



Unsung Heroes—Ballinamore, Aidan and Eileen Donohue (front row) celebrating with friends at the Love Where You Live Leitrim Awards 2019



Unsung Hero – Manorhamilton, Shirley Hewston (front row LHS) celebrating with family and friends at the Love Where You Live Leitrim Awards 2019



Members of many groups in Ballinamore celebrating with Ballinamore Area Community Council.

BLIGHT Eileen Gillen

I WAS ALIVE when my fingers knew their place, when they worked their fury into the wool falling over my hands. I was alive when sound was warm and mellow as a clarinet.

I knit now from memory, I am five, I am ten,

I am tired, I am haunted, I am lonely. My fingers know this. My eyes close and the tears fall; grey, for tears come from the battle between black and white where irony lives, where emotion overflows, where life slows, drop by drop into my shadow world. Now my black becomes nuanced; I see charcoal, jet, smoke, smoke—yes; now the wool cables, two to the back, knit two, two to the front, knit two. I am on the top road looking down over the endless rows of smoking chimneys. Yes, my nose knows grey; grey is the safe space where I hide, grey is the smell of winter blankets.

My world is round now; round like an echo in space. My fingers work the blackberries; make three, purl three together, repeat to the next safe knit stitch. Home. I smell tea, deep and earthy. I hear voices from long ago; raised voices, fearful voices. I hide. Tea is a dangerous colour. Now I am Oolong, soft and willowy like a mist over a mountain. Morning will come; light emerging slowly, painfully but inevitably. I am still. Sounds rise from the silence; I hear dew drops, they murmur, I hear the mud, dense and dark. I hear the mountain.

“Now” she cries.

“Now.”

“No” I shout.

She scratches my wounds with her granite, her slate.

“No” I whisper.

I am safer in silence, in almost black, in almost gone; in almost remembering. I am faint now, I am swirling, swirling. I am almost white, smoke white. My body is bone now. My skin, flaccid and weak, lies in ridges on my arms, in ridges on my belly like potato fields from famine days. My famine is silence, I am starved of words, I am starved of meaning. I give birth to the child of the dark, I give birth to the fear under the covers, I give birth to death. Memory is no harbour.

I return to the wool, return to its safety. There are people outside now. The door is banging. I sense their colours, loud like their voices, they assault me. Their smells are green like birth, red like pain—so much pain can't be hidden under a blanket, blue like a stillborn, yellow like my endless fear. I watch them with my eyes closed, my fingers listening; steeling myself in silence. The banging, banging is oily black, dense black, dead black. My fingers know. I am cast off.