have got closer together and feel more comfortable with each other. I think I have changed. I feel more comfortable to talk about my past, and talk about things I have done. I’m more confident to share my opinion, even when people don’t agree.”

Colleen, 16

The storytelling process created opportunities for personal and social development to take place. This project provided the teenagers with support and a safe place where they could voluntarily share feelings and emotions which they had otherwise chosen to hide. Throughout this process the young people started to see the past in a different light. Through this reflective exercise they slowly began to develop confidence in themselves. Their journey together allowed each of the teenagers to take control of his/her own story, thus empowering them and allowing each individual to grow in myriad ways.

All three groups went on a weekend residential to the north coast of Northern Ireland to mark the end of their journey, to evaluate the process of putting their stories into words and pictures and, most importantly, to share their story with the rest of the group. This was a powerful exercise for the young people as they were able to realise other teenagers have experienced similar problems and have similar fears. They spoke of feeling less isolated and alone. A healing process begins when people are willing to share their stories and listen to others; this produces an invisible bond forming a connection between bruised strangers. This dialogue opens up an appreciation of others as can be seen by the comments of some of the young people who were involved.

“I enjoyed listening to other people’s lives. When telling their stories I realized that I wasn’t on my own and people were going through similar things. It made me feel better, I can open up more.”

Alana, 17

“I was really nervous and quite embarrassed to share my story. But when everyone read theirs out in front of me this helped me. I felt that I could relate to most of their stories and this made me feel more comfortable with talking about my life now.”

Laura, 16

“I felt like I was not alone and that others had problems in their lives too. I was so relieved. I would like everyone who’s in the same position as me to read it to see that they are not alone.”

Sara, 15

The teenagers who attend Quaker cottage come from both West and North Belfast. They are enclosed within their communities by locked gates and barred wire fences, representing the religious segregation that still prevails. The young people often feel confined within their neighbourhood, afraid to venture further afield. They are too anxious to spread their wings. Their environment is often characterized by violence, through punishment beatings and other aggressive behaviours. In the communities where they live they are made to believe that the “grass is definitely not greener on the other side”.

They feel controlled and repressed by limited opportunities and open doors. All their lives they have been taught to repress themselves, which makes their contributions to this book even more of an amazing achievement. The nature of “Our View” clearly demonstrates a combination of feelings of fear, social isolation, and the loss of control over one’s life. This book is not only about giving the young people a voice, but also a platform where they can be heard. They want to be listened to and they want changes to be made.

I would like to end by expressing my utmost admiration for each of the 21 young people who were brave enough to take part in this project. I can’t express how delighted and privileged I feel to have the opportunity to help share their stories and experiences in the hope that young people everywhere will benefit.

Rita Duffy

The project was structured around the ancient processes of storytelling and drawing, as a means of self-evaluation and personal growth. It has been a journey into the unknown and the previously unspoken. The translation of an individual’s experiences into words and images has been a thought-provoking and cathartic process for all those involved. The poet Seamus Heaney values the poetry of inner freedom and in a similar vein these individual narratives stand as examples of self-conquest and universal ordinariness. This project became a way of re-establishing the authenticity of personal experience and survival. The project took on its own energy and was steered in directions that were both challenging and respectful. I am hopeful that somehow by putting this project “out there” into public space, it will continue to energize.

The opportunity to create a public artwork was not limited to the book. We decided to present a selection of images and quotations on the facade of the Scottish Mutual a major building right beside City Hall. The word “mutual” comes from its former incarnation as an insurance society and in this context presents a possible interpretation of the art project as an encouragement towards a more equal society. Interpretations and understandings of contemporary visual art vary greatly depending on the context in which an artwork is viewed. A quotation from one young person’s story, taken from the book and written large on the side of the Scottish Mutual Building in central Belfast, takes on its own powerful meaning:

“You’re ones please open the door.”

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This book is a record of a collaborative project between 21 teenagers from North and West Belfast, the artist Rita Duffy and youth worker Rory Doherty.

Through images and recordings, this contemporary art project gives voice to individual young people who are living in post conflict Belfast.

Often frank and unashamedly honest these are real stories that represent what life is like for many young adults in this so called progressive society. This project was realised in collaboration with Play Resource and Quaker Service.