

A Collection of Writings
by
Learners of
Core Skills



Bord Oideachais & Oiliúna
LUIMNIGH & AN CHLÁIR
LIMERICK & CLARE
Education & Training Board

Acknowledgements

This publication was produced by:

Core Skills

Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board

College of Further Education and Training, Ennis Campus

Clonroad Business Park

Ennis, Co. Clare

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Ireland's EU Structural and Investment
Funds Programmes 2014 - 2020.

Co-funded by the Irish Government
and the European Union.



Co-funded by the
EUROPEAN UNION

SOLAS

An tSeirbhís Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna
Further Education and Training Authority

Provision co-funded by the Government of Ireland and the European Social Fund as part of the ESF Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning 2014 – 2020

FOREWORD

Welcome to the 32nd edition of *Simply Said*, the annual collection of writings by learners taking part in programmes with Core Skills which is part of Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board. This issue marks 32 years of published writings, which is a wonderful achievement for our learners. This year has been a difficult year for everyone as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. That we even have a *Simply Said* book to publish is a testament to the dedication of our learners, our tutors and all our staff.

The writers of *Simply Said* attend classes across our centres in County Clare. In March 2020, most of these classes stopped as a result of the first COVID-19 lockdown. Classes soon began again through a variety of means including TEAMS, Moodle, Zoom, WhatsApp and by post. The creativity of staff and learners and their willingness to learn new skills was an inspiration. The experiences of 2020 are borne out through the stories in these pages. The stories are remarkably poignant, personal and uplifting.

During the first lockdown in March and April 2020, we reached out to learners to record their experiences of COVID-19. This project, called "Life in the Time of Coronavirus" was led by Katie Lewis. The stories are about living in this COVID-19 pandemic and how it has affected learners. We contacted Clare FM about the project and for two weeks in June and July, Morning Focus broadcast a series, "Stories from the Time of COVID." The stories told the tale of lives during lockdown, of hope and anxiety, and of some of the events that people will remember from this most remarkable of times.

During the year we organised a postcard initiative where we sent out postcards to our learners. Nathalie El Baba designed and painted the postcards that were sent out to learners in March so that they could record their lockdown experiences. These stories are within these pages. We have included quotes for the postcards on the back of this publication. The picture on the front cover of this year's *Simply Said* is from that postcard.

The bunting was created by Nicola Barnes during an online class for learners and staff to depict feelings about COVID-19 through embroidery.

The collage of pictures on the inside back is from a Family Learning beauty course. The collage was collated by Claire Connellan, the course tutor. This course went online during lockdown.

The stories of *Simply Said* 2020 are moving, funny, sad and hopeful. They document loneliness, courage, hope and gratitude. There are wonderful stories about the benefits and importance of lifelong learning, memories about growing up in simpler times, inspiring poetry, mouth-watering recipes, travelling, hiking, kayaking, birthdays, memories, presents and the anticipation of a visit from Santa Claus.

Thank you to all the tutors, especially the volunteer tutors who encourage learners to value the knowledge and life experience that they have and support them on their learning journeys. Thanks to everyone for the planning and production of this year's publication. The 2020 edition of *Simply Said* is being produced in December 2020 and for obvious reasons, we will not be having our annual launch in Glór. We hope to have a much bigger celebration in 2021.

Congratulations to everyone who has written stories for *Simply Said* in 2020 and we hope you enjoy this publication.

The Core Skills Team

December 2020

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Postcard story *by Aroba*

The whole world woke up to a terrible event that shook the globe. The coronavirus. Life was turned upside down. People got stuck in their homes. Animals ran free. We lived in a terrible nightmare.

COVID-19: What I did and how I coped *by Toni*

2020 was going to be a great year. We had so much to look forward to: Brexit, election, good weather! Optimism. March 2020. Bang! Wallop!

I am part of a very special group of people: "Family Carers Ireland," who cover carers, young and old in the home. We were very lucky that we got our respite break to Cork in early March so that a break was had. That weekend, there were rumours that a bad virus was coming our way.

Then, disaster. Country closed down and we were in a "lockdown, sort of." For a change, we Irish rose to the occasion, followed the guidelines and did what we were told.

Now, I usually have a routine that keeps me fairly busy most of the time. I go to art classes, history class. I do decorating and gardening. I also go to meetings related to carers. The usual socialising meals out - Sunday lunch with friends, etc. - most of this stopped and I am indoors.

Luckily, as I live on my own, I did have to go and get my shopping for food, so I did see people, talked from a distance and took all the necessary precautions as instructed by Government and the HSE.

I also thanked God for my garden and all my usual spring work. I usually paint my garden furniture, re-pot my shrubs and flowers. This year, I turned my hand to growing herbs. Not much luck there. Only two out of the six herbs grew. I also got the planters from outside our church and sanded them, put wood preserve on them and then wood stain. I must say, these turned out well.

I have great friends and relatives. They have phoned me. WhatsApp is wonderful for conversations and has kept me sane.

You definitely need to have a sense of humour, calm outlook and patience to see through what is left of 2020.

We can do it. Is féidir linn.

Biddy Early's bottle *by Noel*

Biddy got married there in Carrowroe to Tom Flannery, and they had one son, Tom. At about seven or eight years the little boy went to the landlord, Colonel Westropp O'Callaghan, because the landlord was looking for the rent. Now, Tom Flannery was dead a couple of years at this time and sure, Biddy wasn't able to pay the rent. So

she sent letter after letter and visited the R.I.C. in Tulla to get help to pay the rent. She told them she could not pay it. So the next thing was one of the R.I.C. men in Tulla, paid her a visit one evening and he says to her, "Well Biddy," says he (he knew her), "Tomorrow is your last day where you are. You are going to be put out of this house if you are not able to pay the rent."

She went by the fire on the way to the kitchen. The little boy, about seven or eight years old, her son, was there and she started to tell him about the man and his visit. She did not know what to do or where they would go. But she says to him ('twas near nightfall), "Well Tom," says she, "I will go out anyway and collect a bundle of sticks." She went out and was not gone far, when who appeared to her only her dead husband Tom Flannery. "Well Biddy," he says to her, "I came to help you. You had a visit from the police and not the first time but many a time," and says he, "The one that called on you today told you that you would be put out. If you do not want to go, I tell you now you won't be put out." "Well, thank you very much," says she, "and may the Lord receive you into Heaven." "Say no more Biddy; say no more," says he, "but take this bottle, this blue bottle. And every time you look into it you will be able to know what will happen in the future," says he, "but go now and collect your bundle of sticks. My time is up and I have to go." He gave her the bottle and disappeared.

When she got home she looked into the bottle and she saw inside it, a carriage, and a pair of ponies being brought and harnessed to the carriage, a man getting up on the high seat of the carriage and another man getting into it. She saw police getting up on horseback and going on before the carriage along the road. "Now," says she, "I know what to do tomorrow." Inside in the room, Tom Flannery came back to her and says he to her, "The police will lead the sheriff and his driver tomorrow. When they come, all you need say is, 'Stay where you are.' They will be stuck to the road. You can leave them there as long as you like."

About eleven o'clock the next day there did come mounted police riding along, eight of them in front of the carriage and a pair of horses, and a driver above in the high seat. The carriage pulled up in front of Biddy's house and the driver came down out of the seat. He opened the door. Biddy came out to her half-door. "Stay where ye are," says she to them. The driver couldn't walk away from the carriage. The fellow inside in the seat couldn't come out of it. The R.I.C. couldn't come off the horses on the road. "Ye can stay there now," says Biddy. "I will leave ye there as long as I like," says she.

Well, she got whatever bit she had to eat for her dinner, for her and her son Tom and they ate it. Biddy went off to a neighbour's house and she came back in the evening and made a drop of tea, maybe for herself and the little boy. When it was getting dusk, she came up to the door, and she says to the sheriff, his driver and the police, "Ye can go now, but don't trouble me anymore or 'tis not the one day ye will be stuck to the road but several days. Go on now while ye are able." Off they went and never bothered Biddy or her son no more.

No love from Russia *by Tony*

Russia has been banned from major sporting events for the next four years. It is banned from the next Olympics.

I was in hospital when I heard this and I said, "No love from Russia."

COVID-19 coronavirus *by Tony*

People are cocooning in their homes. People over seventy have to stay at home.

The weather is very nice at the moment, but no one can go on holiday this Easter.

I help out in the village: I bring the paper to a man in the village – I bring it every day to him. He is cocooning in his house at the moment.

There are 365 deaths and 6,074 infections at the moment in the Republic of Ireland.

Every place is quiet in the villages and towns in Ireland. I keep myself busy by walking twice a day.

Coronavirus 2020 COVID-19 *by Tony*

On the 5th March 2020, 18 out of 27 EU countries are reporting positive COVID-19 infection cases. At least 56 EU citizens have died from this disease, the majority in Italy. Germany also reported a spike in cases yesterday with 21 new cases. Portugal and Andorra have confirmed their first infection cases. Russia, Belarus, Ukraine and Georgia have confirmed the presence of COVID-19. The Russian capital, Moscow, has also reported its first case. The rise in European cases comes at a time of slow-down in China's cases. There are nine times more COVID cases outside China now than inside. In China, in the past twenty-four hours, there have been only 206 new cases reported. This is the lowest daily total since the 22nd January. More than 96,000 people worldwide have picked up the infection, including over 3,000 fatalities. People are wearing protective masks on the street. The World Health Organisation has noted that France has recorded 130 cases of COVID-19 and local media has reported that four people have died of the disease, including two people in a hospital in Compiègne, a city in northern France.

06/03/2020 at 1:00 p.m.

There are 33 more cases of COVID-19 on the island of Ireland this week. There have been 21 cases in the Republic and 12 cases in Northern Ireland reported. A case was confirmed after a woman travelled home to Ireland from northern Italy. A Dublin school pupil is currently being treated in hospital. Health officials are under fire for their handling of the first case of COVID in Ireland. Some 397 people have been tested so far in Ireland.

11/06/2020

There have been 23 COVID related deaths today and 211 new cases. The overall confirmed death toll in the Republic of Ireland is 1,339 and there are 21,983 confirmed cases.

Asylum: a blessing in disguise *by Innocent*

My name is Innocent. I am from Nigeria, a country located in the western part of Africa. It is a country with a population of over two hundred million; thus, the country goes by various names such as the giant of Africa and the most populous black nation on earth.

I am the sixth child of the family, which consists of the following people: my widowed mum, who now enjoys the company of her children and grandchildren; my eldest sister, a Catholic nun and a medical student. She is followed by a graduate of biological chemistry and a career married woman (rather, mother), who runs a fashion business (I really miss her son a lot. His tiny voice calling me by the special name *Uncle Tiitii*). She is followed by my brother, a graduate of optometry who currently heads the optometry department of a prestigious Nigerian hospital, whilst also running his own private clinic (I really miss his wife and his three lively sons).

There is also another sister, a graduate of Mass Communication, who works as a receptionist in a tech-company. She wished for me to be present at her wedding recently, but that was not possible. Then the last born, she is a final year student in university. Ironically, she is the last child but the tallest of all the children and very troublesome, always asking me for pictures, knowing full well that I am not photogenic.

My tribe and ethnicity is Igbo. We are known for our industrious and resilient nature. We respect and love to be respected. Also our republican and egalitarian nature allows us to criticise only when a situation has become unbearable. Igbos are very welcoming; in fact, we give maximum welcome to visitors and are positive minded people.

In light of the above positivity, I have resolved to remain positive as it will go a long way to keep my mind healthy and purposeful, while I await the Republic of Ireland's decision on my application for asylum.

Prior to seeking asylum, I have been writing about refugees and asylum seekers, though from the perspective of my home country, Nigeria. I never expected a day would come when I would be in the situation I examined and even constructively criticised. What a wonder! Hey! I think I have passed the stage where I pitied myself, and instead look out for opportunities and friendships that can contribute to my general development while waiting for a decision to be made.

Some of the ways the process is adding to my general development include, taking part in academic and non-academic training that is being offered by the Education and Training Board (ETB), especially in the ETB centres located in County Clare – Miltown and Ennis to be precise. There are also a lot of opportunities and mentoring provided by the Clare Local Development Company, the Clare Immigrant Support Centre, communities and individuals alike.

There is another aspect of development that I am falling in love with. It is a kind of development which is based on human relationships and cultural competency. As a graduate student in Nigeria, I used to lecture undergraduate students on intercultural communication. The bulk of what I taught the students was based on research and

personal experiences. But, as an asylum seeker residing in accommodation centres with other asylum seekers from different cultural backgrounds, continents and religions, I feel a whole lot is being added to my intercultural ability as the days go by.

I am seeing the best and the worst of cultures and characters of the global community being displayed in the confines of my residence. And the basic lesson I am learning is that I can no longer have one single story to tell about people whose cultures, religions and nationalities are different to mine. To be frank, when this asylum process is over, I can rest assured that I will come out as a global personality, with multicultural competencies in inclusive human relationships.

Postcard story *by Rose*

I miss the freedom to travel, and relax when doing so. I miss my tourism course, our lovely instructor Mary and friendly, pleasant fellow classmates. I feel it will be quite a while before our lives go back to normal. I hope all my family and loved ones come through this pandemic safely. I hope our tourism course returns in September.

A compilation of remedies

Rosemary wine *by Richard*

50g rosemary leaves

15g raisins

25g rosehip (fruit, leaves, flowers)

5g ginger

3g cinnamon stick

3g cloves

2ltr sweet red wine

Stir all the ingredients together and add into the sweet wine. Keep this wine at room temperature for ten days. After ten days, strain off through a sieve and pour into dark bottles.

Drink every day, in the morning and evening. It's very good to strengthen your veins. It helps with low blood pressure, improves blood circulation, warms you up and it recharges the heart.

Elixir for 'flu *by Daniel*

Hot whiskey recipe

Make ½ cup of hot tea (boiled). Add 2 cloves, 2 tablespoons of raspberry juice and a slice of lemon. Fill up the cup with whiskey.

Go to bed after drinking it.

Mulled beer with honey and citrus *by Zaneta*

Ingredients for 2 portions

½ltr of light beer

2 tbsp. of honey

4 slices of lemon

4 slices of orange

Cinnamon stick

4-5 cloves

Fresh ginger (2 slices or a pinch of ginger powder)

Put all the ingredients in a pot, on low heat for 5-10 minutes. Be careful not to boil the beer.

Pour the warm beer into glasses and decorate with an orange slice and lemon. It is very good for colds.

Ginger, honey and lemon tea *by Sayeda*

Peel the ginger and cut it into small pieces. Cut a lemon in half and add the juice to the ginger. Add one tablespoon of honey and mix well in a mug. Fill the mug with boiling water.

This is very good if you have a cold or the 'flu.

Onion syrup *by Agnieszka*

When we get a runny nose, a cough and sore throat, we usually reach for the tablets immediately. It's sometimes better to use home methods, which are often much more effective and above all, natural.

Onion syrup is a classic remedy which not only relieves coughs, but also soothes colds, prevents anaemia and strengthens the immune system. It mainly has a disinfecting effect.

All you need is two or three tablespoons a day to provide your child with an additional portion of vitamins B1, B2, C, A, and minerals - calcium, zinc and phosphorus.

Here is a simple way of preparing the onion syrup. You only need two ingredients: onions and sugar*.

Peel two or three onions.

Chop the onions finely and cover them with plenty of sugar.

Let the mixture stand covered for about five hours until the onions release their juice and the onion syrup is ready.

**Instead of sugar, you can use honey.*

Vodka and ground black pepper *by Nadia*

In a glass of about 100ml of quality vodka, mix 2 teaspoons of ground black pepper. We mix well and drink the contents. It is best to drink it after eating to avoid any irritation of the stomach. Then you should go to bed and cover up well with a blanket, because the idea is to sweat as much as possible to remove toxins, caused by the disease, from the body.

This mixture is often used as a remedy against colds, 'flu, clogged nose, headache and fever. This remedy is well-known in my country and in other post-Soviet countries.

Steamed orange *by Feng*

In the winter months, children often catch colds and they start coughing. When that happens, I give my children their favourite drink: steamed orange. First, get an orange and clean the skin. Cut off the top, rub a bit of salt into the orange and put the top back on. Then, put the orange in a bowl and put the bowl in a steamer pot. Steam for about 30 minutes. Then, turn off the heat. Squeeze the orange; let it cool for a while and give it to children to drink at bedtime a few days in a row. The cold and coughing should get better. My children didn't like it at first but they liked it after a few times.

If an adult catches a cold, cut a few pieces of ginger; put them in water and boil for more than 10 minutes. Pour the mixture into a mug; add some honey, and drink. It is also very good.

Lemon and ginger *by Laíma*

This is a recipe for good health.

3 lemons

200g ginger

1-2 tbsp. honey

Peel the lemons and ginger. Finely chop the ginger. Grind the ginger and lemon in a blender. Add 2 tablespoons of honey and mix everything well. Take a spoonful two times a day.

Pineapple, ginger, honey and lemon *by Sayeda*

Peel and cut a pineapple and some ginger into small pieces. Put them into a blender. Add the juice of one or two lemons and one tablespoon of honey. Then, add about half a glass of water. Mix everything well.

Drink one glass every morning. It is great for losing weight.

Homemade beetroot syrup *by Zaneta*

Ingredients

1 fresh beetroot

2 teaspoons of cane sugar or honey (I use dandelion honey.)

Wash the beetroot gently. Cut off a slice about 1.5cm thick from the top, and then make a hole about 2cm deep. Add sugar or pour honey into it and leave it in a warm place for a few hours. The beetroot will start releasing juice.

Give the syrup to children: 1 teaspoon, 3 times a day (until 4pm during the infection - it works as an expectorant).

From the River Danube to the Fergus *by Ildiko*

My name is Ildiko.

I was born and grew up in Baja, a town by the Duna (Danube) River in the south of Hungary. I came to Ireland seven years ago, when my granddaughter was born on a nice spring morning. I have lived here since then, and in 2014 my youngest granddaughter was born, also on a nice spring morning.

When I first arrived here, I fell in love with Ireland from the first moment. I felt at home: the wonderful landscape, the ocean, the friendly people, the music and dance, the great joy of life. This love still continues today.

Now I work every day and we meet with my grandchildren every weekend. Last summer, we went to Hungary on holiday. My grandchildren had a great time. They fell in love with the country - my grandchildren and me seem to have a lot in common.

This summer we're going to go to Hungary again, but I'm going to go at Easter too. This year, Easter Sunday is the same date as my mother's birthday. From now on, I would like to spend this time with her. I hope we'll be happy.

My life *by Hong*

I was born in Shanghai, China. After graduating from high school, I worked in a factory in Shanghai until it closed. I started looking for a new job in a company in Singapore, since my wife went to work in Ireland. Finally, I took my son to Ireland.

Our family life is very good at the moment. My son is working after graduating from university. My daughter is in secondary school. I am learning English and I hope my daughter studies hard, too. I would like to know more about the use of English. It will be very convenient for travelling around the world in future.

Malabo, Madrid, Ennis *by Veracruz*

My name's Vera, short for Veracruz.

I was born in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea. I'm the seventh and last girl of my parents' eleven children. I was very bright at school. I wanted to be a businesswoman. At the age of 17 years old, I had to travel from my country to Madrid (Spain) because my sister died leaving two children of two and six years of age. My brother-in-law needed someone to help him and that was me. It was very sad and hard for me that I couldn't further my education.

In 2011, I decided to come to Ireland. It wasn't easy – the weather, the language – but the people were nice. Now I live here with my son and I'm very happy. I am studying English and my hope for the future is to have my own business, something like a shop. May God help me.

A Moroccan in Ennis *by Keltouma*

I was born in Morocco. I moved to Ireland after I got married. I moved here with my husband and my son. Two years after we settled in, I was pregnant with my daughter. We got used to the town life and once we were comfortable, we moved into a three-bedroom house. It was a good experience.

As time went on and my children were progressing in school, I started English classes. They have really benefitted me in many ways. I can now have conversations with people. I hope, one day in the future, I will be fluent in English and I will be able to speak comfortably with people. I'm looking forward to my children's future and also my own future with my family.

My dream for the future *by Mazedra*

I lived with my family until I was 18. My dad was a school teacher. When I finished my Leaving Cert, I got admission to the University of Dhaka, Bangladesh. I didn't get accommodation on campus so it was very hard to manage all my expenses. I lived with an old lady as a paying guest. She had two daughters who were studying the same as me at university. The following year, I got a place. It was fantastic! I was very excited because it was my own place.

A year later, my dad got sick. It was a really difficult time for me. I left college and went back home. I got a job at the hospital as a healthcare assistant. I managed my family expenses and my dad's treatment from my salary. That was the worst time. Eventually, I did my BA exam as a private candidate.

When I was 26, I got married and God gifted me two daughters.

Now I'm studying at the Adult Education Centre to improve my English and I'm also doing a computer course. I don't think I'm very successful but I like being a student.

As for my dream for the future, I have a big plan and I'd like to tell you about it. I like children. I'm going to do a childcare course next year. In a few years, I'd like to get

a job in the childcare industry and a few years later I'm going to start my own company. In my dream, many people come to work in my company and we take care of a big group of children.

I enjoy sewing because ...

"I enjoy sewing because creating from scratch is so rewarding."

By Colette

"I enjoy sewing because it is very rewarding to alter and repair your own clothing"

By Clare

"I enjoy sewing because it gives me a great boost to say I have made something from scratch or mended it. It's a great achievement."

By Majella

"I enjoy sewing because it's making a gift that you can give to friends and family, and it will be appreciated."

By Sheila

"I enjoy sewing because on completion of a project, the sense of achievement is wonderful."

By Maura

"I enjoy sewing because I find it therapeutic and have a great sense of achievement."

By Maureen

"I enjoy sewing because I find it relaxing and very rewarding."

By Annie

"I enjoy sewing because I have made lovely useful things I can use in my home."

By Teresa

"I enjoy sewing because it gives me a chance to be creative in a way that other crafting doesn't. It also gives me a chance to have some time to myself, enjoying a hobby that many in my family have enjoyed before me."

By Nikki

Are you afraid of spiders? *by Anna*

Hi, my name is Anna. I would like to tell you a story about Arnold.

Arnold is an imaginary spider. My grandson Ciaran, who is 10 years old, told me that he was afraid of spiders a year ago. I told Ciaran that if he became a friend with one of the spiders, the fear would go away. I asked Ciaran what he would like to call his little new friend - and that's how Arnold was born.

Arnold is a very funny spider. Sometimes, he goes to school with Ciaran. Arnold hides in Ciaran's hair or in his backpack. In the class, he plays around, making jokes.

When Ciaran goes to sleep, Arnold visits his other friend – it is a chestnut tree. The chestnut tree is male and it grows pink flowers from April to May. One day in the spring, Arnold shared a story with Ciaran about this big tree. Ciaran told Arnold that soon the tree would have a beautiful male fruit and spikes, and then everyone would forget its pink colour.

The two friends have many more funny stories to tell, about a dog, a cat and a leaf but they are stories for another day.

Ciaran and Arnold remain friends to this day. Ciaran isn't afraid of spiders.

The history of Bangladesh *by Nurul*

In 1952, British India was divided into India and East and West Pakistan. East is known as Bangladesh and the West is known as Pakistan. At the time, the Pakistan government grew lots of good food in the East. The Eastern people started to talk Bangla while people in the West were talking Urdu. The prime minister was Muhammad Ali Jinnah. He said, "Only one language can be spoken in Pakistan," which was Urdu. The Eastern people said that they wanted to only speak Bangla. So because of this, they split up as two different nations in 1971. This started a war between the two nations. The war lasted 9 months. An estimated 70% of the population died during the 9 months, and an estimated 3 million people died in the end, and Bangladesh won.

Bangladesh thanked the Indians for aiding them in the war and also for everything they supplied them with. They supplied food, water, military soldiers, etc. The prime minister was Indira Gandhi in 1971 (for India). Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was the prime minister who made the deal with India to help them in the war. After the war, Bangladesh was bankrupt and was basically finished. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was working hard for Bangladesh but a Bengali terrorist group assassinated him as they thought he didn't do anything good for them – after everything he had done for them.

Eighty-five percent of Bengalis are Muslim, while 15% are from a different religion. Bangladesh is a country of freedom. It is also a developing country. The current prime minister is Sheikh Hasina. She has been prime minister for 11 years. Her father was Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

I like *by Lali*

My name is Lali. I am from Georgia. I speak Georgian. I live in Ireland. I like the people in Ireland but I don't like weather. I have two children. I love my children. I like coffee. I don't like shopping. I want to learn English.

The story I told my friend *by Aziz*

I want to share with you the story I read in English. There was a dog that was very hungry. He searched for food everywhere and, at last, he found a bone. He picked up the bone with his mouth and was running back to his home. While he was crossing the bridge on the way to his home, he saw his own reflection in the water. The dog thought that was another dog with a bone in his mouth. He wanted to get that other bone too. Then, he started barking at his own reflection. His bone fell into the river as soon as he opened his mouth. The dog lost the bone in his own mouth. I translated this story into Arabic and told it to my friend.

الجشع الكلب

منزله إلى العودة في وبدأ بفمه العظم اخذ . عظمًا وجد النهاية وفي مكان كل في الطعام عن بحث لقد . جدًا جائعًا كان كلب هناك كان . منزله إلى الطريق في جسر هناك كان .

الآخر العظم على يحصل أن أراد . الماء في عظم له آخر كلب هناك كان أنه الكلب اعتقد . الماء في ينعكس رآه عبوره بدأ عندما أيضًا .

عظمه الجشع الكلب فقد . فمه فتح أن بمجرد الماء في عظمه سقط . تفكيره في ينبج بدأ لذلك .

An adventure *by María*

We are a very friendly Spanish family who have been living in Malaga for quite a few years now. I decided to move to Ireland for a school year (2019/2020) with my two daughters, while my husband stayed in Malaga to keep going with his job.

The most important reason to make a decision like that was because I wanted my daughters to learn to speak English properly. So, with that in mind, I spent a whole year planning for this adventure.

First of all, I had to decide which place I would like to live in. I chose Ennis and it turned out to be the perfect town to have this experience. After that, I needed to get them a place in a school and to rent a house.

It has been almost six months since we moved here and I definitely can say it was the best decision ever. For sure, it has been a life change for all of us and I will always be grateful to Ireland.

About me *by Andreea*

My name is Andreea. I'm from Romania. I came to Dublin, Ireland 3 years ago. Now, I live in Ennis together with my family. I met my partner in Ireland and we formed a family here. Now, we have a lovely son. We're trying to make a good life for my son. We want to give him a good education and he will learn English. Speaking English will make our future better.

I love walking in nature, drinking coffee and enjoying time with my family.

Those were the days *by Adam*

Those were the days. I grew up in Sudan in my small village. I still remember some things I did during my childhood – a time when everyone treated each other like family. We went outside to play on the road or in the park; we built forts. We were not afraid to get our clothes dirty. We did not eat fast food as much as now. We ate real food, proper homemade food or sometimes just fruit for days. We would go to Jarden and have chips made from spuds and cooked in a chip pan. We had no ice-cream but we were happy enough. We played around and we did not have a soccer ball but we got some clothes and, by sewing them together, made them like a ball and played around on the streets. Sometimes we'd ride horses, donkeys and camels but OMG a camel is so hard to control!

There was no bottled water – we were drinking from the well or sometimes from a river. I remember we didn't have a TV in our village or electric ovens. We had something made of wood, like a wheelbarrow, which we used a lot and there was no such thing as a mobile or any other electrical devices. If one of us was fighting another person, it was defence. That's how we played on the street a lot, until our mums shouted to us to come back home. If we were near home, we could hear her or she would send someone to us. There was one school with four classrooms.

Moment ... *by Agata*

In these difficult times of isolation, when COVID-19 threatens many people, and staying home has become a necessity

Where holidays are in question ...

I am thinking back to my last holiday. We were in Spain, near Barcelona. It was a year of hard work and learning for our daughter. A dream vacation – sun, sand, beach, delicious food and finally the time we could spend together and not rush anywhere. This year's vacation has gone to the background and is not so important to me and my family. We are happy that we are healthy and together.

The current situation around the world gives us food for thought: we have to be happy every moment because we do not know what tomorrow will bring us. My wish for today is that people stop getting sick and life will return to normal, so that I can fly to Poland to my mother and sit down with family and close friends. These are things that were at our fingertips but, for today, have become impossible.

And only a moment was enough ...

An adventure *by Aída*

My name is Aida. I'm from Brazil and I've lived in Ireland for a year.

My husband received a job offer and we came to live this adventure as a family. My son is 16 and studies at an excellent school here in Ennis. The town is very pleasant and the people are lovely! I appreciate the way everyone welcomes immigrants and I appreciate the opportunity to study English.

I hope our story here is prosperous and happy!

COVID issue *by Alba*

It was the middle of February when my husband and I said goodbye to my family at Guayaquil Airport. It was strange for me to see the workers at the airport wearing face masks and gloves because, at that time, there were no COVID cases in Ecuador. It seemed a bit excessive. I was expecting those kinds of precautions at Schiphol Airport in Amsterdam but everything was pretty normal there. European people didn't seem worried at all until the outbreak in Italy after Carnival.

Once in Ireland, before the lockdown, we visited my husband's family in Dublin. We were worried for them because his mother and siblings are in an at-risk group. A week later, in Clare, my husband began to experience a lack of appetite, chills, fever and other symptoms. For two weeks he hardly moved out of bed. My symptoms weren't as bad as his. I'd routinely push myself to the kitchen to prepare meals, herbal teas and unimaginable home remedies. I was trying, at all costs, to eat well because we were living minute by minute through a disease without a known treatment. Being active was also good therapy for me because when I tried to rest, I felt worse. We did call the ambulance so that we could be tested but it never arrived. After two weeks, my husband went to hospital because he started having breathing difficulties.

In April, the newspapers and social media networks were reporting that there were corpses wrapped in sheets left in the streets of Guayaquil. It seemed like sensational news but it was the truth. The medical system had collapsed. They did not have artificial respirators, and people were panicked and lacked the resources to lock down. Since we got sick, I have maintained daily contact with my family in Ecuador. My younger sister and her partner are dentists but both had to close their clinics; my older sister and her partner are doctors, and they worked throughout the pandemic.

Looking back, it was a terrifying situation because in Ireland we live in the middle of the countryside. The weather was so cold and there is no access to public transport. On the other hand, it was a great opportunity to learn to make wine and to start a vegetable garden, which has been a great success! My family is doing quite well also. My younger sister has reopened her clinic and my older sister is working as an ophthalmologist at the hospital. And something that makes me very happy is that my mother is spending her time at the beach. Fortunately, none of them got sick. I am the only one that got sick in a freezing cold, strange territory.

My journey to Ireland – 2020 *by Ali*

My name is Ali and I am from Somalia. I have lived in Ireland for the last nine months. Before that, I lived in Germany for two months – January and February. I travelled from Germany to Poland by bus at the end of February and then I flew to Ireland.

That was the time that COVID had started and the people were afraid of each other, in case they would get the virus. But now the situation is different and people have adapted to COVID.

A big dream *by Ameniane*

I am from Goias, Brazil. My mother died in 2000. Then, I lived with my grandparents. My grandfather died in 2015. I think my grandmother, Maria, is a warrior.

I had a big dream – my own ice business. In 2017, I drove to Sao Paulo with my husband and daughter. We drove for 15 hours. I bought a very special freezer for my ice business. It was very expensive but it freezes 600 ice-creams and ice juices in 3 hours. Before, I froze 200 ice-creams in 4 hours in my fridge. My business grew bigger and bigger. We worked harder and harder. When we worked, we were very tired. We never had free time – to relax and be happy with my daughter and our families.

My aunt and my cousin lived in Ireland and helped my husband to move country – to come to Ennis. My husband came to Ireland in November 2018. I sold my special freezer. I was very sad. My dream ended. It was very difficult for me because I didn't want to leave my grandmother. I worked as a school bus driver with my brother in 2019. It was a difficult time. I came to Ennis in 2019 with my daughter.

I am sad but know it's the right choice for my family. My English teacher says I am a warrior too – like my grandmother.

I know that despite so much pain, God has a purpose in our lives.

I wake up early *by Ana*

I wake up early.

Day like every day.

I go to make coffee.

The guinea pigs are glad to see me ...

They are hungry again 😊 You have a cucumber – I say – enjoy 😊

My daughter also wakes up.

We sit at the table and we eat a delicious breakfast together 😊

Time for chores.

I go to work and Susi goes to school.

Have a nice day 😊 😊

"This too will pass" by Annette

It is September 4th, 2020. Where have the months gone since Leo Varadkar's grave address to the Irish nation?

Over six months' worth of life has been lived by nearly everyone in the world under the same cloud of COVID-19. We were united in this same situation, whether willingly or unwillingly.

I sometimes wonder if I had realised that this changed state of everyday life was to be with us for this length of time - would I have lived daily life any differently? Would I have laid down more ground-rules for myself and achieved more goals?

No, I don't think so. I like to think that every day was special and different and that I embraced this new way that somehow relieved me, personally, of the (imagined) stresses and demands of life. I like to think that this new way allowed me to feel free and open to simple pleasures, particularly the pleasure of "time" – to have time and not to feel guilty about it!

I know that I am lucky to live where I live and to be at this stage of my life where I do not have to worry about not having work and everything that that implies.

Also, even though I am part of a small but close family, we became even closer due to our shared care for one another and hope that we would all come through this virus safely. Video-calls became the norm rather than voice-calls. My fear that my little grandson would forget me was relieved by daily "chats" together and he entertained me with toys and books brought up to the screen for me to admire.

Again, I do not want to seem impervious to what a lot of people have gone through because of not being able to see other loved ones. I know how difficult it must be for those living alone and isolated. Particularly heart-breaking was the loss of loved ones and not being able to be with them in their final hours and then not having the support of the entire community to help grieve and mourn according to our age-old traditions.

The quote, "This too will pass," comes to mind very often and I hope that one day good things will come from this unprecedented time in the history of the world.

A new life by Aura

My name is Aura. I'm from Romania. I lived in Spain for 15 years. Now I live in Ennis. I've lived here for 2 months. I live with my sister and nephew. I like the Ennis people. They are very nice and respectful. I love running, especially running in mountains. Ennis has beautiful landscapes. Now, I'm studying English and I work as a cleaner or doing nails. I am starting a new life in Ireland.

My decision *by Beata*

My name is Beata and I'm 47 years old. Six years ago I made a decision to leave my country, Poland, for Ireland. This decision brought a complete change in my life. I had to change my profession because, when I came to Ireland, I didn't know English at all so I couldn't work in my profession as a nurse. Leaving my CV in various companies was a big challenge for me.

After three months, I got a new job. Fortunately, I met very friendly, helpful, open people who helped me find a job in a factory. It was not easy. Starting in the company was very difficult. I knew only a few words in English and communicating with my colleagues and supervisors at work every day was a big challenge for me.

For the first few months I had moments of doubt as to whether I had made the right decision. Was I too old for a new start? But I didn't give up. Every day, I tried to learn new words. I was learning the language from the Internet and I tried to read books in English. My colleagues gave me their children's books from primary school. Now, after 5 years, I know that it was a good decision.

My English is still not perfect. I am still learning the language but I know much more and it is easier for me to communicate in workshops, etc. I was promoted. Now I am a shift lead. I have new Irish friends. My life has started to unfold here and I don't feel like a stranger anymore. I am telling my story for those who are not self-confident. My advice is: DO NOT GIVE UP on your plans when they fail at first.

It is worth fighting persistently for your dreams. Persistence produces results. I wish you patience and that your dreams may come true. You can really achieve your goals.

Don't give up.

Thank you! *by Carmel*

I would like to take this opportunity to thank everybody in the Education Centre who has given me an opportunity to better myself through joining a cookery class with chef, Nora. It's a class that I have learned a great deal in. Nora is an outstanding chef and I have learned so much and more in her class. I thought I knew everything there was to know about cooking but by joining the class with Nora I learned a whole lot more. I made good friends in the class and we were a good team. Thank you, Nora, so much for your time. I appreciate your dedication in getting us all through the course. I appreciate all that you have taught me.

I have done other courses too: a computer course with Antoinette and one-to-one with Mary. Thanks to Liz for uploading our files. And a very big thank you to Colette for giving me the opportunity to join these courses, including Gerry's mosaic class. I have met a lot of interesting people through my courses. A big thank you to Colette and staff, and the staff in the cafeteria. It is a privilege to have met you all.

Thank you all so so much. I look forward to doing a lot more courses with you.

Wishing you all the very best from the bottom of my heart. All the best for 2021.

I Am *by Carmel*

I Am the sunshine in the morning
with rays of heat across the plains.

I Am the birds chirping happily
sending songs of praise.

I Am the wind gently blowing
softly against your face.

I Am the earth underneath your feet
that crunches with every step you take.

I Am the sky up above you
and the ground below you.

I Am the trees that sway to and fro.

I Am the stars shining brightly
that light up the sky at night.

Respect me for I am nature,
live in me be kind.

My lockdown *by Cathy*

How was my lockdown? I spent my time in my home: a comfortable, warm and spacious enough place for my son and me. I can see the street from the kitchen window and, usually, there are cars passing but during this time there were only runners, teenagers on bikes, children with parents, or dogs being walked on leads. For two months, life changed.

I could hear birds in the garden; I could see the lovely trees getting their leaves and flowers growing. Just by chance, we had lovely weather and more sunshine than usual.

My son, a teenager, spent time in the attic, a spacious room for him. He can play, sleep, study or cycle there. During this special time at home, he started helping me more with cooking and cleaning. He played badminton with me in the garden for exercise.

The first month was a good experience; we had fun and new ideas for different activities. The first lockdown became a habit but the second one seemed to be more boring for us, although we had everything we needed. What did we miss? We missed our social life, being able to meet neighbours and friends.

I spent time online doing gym exercises with my cousin, Jean-Charles, or cooking with a famous French chef called Cyril Lignac. I also started watching a series called *This is Us*, and then *Grey's Anatomy*. That was in English because I had to practise my English listening. I kept in contact with my French family by sending some links, jokes or having video conversations together.

That was a very special and unforgettable time but I am keen to have real life now, the Irish life that I love with pubs and friendly people.

My history in Ireland *by Cíntia*

Hello, my name is Cíntia and I live in Ennis. I work in a vegetable shop, and working there has really helped me with my English. I like where I work, and the customers talk to me so I get a chance to practise my English.

I love Ireland. It's an incredible place, very beautiful. It has a great history and I love the stories that my friends tell me. I've gone to many of the places that, before, I had only known in pictures or movies. I had the opportunity to go to the Cliffs of Moher. I love the beautiful beaches. They are very clean and so different from my home country of Brazil. Anyway, Ireland is wonderful. I like it a lot just being here.

I also thank my teacher for helping and encouraging me in my improvement and I hope to learn more in the future. Life is good.

COVID-19 *by Colm*

Life with our family and friends

We can't meet up with our family and friends because of COVID-19.

But without our iPhones and social media, we would be lost.

We can see family on FaceTime, and our friends also.

We need a government as fast as possible.

It's looking like Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and Independents.

I hope this virus is gone soon,

Missing sport and music,

We will get through it,

Believe we can and we will get through it,

Keep calm, be level, that's the best we can do,

That's part of the Lockdown.

My wish is that my family and friends

stay safe and healthy and stay at home.

See you soon everyone,

And we will have one Big Party when it's over,
Let's get rid of that virus,
To get Ireland back
Until we meet again
United by staying apart.

The impact COVID-19 has on our lives *by Colm*

Shopping: first, queuing outside for at least half an hour. Then, making sure we keep our distance when shopping; wearing masks, using hand sanitisers and being cautioned at all times.

The impact it has on people: we are unable to meet up with friends for lunch or a drink and if we do, we have to keep our distance. And as we are a very friendly race, this is not normal for us. We will have to adapt to this way of life.

Our sport is not happening. Music events are not happening. Music artists are keeping going on YouTube with their videos. Sports players are keeping going with their skills.

I hope Ireland will get back to what it was before COVID-19.

And when this ends we can enjoy the simple things that we took for granted.

My short story *by Dainius*

My name is Dainius. I'm from Lithuania. I came to Ireland twelve years ago. I have two sons. Their names are Robertas and Edgaras and they live in Lithuania.

Now I live in Kilrush. I go to English class. In the morning I like to walk in the park. I love going to old castles. People in Ireland are very good. I am happy in this country.

Dreams come true - *by Dayane Morgan*

Hi, my first name is Dayane-Morgan. I'm 32 years old. I'm from Resende, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. I live in Ennis. I'm married to Eric and I have 2 children, Kevin and Brian.

My journey started when my husband said he wanted to live in the United States so that our children could study in a school with good education, have more security and live in a country with less corruption in politics. I convinced him to live in Ireland because here we would be legal as I have dual nationality – Spanish and Brazilian.

I changed his mind. We researched the city we would live in in Ireland. We sold our apartment and car. We were all to be here in April 2020. Then I broke my arm in a motorcycle accident and had surgery. Then COVID came to Brazil. The money we had devalued and because of that I had to come to Ireland alone, leaving my husband and children to come later... It was very painful.

On September 20th, I came to Dublin. I didn't understand anything but I had met Celia at the airport in Portugal. She helped me in Dublin Airport to board the bus for Ennis. I will be forever grateful to the wonderful family in Ennis who opened the door of their home without even knowing me.

At the beginning of lockdown, I thought I would not get a job but after 25 days I got a call to start work at a company in Shannon.

My husband and children will come from Brazil. I will kiss and hug them. I wish there were more people to kiss and hug like my mother, my mother-in-law, brothers, sisters-in-law and nephews.

"Dreams come true the moment you start believing that they are possible ..."

My travels around Ireland *by Edgar*

My name is Edgar and I am living in Ireland, but I am from Brazil.

This country is very nice. I came on holiday from Brazil and never went back. I have travelled all around the country – from Cork, Dublin and Galway to Limerick and Belfast, Northern Ireland. I have seen the mountains and the big lakes. When I was in Doolin, I took a boat to the Aran Islands and visited Inis Oírr for a day. It was so beautiful, I can hardly explain it.

The best place for me is North Galway. I spent 4 days on holiday there. Now I am here such a long time, I tell everybody I'm from County Clare – it's very nice.

2020: What can I say? *by Elvira*

What can I say about this year? For sure, the year 2020 is a year I won't ever forget. Don't get me wrong, although it was a pandemic time, I can say that it is a positive thing to remember. Positive because this strange time gave me the opportunity to think about the future and about the things that I didn't do in the past due to laziness.

I had the opportunity to renew a friendship with a person I hadn't seen in 12 years. I also had the opportunity to recommence my computer studies, achieving an IT certificate. I had the opportunity to spend more time with my family but, in other ways, we lost a lot.

My children lost their daily training, competitions, sleepovers. We lost the pleasure of going on holidays and we lost the opportunity to visit other countries as we had planned to do. The year 2020 will certainly not be a year to forget.

My time in Ireland *by Jan*

My name is Jan. I came to Ireland from Slovakia a few years ago with my partner and kids. I have three kids and one on the way. I came to Ireland in the hope of learning new things and the English language. I like to read new books and make new friends.

Through my window ... *by John*

I can see flowers, the sky, gardens, planes, birds and green trees.

I hear cars, birds, people talking and airplanes flying.

I am able to go outside for my shopping, and go for a walk and do some gardening.

My wish for today is that the weather will still be lovely and you can get out.

My little story *by Juan*

My name is Juan. I'm from Spain. I was born in Granada but I live on the Costa del Sol, Malaga. I am 46 years old. I went to university and have higher studies in sports. When I was 23, I created a sportswear company. Step by step, it has grown bigger. I have worked with Irish sports clubs for 2 years but with circumstances in 2020, I decided the best thing was that I should lead the way in Ireland myself. My plan is to open a company in Ireland and create jobs but I have a big problem. I don't speak very good English. I must use Google translator! This is the main reason I'm here.

I have an adventurous side that helps me grow in life. I came to Ireland by motorbike. I needed a means of transport for my work and also for my passion: to see the world. I travelled, before government restrictions, from Malaga to Bilbao, and by ferry from Bilbao to Rosslare. I visited Galway, Waterford, Ennis, the Cliffs of Moher, Doolin, Limerick, Tulla and Quin. Soon I will go to Cork. At Christmas I will go to Spain and return in January to learn more English. The COVID restrictions have not let me get to know the country, the people, or practise my English but I hope that in a short time everything will change for the better.

I can say that the people I have met here are lovely. This is a good country. It doesn't have the best climate but we can go sunbathing in Spain on holidays!

The best choice *by Juciele*

My name is Juciele. I am 27 years old. I am from Rondonia, Brazil. I came to Ireland in October 2019 with my husband and 2 children – 7 and 4 years old. I love my country but I am very happy in Ennis, Co. Clare. This place wins my heart more and more. I came in search of a better life for my children. I want to give them a quality education.

The sacrifices we made to be here are many because we left a life behind. We left people we love. Christmas for us is a beautiful family reunion. We have a beautiful meal all together in celebration of the birth of baby Jesus. In my city, there are no ornamental lights and no Santa Claus. Christmas is a very important date and we miss our family at Christmas.

I know it is the best choice, especially for our children. I am very grateful to Ireland for having welcomed us so well. We will stay here. We believe this is the beginning of a beautiful story.

KAYAKING ... from Ballyalla to “The Homecoming” at Scoil Chríost Rí, Cloughleigh *by David, Martin and John*

Our kids go to Scoil Chríost Rí, Cloughleigh. It's beside the River Fergus. We saw kids kayaking and we asked Joe Garry could we do it. He is an absolute gentleman. He organised it with the Adult Education Centre in Clonroad (Mary and Maria) and the Burren lads (Ger, Alan and Ephan). We felt very safe while we were out on the water. They taught us loads and minded us well. We learnt to respect the water and people who're in our groups. We learnt a few rules too - don't tumble each other in!

The first day, we learned how to get into the kayak and sit in it with the knees out to the edges to balance ourselves. We learned how to hold the paddle and move it. We were blessed with the weather. It was freezing and an awful shock when we fell into the water. We held onto the boat and floated and the leaders helped us back in. The boats filled with water so we'd to empty them before we got back in. We all capsized – some lads capsized a few times! Your heart goes awful fast when you fall in the first time. We didn't wear wetsuits the first couple of weeks but after a few tumbles, we wore them every week to keep warm. We had to wear buoyancy aids and helmets for safety.

We started off the first day in Ballyalla. We learned different strokes, how to paddle forwards, backwards, sideways, in the current and in the eddy. We paddled across Ballyalla lake and we paddled from the recycling centre by the reeds and under the bridges up to the school. It was lovely to wave to people on the banks and the bridges. We saw snipe, herons, ducks, swans and egrets – we were all messin' calling them eejits. We had the craic and laughs.

It was lovely for our kids to have “The Homecoming.” We called us arriving to the school by water “The Homecoming.” We said we hadn't the Liam McCarthy Cup but we paddled our own canoes. Our kids were waiting for us and they presented us with our awards. We were very proud.

Thanks to Joe for giving us the wonderful opportunity to participate. We felt privileged to get the opportunity in these weird (COVID) times to be out. It helped our mental well-being. It gave us something to look forward to on a weekly basis. We'll be sad when it finishes and hope we'll get a chance to do it again. It was great to clear the head and feel that we've some normality. We would recommend this kayaking to anyone that hasn't done it before. We are really grateful and thankful for this opportunity and for the great friendships we've made.

(Story compiled by Maria)

Smiles *by Ksenia*

My name is Ksenia. I come from Uzbekistan.

My first acquaintance with Ireland began with smiles. Wherever I went, I met people with kind smiles.

The Irish are a welcoming and friendly people. This is especially noticeable in children. My children go to school with great pleasure, as there they are met by kind, understanding and sympathetic teachers. The teachers create a special friendly atmosphere for them, in which it is pleasant to study and find new friends.

For this, I am very grateful to Ennis National School.

End of the year in Brazil *by Leonor*

In Brazil, at Christmas and end of year we love to get together. We have lots of food, lots of drinks and new clothes. On New Year's Eve, there are many, many fireworks in the sky. This is all very beautiful. I miss my country a lot. Once a year, I go to Brazil. I stay there about three weeks. I love my country.

My son's birthday *by Linda*

Hello, my name is Linda. I am from Uzbekistan. We have been living in Ennis since the beginning of 2020. I live here with my husband and our son Markus.

In July 2020 my son turned 2 years old. Despite the pandemic and lockdown, we celebrated his birthday among friends and it was amazing. It was a party by the ocean. We invited all our friends to the beach. It was a sunny warm summer's day.

We swam, sunbathed, and had a picnic on the ocean shore. We brought a lot of shovels and buckets for playing in the sand and we also took a slide. We hid the treasure and the children looked for it later, and the prize was a treasure chest.

It was a birthday one could only dream of. The children were over the moon and the parents were happy too. There is no ocean in Uzbekistan, and so it was a good idea for us to celebrate our birthday near the ocean.

Living in New York *by Deborah*

I lived next to a very large park. There is a golf course with a lovely pond beside the park. Large birds, called Canadian geese, make their home in the park. I would stop and watch the birds flying high in the sky in a v-shaped formation. In winter, the pond would freeze over and the geese would stand at the edge of the pond as if waiting for the ice to melt.

We went for a walk on a lovely pathway beside the golf course. The path was full of very old trees and the ground overgrown with wild flowers, weeds and fallen old trees that are lying there for years. You can see and hear the squirrels running back and forth searching out food, and you can hear the birds singing. And every so often, as you walk along the pathway, you will hear the sound of a golf ball as it takes flight over the fence, landing just in front of you or landing behind a tree.

This is where the fun games began for my dogs, who loved to chase after the golf balls or go hunt for them among the trees and weeds. Sometimes, my dogs would smell the golf balls buried deep in the ground, digging holes until they could retrieve the

balls. We would throw the golf balls back into the golf course. Our walk continues – to our left is the golf course and to our right is the expressway, a very busy road that leads you to the other parts of the large city I call home. Further along this pathway there is a beautiful old carousel that was built in 1903. The carousel has 52 figures. Also, on this side of the park, is the bandstand and in the summer months there are outdoor concerts. Sometimes, I would take my dogs into the dog park/run where they would meet up with other dogs and play with them.

My favourite part of the park is the horse trail. The lovely horse trail is hidden behind old trees and this zig-zag trail goes deeper into the parkland. Along the way you will meet the horses and their riders. The park also includes a pond that has ducks swimming around, and is full of wildlife – including squirrels, chipmunks and raccoons. The raccoons leave the park to go in search of food in people's gardens. There are basketball and tennis courts, a running track and a children's park. In the summer months, the sprinklers turn on for the children to cool down and they chase each other around the sprinklers in play. In the summer months, you can have a BBQ and barbecue grills are around the park. There are 538 acres of ground in the park and I'm sure in the last 30 years, I have been to every part of this beautiful parkland. If you would like to check it out, it's called Forest Park in New York.

Feelings about COVID *by María*

At first, I never expected that COVID would change the lifestyle of the whole planet. So my first feeling was surprise.

However, the feeling of surprise turned to fear when the lockdown started. But not only fear for me and my family, rather I felt fear for all humanity. I had never had this feeling before. So I stopped to reflect.

When fear appears, the first human reaction is paralysis. When you move on from that, you have two options. You can connect with yourself or disconnect completely and panic. Disconnecting from yourself brings more and more fear. This is a cause of disorder and anxiety. You feel very vulnerable.

In my case, fortunately, I decided to connect with myself, feel my breath, observe my thoughts and not get carried away by them. All of this is achieved through the practice of yoga. Thanks to yoga, I stayed calm and peaceful despite the difficult times we were going through. To sum up, I highly recommend the practice of yoga, especially in difficult times.

Living with COVID-19 *by Marina*

Living with COVID-19 has been a bad experience. Everything has changed. If you look around, nothing is how it used to be. I even believe that people have changed too.

It is a terrible time for everyone. Companies, jobs and the economy are in decline. The streets are empty; there are no tourists anywhere; shops are closed; there is no

background music from pubs and we cannot give hugs anymore. People seem sad, or at least they look sad to me.

That is totally understandable. I am sad too. I cannot meet my friends. I cannot work. I cannot do my hobbies. In summary, I cannot do anything so I think it is normal not to feel great with coronavirus around us.

I would tell everyone not to give up though. We will soon smile and hug our loved ones, I hope.

Memories *by Mary*

Growing up in pre-electricity Ireland was a very different lifestyle to what we all are accustomed to now.

But, that aside, being born in the country I had a wonderfully happy childhood from an early age. I always wanted to be outdoors and so I succeeded in milking an "easy" cow at a young age. There were no Wellingtons in those days so I had a pair of laced boots for work every Saturday. Then there was the donkey and cart and filling farmyard manure and drawing it out to the fields as top dressing. There was the occasional trip to the village to bring homemade butter to the local shop and maybe return home with a very large bag of flour, not in a paper bag but in a type of calico or linen mix bag.

There was Sunday Mass at 8am and people receiving Holy Communion, all fasting from midnight. We travelled in the pony and trap. I have vivid memories of being sent out to catch the pony in the dark, using a "Tilley" lamp. I could only find the pony when she looked up and two eyes shone in the dark. On the way to Mass, we often gave a lift to a neighbour as she was walking. She was an "oldish" lady with false teeth and my sister and I were always watching her as the teeth sometimes fell out when she spoke. We thought that very funny but got a quick glare from our mother if we attempted to laugh.

Birthday parties consisted of school friends invited for a picnic, again the donkey and cart and we all set off to a nice clean field with short grass.

Summer holidays were spent in the garden weeding, which I hated, but when we heard the Angelus bell, we knew it was soon a break for dinner. Hay making was great because I was able to work the hay turner and horse, then the wheel rake, so I loved that.

Bringing home the turf was great. My father had the horse and creel and I had the donkey, cart and creel, so my load was small. Mid-afternoon, when we came home, my mother would have a fresh rhubarb or apple tart out of the oven for tea.

I didn't like Mondays during the summer holidays as it was wash day, with a big tub and wash boards; then it was always a cold meat dinner. Butter was made using the big churn in the dairy. It was hard to keep turning the handle so I ran off and avoided doing it.

A long time ago, but the memories are still very fresh.

Best present I ever got *by Mary*

Growing up as the eldest child in the country when money was scarce, one didn't have too many luxuries.

Round the age of 8, I was beginning to wonder about Santy; did he really exist? I really, really wanted to get a lovely new shiny bicycle so I planned to ask Santy in time, to bring me one and wrote a letter to him.

As Christmas approached, I had my doubts. I figured out that if my father was doing Santy, he could by then have bought the bicycle and hidden it somewhere. And so, I decided to do a full search outside the house. We had a few farm buildings and a big barn where the horse trap was kept, among other things. Also, in the barn was a great big concrete corn bin stretching the full length of the wall and a big timber lid on hinges. Opening it was difficult but I managed to prop it up, then I was equipped with the flash lamp and up I went on a few blocks and was able to lean half in, half out. Just at that minute, the big barn door on rollers was rolled back and my father in a very loud voice said, "What are you doing in here?" I got such a fright but I had already seen only the oats, no bicycle hidden. That put my mind to rest. So, roll on a few days and it was Christmas Eve. I hadn't dared mention all this to my younger siblings, and my mother never mentioned the barn incident to me.

My excitement knew no bounds as I went to bed but couldn't sleep for a while. At some stage during the night I woke up and crept to the kitchen, and there before my eyes was the most beautiful shiny Raleigh bicycle, complete with basket in front. The most wonderful time of my life and, yes, wasn't it great there was a Santy after all?

(P.S. I don't recall the following Christmas, but I somehow think my mother may have put me "in the picture" during the following year.)

A day trip *by Andrea*

A long, long time ago they had planned to go for a day trip somewhere where nobody would be around. The hardest part of the plan was finding the place and, of course, the time when they should go and how? After many questions and much discussion, they decided to go to the Spiritual point, which is also known as The Heart of the Earth.

They were so excited the morning when they left the house and drove to the mountain. The weather was nice, and warm enough for walking in the forest. The views were amazing. How the sun was shining into the leaves and the autumn's colours created beautiful pictures in front of the car. On the way up to the mountain they travelled in silence. They were really enjoying the moment and the peace that they felt in that place. Finally, they arrived at the top and found a place in the car park. The adventure had just started. At the look-out point they had an amazing view of the other mountains, the River Danube and lots of big rocks around. The place was breath-taking. They had planned to stop for a minute but were there maybe more than half an hour. They were overwhelmed by feelings, energies and peace.

Later, when they came back to themselves, they started to walk slowly on the path, and there were different signs: red, blue, yellow or green, depending on the level of

difficulty of the route. They chose the blue one because they thought that would be the easiest one. As the first few kilometres were easy, they found another path and decided to give themselves a greater challenge and tried that way. That was the hardest and most "dangerous" way. The views were still amazing, but the climb got harder and harder. Sometimes, they were using a ladder to climb up to or down to the path. They were extremely excited about how nice and how beautiful the mountain could be. And the forest, of course, was peaceful.

Enjoying the moment and the views and being so tired after all the climbing and walking along the mountain, they decided to have a break for lunch. They found a nice glade where there was nothing around, just sunshine and birds singing and peace all around. They were feeling energised by nature and recharged from eating the food they had taken from home – simple sandwiches with tea and coffee. After the picnic, they tried to find the way back to the blue line walkway slowly but surely, enjoying being in nature. Once, they gave a big hug to a tree and got more energy from it. Everything was magical. This time felt like a fantasy and real life was so far away.

Still in silence and walking quietly beside each other, the day was almost finished. The sun went down, the horizon giving another nice picture all around the forest, like a painting. They had arrived back in the car park filled with good feelings, full of energy and peace.

That was an amazing day trip with adventure and big challenges. They decided that next time they would go to the same place and find another path and experience another challenge.

My sister, Rabin *by Alice*

A long time ago I had a sister called Rabin. She was three and a half years old when she got diarrhoea. She was very sick and she had to go to the hospital and had to stay there for one week with my mom. Six months after she got better, she was with my grandmother next door and my mom was in our house cooking. My dad was at the school because he was a teacher. My sister said, "I'm going home," and Granny said "OK," but my sister didn't go home. She went to the pond to look for our mom. My mom thought my sister was with my grandmother but then my grandmother came in and said, "Where is Rabin?"

They went looking for Rabin but they couldn't find her so, finally, they went to the pond where they saw her dead in the pond. My mom picked her up but she was dead. Then I came back from school and I started crying.

My story *by Shazia*

I'm Shazia, married with five children. At 19, I left school (in Pakistan). In August my results came out, and in the February the following year I got married. In two years I had two children. I was busy for those years looking after my own family and my

mother-in-law, father-in-law and brother-in-law. When I left my education, I saw girls passing going to school in September and I was crying, a bit sad that I wasn't going with them. It was a difficult choice between marriage and education. It was confusing. I wanted to become a psychologist and had studied this for two years. My teacher was happy with my work. I couldn't do what was expected as a wife and daughter-in-law and be a student.

I came to Ireland and had three more children. First, I learned English in Ennis Adult Education Centre for a year and then started a childcare course. I completed five modules and had to stop education as I had more children. I continued to come to Clare Women's Network for short day courses or three-week courses. I also attended other courses in the Clare Education Centre.

I did computers, cookery, gardening and sewing courses. These small courses gave me a good standard of life. If I compare from that time 'til now, I have a lovely garden with fruits and flowers. If something goes wrong I can check it on YouTube, or visit the garden centre and ask for advice. It's all learning and making the garden beautiful.

Margaret and Alan were my first teachers. Everyone in the Adult Education Centre encouraged me. The Special Needs module gave me good knowledge. I stayed at home with my children as the childcare wasn't up to standard and I decided my children needed me at home.

I still have feelings to learn, to do more than be a mother. When my youngest child started full-time school, I decided to come back to learn. This is for myself. I came back to Adult Education and asked for English, as my English writing and literacy are not good. I want to help my child in second level with spelling and to write proper letters or essays.

I am on a computer course. I found it hard to find the letters on the keyboard. I found it hard to read the task. I did ECDL in 2002 and had forgotten a lot by 2014. I'm now doing Social Media. I'm enjoying Office Skills, Web Design and Stock Control. This has given me a big boost in my life. I do all the bills now. I opened a bank account and, previously, had no idea about bank statements or account details. Then I learned how to do online banking. My daughter is doing Business Studies and I can help her with terms.

I'm doing a Career Guidance module now and I want to work in an office. I'm not ready for a full-time job with my children still in school. Not coming to education is like putting yourself in a cupboard like a shirt for years and years, you come out the same.

I learned to drive when my fifth child was born. I had to pass my test so I could bring them to sports and friends. In 2008 I passed my test. I feel it's a great achievement.

In every aspect of my life, education is important. I boost my children and tell them you must do this. I left my education but I won't let my children do this. I'm still on a hard working road until my youngest daughter is finished college. They still need a lot of support now. Today, my two sons have completed masters' degrees; one daughter is in third year in college, and two daughters are in second level school. On my son's graduation from Trinity College, Dublin, I felt it was my success too.

My trip to Dublin *by Aoife*

I got the train from Limerick to Dublin with my best friends. When we got to Dublin, we went to a fish and chips restaurant; then we went shopping. I got a lovely jumper in Penneys. Then we got ready. When we were done, we got a taxi to the Button Factory. It was a good night. We had a lot of fun. The concert was on the 8th November. The DJ's name was Ben Nicky. When it was over, we went back to our hotel. We got the train home the next day.

I am really looking forward to my next adventure, which is a trip to Prague with my friends on 26th April 2020.

Like/Love *by Nelly*

My name is Jaroslava. In Ireland, people call me Nelly. I am from Brod nad Dyji in the Czech Republic. I came to Ireland in 2007. I live in Ennis. I have a partner and 2 children. My boys go to school in Cloughleigh.

I like Summer because I like sunshine and swimming. I like Autumn because the leaves change colours. I like Spring because the flowers grow. I sometimes like Winter. I don't like rain. I want snow like in the Czech Republic. I like playing snowballs and building snowmen. It's fun.

I love coffee. I love sugar. I love my children, my partner and my mummy-in-law. She is teaching me cooking and baking. She is a very good woman.

Hard times come again no more *by Noel*

With the ending of World War Two in 1945 Ireland and its people were going through a tough economic time, which led to mass unemployment and emigration. In this story, you will get some idea of what families went through.

1946

After the German air raids on major cities in England, a lot of Clare people left their homes and families to find work in England. Most of these people were married men ranging in age from their early twenties to, sometimes, late forties and early fifties. Some were eighteen or, in some cases, sixteen.

One man in particular left the village of Clarecastle for London, leaving behind a wife and three young children. He, like many more, had no choice but to do so. It was either leave, or stay and let his family suffer and endure the poverty and unemployment that was rampant throughout the country. This man who left Clarecastle was to come home for Christmas of 1946 but could not do so due to a very bad accident he had on the building site.

I knew this family myself. His wife told me the story herself before she died in the late 1990s. In her own words she described that time to me with tears in her eyes. She began to tell me:

"It was the Christmas of 1946, a very cold December. Round the second week in December, a Friday evening, I remember it well," she said, "I had a call from the local guard. He told me the news that my husband had an accident on the building site in Finsbury Park, North London. How was I going to tell my two daughters and son that their father would not be home for Christmas? That night the four of us went to bed after a supper of homemade bread and tea. I cried myself to sleep that night. I prayed that everything would work out. Later that week, to make things worse, the postal services went on strike. My worst fears were beginning to unfold, but I kept on praying and hoping an answer would be found. The strike ended a few days later.

Christmas Eve came but no letter or money arrived from England. There would be no Santa Claus for the children. That same week I became ill and was confined to bed. Only for the kindness of my neighbours and their understanding, God only knows what we would have done. That Christmas Day my neighbour brought us food for our Christmas dinner. My children were given small toys and sweets as Christmas presents.

Christmas Day and St. Stephen's Day passed off. I was hoping these two days would go quickly. Then the 27th of December that year, things began to change. The postman arrived with a letter; it was from England. The postman smiled and said, 'It's a long time to wait. I hope it's good news.' I thanked him; it was good news indeed. Not only was my husband getting better but in the letter was £5 and 10 shillings. Later that morning, I went to Ennis and paid my last repayment on my children's toys for Christmas. I came back from Ennis with my groceries and toys.

I invited a few neighbours in for tea and a few drinks. We had a wonderful evening but it was a Christmas I wanted to forget. The only thing about that Christmas I will never forget was the happiness in my children's eyes when I came back from Ennis and, above all, the kindness of my neighbours and the trust I put in God and his Holy Mother.

New Year's Eve – A new beginning

New Year's Eve morning, we all went to Ennis shopping as a day out for the children and myself. As a treat, I took them to Considine's Bar and Restaurant in O'Connell Street. That same establishment is now Brogan's. We had a great lunch in Considine's restaurant that day. Then it was time to go to Neylon's Butcher's in Parnell Street to get some meat for the week and New Year's Day.

When we came back home, we had another surprise to meet us, for standing at the front door of the cottage was a man with a suitcase. 'Look,' said my son, 'it's my Daddy.' He ran to his father and all I could do was stand there and cry. It was tears of mixed emotions as he picked up his son and said, 'Thank God I'm alive to see ye all again.' That evening, after a good supper, we all sat around the fire listening to stories of his time working in London and about his time in hospital. It was coming towards midnight; we raised our glasses and made a toast to 1947 and wished that the misfortunes and trials of 1946 would be a thing of the past and hoped for a better change of fortune."

My COVID-19 story *by Omar*

I stay home because of this virus.

I play with my children in our garden and after that I teach my children the Arabic language and English. I can't move like I want.

I hope this virus ends and life returns as it was.

On a journey *by Jamcy (Adam)*

In spring 2012, I went to visit my mum. I hadn't seen her for more than seven years. We lived in different places. We were trying to get to Ireland and I said to my dad, "I want to say bye to my mum before we go."

He said, "All right," and he gave me some money for the trip. The next day, we went on a journey, day after day, night after night then, finally, we arrived there. The car stopped. Some people were getting off and I asked the driver, "Where are we now?" He said, "You have arrived." I said, "I need to get out," and some people told me to come with them because it's night time. I said, "No, I will be fine. I'm gonna phone my uncle to come meet me."

We said bye-bye; then they left me there. I walked for five minutes, then stopped and phoned my uncle to ask him to come there to meet me. But I didn't know the name of the street where I was and I didn't know which house to go to. The phone battery was gonna die soon; it was around 16%. Then I saw a shop open and asked the shopkeeper for help.

Finally, my uncle arrived and we went home to meet my family and I was happy.

Beauty course 2020 Parents'/Learners' voices

This course was really well run. Claire is absolutely fantastic, giving us plenty of information and videos. I would like to move on to the next level. I learned how to do facial exercises, making my skin look more youthful, and how to make facial masks to reduce the appearance of wrinkles. I learned how to make smoothies for good looking skin. I practised contouring and highlighting. Really enjoyed it! Thanks very much!

By Tania

I'm glad I joined the beauty course. We have a beautiful and lovely teacher. I learnt lots of tips and skills of skincare and beauty. Now, I feel more confident and spend more time on looking after myself. Definitely will join the next class.

By Valerie

I started the beauty course because I love everything to do with beauty and have learnt so much from Claire. She has been a great teacher. I've learnt how to do a facial; what cream to use on different skin types; and to use Vitamin E on the face to give skin a boost. We learnt how to make our own face masks at home and how to apply them; how to reduce puffy eye; and how to apply make-up properly. We learnt to do eyebrow tinting; how to clean our make-up; and how to set up our beauty stations. We learnt how to ground ourselves through meditating. The beauty course has boosted my self-esteem and self-confidence. I loved every area in it. I would love to go further in this area.

By Melanie

When I was living in the United States, I was a hairdresser so I had a huge interest in the beauty course. I've been living in Ireland for 13 years raising my 2 daughters and decided I would like to get back into the beauty industry. This course has helped build up my confidence again. I have enjoyed meeting new people and thoroughly enjoyed the course with our instructor Claire.

By Marissa

My story by Raquel

My name is Raquel. I am from Spain and I arrived in Ireland on 10th March. My idea before coming as an au-pair was to have free time for my English classes while the children were at school. But, two days after my arrival, the schools closed. In just two days my plans were gone.

News from my country was terrible. There were many infections, and people who should have been at home were leaving home. The possibility of returning to Spain was impossible at that time. Flights were cancelled and returning could be dangerous. I was worried about my family, but there was nothing I could do. It's a great feeling of helplessness.

The quarantine was in Ireland too. At this point, I knew that I would have to go through quarantine with a family that was not my family and with communication problems because I do not speak English well.

After two months, I can say that I am very lucky. My family in Spain is OK and things in my country are better. My family in Ireland is OK too. They were very kind and friendly to me. All this time, you can learn that maybe the language is different but the feelings about the situation are the same. It doesn't matter where you are or what you are, the situation is the same. The pain is the same and the hope is the same.

In a few years when I talk about how my quarantine was, I will be able to tell my story and how wonderful my Irish family was. Probably, it is not the best option to spend more than two months locked down but I wouldn't change it. Ireland and Irish people will always have a very special place in my heart and in my memories.

Remember, what doesn't kill you makes you stronger.

Coronavirus creates fear and panic *by Sadia*

The coronavirus creates fear and panic among everyone. If someone is to cough or sneeze in a public area, people get scared. They are thinking that they can be victims of the coronavirus, even if the person hasn't had the virus. The person might just have a normal cough or, in some cases, only has winter 'flu.

Coronavirus has changed all our lives *by Shukri*

My name is Shukri and I am from Somalia. I have lived in Ireland for about 3 years now. This year has changed all of our lives. The coronavirus started and we were in lockdown. It's been tough for my family as my kids couldn't meet their father as he lives in Denmark for work. He would visit us but this year was different. We really hope next year will be a lot better and safer and I hope everyone stays safe.

Missing home *by Silvia*

I have been living in Ireland for 6 months. I moved here with my husband and our little son. We have great times in Ireland, but I often think of my native Bulgaria. All our relatives and friends are there. We miss them very much. I often think of my family there; my mother Anna, my sister Eli, and our pet cat Victor.

I hope that in the future we will be able to see our families and hug them again.

The benefits of art *by Teresa*

To whom it may concern:

Re: ART

I wish to express my enjoyment and delight with the art classes and not forgetting our wonderful tutor, Michelle. Her encouragement, patience and guidelines bring out the best in me and I know that also goes for all the other attendees.

I have been attending the classes in Kilmurry McMahon Community Centre for the past few years. As I am retired, I find it a great outlet as I meet other friendly, lovely ladies and I find it relaxing and a great therapeutic hobby. While I had done art for my Leaving Cert all those years ago, I never bothered to practise it afterwards until I attended the classes.

Also, through the Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board, I have received two certificates of attendance, which is satisfying in itself. Also, I must mention Mary who co-ordinates and organises the classes for us with the LCETB.

I look forward to attending class every Thursday morning and I get great satisfaction from being among others. I have finished some nice pictures over the years (even if I say so myself) and have framed them. To my amazement, they have been admired and received many compliments.

People often choose to display art in their homes for aesthetic reasons but recent studies have shown there are benefits of art for memory and creativity. Engaging with the visual arts can actually improve stress, memory and empathy, whether by viewing art or creating it.

Yours sincerely,

Teresa

Moving to Ireland *by Elvira*

Moving to Ireland three years ago was a very important decision. Since they were little, our children have attended private English classes, but they never managed to learn the language well. My husband has always thought that going to live in another country opens your mind and makes you see things from another point of view. So we decided we were going to live in Ireland for a year and so we did.

At first, the children were not very happy because they left their friends behind but once we were established in Ireland everything changed, and for the better.

They were very happy. The school was very good and they finally learned the English language. But we had to fly back to Spain since we had only planned to be here for a single year, and my husband was still working in Spain. The children were very sad and did not want to return to Spain but we returned.

But we had a taste for Ireland and we missed it, so once we found out that my husband was retiring from work, I decided to leave my job in Spain and we returned to Ireland to live permanently.

The children were very happy and are delighted to live here. We have left the family in Spain but with the new technologies we have video calls, and it is as if we are all together. Thank you Ireland for welcoming us with open arms.

Letter *by Artur*

Hi John,

How is it going? I hope you are fine. We are doing very well. We didn't have much time this year to stay in touch. The pandemic of COVID-19 turned our lives upside down, starting with the lockdown in March.

I found the lockdown very stressful. Kids have been out from school. I was worried that I would spread the virus to my family, as I was the only one who was working and having contact with other people. After some time, I got used to the new situation but it was very hard.

The situation with the pandemic improved over the summer. The kids returned to schools "normally." By "normally" I mean that they have been working in the classrooms but they have to keep a social distance. Children are closed in the "Class Bubbles," which means that they can't mix with other classes. This is good because it is reducing the spreading of a virus.

We are after the second lockdown at the moment. The situation with COVID-19 got worse during the autumn, like in all of Europe. This time wasn't as hard as the first time. Kids attended schools at least. I'm happy with that.

Let me know what your thoughts on this whole situation are.

Stay safe,

Artur

P.S. We wish you a Merry Christmas!!!!

Lessons from COVID-19 *by Paulina*

COVID-19 has changed a lot in our lives. It stopped the world and turned everything upside down. However, the pandemic reminded me of many important things that we usually don't pay attention to. The virus teaches me these things:

Humanity is not indestructible. The Earth can get rid of us at any time, especially if we don't take care of the environment.

Let's enjoy the little things like travelling, having coffee with friends in a restaurant or meeting new people.

Nothing is more important than family and friends. We also started to pay attention to lonely and sick people and to care for them.

Almost everything can be arranged online. Courses, meetings, trainings, shopping can be even easier than in reality.

Every profession is important. We are all needed to rely on each other.

After the pandemic, people will never be the same again. But we should learn something good from the whole situation.

Lockdown *by Lukasz*

I experienced the lockdown very early in March when I was on holiday with my wife in Lisbon. So when we got back to Ireland, my boss called me to announce that I had to stay at home for the next 2 weeks for self-isolation. My wife was asked by her company to call the HSE to find out if she needed to quarantine as well. We were locked at home for 2 weeks, lying every day on the couch. We couldn't go outside, so our friend was delivering shopping to us every few days. It was a very hard time for

us; we were bored without any activities. It was the most difficult part of this self-isolation period.

Now, after a few months, everything is easier because we are already accustomed to this situation. We have to wear masks in shops and on public transport, disinfect hands often and generally care about our own and other people's safety.

The positive thing is that people are spending more time with their own families during this time. I hope that a New Year will bring us only better news about COVID-19, so it will be a possibility to plan holidays and fly somewhere to warm countries.

Postcard story *by Geraldine*

Covid-19 was a shock to everyone and the first feeling I had was fear. Everyone at home, no one allowed travel, no visiting friends, non-stop coverage on the media, etc. I then accepted it and because the weather was so magnificent I spent every day in the garden. What really helped, apart from that, was my connection with friends and family both in Ireland and abroad. WhatsApp, email, etc. all of which I had learned at computer class. I missed those classes, the camaraderie, chats, etc. But it was wonderful that Mary (our tutor) continued to link in with us each Friday. I always looked forward to that and it helped enormously during lockdown, as well as the connection with the 'other students' during the week. I sincerely hope classes continue in September if it is safe to do so.

The pandemic *by Victoria*

At the beginning of the pandemic situation, I was spending more time reading all kinds of news related to the COVID-19 virus. It was a very overwhelming situation especially in terms of the uncertainty. By that time, I got really obsessive about keeping everything around me very clean and disinfected. As the weeks went on, I was focusing more on following the restrictions imposed in my country, Spain, as the situation was worse there than in Ireland.

After doing some online courses about managing stress and time-management, I started feeling more focused and calm. Still with some practice, I have been trying to live in the present moment rather than thinking too much about the past or the future.

Regarding being in contact with others, I have been wearing a face mask each time I have met a person. Generally, I believe that the researchers around the world are doing really valuable studies to get ready possible vaccinations to be used for the general population. So, I feel confident about getting the pandemic under control in the coming months. It is true that, sometimes, I miss my family or the freedom to travel to my country to visit them.

The positive thing about this situation is that I have been working remotely from home since March. Even when I have to go a few hours each day to my workplace, I can

manage my time in a most productive way. To sum up, I can have more time to focus on some of my hobbies such as gardening, reading novels and, the most important, enrolling in an English course to complete the Cambridge First Certificate in English.

Poland and Ireland *by Agata*

I come from Poland. My country is situated in Europe. The Polish flag consists of two colours: white and red. White represents the hope for peace, and red means many fights for freedom over the years. The biggest cities in my country are Warsaw, Cracow and Wroclaw. The most important crops are grains like oats, rye and wheat. We raise dairy cows, beef cattle, pigs and poultry. The most famous sport in Poland is football. The best of our football players is Robert Lewandowski who is famous around the world. We have 4 seasons of weather: spring, summer, autumn and winter. They are easy to recognise during the year. The most famous Polish food is *golabki*, *bigos*, *pierogi* and *schabowy*.

Compare and contrast Ireland and Poland. Show similarities and differences.

Poland and Ireland are the most beautiful countries in Europe. Even though they are separated from each other by 2,590 km, they have more similarities than differences. Both of them have similar histories. Irish and Polish people fought for many years to regain independence and they know how much effort that costs. Poland and Ireland are agricultural countries. They are famous for crops, grains, potatoes and raising dairy cows, beef cattle and sheep. Both nations love potatoes and I think neither of them can imagine dinner without mashed potatoes or chips.

However, we can see a couple of differences between them. Whilst Poland has four seasons, there are usually only two in Ireland, winter and summer. Weather in Ireland is more unpredictable and you cannot trust forecasts because it could start raining at any single minute.

Poland *by Bernadeta*

Poland is located in central Europe. The Polish flag has two horizontal colours: white and red. The capital of Poland is Warsaw. Poland has 16 provinces. The longest rivers in Poland are Odra and Vistula. The border of the north side is the Baltic Sea. The highest mountains in Poland are the Tarty Mountains. Summers in Poland are warm, with average temperatures between 18°C and 30°C. Winters are cold, with average temperatures around -6°C to 3°C. The majority of people in Poland are Catholic. The most popular dishes in Poland are *pierogi*, *bigos*, *Zurek* and *kotlet schabowy*. Football and volleyball are very common sports in Poland.

From Poland to Ireland *by Slawomir*

Poland is located in the middle of Europe and is one of the biggest countries in Europe; however, Ireland is an island located in the west of Europe and is separated from the continent by the Irish Sea. The Polish flag has two horizontal colours: white on the top and red on the bottom, whilst the Irish flag has three vertical colours: green, white and orange. The Polish weather has four seasons with hot summers and cold winters but the Irish weather is different. Summer is very short and the weather changes very quickly during the day. Nevertheless, there is one week with good weather during the year. The Polish summer is more predictable for any holidaymakers. Though, most Irish people think this Polish season is too hot.

Both countries have similar food preferences. I think that there is a much bigger selection of food in Polish shops, as the Polish population is much higher than the Irish one. Both countries are in the EU but Irish cars are not the same as Polish cars; they are right-handed while Polish cars are left-handed.

Thoughts on Poland and Ireland *by Krystian*

Poland is a country in central Europe. The population is approximately 40 million. The country is divided into 16 provinces. The biggest city and capital, is Warsaw.

The diversity of landscapes is amazing. The north is very flat. There are no hills or mountains. Starting from the Baltic Sea and travelling more to the south, irregularity of the land can be clearly seen. Flatness changes into kilometres of hills and later into mountains, which are also the Polish southern border.

People speak the Polish language in Poland. However, many accents can be recognised. These accents can be so different to the regular Polish language, that some people from the north of the country may have problems with understanding people from the Silesia region or the highlanders.

Poland and Ireland are countries in Europe. Poland is bigger than Ireland when we consider surface and population. The histories of these two countries are similar; for example, both had to fight for independence and suffered a lot. Many people were killed.

There is a significant difference in climate. Four seasons are known in Poland, whilst there are only 2 in Ireland. Poland has spring, summer, autumn and winter, while Ireland has only spring and autumn; though some people have a theory that there is only one season in Ireland.

Poles have not developed a sport that would be played only in Poland and nowhere else, whilst Irish people invented two sports that are very popular in the country. These are hurling and Gaelic football.

The far mountain *by Nabilah*

Every morning I look ... a deep sorrow

Look at the far mountains which are my homeland, people I love and my original roots are behind.

I miss birds, shiver when a new sun rises

I used to see twilight in front of my house like a multiple painting

I see the bright light out of the reflection of light on Latakia's sea

My beloved city, which becomes distant from me

I miss your streets, the sounds of sellers and city congestion

Every day I imagine your gardens, mosques and old churches

And in *Al-Slaybah* ... the victory Arch ... is a tower since ancient times.

In Ugarit and Amrit ... alphabet and legacy appear

So you are the title of civilization

You are Arabs Latakia ... you attracted all countries with a loving eye

You have my family ... my friends ... childhood; I lived dreams, I put in your wide angles

You have ruins and memories ... although bitter ... they are close to myself

My beloved ... remove your blackness and be ready to wear colour ... your spring is inevitably coming

Lord of heaven will respond to mothers' appeals

Who wished a noble life for their sons

My story *by Jan*

My name is Jan. I came to Ireland a few years ago with my partner and kids. I have three kids and one on the way. I came to Ireland in hopes of learning new things like the English language. I like to read books and make new friends.

Dad's camera *by Benjamin*

My father's camera came from days of old.

Each picture it took, a story it told.

As we look at them through our young eyes,

the pictures remind us of our family ties.

The good times and bad,

bring joy and great cheer.

When I look back at them,

with a smile or a tear.

How things are better *by Mary*

I sit by the window on a rainy day

Hoping the clouds will soon go away

Struggle and struggle 'til the day is done

And finally I think the day is won

You see I listened to my instructor

Ate my bread and butter

Exercised and widened

and this is how things are better!

My coronavirus story *by Mary*

Little did we think a month ago how different life would become when coronavirus hit Ireland. Here we are with unplanned time off work and find it strange to occupy ourselves. Even though there is plenty to be done, we are distracted with the media, keeping an eye on the world and Ireland especially. We are all hoping it will pass quickly and get back to normal.

Everything has changed. A trip to the supermarket involves rules, hand sanitising, cleaning trolley handles, all to help in the control of this dreadful virus. No chatting or hanging around aisles, just keep moving. Everyone is doing their best as advised. Amazing how we took life for granted. Maybe this is a wakeup call for us all.

Most of all, we all miss meeting everyone and interacting with our friends and families. When this comes to an end we should make the most of life and make the world a better place to live in. We pray for all those involved in the medical profession and all volunteers helping out.

Stay safe and stay strong and we will all get our lives back to normal again.

Fish pie with cauliflower mash *by Bernadette*

Ingredients

1 large cauliflower broken into florets (750g)
2 tbsp. crème fraîche
15g butter
1 tbsp. plain flour
300ml semi-skimmed milk
2 tsp. of wholegrain mustard
200g leaf spinach
300g smoked haddock fillet, cut into large chunks
250g skinless salmon fillet, cut into chunks
15g parmesan, finely chopped

Method

Cook the cauliflower in a large pan of boiling water for 10 minutes. Drain and set aside to steam dry. Transfer to a food processor with the crème fraîche and blitz to a purée. Season and set aside.

To make the white sauce, heat the butter in a pan over a medium heat. Add the flour and stir well to make the paste, then gradually add the milk, stirring well between each addition, until you have a smooth paste. Add the mustard and season.

Preheat the oven to 200°C; fan 180°C; gas mark 6. Wilt the spinach in a microwave. Squeeze out all the water and add to the sauce, along with the fish. Transfer to a pie dish 20cm/26cm.

Top with the cauliflower mash, by forking over the surface to create a rough texture. Scatter the parmesan over the top and bake for 25 minutes. Then finish it off under the grill for 5 minutes to get a crisp golden crust.

Serve with green vegetables on the side.

Holiday to Austria *by Brendan*

My flight was from Dublin to Salzburg. I travelled by bus to Zell am See on the first day. I did a walking tour of Zell am See. The next day, I went to The Eagle's Nest and went to the salt mines there. I went swimming the next day in the lake and did a wine tasting tour. The day after, I went to Salzburg. I went for a walking tour there. The next day, I went on a night walking tour of Zell am See. I stayed seven days there and then I flew back to Dublin.

My biscuit cake recipe that I make for special occasions in my family *by Peggy*

Ingredients

1½ pkts. Marietta biscuits, broken into small pieces

6ozs sugar

6ozs butter

2 eggs beaten

1½ tbsp. cocoa

Method

Heat the butter and sugar in a saucepan over a low to medium heat. If the heat is too high, the mixture will caramelise.

Turn off the cooker and beat eggs and prepare the biscuits. This will allow time for the mixture to cool.

Next, add the biscuits and mix well.

Transfer into a lined quiche dish or a sponge tin.

Leave to cool and put in the fridge overnight.

This cake will last for 4/5 days.

My travels *by Derek*

I love travelling the world. It broadens my mind and the different cultures and social norms amaze me. I love visiting historical landmarks, going on cruise ships and engaging with people with different views. There are different aspects to the world. Having travelled most of the European continent and North America, I have come to the conclusion that we as a society are very influenced by others.

My favourite place *by Shukri*

My favourite place I visited is Egypt and the Egyptian pyramids. I lived there for 12 years with my family, in a small city. I really enjoyed seeing the famous Pyramids of Giza, the Tomb of the Great Pharaohs and The Great Sphinx. Now I have lived in Ireland for about 2 years.

My favourite recipe is chicken and rice *by Shukri*

This is a recipe I taught myself.

Chicken and rice recipe

2 cups of rice

2 tomatoes (chopped)

1 onion (chopped)

1 cinnamon stick

5 whole cloves

4 whole cardamom pods

1 teaspoon cumin seeds

3 cloves garlic

4 tablespoons butter

1 pound of chicken fillets (cut into small cubes)

2½ cups water

Salt to taste

How to make

Wash the rice and let it soak in water for 5 to 10 mins.

Fry the chicken for a few minutes.

Fry the onions for about 2 minutes.

Grind the dry spices and add with the garlic. Cook for a minute.

Add the tomatoes and cook until the mixture breaks down into a sauce.

Add the chicken back into the pot.

Drain the rice and add the water.

Bring the rice to a simmer, then cover the pan with aluminium foil.

Simmer for about 15 minutes.

Birthday celebration *by Tony*

A drive-by of a different type took place in a West Clare village on Friday last to celebrate the seventieth birthday of parishioner Tony. Due to confinement at the moment, a gathering wasn't possible, so over forty cars, many festooned with balloons, flags and posters, drove in convoy through the village to wish Tony well. It was a wonderful gesture and a social occasion for everyone to raise spirits at the present time.

Postcard story *by Flávia Lúcia*

It is very sad what is happening to the world. This virus, it was very bad. It killed many people. Thanks to God nobody died in my family, thank God. What I see good is that our family became more united, with my husband working at home every day. Of course my work in the kitchen fed us all. I am very grateful to God, for all of us at home, my family in Brazil. We are alive.

COVID life *by Michael*

I came to Miltown in December from Dublin. I found myself surrounded by lovely and friendly people. They were like a family to me and I miss being with them, but with this COVID-19 it's impossible. We now have to distance ourselves from each other to avoid spreading this deadly disease. I used to attend classes at Miltown Community Centre and enjoyed dancing lessons, but now all that has been put on hold. We are so grateful for the Zoom classes, and they keep us busy.

This social distancing and being indoors all the time is driving some of us insane, as we used to enjoy doing voluntary work for the community and socialising with different people. How I wish this thing was contained before it could spread like this. I also pray to God to continue giving strength to the healthcare workers who are risking their lives to help affected people. We all need God at this moment and to continue listening to the authorities. Together, we can help each other and overcome this.

Life right now *by Andriú*

Weird time. Everyone understands that. In the 21st century we are able to see how weak we are against COVID-19. The healthcare system is not perfect. We can do nothing against viruses. However, we learn to appreciate simple things like freedom of movement, hugs, handshakes, dances, live conversation, etc. The main values are impossible to buy. Humanity gets a lesson, but there is an expensive price. It is a time for thinking. Only love can save the world.

Light at the end of the tunnel, by the grace of God *by Lilly*

The lockdown is really hard. I'm missing my friends and family. It's like a dream; it's not reality. I see people on the road or in the shop and I don't feel comfortable saying *hello* because of the virus. I feel isolated because I am not mixing with family and friends.

One good thing for me is the spiritual world. I feel more connected spiritually with God. I feel safe. I'm not scared. It's all down to the grace of God that I haven't got sick, so I am grateful.

I miss things like my walks, dancing, swimming. I'm an outdoor type of person. I miss my church. I miss the connection with the members of my church. The bond that we have, we're like brothers and sisters. That's how well we get on. I am looking forward to returning to my church.

At the end of the tunnel, there is light, there is hope. If you are sick, don't give up on your faith, either in the good times or the bad times.

Postcard story *by Diana*

The weather was lovely for weeks so it was easier to stay focused. Plenty of walks with family, friends and dog. August 5th: horrible day. It's a bit depressing. I miss my classes. I hope they are back in September. It was great to be busy before COVID-19.

My own lockdown *by Esmeraldo*

Hello! Our lockdown has been difficult because before, we were able to do many things freely, but now we can't; for example, before, I could hug my friends but now I can't. We had an English class every week but now we are not able to do that. We could dance every Wednesday and Saturday but now that is cancelled.

Most of all, I miss my friends that I can't see because of this situation and some of them were transferred to another place.

But now it is beyond boring. One good thing is that I have more time to study and also to write my songs and, at last, I am able to sleep more and more.

How COVID-19 is affecting me as an older person *by Bridget*

Quarantine, lockdown, COVID-19. It seems like we've heard of nothing else during the past three months.

Family and friends

At my age, I often get asked, "How are you managing?" "Fine," I tell them. I'm lucky enough to be in the country. We've been blessed with the weather and I have lovely local walks that I can do every day. Our daughter and granddaughter bring our

shopping and we have great neighbours who keep in contact all the time, and get anything extra we need. We have the blessing of a comfortable house to lockdown in. So, apart from not being in town regularly and seeing less people, there's not much different for me.

An upsetting time

I watch the 6pm news and see how many have died and how many health workers have died. It is so upsetting. You can only imagine how their families feel. They can't have a service or the chance to say a nice goodbye.

My grandparents' time

I think about others who are not as fortunate. I think too of my grandparents and the people who were around one hundred years ago who had to deal with the Spanish 'flu and TB. Both were highly contagious; the 'flu alone killed 23,000 people in Ireland. Families of ten or more were living in tiny two-roomed cottages. My aunt Bridgie (who I am named after), died at nineteen years from TB. Her sister Mariah contracted it from her but survived long enough to go to New York and become a nun. Sister Carmel was her chosen name; that's my second name.

Before she went to New York, Aunt Mariah worked in the local town, Newport, County Mayo, for the Canon. She wanted to become a nun. In those days, you had to have a dowry to join the nuns. After Aunt Bridgie died, the money was borrowed from the local shop and Aunt Mariah went to New York. At Ellis Island she was told she had TB and would be sent back. Her first cousin that was claiming her had a house and a job and she was to go to his house. Mariah was allowed to stay in America. She got work and sent money for her two sisters to go to New York. Then, she joined the Sisters of Saint Joseph and lived for just another three years. The TB got her too and she died at the age of 29.

My grandparents lost most of their remaining children to emigration, some never to come home again. It was the same for almost everyone at that time. It is hard to imagine the helplessness of the whole situation. But I never heard my granny complaining or being annoyed about it. I only remember her saying, "Welcome be the will of God; most of our pain is in the resistance." Acceptance was what made it possible for her and the people of that time to keep going.

Different expectations

Our expectations are very different now to what they were one hundred years ago. I know that. I also know that it's heart-breaking for the families who lose their loved ones every day. It's worrying for all of us, but as Gloria sang many years ago now, "One day at a time, is all I'm asking from you."

Technology *by K*

I find it amazing to watch how technology changes with each year. When I was a child we were delighted with our TV with two stations. I loved it when video recorders came along and DVDs. I collected CDs for my Walkman.

These days my children have MP3 players; CDs are never used. Everything is wireless. We have the Internet at the touch of a button, mobile phones that fit in our pockets, Bluetooth. Our cars have features like hands-free phones. We have Google Home Minis or Amazon Alexa that talk to us. Our cars are getting more advanced. We have electric models of cars. Soon, it will become common to have hydrogen powered cars. These will be more popular, as you won't need electric plug point outlets.

There are robots being developed to assist in operations in hospitals and to do various other jobs. We would be lost without all this technology, even if we do give out about our kids being glued to their mobile phones. I am excited to see what further inventions and advances there will be in the future.

The holidays are coming *by Snezana*

This is part of the custom in my country, Serbia.

Orthodox believers, whose Church respects the old Julian calendar, celebrate Christmas – the birth of Jesus Christ – on 7th January.

Christmas fasting, which lasts from 28th November to 6th January precedes this. Fasting implies praying and doing good deeds, abstaining from bad thoughts, desires and deeds, as well as abstinence from fatty foods.

Memories *by Teresa*

I once lived on a farm in County Clare. My family had dairy cows, calves and a bull in the fields at home. It was a very busy farm with lots of work to be done.

I walked to school through some fields to get there in all kinds of weather. I enjoyed going to school in our village and I had some nice friends. In the evening time we had our nicely cooked dinner.

Then, when the time the dairy cows had to be milked came, we walked for a while through fields, to collect them to be milked in a shed. The following morning the milk in our own tanks was collected.

We had a normal happy life on the farm, and I was really happy there with my parents. The weather in summertime was very warm and sunny and it made it easier to do the rest of the farm work, including the making of feedstuffs such as silage and hay. We had a pet dog called Brownie who was a nice dog and some pet cats also.

My parents are retired now, and I have chosen to live with them in another house some miles away. The farm still exists at the old house on a smaller scale. Now, my parents still have happy memories of farm life there, some time ago.

We will always live the rest of our lives with fond memories of our farm.

The golden cage *by Ewelina*

Emigration is like a life in a golden cage ...

Everyday life is easier; you can afford a lot; it seems you have everything, but you feel you have nothing at the same time.

You miss the most important things: Christmas with a whole family, all the lovely smells and laughing, the egg sharing at Easter time and your siblings' hugs.

You can't see your parents' new grey hairs, or new wrinkles on their faces. You can't be with your loved ones on their most important days. You count the days every day, until you meet them.

You see with sadness that your children are losing out on something very important: their grandparents' hugs, playing with their cousins, their aunts' and uncles' visits - just being part of the big family.

You miss the colour of the Polish sky, hearing well-known Polish songs on the radio, the taste of juicy Polish fruits and the smell of Polish barbecues. You miss hot Summer days and snow at Wintertime.

It doesn't matter how much you like the place where you are or how many lovely people you have met there, this longing makes you sad, breaks your heart, killing you sometimes ...

Only emigrants can understand this ...

The important things *by Marina*

We do not realise what the important things are until life makes us open our eyes. Life is simple and marvellous but, unfortunately, people insist on trying to find happiness in vain, or try to find happiness in material things.

I used to be like this. For a long time, I thought that I was happier as long as I had more things than other people. But, one day, my father passed away and that selfish and immature teenager realised she had taken the wrong way in life. She decided to take more care of her family and friends because, at the least expected moment, we can lose them. She also decided that the most important things did not have a price, size, shape or colour. She understood that all those important things were not visible and could not be touched, but they were always around her. She just needed to believe and find them.

The passing of the years was hard; I would even say it was often horrible, but some kind of light made that girl come out and shine from the darkest shadows. Today, I am thankful for being a healthy person, with an incredible family and friends.

And for my future self, I only wish that I continue to be able to enjoy the small and insignificant things in life because here is my secret, a very simple secret: it is only with the heart that one can see clearly; what is most valuable is invisible to the eyes.

The meditation *by Andrea*

A woman decided to spend time in a peaceful place and meditate to clear her mind and body.

The meditation was guided. A nice, relaxed female voice was telling her to imagine where she was, what she could see and feel. She felt calm. She thought nothing unexpected could happen, but... They had arrived in a dark place. It was a cemetery. She was sure that she would have to revisit her memories of her father because she still felt too attached to him and missed him. But beside her father she saw another shadow and recognised that it was her first baby who, after 9 months of pregnancy, was stillborn. Now she was crying hysterically and could not stop tears straining down her face. She had put those feelings deep inside her, thought they were well hidden so nobody could see her pain and loss. But now it all came out, all those feelings. Slowly she became calm when the voice said to give a hug to the person she met in the cemetery, her father and a baby, and be assured that they are in a good place, that it was their choice to leave their life on this planet early. She should not blame herself.

She understood that everybody has their own life and makes their own decisions. We are to join them for a short while or for a long time. It depends on our decision as well.

The price to pay *by Jhessica*

My name is Jhessica. I am from Brazil. I am married and I have a son – 6 years old.

Life in Ireland is beautiful but it is not easy. I always miss my family. Things are good but cheap here compared to Brazil, but everything loses its value because I can't hug the people I love. I don't like talking on the phone on special days – Christmas and birthdays - because the homesickness increases even more these days. It's very difficult. Everything in life has a price and that is the price to pay for travelling so far from home.

The summer holiday *by Emma*

People were looking forward to their lovely sunny holiday, but they were stopped by the coronavirus.

We all love a good holiday. I love to go to Kerry every year to the Rose of Tralee - my highlight of my year.

I always get to stay in the Rose Hotel. We always meet some of the Roses and I always get the best photos with them. My favourite part of the holiday is to go to the parade and watch the fireworks display.

Unfortunately, this year's Rose of Tralee is cancelled because of the virus, but I'm already looking forward to next year's festival, which will be even better.

My aquarium trip *by Jení*

On the first of January, me, my sister, my mum and my sister's dad all went to the aquarium in Galway by train. We saw loads of fish – sharks, stingrays, jellyfish and more amazing things. We saw a boat that my sister's dad sailed on and we saw some skeletons of sea animals.

I enjoyed the aquarium very much but, unfortunately, a few things went wrong. First of all, we took a wrong turn on the way to the aquarium and ended up at the swimming pool, but we found it in the end. After the aquarium we had lunch in a café. I got a ham and cheese toastie and a hot chocolate and my sister had the same as me, but with juice. My sister's toastie didn't come until the last minute, so when it came, we had to take it with us to get back before the train left.

When we got there, we didn't need to rush because the train was late and packed with drunk people that had been partying all night. There were no seats, so we had to stand up. My legs were tired from standing up, but I was glad when we finally got home to my dogs who got very excited when they saw us.

The drive to Portumna Castle *by Paula*

I had to go to Portumna for an appointment, and it was a lovely sunny day, so we drove to Portumna Castle. I took a picture and then I decided to write a bit about it.

I know a small bit about the history of the castle. The De Burgo family used to own it but now it belongs to the OPW. There is an exhibition on the ground floor, which is all about the history of the castle and the De Burgo family, but you can't visit it now because of COVID-19 restrictions.

I would recommend it as a nice place to visit because it is right beside Portumna Forest Park and the River Shannon.

Love and patience *by Alanís*

It was 2015 when I started dating my best friend. We got engaged four months later. He had a dream of living in Ireland and I accepted that dream. He moved to Ireland after six months of our engagement. Oh my God, now what? Will it work? What will we do? Let's wait and see what God has for us. I quieted my heart and we carried on. He was in Ireland and I was in Brazil. The days passed by, seeming like an eternity. We picked a date for our wedding and we waited for that date to come. Months later, I received the bad news that we would have to cancel the wedding. The first date was gone and we had to reschedule.

2017 arrived, the year of our dream, the year of my 20th birthday, the year my life was going to change and it did change. April, the month of my birthday and the month of my wedding, arrived! I could not believe it!

With 15 days to the wedding, I received an unexpected gift. I was diagnosed with cancer. Yes! I had leukaemia (ALL). We cancelled the wedding once again but now with uncertainty about a new date. Well, the show must go on. I did not let my fiancé

head back to Brazil because I didn't know whether I would live or die. Anyway, I put a smile on my face and carried on.

I was admitted to the hospital four days after my birthday. It felt like I was in a spa hotel. I didn't have to wash the dishes, iron or cook. I was just eating and sleeping. It sounds cool, but it wasn't. My treatment was very short. I had the complete package: chemotherapy, interval, transplant, various complications during the process, immense restrictions and, of course, the possibility of everything ending, or getting out of this.

At the beginning of 2020 my condition stabilised. I went back to eating what I liked, drinking what I wanted to and finally I could get married. And then comes CORONA! Great, cancelled the wedding again! Everything was paid for, everything planned. After all, I had spent three years thinking about this. We reviewed everything again and rescheduled for the fourth time. I couldn't accept it and decided that I would get married, period. I spoke with my husband and the celebrant and we decided to elope, with only our parents and close friends with us. It turned out better than we thought. Everything was wonderfully beautiful, but the party will have to wait until next year. It will be our 1 year anniversary anyway.

Now, we are married and living in another country, meeting wonderful people and fulfilling our dream together. Today, I just have to thank God for showing me that what really matters are the little things in life, like love and patience.

Never give up *by Miriam*

My name is Miriam and I am 30 years old. I was born in Italy but I have Egyptian origins. I have a daughter who is 5 years old. She loves to dance and, one day, I hope she will become a ballerina.

This is my first time in Ireland. I like this country because it has wonderful nature and fresh air. I love the feeling of the cool breeze. The other thing that I like here is that the people smile and salute me on the road, even if they don't know me.

I am doing an English course at the moment to learn English. I want to say that it's not an easy language to pronounce. But I won't give up; you should never give up: "If you stop you are lost."

A new chance *by Elena*

Today, I want to talk a little bit about myself. My name is Elena Elvira. I am from Aguascalientes, Mexico. This is a little town in the countryside of Mexico. I have been living in Ennis in Ireland for almost 3 months. This is a challenge because I want to learn English in the best way and I feel frustrated on some occasions when I want to express my feelings or thoughts. I think this is the last chance that I have, because I am not as young as I'd like.

My life here is very interesting because it is all new and different. It is like a new chance. I have the power to do it. I want to work and help people of this town where I live, and to teach to my daughter that she can achieve what she sets out to do.

Life will always be complicated *by Izabela*

Anyone can love you when the sun is shining. It's in the storms when you learn who truly cares for you. If you have only one smile in you, give it to the people you love. Don't wait for things to get better. Life will always be complicated. Learn to be happy right now.

Otherwise, you'll run out of time. Only those who care about you can hear you when you're quiet.

Awareness *by Naoise*

I found deeper meaningfulness in living after realising that awareness is much more important than what I think I know.

Postcard story *by Kieran*

Stay positive, stay in touch, stay connected. Back to learning. Staying safe, taking care of each other. Staying apart.

My time in Ireland *by Faadumo*

My name is Faadumo and I'm from Somalia. Now, I live in Kilrush. I have been in Ireland for five and a half years. I like learning English. I want to sew clothes. I hope one day I will drive a car.

My time in Ireland *by Foosiyo*

My name is Foosiyo and I'm from Somalia. Now, I live in Kilrush. I have been in Ireland for three years. I like learning English. I want to make beads. I hope that one day I will go on holidays.

My favourite pet *by María Teresa*

My favourite pet is the cat. I have a black cat. She has green eyes and her name is Tora. She is one year old.

Tora is just lovely. When I am walking with the dog she follows me. She is happy when I give her food. She loves to sit on my legs.

When we came to Ireland *by Adam*

First, I went to school in the Refugee Council in Ennis in 2014. That was one-to-one for six months. After that, I went to Ennis Community College. I was turning eighteen in two months, and they said to me, "You are almost eighteen so we can't take you here." I said "OK." In 2015, I went to the Adult Education Centre.

I studied there for one year. And I went to Youthreach. I studied there for three years. I did my Junior Cert there. As well as that, we had work experience every year. For my work experience, I went to Digitech and Clarecare in Ennis. I did get excellent results for my work experience. We had a really good time with friends.

Letter to Rosa *by Joyce*

Dear Rosa,

How are you? I hope you are all keeping well and safe at this time of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Here in Ireland, the number of infected persons and deaths from the virus are getting higher every day. It's not looking good. The virus started here in Ireland last February 29th, 2020 and the schools closed last March 12th, 2020. The full lockdown was March 21st, 2020.

Our family started quarantine on March 12th. We're nearly 2 months in quarantine. It is hard because we have to stay at home as much as possible at all times, and the kids' school work needs to be done at home every day.

Last week, we received news from the nursing home that my mother-in-law has tested positive for the virus. It's very worrying as she has underlying health conditions – diabetes and high blood pressure. All we can do for her is pray and hope that she will be OK and kick the virus out of her system. Every day, we always ring her to check how she is and what she feels. Thank God she's not that bad – just aches and pains but, overall, she is fine.

In our family, I'm the one who does our food shopping and we always do the social distancing in the shops and in every place. I have to be careful not to bring the virus home. As you know my husband is one of the persons vulnerable to this virus, as he had a third cancer diagnosis. Very worrying this time, at the moment, for my family here in Ireland and for my family back home. We hope and pray this will be over and we will back to normal very soon.

Looking forward to your reply and hope to see you soon. Stay safe and well.

Always,

Joyce

Postcard story *by Jane Anne*

I missed the excitement and fun of new learning. I feel the course will expand my knowledge. I hope everybody kept safe and healthy during the virus and looking forward to meeting up next year. God bless.