

Ann Doherty 2015

## From Cardiff Bay to Johnny Cash

Plucked from love, loss and a sense of adventure Cardiff drew us in. It took us down to the docks where we photographed remnants of Wales's post-industrial past. He had an urgency to learn, to absorb it all.

Up at the crack of dawn, pressed to a computer, processing information, garnering layers in his multifaceted mind. I could not begin to imagine the speed, motion, alertness of his thoughts.

Drawn to the dark, he photographed the abattoir, a blood-ridden casualty and the deaf. This was the beginning of the road ahead. Tolerant, intolerant, filled with humility, ambition and an urgency to succeed.

This was the boy who signed himself off as Sheik Omar Hetherington in 1996 a member of Magnum / 21<sup>st</sup> century, on that cold November evening how prophetic it seems now. Grateful to share food around a cassette machine listening to Jeff Buckley.

We shared many evenings, the small group of us aligned by a love of images, a sense of adventure and a will to do good. Alas this was questionable, when he asked  
“Who do you think you are? Bloody Mother Teresa!” But it was there in us all. Catholicism had left its mark.

The year reached its end and we all went to the rocks to say a farewell to the sea. He stood on those arduous stones hanging on the cliff edge outstretched like Christ I told him and I knelt like Mary Magdalene I said.

In London we went for a picnic and ended up under a flyover in Richmond arguing about filters.

Love had found him in the shape of a rectangular image and his love affair with photography had begun. In equal measure its love affair with him too.

This beautiful fellow with the billowing mind strode ahead of the little man on the ground. Formulated views we could barely read let alone comprehend, he was leading the way for us all to follow.

Everything he touched turned to gold but his sense of self was too great. He had no need to prove his background, education or worth. Nothing needed to be said.

Driven by a will and need to succeed to achieve the achievable.

“There are two Tim Hetheringtons who are photographers but I will be the one who is remembered.”

At an awards ceremony he told me

“I photographed war and didn’t win.”

“You didn’t do it for a prize.” I said.

Maybe he didn’t, but he wanted his worth, that mind validated.

I told him to watch Johnny Cash singing Hurt.

As images of his life pass before him. The beauty and poignancy of this would touch him I said.

It came to pass when I saw him last he no longer took photographs. He wanted me to see his apartment.

“People write to me to ask for advice,” he quietly told me. In the ten years that had passed he had become a master in his field. His love with the art had been reciprocated at every level.

He went to his CD player and pressed play.

Johnny Cash sang as we spoke our last ...

Never to be seen again.

On the train one day I heard a man say West Brompton. I thought of him lying there. How could it be?