**This story starts in Ireland**

Today I feel the stress

The stress of knowing that the world, as I had perceived it, is really not so wholesome

I am back in Ireland

The country of my childhood

The country of my ancestors

The country of my identity

My safe harbour

But is it still?

Does it still inspire me?

Does it still leave me speechless with its beauty?

Contrarily,

It angers me

More and more

Like a kettle on the boil

That defines my relationship with Ireland

It is not the place it was

Or, it is not familiar to me anymore

Or, maybe it was just that I did not see behind the curtain before

You see, 5 years ago I lost Paul, on 24th of November 2016.

**Paul**

Paul was my nephew

He was 21 when he left us

Though I saw little of him, we spoke quite often and for some reason there was this deep, deep connection

He was the one person that I felt truly understood me

If I was adrift, I called Paul

*I knew* that *he knew* my pain

Someone once told me that Paul was my twin in my past life

That completely made sense to me

Losing him was like losing a twin

Also, the way I lost him

The way I didn't save him

The way I regret each and everything I have done prior to his passing

The way I cry out his name in ongoing shame for not knowing his pain

Not helping ease it

(Being too preoccupied with my own)

**The past:**

 Paul had gone to live in America with his dad when he was a teenager

He went to live in West Virginia

I had gone to New York

Paul was fun

He was gregarious

He made everyone laugh

They called him Irish Paul

He was so dashing

We thought West Virginia was such a beautiful place

“Country Roads, take me home...”

Things look so bucolic

Barns and farms

Rolling hills

But there was something very dark afoot that we were not aware of

It was had become a hotbed of "pill dumping"

Percocet's

Vicodin

Dilaudid

Oxycontin (aptly called “heroin in a pill”

Paul's friend had a car accident

Thousands of pills followed

The supply seemed endless

They were everywhere

The state was lost in a mountain-top cloud of opioids

And teenagers, being teenagers, didn't object

But the party didn't last long

The party quickly became a nightmare

Addiction had spread like a fungus

Devouring their minds

Their young, optimistic, innocent, minds

Their beautiful minds....

And you can't just stop

That's the greatest fallacy of all time

It's not an option

It's not even reasonable to expect a 21-year-old to face this

But Paul tried

More than once

He tried so hard

And he almost made it

It was heartbreak,that was the final straw

Young love hurts

And there was always something in West Virginia to take the pain away

And it did

But for good this time

**The darkest day**

I got *that* phone call

Immediately I went into denial

It was all wrong

It couldn't be true

He couldn't be gone

It was a lie

He had faked it, (he sure was clever enough)

It was a cruel joke

I kept thinking he would show up

It wasn't until his wake, until I saw his lifeless body,

Paul

Without the light in his eyes

He wasn't of this earth anymore

My world collapsed

My whole world went black

The colour was gone

My laugh would never return

It had been so hearty

It was gone

Joy was gone

Hope was gone

Everything good was gone

Paul was gone

Paul was gone

Paul was gone

I screamed into the night sky

Night after night

I screamed in my car with the windows up

I beat the steering wheel

I walked aimlessly at night, like the tortured soul I was

Screaming

A wail that is otherworldly

A wail that came from the deepest part of me

The death wail

This gruesome guttural sound seemed to shatter the stars; did it break through the barrier between worlds?

They say that sound is the last of the senses to go when you leave the world

Maybe they can still hear you

Maybe

**Taking Action**

Then I read Eric Eyre's award winning story about all the pills that went to West Virginia

That drug companies had targeted these communities

I met a journalist named Chris McGreal in Morgantown

He helped me understand why this state had become a war zone.

He was the only journalist I met down there.

A war zone with only one reporter

I soon realized that doctors were being bribed

That they were falling prey to their own addiction

That whole communities were being wiped out

That children were in foster care. (In West Virginia, it’s estimated that more than 50% of students in some counties are not being raised by their parents;

That the whole state was being robbed of a future

Robbed of life

Robbed of happiness

Robbed of pride

**"Take your broken heart and turn it into art"**

I felt Paul beside me

I felt him in my car

I felt him in the hotel rooms

Sitting at the bottom of my bed

I felt him everywhere

I saw him on the street

Though it wasn't him, it could easily have been

I met him in my dreams

He spoke to me

He begged for justice

Justice for West Virginia

Justice for the state he loved

Justice mattered to Paul

He wanted to be a lawyer

He wanted justice

And he asked me to get it

That is how I started my journey

The film

**Overdosed**

"The Real Story Behind America’s Opioid Epidemic"

I drove around the state

Through the mountains

I met users, dealers, doctors, DEA agents

I pushed on relentlessly, like a demon had a hold of me

But it was no demon; it was the guidance of an angel in heaven

I was a single mother with a 3-year-old daughter in tow

Though this went beyond comprehension, her soul understood

We *had* to do this

She knew

This was our fate

Her little hand holding mine

Me, looking out the window to hide my tears

Turning up the music to drown the sound of my gasps

The disbelief and shock were still ever present

My daughter sat in the backseat of our rental car

Watching the world go by

Mountain by mountain

Valley by valley

The deer

Gazing at us from the roadside

I would pull over and film in random places

Captured by an image that would help me tell my story

We journeyed the length and breadth of the state

I cried into my pillow at night with Paul's photo by my bedside

But there was never a question of turning around

Come hell or high water

That feeling of being on your path, I absolutely had that

This was our journey

But It was a journey not without risk

I hid out in hotel rooms, sometimes pulling a dresser to block the door shut

I sat beside murderers

I sat in prison visiting rooms

I was threatened

I was followed

I shoved cameras in people's faces

I knocked on so many doors

I drove through the snow

I drove through the freezing rain

I drove for days

I had to know

WHY WHY WHY WHY

I met a former dealer named Bre

She helped me find answers

I had to find answers

I got them

**The Answer**

It was true!

This was a manmade epidemic

All of this pain was avoidable

This was akin to murder

I made my film

I found the people responsible

I found the doctor that that ran a pill mill and circulated his pain pills in the West Virginia University campus

I found the dealers

I found the DEA agent that took the doctor down

I found the pharmacy that was making money off it all

I found the drug companies; they were the ones most culpable

I spoke to a member of the Sackler family (of Purdue Pharma)

And I found many others like Paul

Way too many....

I left the US after shooting my film

I couldn't live there anymore

Knowing the truth now

About how death was part of the regime

I lost all faith in everything

I blamed the US, this was their policy failure

I was going to go back to Ireland, a reasonable country. I was going back there to edit my film

 I came home

The green little land

Ireland

My mother

My womb

My saviour

 But all was not well....

Shortly after returning I realized that Ireland had too betrayed Paul

The DEA released its database of drug diversion in West Virginia

The single biggest manufacturer of oxycodone pills sent to WV during the height of the opioid epidemic were from an Irish company

Mallinckrodt is that company

Under their subsidiary SpecGx

They were the largest supplier of pills to WV between 2006 and 2012

Every single pharmaceutical company in my film had offices in Ireland

They were there for tax purposes

Because Ireland is a tax haven

Our government was harbouring criminals

Drug cartels

In plain sight

**McKesson**

Think of the guy on the bike who delivers drugs for the dealer

They were McKesson

But they weren't on BMX bikes riding around Baltimore

They were the 8th biggest company in the US

And guess what?

They had 2 offices in Ireland

So, when I needed b-roll for my film, I just had to drive up the road to Cork to get it

*McKesson on* big letters outside their building

Right there in beautiful, gentle, unassuming Ireland

I remember being in their parking lot with my camera

Seeing a McKesson employee walk around his office

It was a glass office, so I could see him clearly

Talking on the phone, pacing,

He had a family no doubt; maybe he had a son Paul’s age

He looked out the window at one point and I sunk into my car seat

Did he wonder who I was? What I was doing?

Are the employees shielded from the truth?

Would they work there if they knew?

They played a part in Paul's death

I called Mundipharma, the European arm of evil giant Purdue Pharma, the ones who started this pain pill racket in the first place by announcing that OxyContin was not addictive (that's one of the biggest lies ever told in the history of medicine)

They had a marketing office in Dublin with 15 employees

They had won an award for being "one of Ireland's best workplaces"

Marketing of all things. They were pushing pills, just like the dealers on the street.

I was put in contact with their PR dept

They sent a response in an email

This was their response;

"“We are very sorry to hear of the loss of your family member - please accept our condolences to you and your family.

 Opioids have a valuable role to play in the treatment of pain when used appropriately in patients for whom they are a suitable option.  However, we also recognise that there are risks that can lead to abuse, addiction, overdose and death.  That is why we have always been careful in our communications to doctors to only recommend appropriate use.  The information provided to prescribers states that when used in chronic non-malignant pain OxyContin’s use should be no longer than necessary to minimise the risk of dependence, that account should be taken of any history of addiction and substance-abuse, and that the patient should be regularly reviewed by their doctor.  Warnings about the risk of addiction are included in the prescribing information and the patient information leaflet in the pack."

Wait, what?

"Careful in your communications to doctors"? **You blatantly peddled this drug as non-addictive!**

**Flash Forward to 2022**

Back in Ireland

I just returned from being in West Virginia. I was there for the fifth anniversary of Paul's passing.

I spent that anniversary sitting in a car outside his apartment in Morgantown, where he used to live, just to feel close to him. It was raining, a soft rain. It tapped on the roof of the car. I lay across the front two seats and fell asleep. A peaceful sleep. I was in the right place for once. The place where he took his last breath. I could feel his closeness.

As it was thanksgiving, there was hardly a soul on the street. Just the gentle tapping rain. A little bit of Ireland maybe, or a little hello from heaven.

It had been five years. It had been a long five years.

While Purdue Pharma has since faced some reckoning, what about the other culprits? What about Mallinckrodt? And McKesson?

My stress level is still high

Watching these drug routes operating

From the USA (the birthplace of the opioid brand) to Ireland (corporate headquarters, marketing, some manufacturing, Irish domiciliation for tax purposes) then back to the USA (which consumes 80% of the world’s opioids)

Watching my nephew's death being swept under the carpet (West Virginia has continually been the state with the highest drug overdose rate per capita)

Watching how the media doesn't want to address this (Purdue Pharma makes headlines, no one else does)

Watching pharma company after pharma company set up office in Ireland with a big hoopla from our leader about how wonderful this is for our country

Well, it sure wasn’t “wonderful” for Paul or our family... not to mention the families of the hundred thousand plus people lost to overdose per year in the US)

Watching them dismiss the Paul's of the world

Watching how the stock price is the only thing that matters

Watching them turn a death story into a glory story

That's why I am writing *my* story

About how Ireland both raised and betrayed my beautiful nephew

Waterford

(His home city)

Sligo

Galway

Dublin

Cork

These places on these maps

For me they mean only one thing

Which city harbours these criminals? And how many do they harbour?

So,

Where to go now?

Having exiled myself from both countries

Both countries betrayed me

Betrayed Paul

And my daughter, now 8

Carrying the weight of loss

We still bring Paul's picture everywhere we go

We will not stop

Representing him

His life matters

He will not be another statistic on a pie chart of those lost to a "dreadful epidemic" that no one can control

Because they CAN control it

And they don't

They reward it with tax incentives

Well, I have to tell you this

Paul

Will

Always

Be

More

Then

Any

Statistic

He told me to tell you

Irish drug company Mallinckrodt: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-06/mallinckrodt-judge-asks-if-proposed-opioid-legal-shield-is-fair>

DEA Database: (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2019/investigations/dea-pain-pill-database/?utm_term=.aa6d8b55da18&itid=lk_inline_manual_4>) \_\_Eric Eyre’s investigation for The WV Gazette: (<https://www.wvgazettemail.com/news/legal_affairs/drug-firms-poured-780m-painkillers-into-wv-amid-rise-of-overdoses/article_99026dad-8ed5-5075-90fa-adb906a36214.html>)

How the drug crisis effects the children: <https://wchstv.com/news/local/new-statistics-show-larger-percentage-of-grandfamilies-in-wv>