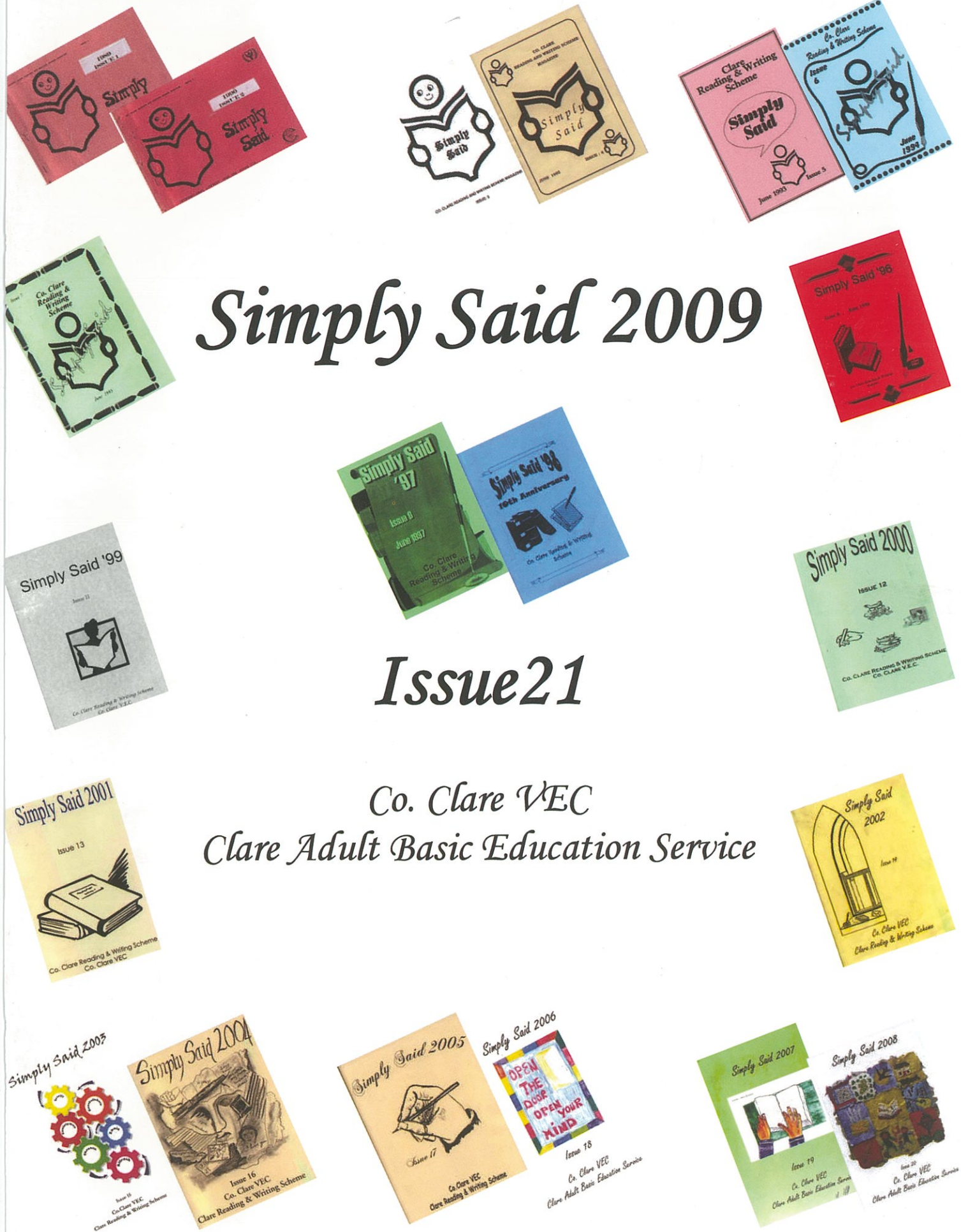


Simply Said 2009

Issue 21

*Co. Clare VEC
Clare Adult Basic Education Service*



*A Collection of Writings
by Students
of the
Co. Clare
Adult Basic Education Service*

Acknowledgements

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Please contact us at 065 6897618

Co-ordination:	Mary Lyons
Cover Design:	Caroline Hanrahan
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Foreword

The staff and learners of the Clare Adult Basic Education Service are delighted to welcome you to the 21st edition of *Simply Said*, our annual student magazine.

On the occasion of this 21st anniversary, some of our staff and learners have been asking, "how did the magazine get started?" The idea came from a student. While working on her writing skills, EMAC (her pen name) produced a small collection of poems under the title, *Simply Said*. Pauline Chadwick, the literacy organiser at the time, then thought that other students might like to the opportunity to write about something that was significant to their lives. She asked permission from EMAC to borrow the title, *Simply Said*. She was delighted to say, yes. For that first edition, 15 students shared their thoughts and experiences. Twenty-one years later, students are still putting their thoughts on paper (or, nowadays, perhaps onto a computer screen) to inform, entertain, challenge and delight their readers.

Congratulations to all the students who are represented in this collection. More than 150 students have contributed. Among the writings there are tales about adventures, real and imagined, and stories about life in other countries. There are recollections of local traditions, legends and historical events. There are inspiring stories of enduring courage in coping with life's difficult challenges. There are reflections on the dignity of work and suggestions for recreation and entertainment. There are poems to savour, and riddles to solve. We think there is something here for every reader to enjoy. We hope that you will agree!

A sincere thank you to all the learners, the volunteer tutors and members of staff who have helped in the organisation and production of this publication and in other ways throughout the year. Best wishes to all for the summer holidays. May the sun shine brightly on us all.

Móira

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Summer

I walk across the yard thinking of all the day's chores and which I would attack first. Then, suddenly, I am hit by an almost deafening, yet very peaceful, relaxing and soothing silence. I look around me to see where it is coming from. It is all around me.

It is 5 o'clock in the morning. No one is up. It is as if the whole world is still sleeping and everything is still. Nothing is awake, not the birds, the trees nor even the sun. The sky is a very dark, bluey, grey as if it were dead and waiting for something to breathe some life into it. It looks as if it needs a gale to sweep across its dark, moody complexion, to lift it back into its light hazy, blue that left us only a few hours ago but there isn't even the air of the wings of a butterfly. How was this lifeless sky going to regain its former glory?

Then, off in the distance over the tree tops and the far off mountain ranges, a strange but familiar glow appears. Not taking any shape yet, just a few golden flickers, a hint of what is to come. Suddenly, it appears, slightly rounded with a positive radiance and an unearthly glow, slowly inching its way up toward the once seemingly lifeless sky. Almost like a conductor standing in front of an orchestra.

As the golden ball inches higher and higher into the sky, a symphony of sound appears around it. The birds begin to come alive, the trees appear to wake, and even the grass seems to awaken by standing and shaking the nightly dew from its sleepy blades.

In just a few short moments, the whole world has come alive. The golden ball is now fully in the awakened sky, breathing life into the once dead and lifeless earth. A new day is born.

By Barry

Newton Heath/Manchester United

League champions - 2009 season. If I was to tell you that Newton Heath were the champions instead, I would be right.

Manchester United or the Red Devils started out as Newton Heath in the middle of Manchester in 1878. They were founded by railway workers on the Lancashire and Yorkshire line.

A far cry from the 'Manchester United' we all know today. One could say it is a rag to riches story. I wonder, did the men who started Newton Heath ever think that it would become one of the greatest soccer teams in the world today.

By David

Horse riding

I enjoy horse riding on Mondays in Kilrush at Moyasta near my home from 8.00 to 9.30 p.m. I ride a pony. Her name is Cindy. When I ride I do jumping over bars. I trot up and down in the shed. The horses are very quiet and friendly. Sometimes I feed them nuts in the morning for a snack. I will be winning loads of medals. I will do competitions and racing for medals. My favourite part is the competitions and meeting loads of friends. I brush the ponies and take them out for walks. In the winter they're kept in the shed.

I have three horses of my own but they are not trained yet, so I can't go on them. They will need to be taken to a farm to be broken in and jockeyed. My horses are going to have three foals. We will sell two of them on to make money and we will keep one. You have to be careful with horses and be sure not to go around behind them or they may kick you.

By Stephen

A change of job

I would like a new job. I have a job at the moment but my hours have been cut from ten hours to six hours so I am getting less money now. I work as a cleaner in a big shop here in Ennis. I have been working there for about four years and I would like to change jobs now.

My brother's girlfriend works in a hairdresser's and I would love to do that. I love girly things like make-up, hair, clothes and jewellery. Most of my money is spent on these after rent and food. My friends ask me to do their hair sometimes. I am good at washing and straightening it. I even do my own hair and people say it looks nice.

I wear gloves at work to keep my hands soft.

By Sylvia

My family pets

We had two dogs. They were Red Setters. They were happy, loving dogs and they were great fun. They got very excited every time Dad would take them for a walk. They stayed in the house all day. At night, they slept in their own beds in their shed. They had to be given nuts and a drink of water before going to sleep at night.

Now they are gone. They both got very sick and had to be put down by the vet. He gave them injections. We were all very sad. Their names were Colleen and Molly.

We now have a stray cat. His name is Blackie and he sits in the window box in the sun. We think that he is two years old. I think that is the end of the story.

By Mary

Against the odds

Four years ago when I was in my late thirties, I got a major stroke. I was in Cork hospital for a long time. I nearly died but with all the care I got in the hospital, I eventually made a reasonable recovery.

I spent many months in rehab in Dublin. I wasn't able to walk or talk and had no memory of anything when I went in there. I didn't even recognise my own children. The rehabilitation programme was very difficult but I persevered because I wanted to get well for the children. I slowly got my memory back and learned to walk and talk again, even though I still have difficulties in these areas. My house had to be adapted so that I could make full use of it. Looking back, my adapted house is much nicer now than it was before I got the stroke, so that is one good thing to come out of it.

My biggest problem now is trying to get my thoughts together so that I can talk. If I go into a shop or café I get into a panic and can't get the words out. When I panic, nothing works. I just freeze. I panic all the time. I feel that I have very little control over my life and can do very little without help. I'm constantly late for everything. I can't manage time. I can manage a one-to-one conversation but cannot converse in a group. I'm constantly tired. Even trying to think straight takes huge amounts of energy.

Last year, I started attending classes in the Adult Education Centre in Ennis. It's one of the best things that ever happened to me. I've got new confidence from going to classes; art, computers, maths to name a few. I've gained confidence in meeting new people and in finding my own way around the building. I've learned there that it's ok to make mistakes or to get things wrong. When I was young, I was good at school. It upsets me greatly that my head won't work properly now.

I couldn't survive without my home help and my family. With their help and patience I'm slowly getting back some

confidence and a little independence. It's hard work and I constantly have to tell myself "I can do it." I have learned to be a survivor.

By Theresa

Trip to Youghal, Co. Cork

Last year I went to Charleville, Co. Cork to visit my cousins for a few days. I travelled down by bus as the roads are so dangerous for driving and I had broken my elbow sometime back. The bus arrived in Charleville at about one o' clock and my cousins were there to pick me up. I went back to their house with them and we had tea and sandwiches. We chatted about different things. Later that evening we went for dinner and then we had a walk after dinner. At dinner they told me they had booked a seat for all of us on a bus tour to Youghal, for the next morning. I thought, of all places – Youghal! I would have liked Cork City much better.

Next morning we set off at ten o' clock on the bus tour and the guide explained all the places she was going to take us and that we'd stop for lunch at one o'clock.

I could not believe that Youghal was so nice! She took us around to see all the old stone buildings. It was hard to believe there were so many old buildings in such good condition. They might have been a few hundred years old. We walked for miles looking at all of them. Then she took us to a very old church. It looked so well, made of timber and stone. We spent about two hours there as it was so big to see all of it. The old church piano was still there and it looked really good. We left donations in the church.

I was really fascinated by our day, but I was very tired with all the walking that we did.

By Patrícia

Meeting the stars

Recently, some of my friends and I went on a trip to RTÉ in Dublin as part of a course we're doing on Inclusive Research. In the RTÉ canteen we met Pat Kenny, Ryan Tubridy and Larry Gogan. They were really friendly and stopped to chat to us and let us take photos with them. The canteen was full of people we knew from the television and radio.

Some of the cast from *Fair City* were there playing cards while they were waiting to get called to film some scenes. We went over to them and they took photos and gave us their autographs. I have photos taken with Carol, Dean and a few others.

It was a very exciting week for me. Not alone did I get my photo taken with all the stars in RTÉ, but my picture was in *The Clare Champion* as well. I took part in workshops and a drama production in Kilrush as part of the Inclusive Research Programme. I like being on stage and didn't forget any of my lines. I did some acting at school, so I wasn't nervous at all. I love being on stage and I'd I like to do more of it.

It was a great week.

By Declan

My new house

In three weeks, I will be moving to a lovely new bungalow. I am going to have my own bedroom and en-suite bathroom. I will be living with my sister, Anna, and my friend Philomena as well as Sibby the cat. I am really looking forward to moving to my new house.

By Marion

A rodeo champion from Cuba

I was born in Havana, Cuba in December 1970. My mother was Rita Maria and my father was Max Jose Simon. I grew up in Ranch Boyeros in the South of Havana City. Our house was situated just to the side of the Ranch Boyeros Cattle Fair, which influenced me from a very early age in my future vocation in life. From here came my great passion for horses, the rodeos and fairs. This world absorbed me.

My mother and my dear uncle, Kike, always wanted to change the course of my vocation and influence me to consider computer programming. Parents always want the best for their children and they knew that the rodeo was very hard and dangerous.

However, nothing could change my mind. I was completely devoted to the rodeos, the horses and the fairs. I thought about the rodeos all night, every night. I wanted to be like Juan Carlos Rodrigues, Fermin Costilla, Tomas Hernandez Tatao, Higinio Benitez and many others that were my idols. I owe them a lot because of what I learned. I owe them my total success, my lifelong devotion and my love for this sport. I love rodeo, cattle and horses and I enjoyed my life in the rodeo.

My most important Awards in the Rodeo are:

1. Champion in bull riding and bull dodging - Cuba-Mexico, Ranch Boyeros Fair, 1992.
2. Champion bull riding - Cuba-Mexico, Boyeros, 1993.
3. Champion bull riding - Santi Spiritus Fair. 1993.
4. Champion bull riding - Colon Fair, Matanzas. 1994.
5. Champion bull dodging, maximum points and first place in management and equine presentation - Santi Spiritus Fair 1994.
6. Champion Bull Dodging - Ranch Boyeros Fair, 1995.
7. First place in management and equine presentation - Boyeros Fair 1997.

By Michel

Dear diary

I have had the worst day ever. O my God, I just couldn't believe it! It was so bad. It's a day I will never ever forget. Here's what happened.

Yesterday, I called to the dry cleaners and I collected the bag with my name on it. I went home as usual and hung the hanger in the wardrobe. The next morning I woke up so excited. Off to the beauty salon I went. I had my hair, make-up and tan done. I got my finger nails and toe nails painted, too. Oh I thought I looked perfect and I was ready to rock and roll. The clock was ticking and I was running late. It was time to put on my dress. Big problem! It didn't fit. I couldn't have put up so much weight in a week. The dry cleaners must have shrunk it. I really didn't know what to do and we were leaving in 10 minutes.

I looked out my window and my neighbour had her wardrobe door opened. She had the exact same dress as mine in her wardrobe. I just couldn't believe it. I ran down the stairs and out the front door and knocked hard on the neighbour's door. My neighbour answered and I quickly asked her could I borrow her dress for my graduation? I must have looked very anxious because she said, "yes." Then I ran home and as I was putting it on, the doorbell rang. It was the lad who I was bringing to the graduation. On the way to the graduation, I reflected about my busy day so far.

I had the best night ever and the lad that I went to the graduation with is still my boyfriend. So what I thought was my worst day ever turned out to be the best day so far.

By Jeananne

My stupid mistake

It happened on a Thursday in 2008. It was about 6.30 p.m. and I was on my way home from work to my wife and children. I was coming from a serious meeting and had a lot of important files and documents in my brief case in the back seat of my car.

I saw a woman on the side of the road hitch-hiking. The woman was small-built, had a lot of tattoos and a lot of scars on her face. I had already pulled up so I had to pick her up. I pulled down my window and asked her if she needed any help. She asked me if I could bring her back to her car up the road and give her a jump start when we got there. She had me thinking. I thought to myself that this woman was bad news, but she was really nice to talk to. I was near the N67 when the woman asked me to turn off. So I asked her if this was where her car had broken down and she said that the car knocked off in the main road so she left it roll down this old bumpy, rotten road, out of the way from other cars. I drove down the road for a few minutes and then I saw her car. I pulled up and got out of my car, went around the back and took the jump leads from my boot. I then locked the car and walked over to the woman's car and asked her to open the bonnet.

It was then that I saw the man coming from my left. He was about six feet tall, a big man and he was dressed in black. The woman then started to laugh. I then asked myself if I should run. Suddenly, another man came from my right. This man was about my height, 5'11, also dressed in black, wearing a balaclava and had a big stick in his hands. I was outnumbered and suddenly very frightened.

I asked them to stop and leave me alone but they kept coming towards me. I was backing up, but then I fell over. As soon as I fell over, one of the men hit me with the stick into the face. The woman came over and sat on top of me and laughed into my face. "You're getting robbed, big business man!" She got up and then I got hit another time with the

stick and another nine or ten times after that. I couldn't feel my face when I woke up. My face and clothes were covered in blood. I struggled to get up and hardly made it to my car. My brief case, phone and a lot of money had been stolen. I had to drive to the hospital in pain and I couldn't really see in front of me while I was driving. When I got to the hospital, I had to have plastic surgery on my face and spent the next three weeks in hospital.

I have learned now not to trust anyone. I thought that day that I was doing a good deed but all I did was get my family and myself hurt. I nearly died that day. I have now moved to another part of the country, a much more respectable place and I have recovered from my injuries.

By Aaron

Magic moments

I went to Lapland in December 2005 with my mam, sister, Niamh, and my six year old niece, Chloe. We brought Chloe to see Santa Claus. He gave her a present and we got photos taken with him. She was in her element.

Lapland is very far away in the north of Finland. It was very cold there – 20 degrees under with only 3 hours of daylight. We had to wear warm clothing to survive the cold weather. It was snowing and I had a snowball fight with my niece. The snow didn't look like snow. It looked more like glitter. I'm glad I went there and I enjoyed myself (who wouldn't?) but I don't want go back again.

I think Lapland is for boys and Disneyland is for girls. I have been to Disneyland, too. They are both magical.

By Tara

My favourite things

Some of my favourite things are tractors, basketball, soccer, *Eastenders* and Garda videos on You Tube.

I like tractors because they are good machinery. I have a John Deere tractor at home. We use the tractor for pulling stuff like trailers and topping the field.

Basketball and soccer are my favourite sports. I love to play these sports and they keep me fit.

I like to watch the soaps and *Eastenders* is my favourite. It's very good and I really like the women in it. I also like to watch Garda videos on You Tube. I like to see the Gardaí driving around and I really like the sirens.

I went to the Garda station in Kilrush for a tour. When I was there, I saw the cells and the station. I also went in the Paddy Wagon and used the siren. They showed us their batons, their jackets, their hats and their motorbikes.

By Robbie

A Cuba dream

My name is Surelys and I am 19 years old. I'm Cuban. I love Cuba and my family but in Cuba the life is very difficult for the people. I love my mother. She is a teacher, but on a very low salary. I study in school and I was very happy on graduation day, but there was some disappointment because the school did not do anything for the students. The young people in Cuba have dreams for the future, but now I am very happy to live here in Ireland because here I see a beautiful world.

By Surelys

Work experience

I had work experience at a hairdresser's in Kildysart. It was my first work experience because before, when I was in school, I hadn't work. When I was at the hairdresser's I mostly cleaned. I looked after cleaning the mirrors, sweeping the floor and folding the towels. It was a bit quiet in the mornings but busy in the afternoons. I liked everything about it. I always wanted to work in a hairdresser's.

When I told my parents, my dad was very proud of me and so was my mom. It made them happy to know that I had a job and was happy. My granny got a shock when she heard. She was glad that I got a chance to work. I'm so happy I got to do that job. I would do it again.

By Sarah

My change of workplace

It all started when I was told that Irish Country Pottery was to close down. Then we were told that Rehab Care was taking over. One of our supervisors, Patricia, from the workshop came to Rehab with us and we also got several other new supervisors. We got a completely new purpose built centre. It is located in a very central position near the town centre. We have art & craft, cookery and first aid classes. Patricia has shown us how to make handbags, cushions and we have made several wall hangings. We also have an allotment where we will be setting vegetables, fruit and herbs. We are presently preparing for the official opening of the centre.

By Noreen

My nephew's Confirmation

My nephew Shane's Confirmation was on the 6th of February '09 in Christ the King Church in Cloughleigh, Ennis. He invited me to it a few weeks beforehand. I was delighted to be asked. I decided to wear my navy pants and jacket with a blouse inside it. The weather was very cold and frosty, so I decided to wear my warm, red coat over them.

The Confirmation was on at 3 o'clock. There were forty boys and girls to be confirmed by Bishop Walsh. Father O'Neill was there, too.

It was a lovely ceremony with a choir and music from the school. Shane did one of the readings. I was so proud of him. It was over at 4.20 p.m. A lot of photographs were taken with the Bishop.

Shane got a lot of presents from his family and friends. We went to Magowna House in Kilmaley for a meal in the evening. It was lovely and we all enjoyed it.

Shane had a wonderful day which he will remember.

By Eileen

Growing up on the farm

I have many memories of growing up on our farm in Killmallock, Co. Limerick. When I was a young girl, I used to help milk the cows and feed the calves. I really enjoyed helping out my family on the farm. During the summer we used to save the hay. Unfortunately, I never learned to drive the tractor.

By Nora

The lodger

Meg was sitting at the kitchen table sipping a cup of tea. It helped to calm her nerves. Her daughter, Beth, had phoned earlier and was coming home for the night. Would it be good news or bad news? Meg had been worrying ever since. She loved to see her children but their visits were few and far between as Beth lived and worked in Dublin and the boys lived in England.

Beth was worried. She should have explained why she was visiting but this would have given her mum a chance to say no. She had a motive for going home and he was travelling with her. His name was Paddy. She had been introduced to him by her flat mate's mother who knew him through a friend. Paddy was originally from Tipperary, but had lived until recently with his dear friend on a farm outside Dublin. Unfortunately this friend had died suddenly and the son, who had inherited the farm, was selling it, so Paddy was homeless. Her flat mate felt sorry for Paddy, so he ended up staying with them just until he found somewhere else to live. That had been four weeks ago. The arrangement was not ideal as the flat was small and near the city, and although Paddy was not much trouble, he hated city life, missing the fresh air and the open spaces. That is why Beth had thought of her folk's place out west. They had plenty of room now and her mum could do with the company as her dad worked away some of the time.

Beth and Paddy arrived just as the kettle was boiling. So, after the introductions had been made, they sat around the fire with the tea for a chat. Beth was doing most of the talking and Meg sat looking at Paddy. He was a cool one, sitting there dozing in her husband's chair as if he owned the place. He was no spring chicken, but something of a looker, and he knew it. Long legged, world toned as they say, dark with an oriental look about him with short, brown, shiny hair and the bluest of blue eyes that looked right into your soul. Suddenly, Meg was listening properly again. Beth was voicing her idea.

After a while Beth went for a stroll in the garden, but Paddy stayed dozing in the chair. Meg needed to lie down. She could not think straight. She put her feet up on the sofa, pulled the throw over her and laid her head on the cushion. She was just dozing off when she felt the cover move. Paddy, as bold as brass, lay down beside her, staring at her with those pleading, loving, big blue eyes. She was hooked. What else could she do? She pulled him close and put her arms around him and they fell asleep.

Later, when Beth came back in, that was how she found them. She smiled. Paddy had a new home. Her plan had worked. Hadn't her mum always wanted a Siamese cat!

By Margaret

A mobile story

I can't remember ever being without a mobile phone. I'm on my second one now. My first one got broken.

I was at home cycling around the roads when I saw a car coming. I pedalled really fast to get out of the way. My phone slipped out of my pocket onto the road. The car ran over it and smashed it into pieces. It never worked after that. I had to get a new one then. That didn't bother me too much because I didn't like that one anyway. I got a lovely new black one.

When I'm in the VEC, I leave my phone in my locker. We're not supposed to use them in class.

I take good care of this phone. New ones cost a lot of money.

By Liam

Galeb's poem for the beloved

Translated from the Arabic by Aiman

I love you... I don't deny
I love your bronze face;
I hide in you my history and my boyhood days.

When we fell in love
Let us neither forget, nor remember
That we just
Want longing no more.

The stars in the sky say,
"Why doesn't the full moon appear?"

Of your eyes, my queen
The full moon is envious
And he bows down at
Your hands...begging and asking forgiveness.

I'm a sailor...but my sky never rains.

Be my sea and my boat;
Be my poetry and forum;
Be like the emitted perfume.

Across the yellow beach
I and a convoy of lovers
Are deceived by the dazzling mirage.

The sea calls me in your eyes
My queen as I set sail.

By Galeb

Keeping the law

I'd like to be a Garda and put bad people in gaol. I'd lock up the people who rob shops and fight on the streets. I like the uniform and would love cycling around the town wearing it.

Guards are nice. They stop and talk to you.

By Conrad

Life in Cuba

My name is Edgar and I'm from Cuba. My life there when I was young was very hard and bad. The government have bad laws for the people and human rights do not exist. They have no respect for them. The government gives out food for the people once a month and that is not good because the food is just rubbish.

The transportation for people in the cities is very difficult because there are few buses. The people have many businesses 'on the black' that are illegal. For example, I worked with my car as a taxi illegally and every time I was scared of the police. I need to live and to buy things. I have all my family there and, some day, I think I will go and visit my parents and my family. Life there is better for tourists because money has the power.

Now, I am very happy and I feel good here in Ireland because I can realise my dreams. I would like to be a great person and I know that here in Ireland I have a future. I would like to tell you more but I'm learning English every day and some day I'll write it perfect.

By Edgar

You

You are a hairy fleabag; you never do a stitch of work.
You lick the faces of complete strangers
with the sole intention of underlining
my own social inhibitions.

Sometimes you smell like old red wine,
a bouquet of damp fur.
Not only are you colour-blind,
you also cannot tell the difference between
a carpet and a couch.

You pretend that you find the word 'no' incomprehensible.
You insist on sharing your unmelodious
bark with the entire neighbourhood.

For some reason, you are afraid of statues.
Statues just freak you out.
You are utterly shameless.

You are the laziest, dirtiest,
most stubborn and presumptuous thing
I have ever known
and I think you're perfect.

By Elizabeth

Sport

I participated in the Community Games in 1993. I came in last place in 1993. I came in third place in 1994 and I got a medal. I like sports because it makes me fit. I like running because I get fitter and faster. I would like to be in a running club. I think I would be very good at running.

By Anthony

Independence days

We come here to the Enable Ireland centre five days a week. We travel by bus and because many of us come a long way, we get a drink of hot chocolate first thing when we get here. After that we get down to doing various activities – art and crafts, computer, gym, music, reading and writing and sometimes cookery. The staff here are good fun and we get on well together.

We live at home with our families normally, but on two nights a week, we stay in a house here in Ennis with a house parent. This gives us a break from our families and gives them a break from caring for us all the time. To prepare for our stay, we have to make out menus and budgets with help from our carers here in the centre and then do the grocery shopping. It's like any other house; we have to do the housework – washing dishes and cooking. We do whatever we can. We also dodge doing the housework when we get a chance! A house parent stays with us all the time. It's difficult to get in and out of bed from a wheelchair so we need the help of a hoist with that.

There are usually four people staying in the house with a house parent. We each have our own bedroom. We do the usual things; watch TV, read the newspapers and both of us have radios in our rooms and we like to listen to Mike Gardener on Clare FM or to Coldplay on the CD player.

We don't always cook dinner. Sometimes, we go to the Sherwood and eat out. We also go to the pub for a drink or two with our friends or go bowling. We have a cat called Tiger and we feed and take care of him also.

We like staying in the house.

By Johnathan and Ross

Postcards

We imagined we won the Lotto and went on our dream holiday. We sent postcards to our friends and loved ones ...

Dear Karim,

We are on holiday in Havana this week. Our hotel is very nice and not expensive. People are surfing on the waves. The food is delicious and the national drink is delicious, too. The weather is warm, sunny and healthy.

See you soon,

Ahmed

Dear John,

We are on holiday in Miami. The weather is fantastic! The beaches are very long and the buildings are very high.

We are having a wonderful time,

See you soon,

Bertha

Hi everyone,

We are on holiday in Algeria! We are staying in a hotel. The weather is sunny and warm. We are drinking mint tea and eating lokoum!

See you soon,

Hocine and Yvonne

Hello Svetlana,

Greetings from sunny Italy! It is a beautiful place and the weather is warm and sunny. It suits me. There are beautiful old cities here.

Wish you were here,

Love,

Polina

Hi Clare,
I'm on holiday in London. This is my dream holiday. I always wanted to visit here. We were on the London Eye yesterday. We are staying in a nice hotel. I'm having a very good time. Wish you were here,
Comfort

*By Ahmed, Bertha, Hocine, Yvonne, Polina &
Comfort*

Good memories of fireside chat and history

The first time I got to know Doctor Paddy (or President Hillery to be exact) was when I was going to school. I worked with local farmers during my summer holidays and one haymaking time, the boss got sick and went to hospital for a while. When he came out, Doctor Paddy used to call to the house and talk for a while with him and his wife.

What he really wanted to talk about was what life was like for them in their younger days, but they would ask him an odd question to do with health. One day another neighbour was there to see him and asked him the question, "What do you think of a hard boiled egg, Doctor?" This elderly man had also been in hospital some time before and he said he used to get hard boiled eggs in hospital and did not like them. Signs of a politician breaking out, Doctor Paddy said, "An egg is an egg."

Not long after, there was a vacant seat in Clare for a Fianna Fáil candidate and he was asked to stand for election. I knew the people well who asked him and after a while he agreed to stand for election. I was glad someone I knew was going, but the elderly neighbours I mentioned didn't like it, as they would be losing their doctor.

He stood for election and the rest is history for an ordinary man who was once in my time, Doctor Paddy.

By Joe

The War of Independence

In 1919 De Valera went for a General Election. My mother, (R.I.P.) with all her little friends then aged twelve years of age, dressed up in their aunts' clothes and went to cast votes for their aunts who were unable to go. The R.I.C. was at the policing station but only laughed. De Valera was elected by an overwhelming majority.

De Valera, when elected, went around to several towns and villages giving speeches and organising the I.R.A. volunteers. My three uncles joined the volunteers. They were Johnny, Thomas and Paddy.

In 1920, Ireland was at war with England. England was tired after the First World War. England sent over the Black and Tans, who were old war soldiers, tired and weary after fighting in the Great War.

The most successful of all the I.R.A. ambushes was the taking of the Ruan barracks. The I.R.A. got friendly with one of the R.I.C. He told them the password was milkman and when the I.R.A. would come to the barracks, one person was to shout, milkman, and he would let them in. So one summer morning in 1920 the I.R.A. surrounded the Ruan barracks and one person knocked on the door. Someone shouted "Who's there?" and the I.R.A. man replied "Milkman" and he was let in and soon all the I.R.A. were in there and quickly disarmed and tied up all the R.I.C. However, the R.I.C. sergeant slept with his rifle and he drew immediately. My uncle Thomas jumped on him, disarmed him and threw out all the R.I.C. officers and burnt down the building. It was a most successful ambush because there was no loss of lives.

The Rineen Ambush was fought on the 22nd of September 1920. All the nationals were there led by Ignatius O'Neill. They ambushed the R.I.C. on the hill above Rineen, killed all the R.I.C. and took their guns and ammunition. When the Black and Tans heard the shots they came out immediately and followed the I.R.A. down as far as Rockmount school

shooting all the time. Ignatius O'Neill was wounded but turned back and shot and put a machine gun out of order. He fired five rounds and several of the Tans were wounded. He was brought into Clancy's where the doctor came and attended him. O'Neill recovered and once again went back to battle.

In the summer of 1920, there was an ambush at Crowe's Bridge. One column of the I.R.A. was there, led by Ignatius O'Neill. They ambushed two R.I.C. men who were talking to two girls on the road. A shot was fired in the air to warn the girls to leave, but they did not. They then shot at one of the R.I.C. Martin Devitt was shot at and he fell to the ground. He put his head up to see if O'Neill was alive and the minute he did this, he was shot in the head.

Ignatius O'Neill was wounded in the thigh and he went to assist Martin Devitt who lay dying. Devitt's body and O'Neill were brought to Cloonanaha, Inagh where the body was hidden and O'Neill was attended by a doctor. The body was later moved somewhere else and was eventually discovered by the R.I.C. in another part of Clare.

By Mary Ellen

My nephew's First Communion

On the 10th of May I went to Kilkenny for my nephew's Holy Communion. This was a great experience. I asked my nephew if he had made his first confession to which he replied he had no sins so he had to make up one saying he locked his sister in the bathroom for 10 minutes. My next big outing will be for my other nephew Eanna, who is making his Confirmation on 30th of May. I am looking forward to that day P.G.

By Mary

Fair days in Kilrush in the 1940s–50s

I was brought up in a public house in Kilrush in the 1940s and 50s. There was no mart then like there is today, more like the horse fairs that occur many times each year, but what a difference! No stalls or hawkers selling their wares, but horses, horses, horses or cattle, cattle, cattle.

It was a busy time for my parents. They had to prepare for this event, get in extra stock, do a big clean-up, but still continue with everyday affairs, not least looking after the children and getting the food ready for the family for the day. Old Moore's Almanac had to be consulted as to the exact date of each fair. This book was a small version of *Nostradamus* with fair day dates, forecasts for the future, the weather and your stars. We would all be told of the upcoming fair and each be given a job to do to help prepare but, most of all, what was expected of us on that day.

In those years long ago, horses and cattle were all transported on foot as very few people had motor transport. So people with animals had to leave home at some ungodly hour and arrive in town at about four or five in the morning. Sleeping in the front of our house, you would always be woken up by horses neighing or cattle lowing, and dealers greeting each other, and deals being made. I would look out of the window and see the street filling up with horses or cattle. I think horse fairs were preferred as the streets didn't get so dirty or messy. Up we children would get to find our parents already busy getting breakfast for us before we were sent off, very reluctantly, to school.

The pubs all had morning extensions so they could open at four in the morning. My parents had been at work for hours before we woke up. Now, we lived about a hundred yards from the school and normally it only took us about five minutes to get there. But on fair days it took almost thirty minutes as we would stop to watch deals being made, and

trying to get through the animals and crowd was very difficult, or so we said when we were late for school!

Now, the deals, they were a work of art. Cattle buyers would send a go-between to ask the seller how much the beast would cost. He would give a price but that wouldn't be accepted by the buyer so negotiations would start. The buyer would give a very low price and the seller would give a higher price. Eventually, they would meet somewhere in the middle and the price would be agreed. Then they would each spit on their hands and shake on it. The deal was signed. Now the luck penny had to be agreed on. The man selling was expected to give the buyer a small sum out of the price as a sign of good luck. Deal done! All this buying and selling was done with cash. Farmers didn't believe in banks. I never heard of anybody getting robbed, although there was a lot of money about during the fairs. The buying and selling went on all day and when we arrived home from school, it would still be going on. If you were not needed at home you wandered off through the town to see all the goings-on.

At nearly all the fairs, the travelers, would go around and mend the pots, pans and kettles with pot menders. These were little silver coloured discs put on both sides of the hole and screwed together to make the pot last a little longer. They also sharpened knives with a contraption like a bike which they pedaled so that it turned a wheel to sharpen the blade.

A lot of drink would be consumed and a lot of men would be the worse for wear. If they had sold a beast they would have to celebrate. Mind you, it was good business for the pubs. Of course, due to the large amount of drink consumed, fights often broke out. They could start at the bottom of one street and go through every street in the town, everybody cheering the fight on, and joining in, so at the end the two who started the fight may have shook hands and gone home whilst everybody else involved kept on going until the guards came to break it up.

It would be late into the evening and the pubs would be empty and the well drink-soaked buyers, sellers and lookers-on would start to make their weary way home. Some to walk and fall in the ditch and sleep it off, some in donkey/horse and cart to be led home by the donkey or horse who knew their way home and didn't have to be guided by their sleeping, drunken driver.

Now the big clean-up had to take place. The streets were awash with muck, paper, food, etc. and they had to be cleaned up before the next day. The same in the pub. All the floors had to be scrubbed, glasses washed and polished and put back in place. How things have changed – I remember a time when a cow came into our pub to visit and of course left her calling card. Trying to back a cow out of a small place isn't the easiest thing as they don't like going backwards, but out she went with much pushing, shoving and a lot of swearing!

My mother and father would be exhausted at the end of a fair day but they were always thankful for the extra money that would have been earned during the fair.

By Jackie

My home country and my city

My home country is Tanzania. I lived in Zanzibar. Zanzibar is an island, but it is a city, too. It is a small city, but it is very beautiful. There are some beautiful beaches and there are some beautiful old buildings. There are a lot of shops. There are a lot of beautiful old mosques, because there are many Muslims there.

By Saida

Money

Money has been around for centuries. People everywhere used it since it's been around. Money needs to be around and people and countries need it. They need it because it keeps order in the countries and stops everybody from fighting and looting.

Too much money can lead to too much greed and some people would kill for money for various reasons, such as to feed their family, for drugs or just steal it to get by. Thousands of years ago, before money was around, people used to barter. They traded their belongings with other people for something they liked or needed.

I think that the world would not function without money because people wouldn't get by. If there was very little money only the rich would have it, and the middle class would have little or none and lower class people would have none and they'd live in shanty towns and on the streets. There would be lots of diseases and no food or any essentials. Diseases would spread, and lots of people would die, and there would be lots of fighting, and no one would be able to keep order, and the governments would all be corrupt and wouldn't really care about the people.

So all in all, money can be both good and bad. If people had too much money they'd get too used to it and wouldn't last a day without their money. If people have too much money and start to love it, they'll forget about everybody else and would just concentrate on themselves and they could lose out on their friends and family. On the other hand, they could be generous and give other people money, like to charity, or friends and family, and be constructive with their money, and that would probably make them and other people around them happy.

By River

Short stories

I love to read short stories. They are a great way to pass the time. There was a moral to the last story I read - if you help someone in need you could be repaid in an unusual way!

The story was about a man who was let go from his job as a painter because work was scarce. He felt very bad because he had a wife and small child. Money was very tight.

One day while he was out walking, a senior citizen fell on the footpath. He went to her assistance and called an ambulance. He went with her to the hospital and waited until her son arrived. She was very frightened but, fortunately, only bruised and sore. Mother and son were very grateful to him and wondered how they could repay him.

The man owned a painting company and offered him work straight away. His good deed had found him work. He was delighted and his wife was, too.

By Margaret

My dream is a free Cuba

My name is Leonardo and I come from Cuba. I came to Ireland In May 2008 and it is wonderful. I love Ireland. There is a dictator in Cuba. His name is Fidel Castro. He governed for 50 years and his brother, Raul, is the current president.

'I want when I die, with a country but without a master, to have on my grave a bunch of flowers and a flag'.

Quotation from Jose Marti - Cuba's national hero

By Leonardo

Something I feel optimistic about

When I have finished doing my Leaving Certificate I would like to get a job in a hairdresser's. I'd like to stay in Kilrush and work in a nice salon.

Kilrush is my home town and I know lots of people here. I'd work hard and train until I could get my own hairdressing salon.

I like hairdressing because you can do different styles and it changes the way you look when you get your hair coloured and cut. It's nice to make people feel good when they are getting their hair done. They leave the salon feeling happy.

By Claire

The Siege of Ennis

On Sunday 17th of May 2009, we left home at 1.30 p.m. and headed for Ennis. We parked in Parnell Street car park and we walked towards the Fairgreen.

We stood with the crowd of 5,500 and it was pouring rain. At 3.30 p.m. there was a count down and then the *Siege of Ennis* began. We danced it with the crowd for 15 minutes.

We were trying to break the world record but did not succeed. We needed 9,000 people to do so. They were collecting money for the Special Olympics and all the buckets were filled. A great day was had by all.

By Tom

Where is my mammy?

There he stood with the knife, "How did it come to this?" he asked himself. It all began two weeks ago on a dark rainy night. Michael was going to his son's birthday, the youngest of three, Paul. He came to the front door to find it wide open with no one inside. He rang his ex-wife but there was no answer. He searched the house upside down till he found a note on the back of the kitchen door. He read, "If you want to see your wife and children again meet at the top of the multi-storey car park to discuss terms next Saturday at 9.00 p.m." He broke down to his knees. He let out a roar with anger. Hours passed as he still lay on the kitchen floor wondering what to do next. He got up to his feet, walked towards the front door and slammed it shut. He got into his car and drove off.

Days passed like months. It came to d-day. He arrived at the car park. He saw two hooded men and they called him over. As he walked towards them his heart was racing, thinking, "Will I ever see my kids again?" He approached the men and asked "Where are my kids?" One of the men replied, "They're at a safe location. Now you listen to us. We need you to find your ex-wife and kill her to save your kids." Michael replied, "I thought you had her." "No, we don't," shouted the other guy, waving a gun around. "She got away." "Why do you want me to kill my ex-wife?" asked Michael. The gun man said "Because she has information on us that we don't want people to know and if you don't kill her, we will kill your kids." Michael said, "I'll do it. Give me her location." The gun man replied, "If we knew that, she'd be dead by now, so you find her, kill her and you get your kids back. OK?"

Michael walked off wondering where she would be. He rang her brother to see but he hadn't heard from her in weeks but, just as he hung up the phone, it rang. It was a private number. He answered it. It was his ex-wife crying, pleading with Michael to come get her. He asked her where she was, "In the church where we got married," she told him. Michael

rushed to his house, grabbed a kitchen knife and got in his car and drove to the church. As he walked towards the door his hands began to tremble, his mind full of sick thoughts. He turned the door knob and walked in. There was his wife on the floor, lying face down. He rushed to her, dropped the knife and turned her over but it was too late. She had been shot several times. The blood was all over the place. Then he heard a cell phone ring. It was in his ex-wife's pocket. He reached in her pocket and answered the phone. A cloudy voice said, "Your kids are back home safe," and then hung up. He picked up the knife and asked himself, "How did it come to this?"

By Cathal

The city of Liepaja

We are both from Latvia, from the city of Liepaja. We would like to tell you about our city. It is located on the coast by the Baltic Sea. A large seaside park and beach provides a nice place to visit in the summer. There are many hotels and pubs.

Liepaja is an art and music city. There are many art and music colleges there and in summer time there are many festivals and concerts. Liepaja's theatre is the oldest professional theatre troupe in Latvia. There are a lot of different churches and museums and old streets with many old houses. The weather in Latvia is similar to Ireland, but winter time is colder and summer time is warmer.

We came to live in Ireland because life in our country is very difficult. There are no jobs, no money and no future for our children. Liepaja is the city we would most like you to visit in Latvia.

By Elena and Julia

Apple cake

This is a nice change from apple tart.

8 oz plain flour
4 oz castor sugar
4 oz margarine
3 medium apples
1 egg
½ tea spoon bread soda
½ tea spoon brown sugar
Pinch of nutmeg

Rub margarine and flour together. Add sugar. Peel apples and cut into small pieces and add to the mixture. Beat the egg and add a little milk and bread soda. Add to the dry ingredients and mix. Put into a greased loaf tin. Sprinkle the top with the brown sugar and nutmeg. Bake in a moderate oven 160 c for approx 45 minutes.

Lovely hot or cold served with ice-cream or custard. Enjoy!

By Noreen

St. Patrick's Day parade

The parade was held on Sunday 15th March in Kilrush this year to accommodate the floats, as they were participating in more than one town. The highlight of the parade for me was the children dancing from Hell for Leather. They were just brilliant. Some of the children went to dance at Áras an Uachtaráin for the president on St. Patrick's Day. It was a lovely fine day with many families present.

My wish for everyone is – may you live as long as you want and never want as long as you live.

By Anne

What does bullying feel like?

Well, bullying can be of someone who is not from your country. Example, I was living in the UK and I am originally from the Czech Republic. I lived in England for nine years and I was a little girl and I was in primary school. I got bullied there for no reason and if you had to still go to the school, you felt really bad and sad, because it is not nice if you get bullied for no reason just because you are not a British girl.

Well, the primary school was okay and when I went to junior school it was okay for three weeks. After that, I got battered by twenty girls and you can imagine how you feel because it's not all about being afraid. It is all about how you feel and how you can stand up for yourself. If you have a survival instinct, you will always go through anything. You will feel apprehensive, but if you have no way to run away or no way to get help from somebody, you will be hard. Because if you are a really soft person like you're scared of people in this situation, you will change your mind straight away because you won't just stand there and look. You will go and stand up for yourself. I've been through this one time and I felt like a person with nothing, but I'm hard now because I learned a lot. Imagine you're sitting down and someone from behind throws a chair at you. Would you get up and do something? I was sitting down and looking forward to school being over and going home.

I'm writing this so that if you have problems with somebody, you will go and say it straight away because I made a mistake not saying it to anyone. Don't do the same, no matter what they say to you. Just go and say it to someone you know who will help you. Don't forget. Thank you.

By Andrea

Living in Ireland

My name is Martine. I come from Reunion Island, but I was born in Paris because my parents worked there and we finally moved back to Reunion before my second birthday. We are French but we are a little bit different from Europeans; in fact we are a small French island, lost in the middle of the Indian Ocean with a mixture of different cultures (due to our history) and different weather.

When I was twenty, I married a man native of Reunion and we had two children together, a daughter who is ten years old and a son who is nearly three.

Last year, I decided to move to an English speaking country and I chose Ireland. I wanted to experience another way of life, another language, culture and habits. Unfortunately, my husband stayed in Reunion where he works, but he comes to visit here and we visit Reunion.

I didn't work in Reunion. I just took care of my children, so I had the opportunity to move to Ireland and I didn't hesitate. I prefer Ireland as a place to take care of my children for all the reasons above.

I really enjoy it here and my children do, too, which is the most important thing. First I had thought to stay one year but, in my opinion, it is not enough and everything is going very well. My daughter simply delights in it, a school with uniforms; she made new friends, not too easily, but that kind of thing can take time, and she does a lot of activities after school. I was really very surprised to find such a welcoming school for both children and parents. So everybody said yes to the idea of staying another year.

It is not a real problem for me to live abroad but, sure, I miss my husband and of course my children miss him, too. For the moment everybody is happy. The only problem is that I don't work and we have to pay for the flat and the car.

It is a long journey which costs money, but if someone can do it, don't hesitate! Ireland is so beautiful, its landscape, its people and much more. Don't miss it!

By Martine

About Richard

I am 25 years old and I have been living in Ennis for 5 years. I am the youngest in my family and I have 3 older sisters who I get on very well with. I am an uncle to five nieces and one nephew. I had a brother but he died in a motorbike accident 6 years ago. He was my best friend and I miss him a lot.

My favourite hobby is playing football. On Thursday nights I go to Drumbiggle to play 5-a-side football with my friends. I play in defence and I am also the captain of my team. We are called the Kilbreckan Smashers. My other hobbies are playing pool, going swimming and playing card games. I also enjoy fishing with my friends in the Fergus River. We usually catch trout which we then take home and cook.

My girlfriend's name is Sylvia. We are going out together one year. We were best friends for 2 years before that. She has a great sense of humour and we have a good laugh together. I think she is gorgeous and I like spending time with her.

At the moment I am setting up my own business. I will be cutting lawns, washing cars and doing general maintenance around the Ennis area. I have already got 3 regular customers and I hope to get more in the future. The work is hard, but I like it.

By Richard

Traveller boy

A traveller boy came home one day
To find his true love has gone away
But when he asked the reason why
These are the words she did reply,
"If you live a life of crime
Go away and do your time
And if you live an honest man
I will gladly be your wife."
Late one night down in his cell
He received a note saying,
Dig my grave, dig it deep
Leave red roses at my feet
And at my head put a true dove
To tell the world I died for love.

By Donna

Tiesto

Tijs Verwest was born on 17th of January 1969 in Breda, Netherlands. Tiesto is a trance DJ. Tiesto is best known for his famous remix of the *Deleriem* single, 'Silence'.

Tiesto's fame started in the late 1990s, by playing at the first IDT inner-city party and in the early 2000s for his six hours Tiesto solo. On the 20th of August 2005 he took 'Tiesto in Concert' to America to 10,000 Tiesto fans in Los Angeles, California in the L.A. sport arena.

Tijs was the first DJ to hold 'DJ magazine no. 1 DJ in the World Title' for three consecutive years in 2002, 2003, and 2004.

By Maros

My life

I was born in Cork at 2.20 a.m. on 25-07-1985 and I had red hair. Mam, Dad and I lived in Cork for one year and then we moved to Askeaton.

When I was a year old I could not keep my food down. I kept on getting sick, so mam took me to the doctor and he couldn't do anything for me. The doctor told my mam to take me to the hospital. I was in hospital for months and I came out three weeks before my birthday.

When I was three, my sister Victoria was born on 08-08-1988 and she was really cute. When I was five, I went to school at St. Mary's National School in Askeaton. I was in St. Mary's school for a good few years and then I went to Newcastle West School until I was ten and a half.

Mam, Dad, Victoria and I moved to Ennis when I was eleven and then I started school at St. Anne's school. I finished school when I was 18. These days I'm at the Clare Youth Service. I'm here a year and a half and I will be finished some time in May.

By Tracy

Work experience

I started work experience in October of last year. I work in Kilmaley in the shop every Wednesday. I like working in the shop.

I do reading and writing classes every Monday, Wednesday and Thursday afternoons. Tuesdays I go to aerobics class.

By Martina

Poland

We are three polish students who study English in the Adult Education Centre and we would like to tell you something about our country.

Poland is a country in Central Europe with a moderate climate. This country offers a lot of places for holiday. We can choose among sea, lakes, or mountains.

Polish people have two big Catholic traditions during the year. First is Easter, second is Christmas.

Before Easter, on Saturday, everybody goes to the church for the blessing of food. They have small baskets with coloured boiled eggs, ham, salt, bread and sheep made from butter. Some people have sheep made from sugar instead of 'butter sheep'. On the first day of Easter, all families go to the church before breakfast. When they come back, then all the family sit at the table ready for breakfast, but before that the head of the family shares the blessed food with other family members. A special tradition in Easter is Monday, which Polish people call 'wet Monday'. Everybody tries to wake up very early that morning and sprinkle or throw water at each other. People believe it brings luck for unmarried girls and fortune-telling for married.

The second big tradition is Christmas. In Poland, people start to celebrate earlier than in Ireland, from 24th of December. On that day, we dress a Christmas tree. We begin to celebrate on Christmas Eve when the first star appears in the sky. For Christmas Eve, we prepare special dishes without meat. Usually this is fish, salad, beetroot and mushroom soup as well as dumplings.

Mostly, people make supper with 12 dishes which is a symbol of the 12 apostles. Before supper, the head of family shares the food with other family members and wishes good look and health for another year. Some families buy special food

for animals which have a red colour. After the supper, we sing carols and give gifts to each other.

By Mirosław, Joanna, and Izabela

Visiting America

The first time I went to America I went out for my son Michael's wedding. He was marrying an American girl in Chicago and my husband and I travelled out for two weeks for the wedding. We flew from Shannon directly to Chicago and the wedding took place soon after we arrived. It was a very different wedding to the ones we have here. After the Mass we went to the reception hall. Everything was going well. They had an Irish band and everyone was enjoying themselves. But come twelve o'clock, it all finished! An Irish wedding would only be just starting at that time! The bride had a satin bag into which everyone put an envelope of money. Only a few bring presents for the bride and groom.

When my other son got married in America, we drove to New York after the wedding. It took two days to drive there from Chicago, but I loved New York. It was so full of life, colour and noise. I loved the big buildings, fantastic shops and the people were very friendly. We went to Manhattan and saw all the wealthy people. It was full of luxury, not at all like Chicago.

I love going to America and I have been back many times as my five boys and a daughter all live there. I usually go for a couple of months at a time and I just celebrated my 80th birthday in December in Chicago with all my children and grandchildren. I'd love to go again but the travelling is a bit too much for me now.

By Kathleen

Take care

A guide when leaving your house to meet someone or going shopping:

Always arrange to meet in a public place.

Always arrange to meet during daylight hours.

Tell a relative or friend where you are going and the time you expect to return.

Bring your mobile phone if you have one and leave your number.

By Michael

A stormy night

One dark, stormy night an old woman was sitting all alone in her home. It was Halloween and she sat near her window watching the storm clouds and lightning flashes through her curtains. She had a candle sat on the windowsill. The wind was howling outside and the electricity had gone off. As she sat staring at the flashes of lightening and dark sky, the candle started flickering. Suddenly, the doorbell rang and at the same time a puff of wind blew the candle out.

She went to the door and peered out through the peephole but there was no-one there. Slowly, she opened the door and gasped as a hand grabbed the door handle. A big, black boot was wedged in the doorway. The old lady stepped back into the hall and prepared to scream, but smiled gently as her neighbour pushed the door in.

"Are you all right Mary?" he asked, taking off his black hood.
"The lights were gone. I thought you'd be worried."
"I'm fine Joe," she smiled. "But thanks for coming by." It's good to have caring neighbours, she thought.

By Frances

The war

My story begins in 1918 in Russia. My name is Igor. Now this is a true story, so read it really carefully. When I was twelve years old it was the first war. I remember it really well. When this happened, all the men had to go to the war, even my father. My mom was so sad. I'll never forget her eyes, how sad they were and everywhere were dead bodies. It was horrible, really terrible. One day, the soldiers came into our house and they killed my mom. When I saw that, I ran through the window and I was running like a rabbit. Then a man stopped me and he said, "Why are you running so fast?" I said that my family were all dead and they tried to kill me, too, and the stranger helped me a lot. He hid me in his house. He lived alone. When we came to his home, he told me that I looked like his son and I asked him where was he and he told me that he was dead and I knew how he felt.

One week later, the soldiers came there. He hid me and he said to me, "If anything happens, be quiet." Then he opened the door. They asked who else lives here and he said, "No one, just myself." They looked everywhere, but they didn't find me. After a little while they asked him, "Why are you sweating?" and he said, "I don't know." Next thing, the soldiers shot him and I had to be quiet like no one was there.

When they left, I came out from the place and had no one again. For one year, I lived alone. All I had was water when it rained, but it was very dangerous because everywhere guns were firing and for eating I had to eat rats. It was terrible, but I had to do it if I wanted to survive.

I'm telling you this story because I'm dying and I have never told anyone before. You are the first person.

By Dusan

A visit to Bunratty Castle

I went to Bunratty Castle and I did some shopping there. We went into the castle and saw the very old furniture and rooms where people lived. We climbed to the top of the castle. Then we went into the cottages and I saw a spinning wheel there and a woman making griddle bread and some scones. We went into the shops and we bought jumpers and handbags. We had a good walk around the shops and gardens.

I moved to Kilrush from the country about two years ago and I am getting used to living in the town now. I like the shops in Kilrush, but I miss going into the local shop where I lived before. I used to bake my own bread and scones in the country but now I buy them in the supermarket, but the homemade ones are still the best.

By Maureen G.

Learning and work

I heard about a class starting at the Adult Education Centre and I decided to enrol. It is on all day Thursday and there are ten people in the group. We do computers, math and English. I have made many friends in the group and I enjoy the day.

I have a part-time job. I work in a health food shop. I like the job. I like meeting people and learning how to run a shop and keeping time. I am also learning how to deal with the public and about healthy eating.

By Julie-Ann

Village life in Albania

I was born in Albania in 1975, in a small village in the mid west of Albania. The life in the village was very hard, and the people were poor and they didn't have anything, or didn't own anything, because the regime had everything. After World War II, Albania was a communist regime and the government owned everything; for example, the land, the farms, the factories, and the shops. So the people had to work just to survive. Most of the people there worked from morning till the late evening. The life in Albania was so hard, not just in the villages, but also in the cities. The workers had to work very hard for nothing at the end because the government took everything, and if they complained they were facing a sentence or life in prison.

But after 1991 everything changed. The people have the right to speak and the freedom of doing whatever they like. Before, you could see the children going to school without shoes on their bare feet, walking on the road during the winter so the life was very hard for ordinary people and for their families. But, after the fall of the communists, everything has changed, but the government needs to do more for the people.

The life there and the life here in Ireland is different. The life here is much better, but I hope that very soon life will be the same in Albania as here. Here, people say that life was very bad over 30 or 40 years ago. You could not find work and most of the people left the country to go to England, USA, Canada and all over the world. So the same thing is happening to Albania at the moment, and we hope that we can return one day as the Irish people hoped when they left Ireland.

By Viktor

South Korea

My name is Moonsu. I'm from South Korea. I lived in the capital Seoul. My country's population is approx 50 million, almost 10 times the population of Ireland. Like the Irish we like to drink alcohol. We have a drink the same as vodka. It is called soju and our traditional foods are kimchi, and bulgogi. Kimchi is made with cabbage, chilli powder, salt, fish and prawn oil, always made by our mother. Bulgogi is a sort of pork steak. Our national flower is a rose of Sharon.

Our national sport is taekwondo, like hurling or gaelic football is your national sport. Our national song is Aegukga. We have 5000 years of history. But, unfortunately we have two countries, because in 1950 we had The Korean War. So our country was divided by democracy and communist. Westerners call our country Korea because the name Korea is about 1500 years old. Then our country's name was Koryu so, nowadays, our country is called Korea by westerners, but we call it Daehanminguk.

Our education system is elementary school (6 years), middle school (3 years), high school (3 years) usually college (2 years) and university (4 years). Irish, English, American and Australian people and New Zealanders, etc. come to our country to teach the English language.

By Moonsu

Driver theory test

I am practising for my driver theory test. I haven't sent my application away yet. I am hoping to send it away very soon, because it's time now I started driving. I'm sick of walking.

By Michael

Waking up

I remember a neighbour telling me a story that happened in Crusheen a long while ago. An old man was bent over in double with age and arthritis. When he died they tried to lay him out in the house, but they could not straighten him out. So they got a cord and tied the body onto the bed after dressing him in his best Sunday suit.

People started arriving for the wake and everyone stayed for ages, telling stories and having a good chat about the dead man. Quarter-casks of porter and bottles of whiskey for the men and a saucer of snuff for the ladies were left by the bedside. Soon, everyone was in fine form and very merry with the drink.

Then someone started to say the Rosary and everyone stood quietly and respectfully around the old man. All of a sudden, the corpse sat up in bed! Everyone screamed with shock and fright and people ran out of the room, but the culprit who had cut the cord was laughing like a banshee!

By Mary H.

I love swimming

My name is Teresa. I go swimming every fortnight. Swimming is great. I swim with the Special Olympics team in Ennis.

Three weeks ago, ten of us went in a mini bus to Leisure Land in Galway City to race. I won two gold medals and one bronze medal. After the racing we went to McDonalds for burgers and chips. By the time the bus got back to Ennis it was eight o'clock. We were exhausted but we had great craic.

By Teresa

No more tears

It was cold and dark as she walked up the lonely road. It was raining and the rain mixed with the tears on her face. Her heart pounded with every step that got closer to the house, a house that she hated, a house that she couldn't call home. It was just a place of fear that awaited her.

She stopped and froze. His car was outside. He was in the house. Would he be sober? Irritable? Cranky? With a face like a snorting pig, or would he be drunk and abusive? She found him to be mean, disgusting and repulsive. Her mind was a mess; she wanted to turn back but had nowhere to go. She felt so trapped, so hopeless, so alone with nowhere to go.

She got married young and had five children, one after the other. She never thought drink would be part of her life and how hard of a struggle it would be to feed and keep her children. Life for her was a constant worry. Would he drink everything and not give her anything to keep the house running? What would the children eat? They were already dressed in hand-me-down rags, which embarrassed them and made them hate going to school. They were also teased a lot that their father was a drunkard, and stayed huddled together in the corners of the playground, holes in their shoes and patches on their clothes.

Her children often begged her to leave him, "Please get rid of him mummy," they would say. Her reply would always be, "It's his house and we have no money. Where would we go?" In the olden days marriage was for life, through thick and thin.

She felt so trapped, so afraid, so disappointed. She had married the wrong man. She felt so sorry for her children, who had no role model, no one to look up to, no one to respect, just a man that beat her in front of them and who took off on drinking binges for days at a time. The children loved it when he was gone, but she had to go to the different charities to beg for food for them. The nuns were

very good to her, but she always felt sad walking away with the leftover scraps from their tables. She had nobody to talk to because in those days you kept your problems to yourself and just pretended everything was normal. She tried to be strong for them and always remained positive so they wouldn't feel too sad all of the time.

Then one day when he had gone off on one of his benders, she received a letter from a solicitor to go and see him. She couldn't understand what it was about and felt a bit panicked. She dug out the best coat she had, polished up her shoes, sent the kids to school without telling them anything and got the bus into town to meet him. Her heart was racing; worrying what kind of trouble was she in now? She arrived at the office, shaking. The lady at the desk offered her a cup of tea, which she gratefully accepted, and told her that Mr. Connor would see her in a few minutes.

He called her in and told her not to be nervous. He shook her hand and told her to sit down. He said to her that an aunt of hers had died in Dublin, leaving her a house and £20,000. She was in shock. She couldn't believe it; she could escape with her children and provide a life for them, a life with no more drink, no more beatings, food on the table, clothes on their backs, no more walking in fear. She was ecstatic, in shock and very much relieved. "How soon can it happen?" She asked. He replied, "Straight away," and gave her £100 to make the trip. She ran out of the office elated, excited.

The next day the kids didn't go to school, instead they took the long bus ride to Dublin to their new home and new life. "Thanks, mammy," was what they said for finally leaving him. Now we can be happy with no more tears.

By Carmel

Real story of my country

My name is Alexandre. I'm from DRC (Democratic Republic of Congo). Today, I'm going to tell you a real story that is happening now in my country. This story is about BDK. I know that you will ask yourself, what BDK is.

Let me tell you briefly something about Africa just to remind you about it. I will go back for some story about civilisation in Africa, how Africa was organised precisely in my country. In the past, Africa was organised in kingdoms and empires. In my country we have had Kingdom of Kongo (where the country's name come from), Bakuba's Empire, Luba's Empire, Lunda's Empire, etc. But among those civilisations, Kongo's civilisation was the biggest. That Kingdom took one part of DRC, one part of Congo-Brazzaville, one part of Angola and one part of Gabon.

Today, we have that association called BDK, a political-religious group, which is fighting for independence and for the restoration of the former kingdom of Kongo with all their former worth. BDK means in Kikongo's language, Bundu dia Kongo. That means Association of Kongo's people.

What are they fighting for? As I've said before, they are fighting for the restoration of the former Kingdom of Kongo with all their former land. Because the government of Congo gives less importance in that part of Congo, this part is not built up and they haven't good infrastructure, but there is one of the parts of Congo that has much wealth (electric power, international ports, good soil for agriculture and much more). Bas-Congo (Low Congo) produces many things that give money to the Congo government.

How are they fighting? Kongo people haven't guns or bombs for fighting. They use traditional things such as pieces of sticks, etc. What if those things could change mystically into guns and bombs as instruments of fighting? But, on the contrary, the government is using the guns and other heavy

arms to fight against those people who are seeking their freedom and the restoration of the former Kongo's kingdom.

By Alexandre

Memories of Hawthorn

My home in England was called Garden House situated in the village of Hawthorn in the north east of county Durham. The Quakers built it around 1700 AD as a school to educate the poor children in and around Hawthorn village. It had half an acre of walled garden. I liked living in Hawthorn; it is a quiet place with one public house and a school, which is now closed. The pub, called The Stapylton Arms is owned by Whitbread's brewery and serves English ales. I lived there until 1990, when my parents and I moved to Ireland.

One particular job I had when I lived there was working on a farm. Harvest time was our busiest time of the year in the month of August. The farmer used to cut the wheat with the combined harvester and the grain was fed into a holding tank on the machine. When the tank was full, the grain was then transferred by means of an auger into a large trailer. When the trailer was full, it was brought to the corn shed where I dealt with it. The grain was tipped in a heap and was then moved by a large auger to the main heap, which I kept levelling with a shovel to cover the air ducts on the floor. Dry air is passed through the ducts and the corn to reduce the moisture content to the required level. (Augers are a device consisting of a long steel tube six to nine inches in diameter. Inside is a spiral worm driven by an electric motor. It is a great labour saver.)

Working on the farm was a challenging but enjoyable job.

By Chris

The day my wish came true

It was the 15th of February 1995 in New Zealand. My two brothers and I and my parents were at my Aunt Mary's house. My two brothers and myself and our twin cousins were getting ready for school. At the same time, my mam and dad were getting ready to go to the hospital because today my mam was due to have her baby.

Before mam and dad left for the hospital they dropped me and my two brothers off at school. I was so giddy and excited all day, hoping and praying that my mam was going to have a little baby girl. I could hardly concentrate on anything all day at school. I got in trouble a few times for just staring into space (oops!), but I was too busy thinking about my mam having her baby.

Just an hour before it was time for school to finish, my dad showed up in my classroom and said to my teacher that he needed to pick up me and my two brothers to bring us to the hospital. I asked my dad if mam had had a baby boy or girl. I was so excited and wanted to find out, but dad wouldn't tell us because he wanted it to be a surprise. We didn't even stop off at home to drop off our school bags. Dad just drove us straight to the hospital. He brought us down to the room mam was in, and she was holding a little baby. She said to me and my brothers, "Say hi to your sister, Molly." I was so happy because after spending all day hoping and praying for a little sister, I finally had one and she was so cute.

About a week later, after mam and Molly had gotten out of hospital, mam came to pick me and my brothers up from school. Everybody was crowding around Molly sleeping in her pram. Everybody thought she was adorable.

Now it's fourteen years later and we are living in Ireland. We left New Zealand when Molly was nearly three years old so she doesn't remember much about it at all, except maybe when she sees a few photos of herself or we describe a few

things she may remember. Molly is practically a young woman now, putting on make-up. She has a boyfriend, and all her friends etc. She is all grown up looking, but to me she will always be my baby sister who I love lots.

By Sarah

Outbreak

I just came back from my holiday in Spain to find them demolishing the flat where I lived. What's going on?

I ran over and pulled the builder out of the bulldozer. I caught him up by the throat and smashed him in the head with a brick. He died instantly. His brains sprayed all over my new shirt. I stopped for a moment and thought about it. I should have probably asked him what was going on before I killed him.

I ran down the street and everywhere I went I could see people wearing biochemical suits and gasmasks. They looked like soldiers in suits and they were destroying everything. Many people were lying dead in the streets and then I saw a big mound of bodies being burned. Why?

I started running and as I went into an alleyway, I saw a big poster. There had been a violent outbreak of the H1N1 Swine Flu virus and it had become lethal. Once you contracted it you start vomiting blood and going into convulsions. The area had been subject to the virus and the government was attempting to demolish, clean and decontaminate the area.

I was captured and put into quarantine. It was lucky I hadn't contracted the virus, but they now wanted to kill me because of what I had seen ...

By Jonathon

The soaps

I like watching the soaps on the TV. My favourite is *Home and Away*. I like this because there are good actors in it and it is set in Australia. Annie and Jeff are the main characters, and they are brother and sister, but they don't get on with each other. Aidan is the man who works on the boat with a girl called Joey. Mary, my sister, likes to watch *Home and Away* too, and she thinks I look a lot like Aidan.

I like watching *Coronation Street*, too, and my favourite character is Steve. I used to like Sarah Platt when she was on, but Sarah went off to Spain after marrying Jason. She thought he was having an affair with Violet so she threw a pint of beer over Jason and then left.

If there were no soaps on the TV I would watch something on the Disney Channel. I love watching the television.

By Kieran

Cattle marts

I go to the marts in Ennis and in Ennistymon. Ennis mart is on Thursdays and Ennistymon mart is on Fridays. Calves, cows, bulls and sheep are sold at the marts.

People go there to buy and sell cattle. There are lots of farmers there. A man shouts out the price of the cattle over a microphone. Cattle are dear to buy at the moment. You can have your dinner at the Ennis mart and it's like eating in a hotel.

I like farming. Sitting down is no good. When you're farming, you feed the cattle. You're moving all the time.

By Seamus

My holiday in Spain

I went to Spain for my holidays with my sister, Eleanor, and my mum. We went for a week and stayed in a lovely hotel with a swimming pool, near the beach. Every day I had fresh fruit, cereal and orange juice for breakfast and then we went to the swimming pool. After that, we would go for a walk in the town. We looked at the clothes shops, but I didn't buy anything. My sister bought some nice tops and pants.

In the afternoon, we used to go to the beach and sit in the deckchairs watching the sea. I didn't go in the sea because it was a bit cold. The swimming pool was warmer.

In the evening we would have dinner in the restaurant. I liked to have sausages and chips with salad. I didn't try the Spanish food because it didn't look very nice and I was scared to try it. My mum didn't try it either.

It was the first time I've been to Spain, and I really enjoyed it. The sunshine was lovely. It's such a shame we don't have the sun here in Ireland.

By Frances

A day trip

Every now and then we go on a day trip. Recently, we went to Spanish Point for the day.

It was a lovely fine day. It was lovely to see the daffodils out in the countryside and the buds coming on the trees. The cherry blossoms were appearing on the trees. There were young lambs in the fields. We had afternoon tea at the Spanish Armada Hotel. It was beautiful. Everyone enjoyed the day.

By John

The true story of the visitor who came in the night

After having a busy day, husband Tom and myself took ourselves off to bed for a good night's sleep, or so we thought!

In the early hours of the morning, I felt our cat Tom Puss coming into the bed, as he did every night. He snuggled down on my tummy, purring away. I said to Tom, "That's Tom Puss in for the night." He grunted. "Can't be, you must be dreaming, Tom Puss has been in for hours and he's asleep here at my neck." I said, "You're wrong, he's on my tummy." "No, no, he's at my neck," says hubby Tom. More grunting at being disturbed. "Well, if he is," I said, "Who is on my tummy?" God knows.

I popped on the light and picked up the covers and God forbid! A lovely ginger puss, purring away to his heart's content, green eyes staring back at me and fleas jumping like mad from him! "Oh help!" I roared. Everyone was awake by now. The calm ginger puss wondering what was happening, who was disturbing his comfortable sleep, was still purring away. Both Tom and I jumped out of the bed and laid ginger puss on a chair. He looked up at me with wonder in his eyes. Our own Tom Puss, admiring him immensely and sniffing enquiringly at him went to investigate our new visitor.

After stripping the bed and remaking it up with fresh linen, etc. I went and got the DDT powder. Then I dosed and hosed our new visitor until he was white. I pulled out a drawer of the tallboy, tipped out the contents, replaced them with a towel and laid ginger puss in it with more DDT around him. I was being thorough. Sometimes, it's necessary to be cruel to be kind. Our own cat, Tom Puss, watched carefully at all this being done. Ginger Puss settled down well and went to sleep, still purring.

Tom, myself and Tom Puss all got back to bed, settled, exhausted and fell asleep. Thank God, What a night!

I bet you are wondering what happened to our ginger visitor? He hung around for a while then left us all nice and clean and well fed, probably to find another bed. God only knows.

By Valerie

Precious memories

I am one of three girls and seven boys. We were reared in Limerick. We used to travel all over Ireland in horse drawn caravans. We would stay in Limerick during the winters. I remember we lived at the side of the road and my mother would cook the dinner over an open fire outside. She would have the radio on and she would have two pots hanging over the fire. The oven would be at the side of the fire. Cinders would be pulled out from the fire and a metal three legged stool would be placed over the pile of cinders. A metal oven was then placed on top of the stool and hot cinders put on top of this. Bread would rise very well in this oven. All the children would be down the road playing until called for dinner.

Every summer we went to Kerry. We crossed the ferry at Killimer and landed in Tarbert. We loved being on the ferry. My father and brothers would get a horse box to bring the horse in on the ferry. We would have to push the caravan onto the ferry ourselves. All the tourists loved this and they would take loads of photos. Whenever we travelled around Kerry, there were always tourists taking our photos with the horse drawn caravan.

Even though I'm married with a big family, God bless them, these memories are very precious to me and I will always have them.

By Nora

A new friend

Emily had just turned 11 years old. She was an only child and much cherished by her parents, Jim and Rose. Emily was a fun-loving, happy-go-lucky child. She had big blue eyes and a mass of blonde curly hair. Emily had wondered how she would adjust to her new home and school. She was moving from a city to a small village tucked away in the middle of nowhere. Would she fit in, make friends, and enjoy her new life?

The big day arrived and Emily was both excited and anxious at the same time. They pulled up outside a house with a beautiful garden hugging a stone path that led to the big red front door, their new home. Emily couldn't wait to explore her new surroundings. "Mum can I go for a walk?" asked Emily, half expecting a no. "Yes," her mother said, "but don't go too far." Emily happily skipped to the back door. Opening it, the beautiful back garden beckoned her outside. Looking almost feverish trying to take in all the new sights and smells, she thought to herself, I think I'm going to like it here, as she neared the woods at the bottom of the garden.

Emily awoke the next morning, sun beaming through her bedroom window. "Was yesterday a dream or was it real?" Emily sighed. Throwing her duvet off, she got up and walked to the window squinting from the light of the sun. She looked through the window down to the back garden and then to the woods. Thoughts of yesterday flooded her mind. Was it real? Did it happen? Who would believe her? Now she was questioning her sanity. She had to go there, to the place, that place where it had happened. Was it a dream? Was it real? I have to know.

"Good morning, cupcake," the name her parents liked to call her. "Morning, Mum," Emily sat at the big wooden kitchen table and had her cereal and toast. She ate quickly. She had to go to the woods. Thanking her mother, Emily asked if she could go for a walk trying not to sound too

eager. "Yes, but be back in time for lunch," her mother answered. Emily opened the back door, closed the door and answered at the same time. "I will."

Making her way sheepishly down the garden, she wondered if she should try to find out the truth or just abandon her mission. By this time the huge trees in the wood surrounded her. She was so close to getting her answer. Her pace quickened as she made her way down to the stream she had visited the day before. Stopping at its edge, Emily became scared, as she sat down on the big rock. She had no time to think before she heard it. She jumped up, frightened, not knowing if she should run as fast as she could back to the safety of her house or stay and get her answer. Her legs, now rooted to the ground, like the huge trees all around her would not move. There it was right in front of her face.

"Hi!" this tiny voice said, "I'm so sorry I scared you yesterday. Please stay. I'm Bluebell and I want to be your friend." Emily's big blue eyes lit up and she felt a calmness embrace her.

"What are you?" Emily asked.

"I'm a fairy."

"A fairy," repeated Emily. "Are you real?"

"Of course I am silly!" At this they both started to giggle out loud.

It was the start of a very secret and wonderful friendship. They would meet every day to play, chat and even sing. They both looked forward to their meetings and they enjoyed lots and lots of fun, laughter and joy together.

When Emily became thirteen years old she didn't see Bluebell any more. They had both understood that their special friendship would end but they knew they would forever remember their time together. So special, so wonderful and so real!

By Julie

My favourite singer

Joe Dolan was born in 1939 in Mullingar, Co. Westmeath. His father died when he was young and after working for a while as a taxi driver, his mother got him a job with the Westmeath Examiner. He was caught singing and playing the drums when he was supposed to be working and his timekeeping was so bad that he got fired from work. He now had a choice to make so he chose singing and he formed a band with his brother, Ben, whom he went to live with after their mother died. They called the band *Joe Dolan and the Drifters*, and Joe and his brother were in the band together for 47 years. He was also a keen golfer and won many trophies over the years.

The first hit song they had was 'The Answer to Everything' which was followed by 'Pretty Brown Eyes', 'My own Peculiar Way', 'Teresa' and 'House with the Whitewashed Gables'.

The first time I went to see Joe Dolan was in Leisureland in Galway. I wasn't into him at that time but after that concert I became a big fan. After that I saw him in the West County, here in Ennis a few times. I bought all his cd's, calendars, dvd's and scarves.

Joe was always a great entertainer and knew how to put on a good show. He was never in bad form and would tell jokes to help cheer up the audience. What I liked about him was that he could be very funny without telling dirty jokes. Joe would always throw his tie into the audience. I caught it once but I lost it later on. The last time I saw Joe was on the 13th April 2007.

In 2007, Joe's health wasn't so great. In December he was singing at one of his concerts when he had to stop because he wasn't feeling very well. He went to his brother's house and an ambulance was called because he was so ill. The hospital told his family that he had a brain haemorrhage and that he wouldn't survive. Joe Dolan died at 3 o'clock on St. Stephen's day. He was 68.

I was very sad when Joe died but I know he wouldn't want people to stay sad. He would want people to have a party and remember him. As long as I have his music to listen to, Joe's memory will always be alive to me.

In 2008 they put a statue of Joe in the square in Mullingar. He is holding a microphone and wearing his famous white suit. I'd love to go see it sometime.

Also in 2008, his brother Ben put on a tribute show. They put a film of Joe on a big screen in the background and the band played along with it. Ben talked about Joe's life. It just wouldn't be the same to me without Joe. As the saying goes 'there's no show like a Joe show'.

By Helen

Seasons

Spring,
New life, growth, Easter,
Sun, summer flowers, long days,
Holidays, swimming,
Back to school,
Leaves falling, Halloween,
Bonfire party, cold weather,
Fire, hot soup,
Christmas

*By Julie-Ann, Tina, Elizabeth, Joan,
Anthony, Brian, Patrick, & Paula*

Sam's seaside adventure

This is a dog called Sam. He is a black and white terrier with black ears and small white paws. He lives in a big, new house by the sea, with his owner called Mick. Every day Mick takes Sam for a walk down to the beach where Sam likes to chase birds. The birds keep flying away and Sam keeps chasing them up and down the beach till he gets tired.

One day, Sam chased the birds right out into the sea. He suddenly realises that he is swimming in the salty water, but he likes the warm water and paddles out further to sea. Mick is calling him back from the beach, but Sam spots an orange fish and he chases the fish. Sam catches the fish in his mouth and swims back to Mick. "Good dog, Sam," says Mick as he picks up the fish. "We can cook this for our dinner tonight!" Sam is delighted with himself and decides to go fishing every day.

By Breda

Wise words

Two little girls, Betty and Jill, sat down to dinner. Betty had a plate of fish and chips, whilst Jill was having sweet and sour chicken. Jill pushed her plate away and said that she had eaten enough. Her mother asked if she had eaten her chicken. There was no answer.

"Eat up your chicken," Betty whispered to Jill. "Someone had to catch and kill it to put it on your plate."

"What about your fish?" Jill asked her. "There are plenty more fish in the sea!" Betty exclaimed.

By Rita

A piece of writing I like

A Good Marriage ...

A good marriage must be created.
In marriage, the little things are the big things.
It is never being too old to hold hands.
It is remembering to say, "I love you."
It is never going to sleep angry.
It is having a mutual sense of values and common objectives.
It is standing together and facing the world.
It is forming a circle of love to gather in the whole family.
It is speaking words of appreciation and gratitude in thoughtful ways.
It is always having the capacity to forget and forgive.
It is giving each other an atmosphere in which each can grow.
It is a common search for the good and beautiful.
It is not marrying the right person – it is being the right partner.

By Joan

Coming back to class

When I met Margaret for the first time she told me about the course. I decided to do the course. I come every Thursday. I meet loads of friends at the course. I started in October. I do three subjects: computers, English and math. I like the course and I would like to learn more. I hope to get a job.

My dream job would be to work in a music shop. There are lots of different types of music. I like most types. Custy's music shop in Ennis is very good. They sell everything and know a lot about music.

By Paula

How I became a publican in Limerick

Around 1980 I was living in Co. Meath. I was asked to go working in Limerick with cable TV. I got to know Limerick and the pubs very well. So after about ten years I decided to leave cable TV and buy a pub. At that time all pubs were very busy. I bought my first pub in Edward Street. It was called The Chaser. I did a lot of work to it and it was going well. After a year or two I decided to move on, so I leased Edward Street pub.

I went into partnership with an accountant and we started a nightclub in Thomas Street. We called it Newtown Pery. It was going great, even on Monday nights we were so busy we had to turn people away. About two years later I moved on again. I'll not tell you the reason why. It would take me too long. I bought another pub in Catherine Street and called it P J's. It was also a busy pub.

During all the years in the pub trade, which was hard going, I achieved a lot. I got my sons through college and set up in their own homes and businesses and built a few good houses for myself. I also became reasonable at golf. I win a lot playing with the veterans' society. I won an English Open Pro-Am.

There are a few good reasons why I gave up the pub trade. I still have part of the problem I had in the Pery days. The most important was my health. Early mornings, late nights, stress and a lot of pints are not good for your health. I wouldn't go back to it again.

There are many fiddles in an early morning pub, from the cellar man, chef, bar staff and even the delivery men. We were busy in the mornings. We had regulars and a lot of parties for breakfast. We sometimes had a DJ or a band in the mornings. Most of the parties came from the busy industry at the time. I'll give you an example of the fiddles. The chef used to leave food in the bin for someone to collect. The cellar man would take a pint down with him to

the cellar and keep filling it up with bottles. When you have a pub in a city you hear some great stories and meet some great characters.

By PJ

Stop the desert

Everyday Joe wakes up and worries about how he will feed his family today because food is very scarce. Joe lives in Africa and food and water are very precious – there is so little of it and he has to feed his family somehow. The water has to be brought from the well that is miles away from where they live. His daughter, who is about ten years old, has to go and get water for the family and Joe goes out every day with his axe to chop down trees for firewood. He knows that every tree he cuts down will turn the ground into desert. He knows that he should not cut down the trees, but there is no other way to cook the food or heat the water to wash themselves.

They can't get jobs because there are no jobs out in these poor places and there is no other way to feed his family except to grow food themselves. For this, too, they need water. They have no shoes or clothes but Joe is strong and he works in the fields every day to grow things, but cutting down trees for firewood makes the desert grow bigger each year and it won't be long before nothing grows.

It is up to us all to help Joe and stop the earth from becoming a desert. We could help him to grow food, get clean water and feed his family.

By Sean

The course

I would like to share with you, what began for me at the end of January this year. Before I begin, I will tell you a little about me.

I am 42, married and have two little girls, one nine and the other two. Before I began the course, I was a stay at home Mum taking care of my two year old, while my nine year old was at school.

While I enjoyed being at home with my two year old for most of the time, there was a part of me longing, even screaming at times for escape. Help! Please give me a break from house work, nappy changing, whinging, whining and Peppa Pig on TV. "Push me on my swing, Mummy," when it was freezing cold and gale force winds outside!

I was getting some escape at times, switching on the radio and hearing the DJs tell me what was going on outside of my kitchen walls. Most of the time I would feel blessed to be at home with my healthy, noisy two year old, especially after hearing on the radio about someone else's struggle with life. Other times I felt inadequate with what I heard, especially during the so called Celtic Tiger movement. Never quite understood what that meant really. According to the DJs, it's over now.

Anyway, as I was saying about feeling inadequate, 'yummy mummy' was a term used quite a lot on the radio then to describe what mothers (yummy ones that is) were wearing, driving, eating or more accurately not eating. They used only branded expensive make up. They did pilates, went to the gym and all this before 8.30 a.m. Little treasure had to be brought to school with 'yummy mummy' clad in designer clothes and high heels. If 'yummy mummy' was behind schedule after the gym, 'yummy mummy's' are never late you see, she could be a little bold and drive little treasure to school in the 4x4 in her pyjamas, once, I must add, Calvin Klein had designed them! I believe track suit bottoms with a

sagging arse and matching zip up top was out! You would be stripped of your 'yummy mummy' status with immediate effect should you break this rule.

Anyway, one day in January when I was in my kitchen, DJ talking to me about toxic debt, my two year old demanding four things at once and the aquarium stinking under my nose, I came across *The Clare People* newspaper. I had put it away in the hope I would get a chance to read it at some stage. I got that moment and began to scan and skim through the paper not looking for anything in particular, and then a stamp sized article jumped out at me, entitled, A Course. I read on. It said a 12 week course was starting the end of January in communications, computers, and art. Wow! I thought could this be the answer to my prayers?

Then the chatter box pops up in my head saying, "what, don't be mad. Who will mind the two year old?" And "you wouldn't have the time in your day anyway." I will ring the phone number given and just see, I thought, and that's what I did. I put my name down for the course and what a relief to discover my two year old could be taken care of at the crèche provided, and that a place was available for her.

I started my two year old in the crèche before I began the course, hoping she would be settled in and be happy there. Thankfully, that's what happened. She loved it. I started the course and must say how glad I am that I did not listen to the negative chatter box in my head. Not just because of what I have learnt so far, but also because of the people who are doing the course with me.

There are five of us girlettes and one guy in our group and it's only fair to say I don't know how he puts up with us at times. Twittering on about things like hand-cream, fish oils, and body bits and pieces that no longer do what they did, obsolete and dysfunctional partners. Thank God he does put up with us though, as the group would not be the same without him.

Each person in the group has brought their own unique self and between us all, there is a huge wealth of life experience to share. I have found no judgment or comparison, just acceptance. Our tutor for communications and art always reassures us that we can all write. "There is a book in each of you," she says. I look at her hoping she is right, that one day I will be able to write. She once again reassures us, too, that each of us can paint and, to my surprise, whether I can or can't, there is always something on my sheet at the end of each art class.

Our tutor for computers is a thunder bolt of knowledge, energy and enthusiasm in the pursuit of learning about the computer, with one hundred per cent accuracy and nothing less will do! I now have my own email address. I send messages off into cyber space and I get replies back too.

I have found that since starting the course there has been a ripple effect into other areas of my life. I am more confident to give new things a go. I always filled my own car with petrol but now I put the air in the tyres, too. In the supermarket, I now weigh my own fruit and vegetables at the self-service checkout and key in the numbers on the bar codes that won't scan on the reduced price items. I know these are small things, but I would have avoided them before.

Anyway, I have to go now because my two year old wants to eat a full box of children's chewable vitamin C in one go, instead of the recommended one a day. How do you reason with a two year old that this is not a good idea? Anyway, I have my course tomorrow to get me away from this mad house. I cannot wait to catch up with the girlettes and I do hope our one and only guy has not come to his senses and done a runner. Oh! I have just remembered, I have a story to write.

By Sandra

A trip to Dublin

We went on a trip to Dublin Zoo last June 2008. We were up for the bus about 5.00 a.m. and we were at the station in Ennis at 7.15 a.m. We were on the train at about 8.00 a.m. We changed trains somewhere along the line.

It was my first time on a train and it was nice. We went around having a look at the different kinds of animals. After a while, it started to make a light rain and we went to a take-away for a bite to eat.

By M.M.N.

A big year in 2008

My mother and my two sisters, Helen and Eithne, had a big birthday in July 2008. We all brought my mother out for dinner in the Old Ground Hotel for her birthday. My sister-in-law and my brother came to see my mother on Sunday. We had a cake. My brother gave my mother a beautiful lamp for her birthday. It is special. My sister-in-law brought a nice box of chocolates. My sisters and I gave my mother a special gold ring. My other sister brought a picture frame with a photo of her new daughter inside. My mother got other gifts from her friends. She enjoyed her weekend.

My sister, Eithne, and my brother-in-law had a new baby daughter. She was born in July 2008. Her name is Emelia Mary Margaret. Her brothers Daniel and Benjamin were delighted to see their new sister. On the 4th October, Emelia was christened. Aunty Breeda and Uncle Brian stood for her. Emelia's first cousins Aoife, Laoise, and Orla came to the christening. Fr. John baptised Emelia at the cathedral in Ennis. She loved the Holy Water being poured on her head. We took pictures in the church and at home. We went back to my sister's house to have refreshments. We had a great evening.

In November, my brother and my sister-in-law had their wedding at Castle Durrow. We all stayed in the castle three nights. On Friday night we had a family dinner. It was nice. After dinner we all talked and had some drinks in the bar. The wedding was on Saturday. They got married at the Church of the Most Holy Rosary, Abbeyleigh, Co. Laois. Fr. Tom married them. My sister-in-law was simply gorgeous in her lovely long white lace wedding dress with buttons down the back and a veil on her hair. Her makeup was lovely.

My Auntie Bridie and Helen came all the way from Michigan, America to the wedding. Auntie Liza and Uncle Tim and family came also. Everybody was dressed nice at the wedding. The meal was beautiful. I had soup first, sirloin beef for the main course and warm rhubarb pie for desert. Late in the night there was a barbeque. My brother made a great speech. I danced and danced at the wedding. We all had great fun. We had refreshments before the photographs were taken. The photographer took the pictures outside the castle. He showed us where to stand and pose for the pictures. They went on their honeymoon to Africa.

I am very happy that my sister-in-law and new niece, Emelia, joined our family last year.

We all left Castle Durrow on Monday. My mother, my two sisters, my two aunties, Helen and myself went on to Kilkenny. We stayed two nights in River Court Hotel. It was comfortable and a nice place to eat. We went to Morrissey's pub for drinks. I took some pictures of the pub. There was a poster on the wall and it said, 'You never know who you might meet.' We went to a beach. There was a thatched cottage nearby and a restaurant across the road. We all went to the restaurant to have a meal. It was nice.

We all enjoyed the wedding and the two days we stayed in Kilkenny.

By Breeda

Swimming

I like to go swimming on a Thursday with Marion. We have great fun in the pool in Ennis. When I go on holidays with my mam and dad, I also go swimming. It is a good exercise.

By Eilish

I governed Ireland

My name is Frank Peers. I was governor of Ireland 15 years ago when the recession was in Ireland and Ireland was going to the dogs. We had to act fast; scumbags were taking over with their drugs and guns and trafficking women over from other countries. We had to put armed police in nearly every street corner to try to stamp out the gangs but no one knew who was in a gang or not. They would just come out of nowhere and start shooting at the police; it was turning into a war everywhere in Ireland.

A gang member called Leo who runs the Scorpions rang me, saying that if the government gave five million to the gang they would help get rid of the rest of the gangs. We all talked about it and it seemed the only way to go about it. He rang back three days later and we told him, if any police died or got shot by the Scorpions, the deal would be off.

On Saturday that week, the Scorpions went down to the Aquinas' hideout. About ten of them got out of a car and started shooting at the Aquinas. Two of the Scorpions died; twelve Aquinas died but they never knew that there was an undercover cop there when they started shooting and he got shot.

The government found out about this and told the Scorpions the deal was off, but they said they would sign a peace treaty with them if they put down their arms. The Scorpions agreed and put down their arms.

By Oliver

Moving to Ireland

My name is Sue and I come from Gravesend in England. Over there, I used to work as a carer in an old people's home and I used to get their dinners and look after their needs. I had lots of friends and we loved going out to a club called The Grove at the weekends.

In early June in 2004, I came to Ireland for a weekend with my boyfriend. It was his birthday and he wanted to celebrate it with his family over here. We had a great time and to make it even better he proposed to me on the second day. I was so happy, so of course I said, "Yes." The next day we went out and everyone was congratulating us. I was really enjoying myself, but then sadly, it was time to go back to England.

When we got home I decided to move over to Ireland. I discussed it with Jimmy and he was happy to move over too. So we came over in December 2004. When we first came over, we lived with his parents for a while, because we moved over so quickly, we hadn't thought of where we were going to live or what we were going to do. We were young and wanted to have fun. Then, in January, we found our own place and I was so happy to be here.

We had our baby girl a year later, so I became a mum and housewife. In May 2006, Jimmy and I got married and our little girl was our bridesmaid. It was the best time of my life, but I felt a bit sad that my family didn't come over for the wedding. But life goes on and this was what I wanted and no-one was going to spoil it.

Two years later, I gave birth to a baby boy and we were very happy to be a family. But, after a few months, I started to miss home and family in England. Now I try and to be strong and tell everyone I don't miss home but sometimes it gets hard.

I have been in Ireland now for nearly six years and I have my good days and bad days. I would go back to England, but only for holidays and to see friends and family. My life is in Ireland with my new family – my husband, little girl and little boy.

By Sue

Memories of Eileen

My mother and her sisters-in-law went to Lourdes in 2006. A few of my sisters went, too. One in particular, Eileen, loved it so much that she wanted to go back again. I couldn't understand why a young girl of eighteen wanted to go to Lourdes so much. I went to Spain myself five times and I used to tell her how nice it was and what great holidays I had. Yet each time I mentioned Spain, she mentioned Lourdes straight back to me. She always wanted to go back to Lourdes after her visit and she wanted myself, my mother and sisters to go with her. It just happened that the time was not right to go, but we did promise her that we would go some day. Sadly, my sister died two years later.

Still heartbroken, my mother, sisters and myself went to Lourdes for Eileen. Lourdes wasn't what I expected. I thought Eileen liked Lourdes because of the social life. How wrong I was. Lourdes was a place of holiness, peace and sanctuary; this is what Eileen loved about Lourdes. When we were there, we prayed for Eileen and for our family as well, to help us with our loss.

In Lourdes there are Twelve Stations of the Cross. We prayed at each of the stations, and when we came to the last station we left a picture of Eileen and we planted an Irish tree in her memory. When we go back to Lourdes we will always visit it and remember her.

By Teresa

My adventure to Spain

In January my mother, father, sister and myself decided to go to Spain to Benalmadena for a week's holiday. We flew from Shannon. We stayed in a family friend's apartment. It was a gorgeous apartment, a bit small but grand for the four of us. There was a swimming pool and the apartment overlooked the marina.

The weather was very pleasant while we were there, very warm and sunny, even though it rained one day. The temperatures were in the 20's most days. The day after we arrived I got sunburned, so I remembered to put on sun cream for the rest of the holiday.

On the Friday, we went to Fungorola. We had to go by boat. It only took us about 20 minutes. It was a beautiful city and I had fun driving the boat for a little while. Most days we walked around the shops near where we were staying. I bought a top and a pair of boots. They were cheaper than at home.

We walked down to the beach and there were geese, ducks and swans on the beach. I went to rub the gander and he decided to chase me. I wasn't frightened, but I ran away. At night time, we went to the Irish pub and a Chinese restaurant. The food and drinks were delicious, much cheaper than at home.

I would go back again because I was never in a foreign country before. It was a good experience for me. This was my first time in Spain and I thought it was fantastic. I love looking back at my photographs. I am hoping to go back again in July.

By Adrienne

Forever

I wrote your name on a rock but the water washed it away.
I wrote your name on a leaf but the wind blew it away.
So I wrote your name in my heart and forever it will stay.

By Evelyn

Pastimes

My name is Faith. I have many pastimes that I want to tell people about and I decided to write about them as it may be of benefit to others.

One day I felt very unfit, so I decided to enrol at the local pool for swimming lessons. I had never been in a pool before so I was a little nervous. The instructor was very good at giving me courage to stay in the water. After a number of lessons I was able to swim the width of the pool. He taught us how to swim freestyle which is the easiest stroke to learn. After another few lessons I was then able to swim breast stroke and the back stroke. I now go to the swimming pool twice a week to keep fit.

I had a lot of spare time, so I decided to visit the library to see if there were any interesting books I could read. I was surprised to see the selection of books that were on display, fact, fiction, mystery, suspense and general knowledge. I have now become an avid reader of all types of books.

A six screen cinema opened in Ennis, so I decided to go and see what it was like. There was a selection of six films on at the same time on the different screens. The film screen was huge and the picture was crystal clear and the seats were very comfortable. I was so impressed with the place that now I go to the cinema every weekend with my friends.

I have thought long and hard about my pastime experiences and I feel that I have benefited greatly from my participation in them.

By Faith

My own town, Lisdoonvarna

I live in Lisdoonvarna, a small town in north Clare. It is a busy place during the summer as a lot of tourists come here. It has a pleasant environment and was a nice place for me to grow up in.

In the summertime, the growth starts and the flowers bloom in July. The crops start growing and the weather is very warm for the three months of the summer. The days are longer and brighter. This season is the warmest time of the year. The birds sing during the season of the summer months as well.

Holiday makers come to Clare during the summer and they visit the Burren, the Cliffs of Moher, and the Aillwee Caves in Ballyvaughan. A lot of tourists go hill walking and mountain climbing and some come here to study art. At the moment, because of the economic climate, a lot of people won't be going away on holidays, so local attractions will prove very popular in the summer to the Irish.

The tourist season starts in March and the hotel owners get ready for the busy times ahead. People leave their CVs in hotels and restaurants in the hope of getting work for the summer. The music and dancing starts up in the middle of June in Lisdoonvarna. The sulphur wells are very popular here. People drink the sulphur water for their health. It is supposed to be good for the bones. People also take baths in the sulphur water to help ease any pains they may have.

People come from all over the world to Lisdoonvarna to hear the céilí music and the country 'n western music. September is the busiest month in Lisdoonvarna. The Matchmaking festival is on during this month. Older people tend to go to this festival in the hope of meeting someone.

The winter months are very quiet in North Clare. Only the locals are around.

By Tommy

My hobbies

Hi, my name is Michael and I have a lot of hobbies. I like playing a lot of sport like hurling, football, soccer and swimming. I like doing it because it keeps me fit and strong and I make a lot of friends.

I play hurling with the Banner and I play football with the Banner, too. The last time I played soccer I played with the Ireland under 18 team. We went to Scotland. We played Scotland and Northern Ireland and we won both of the matches.

I like going to the gym, too, to get me strong for the football and hurling. I use the weights for my legs, arms, shoulders and the whole body. That is what I like about sport.

By Michael

Giving up cigarettes

My name is Tina. I am on a course in Scariff in the Adult Education Centre. I come in every Thursday and I do English, math and computers. Today, I had a mock interview which should be a big help to me.

I work with FÁS in a thrift shop in town.

There are ten people in our class and I have made friends in the group. I have also given up smoking and while it is very hard, I have three weeks done already, so I hope I am over the worst. I am determined to stay off them as they are not good for my health and they are very expensive. I feel a lot better now and I am able to walk a long distance without getting out of breath.

By Tina

The four who fell

These are my memories of what my grandfather, Billy Malone, told me regarding the capture and deaths of Brud McMahon, Alfie Rodgers, Michael Egan and Martin Gildea on 16th - 17th November 1920. The first three were members of the I.R.A. and were in hiding from the Black and Tans on an island near Mountshannon. The local priest tried to help them by sending a wire to someone living in Killaloe. This person showed the wire to the Black and Tans who were stationed in the house on Main Street which is now owned by the Woods family. The Tans immediately ran helter-skelter down the street and people said they would never forget the sound of their boots. They commanded my great grandfather Billy Malone, who was a fisherman and lived on Canal Bank, to drive the steamer 'Shannon' which was owned by Lord Finch, up the river to capture the heroes, but he refused. Another man was forced to take the Tans up the lake. They landed at Mountshannon. They started searching for the three men. They saw a man coming along the road and they questioned him. His name was Martin Gildea. The men were sleeping when the Tans broke in. They were taken to Killaloe by steamer to the Lakeside Hotel which had been commandeered from John McKeogh.

That night the four men were questioned and tortured. A man called Horan told them to make a break for it and they were shot in the back. So many shots were fired that coins on the shelves in the Bridge Bar (now called the Anchor Bar) were scattered. The priest in Ballina heard all the shots and wanted to go to the scene. He was not allowed. He gave absolution from his bedroom window.

The bodies of the four martyrs were held at the R.I.C. barracks (now Molly's Bar). A sad day for town and country. The bodies were then taken to the R.I.C. barracks in Killaloe, now known as the Molua Centre. The parents, with a crowd of people, gathered outside begging for their sons' bodies to be taken home to Scariff. Eventually, this happened. All along the road people came out to pay their

respects through Ogonnelloe and Tuamgraney as they were brought to their resting place in Scariff. Their tombstone is a beautiful Celtic cross and can be seen outside the church in Scariff, the bed of Heaven to them.

The rest of the story was told to me by Captain Joseph Clancy. He was a customer in my father's barber shop and was a captain in the old I.R.A. He told me that when the troubles were over, Mr Horan joined the Garda Siochana and became a sergeant and was stationed in Ennis. This poem was printed in the newspaper,

Horan give over your roving,
You will kill no more of our men,
And when this ambush is over,
You'll ne'er see Horan again.

He was shot dead in the town of Ennis.

By Pauline

Prince, my all Ireland champion lassie collie dog

Dogs were a big part of my dad's and my life for years. Dad got me a lassie collie pup of eight weeks old. He was from a top breeding kennel in Galway. I had to groom him and go walking on a regular basis. Before he was twelve months old, we went to the first dog show in Dublin. He won the puppy class (which were pups under 12 months old). The judge said that he was top class, so from there we went to every dog show in Ireland. When he was two years old, he was an all Ireland champion lassie collie. Before he was five years old, he was the father of twenty pups and was well known in the show dogs' organisation.

By Gerard

What having a job means to me

Having a job gives me confidence within myself and it gives me independence. I walk to work three days a week. It is good exercise and I enjoy it a lot.

In one job my work involves cleaning, washing and ensuring bathrooms are clean and tidy. In another, my work includes general domestic duties such as cleaning, dusting and ensuring the kitchen is always clean. My third job is carried out on a voluntary basis in the Clarecastle Daycare Centre where I help older people by helping with kitchen duties.

While this work keeps me busy, I also attend college (L.I.T.) where I represent a group at advocacy meetings. This includes knowing our rights and speaking out against injustice and unfair treatment of all people. These meetings are held in group sessions and complete confidentiality is expected from all group members. Although I enjoy these meetings a lot, I have some work to carry out at home in preparation for each meeting.

To me, having a job means gaining independence and having the confidence to be able to meet new people, to help others and to make new friends.

By Nuala

My new job

I started a new job with FÁS. We cut the grass and sweep the footpaths in Tuamgraney and Bodyke. We also sow flower beds and sweep the handball alleys and tidy up around the graveyards. Other jobs include helping around the GAA field and the clubhouse and the heritage centre. We work 19 hours a week.

By Brian

My friend Brige

As a young girl growing up in Kerry, there lived next door to us an old lady. I suppose looking back on it she wasn't that old really. Most of her life was spent in a wheelchair as she had one leg amputated at one stage of her life. But it was amazing to see how she went about her daily life and she was able to do a lot for herself, most of the time. That is where I came in.

On my way home from school I had to pass her house, and if she wanted anything she would be inside the door waiting for me. Usually, she wanted turf for the fire or water from the well. There was no running water in the houses at that time and that was something she was not able to do herself. She used to do all her own cooking on an open fire. She was very good with her hands and she did a lot of sewing on the machine. I remember her making new dresses for me when I went back to school after the summer holidays, and she would have a fine big hem so that she could let it down as I got bigger.

That went on for most of my time in national school. I was very close to her and I loved going down to help her. But, alas, one day when I was on my way to school I did not see her, and when I asked my mam she told me that she got a fall from her wheelchair that day. I was very sad and mam said that I could go down to see her when I'd had my dinner. And so I did, but I wasn't happy with what I saw. She had marks all over her face, poor thing.

She lived for a little while after that and then the Lord called her home. The house is no longer there but is replaced with a more up-to-date building. I often think of my friend, Brige, and always say a little prayer when I pass where she lived.

By Sheila

Manchester United

My favourite football team is Manchester United. I have followed them for ten years. Every Saturday and Sunday, I watch the premiership to see them play their big rivals like Manchester City, Chelsea and Liverpool. Last year they won the premiership and this year they won the Carling Cup.

Their manager is Alex Ferguson and some of their players are Cristiano Ronaldo, John O'Shea, Wayne Rooney, Ryan Giggs and Paul Scholes. The name of their home ground is Old Trafford Stadium where their fans go to see them. The players wear red jerseys and are known as the Red Devils. They wear white shorts and red socks and the goalkeeper wears a yellow jersey.

I have a big poster of them at home on my bedroom wall. For my last birthday my mother bought me a football, a mug and a scarf with the club crest. When they win a competition and get a cup, I celebrate by drinking orange from my Manchester United mug.

In my bedroom I have a Manchester United quilt cover, slippers and mat so I am always reminded of them. I would like some day to go to Old Trafford to see them play.

By Kieran

My two dogs

I have two dogs, Spot and Jessy. I take them for a walk every day. Spot is a big dog and Jessy is a small dog. My sister feeds them each day. She gives them nuts. I also have a cat. My mam feeds the cat. I love animals.

By Therese

The cow's tail

In my day, before milking machines had been invented, cows had to be milked by hand. Not my favourite pastime!

I remember in particular one Sunday evening - and it my night for dancing - something not to be missed as it was our only outing for the week. If I didn't show up I could be missed or worse still I could miss the talent, namely the boys!

Well, during the day I washed my thick, long blonde hair and donned my rollers - I had to look my best. The hair washing consisted of washing with shampoo and warm water, then out to a barrel by the side of the house which contained rain water collected as it came down the chutes. I would rinse my hair in the ice-cold water, convinced that it made it shine even more, or so I was told. It was important to look good for the dance!

Well, I had to milk my allotted cows; otherwise I would not be allowed to go to the dance. So I got my three-legged stool and bucket and milked my cows like there was no tomorrow. I was going great until my last cow that had a very dirty tail. In those days, cows coming into new grass had a problem which left their tails in a bad state. I was just ready to lift my stool and bucket of milk (thankfully, I was finished) - the cow must have taken a dislike to me for suddenly she swished her tail right round my head. Shock! Horror! My hair was ruined!

I had to remove the rollers and rush in to wash my hair again. There was no time to think of rain water this time as I had to run out to meet my lift that I was getting to the dance. Not only was my long hair wet but it also soaked my dance rig-out, but did I care? At that stage, the most important thing was getting to the dance. When I got there, I danced from 8.00 p.m. to 1.00 a.m. - wet hair and all!

By Maureen

Stronger and wiser

Happy at last! Times are good now. I live with my two daughters and we have a quiet and contented life. I work 19.5 hours a week on a CE scheme. Here, I meet lots of people and it's good to get out of the house and be busy. I thought I'd never get a job, but here I am doing courses and working. Some day I want to fulfil my dream of becoming a hairdresser. I'll wait until the children are reared.

I am doing a First Aid course at the moment. It's a long course, but if someone was choking I would know what to do now. It's a valuable skill to have to be able to save someone's life through knowledge of First Aid. I am also doing a course in computers and reading and writing. I like the computers and the Internet. It is very handy to know how to do this as there are computers in my local library and I can very nearly use them myself now.

By Josie

Creamery days

I went to the creamery in Kilmaley. We had eight cows we milked by hand. The milk was put into cans and then was brought to the creamery. People would do their shopping after the creamery. Farmers would get two pounds of butter and a cheque for their milk from the creamery every month.

We would sell the cattle when they would be a year and a half old. The cattle grazed but were also fed on cotton cake. There was great feeding in this. It was a brown meal mixed with boiled water.

By Thomas

Prisoner 6833

His name was John and he was a prisoner in Limerick where there were another 800 prisoners. He was a big man, but he was only nineteen years old. He had three years served and had another seven to go as he was sent down for ten years for shooting at a guard's house. He had a big scar on his jaw as he was stabbed in a fight outside a bar and he had many tattoos covering his arms and legs. He was in a single cell as he was too violent to share with anyone. John was a psychopath. He had already stabbed six people and one prison officer.

One day, John was sitting in his cell when three big men burst in and stabbed and slashed his face open. He was put into the hospital unit but he swore loudly that he would kill the three boys that tried to kill him. But the three men were never caught; this was good for John because they did not get transferred to another prison. He had to plan his attack.

Two weeks later he had the chance to strike the first man when he was alone. So when he was walking past his cell, John dragged him in and broke a brush off his face and stabbed him. The man died instantly. "One down, two to go!" thought John to himself.

The reason the people were after John was because he stabbed the main man's brother – the main man, Peter, now wanted revenge. John planned his attacks on the other two and managed not to get caught. The main man was furious but now had less power as his goons were killed off by John.

John eventually managed to get rid of Peter, the main man, as well by killing him in the gym with a weight in a sock. No-one could prove it was John who did it and everyone was too scared to snitch. Now John was the main man, but for how long?

By Anthony

My father

I miss him. He passed away on a Saturday morning a few months ago. My mother misses him, too. The whole family misses him.

My dad was a nice man. I helped to mind him when he was sick. The nurses and the doctor came every evening to the house to help make Dad comfortable.

My dad was very good to me. He used to work on the farm. When he was sick and couldn't work, he would still go outside to watch my brother, Pat, and myself doing baling.

Dad liked driving and would drive the car every day. He would go to the shop in Kilfenora. When we would arrive in Kilfenora, he would give me the money and I would do the shopping.

He liked music and the GAA and watching TG4 on a Sunday night. We used to watch *The Sunday Game* together.

By Michael

My computer class

I started a computer class last year. I found it very difficult at the start, but I am slowly getting better. Every day in computers I learn something new, such as typing, how to access the internet, how to access microsoft word, how to save files in my documents and how to print documents. I can now use these practical skills I have learned in my computer class and some day put them into use when I write my book on my life.

By Mary

A family holiday

We had a family reunion some time ago and as our three children, their partners and children gathered around for a meal at the table, a discussion developed for a family holiday. Various places were named – places we never heard of. Foreign countries were not for us or so I thought ...

A few places were put into a hat and Salou in Spain was drawn out. "OK that is where we will go," everyone agreed. Some of us had no passports so we had to get these, but at last the day of departure came. On the day, it was like questions and answers on TV. Have you got your tickets, your passports, your sun cream, and your money? It's very important to have this and that etc. We eventually got to the airport – great excitement all round.

On arriving in Spain, we were met with a lovely blue sky and sunshine and we settled in. However, we got up next morning to see it raining. No beach today!

Some of the group decided to go sightseeing in Barcelona. We went to see a lovely old cathedral some 200 years old but, whilst we were inside, the sky darkened and a thunderstorm broke overhead. The lights went out leaving everyone in a panic, children screaming and people rushing for the narrow corridors. The place was packed and we managed to get to the ground level to find that our group had split up. We had arranged to meet everyone at a certain time, but of course that didn't happen and we ended up going into the city for more sightseeing.

We arrived back to our mobile later on in the evening to find that they had all arrived back safely. Our son-in-law said, "I thought I could lose you, mother-in-law!" "You'll never lose me now!" I replied laughing.

By Mary L.

School days

When I was three
I went to school
To read and write
That was the rule.

Up in the mornings
At eight o'clock
Getting dressed and washed
No time to stop.

My mother would shout,
"You have to eat
To keep awake
And stay on your feet!"

My father would walk
Us to the bus stop
Put us on the bus
And wave us off.

We'd land in school
Just before nine,
The teacher would say,
"Great, you're on time."

We'd start the day off
With a prayer
And I'd thank God
I was able to come here.

The day would fly
It was soon three o'clock,
Out the door,
No time to stop.

A bus to catch
To get back home
To help mother
And get homework done.

It was great to learn
To read and write
Be able to read to our parents
By the fireside at night.

Now, I'm older
Eight kids in tow,
These memories of my youth
I can never let go.

By Mary

Car rallies

"Winners never quit and quitters never win." (Anon.)

A lot of people from all over the country are involved in car rallies. All the cars have different starting points, but they have to do the full circuit. Rally drivers drive up mountains, small roads and main roads. They drive fast and can't stop or talk to anyone. Roads have to be closed off to the public because it would be dangerous if people were on them.

There are always two people in the car. One person drives and the other gives instructions. Both wear headphones and there is a camera in the car so that the people at the rally office can see where the drivers are going.

I've been to a lot of rallies. I was at a rally in Tuam and there was a lot of wind and rain on the day. That makes the driving harder.

Car rallies are noisy, exciting and good fun, but they can be dangerous. I was involved in a car rally crash last year and I injured my leg. That hasn't stopped me from going to car rallies.

By Michael O'K.

Learning to drive

In 2004, I was 22 years old and I decided that it would be great for me to learn to drive a car.

I studied for the driver theory test in the Dulick Centre in Ennis. At first I did not get the test. I left it for two years and then I came to the Adult Education Centre and studied for the driver theory test again.

I studied for a year and a half and then I booked the test. It was on the 18th of July 2008 and this time I passed it and I was delighted.

At the end of August 2008, I had my first driving lesson and it was very hard. I found using the clutch and gears very difficult. Anne, my driving instructor, asked me to stop on hills and it was hard to start the car again.

Every Tuesday at 3.30 p.m. after my reading class at the Adult Education Centre I go to the driving class with Anne and the lessons are good and enjoyable. I hope that I will be able to drive in the next year or so and pass the driving test. Wish me luck with the test!

By James

My great trip

The 2nd of August 2007 was my first time in the Aillwee Cave and to Black Head. The weather was nice. The town was lovely. The Aillwee Cave is all underground. It was for me a surprise.

I went again to Black Head for a second time on the 22nd of August. The weather was nice and warm. I took some pictures of Black Head. I was in Doolin, Ballyvaughan and Ennistymon. I really enjoyed the trip.

By Susanne

The missing soldier

I was walking through the woods one cold, dark winter evening when it started to rain. I decided to take shelter under a large, old oak tree and wait for the rain to stop. But as I was waiting, lost in thought, I heard footsteps behind me, crunching the leaves and slowly coming towards me. I froze with fear. It was so scary that I started to run, but a voice said to me, "Don't be scared." I stopped and waited.

"I'm a soldier and I live in the woods, I won't harm you," he said. I looked at the soldier twice before I could speak to him. He was quite young but his clothes were all muddy and torn. His boots were broken and the laces were missing. He did not look threatening.

"If you are a soldier, what are you doing in the woods?" I asked as I felt calmer now. "Where are all the other soldiers and why are you all muddy and dirty?"

"All the other soldiers are in the army camp. I was sent out to the woods to make sure no-one tried to attack the others," he said, coming towards me. He didn't look fierce.

"Why are you all dirty?" I asked. He explained that he had to run away from the camp and had been sleeping rough in the woods. "Why did you run away?" I asked.

"If you have to look at people and kill them, it would break your heart and spirit like it does to me. You would run away like I have" he said sadly. "I could not kill people. That's why I deserted."

"But you will be shot as a deserter!" I cried. I felt so sorry for him - he was only about nineteen, my age really.

"Only if they catch me!" He laughed, and with that he was gone.

By Nicole

Liscannor

I am from Liscannor and I go home to my mother in Liscannor every second weekend. I go for walks there from my home to the bridge, which would be about half a mile away. As I am walking, I can see the Atlantic Ocean and the boats by the pier.

There are lots of holiday homes near the beach and in the village. There are two hotels. One is quite new and is painted yellow. Lots of tourists visit during the summer. They like camping and going to the Cliffs of Moher. The Rock Shop in Liscannor is very popular, too. There is lovely jewellery for sale in this shop. There are two nursing homes in Liscannor and Moher Hill Farm is nearby. Vaughan's pub and Joseph McHugh's bar are busy places.

Even though I live in Ennistymon now, I will always be from Liscannor.

By Margaret

Swimming

My name is Imelda. I like swimming a lot and I like walking as well, as it's good for the body. Dermot is my favourite swimming instructor and my favourite gym teacher.

I go swimming six to seven in the evening. I put bath towels and togs into my bag before I go. When I get into the pool, I swim and I put my head under the water and I don't even wear goggles.

On Tuesdays, I go to the gym and I hope to meet Dermot there. I like going to the Ennis Leisure Centre.

By Imelda

My weekend in Liverpool

My favourite team is Liverpool. I went to Liverpool a couple of years ago with my mother to see one of their matches. When we got to the hotel, we dropped our bags in the rooms.

Liverpool was playing Blackburn Rovers at Anfield Stadium on the Saturday. I was wearing my red jersey. There was lots of excitement and singing and noise. I was shouting for Liverpool. Liverpool got 3 goals and Blackburn Rovers got 1 goal. I was thrilled when Liverpool won.

On the Saturday night, we went to a Chinese restaurant and afterwards we went to a night club. The night club was big. There were lots of people there, dressed up. There was loud music and flashing lights. I danced.

By Sean

Working outdoors

I work in Jaime's garden in Miltown Malbay. Jaime is a man from Colombia and he grows flowers and vegetables.

I have my own patch. I planted carrots, onions, peas, broccoli and tomatoes. Some of the vegetables will be eaten for dinner and some will be sold at the farmers' market in Miltown Malbay.

I like working outdoors, especially when the sun is shining. Indoors, you're just tidying but outdoors you can enjoy a lovely day. When I'm outdoors at home, I can see the lake and the trees. These are lovely.

By Adrian

A windy night

It was a windy evening. The rain was lashing the windows and the curtains fluttered in the living room. I collected all the candles from every room in the house so that if the lights went out, I would have light to see by and the dog would not be scared.

The lights did go out whilst I was sitting reading in the living room. I lit all the candles and felt a little easier to see the welcome glow of the lights. All of a sudden, I heard the door bell ring. I went out to answer the door but there was no one there ... so I came back thinking it must have been the wind. But it rang again, this time louder. I went out to have a look again, feeling a bit angry but also a bit frightened. Who could it be at this time of the night? My nearest neighbours lived a little bit away and they would not be calling at this time on such a bad night.

Maybe the house is haunted. It was a frightening thought. I had heard noises before but I took no notice of them. I went to bed and tried to sleep. The dog was lying on the floor, also looking worried. Then I heard the door bell ringing again. I got up and looked out of the window. There was a hooded man standing outside the door with a black cloak on him. He looked old but I couldn't tell. What did he want? My heart beat faster as I thought of murder, rape, death ... If I opened the door, he might push his way in. I'll ring the guards, I thought. So that is what I did, but he kept ringing the doorbell as I struggled to dial the number. Finally, a friendly voice asked what I wanted. I told him about the man and my address. But the guard laughed and said, "Don't worry Anne. It's John from the village up to see if you're all right!" John was the local guard – I needn't have worried. People were taking care of me.

By Nowell

Tragedy averted in Co. Clare

On Monday evening the 2nd of March 2009 at 5.45, Anthony left his home to meet his cousin, Michael. While waiting on the road Anthony heard cries for help emanating from the property next door. On investigation he found his neighbour, Martin (75), face down on the ground. He was conscious but obviously in pain. At this time, Michael arrived and the two men helped the injured man into his house. It was decided to phone his sister.

When she came with her husband they immediately took Martin to hospital where it was discovered that he had fractured an ankle.

When interviewed the following day Martin's neighbour, Anthony said, "It was by pure chance I stepped out of my house on that evening. It was cold and frosty with the promise of snow and sub-zero temperatures. My neighbour would almost certainly have died from exposure."

By Tony

Memories of music

Music is in our family. My father used to sing and his sisters sang too, some still do. He had two brothers who were lovely singers. I am not a singer myself but I recognise good singers. I enjoy all kinds of music, especially country and western and songs with a story behind them. We always had lots of tapes in our house; for example, The Dubliners, Paddy Reilly and Dermot O'Brien. Dermot O'Brien is the best accordion player in Ireland; he is called 'The man with the box'. Music is on 24/7 in our house. It is part of our daily lives.

By Charlotte

My froggy friend

I met a frog
In our wood last week,
It was small and green and
Just sat there mutely
In the middle of the road.

I spoke gently to
My amphibian friend
But got no response,
Not even a flicker of an eyelid,
Just sitting there forlorn.

Was it dead or alive?
Was it male or female?
Where was it going to
Or coming from? Maybe
It was just out for a walk.

A few days later I found
What I look for every spring.
Great big blobs of frogspawn
In a dirty pool by the road.
Will these eggs survive?

The frogspawn of my schooldays
Was clear wobbly jelly
In a sparkling stream
That flowed by the roadside
With watercress growing wild.

Days later there was my froggy friend
Sitting further up the road.
I stopped to chat
And this time got an answer
Much to my surprise.

"Thank you for caring, but
I couldn't talk that day.
You see I was exhausted
Having just delivered these babies.
You know how it is," she said
As she hopped into the grassy verge.

By Maura

Kilmurry Ibrickane – the champions of Clare

Kilmurry Ibrickane is top of the county club football table. They have made it to the semi-final so far this year. Kilmurry's colours are red and green.

I go to most of the matches. There is a lot of roaring and cheering at matches. Sometimes everyone gets wet through.

Footballers can play until about 35 years of age. I interview footballers after matches. I ask "Who got goals?" "Were you disappointed (when the team loses)?" They don't mind talking after matches. I interview for Eirí Corca Baiscinn community radio.

The GAA is celebrating its 125th anniversary this year. It was founded all those years ago by Michael Cusack – the man from Carron.

By John

My cat

My cat's name is Tigger. He is a brown cat. My Mam feeds the cat every day. He sleeps in the house. He is a very quiet cat. I like my cat.

By Ian

My family

"Happiness is ... the first years of my daughter's life."
(Brenda)

My family is important to me because they are always there for me, day and night. They make my life happier because I have a slight disability and it doesn't bother them. My parents raised me to be respectable. They try to be helpful and they would do anything for me.

I have a seven year old daughter. She is very special to me. She is very clever and she always makes my day. She knows that her mum has a disability and she helps me to read. She often talks about her dad, who died when she was one and a half years old. My daughter often asks me if she can have a brother or a sister but, unfortunately, I can't have any more children.

My partner is so brilliant with her and she always hugs him. They get on really well. He loves spending time with her. He's very good with me as well. I love him for that. He's caring, kind and gentle.

I have a wish for my family – that they will be happy and at ease in their lives.

By Brenda

CDs

I like listening to CDs. I love country and western music. I like listening to Daniel O'Donnell, Michael English, Dolly Parton and Louise Morrissey. I use my earphones to listen to them. I listen to music every day.

By Paddy

The hermit

The cliffs at Kilkee are very high, nearly as high as the Cliffs of Moher. Walking along the cliff road you come across a place where the sea cut the land away from the main cliffs. A story goes that the hermit came from the North and decided to live here by the sea.

The hermit was a small, heavy man with a long red beard and hair. He wore a long brown cloak over faded grey trousers and a heavy knitted jacket and black sandals. When he was younger he never had peace and quiet in life where he lived, so he decided to move somewhere he would have peace and quiet and he would be able to live with nature. He saw a beautiful place near the cliff by the sea and decided to move there.

The winters for the hermit were not that good and it was very frightening. Some winters it was very bad and the waves came right over his house. The stormy sea sounded like thunder. The house was on its own and was shaken by the whistling, roaring wind. He was very scared in case his house fell down. He had a dinghy so when he needed food, he used to row across the water to the cliff edge, tie his boat onto the edge and get his food and stock up for the year instead of going over and back.

At times, he felt very lonely and missed his family. He only had the water, the birds and the trees to talk to. After a while he took in a stray dog and kept him for company. People would see the two of them walking the cliff edge in the summer. The hermit stayed in his lonely house for over five years. But then he got sick of being lonely and so he moved back to the town where he came from to be with his family.

By Amy

The happiness of children

It is May 6th 2009, the eve of my second child's 6th birthday. Our tutor had suggested that it would be nice to contribute some writing to the *Simply Said 2009*. No pressure, mind you, was added but wow! What a daunting task! Your mind starts to race, you suddenly seem to have lots of things to put on paper, then you pause and nothing comes out. Oh God! What has happened? It is a lovely feeling though to give time and thought to such a project. It takes you to a different place. Then suddenly, I am brought back to reality. I have two little girls watching a DVD and a row breaks out and your thoughts are interrupted, but calm is restored quickly as it's nothing major. Soon after, my son comes in.

"What are you doing Mam?" he asks.

"I'm trying to write a story," I reply.

"What about?" he asks.

"I don't know," I say.

"Write about your life but don't write the bad things," he replies helpfully.

On reflection life has been difficult and it truly makes me appreciate the stage of life I am at now. Life with my husband and our three beautiful children with their wonder is summed up in the following prayer:

Free to be Children

Give our children time to be children.
To savour the wonder
That is theirs.
To blossom in the world
Of their simplicity,
Not darkened by the shadows
That are ours.

Let them bask in the warmth
Of their sunshine,
Cleansed in the softness of their tears,

Be kissed by the beauties of nature.
Let them be free
In the kingdom
That is theirs.

Their beauty is the purity of Heaven,
Not tainted by the ugliness of man.
Oh! Let's not destroy
Their simplicity.
We never can improve
On what they have.

By Mary C.

One day at a time

This time last year I wrote about my struggle with the cigarettes for the *Simply Said* 2008. It was my third attempt at giving them up, and I thought that I had succeeded.

Unfortunately, I went back on the cigarettes again, this time for about eight months. I made up my mind to give them up again as I was finding it too expensive. I was always short of money and I reckoned that if I gave them up, I would have an extra €100 in my purse. With every budget a few cent had been added on the price of a packet of twenty.

In January 2009, I knew that I would have an expensive year ahead because of various family celebrations, so I was more determined than ever to give them up. Again I relied on the nicotine patches for two months. I am now off the cigarettes four months with no aid and I have more money to spend on family events.

This is a big incentive for me and I just know that I will stay off the cigarettes this time, by taking it one day at a time.

By Anita

The day I won a prize

A few years ago I was a member of an athletic club called St. Mary's in Co. Clare. I used to run the cross country races in the winter time. I used to train three times a week in my field at home. I used to meet other people at training. Running kept me fit. I really enjoyed the running.

Our club decided to have races to celebrate their Golden Jubilee. It was a lovely sunny day for it. There was a big crowd of people there when the time came for the race. I was ready to start on the line and I ran very fast to the end line. I came in first place. After the race was over I went up for my prize. I won a marble plaque. There were other games on that day to take part in. Nine people ran in my race.

I met a few people that I hadn't seen for a long time. There was a barbeque in the field. I sat at a table to have the meal. It was a great meal and a great day.

By Tony

My job at the Gala shop

I have started working in a new Gala shop in Miltown Malbay every Friday for two hours. Leonard and Ann Marie own the shop. I check the shelves to see what is needed. I then get the trolley with two baskets and get the food and drinks from the stock room and put them in the baskets. I bring them out to the shop and fill up the shelves.

I enjoy my cappuccino and ice-cream when I finish. I like working at Gala.

By Máiread

The matchmaker

It was the year 1910. Comforts were few; hardship was normal. Bridget sat by the blazing fire trying to dry her long, silky, auburn hair. Just seventeen years old, she was full of anticipation at the prospect of meeting her boyfriend, Christy Byrne. Bridget was known locally as the Queen of Park as she had that rare beauty of an Irish colleen. She had smooth, tanned skin that glowed with health and twinkling, dark brown eyes so some people called her Bridget with the laughing eyes.

She wondered why the fire was stacked so high. There seemed to be an air of expectancy about the house. Best china, drinking glasses and a bottle of whiskey were carefully laid out on the polished table. Her brother, John, must be expecting Father Ryan, the local priest, to call she surmised. Bridget had seven brothers and two sisters. Her parents were both dead and the eldest brother, John, and his wife had taken on the responsibility of raising the siblings in their family home as John and his wife were themselves childless. The youngest child in the family was Kathleen who was only five years old when her mother died.

The family home was a small cottage with no running water and no bathroom. It had three bedrooms and a large kitchen cum living room. Each bedroom had a large ewer and basin stand for washing. All the cooking was done on a big fireplace which had a crane and large hooks for hanging pots and kettles over the turf fire.

Four of the brothers had left the family home and had homes of their own, but privacy was still non-existent in the confined family situation. There was always plenty of work to do on the land, vegetables to be picked for the market, chickens and pigs to be fed and cows to be milked.

Bridget coiled her long hair on top of her head, put on her best long skirt and frilly leg of mutton sleeved blouse. She

wrapped her late mother's shawl around her shoulders and went off to meet her Christy.

There was a chill in the air as the young lovers passed by the railway gates. Old Jack Ryan, the gatekeeper, who was nearly forty years old, smirked with a knowing look at the young lovers and said, "You'll not be passing here hand in hand for much longer!" "Just ignore him," consoled Bridget. "He is just jealous!" Off they went, full of their hopes and dreams of the future.

Bridget arrived home a couple of hours later to find two strange men sitting with her brother, John. One was the matchmaker and the other was the 'devil's advocate', so called because he checked out the bloodline to ensure no kinship. "The deal is done," declared John. "You are to marry Jack Ryan. The match is made, the dowry settled and that is the end of that."

So the match was made and Bridget had no choice in the matter but to marry the old, jealous, man who proceeded to make her life miserable as the years went on. She turned from a gentle, happy girl into a hard, crusty, embittered person. Her sister, Kathleen, came to live with her after the marriage to take care of her children and work as an unpaid slave for years to come. Bridget was a hard task master and gave no comfort to Kathleen. However, when her last baby was born, Bridget died in childbirth. The baby was taken by relatives and reared as their own and that left Kathleen free to go back to her home and pick up her life once more.

When Kathleen started dating, her brothers tried to marry her off to a wealthy farmer from Limerick, but she had seen what a forced marriage had done to her sister and refused to comply. Instead, she married for love. I thank God that Kathleen had the strength to make her own decisions and I thank Him also that I am that strong woman's daughter!

By Marie

Special Olympics

"We're going to win." (Ger Loughnane)

A lot of people are involved in the Special Olympics. People who are involved in the Special Olympics often go to the gym to train. They also need someone to train them. At the gym, they lift weights and use the treadmill and the pool.

Gymnastics is a big event at the Special Olympics. There is also bowling, basketball and boccia (pronounced *botcha*). Boccia is played with 13 balls (6 red, 6 blue, 1 white). The white ball is used to start off the game and is thrown by one of the players on the court. The goal is to land the coloured balls as close as possible to the white ball.

People sit down and watch the events. Family and friends come to watch the performances. They shout out support for the athletes.

Good athletes have energy, strength, concentration and confidence. They need to believe in themselves, too, but the Special Olympics is not all about winning. It's also about enjoying yourself.

By Brendan

Recession

There is a lot of sadness around with people having lost their jobs. Unemployment has risen all over Ireland. Almost every household has experienced some work loss. Hopefully, things will improve soon. We are all well and happy in Avonree.

By Martin

Farming in north Clare

I am a young farmer from north Clare. It's a challenge but I enjoy it. Spring is my busiest season. Cows are calving and I have to mind them when they are in calf. If the cow or calf gets into difficulty I would have to be on hand to help them. Cows calve during the night as well as the day. Sometimes, you would have to get out of bed to check on them. The next day you would be very tired and still have work to do. Only people who live on farms know what this is really like.

A farmer's day starts at 7.00 a.m. with the milking. The cows are fed nuts while the machines are put on them. Depending on the time of year, the milk would be collected from the farmer every day or every second day. The farmer would then have breakfast. After this, the farmer would then decide what he or she will do for the rest of the day. Jobs for the farmer can include clearing briars, gardening, doing accounts, caring for other stock, e.g. dosing animals and going to the mart.

On our farm in north Clare the soil is rich and clay-like. I sow potatoes, cabbage, carrots, beetroot and onions. Gardening does take up a lot of my time but it is well worth the effort. I did a horticulture course with B.T.E.I. and I found it very helpful. What I learned in this course I was able to put into practice in our own garden. It is great to grow and eat your own vegetables and be self-sufficient in some small way.

Farming is a tough but rewarding job. A farmer has a healthy life being out and about so much.

By Kieran

About my family

My name is Lilly, and I'm 27 years old. I'm married to a man from East Africa. We have 3 sons. Aiden is the eldest, he is 9 years, Mohammed is 7 years and Halim is 5 years old. We live in Shannon. We have lived in Shannon now for the past 7 years.

My husband came to live in Ireland 10 years ago. We got married in Limerick on my 20th birthday in 2001. We have two puppies, a six month old, and a two month old, their names are Dasie and Coaly. They are always up to no good!

My two eldest boys are going to St Conair's NS in Shannon. Aiden just made his first Holy Communion last Saturday, the 9th of May in St. John and Paul's Church. We had a big party for him at home. All my husband's friends came down from Dublin, Waterford and Galway. My own family from west Clare also came, and neighbouring kids came too. Aiden enjoyed himself very much. As a family we intend to travel to my husband's country for a month. That's my family.

By Lilly

Horses

My favourite pastime is horse riding. Every week I go to O'Dea's Riding Centre, Tullabrack in Kilrush to spend some time with horses. When I am there, I clean out the stables, groom the horses and take a riding lesson.

I love grooming the horses. I have gotten to know them well and they love it too. My favourite horse is called Lincoln. She is quiet and gentle. She is a tall, brown filly. She is a friend and we have lots of fun together.

By Pauline

A favourite recipe

Walnut brownies

Ingredients for approx. 25 brownies:

- 200g butter
- 2 bars J.D. Gross 70% chocolate
- 3 eggs
- 180g icing sugar
- 1 pinch of salt
- 80g plain flour
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- Icing sugar for dusting
- 150g walnuts

Method:

Dice the butter. Finely chop 200g of chocolate and melt together in a bowl over a pan of hot water. Whisk the eggs, icing sugar and salt until thick and creamy. Let the chocolate mass cool down and add to the other ingredients. Chop the walnuts and the rest of the chocolate coarsely, mix with flour and baking powder and add to the mix.

Pour the mix into a greased baking tin (approx. 18 x 25cm) and bake it in a pre-heated oven at 180 degrees Celsius for approx. thirty minutes until the surface is hard but the inside is still soft. To avoid the surface becoming too dark use some kitchen foil to cover it. Let it cool down in the tin. Turn it out onto a flat surface and cut into cubes. Dust icing sugar over the brownies.

By Joan

Working in a charity shop

I have been working in a charity shop in Ennis for the last couple of months, and it has been fantastic. I've been looking forward to going in to work.

The name of the shop is Mrs Quinn's Charity Shop. I'm working with the girls that make me feel so welcome when I walk into the shop. We sell clothes, jewellery, handbags, books, tapes, children's clothes, shoes, vases, mugs and photo frames. We sell all sorts of stuff.

The stuff we get into the shop is second hand, but some of it is new stuff. I'm living in Shannon, but the shop is in Ennis.

The charity is for the blind.

How do I get into Ennis? Well I get the ECAT bus. It's a mini bus that takes the disabled people from A to B and it is very handy, because all you have to pay for it is just 5 euro a year.

I've always wanted to know what it was like to work in a shop and now I know. I don't think I want to work at anything else.

By Susan

Ross

My neighbour's dog's name is Ross. He has a brown coat and he is about five years old. He is a big dog. I have often taken him for a walk. He is a playful dog and he likes to play at throwing and fetching the ball. When I call his name he runs to me to play with him. He also barks a lot sometimes. He wears a red collar with his name on it around his neck. He has a short tail. He is a nice dog.

By Brian

Jokes

"Humour is full of surprises." (Erma Bombeck)

Why did the cow look over the fence?
Because he couldn't look under it.

What did the postman get on the first day he started his new job? The sack!

What did one telephone say to the other?
You are too young to be engaged.

What is the last thing you do before you go to bed?
Lift your feet off the ground.

How many letters are there in the alphabet?
22 – E.T. went home and J.R. got shot.

What has 40 heads and no brains? A box of matches.

Did you hear the story about the 3 eggs? 2 bad.

Why did the boy bring a ruler to bed?
To see how long he slept.

Why did the man put Daz on top of the television?
Because he had no aerial.

What keys are always locked inside? Piano keys.

Why did J.R. go to court? To sue Ellen.

Where is Arthur's key? In his pocket.

By Josie

My new niece

On the 21st of December, my sister-in-law had a baby girl. She was born in Galway Hospital. She is called Grainne Catherine. We were delighted when she came into the family. When I go to their house I look forward to seeing her. She is a beautiful baby. She has two sisters and they are mad about her.

On the 14th of March she was christened in the cathedral. John and Maeve stood for her. We had the christening party in their house. It was a great day and we all had a great time.

By Helen

About Pink

One of my favourite singers is Pink. Pink's real name is Alicia Beth More and she was born on September 8, 1979 in Doylestown, Pennsylvania, U.S.A. Pink grew up in a musical family. At age 14 she began writing and singing some of her own songs in clubs in Philadelphia. She was spotted by an MCA records executive who asked her to audition for a group.

She made it into a band called *Basic Instinct*, but she didn't last long with them. Pink's first album, *Can't take me Home*, was released in 2000, and was recorded with a wide range of R 'n B songwriters and producers. Pink has said she really didn't like this direction for her music, but the album sold over two million copies and included the top 10 hit singles 'Most Girls' and 'There you go'. Pink's next album was more rock 'n roll music. My favourite Pink song is 'Don't leave me'.

By Lisa

Hurling matches

*"I have spread my dreams under your feet,
Tread softly because you tread on my dreams."
(from He wishes for the Cloths of Heaven by W.B. Yeats)*

A friend had a dream to get on the Clare hurling team and he did. I follow Sixmilebridge GAA Club and the BANNER county. My favourite club hurler is John Reddan and my favourite county hurler is Alan Markham. They are the boys from the BANNER county.

At a hurling match, you hear the clash of the ash. Matches are played in the rain and the wind and, sometimes, in the sunshine. Supporters get very excited. Two supporters got in a fight at an under 21 match one time. A Clare supporter threw a can of coke at a Tipperary supporter.

If I was a manager, I would train the team at the Cliffs of Moher. There are hills there that players could train on so that they build up muscle. That would be great. There are things players can do to improve their play. There was a Tipperary hurler who used to practise scoring points by hanging a tyre from a tree and trying to hit the ball through it.

Joe Canning's sideline cut is a great part of the game. He is on the Galway team. A player that can score a point from a sideline cut is a very skilful hurler.

Winning or losing doesn't matter, as long as you have heart. That's what the Clare team had in the 90's. The Clare minor team has heart, too.

By Colm

How I like to relax

I like to go to the beach whenever I can. I find it very relaxing just to walk along the shore with the cold breeze on my face and watch the waves coming in and going out. I love to feel the sand, how soft it is on my feet. Whatever stress you might have just seems to leave your mind. It clears your head and you feel so relaxed after and full of energy.

I love looking at the sea, to hear the sound of it, to look around and see other people enjoying themselves and the little children making sandcastles. It makes me feel good, getting away from it all and having time for myself. I feel so refreshed afterwards.

I also love to read a good book whenever I can. I find it very relaxing, especially if you are having a bad day to read a book that you like. After a few pages you find that you are more relaxed in yourself and find that you are better able to deal with things. You can really get lost in a book. It takes your mind off things.

I like books that are interesting like true stories about people, what happened in their lives and how they turned their lives around. I also like to read religious books about God and Our Lady and how they have come into people's lives to heal and comfort them when they had given up all hope in themselves, God and everything else. It might have been a simple thing that the priest might have said at Mass or someone told them what happened to them or just a book they came across and read a line or two that might have made a huge difference in their lives.

Newspapers are okay to read. I like to pick out the interesting bits. I also like a good magazine. Books are great.

By Margaret

