FIGHTING WORDS

The write to right.

CREATE THE MOMENT



STORIES BY THE WOMEN OF THE DOCHAS CENTRE

Create the Moment

Work by the Women of the Dóchas Centre

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Create the Moment

Work by the Women of the Dóchas Centre

Over the course of 12 weeks, women in the Dóchas Centre were invited to explore different forms of written expression and be introduced to yoga and mindfulness practice. The sessions were facilitated by Hugh McElveen, Cormac Mac Gearailt and Aoife Ni Mhurchú for Fighting Words between September and November 2024. Over the course of six introductory and six follow-on sessions, the works collected here were crafted. The authors' names have all been changed to protect their anonymity.

This project was supported by the Collaboration and Innovation fund as part of the Adult Literacy for Life strategy. Adult Literacy is co-funded by the Government of Ireland and the European Union.

Fighting Words is the creative writing charity founded by Seán Love and Roddy Doyle in January 2009. Its aim is to help students of all ages to develop their creative voice. It uses the creative practice of writing and storytelling to empower and strengthen people from all backgrounds to be resilient, creative and successful shapers of their own lives.

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Foreword

Creativity is something we all have, but we don't always have the opportunity to explore it and freely express ourselves. Fighting Word's programmes support people to explore their imaginations and creative voices, becoming more confident in the process.

In autumn 2024, Fighting Words visited the Dóchas Centre where a group of brilliant women took part in twelve creative writing sessions. This group of women came together each week, dedicated themselves to their writing and created something really special and personal. Each week, the women explored different forms of written expression and took part in yoga and mindfulness practice. This helped create a safe space for creativity in the space each week and the result is this collection: honest, imaginative, powerful, and often deeply moving.

Freya wrote two pieces: Billy the Kid, about a young goat and the power of second chances, and Brought to Life, a magical story where art comes alive thanks to a young girl's wish. Anne shares five touching pieces about love, family, hope, and trust. Laura brings us into a magical world with Love is Blind, where a mermaid causes trouble for a married couple. In My Friend Polly, Sarah writes a heartfelt story about life in prison and the dream of a better future. Martha and Paula each share very honest, personal stories – Freedom is Precious and Paula's Story – about their own lives. Natasha's piece, The Road to Recovery, gives a moving look at a woman struggling with addiction.

Each of these writers showed great creativity, effort, and talent. As well as the brilliant work collected here, what made this project truly special was how it brought everyone together each week in a safe and supportive space, where they could write, share, and just be themselves. While it's hard to fully capture the feeling of those sessions, reading these pieces lets us glimpse moments of courage, honesty, laughter, and hope. This collection shows just how powerful creativity can be when people are given the chance to express themselves.

Mark Davidson

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A Thought

By Anne

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A Thought By Anne

Since I've come to prison
my mind has changed a lot on people.

Sometimes I would think of people
that have an addiction
that it was self inflicted.

But being in prison and speaking
to some of the people,
their stories are horrific.

Women here in Ireland
have been through more
than I could ever imagine.
Some of the stories are something
that you would only hear on the news
in third world countries.

Ireland has so many strong women
that are TDs, Senators, MEPs
and that work in the government
you would think that there would be more
done for Irish Women in Ireland.

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Billy The Kid

By Freya

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Billy the Kid By Freya

Goldenbridge farm was a home to one and all,
It gave a loving life to all creatures great and small.

A little goat was born one beautiful sunny day,
But sadly at birth his mum died and had to go away.

All the animals pitied him but none would take him in.
A mother horse felt so obliged when she looked at him.

She'd recently had a foal, a little baby of her own.
But who would look after this goat up until he's grown?

She couldn't stand to see him with no mother there to feed,
So why not take a chance to see if she could give him what he needs?

She went over and began to stand above the kid,
And before you know it he began to suckle at her tit.

Day by day she fed him and also cuddled when it was cold,
And the little goat began to run and trot just like the foal.

The other horses told her what she was doing could raise alarms.
She's only being a surrogate mother, what could be the harm?

When her foal was old enough to stand on his own feet,
She went out by day pulling carts of coal along the street.

The goat and foal would stand and watch her pulling with such pride,
Then evening time came and they had her back right by their side.

The day came for the foal to also pull the cart.
The little kid was so excited as he thought he too would start.

But off the horses went, leaving the kid all on his own.
He wondered why he wasn't brought, as he too was grown.

The mother horse explained this was not the kind of job for a goat,
As horses were to pull carts full of coal or hay or oats.

The little kid was just so sad he cried and cried and cried,
'til mama horse thought: "what's the matter if he tried?"

So next day, they let him pull the smallest cart full of hay,
The farmer thought, "what the hell, we will let him stay."

So anytime people see this wondrous parade go by,
Billy the kid forever thanks his mama horse who let him try.

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Brought to Life

By Freya

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Brought to Life By Freya

My life began very miserable. The artist who drew me painted a host of pictures and we were briefly displayed with pride in the studio we were created in, until our father never came home and I heard he had passed away. We've been kept in these crates ever since. I don't know how long has passed while we've been in here, in storage.

Finally, I felt my box being moved and I heard the movers talking about how our creator is now very sought after since he died and his work is being put in a gallery.

"Oh wait," I thought. "I'm his work, and I'm going to be displayed for everyone to see, how exciting."

I mean, I can't move and have come to terms with that but I'll finally be able to watch others living and making comments about me, which certainly beats living in a box. All our creators' portraits were placed on different parts of the wall. I was on the corner all illuminated with lights and I never felt so good.

This building sure was beautiful and people remarked what a good job they did renovating it into a museum. Apparently it was an old barn that, back in the day, had some kind of religious or magical ceremonies in it. No one was exactly sure but some kind of voodoo mumbo-jumbo was practised here.

Now, it was a fresh, crisp, high-ceiling museum with areas for certain dedication and the likes. Today was our first viewing to the public and a little girl remarked how I "looked like someone from a fairy tale called Snow White as she too held a shiny red apple."

It was the child's birthday and after her parents walked away she said to me that she would make a wish when she blew out her birthday cake candles that our pictures could come to life and that it was a secret. I found it adorable and amusing. I'm sure she would forget to make that wish when the time came but just the fact she thought of it was cute. Then came closing time and I never slept as my eyes were painted open but I had lots of daydreams thinking of how great it would be if her wish came true.

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Create the Moment

Oh how many great adventures I imagined, lots of different scenarios I dreamed up and all the different things I would get into.

Just then, weirdly enough, my arm, the one that was holding the apple, felt tired for the very first time. This was very weird. No sooner had this thought gone through my mind, than my eyes nearly couldn't believe it when I saw the big red apple roll off my hand and begin to fall!

I didn't even get the chance to process this but felt the urge to try to grab it, as I'd been holding it for so long that it felt really weird not to be holding it. Before I knew it, my arm reached out and I grabbed it.

Suddenly, I toppled off the chair I'd always been sitting on and fell out of the picture frame and landed in a bundle on the floor.

"Oh my god, what just happened?" I thought.

"I'm free, I'm free!" I shouted.

Then for the first time since my creation, I began to stand up, my legs shaking as I did so. "Oh what a bloody feeling," I thought. "What do I do now? Well, let's just have a look around." I began walking around and as I turned around the corner I was stopped by a man in a lump in the middle of the floor. I was about to ask him if he was ok but then wondered how I would explain who I was or how I got there when he arose himself from the floor. He seemed to go on forever when he was standing up because he was so tall and I noticed the huge axe he had in his hand. Just then, I noticed the picture frame on the wall beside him was empty and realised he too must have fallen out.

"What on earth is going on?" I thought. Looking at him with pure and utter disbelief, I noticed him grab the handle of the axe tightly and begin to raise it up high over his head. I couldn't bloody move, my eyes were fixated on the huge metal axe that looked like it was sharpened so much it could split a hair on your head. Why on earth was he going to chop me down with it? Just then he bellowed in a very loud and deep voice, "Get out of the way." As soon as he said this, I felt the ground pound under my feet and what sounded like enormous footsteps, yet nothing I knew could

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sound like that. I quickly glanced over my shoulder and saw the most enormous beast with huge teeth flashing and big yeti feet and tiny arms coming towards me. The cave man wasn't in fact going to strike me but instead try to defend us from the monster that was drawing closer. There was a man in a plaid shirt running as fast as he could away from the monster and towards us. In his fear to just run away from it, the stupid idiot was just bringing it towards us in our direction. The caveman yet again roared "Out of the way!" and the scientist looking guy in the plaid shirt said, "I'm a paleontologist and that's a tyrannosaurus rex and your axe is no use at all against him!"

"Run, find somewhere dark we can hide as his eyesight's no good."

With that the 3 of us turned tails and ran in the opposite direction. Many of the pictures we ran past were empty. As we ran on, just in front of us stood a very large dog-looking animal as it had a long tail and we could only see it from behind. He'd a man with a whip in front of him.

"Stop," he said, "don't come any closer!" but the animal must have heard us coming or even smelled us, for it turned towards us displaying its huge golden mane.

"Jesus, it's a lion," shouted the paleontologist, but the man with the whip said, "don't worry I'm his tamer and if you listen to me you'll be ok." The lion let out a massive roar lifting the edge of his mouth as he did, showing these massive long pointy teeth to us. The roar made the hairs on the back of my neck stand up and the caveman stepped out ready to take on the mighty beast. The lion tamer in a calm but authoritative voice said "Simba, still," he then motioned his fingers as if to tell us to slowly walk around the lion to him. No way, I thought but then again I felt the ground pounding as the T-rex was drawing close. The 3 of us slowly moved past the huge feline, while the lion tamer said "Good boy, stay." As we got to him we heard him say "What the hell is that" and turned around to see the T-rex had caught up to us and momentarily stopped to see what the lion was in front of him. The huge cat facing the T-rex let out an even bigger roar than before, moving its head side to side as its roar echoed round the room, as if giving the T-rex a warning not to come any further.

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The T-rex then too let out the most earth trembling roar you ever heard. Quickly the paleontologist grabbed my hand squeezing it so tight it felt like he nearly broke my fingers.

"While the lion stalls him we need to get out of here," I said. The lion-tamer said, "No way am I leaving him!" The caveman said he too would stay to help as he wasn't afraid to fight the monster. "You two, go wide!" said the caveman.

"Quick, let's find a dark corner to hide in 'til we see how this pans out. My name's Jack by the way," said the paleontologist.

"Ok Jack, let's go," I said.

We ran off feeling bad leaving the others but what else could we do?

"Over there," Jack said. "There's a room with no light coming out of the window." It was a corner office or something. We opened the door and we couldn't see anything in the room. Only near the door was slightly lit up but the rest of the room was pitch black. "You get under the desk," he said while he was going to try to find somewhere else to hide. I did so and I was out a few seconds in my hiding spot when I heard a tussle going on! Then something banged on top of the table like something was knocked on top of it and with that an arm fell off the table in front of me. I could barely make it out but the sleeve was the same plaid shirt that Jack was wearing. Someone was struggling with him on top of the table and had him pinned. I popped out and ran to the door, flicked on the lightswitch as I did so and all I could see was this really pale skinned man on top of him, biting into his neck and the pale man-looking creature let out a big angry hiss like the light turned on angered or hurt him and he stopped biting Jack and he swooped towards me. I charged off screaming but he never followed me out the door. Maybe he just turned off the light but either way he's going to go back to attack Jack and I've just run off and left him. What kind of person am I? I need help, and fast. I ran back to get some of the others to help and when I got there I was greeted with some sight indeed. There was now the lion tamer standing on top of a pillar which had a vase on it. The lion stood in front of the pillar growling angrily in defence of its tamer. The caveman was still on the floor holding the axe on his shoulder and just in front of him were 10 man sized dinosaurs

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circling the T-rex with their attention on him. With that I glanced to the right to the empty painting on the wall which had a label underneath stating: "Velociraptor: natural enemy of the tyrannosaurus rex."

They were all briefly at a stand-off, each one waiting for the other to make a move. I touched the cave man on the shoulder and whispered, "You have to help me, Jack's trapped by some creature."

"Who's Jack?" he said and I explained it was the paleontologist.

Knowing the lion tamer couldn't get back down until after the fight, we said we'd be back and ran off to try to save Jack.

"Don't worry, we'll be back," roared the cave-man to the lion tamer. "Show me where Jack is."

"Over here," I said. I could see the light was still on in the corner of the room and I gasped in horror as I got to the door. Jack flopped on the desk with no colour in his face and blood dribbling down his neck into a small puddle on the table.

"I feel so responsible," I said, "But at the time I felt too scared to help!"

The caveman walked over to see if Jack was breathing but said he wasn't sure. So I checked Jack's pulse and said,

"Oh my God, He's actually dead!" The guilt overwhelmed me, I said, "I have to get out of here," and I began to slowly walk for the door with the caveman following me. "Aaargghh, let go," yelled the caveman. I turned to see that Jack had him from behind, biting into his neck as the caveman held his arm out as if waiting for me to pull him free. With that Jack pulled his head back with this frustrated look on his face. He hadn't managed to bite the caveman but instead his bite got caught on the lion-skinned toga the caveman had tied over his shoulder. The caveman knocked his arm upward smashing his elbow into the face of Jack knocking him off and onto the ground. With that a giant creature ran into the room. It was a man at the front but with the legs of a horse and a body of a huge black stallion at the back.

"Jump on," he said. He used his arm to pull me onto his back and the caveman jumped up behind me. We just galloped out the door and Jack

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hadn't even managed to get up off the floor yet. As we bounded across the floor we could see various animals and birds running everywhere, chasing the various people who were running about. Then the sight of this mad shaped woman with arms and hands for her legs and legs for her arms was truly amazing. She made a clapping noise as she ran and was caught by one of the velociraptor dinosaurs and it locked its jaw onto her side while she just screamed in anguish. We continued galloping on when I shouted, "Turn right, we have to save the lion tamer!" Two velociraptors were about to go for the tamer perched on the pillar while hopelessly cracked his whip to try to scare them off. One tried to reach him with a bite when the lion reared up confronting him and the two became locked in a fight. The second velociraptor, seeing this as his opportunity, then leaped for the tamer.

But we got right up beside them and the caveman swung his mighty axe, nearly beheading the velociraptor in the process.

"Jump on!" I said to the tamer. Just then the other velociraptors, who had been busy fighting the T-Rex, heard the dying cry of the one the cave man had hit and they all turned and began to chase us. The T-Rex seemed to chase anything that moves, so he started to chase after us too, but due to the fact his feet and legs are so huge, he started gaining on us way ahead of the others. So I looked back to see what was chasing us and there was the T-rex, all the velociraptors and the lion (who was probably running after its tamer) all pursuing us. There were many winged things fighting in the sky but through them flew this huge, dark, caped figure which I realised was the pale, skinned creature that had bitten Jack. Plus, most to my surprise, here came Jack on a charging run between the creatures, with a demonic look in his eyes.

The horse man underneath me was running as fast as he could yet still they were all gaining on us. We ran past the big grand-father clock on the wall as it chimed. It was twelve o'clock at night. The horse man suddenly didn't feel so solid underneath me anymore. I looked down and the only way I can describe it is that he seemed to dissolve right in front of my eyes. Suddenly we all ended up in a heap on the floor.

"What is happening now?" I thought. I rolled over onto my back, feeling

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so defenseless now to fight what was coming towards me and all I could see was the monstrous T-rex as it stopped, ready to devour me. I'd say it would have had a smile on its face if it could. It licked its lips as a big drop of drool fell from its mouth and splashed on the floor in a big plop beside me.

"This is it," I thought as it took a look back to decide if it was the one about to snack on me, or had the others caught up and were about to ruin his feast. He looked back at me again and with that dipped its head down towards me, opening his enormous jaws that looked so big he could probably swallow me whole, yet probably wouldn't, he would just enjoy the moment of chomping me down. Then he got so close that I could smell his rotten breath which probably smelled of the flesh of his last victim. Through the sides of his mouth I could see that everyone and everything else had managed to catch up with us too. I thought, "what a relief it would be if he'd just swallow me whole instead of me being torn to pieces."

So the moment had come, even though everything seemed to be kind of going in slow motion, and just as it was about to close its mouth and chomp me down, it too started to dissolve right in front of my eyes.

"Wow, he's gone," I thought, while I was laying there with my arms outstretched, still watching in disbelief. One by one, everyone disappeared and as I looked at my hand, it too began to dissolve until I couldn't see it any more.

Next thing I knew, I was once again looking at my hand, which was holding the shiny, red apple. I was back in my portrait and I couldn't move anymore. I realised that the little girl must have made the wish, that it unbelievably came true and all the paintings came to life for her birthday. That's why, at twelve midnight, everything had dissolved in front of me and we all disappeared and were no longer real. By the time it turned one minute past twelve, her birthday was over. Sure, it sucks that I'm back in my frame, unable to move, but what a night I had, one that I'll remember forever. Now I can be at ease and forever be able to recall the amazingly dramatic night I had when, for one night only, I was alive. Thank you, little girl!

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A Moment of Truth in Prison

By Anne

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A Moment of Truth in Prison By Anne

How you really feel no one will know, except yourself.

Most days you feel like your whole world is ending.

You pray to God he will give you the strength

You never really talk about it to anybody

You never really let your true feelings show

You pretend to the guards that everything is OK

And you always smile when you do

Even though you feel like your heart is broke

Because I have not seen my children in many months

They are the most important thing to me.

They are in America and I don't think it is fair on them

That they have to suffer for my mistakes.

Most times I feel like sitting down and crying

I feel really, really down and I thank God for the teachers helping me as much as they have and the prison staff.

And not judging me for what they have read about me and for treating me like a human being.

Coming from a hardcore travelling family you never ever trust a settled person.

Coming to prison opened my eyes on that, though.

You should never judge a book by the cover.

"Don't trust 'gorgy' people, don't ever talk to the guards ever," is what we were told.

We were told the guards are there to punish you, not to help you.

How I feel in prison now that you can trust your teachers, they are only there to help and you can trust prison officers and the chief and my whole perception of settled people has changed.

They are all there to help us if we want them.

And I am so grateful for all of them that have helped me since I came to prison.

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Love Is Blind

By Laura

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Chapter One

Once upon a time there was a boy who left school at a young age who did get a lot of eud. He started working on a farm with his grandad who was an old man who needed a lot of help. His grandad lived alone with his pet dog who he loved and adored. It was the closest thing to him after his wife and son died in a crash. After a few years, the grandson came and found the grandad who knew a lot about John.

Chapter Two

Marie hears Tom splashing through the water, and she shouts:

"Tom! Come back please!"

Tom is hypnotised and cannot hear her. The mermaid is singing to Tom:

"I put a spell on you, and now you're miiiine. Even though your wife is bliiiinnnd. Now you're miiinnneee."

Marie is not happy. She heads towards the water to get her man back. Once she reaches the water her eyesight becomes crystal clear. The blindness was only an illusion.

Marie can see the mermaid's true form. Her fingers were long and skeletal with webs. She has green-blue scaly skin. Her eyes are big and black – two orbs like a fish. She has serrated teeth, her mouth is big enough to swallow a human whole.

Her long fingers reach towards Tom, Marie tries to wake Tom up.

"Wake up, Tom! Wake up!" Marie shouts. Tom was calling the mermaid in his sleep.

Tom wakes from his dreams. It's a Sunday morning. He goes to the bathroom and looks into the mirror. He notices marks and scales on his arms in the shape of a hand.

"Marie! Did you do this to me?"

"Yes, cause you were talking in your sleep about a beautiful mermaid."

"God, I wish I was still in the dream instead of living this nightmare," Tom says.

THE END

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Craft, Half, Past

By Anne

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Craft, Half, Past By Anne

Words can't describe how much ye four mean to me
Football, Boxing, Gaming, Make-up, Clothes, phone,
Going off to shopping centres,
Driving, Swimming, Travelling.
I can't wait to see ye
To bring ye to Killarney.
To go and see the scenery.
We would be so happy
The five of us going on holiday

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My Friend Polly

By Sarah

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My Friend Polly By Sarah

My friend Polly has been telling me about her experiences in prison.

She is in jail for the first time in her life. All she wants is to get through this nightmare as fast and easy as she can. She is feeling very low today. She misses her family and friends... and her freedom.

She lived with her daughter and two granddaughters and had a very good family life with them before going to prison. She is very close to her daughter and granddaughters and has always done everything with them so she wants, desperately, to go home to be with them.

She is in her sixties and has led a very quiet life, always looking after other people more than she looks after herself. She loves having the craic with people in her job as a carer. She has always got on great with people. No matter how ill a client was she was always able to make them laugh. One man that has been in a wheelchair for over fifty years always said to her that if laughter could fix him she would have cured him over and over again. That's reason enough for her to go to work. She loves making people happy.

She went to court one day and when the judge finished talking she was in shock because she did not think she would get a prison sentence. Polly is feeling very low because she is thinking about all the things she is missing, like Halloween and Christmas with her daughters and granddaughters. They would all dress up for Halloween and have great fun and Christmas but this year there will be no Halloween or Christmas for Polly.

She was put in a cell and left on her own for a few hours before she was transported to jail where she was put through the system. A system that the prison knows well but Polly was just going with the flow and did not know what was happening to her. It was the scariest time she has ever known in her life.

Now, I suppose she would class it as another lesson in life. Not one she would want to repeat.

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"At Halloween I surprise the girls when they come home. We put a box inside the door covered in black bags and when the girls come in Mammy jumps out to scare them and they love it," Polly tells me.

"We have skeletons and other scary stuff around the house and the girls help decorate two. We all go off to get pumpkins to carve and have great fun doing that. The lead up to Christmas with the two young girls in the house is great fun. Mammy goes off to get presents for the girls and hides them before the girls get home. We sneak around when they are asleep for Mammy to show what she has got for them and ask me if I think they will be happy with them. Christmas morning comes and the excitement on the girls faces would stick in your heart forever. You spend the rest of the day putting the toys together and looking for batteries and cooking Christmas dinner."

In the big yard Polly only had one cell mate for the first six weeks. That cellmate made her life hell. She sat in her bed as quiet as she could be, not making any noise as her cellmate would tell her to be quiet. She could not read after her cell mate closed the blinds and turned out the light and she was not allowed to turn on her reading light because it was too bright for her cell mate and her cell mate had complete control of the TV. She was delighted when that cellmate was released from prison and she got a few new cellmates that were easy to get on with. It does not matter though what kinds of people you have to live with, you just have to put up with it.

She goes to school and the gym every chance she gets just to try to stay out of the cell. She tries to keep busy by going to school and the gym. School is good for learning new things like decoupage, jewelry, stained glass. Things you would not make time for on the outside. It's also good for interacting with other girls and the teachers are very helpful.

In the gym she plays basketball and if she gets it into the hoop that's a bonus; if not she is getting some exercise anyway.

Polly continues to tell me about her life.

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"You get called in the morning around 8:30 am if you need meds you are called out by your house name around 9.00am then you are locked back until it's time to go to school. If you won't go to school or the gym you are locked in your cell until 12.00 noon. That sometimes changes and you could be let out to the yard at noon."

"If you have school you go to the gate and give your name. If your name is not on the list you are sent back to your cell. You get lunch around 12.00 and are locked back until around 2.00 pm, then you go to school again if you are lucky enough to have classes as there are so many girls here looking to go to school it's hard to give it to everyone. There is another class in school after lunch if you get it or you are locked back until around 5:30. Then you are out until 7.00pm and then locked back till morning. They call you for meds around 6:30pm before lock back. Sometimes it's nice to walk around the yard and have a chat with the other girls. Sometimes there are people fighting and you stay as far away as possible from the drama. Sometimes you hear the girls calling from cell to cell or fighting in their cell and you hear the jangle of the keys when the officers are doing their rounds and the noise from the road but you get used to the sounds."

"Because of the circumstances of what was happening in our family life the family home has to be resold. My divorce has gone through while I have been in prison so it's not just the prison sentence I have to deal with and it is so hard to try to sort out any problems that occur on the outside while you are in prison. Your hands are tied and you have to rely on the prison to help. My daughter and granddaughters are now in accommodation and I will be homeless also when I leave prison. My relationship with my daughter is very strong. "We talk twice a day on the phone and also on video calls. Our chats on the phone can be very stressful because through no fault of my daughter, she now finds herself and her two children homeless. They are in a B & B 40 minutes away from the school which is causing her more stress trying to pay for the B & B and for the car and the other expenses. There is no light at the end of the tunnel for a very long time as every

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day seems to bring more problems that always go against me. The only time my granddaughters got to come here to see me was very heart breaking and there were restrictions on visiting as someone had passed away over something that was brought into prison so everyone had to suffer as a result. I saw the girls on video call and talked to them on the phone but I was so looking forward to putting my arms around them and cuddling them and it just could not happen. I had boxes and jewelry I had made for them and was lucky enough that the officers allowed them to have them. The officers also gave the girls pictures for them to colour in for me which was lovely to have them on display in my cell. "

"There are toys in the visiting room for children to play with and the other people were having visits so the room was buzzing with talk. There were also a lot of officers around as a result of what had happened the day before. The youngest granddaughter was distracted with the toys and the oldest granddaughter got her hands on a play needle and poked me in the arm with it as if to say I will get near my Granny one way or another. It was so hard to watch them walk away and not be able to hold them."

Polly tells me that it was so embarrassing to have to ask every day for help and to spend most of your day sitting on the toilet making noises and raising a smell with your cellmate in the room. This situation really upset her and she feels so bad for her cellmate. The food is not the best in prison, some days you get a reasonably good dinner some days you would not give it to an animal, maybe this is something to do with her loose bowel but she tells me she is eating more in prison than she ate on the outside but she has lost about half a stone in the five months she has been there.

Sometimes you get your meds to keep for the week in the cell but sometimes other prisoners will come in and rob them. The bad thing about that is you will suffer by them reducing your medication and the person who robs it gets away without any punishment. She has a brilliant relationship with her daughter

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and granddaughters and talks on the phone twice a day and has a video call at least once a week but because of things that have happened with family life the family home has to be sold. She has gone through a divorce since going to prison so it's not just her jail sentence she has to cope with.

Polly has been on a long journey and does not know where it will end yet. She has another three months in prison but because her whole life has fallen apart she has to work out how she is going to make it through the rest of her life like where she will be able to afford to live, if she will ever get a good job again like the other one she had caring for people, if her friends and extended family will still be there for her when she gets out. Friends have been few and far between since going to prison so who knows. Polly is going to have to find out who to talk to in the prison that can give her help and advice for the future. As I said, it's already been a long road for her and she is just waiting for a knock on the door to determine her future. Best of luck to Polly and when that knock comes for her I really hope it's the best news for her: she deserves it.

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Freedom is Precious

By Martha

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Freedom is Precious By Martha

Autumn time is here. I can smell it in the air.

I can feel the cool evenings, as I look out the window in my prison cell.

The nights are getting longer, days are getting shorter.

I miss life outside, family, friends, especially my two boys and my cat, Mollymae.

Time waits for no man, that's for sure.

One thing I do know, God has a plan for me.

The weeks are flying by, I am glad of that. Before we know it, it'll be the new year, and freedom will be near. Time to reunite with my boys, build a bond stronger than ever! Prison gives one a lot of time to think, especially about past mistakes and regrets.

I actually appreciate the time I spent inside in many ways, it gave me a wake up call. I'm closer to my family now, doing great, clean now, recovery from addiction is going well.

I was homeless outside and life was very chaotic, so I am hoping I can have the same mindset when I am free from prison as I do now.

On release I will have a place to go, a room or a B & B. I will link in with the services out there to keep me on the straight path and I will work towards getting my own apartment. It may be around the new year. I will have been offered temporary release. I will receive the help I need to get where I need to be. I will be more independent, having my own responsibilities. I will work well at this. My boys and me and my family, we will be content and happy.

One thing I've learned is when you get time served in jail you learn to appreciate time wasted, time that could have been spent with family and friends or doing something productive in life, making memories with family and appreciating the little things. Let's hope this is a big lesson learned.

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The Road to Recovery

By Natasha

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The Road to Recovery By Natasha

There was a girl called Jenny who suffered from addiction for many years.

She thought that there was no way out for her. She tried for years to give up drugs and wanted a better life for herself and for her kids. Every time she tried, she would be doing really well and then her ex boyfriend would come back into her life and she would find herself back down the road of using drugs.

Jenny got so bad she felt like giving up on life that there was no way out for her until one day a woman walking her dog came along and saw this girl lying down crying on a footpath. It was Jenny. The woman asked Jenny if she was alright. Jenny looked up and just nodded her head and then slowly said: "I can't do this anymore, what am I going to do?"

The woman said to her: "Let me help you, come with me and I'm going to get you something to eat."

After having something to eat with this woman who was really nice to Jenny, the woman took Jenny home and cleaned her up. She brought her to a treatment centre the next day where Jenny stayed for six months.

Jenny found the first few weeks of treatment so hard, that hard she wanted to leave, but as the weeks were going on it got easier for Jenny. Jenny was slowly finding herself again, she was working hard on herself every day.

It's now the end of Jenny's time in treatment. She is meeting up with the woman who saved her life, the woman who believed in her.

Jenny runs over to her and gives her a hug saying, "Thank you so much for helping me get back my life."

Jenny now has her own house and has her three kids back living with her. She has no contact with her ex-boyfriend who also suffered from addiction. She now understands that if she wants to stay well and keep away from drugs, she has to continue keeping her ex-boyfriend out of her life.

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She now works at a day programme to help her with her addiction and to keep her on a good road in her recovery. Jenny is now one year sober and continues going to NA and wants to work with people in addiction.

Before Jenny went into treatment, she struggled. She got deeper into her addiction and her world became very dark and lonely: her habit for using drugs was getting worse by the day. Jenny ended up doing things in her addiction, things she would have never done in her right state of mind. She found herself down a really bad road.

Jenny robbed and lied throughout her addiction, to feed her drug habit.

She always looked after herself when she was not in addiction, getting her hair done, doing sunbeds and going to get her nails done, she always looked after herself. But then when Jenny got into addiction, self care was slowly going out the window.

Jenny struggled with using sleeping tablets first. That led her to buying street tablets. Then when Jenny ended her relationship with her ex partner she was introduced to heroin by a group of people who did nothing but hung around street corners drinking and taking drugs. That's when Jenny got really bad on drugs and stopped all contact with her kids. Jenny had always had a good relationship with her kids, but sadly drugs became her number one. Jenny took more than she should have and fell asleep and couldn't seem to wake up; Jenny woke up in hospital and said to herself that she couldn't carry on living like that.

Jenny was going for milk a few days after she came home and she ended up meeting the group of people she knew were not good for her. They called her over for a chat, Jenny turned around and said:

"Sorry I can't, I have to go."

"Ah come on Jenny, come over for a chat here's a few tablets and a smoke of a joint for you."

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That's when Jenny started back on drugs and that's when life got worse and she continued using. On the guilt of relapsing, Jenny didn't want to live her life anymore: she wasn't happy, she just felt like giving up and she couldn't find a way out, the hole she was in was getting dug deeper and deeper.

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Paula's Story

By Paula

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My name is Lisa, I'm forty-four years old, I came into prison November 26th 2023.

I received 8 months for selling drugs. At that time I was an addict. I felt I had no choice as I needed to keep my habit going.

I got caught and I ended up doing six months when I got full TR, I was let out of prison with no hostel, so I ended up back on the streets. I was so lost that I ended up on the drink. I know now the drink doesn't suit me as I'm back in prison again. I received 6 months for public orders, in a way I am glad I'm back, as the streets are too hard. I was always alone drinking by myself, but when I heard music outside the pubs I would start dancing and enjoying myself.If I have to say so myself, I am a good dancer.

As the weeks passed with no sleep I was going through sleep psychosis and kept doing silly things like drinking in the shops when I felt sick.

I must have got arrested every-day which I didn't mind as I was able to sleep in a Garda station, plus I got fed. I did not realise that all this was adding up.

So yeah, six months back in the Joy. It's not too bad as I'm getting on better and my mental health now is good as i'm back on the meds.

I got put into "enhanced" last Tuesday so that made my day: my only hope when I do get out is that I will have a hostel so I can get my life back, then I can focus on my kids. The one thing about me, I won't make the same mistakes again. I feel this will be my last time in prison, if I get the right help. There's always time for change.

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My Children

By Anne

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My Children By Anne

You are the best laugh
You are my best friends
Sometimes you look after me
More than I look after you

You ask me am I alright
Even when I am down and out
With a hot cup of tea
You always bring me around

I love ye all individually
You've got your own personalities
Moody and Understanding
Spoiled Rotten and Loving

You always bring me around
With a hot cup of tea

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Shauna

By Anne

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Shauna By Anne

Woman. Old. 38

Brown hair, brown eyes

Sallow skin. Tall and thin.

Dublin. Crumlin.

A few old scars on her face

One across her eyebrow
and one on her cheekbone.
(The scars have a story).

Hard life. Drug abuse
and alcohol from an early age 12.

I looked at my life at 38 and realised I didn't want to continue anymore. I looked at people coming into prison in the situation I was in. I don't want my life to be like that any more. I wanted a fresh start after prison. Since I've been in prison I have managed to take myself off drugs.

I've been away from my children for so long.
Thank god they were not taken into care,
that's the only good thing.

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CREATE THE MOMENT

STORIES BY THE WOMEN OF THE DOCHAS CENTRE



FIGHTING WORDS

The write to right.

SOLAS

learning works

ALL

Adult Literacy for Life



Rialtas na hÉireann

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Arna chomhchistiú ag an Aontas Eorpach

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