

Simply Said 2013



Issue 25

Co. Clare VEC
Clare Adult Basic Education Service

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

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"This represents freedom to me. Ireland is a country of freedom, we belong and we can live the way we want." (Photo of Ballyalla Lake)

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Foreword

This year sees the publication of the 25th issue of *Simply Said*, the annual collection of writings by adult learners taking part in programmes with the Clare Adult Basic Education Service.

Simply Said has grown over the last 25 years from a small sixteen page booklet with nineteen articles to today's issue of 97 articles. Contained within this edition are stories, words of wisdom, poems and recipes. This year's writers tell us about the Olympics, Saorview TV, spinning bikes, frozen peas, hot water cylinders, sushi and much more.

The photo on this year's *Simply Said* cover was taken by a CABES learner who participated in an Ealaín an Chláir initiative. The project asked English language learners to capture, in photographs, images of place that connect their lives here to the culture of their homelands. Photos from the exhibition by CABES learners can be seen in the Adult and Community Education Centre, Clonroad.

Special thanks are due to our volunteer tutors who encourage learners to value the knowledge that they have and support them on their learning journeys. Thanks also and well done to those involved in the planning and production of *Simply Said* 2013.

Finally, and most importantly, congratulations and thank you to all who have written in this year's publication. Here's to the next 25 years!

Best wishes,

The CABES team

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My weekend in Dublin

I got up early. It was Saturday. My parents brought me to the station. The train was nearly full. I looked out the window and saw cows. The train stopped at Heuston Station in Dublin. I got off the train and my sister picked me up in her car. We went to her house and ate pizza. We watched TV.

On Sunday we went to my aunt's house. My sister brought me to the station. I got the bus to Ennis. My parents picked me up and drove me home. I was tired so I went to bed. It was a great weekend.

By Leah

A dream

I have always had a dream that one day I would be a chef, but I have always put it off for many reasons, be it a job I was in at the time or the birth of my children. For many reasons I have been in jobs that were to pay my bills, but I never got any fulfilment from them. As my children have gotten older I decided to go back to education. I enrolled in a course with the VEC.

I am currently doing a course in business studies. Within that course I had to do other classes, one which includes cooking. In the months I have been doing cooking it has made me more confident that I am able to cook, and be more positive about what career I want in the future.

We recently took a trip to the RDS in Dublin for the Catex food trade exhibition. Twenty seven of us took the trip and had a fantastic experience. We stopped at the Coverture factory that supplies ready-made desserts to Spar, SuperValu and to most hotels. They showed us how their factory operates and took us in groups of nine. It was very interesting to see how it all works.

We then went to the RDS. When I entered the building I was amazed with all of the stalls. There were all different food varieties. I was in my

element tasting them all. I then went to another part of the building that had chefs competing against each other in the junior and senior championships. I was in awe watching them!

When I came back from Dublin I could not stop thinking of what I wanted to do as a career. Cheffing is where I want to be. I emailed the GMIT College in Galway and enquired about what courses they have in the culinary area, as it is what I want to do when my current course ends. The course I am interested in is a certificate in Culinary Arts.

Two years ago I was a single mum raising two boys and didn't see a future for myself in education or any work area. Since joining adult education, so many doors have opened for me and created opportunities for me that I didn't think were possible. I am very grateful to Nora who has been a very good teacher and has helped and supported me in my decision to try and become a chef. I know it will not be easy. It will be a long few years but I will take this challenge for myself and work hard. This is where I want my future to go and, hopefully, in ten years time I will be one of those chefs competing. Thank you to my teachers for helping me become more confident in myself and giving me this opportunity to come back to education. It is a fantastic facility for anyone trying to get back into education.

By Nicola

Coming to class

I love coming to class. It is nice and I like everything about class. We do reading and writing and we even have a laugh. Class is in the library in Ennistymon and it is very nice here.

By William

My job in Ennis

Oh! How the time flies when you have been at your job since 2004. I've been working in a supermarket in Ennis for nine years and I'm loving every moment of my job. Okay, there'll be good days and bad days at any given time, but nobody can tell when these bad days or moments will occur, and you've to get on with your business regardless.

During the nine year period I've been here, we've won many awards of best kept store in Co. Clare because we care about our environment and customers. Naturally, if we didn't have customers then we couldn't do any business. Nor would we be very successful at all, would we? The worst moment for me was January 2010 when I slipped on black ice and fractured my wrist. I was out of work for 5 months with my right wrist in a sling. It was a total nightmare. There was nothing I could do about it, very frustrating indeed. I was extremely emotional when I eventually returned, just glad to be back. I must thank the nurses, my family and friends and everyone who assisted in any way possible while I was absent.

A lot of water went under the bridge since then. My sister became a mother for the fourth time. I lost my uncle in Dublin at Easter last year. I visited my dreamland Anfield Stadium Liverpool, especially The Kop End in lovely sunshine.

My job is to keep the car-park spotless for the customers. I recycle all the plastic and cardboard using balers and wash out big green bins every Friday morning. I do this from nine in the morning in all weathers and in all four seasons. There are two bins in front of the shop for the customers to use. You never know who you'll meet while you're working.

By Gabriel

Classes in the Orchard

I am doing felting on Mondays. We have been doing it for a couple of weeks. We will be doing it for a few more weeks. I am doing gardening and art and drama in the Orchard. We have instructors. I am doing it five days a week. There are a lot of people there. I have lived in Kilrush for a couple of years. I have learned a lot.

By Maureen

All alone

Everybody grows up and most people leave home. Some people even leave the country. Some are happy to leave, others not so happy. Some leave because they want to, others leave because they have to. I will tell you about the first time I left Ireland.

I had no work. I could not survive on fresh air, so I decided to go to England. Lots of people were emigrating, so it seemed the thing to do. I was not too happy about this. I was very young and felt all alone. I did not have a choice.

I got on the boat in Dublin and away I went. That was my first time on a boat. I felt very sick. Then a stranger came up to me and asked me if I was all right. "Not really," I answered, "I feel seasick and lonely." Then the stranger said, "That is only normal when you are not used to the sea."

We arrived at the port in England. "Hey man," I said to the stranger, "This place is very big!" "Yes," he said. "You ain't seen nothing yet!" I looked around and when I looked back he was gone. I had not asked his name.

Then the problems started. I felt I wasn't the brightest button in the box since I found it difficult to read. This left me with a problem and I wondered how I would get to where I wanted to go. I wandered around like a fool for a while. I decided to ask someone for directions. I met this woman and I asked her how I would get to Southampton. "I

can't tell you," she said. "Just got here myself, but as it happens I am going to the same place." "Great," I thought. "She will be able to read the signs," but she may not have been able to read either. I say that because she asked directions from the next person we met and he said, "Can you not read the sign? It is over your head." Then I knew we were in trouble. But as luck would have it, I met someone I knew. He told us where to get the tickets, what platform to go to and what train to take. After hours of travel between train and bus, we eventually got to our destination. I felt relieved.

I stayed there and got a job. Life was OK and I was reasonably happy. Through my everyday life and work, I realised how important it is to be able to read and write. Without it you have less confidence and independence. You can feel alone, all alone in a strange land although the language is the same. I never really settled and I could not wait to get home.

I made up my mind that one day I would do something about changing my situation with regard to reading and writing. I have taken the first step. This is the first time I have ever written an essay or a story. Life begins with just one step. Maybe one day I might write my memoirs! Watch this space! I am never alone now. Books are my friends.

By Denis

Learning to drive

First of all you have to take the Driver Theory test. To learn how to pass the test we came to classes at the Adult Education Centre. We turn on the computer and load the disc and practise a test. We have to know the road traffic signs and the sequence of the traffic lights - green, amber and red. We have to apply for the test and, if we pass, we can apply for a provisional licence. A qualified driving instructor will teach us to drive a car. We hope we pass.

By Edel and Maura

Famine in Kilrush, 1850

The Adult Education Centre in Kilrush is built on the site of the old workhouse. The workhouse was built in 1841 and closed in 1922 after 82 years. At one time, 2,000 people existed here. The people were living on potatoes called lumpers but the potato blight killed off the potatoes and left the people hungry. They went to the workhouse to see if they could get fed. There were too many people in the workhouse, so some people went on a boat across Poulfnasherry Bay near Moyasta. Unfortunately, they became shipwrecked and died.

If you want to visit a workhouse today go to Donaghmore near Rathdowney, County Laois. It is open to the public and you can see how the inmates lived and slept and what they ate. An interesting website is www.theworkhouse.org.uk. This has a map of Kilrush workhouse. Kilrush is the town chosen to commemorate The Great Famine of 1850 this year. Events will take place in May 2013 and will include a play, soup kitchen and food in famine times, book launch and film festival.

By Maureen and Mary

My Easter holidays

I went home to my mother on Good Friday. I helped her to clean the house. Then we had our dinner and, afterwards, we watched *The Late Late Show*. We went to Purcell's Pub on Saturday night for a party. We all sprayed our hair and changed the colour. We had great fun. We had lovely music and danced all night. I got a big Easter egg and it was delicious.

My brother gave me a present of a calculator and I love it. I'll be able to do my maths on it now.

By Martina

Memories of Lisnagry

My school days started in Doora when I was 5 years old. It was a small two teacher school. I made my Holy Communion while I was there. The teacher ignored me in class as I was thought to be a slow learner. I had not learned to read and write by the time I was 9 years old, so my mother decided it was time to take me out of there.

She found me a place in Lisnagry, Co. Limerick. I can well remember leaving home for the first time on a Monday morning and being taken by ambulance to Lisnagry. I was very sad and lonely saying goodbye to my parents and sister. My mother had packed a suitcase for me with all I needed until I came home at Christmas. An ambulance took me home again for the holidays.

I soon settled into the routine there. It was tough in the beginning, getting called for Mass every morning at 6.00 a.m. Classes were held in the mornings, and the afternoons were spent doing embroidery which the nuns had taught us. We made a lot of lovely things like cushion covers and tablecloths, but the nuns kept them all.

My happiest memories from that time are the friends I made there. We had a lot of fun, sneaking out to the shop and stealing apples from the orchard. Sometimes we were caught by the nuns and they punished us by putting us into a room and leaving us there.

I stayed in that school for 6 years and I still keep in touch with my friends. We meet for lunch a few times a year. It was a strict place to be but I was able to read and write when I left.

By Teresa

Computer class

My name is Maureen. I am in a computer class. It is in Kilrush. On Monday I do exercises.

By Maureen

Learning to grow

My name is Mary. I am fifty-nine, married with three grown up children and six delightful grandchildren. For me, that's some achievement for someone without much of an educational background to support them. But now I have the opportunity to turn that around through adult learning.

I am a member of a carers' group in Scarriff and, one night, Margaret from Scarriff Adult Basic Education Service was invited in to talk to us. I was totally pulled in. After the meeting I told her how I would love to do a course but lacked the confidence – from here there was no going back.

Margaret brought me to the Centre and encouraged me all the way to taking the first step and exploring learning around one of my interests. Before I knew it I was head over heels into a horticulture class with the hard-working Martina. We grew plants in the tunnel and learned how to care for them. I found it so interesting that I decided to practise what I was learning at home. I started growing my own vegetables, potatoes and bedding plants from seed. I couldn't believe how successful I was.

Seeing how well I was getting on Margaret asked me to join one of her own beginner's computer classes. Me doing computers! I would never have thought this possible. I was full of fear. Starting off with Fun Computers, my fears disappeared and while I thought I was having fun I couldn't believe what I had learned. When the fun got more serious I didn't even notice. In Writing it Right we learned to type poems, stories and letters. Soon, things like grammar, punctuation, spelling, etc. not only became meaningful but enjoyable. Finally, with Word Applications we were able to create useful documents relating to everyday life such as letters, posters, menus, timetables and so on.

Again, Margaret was on my case and I found myself doing a FETAC Level 3 Personal Effectiveness course with Martina. As part of this course we had to organise an event. We set about organising a harvest fair. Pooling together the various talents within the group which included bakers, artists, organisers and workers, we set about decorating the Centre with displays of baking, vegetables, fruit, plants, flowers and pumpkins and ran a bric-a-brac stall. We made and

displayed posters and the money raised was divided between the Centre and the Community Garden.

At the moment I am doing a FETAC 3 Internet Skills with Mary and I am doing a project on the Grand Canal and my family's connection to it. I have researched a lot of information and Mary, our tutor, is giving us great encouragement and individual support.

I am so delighted to have made this wonderful discovery of learning to learn. I have gained confidence, enjoy working as part of a team and am now looking forward to getting another FETAC award and would like to thank Margaret, Martina and Mary for their help and support.

By Mary

My cousin's wedding

On the 3rd of March I got the invitation to my cousin's wedding in London. I was delighted to be invited to Ann's wedding. I was looking forward to going to England for the first time. My sister Mary, her daughter Sarah, her son Sean and I decided to travel together. We booked our tickets online to fly from Shannon to Heathrow. It was Sean's first time on a plane and he was very excited.

We arrived on Wednesday. As the wedding wasn't until Friday, we went to Lego Land on Thursday. We had to take five buses to get there. Unfortunately, it rained all day but Sean and Sarah enjoyed it. When we got back to the hotel we had a lovely warm shower and changed into dry clothes. We had an early night because we wanted to be rested for the next day. After breakfast next morning we went to the hairdresser. I was pleased with the way she styled my hair. I changed into my blue dress with the dark blue spots and put on my make-up. Mary thought I looked well. At one o'clock we headed to the church and we enjoyed meeting all our relatives.

Ann looked lovely in her wedding dress. Her sister, Geraldine, was her bridesmaid. After the church ceremony we got a taxi to the hotel for

the reception. We finally got there after an hour, as the taxi driver couldn't find the hotel. We were hungry and grumpy by the time we arrived. We took some photographs before enjoying the lovely meal. We all felt much better after eating.

We had time to meet the other guests before the disco started. We danced until the reception ended at around 11 o'clock. We were glad to get back to the hotel to rest after a very enjoyable day.

On Saturday we went shopping to Hollister where I bought a Hollister cardigan. After shopping we went for something to eat before we went to see Buckingham Palace. We paid our last visit to Auntie Mary and chatted about the wedding and looked at each other's photographs. We packed our bags for home before going to bed as we left the hotel early next morning to catch our flight for home. I enjoyed my holiday, but I was happy to come home.

By Joan

My favourite band

Little Mix won the *X Factor* 2011. They were the first group ever to win and they were the first girl group ever to get to the final. Tulissa was their mentor. It was so exciting when they won and they were so happy. The winning song was "Cannonball".

Since then, *Little Mix* went on the *X Factor* tour. They wrote their own song, "Wings". It went to number 1. Then they released a single titled, "DNA". *Little Mix* brought out their own autobiography *Ready to Fly*. Their first album was released in November 2012. *Little Mix* toured in Australia and America and proved very popular.

I am a big fan of this girl band. I love them and I think they are amazing. I was so excited when they won the *X Factor* final. They were very worthy winners. I love their music and enjoy following their careers. I bought their book and album. When *Little Mix* celebrated their first birthday as a group I made a card for them on their Facebook page. To my surprise they read it out and I got so excited. I wrote a letter to *Little Mix*. They sent me a signed photo. I was so lucky

to be able to travel to Dublin to attend the *Little Mix* concert on 23rd of February 2013. It was fantastic. I bought their sweatshirt, a picture of them, T-shirt and programme. I think *Little Mix* are the best girl band ever. They are so successful. I know they will do really well in the future.

By Helen

Sushi and me

In my lifetime sushi was something I had little knowledge of. I imagined what it might taste like when I would see it advertised in fancy restaurants. I never had the courage to indulge. However, this changed all of a sudden during a culinary expedition to the RDS in Dublin in February 2013.

During this expedition, which turned out to be a taster's paradise, the possibility of tasting sushi for the first time became a reality. My first reaction was, "Oh no, not raw fish!" Then, "Maybe." Mmm, I was curious. It seemed to be that perhaps I should taste this sushi, which for so long had been out of my reach. The sushi demonstrator saw my hesitation and suggested that maybe I should try sushi with cooked fish first. She then explained the difference between sushi using cooked fish and raw fish. Sushi with raw fish is called sashimi; cooked fish is called sushi. She proceeded to assemble a sample of sushi for me. I watched with admiration and a little bit of uncertainty as she prepared the sample of this exotic food for me. It consisted of a strip of nori seaweed, covered with cooked sushi short grain rice, which was slightly flavoured with a thread of saffron. Then she added cooked tuna and finally a small piece of fresh cucumber. She rolled this collection of simple ingredients into a Swiss Roll shape. She placed the finished sushi on a white serving plate and garnished with soya dipping sauce.

So then, with anticipation and more than a little uncertainty, I was about to taste sushi for the first time, "Delicious." I discovered the other ingredients are very mild but the salty taste of the nori seaweed gives the sushi a really nice flavour. I really enjoyed this food. My taste buds

were yearning for more but I decided maybe it's best not to appear too greedy. So, circulate a bit and then come back again for more. Despite my mistrust, my mind was made up - I would try the raw salmon sashimi. It tasted so different to what I imagined; for example, like chewing a lump of raw salmon! But of course not, it was delightful. It was a delicate flavour of salmon enriched by the other ingredients. It's a classic, unpretentious and dizzyingly good food. Although there is a longish menu of various sushi and sashimi, a person can order a platter prepared according to choice. Most impressive is the way that sushi and sashimi are arranged on a plate with exquisite attention to detail. All I am missing now is a damn good glass of sake!

By Mary

My running experience

I got hooked on running as a result of joining the *Meet and Train* running group in Ennis seven years ago. I was one of the first members of the group. We started off running for a minute and walking for a minute and continued this a few times. We built the training up to two minutes and continued on building on that approach. Soon we were able to run ten kilometres (6.2 miles).

The training schedule was three days a week, which included two 10ks and a longer run at the weekends. This level of training was optional. In winter we included some speed work sessions. When there were upcoming races we trained four days a week.

I soon began to train for my first marathon with the *Clare Crusaders* group. Once I got over the half marathon stage, in my training, injuries started to occur. I got an IT band (hip injury), knees and hamstring injuries. To treat the injuries I would go to a few sessions of physiotherapy. Physiotherapy was painful!

On the day of my first marathon in Dublin there was a huge amount of supporters on the sidelines cheering people on. It helped encourage me when I was struggling to keep going, especially when I hit "the wall". When I finally reached the finish line I was so delighted. I heard

all the people cheering; I was really excited. I was afraid to sit down in case I couldn't get up again. I felt I had achieved something and I was proud of myself. There was a great buzz at the finish line with everybody congratulating each other.

After my first marathon I swore that it would be my last (but you never know)!

By Olive

My second chance

My name is Bernadette. I come from a large family. I went to an overcrowded school where I got left behind. When I left school my reading and writing was very poor. I still got jobs where no reading and writing was needed. I now work in a hospital, which I enjoy, but I have always felt that my reading and writing has held me back. I have been offered courses, but I was too scared to do them.

Some of the people at work know of my problems with reading and writing. An incident occurred at work in which one of these people used that knowledge to belittle me. This made me very sad at first, and then very angry, and that is when I decided to do something about it.

I saw an advert on the TV for adult literacy and wrote down the number. I was too nervous to ring them so my partner rang them for me and this is how I'm getting my second chance. A few days later I got a phone call from the Adult Education Centre. I spilled out all my troubles and fears about reading and writing. Amanda gave me a date to come in and meet her. The fear set in then. I thought, "Oh my God, what have I done?" I wondered if it was too late for me. My fear was that it would be like school where I was put at the back of the class because the teacher couldn't be bothered with me.

It wasn't at all what I imagined it to be. Amanda was so nice to me. She told me the class was going to be one-to-one with her for the first few weeks. I go in every Monday for one hour. That first day I cried

with relief because I had spoken out. I felt so relieved I could not wait until the next Monday.

I started by doing some reading and, after a bit, I started to enjoy it. I never thought I would. I used to tell people I couldn't read or write. Amanda was surprised with me. She said I am much better than I thought I was. After a few weeks I was put with another tutor. Amanda told me she was nice so I was looking forward to meeting her. Her name is Teresa. My first day with Teresa I was a bit nervous but it soon wore off. She made me feel important. I felt so comfortable with her. We chatted about our families and got to know each other. She has helped me a lot and I have made a lot of progress in the last few weeks. I have also been helped with numbers. I never understood what 50% off in the sales meant until now. I can also do so much more with my mobile phone now. Shopping is easier now as I can read the signs overhead in the shops and supermarkets. I never bothered before. I can find the bargains much quicker now. I have even joined the library.

I have always liked my handbags but my schoolbag is my most important bag now.

By Bernadette

I am a friend

I am a friend
I wonder what people think of me
I hear all life's ups and downs
I see the best in everyone
I want to always be needed
I am a friend

I pretend to have no cares
I feel happy and sad
I touch my friend's hand
I worry I'll let people down
I cry at sad stories
I am a friend

By Anna

Handy household hints

Cooking

Add a spoonful of mint sauce or a vegetable stock cube when boiling cauliflower or broccoli to take the bland taste away.

If your veggies are looking a bit tired, peel and chop them up, boil in water, add salt and pepper, blend together and make a lovely soup.

When cooking with fresh lime juice, add it right at the end so that it enhances the flavours without making the dish bitter.

To get fruit into your kids, chop up different fruits, arrange them on skewers, drizzle with some orange juice, leave them in the fridge and they will nibble on these.

Washing & Cleaning

Soak cloudy drinking glasses for an hour in slightly warm (not boiled) white vinegar and then use a nylon net or plastic scrubber to remove film.

To get rid of lint on clothes, add ½ cup of vinegar to your rinse cycle and your clothes will be soft, smooth and clean.

To remove Tipp-Ex and permanent marker stains, dab some sunscreen over the stain and rub off with a paper towel. Repeat until stain is gone.

To freshen up your pillows, tumble in a cool dryer with a cloth slightly dampened with fabric softener for ten minutes, or tumble in a warm setting with two or three tennis balls for a couple of minutes.

Add some vinegar to your water when washing windows to leave them streak free.

To keep your chimney clean, throw a handful of salt on the fire.

To remove rust from chrome, wipe it with aluminium foil dipped in coke.

To polish chrome, use a crumpled up piece of aluminium foil and rub.

Place a shallow dish of baking soda behind the toilet to absorb bathroom odours.

Peel an onion and leave on a plate to absorb odours when painting your home.

By Debbie

Lucky in learning

My name is Noreen. I am 40 and single. I left school in 1991 with a failed Leaving Cert. One of the subjects I failed was English and I was gutted at the time.

Between December 1999 and November 2000 I found work in a nursing home and at the same time I got a job in Dell. After a year working two jobs something had to give. I learnt how to drive and decided to give up the nursing home with the intention of returning to that type of work later on down the road.

Nine and a half years later I was made redundant from Dell. I had worked in processing and apart from what I had to do for work, I came out of Dell not having a clue about computers.

I called into the Family Resource Centre on the main street in Killaloe to enquire about what courses were available. The girls there were very helpful. I put my name down and got a call to say there was a basic computer course starting with CABES. I met with Margaret who took me under her wing and from here it was progress all the way. I went on to do a FETAC Level 3 course with BTEI in Scariff and then progressed on to FETAC Level 4. One of the modules was computers and, building on the excellent basics I acquired from the CABES foundation course and great support from our tutor Mary, I was happy out when I got a distinction in computers at level 4.

There was a FETAC Level 5 Health Care Support course starting in Scariff and with my interest in this area, I decided to go for the interview and was delighted when I got accepted. I started in September 2012 and among the modules completed to date are Health Care Support, Health & Safety, Manual Handling, First Aid, Work

Experience and CPR. With it becoming compulsory to have FETAC Level 5 for caring for the elderly I am so lucky with the path I have taken.

In this current economic climate, there is work in the health care area and I have been lucky to have had the opportunity to do work experience and find part-time work with Clarecare. By the end of May of this year I hope to have completed the full FETAC Level 5 Health Care and then I will be just one step away from my final goal of getting full-time work in caring.

By Noreen

The farm worker

The farm worker's name is Tommy. He is hitching a lift towards his local village. A driver stops.

Tommy: Thanks for stopping. Are you driving towards the village?

Driver: Yeah, hop in. We'll be there in ten or twelve minutes.

Tommy: Ah 'tis great to get the lift. 'Twas kinda cold out there while I was thumbing. Two or three cars passed during the last half hour. You know, two of the drivers are from the next townland.

Driver: If they knew you, it's rather strange that they did not stop for you. Are you busy these times?

Tommy: Yerra, I do a bit of labouring work there with a local farmer. His place is back the road you just came, about two or three miles. He has fields on both sides of the road. You drove past it.

Driver: How long have you been doing farm work? Do you like it?

Tommy: Ah 'tis hard ould work at times. This was a bad year - sure we had no summer at all. A lot of his land is low and drainage is not great.

Driver: Does that farmer have cattle and sheep?

Tommy: Yeah he has about forty cows - twenty five are milking, and about fifteen are sucklers. There is a flock of sheep in a rented farm up there in North Clare. Ah 'tis dryer land altogether. Of course you're closer to the Burren rock up there.

Driver: Not many in the village this evening. Where do you want to get out?

Tommy: Pull up there outside O'Kelly's pub. You're a decent man, God bless you.

Driver: Are you going drinking porter for the evening?

Tommy: Ah, for a start I need to warm myself with a hot brandy. Surely a few of the buckos will be in later. We might throw back a pint or two of the black stuff. Will you come in for one? Yerra do.

Driver: No, no, not this time. It'll take around forty five minutes before I get to Oranmore. It would be great to get home before the darkness sets in.

Tommy: Safe journey to you then. Sure we might meet again some time. Good luck now.

Tommy strolls into O'Kelly's pub, walking to the men's room to spend a penny. He is thinking about the conversation he just had with the kind man who had given him a lift to the village. He returns to the pub and throws his jacket on the back of a wooden chair close to the open turf fire. The barman is wiping down the counter. His name is Damo.

Damo: How's she cuttin' there Tommy? You're in early this evening.

Tommy: Yeah, I was thumbing a few miles out the road and got a lift from a decent man. He said he was driving towards Oranmore. He was a good speaker and he wore a grey suit, blue shirt and a red tie. Fair play to the man, he was chatty. He asked me a few questions about farming around this part of Clare.

Damo: I hope you did not tell him much about the farmers around here. Do you realise he might be one of those nosy inspectors from the Department of Agriculture office up there in Galway?

Tommy: Ah God no, do you take me to be some kind of an eejit or something? He was friendly. The man seemed to know a good bit about farming. I only told him a little about O'Gorman's farm where I work.

Damo: You see Tommy, that's how these well-dressed Department men gather bits of stories from talking to innocent fellas like you who just babble on about yer own work. You should not be telling men like him any useful information. You know yourself, he will just bring your bits of stories back to his boss up there in their fancy Department offices in Galway.

Tommy: I hope you are not right about that Damo. The hard-pressed farmers in this part of Clare have more than enough to be doing in these tough times and can do without those so-called educated lads from the Department calling around here.

Damo: Well Tommy, these are the sort of times we are living in. Surely you know that the Agricultural men take their orders from Brussels nowadays. These men have to complete loads of forms to be signed off by their bosses who send the completed forms out there to Brussels every month. If the farmers around here have delays in getting their farm grants because of stories you spouted to that man, well that might stop you from babbling on to these men dressed in nice suits any time in the future.

Tommy: Fellas like you are all the same. Ye have handy cosy jobs working in pubs and shops in this village. Ye collect a good wage every week. Ye have no time for hard-working farming people who are struggling to make a living.

Damo: If the word gets out in the neighbouring parishes that you were travelling in a car with a well-dressed man from the Department who asked you many questions and you filled his belly with handy pieces of stories about the farmers around here, they will not be happy. You might have to consider moving to your relations up there in Donegal for your own peace of mind. By the way, do you still have friends in that county?

Tommy: Yerra Damo, you are talking through you rear end as usual. I am well known to the farmers in West and North Clare. They know that

I am a hard-working, honest farm worker who minds his own business, not like your class. You should be ashamed of yourself, you little upstart.

Damo: Take it easy there Farmer Tommy. Relax, like a good man. Can you listen to me now? There has always been a warm welcome here for you. Many is the evening you have come in here tired, cold and wet after your day's work on the farm. You were glad to dry your clothes there by the open turf fire.

Tommy: Yeah, you think you are a great young man. 'Tis many the trailer load of good dry black turf I delivered here before you were even born. Have you that pint of Guinness ready yet? I hope you will have a good head on it. Are you able to fill a decent pint of Guinness yet?

Damo: Right Tommy, there's your cool pint of the black stuff. Leave it settle there on the counter for a few minutes. Drink it slowly. Don't let it go to your head. Do you hear me?

A customer sitting nearby has been listening to the conversation.

Customer: Was it a well-dressed fella called John Brennan that gave you the lift?

Tommy and Damo look slowly across at the man at the counter as he drinks from his glass and waits for an answer from Tommy.

Tommy: Do you know him?

Customer: Ah, he's with the Department all right.

Farmworker falls silent.

By Joseph

Classes at the VEC

Classes at the VEC are great.
The instructors are so nice
And they don't even mind if you are late!
I have learned so much
At the classes
And you can apply what you've learned as such.
I would recommend attending
The VEC for learning
About yourself and the wide, wide world
And all things that are upstanding.

By Mary

One last look around

I turned the key on the tall white door – stained glass with four different colours; purple, green, blue and red. I stepped inside. I could feel the cold air on my face. Standing in the corner was a hall stand with coats and two scarves. Going back over the years I can remember when the hall stand was full of coats and scarves and even the odd brolly. A solid timber door led into the sitting room, where there was a vacant three piece suite, a tiled fireplace with two candles on the base. On the walls were photos of family members living and dead; now covered in a film of dust. A bay window looking out onto the road brought my mind back to the many times I had cleaned it for her. The window was dressed with long velvet curtains. I made a note to clean the window later, as she was always a house-proud woman.

I went up the wide steps of the stairs to the bedrooms; on the landing were four doors. I went into the main bedroom, which was quite a large room. Memories came flooding to my mind of the many times I helped her change the bed linen and Hoover the carpets. I opened the wardrobe doors; inside I could see all her outfits hanging neatly on hangers. Which one do I choose? All different colours – more importantly, which one would she choose for her final journey? There it was – the tweed suit, which she always wore when she was going

somewhere important. I chose this suit, in particular, because Mary would wear it when we would go out for the day to Cork or Dublin. However, when I say we went for the day, we would be home by two o'clock! No time wasted with this lady!

The day before, she would get her hair done and on the morning when I would arrive at the house, she would open the door – a big smile – looking like the Queen Mother. She would wait for the compliment to come and, of course, I would respond, "Mary, I love your hair!" She'd smile, as she did every time, and pat her head.

I heard a voice from downstairs saying, "Are you ready?" As I left the room, I took one last look around and I closed the door for the last time.

By Joe

Teacher

I sat at the third desk in the third row beside Kevin, looking up at the large brown clock above the door. It told me there were only thirty minutes left. "I hope he has forgotten," I told myself, but no sooner had I told myself this, than out came the words I had been dreading to hear all day. "Get your homework journals out."

He always started at the left hand side of the classroom, walking down between the rows checking the journals. As he came closer to our row, my tummy filled with butterflies. He marked Kevin's journal with his red pen. His top pocket at all times contained three red pens and three blue ones. I think he thought they were a row of medals.

Turning his attention to me, he asked, "Where's your journal?" using my second name. He always did. I replied in a low voice, "I forgot it sir." "You forgot it!" Teacher then lowered his head and stared right into my face. "You forgot it!" I did not answer him. His eyes began to open wider behind those thick black rimmed spectacles. His bushy eyebrows, which were black, grey and ginger, seemed to move closer together. There was hair coming down his nostrils, also sticking out of his ears. He seemed to have hair everywhere, and his breath reeked of tobacco.

He then stood up straight, towering over me, "Put your hands out." I saw the cane being produced from his side pocket. What could I do, only follow his instruction? Six slaps I was given, three on each hand. I put my hands up to my mouth to blow on them and, hopefully, ease the pain. Teacher then ordered me to the front of the class. As I slowly made my torturous journey to face everyone, I was asking myself, "What is he going to do next?"

Taking up position directly behind me, he then said, "Repeat after me five times, *I must not forget my homework journal.*" Feeling a blush creeping up my neck, and now starting to burn my cheeks with embarrassment, I found it hard to look at the class. I lowered my head and looked intently at my feet. I was beginning to feel humiliated. My voice sank to a murmur.

When I finally finished the last line, he ordered me, "Say it another five times, only this time louder and stop looking at the floor." I was praying the bell would ring and save me but it never happened. Teacher got to humiliate me a second time.

After the ordeal was over, I was instructed to go back to my seat. Being able to look up at the large clock again, it told me there were only five minutes left before class finished. However, they turned out to be the best five minutes of the day. Sitting on mine and Kevin's desk was teacher's red pen. He forgot to pick it up, being too concerned about what punishment he was going to deal out to me.

Teacher then told the class, which was filled with silence, "I will not tolerate anyone forgetting their homework journal." He continued in a loud and domineering voice, "Anyone who forgets things is stupid or lazy or both. Forgetting is not an excuse and will not be tolerated."

After all he had just put me through, I summoned the courage to put my hand up in the air. This was an opportunity of a lifetime, I thought. Teacher looked at me and, using my second name as usual, he snapped, "What is it?" To my humble satisfaction, I said, "You **forgot** your pen sir." I could hear giggling throughout the classroom.

By John

Griddle cakes

Griddle cakes are lovely. You used to make them on a griddle pan. Sometimes, if you put too much on the pan, it would spread out and go over the edge of the griddle. I love a slice of griddle cake with butter and a cup of tea.

By BB and Mary Mac

Then/Now

Another lump. Oh God! What's this – the fifth? Always cystic. Always benign. A few days of panic and then – aaaaah! Well, this time, I'm not going to panic. I'm just not. Ten minutes in the GP's surgery and that will be that. Only, not quite. A biopsy is arranged. That's fine though. Fairly standard procedure. Best be sure.

The biopsy wasn't bad. I've done worse. Then, all those women at the clinic, rows and rows of them. A lot of them have no hair, none at all. Their heads look chalk white, huge. I never realised how big the human head is. I want to cover them up, poor things. Some are wearing various types and colours of headdresses. Some have wigs – I think. Not sure. Scary. Some have husbands or partners in tow. Some are horribly pale. Curious. Nothing to do with me though. I wish them all well. I say a little prayer for them, a sort of blanket blessing.

My husband is beside me. "You might as well wait outside," I tell him. "I won't be long, and then we will go to lunch and forget the whole thing."

A few chapters of my book, and then the call comes. All is calm. The doctor is rail-thin. His white coat is hanging off him. His expression is quite neutral, but he looks so weary. Nothing exciting here then, obviously. I'm thinking that he has the face of someone who has delivered too much bad news, too often, and hasn't managed to detach. Bad for him, that. Probably why he is so thin.

I'm quite relaxed now. Lunch will be good. A nurse sits down, facing me. Her expression is pleasant, neutral as well. Fine then. "There are

some abnormal cells," the doctor says. Just that. My heart stops, I think. I can't get my breath.

The nurse speaks to me, her voice seeming to come from far away. How did I not realise that she was there for a reason? "Will I call your husband in now?" she asks. "Will I phone him?" "No," I say. She smiles then. I think she knows what I am thinking – once someone else is told, it all becomes real. "No," I say. She gets up to call him anyway.

I won't look at him. I can't. I know I have to. One life ends here. A whole other kind of life begins.

By Catherine

Tatoy Gulang

This is an extract from a longer story.

The sad looking weathered bamboo hut was bathed in blazing sunlight even though it was still only 6.00 a.m. The smell of charcoal fires cooking the morning meal permeated the air of the village as I approached the bamboo hut. Both sides of the dirt road had knee-high grass but the grass was shorter in the middle of the road where two tracks were worn bare as a result of carts, tricycles and *jeepenys using the road.

The house had no fence – just ten feet tall banana trees, spaced every few feet, defining its boundary. In the space between, was planted corn on the cob about five feet tall, competing with long grass and weeds that were almost as tall. Two native mongrel dogs ran towards me barking, but passed me by and stood barking in the direction I had come from, as if covering my rear-guard. I felt protected somehow. Two young boys and a lean looking man stood smiling at the bamboo door. I could see nothing but the dark interior of the hut as even the narrow trestle-design windows without glass offered no view. However, from inside, the occupants could see anyone approach and could see right across the green rocky area on which a prized caribou, a native water buffalo, grazed with its young cow. This was a typical scene in any village on the island of Negros in the Philippines.

Scattered on the ground outside the door were flip-flops, referred to as sandals here, some pairs and some not. People slip them off on entering any house in the Philippines. There were old orphaned flip-flops whose origins were long forgotten and some orphaned as a result of their partners being borrowed in the dimly lit huts at night by neighbours or friends heading home. Some could be retrieved or would be returned, though not always on the same day; sometimes, the person might decide the sandals they took were better than the ones they left and keep them. Many a rainy day was spent discussing amusing stories of the travels of sandals.

There was an unoccupied, old, battered armchair just outside the door, constructed from four inch round bamboo with flat narrow strips making up the base. Hanging on the back of the chair was a newish looking pair of flip-flops that Tatoy Gulang usually wore around his neck and which I had bought for him recently. When I enquired why he wore them around his neck, he insisted, "Only for use on special occasions." I guess even Tatoy Gulang would count today as one – it was his final journey.

He was called Tatoy Gulang by everyone in the village, young and old. It means *grandfather*. I stood beside the chair among the disarray of flip-flops and I caught sight of his pillowcase that held all his worldly belongings inside the bamboo door. The sight of this brought me back to a few months previously, to my piggery in the mountains and him sleeping on the raised bamboo floor in my bedroom with his pillowcase of worldly belongings under his head. I thought of all that people accumulate in a lifetime and have to leave when they pass on. In Tatoy Gulang's case, he only had wonderful memories to leave but they would always be remembered, as everyone loved this very old but youthful man. As this flashed through my mind, I felt my eyes well up and I turned away to gather myself.

By Terence

**Jeepneys are a type of bus, used mainly for public transport, in the Philippines.*

Cooking the Christmas dinner

It was just last Christmas – 2012 to be precise – that I decided to cook Christmas dinner! I did go to mom and dad's all those years before, which I must say was nice – getting dinner handed up to me. Anyway, I wanted to cook the dinner myself, as the kids were getting older. So, I ordered my ham and turkey from my local butcher – fresh, white, free range turkey, and ham - the average family size, and that came to €55 for both. Genie mac! "But, it'll be worth it," I thought.

I cooked the turkey on Christmas Eve. It cooked for four hours, so I then decided to cook the ham on Christmas Day. With the turkey out of the way, I had loads of time. I woke up on Christmas morning and the first thing I did was check to see if the turkey was still there. It was. I didn't know what the fuss was about. Cooking turkey was easy! So, then I decided to cook the ham. "OMG!" The ham was too big for the pot! I went to the drawer, got my knife and started to cut the big bone off, so the ham would fit in the pot! Well, I was cutting and cutting but it just wouldn't be cut. I ran across the road to mam's and grabbed her butcher's knife. I started cutting again. I cut half way through. Then, I went out to the shed, got the hammer and whacked it a few times. There was fat and flesh flying on the counter. The bone cracked and finally broke.

I put the ham in the pot. It wasn't as I had hoped it would be – cooking the ham and turkey. The turkey was fine. The ham was a nightmare. Anyway, it was lovely when I finally got it cooked. I was proud that I managed to cook the dinner by myself. When I saw all of my family sitting at the table, I was very excited and, although it wasn't an easy task, it was worth it. A lovely tasty ham!

By Vivienne

I am a cancer patient

I am a cancer patient
I wonder what lies ahead for me
I hear the sound of the MRI machine
I see my life flash before me
I want to be cancer free
I am a cancer patient

I pretend that everything's OK
I feel let down by friends
I touch my guardian angel
I worry that I'll give in
I cry for my family
I am a cancer patient

By Anna

The cottage in Clare

This is an extract from a longer story.

The old renovated cottage, on one acre, is a mile from the village, on a very steep, winding, narrow road, almost at the base of the mountain. There have been many tales to do with this cottage - in fact - it has taken over my life for the last thirty-two plus years. It has been a lot of work. There are no nearby neighbours, so the cottage stands alone, surrounded only by sloping fields and the road. The three neighbours are all farmers and have interaction with each other, so they have the camaraderie and contact with each other, which is missing for me.

This old cottage gave my life focus and a purpose as I'm a very work-oriented and productive sort of person ... used to be then, when I was 19 - I've slowed down now - at fifty plus... It gave me somewhere to belong. The first time I went to see the cottage was on a dark October afternoon in 1981 at about 5.00 p.m. I had to get the house key from de Courcy auctioneers in Limerick and go out to Sixmilebridge. The key was a big, rusty, huge thing and the door was an old wooden door. The key slowly slotted into the deep keyhole. It was a process, not a quick turn and enter - it had a knack to it and needed a bit of

strength and, of course, patience! It was reminiscent of Wuthering Heights era or similar times, in a nice way... From the minute I opened the door and stepped into the main living room/kitchen ... I felt it had a lovely, cosy atmosphere and I loved it. The thing about the cottage is - I couldn't "see" what it was really like, or what the outside looked like, or the surrounding area - or much of the inside either really, as it was very dark - it was the atmosphere that appealed to me.

When I was a child, of about nine years old, I would see old run-down cottages in Spanish Point and the surrounding area and feel very sorry for those poor cottages and the people who were gone, probably during the Famine. This is where I got the passion for renovating an old cottage, I think. We'd go to Spanish Point for summer holidays and go for drives around West Clare, with my father, my mother and my sister, Susan. I'd see these broken-down - abandoned cottages - and feel so sorry for the families. I'd ask my father why they were idle and he said possibly someone had died and the remaining family were in America or England and maybe there were problems with house or land deeds or similar. Little did I know that ten years later I would be without parents and buying an old cottage myself.

The outside of the cottage had an empty, desolate, cold, concrete, flat roofed, small porch. It was unkempt and not lived in by a family for some time. There were two *steel*, white framed windows on either side of the porch, which were *cold*, but they were useful. Both doors were to the front of the cottage. Once the inside wooden door was opened you were straight into the main living room. It was a similar cottage to those in Bunratty Folk Park, except to the left was another room, a good sized sitting room - which obviously wasn't used. It had a concrete floor - with onions on the floor. It had old, wooden, sash windows, one at the front wall and one at the back - they were about 3' long by 2' wide. The wood on them was well decayed and this would be the first building job to be done on the cottage.

I worked in Oxy-dry at the time and got one of the men there to make a big iron fire grate - he did this in his spare time. I was thrilled with this big, open, moveable fancy ironwork grate. It cost £80, as far as I remember. It has since been left down by the shed - it never got the lovely black glossy paintwork I imagined being done. "A woman's work is never done," but where were the men to do the man's work

(which to me includes painting!), while I did the cooking, cleaning, etc., etc., etc.?

I had great notions that if I took the old plaster off the fireside walls in the main living room, there'd be lovely stone work behind it. The big inglenook fireplace in the main living room had been blocked off and a Stanley, solid fuel stove placed in front of it. It made the room very warm and cosy. I didn't fancy cleaning out this yoke and I didn't fancy the complications of the Stanley. I came from the electric cooker generation! So that was also one of the first jobs to be done – the Stanley was dismantled and the fireplace opened to reveal the inglenook and huge, gaping chimney – but no nice stone work, unfortunately. So, a brick wall was built in front of the bad stone wall – in red "Tyrone" brick – which in 1982 was all the fashion. I have since painted it soft cream and it's much brighter and cleaner looking.

We used to light huge log fires in it and when taking a break from the work, would sit in front of it. I had my father's two-ring camping gas cooker and cooked food for us. What lovely memories of when I was young and hopeful and full of life. It was a time when my life was full of friends and beautiful, innocent, fun ... and I was young and lively with no serious responsibilities (yet mature), a 20 year old, in 1982.

Excerpt from "Yvonne's Life" (for the first 11 years or so; for my daughter - Dec 2009)

"My family have been very important to me, as I think is the case for most people. I think the most wonderful thing in life, the thing that gives the most warmth, comfort, love and belonging, is a family. I think the roots go very deep and the connections are very strong, even if families are divided and have fallen out. We still carry them in our hearts, forever. I used to think that I should never have been born into my family, and again I think that may be common with most people, especially children and young adults. I do try and tell my kids that other families have problems and they're not as "perfect" as we might think they are. I know that growing up in Rathbane, I thought that all my other friends had "better" families, better situations but, of course, I learned in later life, that they all had their problems too. It seems to be the nature of being a child, that we think "someone else" has it better than us. I love what Fr. Harry says now sometimes, that there's no family can wave a white flag outside their house and say, there's nothing going on here..."

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding;
in all your ways acknowledge him
and he will make your paths straight." (Proverbs, 3:5-6)

By Yvonne

Farming

I go to the marts in Ennistymon and in Ennis. The Ennistymon mart is on Fridays and the Ennis mart is on Tuesdays. Cows, calves and weanlings are bought and sold at the marts. There is sometimes a horse fair there as well and sheep are bought and sold every week.

I have dinner at the Ennis mart and a cup of tea. There is a canteen. It is a very busy place.

I like farming. I like cutting silage and herding cattle and the outdoors.

By Thomas

Paradise House

Strolling in the country on a warm sunny day, the mind strays back to times past. Old friends, long gone, are remembered and good times are relived in glorious technicolor. The smells of wild garlic mingling with honeysuckle waft along, driven by a balmy breeze. Cattle graze contentedly behind dilapidated fences on each side of a grass verged driveway.

This idyllic past time, was brought to a sudden and unpleasant halt by a loud, rude shout demanding to know what was going on. Standing behind an unsightly barrier was an equally unsightly man, waving a stick. He informed me in no uncertain terms what would happen if I did not remove my person forthwith.

What was going on and why was this Neanderthal jumping up and down like a demented flea, demanding that I leave the area where I had walked for over fifty years? Had something happened that I did not know about, or was I the demented one?

Striving, with little success, to recapture the earlier feeling of euphoria, I continued my stroll. The altercation with the upstart had put a damper on my enjoyment and to cap it off, I had just reached the darkest part of the avenue. On one side, the misshaped fir tree blocked out the sunlight so much that no self-respecting weed would even think of trying to exist there. The knowledge that there is an old abandoned graveyard just over the wall, the headstone just visible, would put the be-J*! into you.

The landlords, named Henn, were not known for their brains, evidence of which can be seen in their attempts to extend the house and forgetting to put in windows. They would have been better advised to have rerouted the approach to the house away from the back courtyard - with its accompanying smells of horse manure and pig swill mixing with the dampness, it was not very welcoming. But oh, having braved the above, the once majestic estate house comes into view. Its walls blackened by smoke, the roof collapsed, it is a sad and lonely relic of its glorious past but, for me, it still retains its dignity in its stones. Maybe it's because, as a child, I remember seeing the house before it was burned, or it could be that I did not want to acknowledge the truth before me. Who knows?

Circumstances can change bricks and mortar but nothing could change the view from the front of the house. The vast expanse of the Shannon River, Deer and Coney islands and across to Co. Limerick is awe inspiring. Never mind the shell of the boathouse and its broken-down slip. They fade into insignificance. Standing there, surrounded by rhododendron bushes and with such beauty to behold, must be as near to heaven as one can get.

Returning one summer's evening by boat from Coney Island, the tides dictated that we travelled along the farthest out channel of water, which gave us a better view of the mainland. Glancing up at the old house, I could see that the golden rays of the setting sun had wrapped themselves around the house, obliterating the sight of broken windows, chipped paint and blackened walls. No, my beloved house stood proud in its golden glory looking down on us, protecting us on our journey, majestic in its stance high up on the hill.

Years have taken their toll on both of us and many years have passed since we last met. No more can its magic draw me to its side like a pin

to a magnet, as it had done for many years. Between us, we solved many problems, solutions arrived at with startling clarity. The old house and I met for the last time, but I have only to close my eyes and I am back once more, sitting with my back being warmed by its beautiful stone and enjoying the calm and beauty around me. I can visit once again with my old friend and say, like Mrs. Henn, when she first arrived, "What a paradise."

By Margaret

Behind the window

Long ago in 1963, there was a little girl called Sally who lived in a small terraced house at 36 Lucy Road, Dorset, England. It was a working class area, where there were factories. Sally's father worked as a blacksmith in a firm called Dougall's. He was there since he was eighteen – 31 years he worked as a blacksmith.

The smells of freshly washed clothes hanging from clothes lines in everybody's houses had a fragrance of freshness you would never forget. On the other hand, the factories' smell of rubber was not a nice smell at all and the grinding of metal was not a nice sound.

Behind the window of the house at 36 Lucy Road was a sweet little girl called Sally. She was two years old. She always got up to mischief. Sally's mother and father called her their angel. She was no bother to them.

But one day, while Sally's mother was upstairs, something happened. Sally climbed up on a chair in the sitting room and lost her balance. She hit her head on the sideboard when she fell.

When Sally's mother came downstairs she couldn't see her daughter. She called her but there was no answer. She found Sally unconscious. She screamed and cried and blamed herself for Sally's accident because she was not there for her.

Sally's mother tried to get her back to life, but there was no pulse. Panicking, Sally's mother tried C.P.R. Sally started to come round. There was relief in Sally's mother's words, "Thank God. I thought I lost

you, my little angel." Sally looked up to her mother and said, "You'll never lose me mammy. I love you so much."

By Sharon

Going to Mass

When I was young going to Mass was a bit different than it is today. Many people had to walk and they wore their Sunday best clothes. Your hands had to be spotless and you had to clean your nails. It was very much a social thing, too. Most people had a chance to talk and catch up on news with their friends. You usually did not see people during the week as they were too busy. In those days people had less free time than they do now. The church was the centre of community life. At the end of Mass people would offer their neighbours a ride home. In those days the community encouraged everyone to behave well. You cared about what people thought about you.

By Níall, Gerard, Tony and Bart

Kilkee

Walking along the shore,
Admiring its horseshoe shape.
Water lapping over my feet,
The sand between my toes.
The reflection of the colourful houses on the water.
There is no nicer place to be, than Kilkee,
On a soft summer's day.

By Margaret

Rescued

Just before Christmas 2012 I received an invitation booklet from the Clare Adult Education Centre detailing available courses for 2013. This mail had a positive effect on me and made me feel special. The decision as to which course I needed to enrol in was an easy one.

For years I had suffered low self-esteem, panic attacks, chronic anxiety, hypertension and irrational fears. I knew I needed help and, having tried numerous remedies with little or no success and at a huge cost, I did find the answer in a therapy group which has no cost involved.

During my years of turmoil, my husband, who happens to be a chef, not only cooked the dinner each day, he also shopped for the ingredients. As he is so passionate about food and cooking, of course I did not complain. Mostly my role in the kitchen was to keep it clean, a far cry from the young girl that was well able to cook and bake.

Reality hit home when my husband was hospitalised with a serious condition. It suddenly dawned on me I would have to cook myself a dinner and, worse still, I would have to go out and buy the ingredients. In my mind this was bordering on impossible. I knew then that without realising it, I had allowed myself to become a cripple in my own kitchen.

The nervousness I experienced on my first day attending the course was quickly put to rest by the tutor. Now, several weeks into the course, I have no fear. Laziness will often make me wish I did not have to do this, but the moment I go through the door of the Adult Education Centre I feel safe, wanted, welcome and worthwhile. The buzz and progressive atmosphere of the Centre has to have a positive effect on you. What can I say about the tutor? This individual knows how to get the best out of you. We will have a laugh and a short chat but then it is, "Shoulders down," and work has to be done. While the tutor runs a disciplined class, she also ensures each person is included and doing their part. Already my confidence with cooking is growing and with each class I am broadening my culinary skills.

If I were in a foreign country and found such a facility with so much to offer I would be very happy indeed.

My prime reason for enrolling was to regain my cooking skills but there is also the aspect of the wonderful people you meet. Some years ago I would not have been able to do this course, now I have little or no fear of shopping and cooking. Cookery class with CABES has rescued me from being a cripple in my own kitchen.

By Marie

My day at work

Every Wednesday I work in a shop in Kilfenora. It is a grocery and general store and also sells animal feed. The shop opens from 8.00 a.m. to 8.00 p.m. It gets very busy at times and has a good business. A lot of local people come into the shop for their groceries and in the summer there are a lot of tourists in the village.

I started working there in 2009 and I love my job. My father or mother drops me over at 10 o'clock and I work until 2.30 p.m. or 3.00 p.m. I get a lunch break of about half an hour and I have something to eat.

The owner works there with two assistants and an office worker. My job includes looking at deliveries that have come in and sorting them out. I empty the boxes and stack goods on the shelves and in the fridges and freezers. I put the extra goods in the store room upstairs and try to keep the store room tidy. Sometimes I help customers carrying their shopping to the car, especially older people.

I like doing different jobs at work and I am happy to help out wherever I am needed. From time to time I work with the owner in the yard, helping to load the bags of animal feed.

I really enjoy the Wednesday at work. The people that work there are very helpful and nice and we all get on well. I think it is a good place to work and I am glad to have my job.

By Kieran

I admire Adi Roche

A person whom I admire is Adi Roche. She is a campaigner for peace, humanitarian aid and education. I greatly admire her for her work.

Adi is the chief executive of the charity Chernobyl Children International. She set up this charity to help the children affected by the worst nuclear accident in the world. She received the Health Award at the World of Children Awards ceremony in November 2010. She has also worked since 1990 to provide aid to the children of Belarus, Western Russia and the Ukraine.

From her work in Chernobyl, the Chernobyl Children International charity has made over €92 million for children from areas affected by the nuclear disaster. Under her leadership over 22,500 children have been brought to Ireland for rest and recuperation holidays.

For these reasons and the outstanding and inspirational work she has done, she is a person that I've always admired.

By Eileen

Ike Eisenhower

Ike Eisenhower was a general in the American army during the Second World War (1939-1945). He was a great man and one of the best generals ever. After the war he was given many awards from countries around the world. He was president of the USA twice. There are many roads and buildings named after him. He was a great president and a great man during his time in office.

By Gerard

White chocolate and raspberry cheesecake

Ingredients:

For the biscuit base:

75g digestive biscuits, crushed
75g ginger nut biscuits, crushed
75g butter, melted

For the filling:

400–600g white chocolate, broken into pieces
65g butter
½ vanilla pod
500g cream cheese
50g caster sugar
180mls whipping cream
1 punnet of fresh raspberries
Fresh raspberries to decorate

Method:

1. For the biscuit base: combine the biscuits and butter and press onto the base of a 23cm springform tin.
2. For the filling: place the chocolate, butter and vanilla pod in a heatproof bowl set over a pan of simmering (not boiling) water until it is melted. Allow to cool slightly.
3. In another bowl, mix together the cream cheese, sugar and whipping cream to a smooth consistency.
4. Remove the vanilla pod from the melted chocolate mixture and stir into the cream mixture. Gently stir in the raspberries, being careful not to release the juice.
5. Spoon the mixture on top of the biscuit base and place in the fridge to set for 8-24 hours.
6. To serve: remove from the tin and place on a serving plate. Decorate with a few whole raspberries.

By Jean

Coronation Street

Of all the soaps on TV3, the one I like best is *Coronation Street*. The reason is that it keeps me interested and I have sympathy for Tyrone Dobbs who is in prison for crimes that he did not commit.

A character that people do not like is Kirsty Soames who was friendly with Tyrone. When their girl was born Kirsty registered her without including her father's name. He was mad and vexed with her because he had not done anything at all to her.

Kirsty got mad when she heard that Tyrone had told Fiz Brown what Kirsty had done with the registering. She proceeded to give out to Tyrone and to beat him. He wanted her to leave the house and baby to him and she did not want to leave the baby.

Kirsty went upstairs to get the baby but, on arriving on the landing, she fell backwards over Tyrone to the bottom of the stairs and broke her hips and had to go to hospital. In hospital she had X-rays and was revived in a few days. The police were called and Kirsty told lies to the police. The police believed Kirsty and not Tyrone. In all, only three people - Fiz Brown, Tommy Duckworth and Tina McIntyre - believed Tyrone.

After this, Tyrone took his baby and ran away with Fiz and her baby to a port. When Tyrone saw a policeman there he got afraid and turned back from the boat and went to a B and B.

After two days Fiz turned Tyrone in to the police. They arrested him and took him to the police station. They handed the baby back to Kirsty and charged him with kidnapping the baby and assaulting Kirsty. There was a court case as a result of this.

On the first day of the court case Kirsty handed over the baby to her former friend, Julie Carp. Kirsty swore on the bible to tell the truth but proceeded to tell a pile of lies. When she arrived home she found that Julie was gone and Sally Webster was minding the baby. Kirsty told Sally to get out in a fit of rage and Sally left and, a few minutes later, Julie arrived back.

Then Kirsty threw something breakable against the wall. The same night the baby cried so much that Kirsty got mad with the baby. Kirsty went to the doctor to get tablets to sleep but the doctor refused. The next day Tina was in the witness box when Kirsty arrived with the baby and she told the truth to everybody and Tyrone was released from custody. Kirsty's baby was handed over by order of the judge to a social worker for a short time and later to Tyrone, and Kirsty was arrested and our story ends happily.

By James

Spring

Spring is my favourite time of the year. I always look forward to long evenings and warmer temperatures. The daffodils and snowdrops are the first to appear. The clocks go forward one hour, which gives us more daylight. Lambs can be seen bouncing around the fields. People start thinking of holidays and where will they go? The farmers spread fertilizer, which helps the grass to grow strong. Those who set vegetables start getting the soil ready and they plant row after row of potatoes, cabbage, carrots, onions, and many more. Anyone who has a glass house will be tidying it up preparing to grow tomatoes, herbs and delicate foods. Many flower seeds will be set and left to start growing in these hot houses.

Easter is always in spring and seems to be a nicer time than Christmas to me. Our Lenten fast is over and we can go back to using whatever we gave up. People give up things like sweets, chocolate, drink or maybe even take up something like exercising or helping someone in some way. We have a great day of celebration on Easter Sunday, eating chocolate eggs and cakes. Some people like to roast a leg of lamb for dinner.

The sight of cattle out again grazing is nice to see, as they have been inside all winter. The swallows and cuckoo will be on as well. The swallows seem to build their nests everywhere, in sheds or under a roof. Once April arrives the turf cutting starts. We have machines for cutting that now so all we need to do is decide how much we might need for the next year.

Towards the end of spring we can see the grass grow tall and thick. It is a beautiful sight when it sways with the wind. There will be wild flowers mixed in with the grass. The cuckoo flower is my favourite. There will also be buttercups and clover. The smell of freshly cut grass is so wonderful. Spring is the best season, as we all know that a long hot summer is on the way.

By Mary

Fair Day in Kildare

I went to school in Kildare when I was young and my teacher's name was Stephen. I used to learn to read and write and I remember there was a girl there but I forget her name. It was a boarding school and I lived up there. It wasn't too bad and my mam and dad used to come and see me with my sister when they could.

I remember going to the Fair Day in Kildare. It was a horse fair, like the one in Kilrush. There were lots of people, a big crowd, selling things like clothes, household things, hens and horses. I had no money to buy anything but I liked looking at the stalls and hawkers and watching the horses and donkeys. It was always exciting to go to the fair and you would always meet someone you knew for a chat.

By Joe

Gardening and landscaping

Last year I began working as a gardener and landscaper. I did many courses on health and safety, lifting skills and gardening maintenance skills. I enjoyed the company and friendship of my fellow workmates, which made my work days enjoyable.

Springtime was a very busy time. We prepared the ground. We dug and removed the weeds. We then got the ground ready for planting.

We used a polytunnel to grow flowers and vegetables. When the plants matured we planted them outdoors. We watered and cared for them throughout their growing season.

Summer time was the most enjoyable season as all the flowers, bulbs and shrubs were in bloom.

We mowed the lawns and that was the most time consuming job as it lasted most of the year. Plant care involved getting rid of slugs, pests and greenfly.

The tidy town award was a big event in the month of September. We had prepared for this many months before the event. The entire village bloomed and was at its best around that time of year.

Autumn was tidy up time. I raked and collected leaves and dead blooms and put them in the compost heap. I cleaned out the polytunnel and washed all the pots ready for spring.

The Christmas season was very busy. I made wreaths, table decorations and seasonal potted plants.

Now it is time to start a whole new year and I am looking forward to that very much.

By Michael

The city of Vilnius, capital of Lithuania

I was born in Vilnius, but have lived in Ireland for the past six years. Over this time period and since I started writing this text, I have decided that Vilnius is a very nice city! I like Vilnius! The medieval architecture is mesmerizing. However, it is very difficult to enjoy the beauty of the city every day when you are living there.

Now I will give some facts and statistics about Vilnius. It is the capital of Lithuania and has a population of about half a million. It is situated on the confluence of two rivers in the southeast of the country and is over three hundred kilometres from the Baltic Sea.

The real age of Vilnius is unknown. Archaeological studies tell us of settlements found there dating from around 2000 B.C., but the name Vilnius has existed since 1323, over seven hundred years ago.

At this moment there are still surviving around forty different types of church, Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox. There are still some functioning abbeys. There is still one synagogue remaining and one *Karaim kanesa*, the prayer place of a particular sect, though 95% of the Jewish population perished in the Second World War. The Old Town of Vilnius is one of the largest surviving medieval towns in central Europe. In 1994, it was included in the UNESCO World Heritage List, number 541.

The architectural styles have evolved through the centuries, from Gothic, to Renaissance, Baroque, Classical and modern. Most people live in blocks of flats which are outside the city centre. These are built in the Modernist style. There are six large public parks and a variety of squares which are very colourful in autumn.

As the capital of a European country, it is a cosmopolitan city with good infrastructure. Vilnius has very good public transport, which includes buses and trolleybuses. There is a good taxi service too, but actually as a big city Vilnius has traffic problems, especially after work time. There are very good connections to other Lithuanian and European cities.

As a European city, Vilnius has great variety for your leisure and pleasure. There is not only historic architecture, but also modern shopping and entertainment centres, modern cinemas, designer boutiques, souvenir shops, bars, restaurants, night clubs and casinos. There is a National Philharmonic Society, seven high standard theatres, about sixty museums and galleries and more than thirty sporting associations. There are good medical services, too.

The city is the major economic centre of Lithuania and one of the largest financial centres in the Baltic States. Tourism is an important part of the national and cities' economies. There are about eighty hotels, hostels and motels for accommodation. It is an industrial city as well, with mechanical and electrical engineering, motors and equipment, textiles, leather, clothing and footwear manufacturers,

food processing, chemical and pharmaceuticals, wood and furniture, and construction materials manufacturing.

Research is important there and it is an important educational centre. Vilnius University was founded in 1579 as the Jesuit Academy of Vilnius. The building complex of Vilnius University occupies almost a whole block of the Old Town. It is one of the few universities in Europe still used for the purpose it was founded for.

Vilnius is a very friendly city for American and European tourists. I would like to say there is an atmosphere of cosiness and comfort. However, there are no English names on the street signs, but the Lithuanian alphabet is the same as the English one and is not so difficult to read. The money system is similar to the euro.

Lithuanian history is very dramatic. War and occupation were continuous for nearly seven hundred years. People were cheated and adapted to survive. People become closed in on themselves and that has still continued. Unfortunately, Lithuanian people do not like to help each other. The situation makes them angry, especially to the Lithuanians who live outside the country. Sadly, the energy of anger is felt everywhere and it is the main reason why I do not like to go back to Lithuania. In my opinion, the people are the city. Lithuanian people are in a complicated situation now, but I hope this will change one day.

By Andrej

The post office robbery – a class story

It was Friday morning, pension day, and Kitty was on her way to the post office. It was a lovely summer's day in Kilkee and the sun was shining. Kitty had on her cream coat and her best white hat with a flower in it. She was carrying her shopping basket to get the messages after the pension and she was hanging on to her walking stick so she didn't trip. Kitty always liked pension day because she would meet someone she knew.

As she got near to the post office, Kitty saw two men running out of the door carrying heavy bags. They looked shifty and running behind

them was Christina, the post mistress, shouting for them to "Stop!" but they kept running and took off with the money.

Kitty was upset and Christina rang the police to report the robbery. They waited for the police to come. The policeman asked Kitty what the men were wearing and she gave them a description. One of the men was wearing a motorcycle helmet and a dark jacket and the other one had a black cap and red scarf over his face. They were both carrying a big brown bag each with the money from the post office.

Christina made Kitty a cup of tea because she wouldn't get her pension that day. All the money had gone!

By David, Christina and Frances

Looking after the hens

I moved into my new house last Friday because it is near to the community garden where I keep my hens. The house is very nice but the best thing is I don't have to walk a long way to see the hens.

I have three hens at the moment and they are back laying again after the winter. I collect the eggs in the morning when I let the hens out at 9 o'clock and I usually have a boiled egg for my breakfast. I bring some of the eggs for my mother, when I go home at the weekends, and I give the rest to my friends and neighbours.

It is easy to look after hens. I feed them and give them fresh water every day. On Saturdays I clean out the run and put fresh straw in. The old straw goes on the beds for the potatoes and carrots. I feed them with meal which I buy in the shop because the hens like to eat all day. They eat snails and slugs, too, which helps to keep them off the vegetables. At night time, about 4 o'clock in the winter or 6 o'clock in the summer, I put the hens to bed in the hen house.

I really like looking after my hens and it gives me something to do every day.

By John

My birthday party

I had my 50th birthday party at the Golf Club in Kilrush on Saturday night. I was very excited but I still went to work in the bookshop in the morning. After that I had lunch in the Haven with a friend. Then I got ready for the party in the afternoon.

I had bought a new dress, a lovely purple colour and I had a pair of purple flowery shoes to go with it. I got my nails done, bright red with white stripes and I had my hair done the day before.

My sister, Áine, came to take me to the party. Everyone was already there and they all sang "Happy Birthday" when I came in. All my friends and family came from Dublin and people from the workshop came, too. I knew everyone there and I got lots of presents - a watch, handbag, necklace - and lots of cards from friends. We had finger food, sausages, chips and chicken goujons. Then I had a really big birthday cake and I was given 50 kisses by everyone!

The music was great and we danced all night. I had the first waltz with Sean and then I danced with everyone else. The best thing about my party was the music because I like Morgan playing the keyboard. We went home after one o'clock. I had a really good night and it will be a birthday party I will remember for a long time.

By Breda

Felt craft

I go to felting class on Fridays. I have made a wall-hanging, pictures and decorations. We need wool, boiling water and soap to make the felt. The wool comes from Moher Hill farm. It is washed and carded before we start felting. Carding is a way of straightening and combing the wool. The wool can be dyed with onion skins, nettles or ordinary dye.

I like to make things. It is my hobby.

By Margaret

A letter to Grandad

Grandad Byrne was not my grandad but my father-in-law. He passed away on St. Patrick Day 2013.

I was not there to say, "Bon voyage." But I don't want to say goodbye because I know some day, a long time from now, I will see you again.

You went so quickly, I still can't believe you are gone but I know that you are with Nanny Byrne. I hope you are happy with her. Tell her, "Hello," from me. I am glad you didn't wait around for me to get to Dublin because we had no unfinished business.

I hope you know what you meant to me. It was an honour to have you in my life. You were a great grandad to my children and I know they will miss you. But you will never be forgotten. So in my father's words, "Grandad Byrne, I will see you again with the help of God and John Wayne!"

Love, Catherine.

By Catherine

My favourite place

My favourite place to visit is Killarney in Co. Kerry. I always went there on holiday as a child, with my parents. My parents have sadly passed away, but I now travel there with my own children.

Killarney is called "Heaven's Reflection". It is home to Ireland's highest mountain, Carrauntoohil, in the MacGillycuddy's Reeks. It is 3,414 ft. high. Tours can be arranged to the summit from the Kerry Outdoor Shop in the Outlet Centre.

One of the best known places in Killarney National Park is Muckross House and Gardens. Mr William Bourn gave the estate to his daughter, Maud, as a wedding present, when she married a Clare man, Arthur Vincent. When Maud passed away in 1929, Arthur donated the estate to the nation. In 1933, Muckross became Ireland's first National Park.

There are many woodland walks and cycle paths to be enjoyed for all levels of fitness throughout the park. A lot of exotic trees and shrubs grow at Muckross such as rhododendrons of all colours and azaleas. It is very relaxing to stroll through the sunken garden, which is planted with bedding flowers and roses that give lots of colour from spring to autumn. The heather & hydrangea borders are very colourful also. A rock garden has been developed with many pathways leading through it, which children (and the young at heart) always enjoy discovering.

Muckross has a fine garden restaurant for a welcome cup of tea or coffee and hot food. They also have a well-stocked gift shop with items to suit all ages and tastes.

A lovely drive takes you out the N71 passing Torc Waterfall, Ladies View and onwards to Moll's Gap. The scenery here is breath-taking, passing by the lakes of Killarney and up through the winding mountain roads. This part of Kerry is ideal for landscape photography, whether amateur or professional.

Another place to spend a relaxing hour or so (and let someone else take the wheel) is to take a waterbus tour on Lough Lein from Ross Castle. The lads on the boat give an excellent introduction to the history, heritage and folklore of the area.

In all the years I have been visiting Killarney, there is always something new and different to be seen there. I will close with a verse from William Allingham:

"Where spreads the beautiful water,
To bright or cloudy skies
And the purple peaks of Killarney
From ancient woods arise."

By Teresa

Communication

Communicating properly with other people is one of the most important factors or survival tools that human beings can have in social, personal and work life. It seems the simplest thing in the world to do but if we do not do it properly it can lead to frustration, conflict and difficulty in life.

It can be a very powerful tool. We often assume that people know how we feel but in some cases, unless we say it clearly enough, people can pick up the wrong message and therefore can cause massive rifts, fights and even break-ups in relationships.

So remember, say what you mean clearly and effectively and with meaning.

By Madeleine

Our group

We usually gather at the bench out front,
Coffee and smoke as we chat and joke,
In an unhurried manner, we ramble into class,
Books in hand, we'll take it en masse.
Each to our own seat,
As if we had our name on it.
Do we have our homework done?
I really wouldn't count on it!
Then the work in earnest begins,
We listen, we glance, we giggle a bit,
But slowly the learning is beginning to stick!

By Deirdre

A Moroccan dish – vegetable tagine

Ingredients: 2 chopped onions
3 medium carrots, sliced
3 medium potatoes, sliced
green beans, fresh or frozen
1 tin of tomatoes
2 tbsp. olive oil
parsley, finely chopped
3 cloves garlic, chopped
1 tsp. turmeric
2 tsp. cumin
vegetable stock
salt and pepper to taste

Method:

Tagine is cooked in a special dish from Morocco.

Heat the olive oil in the frying pan or tagine pan and add the parsley, garlic and onions. Fry gently until the onions are soft and add turmeric, cumin and salt and pepper. Then add the carrots, potatoes, green beans and tomatoes. Add the vegetable stock to cover and bring to boil. Reduce heat and simmer to cook in the tagine for about 20–30 minutes.

By Karima

Labour day

It was a dry, humid day in July, just after two in the afternoon. The house was so quiet that you could just about hear a pin drop. Outside you could hear the bubbly laughter of a child playing.

Then there was a loud scream! The rush of excitement that followed would stay with them forever.

"The baby is coming!" shouted Ava.

"Now?" shouted Cian grabbing the bags. "Oh my God, where are my keys?"

"Have you tried your pocket?" Ava asked calmly as they sat in the car ready to go. Looking at them was their daughter, Charlie, who had been playing in the garden pool.

"Oh my God, what about Charlie? We forgot her!" Ava shouted.

"It's OK," Cian said. "I'll ring my mum and she'll take her." They rang and rang but couldn't get any answer. Then Ava remembered that it was his mother's day at the shops.

"We'll ring Corry's. They're always at home." But again there was no answer. "They should be home," Ava said. "They are always at home." But today their neighbours had gone shopping.

"What will we do?" cried Ava.

"Don't panic. Leave the panicking to me. We'll just have to bring her with us," Cian said.

"No way!" shouted Ava.

"What can we do?" Cian asked. "There is no one here."

"Try your mother again." Ava began to cry but again no answer from Cian's mother. "OK, she'll have to come with us," Ava said.

As they set off, Ava's pains were getting stronger. She was beginning to feel scared and excited all at the same time. Just then, Cian's mother turned the corner.

"Oh thank God!" shouted Cian. "Mum, you need to take Charlie. The baby is coming!"

"What's the panic? Charlie didn't arrive for thirty six hours after you went into labour. There's plenty of time," said Mum.

"No!" shouted Ava. "The baby is coming now. We have to go!"

The pains were coming stronger now. Cian panicked again.

"I can't start the car!" he shouted.

Ava laughed and said, "If you put the keys in the ignition, just maybe, it might start."

They were finally on the road to the hospital. At the hospital, baby Paul was born just fifteen minutes after they had arrived.

"That was close!" said Cian. "You could have had him in the car and that would have been such a mess."

Later, at home, with Charlie playing and running around and baby Paul cooing in his cradle, Ava started to laugh. She couldn't imagine having her baby in the back of a small car at the side of the road. As she recalled her story with her friends, the laughter was so infectious that even Cian giggled at the thought of what could have happened.

By Yvonne

Food for the soul

To me living in England felt like this poem by Sakthi Ravichandran:

A Hell in a Concrete Jungle

A hell in a concrete jungle
A hell in a concrete jungle

We have already turned animals
and lost our sixth sense,
merely to fill the stomachs
we run days, months and years
after unreal wealth.

Love has turned into lust
Romance is no more pure.
Violence encroaches
every inch of our being.
Peace is long perished

and is buried in the land of demons
God is helpless. Yes God is helpless
to help humanity in this concrete jungle.
Heaven has vanished and
this planet is now a hell
and the people live in sorrow and grief.

Moving to Ireland I found my saving grace. Along the west coast of Clare are the wide open spaces, plenty of sky between the houses. The beaches and cliffs from Doonbeg back to Loop Head were the balm that my soul needed. A road in Rhynagonnaught, which has the sea to one side, the land to the other and the sky above, I called my church. No closer to the Creator could I get.

The majestic cliffs of Dunlicky are wonderful, with the Atlantic rolling by in all her moods and a man's face in an island just off the coast. Along the road to Carrigaholt from Kilkee, most days you have a wide open view of the land. Then in a certain light, or time of the day, the mountains in Kerry rise up out of the sea, or so it seems, framing this wonderful view. Pure magic!

Further west, to Ross and the bridges, Kilbaha with the Little Ark, having lunch by the harbour wall, looking out on the river Shannon. Then up to the tip of Clare, to the Loop Head lighthouse, where the Shannon river meets the Atlantic sea.

All of this and more is the food of my soul.

By Gretta

The market in Ennistymon

There is a vegetable stall in the market square in Ennistymon. The lady who runs it is very nice. She is very obliging and kind to deal with. Her potatoes are fantastic. She sells fruit and vegetables. She told me she has been doing this all her life.

Sometimes she sells bread, cakes and pies but she has only started this recently. She is there all round the year, in all kinds of weather. Some days she is perished with the cold and she really earns her money on

those days. She runs over to Conway's shop for take-away tea to warm her up.

The odd day her nephew helps her out. He is only small as he still goes to school.

By Mary

The coffee morning for Pemba

We went to the coffee morning to raise funds for Pemba. Katie from CABES organised it. There was tea, coffee and cakes. Father Matthias was very nice and he talked to us. He smiled a lot.

By Niall, Gerard and Joe

Daniel O'Donnell

My favourite singer is Daniel O'Donnell. He is from Kincasslagh in County Donegal. He is a Country and Western singer. He has been very good to charity. He has a sister called Margot who is also a Country and Western singer. He does concerts all over the world and is very famous. My favourite song of his is, "I Want to Dance with You". He is mammy's boy and he is very good to her. I think, as well as being famous, he is still a very nice person.

By Bart

The day my godchild was born

She was born on the 6th of October.

My cousin woke me saying her contractions had started. I freaked out and started running around the house looking for everything. When I finally stopped she told me that the contractions were far apart and to relax!

We called the person who was bringing us to the hospital. We grabbed my cousin's stuff and got in the car and drove to St.

Munchin's Maternity Hospital – only for them to tell us that we had a good while to wait. So we had to come back home!

We walked up and down the house because of the pain she was feeling. It was 7.00 a.m. by this time. She went for a bath, trying to speed up her contractions and we couldn't get any spicy food because it was so early. We waited until 9.00 p.m. that night and then we travelled to hospital again.

We went to her hospital room and they put a heart monitor on her stomach. The nurse told her to sit on an exercise ball and wait. A little while later they broke her waters. The doctor told us it would be any minute now. She positioned my cousin and told her to push. I stayed with her throughout the delivery, my heart in my throat the whole time. I didn't want her to know that I was freaking out!

At 4.32 a.m. my goddaughter was born, my Anna-Kate, weighing 5 pounds, 7 ounces. We all had a joke in the hospital when her mother was in labour, as she had the hiccups and when Anna was born she had the hiccups, too.

It was an overwhelming experience and one I will cherish for a very long time.

By Kiera

The television change

From October 24th 2012 there will be a big change in television. All TV is going to be digital. The old aerials will not work anymore and you have to get a new Saorview box. If your TV is very old, you need to get a new one. If you do not, you will not be able to watch TV. Fitzpatrick's in Ennistymon was selling the box for €45. Some people, maybe the older generation will not understand what is happening. This is the new modern technology. What changes will we see next?

*By Mary, BB, Gerard, Bart, John, Tony, Mary Ellen,
Brid and Francie*

Lourdes 1978

I worked in Limerick in 1975. I left my home in Lisdoonvarna that year to build a house in Limerick. I had worked in several different jobs in 1979, the year the Holy Father, the Pope came to Limerick, Cork and Dublin. I became a helper in Limerick and worked with the poor. In thanksgiving, I went to Lourdes in 1978. I worked in the Notre Dame hospital and helped to get the patients up for breakfast. I travelled from Shannon in the summer of 1978. Three chartered planes flew from Shannon and I spent ten days there. I would go to the Grotto of our Lady every morning at 9.15 a.m. and would pray to Saint Bernadette. Lunch would be at 1.30 p.m. and then I would rest at the hotel. There were a lot of holy books for sale there and it was lovely to talk to the priests. At 9.30 p.m. we would have a sing-song in the hotel. The lady that played the piano in the hotel was from Limerick.

By Tony

My summer job at the Cliffs

I worked at the restaurant and in Cliffs of Moher Visitor Centre during the summer. I enjoyed it very much. The restaurant is upstairs and the museum and gift shop are downstairs. I worked in the kitchen doing the dishes. Firstly, the waiter brings the dishes into the kitchen from the tables in the dining room using trays. When I get the dishes I stack them in the dishwasher baskets. I rinse them with a hose attached to the tap. I then place the basket in the machine. I pull the door of the machine down to close it and it starts to work immediately. Sometimes, I would have to soak dishes and pots.

Initially, I was on a trial run but as soon as that was over I got a contract for the rest of the summer. My roster was two or three days per week from twelve to five o'clock. I had to clock in and out using my code on the machine. I had a key card for the doors. My uniform was a black shirt, trousers and peaked cap with the cliffs logo.

I met a lot of new people who were working there for the summer. A lot of local people are employed at the Cliffs. Most of them are seasonal but a few of them work all year round. I worked from the 13th

of March to the 29th of October 2012. I enjoyed every day of my work. Every day was busy and different.

I hope to be back working there next March when the summer season starts again. I will look forward to being with the same staff and doing the job I know so well.

By Kieran

Olympic winners

One day I was making a cake and needed some chocolate and found a golden ticket. I was so happy. I called my husband, Noel, and said, "What's this?" Noel read it and said, "It's the golden ticket for the Olympics." I said "Wow." So we phoned Cadbury and they sent us our Olympic package.

It was my first time in England. We got the underground to the hotel but we got really lost. We had to go back and then we found the hotel. We stayed there for two nights. We met lovely people and we had great craic.

Going to the two games was fab. The games we saw were handball and weight-lifting. The stadium was mobbed. As we watched, we did the Mexican Wave. It was great fun.

I loved being in England with my husband, Noel, and being at the Olympics. We were the luckiest people from our estate. When it was time to go home we didn't want to go home at all.

And before I finish this story, me and my husband would have loved to have seen Katie Taylor.

By Imelda

My fantastic new hot water cylinder

How important can a cylinder be in a woman's life? To always have warm water when you need it, is a wonderful thing. To have lots and lots of hot water when you need it, is even better!

I had wanted a good big cylinder for a long, long time. I take a good hot bath three times a week for my back.

I have a special kind of bath. The bathroom is quite small and the bath is very big. I bought this bath when we moved into our present home, about eight years ago. This bath has twelve jets for pressurised air which blows through the water and gives an underwater massage.

When we moved into the house first, we had an ordinary cylinder of thirty gallons. Unfortunately, after a few months, it started to leak. Luckily, we knew a good plumber who came immediately. He told us that we needed a new cylinder. My mother said, "Oh my God!" because she thought it would be very expensive. However, it wasn't too expensive.

With my beautiful new bath there was still a problem, though. The bath only filled half-way up with hot water, and then it got cold. So, you can understand why I wanted a bigger cylinder.

So, after waiting for eight years, I finally got what I wanted for such a long, long, time!

We use a wood burning stove to heat the water and I can enjoy this now with my cylinder which holds forty-two gallons of hot water!

By Suzanne

County Clare

In the early March mornings during springtime, there can often be frost on the land. This St Patrick's Day on the 17th March, I was at the parade in Miltown Malbay and it was frosty and cold, but it was dry.

Tourists like to visit Miltown and they also like to visit other parts of north and west Clare like the Burren, Kilfenora, Lahinch, Liscannor, the Ailwee Caves and Ballyvaughan. I would not like to visit the caves as they would be too dark for me. Clare is often called "The Banner County".

By John

Learning to go on

I am forty years old, married with a young family. I left school early to take up work and help in the running of the family farm. In 2009, a crush accident at work impacted on my hand, leaving severe lasting effects on the strength and flexibility of my left hand.

Out of work for a number of months and wondering what to do with myself, I decided to check out Adult Basic Education, not that school had ever been very appealing to me. I met with Margaret, and as well as offering one-to-one support she suggested with regard to my background and interests that I might join a beginner's horticulture course, which was just starting up. I agreed and met Martina. I loved the course. We had so much fun taking cuttings and sowing seeds. We grew a lot of plants and vegetables.

Seeing how well things were going, Margaret asked me to join her beginner's computer class. I wasn't sure! Doing computers conjured up thinking about writing, my educational background and so on. Margaret said we would start with a bit of fun and she would help me. Not only did I learn a lot about computers, I learned to write letters, make posters and lots of other stuff.

Through my involvement with Margaret, I was put in touch with Sheila in FÁS and got to do a forklift licence training course. It gave me a great sense of pride and achievement when I successfully completed the course and got my certificate to prove it.

In the meantime, Margaret had also set up a meeting for me with Clare Supported Employment, where I met Lorraine and Fiona and learned about the Wage Subsidy Scheme. At the same time Martina was getting her new flower business off the ground in Scarriff and

looking to avail of this particular scheme. The end of the tale is that I now work part-time for "In Season" in Scarriff.

Working part-time enabled me to continue learning and I was ushered into a FETAC 3 Personal Effectiveness course. Part of this course involved our group planning, organising and hosting an event that was open to the public. We organised a harvest fair which turned out to be very successful and funds raised were divided between the Centre and the Community Garden and I had another certificate to collect.

At the moment I am doing a FETAC 3 Internet Skills course with Mary and researching a project on the use of cameras as an aid to farmers in the calving season. Hopefully, what I learn here can be used in the future to make life as a farmer a bit easier.

Returning to education has given me the confidence to take on learning and apply myself to new things. Feeling prepared to take on new challenges has been of great benefit to me. For this, I have to thank Margaret, Martina, Mary, Sheila, Lorraine and Fiona for all the support, help and time they have given me to get to this point. With continued time and support I believe I can achieve a whole lot more.

By Brian

About me

My name is Declan. I work on the buildings. I like hurling and rugby. I like farming, as I like to work outside.

I went to America in 2005. I lived in Boston and I worked in the buildings. I lived in a flat with my brother there. It was nice in the flat as well.

At the moment I am looking for work. It is very hard to find a job. This week I was cutting timber and walking the dog.

By Declan

Heartbreak

My husband and I are the proud parents of four children. They are all talented at sport.

When our eldest child got on the primary game we were delighted. At that time, one child under the age of twelve from each national school in the county was picked for the primary game. From then on, our son made it through all the underage teams for his county. Then in 2009 the U21 team won their first ever Munster and All Ireland for Clare. Our son was a player on that team. The final took place in Croke Park. They played Kilkenny. The score was Clare 15 points, Kilkenny 14. It was nerve racking. I could not watch the match. It's painful when you have someone playing.

In 2010, he was on the senior panel. Throughout this time he was attending college, travelling to and from Galway several nights a week for training. My husband was so proud of having a son on the county team. He trained constantly for three years and never once got a senior match. After the third year of travelling back to Clare for training he began to get frustrated. One evening he arrived home and announced that he would never play again for his county.

Being his mother, I felt the pain he was suffering. He loved playing the game. He did not go back in 2013.

By Marie

My trip to Lourdes

We went to Lourdes from 22nd to 27th September 2010. I had saved up €50 every week. The hotel was beautiful and the food was good. We went to the ceremonies every day. We took the bus to get there. We also went for a trip up the mountains on the Friday. On Sunday we went to see where St. Bernadette was born. It was a great trip.

By Mary Ellen

In Kilrush for a day

I get the bus every Thursday morning at 10.00 a.m. in Labasheeda to go to Kilrush. There were a couple of people on the bus for the journey.

The journey starts in Labasheeda. First stop is Kilmurry McMahon and a few people get on there. Our journey finishes in Kilrush.

We arrive in Kilrush at 10.40 a.m. All the people on the bus journey with me go shopping. Some go to the library to renew or exchange books, read the daily papers and use the computers. Some go to Mass. Some will go for a cup of tea or a bit to eat. Some may have an appointment for the dentist, doctor or their solicitor.

We leave at 1.30 p.m. from Kilrush calling to Kilmurry and finish in Labasheeda at 2.05 p.m.

By Tony

My trip to Spain

For my summer holidays I went to Spain. I got the flight to Spain from Shannon.

The first thing I noticed was the lovely weather, no rain lots of sun when I got off the plane.

Myself and my friends stayed in an apartment five minutes from the beach. There was a swimming pool in the apartment and we went for a swim every morning.

We took a tour to Barcelona in the morning. We saw the Olympic Stadium and we went to see their famous church and the biggest thing was seeing Barcelona Soccer Stadium. We had a tour of Barcelona Soccer Stadium. Barcelona was the cleanest city I ever saw.

We went to the fun park in Spain. On the third day we went on all the rides and some of them were scary until you got on them. The fourth day we went to the water park. That day was fun - lots of slides to go on. The fifth day we went back to the fun park to finish it all. It's so big you need two days to get through all of the rides.

That night we had to get ready to go home in the morning. I hope to go back again.

By Michael

I am a shoe

I am a shoe
I wonder why women buy me
I hear my heels on the concrete pathway
I see bright lights and big occasions
I want a matching handbag
I am a shoe

I pretend to be cheaper when her husband asks
I feel sore if I'm worn too long
I touch calloused heels and ingrown toenails
I worry that I will no longer be the favourite
I cry when I'm taken to the cobbler's to be re-soled
I am a shoe

By Anna

Role play

This was a new project for me. I never did this before and I found it very interesting. I was having a bit of difficulty writing down some numbers given to me on the phone. My tutor and I did a bit of role play together. I learned a lot about talking on the phone and writing down numbers. I have been better with myself with listening properly and not taking down wrong numbers.

By Kathleen

My first day in Ireland

My first day in Ireland was fantastic. It was a feeling I'll never forget. This is what happened. I got off the plane in Shannon Airport. The air seemed different from Bangladesh, but a good different. Then I went to collect my daughter's and my bags. When we got to the entrance of the airport my husband was there to collect us. He took us to the home we were staying in on the Clare Road.

Everything seemed so bright and beautiful with a tinge of coldness. I was fascinated by every little thing I saw.

My first dinner with my husband in Ireland was a fantastic feeling for me. He organised a big dinner party for me.

By Mazedra

Lessons for life

In a quiet town, long ago lived a narky old lady. Everyone was afraid of her. She looked real scary with long wild hair and she had a hooped nose.

You did not walk slowly past this old lady's house, you ran past it. Only, one day, I forgot to run. Too late! She called out, "Young girl, come here." I looked straight at her and I thought I'd go blind. Good God, my heart was racing. I looked for a quick escape, but I could see none.

"Come here quick," she said. "I want you to get me a few messages. Woodbines, get me Woodbines," she shouted. "Stop shouting," I said. "I'm not deaf." "Sorry girly," she said, and I stopped right there. "Sure Woodbines are gone off the shelves long ago." "What do they sell so?" she said in a low voice. I then told her what was on the market. She looked at me funny and said, "I never heard of any of them." "What planet are you from?" I said. "If you are going to be funny, I won't go to the shop for you."

Well, at last, she gave me a list as long as your arm. If only I had ran past her house, but this time I ran all the way to the shop. I got her messages, gave them to her. She thanked me, and asked me in for a treat.

I looked straight at her and said, "Can you tell me why you don't go to the shop?" She up and told me her story and finished off by saying, "Philip used to do that for me but he ran away with the Bourke one."

God love her, I thought. She must be lonely. "I'll get your messages. After school I will pass your house. If you want anything, just call out." "Thank you," she replied. As I said my goodbyes to her, I felt happy to have done something good. I never told anyone in the village about meeting this sad old lady. I got to know her well, eventually.

When I left school there were no jobs in my village so I went to England. The years flew by, and one day, I met someone from our village. She told me a long lost relative turned up to look after the old lady and stayed with her till the day she died. Rest her soul. For me, having met her I had learned not to judge anybody by their looks or run past anybody's door.

By Noreen

Couverture, the premium desserts specialists

It was a day trip designed to tease our senses with different flavours and smells. We arrived at Couverture factory full of anticipation and excitement, probably like Charlie in the movie *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* when he found the remaining golden ticket. Luckily for us, we don't have to consume a big amount of chocolate to look for that ticket. Our teacher Nora had provided us with the opportunity to visit one of the award winning suppliers of desserts in the country.

An early bus trip from Ennis to Dublin on 21st February 2013 took us to the factory. We went inside the building and in the reception area we saw the different awards given to the company for their award-winning desserts. One of the staff introduced herself as Margaret and

ushered us in. We were divided into three groups so that she could give us a proper tour.

Excitedly, the first group went ahead and for us who remained waiting in the lobby, the anticipation was building by the second. Fortunately, the second group was called in so we didn't have to wait that long. As we walked into the building we couldn't help but notice the beautiful smell that lingered in the air. It was something sweet and inviting and I couldn't wait to see where it was coming from.

We went inside an office upstairs where we had to sign a form or checklist that we were not carrying any diseases, especially in the last 24 hours. Basically, all visitors have to do this to adhere to health and safety procedures in place.

After those small formalities, we were given a tour to a stock room located at the back of the building. We had to use hair nets to cover our heads, only then were we allowed inside. This place is where they store all the ingredients used for making desserts and it is considered a low risk area. The next place we went to was inside the main building where the heart of the operation takes place. Everything happened here. Again we had to comply with the health and safety and personal hygiene standards.

One of the staff showed us the desserts that were ready for delivery only after these products went through some sort of conveyor belt that checks for metal. (It's nice to know I'm not gonna bite a metal object!) One of the dessert's names that caught my eye is the one that is called "Billionaire's Dessert", made affordable for people like us. Looking at how everyone was working prompted me to ask whether anyone can work here. (OK, I was actually looking at those delicious desserts.) I was told that you don't have to know how to bake or cook because they will provide the training. Chocolate every day? Yes, please.

It was a great experience seeing how those desserts are made. My perception about it has changed dramatically based on that experience.

We left the factory feeling hungry but because this was just a side trip, an appetiser, we were left wanting more. Just as well we didn't taste

anything because greater things are about to come. Catex 2013, here I come, but that is another story.

By Mía

The St. Patrick's Day rap

Adult Education we're on the move today
We are here to celebrate a special day
We've got creativity, we've got class
We are here to enjoy the party bash

We bring style, swagger and our learning skills
For each other we walk the longest hill
Adult Education is in a league of its own
Just like St. Patrick's Day, it helps every home!

By Teresa, Juule, Mike and Killian

My cousin's wedding

My cousin Alan married Zara last September in Roundfort Church, Co. Mayo. My mother and father and I went to the wedding. The church was very packed. There were about 200 people at the wedding altogether.

The Mass started at 1.30 p.m. and finished at 3.00 p.m. Before the Mass started some of my family and my mother took photographs outside the church. The priest said a lovely Mass. His name was Fr. Michael Murphy.

We went by car to the reception in the Westwood Hotel, Galway. The bride and groom went in a vintage car. We had refreshments when we arrived at the hotel.

We had a beautiful meal and lovely music afterwards. It went on until 3 o'clock in the morning. I was very tired by then. I stayed in the hotel that night. Next morning the married couple joined the two families for more photographs and had a big chat about the wedding day. Alan

and Zara went to Africa and Dubai on their honeymoon. They flew out from Dublin.

We had a lovely breakfast in the hotel. After breakfast we went home. It was a great wedding and I had a great time.

By Kieran

My home

I live out in the country, down a valley and a mile from the main road. It is a clean two storey house. The land around is rocky and mountainous. I like living there because it is peaceful and it is home. All my memories from childhood are there. A little bit of my heart is where I call home.

By Bríd

The day I met the Queen

The embossed envelope had arrived and inside was my invitation to Buckingham Palace to be presented with my medal from the Queen.

Panic! What was I going to wear? Pink or peach would be too pastel. Black, grey or brown - too morbid. Red – too daring. Yellow – too big Buddhist. Help! In the end I opted for an ice-blue ensemble created by John Rocha - very important to support Irish designers. I chose a matching hat by the famous milliner Philip Tracey, and a beautiful pair of shoes by Christian Louboutin finished off the ensemble, or so I thought.

My flight was from Shannon Airport to Heathrow. As I boarded I looked around and thought smugly to myself of my impending appointment. The plane touched down at Heathrow and I could feel my heart pounding in my chest with excitement. I stepped out into the lovely warm afternoon air and took a black cab to the five-star Dorchester Hotel in Park Lane. If I was going to meet the Queen of England, I might as well stay in luxury accommodation. After all, it was good enough for Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor!

As I stepped into the foyer I was overcome by the splendour and opulence. After checking in I was taken to my room by a friendly butler. The room was decorated in a chintzy country house style and the bed looked like a dream to sleep on. The bathroom was glistening with chrome and white marble.

I decided to treat myself to afternoon tea. We were offered traditional or themed options and I opted for the traditional. I was served tea from a silver teapot and I drank from the finest Doulton china. The pastries were something to behold. Afterwards I enjoyed some people-watching in the hotel lobby, intrigued by the mix of international guests.

Later, after all my people-watching, I decided to have a stroll down Hyde Park, one of the greatest city parks in the world. Some people were strolling, others were walking their dogs and some more were jogging, each in their own little bubble. I walked down to the Princess of Wales Memorial Fountain. I sat for a while, deep in thought. When I looked at my watch it was almost six-thirty, so I decided to return to my hotel to freshen up for dinner.

I dined in the private dining room. Dinner was exquisite. I treated myself to dessert which was light and indulgent. I followed this with a glass of Pinot Noir.

After dinner I decided to retire for the night, as tomorrow laid heavily on my mind. As I mentioned, the bed was a dream and I had a restful night.

At eight o'clock I ordered room service and had a light breakfast of fruit salad, pastries and waffles. I got ready and felt pretty pleased when I looked at my reflection in the mirror.

I had pre-ordered a taxi for eleven o'clock and it arrived promptly. As we drove up The Mall, it felt surreal. It was like entering another beautiful world.

Four gentlemen were on duty to look after the recipients and I was promptly ushered into a large, fantastically decorated room. The Queen entered the ballroom attended by two ushers and escorted by the Lord Chamberlain. He stood at the right hand side of the Queen

after the National Anthem was played and announced the name of each recipient and the achievement for which the person was being decorated. The Queen was given brief background details by her equerry as I approached to receive my award. I had to kneel on my right knee on a stool to receive my medal while she dubbed me with a naked sword. She briefly spoke to me and congratulated me for being the best "Slurry Spreader in Ireland".

As I walked away, I opened my eyes to hear the bedside clock ringing the alarm. It was time to get up and take my little daughter to school!

By Kathleen

My sister, Sharon

My sister, Sharon, lives in Tralee but for St. Patrick's Day she went to the parade in Killarney. The nickname for Kerry is "The Kingdom." Sharon is a good cook and she is the best sister ever. She is also my best friend. Her birthday is in June.

By Adrian

Sustainability in my father's time

I remember going to the bog with my father in the early fifties and sixties. Most people went to the bog after the creamery. They usually travelled there by horse or donkey and cart. The week before cutting the turf, my father went there, cleaned the bank, repaired and filled in where he had cut the previous year's turf. The first day, they brought everything they needed such as a turf barrow, sleans, forks and a hay knife. The lunch bag and kettle were very important, too.

The first task was to light the fire from the previous year's left-over turf to have it ready to boil the kettle and some eggs in a pea tin at lunchtime. Once the fire was lit we worked very hard. My father cut the turf with the slean, starting with the light white turf which I barrowed and spread on the bank. It took him about a week to cut the white turf as the bank was sixty feet long. The white turf was much easier to barrow as it was lighter. We spent the same time again cutting,

barrowing and spreading the black turf. Turf cutters took great pride in their work. My father cut the bank perfectly straight and kept an eye on me to make sure I spread the turf correctly.

We looked forward to lunchtime as we'd be quite hungry. Over lunch we enjoyed the company of the men from the neighbouring banks. They told stories and we all relaxed for at least an hour as we ate our meal of homemade bread, butter and a boiled egg, washed down with tea from the kettle. After the meal we returned to work until about six o'clock when we went home.

The turf cutting continued for about two weeks, then the turf was turned, footed and clamped. At the end of the season when all other work was done, the turf was drawn home with a horse and creel.

Turf was the main fuel used by my mother to heat the house. At the same time she used the open fire to bake the bread and cook the food, including the turkey for Christmas dinner. Firelighters were never used in our house as the fire never went out.

Back to the present! Sadly, times have changed. Machinery has taken over the bogs and recession has taken over our country.

By Stephen

The best show in Glór!

It was Ennis Musical Society. The title was *Me and my Girl*. I was there three times and I enjoyed it very much. The music was also excellent and a lot of hard work went into it. There were a lot of children with their parents. There were all kinds of people there, old and young, able and disabled people, wheelchairs and walking frames.

My brother Max was involved in the show, but I didn't know exactly what he was doing.

The rehearsals took place in the Community College in Harmony Row to begin with and after a few weeks, they moved to Glór to rehearse.

Around two weeks before the performance went on, the postman gave me two leaflets all about the show, but they only gave general information. I still didn't know what my brother was doing in it.

A few days before the show was due to go on, Max told me that he was in the show and to buy two tickets, one for myself and one for Margaret Mary his wife, my sister-in-law.

I spoke to my sister-in-law and we made an arrangement to go to the show together. I went around to Glór, which is only around the corner from my home, and bought the tickets.

I told her, "Please be early! Come to the house at 7.15 p.m. at the latest."

At the show, she bought a programme. I was so excited to see the photographs of the performers, including my brother Max!

The show ran from the 5th to the 9th of March 2013. It was quite long, starting at 8.00 p.m. and finishing after 11.00 p.m., with an interval of fifteen minutes.

Imagine! I went to see this show three times and each time, I enjoyed it more. The third time I understood every single word they spoke and sang. It was a wonderful experience and I am keeping the programme as a souvenir to remind me of it. Better still, the players are sending me a DVD of the show to watch and enjoy many times again, together with the many photographs we took on that special night.

By Suzanne

The yellow ball

I am bounced over and back. Children having their tennis lessons; how I hurt. I have just landed in the playground. A dog has me between his teeth. I can feel the saliva dribbling all over me. No! He drops me in a puddle. I can't take much more. A little girl walks by, picks me up and puts me in her pocket. It's dark and scary. Chewing gum sticks to me. A couple of coins lay beside me - the silver sixpence keeping well away from the copper penny. Is this my destination? Is

this where I am going to end up? When the girl named Clodagh gets home, she puts her cold hand into the pocket and takes me out. She lets the warm tap run on me, and then she dries me tenderly. I am brought up to her bedroom. She puts me on the shelf beside her favourite ornament, Peter Rabbit. I sit here and watch her playing with her toys. Now and again she takes me down and bounces me gently. I am very happy that it was this sweet little girl who found me.

By Mary

What am I?

I am a garden growing my own vegetables.
I wonder about vegetables that I will grow.
I hear lawnmowers cutting grass nearby.
I see a polytunnel that will make things easy to grow.
I want the weather to get better.
I am a garden growing my own vegetables.
I pretend to feed all hungry children in the world.
I feel good if the sun shines.
I touch the hens that pick my earth.
I worry if I would be left as waste ground.
I cry when I get too much wet weather.
I am a garden growing my own vegetables.

By Rose

My uncle

I have an uncle called Michael. He lives in Ennistymon on his own. He used to live with his brother, Paddy, but he died. Michael does not talk much. He is a quiet man. He goes to Mass in Clouna. He likes to listen to the radio every day. Sometimes, I go to visit him and he makes me a cup of tea and gives me biscuits.

By Seamus

My mother was a great fan of the frozen peas

She plonked the pot down on the draining board. Out came the frozen packet of peas. The horrible colour green, that turned me off that colour for life. As I sat watching her from the kitchen, I wished I could get my hands on the man that invented the fridge. Some of the peas fell and scattered on to the ground. The dog even turned away. Last week that packet of peas was on my brother's head. They looked better there, than ever they did on a plate. I have always said I don't like frozen peas, but they always appear on my plate. Mom says, "You have not touched your peas." Here it comes! "I'll put them in the pot of soup I'm making for tomorrow. If you are finished, be a good girl and sweep the floor." I get the brush and sweep, looking at the little horrors as they try to escape. I am on a mission, as I look at them in the bin. I make a promise; I will never serve my children frozen peas.

By Mary

Visaginas, my home town

Before I came to Ireland I lived in Visaginas in Lithuania. Visaginas is a modern, young town. It is thirty seven years old and was built in the Aukstatijia National Park. Aukstatijia is in the east of Lithuania. The town is only ten kilometres from Belarus, and the Latvian border is twenty five kilometres away. It is also 450 kilometres from the Baltic Sea. According to the census in 2011, Visaginas has a population of 22,091. Since the last ten years, the population has declined by 25%. If ten years ago the average age of people was 26 years, now it is 50 years of age.

Visaginas was built for people who were working on the Nuclear Power Plant. The building of the NPP started in 1975, and in 1983 the first reactor started working. Three thousand people were employed at the time. In 1987, the second reactor was started, and two hundred more people were employed there. Unfortunately, in 2009 both reactors at the NPP were stopped by a Lithuanian Government decision and by a European Union requirement, as they were considered unsafe. Three thousand highly qualified staff lost their jobs.

However, the town is still alive as there are two factories in Visaginas. There is a sewing factory where 650 people, mostly women, are employed, and there is a furniture factory with 100 employed. There are also five supermarkets where people are working and doing shopping and there are a lot of small shops. There are two markets. One is opened daily and another is opened at weekends only. There are bars, restaurants and coffee shops also, where people can have lunch or drink a cup of coffee or just spend time playing bowling in the new shopping centre, which was built two years ago. There is a cinema also for 200 people where you can watch new movies. Otherwise, you can just spend your time on the lake beach which is 200 metres from the town. If you like sport, such as football, you can play it in a beautiful stadium. We have a rowing club also and our sportsman, Evgenij Shuklin, won silver in the Olympic Games in London in 2012. I love Visaginas because I grew up there. I like very much walking on our pedestrian streets, especially in the summer time when all around is green and the flowers are blooming.

Visaginas is a young town so the architecture is in the modern style. People live in five, nine or twelve story block apartments. The highest building is 56 metres high. The roads are wide, so are comfortable for driving, and pedestrian areas are very comfortable for pedestrians. Public transport is good, both inside the town itself and for intercity travel also.

In 1990, when I finished secondary school and got the Lithuanian equivalent of Leaving Certificate, all eight of Visaginas' schools were completely full of learners. Now, only four of the eight schools are open and the number of learners is half what it was twenty years ago.

However, all schools have swimming pools and large covered halls for doing sport and exercises, and mini-stadiums as well. There are two playschools for 300 children each approximately. We have a technology school in Visaginas where students can train in one of thirty different occupations such as seamstress, secretary, electrician, welder, mechanic and many others. The course can take a minimum of 26 weeks and a maximum of three years.

At the end of August each year since 1991, Visaginas welcomes a lot of guests who come from all over the world to the Visagino Country Fest. It is an international country music festival with country music stars

from USA, Australia, Norway, Russia, Poland, Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania and many more. Usually, Visaginas welcomes and accommodates about 35,000 people each year. It is a very busy time for the town. The ten- storey hotel is full all the time. The townspeople provide accommodation for guests as well as the hotel, which cannot place all guests. The venue is the Fest Town Stadium. It continues for two days and finishes at midnight on the second day with spectacular fireworks every year. Welcome to Visaginas!

By Aleksandr

The B&B

I work in a B&B in Ennistymon. The lady of the house works in the B&B and her husband works in the pub. I go there every Tuesday at 1.00 p.m. I wash the windows and fill the coal bunker. My employer makes me tea and she gives me a bun or a biscuit. She is a kind lady. She is kind to animals even when the cat dirties the windows. Her dog died last year. I like working at the B&B.

By Michael

Lourdes

We are going to Lourdes this year in July with the Lisdoonvarna Faith and Light group. Our sister, Marie, is coming, too. We have been there before and we will stay in the same hotel. We will bring home bottles of holy water for our friends and family and holy medals for ourselves. We will go shopping before the trip and buy new jumpers, cardigans and a new outfit each. Lourdes is a holy place and we feel happy when we are there. We feel happy because it is a nice place and we are on holidays when we are there.

By Susan and Geraldine

I am a spinning bike

I can keep you slim and fit.

I am here among the other bikes, chatting to the kettle bells

Sitting on the yoga mats, they do look small.

I am waiting for the first class to begin.

The women start to come in, some anxious to get started.

Here comes my lady, I hear her before I see her.

I call her my lady because she plants her backside down on my saddle.

Then it's "Pass me the water. Take my jacket." She must have been a queen in a previous life.

The other spinning bikes are going faster and faster.

I wonder how I ended up with this lady, she is not going fast enough to pant.

The other bikes are all talking about the distance, and calories they have lost.

They're so proud, I want to be one of those bikes.

I am a spinning bike I can keep you slim and fit.

I pretend I am the one talking about calories lost, and distance.

I want to talk to this woman and tell her we can do it together.

I worry I am not going to reach my potential and never be as fast as the other bikes.

Sometimes I cry with frustration.

My lady gets down off the saddle when most of the women are gone.

She is really pleased with herself, she thinks she's done well.

She gets a soft cloth and cleans me down.

Sometimes she says, "I love this bike."

The other spinning bikes say their ladies never say that.

How lucky am I?

My lady isn't so bad after all.

I am a spinning bike.

By Mary

Switzerland

I visited Switzerland in May of this year because my niece was getting married there. I flew from Dublin to Zurich. Zurich is a big city. The people I met were very nice. In Switzerland, people usually speak French or German. Some people speak English, too. The money used there is the Swiss franc.

I looked around the shops in Zurich and I also saw the Swiss Alps. The weather was hot and I got a sun tan. I had a good time in Switzerland.

By Martin

My life in music

My life in music began when I was four years old. I used to get up in the morning and play all the records in the house. We had a radiogram that had a record player, radio and a place to store your records. I now have over two thousand records in my collection!

My collection of vinyl ranges from the nineteen twenties right up to the modern day. Gramophone records are played at a speed of 78 revolutions per minute or r.p.m., albums or L.P's are played at 33 r.p.m. and singles or "the 45's" as they are known are played at 45 r.p.m.

I am not four years old anymore; you can add a zero to the four. These days I am a D.J. or disc jockey and I call my events "The gramophone disco". I play to all age groups but mostly the older generation. These people enjoy listening to the old vinyl and enjoy the craic that comes from it.

There is something to be said about vinyl. It has lasted the test of time. It is now 2013 and I am still playing my vinyl and loving it.

By D.J. Douf

Farming in days gone by

I grew up on a farm in west Clare. With my family we saved hay, went to the bog, kept cattle and chickens and went to the creamery by horse and cart. My father was also a blacksmith so there were always people and horses going up and down the avenue to the forge. My mother would always ensure that people going to the forge would have a bite to eat and a cup of tea while they were waiting.

My siblings and I went to school during the day and studied and did our homework in the evening. We did not do any farm work during the week because my parents thought our education was very important. However, come the weekends and the school holidays we would all help out with the various jobs on the farm.

When the time came to save the hay in the meadow, I would drive the horse and raker. My mother and sisters would be terrified of me when I was driving and would shout "Shove back! She's coming!" I wouldn't knock them down but they were still wary of me!

We kept chickens in a coop and for devilment I would go in with the sweeping brush and knock the lot of them off their perch! They would then fly around the coop and squawk noisily but would eventually gather themselves on the perch again. I thought this was great fun!

When the time came to bring the trams of hay from the meadow to the barn I would drive the horse and float that would carry the hay. My father would be in the back with the hay and I would drive so fast that he would cling to the sides of the float pleading with me to slow down. I might have gone fast, but I was careful and got the job done.

My father used to go to the creamery in the mornings on the horse and cart with his few tankards of milk. He also brought tankards for the neighbours if they did not have any method of transport. They were very grateful and gave him a couple of pounds at Christmas in gratitude.

I used to help out at the bog when it was time to cut the turf. My job was to put the cut turf into the wheelbarrow and bring it to a place where I would stack it so it would dry. This was hard work but it had to

be done. Lunch in the bog was the same as it was in the meadow, fried eggs, bread, milk and tea.

We had a garden and there was nothing I liked better than to nip in and pick a few potatoes for myself. I would go home, boil them and eat them with butter and salt. This was a treat as they tasted so good.

I had a healthy and fulfilling childhood on the farm. My parents were very keen on education so school was as important as the farm. It was a great way to grow up.

By Dympna

I am

I am unique
I wonder why I can't keep up with everyone else
Why some people see kindness as a sign of weakness
I hear the sound of silence
I see the dress I would like to fit into
I want to be able to let go
I am unique

I pretend and say, "Yes," even when it doesn't suit me
I feel I have a lot to give but the more I give the more people expect
I touch the earth
I worry that I can't fix things
I worry when I see people being unfairly treated and a person hurting
I am unique

By Mary

Casseroles from Finland

In Finland we like to cook casseroles. We have turnip casserole, carrot casserole, potato casserole, mince casserole, ham casserole and fish casserole. The children love macaroni casserole. My favourite is cabbage casserole.

Finnish macaroni casserole

Ingredients: 200g macaroni
 700g mince meat
 200mls milk
 1 egg
 1 onion
 salt and pepper
 butter
 cheese


Method:

1. Put the macaroni to boil and chop the onion into fine pieces. Heat the oven to 175 degrees.
2. Start frying the mince and add the onions to the mince. If you like add salt and pepper.
3. When the macaroni is boiled pour the water out and take out a large casserole dish and rub some butter on the edges.
4. Place the macaroni and mince in the casserole dish and mix them together.
5. Take a small bowl, break the egg into it, add the milk and mix them.
6. Pour the mixture into the casserole dish. It should reach the top.
7. If you want, you could grate some cheese on top of the casserole mixture.
8. Put it into the oven for about 30 minutes until the egg is fully cooked.
9. Let it cool down and enjoy with salad and ketchup!

By Emma

Simply Said:

Then and now



"I'm never alone now. Books are my friends."
Denis (Issue 25)

"I've always liked my handbags but my schoolbag is my most important bag now."
Bernadette (Issue 25)

"We listen, we glance, we giggle a bit. But slowly the learning is beginning to stick!"
Deirdre (Issue 25)

"I am so delighted to have made this wonderful discovery of learning to learn. I have gained confidence, enjoy working as part of a team..."
Mary (Issue 25)

"We moved with a big lorry. We brought the horse, the goats, the bees and the rotavator and the other belongings came in barrels."
Anonymous (Issue 1)

"Luckily during the summer of 1988 the priest announced at Sunday Mass that the County Clare Reading and Writing Scheme were there to help people like me and their service was absolutely confidential. This put the bug in my ear and I kept thinking about it."
Thomas (Issue 1)

"I sat for many empty hours twiggling my thumbs in envy of my reading friends..."
Ernie (Issue 1)

"We here in Ireland need a new education for our young and old who may travel abroad. What is expected of them and the habits of others must be understood."
Noreen (Issue 1)

"I like coming to this class because I am learning to read and write. It is something I should have done when I was little. But better late than never."
Kay (Issue 1)