

## THE LIFESAVING FOUNDATION CLG.

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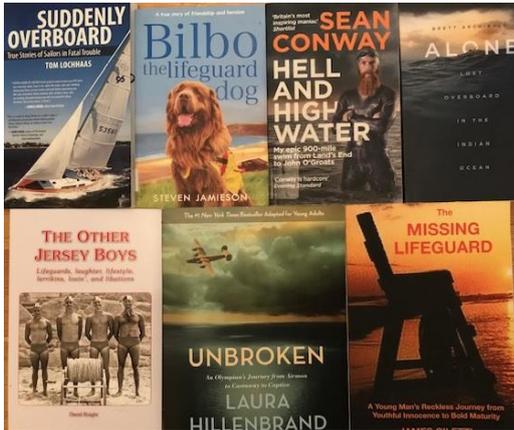
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### ADDRESS BY JOHN CONNOLLY AT WIT BOOK DONATION 23<sup>rd</sup> MAY 2019



Thank you for supporting this Foundation project.

The aim of our project is simple. We want to assemble, in Waterford Institute of Technology's Luke Wadding Library, a world leading research collection of drowning related books and other publications. Today the Lifesaving Foundation Collection numbers around 300 separate book titles. Our aim is to increase it to over 500 titles by the end of 2019 and in 2020 to break the 1000 title barrier.

We have a secondary aim, piggybacking on the library's website through the Foundation's Subject Guide page (<http://wit-ie.libguides.com/c.php?g=665155>). Our aim is to provide links to websites such as Ireland's Marine Casualty Investigation Board where you will find investigation reports on boat sinking's in Irish waters. In time this webpage will contain hundreds of web links to tens of thousands of reports on real drowning incidents from around the world.

Thirdly, we aim to collect, in electronic format, water safety leaflets and posters on different aspects of drowning prevention. Our idea is that a teacher or a parent will be able to visit the Subject Guide webpage and find a leaflet on beach safety, fishing safety, rip currents or another aspect of water safety which they can print off - anywhere in the world.

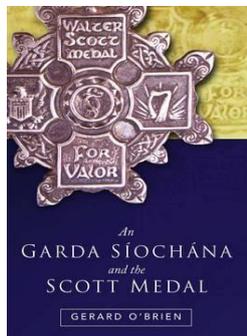
We are really only at the starter stage with all three aims. This is a 5 year project and we are only half-way through year two. To achieve our aims we will need to receive donations and sponsorship from Waterford, Ireland and elsewhere. Here we have a project that is up and running which will help us fundraise.



*Present were Eamonn Doherty Jnr, Eamonn Hession (Garda Síochána Retired Members Association), John Connolly, Deirdre Doherty Cleary, Peggy McHale (WIT Library), Fionnuala Doherty, Kieran Cronin (WIT Library), Joe Cashin (Retired Teachers Association Ireland), Terry O'Brien (WIT Head Librarian)*

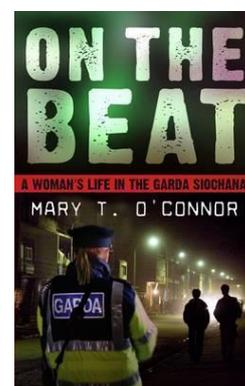
I want to talk to you about the 50 books we are adding to the Collection today and why they are of interest to us. We have a number of books dealing with the work and history of An Garda Síochána. I would like to acknowledge the financial support received from the Garda Síochána Retired Members Association who are represented here today by its Treasurer Eamon Hession and by the family of the late Garda Commissioner Eamonn Doherty.

Only two of the Garda books have a direct link to drowning prevention and rescue – **An Garda Síochána and the Scott Medal**, which contains accounts of medal winning drowning rescues and **On The Beat** by

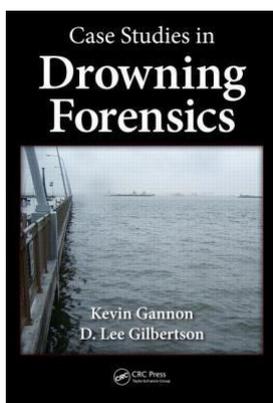


retired female Garda Mary O'Connor. The Scott Medal book contains citations and background information on medal winning rescues performed by serving officers. In her book Mary talks about what it was like to be a female police officer in Ireland describing how Dublin's disturbed inhabitants seem drawn to O'Connell Bridge over the Liffey on nights of a full moon with the intention of drowning themselves. If you are writing a research paper on Garda rescues it is necessary to outline what their normal working procedures are and what regulations apply to rescue situations before considering the actions of officers stepping outside them. It should be noted that Gardaí are not required to rescue but

they do it all the time. Mary tells of how she struggled to learn to swim while in the Garda College in Templemore. We have with us Eamonn Doherty Junior and his sister Deirdre Cleary, children of the late Garda Commissioner Eamonn Doherty. Their father, while he was President of the Garda College had a swimming pool built there. He told me once that he wanted officers to be able to swim, for their own safety, and being able to rescue others from drowning was a bonus. The Doherty Police Research Fund has provided financial support for our research project with the School of Health Sciences, represented here today by its Head, Professor John Wells. Last year we studied the impact of drowning deaths on local communities.



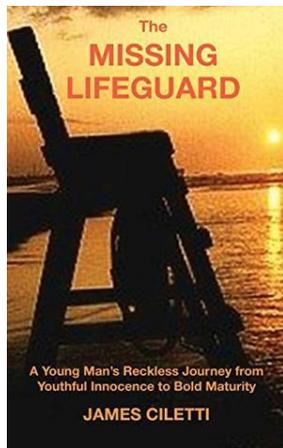
This year we will investigate the impact of nightly foot patrols on suicide by drowning numbers. We are at the ethical approval stage with this project.



I want to finish the police part with an American book- **Case Studies in Drowning Forensics**. Case Studies is co-authored by a US missing person's detective and a forensic pathologist. They believe that there is an unrecognised serial killer moving around the US dumping bodies into rivers. The deaths are usually declared to be suicide. They offer two reasons for the misclassification – every US county has its own sheriff and police department and within one state there are many counties so patterns are not easily identified and also to be appointed a coroner in the US you only need to be a medical doctor. You do not have to have any qualifications in pathology. It is a political appointment and if you are a gynaecologist and a friend on the Mayor you could be appointed local coroner.

In their book they take 13 similar cases and provide readers with professional analysis of the police work and pathology evidence and ask you to decide for yourself if the evidence points towards suicide or murder. The book contains useful information on how drowning deaths are investigated in the USA.

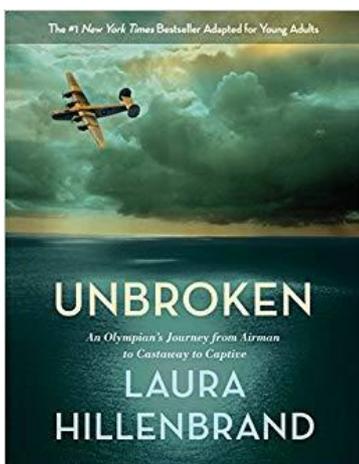
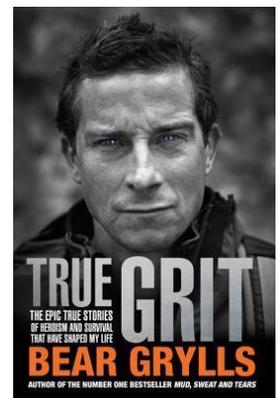
We are collecting autobiographies of police officers, firefighters and rescue pilots as well as those of lifeguards and soldiers. I spoke about our getting ethical approval for our suicide study. Ethically it is not acceptable to test subject to death and this is a weakness with most drowning research. The test subjects know that if they look like they are really drowning the test will be stopped and they will be rescued. In real life a drowning person cannot say 'Stop!' We rely on the experiences of survived casualties and of rescuers to tell us what it is like in the real rather than academic drowning world.



**The Missing Lifeguard** is the autobiography of a lifeguard on US New Jersey beaches; **The Other Jersey Boys** tells the story of Australian lifeguards who worked the beaches of Jersey in the Channel Islands; **Nine Lives** is the autobiography of Dave Courtney, an Irish Air Corp helicopter rescue pilot; **Rescue His Business - The Clyde His Life** is the biography of George Parsonage in **Glasgow** who rescued or recovered the bodies of over 1000 persons from the River Clyde over 51 years as a Riverman with the Glasgow Humane Society. We also have two books describing the work of dogs – **Bilbo the Lifeguard Dog** and **Search and Rescue Dogs**. Bilbo was a Newfoundland Labrador who specialised in drowning rescue while the second book describes the use of dogs in the search for drowned bodies.

‘Why do people drown?’ They drown because they don’t know how not to drown. This has not been so blindingly obvious as you might immediately think. How do you not drown? You start with not getting into trouble in the first place. Much time and money has been devoted by national and international lifesaving organisations on promoting Water Safety Advice and this is good. Prevention is a lot better and easier than rescue but if you get into trouble in water what do you do?

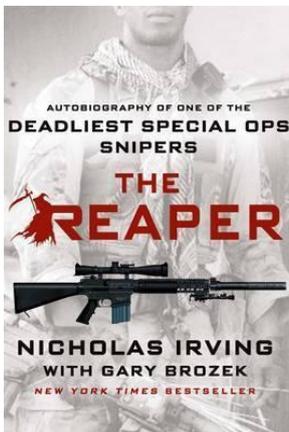
Learning how to swim is a good start but being able to swim is not a vaccination against drowning death. The majority of those who die by drowning in developed countries can swim. Drowning survival is about more than ‘being able to swim’. “We drown inside of our minds long before our bodies succumb to the water.” This is a John Connolly quotation. Drowning survival is as much mental as it is physical. Recently deceased world champion racing driver Nikki Lauda, talking about surviving a horrific crash in the 1996 German Grand Prix said, and I paraphrase – in a crash the body does what the body does and we cannot control it. We can only control our mind and our thoughts and the body responds to what we think. Understanding how humans perform under stress is a part of knowing how not to drown. Some of today’s books are military biographies or autobiographies because we learn in war about human performance under stress.



**True Grit** by Bear Grylls contains stories of people who displayed great courage but more than that great survival instincts who lived when others with them died. **Unbroken: An Olympian’s journey from castaway to captive** tells the story of US Olympic athlete Louie Zamperini. Zamperini competed for the USA in the 1938 Berlin Olympics and had joined the US Army Air Force in World War 11. His plane had crashed into the Pacific while taking part in a Search and Rescue operation. He survived the crash, stayed alive in a life raft for 27 days when other crew members died, was rescued by a Japanese patrol boat, and imprisoned in a number of prison camps. He was specifically targeted in an attempt to break him and have him broadcast propaganda on behalf of the Japanese. He underwent horrific torture but they failed to break him. After the war he suffered

badly from PTSD. The mental strength that kept him alive while others died deserted him. Afraid of his dreams he became a drunk until he found God through the preacher Billy Graham. Zamperini turned his life around becoming a motivational speaker.

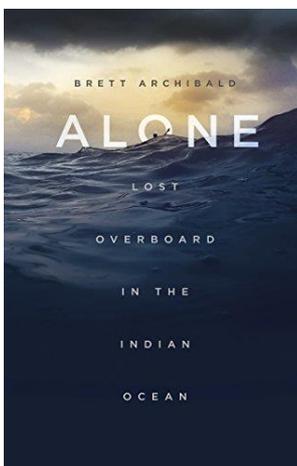
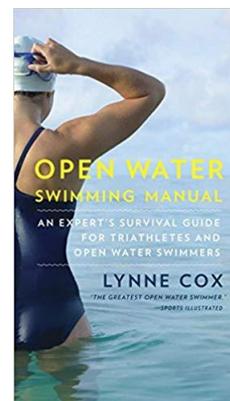
**Zero Six Bravo** tells the full story of a British Special Forces mission behind Iraqi lines during the Second Gulf War. Intelligence said that 100,000 Iraqi soldiers were willing to surrender and 60 Special Boat Service personnel were secretly sent to negotiate the surrender but the intelligence was wrong. The 60 Special Forces men were attacked and chased by the Iraqis resulting in a running hide and seek gun fight. One sergeant describes how time slowed down for him as he used a heavy calibre machine gun to



provide covering fire to enable the rest of the squadron to escape from a wadi. This 'slowing down of time' when under life threatening pressure is something I have personally experienced and it is described again by other soldiers like US sniper Nicholas Irving in his book **The Reaper**. Irving, fighting in Afghanistan describes seeing tracer coming at him in slow motion, allowing him to avoid it, while he provided top cover to US Marines withdrawing from a village under attack. One final book in this military section is a biography **A life in medicine** which tells the story of Irish Surgeon Malachy Smyth who served in the RAF during World War 11. Smyth describes himself as a medical doctor, without any specialist psychiatric training, trying to deal with post-traumatic stress in pilots and air crew. This was when PTSD was called 'lack of moral fibre'. Smyth

recognised that this condition was a real medical problem. This connects with Louie Zamparini's experiences on his return to the USA after the war. In looking at how people face the possibility of sudden accidental death we also need to put it into context of how people face coming medical death. We have books **Mortally Wounded** and **Death & Dying** which look at how we Irish deal with terminal illness.

I said that the majority of those who die by drowning can swim. On 15<sup>th</sup> June we are hosting a specialist seminar in WIT ARENA on this very topic. We will have 15 specialists discuss why swimmers are unable to save themselves from dying in cold open water. Today we are donating books that deal with swimming in cold open water. **In Cold Water** looks at swimming the English Channel; **Open Water Swimming Manual** is a training manual by US record extreme swimmer Lynne Cox along with her autobiography **Swimming to Antarctica**; **Hell and High Water** by Sean Conway describes his swimming the length of the island Great Britain; and two booklets on floating recently published **Floating – How to Float** by US trainer Mark Young and **Floating** by myself published on-line in 2006.



We have books outlining how individuals survived for over a month in a life raft and over a year drifting across the Pacific in a boat. I want to close with the book **ALONE: Lost Overboard in the Indian Ocean** by Brett Archibald. He survived for 28 hours swimming and floating having fallen overboard while suffering from food poisoning. Brett gives an hour by hour account of his thoughts and actions while he waited for rescuers to come. He tells of how he tore tiny pieces from a paper receipt to check which way the currents were flowing so that he could swim with them instead of against them.

I could spend an hour telling you about the other books but won't. Thank you for supporting this project. Our task now is to promote it.

I want to specially thank librarians Peggy McHale and Kieran Cronin without whose help we could never have gotten this project off the ground and WIT's Head of Library and Information, Terry O'Brien, for his positive ongoing support. This is our first function in the library's Collection Room. It will not be our last as we plan to bring some of the world's leading drowning researchers here on a regular basis.

Thank you for listening to me.

**John Connolly**

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25<sup>th</sup> May 2019