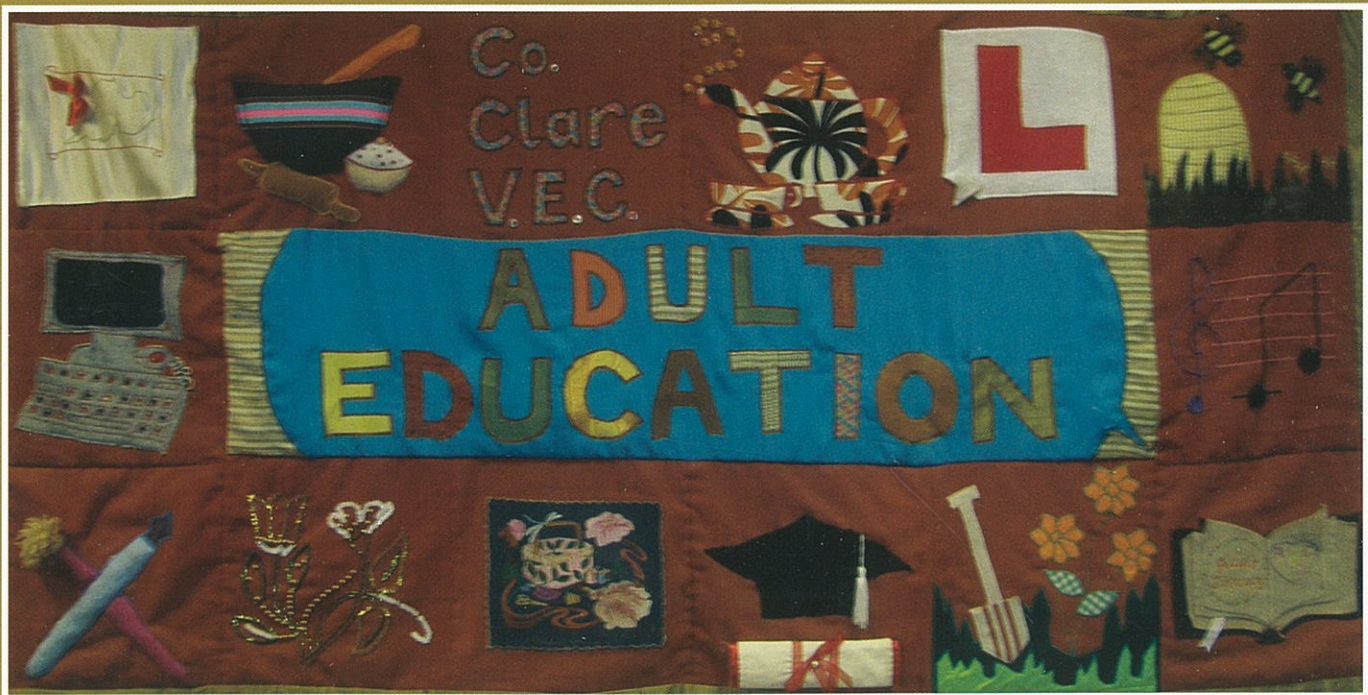


Simply Said 2011



Issue 23

*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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Foreword

This, the 23rd edition of *Simply Said*, is the annual publication of writings by adult learners participating in programmes with the Clare Adult Basic Education Service. The stories are written by learners from across the county and include moving stories on life experiences, wonderful poetry and song, national folk tales and advice for the government.

Many stories in this year's publication reflect on different types of journeys. There are the short journeys we take like the day trip to Galway or Waterford, the holiday in Ghana or the road trip from Las Vegas to Los Angeles. There are the physical journeys we take through life, moving from house to house, or town to town or indeed from country to country. Then there are the emotional and spiritual journeys we take in life dealing with successes and failures, experiencing moments of joy, enduring times of heartache and getting through the ups and downs of rearing children!

Ireland has endured much over the last few years and there are stories in the book where learners write about what they think would make Ireland a better place. There are also stories which describe the special features of Ireland and her people. The Irish are described as nice, quiet, friendly people with a great sense of peace and humanity.

We would like to thank the CABES Family Learning class from Ennis who made the 'Adult Education Quilt' which is the picture on this year's cover. The quilt reflects the different types of courses and programmes we offer throughout Clare. Congratulations and thank you to all the learners who have written stories for this year's publication. A special thanks to the volunteer tutors for your continued dedication to our learners. Well done to everyone involved in the organisation and production of *Simply Said 2011* and best wishes to all.

The CABES Team

Contents

Title	Author	Page
Road trip USA	<i>Martina</i>	10
Telling a story	<i>Leigh-Anne, Paddy & Yayoyi</i>	11
I was good enough	<i>Sue</i>	12
The stars in Cuba	<i>Roman</i>	12
A morning of drama	<i>David, John, Mary, Marion, Nora, Paul, Ollie, & Philomena</i>	13
Dealing with a brain injury	<i>David</i>	15
Trip to Galway, May 2011	<i>Beata, Ella, Wiolla, Vaida, Oleg, Vladas, Audra, Ariadna & Luidmila</i>	15
Going to school	<i>Joe</i>	16
What Bart thinks would make Ireland a better place	<i>Bart</i>	16
Sewing	<i>Margaret</i>	17
Daniel's Holy Communion	<i>Breeda</i>	17
What Joe thinks would make Ireland a better place	<i>Joe</i>	17
My different countries – a chapter of my story	<i>Suzanne</i>	18
Don't miss class	<i>Maria</i>	21
A poem can be more than just words	<i>Mary</i>	22
Driver theory class	<i>Julie Ann</i>	22
My holiday	<i>Bertha</i>	23
Tall ships	<i>Barry</i>	23
Nobody is gone	<i>Ann</i>	23

Driver theory test	<i>Lynn</i>	24
A folk tale from Croatia	<i>Snezana</i>	25
My new life in Ennis	<i>Kenny</i>	26
Everyday things we love and hate	<i>Omar, Aissatou, Teresa, Saida, Qiang, Aicha, Peter & Jaroslav</i>	26
My happiest day	<i>Teresa</i>	27
Sports	<i>Sean</i>	27
The photograph	<i>Jonelle</i>	28
A time I cheated	<i>Rafal</i>	29
My quad bike	<i>Adrian</i>	30
Food in Nigeria	<i>Abby</i>	31
FETAC	<i>Tony</i>	31
Fanore	<i>Susan</i>	31
Trip to Waterford	<i>Mary</i>	32
What B.B. thinks would make Ireland a better place	<i>B.B.</i>	32
Back to education	<i>John</i>	32
My trip to Bunratty in the autumn	<i>Oliver</i>	33
My boat, the Colla Queen	<i>John</i>	34
A lovely day	<i>Ann</i>	35
Another chance	<i>Margaret</i>	36
What Francie thinks would make Ireland a better place	<i>Francie</i>	36
Keep the classes going	<i>Patrick</i>	36
Getting from A to B	<i>Nathan</i>	37

My first job in China	<i>Jun</i>	37
April – my favourite month	<i>Maureen</i>	38
Travelling on Christmas Eve	<i>Mamisa</i>	38
The Sunday Game	<i>Michael</i>	39
How I got my driving licence	<i>Linda</i>	39
A memorable day out	<i>Maureen</i>	40
Mr.?	<i>Leni</i>	41
Winter turning to spring	<i>Mary</i>	42
School days	<i>Nicholas</i>	43
Beautiful day at the beach	<i>Rita</i>	43
Discrimination	<i>Richard</i>	44
Working at the golf club	<i>David</i>	44
My mother	<i>James</i>	45
What P.J. thinks would make Ireland a better place	<i>P.J.</i>	45
Family life in west Clare	<i>Alan</i>	46
My parents	<i>Joe</i>	47
A folk tale from Congo	<i>Dorcas</i>	48
What John thinks would make Ireland a better place	<i>John</i>	48
The garden	<i>Seamus</i>	49
The gift of reading	<i>John</i>	49
When everything went wrong	<i>Kinga</i>	50
I wish I was the waves	<i>Josephine</i>	50
Guadeloupe	<i>Anglele</i>	51

What Dympna thinks would make Ireland a better place	<i>Dympna</i>	51
Dreams	<i>Anna</i>	52
What Niall thinks would make Ireland a better place	<i>Niall</i>	52
My boyfriend	<i>Jeni</i>	53
Up and downs of rearing children	<i>Claire</i>	53
Computers	<i>Senan</i>	54
A visit to the Clare Museum	<i>Helen</i>	55
The story of the Band Hall	<i>Pauline</i>	56
My time with Clare Youth Service	<i>Faith</i>	57
Car maintenance	<i>Kieran</i>	58
My school days	<i>Kenny</i>	58
Secret love – a good gravy	<i>Janet</i>	59
Libya	<i>Hind</i>	59
My cousin's confirmation	<i>Kieran</i>	60
A very long day	<i>Mark</i>	61
My girlfriend	<i>Shane</i>	61
Japan	<i>Yayoi</i>	62
My worst day ever	<i>Stephanie</i>	63
Going back	<i>Teresa</i>	63
White mare of Mabon	<i>Jessica</i>	64
My sister's wedding	<i>Sylvia</i>	65
St. Patrick's Day parade	<i>Mairead</i>	65
Bad day	<i>Pawel</i>	66

Story about a husband and wife	<i>Comfort</i>	66
School dinners to packed lunches	<i>K. Ann</i>	67
Independence	<i>Nuala</i>	67
Sugar Loaf Mountain	<i>Tina</i>	68
One God	<i>Karimu</i>	68
How I came to Ireland	<i>Mr. Diallo</i>	69
What Annette thinks would make Ireland a better place	<i>Annette</i>	69
A good snooker weekend	<i>Kevin</i>	70
What Mary thinks would make Ireland a better place	<i>Mary</i>	70
Our time	<i>Gabriel</i>	71
The knock on the door	<i>Catherine</i>	71
My worst day	<i>Rafal</i>	72
What Mary Ellen thinks would make Ireland a better place	<i>Mary Ellen</i>	72
The day I saw the Dalai Lama	<i>Teresa</i>	73
Dromoland Castle	<i>Joe</i>	73
Gassing the bananas	<i>Anne</i>	74
My good friend, Charlie	<i>Jun</i>	74
Accident	<i>Anna</i>	75
Class	<i>Mary</i>	75
Driving	<i>Helen</i>	76
What Anthony thinks would make Ireland a better place	<i>Anthony</i>	76
My trip to Birmingham	<i>Cathy</i>	77

What Gerard thinks would make Ireland a better place	<i>Gerard</i>	77
Pilgrimage to the Holy Land	<i>Gerard</i>	78
Hobby	<i>Brendan</i>	78
Mondays at the Tech	<i>John, Breda, Anne-Marie, Sarah, Kieran, Christina, Frances & David</i>	79
The little cash box	<i>Margaret</i>	80



Road trip USA

My sister and I have always dreamed of seeing more of America than just the big cities and getting out on the open road seemed the best way. A few years ago we made up our minds to bite the bullet and do it. We got a lot of information from the local travel agent on how to rent a car and tips on the do's and don'ts of driving in America, all of which was very helpful.

The first leg of our journey was to Las Vegas (Sin City!). We stayed there a couple of days. It's a very big city with lots to see. We took a trip out to the Grand Canyon to fly over the Hoover Dam in a helicopter. It was exciting, even though I had already been in a helicopter in New York. The New York trip was very short so it was fun to be in a helicopter for a longer trip this time. The pilot was very funny and made us feel relaxed. We were in the front seat so we had a bit of banter with him.

Renting the car in Las Vegas was very exciting but nerve-wracking. So much so, that the very kind lady in the car rental office let us drive around the car park to get used to it before we set out on the open road. Once we got our heads around the fact we were driving on the other side of the road, we were starting to enjoy the freedom. We drove from Las Vegas to Los Angeles. It was so cool driving until the sat. nav. decided to take us the wrong way. It was getting late so we stayed overnight in a motel and set off again in the morning. We had breakfast in an off-road diner - very American! When we got near Los Angeles there was, like, 5 lanes of traffic. My God! My poor nerves were truly tested. It's such a big and exciting city. We saw the Hollywood sign and the Hollywood Walk of Fame where all the big entertainers, not just from America, but from all over the world, get their names engraved on the sidewalk. You need to be really famous to get your name there. It's a big honour.

San Francisco is just like you'd see on the T.V. - all hills and trams. We loved it. We went to Alcatraz prison, now disused, which is on an island. It was near impossible to escape from it. Many died in their attempts to do so.

Overall, my sister and I got on really well except when our sat. nav. had plans to get us lost. We plan to go back and do another trip in the future, maybe route 66. Now that would be something!

By Martina

Telling a story

Today, you can use the latest technology to read a book. You can read classic books like *Alice in Wonderland*, *Dracula* or *War and Peace* on your iPod, iPad, laptop or Kindle. Kindle was specially designed for reading digitally.

In the past, there were scrolls and people even wrote on bits of pottery and stone. Before writing was invented and before books, people heard stories through word of mouth. Stories passed from one person to another. In homes all over the world, the older generations passed stories on to the younger generations. Stories about heroes and villains, witches, ghosts and monsters kept people entertained for hours, since there was no TV or radio. Some stories were about family experiences and memories. Children hearing these stories learned about their families and who they were.

Children first hear stories from their own parents and grandparents and gradually they move into their communities and they hear more stories. They hear as much as is right for their ages. In the community, there are often local characters who tell stories.

We've come from word of mouth to digital reading, but story is forever.

By Leigh-Anne, Paddy & Yayoí

I was good enough

I am a student in Killaloe. I go to class on Thursdays. I have learnt a lot since I came here which I didn't at school, as I didn't get the help and I didn't think I was good enough to go back. I like history and can now learn why two world wars started between the years 1914 and 1945.

By Sue

The stars in Cuba

I'm from Cuba, the largest island in the Caribbean Sea. I arrived in Ireland three years ago. The most relevant contrast between Cuba and Ireland is the weather because the sky here is often cloudy and grey almost all the year. Last night was different. The moon was full and my mind went back to my childhood in Cuba.

I remember one night lying on the grass looking at the sky full of stars. I tried to count them - one, two, one hundred, one thousand - I couldn't do it, but then, one or two stars started to fall. I ran and asked my dad, "Where are the stars going?" "They are going to the land of dreams," he said. I wondered about this. When the sun began to rise and all the stars began to disappear I asked my mum, "Where are all the stars hiding?" "My little son," she said, "when the sun rises, the stars go to sleep in the land of dreams."

One night while I was looking at the stars, a fairy riding a beautiful white horse came and asked me, "Would you like to go to the land of dreams?" Of course I answered, "Yes." "Now," said the fairy, "you must promise to be obedient to your parents and loyal to your friends." "Yes," I said. Then I heard my mum, "Roman, Roman wake up or you will be late for school."

I still remember this and I sometimes wish the fairy would return and take me to the land of dreams.

By Roman

A morning of drama

We, the Shannon Rehab group, took part in a drama class this year. Our tutor was Karen and there were eight of us in the group. Our classes took place on Tuesday mornings. Some of us had done acting before and some hadn't. In February, some of us enjoyed a trip to see Shannon Musical Society perform *The Wedding Singer*. The show was great fun and provided great motivation for our performance; John saw the Musical Society's first ever production, *Oklahoma*, in 1979.

In the beginning, most of us were a small bit nervous; Marion wasn't though. For the first few weeks, we did some warm ups at the start of class. We did warm ups like stretching, breathing exercises and drama games. These were great fun and a good way to start the class.

During our classes, we came up with ideas for short plays. We got some ideas from different TV programmes. Paul based his character on Manuel, a funny waiter in the show *Fawlty Towers*. John enjoys *Kilinaskully* and *D'Unbelievables* so he based his character on Pat Shortt. Ollie's character, Falstaff, was inspired by Shakespearean characters; his favourite play is *Hamlet*.

We came up with storylines for three plays; *Mooney's Restaurant* starring John as Pat, Nora as Jacky, Paul as Manuel and Ollie as Falstaff, *The Chancer* starring Marion as Rosemary and John as Dicky, and *A Bad Hair Day* starring Philomena as Crystal and Mary as Caroline.

We invented all of the characters and wrote the scripts ourselves. Everyone was given a part in a play. Mary and Phil really enjoyed composing the story for *A Bad Hair Day* because it was very witty. Nora based her character, Jackie, on an old work colleague. David's character, Dicky, differed from the others as it was not based on a person or T.V. character; it was created while we were rehearsing our plays.

We rehearsed every week and worked very hard at learning our lines. Together, we decided on a performance date and time, to showcase our acting skills to our families and friends! We made

programmes for our guests and a poster for each play. These were used to decorate the room on the day of the performance. We decided to call our performance A Morning of Drama. We also spent some time during our classes deciding what props and costumes were needed for each play and choosing who would set up the stage, who would greet the guests as they arrived, and who would hand out the programmes to the guests.

Eventually, our performance date, the 8th of February arrived! We were all very excited to put on our plays for an audience. We spent the morning rehearsing our lines and preparing the stage and props for each play. We also put on our costumes and some make-up. At 12 p.m., the audience began to arrive. Marion handed out the programmes to the guests as they took their seats. Paul welcomed the audience and introduced the show. Then, the performance got under way. Nobody was nervous. We all performed very well and no-one forgot their lines. The audience loved all of the plays; they found them very funny and clapped and cheered loudly at the end of each one.

We, as a group, loved this experience. It was great fun getting to perform in front of our families and friends and it gave us a great sense of achievement. We also enjoyed coming up with the ideas for the plays and writing the scripts. Most of us would love to perform these plays again or create new plays to perform.

*By David, John, Mary, Marion, Nora, Paul, Ollie,
and Philomena*

Dealing with a brain injury

I had a brain injury over 10 years ago. A consultant suggested to my mother that I go to a nursing home as she would not be able to care for me. She would not allow this. She said that I would recover better at home. My family, especially my mother, was the biggest help in my recovery.

I wasn't going to let anyone put me down. I was going to do it myself. I walked straight away after surgery. Thanks to the National Rehab staff who helped me so much, I made a full recovery. Before my injury, I had trained to be a chef. I was told I would never work as a chef again. I am back cheffing now.

I would advise anyone never to give up.

By David

Trip to Galway, May 2011

We were all very happy on the trip. The people we met were lovely and friendly. The hotel was exclusive, expensive, lovely and comfortable. The food was delicious and the coffee was wonderful. There was a huge buffet. Oleg says the Irish coffee at the bar was very expensive. It was seven euros.

The Irish dancing was very good, but it was funny to see people from different countries doing Irish dancing. We would like Irish dancing classes at the Centre!

The fashion show of international costumes was fantastic and colourful, especially the Brazilian gaucho.

We missed our friends from the class who couldn't come. Next time they must come! We all really had a great day.

*By Beata, Ella, Wiolla, Vaída, Oleg, Vladas, Audra,
Ariadna and Liudmila*

Going to school

We walked to school across the country but making use of every bit of road that we could. Along the way, there were some hazards. In springtime, there would be sows which would be rearing piglets and they looked dangerous. They would be let out of the kitchens of the houses in a couple of places. There would be cows after calving, even a goose and gander with goslings. The gander would follow us at times.

There were pleasant memories too. At the top of a hill as we neared the school we walked on the high wall. It was a ditch with a sunken path in the middle. It saved us having to walk on rough ground at either side. It was from that wall that I got my first view of the old steam train with a trail of smoke about a mile long as it came up from the southwest. A few miles away it looked a spectacle on a fine morning. Pollution and carbon emissions aplenty!

There was a flag across a drain in one place and a sleeper across another one. In between, there were many steps or crossing places on ditches and walls. There were different makes of them. The countryside was full of them at that time. Besides the scholars, other people used them crossing to Miltown and places. The postman used part of our path as well. We found his whistle one evening and knew at once who lost it so we returned it to him. There seemed to be people who didn't cycle back then, the same as some don't drive cars now. So there were many busy paths or boreens as we called them and steps along the way.

By Joe

What Bart thinks would make Ireland a better place

I think we could improve things by concentrating on health and cutting TD's wages.

By Bart

Sewing

I like sewing. I have a sewing box with needles and threads and I have a new sewing machine. I used to make cotton bags, cushions, rugs and pin cushions years ago. I liked making pin cushions.

I go to a sewing class on Fridays in Ennistymon. I am making a skirt. I enjoy knitting and crochet too.

By Margaret

Daniel's Holy Communion

My nephew made his Holy Communion on May 15, 2010. He made it in St. Joseph's Church in Ennis. Afterwards, he went to his school hall with his parents and grandparents. Then, the whole family went for a meal at the Old Ground.

The best part of the day for me was the meal because all the family were together. The best part for my nephew was receiving Holy Communion and going away for the day with his family.

By Breeda

What Joe thinks would make Ireland a better place

We are not in a position to change anything because the country is bankrupt. The IMF and the European Central Bank control the country.

By Joe

My different countries - a chapter of my story

I was born on the 25th of March 1970 in the town of Augsburg, in Bavaria, Germany. We were living in a small village called Horgau, also in Bavaria, at that time. There was a church, two banks, one pub, two restaurants, one pharmacy, one pre-school, a childcare centre and a school. In the village lived 5,000 people.

I was christened in the church in Horgau. I was crying all the time during the baptism, my father told me. My mother said it was because I was hungry. This happened in May, when I was just two months old.

When I was nine years old, we moved to France. We lived in a town of 7,000 people, in the town of Rambervillers, in Lorraine in eastern France. There are seven pubs, one hotel, a post office, a church, a registry office and a police station and a gendarmerie station because, in France, there are two police forces.

I used to go to school every day because, in France, you must go to school until you are 18 years old. I had mixed feelings about going to school in the beginning because I didn't know the language and it was hard to make friends. In college, after the age of twelve, it was better. I had friends there.

When I became 18 years old, I didn't have to go to school any more. When we lived in Rambervillers, my parents didn't speak French. My father said to us, "You have to learn French." So my brother and sister learned French. My sister learned it in pre-school and my brother learned it in primary school. I learned French too, in school. My brother and sister also learned English in school.

When my brother turned 18, he moved to the south of France to the city of Toulouse. There he studied architecture for six or seven years. I went to Toulouse with him in September 1990 when he was registering for his studies. I visited him again two years later at the end of June 1992, for four days.

Now I want to talk about my sister. My sister is four years younger than I am. When my sister was 18 years old, she moved back to Germany to learn business studies. She did this by going to work for

four days a week and going to the college for one day a week, on Fridays. I think she was happy doing this. She did this for three years. She did all her typing on computer and passed all her exams. During these three years, I was with my parents in Rambervillers.

We will turn now to talking about Ireland. We first came to Ireland in 1986 for a holiday. At that time, my father thought that all the people in Ireland were so nice, friendly, and helpful. He never changed his mind about this, and I agree with him, in fact, the whole family agreed with him. When people wanted to borrow something from my father, they used to speak very slowly and carefully. However, usually, when they were talking to one another, they spoke so quickly that they nearly swallowed their own words! I do the same with my words when I speak German.

When we came to Ireland in 1993, we went to live in Shanahea, Kildysart, Co. Clare. My father wanted to live near a river because we lived beside a river in France. He liked to be near the water and he loved the Shannon.

My family found a nice cottage to live in. We had the cottage with some land in the front with two apple trees, and behind the house there is now a garden. When my family took over this cottage, that space was just a rubbish dump with broken plates and cups and a lot of plastic fertiliser bags and other general rubbish. I don't know exactly what my father had to remove from there, but he worked hard to create a lovely garden helped by my mother and myself. He planned the layout of the garden in his head with a suitable place for the herb patch, the rhubarb and the vegetables. In fact, vegetables were growing in three different places - the polytunnel, the glasshouse and the vegetable area in the garden.

In the garden, there was some rhubarb and some herbs such as peppermint, melissa, apple mint, marjoram, coriander and oregano. There was another herb called comfrey. This is a very useful herb. It grows up to one metre in height and sometimes more. It has a large dark purple flower. There are two important things you can make from this herb. You can use the root to make a treatment for joint problems. To do this, you have to chop up some of the root in small pieces and soak them in a spoonful of oil. Later, you can stir the

mixture into a paste. This paste is a very good treatment for joint problems.

The other thing you can do is to make a liquid feed for your tomatoes. You can do this by taking some of the leaves and chopping them up. Then, put them to soak in ten litres of water. After a while, the leaves will dissolve in the water. This is now a very good liquid feed for tomatoes.

All these herbs my father brought from Germany and from France. I bought the apple mint myself in a garden centre in Limerick. I like this herb very much. You can dry it and make herb tea with it and I enjoy it very much. I often have some before I go to bed in cold weather. We had a big glasshouse too alongside our home down beside the estuary. My father bought it in Limerick. He grew tomatoes, spinach and some salad in the glasshouse. He also had a polytunnel. In this he grew pumpkins, marrows and cape gooseberries. He grew onions, celery, horseradish, sprouts, broad beans and peas in the open garden. We had dog-roses as well. Usually a family member used to help him in the garden; sometimes my mother, sometimes my brother and sometimes myself. My father never grew potatoes in the garden. If you grow potatoes you have to look after them because they can get disease and my father didn't want to spray them because he thought the spray was poison and bad for our health. My father died in the year 2000. He was fifty-eight years old.

As well as being a gardener, my father was an artist and a craft worker. He made wooden toys for his livelihood. He used to sell the toys, first in Germany, and later, in Ireland, in the many markets around the country such as Ballina in County Mayo, Rush, County Dublin, Castleconnel, County Limerick and many other places. We used to help him make the toys, too. We used to trace the template onto the wood which he would cut out with a special saw. He used to make animals such as cats and tortoises. He also made objects from nature such as moons and little trees. The trees had leaves which could be removed and put back just like in nature. This is a nice activity for children. He made puzzles, too. The sizes of the pieces depended on the size of the piece of wood he was working with. We remember all these things about my father with much affection and we still miss him very much.

My mother and I moved into Ennis in January 2003. We moved because I wanted to learn English. For a short while, I was going every day to the Adult Education Centre. I learned computers with Amanda and English with Beatriz, Clare, Karl and Margaret. Now my English is very good. Everyone can understand what I am saying - most of the time anyway!

This is the conclusion of my chapter about my different countries. There are more chapters in my story that I will write another time, soon.

By Suzanne

Don't miss class

It was Thursday morning and I was on my way back from work. I was tired and felt I didn't want to go to English lesson. As I went past the Family Resource Centre, I thought it would be a pity to lose the knowledge I could gain and I would also miss our tutor, Annmarie.

I went to class. People smiled at me and I felt better. Suddenly, Annmarie said, "We are doing our listening and speaking exercise today and I am taking you to the café." This was a dream come true. I had been dreaming about a cup of coffee.

After class, I was very happy. I had a nice time and I also had occasion to speak English. I both spoke and listened to other people. By the end of class, I didn't feel tired any more.

I go to my class every Thursday morning now. I am learning a lot about the English language and Irish culture. I really want to keep going to these classes.

By Maria

A poem can be more than just words

After the break-up of my marriage, my life was turned upside down. I didn't know how I was going to face life on my own, with three children aged four, five and eight. The fear of providing for them and paying bills on my own was overwhelming. I started by getting a part-time job so that I would be there for my children when they got home from school. It was not easy getting into a new routine, making sure the kids got to school and rushing off to work myself. As time went on, though, I grew with the new responsibility that I had.

Then, out of the blue one day, I was in a shop and I spotted this poem; I read it and thought to myself, this would be a good one to send to their dad. It would hit him where it hurts most I thought because I was still angry with him.

The poem is called, A child grows up. The more I read the poem, the more I realised how there was no need to send it to him. I had my three lovely children and their love was unconditional. I was the one tucking them up at night, reading their stories, getting cuddles and seeing them laughing and crying.

They are all grown up now and a lot of years have passed, but the love I have for them is nothing I ever expected to have in my life. So, at the end of the day, I am the lucky one to have three angels to help me through the bad times.

By Mary

Driver theory class

Every Thursday morning I go to class to learn the road symbols and practise the driver theory test. I like my class because I get to meet new people and I would like to be a driver in the future.

By Julie Ann

My holiday

My holiday in Ghana was fantastic and I was very excited before the trip because I hadn't been there for about three years. I miss my country, so I was very happy to meet my family and friends. They were excited to see me because they didn't know that I was coming, so I surprised them.

My friends and I went out one day. The weather was very hot and I am not used to it anymore, so I was looking forward to coming back to Ireland.

By Bertha

Tall ships

I was involved in the Tall Ships Race in 1998. I was on the Asgard II. I did watch. If the boat was pulled into harbour and people got off the boat, there had to be two people who stay on watch for safety and security. I helped in the galley too. The galley is where all the cooking is done.

We got medals after the race. I still have my medal. The Tall Ships are coming back to Ireland this year.

By Barry

Nobody is gone

Nobody is gone
Unless you want them to go
Then they will be with you forever
Memory of those
Who are gone but will never
Be forgotten

This poem is on a remembrance stone in memory of the mill workers of Sixmilebridge. I read it often. It is so meaningful to me.

By Ann

Driver theory test

I saw a poster in the local SuperValu saying there were classes in the local library building that would help people with the driver theory test. It was a message from God, I thought. "Prepare for this test and do it!" he was saying to me. I looked at the poster again. I needed to organise myself and do this test that I have been avoiding for so long. I was getting quite masterful about thinking up lots of excuses as to why I shouldn't do it. I really did not want to confront this right now and hoped the class would be on Monday mornings when I help out at the local hospital. But no, the class was on Wednesdays at 11a.m. for an hour and a half. I then hoped it would cost an absolute fortune to attend so then I could really justify it to myself that I couldn't go, but again no, it was free. So I said, "Ok God, you win. I'll call down and check it out."

I met Katie and she introduced me to the tutor, Mary. There were four other women in the class and one man. They were all busy working on their computers when I went in. I thought nobody would take any notice of me. However, Mary introduced me to the rest of the class and everyone said hello. Mary gave me a folder with some hand-outs in it and I sat in front of a computer. I immediately said to myself: "This is it. I am going to do this course and sit my driver theory test!"

Mary focused the whole class on a topic and we were all chatting about the rules of the road within minutes. The classes were great and after eight sessions I had a good grasp of the book and, with Mary's help, I sent off the application form. Whenever I would meet any of the class up town all we would talk about was the driver theory test.

Would you believe I passed it? I'm sure God was proud and a bit relieved. I went back in to the Centre to tell Mary and you know what she said? "Well done! I knew you could do it!"

By Lynn

A folk tale from Croatia

Regoc and Kosjenka

One night a little fairy named Kosjenka came down from the sky to earth. She landed in a meadow full of horses. She got on the fastest horse and rode for seven days and seven nights. She came to a big castle with a huge wall made of stones all around it where a giant called Regoc lived. The giant had spent every day for a thousand years counting the stones on the great wall. Kosjenka persuaded him to go with her and see all the beauties of the world. She made a little basket and in this she travelled in Regoc's ear. They journeyed above the surface of the earth. After many adventures they came to two villages divided by a river. The people in these two villages had for years been quarrelling about a meadow. The children of the villages were not interested in the quarrel and played happily in the meadow every day. The sheep of both villages grazed in the meadow and the old people saw no sense in the dispute.

When Kosjenko and Regoc arrived in the meadow the children were afraid of the giant. One child was very smart and saw that Regoc meant them no harm. He was also the only child that knew that the people of his village had a plan to break the river bank and destroy the other village. He also knew that if the river bank was broken both villages would be destroyed.

When the river bank was broken, both villages were flooded and the people were happy that the others were being drowned. Kosjenka asked Regoc to stop the flood. The giant took all the children in his arms and moved all the old people out of danger. He then made a big hole in the ground and the water disappeared into the hole. All the others in the village were lost. Only the young and old are left and they decided that this must never happen again. They decided that from now on they will live in one village.

By Snezana

My new life in Ennis

I moved to Ennis two years ago and these last two years have been the best in my life. I first visited Ennis three years ago. I came to visit a friend of mine who had been living here for many years. While I was with my friend I noticed something about the people who were my friend's neighbours. They were the quietest and the loveliest people you would ever meet. In fact, when I met them I was completely blown away by their sense of peace and humanity. The experience was life-changing for me.

Later, I decided to move to this town and since I have come here it is like I have fulfilled my destiny just living here. I am so glad to live here and to be a part of the blessed town of Ennis.

By Kenny

Everyday things we love and hate

I'm crazy about football.

I hate Irish weather.

I enjoy boxing.

I love summer but I don't love winter.

I like Ping-Pong sometimes.

I enjoy Kung Fu.

I like football in the garden with the children but I hate football on the television.

We loved our trip to Galway.

*By Omar, Aïssatou, Teresa, Saïda, Qiáng, Aïcha,
Peter and Jaroslav*

My happiest day

When I finished my life as a carer after nine years, my working life seemed to be at an end. I hadn't a clue what to do next. I went back doing volunteer work with the Community Development Project. Our administrator told me about a course on Community Development in Galway. She said I should apply. After a lot of persuasion I applied, did the interview and after a week, I got accepted.

The first year was one night a week with a few weekends away on a Community Development field study. The second year was two nights in UCG and a few weekends away doing field work. Finally, came my happiest day in November, when I got all dolled up and we had our graduation gowns and hats. I had to walk on to the stage and accept my diploma to the applause in the background. I had achieved something that I thought I couldn't ever achieve.

By Teresa

Sports

I go to table tennis practice on Wednesdays. I travel by bus. Derek comes with me and I play against him. I usually win!

I play soccer as well with a team in Ennis. I play for Clare in the Special Olympics team. Of the two, I prefer soccer. I like playing with a team because there are lots of people around.

Liverpool is my favourite team. They play at Anfield Stadium. Their colour is red. The captain wears an arm band. I was captain of my soccer team once. I wore the captain's armband. I liked being captain.

By Sean

The photograph

I am looking at a photograph. You cannot see it. I will describe it to you and maybe then you will see it.

It is a black and white photograph of a kitchen in rural Ireland. Three sùgán chairs sit around the kitchen table. The chairs are made of wood with a sùgán seat. The wood looks like it has been painted and they look like they would wobble a bit if you sat on them. There are cushions on the chairs and they look well worn. One of the chairs has a big overcoat hanging over the back of it. The table is set for tea. There is a tall glass sugar bowl in the middle of the table and a jug for the milk. There are about 3 plates and 3 mugs and some cutlery. The delph looks like it has the Willow Pattern design on it. There is a butter dish on the table alongside a bowl, which may have jam in it, and a block of shop bought cheese – it looks like Galtee cheese. There is a round loaf of soda bread on the table.

On the walls there are two pictures. They look quite impressive, both in glass cases. One has a statue of Our Lady in it and she seems to be swathed in silk. There is a very small light bulb in front of the glass case. The other has a statue of the Sacred Heart in it, likewise, swathed in silk, and the small light bulb.

I can see part of the range and there seems to be a large goose feather beside it. I suppose it is used for dusting. There is also a bucket with sods of turf in it. The floor looks cold and is made up of large slabs of dark stone. Finally, there is a half door and I can see the road and the sky outside. The day looks fine and there is a tree and a neatly trimmed hedge in the distance.

Can you see the picture now?

By Jonelle

A time I cheated

In elementary school I was a pretty good student and I didn't have problems with most items. For many teachers I was a good role model for my classmates. I was considered a geek, although at home I never studied. I like the Polish language, mathematics and geography, actually everything except history. My history teacher bored me, so I always had something better to do during her lesson. However, to be in her good books, I tried to seem very concerned.

And here begins my story.

One day, my beloved history teacher announced to all and sundry that I was nominated from among the other students to take part in the history contest on the Napoleonic wars. Outwardly I pretended I was happy but, in my mind, I knew that with my knowledge of history I would only bring disappointment.

Immediately after school I decided to act; there were preparation battles. First, I bought a few history summaries and I copied the passages about the Napoleonic wars in much smaller format. Then I spent many hours with the books in preparation for action.

The next morning I was exhausted and became very nervous, but I appeared proud with my pockets full of notes for cheating. I went to the facility where the contest was held. Many of my peers were waiting at the hall before it became a competition hall. They were talking in a strange, incomprehensible language. My rivals had real swagger with hair to one side and big glasses. For them, soccer or computer games did not count but only just thick, big, history books. It made me feel really scared and I realised that in order to match them, I had to count on my 'teaching aids'.

It was time for judgement. Someone opened the door and invited everyone into the hall. We sat in the previously drawn places. I sat in the fourth row in the second section from the right. In total, the place seemed to me not too bad for my plan with the 'pocket stuff'.

The countdown started: the operating time 4 hours and not a minute longer. I took the envelope with the questions in my hand and I

opened it. I read everything once, then again and I smiled to myself because it was the question which I had prepared in my pocket.

For the next 2 hours I only could write the draft just to pass the time and to deceive the jury. Then, I discreetly pulled my little 'help' from my pocket and started re-writing. The trick was childishly simple and extremely dangerous - my hands were perspiring and hurting. The judges looked at me furtively for a few moments, but none of them had the courage to approach knowing that here were all the young intellectual elite and one could feel offended by their suspicion.

It had been four hours; I gave my work calmly. I felt tremendous relief and joy that the scam had succeeded.

After about two weeks the results were announced. I was not, to my delight, in the top three which advanced to the next stage of the competition - the regional finals. Five prizes were also awarded which included my work. Everyone congratulated me. I became even more popular in my school. I was thanked officially and I enjoyed it all. However, I almost became the biggest failure in school due to success achieved by fraud.

But it remained only my secret - until today!

By Rafał

My quad bike

It's a lovely machine. The quad bike has four big wheels and a steel bar to steer with. There is one seat for the driver and a carrier at the back. It runs on petrol. My quad bike is yellow and black. I drive it at Mullagh track. I wear a helmet when I am driving. My quad bike is my pride and joy.

By Adrian

Food in Nigeria

In my country people eat pounded yam and in my region especially, powdered yam is the staple food. Here in Ireland pounded yam can be bought as a powder. When this is added to hot water it turns into solid food, a bit like mashed potatoes. We eat pounded yam with many different kinds of stews. There are several popular dishes e.g. spinach stew, okra stew, etc. Some of these dishes are very hot and spicy.

By Abby

FETAC

I have been working towards my FETAC level 2 certificate, Issues in the 21st Century, since September 2010. I get the bus to Ennis once a week for my class. I had many different things to do in this like reading, writing and listening and speaking. I had to tape myself and my tutor discussing how to follow instructions.

When I came in for my class in May, I was told that I had passed my FETAC level 2. I was delighted. I will be getting my certificate in September and this will be a great night out for me.

By Tony

Fanore

I used to live in Fanore. I could see the sea and fields from my house. We had cows there. I liked working with the cows and the calves. There are shops and a pub in the village.

It is quiet in Fanore in the winter time. I live in Lisdoonvarna now but I like Fanore the best.

By Susan

Trip to Waterford

My family and I went to Waterford for a long weekend on Friday 29th of April to visit my aunty and her family. We travelled in the campervan. My brother drove half of the way and my sister drove the rest of the way. She also drove all the way home.

My aunty was delighted to see us. I played games with my cousins on the television while my mammy and aunty went shopping.

Waterford is a big city and my aunty lives in a nice house. We had a lovely visit and I really enjoyed seeing my cousins.

By Mary

What BB thinks would make Ireland a better place

Two things would improve Ireland: a change of government and fine weather.

By BB

Back to education

As I did not have a most happy childhood when growing up I was sent to an industrial school, not because I was trouble, but because of family circumstances only.

The education was not as good as it is now. I had to leave the school at 16. I am now participating in a Back to Education course, which is quite enjoyable. The tutor is helpful.

I would recommend to young people and adults to avail of adult education if they left school early.

By John

My trip to Bunratty in the autumn

On Tuesday, I went to visit Bunratty and St. John's Castle in Limerick. The weather was nice. It was a lovely dry morning. A small group of us and a nurse went on a mini bus. The bus driver's name was Brendan.

The countryside looked lovely but lots of trees had lost their leaves and looked bare. When we arrived at Bunratty we parked in a big car park near to the castle. We walked all around the castle grounds and saw big old buildings, an old post office, old houses, sheds and outhouses.

I saw deer, donkeys, hens, cockerels, pigs, geese, ducks and two small ponies. There was a big henhouse with an egg fetcher with a long handle and two prongs on top lying beside the door. I saw old farm machinery such as hayfloats, a reaper and binder and a pony trap. We went into the old pub and the old post office.

We walked through the castle and went up long steps and saw huge bedrooms all lovely and dressed in the old fashioned way. I saw the large function room used as the banqueting hall with a huge fireplace. It had a large long oak table with large candle sticks on it. There were big chairs around the table.

We had our tea break there and enjoyed it.

We got back on the minibus and headed for Limerick. The roads were busy and I was glad when the driver found a parking place. We crossed the busy road to get to St. John's Castle. We toured the castle and enjoyed the view of Limerick city. I saw many houses, trees, tall buildings and the River Shannon. We got back on the bus and headed for home.

The driver dropped the passengers off in different places. The first stop was in Kilminihil and then on to Kilrush. I finally got home around 7.30 p.m. I was tired but delighted I had spent a very happy day with nice people and in such lovely places.

By Oliver

My boat, the Colla Queen

For years I wanted a boat. I always loved the sea. I did scuba diving for ten years when I was in my twenties. I lived in Hackney in London, so my wife, Helen, and I did a six monthly' training course in Tottenham pool. After we had got our certificates, we started proper diving in the sea at home and abroad. We dived in Spain and Cornwall. In Brighton, we dived around an old World War Two submarine. It was a war grave with dead men still inside with the entrances sealed up with concrete. We stayed diving for about six or seven years.

In 1997, we moved back to Kilrush and gave up diving. I had always wanted a boat. I spent a lot of time fishing off the Bridges of Ross. However, this was becoming dangerous because of overcrowding, so I decided to buy a boat so I could go sea fishing.

I heard by word of mouth about a boat which was for sale in Kilkee. The owner had bought a new and bigger boat and wanted to sell his original one. We agreed a fair price and he delivered it to my house.

It was a sixteen foot dory with a thirty h.p. engine. She was called the Colla Queen. I kept the name because it's unlucky to change it.

Four days later my friend, Kevin, and I took her out to sea from Kilrush marina. I was nervous at first but I soon got used to it. I had great confidence in Kevin because he is an expert on boats and he showed me the ropes. We went up and down the estuary and did a bit of fishing. We caught a few mackerel.

From then on my mates and I went out about once a week, usually on Saturday. We'd be out for the day. When we got back we would gut our catch, get the boat out of the water and head to the pub!

I got my boat in September 2007, towards the end of the season when the weather was changing. One Saturday, my two mates and I went out and headed out towards Ballybunion. We got halfway there and the wind blew up suddenly. The sky darkened and it began to rain. We were wearing lifejackets but we were all inexperienced sailors. We knew we couldn't go any further but we

couldn't turn around too sharply either as the waves would have capsized us. We had to keep sailing directly into the waves and turn the boat around very gradually. The waves were crashing over the bow of the boat. We had to keep bailing out water with a bucket while we got soaked to the skin! You might wonder why we didn't call the coastguard. Two of my other mates work with the coastguard and we would never have heard the end of it if we had!

I got good sailing all through the 2009 season then, suddenly, the gearbox seized up. We went into shallow water and smashed the gearbox on rocks. The back of the engine flew up and we had to use oars to paddle to shore. Because of the cost of repairing it, the boat was out of the water for the next two years. It has been sitting in my daughter's boyfriend's yard for all that time.

Last January, I began searching the Net for a second-hand gearbox. Eventually, I got one in London. Unfortunately, it has taken five weeks to receive it due to hold-ups in England. It has just arrived today. Hopefully, it will be running tomorrow. I'm looking forward to getting my boat back in the water this weekend.

By John

A lovely day

My niece made her Holy Communion on March 24th. She made it in Kilkishen. We ate at my brother's house afterwards. The meals were brought in from the Sherwood. We had a lovely day.

I got a new outfit. I wore a grey skirt and a black top. The best part of the day for me was the meal because all my cousins and other relatives were there.

By Ann

Another chance

I go to class every Thursday in the Family Resource Centre in Killaloe. I really enjoy coming to class. Our tutor is lovely so I look forward to it every week.

I never got a chance to learn when I was young. Now I am learning reading, spelling and history. I hope someday to work in an office and look forward to being able to study subjects in this area.

By Margaret

What Francie thinks would make Ireland a better place

We need a good government that creates jobs and helps the farmers.

By Francie

Keep the classes going

Every Thursday, I go to classes in the Family Resource Centre in Killaloe. I am doing English, history and driver theory. I am happy to continue as long as the classes go on.

By Patrick

Getting from A to B

My name is Nathan. I live in Corofin which is 8 miles from Ennis. I have to hitch in most days. Sometimes I get a lift from my friends or my mother. I don't like hitching on my own. I like to be with someone in case I got a lift with someone I don't know. I don't like hitching in the dark. It is so hard to get a lift. Even if I do get a lift and I don't know them, I don't really like chatting to them. That's why, when I am hitching with someone else, I will jump into the back seat of the car so I don't have to chat with the person. Sometimes it is funny getting a lift with the 'hippies'. I love getting lifts in cars that are very nice looking like the Mercedes Kompressor, but another day you could get a lift in an old wreck, which is not very good. It will take you all day to get home!

By Nathan

My first job in China

In China, I began to work in a very big factory of about 30,000 workers. The factory is in Dalian in North China. All my family worked in this factory. My husband worked there, too.

I passed an exam to get the job so I cherished that time. Then I was on probation for six months. I was lucky to have a very good trainer. After the six months I took an exam and I passed, so after that I could work independently.

I really liked the job because the working environment was very clean. I had to wear a long white coat, white gloves and a hat. The factory makes parts for cars and aircraft and my job was to check these parts.

I worked there for 20 years but the salary was very poor. My husband came to Ireland in 2001 and I came in 2004.

By Jun

April – my favourite month

My favourite month is April because it holds the promise of summer. The showers remind me how life still holds the element of surprise. April can change in an instant. It is often possible to experience all the seasons in the one day!

Lambs dance in the fields and little rabbits can often be seen playing in the shadows in the evenings. The days are long and there is time to plant summer bedding plants and potter outside. As a child, April meant gazing in shop windows at Easter eggs, giving up sweets for Lent and storing them in a glass jar until Easter Sunday.

Everything seems possible in April. The sunshine and showers are like life itself.

By Maureen

Travelling on Christmas Eve

Last winter I was going to travel to Paris to celebrate Christmas and New Year's Day.

On 24th December, the weather in Clare was very bad. It was very foggy. You couldn't see anything in front of you. I arrived at Shannon Airport at 4 p.m. My flight was at 5.30 p.m. Many flights were cancelled. Luckily, mine wasn't but it was delayed. Finally, we left Shannon at 8.30 p.m. and arrived in Paris at 10 p.m.

When I went to collect my suitcase I couldn't see it. They told us that the luggage was still in Shannon so some passengers started complaining. After that, they told us to wait for two hours. We had to fill in a form with our address and description of the luggage.

I got my suitcase at 11 p.m. so I couldn't celebrate Christmas Eve. I was very disappointed. I hope this year will be better.

By Mamisa

The Sunday Game

The Sunday Game is a programme on television. I watch it on Sunday afternoons during the summer. Michael Lyster, Pat Spillane and Marty Morrissey are on the programme and they talk about matches and training.

They show matches from Croke Park. I watch Clare and Tipperary matches. I like to listen to the chat from the panel. Pat Spillane talks too much but Ger Loughnane is good. He knows a lot about hurling.

I went to Croke Park once with my father. Clare was playing. I enjoyed it.

By Michael

How I got my driving licence

The first thing I had to do was apply for my provisional licence. I sent the application form to the driving test centre in Ennis. After about six months I got a call for my driver theory test. I sat the test on a Tuesday and was delighted when I passed first time. I then received my provisional driving licence a few days later.

I had to wait another six months before I could apply for my driving test and get my full licence. During this time, I was practising my driving and I took some driving lessons.

The day I took the test was a Friday. I was called for 8.30 in the morning. I was worried about doing the test because I was not driving my own car. I was driving my brother's. The test day was a week before Christmas. The morning was very dark and my test was delayed until it got bright. My driving test lasted 20 minutes. When I returned to the test centre I got the good news that I had passed. I got my full driving licence later that day.

By Linda

A memorable day out

My first real bicycle waited impatiently against the wall. I don't remember what I had for breakfast. I remember rolling up a blue rain coat and securing it on the carrier.

My friend was dancing around her bike as I braked suddenly in front of her house. Her mother's advice drifted behind us as we rolled away down the hill. "Where are we going?" Sarah gasped. It was then we both realised we had choices and our first taste of freedom. The sun shone on the dusty winding road and the hawthorn blossoms seemed to sweeten the breeze on our faces. We laughed at the silly farmyard dogs who tried to chase us.

An old farmhouse with trees and bluebells seemed to call us in. It seemed deserted until an old man appeared out of the shadows. He seemed bent like the twisted hawthorns that grew behind the crumbling stone walls. His eyes seemed to blink a lot and little tufts of hair, like cotton wool, covered the sides of his head.

It was Sarah who spotted the white pony in a nearby field. "Is that your pony?" she enquired hopefully. "Could we have a spin on it?" The old man seemed to waver, then disappeared into a shed. He appeared with a bucket and a rope. The pony trotted to the bucket. We watched in excitement as he attached the rope to the head-collar.

The pony seemed more surprised than we were. The old man helped each of us in turn to settle on her white silky back. Round and round we went as the summer ditches pulled us into green circles of delight. We grasped her strong mane and tried to grip her round belly with our ankles.

Afterwards, we sat on the low stone wall and the old man brought us out flat lemonade in dusty glasses. He smoked a pipe and gazed into the distance. We promised to return another day and cycled home giggling and marvelling at the distance we had travelled. It was almost dusk when we reached home, tired and happy after our adventure. We never went back to the old farm house and we never met the old man again.

A world lay waiting to be discovered by two ten year old girls with new bicycles.

By Maureen

Mr. ?

When we started living in Ireland our boys had to go to school, one to the national and the other two to the secondary. The two in secondary school found one teacher a bit strange or funny. I have to tell you that I had, myself, only a little bit of English. I didn't know exactly what they were saying about him so I just told them to be respectful of their teachers.

One morning I went to our small shop in the village to get my groceries. Who came into the shop but that same teacher? As politely as I could, I said, "Good morning Mr. Brassneck". The shopkeeper dropped my bag of sugar and I noticed all the other customers went very quiet. The teacher looked at me, paid for his paper and left the shop without saying a word. The shopkeeper burst out laughing and so did everyone else in the shop.

When the boys came home from school I told them that I met the teacher in the shop and that he had indeed acted strange. They went red and asked me, "What did you say to him?" "Just, good morning Mr. Brassneck," I told them. "Oh my God," they went. "That is his nickname. How could you do that? We cannot go back to school again." I now had a fair idea what "brassneck" meant. "Of course you go back to school," I told them. "And as well as dealing with Mr. Brassneck you will also be dealing with me for some time."

By Lení

Winter turning to spring

Winter visits us from November through January
The ice and the wind make us wary
Too cold to go out
We wish it was warmer without a doubt
And that is the winter time story

The spring comes from February through April
Just in time because of winter we've had our fill
Beautiful daffodils and tulips
And warmer weather through the air slips
And that is the spring time story

Summer time comes from May through July
Oh how those months fly
It is my favourite time of the year
Because in June my birthday is near
And that is the summer time story

Then comes fall from August through October
The leaves fall and the evenings get darker
It is a pretty time of the year because the leaves turn colours
However it is also a sign that winter is drawing nearer
And that is the fall time story

Winter, spring, summer, fall
I love all the seasons of the year
Each season has a special reason
To be what God has sent us all

By Mary

School days

My name is Nicholas. I come from Ghana. When I was in primary school, I had a sister in the same class. We went to school together every day. One day our teacher gave us class work and some students, including my sister, did not get it correct so the teacher said he was going to beat them.

My sister started to cry and I was very sad because she was going to get ten lashes so I went straight to the teacher and said, "Please, I want to share the punishment with my sister because I feel bad for her." The teacher was very surprised at my request so he took both of us to all the classrooms to let other teachers know what happened.

Some of the teachers were moved by my feelings so the head teacher decided that we would not be punished. And our teacher told me that I should help my sister with her homework all the time and make sure that she did it well.

By Nicholas

Beautiful day at the beach

When the wind blows the birds stop singing.
The sea is green, the waves are a foot high.
The beach is deserted, there is only myself and my dog Sam.

We are enjoying the beautiful day.
The sky is blue and there are no clouds to be seen.

Where are all the people?
They must be stuck in traffic or at school doing exams.
They are missing a beautiful day at the beach.

By Rita

Discrimination

Discrimination happens when people do not get their rights or when they are not welcomed into the community. People with psychiatric problems, learning disabilities and old people are sometimes discriminated against in Ireland. People may not get their rights because there is a lack of funding from the government. For example, people with medical cards are not always able to get free dental treatment.

People with mental illnesses are discriminated against when they do not have enough services. Things are being taken away from them. Things are being taken away from people with learning disabilities too. Their social welfare has been cut for the last two years. Old people, living on their own, are sometimes discriminated against because their families are not around. They have no one to talk to.

If you are being discriminated against, you can talk to a counsellor who can help you to know your rights. An advocacy course is also very good to find out your rights. I have done one and now I can stand up for my rights and no one has to stand up for me. I can do it myself.

By Richard

Working at the golf club

My name is David. I work at the golf club in Kilrush. I started working there in 2009. I work 4 days a week.

I help the lads with the machines. There is a digger, a digger for sand, a spreader, lawn mowers and a strimmer. It is important to keep the grass cut on the course. I like working at the golf club.

By David

My mother

It is with mixed emotions of sadness and joy that I write this article about the life of my mother, Margaret, and her struggle with lung cancer.

My mother meant the world to me in so many ways. She was always very good to me and my four sisters as we grew up in the village of O'Callaghan's Mills in Co. Clare. Our father, Chris, passed away when I was only five and a half years old. This meant that my mother had a very hard life trying to rear the young ones.

My mother loved to smoke up to 60 cigarettes per day. She tried to stop smoking a few times but she could not succeed in stopping smoking. She developed a very bad cough from all this smoking and before Christmas 2009 she was diagnosed with lung cancer and she had other complications as well. Her doctor, Mr Hughes from Sixmilebridge, sent her to the Regional Hospital for further tests. These tests showed lung cancer too.

In 2010, we found out that Mum had not very long to live in this life and she was going in and out of Milford Hospice on the Dublin Road in Limerick. All the family and neighbours rallied around Mum to make her final months alive as easy, happy and comfortable as we possibly could. We all visited her many times while she was ill.

On the 3rd of August 2010, Mum celebrated her 63rd birthday in Milford Hospice with all the family. A few weeks later she went into a deep coma. The nurses and doctors were very nice to all the family too. On Sunday 22nd of August 2010, Mum got her eternal reward in heaven.

By James

What P.J. thinks would make Ireland a better place

We need to help the emigrants return and create more jobs. We also need to build more hospitals.

By P.J.

Family life in west Clare

We are a family from Quilty. I grew up in Quilty with my two brothers and three sisters. We moved there when I was four years of age.

I met my wife in Miltown Malbay fifteen years ago and we got married five years later. We moved into our new house just thirteen doors up from my home place. That was the start of my own life. We're in that house for the last ten years. We have three children, two girls, Sarah and Amy and a boy, Gavin.

Sarah and Amy are going to national school. Gavin is going to pre-school. Sarah is into sport like football, basketball, swimming and a bit of dancing. Amy is the mad one! She likes to dance, torment people, watch TV and play with dolls and Gavin. Gavin is just a typical boy. He is into everything. When I work at home so does Gavin. He hangs around with me and keeps me entertained with his questions. When I give him the day off, he likes to play with his tractors and his friends.

I do a lot of different kinds of work. I am a builder, plasterer, local coal man and I also lay patios and kerbs. When that work is not there I go to the strand. A family man has to do any kind of work he can to provide for his family. My wife works in Kilrush. She gets up at about 7.30 a.m. to get the girls ready for school. She goes to work at about 8.30 a.m. and is home at about 6.10 p.m. She is a great wife and mother and we are lucky to have her.

A day out for our family is a day shopping in Ennis. We like to go to matches or just go for dinner and a drive. We do this most Sundays. Myself and Pamela like to go for dinner and a few drinks on a night out.

I like swimming, watching football matches and going fishing. I have my own boat that I use in the summer for pleasure fishing and getting time to myself. Sometimes, I bring family and friends out fishing or for a spin in the boat.

This is some of my life story and I hope there will be many more years to write about as I have a very young family yet. Thanks for reading.

By Alan

My parents

The other day Margaret brought in a poem to the class called *Looking Back to the Past*. It got me thinking, so I started looking back myself.

My parents got married in 1949. At that time there weren't many cars around, so they went to the chapel on the bike. After the wedding they went to my grandmother's house for the breakfast, with their witnesses.

There were fifteen children in our family, and times were hard then for everybody. I remember my mother and father rearing a pig so as to have meat for us, but when the pig was killed we, the older ones, would not eat the meat as we knew it was our pet. My poor mother was addled from us.

My father worked as a pipe layer for P.J. Wallis, and got paid two shillings and six pence a week. Every Sunday after Mass he would buy us sweets. He cycled eighteen miles to work every day. My father died on the 4th of March 1975 from a brain tumour. My mother had nine children under the age of fourteen and, at that time, social services wanted to put the younger ones into foster care, but my mother said no, she would manage on her own.

She had to be a mother and a father to her young family. She reared us all as best she could under the circumstances. She missed my father and told us a lot about his short life. My mother, sadly, passed away on the 6th of June 2006. I miss her every day. She was a fantastic mother.

By Joe

A folk tale from Congo

I am from Democratic Republic of Congo. This is a story I heard my grandmother tell us when we were children. It is called *Why the Cat Kills Rats*.

Gongo Lutete was the King of Batetela for many years. He had a very faithful cat as a housekeeper and a rat who was his houseboy. The king was an obstinate, headstrong man but was very fond of the cat who had been in his store for many years. The rat, who was very poor, fell in love with one of the king's servant girls, but was unable to give her any presents, as he had no money. At last he thought of the king's store, so in the night-time, being quite small, he had little difficulty (having made a hole in the roof) in getting into the store. He then stole corn and native pears and presented them to his sweetheart.

At the end of the month, when the cat had to render her account of the things in the store to the king, it was found that a lot of corn and native pears were missing. The king was very angry at this and asked the cat for an explanation. But the cat could not account for the loss until one of her friends told her that the rat had been stealing the corn and giving it to the girl.

When the cat told the king, he called the girl before him and had her beaten. The rat he handed over to the cat to deal with, and dismissed them both from his service. The cat was so angry at this that she killed and ate the rat, and ever since that time, whenever a cat sees a rat, she kills and eats it.

By Dorcas

What John thinks would make Ireland a better place

The banks should give loans and we should stop the banks imposing charges.

By John

The garden

My garden is an allotment. A few people work in it. We dig the garden and grow things. I was in a photograph in *The Clare People*. The photograph was taken at the Farmers' Market in Ennistymon.

We bought a tunnel and Eddie, Michel, Jaime and myself put the tunnel together. It wasn't hard work. In the tunnel lots of things can grow. We grow pumpkins for Halloween and cabbage, but we grow onions outside as they go bad with the heat in the tunnel. We grow tomatoes and peppers too.

We sell vegetables at the Farmers' Market in Ennistymon. The Farmers' Market is on every Saturday in spring and summer. It is busy after 12 o'clock.

I like working in the garden because I like working outside in the fresh air.

By Seamus

The gift of reading

Last January, I decided to start reading a book from start to finish. I had never completed a book before and this was going to be a big challenge for me. In the beginning, I found it hard. I was anxious and nervous all the time but as time went by I became more confident and relaxed and I started to enjoy the book.

After a few weeks, I decided that I was no longer afraid to pick up the book on my own. This was really the beginning for me. I began to pick up the newspaper while shopping and would really enjoy reading it. I learned that a person should never give up on their dreams and that practice makes perfect. I have reached my goal and I am so proud of myself. The first book I have completely read was by Roddy Doyle. It was called *Not Just for Christmas*.

By John

When everything went wrong

It was almost 6 years ago. I worked in a shop at the time. The shop was 20 miles from my home town so I went there by bus. Every day I woke up at 4.00 a.m. but not that day – I overslept! While I was getting ready, the bus drove away without me. I went to the bus stop and waited for another. The weather wasn't nice. It was December, minus 20 degrees outside. Due to the biting cold, the next bus broke down because the engine wouldn't start. Brilliant! I was sleepy, frozen and late. When at last I arrived at work my boss wasn't happy. I had a horrible work day. While I was at work, the central heating stopped working in the shop. When I eventually got back home I was tired but happy because it was warm inside. I turned on the TV and lay down on the sofa. I was almost asleep when I remembered about my supper which was burnt on the cooker!

By Kinga

I wish I was the waves

I would like to be
free like the bird
flying in the blue sky.

I feel in my own world
when the waves are lashing in and out towards me –
hearing the sound of the ocean.

It sounds like the waves never stop.
We have to stop and think of all
we have to do in everyday life,
but the waves don't have to stop and think.

I wish I was the waves.

By Josephine

Guadeloupe

I was born in a small town in Guadeloupe. I'm the last of a family of six children. My father worked in a sugar cane factory as a mechanic. After work he cared for the animals, cows and pigs. Together with my mother, he grew vegetables. My mother was a housewife and did sewing as well and also sold vegetables in the market on Sundays. One of my brothers is a policeman. My three sisters and one brother live in France. I lived in France for seven years and came to Ireland in 2001. I married in 2002 and live with my husband and two boys in Ennis.

Guadeloupe is located south of the Tropic of Cancer, 7,000 km from Europe. It is divided into two separate islands resembling the outstretched wings of a butterfly. It was discovered on the 8th of November 1493 by Columbus. The first French settlers landed in the 17th century. Since 1871, the island has been represented in the French parliament.

Guadeloupe has a total area of 1,709sq. km. The population is about 508,000. The people are from multiracial backgrounds; South American, European, African and Asian. The countryside is mountainous and wet. The tropical flora is very rich. Bananas and pineapples grow well. There are many small islands and the mainland has many sandy beaches. Guadeloupe is the ideal place for a holiday for Irish people.

By Angele

What Dympna thinks would make Ireland a better place

I would look after the poor instead of the rich. I would change the government and bring in honest ministers. I would like to see better health and education for the poor.

By Dympna

Dreams

For some people money is the most important thing. As far as I am concerned, my dream is for me to be happy. In the future I would like to work as a dietician. But a career is not the most important thing for me. What really counts for me, in my private life, are a good husband and beloved children. I care deeply about a good atmosphere in my home. As in some way I am an idealist, I would like to change the world. My great dream is to help other people, especially children.

Another dream of mine is to go and visit Japan and China. I am very keen on the martial arts and that is why I am so interested in the culture of Asia. I wish I could go and see the countries where it all began. I wonder how common the martial arts are in those countries. But I am not only interested in kung-fu. I like Japanese and Chinese cuisine too. I wish I could try what sushi tastes like in its country. I think it must taste much better than in Poland or Ireland. I am also very interested in big Asian cities. I think they are overwhelming and I wish I could see them. It is amazing that their cities are so big and colourful. I would like to see their temples and monuments. There is so much to be seen in Asia. I think this is the most interesting part of the world. I wish I could go there with my husband and kids.

However, my biggest dream is to buy a house and if it happens my dreams will come true and I'll be extremely happy.

In our life everything is possible and I hope I will realise my biggest dreams.

By Anna

What Niall thinks would make Ireland a better place

Ireland needs to improve its health service. We have good doctors and nurses, but we need more doctors.

By Niall

My boyfriend

I met Shane last year in the Dulick Centre. He has black hair and blue eyes. We are the same age, which is good. Shane lives in Kilkee with his mum and dad. I like talking to him every day on the phone and at the centre. He is easy to talk to and he makes me laugh, which I like. We meet sometimes in Ennis and we go bowling, swimming or to the cinema. We enjoy going to the cinema a lot. I really love him so much.

By Jení

Ups and downs of rearing children

It's hard enough looking after oneself but the added responsibility of looking after children can be challenging but can also be rewarding. In this essay I will try to discuss what is important to bring up mentally and physically healthy children.

I believe that love and consistency are very important in a child's life. Children learn from their parents. The most important part of a child's life is the love you give them and also the encouragement. You should always praise a child when they have done well at home or school. Accept everything about a child such as their personality, intelligence, looks and perhaps disability. Be there for them no matter what happens. It is important that you are available to your children when they need to talk about anything.

Structure in a child's life which includes boundaries, discipline and consistency are vital. As well as praise, I find the use of star charts very rewarding. It gives them confidence, a sense of achievement and improves their self-esteem. Positive discipline (consistent ground rules which give children a safe structure) as opposed to negative discipline (roaring, name-calling, beating and grounding) is vital. When children test boundaries you have to be consistent and this consistency makes them feel secure and loved. A parent should practise what they say themselves and lead by example.

Play is essential to development because it contributes to the thinking ability, imagination, physical, social and emotional well-being of children and youth. Play also offers an ideal opportunity for parents to engage fully with their children. Despite the benefits derived from play for both children and parents, time for free play has been reduced for some children. Factors that have reduced play include a hurried lifestyle, changes in family structure, and increased attention to education and enrichment activities at the expense of child-centred play.

As a mother and father it's important to talk with your children on a daily basis. Good communication involves listening to children, being patient and honest and taking the time to be available to them. Sometimes, it is not possible to be totally honest as we tend to protect them from the harsh realities of life. Your children should feel free to come to you with any problem no matter how big it is.

Parents have to lead by example. It's not what you say, it's what you do that matters.

By Claire

Computers

I always wanted to use a computer, so I decided to do a course last September at the Clare Adult Education Centre. I started the course and was amazed at the amount of information that I have learned.

I am able to send emails and communicate with friends through Facebook and watch programmes and videos on YouTube.

When I joined Boot-camp Fitness, I realised that most of the people there were already on Facebook. That's when I decided I needed to purchase a computer to educate myself on the use of the Internet.

This course has improved my confidence and skills. Thanks to the Clare Adult Education Service.

By Senan

A visit to the Clare Museum

On Wednesday March 16th we met our tutor in the Temple Gate car park and we went to the Clare Museum. The building was originally a school and a chapel run by the Sisters of Mercy who came to Ennis in 1854.

The museum has 5 themes, Earth, Power, Faith, Water and Energy. I saw the farming tools that came from the Stone Age as well as a lot of jewellery made from bone and bronze that is from the Bronze Age.

There is a well down in the ground that dates from when the school was built. The Sisters of Mercy used the well and it was discovered when the building was being renovated to house the museum. The well is covered with strong glass.

The most powerful people in Clare back then were the O'Briens who descended from Brian Boru. He was High King of Munster and owned most of the land. The O'Briens ruled in Clare for centuries. They founded Clare Abbey and the friary.

One item I found very interesting was a large rosary beads. I learned that it was found in Miltown Malbay by a farmer about 40 years ago. The story is that a friar left it in a house when he was fleeing from soldiers about 300 years ago. The woman of the house buried it in the ground before the soldiers came and all these years later it was found when the farmer was ploughing the land.

I learned a lot about the history of Clare during this visit.

By Helen

The story of the Band Hall

My grandfather, Tommy Collins, was a barber in Main Street Killaloe. He was very musical and helped to organise events in the ex-soldiers' hut. The hut was down between the waters near the Canal Store. There was a lot of trouble at the time of this story. One evening at a dance in the hut, a British soldier was shot dead by a sniper from the Tipp. side of the water. There was a terrible hullabaloo but the sniper was never caught.

The hut at that time was used for dancing, as a place to practise for the Pipe and Drum band and for concerts. On the 3rd December 1931, a very cold day, a very sad drowning down between the two waters occurred. Six young boys from Killaloe went to cross the timber bridge from Killaloe. It was rotten and five boys were drowned. One boy escaped. He held on to a branch and screamed and was saved. Outside the Catholic Church in Killaloe there is a memorial stone. This is a copy of it.

Pray for the souls
of
Patrick Flynn aged 12 years
Thomas Kiely aged 12 years
Michael Kiely aged 9 years
Michael Fitzpatrick aged 10 years
John Fitzpatrick aged 8 years

Who were accidentally drowned in the Canal at Killaloe
on
the 3rd of December 1931

Sweet Jesus give them eternal rest.

The boy who was rescued was Jimmy Keneally. He lived the rest of his life in Killaloe. He worked in the Benson Box factory. He married a local girl and had two children. The bodies of the five boys were laid out in the soldiers' hut. It must have been a very hard time. Soon afterwards, the hut was burned down.

My grandfather and other members of the committee went over to Boston to collect money for a new hall. They were successful and

when they came home they built a hall known as the Band Hall. It is the building now known as Harry Branns.

The Pipe and Drum band continued to practise and give concerts. There were also dances held there. I remember peeping through the window to watch the people dancing. That would have been about 1953.

The Band Hall was bought by the Crowe family from Main Street, Killaloe and used as a weaving factory. It employed about 25 people at the time. The factory moved to Convent Hill and the hall was empty for years until it was bought by Harry Brann and used as auction rooms.

By Pauline

My time with Clare Youth Service

My time in Clare Youth Service (CYS) is something that I found to be of tremendous help to me. Looking back at my educational background since I first came to Ireland, I have experienced a lot of progress in my education based in CYS but also in my life in Ennis.

Firstly, my time in CYS has been very happy because I have gained the opportunity to visit a lot of places. Dromoland Castle was my favourite and it was my first time there. We went as a group. When we arrived we met the manager who showed us around the building. It was very nice with modern-day comforts at one of Europe's most desired destinations. Their commitment is to provide the highest level of comfort and service on entering the tranquil world of the hotel. The worries of the world recede under the gentle care of the friendly accommodation staff.

I have really enjoyed my time with CYS, which can never be forgotten, and I will always remember all the beautiful places I visited and I have also built up my confidence and communication skills with the public. Thank you CYS!

By Faith

Car maintenance

I went to a class on car maintenance last year. The class was a group of six people. Joe was the teacher of the class who showed us a lot about cars. The car was above in the car park at the Teagasc building.

Joe took us outside to look at the car. The first thing he did was show us how to open the bonnet. Joe pointed out the different parts of the engine. He showed us the battery and the connections. He explained how to take out the battery and put it back in. We looked at the oil dip stick and how to check the oil and how to change the oil in the car. The radiator is at the front and has water for cooling the engine. We found out where the water goes into the filter for washing the wind screen. We learned how to change the wiper blades because the old wiper blades could scratch the windscreen. If you had a puncture you would have to change the tyre. The jack and the spare tyre are in the boot. We learned how to loosen the nuts and lift up the car to take off the old wheel.

Joe was a good teacher and we learned a lot from him. Everyone enjoyed the class and we got on well with each other. I would be able to do a bit of car maintenance on my own, after Joe's interesting class.

By Kieran

My school days

I come from Burundi in West Africa, from a family with two children. My mother died when I was three years old. I started school when I was eight years old. I was a good student and I loved school. Then, when I was about eleven, a new government came to power and the school fees were increased. My father didn't have enough money to pay the fees so that meant I had to finish school. I joined my father working on the farm but I was always dreaming about going back to school. Now, I thank God every day for His grace that I am back in school again.

By Kenny

Secret love - a good gravy

When the roast beef has been taken out of the roasting tin, stir in a good heaped spoonful of flour, scrape and scratch the sizzling mixture, getting all those tasty, savoury, salty burnt bits into the hopping hissing rue. Gradually splash in the vegetable water, just a tad at a time while stirring fast and furiously. As the gravy thickens, add more of the veggie water until you arrive at the desired consistency. Some like it thick, some like it thin. Personally I like it any way, just as long as there is plenty of it.

I remember watching a cook called Brenda in a home for naughty boys and girls doing this every Sunday. At school everybody claimed to hate school dinner.

Say what you will
School dinners make you ill
Davy Crockett died of Shepherd's Pie
All school din dins
Come from pig bins
Out of town.

That's what we all sang. Secretly, I loved the dinners. I loved everything about them. The soggy greens, the lumpy mash and whatever meat came with it. All I needed to reach heaven for an hour a day was a school dinner with lashings and lashings of gravy.

By Janet

Libya

I am from Libya. I like my country but it is in a difficult situation now. My husband travelled to Libya last month. It was the first time in 12 years, so he was very happy to see his family and friends again. He visited many places such as the prison he was in for eight years, from 1981 to 1989. I hope my country becomes a free and safe place for all its people.

By Hind

My cousin's confirmation

My cousin, Conor, made his confirmation on the 4th March last in Mayo. Conor is my youngest cousin and he is 12 years old. He will be going to secondary school next year.

We left home at 9 o'clock and arrived at my uncle's house in Mayo at half past 10. We had breakfast there and my mother took photos of my cousin and myself. The house was very nicely decorated for the party. We talked to our relatives for a while and then it was time to go to the church.

It was a nice bright sunny day and a little cold. I wore my new suit and a shirt and tie and my new shoes. The Mass was at 12 o'clock and when we arrived at the church it was packed out. There were three schools taking part. The bishop, whose name is Michael Neary, said Mass with the local priest. He said that no cameras or mobile phones were allowed in the church and photos were to be taken after Mass.

There was lovely music and singing in the church and Conor brought up a candle at the start of Mass. My uncle, Jimmy, who lives in England, stood for my cousin.

When Mass was over we took photos and Conor had his photo taken with the bishop. Before we left we went to visit my uncle's grave. Then we went back to the house. There were lots of people there. Conor got lots of cards and gifts and there was a bouncy castle.

We had soup and sandwiches and tea and lots of different desserts. At 6 o'clock we left to go home. It was a long day but I enjoyed it.

By Kieran

A very long day

My name is Mark. My dad and I are local fishermen. In summer we start fishing at 4 a.m. so that means I have to get up at a quarter to four. I don't get a chance to get a breakfast. I just get a cup of tea.

We get into our oil suits and start dragging our nets out the bay. We put our nets about 3 miles across and three back. We then go set our pots and leave them for three days at a time. When we have them set, we haul our nets. We probably don't stop fishing until about one o'clock, then go back to the pier and weigh the stock. Then we take them up to Galway to sell them and might not make much. It all depends on the price. We come back from Galway and redo the nets for the following morning and oil the haulers. It would probably be about half seven before I would even get something to eat. At that stage, I would just be fit for bed. Now that's a very long day!

By Mark

My girlfriend

I met Jeni last year in the Dulick Centre. She has nice long blonde hair and lovely blue eyes. We are about the same age, which is good. Jeni lived in England with her mum and brother, Leon. They came to live in Flagmount, Co. Clare about 5 years ago. I like talking to her every day on the phone and at the centre. She is easy to talk to and she laughs a lot, which I like. We meet sometimes on Saturday in Ennis. We go bowling, swimming or to the cinema. We enjoy going to the cinema a lot. I really love her so much.

By Shane

Japan

I am living in Lahinch for the past 2 years. We moved here from Nishinomiya, Japan. Lahinch is very scenic and has very rural countryside.

Japan is one of the most densely populated countries in the world. Most people live in apartment blocks. Urban Japan is a huge concrete jungle. But 80% of Japan is mountainous so there are many beautiful scenic rural landscapes also. Japan is made up of 5 main islands. Hokkaido, Honsyu, Shikoku, Kyusyu and Okinawa. Hokkaido and Northern Honsyu are very cold regions and spend many months under snow. Okinawa is a tropical island in the very south. Japan is over 2,000 km long. September is typhoon season and Okinawa always gets hit by typhoons. Japan is located on what is known as the 'Pacific ring of fire' so it is prone to many earthquakes and natural disasters. For this reason we build many earthquake-proof buildings, flood-drainage channels and embankments. We also continuously practise emergency drill procedures in our schools, colleges and work places.

In March, huge earthquakes hit the north of Honsyu and many people lost their lives with vast amounts of property destroyed. I pray that those who died may rest in peace and that those who suffered tragic losses may quickly rebuild their lives. Japan is very grateful for all the sympathy and charity from the rest of the world in these difficult times. Japanese people have already started to try and rebuild their lives in preparation for the next disaster. But Japan will never surrender.

By Yayoí

My worst day ever

Five years ago I decided to leave Germany and go travelling. India was the place I chose. It was very difficult to leave friends and family behind. Sitting in the aeroplane I got very upset because I missed them already. I was excited but scared at the same time. Getting to know a new culture and being able to manage everything by myself was a big adventure.

After nine hours flying I arrived exhausted in Bombay airport. It was very hot and the humidity was incredibly high. I could hardly breathe. The noise, the dirt and the amount of people there scared me. It took all my courage to leave the area and get a taxi. I asked the taxi driver if he would bring me to a tourist area so I could at least talk to people about my feelings and fears. He drove for ages and I was just sitting there staring out the window. I've never seen anything like it before. There were slums everywhere, sick people, poor people, rats, dirt and the most disgusting stench. It was shocking. I had seen enough. I told the taxi driver to bring me back to the airport, where I felt safe.

Back at the airport I found a quiet corner and I cried for hours. I don't actually know how long I was sitting there. I've never felt so lonely in my whole life. Lack of sleep and hours of crying was tiring and I closed my eyes. After waking up I decided to leave that town as soon as possible. Hours later I found myself sitting on the train to Goa and thinking, it can only get better!

By Stephanie

Going back

I am from Killaloe and left school at an early age. Now, I go to class every Thursday morning to get to know other people and to learn reading and writing. I can learn lots more now, like spelling and pronouncing different words.

The class takes place in the Family Resource Centre. Other classes go on in the Centre and we meet other groups for coffee and chats.

By Teresa

White mare of Mabon

Divine Mare, born of mare and sire.
Come to the wild woods where I wait
With sapphire and topaz pendants,
And garlands of the sweetest rose
To drape across your flowing mane.
Run with me down un-trodden paths,
Where wispy strands of swirling mist
Cloak the changing autumn forest
Of lichen and ivy shrouded trees.

Let our endless hoof-beats echo
Through the evening honeysuckle
And deep thickets of fading ferns.
In the vast realm of the Great Stag,
Where the howling winter wolves sing
To the ancient stream's sacred song.

Come back to the sleeping stables,
Where each season's endless wheel spins
Form the first damp staggering steps
Of the long expectant winter.
Please join us as we celebrate
Each success and new beginning,
And grant us your boundless blessings
As the wheel turns into the twilight.

Guide me as I traverse new paths,
And find the distant Other-World
Where poets and wanderers soar
In the gossamer veil of dreams.
Bring your keys to the underworld,
To give flight to the swift passage
Of the souls who have gone before.
Prepare us for the coming dark.

By Jessica

My sister's wedding

For months I looked forward to my sister's wedding. I had been saving my money to buy a new outfit. I bought a lovely dress and high heeled shoes.

At last the big day arrived, Thursday April 28th. Carol was very nervous that morning as she got ready. She looked beautiful in her white dress and veil. The wedding ceremony took place in the cathedral. My nieces, Amanda and Catelyn, were flower girls and my nephew, Alan, was a page boy. He looked so cute dressed in a little black suit.

After the ceremony we took lots of photographs in the grounds. The bride and groom were very happy. The reception was in the Woodstock Hotel. More photos were taken there before we sat down to the meal. The band played later but it was when the disco started that everyone danced.

It was nearly morning when I went to bed, tired but happy after a very enjoyable day.

By Sylvia

St. Patrick's Day parade

I was in the St. Patrick's Day parade. I was dressed up. I like getting dressed up. I was walking with the children from the crèche in Miltown Malbay. The children are small. They are two or three years old. I was holding a banner and singing songs with the children. They all wore something green for St. Patrick's Day.

I work at the crèche on Thursdays. I put out the food for the children. I play games with them and do puzzles.

By Máiread

Bad day

It was going to be a good day. I was meeting my friend to go fishing. We planned to start around 3.00 p.m. so I was preparing from early morning. Just before 2.00 p.m. my friend called and told me he couldn't go with me. After a little thought I decided to go alone. I left home at 3.00 p.m. and drove for hours to get to my destination. Unfortunately, I had to wait another 3 hours because of the low tide before I started fishing. At last, shortly after 8.00 p.m., I was able to start fishing. I caught nothing for 2 hours. The first bite was at about 10.00 p.m. and I landed a small flounder. Shortly afterwards, I caught a sea bass. For another few minutes nothing happened, so I decided to take a short walk along the pier. When I got to the end of the pier I heard the bell on the top of the rod ringing, which meant a fish was on it. I started running back and mid-way, I stumbled over a mooring line, fell and broke my wrist. The treatment lasted for 6 months and the pain persisted for 12 months. I can still feel the pain now after 2 years!

By Pawel

Story about a husband and wife

One day a man woke up in the morning and called his wife and told her, "Next Sunday we have special guests. I want you to prepare a nice meal for them." She asked him how many people were coming and he said about six. The day before the dinner she asked her husband for money but he refused to give it to her. She kept quiet.

Sunday morning he didn't give her anything either. He went out and later he called his wife and asked, "Is the food ready?" She said "Yes."

The husband and guests arrived for dinner. The table was set up nicely. In the middle of the table there was a big dish with a lid on. When her husband lifted the lid he found stones on the plate. He was shocked and asked his wife, "What is this?" She said, "It is the food I could buy with the money you gave me."

By Comfort

School dinners to packed lunches

I was 11 when we moved from Belfast. I was used to lots of noise, big lights and most of all a big school with a huge dinner hall where we all sat for our hot meals every day; very spoiled we were!

My God! What a difference in Ballycar Primary School. Myself and my three brothers were in this tiny school with no dinner hall, only a bike shed. I became the dinner lady. Every day I had a box of sandwiches, a packet of biscuits and a bottle of juice with four plastic cups. I hated it. At lunchtime someone, usually my brother Christy, rang the school bell. I would be sitting waiting in the shed and soon my three brothers would come running towards me starving, pulling and dragging at everything. Now, to think back, it must have been hilarious to see us. I'll never forget that school. I had that every day for a year until we moved to Ennis. Then I made sure Mam gave them their own lunches.

That's a memory I'll always have. I tell it to everyone!

By K. Ann

Independence

I gave a presentation in January at the Temple Gate. It was on independent living. I spoke about my life. I said that two years ago I would not have had my own place to live in.

You can do what you want to do when you are independent. You have freedom. You learn about keeping time and being on time for work.

I was not nervous when I spoke at the Temple Gate. I felt great.

By Nuala

Sugar Loaf Mountain

When I was about 9 or 10 years old, I had a friend called Mary. I used to go out to her house every day after school. We'd have some lunch and we'd call the dogs, Junior and Jessie. Junior was a very good dog to round up the cows. We would put on our wellingtons and walk up the mountain. The name of the mountain was Sugar Loaf Mountain.

Mary and I had to round up all the cows and count them, then feed and milk them. Then we'd walk back and milk the three goats. I stayed at Mary's house at the weekends too. Her dad and brother, Brian, lived there. They had chickens, ducks, pigs and geese. I fed all of them and collected the eggs and washed them.

They kept bantams too. Mary's dad used to crack two eggs into a mug and whisk them with a fork and I'd drink it down. I really enjoyed going up to Mary's house. It was the best time in my younger days.

Every summer I still go up there with my daughter and son. They love going up there.

By Tina

One God

I am from the Ivory Coast. In December, people come from the village to the city to celebrate Christmas. In the Muslim religion, when it is time for our Id al-Kabir, we celebrate together with the Christian people. We have to do good things because we don't know what will happen tomorrow and we don't know who will be with us tomorrow. Do good and you will get good things in return. All of us come from God and we go back to God. All our actions have consequences.

By Karimu

How I came to Ireland

I come from West Africa, from a country called Guinea Conakry. There are 6 people in my family; my mother, my father, my sisters and myself. I am the only son. I have 2 sisters older than me and one younger.

When I was young, I didn't get a chance to go to the French school so I went to the local Koranic school for about 10 years. When I was about 20 years old I moved to the capital city, Conakry. I lived there with my uncle and started looking for a job but I had no luck.

Then, one day, I met a political leader. He was speaking about corruption in the government. At this time I was very happy to meet him as he was telling the truth, and I decided to join his group. To make a long story short, I had to leave my country for my own safety. That is how I came to live in Ireland. I am very happy to live here where the government gives everybody the chance to speak.

By Mr. Diallo

What Annette thinks would make Ireland a better place

I am looking forward to the visit from the President of America to Ireland, also the Queen of England. We are hoping that the Pope will also come to Ireland. If I was Taoiseach of Ireland I would look after the poor and starving people of the world. The country is in a very bad state. The ministers have very big salaries and they should be reduced and there should not be so many foreign trips.

By Annette

A good snooker weekend

It all started off when I was playing snooker down town in a place called Club 147. I used to play there a lot and I improved my game very quickly. As I got better I was asked to go to one of the biggest competitions in Ireland. When I was asked to play, I said yes and they said it was in Killarney. When the time came to go, I got packed and off I went to Killarney. When I got there, there were a lot of people and most of them were there to play snooker. Some people were down to see *Jedward* because they were performing in the INEC which was attached to the hotel that we were staying in.

The next day we were all playing snooker and we had played 3 games and we made it through to a different round. After we made it through we lost to a team from Cork so that was our weekend over from playing snooker.

So, overall, our weekend was brilliant and the standard of snooker down there was extremely high. I would love to go down again and do better than I did last time. I'm sure I will!

By Kevin

What Mary thinks would make Ireland a better place

Ireland would be a better place to live in if there were lower college fees for students, if young learner drivers weren't charged too much to learn to drive, and if all the government ministers would drive their own cars.

By Mary

Our time

The rain will come and go,
the stars in the sky will never lie,
the wind will blow from north to south,
but our time will never die.

Watching over this calm bay,
as I wander along this summery sea,
no matter how far we roam,
but our time we'll never see.

Walking along this dusty road,
feeling the mild breeze upon my hair,
listening to the singing birds,
but our time will always be there.

Watching the children play with a smile
is something that brings joy to bear.
their fun and laughter is a wonder to hear,
as long as our time be there.

By Gabriel

The knock on the door

The girls all looked up from their reading when they heard a sharp knock on the door. Mary folded her newspaper, laying it on the table and in the total silence that had gripped them all, she went to open the front door. Rosie took Alice's hand to calm her nerves. They heard the front door clunk shut and the light, measured, almost hesitant footsteps of Mary coming along the hallway. Mary opened the door slowly. Alice could contain herself no longer. She slid along the bench and ran to her sister grabbing the letter from her hand.

By Catherine

My worst day

I remember one evening many years ago, when I was a little toddler. Before bedtime, as always, I went to brush my teeth. However, my eyes caught something else and it was not a toothbrush or toothpaste. This object was much more interesting than my best toy because it was mammy's lipstick.

I usually wasn't bold and I knew I was not supposed to touch it but my finger began to twitch. Curiosity took over and before I thought about it, I had already painted the mirror, tiles, and everything I could reach in the bathroom.

The joy of my work didn't last long because when my mammy got concerned about the suspicious silence, she came into the bathroom and she saw I had messed up and ruined her favourite lipstick. Then my mum was very angry and my dad gave me a slap on the butt.

So my fun finished and I ended up crying, but I remember the lesson that you should have respect for other people's property.

By Rafal

What Mary Ellen thinks would make Ireland a better place

In Ireland the gap between the rich and poor is too great. If I was in government, I would have no changes in social welfare. I would tax the rich. I would lower college fees and cut out the registration fee of €2,000. I'd bring back the emigrants, stop emigration and create more jobs.

By Mary Ellen

The day I saw the Dalai Lama

My two nieces, Breda and Martina, surprised me with an invitation to go and see the Dalai Lama at the University of Limerick. The Dalai Lama is a Buddhist monk and the spiritual leader of the people of Tibet. He is a very famous man and he is known all over the world as a man of peace.

I got up at 5 o'clock on Thursday April 14th and got ready for the drive to Limerick. There were over 2,000 people packed into the hall from early morning. Choirs sang on stage until the great man arrived. We heard the noise of the helicopter around 10 o'clock and this caused great excitement. Everyone stood up and clapped as the Dalai Lama came on stage. He was dressed in orange robes and his arms were bare. He told everyone to smile and be happy and that wealth would not make us happy if we hadn't peace in our hearts. We closed our eyes to pray and he prayed with us. I was very happy and excited to be there.

Afterwards, we went to Annacotty for our lunch. I will never forget that day.

By Teresa

Dromoland Castle

A group of us went to Dromoland Castle to take pictures around the castle. It is set in lovely scenery. It is surrounded by a forest. The castle has a lily pond.

Our tutor showed us how to use a digital camera. I had never used a digital before. I took photos of the castle. One of them was very good so I framed it.

By Joe

Gassing the bananas

My father worked in the fruit and veg in the market area where we lived in Belfast. This was during the 60's. I was about 10 or 11. He used to bring us home loads of fruit and spuds. His job was looking after all the fruit that came in off the boats. His main thing was bananas, as when they came to Ireland they would be green and hard, not like the yellow ones you would see in the shops. He used to go over to the warehouse and gas the bananas. This had to be done every night as the bananas had to be ripe. He used to lay them on shelves and then he would lock the door and gas away. I can't remember how long this took because he used to stack all the banana boxes in a row and then after a while he would turn off the gas.

One time he found a large spider in the boxes of bananas. This had come off the boats. He put me and my brother out of the warehouse and phoned for the men in the white coats. My father had the spider in the box and it was trapped. The men took it away and the next day the men rang my father to tell him the spider was poisonous, so my father was very lucky and I then knew my dad's job was dangerous.

By Anne

My good friend, Charlie

I'm Chinese and I'm living in Ennis for about six years. My English is so bad, but my neighbour Charlie helps me with it. Charlie is English and he speaks English very well. He is also very good-natured. If I don't understand something he has great patience with me. He always smiles and says, "Take the time to learn that. If I lived in China I could never learn to speak Chinese and I wouldn't be able to do anything."

By Jun

Accident

One winter day we went ice-skating with a group of friends. Everything seemed to be fine. The weather was beautiful and we had a great time. This skating rink was located about half an hour from where we met. It was really big and well prepared.

Once we arrived at the rink we started skating and we were having fun. It was a great time until someone accidentally bumped into me. I fell onto the ice and the worst pain began. The pain was so bad that I thought I couldn't bear it.

It was only minutes, but it seemed like hours waiting for an ambulance. Finally, it arrived and they examined me and said that I needed to go to the emergency room. So I went to be examined and x-rays showed that I had broken my left leg and my collar-bone.

Despite the pain, I thought about it and I knew that the winter fun was with great friends. I cried and they all began to comfort me.

I think it was the worst day in my life.

By Anna

Class

I go to class every Wednesday. I like going to my class because I get to meet other people. We have coffee in the canteen and chat about many things. I like learning now because it is different to when I was young and going to school.

By Mary

Driving

I would like to be able to do things for myself and for my mother. The biggest thing I would like to do if it all goes well is get my full driving licence. I would like to be independent and have more confidence in myself because I know if I can drive, I can do anything. I just need to believe in myself more.

Driving is important to me. If I pass my test I would be very happy and proud of myself. I'd be able to go lots of places like Mass, choir practice, concerts, musicals and shopping on my own. I wouldn't need to ask my mother or anyone else for a lift. I want to be able to say to my mother I'd do messages for her. If I get my full driving licence, I won't have to be depending on anyone else to bring me places.

I don't want to give up the driving lessons because I want to be able to say I can do it. I love being able to go on the road for a drive. Driving gives me a lot of confidence. I want to be able to do things for myself. I know if I keep up my driving lessons and pass my test I will be the happiest person as I will have my independence. Way to go Helen!

By Helen

What Anthony thinks would make Ireland a better place

I think the people of Ireland are saints and scholars and are so lucky to be the best in the world. I think there should be more done to bring back emigrants and more done to bring people to this lovely country of ours. It has famous musicians, poets and beautiful cities like Dublin, Galway, Limerick and Cork.

By Anthony

My trip to Birmingham

I got word in May last year that my eldest sister was not well. As she lives in England I do not get to see her as often as I would like. However, I decided to pay her a visit and set the wheels in motion, but for some reason, every time I planned to go, something went wrong. I thought I was never going to get to see her. She had been in hospital for 5 months and had a heart transplant. My sister was 66 years old. Finally, I booked a flight for November 9th at 11am.

I set off to Dublin the day before to stay at my brother's house as he was driving me to Dublin Airport the next morning. I got up that morning, had a shower, had my breakfast, turned on the TV aertel pages to check the flights and, to my horror, my flight had been cancelled due to bad weather conditions. My heart sank. I was so looking forward to my 4 days with my sister, whom I had not seen for five years.

My brother managed to book a later flight for the afternoon of the same day. It was due to fly out at 2 o'clock. We duly arrived at the airport at 12 o'clock midday. I arrived in Birmingham at 11 o'clock that night.

Despite all the hiccups I got to see my sister, which was the main thing. She is doing well, thank God.

By Cathy

What Gerard thinks would make Ireland a better place

We need to protect social welfare; a lot of people have had their welfare cut. We also need to create more jobs for a better future if at all possible. We also need to make the banks work better. The banks are banjaxed. They won't lend you money unless you have big money in the bank. We need a better banking system.

By Gerard

Pilgrimage to the Holy Land

In 2008 some of my family and I went on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. We have great faith and it was something we have wanted to do for a long time.

We were touring around the region of Galilee, Bethlehem, Jerusalem and the Dead Sea; all areas that Jesus went to when he was young. We had very early starts every day. We usually got on the tour bus at 7 a.m. Even though it was October, the weather was very warm and humid. We had to drink a lot of water.

In the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus was crucified, we took turns carrying a wooden cross while reciting the Mysteries of the Rosary. There are some very old fig trees in the Garden, about 2,000 years old, said to be there since the time of Our Lord.

My father and I chose to be baptised again in the River Jordan. We wore white robes and the priests and Bishop Willie Walsh baptised us by dipping us in the river. It was a one-off experience that I'm glad I did when I had the opportunity. I'm a religious person. I get solace and comfort from prayer. The House of Prayer on Achill Island is one of my special places.

The pilgrimage to the Holy Land deepened my faith. It was very exciting to walk around the places that Jesus lived in all those years ago.

By Gerard

Hobby

I love dancing. I follow the dance moves of Michael Jackson and Alexandra Burke. I started dance training about two years ago and I belong to a dance club called Arch Club and a dance group called Funk Fusion. We have performed on stage in the Arch Club and in Glór. I like this. I enjoy it.

I like music and dance because it keeps me fit and gives me confidence.

By Brendan

Mondays at the Tech

Every Monday in Kilrush we meet up at the old Tech to do reading, writing, numbers and lots of chatting. We have great fun talking about what we did during the week and at the weekend. John tells us about the hen house he is building. He hopes to get two hens for it. John also loves gardening and doing crafts.

Breda loves fashion and tells us about any new clothes, shoes or jewellery she has bought. Breda works-part time in the laundry. She also has a cat called Bibi. Anne Marie is very organised and loves reading magazines and writing. She loves talking about the soaps on TV and often goes to concerts in Glór. Her little dog is called Holly.

Kieran loves to talk about musicals. He likes to watch *Glee* on the TV and has been to see *Fame* and *High School Musical*. He enjoys singing the songs from them. Sarah is always in good form and is always smiling. She loves music and dancing and sometimes she sings for us.

Christina loves reading and writing, especially writing letters to her family in England. She is a beautiful singer and often sings for us. She works part-time in the nursing home and loves it there. Frances goes dancing at the weekends and tells us all about it. She loves writing and she works part-time in the coffee shop and The Family Store. She loves working in both places.

The newest member of the group is David who has just joined. He enjoys the class. He likes listening to music and is learning to play the mouth organ and the banjo. John, Breda, Kieran, Christina and Frances also work in the bookshop looking after the customers, putting the prices on the books and tidying the bookshelves. We are all good friends in the class and always have a good laugh together. We all love going up to the Tech on Mondays.

*By John, Breda, Anne-Marie, Sarah, Kieran,
Christina, Frances, & David*

The little cash box

I am a cash box. I am very old and dilapidated now, but once I was all shiny with black paint and gold designs on my lid. For many years I kept my owner's money safe even when he and his brother, who were tailors, were not too busy to adjourn to the hostelry down the road.

One weekend, there was a lot of comings and goings. There was shouting, lots of people running around the streets and, suddenly, all hell broke loose. There were bullets flying by the dozen. After all, it was Easter week in 1916 Dublin. Left, right and centre the bullets came, and there was poor me sitting right in the line of fire and not being able to do a thing about it. They say your life flashes before your eyes at a time like that, but at that moment I was convinced that I would end my days as a cabbage strainer.

All the next week, I was left to my own devices to keep my cash safe. Nobody came. Worse still, nobody boarded up the broken window. I was worried. Things were not like they are today, however; nothing was touched, not even the few bob I was minding. Eventually, my owner came back and, in all the years I knew him, I never realised that he spoke another language. I heard words I never heard before or since but who could blame the poor man, all his stock ruined and not enough cash in me to sustain a good drowning of sorrows.

Now I am retired with nothing to do except mind a few bits and bobs, long forgotten but for my new owner, who happens to be the tailor's granddaughter. I hope that nobody ever tosses me in the bin. Being out in the cold would not be my cup of tea at all. Maybe my new owner has a soft spot for me. After all she kept me and not other things that were much prettier and more useful than me. There must be something about me.

By Margaret

