

In loving memory twice over: *Noreen Mulligan & Diana Erskine Hill*

Mary Pillow, Rita Smith, Declan Tarpey and Eileen Boyle - February, 2014.

A small group of us, IACP-accredited counsellors, decided to set up a CPD group in 2009. The inspiration for this came spontaneously at one AGM in the Gresham over a cup of coffee. Noreen spoke with Eileen about how she felt that art and poetry are so important, not only in the work we do but also as a support and guide for ourselves in doing this work. A short time prior, Diana Erskine Hill had spoken about her wish to read her poetry and Eileen felt that this could be a perfect opportunity. The rest of our group came together easily, Mary, Rita and Declan.

We met 3 - 4 times per year and shared poetry, sometimes based on a theme, other times based on the needs of the group on a particular evening. During this period, each of the group lost a parent and Noreen lost her beloved husband, Paddy. Poetry, we find, with its ability to subtly "hit the spot" was very useful, challenging and consoling for all.

Then in 2012 Noreen became very ill. She bravely fought this and remained positive and committed to life right up to the end. Noreen was a very creative person who loved her work as a counsellor. Her empathy and care for her clients in the HSE were without limits. She was patient, open, stylish, non-judgemental and above all, curious. Noreen always questioned things from several angles and yet she appreciated and nurtured her own artistic nature realising that there are no answers.

As well as being colleagues, we were Noreen's friends and shared a mutual warmth and fun too. Noreen passed away on December 11, 2012. Members of our group had visited her a few hours before she died. We miss Noreen very much and still feel her presence in our meeting place as she angels over us, and keeps us on track should we stray from talk of poetry to more trivial territory. Our group was sad and upset by this premature loss of a dear friend, colleague, and great person.

We next met and, to our great disbelief, found that Diana was now seriously ill. She came to one of our sessions and though she was frail, Diana read beautifully from an appropriate poem. Diana's gift to the group was of course her own renditions of very skillfully woven poems (we always asked for a second reading) and also her ability to keep focus and time on our sessions. Sometimes she struggled when we spoke together or, in un-intentional careless ways, did not look in her direction

so she could lip-read. This did not deter Diana who was as ever enthusiastic, hard working, punctual, creative and who delighted in music and sound, especially from her beloved singing-bowl.

As a friend, Diana was caring, non-conventional and adventurous. Diana sadly passed away from our world on November 12, 2013 and spoke of coming to our poetry evening up to the end.

We are writing this short piece in their memory and in recognition of how much they contributed to their chosen field, each in her own quiet and creative way. For each of us, the personal loss and vacuum continues even as time heals. We feel fortunate to have had the close and intimate contact with these two gentle souls and unconventional, inspiring people which poetry facilitated.

I will not die an un-lived life!

I will not live in fear of falling or catching fire.

I choose to inhabit my days,

to allow my living to open to me

to make me less afraid

more accessible

to loosen my heart until it becomes a wing

a torch, a promise

I choose to risk my significance;

to live

so that which came to me as seed

goes to the next as blossom

and that which came to me as blossom

goes on as spirit.

by Dawna Markova *I will not die an un-lived life: reclaiming purpose and passion.* Publisher: Berkeley, California: Conari Press, ©2000

