

# Angela's ashes: a memoir

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Lankford 1 Michelle Lankford Angela's Ashes: A Memoir 10/06/2012

Antagonists in Angela's Ashes Philomena Flynn was Angela's cousin.

Philomena was one of the people who pressured Malachy McCourt Sr. to marry Angela Sheehan after their mishap when Angela first came to the United States resulting in a pregnancy out of wedlock. Instead of Philomena helping her cousin she tracked down Malachy to make the pregnancy Malachy's problem. Philomena tracked down Malachy McCourt at a bar. Philomena stated to Frank McCourt, " Our cousin no sooner gets off the boat than you are at her.

We have morals in Limerick, you know, morals. We're not like jackrabbits from Antrim, a place crawling with Presbyterians," (Mccourt 16). Philomena also commented on how Malachy had an odd manner (Mccourt 16). After the birth of Angela and Malachy's first son, a party was given at Philomena's house. Philomena made a statement to Angela, " I'd make sure there's no more children. He don't have a job, so he don't, an' never will the way he drinks. So... no more children," (Mccourt 19). Philomena had her fill with her cousin after Angela gave birth to another child.

Philomena and herfamilymade it clear, " they wanted nothing to do with Angela until she came to her senses," (Mccourt 19). Years later Philomena intervenes in Angela's life again. Philomena gets in contact with Angela's mother, Margaret Sheehan, asking formoneyto send Angela and her family back to Ireland (Mccourt 45). Philomena even goes as far as buying a steamer trunk and hiring a van to take the family to Lankford 2 the pier (Mccourt 46). As Francis McCourt states," It was good-bye and good riddance," (Mccourt 46).

Angela McCourt, mother of the seven McCourt children, enabled her husband Malachy McCourt Sr. to be a drunk. No where throughout this memoir does she put her foot down, encouraging Malachy Sr. to quit drinking. Throughout the memoir, Angela rants and raves about Malchly Sr. , not providing food and money for his family. Angela states many times though out the story, "They're gone to bed half hungry because you have to fill your belly with whiskey," (McCourt 25). Angela goes as far as taking her children down the streets of Brooklyn and Limerick, going from pub to pub seeking her husband.

When the family returns to Ireland, Angela spends more time in bed due to illness and or own depression over the loss of 3 of her children instead of taking care of the ones who are alive. Angela takes to her oldest children down a road in search of coal to light a fire (McCourt 69) instead of demanding Malachy Sr. find gainful employment. Angela allows her eldest son, Francis McCourt to be the one who provides the care to his younger siblings. When Malachy McCourt Sr. , goes away to England to work, Angela shacks up with one of her cousins, Laman Griffin, and has an extramarital affair while her children are in another room.

The children hear them " talking, grunting and moaning," (McCourt 291). Angela also has no problem allowing her eldest son to find gainful employment to help support the household while Malachy McCourt Sr. is in England sending no money. Angela receives welfare and charity most of the story instead of finding employment herself to support her family. Angela spent most of her time fixating on her losses rather than trying to figure out keeping her family together. Lankford 3 Malachy McCourt Sr. , from Toome,

County Antrim (McCourt 12) was an Irish drunk. Malachy Sr. spent most of his years in a bar or pub spending whatever money he earned. Even after he married Angela and had seven children, he couldn't resist the alcohol. The eldest child, Francis," knew his father was always out looking for work, came home with smell of whiskey on his breath, and sang songs about Ireland suffering,"(McCourt 22). Angela always has hopes that Malachy Sr. could resist the pub and bring home his pay to support his family (McCourt 95). There comes a time in the story when the McCourt's have their last child and Malachy's Sr. 's father sends five pounds. Malachy Sr. cashes the money order and spends the money at the pub," (McCourt 183). Even though Malachy Sr. is a chronic alcoholic his children and Angela love him. It is stated by Francis McCourt," I think my father is like the Holy Trinity with three people in him, the one in the morning with the paper, the one at night with the stories and prayers, and then the one who does the bad thing and comes home with the smell of whiskey and wants us to die for Ireland," (McCourt 210). Malachy Sr. , has a hard time finding working in Limerick, Ireland because he has a northern Irish accent.

Northern Irish people aren't accepted in Limerick due to their non-catholic religion and affiliation with the English. Malachy Sr. eventually leaves his family and heads to England for work. Malachy Sr. seldom sends his pay, causing his family to have to beg from charities. It was said by Mr. Downes, " Malachy McCourt is gone pure mad with the drink, that he squanders his wages in pubs all over the Coventry," (McCourt 230). Towards the end of the novel, Francis McCourt makes the statement," He's not coming, Mam. He doesn't care about us. He's just a drunk over there in England," (McCourt

269). Malachy Sr. s many years of frequenting the pub have caused his family to starve, move to one room shacks, and to rely on others to help support his family. Lankford 4 The McCourt family belonged to low social class. They were poor. They lived in poverty. The McCourt family was rejected on many things because of their social class. Angela McCourt was nearly denied assistance from St. Vincent De Paul Society because they are “Yankees and there’s barely enough charity for the poor people of Limerick,” (McCourt 63). Francis McCourt is denied being an altar boy, as Angela states, “I’ll tell you what it is, she says. Tis class distinction. They don’t want boys from the lanes on the altar,” (McCourt 149). The McCourt boys are constantly made fun of because of the rags they wear for clothes, shoes that have holes in them fixed with rubber tires by Malachy Sr. McCourt (McCourt 105) and even as far as having to eat a pig’s head for Christmas and carrying it through the lanes while other kids point and laugh and make jokes (McCourt 98). Poverty is the biggest antagonist in this memoir. The McCourt’s lived in one-room shacks that contained a fireplace, table, 3 chairs and 1 bed which had to accommodate six people. McCourt 59). Most of the McCourt’s meals consisted of tea and bread (McCourt 24) while Malachy McCourt spent his earnings in a pub. The McCourt’s were so poor that they filled the infant’s bottles with sugar and water (McCourt 36). While in the United States, many of the McCourt’s neighbors would bring extra food over to support the McCourt household (McCourt 41). In Ireland, Malachy McCourt Sr. goes to the Labour Exchange for the dole to provide some type of income for his family (McCourt 63). Angela McCourt proceeds to go to St. Vincent de Paul to get assistance.

Angela is given a docket for a weeks worth of groceries (McCourt 66). The McCourts have to search down roads in order to find coal to have a fire and warmth (McCourt 69). In one of the dwellings the McCourt's reside at, they must share a lavatory with the whole lane (McCourt 103). Angela McCourt is ashamed of how her family looks “ with the Lankford 5 dirty old torn shirts, raggedy ganseys, broken shoes, and holes in their stockings,” (McCourt 231). Angela McCourt is forced also to be a beggar, as stated by Francis McCourt, “ This is worse than the dole, The St.

Vincent de Paul Society, and the Dispensary. It's the worst kind of Shame,” (McCourt 250). Many times throughout the memoir Francis McCourt himself has stolen food such as stealing bananas from the Italians in Brooklyn (McCourt 32), stealing fish and chips from a drunken man (McCourt 184), acquiring lemonade from pubs for his mother (McCourt 236), and stealing food off people's front doors (McCourt 238) to provide food for his family while his father is away in England not supporting his family. The poverty the McCourt's faced caused illnesses and deaths in this family.

It caused hospitalizations for Angela and Francis. This family was near starvation most of Francis McCourts childhood to teenage years. Francis McCourt is what held the family together. Francis McCourt's life began in the United States and in the end of this memoir he ended up back in the U. S. Francis McCourt had many struggles while growing up. Francis had to deal with poverty, deaths of his younger siblings as well as friends, typhoid and conjunctivitis, his alcoholic father, religion and its hypocrisy.

Francis learned that the only he was going to get anywhere was to be a hard worker and he waited year after year until he was finally able to work at 14

yrs old. The story told by Francis McCourt and his upbringing shows that if you work hard enough to achieve your dreams you will accomplish them regardless of what obstacles or mountains you have to climb. Look what Mr. Francis McCourt had to endure to make his dreams come true. He had a dream to return to the United States; A dream that he fulfilled at last.

Lankford 6 Works Cited McCourt, Frank. *Angela's Ashes*. 1st ed. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996. Print