



## CONTENTS

### PART I

1	Lights of Home	3
2	Out of Control	11
3	Iris (Hold Me Close)	17
4	Cedarwood Road	31
5	Stories for Boys	43
6	Song for Someone	55
7	I Will Follow	69
8	11 O'Clock Tick Tock	83
9	Invisible	107
10	October	133
11	Two Hearts Beat as One	147
12	Sunday Bloody Sunday	161
13	Bad	179
14	Bullet the Blue Sky	191
15	Where the Streets Have No Name	201
16	With or Without You	211
17	Desire	223

### PART II

18	Who's Gonna Ride Your Wild Horses	233
19	Until the End of the World	245

CONTENTS

20	One	257
21	The Fly	271
22	Even Better Than the Real Thing	289
23	Mysterious Ways	297
24	Stuck in a Moment	309
25	Wake Up Dead Man	319
26	The Showman	335
27	Pride (In the Name of Love)	353

PART III

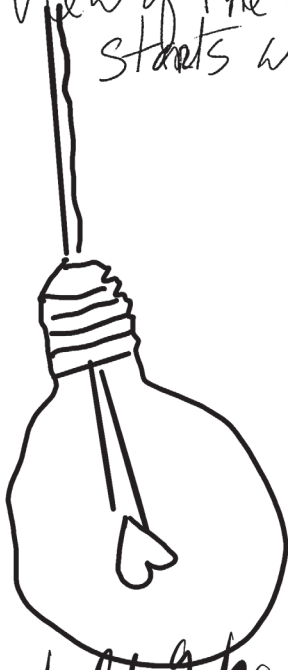
28	Beautiful Day	375
29	Crumbs from Your Table	391
30	Miracle Drug	403
31	Vertigo	429
32	Ordinary Love	443
33	City of Blinding Lights	461
34	Get Out of Your Own Way	471
35	Every Breaking Wave	489
36	I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For	505
37	Love Is Bigger Than Anything in Its Way	521
38	Moment of Surrender	533
39	Landlady	549
40	Breathe	553
	<i>After Words</i>	559

# PART I

I can't change the world  
but I can change the world in me.

—SFX Theatre, Dublin, December 1982

a bicuspid view of the world  
starts way before



I am told I have  
an eccentric heart.....

## Lights of Home

*I shouldn't be here 'cause I should be dead  
I can see the lights in front of me  
I believe my best days are ahead  
I can see the lights in front of me.*

I was born with an eccentric heart. In one of the chambers of my heart, where most people have three doors, I have two. Two swinging doors, which at Christmas 2016 were coming off their hinges. The aorta is your main artery, your lifeline, carrying the blood oxygenated by your lungs, and becoming your life. But we have discovered that my aorta has been stressed over time and developed a blister. A blister that's about to burst, which would put me in the next life faster than I can make an emergency call. Faster than I can say goodbye to this life.

So, here I am. Mount Sinai Hospital. New York City.

Looking down on myself from above with the arc lights reflecting on the stainless steel. I'm thinking the light is harder than the steel counter I'm lying on. My body feels separate from me. It is soft flesh and hard bone.

It's not a dream or vision, but it feels as if I'm being sawn in half by a magician. This eccentric heart has been frozen.

Some remodeling needs to take place apart from all this hot blood

swirling around and making a mess, which blood tends to do when it's not keeping you alive.

Blood and air.

Blood and guts.

Blood and brains are what's required right now, if I'm to continue to sing my life and live it. My blood.

The brains and the hands of the magician who is standing over me and can turn a really bad day into a really good one with the right strategy and execution.

Nerves of steel and blades of steel.

Now this man is climbing up and onto my chest, wielding his blade with the combined forces of science and butchery. The forces required to break and enter someone's heart. The magic that is medicine.

I know it's not going to feel like a good day when I wake up after these eight hours of surgery, but I also know that waking up is better than the alternative.

Even if I can't breathe and feel as if I am suffocating. Even if I'm desperately drawing for air and can't find any.

Even if I'm hallucinating, 'cause I'm seeing visions now and it's all getting a little William Blake.

I'm so cold. I need to be beside you, I need your warmth, I need your loveliness. I'm dressed for winter. I have big boots on in bed, but I'm freezing to death.

I am dreaming.

I am in a scene from some movie where the life is draining out of the actor in the lead role. In the last moments of his life he is vexed and questioning his great love.

"Why are you going? Don't leave me!"

"I'm right here," his lover reminds him. "I haven't moved."

"What? It's not you leaving? Am I the one walking away? Why am I walking away? I don't want to leave you. Please, don't let me leave."

There are some dirty little secrets about success that I'm just waking up to. And from.

Success as an outworking of dysfunction, an excuse for obsessive-compulsive tendencies.

Success as a reward for really, really hard work, which may be obscuring some kind of neurosis.

Success should come with a health warning—for the workaholic and for those around them.

Success may be propelled by some unfair advantage or circumstance. If not privilege, then a gift, a talent, or some other form of inherited wealth.

But hard work also hides behind some of these doors.

I always thought mine was a gift for finding top-line melody not just in music but in politics, in commerce, and in the world of ideas in general.

Where others would hear harmony or counterpoint, I was better at finding the top line in the room, the hook, the clear thought. Probably because I had to sing it or sell it.

But now I see that my advantage was something more prosaic, more base. Mine was a genetic advantage, the gift of . . . air.

That's right.

Air.

"Your man has a lot of firepower in that war chest of his."

That's the man who sawed through my breastbone speaking to my wife and next of kin, Ali, after the operation.

"We needed extra-strong wire to sew him up. He's probably at about 130 percent of normal lung capacity for his age."

He doesn't use the word "freak," but Ali tells me she has started thinking of me as the Man from Atlantis, from that 1970s sci-fi series about an amphibian detective.

David Adams, the man I will owe my life to, the surgeon-magician, speaks with a southern twang, and in my heightened Blakean state I begin to confuse him with the crazed villain of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*. I overhear him asking Ali about tenors, who are not known to run around a stage hitting high notes.

"Aren't tenors supposed to stand with two legs apart, firmly rooted in the ground, before even considering a top C?"

"Yes," I say, without opening my mouth and before the drugs wear off. "A tenor has to turn his head into a sound box and his body into a bellows to make those glasses smash."

I, on the other hand, have been racing around arenas and sprinting through stadiums for thirty years singing "Pride (In the Name of Love)," the high A or B depending on the year.



SURRENDER

In the 1980s the stylish English songster Robert Palmer stopped Adam Clayton to plead with him. “Will you ever get your singer to sing a few steps lower. He’ll make it easier on himself, and all of us who have to listen.”

Air is stamina.

Air is the confidence to take on big challenges or big opponents.

Air is not the will to conquer whatever Everest you will encounter in your life, but it is the ability to endure the climb.

Air is what you need on any north face.

Air is what gives a small kid on a playground the belief that he won’t be bullied, or if he is, that the bully will have the air knocked out of him.

And here I am now without it, for the first time.

In a hospital emergency room, without air.

Without breath.

The names we give God.

All breath.

Jehovaaaah.

Allaaaah.

Yeshuaaaaah.

Without air . . . without an air . . . without an aria.

I am terrified because for the first time ever, I reach for my faith and I can’t find it.

Without air.

Without a prayer.

I am a tenor singing underwater. I can feel my lungs filling up. I am drowning.

I am hallucinating. I am seeing a vision of my father in a hospital bed and me sleeping beside him, on a mattress on the floor. Beaumont Hospital, Dublin, the summer of 2001. He is deep breathing, but it’s getting shallower and shallower like the grave in his chest. He shouts my name, confusing me with my brother or the other way around.

“Paul. Norman. Paul.”

“Da.”

I jump up and call a nurse.

“Are you okay, Bob?” she whispers in his ear.

We are in a world of percussive, animated whispers, a world of

sibilance, his tenor now become short tinny breaths, an s after every exhalation.

“Yesssss sssss sss.”

His Parkinson’s disease has stolen the sonority.

“I want to go home ssssss I want to get out of here sssss.”

“Say it again, Da.”

Like the nurse, I am leaning over him, my ear close to his mouth. Silence.

Followed by another silence.

Followed by “FUCK OFF!”

There is something perfectly imperfect about my da’s exit from this world. I don’t believe he was telling me or the very vigilant night nurse to fuck off. I’d like to believe he was addressing the monkey that had been on his back for a large part of his life.

He had told me in those final days that when accepting his cancers, he’d lost his faith, but he also told me that I should never lose mine. That it was the most interesting thing about me.

Emboldened, I read to him from a psalm of King David, Psalm 32.

David was in a fair bit of trouble himself. Da was not in the mood for a sermon and I saw his eyes roll, likely not to heaven.

*While I kept silence, my body wasted away  
through my groaning all day long.  
For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;  
my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.  
Therefore let all who are faithful offer prayer to you;  
at a time of distress, the rush of mighty waters shall not reach  
them.  
You are a hiding-place for me; you preserve me from trouble;  
you surround me with glad cries of deliverance.*

Was this for him, or me?

The old man confessed his admiration for what seemed like me having “a two-way conversation with the man upstairs.”

“Mine is all one-way, but knock it off, will you? I’m trying to get some peace here.” Well, he didn’t get it here, but I want to believe he found it there.

Where’s there? Home.

SURRENDER

I don't know if I know what that is.

I say goodbye. I take a deep breath and head off to look for it.

Spring 2015.

More cold white fluorescent light. Steel and glass.

Nausea.

This time it's no life-threatening affair. I'm staring into a mirror in the bathroom adjacent to a dressing room under an ice hockey arena in Vancouver, Canada. It's the first night of the Innocence + Experience Tour.

I was never vain when I was younger. I would avoid standing in front of mirrors. But here I am, in the white-tiled bathroom, staring at my own face to see if, on some second glance, it might become more attractive.

I can hear the rumble of a crowd through the walls, singing along to Gary Numan's "Cars": "Here in my car / I feel safest of all / I can lock all my doors / It's the only way to live / In cars."

I am in the future I dreamed of when I first heard this synthesizer song in the late 1970s. I can't believe that now, turned fifty-five, I've opted for the DIY bottle-blond peroxide of that period. The color of a chicken wing, as a Spanish reviewer will later suggest. The rumble from the arena only increases the curdling of excitement I feel. I walk back into the dressing room, itself a time capsule, and complain that it looks just like the one we had on the last tour. I'm told it's been the same one for twenty years. Green hessian, fairy lights, tobacco leather couch. After all this time, why is getting ready to walk out and meet 18,474 of your closest friends so nerve-racking? It's the opening night of a world tour, but as usual I'm not alone.

Larry has an angelic aura about him, the look of someone who's seen through to the other side. I think that perhaps he has, having buried his father just yesterday. Adam looks like the lead in an art-house movie. Unruffled. Edge is tense and intense, but just about able to cover it up.

As we do before every show, we pray.

Sometimes it can feel as if we're strangers, praying to find the intimacy of a band that could be useful to our audience this evening.

Useful? To music. To some higher purpose. In some strangely familiar way we are changed. We begin our prayers as comrades; we end them as friends finding a different image of ourselves, as well as the audience we're about to meet, who will change us again.

To be useful is a curious prayer. Unromantic. A little dull even, but it's at the heart of who we are and why we're still here as a band. Men who met as boys. Men who have broken the promise that's at the very heart of rock 'n' roll, which is that you can have the world but in return the world will have you. You can have your messiah complex, but you must die on a cross aged thirty-three, or everyone has the right to ask for their money back. We've turned them down. So far.

We are men who bear some scar tissue from our various struggles with the world but whose eyes are remarkably clear considering the vicissitudes and surreality of a life playing stadiums for thirty-five years.

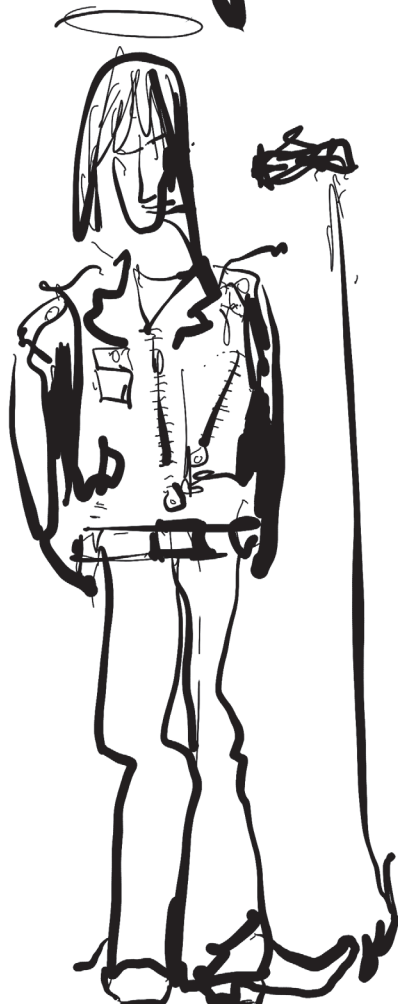
Now, through the walls, I can hear Patti Smith singing "People Have the Power," the signal that we have five minutes and ten seconds before showtime, five minutes and ten seconds before we find out if we still have the thing that people have turned up for, which is not just our music or our friendship. What's on offer is our band as a chemistry set, a chemical reaction between our audience and us. That's what makes a good band great.

The roar of the crowd rises as we head down the corridor from the dressing room, a roar that turns this mouse into a lion. I have my fist in the air as I walk to the stage, as I get ready to step inside the song. I will try over the next pages to explain what that means. But after forty years, I know if I can stay inside the songs, they will sing me and this night will be not work but play.

Nearly twenty thousand people are singing the choral refrain of "The Miracle (Of Joey Ramone)," and as Edge, Larry, and Adam walk down to the front of the stage, I walk up alone to meet them from the opposite end of the arena. I walk through our audience, through this noise. In my mind I am seventeen, walking from my house on the Northside of Dublin, all the way down Cedarwood Road, on the way to rehearsals with these men all those years ago, when they were boys too.

I am leaving home to find home. And I am singing.

The miracle of Joey Ramone



## Out of Control

*Monday morning  
Eighteen years of dawning  
I said how long  
Said how long.*

I'm jumping around the living room of 10 Cedarwood Road to the sound of "Glad to See You Go" from the Ramones' *Leave Home*.

*You gotta go go go go goodbye  
Glad to see you go go go go goodbye*

It is 1978, the day of my eighteenth birthday.

These songs are so simple, and yet they express a complexity that's way more relevant to my life than Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. Which I've just finished. Which took me three and a half weeks to read. This album takes only twenty-nine minutes and fifty-seven seconds. Songs so simple that even I can play them on guitar. And I can't play guitar.

Songs so simple even I might be able to write one. This would be some kind of personal revolution, the reverberations of which might be felt all the way upstairs to the empty room of my older brother, Norman. Or, more important still, down the hallway to the kitchen, where the da is sitting.

My da, who wants to talk to me about getting a job. A job!

A job is a thing where you do something you don't really like for eight hours a day for five or six days a week in return for money to help you do the stuff on the weekend you want to do all the time.

I know I would like to avoid work. I know that if I could do what I love, then I would never have to work a day in my life. But there's a problem. Even in my pimpled teenage obnoxiousness I know that this is unlikely if I'm not great at something.

And I am not great at something. I am not great at anything.

Well, I'm a pretty good mimic. My friend Reggie Manuel says the reason I ran off with his girlfriend Zandra was all down to my Ian Paisley impression. I'm quite good at channeling the bellicose ranting of the Reverend Ian Paisley, leader of the unionists in the North.

"NOY SRRNDRRR." He would belch.

My Ian Paisley makes Zandra laugh so much that I tell myself she is vulnerable to my advances, but I also know she might dump me for Keith what's-his-face because it's not enough just to be funny. You have to be smart as well, and I am smart enough to know I'm not smart. Enough.

It wasn't so long ago that I was smart at school, but lately I can't concentrate on anything except girls and music. I'm smart enough to see a correlation.

I can paint quite well but not like my best friend, Guggi. I can write prose quite well but not as well as that gifted know-it-all Neil McCormick, who writes for the school magazine. I've played with the idea of being a journalist, fantasized about being a foreign correspondent, reporting from war zones. But to be a journalist, you have to do well at exams, and I'm having problems with exams. Problems with being in school to sit them.

And anyway, there's another war zone I'm involved in. In our street, at my house, in my head.

Why go all the way to Timbuktu as a war correspondent when there's so much good material under my bed? The fears and specters under my pillow are the reasons I sometimes don't want to get out of bed. I don't yet know that rock 'n' roll—punk rock in particular—will prove my liberation.

That it will end my occupation. Of my bed.

We have a brown leatherette couch in our living room at 10 Cedarwood Road. An orange-and-black sunburst carpet that runs flush to the walls and hugs our bare feet in the winter. We've just gotten central heating so that for the first time the cold does not chase us every morning from bedroom to bathroom.

We're rich.

So rich that my da drives a metallic-red Hillman Avenger. So rich that we had a color telly before our friends. A color telly is a big deal. In our house it makes real life look less real, and in my teenage years life for me, for Da, and for Norman regularly needs to look a little less real.

During the 1970s, color telly makes the green of the Old Trafford or Anfield or Highbury football grounds so much greener on *Match of the Day* than any green field out the back of our housing estate. The red shirts of George Best and Charlie George are ablaze. It doesn't do much for Malcolm Macdonald. What's the point of supporting Newcastle United in their monochrome kits when black-and-white is history?

My da says royalty should be history, too, but agrees with my mother that the queen looks great in color. Every year, my mother and father might laughingly argue about whether we Irish should interrupt our Christmas lunch to watch Her Majesty-ness give her Christmas Day speech on the telly at three o'clock. It's like the whole world has a weakness for the fanfare and parade, the royal pomp and circumstance. But war is black-and-white even when it's in full color. Parts of our country are at war with other parts of our country. Our next-door neighbor, Great Britain, has been a bully, and now we have grown some of our own. Blood is a crimson color on the news. More and more flags on our streets are branding public space with the divisive history of Ireland and England, but that doesn't stop us pausing to watch the Trooping of the Colour on the queen's birthday. It all comes alive on a color telly.

But even accounting for the U.K.'s punk rock, to a teenage boy in Dublin, England can never be as vivid as America. The "cowboys" introduce a whole other spectrum—John Wayne, Robert Redford, Paul Newman—and so do the "Indians," though they had no hand in their own drawing. The portrayal of the Apache, the Pawnee, the



Mohicans will influence the way punk looks. Then there's the urban lawmen like Clint Eastwood as Dirty Harry, Peter Falk as Columbo, or Telly Savalas in *Kojak*.

But fiction was nothing next to real American life. Nothing next to the dazzling Apollo space program, the most visionary of visions.

How mad these Americans are to think they could land a man on the moon, the kind of mad we Irish feel a stake in. And wasn't it one of our own royal family, John Fitzgerald Kennedy, who first thought up the idea of putting a man on the moon? That's what my da says.

A teenager in 1970s Dublin, I'm serious about turning the black-and-white world outside the ornament-cluttered windowsills of Cedarwood Road into the kind of color we have on that Murphy television. And if I want to see life differently, I want to hear it in a new way too. To move from the monotones of teenage hopelessness to the rounder, richer sounds of another objet d'art in our living room.

Our stereo.

We have a great stereo. It isn't just a record player to fill the house with the sound of my da's operas. It is also a Sony reel-to-reel tape recorder that is going to spin my life around. The Ramones, The Clash, and Patti Smith will reframe the world outside, but it had already started with The Who and Bob Dylan and a special obsession I developed with David Bowie, who, at first, I imagine as one half of a duo. Thinking *Hunky Dory* was the name of his other half, rather than the name of his fourth album.

MAY 10, 1978

A big day for an apprentice rock star of five feet seven and a half who swears he's five feet eight. That it's my eighteenth birthday is the least of it. We don't do birthdays well in our family. True, it's excellent to receive a £5 note from my da, but that isn't why today is special.

This is the day I will learn to do a Houdini-like great escape. Better than any Indian rope trick, I will make my black-and-white life disappear and then reappear in color. This is the day I'm going to write my first proper rock 'n' roll song and U2's first single. I have

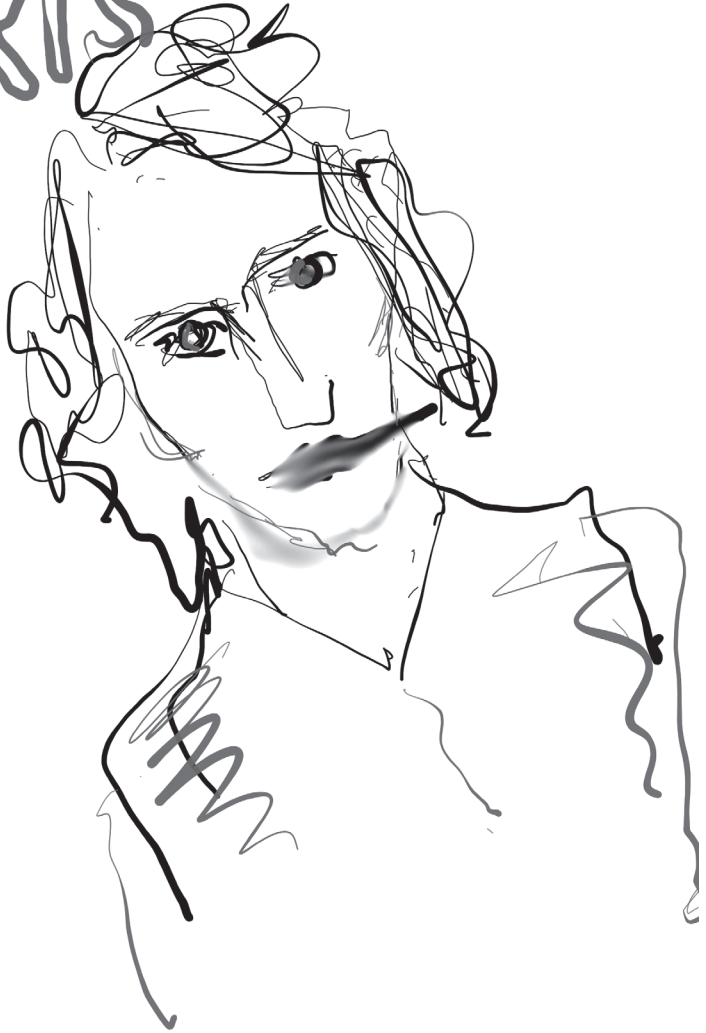
the miracle of Joey Ramone to thank for that. And his miraculous brothers. But without Edge, Adam, and Larry—my own miraculous brothers—no one would ever have heard it.

*Monday morning  
 Eighteen years of dawning  
 I said how long.  
 Said how long  
 It was one dull morning  
 I woke the world with bawling  
 I was so sad  
 They were so glad.  
 I had the feeling it was out of control  
 I was of the opinion it was out of control.*

I called the song “Out of Control”<sup>\*</sup> because it dawned on me—and Fyodor Dostoyevsky might have had a hand in this—that we humans have little or no influence on the two most important moments of our life. Being born and dying. That felt like the right kind of fuck-you to the universe that a great punk rock song requires.

\* The song was released on September 26, 1979, on an EP called *Three*, with two other songs—“Stories for Boys” and “Boy/Girl.” The order of the songs was selected by listeners of Dave Fanning’s RTÉ radio show, and Dave was the first DJ to play our first song. Dave has been the first person to play every new single of ours ever since.

IRIS



## Iris (Hold Me Close)

*The star,  
that gives us light  
Has been gone a while  
But it's not an illusion  
The ache  
In my heart  
Is so much a part of who I am  
Something in your eyes  
Took a thousand years to get here  
Something in your eyes  
Took a thousand years, a thousand years.*

Imagine a fifty-five-year-old man singing to his mother in front of twenty thousand people every night.

*I mean what's up with that?*

It's hard losing your mother at fourteen and all, but maybe he should be over it by now. Seriously.

As lead singer of the U2 group, I get a fair amount of harassment. Fair or unfair, it's part of the job description and most of the time I quite enjoy it. None of it compares with the kind of shit I accuse myself of, especially onstage when I can have all kinds of psychedelic, psychological stuff going on. There's a lot of static on that stage and in that crowd.

*What's up with that?*

That question above? An example of the more inane accusations I hear in my mind just before I step into the song "Iris." It's as if I have my own personal satan trolling at my shoulder, sowing doubt at every turn. The little devil sprays emotional graffiti all over the walls of my self-respect. But the little devil is me, so why would I put myself through this?

Someone has likened prayer to being on a rough sea in a small boat with no oars. All you have is a rope that, somewhere in the distance, is attached to the port. With that rope you can pull yourself closer to God.

Songs are my prayers.

#### BLACK CURLS AND CHURCH BELLES

I have very few memories of my mother, Iris. Neither does my brother, Norman. The simple explanation is that in our house, when she died, she was never spoken of again.

I fear it was worse than that. That we rarely thought of her again.

We were three Irish males, and we avoided the pain that we knew would come from thinking and speaking about her.

In 2014, on *Songs of Innocence*, I'd given myself a license to look back, to lift up stones under which I knew lay creepy-crawlies. What strands of memory I had left of my mother I'd attempted to weave into the song "Iris."

I would sing myself to her.

I would find her.

Three days before the album's release, I panicked. I'd gone off the idea of the song "Iris" going out into the ether of music releases, out into the world, this song by a fifty-four-year-old man wailing for his late mother. "Iris" felt, at the last minute, too everything: too soft, too broad, too exposed, too much for a band to have to suffer for a singer. This being initially a digital-only release to 500 million people (another story, we'll come to that), I tried to pull the song off

the album. It wasn't as if a million CDs or vinyl albums would be consigned to a landfill. But digital too has deadlines, and I'd missed mine. Apple had loaded the album into its myriad virtual systems, and pulling the track would mean blowing up the world.

Or something equally bad.

I stared at the wall asking myself why this was still so raw, why Iris still hurt after all these years. How many years exactly? This is 2014, forty years later. And September—forty years to the month.

Really? What date exactly? I couldn't remember. I texted my brother. He couldn't remember. He called my uncle, but Uncle Jack couldn't remember either, though he remembered that "Gags" Rankin—my grandfather—was buried on September 9 because that's the last time he saw his sister Iris.

September 9 was the album release. Unbeknownst to anyone, *Songs of Innocence* was arriving in the world on the same date I last spoke to my mother. What are these serendipities about? Coincidence? I treasure the mystery of every cosmic rhyme and took this for some comfort that I was doing the right thing.

*Free yourself to be yourself  
If only you could see yourself.*

That phrase became my mantra—"Free yourself to be yourself"—and the memories began to return.

Iris laughing. Her humor, black as her dark curls. Inappropriate laughing was her weakness. My father, Bob, from the inner city of Dublin, had taken her, and her sister Ruth, to the ballet, only to have her embarrass him with her muted howls of laughter at the protruding genitalia boxes worn by the male dancers under their leotards.

I remember at around seven or eight, I was a boy behaving badly.

Iris chasing me, waving a long cane that her friend had promised would discipline me. Me, frightened for my life as Iris chased me down the garden. But when I dared to look back, she was laughing her head off, no part of her believing in this medieval disciplining or the badness of the boy.

I remember being in the kitchen, watching Iris ironing my brother's school uniform, the faint buzz of my father's electric drill from upstairs, where our DIY da was hanging a shelf he'd made.

Suddenly the sound of his voice, screaming. An inhuman sound, an animal noise.

*"Iris! Iris! Call an ambulance!"*

Racing to the bottom of the stairs, we found him at the top, holding the power tool, having apparently drilled into his own crotch. The bit had slipped, and he was frozen stiff with fear that he might never be stiff again. "I've castrated myself!" he cried.

I was in a state of shock, too, at seeing my father, the giant of 10 Cedarwood Road, fallen like a tree. And I didn't know what that meant. Iris knew what it meant, and she was shocked, too, but that wasn't the look on her face. No, the look on her face was the look of a beautiful woman suppressing laughter, then the look of a beautiful woman failing to suppress laughter as it took hold of her. Peals of laughter like a bold girl in church whose efforts not to commit sacrilege just make for a louder explosion when it finally erupts.

She reached for the telephone, but she couldn't get it together to dial 999; she was bent double with laughter. Da made it through his flesh wound. Their marriage made it through the incident. The memory made it home.

Iris was a practical woman. Pretty DIY herself. She could change a plug on a kettle, and she could sew: boy, could she sew! She became a part-time dressmaker when my da refused to let her work as a cleaning lady at Aer Lingus, along with her best friends on Cedarwood Road.

There was a big showdown between them, the only proper row I remember. I was up in my room eavesdropping as my mother reared up at him with a "you don't rule me" tirade in her own defense. And, to be fair, he didn't. Pleading succeeded where command had failed, and she gave up the chance to work with her mates in Dublin Airport. Years later, returning home from tour, I would ache more than a little on meeting her great friends Onagh and Winnie at Arrivals. Iris had departed, but sometimes I could see her standing right there beside them.

## SUNDAY MORNINGS AT THE TWO ST. CANICE'S

*Hold me close, hold me close and don't let me go.  
 Hold me close like I'm someone that you might know  
 Hold me close the darkness just lets us see  
 Who we are  
 I've got your light inside of me.*

Bob was a Catholic; Iris was a Protestant. Theirs was a marriage that had escaped the sectarianism of Ireland at the time. And because Bob believed that the mother should have the casting vote in the children's religious instruction, on Sunday mornings my brother and I were dropped with our mother at the Protestant St. Canice's Church in Finglas. Whereupon my da would receive Mass up the road in the Catholic church. Also called St. Canice's.

Confusing? Yes!

There was less than a mile between the two churches, but in 1960s Ireland a mile was a long way. The "Prods" at that time had the better tunes, and the Catholics had the better stage gear. Gavin Friday, my mate from the top of Cedarwood, used to say, "Roman Catholicism is the glam rock of religion" with its candles and psychedelic colors—cardinal blues, scarlets, and purples—its smoke bombs of incense, and the ring of the little bell. The Prods were better at the bigger bells, because, as Gavin said, "They could afford them!" For a fair amount of the population in Ireland, wealth and Protestantism went together. To have either was to have collaborated with the enemy—that is, Britain. This was the rather warped thinking in the 1960s and 1970s. In fact the Church of Ireland had supplied a lot of Ireland's most famous insurgents, and south of the border its congregation was mostly modest in every way. Very modest, very nice people. In fact, far from bigotry, niceness was the only thing you could complain about. Its garden fetes and bring-and-buy sales were much more a death-by-sticky-bun situation. The Church of Ireland could nice you to death!

My da was hugely respectful of this church community he'd married into, and so having worshipped on his own up the road, he would then return from his St. Canice's to wait outside our St. Can-



ice's for his wife and children to come out and then drive us all home.

Iris and Bob had grown up in the inner city of Dublin around the thoroughfare of Oxmantown Road, an area known locally as Cowtown because every Wednesday it was the seat of the country-comes-to-the-city fair. It was next to Phoenix Park, which, the locals would tell you, was the largest city-center park in Europe, and where Bob and Iris loved to walk and watch the deer run free. Unusually for "a Dub," as inner-city residents were known, Bob played cricket in the park, and his mother, Granny Hewson, listened to the BBC for results of English Test matches.

Cricket was not a working-class game in Ireland. Add this to my da saving up to buy records of his favorite operas, taking his wife and her sister to the ballet—and then not letting Iris become a "Mrs. Mops," as he called it, even though her friends were—and you can sense there might have been just a tiny bit of the snob in Bob. His interests were not the norm on his street, that's for sure. Actually, the whole family might have been a little different. My da and his brother Leslie did not even speak with a strong Dublin accent. It was as if their telephone voice was the only one they used.

My da's family name, Hewson, is also unusual in that it is both a Protestant and a Catholic name. Visiting a posh pub during a U.K. tour, I once saw a charter for the beheading of Charles I, with one John Hewson among the seven signatories. A republican? Good. One of Cromwell's henchmen? Bad.

As a kid I could see that Hewsons tended to live in their heads while Rankins were more at home in their bodies. The Hewsons could overthink. My da, for example, would not go to visit his own brothers and sisters in case they might not want to see him. He would need to be invited. My mother—a Rankin—would tell him just to go on and drop in on them. Her family members were always dropping in on each other. What's the problem? We're family. Rankins are laughing all day long, and if the Hewsons can't quite do that, we do have a temper to keep us entertained. A big temper.

I might have a bit of that.

There's another difference. The Rankin family is susceptible to the brain aneurysm.

Of the five Rankin sisters, three died from an aneurysm. Including Iris.

#### JESUS, IRIS, AND JOSEPH!

My mother heard me sing publicly just once. I played the Pharaoh in Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*. It was really the part of an Elvis impersonator, so that's what I did. Dressed up as Elvis, I curled my lip and brought the house down. Iris laughed and laughed and laughed. She seemed surprised that I could sing, that I was musical, which is odd because I'd hinted at it often enough.

As a very small child, from when I stood only as high as the keyboard, I was transfixed by the piano. There was one in our church hall, and any time that I could spend with it on my own was time I held sacred. I would spend ages finding out what sound the keys could make or what happened if I pushed one of the pedals with my foot. I didn't know what reverb was; I couldn't believe how such a simple action could turn our church hall into a cathedral. I remember my hand finding a note and then searching for another note to rhyme with it. And another. I was born with melodies in my head, and I was looking for a way to hear them in the world.

Iris was not looking for those kinds of signs, so she didn't see them.

Iris was not a romantic; she was a pragmatic. A frugal woman who made her own clothes. When my grandmother decided to sell her piano, my hints about how well it would fit in our house could not have been any less subtle.

"Don't be silly, where would we put it?" No piano for our house. No room.

Iris had a second chance to sort this. When I was eleven, my parents sent me to St. Patrick's Cathedral Grammar School in the city center, a school famous for its boys' choir. At the interview

Mr. Horner, the principal, asked if I might have any interest in joining the choir. My heart stirred, but I had the nervousness of an eleven-year-old claiming a talent I hadn't really owned up to. Iris, sensing my embarrassment, answered for me.

"Not at all. Paul has no interest in singing."

For a child so evidently betrothed to music, my mother's behavior might seem a little odd, a little out of touch with her second son, but I don't think so. Iris was a problem solver, not a problem maker. Iris was just being practical.

FROM CATHEDRAL TO TEMPLE

*Once we are born, we begin to forget  
The very reason we came  
But you I'm sure I've met  
Long before the night the stars went out  
We're meeting up again.*

In September 1972, I was twelve and in my first year at Mount Temple. St. Patrick's Cathedral Grammar School had been unhappy for me and unhappy for them. The final straw was a Spanish teacher known as Bidy who I was convinced put lines through my homework without even looking at it. I was feeling bullied, but what began as a prank turned me into a bully myself. When the weather was good, Bidy would take her lunch from her clear plastic Tupperware box and sit on a park bench in the shadow of the magnificent St. Patrick's Cathedral, the largest in the country. Students from St. Patrick's were not allowed in the park at lunchtime, but I'd found a way to mount the railings and one day, with a couple of accomplices, successfully lobbed dog shit into her lunch box. It was revenge on her for shitting on our work. Some of it might have gone into her hair, and that was very bad. Unsurprisingly, by the end of that term Bidy wanted this little shit out of her hair, and it was suggested I might be happier somewhere else. Enter Mount Temple Comprehensive School.

Mount Temple was liberation.

A nondenominational, coeducational experiment, remarkable for

its time in conservative Ireland. Instead of an A class, B class, and C class, the six first-year classes were D, U, B, L, I, and N. You were encouraged to be yourself, to be creative, to wear your own clothes. And there were girls. Also wearing their own clothes.

The challenge was the two bus rides it took to get there, the long journey into the city center from the northwest side and then out to the northeast. Unless you cycled, which is what my friend Reggie Manuel and I began to do. It was on one never-ending incline of a hill that we learned how to hold on to the milk van, and I'm not sure I've ever felt as free as I felt on those days cycling to school with Reggie. If the weather meant we couldn't cycle all the time, leaving us to the drudgery of the bus journey, compensation would come on Fridays by being in the city center after school with the chance to visit the record store Dolphin Discs on Talbot Street. The chance to stare at album covers like the Stooges' *Raw Power* or David Bowie's *Ziggy Stardust*.

#### THE MEN AND WOMEN WHO FELL TO EARTH

The only reason I wasn't standing in Dolphin Discs at 5:30 p.m. on May 17, 1974, is that a bus strike meant we'd had to cycle to school. We were already home when the streets around Dolphin Discs were blown to bits by a car bomb in Talbot Street, another went off in Parnell Street, and another in South Leinster Street, all within minutes, a coordinated attack by an Ulster loyalist extremist group who wanted the south to know what terrorism felt like. A fourth explosion struck in Monaghan, and the final death toll stood at thirty-three people, including a pregnant young mother, the entire O'Brien family, and a Frenchwoman whose family had survived the Holocaust.

I didn't dodge a bullet that day; I dodged carnage. Guggi's eleven-year-old brother, Andrew Rowen, aka Guck Pants Delaney, did not dodge it. He and his father, Robbie Rowen, were parked in Parnell Street when the blast hit. His father locked Andrew in the family van while he set about trying to rescue people from this destruction. Andrew watched in horror at the dismembered, purposeless bodies all around him. Years later I called him to ask if he would mind if I wrote about that day in a song called "Raised by Wolves." Hold on a

sec, he said, and when he came back to the phone, he told me he was holding a piece of shrapnel from the original car bomb. He'd kept a little piece of the bomb for forty years, evidence of a trauma that had taken a little piece of him. His words. At fifteen he was in the newspapers for shooting an intruder who'd broken into the bicycle store he was minding. By twenty he was a heroin addict, sleeping rough on the streets of London. I wrote our song "Bad" about Andrew.

The Dalai Lama says you can only begin a real meditation on life with a meditation on death. Gothic stuff but something in it. Finiteness and infiniteness are the two poles of the human experience. Everything we do, think, feel, imagine, discuss is framed by the notion of whether our death is the end or the beginning of something else. It takes great faith to have no faith. Great strength of character to resist the ancient texts that suggest an afterlife.

At age fourteen, none of this was abstract.

#### DREAM SEQUENCE WHILE AWAKE

I'm fourteen on Monday, September 9, 1974. My father is carrying my mother in his arms through a crowd that splits open like a white snooker ball hitting a triangle of color. He's rushing to get her to the hospital. She has collapsed at the side of the grave as her own father is being lowered into the ground.

*"Iris has fainted. Iris has fainted."*

My aunts, my cousins. Their voices blow around like a breeze through leaves. "She'll be okay, she'll be okay. She's just fainted."

She she she . . . whispers in the wind . . . fe fe fe fainted . . . Irissss hasssss fainted. Before I, or anyone else, could think or blink, my father had Iris in the back of the Hillman Avenger, with my brother, Norman, at the wheel, twenty-one and driving the getaway car. But there was no getting away from tragedy that day. I stay with my cousins to say goodbye to my grandda, and then we all kind of shuffle back to my grandmother's house, 8 Cowper Street, where the tiny kitchen is a factory producing sandwiches, biscuits, and tea.

This two-up two-down with an outside bathroom seems to contain thousands of people, all of whom are miraculously being fed.

Only three nights ago, my grandda had danced and sung Michael Finnegan's reel, on his fiftieth wedding anniversary. He'd had such a high time that his children worried he'd wake in the night and not make it to the bathroom. They left a bucket beside the bed. My grandfather left this life kicking that bucket. That's right, he actually kicked the bucket, a massive heart attack on the night of his wedding anniversary.

Today the Rankin family of sisters, brothers, and cousins are all squeezed into this tiny redbrick house, and even though it's Grandda's funeral and even though Iris has fainted, we're kids, running around, laughing with the cousins. Until a door slams open. Ruth, my mother's younger sister and best friend, bursts through with her husband, Teddy, who is weeping.

*"Iris is dying. Iris is dying,"* he says. *"She's had a stroke."*

Uncle Ted is starting to wail, but everybody wants to find out the story, crowding around them to unlock the news.

Iris is one of eight kids from number 8. She has four sisters—Ruth, Stella, Pat, Olive—and three brothers: Claude the oldest, Alex next, and Jack, who is married to Barbara, a couple who have become my other close family, the ones we share a holiday caravan with. Jack and Barbara are in a huddle with Ruth and Teddy. I look up to Barbara, who will step in for my mother in so many ways, and I see the weight of grief. It's as if gravity doubles up.

Barbara is struggling to stand. Ruth, the closest in age, and so much more, to my mother, immediately takes her elder sister's job and starts to get organized.

All this is taking place in the moment before someone realizes I'm here too, Iris's youngest. Maybe I don't need to be hearing this news, like this, just now. But I hear it. I'm fourteen and strangely calm. I tell my mother's sisters and brothers that everything is going to be okay. But everything isn't okay. And everything won't be okay.

Everything will be different.

Three days later Norman and I are brought into the hospital to say goodbye to my mother. She's alive but barely. The local clergyman, Sydney Laing, whose daughter I'm dating, is here. Ruth is outside

the hospital room, wailing. And Barbara. And my father, whose eyes appear to have less life in them than my mother. Norman and I enter the emergency room at war with the universe, but Iris looks peaceful. It's hard to figure that a large part of her has already left. I am reminded that with faith the size of a mustard seed you can move a mountain. But this mountain is my mother's mortality, and it won't get out of the way. We hold her hand and say goodbye. There's a clicking sound, but we don't hear it. The sound of a switch. The machine that keeps Iris warm is turned off. Electricity. This mortal coil. Gone.

*The stars are bright but do they know  
The universe is beautiful but cold.*

Sometimes, goes the old spiritual, I feel like a motherless child. What is it about the loss of a mother? Does something inside the child feel that the mother chose to leave?

Abandonment is probably the root of paranoia. John Lennon, Paul McCartney, Bob Geldof, John Lydon, so many rock 'n' roll singers lost their mothers at an early age. There must be something to this. A friend tells me of a parallel abandonment in hip-hop. Abandonment by the father drives that car.

#### SONG LINES: FROM IRIS TO ALI

Big drum sounds, big themes, big emotions. I've always loved the big music. Songs are my prayers. Songs are also where I live, and if you live in your songs, you want to make sure there's enough room. The size of the song is important. Your emotional life has to fit into it, and a lot of the emotions that I couldn't express as a young man living at 10 Cedarwood Road have since found expression in the songs of U2.

Those songs became my home.

In writing the song "Iris," I found myself meandering from singing about my mother to singing about Ali, understandable but unforgivable. A man should never make his lover his mother. It's a trick that a nurturing girl can fall for and a selfish boy can exploit, but it happened in that moment. I was singing for Iris, and then suddenly I wasn't.

*You took me by the hand  
 I thought that I was leading you  
 But it was you made me your man  
 Machine  
 I dream  
 Where you are  
 Iris standing in the hall  
 She tells me I can do it all.*

Kraftwerk's *The Man-Machine* was the first gift I bought Ali, who mostly seemed to listen to her father's record collection of crooners. I wasn't to know it, but Ali would become the one who would believe in me, now that my mother no longer could. I wasn't to know it, but years later when my father passed, Ali would explain to me that I somehow blamed him for the death of Iris and that the anger I had inside me, the anger that can still overtake me, was rooted right there.

*Iris playing on the strand  
 She buries the boy beneath the sand,  
 Iris says that I will be the death of her  
 It was not me.*

The rage that is rock 'n' roll.  
 All the rage that drives you off the page and onto the stage. Every night you sing yourself to it and through it.  
 I didn't kill her; you killed her, by ignoring her.  
 You won't ignore me!  
 Iris.  
 You're no longer singing the song; the song is singing you.  
 The journey away from self-consciousness is the most important journey for any performer to make; it is the hardest journey. But when you get it right, the stage becomes the place where you're fully at home, where in a strange way you're fully yourself.  
 Yeats got it.

*O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,  
 How can we know the dancer from the dance?*





5

GUGGI

10

Home of BONO

CEDARWOOD  
ROAD  
and BOB HEWSON

'a baritone who  
thinks he is a tenor'  
an actual tenor

140

MR FRIDAY 20

## Cedarwood Road

*I was running down the road  
The fear was all I knew  
I was looking for a soul that's real  
Then I ran into you  
And that cherry blossom tree  
Was a gateway to the sun  
And friendship once it's won  
It's won . . . it's won.*

My father was a tenor, a really, really good one. He could move people with his singing, and to move people with music, you first have to be moved by it.

I see my father standing in the living room of Cedarwood Road, standing in front of the stereo with two of my mother's knitting needles. He's the conductor. He'd conduct Beethoven, Mozart, and Elisabeth Schwarzkopf singing Richard Strauss's *Four Last Songs*.

Right now he's listening to *La Traviata*, eyes closed, lost in reverie.

He is taken by the music, no longer present. He is not precisely aware of the story of *La Traviata*, but he feels it. A father and son at odds, lovers cast away and returned. He senses the injustice of the human heart. His is broken by the music. He doesn't notice that I'm in the room looking at him. I won't know for many years what the

opera was that was going on in his head, but music was clearly his only escape. He doesn't really notice much else.

There are only a few routes to making a grandstanding stadium singer out of a small child. You can tell them they're amazing, that the world needs to hear their voice, that they must not hide their "genius under a bushel." Or you can just plain ignore them. That might be more effective. The lack of interest of my father, the tenor, in his son's voice is not easy to explain, but it might have been crucial.

After my mother's departure, Cedarwood Road is becoming its own opera. I am locked in a house of three men used to shouting at the television now shouting at each other. We live in rage and melancholy; we live in mystery and melodrama.

The subject of the opera is the absence of a woman called Iris, and the music is swelling to stay the silence that envelops the house every time her name is mentioned. Which is never, because that's how these men are trying to deal with their grief. By pretending it is not there.

Just as Iris is not there.

Three men dealing with their grief by never talking about it. One of those men is just a boy who, as a result, even now has too few memories of his mother to dredge from the river of silence that sought to drown her out. A river of silence in which our hero himself might drown until his big brother throws him a line that will save his life.

Pulls him on a wooden raft that will take him to shore. The raft is a guitar, both lifeline and weapon.

My brother, Norman, has always been a fixer of the most practical kind, an engineer, a mechanic of the world around him who could pull things apart and put things back together. Anything. The engine of his motorcycle, a clock, a radio, a stereo. Norman loved technology and he loved music, and both came together in the large, chrome Sony reel-to-reel tape recorder that sat in the center of the table, taking pride of place in our "good room." Norman was entrepreneurial enough to figure out that a reel-to-reel machine meant he didn't have to keep buying music. If he borrowed an album from

a friend for an hour, it was his forever. His vast library of songs and albums occupied most of my interior life in the early 1970s. From The Beatles to Bowie via the Rolling Stones, The Who, and even the folkies Bob Dylan, Leonard Cohen, and Neil Young.

Because Norman, seven years older than me, was already a workman when I was in Mount Temple, the reel-to-reel was my only company when I got home from school. Some late afternoons I'd be so hungry but would forget who I was and where I was. I'd stand in front of the stereo, just like my father, and let the house burn down while I listened to the opera. *Tommy* by The Who. A rock opera. Charcoal smoke would fill the kitchen and seep into the living room.

Norman taught me to play guitar. He taught me the C chord, the G chord, and, much more difficult, the F chord, where you had to hold down two strings with one finger.

Especially difficult when the strings are quite a way from the fret board, as they were on his rather cheap guitar. But with his guidance I learned to play "If I Had a Hammer" and "Blowin' in the Wind." He had a Beatles songbook that took me further. It wasn't just chords and sheet music; it was full of surreal paintings of their songs. While my friend Guggi tried to copy the images, I worked out how to play "I Want to Hold Your Hand," "Dear Prudence," or "Here Comes the Sun" on my brother's guitar.

Norman and I fought a lot. He had a bad temper, but he was a clever boy who, like his da, should have gone to university. He'd won a scholarship to a very well-regarded institution called simply the High School, a renowned Protestant secondary school that leaned in the direction of maths and physics but was famous for having been the alma mater of William Butler Yeats. But Norman never felt very comfortable there with his secondhand uniform, secondhand books, and the secondhand religion of his Catholic father. He felt inferior to the Protestant boys from the Southside.

Norman was upbeat by nature, except when the melancholy had him. Then it really had him. He was close to Iris, and I would overhear him talking to her about girls he liked and how he found them hard to approach. I remember Iris helping him with his acne. Like Norman, Iris was a mechanic too, a mechanic of the heart.

## MY SECRET NERDY SELF

I don't remember exactly when I learned to play chess, but it was likely summertime in the seaside town of Rush, just outside Dublin on the north coast. Grandda Rankin—my mum's da—had an old railway carriage that he'd turned into a summer chalet. There was nothing much to do at "the hut." There were card games like patience and 22, but even as a kid I wasn't much interested in luck as a subject. I was interested in my da, and if he wasn't golfing or reading or hanging out with his brothers-in-law, I would try to catch his attention. I craved his affection. I remember walking the pier and the warmth of his hand on my neck.

When I was around eight or nine years old, he taught me to play chess, and I quickly took to its permutations and combinations, beginning to form my own openings before studying the tried and tested ones.

At first I thought he was letting me win, but eventually I noticed he wasn't. This was how to take his attention off whatever he was thinking about and put it on *me*. To best him, to beat him! Bob didn't like losing, and maybe that's where I learned that I didn't either. As I played, I came to learn one of the most important lessons in my life, that chess was not a game of luck but a game of strategy and that good strategy usually trumps luck. Even bad luck.

Long before my teenage life would be crushed and uplifted by the two great forces of girls and music, I developed a secret life with local chess players. Niall Byrne, from two doors up, Joseph Marks from Cedarwood Park, two brilliant boys. And fun too. As we got better, it became harder to find good games, so we started playing in adult chess tournaments. It doesn't take a psychological genius to figure out why adult slaying was a thrill beyond any other. I loved going up against grown-ups who would start out dismissively reading their newspapers—so beneath them to be playing children. Lightning chess was a favorite. To be sitting there at age ten, annoying the face off people five times your age, chasing them around a chessboard. That was a whole other order of fun.

It was dawning on me that while I could do stuff quite easily that a lot of people found hard, I found difficult a lot of stuff that others

found easy. I'm not sure if it's dyslexia, because I'd had no problems reading, but while I was doing okay at school, I was starting to get anxious that I wouldn't excel. My quality of work had improved when I'd first arrived at Mount Temple, and I'd done better in class than at St. Patrick's, but when Iris died, I lost all concentration.

Teachers lamented my scrawly handwriting when my father's letters to them about me were such beautiful calligraphy. They asked why I hadn't noticed leaving complete sections out of essays or why I could do higher maths but not lower. I wasn't able to explain myself.

While I loved poetry and history, I didn't feel as clever as my friends. I started to feel stupid and, because of that, became angry. I was afraid deep down that I was average. I didn't realize that my whole life would be pitted against the concept that anyone is average. "No man need be a mediocrity if he accepts himself as God made him" is how the poet Patrick Kavanagh put it.

I was losing my self-confidence in all kinds of ways. I stopped playing chess, not because I wasn't loving it, but because I began to think of it as "uncool" and I had no mother to tell me that nothing cool was "cool."

Away from the chessboard Bob and I were competing in conversation, and if I wasn't giving him a lot of lip, I gave him enough for occasional escalation. We'd fought a lot before Iris died, but we fought more after. Much more. Our arguments were mostly verbal, and only occasionally would he speak of restraining himself lest he have to clatter me. In truth, from when I was fourteen, he knew that wouldn't work out well for himself. Things would go off unpredictably. Norman winding it up. He'd come home from work and I'd be in the house watching the telly, not doing my homework, not having prepared the tea. He would give me some lip. I would return it. Maybe Norman or I would end up on the ground. Bob half whacked me a few times, but I never responded, although I held him a couple of times.

*Sleepwalking down the road  
I'm not waking from these dreams  
Alive or dead they're in my head  
It was a warzone in my teens  
I'm still standing on that street*

SURRENDER

*Still need an enemy  
The worst ones I can't see  
You can . . . you can.*

But there's something between the father and the son. A thickness of atmosphere, some kind of wall of air that, if punctured from the son to the father by way of a blow, will mean things are never the same again.

Norman was angry.

Bob was angry.

I was angry.

Part of my rage was knowing I had something but not being able to uncover it. Knowing I was clever but not being able to be clever in school.

But there was rage about my mother too. I'd had faith she'd make it through and she didn't. I told her sister she was going to make it. I comforted my aunts, saying that we were all going to make it through.

But prayers aren't always answered in the way you want. I didn't know that then.

That's a part of my rage and maybe even some wild, irrational blame that he, the head of the house, was responsible for the destruction of it.

*He must be to blame if we're all in this trouble.*

THE OPERA THAT WAS BOB

Although Bob Hewson was himself betrothed to music, in tune with his wife he also did not suggest we get a piano. Nor ever ask me about how my music was coming on. He loved to talk about the opera, just not to his sons. He read Shakespeare; he painted and acted. For a working-class Dub, this was not unheard of but was unusual. He had rarefied taste.

But music was his great passion. For years after Iris died, he would reduce a room of relations to a puddle by breaking into Kris Kristofferson's "For the Good Times." I still wonder if he was singing it

from my mother's point of view: "I'll get along, you'll find another," etc. Quite the manipulator, he could crack open a heart like it was a boiled egg with some high falsetto singing. He really was a fine tenor and once told me that I was "a baritone who thinks he's a tenor." One of the great put-downs and pretty accurate.

I am a baritone who thinks he's a tenor.

When I think of opera and my da, it's not just watching him get lost in *La Traviata* or *Tosca*, or, later, seeing him onstage with the Coolock Musical Society, his face caked with orange makeup, singing everything from *The Mikado* to *H.M.S. Pinafore*. When I think of opera and my da, I think of opera in the tortured sense because, though Bob Hewson might have sung light opera, he was heavier than that. And "operatic" is also the operative word in describing our relationship. I was an angry teenager; he was an angry grown-up, an Irish male who didn't know what to do with a young teenage boy. A creature of his time, he was not that interested in his kids and now he was the only parent, and he didn't like it. I was interested in his interest, but I, too, had the seeds of a performer, and above all else performers don't like to be ignored.

*If the door is open it isn't theft  
 You cannot return to where you've never left  
 Blossoms falling from a tree, they cover you and cover me  
 Symbols clashing, bibles smashing  
 You paint the world you need to see  
 Sometimes fear is the only place we can call home  
 Cedarwood Road.*

You can see the through line of this melodrama. Son blames father for the loss of his mother and the ending of his home life. The young buck takes on the old buck.

Patricide. The stuff of the great operas. U2's music was never really rock 'n' roll. Under its contemporary skin it's opera—a big music, big emotions unlocked in the pop music of the day.

A tenor out front who won't accept he's a baritone. A small man singing giant songs.



Wailing, keening, trying to explain the unexplainable. Trying to release himself and anyone who will listen from the prison of a human experience that cannot explain grief.

Maybe Bob didn't take me too seriously as a teenager because he could see I was doing a great job of that myself. But I can still hear his voice, in my head, especially when I sing. I thought he was standing in my way, but perhaps he just wanted solid ground for his son, and there wasn't much of that in Dublin in the 1970s. Bob thought that to dream was to be disappointed, and he didn't want that for me.

I got to thank him for his patience.

I never got to apologize for being such a prick—until he was gone.

After Iris died, 10 Cedarwood Road stopped being a home. It was just a house. Most days I'd return to it from Mount Temple holding a tin of meat, a tin of beans, and a packet of Cadbury's Smash. Cadbury's Smash was astronaut food, but eating it did not make me feel like David Bowie's Starman or Elton's Rocket Man. In fact eating it was not a lot like eating at all. But at least it was easy. You just put boiling water on these little dry pellets, and they shape-shifted into mashed potato. I'd add them to the same pot in which I'd just cooked the tinned beans. And the tinned meat. And I ate my dinner out of the pot sitting in front of the color TV, even though this was a particularly black-and-white thing to do.

I don't enjoy cooking or ordering food, which may go back to having to cook my own meals as a teenager. That was when food was just fuel. We used to buy a cheap fizzy drink called Cadet Orange because it had enough sugar to keep you going but was so foul you would want nothing else down your throat for hours. We drank it after I'd spent my food money on something more important—Alice Cooper's 45 "Hello Hooray," for example.

Sometimes such a musical purchase—Santana's *Abraxas* or Black Sabbath's *Paranoid*—required I invest the grocery money for the whole family. On those occasions, I confess, I'd sometimes have to borrow the entire grocery list . . . and fail to give any of it back. It was easy . . . apart from a whole loaf of sliced bread which was difficult to hide up your jumper. Being honest about my dishonesty, I

didn't feel good about it. At age fifteen, I put away a life of crime and punishment, and turned back to commerce and selling calendars.

#### TAKEOFFS AND TAKEAWAYS

Fate and fortune arrived in 1975 when Norman got a job in Dublin Airport. Airports in the 1970s were even more glamorous than color television, especially if you were a pilot.

Norman had applied to be a pilot, but his asthma disqualified him from their trainee program, and instead he got work in Cara, the computing department of Aer Lingus, the national airline. Computers, Norman told himself, were even more glamorous than airports, and he committed—just as soon as he'd made some money—to learn to fly small airplanes.

Watching jets take off and land is a weird and wonderful meditation. For people like Norman it can become an all-consuming passion, and thousands of Irish plane twitchers would turn up at Dublin Airport each weekend to see flying machines defy gravity, taking off for somewhere else, somewhere different. Every flight was a subconscious reminder that there was a way out of Ireland if it was needed. In the 1950s and '60s, more than half a million Irish people bought themselves one-way tickets out of the country.

The good fortune for Da, Norman, and me at 10 Cedarwood Road, just two miles from the end of Runway 2, was that Norman managed to talk his bosses in Cara into allowing him to bring home the surplus airline food prepared for Aer Lingus passengers. The meals were sometimes still warm when he carried them in their tin boxes into our kitchen, to be heated in the oven for twenty-three minutes at 185 degrees Celsius.

This was highly exotic fare: gammon steak and pineapple, an Italian dish called lasagna, or one where rice was no longer a milk pudding but a savory experience with peas. I told Norman that this was the worst dessert I'd ever had.

"It's not dessert, and by the way half the world eats rice every day."

Norman knew stuff other people didn't. Imagine eating rice pud-

ding as your main meal every day. If my father and I were proud that Norman had removed the need for us to buy groceries or even to have to cook, after six months the aftertaste of tin was all we could remember. Secretly, at night, I took to eating cornflakes with cold milk instead of the airline food.

I thought salvation had arrived in the form of another culinary miracle, this time at Mount Temple, when the end of the lunch-box era was announced and the age of school dinners dawned. Imagine a fanfare of trumpets and cheering at assembly, that's how excited we all were. But I was punching the air only briefly. The school dinners, the headmaster, Mr. Medlycott, explained, would not be cooked in the school canteen. It wasn't big enough. Instead, they would be arriving by van in tin boxes . . . from Dublin fucking airport! They would be heated, he announced proudly, at 185 degrees for twenty-three minutes in new ovens the school board had paid for.

I'd never been on an airplane, but already my romance with flying was over. Airplane food for lunch and airplane food for tea was more than any apprentice rock star could handle. In time, the apprentice with his band would take to the skies, and on those early Aer Lingus flights I would look out of the window and try to see Cedarwood Road. As I finally left this small town and small island and rose above these flat fields, this dull suburbia, my mind filled with memories of the phone box on the street, teenagers with broken bottles and hearts, sweet and sour neighbors, and the vibrant branches of the cherry blossom tree between our house at number 10 and the Rowens' at number 5. At which point the air hostess would arrive and place one of those little tin trays right in front of me.





MR FURST 2U + the G-man

Gavin + Guggi

I was coming to understand that you have  
the people you need right there beside you  
if you can see them. Guggi and I had so much  
intending each other but we were missing  
something. Someone -

## Stories for Boys

*There's a picture book  
 With coloured photographs  
 Where there is no shame  
 There is no laugh  
 Sometimes I find it thrilling  
 That I can't have what  
 I don't know  
 Hello hello*

Was I eleven or twelve when I first read *Lord of the Flies*? William Golding's story is about a group of British schoolboys, around the same age and a little younger, who have crash-landed on a Pacific island while being evacuated during a world war. It's a story about how fear of one another—or fear of “the other” in a metaphysical sense—can shape our imagination and twist our thinking. It's a story about the end of innocence that still shapes my thinking and writing today. And a story that will sketch out the first U2 album, *Boy*, including its cover and final track, “Shadows and Tall Trees,” which borrows its title from chapter 7 of the book:

*Who is it now? Who calls me inside?  
 Are the leaves on the trees a cover or disguise?*

SURRENDER

*I walk the street rain tragicomedy  
I'll walk home again to the street melody.*

Walking down Cedarwood Road one evening, I watched the streetlights shrink and enlarge my shadow and noticed how the telephone poles made stark silhouettes like shriveled conifers. People talking behind the door of the cream-and-green phone box seemed to signal that away from these inexpensively built and modestly mortgaged housing estates of the 1950s and 1960s there was another world to explore. There weren't many trees on our road; the one I remember was the cherry blossom, which miraculously grew out of the stony gray concrete of number 5, a crescendo of flesh tones, pink and pretty. Feminine. In the early summer a kind of luxury fell from its branches, scenting the more modest lives of the Rowen family, who lived there. The tree seemed both sexual and spiritual, and while it made no sense, it also made every sense dance a little. Any suburbanite walking past was reminded that somewhere out there was the possibility of a life of intense color.

APOCALYPSE NOW WITH THE ROWENS

I've been best friends with Derek Rowen, or Guggi, since I was three years old and he was four, this despite his claim that he befriended me only because we had a swing in our back garden.

Guggi not only gave me the name Bono; he gave everyone in his family new and surreal names. Like Clive Whistling Fellow, his older brother. Like Man of Strength and Arran, his younger brother. Guck Pants Delaney, younger still. Glennich Carmichael, his first sister.

Little Bidy One-Way Street, his second sister, then Hawkeye and finally Radar, his youngest brother, who appeared on the cover of two of U2's early albums, *Boy* and *War*. There was one other sister who was born just before he left home, so he called her by her actual name, Miriam.

The name Bono is not the only name Guggi put on me over the years.

I had many, each more ridiculous than the last. The names we gave each other were not merely to make each other laugh but also to illuminate something of who we were, beyond those names given to us by our families at birth, before our personalities were known. The names were supposed to describe the shape of your spirit as well as your physical characteristics. Bono was short for Bono Vox of O’Connell Street, but the boy Guggi was no Latin scholar. “Strong Voice” was an accidental translation. Bonavox was a hearing aid shop in Dublin. He just loved the noise the name made in his mouth. Gradually, Bono Vox of O’Connell Street got shortened to Bonmarie and then to Bono. Previously I had been Steinvich von Heischen, and I was grateful when that phase passed. I called the boy from number 5 Guggi because that’s what his head looked like to me, if you tried to represent it in sound. A sound painting. Say “Guggi” and look at him and you’ll see what I’m talking about. Perhaps.

The Rowens—three sisters and seven brothers—lived five doors down from us, although you could barely see their house for all the secondhand cars parked around it. Robbie, Guggi’s father, was a fiery religious man who was ready if the end of the world arrived suddenly. Mr. Rowen spent most Fridays reading the small ads in the *Evening Herald* in search of stuff that might be needed for the coming apocalypse. Stuff like five hundred tires. Or a 1957 Oldsmobile. Or a garden of chickens and turkeys. Live ones, that is, not frozen ones, to be eaten or sold.

I would sometimes cycle to Mount Temple with Trevor Rowen—the Man of Strength and Arran, later shortened to Strongman. He was an asthmatic whose wheezes and adenoidal voice projections made all the girls drop their guard for him. A genuinely sweet soul who, to protect himself, was capable of some savage humor and malevolent fun. Tidy and organized, he would prepare for the school journey by staring into the hall mirror for a few minutes to check his look was just right, his jeans tucked into socks and ash locks brushed into a quiff. He would later play bass in the Virgin Prunes like a caveman kept from his cave.

Andrew Rowen would end up in three U2 songs, “Running to Stand Still,” as well as “Bad” and “Raised by Wolves.” Andy, who’d



received his name Guck Pants Delaney at age two after a nappy accident, was known for a near-photographic memory. He probably had the highest IQ of any kid on our street, and sometimes it seemed he had memorized the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. He could remember turning two. He could remember a lot of things he would have liked to have forgotten. His party piece was fielding obscure questions on any subject.

Doing my homework one day, in the little box room in Cedarwood Road, I looked out the window as Guck Pants went by on a unicycle. Playing the trumpet.

Along with his apocalyptic mindset, Robbie Rowen had a wonderful sense of adventure and often took me, with all of his children, to places I'd never have otherwise gone. He took us exploring country lanes at the back of Dublin Airport to pick blackberries in August. Or to the "hole in the wall" beach to sail on inflatable rafts. He taught me to ride motorcycles, putting me on my first moped at eight and a Honda 50 at ten. And he taught me how to sell things.

I've often said that I come from a long line of traveling salespeople, people on my mother's side, and I still consider what I do sales. I sell ideas, I sell songs, and occasionally I sell merchandise. The merchandise began with Robbie Rowen when, in February 1972, he bought a job lot of unsold calendars. A thousand 1972 calendars, going cheap because, well, we were already two months into the year.

Guggi and I went door-to-door on our local roads, trying to sell these calendars with their "professional photographs." Asked if we were not a bit early to be selling next year's calendar, we'd explain that no, we were selling this year's calendar.

"But, Mrs. Byrne, you don't really need the first couple of months, do you?"

#### THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO GUGGI

Guggi taught me two things that would change the direction of my life.