



# Remembering: “Petals of Hope”

Artistic responses to the Omagh Bomb

**Conversations with Carole Kane and Malachi O’Doherty**

# Nicole Watt

‘The human justice system, made of imperfect people in an imperfect world, rarely satisfies our need for resolution.’

It was a typically cloudy day in Northern Ireland when I first wandered into the Garden of Light, the memorial established to honour the thirty-one lives lost in the Omagh Bomb of 1998. Having recently emigrated from America, I was unaware of the garden’s meaning, only that I was heavily pregnant and it had a lovely lily pond which beckoned me to rest my tired feet.

A bomb has never exploded in York, Pennsylvania. As far as I know there has never been a murder in the neighbourhood where I grew up. And yet, there were tragedies of a different kind, as there always are wherever human beings live.

The crimes I experienced during my youth and early adulthood are those rarely talked about in public circles. Although society has changed much, most people are still not comfortable hearing the stories I could tell, nor the stories of others like me. No one will ever build a memorial garden to our lost childhood where we can gather to share our grief, to feel strength and hope in numbers. Most of us will never have the opportunity to pursue justice in a court of law.

Defending the innocent and holding lawbreakers accountable is vital in a healthy society. However, I am all too aware, as are most of us, that the human justice system, made of imperfect people in an imperfect world, rarely satisfies our need for resolution. The bitterness and pain can linger for years, even decades, poisoning our lives and the lives of those we love.. What is the answer then?

As a fellow sojourner on the path of injustice, I have come to believe that healing, closure and justice is possible, even in the absence of monetary compensation or an admission of guilt. I know because this is what has happened in my life. But believing in it takes a shift in perception.

I have never had the opportunity to take those who harmed me to court, and yet justice has entered my life in the form of purpose. While those who pursue crime and evil lose their way, corrupting themselves and others, if we take the high road through our loss, we will find noble purposes to pursue that benefit us and others around us.

When we are able and willing to empathise with others who suffer, justice and healing redeem us in the form of compassion? When we are able to bear burdens others cannot because we have carried such a deep grief for so long, we are given justice in the form of strength? When the suffering that has gouged our hearts one day, perhaps far down the road, creates a deep well that can now experience incredible joy and love, that no longer takes a single moment for granted, we experience justice and healing in the very gift of being more fully alive?

When others trust us enough to tell us their stories we are given the honour of being witnesses to others' lives? And by listening, we are being heard, too, if not by an earthly court, then by a much higher one, who judges not for this lifetime only, but for eternity.

Stepping into the garden on this sunny autumn day, I am reminded of the millions who suffer and are not comforted: Abused children, victims of torture, those whose stories are still bound in shame and silence. Perhaps we cannot achieve earthly justice for ourselves and those we have lost, but maybe we can receive another form through helping others who have no hope of helping themselves. We can be the light shining in the darkness- a light so bright that it will be said of us 'the darkness did not overcome it.'

No one can tell anyone else when or where or how the time of healing or surrender will come or when the pursuit of justice has reached its end. The road of grief and redemption has its own clock and the hour ticks differently for each person. But I feel compelled to speak out for those who have shared their story with me: whether the guilty ever receive their worldly due or not, I pray for you the same things I pray for myself- a life of joy, love, healing, divine justice- and most of all - peace.





libraries ni

  
*irresistible learning*

  
**Omagh**  
DISTRICT COUNCIL

**VS** VICTIMS &  
SURVIVORS  
SERVICE

This publication has received support from the Victims Support Programme for Groups Working with Victims and Survivors, which is administered by VSS on behalf of the Office of the First and Deputy First Minister. The views expressed do not necessarily reflect those of the Victims and Survivors Service.