

Anne Marie McHugh – Garden of Remembrance

By **John Quinn MSc IT** - Published on April 25th, 2012

Bordered by the locally popular Chapel laneway with the river Nanny crossing underneath and situated in a quiet part of the town of Tuam in the West of Ireland, I visited this meticulous garden of remembrance dedicated to Anne Marie McHugh. Anne Marie was born in Tuam on April 15th 1966 and was working on the 84th floor of Tower Two, New York on September 11th 2001 when tragedy struck. Her remains were never recovered.

I couldn't help thinking of how far removed this quiet and unassuming place is from the bustle of New York. How could the tragedy of 9/11 reach this remote place? The tantalising aroma of Madras curry wafting from the Indian restaurant across the river Nanny, and the giant telecommunications mast silhouetting the twilight sky are common features of a major city. Having these inanimate objects in common with New York is very well, but the tragedy of her untimely and futile death is difficult to comprehend.

The entrance to the garden is marked by an engraved marble stone plaque dedicated to Anne Marie and donated by the Tidy Towns Committee of 2003. The plaque is flanked on the right by a Holy Water Font taken from the first penal church of Tuam in 1783. You get a sense of being on a journey as you walk the path of neatly arranged square sandstones stretching in a straight line from the entrance to the back of the garden. It takes ninety five of these 12-inch stones to cover the entire length of the garden.

The garden lies in the shadow of a noise-absorbing perimeter wall that creates a refuge from the busy world outside. By night, the wall-mounted lights illuminate the red coloured pebbles on the ground. This breathes some life into an otherwise dull and solemn place, but then dull and solemn is how a place like this ought to be.

In the garden centre, the 5ft high Twin Tower replica mounted on a concrete plinth is its most poignant feature and is a quick reminder of the full horror of events on that fateful day in September 2001.

On the inscription the words, "Her body was never recovered" make me reflect on how painful this must be for her parents and family. The small consolation of a proper burial might have brought some closure to this awful tragedy.

The bench at the back of the garden lies under the shadow of a dominant and protective wall. You can hear the gentle flowing sounds of the river. The laneway traffic whistles by as it always does and you can hear the noisy bar conversations through the wall. This garden may mark a tragedy, but it is also a place for quiet reflection and a refuge from the busy world outside.

These words by Dorothy Gurney inscribed on a plaque on the wall are fitting:

*The kiss of the sun for pardon
The song of the birds for mirth
One is nearer to God's heart in the garden
Than anywhere else on earth*

Anne Marie went to New York to seek opportunity and excitement, but her short life was abruptly ended by this tragedy. I sincerely hope that her parents and family also find the inner peace that her garden of remembrance embodies.