

Creative Writing Club

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One not-so-quiet lunchtime in September 2015, two nervous Year 10s skulked into Miss McConkey's classroom. Creative Writing Club had sounded like their kind of thing in the notices, but in reality? Little did we know what our membership of the least social club in the school could lead to.

Two months later, on the 18th of November, my friend Hana and I fidgeted in two different seats. This time we were in the Radar Centre, Belfast, surrounded by other creative writers, artists and budding directors. This was the awards ceremony of the Northern Ireland Anti-Bullying Forum's Anti-Bullying Week Competition.

Even as I stumbled to the front of the room to receive my prize from Katrina Godfrey from the Department of Education, I couldn't believe that I'd really done it. My little poem had won the Intermediate category. All I had done was to attend Creative Writing Club each Monday lunchtime, and enter the competition when Miss McConkey told us about it.

After the ceremony, my friends and I continued to enjoy the club, entering other competitions as we heard about them. Poetry or prose, I tried every different task, but I had been so lucky once. It could never happen again. Could it?

When Miss McConkey next walked into my form room, it was more than the noise of my classmates that meant she

had to repeat herself.

I had been shortlisted for the Write Here Write Now Competition 2016 as part of the Two Cities, One Book Festival. This seemed even more unbelievable than the last, and yet there was my name and poem on the website.

It seemed a trip to Dublin for the awards ceremony was in order. Just a week later, my aunt and I were on the crowded train watching the city draw ever closer. I was fidgeting in my seat and running through the plan again as my aunt talked of shopping and lunch and Dublin's rich history. It all seemed so strange and so far from the ordinary school day that continued at home.

The city was all I dreamed it could be, and as for the Mansion House, where the awards ceremony was held, it was clear who lived there.

The homeowner herself, the Lord Mayor of Dublin, gave out the prizes, adding another level to my delighted bewilderment. I had been awarded Highly Commended in the Second Level category. After a talk from Lia Mills, the author whose book, *Fallen*, was the focus of the festival, we had our picture taken with the judges. These included the editor of *Hotpress* and Lia herself.

In typical fashion, after an unforgettable day, the finalists all headed to one place: the book shop!

The Waterfall

What bullying means to me -
A poem

I'm drowning in the laughter,
Their harsh words push me on,
Towards the edge of this waterfall,
Towards the longest fall.
No one lifts a finger to help me,
As I flounder past them on the shore.
They all hoot and push me back,
Each time I scramble near their feet.
The edge is coming closer,
The torrent's getting strong,
My tears mix with the water,
As my classmates all look on.
I must be tough, I must not fall,
I must ignore their words,
But they know just where it hurts,
And it's too late to save me now.
I wonder as I'm dragged along,
Just where this all began,
When the stream turned to a torrent,
And why it got so strong.
A new face appears on the shore,
One not twisted up with laughter.
This new face is smiling, bright,
As someone reaches out a hand.
I see the others behind you,
As you reach out from the shore,
Watch them creep up, ready,
I shout out, but almost drown.
They pushed you in, I saw it,
But you just swim up close,
Instead of heading for the shore,
Or waiting for the edge.
You grab my hand and pull me,
Towards the far off shore,
Whispering comfort in my ear,
For the fast flow never slows.