

## FOREWORD

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*L*ooking back over the last three years, it seems to me that the only occasions on which I remember there being utter silence in the editorial office at IMAGE was when, each issue, Polly Devlin's copy rolled off the fax machine. Assistant editor Carolyn McGrath and I knew better than to interrupt each other during that first reading of Polly's copy. Her pristine pieces provoked none of the impatient sighs and muttered expletives often heard in the vicinity of our littered desks. The extraordinarily rich vocabulary and breadth of reference sometimes had us reaching for our dictionaries, but our absorption in her choice of subject, the elegant assembly of her thoughts and the intensely felt emotion and humour that permeate her work, was complete. For me, there is only one thing more revealing than reading Polly and that is talking to her.

Before we ever met, and before any of these pieces were written, I had been fascinated by Polly Devlin. When I joined *Vague* as a novice journalist, I learned that this other Irish woman had preceded me, winning the *Vague* talent contest at nineteen to embark on a career in the most glamorous magazine in the world. Years on, after she left, she was talked about a lot in tones of deepest respect by people of great authority, and I, although she wouldn't remember it now, was once assigned to ring her for some article or other with a ridiculous query about what lipstick she wore or whether she liked skiing. Her flinty observations and her kindness when she heard a kindred accent remained with me. After I joined IMAGE, I asked her to participate along with a number of other women writers, in a literary afternoon we hosted in Dublin; she held her audience, mainly women, enthralled. Their reaction to her was memorable and made a deep impression on me. I was encouraged to ask her to consider writing for this audience of Irish women through the pages of our magazine. When she agreed, I was excited - I knew her contribution would be very special, even unique.

Very soon, letters in response to her articles began to arrive from that 'constituency of women' who, as Polly says, are more or less like her, preoccupied with family, children, married life, dogs, people, houses, gardens, poetry. She touches a nerve.

Her ability to write what women recognise as the truth about their lives owes much to her ability to cross divides. This collection of pieces from IMAGE (including one from our sister publication *The World of Hibernia*) reflects all aspects of Polly Devlin. Reading them again, I am stunned by their diversity, yet realise, as you will, that there is as much of Polly in the wife persuading her husband to sleep out in a field under the stars to satisfy a whim, as there is in Polly, friend of Jean Shrimpton, Peggy Guggenheim and Diana Vreeland; in Polly the Irish woman in her heartfelt reflections on the North, as in the mother delighting in the daftness of daughters.

Polly speaks to the wife, mother, daughter, sister, lover, thinker, dreamer in each of us. She illuminates in words 'the whole crumpled world in which working women and mothers live'. She authenticates our lives by writing them down.

In her introduction to this collection, Polly writes that, when she was writing for us, she was talking to someone who was listening, and listening *intently*. She is right; for there is no other way to listen to her.

JANE McDONNELL  
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