



Feedback



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EDITORIAL

Special Edition issue - Men & Therapy

I feel very honoured to be involved in bringing together this collection of papers about men; men in relationships, families, therapy and work. It is a timely collection which will be of interest and benefit not only to men - but also their partners, children and therapists!

The papers are also written by men. Many talking from their own hearts and experiences - tender intimacies shared. Philip Kearney's introduction is taken with permission from the Wolfhound Press publication "Fathers & Sons" a most beautiful collection of mens stories of their relationships with their fathers, compiled by Tom Hyde. In his introduction Philip is not shy to be critically concerned with the depth or safety of some such relationships and at times the negative and abusive role of men and fathers.

This collection does not shy away either from some of these concerns of working with men and their abusive behaviours. Andrew Favell's paper "Malev(i)olence and Love" holds together such ambiguous and almost contradictory positions in relationships. Alan Carr's paper presents evidence from the research on the benefits and disadvantages of involving men as fathers in Family Therapy.

All of the authors offer suggestions on the sometimes tricky question "How to engage men in Therapy". The papers are different in their styles and suggestions - Jeremy Young invites us to review/re-story our understanding of masculinity. Harry Ferguson asks us to deconstruct the social constructs of 'macho men' and help men talk of their traumas and vulnerabilities. Harry agrees with the American Family Therapist Terence

Real who suggests that we as therapists should work as 'Personal Intimacy Trainers' to help men - and women become 'relationally fit'.

The invitation to listen to mens stories of themselves come from Paul Heslin and Fergus Hogan, both papers asking us to question how we are when we sit and listen to the voice of men. Colm O'Connor, gives a gift to us all in his own poetry, on his relationships with Fathers and Sons.

I want to thank all the authors for their contribution to this collection, and the enthusiasm of many others in their support of this issue. On behalf of Feedback committee and all our readers I want to express our thanks to Nuala Cadwell for her time as Editor. She has brought together many very important papers and kept Feedback what it is, a space for conversation, ideas, feedback and connections. With all our thanks we want to wish Nuala the very best.

Fergus Hogan.

As this is the last issue of Feedback that I will be involved with in an Editorial role I would like to express my sincere thanks to all the team members who have helped me in the compiling and production of each edition of Feedback since Spring '96.

Special appreciation is due to Fergus Hogan for the idea of this issues theme and for putting it together. I would also like to appreciate all contributors of articles, of interviews, of reviews and of news events as without you Feedback could not have thrived as it has.

I am happy to hand on the Editorship into the able hands of Bernadette O'Sullivan and am confident that she will continue to facilitate the national conversations that have begun through these pages. I'm sure that the cross fertilisation of ideas, both theoretical and practical, will flourish under her direction.

Nuala Cadwell.

Soulful Storytelling With Men: An Invitation to Intimacy

by Fergus Hogan, M.Soc. Sci.

Fergus is a Family Therapy student on the Mater Programme, and works as a social worker in the Child Psychiatry Department, St James' Hospital. This paper was presented at the Family Therapy Association of Ireland's 1997 A.G.M

"Poetry and hums aren't things which you get, they're things which get you. And all you can do is to go where they find you."

Winnie-the-Pooh

"We'll make do, he said, won't we? And there was that hint of uncertainty in his voice, as if maybe we wouldn't. We will I said and felt resentful at being the one who must provide the reassurance. What's my name? He asked me. It struck me as an odd question so I didn't answer for a bit and when he repeated it I said, you're my father. No, he said, what's my real name? Sam, I said, your name's Sam. That's right, he said and he wiped his cheek and left."

Neil Jordan

INTRODUCTION

You have honoured me today in inviting me to speak. If you will honour me again as I invite you to listen, together this might become intimate.

I stand before you here not yet among you. I am a student on a learning journey. You are my audience, my vulnerability. Be gentle with me. I am a boy child, and I am a man. I am a man shaking inside. Today in my vulnerability, if you honour me and listen, you will hear my intimacies shaking.

HONOUR AND INVITE:

These two words and the ideas these words symbolise are very important. The word **honour** has become important and has stayed with me since I attended a recent conference in Carlow, entitled, 'Men and Intimacy'. Colm O'Connor spoke quite beautifully of honouring men and fathers. He spoke of everyday occasions where we might have occasion to remember the valued part of men and fathers in families. This remembering and honouring men is an important idea for me.

An idea that I have is that for too long too many men have been sent by women; mothers, partners and wives to other women (therapists) to change. Many men indeed do need to change. At a conference in Dublin, (11th and 12th April 1997) Karl Tomm was asked about his work with men who act in abusive ways. He used the word '**honour**' in his response. He explained that he invites men to take responsibility for the abusive actions just after he has asked them to recognise and name the part of their lives that they honour in themselves, or that others would honour in them.

The second word - **Invite**, was given to me in conversation with my colleague, Peter Coughlan, during one of our many conversations on men's work. I had taken a position stating that "the challenge to men working in therapy is to challenge other men to take responsibility for our actions." Peter changed the word 'challenge', (something men often do with each other) for 'invite' and suddenly the possibilities for difference began to emerge.

Many of the ideas I am presenting, I have developed in conversation and practice with the team in the Family Therapy Training Programme. Standing now in front of this mirror brings the voices of the team very strongly into my head. It feels right to name and honour the team; Peter for his support in my work with men; Pauline, the most constant and clear feminist voice in my ear and over my shoulder; Evelyn, who always encourages an adventure; Renie, who has been a warm and important support over two years now. This year Jane Williams has been our supervisor, gentle and strong. It's been very special. The team would also invite me to take responsibility for this paper.

SOULFUL STORYTELLING

'Soulful Storytelling' is an idea, or approach, a disposition towards joining with people in conversation that is different to assessment, investigation or diagnosis. 'Soulful Storytelling' is an attempt to connect with and invite people to listen and tell, an invitation to self story in a personally meaningful way, to develop connections through stories with other people's stories and to our own sense of self.

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'Soulful Storytelling' as juxtaposed in this paper does not attempt to suggest itself as something new or original but rather as something as old as 'once upon a time', and as 'common as everyday'. The ideas I present here are ideas I have collected from others. They are ideas that I find sit well together as a collective way of inviting people into intimacy. These ideas are generally influenced by the writings on 'soul' by James Hilman and Thomas Moore and the influence from the body of work in relation to narrative and social constructionist thinking.

This paper specifically suggests 'soulful storytelling' with men as another way of inviting men to become intimate in the public domain of therapy. I also consider part of my journey as a man in the field of family therapy and I am happy to take the opportunity, through this paper, to reference friends and colleagues who have been part of my map in this journey.

A PERSONAL INTEREST IN NARRATIVE FAMILY THERAPY

My interest, introduction and inspiration in family therapy comes from knowing Imelda McCarthy. I met Imelda in U.C.D. where I studied Social Work. She introduced me to family therapy, social constructionist thinking and narrative practices. For me it is Imelda's useful application of these ideas in the search for social justice and personal dignity that is most inspiring. I thank Imelda for inviting me into the field of family therapy. I honour her clear thinking and treasure her warm and constant support.

The practical application of narrative therapy and its respectful usefulness became clearer to me during a spell in St. John of God Hospital, Dublin. As a social work student on placement there, I joined Maura Maguire in some work. The point Maura made in relation to narrative therapy was the respect it afforded to people in allowing them tell their own story of self. This application of self storytelling allows us all the possibility of creating preferred stories of self. This is not simply choosing to tell a new story, but more fundamentally choosing to change a part of ourselves through the stories by which we know ourselves.

Concerns are often raised against 'narrative therapy'. Suggestions are made that the story metaphor leads to an 'anything goes' acceptance of people's positions. More so in social work and therapy, work with men is often questioned in terms of being, clear, strict, responsible. Often in my work with men I am advised by friends and colleagues to be careful of being manipulated or naive in relation to accepting the 'man's side of the story'. My notion of narrative therapy is one which is orientated in a social context that demands accountability. Stories are not told in a vacuum or without reference to another context. Narrative therapy, the possibility to self story is a

political action in the public domain of therapy. Narrative therapy is an invitation to a subject to construct a preferred self story. The challenge to the person then becomes one choosing to change and continuing to practice and review the change in relation to meaningful others.

An example from my own family script is in relation to my grandfather, Joe, who was predominantly defined in relation to his moods, grumpy and stubborn. Alternative or preferred descriptions of these behaviours were seldom considered and so my grandfather died a 'stubborn old man' rather than 'a man who had lived a long and principled life, to the end'.

After his death, I took over his role for a while. Family comments suggested 'Joe will never be dead while you're (my) moods are alive'. After some time and trouble I decided that my grandfather's overcoat was too heavy for me to carry and I decided to say out loud. 'I am not my grandfather'. This, for me, was my choice to change, which I needed to continuously practice and review in relation to others in my family. During this time I was involved in reviewing my 'preferred self story' (I am not my grandfather), with others in my family. They in turn would comment on how much I had, or had not changed and we would discuss together how much, or what other changes were necessary or possible. I see narrative therapy as a practice that is both, respectful and freeing while at the same time accountable and responsible to other people and social contexts.

THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF MASCULINITY - THE REAL BLOCKS TO INTIMACY

"Are not men taught from childhood to put aside their pain, to show no hurt, to be strong?"

Hugh Arthurs, 1993.

The singer, Jackie Leven tells a story - "A couple of years ago I saw two young women with a little boy in a Scottish park. The boy was clamouring for something as they talked and eventually one of the women fetched the wee kid a clout round the ear. He started crying and the mother said to her friend - 'and they grow up to be men y'know'. They both laughed. (The reader is now asked to think of this the other way around, two men with a little girl.)"

(J. Leven, 1997).

I work with children and families in a child psychiatric clinic. A very large number of children seen in the clinic are young boys brought by their lone parent mothers, who are struggling to 'control' their sons. Another large number of referrals come from schools who ask us to fix

or change children (boys) who cannot cope with being bullied. Another increasing group of referrals come from social workers and juvenile liaison officers who ask us to 'see and treat' children (mainly boys again) who are either 'exploding', acting out in destructive or violent ways or 'imploding' becoming insular, depressed or suicidal. So much of our work is asked to be about fixing, helping and changing boys to make sure they can cope with the very demanding roles and expectations of our society.

I remember growing up as a young boy, in a family with two younger brothers. In our family we had what we called 'growing pains'. For me, at the time, these were very real pains in my bones. Recently, I've remembered this term 'growing pains'. I use it now with families all the time, as we reflect and consider together the pains and struggles for children, young girls and boys in growing up. The pain of separation going to school; the struggle in the playground with peers; the worry of homework and exams; the demands of teenage years; relationships; drugs; poverty . . . all part of the pressures of growing up - the growing pains.

Out of this, the message being given to young men from a very early age is to grow up tough, to be strong, physically and emotionally, to protect, to provide, to be smart. Messages like 'Fix things yourself', 'Compete and then win', 'Achieve, and be seen to achieve'. 'Be sexually competent and be seen to be sexually competent', convey the expectations of how the boys can become 'macho men'. The way to be seen to be a 'real man' is to be completely other than a woman. That is really the only clear definition of what it means to be a man. A man is a man because he is not a woman. [Men used to know themselves in relation to their paid work outside of the home. (At least since the industrial revolution). However, with rising unemployment and specifically unemployment among adult males, men can no longer rely on employment as a defining variable in our sense of selves].

In fact, it seems that men's biggest fear is of becoming a woman. Men from a very young age are taught not to be womanlike, not to be cry babies, sissies and most of all queer. Boys and men who show any traits of 'femininity' are beaten into order by their peers. In short, this entrenched 'homophobia' is, I believe, the greatest single block to men's real intimacy. Men's masculinity is, therefore, defined as being different to women, to being strong, able to protect, fix and provide. These are qualities that do not lend themselves to men considering a need to go to 'therapy', and for those men who do go to therapy, for their wives and children, the same macho qualities do not lend themselves to the level of intimate conversations required or expected in the domain of therapy.

But I have heard the case put, that men have no fears of talking in public. Most public speakers are, in fact, men. Politicians, priests and football pundits! While I accept that therapy is a public form in one sense, the difference is in the type of conversation required. Men are not socially constructed to talk intimately. This analysis of the 'social construction' of masculinity is important I think, when we ask questions about why men will not engage in therapy. I am suggesting here that men are unused to being invited to talk in the intimate sense of therapy. Expecting men to talk, inviting men to intimacy, must begin with a deconstruction of our macho constructs.

MEN WORKING WITH MEN: THE POLITICS OF GENDER

In this paper I have put forward a position which considers narrative therapy and the story metaphor to be both respectful and accountable. Particularly I have suggested that narrative therapy with men offers an invitation to men to tell their, often intimate, stories in the public domain of therapy. I would now like to comment on the struggles and challenges for therapists working with men, and more specifically, the struggle and challenge for men working with men.

As a man I often struggle with the question, 'can I be a feminist?' Most days I think I want to be a feminist and, therefore, I decide I can. Other days I accept that by being a man I am not a feminist and probably can never become one. On a few short days in the year I think about trying to be open and honest and respectful with people, and on these days I forget the urgency of the question 'can I be a feminist?' Following a 'fifth province' metaphor I feel comfortable working from a pro-feminist dis-position. Again I recognise the influence of Imelda's thinking and writing on feminist issues. Also, having worked in Inchicore, I consider myself hugely lucky to have been influenced by the critical feminist practice of Jo Kennedy and the Hesed House team, Inchicore, Dublin.

There is here, I think, a critical point in this issue of gender politics and that is, that for me as a man, to continue to act from what I consider to be a pro-feminist dis-position could be a continuation of a colonial gender practice. As Michael White clearly put it 'Men do not have women's experience of the world'. Therefore, he considers 'what sorts of men's actions are in the interests of women, can only be decided upon by women.' (M. White, 1995, pp 8-9). The challenge now for men in this work is, to listen carefully with both our heads and our hearts to what women tell us as being important to their lives. This analysis and sensitivity to colonial gender practices must read both ways and similar consideration must be given to the experience of women working with men.

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Two Irish family therapists, Marie Keenan and Colm O'Connor have been hugely influential and helpful to me in my attempts to position myself in my work with men at an interpersonal and a socio-political level. Currently I am comfortable with a position for myself that considers:

- Men who act to abuse women do so because they can. (In the absence of any rigorous or consistent social sanctions.)
- Men who act to abuse are choosing to take control and are not loosing control.
- All men, myself included, benefit from the privileges afforded to men through the maintenance of the patriarchal system. (C. O'Connor, 1996, pp 18-21).

These points position me, at this time, in my thinking about how I work. My attempts to work to engage and change these points are currently most influenced by the conversational practices of Marie Keenan and her co-constructed, not knowing conversations and invitations to responsible action. (M Keenan)

STORYTELLING IN IRELAND

"It is not the literal past, the facts of history that shape us but images of the past embodied in language."

Brian Friel

The Irish tradition and value of storytelling is renowned worldwide. Visiting storyteller, Michael Mead and narrative therapist, Michael White, both began recent workshops in Dublin talking of 'coming home to the heart of stories'. In truth Ireland is the home of the travelling storyteller, the seanachai, a person who journeyed telling and collecting stories that were important to and for people. The seanachai had the power and privilege to tell a dangerous story in the form of a curse in response to a poor welcome, - and so the 'two sides to every story' are said to have been born in Ireland.

Social constructionists consider that language constructs and constrains the experiences of our lives and that it is through the stories we tell about ourselves and others that we come to know who we are or want to be. Anderson and Goolishian consider '*Language does not mirror nature, language creates the natures we know . . . our view is that communication and discourse define social organisation and that reality is a product of changing dialogue.*' (Anderson and Goolishian, 1988).

This 'social constructionist' understanding of living our lives out of the stories we tell is a well respected Irish appreciation. Gaelic salutations begin with '*An bhfuil aon scéal agat?*' (Have you any story?) The response '*Daobháil scéal mura bhfuil aon scéal agat féin*' (Devil a story if you have not got a story of your own).

Immediately the greeting is an invitation to share in stories that create the selves we know.

This Gaelic storied salutation has been translated into a number of regional colloquialisms. I grew up in Co. Louth, the smallest county, and like our geography, our conversation is sometimes 'small'. [This style of shortened conversation may also have something to do with being a border county, where people choose to say little rather than say too much]. In Co. Louth our greeting is as short and sweet as '*Well?*' It's spoken as an invite to tell. It's both short for 'well any news about yourself' and it is a phonetic connection with the traditional Irish '*An bhfuil*' which in Co. Louth is also pronounced 'well'.

In the capital Dublin the greeting and invitation to tell our story and in doing to say something of ourselves, is regularly heard in 'what's the story?' A simple and honest invitation to conversation and we begin to entertain our company.

Many men and Irish people in general, are given to the belief, 'why tell a true story when you can tell a good story', and so, at times, we have been known to tell a 'tall story' or two. Heroic and macho in detail, the size of the fish that got away, the skill of the goal, the beauty of the date; at least the story goes . . .

The Irish pub is one of the well known spaces where stories create potential. A space where the traditional Irish céili (a friendly call or visit) is continually storied. A space where people are le céile (together) for the craic (fun/chat).

The, by now, well known therapeutic metaphor and Irish mystery of the 'Fifth Province' is another such space where people can come together in another way to tell their stories. Traditionally, however, it might be the case that men have not created a valued space to come together to talk or tell their intimate stories of childhood and fatherhood. Permission and desire often go hand in hand, sometimes in a strange way. Men might not have either permission nor desire to tell stories from their hearts or soul. And so the challenge is to create a conversational and, therefore, relational space where men can story together.

STORIES, POEMS, PICTURES AND FAIRYTALES

"When the bond between heaven and earth is broken even prayer is not enough; only a story can mend it."

The Ball Shem Tov

"When someone you love is wedged in a doorway and must wait to get thin enough to get out, read him a sustaining book, such as would help and comfort him."

Winnie the Pooh

As a child I remember waking at night frightened by nightmares. My parents would comfort me with stories. My mother had a special way of telling stories, a co-constructive, imaginative way, in which my teddies and toys became part of the story. The landscape was our garden and the shops we had visited during the day. Most often I too could join in the story. At the same time I relaxed and went wild with the possibilities of imagination. I continue to this day to turn to loved ones at times of pain and hurt to ask them, 'tell me a story'. The comfort of stories for me is something with deep, deep roots.

A mythological understanding of stories would say that stories are communally important, that stories go before us in order to tell us something that is important. Fairytales are a good example of these types of communally important mythological stories. The singer, Jackie Leven remembers, "*in pre-Christian times, fairytales were told communally, and were of the greatest importance to all those who listened. How you responded, how you felt about the things that happened in the tales, and the images that arose for you, more often than not illustrated the dilemmas and difficulties that were currently in, or coming into your life. Few things are as potent as the power of the tale and the telling.*" (Jackie Leven, 1997).

This concept and use of story is slightly different to the 'narrative' appreciation I have described above. Story in this case is told in order to connect. That's what stories do. Stories connect people, places, times. Story here is told in front of people, an audience of listeners. If the story could be seen rather than heard it might be seen to float just above the heads and hearts of the listening audience. The notion is that each listener will hear a detail in the story that is currently important to them alone. The listener will choose to connect with that part of the story that holds meaning or interest. The listener in turn becomes the teller and so the story evolves.

This notion of storytelling with men, listening and telling is critically different. Men are not told what to say. Men are freed from the constricting considerations of how they should respond in intimate conversations. Rather men are given space to choose how to respond to a story for themselves. Such freedom of connection, response and direction of story opens up the possibilities of imagination.

An important part of this type of storytelling with men is the creation of a space, or container whereby men's stories together are valued. Men's groups are fast developing around this form of shared stories. Wayne Liebman, an author on the subject of men's groups, recognises a range of modes through which the door to men's intimacy can open. "Storytelling, poetry, dream sharing, meditation, movement, song, chanting, prayer,

drumming. He continues, 'I think drumming has become important to men's groups because it makes the overlap between physical and spiritual immediately palpable. It's an almost perfect form in which to contain and work with feeling. It's impossible not to be caught up in or swayed by it, a group of drummers absorbed in a rhythmic line, the magnetic power of the beat, hand on skin, embodies a vitality, that is eternal and available to everyone who listens.' (W Liberman, 1991.)

Mythological stories are described as originating in five places - the east where all things begin; the north where you can often find trouble; the south where you can sometimes find a friend; the west where all that began also ends, and the fifth space, the centre within.

This description on the origins of stories are said to be an ancient, world story. Like all global stories it is said to have an equivalent local story. In Ireland, that story is the "Fifth Province".

STORY AND SOUL

This appreciation for story, the connecting with mythological stories at points of detail, and the connecting with each other through the stories we tell, has been described as soulful. (Hilman, Mead, Moor). Stories that connect, in the telling and listening, the heart and the mind are called the "soul weave". Writing on the subject of men's soul and shadow, Hugh Arthurs suggests, 'without soul we are lost to ourselves. Without soul we are blind to the world. We make no connection to another. Where I allow soulfulness with another I meet their soul. I recognise their own deepening. In this I can experience the joy of connection and of contact.' (H. Arthurs, 1993).

This appreciation of soulful storytelling can be applied to our work in family therapy. It is in this application of "story" that the connections with "narrative therapy" comes about again. Soulful storytelling and narrative therapy offer, for me, a respectful, liberating invitation to people to talk intimately in a way that is personally meaningful.

Thomas Moore, in his book "Care of the Soul", talks of the care of the soul of the family. 'To care for the soul of the family, it is necessary to shift from casual thinking to an appreciation for story and characters, to allow grandparents and uncles to be transformed into figures of myth and to watch certain familiar family stories become canonical through repeated tellings'. It takes extreme diligence and concentration to think differently about the family: to appreciate its shadow as well as its virtue and simply to allow its stories to be told without slipping into interpretations, analysis and conclusions. Professionals think it is their job to understand and correct the family without allowing themselves to be introduced fully to its

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genius - its unique formative spirit . . . For this purpose 'family therapy' might take the form of simply story telling stories of family life, free from any concern for cause and effect or sociological influence."

[I have a difficulty if this personal level of soulful storytelling is pursued in a pure or extreme form in that it does not take relevant account for the wider sociopolitical contexts we find ourselves living in at any time. For example people living in contexts of poverty, unemployment and abuse are not responseable (able to respond) to these macro contexts - a way out of this dilemma, in relation to soul work, is to consider soulful stories at a communal level, for example, poverty or poor housing can be considered within soul being neglected.]

CONCLUSIONS

This paper has presented an application of narrative therapy, together with an appreciation of soulful story telling as a way of connecting with people in the public domain of therapy.

This soulful storytelling is suggested as a creative method of inviting men, in particular, into intimate conversations. Men are invited to tell their story, often for the first time, and the audience are invited to listen, to honour the story and the teller.

This invitation to intimacy in our private and public lives is a challenge to us all. The invitation to create a space, a container, a fifth province for men's intimacy is one of the greatest challenges to our society today. The numbers of young boys in child guidance clinics, the number of teenage and adult male suicides, the number of fatherless families and men separated from satisfying relationships with themselves and others, speaks to the call for men's intimacy. This is, I feel, something important to us all.

"One day, reaching out to touch each other they found a barrier they could not

penetrate, and recoiling from the coldness of the stone, each retreated from the stranger on the other side.

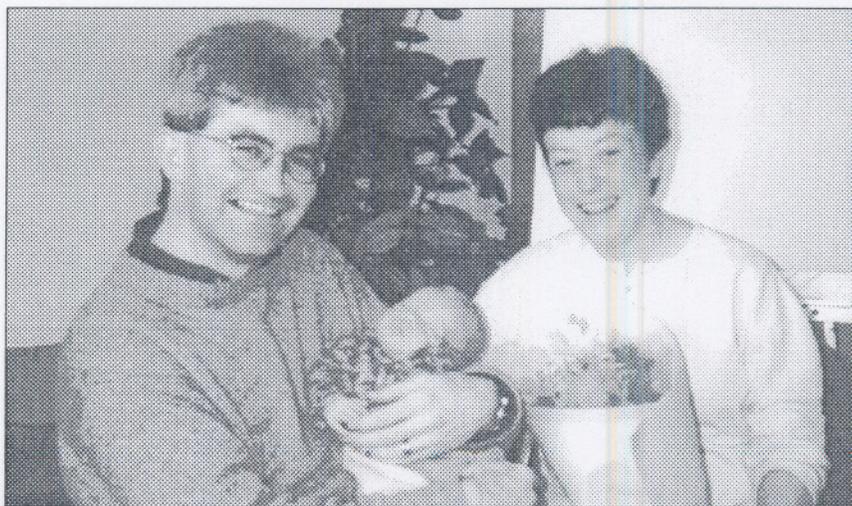
For when love dies, it is not in a moment of angry battle, nor when fiery bodies loose their heat.

It lies panting, exhausted, expired at the bottom of a wall it could not scale."

The Wall

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A big congratulations and welcome to the newest member of the Family Therapy Family. Colm born to Ger Supple (Mater) and Emer Cronin (Clanwilliam).