

OH, TO BE A CHILD

I close the photo album and stare out the window. My eyes glaze over; images of my childhood swim across my vision.

There was a time when the smallest of things brought the biggest of joys: running naked under the sprinkler, without self-consciousness; the unmitigated gratification of eating chocolate cake without counting calories, without guilt.

There was a time before children and truly understanding the unequivocal love of a mother – before worrying about them becoming sick or having anxieties about schoolwork, friendship groups and bullies combined.

There was a time when I didn't realise that the black dog regularly knocks at the door of those close to me; and that sometimes it seems easier to admit defeat and let it in, families and friends then having to deal with the consequences of the aftermath.

There are occasions when I wonder whether the pains in my belly are simply from stress or something more sinister. Or is it just that I have knowledge now; not everything is always as it seems, and not everything has a quick answer.

I once worried about how the next round of chemo would react with my father; and then I had to sit in the hospital room as he took his last breath, family sitting with him and hating the world. I wish I didn't know the horrendous anguish of grief; of witnessing death and then the process of understanding and having to accept it.

I miss the simplicity of being a child compared to the persistent weariness of being a grown-up; it would be much less complicated to sit under a blanket fort and concentrate on colouring between the lines.

Sometimes, it is all too much ... Too much and too hard. The back of my throat burns. I squeeze my eyes shut, willing the tears to dry before they escape and run salty streams down my pale cheeks.

I pray for health and good fortune, wishing karma was certainty and not just a belief.

I square my shoulders and a clarity dawns. There is nothing wrong with these reactions. It is natural. I am human. I feel.

My heart is heavy as I grieve the loss of my own youth, but I dry my tears. For today, my children deserve a childhood of their own, free of the reins that may one day slow them down. And I will take photographs, so that they too can remember.