



Come Sit Awhile

VOLUME 2



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Foreword

by Emer O'Brien

County Librarian

Welcome to our second collection of dementia-friendly stories, Come Sit Awhile Volume 2.

Libraries are at the heart of communities and play an essential role in providing information, services and access to resources for someone with dementia or their carers. Cork County Council Library's Age Friendly programme aims to work towards creating an inclusive place for older people, including those affected by dementia.



This collection forms part of Cork County Council Library and Arts Service's Age Friendly programme. We are dedicated to providing Age Friendly Services, hence each library has an Age Friendly Ambassador within their team, has an Age Friendly Charter and library staff are trained in dementia awareness.

The collection has been

carefully chosen by library staff to cover a wide range of topics including stories and images that can act to evoke memories through reminiscence. Also included are the winning and highly commended entries in our dementia-friendly short story competition which was held as part of our Age Friendly programme.

We wish to thank all contributors, and Fiona Foley, HSE, National Co-ordinator 'Dementia: Understand Together' for her help and support.

We hope you enjoy this trip down memory lane.

Please, come sit awhile...



Introduction

by **Fiona Foley**

Senior Project Manager at the HSE's National Dementia Office with responsibility for "Dementia: Understand Together"

It is with great joy that I introduce the second volume of "Come Sit Awhile", a collection of memories, short stories and images. It is dedicated to people with dementia, their families, friends, supporters and carers.

Numerous artists, including entries from Cork County Council Library's Age Friendly Writing Competition, have shared their literary contributions with us in this vivid collection, which can be read and enjoyed collectively. "Come Sit Awhile" is an invitation to spend time together, to be and to rest, to connect and reflect in this moment. A gift which we can give to ourselves and others in our lives.

Currently there are over 64,000 people in Ireland living with dementia and this number is set to double in the next 25 years. There are many different forms of dementia and every person's experience of the condition is unique.



Awareness of dementia and interest in this condition is growing in Ireland. This is partly because of the Health Service Executive's (HSE's) national "Dementia: Understand Together" campaign, which has inspired organisations, community groups and individuals to take action to create dementia inclusive communities. Partly, because more and more people have been affected by dementia, either personally, or through a family member, friend, neighbour or work colleague.

The majority of people with dementia are living in the community and want to continue participating in and contributing to community life. It is important for us as



members of a community to understand dementia better and support people to stay connected and engaged.

Being at the heart of our communities, the library network across the country has enormous potential to welcome and include people with dementia. Libraries bring people together into an inviting and calm environment, regardless of

their health status, their age and any other aspects of their lives, to sit, read, engage, to research and learn, to interact and participate.

The shared language in this collection can help us understand ourselves and others better, as well as give the person with dementia the opportunity to connect and share their own experiences, which in turn can reduce isolation, support reminiscence, and improve overall health and wellbeing.

Reading or listening to the words, or leafing through the pages, can evoke thoughts and memories of our own, they allow us individual interpretations, emotions, reflections and experiences, be it happy, sad or nostalgic.

“Come Sit Awhile” Volume 2 is just one of the many dementia inclusive initiatives the libraries offer, and I would like to thank participants, Cork County Council Library and Arts Service, and all library staff members across the county for their continuous engagement and support.



Come Sit Awhile

VOLUME 2



Come Sit Awhile

by Alice Taylor

Alice is a well known Irish writer and novelist



How nice to sit
And think awhile
Of little things
To make us smile,
Of happy things
We did in fun
Long ago when
We were young,
To think of
People
Who were kind
And left a ray
Of light behind,
People who were
Nice to know
When we were
Young
Long time ago.
So come and sit
With me awhile
And think of things
To make us smile.



His Master's Voice

by John Connell

Excerpt from John's book The Cow Book: A Story of Life on A Family Farm by John Connell, Granta 2018.

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Every farm and every family have their own unique calls for cattle. These noises are a form of oral culture passed down father to son. The cows know this language and newcomers to the herd quickly learn it, so that they all understand what the words or cadences mean and respond when we want to move them. So often, the words are not words at all, they are not English nor Gaelic, they are of an older sort of sound, perhaps from before, from the long ago.

I have read of the Fulani people of Africa, who are the largest group of nomadic herdsman in the world, numbering some 13 million people. They still adhere to their traditional way of life, moving their animals across the plains of Central Africa through the seasons. I would love to hear their calls, for they must be very old and ancient, unchanged for centuries.

In Australia, where the farms are vast, I have seen dogs used to herd the cattle. They jump on the back of a quad and travel with the farmer out to the bush. The blue heeler is a powerfully built animal, with great personality and tenacity. It will bite cows on the nose and hush them forwards.

Here, though, things are different. Our cows do not fear the dog and will stand and fight them. Vinny is young and, with that, foolish, but he knows enough not to go up against the bigger cows. He is, after all, a sheep dog, and it is not in his nature or instinct to move cattle.



And so with sticks and wire and calling we move the herd. There is a psychology to this act: one must predict what the cows will do when the certain calls are made. To gather them to us, we shout, 'Suck, suck, sucky,' which grows faster, eventually flowing into a continuous rolling sound. This calling may take several minutes if the herd is in fresh grass, and sometimes it does not work, for, being sentient creatures, cows have their own free will.

Family calls can sometimes change. I learned a wolf call from old Robin Redbreast years ago and now it is part of our farm's vocabulary. It mimics the sound of a wild dog, and it has never failed to move a cow or sheep forward. For though neither the cows nor I have ever seen or heard a wolf, the noise is buried in their DNA, in their instinct, and they fear it.

When the pack is moving, we yell and keep up our shouts. Hup, hup, hup, ya, ya, ya, heyup. These are old words, words that were used on the ox and working horses by Grandad

and Great-Grandad. With them, we sing the cows into the crush or holding pens. We picture them in our minds standing in the holding pen, and the song is the vehicle for that vision. This reminds me of the Aboriginal people of Australia, who sang their country into existence through their songlines. After all, as Bruce Chatwin wrote, the first words began as song.

The cows answer us with moos and calls. We try and not run them, for one may break away from the herd and cross ditches and perhaps break into a neighbour's field, and so, as we move closer to our goal, our calls grow softer and we tell them then that they are good girls. We cluck and coo and they calm and slow, and in the end we sooth them with gentle shushes. In this they know the annoyance is nearly over. Sometimes on hot days when they are in the crush, we scratch their backs with our sticks; they enjoy this and keep calm and docile.

It is how we speak, they and I, and yet there have been times when I have spent many days straight with these creatures and have wished we could communicate properly. When the Tower of Babel fell, it not only divided man but species too.



Sweet Memories

by Leanne O' Donnell

Leanne is Writer in Residence for
County Council Library & Arts Service



Sometimes it's a scent you remember the most. The scent I'm remembering now is sweet - sweeter even than sugar - and it brings me straight back to the night of my first and only crime.

I had followed the scent like a hound on a trail, making my way stealthily down the corridor, across the small office and through the big black door into my Uncle's shop. For the first time in my little life no one knew where I was.

The shop was shut up for the night, the only light glowed from the countertop fridge on the far side of the room. Along with the sweet sugary smell, what I remember now is how loud an empty room can sound when you are small and alone in the near-dark. The light switch was so far above my head I didn't even try to reach it. I had one clear thought in my mind and it was to do with what I knew lay beneath the shop counter.

Life was simple then. I was probably more than two and definitely less than three. My days were spent moving from lap to welcoming lap getting hugs and kisses from loving parents, aunts, uncles and cousins. And when we visited

Uncle John J in his shop by the river there were special stories - a series of tales about a small magical man who lived in the woods up beyond the house. Johnny Mc Gorey was a tiny brave adventurer who rode a rabbit instead of a horse and on one dreadfully stormy night the rabbit broke his leg. Johnny Mc Gorey called to his old friend John J for help and John J, my very own uncle, came to the rescue with two ice-pop sticks which he fashioned into a splint and wrapped carefully around the rabbit's little leg. The rabbit rested up in a cardboard box in the office while his leg healed and John J earned Johnny Mc Gorey's eternal gratitude - no small thing when you consider that Johnny Mc Gorey was one of the fairy folk and could do magical favours for his human friends.

A plentiful supply of ice-pop sticks for emergencies like this was just one of the many advantages of having a shop. There were bags of lucky dips, rows of chocolate bars, Tayto crisps, red and white KP lemonade, a magnificent ice cream machine that churned into action on the first sunny day of the year and a medieval looking bacon slicer that we were never ever to touch. A warning that always came with a joke from Dad about the woman who accidentally backed into a bacon slicer - DisArsedher!



But it wasn't the bacon slicer I was interested in as I crept across the slick black and white tiles. It was the late 1970s and my mother was well ahead of her time - sweet treats were kept to a minimum, we had one trip a week after mass on a Sunday to choose one bar of chocolate and a comic. There were no sweets, crisps or fizzy drinks kept in our house. My teeth might thank her now but my early childhood was filled with fantasies of giant chocolate bars and cakes the size of tables.

And that night, right there in front of me in the dim glow of the fridge light, lay an Aladdin's cave of penny and ha'penny sweets. Clear plastic tubs filled with cola bottles, fizzy cola bottles, sherbet saucers, chocolate mice, fried eggs, black jacks, fruits salads, bulls eyes, dip daps, rosey apples, flogs and humbugs. A concentrated sweetness wafted into the

air, crystals of delight floated about causing a dizzying, giddy rush to the head. A handful of fizzy colas, the fine grit of caster sugar dusting my fingers and a mouthful of sweet ecstasy.



I knew in that instant that life could get no better than a gob full of sweets and more to come. It didn't matter which sweets I chose, now that I was here in the midst of endless abundance the important thing was to stuff as much in as possible. I had a sense

of myself as an intrepid adventurer out to find treasure and I only wished I had a magical rabbit to share the experience with.

One perfect mouthful, two, three perfect mouthfuls, suddenly the door opened and the light came on. The room was filled with adults. I was scooped up out of my own little heaven. The adults flushed and happy from their own craic were highly amused, I wasn't in trouble, firmly in the sweet age of innocence when everything is forgiven, they seemed to think I would develop a conscience before I did much harm - and to be fair, I haven't done it since... yet !



Lessons from Moses the Milkman

by Shannon Forde

Shannon is the Heritage Specialist in Residence for
Cork County Council



Moses Fenton was my granduncle, and he worked as a milkman from the age of just 14, beginning in 1944. Early every morning, he would cycle to his neighbour's farm, where he helped bottle and sell milk. For his efforts, he earned £1 a week. After a few years, Moses saved enough to buy his own milk round—and his very own van. He began collecting milk from local farmyards in large churns and delivered it door to door using measures. In December 1955, things changed when CMP Dairies opened, and milk had to be pasteurised and delivered in glass bottles. Moses adapted quickly, loading up crates of milk bottles into his van each morning. With every bump in the road, the bottles would gently clink together—a sound fondly remembered by Moses after he finally retired aged 77 in 2006.

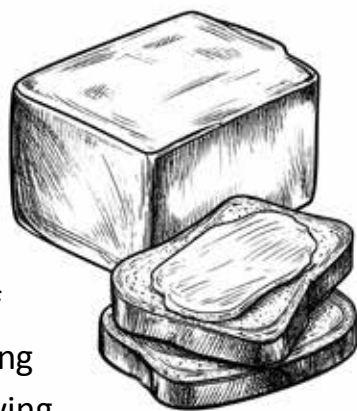
Moses was widely known as 'the running milkman': he'd park his van with the driver's door wide open, grab as many bottles as he could carry, and dash from house to house before running back for more. Moses lived in Ballygarvan and

delivered milk to homes and businesses on Oliver Plunkett Street, the Fire Station and Garda Station on Anglesea Street, Turners Cross, Friars Walk, Ballyphehane, Ballinhassig, Five Mile and Ballygarvan. In earlier years he also delivered to Douglas, Rochestown, North Gate Bridge and Shandon Street. No wonder he had to run! Once the milk was used, customers rinsed the bottles and left them out the next morning for Moses to collect. They were cleaned and used again—practicing 'Reduce, Reuse, Recycle' long before it became a slogan!

Thinking of Moses brings to mind how much has changed in the way we get our food – even in the last 100 years. In the past, people didn't rely on giant supermarkets filled with endless rows of various food options, all packaged in individual wrappers. People were more self-sufficient and less wasteful. Many families, even those who weren't farmers, would've grown their own vegetables and potatoes, maybe had a few hens, and would make their own bread, or source it from the local bakery. Meat was a treat from the local butcher, wrapped in brown paper. People didn't eat it every day, and when they did, they used every bit of it—bones for broth, fat for frying. Nothing was thrown away. People planned their meals carefully. They didn't waste what they had,



because everything was hard-earned. Leftover bread might become bread pudding. Vegetable peelings were saved for soup stock or fed to animals. Lots of people even made their own butter by shaking cream in a jar or using a churn. You wouldn't see strawberries in winter, or pineapples flown in from far-away places. People ate what was local, what was in season, and what they could grow or make themselves. At home, meals were shared around the kitchen table, with stories passed from one generation to the next. No phones. No screens. Just warm food, conversation, and connection.



The habits of reusing, mending, growing, and sharing were just part of everyday life. Today, we're rediscovering these same habits, and there is a growing popularity in locally sourced food. County Cork is renowned for the quality of its produce, with food tours becoming a main attraction for international tourists! Although there is a wonderful convenience in having everything you could need under one roof in a supermarket, it has come at a great cost to small local producers, and indeed all of us; we are presented with so many choices that we often end up leaving the supermarket with more than we intended to purchase! After years of being careless with how we source and consume food, we should remember how

the people before us lived. Now, when we talk about 'food sustainability,' we're really talking about something people in the past knew very well. It means looking after the world



around us by producing, buying and consuming food in a way that is good for people and the environment and fair to communities in which the food comes from, now and in the future.

When I think of Moses heading home at the end of his milk rounds, the gentle rattle of bottles behind him, waving to neighbours in the fields, I picture a life that was simple—but full of respect for people, for community, and

for the planet too. Although he is no longer with us, Moses the Milkman is still remembered by many people he once delivered milk to. Indeed, there weren't many milkmen with such a unique name! As he went to bed each evening, Moses had a catchphrase he'd mutter with a grin: "Oh dear, work in the morning." It still brings a smile to our faces.

Treasure Maps and Trowels: A West Cork Proposal

by E.R. Murray

E.R. is a well known children's author living in West Cork



It all started on May 25th, 2010. Picture this: it's a sunny day in Schull. I'm on holiday and I'm meeting my new friend, Mick, at Colla Pier for a picnic on the sea. We clamber into his punt, the Joan Maria Rose, and head off onto the Atlantic.

We circle Goat Island and whistle for the goats, then catch mackerel from the boat with jigs. On Long Island, we're gifted a cabbage the size of my head. We walk to Westerland strand, rescue stranded jellyfish, and barbecue our mackerel. Back in the boat, gannets dive, oystercatchers cry, and the sea glimmers. The next day, I return to Dublin. The End. Or so we thought...

We stay in touch, exchanging letters and postcards, and meet halfway in Cork when we can. In no time at all, we grow close and in December 2010, I move to Schull; that legendary day on the sea had kickstarted something magical.

When May 25th comes around in 2011, we decide to recreate our symbolic day. I bring the picnic and wait at Colla Pier. When Mick turns up carrying a giant bag stuffed to the

brim with goodness knows what, and several sticks poking out of the top, I have no idea what to expect. But what I definitely don't expect is for him to ditch me the second we tie up at Long Island pier.

'Wait here, and I'll come back in a few minutes,' he says.

Luckily, being a writer, I always have a notebook to hand and so, immersed in my words, I barely notice time pass. Which is a good job, because more than an hour before Mick eventually reappears. Looking somewhat flustered, he leads me to Westerland, hands me a rusty trowel and points to the strand.

'Off you go!' he says.

Clambering over rocks and around driftwood, I follow the arrows he has marked in the sand until I find a glass bottle wedged in a mound of pebbles. Inside, is a hand-drawn treasure map. I follow the map the best I can, with Mick close behind, calling 'You're going the wrong way!' at optimum times. Eventually, I find a stick poking out of the sand and – as the map directs – start digging with my rusty trowel. A foot deep, I uncover a bottle that contains a letter. The label says: don't read me yet.



Over the next hour, I find two more buried bottles, each containing another page of letter. Following instructions, I settle on the sand and read the beautiful three-page letter, which I later find out took a whole month to write! The perfect love letter, it says many touching things about me, our relationship, and our trips to Long Island. It ends with: P.S. One more thing... X marks the spot.

Mick has disappeared from view at this point, so it takes a while to locate the giant X, made with the sticks that had been poking out of his bag earlier. I have no idea what I'm digging for – Mick is known for being a bit of a rogue – but it's fun, so I play along. Ten minutes in, I need help.

'I can't find anything!' I call, hoping Mick is close enough to hear.

'Dig deeper!' he replies, from behind a boulder.



Wondering why my partner is cowering behind a giant rock, I continue my quest.

'There's nothing here,' I yell, a while later.

Mick's head peeps out, then disappears again.

'Dig wider.'

Almost a metre down and across, out of breath with the effort, I find a small box.

Inside, there are tiny shells and a note: Will you marry me?

As I run to my future husband, my face collides with a fistful of roots and sand. Hearing my footsteps, Mick has hastily grabbed a bunch of sea pinks.

'I forgot flowers!' he explains, as I wrestle sand out of my contact lenses. 'I can't believe I didn't make the effort.'

Six months later, we married under a jacaranda tree in Australia. No treasure map and no trowel, but I did push him around in a wheelbarrow. The rest is history. Long Island history.



That Elusive Brown Soda Bread

by Michael O'Connor

Excerpt from Michael's memoir Pastures Near And Far.

First published by The Holly Bough, Irish Examiner



My mother could never bake Brown Soda Bread. She was a city girl who never had to cook. There was always someone to do it for her. She was the apple of her mother's eye. After a few years of marriage in the countryside of north Cork she not only got good at cooking, she became excellent.

I remember our early days as children on the farm. We sat down at the kitchen table to mountains of my mother's hot freshly baked white currant bread. The butter dripped off slices covered with sticky marmalade.

My father brought warm frothy milk home in the silvery gallon from the evening milking. We gulped down as much drinking chocolate as we could take. The game every night was to eat and drink the most.

My mother made baked Alaska, plum pudding, wobbly jelly and the nicest apple and rhubarb tarts. But no, she could not master brown soda bread. It became a running joke at the table. Each soda was a flop. Every recipe she prepared was a disaster.

Mrs. Rea, a long and trusted friend of my mother came to stay with us. She came to mind us from time to time. She loved her fag, a glass of Murphy's and a chaser. She was great fun. She had one passion that was backing horses. It was a religion to her and she was good at them. The Cork Examiner was opened when it arrived in the post.

My mother would ask, 'What does Fallagh Ballagh tip today Jo?' The bet was put on at the bookies. There was great excitement each night when the results were announced on the radio.

'Did you win Mrs. Rea, did you win?' we'd ask impatiently.

But the one thing Mrs. Rea could excel at was baking brown soda bread. She had an old secret recipe and it was delicious. No one knew the secret. She would not tell my mother.

My mother, in her cuteness, asked me to stand peeling potatoes beside Mrs. Rea while she baked. Loyal to my mother I did what I was told. I was experiencing my first taste of espionage. I was only 13. I had one eye on the potatoes and the other eye on what Mrs. Rea was doing.

I worked away at the spuds and memorised the ingredients as Mrs. Rea went through the motions. When all was finished I went into the dining room with glee and told my mother the details. She wrote them down. Three days later

my mother announced she had found a new recipe. She would bake it today.

We sat down for tea that night and like every young child we were hungry. In our house with four children, two parents and our very welcome visitor the cry was, 'stretch or starve!'

My mother lifted the brown soda from the AGA and placed it on the table. Our mouths were watering. My mother put the sharp knife to the rather burnt soda.

'Damn,' she shouted, 'it won't cut'. The knife would not go through it. It would not break. We laughed our heads off.

'I'll go out and throw it against the wall,' I shouted. I threw it with all my might and it bounced off the wall. My mother was red with embarrassment.

But the final insult was when I gave the soda bread to our hungry liver and white pointer. The dog sniffed, pawed it, bit it, growled, barked, turned away in disgust and left it behind her.



A Memory Tree

by Alice Taylor

Alice is a well known Irish writer and novelist



When I am gone
People may remember me,
But plant a tree and
I shall lift my face to the sun.
For hundreds of years.
People yet unborn
Will find peace
As they walk
On sacred ground
Beneath my sheltering
branches.

The leaves of my tree
Will cleanse the air,
And it's roots sustain the
earth.
Amongst it's branches
Birds will build their nests
And bees find nourishing
nectar.

Planting a tree
Is a divine inspiration
Providing a kindness
To the earth
And a blessing
For future generations.



Street Games of County Cork

by Kieran Wyse

Extract from Cork Street Games podcast 2024 by Kieran Wyse,
Cork County Council Library & Arts Service



The continued use of the term child's play reflects the importance of play in a toddler's life. This play can initially be solitary and confined to a family circle before the knock on the door to ask if Eoghan or Aisling are coming out to play. Play can mean various levels of activity for a child with his or her pals, but virtually all will at some stage have participated in street games.

Inexpensive and uncomplicated with minimal adult input, street games have flourished through several generations in Cork. The games in Cork have similar roots to those played elsewhere in Ireland and are not unique but have developed with a distinct regional flavour. While some boys' and girls' games differed, numerous ones involved both.

Picky, arguably a Cork version of hopscotch, is something of a favourite in street game nostalgia. Requiring some level of fitness and involving at times up to twenty people, in picky players took turns in kicking an object, usually used polish or ointment tins, over six chalked squares in a strict sequence. The hop had to be on one leg only and landing in the wrong

box meant that a player was "out". The one to reach the last square in the shortest time was deemed champion, with his/her name chalked on the pavement. In a Champions League of sorts the number of squares was increased from six to ten.

Release was an especially popular street game at wintertime involving two teams of any number. Members of one team hid in separate places before the others, after counting to twenty, set out to find them. The captured ones were detained by opponents called guards, usually near a streetlight, but could be released if a teammate got through, hence the name Release.

In communities of limited means, there was no shortage of ingenuity in finding affordable entertainment, the game known as hoops being a good case in point. The standard hoop sold at sixpence, a sum that could be put to better use for popular confectionaries such as boiled sweets, but an old bicycle wheel minus its remaining spokes was a good substitute, if not a preferable one as the guiding stick could be inserted into the valley of the wheel providing considerable comfort in what was really a game of juggling.



Chessies, derived from the chestnut tree, was a popular winter pursuit. A string would be drawn through an inserted hole and a knot made to keep the chestnut or conker in place. A player would seek to break an opponent's conker with a swinging motion till the other was left only with the string.

As so many street games involved either pretending that desired items were available or finding substitutes for those that were not, a Cork slang term "mock- ee- ah" emerged meaning anything made up. As already mentioned, there was a "mock- ee -ah" ball in Picky and a "mock-ee-ah" hoop too in the game of that name. Playing football on the street, or "kick around" as it was called, also required much simulation with "mock-ee-ah" goalposts, corner flags, the lot. In the girls' game called Shop, bottle tops and corks functioned as "mock-ee-ah" money and in Cowboys and Indians, the boys acting as Indians used twigs and strings as "mock-ee-ah" bow and arrows. There are countless other examples.

Marbles, known as glassy alleys, were a favourite with boys in wintertime. In each game a boy tried to throw a marble farther than an opponent, gaining or losing a marble depending on the outcome. At the end of a session a good player could have amassed a considerable selection of marbles of many colours for his collection but had to watch

out for certain girls who were marble "sharks" and could deprive boys of their entire stock of marbles. Marble playing however was rife during school hours, sometimes getting in the way of business, and one teacher at a Cork riverside school regularly confiscated any marbles visible during lessons and threw them down to the rats.

The spinning top also provided great entertainment. A wooden top was decorated with coloured chalk and crayons before being grassed along by a piece of shoelace attached to a stick. However, that method was a skilled art and most people settled for hand spinning.

The street games of old may seem dated compared to the entertainment enjoyed by the children of today with everything from television/ video games to iPads and Gameboys but these are solitary activities much of the time. In contrast the street games played an important part in the development of character with the mixing and integration that they encouraged.



Double take Cork joy at Magic Result

Article courtesy of Irish Newspaper Archives,
Irish Independent, 17 September 1990.



Cork marched into the record books on the double yesterday. Just two weeks after the Rebel County hurlers raised the McCarthy Cup, Cork's jubilant footballers won the Sam Maguire and completed a unique achievement in Gaelic sport history. Cork became the first county – represented by full county sides – to win the unique double. The 1890 hurling and football All Irelands were won by Cork club sides Midleton and Aghabullogue. And Teddy McCarthy became the only player ever to play on the winning senior hurling and football teams in the same year.

Billy Morgan's red army kept the sights fixed firmly on football, when the temptation to more robust rivalry arose. Or most of them did. Colm O'Neill's dismissal just before half-time followed an unfortunate and silly flick at the rugged jaw of limpet-like Mick Lyons – a gesture of



frustration more than serious physical intent. As one Cork wag remarked: "I wouldn't mind if he hit him a right dig!" Needle was never too far from this rematch, but neither was it nasty as in the two clashes of '88 – the draw and reply.

Despite Gerry MacEntee's early dismissal from the replay, Meath went on to beat the southerners in 1988. That was the message Billy Morgan drilled home at half-time yesterday. "Go out and do it for Colm O'Neill," he urged the Leesiders, and they did by 0-11 to 0-9, providing a hard-fought encounter right to the end.



The Big Snow

“The Schools’ Collection, Volume 0326, Page 167” By Dúchas ©
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There was a great snow about forty years ago. It was in the Spring. It fell about the 9th or 10th of February. So some people were caught without flour in the house, as they were going to bring it from Macroom fairday. It was another great trouble for people who had pigs for the fair, and could not go with them as the snow was as high as the fences in every road. A certain man died in Carrigaphooka and the men around had to shovel the snow off the road for a mile from his house down to the bridge, in order that they could carry the coffin to the graveyard. Another farmers horse got sick and two men had to go from his place for John Cotter of Carriganea as he was then the “cow doctor” of this district. It was a distance of four miles, and the men had to walk on top of the fences, as it was safer than they road into where all the snow was blown. This cow doctor was known by the name of Sean Barc.



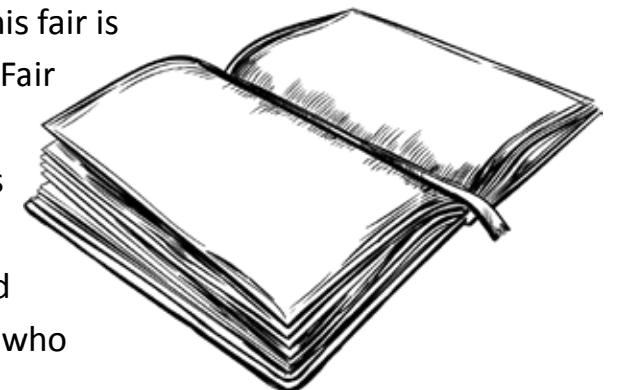
An Aonac Mór

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Ar chnocháinín ar an dtaobh thuaidh de Dhromdháliag ar a dtugtar Bárr na Cairrge a thionótaighe na h-aontaighe go dtí le déidheanaighe. Deirtear gurbh é Naomh Fionnbarra a bhunaig an t-Aonach mór bliantiuíl a thionóltaí agus a tionóltar fós ar an 25adh lá de Mheadhon Fógmhair lá féile Naoimh Fionbarra. Tugtar Aonach mor Dromdháliag ar an aonach seo anois agus cé go bhfuil sé ar nós aonaig ar bith eile le déidheanaighe ní bheadh sean duine sa dúthaig na bheadh sásta gan an lá san a bheith in a lá amuigh aige pé gnó eile níós tairbhighe a bheadh ag fanamaint air ag baile.

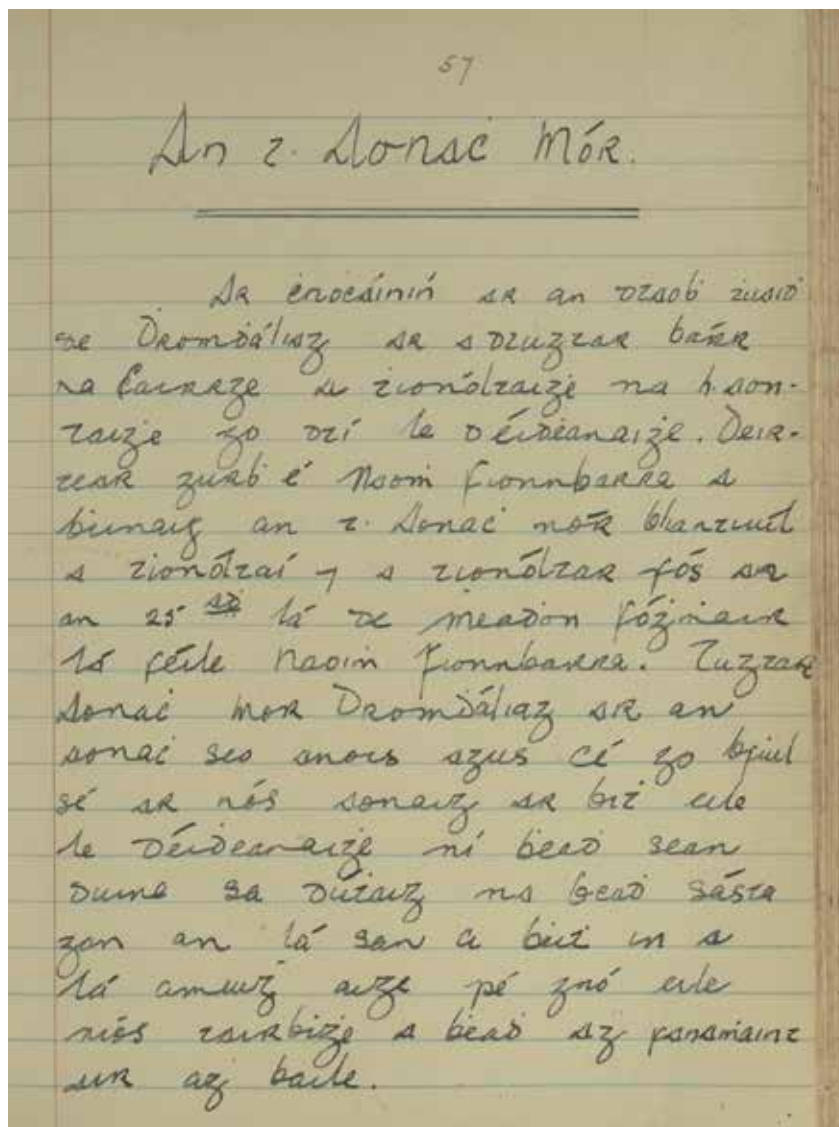
On the hillock on the northern side of Drumdahliag known as Barr na Cairrge, the fair has been held to this day. It is said that Saint Finbarr founded the annual fair that takes place and is still held on the 25th day of mid-September, Saint Finbarr’s feast day. This fair is now called the Great Fair of Drumdahliag and although it resembles any other fair of late, there would be no old person in the locality who



would be happy to spend that day without being out for it, whatever other more profitable business they might be expecting to do at home.

Seanna tionnscailí na h-áite

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Tímcheall cúig bliadhan is fiche ó shoin do h-aimsighheadh mian coppar sa Bhárrlinn idir Doire Cluthmhar agus Cuimín Dara. Bhí suas le fiche fear ag obair ann. Bhí fear ó Shasana dárabh ainm do Holmes mar stíobhard ann. Fuarathas alán coppar ann agus cuireadh anonn go Sasana é. D’obruigheadh é ar feadh cúpla bliadhan ach fuarathas amach ná raibh sé torathamhail.



Bliadhantha roimis sin do bhí líon ghá sniomh ins gach tig san áit seo, agus lín-eudach ghá dheanamh de. Nuair a bhíodh an líon fásta do stractaí as na preacha é agus do ceanghaluightí i bpunnanaibh é agus do cuirtí isteach i bpoll salach puirt é. Do fágtaí annsan é ar feadh sé seachtmhaine nó dhá mhí uaireanta. Do tógtaí amach annsan é agus do buailtí le tuairgín é agus do míníghtí é

agus annsan deintí é shníomh, ach do bhíodh an lín-eudach san ana gharbh.

Around twenty-five years ago, copper was mined in the Barraline between Derry Clonmhar and Cuimín Dara. There were up to twenty men working there. There was a man from England named Holmes who was the steward there. A lot of copper was extracted there and it was sent over to England. It was worked on for a few months but it was discovered that it was not profitable. A year before that, a spinning loom was set up in every house in this area, and fabric was being made from it. When the loom was finished, it was packed up into sacks and put into a dirty hole in the port. It would be left there for six weeks or sometimes two months. It would then be taken out and beaten with a stick and spun, but the fabric was very coarse.

22/

Seana-connascailí na h-áite.

Timicall éig bliadan is píe ó soim de
h-amsigeat mian coppas sa Béalainn isin Dorn
Clutman agus Cuimín Dara. Bhí suas le píe
fean is obair ann. Bhí fear ó Sasana cianab
annam do Holmes mar stiobair ann. Fuair
slán coppas ann agus cuiread anonn go Sasana é.
D'obruighas é an fear cúpla bliadan de phars-
tas amac ná raib sé conmarait.

Bliadanta normas sin do bí lion go
sniom ins gac uig san áit seo, agus lín-eu-
dác go cianam de. Nuair a bíod an lion
pásta do stracat as na piais é agus do
ciantaluzti i bpuinnarib é agus do cuirt isin
i bpoll salac puirt é. Do págtaí annsan é
an fear sé stairmaine nó ós mí uairanta.
Do cógtaí amac annsan é agus do buailti le
uairin é agus do múnúti é agus annsan
cuirt é sniom, ac do bíod an lín-eudac san
ano garb.

Párasuz Ua h-Áirail,
Mullean Mór,
Cúim-Tóla.

Fuairas a mo áit. Párasuz Ua h-Áirail, (63 bl.)
Mullean Mór,
Cúim-Tóla.

The Irish Dance Halls of London

by Paula Redmond

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While the Galtymore dancehall in Cricklewood, London, is probably the best known of the dancehalls frequented by Irish immigrants to the city in the 1950's and 1960s, there were many more that were popular and had interesting stories.

The Gresham Ballroom, at the top of the Holloway Road, was considered by many to be the best dancehall in London. Originally a cinema, the building was converted into a dancehall in 1957. To cover the costs of importing some of the big name acts from Ireland, the door charge was a bit higher than in some of the other halls of the time.

The Gresham had a dress code and insisted that men wore ties – these could be rented at the entrance for the night. Due to its close proximity to both the Royal Northern and Whittingham Hospitals, the ballroom was frequented by many Irish nurses.

The Irish soul band “Margo and the Marvettes” were resident at one point. Unlike some other dancehalls, the

Gresham was known for never having any disorderly behaviour.

Dancehalls were often alcohol free, thus gaining them the name of “tea dances”. At the time a large number of the Irish were tee-totalling so this suited many, while those who wanted a drink had to find a nearby pub.



The Gresham – unusually for its time – had two bars, one upstairs and one downstairs. Some believe that John B. Keane based some of his novel, *The Contractors*, - which follows the life of an Irish contractor in England – on the Gresham and some of its clientele. The ballroom finally closed in 1998 and was demolished in 2001.

The Buffalo Club in Camden Town was originally opened in the 1930s by Irishman Ginger Maloney. A short while later, Kerryman Bill Fuller bought it. At this time it was in a run down condition and had an unsavoury reputation. Bill cleaned it up and drew large crowds with the popular bands of the day.

After the building adjacent to the club was bomb-damaged during the Blitz, Bill bought the site and expanded the club's capacity to 2,000. In the 1950s and 1960s the Buffalo

Club was packed every weekend with Irish coming to see the acts of the era such as Big Tom and the Clipper Carlton showband.

By the end of the 1950s, Bill had acquired a string of clubs throughout England, Ireland and America. These included the famous Palladium in New York, which headlined acts such as Johnny Cash, Jimi Hendrix and Frank Sinatra.

Trouble did occur in the club from time to time. In 1964 Jim Reeves – the popular country and western singer – was due to perform. Reeves refused to go on stage due to a piano not being tuned as per his contract agreement.

Knowing the eagerly awaiting crowd would react badly to news of the cancellation, management removed the night's takings and stowed them down a nearby manhole for safekeeping. They then removed what furniture they could before a riot ensued. Some claim that mounted police eventually had to enter the hall to clear the rioters.



A Ring to Remember: Our First Telephone

by Harry Warren

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In 1960s Dublin, life was different. Communication wasn't instant or easy, and most relied on the cream and green painted public payphone booth down the street. For our family, that old payphone with it's A and B buttons was a small adventure, just a walk, a few pennies, and some nervous anticipation. The clunk of the door and the sound of coins dropping in the slot are memories I hold dear. In this age of mobile smartphones, I marvel at how we managed to keep in touch. But those of a certain age will recall the vagaries of the old payphone, and the unreliability of buttons A and B, either connecting your call or returning your money back if the connection failed.



All that changed one bright morning when my father announced that we were getting a telephone installed in our home. It was news that seemed almost too good to be true. The idea of having our own phone was thrilling, the days leading up to its arrival were filled with excitement and wonder about how this new gadget might change our lives.

The installation day finally arrived, and a friendly P+T man in overalls pulled up in an orange Renault 4 van to set everything up. He worked swiftly, happily chatting to a mesmerised young boy, whilst simultaneously connecting wires and installing the shiny black telephone with its coiled cord.

Placed on a small table in the hallway, it became a new and significant addition to our home. The first call, of course, was a momentous occasion. My mother, eager to test our new connection to the world, decided to call Auntie Mary, her sister in Harolds Cross. The novelty of not having to walk to the payphone was clearly thrilling for her.

I can still hear her excited voice, marvelling at how clear the line was, and repeating, "Isn't this grand?" over and over. We all gathered around, listening intently, taking turns to say 'hello' feeling as though we were part of something magical. For the first few weeks, every ring of the telephone was a moment of great excitement. We'd all rush to answer it, never knowing who might be on the other end. It was

as though this new device had brought the world into our home. The phone became a source of joy, curiosity, and connection.

But it wasn't long before the telephone, once a source of joy, brought a different kind of news, one that carried a heavy sorrow. One rainy Autumn evening, as we sat by the fire, the phone rang, and my father answered. His voice, usually calm and reassuring, turned soft and serious.



The news was grim. Granny had taken a turn for the worse. The excitement we'd felt just weeks earlier faded into the sobering reality that this new connection could also bring news we weren't ready to hear. In the days that followed, the phone sat quietly in the hall, almost as if mourning with us, no longer a novelty but a lifeline to those we loved, even when the news broke our hearts.

Yet, despite the sadness, the phone soon became a source of joy once more. Not long after the news about Granny, we received a call from my cousin Breda, who had recently emigrated to America. Her voice, faint and crackling across the ocean, was a welcome sound, bringing with it stories of her new life and reassurance that, despite the distance,

she was still part of our family. We crowded around the phone, each taking turns to speak, our voices filled with excitement and laughter. The line might have been faint, but the connection was strong, a reminder that no matter how far away we were, we were still connected by the bonds of family.

The arrival of the telephone marked the beginning of a new chapter in our lives. It wasn't just a device, it was a symbol of change, a connection to the wider world. It brought us closer to the people we loved, even as it made us aware of the inevitable mix of joy and sadness that life brings. That little black phone became a vital part of our lives, a source of connection and comfort, sharing in our joys and sorrows. It wasn't just technology; it was woven into our family's story, reminding us of a time when the world felt both bigger and smaller, and each ring promised something new.

Our first telephone was more than just communication; it was a bridge to the people we loved, a way to share in their lives from afar. Looking back, the magic wasn't in the phone itself but in how it brought us closer, one call at a time.

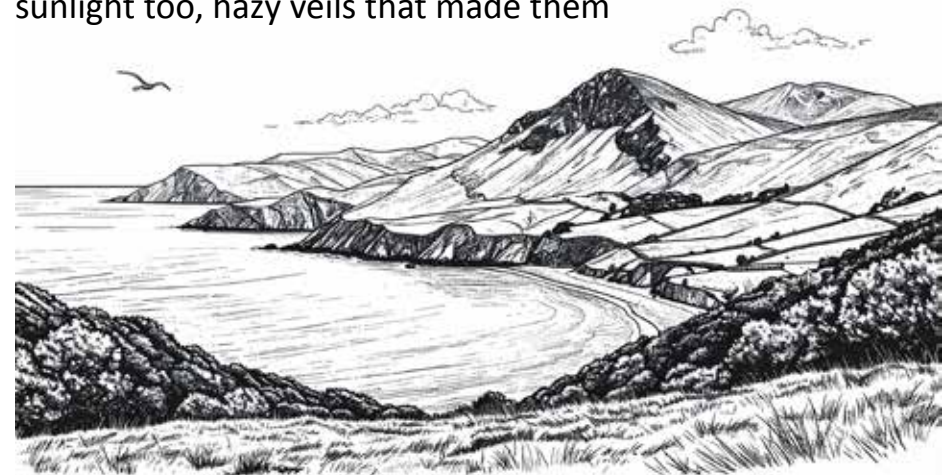
Serenity

by Patrick O'Sullivan

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The mountains, blue and hazy, looked very far away, as though someone had come during the night and thrust them back against the sky. The sea heaved and glittered; the smallest of waves making the softest of sounds when they broke upon the shore. The great sweep of the bay was a mirror image of the sky so that it was hard to tell where the sea ended and the sky began, fused as they were so perfectly together at the edge of the far horizon. The sun danced and shimmered in the tide, the radiant beams tossing light near and far, jewelling the brine in every part. One of the slopes was wooded, the dark evergreen of the trees bathed in sunlight too, hazy veils that made them



stranger, more beautiful still. We had walked more than once in the self-same wood so that it was the easiest thing in the world to imagine the interweave of the light and the shadow on the green and the winding paths. I even tried to imagine the evergreen scent of the trees in the air that was crisp and clear. For though the sun was beginning to grow warm, it was surely still cool enough in the shadow of the wood. The light softened and blurred the lines of the mountains so that they looked like things imagined, wished to life in a single moment. Or maybe they were pictures in a storybook, pictures of a kingdom, fabled far away; the muted tints of lavender and blue adding to the impression.

Across the way the sand dunes at Inch looked resplendent in the light, those at Rossbeigh the very same, though the latter, long since blasted by the fury of winter gales showed yawning gaps here and there. A lone gull stood perched on a rock at the very edge of the tide, its yellow bill and pink legs clearly visible as we went by, the seaweed that draped the rock bronzy and shiny and dripping with brine. The gull did not seem in the least perturbed by our presence for it was as if it too had succumbed to the languor of the hour, the wash of the waves on the strand still soothing and rhythmic and soft.

A few more gulls drifted on the tide, everything about them as easy and relaxed as their counterpart on the rock, a flock

of oystercatchers going by overhead, their broad, white wing bars and high-pitched piping calls setting them apart at once. Sometimes I think that the piped of the oystercatchers are like the sound of the sea and the ocean; the spirit of the rugged coastline given voice in their musical calls. Sometimes the piping notes were speeded up into the continuous trill so that they seemed more wonderful still; the mesmeric blue of the sea still heaving and shining below.



It was lovely just to stand and look and listen a while, the black and white of the birds and their carrot coloured bills set in high relief against the blue of the sky. There were dunlins too, gathered together at the waterline, but they took to the wing as soon as we drew near, the zig zagging this way and that, their shrill flight call yet another of those evocative sounds of the sea. Most people know the abundant but not very distinctive dunlin. Still for all that, it was wonderful to watch their aerial manoeuvres over the tide.

Meanwhile there were larks in the salt marsh, their endless fluttering flight and richly warbled song filling the place with delight. The marsh had been a haven for flowers all summer long, and still the daises of the mayweed made great shows

here and there; the large white and yellow flowers carried above the finely divided, almost feathery leaves. It would have been lovely to see them at any time of year, but all the more so on a glorious October morning, when the bay the peaks and the sky had become the stuff of postcards again. It was almost as if the flowers were reluctant to bid the summer goodbye, redolent, so redolent as they were of all the long-lost meadows of yesteryear.

Cows lay down in the sun in the sloping fields that fringed the strand, everything about them homely, pastoral, bucolic; a white speed boat whizzing by on the outer fringes of the bay, a swathe of foam turning and churning in its wake, but when it went by the calm was restored once more. The last of the thistles, meanwhile, dabbled purple on waste ground, their downy tops promising an autumnal feast for the goldfinch and his kind. If I had to choose a word, a single word to catch the mood of that magical morning in Cromane, it would have to be serenity; the blue of the sea and the sky and the calling of the birds creating their own kind of harmony still. It was no great wonder that that we stood on the strand a very long time, soaking up the views and the stillness too, glad, so glad as we were to be part of it all, if only for a little while.

Creative Writing at Cork County Council Library & Arts Service



The following stories were submitted as part of an Age Friendly Creative Writing Competition held by Cork County Council Library & Arts Service in March 2025.

Presented here are the winning entries and also some highly-commended entries.

Numerous writing groups meet in our libraries on a regular basis.



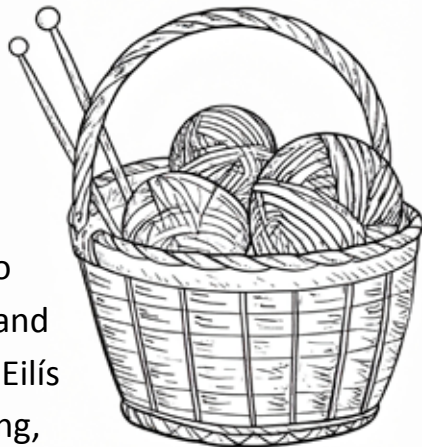
A Day in May

by Clare Bohane

1st Place



Eilís Keegan sat in the armchair of her living room, her knitting needles and wool resting on her lap. The church gong sounded at 9 am; the village was awakening. A noise outside, the clattering chatter of the local primary school children walking to the church gradually rose to a crescendo. Of all of the village sounds, this was Eilís's favourite. She put her knitting to the side and walked to her front door to watch them pass by. The children walked in pairs holding hands, and Eilís, who had been a teacher for many decades, made a guess that they were about seven or eight, still in that hopping and frolicking stage of childhood, delighted to be on an adventure out of the classroom. They were being led by a blonde-haired teacher who looked little older than a child herself. The teacher was slightly flushed and armed with folders and a first aid bag. She called out to the children every so often, telling them to stop and stand in by the wall to let people pass. Eilís guessed that, because it was spring,



the children and their teacher were on their way to the church to practise for their First Holy Communion ceremony. Eilís caught the eye of one little girl who gave her a cheerful wave, her pony tail swishing as she walked.

The group passed by quickly and Eilís was about to head back inside and close her door when she noticed a folder of sheets by her front step. She bent down stiffly to pick them up. At a glance, she knew they belonged to the young teacher; they were a class list and lyrics. The church was only up the road; Eilís decided to walk up and return them.

Outside, the day was bright but there was still a chill in the air. As she walked, Eilís let her mind wander back to her own communion day. The excitement! She had worn her cousin Mary's communion dress, with frilled white ankle socks, white shoes and a bag for her rosary beads that matched her dress. The boys in her class had worn blazers with rosettes and short pants. Her father had taken time off work at the garage to come to the ceremony, afterwards, the family went to Terence McMahon Photographers on North Main Street in Cork City to have their photograph taken. Her father had had to go back to work but her mother had taken her for tea and a cream bun in Thompson's on Prince's Street afterward. Everyone at the tea room had said how lovely she looked and passed on congratulations. Eilís smiled at the memory. It was still special after all these years.

Within a few minutes, Eilís was at the church. She pushed the heavy wooden doors in and saw the teacher on the steps of the altar, with the children seated in the three front pews. The teacher was showing the children how join their hands, pressing her palms together and crossing her thumbs. 'You need to keep them just like this the whole time! Imagine your hands are glued together!'

'But teacher, what if we need to scratch?' One boy sounded dismayed. Eilís stifled a giggle as she approached the altar.

'I think you may have dropped these. I found them on my front step,' Eilís smiled up at her.

'Oh my goodness. Thank you. I must have put them down when I stopped to tie Ryan's shoe lace!' The young teacher took the sheets from Eilís's hands gratefully.

The children, welcoming the distraction, began to chat to one another.

'I thought you might need them. Most of the songs are the same ones I used to teach many years ago. I love 'Go in Peace'—such a lively one.' Eilís commented.

'That's my favourite one too! They really belt it out at the end.' The teacher laughed.

'I always loved teaching songs. That and knitting!'

'My mum learned to knit in school. Not me though. A shame really. We'd need an outside teacher to come in for that.'

'Well, ' Eilís mused, 'I'm only up the road on Main Street there. If you ever wanted a few lessons...'

'You'd come in ? To teach knitting?'

'I'd love to, if you'd have me!'

'I can assure you, we would. I'm Hazel by the way...'

And with that Eilís Keegan, at the grand old age of 83, found herself with a new job. She sat in a pew behind the children and listened to the sweet sound of their singing. She looked forward to being back in the classroom again. She smiled the whole walk home.



Returning Home

by Pat Guidera

2nd Place



“One swallow doesn’t make a summer”, the saying goes. This is true, but it does show that the worst of the dark winter is behind us.

Every spring as the evenings lengthen and we have the “new time”, we start to look forward to these summer visitors returning home. Along with their cousins, the house martins, sand martins and swifts, they signal a time ahead of longer, and, hopefully, warmer and sunnier days.

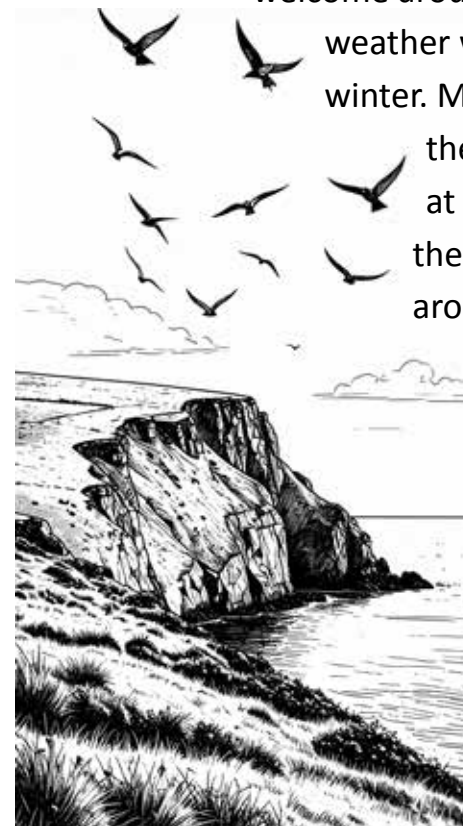
It’s amazing that they can find their way all the way from Africa back to the place where they were born. They soon get to work either repairing or rebuilding their nests, depending on how well last year’s nest survived. Because swallows nest indoors in barns and sheds, this can give them an advantage over the house martins, who nest outdoors. The nest is a work of art, made with mud, straw, and grass.

I think it’s one of the loveliest sights and sounds of a summer’s evening to watch the swallow’s agility in the air as they catch insects. Perhaps a blackbird



might be on a nearby tree, welcoming in dusk. That feeling of peace in a farmyard when milking is finished, the machine gone quiet, the cows left back out to graze and the swallows flying in and out of sheds. Every so often they would stop and perch on an electricity wire and chatter away among themselves. I love the way their long tail streamers would hang behind them like a gentleman’s morning suit.

“It’s a sign of good weather” was often said at seeing the swallows flying high up in the sky. This was especially welcome around hay time when good weather was needed to save the hay for winter. My father would wonder where the young house martins go to at night when they have flown the nest. Despite looking in trees around the farm after dusk, he’s never managed to find them.



Sometimes I would sit on a headland looking out to sea and watch them swoop around me, level with my eyes. It’s lovely to see the evening sun light up the beautiful blue and black tinge on their backs.

I wonder if in winter does someone else sit on an African headland and marvel at the very same birds in their winter home.

All too soon September would be upon us, and the swallows and house martins begin to gather on the wires, getting ready for the long journey south. This leads to a feeding frenzy where they fill up on reserves for the flight. Many times, they fly so low it seems as if they would fly into my head. This brings the summer to a close unless we get an extended summer of fine weather well into September.

The evenings are already drawing in and the children back in school, but I give thanks for the joy these summer visitors brought during their trip home. I wish them fair wind for their flight to Africa and look forward to their return next spring to brighten our skies once again.

Afternoon Tea Party

by Olivia Coogan

3rd Place



Mother's Day is fast approaching as we edge into the year 2025. Hotels and restaurants undoubtedly will be filled with mothers and daughters bonding over lunches and Afternoon Tea. All will be speaking quietly as silver teapots are brought to tables groaning with minute sandwiches, scones and cake. Mobile phones will be beeping and clicking, photographs being taken over and over until the right pose has been secured.

I have had such an experience sitting in an expensive five star hotel with my daughter whilst a display of many brands of teas swirled before my eyes. To say I was confused is an understatement, my eyes glazed over.

I eventually inhaled a deep breath in an attempt to calm myself.

Meekly I ordered Barrys' Gold Blend feeling I was failing a test.

The last of the evening sun beat through the glass making me squint. I felt like a bee



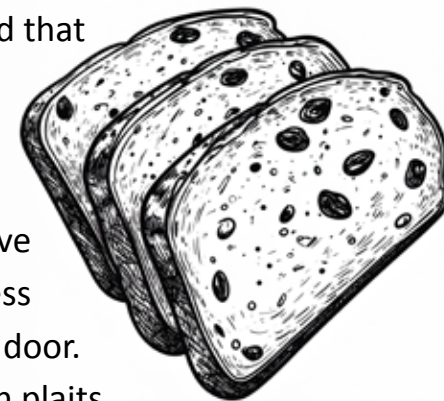
trapped against the pane. We ate copious amount of sugar but we were still hungry. The dining room was imposing and reproductions of women with scowling faces looked down from the walls at us as if we were imposters in this charade.

I remembered a time in the early sixties when I used to accompany my mother to Afternoon Tea in Mrs. Cummins' (Nellie Kidney as she was affectionately known) back garden. She lived on Rope Walk, Blackrock Village, and south of Cork City, hugged by the River Lee. Nellie Kidney held these Afternoon Teas to raise funds for her brother Fr. Kidney who was out in the Missions. For years I thought "the Missions" was an actual country.

I had four siblings and we all took turns in accompanying our Mother. A tea party was a real cause for celebration and brought colour to drab lives. Fishermen's wives creased with worry together with other neighbours would come from nearby Convent Road, Cat Lane, Mahon Terrace and Dunlocha Cottages. Occasionally a few from the village of Ballinure would make it down. It always seemed to be summertime when these tea parties took place and there must have been divine intervention because I never remember even a hint of rain.

Madge, my Mother, and forever the fashion icon loved the opportunity to dress up for these occasions. I remember once she wore a fitted pink coat dress with buttons all down

the front and heels. I was so proud that she was my Mother. I held her hand tightly in case her attention would be claimed by somebody more worthy than me. I would have changed into a smart summer dress made by our neighbour Katy next door. My hair would have been neatly in plaits swinging down my back, my feet marching purposefully.



The expectation of the afternoon made our hearts beat a little quicker and our flushed faces were reflected in the scarlet poppies swaying in the breeze. Daisies and buttercups were out in abundance. The scent of roses mixed with the aroma of tea, wafted around the long wooden tables laid out in strict precision. Nellie Kidney was small of stature but was no shrinking violet, she was the Maître'd and you knew it. In her hands she held a gigantic stainless steel teapot like a warrior about to do battle.

The tables were dressed with tablecloths and were bursting with colour. Queen cakes with cerise pink, white, or chocolate icing together with butterfly cakes bursting with cream and jam were brought out by her family old enough to carry a tray. The helpers were like soldier ants going in and out of the kitchen. There was no state of frenzy; everybody was given their cakes promptly and the tea was poured. I cannot remember if sandwiches were a feature or not but it

didn't matter. The ingredients of the feast were around the table.

The flavour of the day was women and children chatting among themselves as consistent as a stone finch. It was set against birdsong, humming of bees and laughter. There was an occasional raised voice if a child pushed the boundaries but mostly we were well behaved. Sometimes, voices were dropped as secrets and gossip was exchanged. Everybody was animated with the simple pleasure of it all. As I said, the sun always seemed to make an appearance or at least that it is how I remember it. When it was over we felt reborn and full.

The newspapers will be full of advertisements from hotels and restaurants trying to lure us to their fine establishments for Mother's Day. What I wouldn't do to sit in the garden on Rope Walk once more and inhale the sweetness of the tea poured from the big stainless steel teapot. No cameras or pouty faces, just people being people. Cheers to you Mrs. Cummins, the inventor of



Paddington

by Kate Durrant

Highly Commended



Miles are only a measurement of how far love can travel, as any of us with family living on the other side of the world can testify.

With the birth of my first, and very precious, grandson in Australia, I've been wondering what gift I could send to welcome this tiny baby into the world. What would have shoulders broad enough and wings light enough to carry my love all the way from Ireland to Australia.

Unlike many children born into less fortunate circumstances, he's already blessed with everything he could possibly need. Parents who love, and can look after, him. A secure roof over his head, and a warm bed to sleep in, in a safe and peaceful corner of the world.

But need or not, I've been hovering in front of shop windows, popping into toy stores and browsing web pages.

I know the sensible thing to do would be to buy something online and have it delivered directly, but I want to send him something from my world, something that I have touched. After all, what does being sensible have to do with a new

baby and his doting granny?

Passing a gift shop, a flash of blue caught my eye, and I stopped to look closer. Knowing as soon as I laid eyes on it, I had found exactly what I was looking for. Pushing through the heavy door, the jingle of its bell announcing my entrance, I picked up the small bear that had caught my attention. Bright red hat, perfectly matching wellies, and a blue duffle coat buttoned all the way up to his furry neck. With his battered brown suitcase tightly clutched in his little hand, he was ten beautiful inches of pure nostalgia.

To paraphrase the author of Paddington, Michael Bond, who said, “I write it, you read it, we share the joy,” I handed my money over in the same spirit, “I’ll buy it, my grandson will hold it, we share the joy.”

A wise old bear who taught us that, ‘If we’re kind and polite, the world will be right,’ we could learn much from Paddington. Inspired by the three and a half million children evacuated during World War Two, this little bear became the universal symbol of the refugee. Similar to those young people forced to flee their homes during that terrible time, he too wore a label around his neck, pleading with whoever



found him to ‘Please look after this bear’. As he sat on his suitcase at the railway station, down to his last marmalade sandwich, he was alone and scared. Before being found by the Brown family, who took him in and loved him, despite their differences.

I brought my precious package home, giving him one last hug, before carefully wrapping him with brown paper and love for the long journey that lies ahead, as he carries my love across continents and oceans, over mountains and through deserts. Nestling him securely inside a thin, airmail envelope that’s trying to bridge all those miles and months and missed chats and hugs.

As I queued in the post office, hugging the cold package in the same way I’d love to hold the child I’m sending it to, I think how perfect a present it is for my grandson. A child whose mum now lives in a country far away from home and who, too, was taken in and loved when she arrived with a suitcase packed with dreams and a heart filled with hope.

Just like Paddington.



Our First TV

by Eamon O'Leary

Highly Commended



The other evening, as hail of biblical proportions peppered the living room window like gunshot, I scrolled through hundreds of television programmes wondering if there was anything worth watching on such a miserable evening.

My mind wandered back to the day we got our first TV.

We lagged behind the posse in that regard and were almost certainly the last house in Oakfield Lawn to get a set. We relied on the neighbours to occasionally invite us in to see an episode of Dragnet or Sergeant Bilko.

The reason for the delay was simple. Da was conservative when it came to money matters.

“There’ll be nothing come into this house until it’s paid for.”

Any mention of hire purchase or the like was regarded by Da as shameful as mortal sin.

We saved and when all the pennies, shillings and the odd ten-shilling note



were eventually counted; the time had come. An aerial went on the roof and Mr Madden lugged in the Bush telly on that never to be forgotten Saturday afternoon.

We relegated our faithful servant, the radio, to the bottom shelf. After making a few adjustments, Mr Madden gave Da the thumbs up and turned the switch.

And there it was – our very own Teilifis Eireann test card to stare at.

We gathered, gawking, waiting for something to happen. I thought I saw it flicker, but Da said it was only the reflection of the sun.

Ma made a treat to celebrate the occasion. Our favourite. A tray laden with drop scones with heaps of Golden Syrup drizzled on top. The fancy tea cosy, normally reserved for visitors, got an outing. There was barely room for the cups, sugar bowl and milk bottle. We were almost sophisticated.

Each passing minute seemed like an hour. Da gave constant updates on how long more we’d have to wait.

And then, like greyhounds out of the traps, we were off. Rin Tin Tin to start with. Brilliant. We didn’t fully commit to Seamus Ennis and his uilleann pipes, but we persevered. Ma tidied up.

Charles Mitchell read the news and being on holidays, we could stay up and watch every programme all the way to the playing of Amhran Na Bhfiann. Da had us stand at attention as we proudly watched our national flag.

Back then, we'd only the one channel, and it did us fine. Nowadays, there are so many channels, and it's confusing. But I've found the perfect solution; I pick up a book and turn on the radio.



Party Pieces in Times Gone By

by Paddy O'Connor

Highly Commended



My mother's family were wonderful people for sing songs. They liked nothing better than a family get-together where each one would perform a party piece. Every now and then, someone in the family would declare that it was time we had a party: a date would be fixed, the word would be sent out and we would all gather, usually in our house.



The parties were, in themselves, fairly simple events. There would be a couple of drinks for the adults, usually some bottles of Beamish or Murphy's stout for the men, sherry for the women, Tanora (a tangerine flavoured fizzy drink, very popular in Cork), for the children and cups of tea, sandwiches, cake and biscuits for everyone. The night would begin with talk, stories and laughter. Then it

was time for the concert to begin.

There was never any pressure on anyone to perform, as my mother, her sister Nan and her brothers, Tom and Con, given half a chance, would sing all night. At any pause in the proceedings, Tom, my uncle, would be clearly heard, whispering - loudly - to Con, his brother, "Try me Con. Try me. I'll sing another one!"

Everyone there had his or her own party pieces. My mother and her sister Nan sang "Sisters", Tom sang – and acted out – "Famous Kildorrey Town", finishing with a joke about a delegation from Kildorrery going to visit the Pope. During this performance everyone present had to kneel down to receive the Papal blessing, imparted by Tom in his role as Pope. Con and Tom sang "There's a Bridle Hanging on the Wall" and we came close to tears as they sang about the saddle in the lonely stall". Nan played the piano, my mother sang, and acted "You Should See Me Dance the Polka", "Let Mr. McGuire Sit Down" and "Bridget Donoghue." My father, who had been born in Wexford, sang "Boolavogue" or "Kelly the Boy from Killane" and on very rare occasions, after much pleading, consented to sing "The Crayfish", a song about a lady who sat on a pot and was bitten on the bottom



by a crayfish that a fisherman had given her husband. Percy French songs were really popular. Everyone knew the words and we would all join in the choruses. The highlight of the night, however, was when Con sang "El Paso". As he sang, we rode the range with him, into "the Badlands of New Mexico" and then back to the hills overlooking El Paso as he tries to return to Rosalita, the woman he loves.

There was always total silence and respect for all performers and anyone who spoke during a song would be quickly reminded "One voice now, one voice!" We loved the fact that these performances were repeated at each and every gathering. Occasionally, someone would surprise us with a new song but there was a sense of security and continuity in hearing the old favourites time after time. Needless to say, no one ever even considered singing someone else's song. That would have been the height of bad manners. Our cousin, Joe, would recite one of his wonderful, self-penned monologues, often followed by "The Green Wye of the Little Yellow God" or "You're a Better Man than I am Gunga Din." During these recitations we would sit absolutely still, fascinated by the daring of Mad Carew and the courage of the loyal Gunga Din. May, Con's wife, would sing "Velia" or launch into a duet with Con, "I hear singing and there's no one there". May had a wonderful voice and many of the adults felt that she could have had a career in the world of opera.

As we grew a little older and were allowed to stay up later, my brother Bill and I would also take turns. Bill, as a small boy, had won a singing contest in Ballinspittle, where he sang the Pat Boone song “Johnny Will”, so that, of course, was his party piece. My song was “The County of Armagh”.

Finally, as midnight approached, my mother would try to bring the evening to a close. Tom or Con would announce that they would sing “just one more” before it was time to leave. Eventually, my mother would announce, “Well, the way it is, ye needn’t go home but ye can’t stay here.” Gradually, and very reluctantly, people would begin to move towards the door.

“What a night!” “A great night!” “What fun we had!”

Someone would start to sing “Goodbye”. “My heart is broken but what care I ...”

Then, hugs all round as our guests headed, laughing and singing, into the night amid promises to do it all again before long.

Come Sit Awhile

VOLUME 2



Come Sit Awhile is a collection of warm, memory-evoking stories, poems and images created with and for people living with dementia, their families, friends, and carers.

The pages offer gentle moments of reflection, shared laughter, and reminiscence — celebrating creativity, connection, and community.

This collection forms part of Cork County Council Library's Age Friendly Programme.

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