

A reply to “FAILED”

I heard my name being cawed oot by the heidy.

“What was the last word I said?” He said, in a thick Belfast accent.

Emmmmm “ said?”

The duster flew across the room and caught the top of my heid. This type of thing was accepted back then.

He moved me to the front of the class to keep an eye on me.

Apparently, aged seven I was trouble with a capital T. I had to be watched.

He did this with another four weans as well. Always the same four weans fae doon my scheme - The Famous Five.

The humiliation wasn't finished yet. He called all five us out to stand in front of the class before a firing squad of children's faces.

One by one, the arithmetic papers dropped at our two feet.

FAILED! FAILED! FAILED! FAILED! FAILED!

The red inked papers starred up at us. “God help me, I pray to St Jude for Hopeless cases!!!!” he sighed as we walked the walk of shame back tae oor desks, oor cheeks as red as the ink.

Reinforced with wee sniggers fae the other weans as we sat doon.

“FAILED.”

It's a word branded inside you from childhood.

Sharon Collins