

Emm, I was born on the fourth of August 1947. I was born in the Coombe. My mother was 15 years of age, her name was Eileen Farrell and she died three months after the birth of me. That was the start of the downfall of my life. At three years and four months I was brought to court and I was sent to an orphanage in Cork. The orphanage wasn't too bad but it's when I, after nine years of age in 1957 I was sent to Upton because you have to leave the orphanage at nine or ten years of age. That's when my troubles started with. Then I was sent to, me Granny took me out, sorry, and she could only keep me for four weeks, so I was sent to Artane then, so, when I got out of Artane in '63, I was sent to a farmer, which was another downfall. I was raped by this farmer, and I was sent back to Artane, three days after, after the abuse. So this is actually where I'm coming from, by doing damage to my body.

So then I was, after that I was to end up in Daingean, and then after Daingean, in '65, I went to London, that's where my problems start cutting myself, like, it wasn't eh, looking for pity, it was more or less a cry for, it was more a cry for help and, em, I started cutting me wrists, not only me wrists, the whole part of me hand. But I couldn't do it when I was sober, I don't think any individual does it when they're sober. They do it when they've drink on them because, eh, you can't feel the pain through whiskey, but you certainly can feel the pain the next day.

So then I came back to Ireland that year and I started the same crap again cutting my wrists, not only my wrists, my whole left hand. Like, I knew I was left-handed, there was times I felt like cutting the hand off but I didn't have the courage. Like it was, when I was doing it it was kind of dutch courage as well because I had a fear of me left hand, because it was beaten into me so often that I felt like I was eh, a devil, I was a son of the devil actually because I was left-handed. This is all down to the Catholic Church which I've no great time for and I never did and I never will.

But em, I ended up, I was to end up in the Mater about twelve, fifteen times from cutting my body at various times in various places. But, I've always, at the last minute I've always rang an ambulance or I've got someone to ring an ambulance, because I hadn't as I say, I hadn't got the courage to commit suicide and as I said before it wasn't eh, for pity, it was more or less to do as much damage to the left hand as I could. I done a little bit to the right, but I wasn't so worried about the right hand, it was always the left. And, the Mater got wise to it eventually. So they decided one night, they got browned off at this, coming in every second or third night, my wrists slashed, well, not only my wrists right up to the elbow slashed, so they got a bit clever at the end, put a plaster of paris on it. Well they thought they would have, that would have stopped me, but it didn't, As soon as they took that plaster of paris off again, the bould Tony was down to his auld tricks again.

Em, If people remember the old razors, not the modern ones, the old Wilkinson Sword which they had, eh, it was a square blade. You could buy them in packs of 5. It's not the modern razors, it's very hard to do it with the modern razors and anyway, with the old razors you'd used to put the blade in and screw it back on. I always made sure I went in and got a packet of 5, because, you know what I mean, they were always handy to have. And then I'd go up to the flat, at the time I had a flat in Ballymun, and, I'd cut meself to bits. And the last minute, what would I do, I'd ring an ambulance or get one of me friends to ring an ambulance.

I think it was four years ago, 1990, I stopped doing this. It wasn't, 1992 it was when I stopped cutting me wrists, I realised that I couldn't enjoy myself, I could see, I couldn't face life, I couldn't look at life, I hated life, I hated myself. But, em, so, eventually, I was still drinking, but I realised that I couldn't enjoy sports, I couldn't enjoy going to sports because I always had to cover my, my eh, arms, I always had to cover them with long sleeves. Like, there's other parts of my body I did try to rip, tried to cut my throat at one stage, didn't do a good job of it, and tried to cut me stomach, didn't a good job of that either, I didn't go deep enough with the blade. But, I've been in a lot of mental hospitals in Ireland. I've done it in Cork, I was in Sarsfield's Court, I was in Our Lady's in Sundays Well, I was in St. Brendan's for all the same thing, for cutting my wrists.

You see, well, I'm glad I wasn't brought, in a way I'm glad I was, I was brought up in an institution, because, ok, it's a lot of cruelty went on but there was also a little bit of security. You always had, eh, you knew you had your three

meals a day, you had a comfortable bed, but if you wet the bed of course, it wasn't too comfortable then. And, like, I was institutionalised up to, what, nearly 40, 45 years of age. It's unbelievable, but I always wanted to be in institutions. I think that's, in a way too, that's why I did, eh, cut my wrists and my arms and that. That I felt that, it was a lot of anger, but I felt that I wanted to be institutionalised again. I felt safe for a certain, for a limited time, I felt safe, for a limited time. And then I'd come out and do the same thing again all over. I have regrets today, now, that I did do it because I'm 58 years of age and I have regrets today that I did do it because as I say, I can't show my arms, like, this is the first time I've really sat down and talked about it. It's the first time in my life that I've got a chance to actually talk about what happened and why. There's a reason, there's always a reason why and when and what.

I know I'm going to feel happy when I leave here. When I got the photographs done I began to realise that I can look at my wrists, I can look at my left arm and I'm not ashamed, I'm not afraid anymore. Like, I don't care if people see me or, see my arm or not. At one time, as I say I wore long sleeves, but now I think today, I can face that reality that it's not a fear that I want to do it again. Because, I'm nearly 60 now and I don't want to be going down that road again, I want to see the ripe old age I hope of 70, please God, even though I'm not a religious man.

And I would love for people, for me to be there, not just the person interviewing me now at the moment, but for people to come up and say to me. I'd like to be standing right beside that picture and it would give me great relief for people to come up and realise that it's me and say to me "Why?" "What's the reason?" "Was it pity?" "Was it anger?" "Was it your past?"

Well, it, eh, was my past and it was anger. Well, it both, basically the three basic things. It was my past, anger and drink. And I would love someone to ask me if I was standing, beside that photograph and just looking at that and realising it's me and saying why. And I could face them whereas before I wouldn't talk even about it to anybody. I could face them and say that's why I done it. It was down to the Church, down to anger and down to alcohol.

Commissioned by Breaking Ground, the Ballymun Regeneration Ltd per cent for art programme.
The project focusing on people living in Ballymun, a small village on the outskirts of Dublin city.
Five people with different lives and experiences tell their stories.

Their interesting and fascinating life stories cover a wide range of issues, including alcoholism, sexual and physical abuse, homelessness and self-harm, but perhaps most importantly, the interviews demonstrated each individual's capacity to love and to survive hardship. Each interview could be listened to in private on Audiophones which were available in the exhibition space.

A photograph of the person interviewed or an image suggested by what they said in their interview was specially made for the project by Cecily Brennan.

With special thanks to all of the interviewees for being so generous with their time and sharing of their experiences and to Pat Rosney at Irish Diving Contractors, Hugh Mc Elveen at exhibitastudios.ie Ray Yeates at Axis Ballymun, Louise Neiland, Geoffrey Perrin, Aisling Prior, Patricia Scanlon, Martin Murphy at Murphy's Prams and Nursery store, and Philip Whyte at EFJ Laser.