

Double book launch for writer inspired by her love of the Glens of Antrim

Portstewart woman pens a labour of love in her grandparents' memory

by Julie Magee

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PORTSTEWART grandmother Mary Farrell has dedicated her first collection of short stories to her own grandparents who were natives of the Glens of Antrim.

It was undoubtedly a labour of love for Mary, 69, who penned 'The Kingdom' over the last five years.

During a double book launch at the Royal Court Hotel, Portrush, she said: "I wanted to honour the legacy my grandmother and grandfather gave me - a love of the Glens and a sense of their uniqueness, their feeling of being a place apart."

'The Kingdom' has been described as a place "where the Glens meet Tolkien's Shire."

Loosely based geographically on the ancient Kingdom of Dalriada, Mary describes it as a place where its inhabitants "appeared fey, with an ability to connect with the unseen, a way of doing things which were not always explainable, an extra layer of knowingness."

Local author Bernie McGill describes these stories as "a set of interlinked tales, they carry the charm and appeal of a bygone age, of an otherworldly place, and conjure up a universe that is both ancient and familiar to us."

Mary is very proud to be called a 'Glenswoman', having been born in Carnlough.

At the age of one, she and her parents left the town to live near Finvoy outside Ballymoney, where her father was Headmaster at the Craigs Primary School.

When she was 12 the family moved to Portrush where Mary lived for the next 45 years.

Her father accepted a teaching post at Our Lady of Lourdes High School in Ballymoney and, after four years at Queen's University, Belfast, she was proud to follow in his footsteps, teaching there for 26 years.

Mary served for two years as an Educational Advisor with the North-East Education and Library Board before retiring from the world of education and running a small shop in Portrush for three years.

What was intended to be an exciting new chapter began when Mary moved to France with her partner Keith Lound. However, when he passed from cancer only a few years later, Mary returned to the North Coast in 2017, setting up a new home in Portstewart.

As part of the move to begin a new life she joined her first ever Creative Writing Group run by Bernie at Flowerfield Arts Centre.

When Bernie left Flowerfield to take up a position at Queen's University in Belfast, Mary along with fellow writer Robin Holmes set up a new Creative Writing Group which proved so popular that a second Group was formed.

The two groups are now jointly called North Coast Writers and meet on Zoom twice weekly. As part of an initiative launched with Libraries NI in September Mary began a third writing Group which now meets



Mary (right) pictured with Editor of Impsired Press Steve Cawte and his wife Nikki at the double book launch at the Royal Court Hotel, Portrush

weekly in person in Coleraine Library.

Her first two Collections 'It's like walking a tightrope' and 'Out of the Chrysalis' were published in November 2021 and May 2022 respectively.

Mary's short story 'A Tale of a Barn' won the Lurig Drama Club Competition in 2020. However, while she enjoys all her writing activities, Mary's time spent with her grandson Jamie and her three step-grandsons Alexander, Taylor and Charlie is the part of her new world which she considers "beyond price."

The launch of 'The Kingdom' stories was held on Sunday, November 20, with six guest readers Cathy Carson, Maureen Dunseath, Kate Murphy, Kathleen McCracken, Pat Cosgrave and Jim Simpson followed by a very enjoyable meal.

Also launched on the same day was 'Springboards: A Creative Writing Manual for Beginners through to Facilitators.'

This manual provides 24 chapters, each on a different aspect of creative writing designed to help writers throughout the world.

Dr Frank Sewell, Senior Lecturer in Creative Writing and Irish Literature in English at Ulster University describes the Manual as "a useful text for beginning writers, those with writer's block, writers in need of a push, and creative writing facilitators."

Mary was thrilled when Steve Cawte, the Editor of Impsired Press, which had published both the books, along with his wife Nikki, travelled from Lincoln to attend the launch.

She said: "Without Steve, these books would not exist. In fact, 'Springboards' was actually his suggestion. His support, advice and editing expertise - quite apart from his continual good humour and endless patience - turned what I saw as impossible challenges into realities."

Mary was delighted to introduce the couple to the scenic beauty and magic of the North Coast and Glens (The Kingdom) as this was their first visit to Northern Ireland. The couple are already planning a return trip in May.

Mary paid tribute to the many others who have helped her on her journey to produce these books including members of North Coast Writers for their "unflagging friendship, support and willingness to be used as guinea pigs while I was developing the different aspects of 'Springboards'."

"Bernie McGill, with her professional acumen and steady encouragement led me to search for the voice in which to tell 'The Kingdom' tales, Kate Murphy, an Amherst Writers and Artists Trained Facilitator and Dr Frank Sewell both gave generously of their time and expertise."

"I would also like to thank the whole Creative Writing world with writers, Group Leaders and Course Facilitators eager to help, nourish and share their knowledge. I owe them all deep, grateful thanks."

● Both books are available from 'No 6 Queen St' in Coleraine and 'Causeway Books' at 106 Main Street, Bushmills as well as Amazon.



The front cover of 'The Kingdom'.



The front cover of 'Springboards'.



An audience of over 70 people attended the double book launch at the Royal Court Hotel, Portrush.



Mary's grandparents Randal and Mary Ann McKay (known as Gan) on their farm in Glencloy, one of the Antrim Glens.