

The long, dark corridor. A feeling of tension, vague nausea. When the pattern had been set, the indoctrination complete.

Fear still bitter in my mouth after fifteen years, just with remembering.

'Up through the wood,  
Down to the water's edge,  
Sitting in the reeds,  
There's Cherie's date with death.'

My imagination fought hard, the more "they" tried to contain and shape my existence.

'At the witching hour  
Wait until the stroke of twelve,  
Then a figure all in black,  
Glides up to the water's edge.'

During an English Literature lesson, I had begun to write a poem. Not the word I would have used to describe, at fourteen, I would have called it thoughts.

The teacher was a balding man in his fifties, who enjoyed twanging the bra straps of young girls far more than explaining Emily Bronte. We were reading "Wuthering Heights". The way in which it was presented and enforced producing the boredom. The combination, a catalyst, allowing my mind to escape to other realms, making some use of this waste of precious time, a place to escape to that was only mine.

'Did anybody see her born?  
Anybody know just how,  
Cherie's perfect human mouth,  
Came to kiss the water cold.'

I was caught out, my garden subject to intrusion. To my astonishment, no shouting, no clip round the ear. I was presented with a clean notebook specifically for my 'poems'. Of course he would correct them, make a few suggestions. The book was used to write a few flippant verses, then I told him I wasn't interested in 'poems' any more.

'They' would not control me that easily. My thoughts were private, my only stronghold. 'They' interfered with my freedom, had me jumping to their rules. I wouldn't go over to their side so easily. I had put up a vicious fight so far.

They had changed tactics, so could I.

First day at school. Four years old. Resignation. Frustration, terror. Why do they keep on screaming? Head aching but I won't cry. When will it be time to go home? It's been so long.

In the playground. Freedom, of a sort. I won't talk to them. Sitting on the top bars of the climbing frame. I won't go back in. They didn't even miss me, don't even remember my name. Shall I run through the gate? Mother told me I must stay. I'll just wait and see how long it takes before they notice I'm gone.

I could be at home now, in the garden with my animals. On the swing singing songs of Mrs Fields and her seven fat daughters, of standing up Cow Land and the Golliesians.

Is this meant to be better than my world? Do I really have to be here forever?

The long, dark corridor, musty, claustrophobic. Sitting on a chair waiting for assembly to finish. The sounds of discordant hymns wafting to my ears. The so called 'naughty ones' pretended to be more tone deaf than they actually were, a giggle working its way up from my belly.

Mr. King skulking around heard my involuntary chuckle, leapt at me like a rabid serpent caught me by the neck threatened and shook. He knew my little game, had seen through it all along! Only needed him to mention a few words and I would be in with the rest for assembly - who did I think I was anyway, everyone else was in there.

I tried to prise his fingers off, shouted obscenities. He was not in assembly - I did not believe in any religion and was not going to recite the Lords Prayer so he or they could feel superior.

I had done it now, his face grew red with anger, he would make it his business never to let a day pass without some trouble for me. My head was full, I panicked. I screamed, piercing and shrill, had to escape, I kicked his leg. He floundered. I ran, slowly, legs like jelly, people opening doors to see what had happened, I ran faster, reached the light. The sun was shining in through the window. I would show them, for making me feel this way. I picked up a fire extinguisher and hurled it through the window, the force of the throw echoing the strength of my feelings.

Now I would get what I wanted. I would leave this place.

So the struggle started again. Only this time I was expected to explain myself. I was not allowed to hide away. I felt the push and shove of authority even more and I thought, I would never get out alive.

However after a time, when my personality was dissected, categorised, listed, they tired of me, moved on to more interesting, newer experiments, and I was allowed my anonymity, my only escape.

When I left school, I  
danced in the High Street.  
Manic with optimism.  
The dream of freedom  
realised.

My little boy is now five years old.  
He likes school. I wonder how long that will last? How shall I answer him if he says, "Mum I don't want to go to school?"

Do I say - But you must - it's the law.

What words would best bring to mind my experience of school?

Heartbreaking, soul destroying, horrific, boring, twisted, degrading, de-personalising, fear of authority instilling.

They taught us what we should feel.

We were told what we were allowed to feel.

We were never asked for our opinions, just a parrot fashion reply of the euphemistic, blinkered information we were seduced or tormented to ingest.

Being a square peg in the round hole of society is painful. Instead of being forced to conform, adjust, be absorbed into the many layered quagmire, for which our education system is now defunct, it would have been comforting to know that there is room for all kinds of people. Perhaps I could have found contentment, fulfillment, instead of guilt, and emotions turned inside out - frustration turned to anger - (the language of the repressed?)

The chains still show,  
even now.