

Irish member Nigel Kelly has long been an admirer of Quentin Crisp's courage and 'real life' philosophy. Now he has written an acclaimed biography of the artist and writer. Brian Page reports

Nigel Kelly first became aware of Quentin Crisp when he saw the television show *The Naked Civil Servant*, in 1975. At the time Nigel was in his early teens, growing up in a Northern Ireland wracked by the turbulent times of the so-called 'Troubles'. Who and what you were in those times could be a danger in itself...

Which is perhaps why Nigel was so struck with Crisp's courage. Seeing the television show, he says, had a 'profound impact'.

"His integrity, intelligence, courage and humanity showed, for me, the best a man can be, a true life hero.

"Following his life and reading his books, I realised that his greatest attribute was his philosophy, which was profound and unique. His was a 'real-life' philosophy, and he actually lived by it."

Crisp was a flamboyant homosexual in 'less than liberated times' who was reviled in his earlier years but later went on to become almost a national treasure, an actor, dramatist and writer with huge numbers of fans around the world.

After Crisp's death, in 1999, Nigel created a website (www.quentincrisp.info) to keep the man's memory alive.

Through the website he made contact with some of Crisp's friends including Guy Kettelhack, Penny Arcade and Phillip Ward.

But it was not until Nigel and his wife were injured in a bad car accident that the idea of actually writing a book about Crisp emerged. "In the months I spent recuperating I started writing a book on Quentin, to occupy my mind," Nigel says. "I become extremely restless with nothing to do. But I could still write. I didn't start out seriously thinking that it would come to anything. I did it to occupy my mind; to stop myself going even crazier that I already was. I didn't realise at the time that it would occupy most of my 'free' time for the next three years."

During those three years Nigel spoke to many of Crisp's friends, gradually making contact with more and more people who had known and worked with him. "I used these contacts and read all his books – there are 16 of them – as well as those books written about him. I watched as many of his film performances as I



Uncovering the genius of the naked civil servant

could... there are a great deal more than you might think! I watched his interviews and documentary appearances.

"I have put together a book which, while it treads some familiar paths – most people know the general layout of his life – also has a lot of bits and pieces about Quentin which I believe have never appeared in print before."

The bulk of the book is a biography of Quentin using Nigel's many sources. The second part looks at his philosophy "which he encapsulated in his *bons mots*" and the final part is a series of tributes from those who knew him best. Nigel says he was thrilled at the reaction of some of Crisp's friends. "When I mentioned it to these people they were incredibly supportive and encouraging. I made contact with more of his friends and his family and people who had worked with him.

"They all gave their time and knowledge unsparringly. Meeting them was the most life-enhancing part of writing the book."

In 2009 it looked like a publishing deal was on the cards when a publisher specialising in celebrity biographies accepted the book.

That opportunity fizzled out but, displaying the kind of determination Crisp would have been proud of, Nigel put together a new submission which he sent to American company McFarland, an academic publisher with world-wide distribution. And this time the deal went ahead. *Quentin Crisp: The Profession of Being* is now available through Amazon and other outlets.

Contributors include Phillip Ward, who also proof read the manuscript and who is the executor of Crisp's estate. So it is in essence the first officially approved biography.

Having got the writing bug, Nigel has now written a second book, *The Humanity Factor*, a science fiction novel. Nigel says: "After reading in the August *Mensa Magazine* about Eileen Gormley and her book

Don't Feed the Fairies, I contacted

Fantasy Island Book Publishing. Within a week they agreed to publish it.

"It will be available as an e-book first before going to print. I've now started a sequel to it called *The Anna Factor*."

You can find out more about Nigel's work at his website www.nigelkelly.com

