

Memories Matter

An Táin Arts Centre Outreach Project

Rozzi Kennedy Visual Artist / Facilitator - Blogpost Oct 2020

Pre-pandemic, I was delighted to be leading a creative reminiscence project with The Birches Day Centre. We planned to make art, life story books and involve families. We talked about childhood, education, work, marriage, travel, interests and looked at old snaps and books. Our celebration and showcase was scheduled for May at An Táin. Making connections and outings were important. At the Basement Gallery we experimented with brightly coloured glass paint in response to an emotive exhibition honouring artist Patricia Murphy. At the library, Miriam Fox gave us an insight into the history of local buildings with her intrinsic drawings from archive photographs. We were to go to film club and tour streets remembered from childhood. A variety of personal, meaningful subjects would lead to creating things and rekindling skills. Here are some examples using different names to maintain confidentiality.

- Michael enjoyed a love of art with his late wife, he sold some of his artwork and pen and ink was his medium. We were going to try an adapted method for him to draw townscapes again and overcome a slight shake in his hand.
- I wanted Alex to show me how to wire a plug and to make a model of the street he grew up on which he describes vividly. His father taught him to learn by watching a tradesman working and to be inquisitive. This way he learned skills like electrical work and plumbing.
- Sarah is very fashionable, putting together gorgeous outfits, all accessorized and perfectly styled. She remembers nursing in Toronto and driving on the 401 Road to dances with her friends. I wanted to make collages with pictures of the clothes & cars of the time together.
- Mary's husband always had a camera on him. We were to look through the photographs putting names on the back. She and Michael both remembered the German air strikes, so I planned to have a group session on the history of Co. Louth during the World War.
- Marie was 14 when she started at the electrical factory. She loved it, winding wire onto coils that go in the machines or sometimes making the element to put in an iron. I wanted to get her a copy of a book of stories from the factory workers & ask the writer to visit us.
- Emily loves sewing. Friends always asked her to please put a stitch in their clothes. She also really enjoys The Highlanes Gallery Azure Project, looking, thinking and discussing works of art. I thought we would try textiles techniques using an artwork for reference
- Three individuals on the project had previously seen a ghost. I never asked about ghosts or anything like that, those memories just came up. I would have liked to explore that further in a small group but very carefully making sure not to provoke any negative feelings.
- Frank and Michael both have stories of the talented generation before them. Their mothers and fathers had worked for The McAlpine's Fusiliers, the fire brigade, as a live-in nanny, a train operator, at an armament factory, an orphanage and even a job offer to sing opera.

Unfortunately, we only got so far before the Day Centre closed and everyone started staying safe at home. Thankfully, the Birches staff are now providing essential support in people's homes. It could be 2021 before a face-to-face arts project like Memories Matter can continue. But, in the meantime, we must adapt and reach out to older people in other ways.