

Cards

By Lisa O'Donovan

I look down at my cards and take in my hand,
I hear the whispers
-you poor thing
-how tragic!
-it's so difficult
Looking down at my cards I realise something,
I quite like my hand!
In acknowledging that,
Accepting that,
Embracing that!
I smile,
Because I've already won the game.

Giving or taking?

By Lisa O'Donovan

I went to Canada for a camp for the blind and visually impaired. I wasn't long after receiving my diagnosis - legally blind - and I really didn't know what to expect. Not to get all into the camp, but it was amazing, a real eye-opener. (Get it?!). The memory that has stayed with me, however, is one which I have thought about often. I have replayed, pondered and laughed at it many times. And I am going to share it now.

I was sitting at a table in the dining hall, listening to the chatter around me. I took note of the conversation between two women who were discussing their eye conditions. They were talking about what little difference it made to their lives. They agreed that, if given a choice, they would keep their conditions, their visual impairments, their blindness. I was horrified! I remember

thinking that these women must be nuts; damn Canadians. How, or why, would anyone choose to be blind? This made no sense to me. None, whatsoever.

Now here I am, over a decade later, and I get it. My visual impairment has become such an integral part of myself that I wouldn't know who I was without it. In giving me my sight back, a part of me would be taken away. Giving or taking... I guess the real question here is, if offered, would I take my sight back? I don't know who I would be, if sighted. I just know I wouldn't be me. The general social perception is that, if you have a disability, you would want to get rid of it. It never dawns on people that a disability might also be an integral part of someone's personality, their life. So much so that maybe it's worth keeping.

I find it ironic - even hilarious - to have come to this conclusion. I didn't understand what those women meant, all those years ago. And I don't think everyone will understand my perspective now. More than likely, they'll just think that I'm nuts, too! I do wonder, though, if anyone with a disability will understand.

To you, Frances Browne

By Lisa O'Donovan

Born in Stranorlar, Donegal, a small rural town
She was named after her mother, Frances, Frances Browne
With 11 brothers and sisters, she was the seventh in line
A big family indeed! As families were at that time
But Frances was different. She couldn't learn to read or write
This was due to small pox, which robbed her of her sight
However, she was a curious, inquisitive child
She wanted to learn, her desire for knowledge running wild

She listened to her siblings' homework, done after school
She learned everything by heart, making her memory a tool
Soon the bartering began, with family, friends and neighbours
They would read to her in exchange for chores, tasks and favours

Before long, Frances became the narrator, the composer, the creator

Her boundless creativity, talent, ambition becoming greater and greater

From short stories, to novels, to poems - she wrote them all!
With poverty, geographic isolation, lack of education, female, blind - she found her call!

More than a hobby or a pastime, her work was popular and published

She was well-known, the title 'the blind poetess of Ulster' established

She moved from Donegal, to Edinburgh, to London, with her sister at her side

Her sister, Rebecca, acted as a reader, scribe and guide
While her reader, scribe and guide changed, her passion for writing did not

Her countless pieces are still being found, and will never be forgot

Her work, 'Granny's Wonderful Chair', is one of the most famous

Translated and reprinted, Frances has gained literary celebrity status

She is an inspiration, a visionary, a shining example to people far and near

With such legacy and spirit, one thing is blatantly clear
She is deserving of more than a medal, a trophy, an award, or a crown

So, in awe, we raise a glass, to you, Frances Browne.

