

Kathy May



These words were written just after our friend Katharine – Kathy May – died. I wrote them down without thinking of grammar or meter or sequence or refinement.

They are from my first thoughts as my wife Ann McNulty and I were, and still are, trying to come to terms with our grief at the tragedy of Kathy our lifetime friend being dead. Perhaps I thought they were going to be the kernel of a poem or a piece of dandified prose. Not yet, I am not ready to disturb them.

When Jenny Brien, the editor of Corncrake, asked me to write a piece about Kathy, I almost rushed headlong into them. The words and thoughts there stopped me.

I am very pleased Jenny and Fermanagh Writers through the medium of Corncrake are doing this memorial. It is a wonderful way of keeping Kathy's memory alive.

Ken Ramsey March 2021

My words for Kathy

A hot sun shone down
a beautiful day in the empty Buttermarket.
I was thinking, wondering, about this dreadful virus.
Thirty eight thousand feet above me
a Dreamliner was en route to Los Angeles,
its vapour trail tracing white in the clear blue sky.
I should have envied those on board
but not this day.
Frances told me Kathy May was dead; by her own hand.
Shock and pain sucked my breath away.

The day drifted off somewhere.
I sat in the hot sunshine thinking
of Kathy for a long time.
A friend came and sat near me
I told her about Kathy
She gave me a cigarette.
She was shaking by the time
I smoked it.
We talked as friends and friends of Kathy,
how she had come to death.
We talked of Kathy's battles with her mental health.
Then we talked of her titanic talent as an artist
of her gift of words and poetry,
about her being long listed for a Heaney Poetry Prize.
We talked about her love and defence of the earth,
her loud public outrage at human rights abuses of
people with mental health issues.
We talked of her crusade for equal rights for women

and her support of the Palestine people.
We talked of her beautiful smile
of her resolute honesty
and her joy when she met you.
We talked, we parted devastated.
Kathy, you left a fabulous vapour trail.
On clear evenings I still see you,
on dark evenings I still mourn.

Ken Ramsey June 2020

Kathy's poem for the Seamus Heaney Award can be found here. (Thanks to Community Arts Partnership)