



Side by Side was a 10 week project which took place between April and June 2010 in City Way in Sandy Row, Belfast. The aim of the project was to bring together two groups, new to each other and new to combining art and writing skills. The groups came from City Way Day Centre itself and from Engage with Age.

The project offered an opportunity to get to know one another, to swap stories and have a go at writing and printing. Everyone entered into the spirit of it with much singing, laughing and experimenting with print, and with pleasing success. The resulting work has been put together and presented on three panels with the help of Ivan Frew, Ruth Carr & Jill Parton who facilitated the project for New Belfast Community Arts Initiative.

Those who took part were:

Martha Holmes, George Smythe, David Mason, Myra Gibson, Neil McFerran, Denis Hyde, Norman Brown, Jim Bradley, Jean Walpole, Joan Lawlor, Gladys McKay John Galbraith, Marie Matthews, Hugh Duncan, & John Armstrong.

The following pieces of writing are a sample of the longer work produced by some of the above for the project. We hope you enjoy reading them.



Two ships crossed the Atlantic, they each carried a bell. One bell reached its shining shore, the other bell's journey was delayed. Here are two poems for all who perished at sea on their journey to the land of the Liberty Bell.

The Hibernia, 1775

Long ago a ship sailed the foam
Bound for America's lands,
She took a bell of striking fame,
Liberty its ringing commands.

Long ago when the bell hung proud
Now in America's lands
Fine words were spread out clear and loud
The bell rang to the words' commands.

A declaration soon was spread
Equality, Freedom for all
And many as these words were said
Arose and heeded the call.

From every sea the people sailed
Many found America's shore
Yet many a life was curtailed
When lost below waves evermore.

Myra Gibson

The Titanic, 1912

In 1912 she sailed the foam
All set for America's lands
She had a bell of striking fame
And a captain to give commands.

With confidence the ship sailed on
She encountered an icy mass
All happiness, all hope was gone
So far from her home in Belfast.

The bell was wrenched from its seabed
Now it's forever on show.
Its silence remembers the dead
And rings for its host down below.



Myra Gibson

We lived near the Mourne

We grew up surrounded by the mountains and the lough. Then the war came, but it didn't touch us. Well, it did touch my brother about five years older than me.

When the planes came over we got to know the sounds of the different engines. One summery day the sky was so bright you could hear the zoom of the plane but you couldn't see it. We could tell it was an enemy plane. My mother called out to my brother, "Freddie, Freddie/" At the age of 15 or 16 he was an A.R.P. man. His job was to go to a certain air raid shelter and get people in to safety. He never talked about the job as all that was kept from the children. He probably witnessed things but he never spoke about them.

Next morning we turned on the radio but it wasn't working. There was no signal. So we didn't know what happened. My father said to my mother that he thought they got it hard in Belfast. We only learnt how hard when we read the papers the next day.

In the last years of the war my brother joined the army as part of a scholarship he got to go to Queen's university. Some didn't keep the contract to be a soldier and just used it to get their degree. But my brother came through it and got his degree as well.

I liked living in Warrenpoint. There wasn't much sand in our day. Now they have imported it by the lorry load. But we didn't mind. We went to the sea and Mother brought a thermos of tea and we shivered under our bathing towels and that was part of the fun of it. It was easy to enjoy things as a child. We aren't as happy as we used to be. I think we've got greedy and have lost how to be happy with simple things.

Jean Walpole

Tragedy

The Raven and the Lark –
happiness in the dark.
The Lark soars in the sunshine
of this moment,
the Raven stares into the distance
on sparkling sea.
His inner eye recalls past years
in sunlight,
now senses impending doom,
about to eclipse this couple
on earth below.



Neil McFerran

The Door

Here is the door of my Mind.
When closed I am safe and secure,
no-one can get in and I can't get out.
I peer through the letterbox
at a distorted World.

Here is the door of my Mind.
I stand behind it,
my hand on the lock.
Fear grasps me, thirst scalds me,
courage scolds me.

Here is the door of my Mind.
When opened it allows the World
to walk in. I see faces,
smell the forest and feel the wind.
It tastes of Freedom.

I walk out into...



John Galbraith

Plums

I like the way they fit in my hand
Plump but not too heavy
A slight squeeze betrays their ripeness
A swift slice of my blade
And a soft suck when the halves
Open out to a heart of stone.



John Galbraith

Feathers

After the Blitz in 1941 we moved to the outskirts of Lisburn at Achnahoe off the White Mountain Road. At that time I was four years of age and for the next four my mother and I lived on and off between Belfast and Lisburn. There was another family, the Martins, like us, a mother and a boy, David, about the same as myself. As we became more accustomed to country and farm life, we became more adventurous, roaming further afield as we grew older.

We two boys became interested in North American Indians and we decided to make head-dresses or war bonnets for which we needed feathers. Now, there were a lot of feathers running around the farmyard on chickens and geese, but how to obtain them. Getting the feathers from the geese was out of the question as the gander was fiercely protective of his harem. But with the chickens it might be possible.

We hit upon the idea of putting a small amount of grain at the bottom of a bucket lying on its side. When a chicken ventured to get the grain from inside the bucket, we would pull out one or two feathers, followed by much flapping and squawking. We got quite a number of feathers in this way until we were discovered and scolded severely. But we still wore our head-dresses with pride.



John Armstrong



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Evacuation

I was ten years old, just after the depression in the 1930s when war broke out in 1939. My family had gone through hard times, but then many men in our neighbourhood were able to go back to work in the shipyard. My father was a shipwright and had been unemployed a long time.

In April 1941 the German Luftwaffe blitzed many parts of Belfast. We were not too much concerned when the sirens alerted us that there might be an air raid. Sometimes when the sirens went off nothing happened. But when the drone of planes was heard my mother ushered us into the coalhole right below the stairs in the kitchen. This space was just the same width as the narrow stairway and about six or seven feet long. We scrambled over the coal and did what we could to settle, hoping it wouldn't be long till the all clear sounded.

Then all hell broke loose when anti-aircraft and ack-ack gunfire from one of the big aircraft carriers exploded, a terrifying noise. It went on for a long time. In all the noise and confusion around us, my little brother, who was three years of age, wanted a pee. He just had to do it on top of the coal. We heard an almighty explosion in the shipyard. On emerging from the coalhole, the kitchen was filled with dust and plaster from the ceiling, a terrible mess. We were saved from this falling debris by a pokey, wee coalhole.

Our family had to be evacuated the next morning. None of us had ever been on a train. As we journeyed from Belfast to Warrenpoint, then on to Rostrevor, we saw the beauty of the countryside for the first time. The cattle and sheep and all around was breathtaking. When we saw for the first time the majesty of the Mourne Mountains, my brothers and sisters and myself were amazed by what we were witnessing. We forgot the night before, the carnage and noise of the air raid. We were journeying to a haven of pleasure and peace.

Hugh Duncan



First Holy Communion

When I look at this photograph at the age of 8 I was so innocent and unaware of what life was about and what would lie ahead for me, good or bad.

My dress was homemade by a friend of my mother's. I think it cost £2 all told, the veil was a bit more and buckskin shoes. It would appear from the picture that you took life so seriously then, a frightened look on one's face, not even a smile, though nobody seemed to smile in photos in those days.

I think we went home after the ceremony and had a cup of tea – so different from today with their £300 dresses, fake tan and a reception in a hotel.

Though I remember the day so vividly there was no great celebration, your feet stayed firmly on the ground. But 66 years later, I recall the day with fond memories, not so innocent as I was then.

Marie Matthews

Milk Delivery

A new day breaks with all its accompanying sounds: the birds singing their morning songs, along with the pigeons cooing and the odd barking dog in the distance. The busy blue bottle flies up, down, slipping and sliding as it buzzes and bumps against the slippery glass pane. Perhaps it is trying to escape or find its breakfast. In sunshine, hail, rain or snow along comes the clip-clop of the milkman's horse as he pulls up outside our gate. "Whoah, Bick!" he says as he pulls on the reins, then the noise of his boots as he lands on the flagged footpath. The rattle of pint milk bottles as he takes them out of the metal crate. Then the click of the wooden gate, his quick step as he walks up to the door over the the egg shaped stones that grind and crush beneath his weight. Clank, clink you would hear, as he puts the fresh milk bottles down on the step and lifts the empties. Back he goes with the empties as they click into the crate, pushing it over next to the other empty ones with a bit of a crash. Then the creaks and the strains of the milk cart as he climbs back on and says "Gee up." And off he goes to the next customer.

There's not so many milkmen today. My thoughts go back to those days as I look at my old treasured pint milk bottle. It has lived in our kitchen for some time now. This old bottle was one of my father's as he was a milkman and it bears his name.



Jim Bradley

