

Ken Hennelly Creative Writing Award



Luke Kehoe with the Hennelly family



Mr Cullen, Luke and the Hennelly family.

The 'Ken Hennelly Creative Writing Award' is being presented for the first time this year in memory of our colleague and teacher. Ken was an inspiration to students and teachers alike, always encouraging creativity and debate in his students. He is fondly remembered by past pupils of his as 'Ken Hen' and we are honoured to be in a position to remember his contribution to the College in this way.

We thank Ken's family, and in particular his wife Mary, for the beautiful perpetual cup that will be presented for the very first time to Luke Kehoe (2CN) for his piece 'I am not a refugee. I am human.' We look forward to presenting this great award to more aspiring creative writers in the coming years. Well done Luke!

I am not a Refugee. I am Human.

by Luke Kehoe (2CN)

The World ended right in front of me. It fell apart and shook the ground between our feet. Buildings began disintegrating, crumbling, taking people down with them. And it was the end. They had Vanished.

The country remains crippled. Our President was impeached on corruption, our Prime Minister was assassinated, the Military Coup wrecked havoc on infrastructure. Food is scarce, disease is rife and water is running out. It's now a breeding ground for terrorists who slaughter innocent civilians and behead those who differ. Rebels mow down anyone in their path, women, children, whoever's in their way. The economy is decimated. All the companies have moved away and jobs are virtually unheard of. International Sanctions continue to demolish any signs of hope for revival.

Hope is disappearing. Love is fading. Corruption is rampant. Evilness dominates the land. The grief is still raw. The pain is still acute. Visions haunt me everyday. Nightmares terrorise me at night. I lay awake seeing them wailing for aid, writhing to be free, begging for mercy. Tears enshroud me when I think about them.

I remember seeing the trees reaching toward the sky as if they were praying for a way out of the forests, the animals dashing for shelter in the heaving swamps and the children rushing for cover in the caves. The dusk sky illuminated red and the sun sunk behind the rolling hills. The bombs fell from the sky

like a swarm of bees. The air raid sirens sounded as the ground was pounded like a wrecking ball. The buildings were crushed and the vibrations could be felt millions of miles away. The tides turned and the trawlers were swallowed by a mammoth wave that continued inland. The Arabian sea raged with anger. Some say it was war. I say it was the end of the world. Who am I? One of the survivors. One of the warriors. One of the victims. One of the Syrians.

I slowly lifted my head to scan my surroundings. I didn't know where I was. I had expected to wake up in the rubble of Damascus following the attack or maybe a hospital, but this was different. I could hear the faint sounds of children arguing and the howling sounds of the sea. I was completely disoriented. My vision remained impaired and all I could make out was colours and shapes, no details. In a panic, I lifted my battered legs with great strength and shuffled onto my feet. At this point two great questions were racing through my head. Where are they? What happened? Tears slid down my bruised cheeks as I frantically searched for them. I ran over and back, yelled and screamed for them waiting to hear a response. I didn't hear one. The panic attack deteriorated and I pleaded for them. It was another hour before the effects of the attack dissipated. Fear struck me. I was by myself. I didn't know where I was, they weren't there to guide me. The most worrying thought captivated me when I realised where I was. I had escaped. I was one of the 'lucky ones' on a boat. A boat heading to anywhere willing to accept us. I was now a refugee.

For the next two days I spent my time thinking about them. I remembered the good times when their faces lit up with smiles and when we'd go down to the beach on a Saturday evening. The boat was seriously overcrowded. The great waves of the Mediterranean sea crashed onto the boat that was holding at least two hundred people. We had to use buckets to remove the excess water from the boat. No one had life jackets, no one

knew how to swim, no one knew where we were going. There was no food and those who wanted water ended up choking themselves with salty sea water. The sun blared onto the boat and we ripped the carpets from the deck to cover us from the heat. Children screamed with pain as those who didn't work hard enough to bail out the water were thrown overboard. I remember seeing the face of one boy who was five years old. He struggled to bail out the water as his arms began to fail. The crew saw him, they saw the hardship and loss written all over his face, they saw him praying for mercy, but they didn't care. He was pushed overboard like a fish. He couldn't swim. He couldn't even float. He bellowed with pain as his lungs flooded with water and he sank to the bottom. I felt so helpless, I felt so angry. How could people treat people like that. I remain to this day ashamed of myself for not helping that boy.

Another week had passed and I was now struggling to remain awake. My mouth swelled with agony and my hands were covered in blisters. My stomach rumbled for food and my lips withered like a rose. This was the toughest day. Over twenty others had starved to death. Their bodies were flung overboard and fed to the sharks like they meant nothing. The Mediterranean was rough, she fought with anger. Things were going downhill fast and I knew we wouldn't survive another day out here. We needed to find some land, we needed to find some hope. Unfortunately, the opposite happened. The huge waves continued to grow and the boat was being hammered from stern to bow. Panic erupted when water penetrated the hull and swamped the bow of the boat. People were screaming, we were sitting in water as the ship's stern lifted out of the water and the bow sunk deeper into the water. Everyone hurried to the boat's stern in a desperate last attempt for survival. Some were trampled on like a herd of elephants and others were crushed against the iron rails. I knew this was the end. I had lost all hope, I had lost the courage to continue fighting. The sea devoured the boat, along with fifty people who perished to death.

After an hour in the water, there was no sound. I was the only one left. The others had lost their lives. Everyone had gone, I was left alone in the Mediterranean with no signs of civilisation nearby. What had the world come to. Why were innocent people dying for no reason? Why were people killing each other like a game? Why were people blind? Why were people greedy? Why were people still calling themselves people?

My legs were frail and my hands were raw with suffering. I was about to let go of the wood that was keeping me alive, I was about to call it the end. Suddenly, I heard the sound of another ship. I could hear the propellers cutting through the water and feel the currents radiating from the hull. My eyes lit up with hope and I suddenly regained the energy to move. I had never swam before but I had to. If I didn't I would die. I thought of them, I thought of how they would have felt if they saw me giving up. Letting go of the wood, I headed for the ship. Kicking my legs harder than I had ever done before and moving my hands in ways I never knew I could. It was amazing, I felt like a new person. I yelled at the boat, jumped up and down in the water and desperately signaled the boat to stop, praying and begging for help.

I was so lucky to have spotted that boat. It saved me, that's why I'm here today. The battle had just begun though. You see, the captain advised me that if I landed in Greece, Hungary or Turkey I would be treated with great cruelty, I would be treated like an outcast. I didn't believe him. I said to him that nowhere in the world would deny life to people who have fled war. I told him that no country would be so cruel, I told him that Europe has open borders. I told him that Europe is my dream, I told him that I can get my life back, I told him that *they will always accept refugees, I told him that they would always accept humans.*

I arrived on the coast of Greece after one week. Now I was alone again. I knew no one. This was a new beginning for me, a start to a fresh life. The first obstacle that I had to cross

was customs. I was searched intensely, they performed background checks on me and my family. They interrogated me, asked me why I came here and asked me my religion. Following weeks of legal complications I was finally allowed into Greece. I could finally begin a new life.

Myself and over seven hundred other refugees were loaded onto buses. We were told that we were going to a shelter in Athens. We were told that we were going to get a new life. We were lied to. All of them lied to us. When we realised that we were going to be deported back to Syria, mayhem broke out. We abandoned the buses and marched toward the Syrian embassy in Athens. However, our march for justice was quickly interrupted. Hundreds of Greek police lined the streets and blocked the roads around us. We were cornered. The police were armed. They had guns, they had bombs. The sight shook me with fear. I hadn't seen any weapons since the invasion in Syria. I knew how much damage they could do, I knew how powerful and fatal they were. Tensions continued to escalate as the police closed in and we began shouting for freedom. The police now began threatening us to get back on the buses, but we refused to listen. The atmosphere was highly volatile, it would take only one person to start a fight. After another thirty minutes, more and more police flooded into the plaza and began barricading the roads around us. Violence broke out as the police began shooting water cannons and rubber bullets. It was chaos. I rushed for cover in the bus as tear gas was thrown onto us. I began to realise that we were not welcome, I realised that we were seen as outcasts, seen as a burden by the people of Europe. Hope once again diminished when I heard the sounds of pipe bombs exploding across the plaza. The police were now raging with anger, beating people with bats and murdering women and children.

It reminded me of Syria. Innocent people were slaughtered by cowards with weapons. Over six hundred people died in the massacre with only one police man injured. We were forced onto

huge boats with no food or water and shipped back to where we came from. I had seen Europe. I had seen the amount of hatred in the world. I had witnessed the blood shed. I had been one of the victims. Now I'm back to the beginning of my journey. I'm back in Syria.

The Americans invaded us, the Europeans ignored us, the Terrorists slaughtered us, the Rebels fought us, the Government failed us. And what for? Why is there this much blood shed? Why is Syria the graveyard of millions of people? No one wants to help us, no one wants to see us, no one cares about us. The dreams of millions of people have been destroyed, generations have been decimated. Our country lies in ruins, not one building stands, not one flower flourishes, not one animal lives. Centuries of civilisation have been wiped out. All that is left is rubble, all that is left is bone, all that is left is death.

I've learned so many lessons from this journey, I've learned to love those close to me even in the darkest hour. I've learned to never give up even when all odds are against me. I guess they were right. I guess my mother and father were right:

There is no greater journey than the pursuit of a dream