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!”

# Submission 12 - Rory Finlay

## Which of the below 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)

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

This video is a poem I created about discovering I had ADHD at 18 years old. It reflects how I've always dreamt big but struggled to follow through with tasks, and how, once diagnosed, it helped me accept myself and experience an awakening. I shot the footage on my GoPro, and the accompanying song is 'Breathtaker' by SYML. This journey I went on mirrors Christy Nolan's sentiment: 'Now could he ever get his chance to let folk see what they thought never existed?' (p.53), as I began to unveil a part of myself previously hidden.

## Submission 12 - Rory Finlay ~ An Awakening

This was a video submission. Video transcription as follows:

**An Awakening**  
I spent my life just wondering why  
Lost in thought as time flew by  
Forgot the task  
But not the dream  
Always drifting in between  
You should focus just sit still  
But my mind had its own will  
Scattered thoughts  
A restless spark  
A hidden fire in the dark  
Then one day

and name a key  
You're not broken  
Just wired differently  
Now, I know  
Now, I see  
ADHD is part of me

# Submission 13 - Olivia Tranguch

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

"His voice would be his written word." (p.93) ;"Beauty of secret knowledge so secretly hidden and so nearly lost forever." (p.56)

## Submission 13 - Olivia Tranguch ~ Disposal of Cattle

He was buried with a watch that still ticks.

His wife knew their son was in vain, often. And she remembered how they walked, herding the cattle, and how her son came home with secrets. His secrets were his own and they would take up space in his heart. She thought of the day they walked and she watched. How beautiful and violent! The man whom she shared her child with, the child who was half of her and half of him, beat their son with a handful of flowers. How soft and angry! How her son walked on with grace in his step. But how she could hear the quiet sounds he made at night when darkness was a friend. But now that the dead were fallen, and had no chance to rise up, those quiet sounds grew into forests where thousands of birds squawked and flapped their wings in rivers where women had drowned.

How she'd say to her husband, 'You know, he is a hill of emotion, bursting to come off that hill. You must let him live. You must let him breathe without fear of his own breath.' Now she was saying to him, 'Can you breathe down there in your grave we dug by hand?'

He shouts at her through layers of dirt, 'I wasn't ready to go. I couldn't be as I wished. Will you bring me back up? Will you just take your shovel and let me out. You put me in here with that son of ours, now will you just come together to lift me out. I'm not that heavy, really, I've only been eating sweets for the last year. I've already lost some tissue and skin; it won't be too difficult to just lift me out. I'll come back and repair all that we lost, or all that we never had. We can start again.'

And his son was reincarnation of a cow. And all through his father's death, the son felt, 'I am the cow and my father is the crow picking at my back… the flies picking at my eyes and cow coat of skin.'

'I never laid a finger on you, but I think today may be your day, boy!' The dead man's son starts remembering all the past memories of violence and strife. His father looks down at his watch in the grave.

His son sits above his father for the first time. 'It's time for me to come out, now, son.' But his back was turned to his son in his grave and his son couldn't hear him. But in that same moment, the son looks down at his watch, which shows the same time, and thinks, 'It was time. Time for you. Time for me. Now it is time for me to let go of these past memories. It's time for me to live. I've buried with you all those times of violence and strife, and it quietly ticks in this cow's heart.'

His son licks envelopes that hold thanks inside for the people wishing condolences upon them. He enjoys licking the envelopes to better the smell on his breath which holds tastes of death, the taste of dirt, the taste of his father.

The taste of vomit from all the food of reunion. A supper that lasted so long it was meant to keep secrets buried, to keep the food down. But as soon as the dead man's house, which he no longer inhabited, was empty, mother and son reunited alone, his son vomits up all their past.

'Your father… your father, he'd cover himself up in silence. You'd cover yourself up in words. You'd be waiting for him to be different. Some people though, some people stay the same forever and are content. Some people like it that way. You'll always be waiting, son. Even now that he's in the grave, you'll be waiting for your mind to fix a different memory of him.'' A mother comforts her child and holds him in her arms, like the pietà.

He could feel the bodies walking above him. And all his silence wanted to burst from inside him. His son was the only one who thought, 'Will the dead mind us standing on them like this, like the way we do, and have always done?'' A father rests in his grave, wrought with a grave grief for the life he lived, and the lives he created for his wife and child.

'Our boy, my boy whose friends were moaning seals. Good man, my son. My son who dug his father's grave. Who once dug a grave for a big, old cow and laid him to rest with gentleness. We do be getting violent with each other and I'd make him dig up a past his eyes should never see. Now I have the words to say, 'I'm sorry. I'm sorry for all that past. Our past. I'm sorry for those times of violence and strife.' But now, now, he cannot hear me.'

In his grave, on this hill, his eyes let out emotion, and water the dirt with his tears. He looks down at his watch, in his grave. And the ticking stops.

The son's watch kept ticking. And the voices of his father stopped. Relief. The boy's familiarity with burying cows and a man formed him and his life. He buries the dead until his end.

He knows he's burying secrets. But he doesn't know what they are. He is content with this unknowing but decides to fix a memory of each life of each corpse in his mind. He holds all these stories close to his heart. Especially those who came alone, or left alone, like himself. He made sure to remember every corpse in every plot, marking his heart with words of them.

These secrets sit in the dark and water the dirt with their tears, or their joy.

His mother's body was the only body he refused to bury. Because he could not accept her death. He struggled to vomit up the idea of her gone. All that was left of him and his life were the cattle and the bodies beneath the earth he walked on. He tried to recall every word of his mother but could not.

All his life he worked alone, until he could no longer work at all. All the cattle were either sold or buried. And his father's house, desolate, was bought up along with all the land, by the city council. He was now stuck in a care home, that was paid for by every plot he dug.

And then there was herself. She worked in the older folks care home, even though she herself was an older folk and as old as the rest of them. She seemed to outlive all the older folks. Skin grew around her wounds both external and internal, like a cowhide. So she too had been familiar with death. They were both seen as nobility by the people in the town. They both believed their work to be good and decent work since they did not feel they ever destroyed anything. But there was her, always giving him expired supplements that had lost their potency and integrity. In his passing hour, there she was, sitting beside him and could hear sounds of a distant seal moan.

There he goes, goes, sitting expired.

Somehow, the ground would not break initially for his death. He was not ready to meet his father again, or his mother. He was laid to rest with a shovel. The same shovel he used to dig for the cow, his father, and every subsequent grave. One could say he'd dig eternally.

He lies beside his father and mother with a watch that still ticked. And one day it stop. And with him, in his chamber, in a grave dug by hand, were all those secrets nearly lost, now lost.