Perseverance Through Words Transcript

A Tribute to Christy Nolan

# Submission 1 – Aoife O’Donovan

## Zealous mercurial dreams were about to be realised (Written music piece)

"Zealous Mercurial Dreams Were About to Be Realised" is inspired by the work of Christy Nolan, the extraordinary Irish author and poet who overcame his challenges of cerebral palsy to create impactful Irish literature. His dedication to his artistic voice and the power of his words stand as a testament to the human drive to communicate and create. Growing up with dyslexia meant that I often struggled with finding the beauty and enjoyment of the written word. Instead, I discovered a relationship with music, learning through listening and feeling. Music became a language that spoke to me with a clarity, a world where my understanding flourished through sound and emotion. This piece, "Zealous Mercurial Dreams Were About to Be Realised," in its energetic bursts and fluid shifts, reflects a journey of discovery of expression. The "zealous" quality speaks to the passionate drive to create and express, while the "mercurial" nature embodies the freedom and fluidity I found in connecting with music on my own terms. Ultimately, this piece is an expression of the joy and liberation found in the expression of language. It's offered as a tribute to the spirit of Christy Nolan and a reflection of my own unique path towards the joy of language.

# Submission 2 – Avantika Singhal

## Personal Essay

### Which of the following quotes from Christy Nolan did you use to inspire your entry?

"Now could he ever get his chance to let folk see what they thought never existed?" (p.53).

I have written a personal essay about how I got through an especially sunny day as an albino. On many occasions, the sunlight is manageable but on many, it isn't. That's what happened during a bookshop-run and I've tried to capture how I made it to my destination without bumping into a fellow human or a pole. It also captures how I am comfortable and proud telling everyone about my condition, which didn't happen overnight, but I am glad that it has eventually.

## Personal Essay – Avantika Singhal

**"Now could he ever get his chance to let folk see what they thought never existed?" (p.53)** There’s panic. There’s hesitation. And, there’s one recurring thought – you all are just silhouettes to me: black, mobile, and unpredictable.

I let this thought consume me as I stand in the sharp Irish sunlight on a street somewhere in St. Stephen’s Green, shielding my eyes despite wearing sunglasses. Can I see anything clearly? No. You all are a blur and by “you” I mean all the Dubliners spreading in all directions, going about their day – oblivious to a middle-aged albino girl who can’t seem to see straight despite eye protection. This happens more than you’d expect. Usually, when I am alone, I walk it off, praying that the sunbeams become kinder in time and that I can make my way to my destination without being run over or pushed down on the buzzing pavements. However, when I am walking with someone, say a friend or family member and the Sun is reaching unprecedented heights, my pace slows, my steps falter and the eye-shielding is ten times more vigorous. Today, the Sun is a little less forgiving even though I am alone.

By some miracle and a sprinkle of perseverance, I push through the shapes and successfully make my way to Books Upstairs, an unmistakably blue bookshop labelled as “Ireland’s oldest”. The need to be surrounded by books is all-consuming at this juncture of time and space and it also gives me a chance to hide from the Sun. I enter gracelessly and my demeanour changes instantly. The colours, the titles, the bookworms – oh so tempting! But am I here to splurge on a trending hardcover? No. The reason why I am here is because I am somewhat of a Hot Chocolate connoisseur and I must test all the milky-chocolatey concoctions I can get my glove-clad hands on. I make my way upstairs (no book in hand, mind you) and awkwardly order my forever-favourite beverage. The barista is a 20-something college-going girl who couldn’t stop yapping about the latest Hunger Games book before I ordered. That was until she wasn’t riveted by my accent – which is an inauthentic and not-so-compelling mixture of Indian and American. However, she is invested now, and asks me without preamble, “Where are you from?” Here we go again. Time to explain how someone with ginger hair (I dye it), violet, nystagmus-riddled eyes, and a pale complexion sounds like an Indian. Where is she from?!, her brain must be toiling to trace my roots. I tend to cherish and detest such interactions. There have been so many ever since I came to Dublin that I can almost predict how the person is going to react to my origin story. Once I solve the mystery for them, I do feel liberated; like I have just reinstated to myself that I am comfortable in my skin. I offer her a brief explanation gently, “India, but I am albino.” It's no surprise when she raises her eyebrows and opens her mouth in an ‘o’ shape. Yes, yes, cue the surprise. She has finally spotted an Indian-looking Irish young woman in the modern-day wilderness. Huzza! Within seconds, the shocked ‘o’ turns into an understanding ‘o’ and she hands me my drink with a tiny smile on her face. She’s absorbing the information and trying to be polite at the same time. I get it. I always do. I should have never existed. Yet I do. I am the best kind of anomaly. One that knocks you off your feet and forces you to reconsider what you think you know about biology, considering both my parents wear brown skins back home with pride and love. Albinism is a hindrance sometimes. Crossing the road, reading tiny fonts, spotting someone from afar…But it’s also a gift and the biggest gift I can give myself is the gift of self-acceptance. I may not have superpowers but I still possess the ability to stupefy people with my looks and my genealogy. For me, it doesn’t get better than that.

# Submission 3 – Aiven Arones

## Which of the below quotes from Christy Nolan did you use to inspire your entry?

"Accept me for what I am and I'll accept you for what you're accepted as." (p.4)

## If you would like to add any additional context about your entry, or a description, please do so below:

The poem is about being someone’s confidant but it can be interpreted in many ways. One interpretation is the secret being something malicious but being unable to say it, another is that the temptation to share a secret is a curse in itself. Regardless, the character is no fool.

I am with the TCD disability service and was diagnosed with ADHD and Aspergers.

## Submission 3 - Aiven Arones ~ Ne'er a Confidant

I'd ne'er thrust your trust into ash  
Nor feed it to our peers  
To be shared among vultures  
Gnawing corpses  
To be spread like a plague  
Grating sores For truth is a virtue seldom known  
And your secret a thing for you and I alone

I hope you know I hate you  
And the penance you give so readily  
Each day I seam my lips tight  
But I feel it tempt me so  
To speak your truth  
Both kind and foul  
But a confidant is a curse well known  
So, I'll keep my slit tongue carefully sewn

But care you do the same my friend  
For liars meet a far worse end  
And if I knew what you'd say back then  
I'd slit my ears to ne'er hear again

# Submission 4 - Anna Lopuchowycz

## Which of the below quotes from Christy Nolan did you use to inspire your entry?

"Words which had been lifted from the depths of numbness." (p.96);"Now could he ever get his chance to let folk see what they thought never existed?" (p.53) ;"His voice would be his written word." (p.93)

## If you would like to add any additional context about your entry, or a description, please do so below:

Upon hearing about the competition and learning about Christopher Nolan, I chose to read Under the Eye of the Clock in its entirety to get a better sense of who we are honoring. My piece is a 40-line poem, inspired not only by the quotes provided but by Nolan's memoir and his story as a whole. As someone with an invisible disability I can never know what it is like to have a visible disability, but I can know and understand the inner pain, fight, and isolation that comes with a disability in itself - and I can only hope that I did well in honoring Nolan and his legacy through my poem.

# Submission 4 - Anna Lopuchowycz ~ Notch

Climb the spine of the tree  
notch, notch, notch.  
Spindly limbs crawl forward  
pushing, pushing, pulse.  
Brittle bones and backward ways  
falsehoods spring from the lapse in that gaze  
Ichor drips from sunny yolk  
as sundrenched limbs creak and groan

reach forward, slink back  
to bask in the weight of existing.

No known limits  
yet limited nonetheless  
bones grow weary as ichor slips -  
down, down, drips.

Ink raises to meet the iris  
lumbered body sways  
exhaustion heavy through the gaze  
notch, notch, notch.  
Down the spine notch, notch, notch.  
Ichored ink stains these hands  
this proof of existence earmarked

rusting, restlessly, ruthlessly  
against unwilling flesh - scrub, scrub, scream  
no echo, no voice  
yet you are seen.

Sundrenched ichor spots off the spine  
notch, notch, notch.  
Sit, spit, speak.

Voiceless caws from the tree  
limbs shake and overtake  
past the point of ichor drips

ink smears down the spine  
notch, notch, notch.  
Brittle bones slink down  
to the winking pool of numbness

splotchy spots of ink drenched ichor dance  
on the trembly spine  
spindled and sick  
notch, notch, notch.

# Submission 5 - Annika Leistensnider

## Which of the below quotes from Christy Nolan did you use to inspire your entry?

"Of science and the human heart." (Miracle Drug, U2)

## Submission 5 - Annika Leistensnider ~ Extinction Level Event

When I was 7, I learned the sun would explode one day.  
It hit me really hard,  
as if my dad had said we would all die tomorrow.  
He laughed, “5 billion years from now.  
We'll both be dead.”  
That's true.  
I hadn't thought of that.  
And at the time, I remembered evolution and dinosaurs.  
I had learned more in a few years than I ever would again.  
And two of the things I learned were that dinosaurs lived here 200 million years ago and that  
they were awesome.  
200 million was not even close to 5 billion.  
I'd been around for 7.  
That day was one of revelation.  
My family and I were not the universe,  
just one of many.  
I couldn't believe that it was possible nothing from me would definitively exist at an exact,  
inescapable moment.  
Sometimes I feel that way about relationships.  
Sometimes I feel that way with you. That we exist in some seconds of childlike confusion after hearing an inconceivable truth;  
that a day will come when no trace of us can be found in the other.  
As I stare into my lovers' eyes each,  
"There will come a day that I forget you."

# Submission 6 - Aoife Bridges

## Which of the below quotes from Christy Nolan did you use to inspire your entry?

"Zealous mercurial dreams were about to be realized." (p.151)

## If you would like to add any additional context about your entry, or a description, please do so below:

This piece is a reflection on a journey with depression, spanning over several years. It explores the emergence from a place of darkness, a place where the future felt unreachable, where it becomes difficult to recognise yourself, and existence itself becomes a quiet battle. It aims to articulate the almost imperceptible return to life, the long-awaited escape from mere survival. It was inspired by Christy Nolan's ability to write with such emotional clarity and resilience, I wanted to honour the achievement of surviving, and to acknowledge the beauty but also the fear of moving beyond into a life that you almost forgot existed - where mercurial dreams, once too impossible to contemplate, begin to form. 'to tomorrow, and tomorrow' is a letter to a former self and perhaps a future self, with a promise that life can, and will be, more. I hope it speaks to the experience of living with a hidden disability but also celebrates the power of creativity and self-expression to propel us forward when words and life itself feel too far away to reach, something that has undoubtedly helped me over the years.

## Submission 6 - Aoife Bridges ~ to tomorrow, and tomorrow

here  
a breath caught in my throat  
taken aback  
by it all  
23 was an impossibility  
no future  
nor light  
shrouded by a constant darkness  
penetrated only by the weight  
of living  
at war  
an attack from within  
clawed hands ripping at my mind  
its jagged edges  
cutting through the soft flesh  
of my chest  
spilling  
losing hope  
leaking  
slowly  
slowly  
slowly  
drawing out brilliance  
leaving a  
sparkless  
dull  
shell  
how long does it take for scars to heal  
i cannot give you an exact  
timeline  
i wish i could tell you  
by day 912  
that  
wounds will begin to repair  
muscles will knit together  
skin will reach across and embrace  
connected once again  
the drip will slow  
and inevitably stop  
i cannot tell you this  
but  
there will be a day  
when you will realise  
that there are emotions on the fringes  
at the edge of the abyss  
tentatively creeping  
toward your mind  
your heart  
they will slowly pry open  
doors you thought  
were long bolted shut  
and the darkness  
will not be so black  
it will slowly transform  
bursting with purples  
blue and green  
hues that have been forgotten  
breaking across your mind’s eye  
as beautiful as a dawn  
a world will open before you  
misshapen and blunt  
and it will be yours  
all yours  
there will be music to feel  
views to drink in  
stories to tell  
and questions to ask  
laughs that will give you pains, such pleasant pains  
tears that will feel like a blessing  
love to offer  
and love to accept  
albeit a hesitating hand  
but you are so deserving of it  
so deserving  
you always have been  
always  
your days will extend  
you will finally see beyond the night  
to tomorrow and tomorrow and the next day  
maybe a future will begin to unfold  
mercurial dreams  
shaky and uncertain  
flickering, ever-changing  
perhaps fantastical  
and zealous  
but undoubtedly  
there  
i cannot tell you when  
why  
or how  
but i can guarantee  
that it is there  
waiting for you  
it will not be the life you dream of  
it is beyond comprehension  
beyond the words  
i can write.  
wait  
please  
wait  
you will see  
the present will no longer be there to survive  
but to live  
these ideas  
thoughts and fantasies  
forming slowly  
are yours to seize  
there is far too much to find  
to experience  
the crisp air in the morning  
the noon sunshine will heat  
you from the inside out  
and you will feel it  
all of it

# Submission 7 - Aránzazu Varela Muñoz

## Which of the below quotes from Christy Nolan did you use to inspire your entry?

"Accept me for what I am and I'll accept you for what you're accepted as." (p.4) ;"Words which had been lifted from the depths of numbness." (p.96)

## If you would like to add any additional context about your entry, or a description, please do so below:

This poem was inspired by the experience of being hospitalized at a very young age. Christy Nolan's quotes made me reflect about the fights and the difficulties we face everyday to make ourselves and others understand the pain we may experience. It also sees suffering as a powerful source of inspiration, rather than a limitation.

## Submission 7 - Aránzazu Varela Muñoz ~ Everyday defiance

One day I woke up  
on a misty sun in winter  
the sun was burning,  
the sun was healing,  
like the truth told in a poem.  
One day I woke up,  
on a white meadow of thorny hopes.  
And I saw the pain,  
playing around with my future.  
Falling leaves in a quiet autumn,  
I felt the sterile words  
swim in a stream of sorrow.  
In a white room, all in white colour;  
an angel called  
and I asked,  
what if there's no tomorrow?  
On a white gown, down where red flowers follow.  
Should I give up this fight  
which life gives to the uncommon?  
Try to leave all behind,  
try to forgive the hollow.  
I am here,  
I survived.  
Believe me or try  
to judge the life  
I everyday defy.

# Submission 8 - Ciaran Briscoe

## Which of the below quotes from Christy Nolan did you use to inspire your entry?

"Words which had been lifted from the depths of numbness." (p.96)

## Submission 8 - Ciaran Briscoe

“Take your time but move quick. The heroes of our generation”.  
  
Those who knew had to keep shut.  
  
Words which had been lifted from the depths of numbness.  
  
Words to inspire hope, said by the hopeless.  
  
There were those who knew, who decided not to.  
  
A city with the most powerful words ever said, yet no one left to hear them echoing throughout.  
  
A picture paints a thousand words.  
  
In this instance, the words paint a thousand pictures.  
  
  
  
1986, Chernobyl Nuclear Disaster.

# Submission 9 - Cormac Ó Fearghail

# Submission 10 - Holly Wolohan

## Which of the below quotes from Christy Nolan did you use to inspire your entry?

"His voice would be his written word." (p.93)

## If you would like to add any additional context about your entry, or a description, please do so below:

Christy Nolan was noted as not just a writer but a creator of words or portmanteau. This brought to mind the idea of a piano in a picture, art creating art, creating art, in a still silent echo.

Thank you for the opportunity to apply and I look forward to the exhibition to come.

## Submission 10 - Holly Wolohan ~ Private Piano Portmanteau

**"His voice would be his written word." (p.93)**

My mother received a painting on her  
wedding day, another, back-straight at a piano  
Casting a shadow on the duties to her side;  
The dog, the unwashed floor, a baby looking  
at the world through new-soft lashes  
Her fingers set on the keys in firm submission.  
  
No music fills my room of daily duty, but I  
am unfailingly captured by the voices, line  
by line by half-spun line.  
  
Life, line, life, another / Life, line, life, another  
Reminiscent of the painting hung by my mother.  
  
These voices are the key to my survival.  
  
- Holly Wolohan

# Submission 11 - Rhys Pearce

## Which of the below quotes from Christy Nolan did you use to inspire your entry?

"Everyone's confidant but nobody's fool." (p.154)

## Submission 11 - Rhys Pearce ~ Disorder: A Social Model

**In memory of Asperger's syndrome**

Tell me doctor, do you think it proven  
that I bode some strange eruption to myself?  
Should I take it as a given that I'm broken  
and need some puzzle piece beyond my flesh?  
  
But the only puzzling out here is in your work:  
slotting the disordered back in place.  
Do you ever stop and wonder what you're doing?  
Do you think that you can win the human race?  
  
From what standard do you troubleshoot?  
How can you draw a starting line?  
And claim the highest definition, well  
in that case I'll define  
  
the terms of my condition, now rewritten at the source:  
if my 'disorder' stems from anywhere, it trickles down, of course!  
  
And tell me DSM-5, was it not you who  
once labelled purer love as mere disorder?  
Your attempt to “solve” me might be well-spent  
considering why you label me “dysphoria”.  
  
or why you label anything at all -  
I think you're haunted by a spectre  
that cannot cure but classifies the ailments'  
as if they were the hubris you've collected.  
  
but this taxonomy is taxing me  
and takes reality to task:  
for its these self-fulfilling prophecies  
that turn 'ability' to rank.  
  
So, if we really heard how Autism Speaks,  
I've a hunch that it might say:  
“well of course I'm overwhelmed,  
the world's in disarray!”