invested in white collar workers, in management and pen-pushing layers within the HSE. The money is not finding its way to the real needs of our health service.

I continually remain outspoken against the HSE on radio and television. I will continue this campaign through whatever medium is necessary. The position is intolerable and somebody needs to take appropriate steps to fundamentally change the white elephant known and described as the HSE.

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**RICHARD KEARNEY**

*Philosopher and author*

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LET ME begin with a story. In the 1980s, at the height of the Troubles in Northern Ireland, I was invited as a young professor of philosophy in Dublin to go to Derry, a very divided city at the time, and moderate a workshop between republican and loyalist ex-paramilitary prisoners. During the workshop, one of the republican prisoners told of how one night he was asleep in his bed when a group of loyalist gunmen broke into the house, bound and gagged him, threw him into the boot of a car, and drove him to a barn outside Derry.

They strapped him to a chair, and he was about to be shot. When he asked if he could smoke a last cigarette, his captors consented.
and gave him one. As he smoked the cigarette, he told the story of how he had become involved in the republican armed movement, of how his grandfather had been brutally tortured and assassinated, of how his father had been incarcerated, of how his mother had had a nervous breakdown and become an alcoholic, of how his brother had been knee-capped and maimed for the rest of his life. And he went on until he finished his cigarette. Then he waited for the gun to go off. But it didn’t.

There was no sound. No movement. He waited for five minutes, ten minutes, fifteen minutes, twenty minutes – still no sound.

Eventually, he managed to free himself and looked around. There was nobody there; the barn was empty. And he walked home.

When he had finished speaking in the workshop, another man, a loyalist prisoner, stood up and said, ‘I was that assassin. And I would have shot you. But I couldn’t shoot you because, when I heard your story, I realised it was my story.’

I was very struck by this incident, by the impossible hospitality and empathy that had transpired in that exchange. And so a number of years later I set up the Guestbook Project in Boston College, where since 2009 we have been organising a series of interdisciplinary conferences, publishing books and journals and, most recently, establishing an international blog-site focusing on the theme of hosting the stranger: a theme based on the fact that, in most European languages, the word for ‘guest’ and for ‘enemy’ is the same – e.g., xenos in Greek, hostis in Latin – giving rise to ‘hostility’ and ‘hospitality, both from the same root. The purpose of the project is to try to understand how, why and when this improbable act of hospitality can take place, when cycles of enmity can give rise to that miraculous moment of hosting the stranger.

A second story that has informed the Guestbook project is that of ‘chancing your arm’. This goes back to 1492 when a great civil war was raging in Ireland and the Earl of Kildare, Gearóid Mór FitzGerald, hounded and eventually besieged James Butler, nephew of the Earl of Ormond, in St Patrick’s Cathedral in Dublin. At one point FitzGerald said to himself, ‘This must end. This endless cycle of blood-letting and vengeance can’t go on.’ He asked Butler to carve a hole in the door and said: ‘I’m going to take off my armour and stretch my bare arm through, and you can either cut it off or you can shake my hand. If you cut it off the war continues. If you shake my hand, the war ends.’

FitzGerald ‘chanced his arm’, Butler shook his hand, and the war ended.

These two stories are about the improbable act of the enemy becoming the guest. And what we are trying to do with Guestbook is to extend the programme beyond an academic scholarly exchange to a more global initiative where we invite young people from different sides of divided cities and communities throughout the world – Derry/Londonderry in Northern Ireland, Mitrovica and Vukovar in the Balkans, Jerusalem in the Middle East, Bangalore and Dokdo in Asia, Nairobi and Mozambique in Africa – to engage in a work of creative imagination, whereby instead of repetitively acting out the divisions of the past they make and re-make history as story.

Using basic phone cameras and free editing software, young people, as only young people of this generation can, break the cycle of trans-generational wounding and revenge by making short movies, several minutes long, in two stages. The first, where they exchange their respective narratives of hurt and hostility; and the second where they reinvent together, from the ingredients of their divided histories (Battle of Kosovo, the siege of Derry, the fall of Jerusalem) a new story, set in contemporary times, where the old cycle of violence is transformed and overcome. The aim is to encourage young people to chance their arms by retelling their nar-
ratives, and then make that impossible leap of hospitality, trust and imagination towards the possibility of something new.

In Spring 2016, Guestbook awards its first international prize for the best short film or video of exchanging stories between youths in divided communities. The prize will go to the most imaginative, inspiring, and effective digital project that represents the creative overcoming of divisions between opposed traditions, religions and cultures.

For information about the Guestbook Project, visit www.guestbookproject.com

KATE KERRIGAN
Novelist and newspaper columnist

I THINK that making a difference is not about grand giving gestures but simply living a good life.

I remember a number of years ago a friend of mine lost her father and, although I did not know the man well, the fact that there was standing room only right through the car park at his funeral told me all I needed to know.

There were eighteen priests squashed onto the tiny altar and from that alone I surmised he must have been an extraordinary man. From the few times I met him I could tell he was an impeccably mannered old-school gentleman – like my grandfather: a devout, respectable, pioneer who used his intelligence to do good things for people. A decent man. And

Kate Kerrigan is the author of six novels, one of which, Ellis Island, was a New York Times bestseller in 2013. Her most recent work is The Lost Garden. She also writes a weekly column in the Irish Mail about her life in Killala, Co. Mayo, and contributes to RTÉ’s Sunday Miscellany.