

*a woman's part  
in the conflict*

**some personal reflections  
on our paths into activism**



First published in 2007 by the Community Arts Forum  
15 Church Street, Belfast BT1 1PG  
Tel: 028 9024 2910  
Email: hfloyd@caf.ie  
Web: www.caf.ie

All rights reserved

© The Authors

A Woman's *Part* gratefully acknowledges  
the financial assistance of  
The Community Foundation for Northern Ireland

Cover Design: Caragh O'Donnell

Printed by: Nova Print

The writings in this publication reflect the personal opinions and experiences of the authors and are entirely independent of the Community Arts Forum.

## Contents

Introduction	6
Rosena Brown	7
Sarah Copeland	9
Sonia Copeland	12
Barbara Lynn	17
Geraldine McKee	25
Róisín McKee	29
Fiona Magennis	32
Rita Murray	36
Deirdre O'Hare	39
Clara Reilly	42
Jackie Upton	48
Collective pieces	49

## **A Note on the Contents**

The topics we covered are reflected in each woman's writing, so it may be of help to the reader to know what these were:

### **Where I come from**

Participants began by sharing experiences of growing up and expressing a sense of place, people, threatening events and social upheaval

### **Labels**

The common experience of labelling and being labelled was explored; partly to practise writing short, non-rhyming poems, and partly to reflect on the double impact of being branded in both sectarian and sexist terms as a woman

### **Out of the Darkness, Press Photographers' Exhibition**

We visited the above exhibition at the Ormeau Baths Gallery and several poems were written in response to some of the photographs or because of things which they re-awakened

### **Defining Moments**

Participants were asked to home in on moments significant for them because of the impact they had on their own lives

### **My Path**

The journey of each woman's life through the conflict emerged as a path, with many twists and turns. Each woman was asked to consider and write about that path

### **Lost and found**

In conclusion, participants were asked to weigh up the losses and gains of their journey, in personal and general terms.

The writings are arranged under each author in alphabetical order, with some of the collective pieces written for the performance at the end. Where a piece has co-authorship, I have placed it where the subject seemed most appropriate. No pressure was placed on any individual to disclose anything she did not wish to. Many thanks to those who have begun to fill in the gaps.

Ruth Carr

## Introduction

This book came out of a course run by the Community Arts Forum (CAF), set up to explore the part played by women as activists during the conflict years here in the North/Northern Ireland. By the term "activists" we mean women who embraced an active role outside of their usual role in response to "the Troubles", such as protestor, campaigner, community activist, combatant, law enforcer, politician, lobbyist, trade union activist or human rights activist.

The course offered women from different cultural, religious and political backgrounds the space to meet together and reflect on their experiences through writing and drama. We focused mainly on those experiences which led each participant to embrace an active role.

For some, this was their first opportunity to express their experiences through these art forms. For all of the women, as you can imagine, it has been both challenging and emotional; opening doors which are sometimes safer kept shut.

These writings, along with the performance which the women put together, give some idea of the tremendous impact of that time upon each woman's life and how each came to choose the path she took. It has begun an ongoing process, one which has required courage and honesty, and we hope that the women have developed a taste for drama and creative writing.

This little book is just a beginning to the journey of revisiting and recognising the part played by women activists over the last 35 years. Unfortunately the imbalance of voices is evidence of a familiar difficulty experienced by projects such as this one to recruit and retain participants from loyalist backgrounds. Yet, without this risky process of reflection and exchange across the board the walls which still divide us in so many ways will not come down. This is part of the real peace process and we are indebted to each woman who claimed her part in it, whether she came just some of the way or the whole distance.

Heather Floyd, Niamh Flanagan, Orla McKeagney and Ruth Carr

## *Rosena Brown*



### I come from

I come from the last remnants of World War Two; with the dust not yet settled on the empty spaces where life and love and homes were elevated in a mushroom cloud; making way for an adventure playground of derelict houses, where ghost stories and buried treasure could be found.

### Words given, then pieced together

In my experience the pattern of life changes as the world around us changes. When I was a girl, a tributary of the Lagan flowed at the back of our houses. The green shoots of daffodils, not yet flowered, lined the banks, the tadpoles spawning - the patterns of life changing for all.

### Fenian

Never thought  
This was a derogatory name  
My da always sang  
About the bold fenian men  
So I didn't mind being called fenian  
But they didn't know that and I didn't tell them  
I just held my head up. I was a bold fenian woman  
Whatever that was.

## After the photographic exhibition

(The Dead Corporals' March 1988)

Brutal

Up close makes this personal

Not just a photograph

A reality

More casualties of war

The aftermath

Even more personal

Personal friends caught up in the mob

Innocent but guilty by association

Life in prison

More casualties of war

## Brits

Breaking bones

And wrecking homes

Pawns in bigger ponds

## Memories

Nostalgia and sentimental tears

At songs I haven't heard for years

Memories of days gone by

Of sounds and smells that make me cry

The good ones always make me smile

And even laugh a little while.

But the bad ones often keep me awake

Cause me too much heartache

Cause the wounds to open wide

Letting bitterness deep inside

Come bubbling up to wreck my brain

Cause me pain, turn me insane.

## *Sarah Copeland*



### Taking part

I'm here because my mum asked me did I want to take part. I wasn't sure at first because I didn't know who I would meet and how I would feel, but I came out of curiosity and to see if my views and beliefs were shared by others; and also to try and understand and have a better knowledge of other people's views.

I also felt that the loyalist/protestant communities don't feel confident enough to come forward and express their concerns and opinions. So I thought it would be a challenge and a learning curve for me personally. Then I can take my experiences back to my community.

### I remember

- **I remember** the year that a parade wasn't allowed to go through an area and we, plus some neighbours, blocked the top of our street with a digger.
- **I remember** my brother's first day at school and he was jumping on my bed and split his head open. He was 5 and I got the blame.
- **I remember** my very first time going to see the bands and my dad was the master of the District. My uncle was dressed as King Billy and I went in the horse and cart with him. I was 5.
- **I remember** the day I found out that my dad got elected to the Assembly. I was at home with my brother and we were watching the TV but the coverage wasn't the best so we took it in turns to phone my mum, who was starting to get annoyed. We were so nervous but excited at the same time. When we finally got the telephone call at 1.00 a.m. we both cried and my brother hugged me. We screamed so hard the neighbours looked out the windows.
- **I remember** when my mum got cancer and we were told she would die. I remember barely seeing my baby brother, as my granny looked after him. I had to go to my friend's house every day after school and I remember praying every night with my dad over fast food, because he was a bad cook.

## What did you learn at school today?

Teacher: *(writes on blackboard facing the audience)*  
Sinéad: What's that sir?  
Teacher: 12th July, Sinéad, the big date of the Marching Season.  
That's when Orangemen march to the Field in bowler hats  
and sashes to get pissed.  
Jane: That's not true, sir. My granda never drank in his life and he  
was in the Orange Order.  
Mary: Sure they all get drunk as skunks.  
Cathy: And they don't march, sir, they walk!  
Sinéad: They do so! They march up and down, up and down!  
Cathy: And how'd you know?  
Sinéad: I know they march everywhere they're not wanted!  
Jane: You know nothin'!  
Mary: I know you's are marchers and drinkers.  
Cathy: Shut up, ye mingers!  
Sinéad: March, march, march, march - you's march all year long.  
Jane: That's our tradition!  
Mary: We don't want you's marching down our roads.  
Cathy: We'll march where we like.  
Sinéad: I'll knock yer head off yer shoulders!  
Jane: Fenian bastards!  
Mary: Orange bastards!

*(Scripted for the performance, based on Sarah's experience)*

## Hun

Union Jack  
Proud to be  
That's not my religion  
I'm just a protestant  
Not a hun.

## Don't label me

I want to be free,  
Free to be, free to go,  
Free to feel.

What will I be?  
Where will I go?  
What do I feel?  
Who knows?  
I want to be free.

## Funeral

Two policemen  
Doing their job  
Children's questions, children's tears  
Then a ceasefire  
Why did they die?

## Decision time

A moment when I had to make a decision which could have affected the course of my life was when I was asked if I wanted to take part in a Love Ulster rally in Dublin. This was a rally where victims groups protested at the loss of their loved ones. We held posters and banners and photographs of people who had lost their lives in the Troubles. I felt this was something I personally had to do and also felt that I had a duty as a young person to support the people who had lost their loved ones.



## *Sonia Copeland*

### Once upon a time

Once upon a time a baby was born to William and Anne. She was called Sonia, who was named after a Russian trapeze artist. They lived in a small town called Toome. Anne stayed at home to look after her new baby, while William went to work as the local policeman.

They didn't live in Toome too long, as William was under threat from the IRA. They moved around quite a lot whilst Sonia was growing up. Over their 20 years together, William and Anne had two more girls and one boy. All the moving about eventually took its toll on their marriage, and both parted ways on relatively good terms.

Sonia followed in her father's footsteps, she adored her father, and was very much his girl. Later she was asked out by Michael who was a dashing soldier in the Ulster Defence Regiment. Three weeks later they were engaged, in a whirlwind romance and married a year later. They lived happily ever after and had two beautiful children.

They have been through rough times together, but have grown stronger together as a couple: he's her rock and she his. Sonia always thought no one could match her father, but Michael has made the mark.

## Why a black bastard?

Was there something wrong with my eyes?  
Was I colour blind?  
Were they colour blind?  
My uniform was green, silly,  
Some shouted, some whispered.  
I'm not a bastard, I have a dad.  
Even out of the green, names were called;  
Is there a smell?  
I only wanted to help everyone.  
Religion wasn't an issue to me.  
They don't even know me as a person.  
Why a black bastard?

## Untitled

Innocent  
Children, babies  
Blown to pieces  
Because of their religion  
Sick.

Babies  
Shankill, 1971  
Blown to pieces  
Because of their religion  
Shameful.

## Tears

The look of distress.  
Why?  
Because his dad wore a uniform.  
Because he supported the Rule of Law.  
That could have been me.  
I cried every night when I was small  
In case my dad didn't come home.  
The child was the same age as my young sister  
When I was shot whilst on duty.  
Can't bear to think how she would have coped.  
Can't begin to feel what this wee boy is feeling.

## The day my life changed

I was 18 years of age, when I joined the Royal Ulster Constabulary in May of 1976. I joined because I wanted to work within the community, as my father had done before me. I looked up to my dad, he was a lovely man, and I wanted him to be proud of me.

After my training, I was stationed at Hasting Street, which was situated between the Falls and the Shankill. Because I was a woman, my section sergeant kept me indoors operating the telephones, and dealing with members of the public at the desk. I hated it because I wanted to be on patrol, and felt my sergeant was being sexist.

Travelling to work every day, I had to wear a disguise, as I had to walk from the city centre. In those days it was very dangerous. I remember one day walking past the black taxis in North Street, when one of the drivers shouted to the others:

"She's a fuckin' peeler!"

I started to run, pursued by a few fellas, but I knew the area fairly well and was able to reach the station in safety. I informed the sergeant that in future the Land Rover would pick me up in the city centre, if I was not able to get a lift to work.

On that particular day, I was about to take up my usual role as station duty officer, when one of the other officers reported in sick. There was a special patrol in operation, to tour the area and my sergeant decided to put me out on patrol, with him covering my duties. I was thrilled to get outdoors for a change, performing ordinary police work, which I hungered to do.

Whilst travelling along the Springfield Road, I was sitting in the rear of the open-doored Land Rover with my friend and colleague, Arnie, seated opposite. It was a lovely sunny day, and the Springfield Road was full of shoppers.

Suddenly our vehicle was hit with heavy submachine gunfire. As I got down onto the floor for cover, Arnie was injured around the mouth and face. He dropped his weapon, and temporarily passed out. As I lifted the weapon I looked out of the rear of the Land Rover and will never forget the shoppers laughing at our fate.

Arnie regained consciousness and as I helped him up onto his seat, I felt a burning sensation on the left side of my neck. I realised that a bullet had skimmed past me, passed the driver's arm, and hit the brakes. In those days the gates of Springfield Road station were mechanically opened and closed, but were very slow. I remember the blind panic in the Land Rover, hoping that the gates would open in time for us to free-wheel into safety, as the brakes were completely out of action. We narrowly managed to manoeuvre into the station grounds. Had we not been able to gain entrance, I dread to think what would have happened to us.

I was off work with stress for a few months. Arnie was shot a few weeks later, getting into the rear of an army pig. He subsequently died in another incident a few months after that. He was a happy, lovely young man, and I will never forget the comradeship and friendship we had together. I still remember the look and laughter of the shoppers in the street on that day, and still have nightmares of that terrible day.

I joined the police to protect life and property, because I loved helping and working with everyone. Colour sex or religion did not matter to me, and I was determined to work on, in the career which I had chosen. A few months later I became the first police officer, along with a male member, to patrol the Divis flats as a community police officer. Then I moved to Lisburn Road, which used to be called 'sleepy valley', though it also had its fair share of bombing. I simply loved working with the community, and although I only stayed in the police for 12 years, I still work within the community to this day, wherever I feel there is a need, as a voluntary worker.

## A bit of skirt

I remember being out on patrol around the Dundonald area, in a Land Rover on a cold winter evening. The rain was pelting down and the Land Rover was full, with both full-time and part-time male officers. I was in charge that particular evening. Whilst travelling around the area, I was aware of the talk among the men about another female officer. The talk was distasteful to listen to, especially because I knew this woman quite well.

I asked the driver to take me back to the station. On arrival, the men thought that we were having a tea-break. I informed them to stay put as I was only stopping to get a message. I went into the station and looked out some old police skirts - five altogether. I walked out to the Land Rover, opened the rear doors and threw the skirts into the back, saying:

"If you're going to get on like a pack of bitches, you should be wearing these skirts!"

Their mouths dropped open. There was a hushed silence for about an hour. As I was in charge of the patrol, I decided they would perform some road stops in the pouring rain, to let them see that I would not tolerate their behaviour. That was the first time I really spoke out against behaviour that I found unacceptable. Thinking about it now, I don't know where I got the courage to stand up for myself in a male dominated force.

From then on, I was determined to stand firm on something that I believed in. I was able to perform tasks within the police force just as well as the men, if not sometimes better.

## Why do I cry?

I cried so hard.  
Why so sad?  
It's a day of joint demands.  
So they say.  
It could have been joint demands long ago.

Why so sad?  
I remember the colleagues, the friendships lost  
Through all the mayhem of our past.  
The families that are left without their loved ones.  
The memories I will never forget.

So why so sad?  
We are no longer living in the past.  
We have a new future.  
So they say.  
Then why so sad?

Tears of sadness but also joy.  
Joy that we are moving forward in peace today.  
Sadness that it had to happen in a bloody way.  
Time will heal. Time will tell.  
We must, at all cost, remember them all,  
All those lost, remember them well.

## Lost and Found

I lost my Grandfather,  
I lost his love and company.  
I lost my friend in netball,  
She was blown to pieces in Newry,  
I lost all understanding of why this should happen,  
I lost my faith in religion and in moving on.  
I lost my breast to cancer.  
I found a determination to move forward.  
I found new friends, but they will not take Ivy's place.  
I found a new determination to follow my career.  
I got a new boob and I found everlasting love,  
But most of all, my best friend, my husband.

## *Barbara Lynn*



### I come from

The foot of a mountain that is called Black but is in fact the loveliest shade of green you have ever seen.

From a home replicated a hundred times in bright pastel colours with little squares of gardens and doors of vivid reds and blues.

From a big, loving family and a big, loving community.

From lean days and flush days.

From hand-me-down clothes and home made toys.

From sing-songs and parties.

From shared despair and worry and history lessons learnt at my mother's knee and in my growing up.

From a time full of fear and the closeness that it brought.

From a city divided, a city of war.

### Because I was a much loved child

I was a much loved child. I got loads of love and attention from my parents, brothers and sisters. I was brought up to love, not to hate. To be tolerant, not biased. To be kind, not cruel.

But growing up through the Troubles challenged my upbringing in so many ways. Everything that was taught was being contradicted daily. How can you not feel hate when people close to you are being murdered just because they are catholics? When you are bombarded on the news every night with blatant, unjust sentences given to catholics compared to those given to loyalist offenders. How can you be tolerant when you can't even walk down your own street without being called a whore or a slag or fenian scum by the British soldiers who lived in my school? Or when you can't get a job even though you have all the qualifications, because you are a catholic?

But you can't blame every protestant for the actions of a few. You can't hate a whole army because some of its soldiers were nasty. You have to put yourself in other people's shoes to try and understand how they feel or why they act the way they do. My mum always says if you are nice to people it makes it harder for them to be nasty. So I try to be tolerant, I try to be kind and I try to love. Because, I was a much loved child.

## Scum

not me  
but it hurts  
I will walk tall  
- Brits -

## Dear Brit

Yes you solider,  
Who occupy our land,  
With your flak jacket and radio  
And your big gun in your hand.  
You that look at me like dirt  
You stepped on in the street.  
You that make my blood boil  
Every time we meet.  
My name is Barbara.  
Not whore or slut or slag,  
Not stupid fenian bastard,  
Not ugly fenian hag  
It's Barbara, it's not hard to say  
It's really rather nice  
And if you listen carefully  
I'll give you some advice.  
You see you could die at anytime  
Though it won't be by my hands.  
After all you are a soldier  
You terrorise this land  
And when you're lying bleeding  
And begging to be saved,  
Do you really think this ugly whoring slag  
Will give you aid?  
Sticks and stones can break your bones  
But your names really hurt me  
I'm Irish, proud and beautiful  
You're just a Brit, you see.

## Our street

Whistles blow, bin lids rattle  
Noises, noises like a herd of cattle.  
The soldiers are in, the soldiers are in  
Off come the lids of the bins  
Rattle, rattle, bang, bang, bang -  
They would burst your eardrums,  
Well, they nearly burst mine.  
The street is deserted,  
The street has gone quiet  
And I hear in the distance  
The sound of a riot,  
The shrill of the whistles,  
The banging of tin -  
Our street when the soldiers pass through.

## The ring

"You look after that," my granny said. "But you can't wear it or everyone will know you are a catholic."

She pressed the ring into my hands. I looked at it closely. It was silver and quite big with a harp on it.

"I wouldn't want to wear it," I said. "It's horrible!"

"Horrible? Horrible? I'll tell you what's horrible - the place where your cousin who made this ring is locked up in a cage. What's horrible is the fact that Willie Whitelaw can lock up innocent people without crime or trial. Horrible is when people are lifted from their houses or street and interned like animals indefinitely."

"This ring," she said, holding it up to the light as if it was a precious stone, tears welling up in her eyes, "was carved from an Irish 10p. The harp is cut out and the rest is made into the ring bit. Handmade with primitive tools, a symbol of our resistance."

"Really," I said as I looked at the ring in a new light. I examined it closely and felt overwhelmed by its history.

"I will treasure it," I told my granny.

"Just don't wear it or you will be shot!"

## Billy or Taig

*Are you a Billy or Taig?*

*Do you support the IRA or Craig?*

There were four boys standing around

In the dead of the night there wasn't a sound.

They asked me my address, then my name -

They were Prods, that was plain.

*I said I'm a Catholic and proud of it too,*

*And I'll not deny it, not even to you.*

A boy spoke up, *So it's a Fenian you be,*

*Well your religion means nothing to me.*

*I said Thanks very much for the friendly wee chat,*

*I'll be on my way now and left them at that.*

But walking away I was cursing them all

I walked down the road and climbed over the wall,

The wall that divided the Prods from the Taigs,

The followers of the Provos from the followers of Craig.

## The griddle

Mummy had a big griddle. Well, she needed a big one, she had a big family.

Three or 4 times a week the griddle came out. Pancakes flew off that griddle every 30 seconds to be grabbed, smothered in real butter and sprinkled with sugar. When you tried to eat them, the melted butter and sugar mix ran all over your hands. But the warm, sweet taste on your tongue was heaven. The griddle also supplied us with potato and soda farls and potato apple.

My sister was in the Civil Rights Movement and one day she and her friends set off on a march from Belfast to Derry. The B Specials attacked them at Burntollet and they had to turn back. They all arrived back at our house angry and frightened. Their voices were raised - all educated young men and women, disillusioned. It had been a peaceful march which was attacked and stopped.

Well, Mummy brought them all in and calmed them down. Then out came the griddle and the pancakes were flowing and we sat around and watched the news and talked about what had happened well into the night while Mummy's griddle stood cooling at the back door.

## Eileen

Although she was small, she was brave.  
Although she was young, she was wise  
beyond her eighteen years.  
She had a big heart that loved,  
A tongue of sharpened steel,  
A beguiling smile and a bold, contagious laugh.  
She didn't sit back meekly when friends were interned,  
While her home was raided, while she was bullied at work.

She spoke out against injustice, stood up to bullies.  
No one doubted her feeling towards the soldiers  
As she heckled them in the street,  
Standing up to their insults and hurling some of her own.  
She was Eileen Doherty, braver than brave, larger than life.

And now I am being told she is dead.  
Shot by loyalists from the UFF.  
Shot, killed, murdered, gone forever.  
My brother is gripping my shoulders from behind.  
He is telling me the news in a slow, sad voice,  
But I am not listening.  
I can only hear the drone of his voice,  
His deep sadness, his concern for me.  
I only came in to get a towel and now I am frozen,  
stuck in the hot press, not able to move,  
My brain a mass of jumbled thoughts,  
Memories flashing in front of my eyes.

Her laughter, her smile, her teasing and slagging.  
We'd lost her pay cheque on Friday night.  
The whole street was out looking for it.  
She went mad and then she cried.  
But when we cried she laughed and hugged us,  
She told us not to worry.  
She fought with a neighbour that last night  
sticking up for her wee sister,  
On her way to baby-sit on the other side of town.  
Now she is dead and I don't understand.  
"They lifted her by the hair," my brother is saying.  
"Shot her seven times in the head at point blank range.

A long, agonising moan escapes my body  
"Are you all right, Babsie?"  
He grips my shoulders tighter as they heave  
Up and down with every wrenching sob.  
"Are you all right, kid?" He puts his arm around me  
As I try to hide deeper among the towels.  
"You need to go to Anne, you need to be with your friend."

But how can I face her, what do I say?  
What comfort can I give, I'm only thirteen.  
I turn to look at him, "Why?" I cry.  
"Because this is Ireland, she's a catholic  
And they're a pack of bastards."  
He hugs me tightly until my crying stops.

## Shoes

At Twenty Two my street,  
Under a sideboard with four stumpy legs  
Two shoes sit gathering dust  
Never to be worn again.  
Big clumpy shoes.  
Four inch platforms, six inch heels.  
Size three, cost four pounds -  
Eileen's favourites.  
Four foot ten, size eight,  
Childlike figure, childlike face.  
Aged eighteen, almost nineteen,  
The shoes made her feel her age.  
Shot dead in seventy three,  
October first, one in the morning.  
She ran from her killers  
But tripped on her shoes.  
Four seconds, she was caught.  
Two men, two guns.  
Seven bullets to her head  
Two seconds, she was dead.  
Six sisters, one brother,  
One father, one mother.  
Hundreds of neighbours, relations and friends,  
Thousands of mass cards, millions of tears.  
One more victim to add to the list,  
One more family, counting the cost.  
Two dusty shoes, never moved, never touched  
Daily reminder of an innocent life lost.

## Yippy

*a monologue*

It was a cold, clear November night. We were messing about on the building site. The soldiers came and we ran away. But Yippy got stuck. He was being crushed between a trailer and a dumper truck. We heard him moaning and ran back to help.

The soldiers just stood there pointing their guns while we struggled to release him. We begged for their help, for a torch; to phone for an ambulance. They turned their back on us "fenian scum".

When the ambulance came, it came too late. Yippy was dead, just 14 years old.

A soldier lost it - threw down his gun, pulled off his jacket, and screamed: "Look what we've done! I'm ashamed to be English, ashamed to be a soldier!" He got in the ambulance and went with Yippy's body.

Yippy was buried. I was part of his guard of honour. He was buried a hero who died on active service. Lies, all lies! We were vandals. We shouldn't have been on that building site.

After that I left the Fianna, I took my own path.

## A Woman's Part

**A** group of women all ages

**W**riting about our past

**O**range and Green mixed

**M**emories awakened

**A**cting out on stage

**N**arrating stories and poems

**S**haring our histories

**P**atiently listening

**A**cknowledging pain

**R**especting each other

**T**roubles revisited.

## *Geraldine McKee*



### We women

Forced by events  
To step out of our normal role.  
Women who only wanted to work,  
Rear our families and live  
All the dreams we dreamed  
As we were growing up.

Dreams crushed when conflict  
Visited its death and destruction.  
We ordinary women  
Who wanted ordinary things  
Soon became extraordinary women  
Who did extraordinary things.

### She listens

In the still of the night  
What was that?  
She peers out the window  
Was that running feet?  
Fenian bastards!  
Flames and more flames  
Take flight!

she listens  
she listens  
she listens  
she listens  
she listens  
no more listening  
no more listening

## C S Gas

A very strange name  
Maybe some kind of war game?  
We all stupidly thought the same  
Soon found out that we were the game,  
Scared faces at every window frame.  
But now hopefully we have reached the end  
Of lies and poison, perhaps we can mend?

## The Twelfth

A shy little girl on the factory floor  
Afraid to say boo to a goose.  
Bunting and decorations went up on machines  
And party songs reached fever pitch  
The Pope was kicked all over the place  
King Billy was the order of the day.  
She was quite tall, she could reach up -  
"Here love, put that up there."  
"I'm not doing that! Put it up yourself."

No longer a shy little girl on the factory floor.

## Friends of a different colour

I met my friend way back when there weren't any Troubles. She had five brothers and one sister; I had five sisters and one brother. I stayed at her house in Whiteabbey and she stayed at my house in Whiterock. We shared clothes and lots of secrets. We were very close pals. There was never any mention of class or creed or colour. None of that nonsense.

We lost contact in the late sixties with the outbreak of the Troubles. I often wonder, if we had first met during them, could we have been such close friends? Would we have risked it?

## Moments in time

I don't know the moment that decided my fate.  
Was it when I lost my home again?  
Was it when my husband had to leave another job?  
Was it when I knew so much pain and despair?  
Was it when my family thought it better to leave home?  
Was it when utter desperation was all around?  
Was it when I felt like an inferior form of being?  
Was it when death came to the door?  
Was it when the old folk said, "Oh no, not again"?  
Was it when the phrase 'even a worm will turn' entered my head?  
I don't know the moment that decided my fate.  
The blame lies with the state that created this hate.

## After all this

It's hard to take in,  
After the flaring of tempers  
And all the din.  
The turning of the tide,  
The swallowing of pride,  
The big men and the little men  
Have decided to talk.  
The Green and the Orange  
Are mixing at last.  
Look forward to war -  
But only of words  
A battle of wits is surely forecast.

## Lost

What have we really lost?  
Was it property, was it jobs?  
What was it we really lost?  
Was it naivety? Was it identity?  
What have we really lost?  
Was it family? Was it lives?  
What was it we really lost?  
Can we ever count the cost?

## Found

We found we could have ideals.  
We found we could have identity.  
We found we could have education.  
We found we could have the vote.  
We found we could have civil rights.  
We found we could have hope.  
But at what price?

## *Róisín McKee*



### Granny McKee

Wee Granny McKee, what a character she was: four foot nothing, Eleven children she reared - nine boys, two girls. Being devoted Catholics, her children gave her forty grandchildren whom she idolised so much. I always remember Christmas shopping was hectic. She would bring me with her to buy each of the forty grandchildren a jumper for Christmas and when we got home it was so confusing, her and I trying to figure out who owned what jumper. Thinking about it now, it was hilarious.

She also had her share of troubles. Five of her sons served time in jail and each week she would visit them, bringing a different grandchild, travelling as far as Portlaoise. I remember being wakened at three in the morning, pitch black and leaving at four to travel on the bus to Portlaoise to visit my uncle.

Another memory of my granny was watching her scrubbing her front path and a Brit kneeling under her window sill, asking her how my uncle was doing in Portlaoise. He called my uncle by an English name and, of course, my granny being my granny, he was soon soaked in dirty water and told to take himself off. It makes me smile when I think about it now.

One of my funniest memories was to do with my grandpa's habit of cooking up the meat parcel my granny had in for the whole week when he came in from the pub. She decided she'd had enough of this. I woke up one morning to find I was sharing the bed not just with my granny but with 6 lbs of meat! "He'll not be cooking any more meat parcels!"

Being the caring person she was, forty grandchildren to look after wasn't enough for her, she also had three dogs. She would ask me to go to the shop to get some dog food and then suddenly remember, "Oh aye, and get that oul' lad a soda farl." (The oul' lad being my grandpa). So funny when I think about it now.

I also remember my grandpa coming in from the pub for his tea and hoping to go back to the pub after it. That was, until he fell asleep and Granny and I put the clock forward, so when he woke up, he thought the pub would be shut. So many stories like these keep my wee Granny McKee vivid in my memory.

## Visiting

*a monologue*

"Up you get!" Granny says. "Need to catch the bus." It is pitch black, four in the morning, and we are on our way to Portlaoise Jail to see my Uncle Brian.

On the bus I catch up on my sleep. Then my granny waking me again: "Come on. The nuns will have our breakfast ready." I remember the smell of the scones and milk.

Then back on the bus and arriving at the jail. Through so many gates. Then brought into a room. And my granny shouting: "She's only a bloody child!" at the screw that was searching me.

We're allowed into a locked cubicle and there he is, waving and smiling: Uncle Brian. I look up to see a screw on a really tall chair watching and listening to everything

"Time's up" they call. Back we go into the room for another full search. Granny raging again: "She's only a bloody child!" Then back on the bus home.

## Death of the Innocents

Here we go, Mummy in pieces, crying.  
16th September once again,  
A bad day, bad memories.  
Twins, but who was to know.  
Yes, she was big, eight months gone,  
But one was hiding behind the other,

Eight months, protecting her wee brother.  
Never got a chance to take their first breath.  
The Brits attacked, the butt of the gun  
Dug into her swelling womb.  
Too soon the babies came, one in the  
Corridor, one in the delivery room.

They both survived for a few brief hours  
Then laid to rest in the Grave of the Innocents.  
I never had a sister to care for,  
To fight with, share with, confide in;  
No wee brother growing up  
To side with me, to protect.

Sinead and John both under the ground.  
My mother fought, wrote letters, made complaints.  
All ignored, unanswered. Two more innocent victims.  
Unrecorded, unhallowed.  
My wee sister and brother, never seen, never held.  
Never given a chance; murdered by the Brits.



## *Fiona Magennis*

### Where I come from

My dad was an orphaned country boy,  
my mum a mill girl who would raise thirteen.  
We lived in an avenue of white pebble-dash houses,  
trim hedges bordering neat, little gardens,  
where the neighbours always spoke  
always watched out for one another.  
The Black Mountain watched over us children  
as we played cribby, hopscotch and skips -  
fun-filled summer days, the pungent smell of beer hops  
from the brewery hanging thick in the air.  
We were blissfully unaware of the conflict brewing.

### Questions, questions, questions

What's your address?  
The soldier asked  
Your date of birth?  
The soldier asked.

Questions, questions, questions  
Where are ya going?  
What are ya at?  
I'm getting sick of all that.

I'm going to school  
I'm in P.7  
Oh, and you want my age  
I've just turned eleven.

The soldier glared down at me  
A sudden change in his mood  
A few days in Castlereagh  
would do you some good.  
- Soldier no, don't take me there  
And I prayed to God to hear my prayer.

## Invasion

I can hear Saracens approach as I lie in my bed -

Stomach is churning, heart fills with dread.  
Invasive, intrusive, English accents draw near -  
Heart is pounding, filling with fear.  
Thuds, kicks at the door -  
On time as usual, it's just gone four.  
Get out of your fucking beds! is your wake-up call.  
Stay where you are! - Dad's advice to us all.  
Black hobnail boots climbing the stairs  
Mummy quietly saying her prayers.  
They flood the house like a tide closing over -  
Shouting, swearing, searching soldiers,  
Swarming like bees around the honey pot -  
Human rights, Civil rights? Do they exist? I think not!  
Upstairs, downstairs, the garden front and back,  
All scrutinised, terrorised, enthusiasm you don't lack.  
Go, British soldiers, go do your job,  
Storm into our home like a lynching mob!  
Mother's pride and joy ripped, torn apart  
Beating her son, breaking her heart.

I can hear Saracens approach as I lie in my bed.

## Sick I said

So, where were you yesterday?  
Sick I said.  
She'll never know where I had to go.  
Time for the monthly visit  
Trying to remember all the news,  
Ignore the taunts of her majesty's screws.

## Fenian

Yes you!  
Clean your house -  
Heard of the pill?  
Lazy.

## A photograph of fear

Soldiers snatch  
I'm too slow  
I'm 8 years old  
Caught.

## White line picket

I was fourteen years old and in secondary school during the hunger strike protest for political status to be restored to political prisoners. Being a member of a republican youth group I was one of the organisers of a white line picket to be held on the Andersonstown Road. We wanted this particular protest to represent the young people, enabling them to show their support and give them a voice. During break-time at school I put posters up on the walls giving details of the protest i.e. assembly point at the school and the time, so we could all walk the short distance together to where the protest was to be held.

After school at 3.30pm a crowd of young people had showed up and we all walked together down the hill to the protest. We were all given a poster to hold and we stood a few feet from each other along the white line in the middle of the road. The scene was powerful. Young people, most of us in school uniforms, showing our support. We were peacefully protesting and the sounds of the car horns beeping in support told us we were being heard.

## My ma's big teapot

It sat majestically on our gas cooker  
The shiny stainless steel scrubbed diligently  
Its lid placed on top like a crown  
The tea leaves bubbled like anxious servants.

Invited to all the gatherings in our neighbourhood  
Celebrations and commiserations  
Always there to congratulate or to console.  
If only it could speak, the yarns it would have told.

Some days it would disappear  
Taking its loyal companions with it,  
The milk, the sugar, the cups and the tea.  
Returning sad and weary  
From yet another tragic wake.

Watching, listening to strategies of the war machine  
Angrily heating up and in time cooling down,  
Anxiously waiting for news  
Win or lose.

As times changed and a new era began  
The teapot was put beyond use.  
A new safe house found at Number Ten,  
Hopeful the tough stainless steel  
Will never be needed again.



*Rita Murray*

## Early memories

I remember my grandmother would send me for snuff and the different smells in the wee shop were lovely. They served it in a wee paper poke.

There was an old lady lived above us in Cromac Street called Annie Flanagan. On a Saturday night she would have a bottle of stout warming at the fire and she smoked a little white clay pipe. I was allowed to go up to her and she let me have a smoke of her pipe and a sup of stout. Needless to say, I never told my mother.

## First time

Fourteen years old

The workplace

Wrapped in a Union Jack on The Tweeth.

What is this about?

First time called a Fenian.

## That moment

We all have moments in our lives when we have to make a decision.

At some moments in my life I have made good decisions, I have also made bad ones.

But the moment I decided to return to Ireland I knew it was a good moment. I wanted to be home again with my family and continue to do the work I had been involved in, in America.

## Better to be the hammer than the anvil

*(Crowd in riot)*

God, what can I do to help, so far from home.  
Every time I switch on the news there's more death and  
destruction.

*(Crowd in riot)*

I'm praying and raising funds, always praying, but is it enough?  
"Better to be the hammer than the anvil."

I have felt the weight of the hammer, but must I raise it?

*(Crowd in an explosion)*

McGurk's Bar has been hit, 15 people killed and one of them is my cousin! I  
have to go home. I have to do something.

*(Crowd form into walls)*

Belfast has changed. There are brick walls everywhere. Inside and out. We live  
in a brick wall state of mind. What can I do about it?

*(Crowd drop arms in time with speech below)*

I want to break down the barriers, these walls that keep us divided,  
The women on both sides face the very same problems, day in, day out.

*(Scene of domestic violence)*

*(Scene of ex-prisoner's trauma, drink dependency)*

The trade union will be my hammer.

As a trade union activist I can fight to break down these walls. I can smash  
these walls for all women.

*(Scripted for the performance, based on Rita's experience)*

## Memorable steps

Marching on Columbus Avenue, New York for the Right to Life.

Passing black armbands on Fifth Avenue that signified Bloody Sunday.

Joining to fundraise and help in any way the nationalist people back home.

Joining a union and arguing for the rights of fellow workers regarding equal pay, racism, homophobia, disability...

Becoming involved in *A Woman's Part* and hearing how it was for women in their traditions. Relating to them how it was on our side.

Because we all have had our own moments,  
We all have taken our own steps.

## My path

How did I get here?  
Events happened.  
My conscious awareness told me  
I had to choose -  
Albeit it was neither crooked nor straight.  
But the path I took, led me to do  
Things I never thought I would.

## Things I have lost -

My first passport.  
A ring my father bought me.  
Lost my faith for a short time.

## and found -

A beautiful ginger tabby.  
A pearl in an oyster.  
Found my faith in Lourdes.

## *Deirdre O'Hare*



### Names

Sticks and stones may break my bones but names will never hurt me. That was a playground rhyme but it's not true. At the age of 16 I started in Gallagher's, a job I grew to love. I had great friends, both Protestant and Catholic but one particular male co-worker made my life hell.

He called me Fenian, Ballymurphy, Taig. This encouraged others to do the same. And names did hurt me. It led to being searched at the gate, not being trusted; to other co-workers fighting with me; to him turning off the lift and threatening to cut my throat.

That co-worker nearly succeeded in making me like himself but I rose above it. When a family member got killed in the conflict they wouldn't allow me to work. I'd to sit in the toilets all through my shift. But I wouldn't leave and finally they paid me off. Thank God to be out of it.

\* \* \* \* \*

If I hadn't met Jim I would have joined the movement. Thinking back to the treatment I got in Gallagher's, it made me so bitter. It would take forever to tell all, but I think it's a bitter pill to swallow when I still see to this day in town the people who made my life hell. 35 years later I can forgive but not forget.

We would rather have our homes and photo albums full and the graveyards empty of our loved ones.

## I stood alone

I stood alone at the corner of Ballymurphy on my way to a friend's house when a riot broke out. Purple dye separated the crowds. It was chaos and I ended up at Vere Foster. Darkness fell and lots of people sheltered in the school as a gun battle raged.

I watched as people were shot. A local priest was shot dead and I helped carry his body into the school. I wanted to go home but was advised to wait until it was safe.

Eventually I crossed the Springfield Road about 3 a.m. as bullets lit up the sky. I entered Ballymurphy and again I stood alone.

## Same old, same old?

My father would be 103 if he were alive today.  
He could tell a story or two, I might say:  
Hard times, hunger and hardship,  
Good times, happiness and home made chips.

I used the same approach  
I'd try to be my daughter's coach.  
I'd speak of dances and carnivals and fairs  
And every night we'd say our prayers.

In '72 Nuala came through  
Now 2007, can it be true?  
D-Day in Stormont - more than a few  
Strong-willed people made it come true.

Now if this is meant to be  
We could all soon be free  
We could have our lives on track  
And happily no more looking back.

## Lost and found

I lost friends in work due to the Troubles -

I found new ones

I lost sleep combined with tears and fears -

I found answers in prayers.

I lost a family member due to an explosion -

I found a stronger reason to fight.

I lost company of friends due to interment -

I found freedom would come.

I once was lost but now am found.



## *Clara Reilly*

### The woman warrior within us

I faced the soldiers in the street, ranting and raving. People who knew me stood with their mouths open in surprise. They had arrested a group of young schoolboys that morning and one of them was my 13 year old brother. My mother had gone to Springfield Road army barracks and refused to leave until they were released. She took a lot of insults and abuse but stood her ground until the children were finally allowed to go. My rage knew no bounds.

### Get everybody out!

*a monologue*

Get everybody out! They're burning the people out of their homes in Bombay Street!

We have to get organised. These families need food and shelter. Open up the schools and the community centres. Get mattresses and blankets. We're not talking about three course meals here, we're talking about soup kitchens.

*(knock)* I'm sorry, Clara, but they've arrested my husband and my son, and as you're the only one with a phone, I had nowhere else to go.

Come on in, Mrs Fitzsimmons. Sit down and I'll make a cup of tea. Let's take down some details.

I've rung round the police and army barracks and they are being held in Fort Monagh, Mrs Fitzsimmons.

"What'll I do if they're taken to Castlereagh? They can be held for seven days and..."

If there's any ill treatment we'll try and get your doctor in, or if they're charged we'll get a solicitor.

Mrs Fitzsimmons, I'm sorry to have to tell you, your son has been charged with murder. Your husband has been released.

"How am I going to visit a prison for the next 20 years? My husband badly beaten, my son also beaten and forced to sign a confession..."

## The bread thrower

It was 6.30 am, a busy time in our household as I roused the children and attempted to make a healthy breakfast before they left for school. The sudden loud banging on the front door with English voices shouting to open up, left my young family frightened and apprehensive. It was an early morning raid, so common in 1976, especially in our area.

I opened the front door and in swarmed half a dozen British soldiers in a really aggressive mood and with their rifles at the ready. The one in charge asked: "Where/who/which one of you is Karen Reilly?"

I explained that there was no-one with that name living at this address. The only 2 females in the household were myself and my 13 year old daughter, Coleen. After checking the bedrooms, he pointed to my daughter and said he was arresting her. We started to protest, pointing out that she was only 13 and in her school uniform. The soldier insisted that they'd been sent out to arrest a Karen Reilly and he would have to take her in and get it checked out.

My husband lifted a hurley stick from the corner and putting Coleen behind him, stood protectively between her and the soldiers. Her 5 brothers joined him, some of them only 10 and 11 years old. A great argument ensued while outside the neighbours had gathered, banging bin-lids.

Our local baker who delivered fresh bread every morning pushed his way up the front path carrying his tray full of sliced bread. I was shouting out to the neighbours that they were trying to arrest my daughter who was only a school girl. The next thing I saw was the baker throwing the loaves up my hall with such force that they were opening and scattering all over the place. He was shouting:

"English bastards! You are coming for our children now!"

The officer in charge was sweating profusely and you could see he was concerned that the situation was getting out of control. He immediately ordered the soldiers out of the house, saying he would go and check in case a mistake had been made.

Everyone breathed a sigh of relief and I then began the task of brushing up all the sliced bread. The soldiers never returned and we all felt a quiet satisfaction that right and not might had won the day.

## Ode to Brian

The children at play, no danger or fear,  
Sudden bang - what's that I hear?  
A British soldier, gun in his hand,  
Another child dying on the streets of our land,  
His red blood flowing, staining the ground.  
Plastic bullets flying into the crowd.

The life support machine keeping him alive,  
His mother's quiet sobbing as she stayed by his side.  
He took his last breath as a community raged -  
They are killing our children whom we can't even save!

Such a beautiful boy with an angel's face -  
One of too many - a bloody disgrace!  
They say, "Suffer little children..." but not in this place.  
We have to protect them, every creed, every race.  
So ban plastic bullets, we are working for peace.  
They've no part in a society that wants killing to cease.

## Ban plastic bullets!     *Clara Reilly and Sonia Copeland*

Woman:            It's a lovely evening and the children are playing happily on the streets of Turf Lodge. *(Sounds of children playing)*

Bullet:            Here I come, a plastic bullet. I can feel the crack of the magazine as I move down the barrel of the gun.

Woman:            I dander out of my home to call the kids in for dinner. "Liam, John, Terry! C'mon! In for your dinner!"

Bullet:            I tear through the evening air. Where am I going at such speed?

Woman:            Everything looks so peaceful and calm.  
"C'mon Boys. I'll not call you's again. In for your dinner!"

Bullet:            Maybe I don't want to know. Will I do damage?  
*(Drops from box)* I hit a child!

Woman:            I look down the street. What's that British soldier doing with those two young girls?

Bullet:            Lots of blood as I shatter the brain.

Woman:            I run to the corner and see the body of a young boy on the ground, blood oozing from his nose and ears.

Bullet:            *(Falls)* I land on cold stone, spent. The damage done.

Woman:            It's Brian Stewart! Look at him, this beautiful young boy, only 13. How can anybody do this? How can this be happening? We have to protect the children! We have to get organised.  
Ban plastic bullets!

## The path I chose

The path I chose was clear to me at the time. I was anxious to rectify the many injustices that were apparent. We were all very naïve, thinking you only had to highlight what was happening to have it stopped. But then I started to recognise what powerful forces we were up against. Many times it was might against right that won the day. Anger, frustration and powerlessness set in quickly and you had to fight to rise above these emotions that were self-destructive.

My belief that the truth will always emerge, no matter how long, kept faith and hope alive. To remain silent puts you on the side of the oppressor. I never want to be on the side of the oppressor.

\* \* \* \* \*

Why did I devote the last 35 years of my life to fighting to uphold people's human rights and human dignity? Why did I put my family through intrusion and disruption into our family home and lives? We barely got a meal in peace without the constant knocking on the door and some family or visitor seeking help or information. My children were singled out for stop and search and humiliation on their way to work or school. Made to take off their shoes and open their lunches only to have them thrown on the ground.

All the time trying to lead by example. Not to let resentment or hate take over. Insisting on being treated with respect and not like a second class citizen. In one's own country. Standing up for one's rights. Thanking God that my family came through as decent, upstanding human beings, contributing to a society that protects and cherishes all of its children. Putting good will and energy back into their communities.

Would I do it all over again? I have never regretted one day of my work for human rights, despite the highs and lows of that struggle. My only regret is that it took so long and over 3,700 deaths to arrive at the place we are now. It is going to take many years to deal with the legacy of pain and suffering felt by those families who have lost those nearest and dearest to them.

## Lost and Found

I lost my trust -	I found my confidence
I lost all hope -	I found my courage
I lost my patience -	I found self-control
I lost all bigotry -	I found new tolerance
I lost all hatred -	I learned to forgive
I lost old neighbours -	I found new friends
I lost my parents -	I found acceptance
I lost family members -	I embraced new grandchildren
I lost serenity -	I found peace of mind
An end to the war -	I found true peace



## *Jackie Upton*

### Summer job

The Mona Hotel was our place of work and Bernie (short for Bernadette) was from Manchester. So we were definitely working for taigs. Two girls had already started, Jill from Widness and Fra from Belfast. Fra? What could that be short for? I wondered whereabouts she was from. She didn't seem too fenian lookin'. I thought I'd ask what Fra was short for to see if I could get any clues as to what she was.

"Francine," came the reply. Nothing there to suggest a taig. However, when she said she was came from Beechmount we'd hit the jackpot - a fenian through and through! Oh aye, and an IRA tattoo on her arm didn't help. She had tried to say it was FRA, but we knew. We'd need to be careful, say very little about our home and keep it work related.

I don't know how it came about but there seemed to be an unwritten rule and discussions about religion or Belfast were very few. Fra was a very staunch taig. She wouldn't come and watch the Queen the day she visited and she wrote on official forms: "British through no fault of my own". So, for someone so staunch, we coped well. In fact, we got on brilliant, better than with Jill.

"You'll meet up when you's go home?" Bernie wanted to know. She didn't understand and all three of us found it hard to explain.

I've never seen Fra since, but I've never forgotten.

### Getting through

Six years isn't seven.  
I'm just a prod doing my bird.  
We're all not sweetness and light,  
All trying to do our time.  
Just a case of keeping the head down,  
Ignore the insults, the dirty looks,  
Know your enemy. Bide your time.  
Six years isn't seven.  
I'm just a prod doing my bird.

## *Collective Pieces*



Once there was a young girl she came from:

The foot of a mountain called Black, that was in fact the loveliest shade of  
green.

From a street in the shadow of the shipyard's giant yellow cranes.

From a big family with little money and their own share of sorrow and joy.

From hand-me-down clothes and home-made toys.

From a strict upbringing and the family rosary without fail every night.

From a small town called Toome - the only prods in sight.

She came from long summer days filled with street games, the aroma of beer  
hops thick in the air.

Unaware that all around her conflict was brewing -

She stepped into a war on her own doorstep...

## A word of advice

Get back to your knitting!  
Get back to the kitchen!  
Leave the politics to the men,  
Leave the fighting to them!

## First job

- Girl: Sixteen, first job.  
*(on assembly line, women chatting as they work)*
- Girl: Gallaghers was good and the girls were great.  
*(on assembly line, women having a laugh)*
- Girl: Except for one man stirring it.  
*(enter man in threatening manner)*
- Man: OK Ballymurphy!
- Girl: He called me, loving it. Leading them on.  
Til they called me Ballymurphy too.
- All: OK Ballymurphy.
- Girl: Loving the fear in my eyes. Loving it when he stopped the lift.
- Man: There's just me and you here. No-one'd know...
- Girl: As he laid the knife to my throat.

## The mother

How could she, the mother, the giver of life,  
Home-maker, peacemaker, some man's wife,  
Cleaner, cook, nurse and teacher  
Comforter, forgiver and sometime preacher

How could she, the mother, giver of life,  
Protector, defender in trouble and strife  
Don a uniform and carry a gun  
Like a soldier, a sailor or some other mother's son

How could she, the mother, in the darkness of night  
Join with her comrades to carry on the fight  
Planning and training then home before dawn  
The soldier, the mother, the uniform gone

How could she not, though filled with fear  
Protect and defend all that she holds dear  
This woman with a strong mother's heart  
Alongside the men, playing her part.

## Lost and found

What have we lost, what have we really lost?  
Was it homes, was it jobs?  
I lost my trust, I lost all faith  
I lost all understanding of this place.

What have we lost, what have we really lost?  
Was it family, was it friends?  
I lost Ivy, Eileen, Arnie, Brian,  
Brothers and sisters, close friends of mine.

Too many lives ended, too many lost  
How can we ever count the cost?

What have we found, what have we really found?

I found courage and the will to live.  
I lost hatred and learned to forgive.  
I found women a lot like me  
Who want fair treatment and want to be free.

We've found a way forward  
We've fought and won the vote  
We've found a common future  
We've found our way to hope.