

MEMORY SWINGS



A Collection of Life-Poems
by
Cleo McLoughlin

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Thanks to Martin and Sara who believed.

Mark and Eileen who read my poems and
served me lovely food.

To my four kids who now understand me
(I think!)

To Sean O'Healai who typed all the early
work from my scrappy longhand.

To Pam and Fran who have always been
there for me.

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Memory Swings: A Collection of Life-Poems

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

The poems you read here stretch across a large chunk of my life. They are influenced mostly by the West of Ireland landscape and sometimes by the landscape of my childhood in the North of England.

In 1994 I worked in Rwanda. Some poems in this collection are influenced by the experience.

As a child my mother told stories of Donegal, her dream was to return there. There is a longing in those who have roots here, something that won't be denied and calls us home.

I am one of the privileged ones who made that journey and try to write with total honesty about what I see and feel.

Cleo Mcloughlin



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FAMILY



AYE I'M GRAND

White fisted on the stair rail
rasp of breath under the low watt bulb,
chin suspended over chest
slow steps upwards.

Are you ok? I ask.

How many people can put such disdain
into the three words

Aye I'm grand.

I'm fifteen again, trapped in his dislike
or perhaps it is indifference.

Here is the man who climbed mountains in Bavaria
drove a tank in North Africa,
read the Iliad in Yorkshire and watched cricket.

Slow to show concern, love or anger
I lived under the wasteland of his eyes,
never knowing how he felt
as a Desert Rat or mountaineer
or about me.

His faltering steps are a Via Dolorosa
for our lost years
his empty face a dust cover
on the pages of my life.

INNOCENCE

I day - dreamed through the school window and French verbs
to a place where I could hear my voice, strong and beautiful.
Most days I could be seen on the canal bank
sleep-walking my way to school,
invincible with an air guitar lead singer in a band.
The air and trees were shrouded in the smell
of wet wool and chemicals;
tall black chimneys belched toxic smoke that faded the sky,
gave the eye of the sun a hazy cataract.
I was lost in the beauty of it all,
an innocent unfamiliar with any other landscape.
My first love was that canal,
it's Viking treasures had given our town it's name,
it gave me the space to dream.
The stinging smell of those dark waters followed me
down through the years
and into all the meadow grasses of Mayo.

POST WORLD WAR TWO

There's no money in scribbling they said
and for sure there's sod-all in paint
unless you brush it on a wall.
No money for a back street kid
to indulge in four years of art
and with shit for brains the bank is no good at all.
There's the woollen mill
from where the Cut gets it's smell*
and there's plenty of room down the pit.
Women in turbans weft and warp hoarse
thin men with pigeons and dust induced cough.
The rent man and ruddle stone Woodbines and tea,
that's what's in store if you don't take a stand
shake off tradition and set yourself free.

* 'Cut' is a North of England word for a canal

DAUGHTER

My daughter is a Bay Filly
kicking and bucking against the fences
put there to protect her.
Snorts her disapproval at the shoes I chose
then tosses her mane and trots off
to exchange breathy secrets with her friend.
She will jump every wall and fence for fun,
energy to burn
until there is a mundane task like learning rules
to make life easier and safer.
Head high she will run, bit between her teeth
return only if you call softly enough.