

Memory Makers



Reflections and Recollections
Cocooners Special Edition

Déantóirí Cuimhne
2020



Comhairle Contae
Fhine Gall
Fingal County
Council



Memory Makers



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Machnamh agus Cuimhnimh

Leagan Speisialta do Dhaoine

a bhfuil Clutharú á Dhéanamh acu

2020



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Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not reflect the views of Fingal County Council. All information contained in this publication has been entered into this booklet in its original format.
Images submitted by the authors.

Is le húdair aon tuairimí, torthaí, agus conclúidí nó moltaí a léirítear san fhoilseachán seo agus ní thugtar le fios gurb ionann iad agus dearchtaí Chomhairle Contae Fhine Gall. Cuireadh an t-eolas go léir atá san fhoilseachán seo sa leabhrán seo sa bhunfhormáid a bhí aige. Sheol na húdair na híomhánna ar aghaidh.

Introduction

The first edition of our Memory Makers Reflections and Recollections collection was published in 2008. The intention was to create a collection of some of the amazing work created by our seniors from across the county. It was a way of creating a keepsake of precious memories for seniors involved in our Memory Makers Competition and their families.

In March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic the government advised many older people or those who were classed as vulnerable due to ill health to cocoon and remain at home in order to minimise their risk of infection and prevent further spread of the virus. The Fingal Community Call Forum was set up in response to the Government's request to assist the at risk members of our community to access essential services.

In response to this "Cocooning – A collection of activities for those self-isolating" was developed by the COVID-19 Fingal Community Response Project which is a collaboration between Fingal County Council, Age Friendly Fingal, Castleknock Community Centre Laurel Lodge, Blakestown Community Centre, Corduff Resource Centre, and Huntstown Community Centre.

One element of this publication was the Short Story & Poetry Competition. Cocooners were invited to submit a short story or poem that evoked a memory of a moment in time or a special event that connected in some way to what is happening in Ireland today.

The response to the competition was phenomenal and it gives me great pleasure to share the entries with you. Fingal County Council is delighted to record and share these stories and poems in this special Memory Makers Reflections and Recollections third edition. In tandem to this giving a voice to cocooners in our community to share their thoughts and experiences, it is an important record of a special time in our history and will be cherished for generations to come. A big thank you to everyone who participated and took the time to create and share their work with us.

Take care and stay safe

Margaret Geraghty
Director of Housing Community & Libraries

Réamhrá

Foilsíodh an chéad eagrán dár mbailiúchán Cruthaitheoirí Cuimhní - Machnamh agus Cuimhnimh in 2008. Ba é an cuspóir a bhí aige seo bailiúchán de chuid den sárshaothar a chruthú a rinne ár seanóirí ar fud an chontae a chruthú. Bealach a bhí ann chun taisce ar chuimhní luachmhara a chruthú do sheanóirí a bhí bainteach inár gcomórtas Cruthaitheoirí Cuimhní agus dá dteaghlaigh.

Mhol an rialtas i Márta 2020 mar gheall ar phaindéim COVID-19 do go leor daoine breacaosta nó iad siúd a rangáíodh amhail bheith leochaileach don drochshláinte chun clutharú a dhéanamh agus chun fanacht sa bhaile chun an baol a íoslaghdú go dtiocfadh an víreas orthu agus chun cosc a chur ar an víreas a scaipeadh níos mó. Bunaíodh Fóram Ghlaio an Phobail de chuid Fhine Gall mar fhreagairt don iarraidh a rinne an Rialtas chun cabhrú le baill dár bpobal atá i mbaol chun teacht ar na seirbhísí bunriachtanacha.

Mar fhreagairt dó seo, d'fhorbair Tionscadal Freagartha Pobail COVID-19 Fhine Gall "Clutharú – Bailiúchán gníomhaíochtaí dóibh siúd atá ag féinaonrú". Is comhoibriú é idir Comhairle Contae Fhine Gall, Aoisbhá Fhine Gall, Ionad Pobail Chaisleán Cnucha, Ionad Pobail Lóiste an Labhrais, Ionad Pobail Bhaile an Bhlácaigh, Ionad Acmhainní na Coirre Duibhe, agus Ionad Pobail Bhaile an Huntaigh.

Gné amháin den fhoilseachán seo a bhí sa Chomórtas Gearrscéalta agus Filíochta. Tugadh cuireadh do dhaoine a raibh clutharú á dhéanamh acu chun gearrscéal nó dán a sheoladh ar aghaidh a rinne cuimhne a mhúscailt faoi thráth éigin ama roimhe seo nó imeacht speisialta a rinne ceangal ar bhealach éigin leis an méid atá ag tarlú in Éirinn inniu.

Bhí an fhreagairt don chomórtas as cuimse agus is mór an sásamh a thugann sé dom na hiontrálacha a roinnt leat. Tá gliondar croí ar Chomhairle Contae Fhine Gall chun na scéalta agus na dánta seo a chur i dtaifead agus a roinnt sa tríú heagrán speisialta seo de Cruthaitheoirí Cuimhní - Machnamh agus Cuimhnimh. Anuas air seo, bronnann sé glór ar dhaoine a bhfuil clutharú á dhéanamh acu inár bpobal chun a smaointe agus a n-eispéiris a roinnt, agus taifead tábhachtach atá ann ar thréimhse speisialta inár stair agus beidh cuimhne go deo ag an nglúin amach anseo air. Gabhaim buíochas mór le gach duine a ghlac páirt agus a chaith an t-am chun a saothar a chruthú agus a roinnt linn.

Tabhair aire agus bí sábháilte

Margaret Geraghty
Stiúrthóir Tithíochta, Pobail agus Leabharlann



Memory Makers
Déantóirí Cuimhne



Judges
Moltóirí

Marie Mc Caffrey



Biography:

Marie Mc Caffrey is a 64 year old Mother of four and nanny to twelve adorable grandchildren. She lives in Laurel Lodge with her husband Michael. Marie discovered her love of the written word, especially poetry, when she returned to education as a mature student at the tender age of fifty. She successfully obtained an honours degree in English and Sociology from Maynooth University. In 2016 Marie was instrumental in setting up a book club in the Laurel Lodge Community Centre and it is a thriving and popular addition to the centre. Due to the ever increasing demand for places she set up a second club last year which is also at full capacity. Apart from poetry and reading her hobbies include walking and going on holidays with her family.

Judge's comments:

Firstly let me congratulate everybody who submitted work and to say that the standard was exceptionally high. It was a very difficult task choosing the winning poems as each entry spoke from the heart and told their story in a very moving way. I thoroughly enjoyed reading every one of them and I felt very privileged to have a glimpse into the cocooning experience of so many people. I felt very emotional as I read through the pieces as everyone told a different story yet it was a tale which was replicated throughout many Irish households. As a granny myself I felt empathy with the writers who missed seeing their loved ones yet everybody accepted their fate in a cheerful and positive manner. The poems spoke for the nation as they described what we were all missing but with hope for a positive outcome. Well done to all our entrants, you made this reader laugh and cry as you shared your stories during these very challenging times.

Beathaisnéis:

Máthair le ceathrar agus mamó le dháréag garleanaí áille atá 64 bliain d'aois í Marie McCaffrey. Cónaíonn sí i Lóiste an Labhrais lena fear céile, Michael. Thosaigh Marie le spéis a chur san fhocal scríofa, agus san fhilíocht ach go háirithe, nuair a d'fhill sí ar an oideachas mar mhac léinn lánfhásta ag aois óg caoga bliain. D'éirigh léi céim onóracha a bhaint amach sa Bhéarla agus sa tSocheolaíocht ó Ollscoil Mhá Nuad. Ghlac Marie páirt lárnach in 2016 le club leabhar a bhunú in Ionad Pobail Lóiste an Labhrais agus tá an-rath air agus cuireann sé gné eile den ionad ar fáil a bhfuil an-tóir air. Mar gheall go bhfuil éileamh ag teacht ar áiteanna atá ag dul i méid an t-am go léir, bhunaigh sé an dara club anuraidh agus tá ballraíocht lán ag an gclub sin freisin. Tá siúl agus dul ar saoire lena teaghlach i measc na gcaitheamh aimsire eile atá aici, seachas an fhilíocht agus an léitheoireacht.

Nótaí tráchta an mholtóra:

Ar an gcéad dul síos, ba mhaith liom comhghairdeas a ghabháil le gach duine a chuir saothar isteach agus ba mhaith liom a thabhairt le fios go raibh an caighdeán an-ard ar fad. Ba dheacair dom na dánta buaiteacha a roghnú mar gheall go raibh macántacht dhomhain mhothúchán i ngach dán agus gur inis gach dán scéal ar bhealach a mhúscail go leor mothúchán. Bhain mé an-taitneamh go deo as gach ceann díobh a léamh agus bhrath mé go raibh pribhléid mhór orm spléachadh a fháil ar an eispéireas a bhí ag an oiread sin daoine a raibh clutharú á dhéanamh acu. Bhrath mé go leor mothúchán fad a léigh mé trí na saothair mar gheall gur insíodh scéal éagsúil i ngach ceann, ach bhí an scéal céanna á insint in go leor teaghlach in Éirinn, mar sin féin. Is mamó mé féin agus bhrath mé ionbhá leis na scríbhneoirí a bhrath casadh lena ndaoine muinteartha uathu ach ghlac gach duine lena gcinniúint ar bhealach croíúil agus dearfach. Labhair na dánta ar son an náisiúin fad a ndearnadh cur síos iontu ar na rudaí a bhraitheamar uainn go léir ach bhí dóchas iontu go mbainfear toradh dearfach amach. Gabhaim comhghairdeas leis na daoine go léir a chuir dán isteach. Chuir sibh idir ghol agus gháire orm agus bhur scéalta á roinnt agaibh i rith na tréimhse an-dúshlánaí seo.

Domhnall Drislane



Biography:

Domhnall Drislane is a library assistant at Blanchardstown Library, where he organises creative writing workshops as often as possible. Domhnall has been an avid reader since childhood and began studying creative writing while studying abroad in New Orleans, Louisiana. Upon completion of his Bachelor of Arts Degree at Maynooth University, Domhnall completed a Master of Fine Arts Degree in Creative Writing at American College Dublin. He lives in North Dublin with his partner Kayla and likes to spend his free time reading, writing and playing sports, especially football. He is an avid Liverpool fan.



Judge's comments:

I feel honoured and very privileged to have had the opportunity to read all of these stories and act as judge in this competition. To hear so many powerful voices articulating their experiences of these difficult and surreal times was a profoundly rewarding experience.

The quality and variety of the submissions was staggering: from personified coats and broken dentures to neighbourly plates of eclairs and bags of burger buns you just can't let go of; memories of TB and scarlet fever and bombs dropped on the north strand; Sherlock Holmes mysteries and Jeopardy sketches and stories set in 2045 looking back at all of this; stories of old Dublin, of Euro '88, of cancelled celebrations and holidays, of scrabble groups in Castleknock and landmines in Afghanistan; reflections on time and on death, on vulnerability, on the pain of missing one's family, one's grandchildren, so terribly much.

Suffice to say, with so many talented writers connecting with the given theme of cocooning in their own unique, engaging and impacting ways, it was exceedingly difficult to select the winners of the competition. A great many of the stories are very unfortunate not to have their quality recognised with a prize and thus I am delighted that each and every one is printed here so they can all have the readership they so richly merit. I know that you will enjoy reading them as much as I have.

Beathaisnéis:

Cúntóir leabharlainne é Domhnall Drislane ag Leabharlann Bhaile Bhlainséir, áit a gcuireann sé ceardlanna scríbhneoireachta cruthaithí ar bun chomh minic agus is féidir leis. Léitheoir díograiseach é Domhnall ó bhí sé ina pháiste agus thosaigh sé le staidéar a dhéanamh ar an scríbhneoireacht chruthaitheach fad a bhí staidéar á dhéanamh aige thar lear in Nua Orleans, Louisiana. I ndiaidh dó a Chéim Baitsiléir Ealaíon a chríochnú ag Ollscoil Mhá Nuad, rinne Domhnall Céim Máistir i Mínealaíona sa Scríbhneoireacht Chruthaitheach ag an gColáiste Meiriceánach Baile Átha Cliath. Cónaíonn sé i dTuaisceart Bhaile Átha Cliath lena pháirtneir Kayla agus taitníonn sé leis a chuid am saor a chaitheamh ag léamh, ag scríobh agus le spórt a imirt, go háirithe an pheil. Tacaíonn sé go díograiseach le foireann peile Learphoil.

Nótaí tráchta an mholtóra:

Braithim go bhfuil onóir orm agus pribhléid mhór orm go raibh an deis agam na scéalta go léir seo a léamh agus chun gníomhú mar mholtóir sa chomórtas seo. Eispéireas thar a bheith tairbheach a bhí ann an oiread sin glórtha cumhachtacha a chloisteáil agus a n-eispéiris á gcur in iúl acu den tréimhse dhúshlánach agus fhíorait seo.

Bhí méid agus éagsúlacht na scéalta a seoladh ar aghaidh millteanach: idir cotaí pearsantaithe agus cíor fiacla bhriste agus plátaí comharsanúla éadromóg agus málaí borróga burgair nach féidir leat scaoileadh leo ar óir na cruinne; cuimhní faoin eitinn agus faoin bhfiabhras dearg agus faoi bhuamaí a thit ar an trá thuaidh; rúndiamhra Sherlock Holmes agus sceitsí Jeopardy agus scéalta a bhí suite sa bhliain 2045 ina gcaitear súil siar ar an eachtra uile seo; scéalta faoi Bhaile Átha Cliath fadó, faoi Euro '88, faoi cheiliúradh agus faoi shaoirí a cuireadh ar ceal, grúpaí Scrabble i gCaisleán Cnucha agus mianaigh thalún san Afganastáin; machnamh ar am agus ar an mbás, ar leochaileacht, ar an bpian a chruthaíonn do mhuintir agus do gharleanaí a bhraistint uait go mór.

Is leor a rá, mar gheall go ndearna an oiread sin scríbhneoirí cumasacha scagadh ar théama an chlutharaithe ar a mbealach féin uathúil, mealltach agus a imríonn tionchar orainn, bhí sé an-deacair buaiteoirí an chomórtais a roghnú. Tá sé an-mhí-ámharach nár aithníodh caighdeán go leor de na scéalta le duais agus tá gliondar croí orm go bhfuil gach uile cheann díobh clóite anseo, ar an gcaoi sin, chun go mbaineann siad an lucht léitheoireachta amach atá tuillte i gceart acu. Is eol dom go mbainfidh tú an taitneamh céanna as iad a léamh a bhain mé féin.



Memory Makers
Category A:
Poetry



Déantóirí Cuimhne
Catagóir A:
Filíocht

Submitted Poems

Dánta a Seoladh ar Aghaidh



Peter Owens	Lockdown
Tom Sullivan	Come Play Here with Me Grandad
Paula Boyle	Covid
Pat Ryan	Covid 19
Ger O'Dowd	Covid Times
Maureen Penrose	Essential
Lorraine Nealon	First Love
Brian Arnold	Home Birding
Colm Mcgrath	Limerick: Covid Puppy Talk
Marie Duffy	Still 'Cocooned' Cinquains
Breda McCrory	Meeting My Sisters – Anticipation
Mary McCamley	Pandemic Poem?
Mary O'Dwyer nee RUDDY	Untitled Poems
Tony Hickey	Untitled Poem
Mary McGovern	Cocooned
Anthony MacNamee	For the Grandchildren & Retirement
Alice Owens	Quarantine
Seamus McCabe	The Bug
Dolores Delaney	The Imitation of Reality
Ken Duffy	The New Normal
Patricia Langton	One Touch
Rita Ennis	Cocooning Reflections
Michael Cooney	Untitled Poems
Gladys Boardman	Untitled Poem
Miriam Gorman	Why Don't You Smile?
Madeleine Bradley	Untitled Poem
Joan (J.P) O'Hare	Covid 19 Virus
Betty Reddy	The Corona Virus
Breda Horneck-Gallagher	Corona Virus
Tom Barry	Covid Nineteen
María A. Mañueco-Ramos	Entwined Hands
Julie Fogarty	Uninvited Pandemic
William Gerald Roberts	Down Memory Lane
Bernadette Denny	The Healing Touch
Geraldine McGovern	Covid 19 Lockdown 2020
Martin Connelly	Dumb Animal
Ann Sweeney	Thoughts at this Time
Theresa Kinsella	Mother
Kathleen Lindsay	Cocooning



1st Prize
An 1ú Duais
Tom Sullivan

Come Play Here with Me Grandad

2nd Prize
An 2ra Duais
Peter Owens

Lockdown



3rd Prize
An 3ú Duais
Rita Ennis

Cocooning Reflections

Peter Owens

Lockdown

The pandemic and the lockdown took us mostly by surprise.
All too suddenly, the fear and the restrictions,
Were there before our very eyes.

Then that message from the nursing home,
When things just seemed to crowd.
We are so very sorry, but with the danger of infection,
No more visits are allowed.

No more chances to be with my partner,
Just to be together and to cuddle.
All replaced by facetime calls, on the I Phone.
Oh how all seemed such a muddle.

Then came the day I lost my partner of fifty years and more.
They said it was to the virus.
Now I just feel like a castaway, on an alien shore.

Weekly zoom meetings with the family and the valued friends who rang.
Lots of pottering around the garden.
Was it that we had more time to really listen,
Or that the Birds more sweetly sang.

My daily strolls in the castle park and the weather at its best.
Oh just to see the sun light up the greenwood.
Feel the magic of the moment, then let nature do the rest.

I have a special friend, whose name is love.
She has woven another cocoon,
When deep in meditation and all alone,
I can hear her special tune.

She takes me to the still point ,where all thoughts just melt away.
Now it's peace and joy that fill that gap,
On these strange days in May



Tom Sullivan

Come Play Here with Me Grandad

2020 was the start of a decade full of hope
A virus first hit China but we were sure that we would cope,
We went about our daily tasks as deaths in China grew
We never batted an eyelid as there was no one there we knew.

But next it came to Italy a place not far away
Soon many deaths and illnesses were growing by the day.
We prayed for all Italians, especially in the North
We were sure that it would end soon, but in truth it just got worse.

Soon it spread to Spain and to all of Europe too
Taking people in its path now what were we to do?
When next it came to Ireland our beautiful little place
It had broken our defences, Death staring us in the face.

The Irish always happy, swapped welcome smiles for frowns
As the vast and deadly virus it swept from town to town
We prayed to God in Heaven to inspire our government
That they may tell us what to do and give us all some strength.

Our leaders got together like they never have before
Others had taken measures, but Ireland must do more.
They were left now with no option, to keep this graph curve down
The government had no choice, but to close this country down.

Now Ireland as we knew it with its vibrant shops and bars
Overnight became a ghost town with less people, bikes and cars.
On the hole our people stayed indoors and remained in quarantine
City streets once packed with people, now birds and foxes were seen.

We stayed indoors as we were told in groups of three and four
Lockdowns such as this, we had never seen before.
The people stayed at home, technology introduced
From regular chats with family and friends, FaceTime now was used.

Birthdays and anniversaries they just came and went
Now at last we came to realise how much personal contact meant.

I miss my own dear grandchild who means all the world to me
From hugs and kisses in the past I now only see on TV.
We FaceTime, Zoom or What's App almost every day
But I'd swap them all for just one hug, and for her to say,
Come play here with me grandad and all her toys she'd bring
I would join her on the floor and we'd laugh and dance and sing.

Now when all the sadness goes away and quarantines no more
When cocooning finally ceases and we can open up our doors,
This country of ours must celebrate and remember all our dead
And thank our God in heaven for answering all the prayers we said.

We must start this year afresh, examining all cons and pros
This virus brought us sad times, yes there were lots of those.
Apart from all the sad times it brought some good ones too
Now quizzes, bingo and board games were really fun to do.

We now think of all its victims and their funerals so lonely
Please god all this sorrow and sadness, will remain a memory only
Now Ireland as we knew it will never be the same
Since the year of 2020, when Covid Virus came.

Dedicated to Darcy



Paula Boyle

Covid

Care
Of the
Vulnerable and old
In sickness and
Death

Care
Of the
Volunteers
In
Dublin and elsewhere

Calling
Out for
Volunteers
In
Dublin Dundalk medical sectors

Calling
Old
Vulnerable
In
Distress stay in stay safe

Call, phone, text
On
Vulnerable, sick housebound
In
During epidemics





Pat Ryan

Covid 19

We're cocooning together I and you
We wash and clean and thus renew
This awful virus we will outgrow
By staying safe and keeping low
We watch the Mass when on the box
But then that's not quite orthodox
We live in hope and not in vain
That health and soul we can sustain
Keeping in mind that the butterfly
Was once cocooned like you and I.

Ger O'Dowd

Covid Times

We've cleaned up all the presses
We've cleaned under the bed
We've tied up the garden
And made banana bread

We've watched a bit of Netflix
We've taken out the Wii
We've cooked and baked and eaten
And drank a lot of tea

We've walked the dog for hours
We've walked ourselves each day
We've queued in line for ages
And struggled to obey

We've cut the grass and hedges
We've painted up the shed
We've washed all of the windows
And cleared the flowerbed

We've tackled a large jigsaw
We've felt a bit afraid
We've rooted out old costumes
And held our own parade

We've started on line shopping
We've bought a new TV
We've even bought new solar lights
And hung them on a tree



The garden that kept us sane.

We've recycled cans and bottles
We've cleared out clothes and shoes
We've even cleaned the attic out
And drank a bit of booze

We've spoken on the What's App
We've messaged on the phone
We've seen so many people
And yet we've felt alone

We've spoken to our family
We've spoken to our friends
We've spoken to our neighbours
And hoped that all this ends

We've stayed at home to do our bit
We've found it very tough
We've cried a bit, I must admit
And feel enough's enough

We've missed out on our grandkids
We've missed out on so much
We've found this bit the hardest
And always kept in touch

We can just hope its ending
We've found it hard to wait
We'll get to see the gang again
It's going to be great

Maureen Penrose

Essential

In lockdown now, week number four
I'm not advised to go out the door
Cos what I do, it's not essential
So here I am just going mental!
I raised me kids that they wouldn't need me
I'm proud to see they can manage without me
They've taken over, they're minding me here
Making sure that Covid won't be visiting near
Staying away, keeping their distance
Giving me vitamins to build my resistance
So maybe I raised kids who wouldn't be needy
Who wouldn't be spiteful, who wouldn't be greedy
But while I'm sat here going mental
I've come to know that my kids are essential



Lorraine Nealon

First Love

No where to go, nothing much to do
Suddenly I start to fantasize of you
My first love, my first date
Years start flooding back through my mind
I am letting those feelings of love unwind
I was only fifteen, a long time ago
That first time you held my hand I loved it so
My heart started beating faster as I smile you know
Thinking of that mutual love we shared
It lasted for years good memories that we cared
I hope you are happy like I am too
I will never regret the day I met you
Back to reality, I hope and pray
No more lives will be lost and we can live
Peace and harmony to all is what we can give



Brian Arnold

Home Birding



Pigeons coo-coo
Nesting time
Feeding nurturing,
Seasonal rhythms.

The Dawn chorus
Sounds of
Caws and tweets,
A Shrill opera.

Sunshine floods
The garden,
Busy birds in flight,
Over Laurel peace sign.

Crows crow,
Robins dance,
Swifts glide,
On pure air.

Home work,
Learning,
Zooming
Lives together.

Family time
Walking, talking
Laughing, crying
Together, apart.

Daily news,
Deaths and infections.
The invisible fear,
Swarming, stay home.

Community isolation.
Outstretched hands
Of goodness,
For shopping.

Searching hope
From death.
Virtual messages,
A new future.

Nature teaches
Seasons
Come and go.
Stay Safe, Stay Alive..

Colm Mcgrath

Limerick: Covid Puppy Talk



What's going on here?
My owners they are acting queer.
He used to walk me morning and night
But it's like as if he got some sort of fright.

She does all my walking now
I put up with it just to save a row.
He hasn't passed the gate for several weeks
This is no secret as in Wikileaks.

There's gloves and masks to beat the band
It seems to spread throughout the land.
This social distance is hard to take
When I meet my friends give us a break.

My built in clock tells me when it is time
For my first evening walk but for no reason or rhyme
They make me sit and wait for an age
And if I annoy them I'm sent to my cage.

By nine o'clock I'm weary and wanting to sleep
In my own comfy bed with pillow so deep.
If I lie on the sofa and doze for a while
I know I'll be lifted and marched in single file.

To show that I'm smarter than anyone knows
I sometimes go in myself and creep on my toes.
When they discover I'm already in
They say "Good Boy" and make such a din.

Zak.



Marie Duffy

Still 'Cocooned' Cinquains

No joke
Cocooning still
Every day feels the same
Digesting all negative news
Not good

Finished
Downton Abbey
One thousand piece jigsaw
Worthwhile challenge during lockdown
Both chuffed

Thank God
I'll walk again
Beyond my own garden
Maximum five kilometers
Can't wait

Garden
Sanctuary
For God's creatures and me
Cheery gold poppies wave hello
I smile

Summer
Oh yes, please God
Balmy days, no Covid
Dining outdoors with family
Sheer bliss

Breda McCrory

Meeting My Sisters – Anticipation

Today is the day
Eleven weeks since I saw them,
My bestest friends, my sisters.
Now, we are allowed to meet,
Two metres apart,
Outdoors, in a park,
For a chat -
No hugs, careful now!
Not ideal
But better than nothing.
I can't wait!

The Meeting

And so we met, the three of us
In Northwood Park
On Monday afternoon.
I thought it would be weird
It was a bit, at first
No hugs, no physical closeness
But it was wonderful
To sit on our blankets under a tree
We laughed of course
We always laugh.
Some serious talking too,
How could we not?
It's a serious situation after all!
But sitting under that tree
With my beloved sisters
The world felt a bit normal again.



Mary McCamley

Pandemic Poem?

Write about the Pandemic

They said

A poem

They said

Or a short story.

I'll write what I know about

I said

A poem

I said

Or perhaps a short story.

All stay at home, all stay safe

They said

Alone

They said

Cocooned 'till you're weary.

There's little to write about

I said

No one

I said

With me on this journey.

I'll write about the garden

I said

The plants

I said

Are healthy and sturdy.

It's all about the sunshine

I said

Weather

I said

Best ever, surely.

And look how well I am

I said

Not sick

I said

Hale and hearty.

No pandemic here

I said

Lucky

I said

Put that in your diary.

How blessed are you

I said

Family

I said

And neighbours are friendly.

Unconditional love

I said

Children

I said

A wonderful family.

There's so MUCH to write
about

I said

A poem

I said

Plus a short story.



Mary O'Dwyer nee RUDDY

Untitled Poems

I hate this RUDDY Covid

It's driving me insane

I wish they'd come and take it

And wash it down the drain

I walk the lovely Skerries beach

I stop and view the scene

The sky and sea so blue it's true

It gives my heart a lift

In the evening when the sun goes down, the sky is filled with gold

It spreads its jewels across the town so all may view its role



Tony Hickey

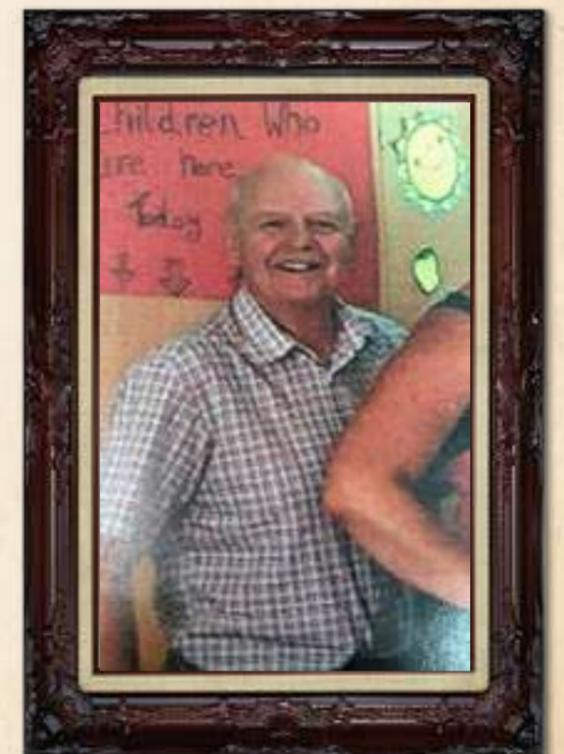
Untitled Poem

I got a message I had to cocoon

Thinking to myself it will be over soon

To my dismay till this very day

I might as well be the man on the moon





Mary McGovern

Cocooned

It took the corona virus to make me realise
The beauty outside the door that lay before my eyes
Other springs I never noticed nor did I ever care
About the nature all around we all can love and share
The dawn chorus each morning does my heart good
When I listen at my window it fairly lifts my mood
Later in the garden I see a bumble bee
He's busy on his rounds he doesn't notice me
The pollen that he's gathered is weighing him to the ground
As his little body struggles homeward bound
The next to come in view is a pretty butterfly
Its coloured wings aflapping as it passes by
When the night sky appears at the close of the day
I look up in wonder at the plough and milky-way
Not long now till the swallows come along
And after that we'll hear the cuckoo's song
This year I think she'll change her tune
And across the Valley will echo cocoon cocoon cocoon



Anthony MacNamee

For the Grandchildren & Retirement

For the Grandchildren

I write this with love from Granny and Grandad
We're 6 kilometres away, might as well be one hundred
Its thanks to this flu called Covid 19
We're keeping separated its called quarantine
Our love to Fiadh and her big brother Donagh
And we also send love to their wee cousin Anna
Like you we behave at the doctor's insistence
Stay home, wash hands, keep a 2 metre distance
These are the rules to flatten the curve
Not easy I know but let's all keep our nerve
And when we hear finally that this bug it is beat
At our house in Loughshinny we'll definitely meet
And you'll just need bring a big appetite
To party all day and maybe all night

Retirement

Retirement has turned into garden leave
And Marie knits another sleeve
A cardie now, then a winter scarf
Be finished soon and we both laugh
At the thoughts of smiles these gifts will bring
There's love stitched in, now that's the thing

Alice Owens

Quarantine

Imposed pause
abrupt dwindling
of the human footprint.
Spotless skies and polished slopes,
bright-eyed daisies, shiny buttercups,
drowsy cowslips nodding in the sun.

With our species in retreat
wildlife wins the *Freedom of the City*.
Songbirds blow a hooley;
j a m b o r e e
over parks and paths,
bidding drifters home.

Tits twitter, thrush's flute-like ditty,
wagtail's high-pitched grace notes
and blackbirds warble
to wood pigeons'
baritone baseline
and chiffchaffs' metronome.

Watchers lurk in trees, on gateposts.
Wren with cocked head
tattles to the robin;
crow on the roof tut-tuts;
magpie's volley from the chimney-pot
"keep in your coops".

Throngs of curious goats and sheep
flock to empty streets and squares
to squint through windows
of cubed spaces
at domestic creatures
in lockdown.



Seamus McCabe

The Bug

Our country and our world are very strange,
with restrictions in vogue all across the range.
No one can say when it will finally end,
if not soon - we'll be gone round the bend!

We cannot move freely, must stay indoors,
self isolate, cocoon, Oh! It really bores.
Wash your hands! Don't cough or sneeze,
unless your head is stuck up your sleeve!

Bars and hotels are closed and restaurants too,
they're all afraid we'll catch this flu.
Gyms, golf and tennis clubs are all out of bounds,
with so little exercise we'll pile on the pounds!

We cannot meet our families, we must stay apart,
can't hug our grandkids - that breaks our heart.
Our leaders and experts say "it's good for you",
but some like "you know who" - haven't got a clue!

But all joking apart this is very serious,
this bug can kill and has killed many of us.
Many families have lost loved ones and they cannot grieve,
so be careful and mind each other - please, please, please!



Dolores Delaney
The Imitation of Reality

...and you'll never walk alone,
unless you want to die,
shoulder to shoulder,
could be your last breath or a lie,
together we're stronger,
the words of an optimist,
and what is reality,
when all bodes for the nihilist.

It's a suicides' dream,
hug a stranger and you'll die,
no need for pills or knives,
no hasty notes of goodbye.

Social distancing a most wonderful oxymoron, strap a trolley to your ass cos they don't heed the warnings, ninja warriors invisible to the eye, tiny droplets of deadly virus, and we cannot explain why.



Ken Duffy
The New Normal

Work routines, are a little hazy
Thanks to Covid, life's gone crazy
It's a new normal, we live in now
Old routines, are missed and how

That 7am alarm, I miss the blast
A warm snug feeling, that didn't last
Hitting the clock, with a fist bang
Two weary feet, from bed did hang

Wipe the sleep, from eyes of red
Wanting to stay, in my comfy bed
One sock, two socks, next my vest
Could've done, with a bit more rest

One leg, two legs, trousers I pull
Then bathroom, for my ritual in full
Stare in the mirror, before I shave
Put on a smile, give myself a wave

Prep work done, to kitchen head
Eat a hearty breakfast, ma always said
That first cuppa, bringing me to life
See you later darling, I call to my wife

Familiar routines, yes, we all miss
Taken for granted, before all of this
Reconnecting, with things that matter
Less phone staring, a lot more chatter



Patricia Langton

One Touch

My hands meet yours through
damp and cold glass
not the heat or softness
of your warm face
one year old today.

This shield between us so thin
yet it protects you and me and
the few people we are allowed to see,
who would have thought that a single touch
could mean so much.

Then I remember dropping a drop of dye from a dropper
to see how fast it turns from the colour
of water to another
instantly-

I look into the whites of your eyes
through fogged up glass
feel the trickle of a raindrop
on my hair and a tear
rolling down my cheek

For Hannah Langton



Rita Ennis

Cocooning Reflections

2020 what a year
Corona virus brought with it fear.
Wash your hands, stay indoors
Anyone could have it
No one knows.
Up at the crack of dawn
Can't sleep at night
The days too long.
Stay at home
Go with the flow
Keep yourself busy
It's the way to go.
Stay indoors
That's what we're told
Wash your hands
Don't touch your nose.
Throw your hankies in the bin
For God's sake do the proper thing.
Stay cocooning in your home
Isolate and stay at home.
If family calls, they stay by the gate
Don't break the rules
Don't congregate.
It's so hard to do all of this
We miss our loved ones
A hug a kiss.
We put our lives in the powers that be
So please give us back our liberty.
At times like this
When we have no control
You begin to wonder
What's my role?
My family that I hold so dear
I cannot comfort or be near.



To hug your loved ones is the norm
To us social distancing feels so wrong.
To be so near, yet stay apart
You're always here within my heart.
Don't be alone while cocooning
You can see family and friends
On internet zooming.
Memories are precious things
The sun still shines the birds still sing.
Be grateful for the things we have
Be happy now and don't be sad.
We must learn to live with all of this
And protect ourselves from viruses.
We don't know what the future holds
We'll put our faith in those who know.
Our world will never be the same
We still must play the waiting game.
The HSE are trying to cope
We long for news to give us hope.
At last we're allowed to leave our home
But stay within the 20k zone.
To feel the sun upon our face
But wear a mask just in case.
Now we can meet in groups of six
We'll laugh and talk and reminisce.
Until our scientists have found a cure and
covid-19 is no more
There is so much more we must endure.
Clap your hands
Shine the light
Our heroes will win the fight!

Michael Cooney

Untitled Poems

I had a bag veggies
I wrestled them to pulp
I put them in my old black pot
and later called it soup
I tasted it for flavour, it would
surely make you poop.
I shared it with my aged friends
To keep them in the Loop.

If you go on social media
for a medical point of view,
well everyone is a doctor now
and I am just 'Doctor Who'.

'...even in bad times I thank God for all the good positive things in life and most of all for giving me a sense of humour.'



Gladys Boardman

Untitled Poem

Hi my name is Gladys
And I have to stay at home
I miss the Monday Club
But at least I have my phone!

Thinking of my friends
And hope they're keeping well
I can't wait for our reunion
I'm sure it will be swell

Although originally not from here
A blow in from afar
I must say Skerries is
A lovely place to retire!



Miriam Gorman

Why Don't You Smile?

When you walk along a street
And some sad-faced folk you meet,
Do you greet them with a cherry smile
Or pass them by in the same cool style,
Why not smile and say "Hello"
to each of them as on you go.
That little smile could lift the day
For a lonely soul along your way.

When next you meet a strange new face
Don't pass by with a shy grimace
Greet them with a happy smile
To quite a few it will be worthwhile
In this old world that's full of strife
When may feel the stress of life!
Smile that smile only you know how
To-day, To-morrow, why not start now.



Madeleine Bradley

Untitled Poem

We are all in lockdown
But I try not to care,
until I look at the
length of my hair.
But when it gets longer
I'll put it in a plait,
And if that doesn't
suit me, I'll put on
my nice hat.



Joan (J.P) O'Hare

Covid 19 Virus

IT CALLED UN-INVITED TO SCARE THE MAJORITY
DOCTOR'S ARE GIVING ADVICE TOP PRIORITY
DON'T SHAKE HANDS WITH ANYONE JUST NOD INSTEAD
IT MAY SAVE YOU ALONE STAY IN BED
CONSIDER RESULTS IF YOU REALLY DON'T CARE
PERHAPS ENDING UP IN A DEEP GRAVE SOMEWHERE

PS WEAR GLOVES AND KEEP WASHING YOUR HANDS
IT'S SERIOUS.



Betty Reddy
The Corona Virus

I am out for my walk is seems to strange
Its hard to believe there is so much change
The Corona Virus has hit our shores
And life will never be like before
We have the power to save lots of lives
All we must do is follow the guides
We must think of others and save our land
Keep our distance and wash our hands
We are at war but not like before
We don't have to fight or be in trenches
We just have to stay home and not be adventurous

Our Government has pulled out all the stops
And if we play our part and follow the rules
We will all keep safe and it will be cool



Breda Horneck-Gallagher
Corona Virus

C It has **C**laimed many lives
O **O**ver a short few months
R It is a **R**are and deadly virus
O **O**lder people most at risk
N There is **N**o vaccine as yet
A **A**ttention to hygiene is most important

Wash your hands
Wash your hands
Wash your hands

V **V**ery
I **I**mportant
R **R**egularly rise, wash and dry your hands
U **U**ntil the bug is gone
S **S**tay safe!



Tom Barry

Covid Nineteen

Covid Nineteen arrived
It decided to stay
Everyman woman
And Child
Wished it would go away

But stay it did
Making our lives a misery
Locking us down
Making nerves tingle

Depriving us of Freedom
To meet shop
Even to mingle
We began to hear

Of a place called
Wuhan
In far off China
A distant land

So distant
Attention paid
Scant

People dying so
Far away
We kept the worry
For another day

But Covid Nineteen
Did arrive
Not to fanfare
But fears and cries

It was among us
Everywhere
What to do now
Be aware

Touch nothing
Disinfect everything
Wash hands till
Skin bleeds thin
wears

There were some blessings
Brought by this Corona fiend
We completed jobs long
Left behind
The garden now resplendent
For a time

We even learned thing's like
Composing a menu
Making bread's
And found joy in
Where Covid us lead

Keep fit the order
Of the day
We ran laps of the garden
We did squats, press ups
Pull ups and more

Now we're so fit
And Covid's taken a vacation
Our bodies itch for adventure
But there's nowhere open where we
May venture.



María A. Mañueco-Ramos

Entwined Hands

Other hands are
helping out
shaky, trembling
digital or pretend
across static, over oceans.

Twirling, dancing
dove wings.

Mine are these
helpless, isolated
extended, frustrated.

Those holding
through windows
beyond countries
on devices screens
open offer sent.

Butterfly flutter
mockingbird spin.

Bakers of pastries,
caressers of crackled skin
holders of letters.

Professional and volunteer
desperate, hopeful
in pray, hiding tears
soothing link
child nest, granny support.

Clasped fingers,
chain of palms.

Neighbours shoppers,
news bearers,
welcome air embrace.

Applause of gratitude
fan down fever
pull out to health,
these and the others
are my hands too.

Universal language,
hands.



Photo by Denise Cannon,
Design Works Photography.

Julie Fogarty

Uninvited Pandemic

You were never ever invited,
Our world wishes you were never here
Killing and infecting people,
Causing pain and unbelievable fear.
This virus has spread across the world,
Closing schools and businesses to
reduce the surge
Being advised to go into self isolation,
Until we find a suitable vaccination.
People are living in extraordinary times,
By obeying the HSE and all of the signs.
Being told to cocoon because I am old,
The feeling of being punished as if I was bold.
Or even having an underlying illness,
Is taking it's toll on my mental fitness.
Looking through the panes of glass,
Hoping and praying someone would pass.
A knock at the door or a ring on the bell,
Reality kicks in, this is not going well.
Our frontline staff work with love and observation,
Coping with lives and death's in a PPE situation.
They see patients at their worst and at their best,
But rise selfishly to the challenge,
When put to the test.
This evil virus will come to pass,
For nothing in this world is made to last.
Some friends or family won't make it home,
But will sadly pass away, all on their own.
The best moments will soon begin,
When friends and family meet up again.
Shops and schools will begin to open,
With new arrangements set in motion.
Those signs will tell us all is well,
Giving us some freedom from this living hell.
Knowing we will have a better destiny,
Far more glorious than mortal misery.



William Gerald Roberts

Down Memory Lane

We turn a corner to make our way
on a journey by the Light of day
To seek solace far and near
We have done for many a year

In our dreaming in the night
Finding ways to put things right
in our search for comfort there
undying love with those we share.

Closest to us family and friends
in our shortcomings make amends
Our darkest hour let it pass
in this verse all we ask

Remember loved ones come and gone
in our hearts where they belong
Amid the loss and the pain
spare a thought down memory lane

Epilogue
'In the midst of a global pandemic,
Death has darkened our door.'
Another memory to reflect
when at last it is no more



Bernadette Denny

The Healing Touch

What makes you laugh when you are sad?
Or cheers you when your mood is bad?
And claims you when you you're feeling mad? A Hug.

What lifts the spirit when you're blue?
What heartens and refreshes you?
And brings a smile when smiles are few? A Hug.

What is it that can dry your tears?
And soothe away your silent fears?
Or light the way when darkness nears? A Hug.

What turns away the angry word?
Can make the heart soar like a bird?
Forgives you when you know you've erred? A Hug.

What brightens up the dullest day?
Or chases all the clouds away?
To send you singing on your way? A Hug.



Geraldine McGovern

Covid 19 Lockdown 2020

We stayed in,
We baked bread,
We drank wine,
We did zumba, yoga and then meditated,
All waiting
for the curve to flatten.

We waited and listened,
Anxiously every evening,
for the count from Mr. Holohan
Fingers crossed as he spoke
That this day had been better
Than the one before,
For our frontline staff
our elderly, vulnerable and high risk
Fearing the numbers as he spoke
Of the less fortunate who would now
Mourn alone.

We walked more
We talked more
We listened to the birds more
We noticed the trees and the grass
growing greener by the day
We heard the unusual silence of the road
Cars parked in everyone's drive
Gates locked at every park
Shutters down on every shop, pub, restaurant
An eerie sight, none of us had ever seen before

Schools closed,
Exams cancelled,
Weddings, Festivals and concerts too
Celebrating birthdays, anniversaries and
Christenings for now, had to be deferred
Instead, for now,
it had to be done
on zoom
Or house party
Through the screen,
For now, that was the only way,
we could all be together.

No football, soccer or racing,
All sporting events,
Gone,
cancelled,
No more.....
Saturdays, and Sundays,
Just the same as the rest,
One day runs into another,
Working from home,
Has now become the norm,
No one has to be anywhere
At any certain time,
Social distancing has also become
The norm....

Washing hands,
Wiping surfaces,
Spraying disinfectant
And wearing masks
Keep your distance,
Stay home,
Stay safe,
Save lives.....



Martin Connelly

Dumb Animal

I

The day before Saint Patrick's Day,
I chose to steer my dog and I
To green parkland and subtle stone.
Sitting on a bench, I let him go,
Smiling as he stared to ensure
That I remained, while he made friends -
Dumb animal.

II

The first free day of June was not
The start of any liberation.
Instead, I looked on as my dog,
Beyond the gate, made fleeting friends.
I realised I'd not spoken
To another soul that day. Me -
Dumb animal.



Ann Sweeney

Thoughts at this Time

The sun rises on another day.
We live quietly come what may.
Birds are singing in the trees
soon we'll hear the humming bees.
Our lives have changed in so many ways
and still we go about our days
remembering what life was like before
missing our family, children and many more.
We stay safe and keep our distance.
We must higher our resistance
to this terrible foe
that has changed our lives so!
A tear escapes along the way
life has never seemed so grey.
But today I saw a white butterfly
she was fluttering in the air

she must have been cocooning
just like we were!
The sun is shining up high
what a beautiful blue sky!
Nature has been at her best
while we've been put to the test!
Some light is peeping through
as we continue our quest
to rid us of this pest.
So for this moment in time.
We will truly pine
for all those we miss
and long to blow a kiss.
So hurry up and disappear.
Let us be happy - not shed a tear.



Theresa Kinsella

Mother

That day was like no other
I never thought I would lose my mother
her gentle voice that said hello
softly told me she had to go

The days before that day were wonderful and bright
life was warm and kind and endless happy thoughts were mine
From a distance I watched you slowly slip away
no more your gently face I see no more your gentle glow will be

To say I am broken in two is so true
but I am so grateful that I will always be part of you
The radiant glow that once shone bright
was tired and had to say good night

I now understand why your soul had to flee
your diseased skin and bone desired to be free
The virus that ravaged was a battle not won
but your new chapter in heaven has only begun

save a place on your cloud for daddy and me
watch over and mind us for all eternity
our skin may not touch but our hearts are combined
your legacy lives on in our hears and our minds

Sleep well my fair darling sit back in the sky
watch over our family and don't question why
our time on this planet is rationed with care
be proud of the difference you made while you were there

Thank you for loving and believing in me
for loving my daddy and helping us see
life will go on but it won't be the same
we will honour your legacy by living your name

Farewell my dear mother until the next time we meet
I promise to live on to make you complete
thank you so much for being my friend
and letting me stay with you til the end



Kathleen Lindsay

Cocooning

We didn't know way back in March.
Just what was to befall.
A virus had come and hit us hard.
And was a danger to us all.
We oldies were told. Lockdown was coming soon
And we all would be asked.
To do a thing called cocoon.
So we stayed indoors and did our chores.
Polished, tidied and painted galore
We weeded and mowed
Cleaned our glass till it glowed.
Washed our hands like never before.
We rubbed down with bleach.
Anywhere we could reach.
Till nowhere was left with a flaw.
We exercised to music
Walked our garden down and up.
Swung our legs while we were sitting
To stop them seizing up.
We spoke to family, organised quizzes
on a thing called zoom.
Were delighted to see their faces.
Come into the living room.
A big thumbs up to our health staff
Who worked tirelessly, night and day
To do everything they possibly could.
To keep this virus at bay.
The nights they were so eerie
With streets that were clearly
As empty, as empty could be
With hardly no footfall
No car horn, no house call
From someone you're longing to see.
Work from home became the norm.
No sound of kids in school dorm.
Many men had to stay home from work
When factories galore.
Locked up their doors
Not knowing when they'd reopen for sure.
The men they weren't too happy.

To watch movies so sappy.
Cause there was no football oh strife
So the male population, all over the nation
D.I.Y.d within an inch of their life.
With sheds that were emptied
Of rubbish a plenty
Then off to the tip with the load.
To sit for an hour, with a face that was sour
In the queue, that took up half the road.
From May 5th we were allowed to walk
A distance of 5 K.
But have to keep 2 metres,
From anyone we meet on the way
But it's better than sitting
And doing some knitting
Or doing some puzzles and such.
At least you are out there.
And getting some fresh air
And don't feel you're hemmed in so much.
As you do your walking
You just can't help but think
How strange it is, in these modern times
That the world can be brought to the brink
But the birds are singing louder.
The Rivers all are clean.
The sky above less soggy.
Than it has ever been.
So maybe in these strange times
Nature has shown to us.
That we should try to live our lives
Without bother and fuss.
Now we still can't go out for some shopping
Can't go to the Church to say a prayer
And everyone is struggling
To bring some order to their hair.
The men are becoming hippies
With hair all down their backs
Let's hope they won't turn to kaftans
Instead of their usual slacks.
And when this is over
And everything is fine
Well. Look back and give a prayer of thanks
That, at least we still have wine!!!

Memory Makers

*Category B:
Short Story*



Déantóirí Cuimhne

*Catagóir B:
Gearrscéal*

Submitted Short Stories

Gearrscéalta a Seoladh ar Aghaidh



Geraldine Finlay	Lockdown Time
Mary Locke	Forever Changed
Pauline Mooney	Hello Sweetness
Sheila Lawless	Untitled Short Story
Eileen Kavanagh	Untitled Short Story
Mary McCamley	My Younger Selves – Meeting During Covid
Sean O’Gorman	Springtime in Fingal
Willie Maxwell	Sun Glut
Eileen McCormack	The Baker
Tom Burke	The Holiday That Never Was
Tom Reilly	The Morning After
Robert Toner Snr.	“The Naller”
Ray Taylor	Then and Now
Peter McNally	A Bag of Burger Buns
Lawrence Power	From Darkness to the Light
Mary T. Desmond	No Squabble Scrabble
Frances Hanly	Untitled Short Story
Noreen Hanratty	Covid Schmovid!!!
Anne B Flanagan	Untitled Short Story
Marian Rogers	A Better World?
Colleen Davey	A Covid Story
Margaret Butterly	The Missing Rosary Beads
Kitty Forde	Chapters of Life
Isobel Smyth	Behind Closed Doors
Pauline Bosch	Untitled Short Story
Joan Denihan	Coronavirus 2020
Teresa McKeown	A Summer to Remember
Betty Reddy	A Day in the Life of Covid 19
Breda Horneck-Gallagher	The Blue Coat
Anne Lowndes Lawler	My Fluffy Fashion Folly of the Fifties
Patricia Kelly	My Time to Reflect
Angela De-La-Mere	Talking to Yourself
Kathleen McEvoy	A Special Event that Happened while I was Cocooning during Covid-19
Bridie O’Reilly	A Memory Triggered by Covid 19
Frank & Paula Prendergast	Rough Guide to Rockabill
Nancy Dempsey	The Past and the Present
Marian Donohoe	The Fear
Anne Boylan	The World Around Us
Mick Shea	Six Short Stories about Covid-19
Ann Mulligan	New Life
Raymond S. Keeley	Gentle Jasper



1st Prize
An 1ú Duais
Pauline Mooney

Hello Sweetness

2nd Prize
An 2ra Duais
Tom Reilly
The Morning After



3rd Prize
An 3rd Duais
Colleen Davey

A Covid Story

Geraldine Finlay

Lockdown Time

“Who knows where the time goes”, sang Sandy Denny. All I know is that during lockdown time has slipped, disappearing into another dimension, leaving me adrift in a new, unexplored, current.

Time no longer rules my life. With no obligations to be somewhere or do something, I exist in another realm. In this new world I can do as I please – eat when I’m hungry, exercise when I feel like it, seek entertainment when I want and sleep when I’m tired.

Time has abandoned me. I’ve taken off my watch and haven’t missed it. I no longer check my phone obsessively for updates I don’t need to know. There is no where I have to be, no-one I have to meet or collect, nothing I have to do. My only job is to stay in this new world.

Time now slips and slides and is not constant. In this new dimension time becomes elastic, speeding up or slowing down arbitrarily. A minute can last a few hours while hours slip by in a twinkle.

Time can stand still. I watch two goldfinches industriously build their nest in the prunus tree. The garden, always there, comes into sharper focus as I notice gleaming sunlight on a fatsia leaf and the golden intensity of a group of dandelions. Reaching for binoculars, I settle in to watch a solitary queen bee house hunting. The day passes _ _ _

I’ve always lived by the imperatives of time, aware of each hour passing – things to do, places to be. In this timeless zone I initially felt uneasy but have now adjusted to another lifestyle where I drift with the current, no longer controlled or organised. I can paddle or rest on my oars without worrying how my actions impact on others.

Yes, of course I want time to reassert itself, to return me to the world and people that I know and love. However, this out of time experience has allowed me to survive these extraordinary times without stressing over that which I can’t control.

Perhaps my relationship with time has altered for the better, moving from subservience to a more equal partnership.

Only time will tell!



Mary Locke

Forever Changed

Aunt Kate’s sixpence given to me as a birthday treat is burning a hole in my pocket so I hurry across the street to Mr. Macintosh’s corner sweet shop. “Good morning young lady”. “What can I do for you today?”.

Soon he is scooping a mixture of acid squares, cough drops, clove rock and lemon sherbets into a brown paper bag.

“Now don’t eat all those together” he heartily laughs, passing them to me over the counter.

From the shop window I see the climbing rose tree blossom in the tiny garden behind the silver railings. It’s at the front of Mam and Dad’s house, a corner one on a street of red brick houses with big bay windows.

Here neighbours huddle close, deep in conversations and everyone knows everything about everyone else. Saturday mornings, Bridie Ennis from number nine, dressed in a flowery pink apron rubs and scrubs and polishes her brass letterbox, knocker and door knob. She stops to talk to just about anyone who passes her by on the path. “Ah there you are Greta”. “Have you heard the latest?”. Greta Woodstock from number fourteen speeds along on her ‘high nellie’ bicycle, one hand gripping the handlebar and the other bidding me the time of day. “Can’t stop now Bridie I’m running late”, and off she cycles helter skelter on her way.

I’ve sucked my last hard boiled sweet and it’s time to find Susie. We are going to play hopscotch, skip together as best friends do and ‘hula-hoop’ all day long, till Dad remembers to call us in before night falls and it’s time for bed.

Next morning the ‘clippity clop’ sound has woken me up and I make it to the window in time to see the horse drawn milk cart grind to a halt at our gate below. Mam stoops to lift the delivery.

She allows us, with a caution, to shake the glass bottles so the cream on top mixes through. My brother picks at the red tinfoil caps to remove them and we sprinkle sugar and pour milk over our delicious hot oaty porridge.

Lots of times Dad has to chase the kids outside away because they kick ball against the side wall of our house. “Off with you and don’t come back” he warns, “Have you no homes to go to”? The thumping noise interferes with his week-end enjoyment of resting in the armchair by the coal fire in the sitting room with the big bay window. He forgets that we can be naughty too, giggling and laughing out loud as we slide our way down the mahogany stairs bannister.

Last week when Aunt Kate and Uncle Joe visited it was in true ball style. Our street became the “Valley of the Squinting Windows”. A horn was beeped repeatedly to announce their arrival. Then the whole front of the three wheel vehicle opened up and

out jumped our country relations from their beloved old “bubble” car.

“Well how are ye all keepin”? Uncle Joe shouted hugging and squeezing and kissing us breathless in the middle of our street. The commotion caused the window at number eight to be opened down in curiosity.

Today it is hot with signs of summer. Mr. Power from number two is out clipping his hedge. Mrs Power waters the red potted geranium on show in their sunny front room window.

The clipping sound is getting louder, almost drowning the jingle of the Mr Whippy van. Clip clip clip, louder and louder it gets as the van comes around the corner goes around the corner, clip clip clip. Running faster and faster, hands to my ears, I stumble landing on a gigantic soft white pillow. Where am I?

“Anna wake up”. “Your phone is ringing” Tim her husband whispers. Tossing and turning she sinks deeper into the warm duvet, drifting away, back to simple carefree childhood days. Tim pulls back the curtains allowing sunlight through and it filters onto Anna’s eyelids. She awakens to the familiar surroundings of their fourth floor apartment.

Sipping a mug of strong tea and not forgetting to wash her hands, she ponders on the walk ahead.

Turning into the row of red bricked houses with the big bay windows Anna knows it is now changed. The narrow street is marked for parking and difficult to drive through. Most of the red bricked houses are let out in flats and it’s rare to see much sign of life.

The top window of number seven is open and a towel thrown over the sill to dry. Over at number nine someone has forgotten to bring in the wheelie bin and it’s blocking the path where Bridie Ennis once stood chatting all those “good old days” years ago.

Number five is empty and to the front the climbing rose tree bare. Standing in the hall Anna breathes in the memorable silence. The “For Sale” sign goes up tomorrow. Closing the gate to leave and checking her face mask is in place, Anna knows her world too is changed forever.



Pauline Mooney

Hello Sweetness

Ah Hi Yea. Long long, time no see. Yea. Me? Ah Just about holding it together. What about you. How are yea coping with all the shenanigan’s going on? I know. It’s mad isn’t it? How much longer do you think we will be stuck in? Don’t know about you but I think I am losing the plot. Yea, I am one of those vulnerable ones they go on about that have to cocoon. #underlyinghealthproblems. Bad Asthma, Heart, turning into an Old Fart, LOL but Touch wood. Isn’t easy but we have to do what we have to do. A sure I’ll be grand. Missing the grandkids most of all though. What about you?.

What? Do I ever remember a time when I felt like this before?. Hummmm. Well I do have a story to tell yea if yer not in a hurry.

Let me take you back about eleven years ago, it was 8th September 2008. I was sitting in the waiting room of Castlebar General Hospital. I was full of anticipation and excitement as were the other three people in the room waiting with me. Down the corridor the most wonderful event was about to happen. Yes the birth of my first grandchild.

Us grandmothers are a bit obsessed with our grandkids. It’s a Nannie thing what can I tell yea. Anyway back to the story. Ohhhh, that moment when my son appeared in the doorway and said. “It’s a Girl”. I jumped out of my chair. Wahoo. I’m a Nannie.

Anyway have you ever experienced that moment you first hold your grandchild in your arms. No it’s not like your kids. It’s different. I can’t describe it but if you ever felt it you will never forget it and if you haven’t yet well let’s just say its Priceless. Grannies or Granda’s know the score. It’s magical.

Later that day as I stood with this bundle of joy in my arms, the first words I ever spoke to her were “Hello Sweetness” and that was it, I was hooked. I just couldn’t get enough of her. I cried every time I left her. She lived so far away. Dublin to Mayo is a long haul but that didn’t stop me. Every chance I got I had her in my arms just feeling the love.

Now let’s move forward to April 2009. Because of one of those #underlyinghealthproblem I couldn’t travel to see her for about two months. I missed her so much but hay when I could almost breathe again I made my way to Mayo.

The night before I left my son called me and he seemed very anxious. “Mam I have something to tell yea and I don’t want you to get upset. The Princess is making strange with everybody. She will only come to me and won’t let anyone else near her so please, please don’t be upset if she won’t go to you. I know how much you love her but I just wanted to warn you just in case. OK Mam. I love you and I will see you tomorrow.” Oh God no not this. Anything but this.

Well me heart was in me mouth on the 200 mile drive up. I couldn’t get it out of me head. “What if she has forgotten me”. Oh now that would be unbearable. Anyway I drove and I cried and I drove eventually arriving at their house

As I sat in my car outside and tried to pull myself together I could see his head through the sitting room window. He was sitting on the sofa with my precious angel in his arms. I got out of the car, walked up to the door, took a deep breath and pressed the doorbell.

As the door opened he stood looking at me with a look of compassion and hope in his eyes. He said to her. "Look who it is". She looked at me and I just uttered those two magic words that filled my heart with joy. "Hello Sweetness". Well I am not kidding yea she took off like a flying squirrel. She leapt out of his arms and straight into mine. He tripped over himself trying to catch her but she was too quick for him but not for me. All my fears were gone in that very moment. She was in my arms again and she clung on for dear life and so did I. Magic.

Now here we are in 2020 and Once again I cannot hold my precious angel in my arms. She is 200 miles away as she was back then but the difference is that I am not sick this time but I am not allowed to see her or hug her or I may get really sick and never be able to hold or hug her ever again. To stay away from her is killing me emotionally but to go out before the lockdown has been lifted may literally kill me and I can't take the chance.

So with tears in my eyes and a massive hole in my heart I share this story with you I like so many other Grandparents out there have to wait to hold our precious bundles in our arms again. We long for the day when we can just hold them and squeeze them and kiss them on the head and feel their love in return.

I miss my Grandson Aaron. He is six. He only lives 7 miles away but it might as well be 700. I miss turning my kitchen table into a table tennis table. I miss playing Monopoly and Bugs in the kitchen and how he cheats. I miss the playground with him and watching Power Rangers and eating Pizza. I miss his laugh when I try to get on the Trampoline with him and I can't even make it through the hole in the net. I miss all the joy and happiness he brings into my life. He is my little Treasure.

I miss my granddaughter Sarah. I miss our movie marathons. I miss all the crafting and the slime making and not forgetting the grapes, cheese and ham for breakfast. It's her favourite food in Nannies house. I miss her snuggles and the girlie talks. Most of all I miss her smile and unicorn hugs. I call her my "Sarahtonic" because she just makes everything better.

I long for a repeat of that faithful day eleven years ago when I can walk up to her door and ring the doorbell. I long to see her standing there and to be able to utter those two Magic words. "Hello Sweetness". To once again have her leap into my arms and hold on tight and not want to let go. To feel that same joy I felt back then when you know that you are loved beyond measure and that they know that you love them beyond words.

If I could choose a memory to live over again in my life that would be the one and I can't wait for my wish to come true. And I know it will. Someday soon I hope.

Hopefully soon each and every one of us can finally get back to some sense of normality but as for me I miss my family the most...

How about you?

What's your story?



Sheila Lawless

Untitled Short Story

I was born in 1929 so I am 90 years old I will be 91 in September. I grew up in a family of 8 children and we lived in Drumcondra. I now live in Balrothery and I am very happy here.

I was just seeing on television about how so many people are cycling at the moment and it reminded me of a cycling trip I took with my father in 1956.

I was 17 years old and we cycled from Drumcondra to Sligo to visit our relations. When my sisters asked why my father chose me to go with him (as I was not the eldest) I always say it was because he knew I would not complain. I was not the tallest either and dad had to put a bit of wood on the pedals so I could reach them for the saddle of the High Nellie bike. There was no gears or comfy saddles in those days. I wore a cotton dress that my mother had made for me and a cardigan that I had knitted myself. I remember it was a lovely Kelly green. I wore my brown Clarkes sandals and white socks. My father wore his suit but took his jacket off when it got warm. We would have looked an unusual sight today without the all the lycra and special cycling gear!

We cycled to Mullingar on the first day and spent that night in 2 single rooms in a hotel there. Then got up early on day 2 and cycled off to Sligo. We spent most of each day cycling, stopping every few hours for a rest and dad had his primus stove in his saddle bags and we would stop at the side of the road for a cup of tea. I remember the beautiful countryside as we passed by.

My dad was a very quiet man but I enjoyed spending this time with him in companionable silence and I felt very special. We spent a few days with our relations and then repeated the journey on the way home. I remember the weather was lovely just like the lovely weather we are having now with beautiful clear blue skies. But of course this was outside the 20k that you are allowed travel today!

We cycled all the time as children and young adults. I cycled to work in the morning and cycled home for lunch and then back to work again and home in the evenings. At weekends we would cycle as a family out to Rush for the afternoon from Drumcondra all 8 children and dad to give my mum a break! I believe this is part of why I am so fit and healthy now in my 90's.

These are strange times and I do miss getting out and about but I have a good family who keep me supplied with food so I won't starve.

Keep safe everyone.

Eileen Kavanagh

Untitled Short Story

I am sure at the beginning of the lock down we all felt a bit down missing family coming especially big hugs from our grandchildren and friends, well believe u me things got a lot worse for me. As my teeth and me don't sleep together anymore I got up as usual went into bathroom and put my teeth in and returned to bedroom opened up window just as I sneezed and instantly my top set of teeth shot out of my mouth slid down sloped window sill and crashed on to patio below in two halves!!!

I panicked as I heard there were no Dental Technicians open all closed because of virus! Lucky for me my son inlaw knew a Technician who was prepared to make me new set I had tried to glue the broken ones together just managed it and left them to set on a plate but they stuck to the plate I rang my friend Ann who told me to use varnish remover to get them off plate then broke again! Eventually I gave up on the glue as my thumb and index finger stuck together!!!

After 10 days of eating bread dipped in soup and jelly and custard I got a ring to call for new set of teeth. By this time cocooning had started so he very kindly offered to bring teeth to my house as I couldn't travel he arrived in full regalia like the nurses complete with mask!! My neighbours across the road get sun in front of house so they all saw him coming into me!!!!!! I had a lot of explaining to do!!!!!!



Mary McCamley

My Younger Selves – Meeting During Covid

On Friday last I met my younger self in the garden. Teenage Mary.

She was sitting under a tree wearing a long maxi skirt and Roman sandals. Acting cool. The hippy phase!

'Hi' I said, 'what you doing?'

'Listening to music'.

Sure enough the transistor radio by her side was blaring out Bob Dylan's "The times they are a-changin'."

How apt!

'The times have certainly changed' I said, 'we are in Lockdown here in 2020'.

'What's Lockdown?'

'It's like the world population is grounded -Indefinitely'.

'So what do you do all day in this Lockdown?'

'Listen to music', and as if on cue the CD player produced Bob Dylan's "Forever Young".

Not so apt!!

I touch my hair. I recall the words of the young lad next door as he peeped over the garden fence – 'Mary, your hair is all white at the back of your head'.

Out of the mouth of babes! Oh for a hairdresser.

"Don't think twice, it's all right".

'Do you remember', teenage Mary said, 'the time Gerry and myself, wall papered the dining room at home'.

My bother Gerry had just completed his Leaving Cert and I had sat the Inter Cert. Mam was baking apple tarts and fairy cakes in the kitchen as a thank you. We would have them later. It was a beautiful June day and Jimi Hendrix was playing on the record player. "The wind cries Mary".

'Will you turn that fella off – he sounds like he has a pain in his belly', Mam shouts from the kitchen.

So we did as we were told and put on Leonard Cohen instead.

Teenager Mary laughs.

‘It was a great summer, TV Club, Harcourt Street on a Sunday afternoon with DJ’s Pat Egan and Larry Gogan. Music was everything and Gerry introduced me to Motown - Marvin Gaye, Smokey Robinson, The Four Tops’

‘Do you remember?’ she said.

‘Do I remember? I still have them all on tape’.

I bend to dead head a few flowers and when I turn back in her direction she has faded. A glorious day in 2020 and I was alone again.

On Monday morning when I come down to breakfast, Little Mary is sitting at the kitchen table drawing princesses in ballroom gowns.

She concentrates so hard, her mouth opens constantly as she moves the pencil across the page.

‘Teenage Mary was out in the garden the other day’, I say.

‘I don’t know her’ she replies. ‘I don’t have her memories, I’m too young’.

Bob Dylan again:

May God bless and keep you always, May your wishes all come true, May you always do for others And let others do for you, May you build a ladder to the stars And climb on every rung, May you stay forever young.

‘I only know the old house in the Avenue where we were all born. The one-up, one-down house, kitchen extension into the yard and the flush toilet outdoors beside the coal hole.’

It was a happy home. Little Mary looks comfortable sitting there with her long brown curls and her hand made dresses. She’s happy. She remembers Steak and Onions on a Saturday for dinner (always) with Marietta biscuits afterwards and mugs of hot, often strewed tea from a tea pot constantly on the gas ring.

Thinking of food – I say foolishly to her ‘you loved bananas’.

‘Yes! Had them almost every evening for my tea at around six o’clock. Daddy said I would turn yellow if I ate any more’

He always came in from work at that time. He only worked across the street. No need to commute. ‘Commute’ wasn’t a word we recognised then.

I notice her white sandals- she got them for Easter and they would be whitened every Saturday night ready for Mass the next morning.

It was out to play every day of summer – fresh air was good for you – and exercise was key to a healthy child. But Little Mary stays at the table and hesitates – she doesn’t recognise my garden. We lived in the inner city. No gardens. The Avenue was our world. Both of us then recall and recite the names of neighbours, friends and family of each house along the Avenue.

Mary Byrne and Jack Brennan (he was the only one with a car), the Wyse sisters, then us at number 2 and daddy’s cousins next door (everyone was related to everyone else then) the big family of Ryan’s and then the widow Meehan and the quiet Curly family. My Grandad was at number 7 and his sister ‘aunt’ Maggie at number 8; The Country woman

was next and then Maud and Jack in the house shaped like a triangle on the corner.

On the other side was the good looking Mrs. Murphy and the not so good looking Mrs. Murphy. What are the chances that two Murphy’s would be living next door to each other and NOT be related?

My lovely aunts, my mother’s sisters lived in the last house. They never married. It was like we had three mothers.

Little Mary gets excited. The aunts are arranging to get her communion dress made and will take her shopping for coat, veil, shoes and handbag. It’s a big event but my older self can’t remember much detail about it. Little Mary is sad and doesn’t understand why I can’t recall every minute of that special day. I apologise but there are no photos and I need a visual as a reminder.

After a while she asks ‘What’s Covid?’

‘It’s like when you got Scarlet Fever and had to go into hospital and no one was allowed visit you’

‘Was I lonely?’

‘Probably, but there are so many happy memories. Let’s not dwell on the unpleasant ones’.

Schoolgirl Mary rushes in. I hadn’t noticed her there. She has a memory which just can’t wait. She always was a little excitable.

‘Remember’, she says, ‘in 1965 when the film “The Spy who came in from the Cold” was filmed in our area and they created Check Point Charlie in Smithfield and we all raced round to see it and get some photos.’

I mention that I visited Berlin after the wall fell and Check Point Charlie was no more so Check Point Charlie will always be Smithfield to me.

Schoolgirl Mary said with astonishment ‘the wall fell?’.....

We laughed – ‘Play the Beatles,’ she said.

The sounds of John, Paul, George and Ringo flood our space and the years dissolved.. The bed room walls covered in posters, cutting from newspapers where the fab four were mentioned. The LP’s played over and over again until every word of every song was known by heart.

After the girls have vanished, I play the same Beatles records again. There are other ‘memory visitors’ to my garden - Mrs Campbell from the local shop, Mr Lyons the baker as well as the woman from the post office and Mr. Morgan the butcher. Mary Anne from the fruit and vegetable shop and Mary Mc from the little haberdashery and Nan Timms from the sweet shop, the gang from the Popular Stores on the corner and the man from the chemist who mixed the various concoctions like a mad scientist. The smell from the chemist still lingers...I inhale its remembered aromas - the dusty fragrance of paraffin and soap. The potions, the essence of rose hip and lemon, the colourful medicine jars lined up in glass cabinets over the mahogany counter. The ailment cures from those men in their brown chemist coats. The shop was a fascination – with magnetism and charm. To me a magical world. I loved to visit with my mother.

I play some tapes in my bedroom later. Four Tops singing “Reach Out” as I undress for the night. Reach out, the ads on the radio say if you are feeling lonely in your isolation or

cocooning – Reach out to a friend, reach out to family but what they don't say is reach out to your younger self – time to reminisce.

'It's like when you got Scarlet Fever and had to go into hospital and no one was allowed visit you'

As the Beatles say:

“There are places I'll remember

All my life, though some have changed

Some forever, not for better

Some have gone, and some remain

All these places had their moments

With lovers and friends, I still can recall

Some are dead, and some are living

In my life, I've loved them all”.....



Sean O’Gorman

Springtime in Fingal

My great friend, the late May Mc Giolla, former Lady Mayoress of Dublin and life-long social activist decided to adopt me as her chauffeur many years ago. She was particularly busy at Easter time and we would drive from pillar to post; Glasnevin Cemetery, The Garden of Remembrance, the GPO of course and later Booterstown, burial place of Wolf Tone. In fact, she prided herself in having attended the Bodenstown commemorations for over eighty years in a row save for two she spent in the United States in the mid-fifties. She cherished a well-worn photo of her in the early thirties as a two-year-old in her mother's arms beside Tone's grave.

As we made our way around the city she would point out places that I thought were confined to the history books; like Maud Gonne's residence in Clonskeagh where she presented a young May with a trophy sometime before the second world war, or Mount Street, where she collected an elderly Nurse Elizabeth O Farrell in the fifties to attend commemorations of fallen comrades from the Rising that she brought to an end with a dirty white flag amid the carnage of Moore Street; or further south towards Mount Street Bridge where De Valera's C Company destroyed so many young ploughmen of the Sherwood Forest Regiment. In retrospect these Easter trysts of ours were generally bathed in Springtime Technicolor. "Rebellion Weather" May used to say, replicating the glorious sunshine that illuminated the heroics of the Rising. Apparently, (and here's the science bit) it's the result of Springtime high pressure over Scandinavia which extends its benevolent influence over these islands, keeping the usual misery of Icelandic lows at bay.

And then there was the glorious early summer of 1988; Euro 88 to be precise when eight of us piled into an ancient Ford Transit van and headed for Stuttgart via Rosslare. The driveshaft fell off the van somewhere outside Gorey and a racing pigeon truck gathered us up and dumped us at the ferry terminal covered in feathers and eh...other stuff. Somehow, we got to the Neckarstadion twenty minutes before kick-off and precisely six minutes later Ray Houghton put the ball in the English net. I recall trying to sit on a drunken English fan for the rest of the game, keeping him out of trouble and regularly appraising him of Packie and Captain Fantastic's valiant exploits in keeping Lineker, Waddle and Hoddle at bay. Not a cloud in the sky and as central Europe began to soak up the first real heat of Summer, and the light of the long evenings fused into the early mornings against the background of the stunning German landscape. There was no need for bed and breakfast accommodation and the locals plied us with free drink and we reciprocated with bawdy ballads of rebellion, pestilence and love lost. We were young then the eight of us and as the Irish team settled itself comfortably among the greats, we suddenly felt grown up as well. No longer cowed or in awe, we mingled with confidence even, giving a local village team near Hanover a jolly good pasting in a friendly game in the unending, brilliant sunshine. In retrospect we seemed, there and then, to be fulfilling the bould Robert Emmet's vision of taking our place among the great nations of the earth. Needless to say, it all ended in the usual tears; we tore the arse out of it later on as the Celtic Tiger's hubris laid us low.

And we are older now; old maybe. Just when we had managed to shake off the scourge of recession this plague seeps like a serpent into our land. For some, it's an existential battle as the daily statistics of disease and death become the anchor of our daily lives. We have lost friends and, for some of us, family. Something we can relate to our grand kids in the future. Yet the future is now, and these grand kids are with us in slaying this malign monster.

For these youngsters, the annual phenomenon of Exam Weather is now the beauty of this Corona Spring. And more: clear skies over Beijing and Los Angeles; La Serenissima regenerates herself free from hedonistic hordes of tourists; turtles lay more eggs on exotic beaches. Bluer skies, clearer, cleaner air as the timeless business of rebirth continues in our natural world. The great cliffs on the eastern side of Lambay are plastered with wild birds and their chicks. A cacophony; more of a symphony of nature. The Stack off Ireland's Eye is blanched with gannets and their fluffballs. The terns are diving into Skerries Bay to feed their voracious offspring on Rockabill. The raven chicks in Baldongan Castle are fledged now and the natural world continues its vital renaissance phase more vividly; more vibrant. It's as if the finger of the Creator has momentarily stopped the earth spinning out of control. We are perched above the rapids as we reflect on the beauty of the blue planet as it used to be. His finger will be released soon. This is our last chance, the precipice beckons. Soon there will be no way back. Let us not bring our grandkids over it with us.



Willie Maxwell

Sun Glut

Lads, there is something queer going on. Fourteen weeks with constant sun, here in Ireland! Oh yeah and there is the Covid thing too. I am beginning to wonder are the two things connected. Here I am on my balcony, cocooning and all the time in the world to contemplate the great mysteries of life. Not a drop of rain. I'm afraid to strike a match in case I go on fire.

Now, don't get me wrong but I like the sun. Our lockdown time would have been harder if it was pissing and bellowing as per usual. Still this whole thing takes some getting used to.

We Irish are only able to hack so much sun. That is why we head to Torremolinos and Mykonos for our two weeks holliers, to absorb enough rays for the year. Mind you, even there, our sun intake is strictly limited. We spend a fair bit of time sheltering out of it. When not in the shade we are under the duvet, recovering from last night adventures, and waiting for the sun to go down, to start tonight's explorations.

That is why we can only take so much sun here at home. Anything above two successive days with continuous temperatures around twenty-two degrees and we are heading to the frozen food aisles in the supermarket, to cool down. We don't suffer from sunstroke in Ireland so much as suffer from Sun Glut. I have seen balanced grown adults lose all sense of normal behaviour in the occasional heatwave that we have experienced in past years.

I was in a queue in the Andrew Street Post Office one day. The sun was splitting the stones outside. A young wan from Kerry was at the top of the queue with her savings book. She wanted to withdraw a few bob, to keep body and soul together, or maybe she wanted some money to go to Iceland to cool down. She produced the savings book to the "madam" behind the grill.

"Can I withdraw two hundred euros" she asked quietly?

"Do they not teach you to say please anymore in them posh colleges. You cannot withdraw that amount without a completed withdrawal slip. You will find one over there on the counter, bring it back to me when you are done" Madam bellowed out so that she could share this key post office life lesson, with all of us.

The victim took one look at the queue and immediately burst into tears
My tut-tutting was side-lined by a local “howya” rounding on Madam behind the grill
“You would not make me do that, you sour auld biddy” he told her.

Now we had a new eruption of tears from the original aggressor. The queue came to a standstill.

Maybe the tears made up for the absence of rain but a clearer case of Sun Glut I had never seen.

Have you experienced the abandonment of cars and the traffic chaos that happens close to Donabate Beach, on the very few days we ever get sun, out here? Again, sober men, impressive women, and perfectly raised children, can be reduced to behaving like frantic gurrriers, as they strive to park up and obtain pole position on the beach. The return home has its own drama. Victims of Sun Glut.

I do not want to stray on to the fashion, or the tanning, lads but you and I both know that we can pick out our fellow citizens in any sunspot in the world, from half a mile. Enough said.

Irish rain gets a bad press here at home. Spaniards and Italians flee their sun-soaked countries to escape to a place where it rains twenty-three hours, most days and they love it. So, what are we complaining about? We do not want to be like the farmers, who want rain when it is sunny and sun when it rains. Tipperary locals have a great way of explaining the weather. They greet each other with “fine soft day thank God” which covers all extremes from howling gales to parched conditions.

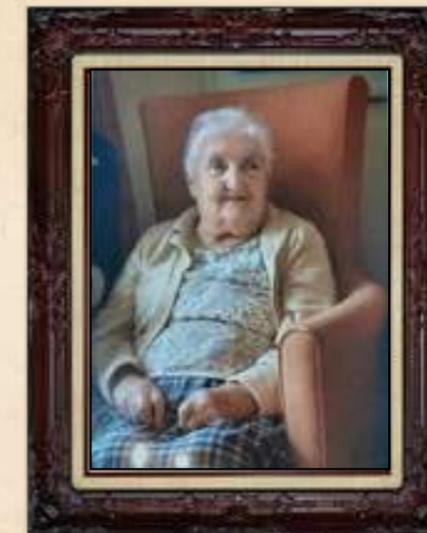
But back to this period of lockdown and all the sun, we are getting

So, do you think the arrival of Covid-19 and the sustained period of constant sunshine are all manifestations of Global warming?

I do not want start spouting conspiracy theories or anything but maybe the lockdown was a subtle way of getting us gradually used to periods of Sun Glut.

Irish water has banned the hosepipes. Until those boyos get their pipes fixed, they like me could do with a little less sun.

Think on it, and I’ll leave it with you.



Eileen McCormack

The Baker

With time on my hands due to cocooning, I think of our Mother who is now in her 99th year. She was born in 1920 just as the Spanish Flu pandemic was burning itself out. She has lived through so much. As the eldest in the family I have taken upon myself to share with my brothers this memory of our Mother.

In her heyday she was not a baker of fine cakes or fancy buns, **but** she had three specialities. The first was an apple dumpling which was basically a dough lined pudding basin filled with apples and sugar. This was steamed for who knew how long. The apple juice soaked into the dough and it was delicious.

The second was Christmas puddings. These were mixed in a large basin, part I think, of a **“Jug and Basin set”** given to her as a wedding present. I only saw this basin used at Christmas time. The puddings were mixed and left overnight to soak up flavours. The next day, white cloths, **which may have been pillow slips or washed flour bags**, were greased with fat of some kind and sprinkled generously with flour. The pudding mixture was placed in these clothes, tied carefully with twine and place in pots of simmering water. There was great anxiety over the pots of simmering water. If the range was not kept fed with sticks and coal, it would cool too much, the water would stop simmering and puddings would be ruined. Another much feared disaster **was** if the water boiled off the puddings and they got scorched on the bottom.

At the time, these puddings represented a large monetary investment and Christmas really would be ruined if something went wrong. So, the boiling of the puddings was a very anxious day in our house. After the required hours (**again who except herself knew how many**) the puddings were removed and hung on a nail to dry off and there they would hang until Christmas Day.

Her third speciality was her soda bread, her “piece de resistance”. She could bake bread with her eyes closed. I can picture the whole performance in my mind’s eye still. Her most important piece of equipment, the mixing bowl, came out of the cupboard first. It was a creamy yellow delph bowl and it looked substantial and decorative. Next came the bags of flour, then the bread soda and finally the buttermilk.

She used no Recipe, No measuring jug and no weighting scales. She didn’t have or need any of them. She judged everything by touch.

Mother used a cup to pour the required amount flour straight from the bag into the mixing bowl. She used white for a “white loaf”, and a mixture of white and brown for a “brown loaf”. Now and again she made a “Sweet” white loaf with dried fruit.

Next the bread soda, she somehow knew the exact amount, the correct sized pinch, and she ground this up in her palm using the thumb of her other hand. She prided herself on getting the amount and the grinding right. If it wasn't done correctly there could be greenish lumps in the baked bread, or it might even taste unpleasantly of bread soda.

Then the buttermilk was poured into the mix, no measuring but mother seemed to know just when to stop pouring. As if by magic, using only her small hands, the dough came together into a ball. She then took a baking tray, and with a swish of her hand the tray was covered with a fine layer of flour. The ball of dough was then placed in the centre with a satisfactory plop and with a few pats of her hands it turned into the traditional soda bread shape. She cut a cross on the loaf, again knowing exactly how deep to cut. Then into the oven it went.

The baking of the bread required even more skill as for many years she baked in the range oven. She was like a scientist with a secret formula for keeping the temperature at just the correct level.

After a time, again known only to herself, out came our daily bread. The bottom of the loaves were tapped and if satisfactory, they were propped up against something in order to cool. In our house a cooling rack did not exist. On fine summer days the loaves were placed on the window sill, and this was great temptation for us children. The smell would have us drooling but woe betide anyone who gave into the temptation and picked at the crust.

The best part of the freshly baked bread was the “cross” with its pale soft crust. When teatime came, we all wanted the fresh bread but we knew that yesterday's, bread (if there was any) had to be eaten first.

The baking of our “daily bread” was probably the task our mother enjoyed most. When she was baking bread, she had an ease and a noticeable contentment about her and it is probably the memory we all have in common.

So, as she approaches 100 years on this earth, let us all acknowledge and celebrate and thank our very own “**bread maker**”.



Tom Burke

The Holiday That Never Was

The holiday was booked and paid for. Our passports were in date and travel insurance in place. On a dreary February day the thoughts of relaxing in the Southern European sun of Alvor in May gave comfort.

I thought of relaxing in the sun by the poolside, strolling to the quaint fishing harbour and wandering along the golden sands of the Algarve or maybe swimming in the Atlantic waves. Alvor is not as packed as Albufeira and has a more relaxed feel to it. The old pension goes that bit further there as well.

A day cruise up the Guadiana River to the border with Spain looks like an interesting diversion, and a relaxing, break from the land based activities. We would pass sleepy whitewashed red roofed villages, a patchwork of reed beds, pastures and olive groves while enjoying life on a sun kissed deck.

After another lazy day around Alvor and our hotel, I'd look forward to a cruise to Lagos with time to explore the historic old city before returning to our hotel for the night.

All these thoughts made the start of May something to look forward to.

AND THEN CAME CORONA VIRUS COVID-19

Will the holiday be cancelled? Will we travel if its not? Can we recover the cost of the holiday if we refuse to travel? Would a doctor recommend against travel? These questions bounce from breakfast table to lunch table and on to dinner and bedtime.

So many questions and the holiday is turning from something to look forward to, to a source of worry and concern. Not a day passed without these issues becoming topics for discussion.

The decision is finally made – we will not travel, even if the holiday is not cancelled and we lose our money.

And then came “lockdown” and cocooning for the over 70s. This is followed soon after by notification from the travel company that all holidays for the period have been cancelled and refunds will be made in due course.

For this year it looks like a sun holiday is out. Let’s grab the brochures and plan for next year. Will prices hold or will they be dearer or cheaper? Will the virus be tamed by then? We can only hope and pray.

Thank God that at least the weather is fine at home.

The bright Dublin sunshine, combined with rising temperatures and the extension of the 2 Kilometre radial exercise limit to 5 kilometre entice me to walk the woods of Millennium Park and the banks of the Royal Canal from Porterstown Road to Clonsilla Railway station. I always found the deep cut at this location fascinating. It seems to have an almost jungle feel to it at times and I enjoy listening to bird song and watching swans glide in majestic glory through the still waters. As the occasional train chugs westward to Maynooth, or maybe Sligo or Ballina, I enjoy the sight of butterflies flitting back and forth and look to see if mayfly will have enticed anglers to the canal banks.

It may not be as warm as the Algarve and I can’t smell the ocean’s distinctive breeze but, its not a bad substitute when the sun shines.

To quote from the book and film “Gone with the Wind”, tomorrow is another day.



Tom Reilly

The Morning After

The morning after I died, I woke up and I went out. I watched the sun come up over Red Island. I stood in awe at the magnificence of nature as the world came alive and a red hue warned shepherds everywhere that the weather could well be mixed today. A scene that lay in wait for me every single day, but I had never managed to see it when I was alive. I tried desperately to feel the thrill of optimism and ponder what dreams may yet come in my life, but for some reason I couldn’t. It was probably because I was dead. As each wave crashed onto the rocks some kids pointed out a single red cloud to their mother as the family took an early morning walk to avoid the dreaded cabin fever.

The morning after I died, I returned home, opened my old familiar front door and I made my way to my familiar kitchen. I made myself breakfast. I added blueberries to my porridge, and I squeezed a grapefruit into a juice glass. I scraped the gunge from the frying pan from last night’s meal into the bin and I and wiped the butter off the counter. I washed the dishes and folded the towels. I sat down for a while and listened to James Taylor and I got lost for the umpteenth time in the fact that he had Carolina in his mind.

The morning after I died, I fell in love. Not with the girl down the street or the elegant lady in the library, who claimed to love the same history period as me but clearly knew little about it. Not with the hot jogger I admired from afar or the woman in the Centra shop who always chatted enthusiastically to me as she beeped my groceries. I fell in love with my wife again and the way she sat on the floor of my room holding each book from my collection in her palms until they grew dark with sweat. I fell in love with my son down at the beach as he trembled at the water’s edge trying to grasp the finality of it all. With my daughter, who loved Liverpool FC just as much as I did but who now sat on her bed, across the hall from my room trying desperately to believe I still existed.

The morning after I died, I walked the dog. I watched the way her tail twitched when a bird flew by or how her pace quickened at the sight of a cat. I saw the empty space in her eyes when she reached a stick and turned around to greet me so we could play catch but saw nothing but sky in my place. I stood by as strangers stroked her on the head and she wilted beneath their touch like she did once for mine.

The morning after I died, I went back to my old home house where I left my footprints in concrete out in the back garden as a ten-year old and examined how they had managed to stand the test of Irish weather. I picked a few daffodils and pulled a few weeds and watched the elderly woman through her window as she read the paper with the news of my death. I saw her husband spit into the kitchen sink and bring her daily medication. I heard them say that it was terrible, just terrible this pandemic, and what was to become of us all.

The morning after I died, I saw two old friends of mine meet on the street. I watched them as they kept their distance from each other, and one broke the news to the second about my sad passing. I listened as they both said that they had only seen me the other day and you just don't know the time or the hour. I winced as they both agreed that it would be dangerous to go to my funeral, so they chose not to. I watched them walk away and forget about me as they went about the rest of their day. Funny. I had always imagined that my funeral would be packed.

The morning after I died, I went back to that body in the morgue and tried to talk some sense into him. I told him about the music, the footprints, the flowers. I told him about the sunrises and the dog and the beach.

The morning after I died, I tried desperately to be alive again, but I had not known about the cancer that had already started to grow in my body, or the underlying illness, as they called it in the hospital on my deathbed. I thought I was invincible. Turns out I wasn't.



Robert Toner Snr.

“The Naller”

I was born and raised in a place called Love Lane off Lower Mount Street in Dublin's southside (from 1939 to 1954). I think this area will be remembered mostly for the great battle that was fought there during the 1916 Troubles on Mount Street Bridge, when a handful of Irish Volunteers held back a whole battalion of British Soldiers in an attempt to stop them advancing on the City, (Google: The Battle of Mount Street Bridge). My memories of course are of a different era to those troubled times.

My childhood wanderings would mostly cover an area within a mile radius of Mount St. and Ballsbridge to the south, taking in Herbert Park and then all those other areas like Baggot St, Powers Court, Merrion Sq, Pearse St, Ringsend, and Grand Canal St.

By far the most cherished memory I have of enjoyment as a kid was spent along the banks of the “Naller”, our name for the Grand Canal that flowed through the heart of our area.

This waterway was everything to us growing up, we swam, fished, picnicked, and even made musical instruments from the reeds, and generally spent most of our summer holidays along its banks. Every kid in our area learned to swim in the Naller (mostly boys) by diving from one side to the other in the lock area, our makeshift fishing nets were made from old nylon stockings wrapped around a piece of wire and tied to a stick or shoved down a piece of bamboo. My Dad had a funny slant on where to make the most of our efforts at fishing, he told us to always fish under the bridge if it was raining, as that is where the fish go to shelter (and I believed him). It was mostly Pinkeens we caught, but sometimes Roach if we used the bent pin for a hook, with a maggot or a piece of dough for bait. We would bring our catch home and make our own aquarium from a sweet jar or a bowl. Another great pastime was going up as far as Leeson St bridge to meet the turf (Peat) barges, if we knew the Bargeman he would allow us on board and we would stay on till it reached Grand Canal Dock, which was the end of their trip. Most of the barges came from Shannon Harbour, a distance of over 80 miles of waterway, we would not have endured that distance, but these men were mighty. On our way to the Dock we would earn our passage by helping to open and close the locks, and if the barge got caught in the weeds we could run to get the horses to haul them out. That gave us the opportunity to show our riding skills which we learned from stabling the horses in Carroll's Coal yard in Love Lane. These barges were laden to capacity with turf, the bargemen would often give us a sackful to bring home especially if we delivered a parcel that they brought up from the country (Poteen mostly). When I think back I don't know how we would have passed the time away, for City lads (and lassies) we owe an awful amount to this God given playground where we got our first glimpse of wildlife and nature, and like many kids of my generation we will never forget the wonderful “Naller”.

Ray Taylor

Then and Now



The fear of what you cannot see, can range from being mild to absolutely terrifying.

The fact that Covid 19 cannot be seen by the naked eye makes it all the more frightening as we have to be on our guard against an invisible enemy.

Up to now, I had always associated invisible threats with landmines and IEDs in locations far away from Skerries, but now the enemy has arrived on our shores.

People of a certain age know exactly where they were when they heard that John F Kennedy had been assassinated and in more recent times, people remember where they were when they heard about the attacks on the 11th September 2001.

I however, was unaware of what was happening that morning in New York as I was in Heathrow airport, ready to board a flight to Pakistan en route to Afghanistan. With hindsight I can say that it was not a good plan.

However it was only when I telephoned home to say a final farewell that I learnt of the attacks on the twin towers in New York. Just as I was about to board the flight my name was called out over the PA and I was informed that I had to ring the office. When I got through to the International NGO that I was contracted to work with, I was told that the mission was aborted and to get on the next available flight back to Dublin. That was my nine eleven, not a day that I will forget.

However several weeks later, but with different terms of reference I was on my way again to Afghanistan. It was a trying time there and there were several incidents that I found unsettling to say the least.

We were in the town of Tolaqan in Northern Afghanistan and I was setting up an operational base and stores.

The Taliban had retreated to a town called Kunduz having recently been driven from Tolaqan by the forces of the Afghan Northern Alliance.

The Northern Alliance had air support from the US Air Force who were carrying out bombing raids and I could see during the day, the vapour trails in the sky from the US B52 bombers as they made their runs towards Kunduz. They were flying so high that we could not hear them and they could barely be seen, so the only clue that they were up there was the vapour trails. Every so often they would fly towards Kunduz and then turn back towards us, only to turn again and make a second run over Kunduz and bomb it. It seemed to us on the ground that psychological warfare was in play as well as the explosive stuff.

I found the situation stressful as several times bombs had fallen near us, presumably in error, but an exploding bomb kills lots of people, error or not.

The most terrifying time however was when the bombings were done at night as we could not hear or see the planes. Like Covid 19, they were invisible to us. One night a bomb exploded a short distance away and the house that I was living in shook so much that I thought it would collapse as I ran out the door. I shouted obscenities at the errant pilots, much to the amusement of my Afghan interpreter who reminded me that they could not hear me, but I felt the better for shouting at what I could not see.

We drove out of our compound one morning to find a large unexploded bomb (UXB) not too far from the house. If it had exploded, we would have all been wiped out, but the local people seemed to take it all in their stride. They just rolled the bomb to the side of the road and life went on.

I had also seen the damage that landmines had caused when some cattle had been killed on a dusty track that had been mined. The locals just made a second track through a field, built a pile of rocks on the edge of the road as a warning to people of danger ahead, and again life went on.

In Tolaqan, I was checking out a number of buildings to see if I could find somewhere suitable for use as offices and living accommodation and I had a close call myself with a landmine. Some years earlier I had been on a course in the UK on landmine awareness and the golden rule where landmines were concerned was ALWAYS keep off the grass and walk on the hard stuff.

I had located a building that seemed to meet our needs, even though there were lots of weapons lying around inside the building, including a machine gun on a tripod, armed and ready for use. In the same building several “shoe box” mines had been left in the bathroom so I was switched on to potential danger, especially as it was clearly visible.

There was a large storage building in the back garden, and I went out to inspect it.

The garden was rectangular in shape and had a concrete path around the sides as well as down the middle which divided the garden into two halves. I walked down the middle path and where it met the end path in a T junction, I lifted my foot to take a 45 degree short cut across the grass but suddenly changed my mind. This was the sort of location that I had been warned about in training, taking the line of convenience as it is called, could end up with a bad outcome, so I stayed on the hard stuff. The danger cannot always be seen.

There was a group called the Halo Trust who checked for and defused land mines and other explosive ordnance and so I asked them to check out the whole place, and make it safe.

The next day when I met the guy in charge he asked me if I had been in the back garden and when I told him that I had, he laughed and said “well you must have stayed on the concrete so.”

Apart from the obvious stuff in the house, they had discovered landmines, buried at each side of the T junction in the path and had now put up a barrier around them. He told me that they would be exploding the mines at a particular time that day and that the ones on the bathroom had been removed. When I thought of how close I had come to being seriously injured, I became even more cautious, but the constant checking to ensure that you are safe and not putting yourself in danger is wearing as I am sure that many people in Ireland can now confirm.

Dealing with a bad situation that you can see is bad enough, but dealing with an invisible threat is much worse so we need to be careful and think before we act.

At this stage I am sure that many people are feeling the strain of dealing with something so alien to our normal everyday living so I will close with some advice that was given to me many years ago when I was working in hostile environments:

“Remember, we are just ordinary people living in an extraordinary situation.”

Peter McNally

A Bag of Burger Buns

I'm retired a few years now but I work a few hours a week in our local Supermarket, when they are stuck. A day or two before I went cocooning, an elderly man collapsed on the pavement outside. He didn't look great. One of his hand's was bleeding and he had a nasty looking cut just below his left eye. With his good hand he clutched a bag of burger buns, so tightly, I couldn't prize them away from him. Eventually, myself and the manager got him standing and between the two of us, carried him to the manager's office where we settled him on the sofa and rang for an ambulance. We got him a cup of tea and dabbed the cut under his eye which thankfully, wasn't quite as bad as it looked. The cut on his hand was superficial too but because of his age, we thought it best to have a medic have a look at him, just to be sure.

I stayed in the office to keep an eye on him. He told me his name was Paddy Doherty*, he soon settled to the warmth of the office and with the cup of sweet tea inside him, he told me this story.

“I found myself standing in the bread aisle staring at nothing but empty shelving” he said. “I can tell you now that I felt every one of my eighty four years. The price tags were still in place, brown batch, white sliced, brown roll. There were crumbs and bits of plastic wrapping scattered everywhere but the shelves were empty, it was like we were back in the Emergency—but you wouldn't remember that!” He smiled for the first time and I was glad to see a bit of colour returning to his cheeks.

“Em, that was a bit before my time alright, I'm only 67.”

“It's all this virus thing, I suppose.” he said

He went on to talk about other elderly people who were lucky enough to have grown up children to do their shopping for them during the Covid. It transpired that Paddy lived alone. He had never married— not that he hadn't wanted to, it just hadn't happened for him.

“Nobody to give me a hard time!” he said, the charming smile spreading. The years had tumbled on for him

—“Gone in a flash.” he said. “You don't be bothered going out after a while, though I used go for a pint or two most nights but that was before the pubs changed. Pubs used be a place where you went to have a chat— not any more. It's all about sport now, televisions everywhere, loud televisions. Sure after a while, there just didn't seem any

point to it! The trouble is, when you stop going out, you stop meeting people and you get to be a kind of recluse—the more you shy away the less you are noticed. You used to go to the post office on a Friday to get the pension and you'd be sure to meet someone you knew there for a bit of a chin wag—but sure even the post office is closed now. Ah, sure that's the way!”

He wasn't complaining just accepting the inevitable.

While he chatted, I noticed Paddy keeping a tight grip on the neck of the bag of burger buns. It occurred to me that he must have hung on to it through all the commotion outside the shop, the falling, being carried to the office, being helped to the sofa—but why hadn't he let it go?

“You're hanging on to those burger buns for dear life Paddy” I said jokingly. “You must be fond of an auld burger or two!”

“Do you know what I'm going to tell you” he said. “You wouldn't get them burger buns from me with a shotgun.”

I laughed.

“Why is that Paddy?”

“You remember I was telling you that people cleared the shelves of bread this morning?” he said.

“I know all about it Paddy” I said wearily “And there's no need for it at all. We are tired telling people not to panic buy but sure you might as well talk to the wall over there.”

“Ah, I suppose you can't blame people either.” he said kindly. “They do be afraid the bread will run out and they'll be stuck. Anyway, by the time I shuffled my way down here today, the cupboard was bare, as they say— wasn't a crust, never mind a slice of bread to be had. I must have looked a bit lost standing there, scratching my head because this woman—a young woman— walked up to me. I'd never seen her before, didn't have a clue who she was—still don't. And what do you think she did? Didn't she hand me this bag of burger buns and says she, “I know it's not a pan loaf but it is bread just the same.”

“Ah, sure you keep them for yourself, says I.”

“Not at all” says she, “You have them, you're welcome to them, I'll get something else” But sure there was nothing else!

“So off she goes about her business! Now, wasn't that decent of her?” His voice cracked a little as he stared down at the bag of burger buns clutched tightly in his good hand. The room fell silent while we both contemplated that small act of kindness.

A yellow flashing light circling the office told me the ambulance had arrived outside. The medics wheeled in a gurney then stooped to lift Paddy from the sofa. “I'll just take that off you”, said the paramedic grabbing hold of Paddy's bag of burger buns. I caught her by the elbow.

“Leave that with him.” I said.

“It means a lot to him.”

(*Not his real name.)

Lawrence Power

From Darkness to the Light



As the evening shadows fall, soon the darkness will prevail. The veil of darkness will creep around our homes, our streets, alley ways, hospitals and those far off lonely places. Yes, it will be dark over our land and beyond.

Many times we have let the darkness fall on us, from the discreet room, the isolation, loneliness and the uncertainty. Our thoughts are entangled. Our minds vibrate to the sounds of the outside world.

Some day that veil of darkness that lingers above will come to pass. A new beginning will settle as the light rises and brings new birth. As we settle down for our night's rest, let us think of our families, friends and neighbours and perhaps we could make that all important phone call and give them comfort that we will be there for them, no matter the hour, night or day. Yes we can all be that beacon of light as we reach out to others. Remember, as we live through these uncertain days, we are not alone. There will always be two sets of footprints.

'If I should walk in the valley of darkness, no evil would I fear. You are there with your crook and your staff'.

By making that extra effort to connect, possibly by phone or video-calling, can shift everyone's energies in a more positive direction and away from endless worries. Obviously not everything is perfect, far from it. This is a hugely stressful time for everyone. We are all anxious. This isolation hits everyone differently. It is harder on people who are alone or families trying to deal with young children. Everyone will have good days and bad days. But life on total lockdown can be bearable it is what you make it. If we need to wait it out until it is safe, that's what we will do.

We have all experienced long nights in dark places, but there is hope. Just to finish on the words of Nelson Mandela,

'May your choices reflect your hopes and not your fears'

Mary T. Desmond

No Squabble Scrabble

Hello!

No squabble scrabble?

That is the name of our Laurel Lodge, Castleknock Community Centre, scrabble group.

Why "no squabble"?

Well, when I investigated if people would be interested in us setting up a scrabble group – the most frequent response was ___ A BIG FAT NO! ___ there would be too many arguments about suitability of cryptic words.

& was thence determined that I would set up a group and there would be no squabbling.

In all honesty, some folks were afraid they would look stupid when they were slow to formulate a word.

Some others were poor at actual spellings

Some people had never joined a board game before while others just did not have the time.

The first meeting was cheerful. Half the group told me afterwards that they go to line-dancing early that morning so they felt that was enough.

Thank god, Catherine Coady, Manager of the community centre was most encouraging.

There were two separate weeks where not one person turned up. I found out later that those people worked irregular hours so we said we would have it as a drop in group. One can come when one is available.

I bought a scrabble dictionary in Easons and also told the group that google had a search possibility to verify if any word was an acceptable scrabble word. Nobody argues with Google!!

Ok, next challenge? Variable levels of ability.

Ok _ again, I was dealing with very passionate scrabble lovers so there was those who have played since childhood willing to teach beginners and some unfortunately who were disappointed long term that they did not have more advanced players to play with.

Rules evolved as the group dynamic evolved.

Everybody was to have some sort of game.

I was interested to discover that two members were years playing online but they wanted the social interaction in a real group, with real people.

Why am I so passionate personally about scrabble?

Well it is,

- Challenging
- Sociable
- Educational
- Inexpensive
- A team game
- Strategic
- No moves or game is ever the same
- It helps your word power
- Helps spellings
- You get to understand meaning of words also,

In a world where the skill of communication is so vital to career and survival _____

Scrabble is a wonderful tool!

It even improves your mathematical skills --- as SOMEBODY has to keep the score.

Any board game teaches you etiquette, learning, inter-personal skills, taking turns, giving the other person enough time to formulate their word and position it to the best advantage.

One learns to be on time = punctuality.

We usually have a cuppa or a cappuccino and scone before us for to keep up with the gossip. We like to respect the community centre by coming on time and leaving on time and leaving our room in good order as we have found it.

One of our advertising skills is to leave our room door open for nosey passer bys to peep in to wonder what all the giggling and excitement is about!

Curiosity killed the cat but it certainly can get us noticed!!

To buy a box of scrabble game is about €17.00.

Just before the Covid 19 pandemic we exchanged mobile phone numbers and set up a whats app group with a delightful logo of all our names intertwined on a scrabble board.



When a member designed such a beautiful logo – I knew we were a team. There are six of faithful members who post Covid wish to return to group, and I am so thrilled about that.

We have kept in touch every day since this pandemic started. We even tried various forms of scrabble on video whats app.

We vary in nationality, in gender and in age.

We get on very well, for we all enjoy the sociability. We have one thing in common, a genuine passion for the game.

I first came to play scrabble on my meals breaks as a pregnant young nurse on night duty. It kept me awake, alert and focused. I was hooked from game one.

A poem I put on our app during Covid 19 to encourage.

Good Morning “no squabble scrabble” pretend we are on a game.

We have letters we do not like.

The other player is winning by a mile.

What is your strategy now?

O.K --- I’m stuck!

There is no place to go, at all at all,

With these tiles I have drawn.

So what do I do now?

?Throw down the tiles I have?

?Is that not admitting defeat?

No!

In fact it is admitting

- Courage
- Strength
- Responsibility
- And possibility

The game is still ongoing.

I throw down my tiles and

I find a new way to continue this game (life)

I make a decision to rid of this impasse.

So now then?

?What is the process to get me going again?

To start the scrabble game you put your hand in the bag

Whoever gets A or nearest to A starts and gets double score for starting

Lately they have made blank the superior tile.

O.K --- A blank sheet

- New beginnings
- New ideas
- Not stuck
- To do list

I am not stuck.

I can play somewhere.

It is not important how high a score I get (perfectionism) with the tiles in hand that I play.

At this point I just want to keep in play – and keep the ball rolling

So if I put down GO and I have made my move – even if I do not win or get the highest score --- It doesn't matter because I am winning the game of life just moving at all.

I did not throw in the towel of defeat.

LOSERS ARE NOT THOSE WHO TRY AND FAIL BUT RATHER THOSE WHO FAIL TO TRY.

WINNERS ALL

Reset, Restart, Renew, Regain, Realise.

We can find breakthrough

Frances Hanly

Untitled Short Story

This is a true story

I live on the street (I don't have a front garden) & since the lockdown, if the sun is shining, I sit in my front door & talk to anyone going by.

One day a man 30ish came to me with a plate of eclairs with a large dollop of cream & decorated with grapes. He said I live in the flat over the shop across the street and thought it would be nice to bake some cakes & get to know you. I thanked him profusely but said "sorry I am coeliac and can't eat them". He said oh give them to someone and then sat down on the step.

I did give him a stool so he sat there talking to me for a good while.

Next day about 4.30 he came over again with a large dinner and a large dish of fruit salad. He had his sister-in-law with him & the two of them sat and talked "it will be Sheppard's pie tomorrow". I said "oh no I have enough here for 3 days" and to the girl I said don't let him bring one over.

3 days later he landed over with another dinner – which I said please (his name) do not bring any more, honestly I have enough here for 2 days.

I await the outcome of what a nice considerate lad he is. He says he has 11 brothers and sisters. He must come from a very considerate family God bless him.



Noreen Hanratty

Covid Schmovid!!!

June 6th, 2020



Bernie waited for the beep of the thermometer. The slide show, of the century since January, repeated it's endless loop in her head. Could it only have been then that the Irish Times ran that tiny paragraph about an unusual new viral illness in far away China --- the other side of the world! In the cold after Christmas, weather, the travel supplements, with their sunshine, colour and heat were much more inviting reading. Surely it was longer ago than February that she had watched those awful TV pictures of the heartbreaking devastation in Italy.

When was it that Siofra had rung to settle the time and place for their planned coffee and chat in town? That was the thing about moving house --- one ended up living at the opposite side of town from long standing friends. Still, the trips to the city centre were fun and the bus trip, with a good book, was so relaxing. After a good gossip, and a shared laugh at the loo paper lunacy in Australia, Siofra said that she would prefer to postpone the trip for a week to let things settle. That suited Bernie. It gave her a chance to have her hair cut and coloured. Bernie liked to look well when she met friends from her youth.

A splodge of memories formed a bouquet of questions. When did that virus get it's name, "Covid 19"? When did first case happen in Ireland? When did "flatten the curve", "social distance", "we're in this together" enter the everyday language? When did "surge" and "cluster" take on a new meaning? When did people who could do so, start working from home? When did the schools close? Did it matter now? And hadn't there been a General Election??

They'd only heard about Leo's speech from the steps of the White House after the event so she and Tony watched the recording next day. "Yes, the virus is in Ireland", "We need to be careful", "There will be restrictions". Impressive!! Maybe it would be a good idea to be more organised about the shopping --- a list, and a once weekly shop by only one of them. Tony would do it. Life went on.

Barry, her eldest son, called unexpectedly to fit a camera to the computer and install Skype. "It's not for you, Ma, it's for my peace of mind." At the time, Bernie laughed. Later, it was a small jolt when her chiroprapist rang to cancel her appointment for next week. Still later, her second son, Davy, rang. "Watch the Telly tonight. Ma. The Taoiseach will be on".

LOCKDOWN! Every business and shop to stay closed. Don't travel. COCOON! People over 70 to stay indoors. ALL THE TIME! Bernie had never felt old. Suddenly, she KNEW that She WAS old. "That's me," her brain shouted. "It's Tony, too." It didn't feel real. What would it mean? How would they cope?" It was so sudden. They were not prepared!

Bernie knew the dictionary definition of the word 'surreal'. That weekend she understood the meaning of it in her gut!

On Monday, new reality kicked in. She and Tony started making plans to cope. Thank God they had a garden. Exercise would be possible. The boys would bring necessary groceries. Tony and Bernie had a land line and they had a mobile each. They could both use the computer. They were both readers. They had TV --- almost too many channels. Anyway, it would only be for a few weeks. It would be fine.

But it wasn't! There was fear of the unknown. The number of reactions to small ordinary things that were suddenly wrong, was astounding. They couldn't make social plans. Ideas to do wonderfully creative things never became a reality. Dear friends died. Not being able to sympathise or go to funerals was truly awful. Bernie did not knit any beanies for the homeless. Bernie missed her music, particularly singing. Bernie came alive in music. She could never have foreseen how much they would miss seeing the grandchildren. All little deals! She felt vaguely smothered and yet guilty for feeling bad. After all, they were well looked after and healthy and safe. What was the problem?

On Monday morning, the phone started ringing. Friends from way back, cousins from the other side of Ireland, also, people who had become her friends sharing more recent projects --- "How are you?" "I was thinking about you." "Are you ok? It went on. The two lovely girls who were married to Barry and Davy were brilliant. Friends, neighbours and family did not surprise her but workers, strangers --- most people!! Then it went on to cards, letters and unexpected little gifts dropping on the mat!

Bernie considered that her life up to now had been happy and fulfilled. She knew that she was lucky. However, nothing in her previous experience had prepared her for the tsunami of kindness and decency that swept over Ireland in those weeks.

Nobody had told Bernie that the Covid Package included a free, two part gift --- (a) a powerful microscope which unerringly identified and spotlighted wonderful moments as she lived them, and (b) the equivalent of a mini poitin still to reduce each one down to its very essence. To the background voice of Dean Martin singing "Magic Moments" she remembered that one magic minute when she stood beside all of Ireland to salute, silently, the frontline workers. She cried that night, but they were happy tears. The morning when she opened the post to discover a can of that spray hair colour which was as scarce as gold dust. Linda, Davy's lovely wife, must have mentioned that Bernie needed it, to her own pal who lived in the city centre. Linda's pal found it. That was a long moment. She laughed out loud until lunch time. Linda's pal also, on Easter Sunday morning, had donned an Easter Bonnet and photographed herself on the Ha'penny Bridge, with some flowers twined in the bars as background, so that she could forward the picture to Bernie. She must have heard Bernie say that the views up and down the Liffey, from the bridges, were among Bernies favourite things in Dublin and that she missed them. Best of all those moments were, on Skype, when Bernie realised that her precious granddaughters were growing and maturing fast in the hothouse conditions of pandemic! Barry's two sons had become fine young men in the moment that Bernie blinked!

Somehow the weeks passed. The number of cases got bigger --- steadied --- started to drop slowly. Tony and herself stayed well. A day came when they could take a little walk outside their own gate. The numbers got smaller. The sun shone. Some businesses were allowed to open. Rumours circulated that things were looking good for more return to normality (new normality)! The rumours became true.

On June 5th, Leo stood in front of the TV cameras again. He opened the doors to life. Lockdown was to be a thing of the past from June 8, if we stayed careful. That night, Tony and Bernie poured a glass of wine and talked about the first thing they might do on Monday. They definitely would not be rushing to the shops. It was pleasant chatting about the options --- we can choose --- no pressure.

Bernie remembered joking, in that first week, that she would emerge from cocoon as a butterfly. Whatever about that, she knew that her thinking about life had developed and that her priorities were different now. She had changed. Bernie hoped it was for the better.

When Bernie woke next morning she felt peculiar. When she sat up, the top of her head nearly lifted off with pain. When she swung them out of bed, her legs felt wobbly. Alarm bells started to ring. Bernie got the thermometer. She popped it under her tongue. She waited. Bernie couldn't pray. Everything inside her silently screamed "No God! Not now!

Please!!

The thermometer beeped.....????



Anne B Flanagan

Untitled Short Story

I have been through so many crisis in my life to date, being born in 1934, this was almost twenty years after the "big flu", when many were lost. My father requested that a badge be fixed on pram saying "do not; kiss, hug or touch baby". There was smallpox, T.B and polio that I remember.

In early March, my neighbour sent me a text to say "I will be in isolation from today" the family have been told to contact by phone.

I had registered that, this virus was in Italy, some of my neighbours were on holiday in the Italian Alps, when they came home, I watched to see how long they would self-isolate, after 2 weeks, David spoke from his garden to his friend across the road, I joined in, to thank him for being so considerate, he had washed all the clothes etc. at the correct temperature.

I have been so lucky, enjoying good health, I spent my time gardening and had lots of repotting to do. I had a walk every other day, kept my civil distance and enjoyed my beautiful Portersgate Estate with woodland, green lawn and parkland to walk.

What have I learned from this time of cocooning? I was so lucky to have read a motto many years ago: "To grow old gracefully, start young and grow old healthy, as fit as can be"

While Covid 19 had changed our way of thinking when out shopping, we will for a number of years to come, spend less time in crowd shopping centres or travelling by line, boat or plane, no more foreign holidays. The active retired and all older people's groups will have to be helped to rearrange their facilities. I went through many feelings while cocooned for twelve long weeks. What did I learn in the time of restrictions? I was so lucky to be of sound mind and good health.

I decided at the start of cocooning, not to worry, take care, keep my civil distance and clean my hands. My neighbours have been very supportive and helpful, doing what ever shopping was needed and my friends in the older people's groups Fingal attended to me making sure that I receiving food each day.

The home help called to my home during the week to check I was well, this was most important to motivate me to be up and dressed each day. It was most important for me to be able to talk to people each day. The only rule I kept was, to keep a civil distance, wash my hands and have nobody in my house or to close.

I have friends all over the world and one friend is on Christmas Island, she is friend who went to Australia in the 70's and lived in Newman Western Australia where my brother and his family lived for many years. Knowing how to use messenger etc. on Ipad, laptop etc. mobile phone and if not we are zooming. All this technology had helped to keep me up to date with friends.

To sum up, what this experience has given me, my neighbours have been most helpful. The first neighbours to help me were new comers to me, they sent me in a meal which reminded of India. Most of my neighbours kept me on top of the idea of being cocooned, which I did not agree 100% with, I was able to join in at a civil distance with some social interaction. The radio was a great help, the music was back to the past 1950 and 1920 my mothers time, this all helped to bring me back to a wonderful and interesting life. I feel that we must continue to keep a civil distance, wash the hands and at all times of epidemic wear a mask when mingling with people, keep windows open for ventilation, avoid crowds and meetings.

Twenty years ago I studied "Aspects of Aging" I hope we have learned from this very sad experience. I know my age and hope I can live after Covid "being young and beautiful" a song from a way back in my mothers time 1920s

Marian Rogers

A Better World?

I sometimes despair of the world we're living in - even before Covid.

Some people, nowadays, just seem not to care at all about their fellow humans!

Some seem to live in their own little self obsessed bubble of social media, looking for affirmation for their filtered photos, their "wonderful" lives and others "keeping up with the Jones's".

Since Covid, I have been cocooning, along with so many other over 65's. We were told by the Govt. that we were in the 'at risk' bracket.

But, according to the news, some twenty somethings have ignored the guidelines re self distancing, not gathering in each others' house, partying etc. It seems because of their age, they assume they are safe. And the rest of us don't count.

It brings me back in time to remember happier, carefree days when people actually cared and helped each other.

My grandparents were from near Cong, in Co. Galway and the highlight of my year was staying there with my gran during the summer hols.

Living in Dublin City, with strict parents who gave us very little freedom, the time I spent with my gran was total bliss.

My father used to drive us - my mam, my sister and myself, when school ended.

It was a long journey, back in the 60's but when we saw the stone walls, in the west, we got so excited. We knew we were nearly there.

My grandfather passed away when I was 5 and gran took over the running of the farm. Her children had married by then and had their own families. Apart from one son, my uncle Joe who did most of the heavy work on the farm. And one daughter, my aunt Annie who was a very hard worker both indoors and on the farm.

Annie and gran taught me so much.

Having been raised in the city, I hadn't a clue about farming life ie. where milk came from - the milkman left it in glass bottles on the doorstep every morning. And eggs - we bought them at the corner shop!

Aunt Annie taught me to milk a cow!

I remember the warm, white liquid foaming in the bucket and the cow, a bit skittish at first, calmed down when she got used to me. She gave us fresh milk every morning some of which was used to churn butter!

Annie introduced me to all the hens, ducks and geese so I took on the job of egg collector!

When we visited at Easter, there were sometimes little newborn lambs whose moms didn't make it through the birthing process. We bottle fed these in gran's kitchen, in front of the roaring turf fire.

Because I woke really early, gran asked me to collect mushrooms. So, off I went every morning with my wee basket, picking mushrooms.

She showed me which ones to avoid and so far, nobody has been poisoned! So she taught me well. We cooked them over the open fire for breakfast, along with boiled eggs and brown soda bread which gran called caiscin.

The mushroom aroma wafted upstairs and my cousins woke, hungry and we all sat around the huge wooden table and tucked in. Those were the most delicious mushrooms I have ever tasted.

Then off we all went, on our adventures.

Before my cousins arrived, and all my jobs were done, I would take my aunt's bike and cycle for miles with my wee pet, Prince, a sheepdog, always at my heels.

He was a working dog and never allowed in the house. When he heard me taking out the bicycle, he was out like a shot to join me. He followed me everywhere.

He snapped at my heels as I turned the pedals! But he never bit. He was just playing and was probably happy to have some company too!

When my cousin, Patti, arrived from Dublin, we took the bikes most days, much to the annoyance of our aunt and uncle!

At the bottom of the 'boreen' lay the gateway to Ashford. We found it just by chance and went back time and time again. We cycled through the 'forestry' for miles and came upon a clearing at the bottom of a hill. From the crest of the hill, the view was amazing. It was magical, just like a postcard, with golden fields of oats and barley and picturesque rose clad cottages and wild flower filled gardens. Soon we found ourselves in the grounds of Ashford Castle!

Wow! We didn't know that place was so near.

There were fishermen on the banks of the river, fishing for salmon, lots of tourists,

mainly 'yanks'. We weren't allowed into the Castle, of course. It was for the elite. We were a bit fearful that we would be stopped but we never were. We cycled out the gates, over the river and into Cong village.

We were so excited to get back to gran's and tell her about the magical place we had found. But of course, she knew all about it. Aunt Annie had worked there years ago when they had a spinning industry and lots of neighbours had been employed there too. Later, Uncle Joe told us about the time an American film crew made a movie there. "The Quiet Man" with John Wayne and Maureen O'Hara. He and lots of neighbours were extras in the film.

The director, Ford, spotted my aunt Annie and asked her to come to Hollywood to become an actress!! She was 19. She declined saying her parents wouldn't allow it but we learned years later that they would have let her go but, truth be told, she was just too shy. What a pity. It would have been wonderful to have had an aunt in the movies!

At harvest time, all the neighbours gathered to help. They worked all day long, for several days, bringing in the hay and cutting the oats and barley. While my mam, aunt and gran worked away in the kitchen, cooking bacon, cabbage, spuds, soda bread, apple and rhubarb tarts for all the workers. We were tasked with bringing bottles to tea and sandwiches to them, then were given the job as 'trampers'. We would trample the hay down on the huge reek of hay as it got higher and higher then we slid all the way down from the top - covered in hayseed and parched. But it was the best fun! We could actually smell the food from a field away. That was our cue to come back for dinner.

I can still see the picture in my mind:-

All the men seated around the huge, scrubbed wooden kitchen table - having 'porter' after their days' work, sweat still on their brows, all tired but chatting, laughing and joking, with a great sense of achievement. 2 huge bowls of spuds were laid in front of them, which they peeled awaiting the sweet bacon. That was back when neighbours gathered to help without being asked! No money was exchanged - just a huge willingness to help each other. It was a time of great gratitude and celebration.

When all the hay was in, and the crops harvested, they would then move on to the next neighbour's farm and do the same again for them.

Hence, the title - **A Better World?**

All too quick, summer was over and dad came to collect us. I didn't want to go back to Dublin. I loved it there so much. I cried silent tears on that dreaded, long journey home.

One day a Garda called with a telegram for my mam. Gran had passed away. It was the saddest, longest journey ever to the West of Ireland.

Gran was waked in her home for 2 days. The house was full to the rafters with family, friends and neighbours, all there to celebrate her life. Some stayed overnight as was the custom.

I feel so blessed to have had such a wonderful gran.

She took me, my sister and my 3 cousins for summer hols. 5 kids must have been quite a handful...but she never complained. Maybe she liked the company and the wee bit of help! She taught me so much and I still have her recipe for brown soda bread. My one regret is not getting to see her before she passed away and not having the chance to say 'I love you, gran', 'thank you'. And give her a big hug.

When she passed, it was the end of an era. We all missed her and those wonderful summers she gave us on the farm.

Because of Covid, I haven't had visits from my daughter and my two grandchildren. I miss them and their hugs so much.

I hope my gran would have felt the same. This wee story is in memory of her and to say 'thank you, miss you and love you'.

Mary Varley, (nee Kane) R.I.P



Colleen Davey

A Covid Story



Katie flashes into my mind yet again. There she is in her shapeless cardigan, long, heavy grey skirt, wrinkled lisle stockings and her brother's cast-off shoes. She shuffles, head down, grey and lonely. She has been dead for years, but in these strange empty days, I seem to have resurrected her ghost.

Katie was my mother's sister, but, unlike Auntie Annie, Auntie Bridie and Auntie Peggy, she was never elevated to aunthood. They were happy, fun-loving and popular. She was not. She was different and we treated her differently. She had a reputation for being anti-social and she did her best to live up to it!

As children, we were never told to be nice to Katie, that she had had a hard time. Instead we were told, "Pass no remarks on her, she's odd."

She lived with my two bachelor uncles in a rambling, unloved house on a hill in Donegal. She shared the same house, but did not share their life. She kept a 2 metre distance and more from them. She ate before or after them. She did not respond to a knock at the door, when they were away at a fair. She would watch the caller from behind a curtain and could guess why he called. It would be days later that she would casually let slip that Mickey Mac or Jimmy Boyle had been looking for them. This would have the intended result of annoying them at not being there for a neighbour, who probably needed them or the loan of something. Katie made her own entertainment. She steamed open letters, hid tools that were important and enjoyed her freedom from the normal rules of communal living.

When my mother and I came to spend the summer in Donegal, this infringed on Katie's liberty. She had to submit to having her hair cut and washed, to bathing at least once during the visit. My mother emptied the rotten food, dirty clothes and dishes from her bedroom and always discovered at least one letter addressed to the uncles, that they had never received. Naturally a row would result. Katie enjoyed a good row. It gave her scope to insult everyone and needle old wounds. My mother would finish the cleaning process by scrubbing the walls and floor of her room with disinfectant. It's not surprising that the pervading smell of Dettol and bleach present in my own home at this time summons up Katie's ghost.

Many years later, I learned why Katie was "odd". She had contracted the dreaded T.B. at fourteen years of age. That rampant epidemic wiped out families. People were shunned if they or anyone belonging to them had the disease. Neighbours had to keep

their distance. Eventually Katie was sent to a sanatorium. It was in Castlereagh, which was considered a great distance at that time, so she rarely saw anyone from her family. Years later the BCG vaccine was discovered and she was given a clean bill of health.

After her "idyllic" years in Donegal, she came to live with us. My mother had given birth to my little sister and needed help as she had to go back to work when her maternity leave was over. She hired a young girl from the village to tend to the baby and do the housework, Katie not being suitable for that duty! She was there to supervise. The girl was called Josie. She was surprised to discover the existence of Katie as she was not known in the town. Katie rarely went out and when she did, she would be muffled up in a big coat and would have a woollen scarf round her neck and covering her mouth. She did not speak to anyone and kept well away from others, sometimes even crossing the street to avoid possible contact.

Josie chatted away as she worked. Katie heard all the gossip of the town. She would encourage Josie not to work too hard, to take a break and have a cigarette. My mother had a strict criterion for a girl she was employing: she had to be a smoker! Smokers were good workers. Katie loved my little sister. She spent hours singing and talking to her, while my mother was at work. After a year we did not need a maid. Katie watched over her charge like a mother cat. She kept her safe, taught her words and rhymes that she had learnt at school. As time went on, they were great cronies and stood up for each other when necessary.

I often caught glimpses of the other Katie, the one she usually hid. Her face softened when she smiled. She had a hearty laugh. She was good to me when I was at home from school with 'flu or some other ailment. When my mother came home from work, Katie would go to her room. She would only eat her dinner by the fire, never at the table. She still steamed open letters, love letters, business correspondence and letters to my mother from her sisters. She died in Omagh hospital after a long illness, this time it was Cancer. Her sisters found it hard to believe that the nurses who cared for her loved her for her courage and wit. They did not see beyond her tough exterior and did not appreciate how hard it must have been to miss out on the joy of being a young, healthy, attractive woman and emerge from the sanatorium a bitter old maid, unwanted even by her own family.

I am a Cocooner. Last year when we were ignorant of Covid-19, I still liked the word cocoon. Caterpillars wrapped themselves in cocoons to allow their bodies undergo the wonderful transformation into butterflies. I swaddled my babies in tight blankets (frowned upon now!) so that they were safely cocooned and felt as secure as when they were in my womb. I never thought that I would be forcibly cocooned in my seventies. I don't feel secure. I know that I will not emerge from my cocoon transformed into a fairylike being with wings! Like Katie, I will be affected by my incarceration, but I hope that all the scrubbing of hands, surfaces and door-knobs will not make me shun soap and water afterwards. I hope the lack of company now will not make me avoid social contact in future.

As I sit here alone, hoping my daughter and her little son will rap at the window for a corona visit, I think of Katie, whose youth was spent waiting in a sanatorium for visitors, who rarely came.

Margaret Butterly

The Missing Rosary Beads



When lockdown came upon us, we were all thinking of what we were going to do to amuse ourselves and how we could cope with all that time in the house, but it is amazing how we have managed. Firstly, we realised there was so much cleaning and tidying we had neglected over the years and all we accumulated over time. I spent days sorting out presses and drawers, going through photo albums etc which went back over the past eighty years and more, so many lovely memories, the hours went into days, it was nice to have more time for prayer and having mass each morning on the web cam was a blessing.

Strange things happen, during lockdown it was the 10th anniversary of my husband's death, I have kept his rosary beads under my pillow since he passed away and have prayed the rosary on the beads almost every night. Coming up to his anniversary as usual I got his beads from under the pillow and began to pray the rosary, but soon after I fell asleep on the 2nd mystery, I slept well that night. The next morning, I woke at the usual time and got up. I threw back the covers to air the bed as I do each morning, got dressed and later when I went to make the bed I could not find the beads anywhere. I searched all over the bed and room, checking the pillows, under the duvet, behind the bed and the carpet but there was no sign of the rosary beads anywhere.

A few days passed and there was still no sign of the rosary beads anywhere. I had called my daughters to tell them of the missing beads and hoped the beads would appear soon. On the day after my husband's 10th anniversary my grand daughter Emma called as usual checking if I needed groceries, I told her that the rosary beads were still missing. Emma said she would go up to my bedroom and do a thorough check, she pulled the bed out, checked under the covers, and looked all over the room but she had no luck finding the beads. What Emma did find during her search was a prayer on a leaflet down the side of the bed. When I looked at the prayer that Emma found I noticed it was titled "Prayer for Our World" – having read the prayer I found it very fitting for the time we were living through.

The prayer read as follows:

*"Lord, in this time of tribulation,
Hear the prayer we offer,
For our suffering world,
May we be united in hope,
For the future destiny of our world,
That together we can strive,
To make it a better place,
Where our human family
Can live in harmony and peace,
Inspire our political leaders,
To find just solutions,
To the terrors that beset us.
Shine in our darkness like a candle,
So that in spite of all the uncertainties,
In our world today,
We may hold fast to our trust in you.
Amen"*

When I went back up to my bedroom after Emma had left to finish making my bed – to my astonishment there were the rosary beads on the top sheet of the bed. I could not believe my eyes – where had they appeared from? I rang Emma to tell her that the beads had appeared on my bed and she was in complete disbelief – she had searched the room and was certain that the beads were nowhere to be found. I was so glad that Emma had checked the bed if she hadn't I would be afraid my family would be concerned about my behaviour! To this day it remains a mystery as to where the beads were all that time.

I feel our loved ones are never far away and it was a comfort to me and always will be to have my husband's rosary beads with me while I sleep.

It was very nice to have the opportunity to share my experience while I was housebound.



Kitty Forde

Chapters of Life



A lot of us golden oldies would have lived through many chapters in our life. I was born the year after world war two ended. Thinking back I wonder was I looked at as a celebration baby or another mouth to feed as there were three small siblings before me and then three more came in quick succession after me. Things were very hard for years after that war. My brother who lives in the family home found a ration book dated 1947-1948 how anyone could feed a family on the amount allocated was hard to imagine.

The fifties brought a different kind of war tuberculosis T.B. as it was known, it was a very contagious disease similar to Covid 19 effecting the lungs and breathing taking the life of many people. My father contracted it and was hospitalised for eight months in a special hospital called a sanatorium. Very few visits were allowed. My mother only got to see him a few times as the hospital was a long distance from our home and no public transport from where we lived. A lot of the patients were nursed back to health through healthy diet and plenty of fresh air windows were left wide open in all weather, being one of the lucky ones my father returned home well again but a stranger to us till we got to know him again.

Those times must have been very hard for my mother trying to keep going with little money but a lot of people were the same at that time. Our granny reared hens and goats the milk and eggs were supplied to us. I remember eggs we got on good Friday had a black cross marked on them by granny us children thought the hens laid them with the cross on them as it was good Friday, how innocent we were. The seven of us children are all hail and hearty today cocooning in our respective homes so the goats milk and eggs must have helped.

Things move on the swinging sixties arrived with the economy picking up. Dance halls all over the country were booming with the showbands every weekend from Dickie Rock, Brendan Boyer, Eileen Reed and many more big names keeping us on our toes. We couldn't wait for the weekend to come. The hair curler were in from morning time the clothes ironed and ready for the night. Not a care in the world as we danced the nights away a lot of people emigrated to England to work during those times but I suppose we been teenagers didn't notice just living our lives and waiting for the next dance. We didn't have the technology of today to text or phone our friends the dance hall was the only place to socialise and meet them.

Another chapter of our lives came in the seventies our generation started settling down marriage children and the ups and downs that came with it. We heard of the terrible troubles in the North of Ireland which went on for a long time, peace came with a struggle and much pain. The end of the seventies brought great celebration the pope was coming to Ireland. John Paul II was visiting Ireland the first time in history a pope came to these shores. The excitement all over Ireland the preparations and expectations was everywhere. People came from far and near to see this great man some even went a second time to one of the five venues he visited. The community spirit was shown everywhere one went. People volunteering to help out anyway they could.

Ireland was changing slowly we were getting more aware of the wider world. Travel got very popular, holiday destinations such as Butlins and Blackpool lost their attractions as people started to explore Europe and America, cruising too became very much to peoples liking. "We went sailing around the Med" was often heard.

The boom years were great plenty of money going around but like all good times the recession followed. Each chapter in life brings its own story be it war or peace recession or boom. World war two must have been a terrible time waiting for bombs to drop or planes to be blown up over head, a loud war noise every where day and night affecting all parts of the globe. The Covid 19 is affecting all parts of the globe too but silently we don't know the day or night it will strike but this will end too and another chapter of life will begin.

Isobel Smyth

Behind Closed Doors

My memory was sparked by something lurking at the back of an old pine dresser standing against the wall of our garden shed. I came across it during the third week of COVID-19 lockdown having spent the first week enthusiastically house cleaning, the second week found me filling bags for charity shops (when they reopen) with unworn clothes, the result of buying on impulse while wearing rose-tinted glasses in various changing rooms.

By the third week household chores had lost their appeal, I was on my second jigsaw and third book and I moved outdoors to the garden shed. I busied myself painting flower pots cheerful colours of Mediterranean blue and sunburst orange using those handy mini sample paint pots. Planting summer bulbs was next and having found some out of date packets of wild flower seeds I scattered them around and hoped for the best. Then I stood back and surveyed the contents of the shed gathered from an earlier life when our now grown-up children were little. Plastic buckets and spades with smiling Disney characters lay in one corner alongside golf balls, footballs and tennis rackets. In another corner children's bikes and go-carts lay propped against the wall. Happy memories surfaced of sun-filled garden fun with castle construction underway in the sandpit while tall sunflowers doubled as goalposts for small, budding, soccer stars. But it was the old pine dresser that caught my attention and awakened my curiosity as to what might

lie within. I approached with caution and tentatively opened the two drawers hoping a mouse wouldn't leap out at me. Among old household bills were school reports, TV licences and dog-eared recipes. A few strips of passport photo-booth snaps lay browning and forgotten underneath the clutter.

The bottom cupboard held vases of various shapes and sizes most bearing chips and cracks. There were flowerpot holders and garden ornaments of butterflies with missing wings, leprechauns with lob-sided grins and chipped elbows. Delving deep into the back of the cupboard I pulled out a bundle wrapped in several plastic bags. Carefully discarding each layer I discovered a Bride and Groom encased in a battered clear plastic container. The bride wore white lace with a pink bow holding her short veil in place on the head of dark hair while a bouquet of flowers were clutched in her bendy pipe-cleaner arms. The groom stood tall beside her in his blue top hat and black coat tails.

The happy couple had adorned the top tier of our wedding cake forty-one years previously. Considering the time lapse and conditions of their storage Mr & Mrs looked remarkably well and brought me back to that freezing cold March day in 1979 when we celebrated our wedding day surrounded by family and friends in Dublin's Clare Manor Hotel.

Returning to the house, eager to show my discovery to my husband Joe, I carefully extracted the couple from their container and placed them on the kitchen table. The groom promptly keeled over, fell off his white plastic platform and rolled off the table onto the floor with a small thud.

'I hope that's not a bad omen,' Joe muttered.

Once retrieved, I checked him over for any damage and with his top hat straightened I proceeded to super-glue the groom's feet back onto the platform and into position beside his bride. My husband who'd been looking on with an expression of amusement quipped 'I think he has had enough of cocooning and was trying a spot of social distancing there.

'Oh well, you have to laugh don't you?



Pauline Bosch

Untitled Short Story

Cocoon. God how I hate that word. The dictionary says it is a protection certain insects spin around themselves to give them shelter while they are growing into their adult form. Maybe that is what is happening, I am growing into my adult form? Will I be a butterfly, a moth, or something more insecty when I emerge?

While I was waiting I looked at my mobile phone and it told me I had 9 more hours of daylight. I wondered what I would do.. Would I be really bold and sneak out for a little walk? Or just look out my window at empty streets? But I had seen those photos from Italy and Spain and thought NO. I will stay strangled, I mean cocooned. Pity I am not domesticated? I could be doing useful things like baking carrot cakes, knitting giant bedspreads or even doing housework! Well, I did a little bit of housework, I dusted and wiped right into corners. That was the whole house done.

What is it I am feeling? Anxiety? Not really. Fear? Not quite. I suppose the word that comes is ominous. Yes, the future is ominous. Have I felt this feeling before? Yes I remember. That was the feeling I had when I was about four years old. I remember going to bed every evening, listening to the same low droning noise in the sky. I would lie in the bed waiting, wondering what was going to happen. My Ma and Da said there was no need to worry, the German planes were getting themselves at the right angle to attack English towns. Because Ireland was neutral, we wouldn't be attacked. There was no need for me to worry at all at all.

But one night those planes did drop bombs - just a mile away from us, on the North Strand. The noise and the terror has stayed with me. That night, my Ma and Da, our new two week old brother and myself we got under the dining room table for shelter. Even today whenever I hear that low droning sound in a film or an airshow, I tense right up. That ominous feeling comes back.

Yes, I have that feeling about Covid 19. What does the future hold? What kind of future? Then I shake myself and say 'Enough.' Life goes in waves. There are waves up and waves down. You have to learn to weather both. If I get carried away too much on an up wave, I could lose the run of myself: take on too much, buy stuff I don't really need or want. You can't give in to a downwave either, talk yourself into a depression, see only doom and gloom and go around saying to yourself 'ain't it awful'. Yes, it is awful, for now.

Feck it, I will have some more chocolate.

A RETROSPECTIVE ACCOUNT OF HOW THE VIRUS AFFECTED MY MOTHER AND ME

I am a 26 year old girl now and it is the year 2045. In 2020, when I was a one-year old, a Coronavirus well-nigh ravaged the World, country after country.

Ireland, my homeland, was no exception. There were many deaths, untold suffering, pain, loss and heartbreak. Months of virtual lockdown were endured, 2m. social distancing was the norm, those who could, worked from home, and most of the remainder became unemployed. My country had to borrow heavily to help those in need, and it took many years to redress the balance. All of this has been well documented already, so today it is our own personal story I would like to tell.

I was the first and only child of my parents who were both doctors.

My father was a Frenchman, from Lille. We were living in an apartment in Ballsbridge and my father worked in a hospital further down the road. My mother had remained at home to care for me and had not worked as a doctor since my birth. When the Virus struck, she took on telephone advice work to try assuage the worries of people, particularly the elderly. She herself grew up in the Midlands, the only child of somewhat older parents who, by then not in the best of health, were living in a Nursing Home. She felt glad that they were safe, well-cared for and had the company of other residents. However, disaster struck! Her poor dear parents were both struck down with the dreaded Virus, and died within three days of one another. The funeral, of necessity, was hurried and almost private, because of the restrictions, and they were buried together. It was 17th of March 2020. I was too young to have any memory of this, or of the total anguish my poor Mam suffered. She told me my Dad had been a great source of consolation and practical advice, although he was quite worried about his own parents, in lockdown in Lille, and air travel was virtually banned.

In mid-April, our lives changed forever. My young and healthy Dad, a frontline medic, was himself confirmed as a Corona victim. He died in the Intensive Care Unit on the 8th day of his infection. Somehow, my Mam, having lost her nearest and dearest, stunned by this triple bereavement, having no job, a child to rear, living in an expensive apartment, had to make plans to survive. Somehow, she did it! She believes that it was my tiny size and my total dependence on her that gave her the strength to carry on, and to start rebuilding a life for the pair of us. She set about finding a Job and a Carer for me. The most suitable job she could find was in Connolly Hospital, Blanchardstown. She thinks she was selected mainly on her Certificates as the Interview was at a distance on a Corridor, and was mainly to ascertain when she could start. She had me in a carrycot beside her, and explained that she had to get a Carer for me first. Understanding her plight, that kind Interviewer, a Lady Manager, gave her the address of a woman she knew who might be interested, Molly Murphy. Molly, in her 50's, had lost her job due to the lockdown. Apparently, when Molly saw me in the Carrycot and heard Mam's

request, she immediately accepted the job. She came to live with us in the apartment, the best possible arrangement at the time. My Mam started work, called to an Auctioneers in her lunchtime, found a little bungalow in Castleknock, which she bought with money inherited from her parents. She gave Notice at the apartment and soon we were able to move to our new abode. Molly went back to live with her sister, who had missed her, but arrived early every morning at the bungalow. I loved her then and I still love her now!

She became the Granny figure that I never had and, in a way, looked after my Mam too, as she was forever preparing little tasty hot meals to nourish her after her day's work.

With the Virus still raging, work at the hospital was extremely heavy. All in all, I think it took the best end of a year to eradicate the Virus completely and then, bit by bit, people's ordinary days began to revert to 'normality'. People had become very resilient and worked hard to improve their lot and to re-build their lives. For me, with Mam and Molly, the time passed happily, my birthdays came and went, and remember Ages 3, 4 and 5 as happy days!

When I was 5, one day my Mam had a day off, and after a late breakfast we made plans to go grocery shopping. It was a lovely sunny morning and Mam said I could play in the garden while she showered and dressed. It was a strict rule that must not go outside the gate unless I was with an Adult, a grown-up person. I understood about traffic dangers, etc. and was not a disobedient child. My Mam was particular about obedience, as her own parents had been. She also liked me to try to be confident, as she said it had helped her going through life. Her father used to encourage her in confidence building... he had an old saying: "If you behave like a sheep, the wolves might eat you". We called it our "confidence thing" and it was something special between Mam and me. Anyway, that day playing in the sunshine and keeping clear of the gate, I peeped through the hedge into the big back garden next door. Everything looked so inviting - the grass, the flowers, the trees and there was a pond, which I guessed might have fish. I thought it would be fun to get in there and have a better look, so I slipped through the hedge very easily. While admiring the flowers, I heard great cheering coming from over the end wall. I was excited by this, and in a flash I was up the nearest tree, straining to be part of the fun. It was a group of boys in shorts and coloured shirts running with a big ball and throwing it to one another. The cheering got louder, and perhaps I moved carelessly, but next thing was I was falling, falling down onto the grass. Not hurt, but feeling foolish and embarrassed, I sat upright and looked around... straight onto very shiny shoes and long trouser legs and, looking higher, I saw a man looking shocked, surprised, even a little angry. I almost burst into tears, but thought in time of the "confidence thing" ... so instead, I managed to apologise for frightening him, for being in his garden and for following the cheering up his tree. He said "How did you outwit the gate alarm?" Not quite understanding that, I said I had come through that hedge and would leave now. He seemed to think it was funny after all, and said the boys were Castleknock College lads playing Rugby, and he had thought that I was a Tree Nymph. I stood up to leave and he said "No, I'm taking you home"! He wanted to explain that he had not enticed me into his garden! I said nothing, but worried about what my Mam would have to say. He took my hand, pressed a button and the big gate opened, and closed once we stepped outside. I turned to our gate which he opened and I said Rule No. 1, Close the Gate! He did. Our hall door was slightly open, and when he knocked, my Mam came running in an agitated

state - she had missed me out of the garden and was searching the house when she heard the knock. She opened her mouth to speak, but no words came...she looked from him to me and back up to him. I could see that she was upset and shocked. I guess that she then had to call upon her own 'confidence thing' to thank this gentleman, whose name was Brian, for bringing me home, and she offered him a cup of coffee. He said that would be too much trouble and only accepted when she said she badly needed one herself! That was the beginning of a wonderful friendship, which in time blossomed into love and a year later, when I was 6 years of age, I was Flower Girl at their wedding! We moved into Brian's house and are living there since.

I am so proud to call Brian my Dad. I have had a wonderful life...he continued to call me his Tree Nymph, shortened over the years to Treeny (TreeNy)... I'm Treeny to everyone now! My Mam has enjoyed Brian's loving support in every aspect of her life, and his invaluable help in my upbringing.

He has been my Mentor and my Rock of Wisdom. He got a bicycle for me and taught me to cycle; got swimming lessons so that I could become a safe swimmer; bought a car for me and Driving Lessons until I passed my Test. Year after year he fetched me from Matches, School Concerts and from friends' houses without complaint. For me, Dad was always there, obliging and caring. Above all, he fostered in me a love of Science, his area, and was overjoyed when I followed that discipline in UCD and got a M.Sc. last Summer. I am now working for a PhD at College. I still live at home with my parents and am happy to do that for the time being. Life is wonderful.

He was there for me at every event
Always averred 'twas pleasure-spent!
School Concerts, Debs or Graduation ...
He stood with Mam in admiration!

My life has been good, as you can see
Brian has protected my Mam and me.
He jokes she's his Heir, and I'm the Spare
But for me, that tree deserves a share!



Molly now lives in our bungalow as it is safer for her, in her late 70's now, no stairs to climb, and where my Man can keep an eye on her health. She drops in to us whenever she feels like it, and comes to dinner once or twice a week.

It seems to me that I found both a loving Granny and a loving Dad and I am so grateful for that. Unfortunately, not all stories from 2020 have such a happy ending.



Teresa McKeown

A Summer to Remember

As a child growing up in the countryside, I was very fond of outdoor life. We had a small farm, Daddy and mammy had to work very hard to make a living. My mammy used to make a big pot of porridge at night. They used to get up about six o'clock in the morning, they would have a big breakfast as they had to milk the cows by hand. Those days, there was no machines. It was very hard work. Then my sister would have to get us up and heat up our porridge, I used to take the cream from the top of the can and put it in mine, it tasted lovely. It was much better then.

My big sister would help to get us ready for school. Mammy would have our clothes ready the night before. Daddy would polish our shoes. We would be washed by the Aga cooker, as it was the only heating we had at that time. We had our share of work to do before we went to school, like going out to count the sheep, and getting the eggs in and washed, we used to fight with each other, if we got the dirty jobs all the time. We had a long walk, over two miles, to go to school, if it was raining we would sometimes get a lift from our grandad.

I wasn't a bright girl by no means, my sisters and brothers would buy and sell me, but I tried my best. My sister and I used to try to do our homework in my friend's house before we would go home from school, we had so much to do after our dinner. I would get my woollies on and help my daddy on the land. It was great when the weather was good. My dad would be shearing the sheep.

One morning I went to dip the sheep with dad, I brought my rag doll, daddy said that was fine. I let my dad go in before me. I put my doll in to have a dip, and then I was unable to get her out, so I got in myself. My mammy came out to see what was keeping me, the two of us were in the tub, and I had a good telling off. My dad blamed himself, I had to have a bath around the Aga cooker. I got my dinner then and mammy was very good and made up my doll for me.

I loved my parents very much. They were so good to us and gave us a happy childhood. I will never forget them. I would never say no to them ever no matter what they asked me to do, I was always there for them, now that they have passed away. I have no regrets

Betty Reddy

A Day in the Life of Covid 19



If I had of been told three months ago that I would have to stay at home and not be allowed out for weeks on end I would have said no way.

Three months later and that's exactly what I have done. I am a person who likes to be on the move. When I first heard that's 70's plus would have to cocoon I said oh God Help Them and then I realised they were talking about me. How was I going to do this stay at home and not even get a walk and then I thought wait a minute we are at war here; we are fighting a serious killer of people. If this were world war 1 or 2 we would have to fight in trenches use guns and bombs and all we have to do is stay at home.

So, I did I followed the rules to the letter I thought I would lose my mind running round my garden every day.

But then I thought of the Doctors Nurses Front Line Staff Cleaners Porters who keep our hospitals operative. I thought of the workers manning the shops and essential services to keep our country running. I thought of the people who had lost loved ones and were not able to be with them at the end. I thought of the people suffering with Covid. I thought that by following the guidelines I would be saving lives.

When we were told we could get out for a walk I felt I had won the lotto to be able to walk in our park listen to the birds see the trees and feel free.

We are still cocooning seeing our sons through the window talking to grandchildren on facetime no hugs no kisses but keeping everyone safe.

I am becoming accustomed to having my shopping done, to sitting in the garden reading my book and relaxing. No pressure to have to do things. Don't get me wrong I miss my golf my bridge my friends but to have this quiet time has been greatly beneficial. I think I found another side to myself and to my surprise discovered I don't have to keep on the move, I don't have to be doing things to be happy.

I am very happy to be sitting here with my beloved husband and our Downes Syndrome son. I can't wait to get back to my life, but I have learned a lot about myself in this time of lock down.

I don't know how long this covid 19 will linger and if they will find a vaccine I certainly hope so. I think when we look back at the terrible time of covid we will see that some good came out of it.

During this time we have to think of others and put ourselves last, we have stood out on our paths when a neighbour had died, we have shared our books our garden equipment our hints and tips with our neighbours. We have smiled and waved and stuck our heads out of windows to say hello.

I hope we never have another covid but having this one has proven to me what a wonderful people the Irish are and how we care for each other.

When we get the all clear we will be able to celebrate together and know we did all we could to help keep ourselves and others safe.



Breda Horneck-Gallagher

The Blue Coat

Bought in January for a very special occasion, the Blue Coat made a superb entrance to the fashion world of 2020. Alas, since then the emergence of Covid 19 put paid to formal, even informal gatherings where the Blue Coat might have expected to shine again. Instead, it spent its days and nights languishing in the back of my wardrobe. --Until yesterday!

I opened my wardrobe door, and reached in for my old jacket, preparing to go for my morning walk, round and round the garden, when to my astonishment, the Blue Coat spoke out.

"I need air", she said. "It is claustrophobic in here. I need OUT". Wow, was I surprised. I carefully dressed up in the beautiful Blue Coat and headed out to the back garden. What surprises were in store!

First, the very mannerly Hydrangea spoke out. "Good morning Mrs.G. I like the coat. In a month or so I too will be sporting my new coat"!

In a state of some shock, I headed down the garden, when I noticed the shy Primroses smiling gently up at me. "Very nice indeed, Mrs. G."

Next, the bold and proliferous Grape Hyacinth, heads together, nodded and said.

“Nice colour, but not as nice a shade as Our Blue”.

At the bottom of the garden the Apple Trees thrust out their budding branches, but, too busy producing, had nothing to say. Beside them, the wonderful Pear Trees thrust up and out their laden branches, so beautiful with their foamy white blossom. I bowed to their beauty.

Here, around me, on the ground, were the remains of the daffodils. Recently, their yellow and white heads made for a feast of colour under the trees. They will come again next year. Will I?

As I passed the Tulips, so frail and delicately coloured, they smiled at me, and in a pert voice said, “Pretty coat, but too heavy for this weather.”

Lastly, I came to my Donegal friends, Manus and Fergie Fuschia. Brought from their nursery in Creeslough while still very young, they pined for their home in Donegal. But with kindness and cosseting they are settling down, and beginning to return our love. Already standing tall and showing some beautiful red buds, they looked at me, and in unison chanted:

Ta an cota go h-Alain a Breda. Go Maire tu slan.

What a walk! Thank you Now, where to hang a Coat that speaks? Too claustrophobic in the wardrobe, and surely the cloakroom with its old anoraks and smelly boots would not suit my sophisticated, new-found friend. “This coat needs company”, I thought. And then I settled on the hall-stand in the glassed-in front porch.

--Here she is hanging, locked in for safety, but on view to the little ones who walk past each morning with their Mamas and Dadas. My Blue Coat now knows their names and calls out to them as they pass,--glad to briefly relieve the tedium of Cocooning for pressurised parents, and happy to see the smiles of the children.

Thank you, Blue Coat



Anne Lowndes Lawler

My Fluffy Fashion Folly of the Fifties

May 2020: Cocooning in the Coronavirus Pandemic: -I have kept busy during this worrying time and somehow enjoyed the freedom of life without pressure, doing all the things I love; gardening, baking and knitting (using up lots of accumulated wool) AND, re-awakening a memory of my knitting days way back when the world and I were young..... The Year 1953!

As an eighteen year old at the time, bleak memories of war deprivation were fading and a world of stylish fashion was opening up. With no television or visual access except the cinema, women’s magazines kept us up to date on the fashion, film and celebrity world and gave us a glimpse into the life and glamour of Hollywood stars, some of whom we tried to emulate,

In vogue that summer were full skirts worn with elastic ‘waspie’ waist bands and dainty broderie anglaise camisole tops; gingham or floral patterned sleeveless dresses with full skirts, pastel-coloured lightweight duster coats for evenings, worn with flat ballet-type shoes and white gloves, which were the essence of chic at the time.

In autumn and winter the fashion was loose flowing coats over pencil-slim skirts with high-heeled shoes of a height that was comfortable and sensible, unlike the vertiginous shoe heights of to-day’s modern sophisticated young ladies

The wooden sandwich notice board outside Savage’s Shop in Swords where I worked, displayed the headline page of **The Irish Press** on one side and the cover of the **‘Woman’s Realm’** on the other with a picture of a model wearing a short-sleeved angora jumper, the pattern for which was free with the magazine. She was shown wearing it with a pencil slim tweed skirt as she posed seductively against a moss-covered tree in a sylvan wood setting. A must-have for me I thought, as I bought the magazine, dug out my knitting needles and balanced the meagre budget of a Shop Assistant cum Secretary-in-waiting.

In a bunch of local teenagers driven by a lack of money, we were very innovative and shared ideas. As a result of this, I was already half way to being right up to speed in the fashion stakes with the latest fad at that time; a circular Felt skirt made from a couple of yards of felt which, when folded in four, was measured against the waist a 24 inch was a measurement of 6 inches across the folded peak which was then cut for the waistband. The required length of skirt was marked at the other end of the fold and cut to make the circle for the bottom, no hem necessary. An opening was made and a button sewn on for the waist opening. No sewing skills were needed which is why everyone seemed to have a felt skirt at the time. Bits of coloured felt were swapped for making into stars, crescent moons and circles which were then applied to the skirt with glue or, depending on how skilled the maker was, fancy wool and fancy stitches.

The skirt was crease-resistant, flowing and a veritable work of art, synonymous with the style and ingenuity of 1950’s teenagers.

For me a lot of scrimping went into buying the expensive angora wool but buying ball by ball as needed, from Taylor's Drapery in Swords made it seem a little less of a strain on the purse strings. (I was earning £2.10 shillings a week at the time). With a kaleidoscope of colours to choose from, I chose lilac; perfect with my masterpiece navy felt skirt I thought.

As I set up the stitches for the jumper, floating bits of fluff like thistledown on a breezy day, were filling the air. Sneezing was also part of the suffering for my craft and when the wool kept sticking to my face, I blamed it on the Pond's Cold Cream that was part of our skin regimen at the time. In the ordinary scheme of things, this should have set off alarm bells in my teenage brain, but with the stubbornness of youth, I kept knitting until the jumper was ready, to complete the very 1950's haute couture outfit; one circular swinging felt skirt and one angora short-sleeved jumper.

The following Friday I was ready in my homemade ensemble to go with my friends to a dance in Red Island, Skerries. The fabulous Clipper Carlton Showband from Strabane was playing. The boys in the band were legendary for their versatility in recreating the popular Glenn Miller sound with talented singers imitating Frank Sinatra, Nat King Cole, Perry Como, Johnny Ray and other singing sensations of that era.

A special bus left Swords (outside Savage's Shop) at around 9 p.m. which, when the dance was over, would take us back at about 2.30 a.m. The fare was included in the price of the dance ticket and so we were able to follow our favourite showbands to wherever they were playing: The Palladium in Rush, the Holmpatrick in Skerries, Rolestown, even as far as Drogheda, in a gang of exuberant teenagers. On arrival back at Savage's Shop in the wee small hours of the morning we'd roll up the street laughing, singing, dancing merrily and, soberly; no drink at dances in those innocent, carefree days.

Like in church at that time, there was segregation in the dance halls, men sat on one side and girls along the wall opposite who had to wait until they were asked up to dance; the 'talent' of course being eyed and assessed from both sides of the floor. The musical brilliance of The Clipper Carlton Band had us enchanted as we jitterbugged and caroused to the scintillating American inspired music. All went well for me as I danced around with different fellows while my felt skirt swung to the rhythm of the music as intended, **but**, I was baked in the bloody angora jumper.

Soon there was a distinctive lull in partners asking me up on the floor. As I sat out the next few dances watching, waiting and hoping somebody would take pity on me, I suddenly realised that I was, the dread of any dancing occasion, **wallflower of the night**, in lilac! The reason for my leper status soon dawned when I noticed that every fellow I had danced with was covered with the flighty, fluffy angora wool; on shoulders, front, back and anywhere else it could have stuck and like a plague, had infected anyone in dark clothes that **they** had got close to. If only I could have floated away like the flecks of goat's wool that had wrecked my night, my life, and maybe my future, as my friends laughingly wondered how many '**Mister Rights**' had escaped that night.

The angora jumper fashion never caught on and mine was a fleeting whim that later became luxury bedding for our cat, as she snugly dreamt with loud purrs that she had reached her feline Nirvana, on wispy clouds of lilac coloured fluffy Angora wool.

When relating the story years later, somebody suggested that if I had put the wool in the freezer it would have stopped the fluff flying around. Apart from the mind-boggling concept of this, what I hadn't the heart to tell them was, that way back then we didn't even have a fridge never mind a freezer! A box covered with mesh on a table in the scullery held all perishable stuff prior to fridge-freezer luxury that wasn't even dreamt of at the time - not in our house anyway.

With hindsight, it would have been a great help if the magazine had issued a 'Fluff' or 'future life' alert when they promoted the beautiful model sensibly wearing the angora jumper with a tweed skirt, obviously chosen as a camouflage for the floating angora fluff from the jumper! No wonder they had to photograph her in the middle of a wood - as far away from all human contact as possible! If only I had been so remote and...so lucky, when I debuted in my feathery, floating fluffy angora jumper all those years ago!

The '**Mister Right**' conundrum of my friends was solved on Sunday December 13 that year in the Church Hall, Donabate. Dressed in a magenta-coloured taffeta dress with full flowing skirt, in very comfortable flat ballet shoes and dancing to the music of the popular local 'Del Rio Band': (the tiniest details of such a fateful encounter embossed on the memory!) I met my future husband, making the year 1953, apart from my fluffy faux pas, the most memorable year of my life and, the rest they say, is... 'History'!



Patricia Kelly

My Time to Reflect

Are you cocooning has become a familiar greeting from passers by as they call out.

“Are you O.K.?”

Stay safe.”

The friendly Gardai ensure that we meet the legal conditions of the time.

These weeks of isolation and cocooning brings to mind the Great War when we lived in London. Times were hard, there was very little work and food was rationed. Many buildings were blown up. In most gardens there were Air Raid “Anderson Shelters” and this would remain a grim reminder of the war, people were in dire straits. The holding of street parties was the release of tension built up during the war years. My father installed the necessary music playing apparatus for the event.

Vera Lynn’s song “We’ll meet again” was the favourite anthem of the day. During this time of cocooning I have continued my hobby of gardening, I look forward to the wildflower seeds that I set in April. Produced a photo collection of the family tree, and pictures of Lusk “past and present” also history notes of people that I have met from near and a far, as key holder for many years (28) to the famous Lusk Towers (Lusk Heritage Centre).

I have kept in touch with family and friends home and abroad by letter writing, telephone calls and skype, plus reading and contributing to the Lusk Heritage Groups website.

Its striking how good humoured people are at this stressful time and are most willing to help.

Our thanks to the many people who have entertained us over the weeks. The dancing Gardai and his many dance moves, the Bingo games, the delightful opera singers and many children who have fundraised for charities in keeping peoples spirits high.

It is heart-breaking in this period that we have lost so many of our people despite the best efforts of the nurses and doctors and frontline team of the hospitals. These truly are our heroes and so courageous.

Together we will get through this.

Stay Safe!



Angela De-La-Mere

Talking to Yourself

Alice worked at a clothing factory as a machinist she loved her job. She was engaged to Edward, (Teddy) to his friends. They were saving for their wedding and making a home, the war was not over very long (Second War) so it was difficult getting back to normal. It was a nice place to work, Alice got on very well with her workmates plus it was not too far from her home she walked every day and always enjoyed it.

The manager of the clothing company was always a little sharp with Alice and she could not understand it as she always did a very good days work, if there was overtime she would do it because she needed the money. It was very annoying for Alice and made her uncomfortable, Peter Brady not liking her was a mystery, she tried to avoid him as much as possible and just do her work.

Alice was a beautiful girl, she was five feet two had beautiful blue eyes, the blackest curly hair you had ever seen and really lovely snow white teeth. Teddy was very proud of her he thought he was the luckiest man alive, that someone like Alice could love him, she was only 18 years old he was 5 years older he thought Alice might think he was too old for her, but that was not the case she really loved Teddy.

One day while Alice was working, one of the girls asked her a question about a piece of material, Alice explained to Grace the best way to sew the material, now while this was going on, Peter Brady had been watching them he came over to Alice and told her she was sacked, Alice was stunned she asked why, she was told just to get her things and go. She was very upset and could not understand the reason why. Trying for another job was going to be very hard things were not quite normal as of yet. The thought of not having money to save for their wedding was a horrible thought for Alice.

Teddy was very angry and told Alice he was going to see about this, it cannot be right doing this for no reason. Alice pleaded with Teddy not to interfere she would sort it out herself. It was the following Friday, Alice went up to the factory for her cards and wages owed to her when she met the owner of the company he had always thought she was a very attractive girl and a very good worker.

Mr Kavanagh asked Alice was she sick or on a day off she told him what had happened she told him she was sacked for talking, Mr Kavanagh asked her was she talking to herself Alice said certainly not, so Mr Kavanagh said where is the girl who was sacked with you she said only herself had been sacked, his face got very red he looked so angry Alice could not believe it she did not know what was going to happen next. They quickly went to the factory to confront Peter Brady.

It seems he had an eye for Alice but she loved only Teddy. She did not know this so it was quite a revelation. Peter was angry because he knew there was no one else for her so he thought this was a way of getting back at her. Mr Kavanagh was so angry he was going to sack Peter, Alice said if she got an apology from him it would be okay as it would be hard getting a job the way things were after the war.

He was suspended for two weeks and given a warning. Alice was reinstated with an increase in her pay and a months wages to make up for her lost wages. Peter Brady never bothered Alice again, she married Edward they had four lovely children. This is a true story. Some names have been changed but not Teddy's or Alice's. Alice died aged 33 it broke Teddy's heart, if he had not had the children he would have really crumbled. He looked after them very very well he died aged 52. It was okay tough he was with his Alice again. They were great people my parents. This was told to me by my Dad years after my Mum died.

This happened in 1943.



Kathleen McEvoy

A Special Event that Happened while I was Cocooning during Covid-19

Covid-19, which escalated in Ireland in the middle of March, had a devastating effect on people's lives. The announcement of the closure of all schools on 12th March 2020 was a frightening realisation of the extent of the problem. People started panic buying and became very nervous. Video footage of events in Italy & other countries left us all terrified. Two weeks later An Taoiseach announced that the over 70s must cocoon – no more walks or shopping. It was difficult to grasp but I understand that it was essential for our safety and to help flatten the curve.

My daughter was kindly doing all our shopping and I got into a routine of circling the garden 20 times a day leaving a pebble on a windowsill each time I completed a lap. My independence was gone but a special bonus for me was that as I reached the garden gate with each lap I could spy on my grandson Sam aged 6 and 2-year-old twins Darragh & Niamh when they were out playing in their garden. I could enjoy watching & listening to them through a cracks in our adjoining gate. They were having such fun unaware of my spying eyes and I was having even more stolen fun watching them.

Life had changed so much and numerous special events for the citizens of Ireland had to be put on hold or celebrated in a different way. One such event was my daughter **Aileen's 40th Birthday** – we had to make a plan and try to make it memorable for her. Her husband Keith came up with the brain wave of inviting all her friends to send video greetings which he compiled and presented to her on the day. It was so exciting for the 10 days beforehand as the presentations/videos arrived to the what's app group. They were so professional and her friends seemed to be having great fun making all the videos. They got better by the day and we were certainly in party mood when the big day arrived.

Our only option of celebrating this very special occasion apart from a delivery of a bouquet of flowers on the day was a **Zoom Party**. Her sister Aoife who was the delegated party planner purchased and sent us all out party hats, which we wore on the day and the 40th balloons were visible on all our screens. She also had to purchase a 40th birthday card for me to deliver to Aileen. I planned the cake and treats with her son Sam as we chatted over the garden wall while he bounced on his trampoline. A Coffee cake, top hats, rice crispy buns, fairy cakes was the agreed menu. I would make the cakes and treats and leave at the garden gate for Keith to collect while Aileen was out for her usual walk.

It was a very special magical 40th Birthday for Aileen on 18th April - listening to all her wonderful video greetings followed by our family party. Birthday candles were blown out to our singing Happy Birthday 🎵🎵🎵🎵 and each household had treats, the same hats and 40th balloons. Her nieces Emilia & Emma in Raheny had great fun by inventing a new way of wearing the party hats. They were piled on heads in different ways and various hat creations were invented. Sam followed their lead and also had great fun with the party hats trying a few together at different angles. Thank you to Oliver, Aoife, David, Stefania, Emilia, Emma, Keith, Sam, Darragh, Niamh and all her wonderful family and friends for making it such a memorable special event with a difference during Covid-19. A special slice of birthday cake was reserved in the freezer for Aoife for her next visit home to Skerries.

There has been so much death, hurt and pain from this pandemic and my heart goes out to all the families who have lost a loved one or been affected in any way. Our cocooning was nothing in comparison with all the tragedies and suffering of so many. It was so exciting to get out of my cocoon on 5th May 2020 and back to walking and 2 weeks later back to grocery shopping. My freedom was restored and I am alive. I am happy that I played my part and have the very happy memories of that very special 40th Birthday for Aileen during Covid-19 lock down.

Bridie O'Reilly

A Memory Triggered by Covid 19

Mammy carried me upstairs to bed. I should have been well able to walk upstairs by myself, but my mother knew I did not have the energy. Granny came behind with the lighted oil lamp, lighting our way and causing our silhouettes to make giant shadows on the walls.

‘You will be sleeping in here from now on, child’ granny said.

We were in the back bedroom. I looked around the room at the large, dark oak wardrobe and the big double bed.

The wallpaper was pink with tiny blue flowers, pretty, but so unlike my bright, cheerful yellow wallpaper with white daisies. The front bedroom was visible through the open, adjoining door and I could see the corner of the room where my small single bed used to be. It had been replaced by a big old-fashioned armchair, an heirloom. That same armchair had been moved around the house so many times, unwanted, and unloved. Now it proudly took up space that used to be mine. I felt terribly upset about this change. I had grown attached to my own little bed and my few belongings. However, I could now cuddle up beside my mother and feel safe. I was home, surrounded by people who loved me more than life itself. I had returned – a shell of my former self.

My mother had collected me earlier that day from Cork Street Fever Hospital. I could tell she was concerned that I was still very weak.

‘Is my child alright? My mother asked the nurse who was helping me on with my new coat.

‘She will be weak for a while; she needs plenty of rest’ the nurse replied.

Cocooning in 2020, as a result of Covid 19, has reminded me of a time of isolation and fear. Scarlet Fever was one of those epidemics that claimed many lives in the 20th century. I almost died. I had been in hospital for one month. The hospital was run with military precision. No visitors were allowed. The door to the Top Recovery Ward that I was in with 21 other children was kept locked. Only the nurses entered with an occasional visit from Matron. Parcels of sweets and comics were delivered to the ward every weekday at 11am but we never got to see who brought these welcome gifts.

Each patient was given a number on admission. Next of kin were given this number. The only way the parents or guardians could find out how their child was progressing was to buy *The Evening Herald* every day. The Herald reported on the condition of each patient through this numerical system. The list was usually on page 2 or 3 of the daily paper. People scanned this list for news of their loved one. There was no other way of getting vital information. It was all very clinical and impersonal in a deeply personal and emotional situation. If a number was missing from the report it meant that the patient had died. In this sad situation the family were informed by Telegram. Access to the deceased to say a final farewell was denied for fear of infection. The hospital arranged the burial. Parents had no say in the matter.

Years later, I discovered that my bed and bedclothes had been removed by the Authorities and burned. Everything I had touched was gone. My copy book from school, my schoolbag, all of my clothes. Gone. The Avenue had been newly painted with a lime based whitewash to stave off infection. Scarlet Fever was a deadly disease but

I was due to make my First Holy Communion the following Saturday. That seemed unlikely now. I was not well enough to return to school and I had missed a whole month of Catechism. However, on Monday morning one of the ‘big’ girls from sixth class was sent to our house.

‘The Head Teacher, Miss Lynch has made arrangements for Maire Ni Fearghail (my birth name as Gaeilge) to get private lessons for her First Holy Communion. I’ve to bring her to the Chapel at eleven o’clock today and every day for the rest of the week’.

Granny was flustered. I had never seen her so happy. Although I was washed and dressed, she scrubbed my face again, rearranged the ribbons in my hair and sent me off at 11am in my Sunday best.

‘Wait till your mother hears this, she will be really pleased’

This tuition was given by one of the Nuns in the nearby Sisters of Charity Convent. On Friday, the Priest showed me how to receive Holy Communion and he heard my first confession. The Nun came into the confession box with me so that I would not be frightened. The following day, the day of my First Holy Communion, Nuns from the Convent, including the Nun who had tutored me, stood in formation outside the Church after the ceremony in their long black robes and snow-white medieval headdresses. It was an unusual, stunningly beautiful sight as a backdrop to the dozens of little girls in gorgeous white Communion dresses and veils, synonymous with the day that was in it. It was a vision of sacredness and loveliness. The whole Parish looked on. I know that the presence of the Nuns in formation like this outside ‘Larrie’s’ as the locals called their Church, was very unusual because the Nuns were not involved in our school or in our lives in any way.

As families gathered outside the Church afterwards, I was, once again, singled out for special treatment. Miss Lynch took me by the hand and introduced me to the line of nuns. Each Nun put money in my white laced ‘mother of pearl’ beaded string bag.

Miss Lynch sought Mammy’s permission to take me to a special breakfast and Mammy agreed without hesitation. Nuns and Priests were held in high esteem and were above reproach. Revered.

I found myself in opulent surroundings in one of the ‘big’ houses with Miss Lynch and two of the nuns. I did not know the family, but they seemed very nice and were very kind to me that day, filling me with lots of cakes and biscuits and sandwiches and lemonade.

‘Have some blancmange, child’ the lady of the house said.

The events of that day were significant in terms of the actions of the Nuns. Until that day they did not know me. There was an overwhelming surge of affection shown to me at that time that was unprecedented.

Shortly afterwards we went on a family holiday to the Dublin Mountains, Mammy, Granny my cousin Christina and me. We stayed in a converted bus in the middle of a field. Stray cattle from a neighbouring field occasionally wandered over to us.

‘This must be their field’ said granny.

Two of my aunts and a big gang of cousins joined us for a day. We went in search of a lake that my Mother had heard about. The older boys were so excited, running ahead and jumping with joy. They were already swimming and splashing about in the lake by the time the rest of us caught up. We were a noisy lot, shouting and screaming with delight, our city voices echoing in the serene rural stillness, unaccustomed as we were to the quiet sedentary countryside.

An irate woman came running down the hill towards us, brandishing a big stick. She was shouting abuse at us as she waved the stick in the air. She frightened the life out of us children.

‘Go back to where you came from’ she roared.

My mother, a gentle, kind woman with a heart of gold approached the woman and told her that we had been given permission to swim in the lake whenever we wanted during our two weeks stay. On hearing the name of the person who had given permission the woman’s attitude softened. Rather than humiliate her further, my mother chatted to the woman for a while. It worked a treat with the result the woman suggested sending her own children down to the lake to play with us. By now though, her unprovoked attack and all the ranting and raving had taken the good out of the experience for us. We left. We made our own fun rolling down the hillside. We chased each other through the hedges and the long grass. The boys went off to explore and forage. They came across a large brown cardboard box. They flatted the box and made a slide. We queued up for a turn to slide down the grassy hill. It was great fun. The fresh air had done wonders for us all.



Frank & Paula Prendergast

Rough Guide to Rockabill

The offer of a weekend for two on an offshore island was the nearest we had come to a free holiday. This was partly as a result of our involvement in the Fingal Branch of BirdWatch Ireland (BWI) winter census counts on the nearby Rogerstown Estuary. ‘Bring food and bedding, have a shower before you depart, and wrap everything in plastic bags for transit to the island’, the Branch Secretary of BirdWatch Ireland advised. We were heading to Rockabill Island as volunteer wardens to assist the professionals in the now highly successful Roseate Tern Conservation Project jointly administered by BirdWatch Ireland and National Parks & Wildlife Service (NPWS). Fulltime wardens are given shore leave during their twelve-week stay, hence our presence as part of the Branch’s volunteer relief programme.

Rockabill consists of two small granite islands, 7 km off the coast of Skerries. Access then was provided by local lobster fisherman Johnny Fanning, skipper of the Kingfisher, assisted by his nephew Anthony. We left Skerries harbour on a Friday in July 1995 to relieve the wardens due for shore leave. Interestingly, Norman Radcliffe, research officer from the RSPB would be returning to shore, having completed a fortnight of project evaluation for that organisation. Also on board the Kingfisher were Emma Brindley, another research officer with RSPB and her husband Steve, both of whom were scheduled to spend a week on project evaluation and assist with ringing newly fledged birds. This task is vital for census and migration research; in autumn, all species of terns, Roseates included, spend the winter months in West Africa. At the time of writing this article, BWI has just revealed that a Roseate Tern ringed on Rockabill during the 2018 nesting season and fitted with a geo-locator, migrated to Ghana but then travelled across the Atlantic Ocean on July 13th, 2020. It was found exhausted near the runway of Bermuda Airport—an unscheduled landing!

Rockabill Lighthouse was manned by Irish Lights staff until 1989, after which BWI staff began the current project to protect and conserve the terns on the vacated island. The Roseate Tern was then Europe’s rarest and most endangered tern. From a baseline of just 180 pairs in 1989 to 1642 pairs in 2018, the Rock now has the largest European breeding colony for this species. Breeding pairs are now seeding new colonies around Britain, so a fantastic conservation success. The island also accommodates nesting Common Terns (2039 pairs), Arctic Terns (59 pairs), numerous Kittiwakes and Black Guillemots (2018 data).

The combination of wardening and habitat management has proved enormously successful. Grade A accommodation in a safe and secure environment is guaranteed for the returning birds. Their rudimentary nests are constructed under the umbrella-like cover of the numerous Tree Mallow (*Malva arborea* or *Lavatera arborea*) dispersed across the island. With the exponential growth in bird numbers, hundreds of artificial nest boxes are now deployed by the wardens on open ground, all made and donated annually by the pupils of Balbriggan Community College.

The survival guide for our weekend as relief wardens advised:

- o wearing a soft hat lined with crumpled paper to protect the head against tern attack;
- o walking with eyes down to avoid crushing the numerous well-camouflaged eggs;
- o minimise disturbance;
- o suffer the aerial whitewashing inflicted from above;
- o bring a 'bottle' to soften the hardness of two nights on the floor!

Limited human intervention is a vital and necessary part of this impressive project. Scientific activities (biometrics) include egg and chick weight and size monitoring, feeding surveys, ring reading of adult birds and ringing of young chicks. Much of this survey work is undertaken with the aid of telescopes, observing from one of several nearby secluded hides. The island is off-limits to the general public during the nesting season. Any casual visitor arriving by private boat is only too keen to comply with this rule, once made aware of the project. Unintended disturbance could cause havoc by allowing predating Great Black Backed Gulls in particular to destroy eggs and chicks.

Departing Rockabill on the following Monday, the landing party arriving on the Kingfisher included John Coveney (BWI Conservation Officer) and the late Oscar Mere (Research Officer with NPWS), both key members of the project management team. Interestingly, the party also included a film crew under the direction of Éamon de Buítléar, the renowned naturalist and TV presenter. For us, the weekend was an opportunity to assist this major project in a small way and to experience conservation at the front line!

Now, being 2020, the term 'Front-Line' has a new and different meaning. Finding ourselves on the wrong size of 70 meant being in lock-down for a number of weeks, coinciding with the return of the Roseate Terns. Like others, we had to dig mentally-deep to adjust to confinement, unlike the free-flying terns visible from our house. But the memories of that weekend on the Rock and the knowledge that this magnificent project will endure, was/is a sustaining thought.

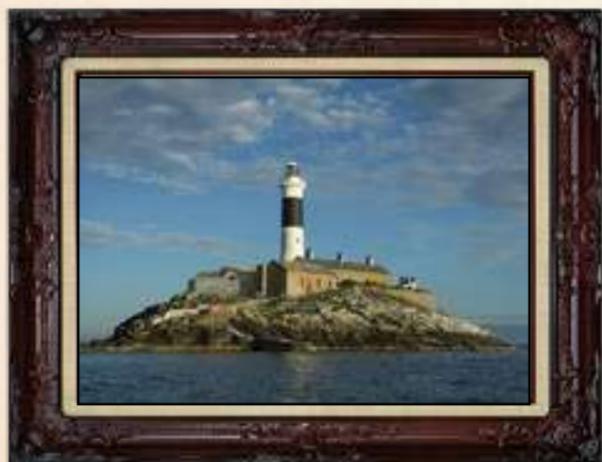


Photo by Dick Coombes



Nancy Dempsey

The Past and the Present

This weather will go down in history I muttered to myself, as I trudged my way through slush from my home in the Burrow on my way to work in the City. It has been snowing heavily and constantly for several days. Now it is a blinding blizzard

It is February the first 1947, but it looks and feels like the middle of Winter. I am looking forward to celebrating my 21st birthday on the 8th. If this weather continues nobody will come to it!

So far, I have been lucky to get a connecting bus from Portrane Hospital Gates to Donabate Station then to the City by train. Railway workers are valiantly trying to remove frozen snow from the tracks in order to keep the trains moving.

In the City, buses are sliding drunkenly towards the stops to avoid sharp braking. The waiting passengers are standing back in case the bus would lose control and mount the pavement.

I have decided to walk.

I am dressed for the weather in my see-through overboots and hooded coat.

These are in the latest modern style, and very practical. They are sold in the department store where I work. My far-seeing boss had taken a delivery of them earlier in anticipation of bad weather. All the staff bought them because we were allowed staff discount.

I knew I was going to be late for work this morning and that could mean trouble. Surely my boss would understand how difficult it was in this weather for staff to be on time.

He didn't have to worry for himself as he could drive his Hillman Minx right up to the door.

Would I be instantly dismissed I wondered.

We had no Union to protect us at that time from unfair dismissal. The bosses in those days could do what they liked, hiring and firing at will. However, none of us were fired.

We were all late anyhow and he couldn't manage without staff.

I am thinking of James Larkin, the great Trade Union leader whose death has just been announced and whose remains would be lying in state this day in The Thomas Ashe Hall in College Street which was also the offices of the Workers Union of Ireland. He, and another great leader, James Connolly, had formed the Workers Union of Ireland to protect the workers and give them some security.

“Big Jim” as he was called, was over 6ft tall and a hero to the poor of Dublin during the LOCK-OUT strike of 1913. It was remembered by many who were part of that time that he had brought parcels of food to families who were without pay and were facing hunger.

I made up my mind there and then that, snow or no snow I would go to his lying-in-state after work.

All day the blizzard raged relentlessly and at half past five as we finished work it was at its worst. I joined the bus queue without much hope of getting on as the few buses which were still operating were passing with the “bus full” sign displayed.

In the sub zero temperature I realised it was best to walk to keep myself warm. It was slow trying to walk on the lumps of frozen snow. People were slipping and falling. There were many casualties. I had never seen anything like it.

(These dates in my memory of 1947 when I was recalling the 1913 Lock-out strike, long before my time, and the present situation of Covid-19 where I am one of the cocooned are all part of our history).

NOTE.

Lock-out or Lock-in, these demanding times will be remembered as traumatic experiences for those who have lived through them. I arrived in College Street at about 6.30 thinking I would be able to walk straight into the Union office. There was no hope. A queue was snaking its way through Westmoreland Street and D'Olier Street and doubling back. In spite of the weather the people of Dublin were prepared to see “Big Jim” off. Having come so far, I was not going back so I joined the queue. People were stamping their feet to try to keep some heat in their bodies.

The queue was moving slowly and kept in order by some officials.

I had no watch so I cannot recall the time, but it must have been well after seven o'clock when I finally went up the narrow stairs of the Union Office, paid my respects and said a prayer for the great man.

As I left the building I looked up at the big “Times” clock. It was 7.45 pm.

My train was due to leave Amiens Street station in 15 minutes. I would have to make it in time. With this weather there might not be another one to-night. With the unthinkable possibility of being left in the City overnight, I decided to run for it, if you could call it running. It was like an obstacle race, having to drag each foot out of the snow as I pounded my way forward.

I fell on the slipway at Amiens Street, but luckily I was able to get up and carry on just in time to get the 8 o'clock train as it was already signaled and ready to leave.

The train was packed with passengers, some going as far as Dundalk, all hoping they would reach home safely. Everybody cold and wet and tired. The journey was slow on account of the condition of the railway tracks. It was a relief to arrive in Donabate. I met some people, who, like me were continuing to Portrane and would have to depend on getting a bus to take them on the second last part of the journey. The Great Northern Railway operated this bus between Portrane Mental Hospital and Donabate Station. It was for the convenience of the Hospital Staff. They held a pass and would have to be accommodated before fare-paying passengers could board.

A few years ago the Dublin United Tramway Company had operated a regular bus service from the Burrow in Portrane to Eden Quay in Dublin. During the war it was withdrawn through lack of fuel. That was the last full service between Portrane and the City.

I was lucky this evening, there was plenty of room on the bus. Despite the weather this bus kept going. It was a relief to reach Portrane. I still had nearly another mile to walk to my home. I joined with three other girls who also lived in The Burrow. We held on to each other to keep from falling.

One of the girls kept saying “it must be the end of the world”

Another one started to sing!

It was nearly 10 o'clock when I got home.

This dreadful weather continued until March of that year, but it was followed by a beautiful memorable Summer.



Marian Donohoe

The Fear

Lockdown Dublin

March 6th 2020 the excitement was increasing 100% in my house. My beautiful grandchild was heading for 21 and rehearsals for The Crucible were in full swing.

To top it all my darling Angel was going to be 40 years of age and she decided to share her party with her Godchild's 21st.

It was to be the party of the year.

Invites sent out. Function room booked, food and cakes ordered. Amazing banners printed as a gift.

Balloon Arch ready. Nothing was spared.

I wasn't really listening to the news filtering in from around the World Covid 19 wasn't in my sights I was too busy flying in and out of town looking for outfits for the party. Dublin city was extremely quiet, no banter it felt like something was about to happen It reminded me of the early 70s with all the bomb scares. Strange but true.

It's now March 9th Schools were closed. The Crucible was postponed much to the devastation of my grandchild it was to be their final performance for college.

The fear had started to set in with friends and family.

Messages pouring in "we won't make the party" "are you going ahead?"

Always answering "YES YES YES"

I was still running around shopping with my scarf tied around my mouth and nose starting to feel other people's fear.

The excitement in the house was starting to wane the college closing and the play cancelled were having a huge effect on my grandchild but I pushed on getting the Party Ready.

We were ready Just the hairs to be sorted.

My young brother flew in from London to surprise Angel.

The excitement, the fear, I still had Corona Virus at the back of my mind

Thursday March 12th I was meeting with friends for a drink and some time to myself.

We met at 8.30 as always in the local Pub to listen to some Golden Oldies but the band cancelled because of the Virus as did all the punters in the Pub. We were the only ones along with the bar staff.

I could feel my anxiety building 24 hours to the party.

I couldn't sleep.

I was checking in on Angel during the night thinking she was excited about her big night.

She was so sad tears streaming down her face.

"I wish it would go away" she was saying over and over again.

So here I was after all the build up trying to comfort my beautiful Angel (who is blind and has special needs.) explaining to her that she would be Ok.

She had listened to the news and didn't understand that the Virus is invisible. I tried to imagine how she felt. It was Fear.

The big day had arrived we were all exhausted.

Headed up to the hairdressers Angel was terrified "what if someone bumps me" as this is a regular occurrence with Angel. Re-assuring her was becoming a nightmare.

My phone was on fire with all the texts, e-mails and calls.

"Think you should cancel the party we can't make it"

Private number calling I really didn't want to answer but it was the owner of the function room "do you want to go ahead, all the parties after yours have cancelled out so I will leave it with you until 3.

Angel was very tearful at this stage as her workshop had also cancelled her two mornings a week until further notice.

At 3 I made the decision to go ahead we could socialize with 100 people.

Everything was changing quickly but all the younger friends were heading to the pub later so I felt it was better to go ahead.

My daughter decorated the room It was perfect.

Hopefully we would get a few guests.

The chef had prepared food for me to take home for the after party.

The happiness and excitement was gone and replaced with a weight on my shoulders.

My thoughts were swirling around in my head "What if someone has the virus? What if Angel gets it? What if? What if? No answers "

We partied and danced all night. We had fun and created great Memories for the 21st and 40th birthday parties.

The after party didn't happen.

As we arrived back to the house Angel pipes up "that was a great night but I am not going out again until its gone"

The tears rolled down her face as she said "I wish it would just go away"

The Fear was back. And it was only March 14th.

This was not going to be an easy task but with my support Angel will get over the Fear.

And then.....

My Grandchild send me this:

Dear Nana.

A drop of support

Can lead to the biggest wave

And that's what I have

A tsunami x

Anne Boylan

The World Around Us

There was this surreal feeling around the work place on the 15th March 2020, like the Ides of March had befallen all, a warning sign for all to stay at home because of a forthcoming tragedy with immense implications to those close to us and around us. Julius Caesar with his strategic mind and swift thinking conquered many Countries. Veni Vidi Vici, "I came, I saw, I conquered", no messing about a fast conquest by military force. However, Julius Caesar did not listen to the advice of his Soothsayer and pattered off to the Senate on that fateful day the 15th March in 44BC for the daily dose of rhetoric from his own mouth or those around him, you may have thought they could out best him with speech. He paid a heavy price for not listening to the warning.

Lessons should be learned from History but we in the 21st Century and certainly in the 26 Counties have had a serene life, with the exception of depressions, stock markets collapsing, rising prices, hard times but all this was/is material, it was never going to keep us indoors, wear masks, cocoon, not see our families, loved ones, on the contrary we travelled abroad maybe twice a year, spent money on material items for our houses, our children, festivals grew longer, celebrations were on-going, life became a "must do" society to such an extent the best was not good enough, and we just kept going all the time looking for new adventures, everything was consumable. The Roman satirical poet Juvenal coined the phrase "bread and circuses" to please the population and keep them happy, quiet and un thinking. Yes, for sure, we stopped thinking about the world we live in, the world we shared with every creature, every tree, river and mountain, if it got in our way it was destroyed never giving a thought to the earth or Societies in foreign parts that depended solely on the earth and nature to survive, and the list goes on and on

I work as an Administrator to a very vibrant Community Centre, a building in its infancy that is just 4 years old. State of the art with rooms for activities, coffee dock for chats, meeting rooms and so forth. The joy it gives to the retired folk in the community is immense. The Active Retirement Association with a membership of 150 upwards and who organised trips abroad, weekends away in Ireland, lectures, parties now gone silent. It opened a whole new world to the lonely, it gave comfort to bereaved families by way of teas and coffees after the Funeral Mass, it was a meeting place for children after special Masses like Communions and Confirmations. The activities for exercise to the retired community in the form of song and dance is a joy to watch, a hub for new Mothers and Babies. I never witnessed sadness when people were in the hustle and bustle of life inside the Centre.

The building has gone quiet and quite frankly my heart is broken and not because I have been laid off, but because I am haunted by the faces in my mind's eye that have now been denied this very important social element at a time in life when it is so important.

Yes it was surreal on the 15th March as I closed the centre and went on my way not knowing what lies ahead for any of my patrons and their families? Yes I was lucky I didn't have to cocoon and could take my daily walks and shop. Yes I could use modern technology and therefore always able to keep in touch. In other words I was blessed.

Those that had to cocoon and still cocoon live in fear and how sad is that for them. The Soothsayer has spoken and the population listened. Let's hope that encouragement will be shouted from the rooftops to this set of people as this pandemic subsides to get them motivated and free once again to live meaningful lives among the Community. Let's hope that they have nothing to fear but fear itself, not to be afraid and to stand up and have courage and trust

As for me I await with bated breath!



Mick Shea

Six Short Stories about Covid-19



“They want what?”

“A story”.

“From you?”

“From anyone – it’s a competition”.

“What’s first prize?”

“Always the bottom line – maybe a box of Krispy Kreme’s”.

“What does second place get – two boxes?”

“It’s supposed to reflect the “experience of cocooning”.

“You’re too young for cocooning – mid-fifties don’t cocoon”.

“Under their rules I made the cut.”

“I think you’re just putting off what you have to do – have you made the call yet?”

“Not yet – I will, don’t worry. Right now - I just want a story – any ideas?”

“You’re re-reading Sherlock Holmes – write one of those”.

Synopsis: Holmes is laid up with a broken leg - interrupted by Mrs. Hudson. She reports a caller with urgent business.

He is masked and refuses to give a name. Holmes says to bring him upstairs.

Caller enters, cloaked and masked. He describes a letter sent by an old friend. It concerns an attempt on his life.

“... you are in danger. Attending a chemists’ conference on extracting aluminum, I concealed myself under a staircase.

Two unknown men spoke of the need to rid themselves of you (I suspect our arrangement has become known). No details, just that it will be within days and involves a prince.

Beware any princes....”.

Holmes ponders the message saying;

“You have already survived an attempt”?

“Well – yes – but how could you have known?”

“The events of two nights ago...”.

- *Glass sculpture, opera, explosion, chemistry*
- *Solution...*

“You won’t tell me how he solves the case”?

“That would be a spoiler”.

“The friend’s American – the spelling of “aluminum”.

“Got that in one”.

“Interesting – what does it have to do with cocooning?”

“Holmes is housebound – and still solves the mystery”.

“A bit of a stretch – and it’s just an outline - perhaps something more contemporary?”

“I’ll try”.

“Do that – and call yer one. The summer’s getting near”.

“I will – as soon as I finish this story. There’s no rush”.

Item: Research shows that increased confinement enhances the craving for spicier foods. The reaction arises to compensate for the loss of other sensory stimulations:

A man visits his mother:

On the first week:

- *Howya Ma?*
- *Grand.*
- *Groceries delivered OK?*
- *Sure – had some in this morning. Stay for tea?*
- *I don’t know... can we?*
- *Ah sure, it’ll be fine. Here’s some Rich Teas.*

After a couple of weeks - a slight change.

- *Gingerbread?*

Then, another adjustment.

- *Chips and Salsa?*

A month later - a cheeseboard with sharp cheddar and chorizo.

Two months in:

- *Vindaloo*

The latest visit - chopping chillies while reading something called the “Scoville Scale” ...

“What brings you out here?”

“I’m a bit hungry”.

“Grab a sandwich. How’s the story?”

“I’ve only a bit of an idea – here - look”.

“No wonder you’re hungry”.

“I know – mustard?”

“It’s not a full story – just a concept.”

“It’s just started. I might slice up an onion – you?”

“I’m good – so – you’re making this the story?”

“Maybe not – I’ll use something different – how cocooning people reminisce, make up lies, tall tales- that type thing...”

“Do they? - and – have you made your call?”

“I’ll get to it, no worries. First I want to work on the story...”

Tall Tales? I grew up with two of the best, Frank and Herb.

Herb: “Hey, here’s Mr. Shea”.

Frank: “I hear yer playin’ basketball”.

Me: “Yessir”.

Herb: “Used to be a good leaper myself”.

Me: “Really”?

Frank: “Yup – I’d hire myself out. ‘Twas me jumped up and put the cross on that there steeple”.

Herb: “Did some of that myself – I hopped up to put the capstone on the Washington Monument”.

Frank: “Hmmm - perhaps you’ve seen the work I done placing the antenna on the Empire State Building?”

Herb: “Son – you seen them craters on the moon?”

Me: “Sure”

Herb: “Well – that’s me bumpin’ my head”.

Me: “C’MON NOW!”

Then:

Herb: “How sharp are yer eyes kid? See that dog a mile up the road”?

Me: “Nope – can’t see any dog”.

Frank: (sensing challenge) “You mean that dog with licence 463”?

Herb: (noting challenge) “Nope – the other one – with the flea sittin’ on his ear”.

Frank: “You mean the green-eyed flea or the red-eyed flea”?

Me: “C’MON”!

I went back just this past year, before travel got shut down. They’re still sitting in their chairs. A bit older, still sharp as ever and they recognised me immediately.

Both: “Hey – it’s the kid”! (“Kid”?) “What you been up to”?

Me: “Well, I live in Ireland now”.

Both: “What’s Ireland like?”

Me: “Well – everyone there drives on the wrong side of the road”

Nods.

Me: “You don’t need to buy a fishin’ licence – but you do need one for your TV.”

Nods – a bit more doubtful.

Me: “And the largest airline – they want to charge you one cent per seat – but fifty cents to use the toilet”.

Both: “C’MON”!

“It’s more sketch than story”.

“It could be developed”.

“I suppose. Listen, did you call up yer one yet? – it’s getting very late”.

“Aaaaargh – there’s still time...”

“Not much – you know you’ve got to – there’s no other way...”

“Yeah, – I have to get something done on this story first”.

“Okay – but drop the sketch, I’m sure they want a proper story”.

“Maybe a different sketch.”.

“Your call.”

WE OPEN ON THE SET OF THE GAME SHOW “JEOPARDY”

ALEX TREBEK - Welcome to Jeopardy!

Contestant Number 1 hails from the UK - let’s hear it for ex PM Neville Chamberlain!

SLIGHT APPLAUSE

ALEX - Contestant Number 2 - 45th President - Donald Trump.

SOME BOOS.

TRUMP - Thank you for what is obviously the greatest ovation ever received on this show.

ALEX: Contestant Number 3, Roman emperor - Caligula!

SILENCE

ALEX - The categories:
Shakespeare's Kings
Food and Drink
Abbreviations
Potent Potables - and
Successors
(Caligula opens)

CALIGULA - Abbreviations.

ALEX - Here we go - The full name of the BBC.

ALEX - Mr. Chamberlain?

CHAMBERLAIN - What is the British Broadcasting Corporation?

ALEX - Correct - Next.

CHAMBERLAIN - Shakespeare's Kings please.

ALEX - Noted for concealed sexual tension with his daughters, who end up the death of him.

(TRUMP BUZZES IN)

Mr. Trump?

TRUMP - What is making me exceptionally uncomfortable right now?

ALEX - Probably true Mr. Trump, but not what we're looking for. Mr. Chamberlain?

CHAMBERLAIN - Who is King Lear?

ALEX - Correct. Your board.

CHAMBERLAIN - Food and drink for 100.

ALEX - A substance that became a great source of calcium for humans due to a genetic mutation.

(CALIGULA BUZZES)

CALIGULA - What are the bones of my enemies crushed into a powder.

ALEX - No - sorry. (TRUMP BUZZES)

TRUMP - What are Trump steaks?.

ALEX - Sorry - Mr. Chamberlain.

CHAMBERLAIN - What is milk?

(TRUMP DEMANDS CHAMBERLAIN'S POINTS. CHAMBERLAIN CONCEDES - THE GAME CONTINUES...)

"A bit American."

"So, it's American - everyone knows Jeopardy."

"Not so sure - speaking of America - the call?"

"Tomorrow. For sure, tomorrow."

"Why not now?"

"I have another idea. There's a book - "Letters From the Earth" - a demon writes to hell explaining how to screw up humankind. Perfect for these times. I'm starting to outline - I'll call tomorrow".

Opening - A letter to an elder demon from his protégé.

Dear Sir,

You would be proud of me. I have joined a group manipulating the humans' social media outlets. While only a mere "Meme Writer, Second Class", I have great leeway to improvise with little threat of immediate torture.
[DESCRIBES ALL THE WORK DONE IN HELL TO PRODUCE MEMES]

Your Humble Servant,

Blather

Blather,

Have been following your department with interest. A tremendous concept, memes - pre-packaged idiocy removing all necessity to think while projecting the illusion of thought. One of our greater efforts. Up there with texting...

"How's it going?"

"The concept's good, but it's going slow. Everything is fragments, I can't finish, one idea piles on top of another, - just like this damn lockdown - everything seems to be breaking apart".

"Look - I hear what you're saying - I do - but you've got to put it aside and make the call".

"I know".

"You're not moving".

"I know".

"Well?"

“It’s just that we’ve gone every year for decades. Long enough to build routines within routines. I go hiking, you do “girls’ night”, the same restaurants, the kids’ see my mom. We don’t get back that often – so this is just...”

“Hard”?

“Yeah, - another thing fragmented, unfinished, discarded”.

“It’s scrambled – not broken”.

“What”?

“It’s pieces disarranged – like the jigsaws we’ve done – a mess when you start, but it’ll come together”.

“I’m sick of jigsaws”.

“I know – but nothing is cancelled – only postponed. We’ll just push things out.”

“I suppose – we can carry the deposit over to 2021, assuming there’ll be one. But no jigsaws – I’ll think of it as a model car instead ...”

“Ferrari?”

“Expensive taste madam. I was leaning towards a De Lorean”.

“I get it, jump ahead through time and all...”

“Spot on....”



Ann Mulligan

New Life

April 25th, 2020.

Their baby bounced in her womb. An old neighbour was cremated. New life and new death. Our grandchild was due. Paddy’s death was expected. I had babysat his first daughter, 50 years ago. The juxtaposition of life and death was unsettling. On the beach our scattered family group exchanged pleasantries with a friend who struggled to hold back her dog on a cord. We beamed at our daughter’s bump. Within days our friend lost mother and brother-in-law. All cords cut.

Day One overdue: Cocooned in the warmth of the womb, baby wasn’t budging. Consoling myself that babies continued to be born during war, famine and disease, I kept my anxieties to myself. No baby. 26 deaths.

Day Two: Baby was snug, holding back, not rushing headfirst to join the Covid queues. No baby. 18 deaths.

Day Three: Check-up. Baby was snug, his masked mother masking her desire for delivery. No baby. 59 deaths.

Day Four: Started another baby cardigan. Casting on stitches shows faith. It’s the sort of thing grannies do. No baby. 31 deaths.

Day Five: Unstirred by long walks and spicy curries, baby bounced on the ball with his mother and swam in his own sea as she paddled. No baby. 43 deaths.

Day Six: No wine for dinner. Hoping for the call during the night, grandparents couldn’t be tipsy in charge of a toddler awaiting her sibling. We could have finished the bottle. Still no baby! 34 died.

Day Seven: No update from the nest! Was that a sign? No. No baby. 25 deaths.

Day Eight: We didn’t dare ask. Nine months is easy. Every day past due date is hard. Sliding a dinner through an opened window I saw no flattening of her curve. No baby. 19 deaths.

Day Nine: Another check-up. Baby still snug. His glowing mother still masking her growing wish for friends and neighbours to stop asking. I knit through my anxiety in plain and purl. No baby. 16 deaths.

Day Ten: It was a long day. Warm and sunny. The heavy belly rested. No baby. 23 deaths.

Day Eleven: The call comes. Baby is stirring. Our daughter, his mother, is dropped at the hospital door. No husbands allowed. She is calm. He is not. We are not. Shakespeare wrote, 'The labour we delight in physics pain.' Shakespeare never gave birth. The husband paces the sitting-room floor. We distract ourselves by cleaning their already clean house and amusing their first-born. The day rolls on. Labour stalls. Labour resumes. The father gets the green light to go. No baby. 37 deaths.

Day Twelve: May 7th 2020. 2.50am. A healthy baby boy. Mother still calm and well. Father relieved.

.....I never thought to check the deaths.

Mother and baby came home the following day. As I held him briefly in my arms, (don't tell Leo or Tony) I knew that our new grandson was well worth the wait. I don't fear for the world that he has been born into. Every age experiences its own disasters and traumas. Human nature is equipped with the resourcefulness and resilience to battle through and adapt. At least, I hope so. Co-incidentally, his second name is Patrick. They never knew my old neighbour.

Raymond S. Keeley

Gentle Jasper

Mr George O Carroll, the art tutor, at Sword's Mens' Shed, announced that we must cease meeting, temporarily, to comply with the COVID-19 virus avoidance regulations. That was on March 12th., 2020. Luckily, most of us had completed our last art projects. "Before, we part, please, let us hear of your next, art, project for when we meet again, whenever that will be", he stated. I piped up that "I wish to paint a picture of a Shire horse, pulling an old style, plough, in a field". "Excellent", said George, a la Constable style, no doubt?" "Yes, I replied, with lots of earthy browns and colours of the countryside". "Good, an excellent choice," he said. "Do some preparation while we are on our COVID-19 leave of absence" I said, "I will, of course". The other members present had not picked any particular subjects so they went away to consider, all saying good bye, to each other and BE SAFE.

I now had research to do but why did I select a Shire horse? I thought about this. The idea came to me from my past. So, COVID-19 circumstances, of today, had stirred up an old memory.

I remember, I was seven years old and during the summer of 1959, our father, Austin Keeley, along with my mother, Julia, decided to rent a small cottage in Rush, North County Dublin. They would bring us, my big sister Gemma and baby sister Mary and me to this cottage during the first two weeks of August. We were to share the cottage with another family, the Farrells (two daughters and a baby son along with their parents),

from Glasnevin, whose father was a friend of my father, both from Dundalk, County Louth. The cottage was of good size, but somewhat primitive in facilities. There were three bedrooms with comfortable beds, but basic. A local farmer from Rush owned the cottage and it was sited, and still is sited, at the top end of a flat field and, we noted, a crop of cauliflower. It was a large field. The cauliflower was just coming to maturity. There was a wonderful aroma from the cauliflower which stimulated the desire to eat these fresh, wonderful vegetables. Of course, Rush is located in the market gardening centre of North County Dublin and there were many fields of various crops alongside large, glasshouses featuring tomatoes, horseradish and many other savoury edibles. The weather was sunny and warm. We were also near the sea, which was about ten minutes walk away, from the rear of the cottage. We always remember those warm sunny days of our childhood because we were happy and the World was a safe and supportive place and waiting to be explored. Ireland was certainly a different country and culture, back then.

My father, Austin could only stay with us at night and the weekends as he did not have holiday time available to him from his employer, for the first two weeks of August and indeed the same was the case for Paddy Farrell, who was self-employed and ironically, in the market gardening, wholesale vegetables business. So, we were all, Keeley's & Farrells, temporarily, fatherless for our holiday period. We were oblivious to their absences as we were running around, enjoying the wonderful freedom of this, fresh, new environment.

One day, while we were all outside the cottage, playing games, such as hide-and-seek and other enjoyments, when we suddenly saw movement from the far end of the large field. The metal, swing gate had been opened and a large, slowly moving, animal began to make its way up the side track of the field. There appeared to be a man behind the creature. We stared, fixed to the spot and my sister Gemma went in to the cottage to inform the two mothers of what was happening. They arrived beside us and also looked at the man and beast, coming towards us. They were not expecting any visitors, that day. Who or what could this be?

After some more time, the pair arrived on to the gravel drive- way outside the cottage door.

My two sisters took fright along with the two Farrell girls and hastened to go behind the cottage, out of sight. The two mothers stood with me to appraise the situation and I was still stood as a statue riveted to the spot, my mouth open in awe and some fear. The man walked over to meet the two mothers who were also askance at this spectacle. He introduced himself: he was the farmer and owner of the cottage and the land. He was a man of average height, unshaven, had a peaked, brown flat cap on and brown corduroy trousers held up with a large, leather belt with a big, brass buckle. He wore a loose fitting, cotton shirt, sleeves rolled up to the elbow, showing his weather beaten, muscular, forearms with blue tattoos. I did not understand these tattoos then nor can I recall what they actually depicted, even now. He also had a pair of heavy, leather boots, stitched up with heavy laces and they screeched as he walked; my mother, later, told us they were hobnailed-boots, hence the sound from the soles on the gravel. He was a soft spoken man with a distinct accent, probably, of North County Dublin origin. The farmer wanted to start to plough a section of his land, located behind the cottage and the

two mothers agreed to this. Well, it was his land, after all and he was a most pleasant character and was being civil in informing his summertime tenants of his plans. During this interaction, I was still rigid and I kept staring at the colossal beast before me. The farmer took notice of this and he turned to me, bent down, placed his hand on the top of my shoulder and said "That's Jasper, my Shire horse. Don't be frightened. He is very big and very powerful and I use him to pull my plough in my fields. The plough is in the shed, behind the cottage. I want you to help me guide Jasper to the shed and hook him up to the plough. Will you help me?" I blurted out a garbled "yes". The farmer stood up and winked an impish wink, at the two mothers, who smiled back, approvingly.

"What is your name?" the farmer asked of me. "Raymond", I replied. "Right, Raymond", he then took my hand and led me over to Jasper, standing passively. "I can tell Jasper is going to like you", said the farmer. Nervously, I was brought right up close to Jasper. The farmer took my right hand and placed it on Jasper's right, front leg. "Now move your hand up and down his leg". I started to do this and could feel the strong, horse hair filter through my hand fingers. Jasper showed no reaction. "Now, move your hand up towards his neck". I stretched up and just about was able to touch the lower end of his neck. "Rub your hand along his neck". I did so and this time Jasper gave a low, horse cough and he looked down at me with his big, brown eye. "He does like you, I told you so", said the farmer. I was unsure. Jasper was a Shire horse, by nature and breed the largest horses on the planet and to me he was a true giant. He had a dark brown colour with a reddish, brown mane and white face with a clump of white hair running down between his eyes. His hooves were also very large and had more white hair stemming from the lower shanks of his powerful legs and draping over them Jasper moved his head by nodding up and down. Thinking back, he must have been about eight feet tall from hoof to shoulder and ten feet long. He was bulging with big, powerful muscles and possibly weighed eight to nine hundred pounds. Wow, I thought, this giant likes me.

Jasper had a complete harness on him with a large, brass bit in his mouth and heavy reins running down his back to his haunches for the farmer to guide him when ploughing. The farmer took the bit reins in his right hand and pulled at them with Jasper willingly complying so that the farmer could guide him to the rear of the cottage and to the shed there. "Just walk beside me, Raymond, and keep your hand on Jasper's leg as we walk to get the plough hitched up". I did this and was awed by the feeling of sheer power from the muscles in Jasper's leg as he moved slowly with us. I kept looking up at Jasper and he looked down at me, the little human, boldly, helping to guide him to start his plough pulling. The farmer opened the shed and there, inside, was a traditional, old plough with fastenings to attach to Jasper's harness. The shed was large enough for Jasper to enter, manoeuvre and line up with the harness attachment to connect to the plough attachment. I stood there, watching, at the shed door, as I would have been an obstruction during this phase. The farmer checked all of the attachments to the harness and the plough rigging and then said

"Go, Jasper, go" With sheer ease, Jasper, began pulling the old plough out from the shed. The farmer had a lever to lower the plough wheels, by a few inches, to the ground, so that the steel shears were not in contact with the rough gravel, as the plough moved. Using the harness reins, the farmer would tug left or right on them to leave the shed and over to the field he wished to plough.

Arriving at this field, the farmer, skilfully lined Jasper up to commence and he then went behind the plough to control it and Jasper. "I can tell you, Raymond, that Jasper has done this so many times before he can almost do it himself, without me, how's that!" "However, it's better that I guide him". Jasper was ready to go and he shook his big head and turned it back to look at me and the farmer. He gave another low, horse cough and shook his head, again, up and down. I perceived, he was the one in control and he was happy. The farmer said "Go, Jasper, go" and Jasper moved off, pulling the plough behind him, effortlessly and it, in turn turning the sod in the field releasing a warm smell of the earth and its fertility. I stood watching as the farmer continued on and watched for a further while as he changed to another furrow, at the bottom end of his field.

I went back into the cottage to tell my mother of my great adventure with Jasper and the farmer. I went back a number of times to the field to further watch the two as they completed their work for the day.

When all was done, later that evening, the farmer brought his plough back to the shed, unhitched Jasper and again, asked me to help him guide the Shire to the front of the cottage and with great delight I did so and this time, without any fear while touching Jasper's leg: I felt elated...

The farmer had a bucket beside the cottage which he filled with water to give to Jasper. "Raymond, you give Jasper his water and I will help you with this". The water filled bucket was heavy but the farmer lifted it with me to offer to Jasper and Jasper, with great relish, started to drink. As he did so, he fixed both of his eyes on me and I sensed, he was, in his Shire way, thanking me and that he was now my friend.

When he was ready, the farmer, again, took Jasper by the bit and started to lead him back down the track beside the cauliflower field. I stood there and watched the colossus walk away, leaving me with a memory which has stayed with me for nearly sixty years. I had truly made a friend of the gentle, giant, Jasper and sadly I never met him again.





Memory Makers
Comments by
Authors



Déantóirí Cuimhne
Nótaí Tráchtá
le hUdair

“ Since the story related to my knitting days way back in 1953, I enclose a photograph taken in fifties showing another of my more successful hand-knitted masterpieces! Suffice to say that since my ‘fluffy wool’ catastrophe of 1953, my knitting attempts have improved greatly and have kept me sooooo busy during the interminable ‘Cocooning’!!!

Congratulations to all concerned in Fingal County Council for the initiatives during these weird times and for all the hard work that went into the book for us ‘oldies’ and prompted us to revisit days of youth, freedom and, to smile in remembering!

—
- Anne Lowndes Lawler

”

“ Here is my poem I hope you like it. My life was torn apart when I lost my mother. This is my tribute to her

—
- Theresa Kinsella

”

“

Thanking you for your kind words in your reply to my Cocooning story called The Naller. It was a wonderful idea, and in writing, my old mind could go back to those bygone days, and relish the memories, we are living in Coolock 53 years now, having come from the Southside with four children under the age of 5yrs in 1967, and we had two more children after that. My children’s names are from the eldest down, Paula, Robert, twins Derek and Brendan, Julie, and Jason, of course all our children proclaim to be Northsiders, but Nuala my wife, and I, still cling to being from the Southside.

—
- Robert Toner Snr.

”

“

I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge the amazing work of An Garda Síochána. For all their support both physically and emotionally they have given to so many through this ordeal. Especially to Garda Rosanna McCaul. On one of the worst days of my cocooning the phone rang. She listened and encouraged me to try put pen to paper when I thought I couldn’t. Thank you Rosanna and all the Blanchardstown Community team for everything.

—
- Pauline Mooney

”

“ I want to express my gratitude for the honour bestowed on me by Fingal County Council by including my poem Entwined Hands in your ‘Fingal Memory Makers Book’. The poem was written after the death of my mother last April the 2nd, when it was impossible for her family to accompany her in her last hours.

Thanks very much for this opportunity to publish my work and contribute to the communal memory of my adopted home.

—
- María A. Mañueco-Ramos

”

“ Thank you so much for your recent letter and for the wonderful news that I won a prize! I am delighted! I’ve never won anything before for my writing, so this is indeed a first.

—
- Tom Reilly

”

“

I am delighted to be included in the book. My poem was one of a series I wrote during lockdown. I recorded myself reciting them and put them on Facebook. For the recordings I wore the top hat and the clown’s red nose. Hence the photo.

—
- Maureen Penrose

”

“

I am 85 years this April. My wife had Parkinson’s disease for 25 years. Spent last 3 years at Swords Nursing Home, with dementia. She passed away on April 4, last. This may explain theme of poem.

—
- Peter Owens

”

“

It is lovely to think something good came out of lock-down. That was a brilliant idea, encouraging the over-70’s to write.

—
- Colleen Davey

”

“

I'm delighted to hear that it (the competition) was such a success and wish the winners all the very best. I'm quite sure that it involved a lot of extra work for you and your colleagues and I thank you sincerely for that. The Fingal Memory Makers' Book will indeed be an added attraction, and I look forward to reading all the stories as time goes on.

”

- Maureen Penrose

“

I was delighted to receive your lovely letter to me. It cheered me up, as I had 6 great sons, but now have left the nest, they are very good to me. My lovely husband has past away this 14 years RIP.
Thanking you once again for all your kindness.

”

- Teresa McKeown



**Comhairle Contae
Fhine Gall**
Fingal County
Council



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