

W E A R E O N E & O T H E R

*THE*  
*STRANGE*  
*TIMES*



# WELCOME TO THE VOID!

For some of us, that means the material void as the finality of the dance that Life & Death do is more palpable than before. Many of us are being confronted with the transience of these earthly bodies we call home; the ephemerality of our physical form. For others it's the meta-physical void of what it feels like to be in our-Selves. Maybe for the first time ever. Everything else has faded away... All the noise, chatter, event-hopping, chart-topping, multi-tasking, stress-basking, plate-spinning busyness – no longer there. And the contents of our reality (in its most rudimentary form) is all that remains.

How revelatory that is!

Suddenly, our security, in the forms of our bodies, homes and family dynamics are glaringly obvious.

For better or for worse.

Let me state what I feel is happening here; **THIS MAY THE SINGLE GREATEST COLLECTIVE HOME-COMING WE EVER EXPERIENCE.** Literally and figuratively.

Regardless of how you spend your days these-days, **USE THEM WISELY.** There is no prescription for what that means, each of us need to cultivate our own wisdom in this period. Rest if you need rest, read if you need to read, write if you need to write, stretch if you need to stretch. **Do ABSOLUTELY nothing if that feels right for you.** Abandon the contrived, pressured projection of a sudden, miraculous self-care regime that includes 7am Anti-viral Yoga, 3 balanced paleo meals per day, 1.5 long-walks-not-exceeding-2km and endless Zoom calls with long-lost friends and family as well as connecting to loads of perfect Strangers. It is 100% natural that your time isn't 'productive'.

Our experience right now may be unparalleled by anything else we have gone through in this lifetime. It brings Light and Dark into sharper focus. In fact, all of the dances danced by duality are magnified, life is through the looking glass for everyone; expansion/contraction, loneliness/social suffocation, ecstasy/depression, abundance/scarcity. Everything is heightened. We must do ourselves and everyone else a service my acknowledging that even though we're all in this together (for there is a beautiful universality of the lack of discrimination Covid-19 spreads with-borders? What borders?) we all have very different circumstances and resources to respond to this new restricted life we are living. \*Cue...extra compassion\*

So here we are...I write this envisioning the moment of sitting down to read the first copy of 'The Strange Times', reading these very words. Frankly, the whole process of receiving peoples inner most thoughts and reflections of this time, perusing them at my own pleasure, responding to virtual Strangers and compiling all of the contributions has been **FRICKING LOVELY.** As with many creative pursuits the means are as valuable as the end itself. **And NOW!** We all get to enjoy the finished piece, in print, woven together by the graphic mastermind of Myriam Riand. What a treat. Myriam you are incredible. And Sarah Zee, thank you for all your backstage support. You women rock :)

The whole premise for this publication was to ditch mainstream and social media and get real. To make a call out to the community and see how people were feeling. We are the authors of our own realities after all. Another unexpected upside to the making of this publication has been the blurring of the line between known and unknown. For this line has been something making us all a little bit shifty in the past while.. The 'Unknown' seeming bigger and bolder than it did before. The

lack of consensus reality is another triggering side-effect of a global pandemic. Was it a Plannademic? I had a spice-bag and chicken sweet and sour last night, am I at risk? What's 5g got to do with this whole thing? When can I go for a pint again? So much uncertainty. And conversely, so many people claiming they have all the answers.\* Even my typically echoey-chamber of my Facebook newsfeed has splintered off into ideology militias. Now the pro-5g-anti-vacciners find so many reasons to fall out of funk with the anti-5g-pro-vacciners. Conspiracies abound in what has become a farcical attempt at rational debate. (I sigh-n out).

However, in the process of putting this together, new folk, known folk, young folk and far away folk all sent their thoughts and we have distilled them into this congruent documentation of Life as it is now...

I have been replenished to read and see how spookily similar our processes are. No matter where we are. The Hive mind remains intact and interactive even when our bodies stay physically distant.

I have been soul-warmed by the familiarity of Strangers.

I have seen myself and my process in the rabbit-hole revelations of others – and that continues to fascinate each and every time.

So, thank you. Thank you for sharing so openly, thank you for making a dream o'mine manifest and documenting these Strange times with me. And thank you for providing resonance in a deeply shakey time. We proudly present 47 contributions weaving together fact and fantasy. The motifs of insight that have been ricocheted across the world, from contributors in Vancouver and Chennai, and much more proximately in London, Cork and Ennistymon capture the Universality of our experience.\*\*

We truly are One&Other.  
Stay Safe & Stay Wonderful

**Strange-Leigh Inuf,**  
**Editor.**

\*Absolutely, the lizards are conspiring against us. Most definitely! Call the HSE helpline and prepare to be on hold for around 18 hours. 5g is the cause, and possibly the cure. Never. Respectively

\*\*A note on privilege – I am acutely aware of how 'We're all in this together' just doesn't cut it in terms of how disparate our experiences are. When I speak of 'Universality', I refer to the inner workings of the psyche. Where human = human regardless of context. What is radically different and diverse is the environment we find ourselves in, and in that respect much work must be done to even approach equilibrium. My solidarity and utmost respect to anyone who is trying to navigate this mess in a refugee camp, institution, abusive domestic situation or in fact any location where your dignity and liberty are already compromised. Life is a bunch of roses and a bag of shit simultaneously depending on where you find yourself.



**Leigh Brosnan**  
Editor



**Myriam Riand**  
Designer

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## FEATURED FINE ART & PHOTOGRAPHY

*Seán Ó hUllacháin*  
*Roisin Taylor*  
*Lelia Ní Chathmhaoil*  
*Joanne Lee*  
*Roger Cummiskey*  
*Alice Karvelli*  
*Giulia Canevari*  
*Carla Beggan*  
*Lucky Agamweonyi*  
*Mrs Redhead Photography*  
*Aarif Amod*  
*Tashana Poblete*  
*Mable O'Brien*  
*Josie O'Connor*  
*Myriam Riand*



A large spider web is the central focus, glistening with dew. It is set against a background of a field at sunrise, with the sun low on the horizon and trees in the distance. The light is warm and golden, highlighting the intricate structure of the web.

# 1 PACHA MAMMA'S GOT OUR BACKS

As simple as it sounds dear readers, the answers lie in the great outdoors...

## BREATH

*Martha O'Brien*

Breathing in. Breathing out.

Maybe the world needed this.  
Needed this 'invisible enemy'  
As Trump is calling it.

Breathing in. Breathing out.

For the first time in Wuhan,  
China, they can  
hear birdsong.

Breathing in. Breathing out.

In Venice, There are fish  
in the river for the first time  
like, ever.

Breathing in. Breathing out.

In the cities of India, You can  
go outside without choking  
from all the pollution.

Breathing in. Breathing out.  
Maybe. Just maybe.

24/03/20



LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Catherine Anderson

The House by the Sea,  
Glassilaun,  
Renvyle,  
Co. Galway

30th April 2020

Dear editor,

I hope this letter finds you happy and well, and that the beauty of this Strange Times project has brought magic and wonder to your days passed and your days to come. I am currently sitting at my desk in front of my nine year old mac (for the first time in quite a while!) listening to a sudden downpour of rain battering against my window panes here in the wild west of Connemara (Oh feck, just remembered my wee little plants are in for a shock outside! Pray, people, pray!). Scents of lavender waft about my room as the rain turns to hail, and my body relishes in the magnificent power and force of dear Mama Nature. Oh how she feeds me so.

Earlier tonight, I took a sneaky drive to a forest nearby as my soul was calling for her home in the trees. I walked and walked as the colours changed around me and twilight moved in. My favourite time of day and night cast shadows all around me, as the dark and stormy clouds formed indigo masses against a backdrop of rich orange fading to hues of pink and blue. I drank my herbal blend from my trusty travel mug and breathed in the wild air. I've been feeling tired today, achy body and sluggish mind.

It's 23.43 on the 30th April – unfortunately old habits die hard, and despite my excitement on hearing about your community endeavour, and my deep eagerness to take part, I'm afraid time did not grace me the space to let my creativity out in much tangible form this trip around the moon. So here I sit, sheer will begging the keys to form some words that to show my support. As the clock ticks, my eyes grow heavy and I've decided to keep it short and sweet, for once.

Below you will find an unedited excerpt from my diary earlier this year. I fell quite ill on New Year's day and spent the following month cocooning in a beautiful wild sanctuary of a home that was gifted to me to keep warm while her usual inhabitants were away across the seas. Fever blazed through me for days on end, and if it wasn't for the help of a dear and (then new) friend, who knows if I would still be here to tell the tale today. The diary entry was written just as I was coming out of my sickness, after about three weeks indoors, unable to do much more than walk across the room. I felt it may be appropriate for the times.

With love,  
Cathy

~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*

Healing is on the horizon. Healing is now. Grateful for my life force, excited to get out. Grateful for the rest my body imposed upon me. Forced me to slow down, stop thought, allow release. Get heavy to get light. Sweet, sleepy cocooning in the dark; getting ready for the light in me, to shine. Fire blaze and then burn low. Warm and steady. Glow. Fire blaze and burn. Clear it all out. Reset the system, renew the whole. Take it slow. Grateful. Glow. Let vitality flow. Let it radiate from your being. Pure universal energy. Glow. Burn bright, embers eternally stoked by the magic of the world.

Let connection replenish your soul. A new day is dawning for you, baby girl. No more waiting. Your time has come.

Dance into it, with light step and fluid body. Broadcast beauty with every track you make. Embrace the movement as you take up space, preparing the ground for blossoms to come. You are wise and young, fierce and soft, tender and firm in your message of Love. The time has come. The time is now. Smile inside, you know the how and the why. The time is now.

There's been a lot moving through me this period past. So much so that I barely remember who I was before it all began to degrade and decay. Constant chaos brought me to my knees, and then the ground. But, baby girl, below the surface is a powerful place to begin fresh growth.

A great undoing as it all melts back to the source, lays (almost) dormant a while, and then begins to reform – something new rising from the ashes of old flames, something new created from the debris broken down. Total decomposition before nature reorganises once more – a precious new pattern unique for this time. To be reborn is a beautiful gift.

Will you fly with me? Glide and soar through landscapes of love? Come. Come fly with me. We can twirl and dive playfully through the moody skies, teasing clouds with our youthful glee. To be free. Oh, to be free. Let's embrace this gift. It's for you and me, and all those who cast their eyes up into the wonders of the changing skies. Let's fly.

LIFE IN A BURREN LAND

Roisin Taylor

Through the rocky terrain  
I wander with loyal companion  
In tow, running soundlessly, without aim,  
Mission or goal, he stalks.  
Sure footed and keen of eye,  
The way forward is up,  
Over and around – like life – towards the sky  
And all its beauty and secrets.  
Delicate wings speckled with brown and grey,  
Blend in with the dying vegetation.  
Where they go, where they lay,  
Is a mystery beyond my reach.  
Obstacles to overcome are plentiful  
In this majestic land of life and rock.  
They merge to become one, the same, beautiful;  
Reclaiming what is hers – a home for all to seek.  
Embraced by the warmth of life,  
A mild autumn breeze rustles the leaves  
As we pass by unnoticed upon a knife  
Edge of a sharp and unforgiving cliff,  
Flat of face that only few can read.  
Beasts both large and small  
Graze lazily without boundaries,  
Without signs. Gracefully they stand tall  
Amongst trees young and old,  
Wise in their ways and in their souls.  
And where does one choose to wander  
In this place so full of life and death,  
Beauty and harshness, energy and wonder?  
Where ever you wish. Whenever you wish.  
It will find you as you find it.



Roisin Taylor - Happy Heals



## TO RUINS, HAPPINESS & REFLECTIONS

Sean Ó hUlltacháin

### Inspiration from the ruins.

The beauty of this old stone wall with its green ivy, red brick and many notches make me wonder how much beauty there is yet for us to discover in the Milky Way Galaxy and beyond. If this is the beauty found just on Earth alone, we are safe to be sure that stupendous treasures of natural beauty await to be found on distant unknown planets. We can only imagine their beauty and grace from afar. Maybe one day we will glimpse them and become enamoured with them in the distance. Their secrets and charm known only to their close neighbours and curse our luck for our apartness. If only we could reach out and touch them.

### Happiness.

We like seeing each other. We don't have to know each other. We just need to be happy and having a good time and it brings such joy to everyone's heart, whether its kicking a football or playing at a céilí, we love being around others having the craic and having a good time, enjoying the company of others in high spirits. We like seeing smiling faces and hearing bawdy laughter. We have lost the huge crowds of fans. We used to love seeing everyone so happy, excited and living life to the fullest. We love to see exuberant smiles and labyrinthine dance routines, enthralled to the gods and goddesses of rock and roll, jazz, blues and every genre under the sun. We live for those days when there are no worries but where to get a drink. We relieve them with our besties and look forward to many more.

### Reflection.

Our reflections on life are like the reflections on a lake. Like the reflection of sky on water is only a molecule deep and contain nothing of the depth of information present in an actual tree, our reflections are only ever superficial and bear no comparison to the actuality of the infinite realities of our multidimensional reality. No thought can compare to the realness (my word) of a spinning electron with all its hidden magical behaviour and infinite secrets of potentialities of which we are only now starting to guess at, never mind countenance the hidden truths of the Universe which are still to be discovered and realize just how wondrous this gift of consciousness is to a species that evolved eating bugs. We have come so far. Hawking said we will need to become extra-terrestrial to survive. This is just a reflection of mine on Life.

## ODE TO OAKS

Sean Ó hUlltacháin

Lessons from an Oak Tree.

**Kindness.** To shelter millions of creatures smaller than you who feed on you and in return they keep you healthy.

**Rootedness.** To be rooted in yourself and your surroundings. To take sustenance from Mother Earth.

**Humbleness.** Oak trees take raw minerals from bedrock and enrich their surroundings with it so that future generations will benefit. To receive from Mother Earth and give back more than you got

**Strength.** To take great strength and be strong inside by countless small actions (performed by the leaves over hundreds of year)

**Solidarity.** Have big roots which help bind a community together whether its a forest or human one

**Think of the future.** Dissipating back into Mother Earth and thereby helping to nourish the next generation and all life.

**Resilience.** To lose great boughs which crash to the forest floor amidst storms but still stand quiet and strong despite a destructive and chaotic ordeal.

**Letting go.** Shedding your leaves annually and starting again.

**Enriching your surroundings.** Every year leaves are shed which will enrich the soil and help the prospects of the young to grow better.

**Every little bit helps.** Every little leaf plays a role in the Earth's atmosphere by producing oxygen, moderating water cycles and being food for wild creatures. In the same way everything we do has an untold impact on the world.

**Relax.** Every year winter comes and the only thing to do is "chill amach"

**Follow your heart.** An oak trees does not try to be anything other than itself

**Be guided by the light.** In the same way oak saplings grow towards the light we should do what makes us grow as human beings.

**Whether that be the good people in your life or by your passions.** Do what keeps worries and stress at bay and what really makes you happy and gives you a sense of purpose in life.

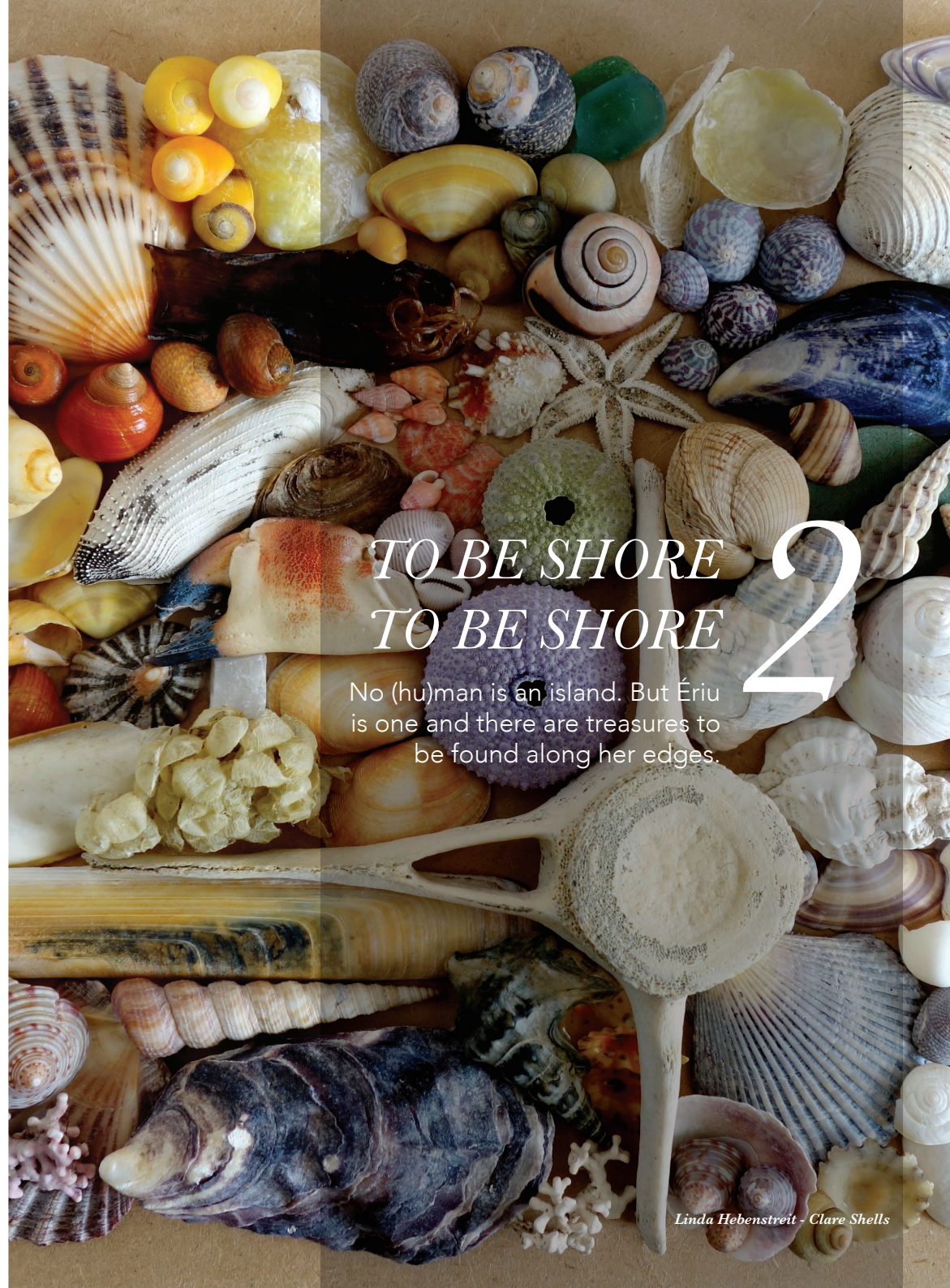
**Be present.** An oak tree lives in the moment doing the best it can.

**All good things come in their own time.** Like the oak tree we have to wait for the high days of summer

**Collective effort.** Only by the collective effort of 1000's of oak leaves over many years does an oak tree grow strong

**Cooperation.** To lose almost all of one's seeds to hungry squirrels but to have evolved to let this bio cooperation take place where the squirrel will willingly plant the acorns ( a portion of which will survive to be future oak trees) and in return receives a year of food. Such genius is known as collective evolution.

**From a little acorn grows... from one acorn a whole forest can arise.**



# TO BE SHORE TO BE SHORE 2

No (hu)man is an island. But Ériu is one and there are treasures to be found along her edges.

Linda Hebenstreit - Clare Shells



## LOVE IN THE TIDAL POOLS

Linda Hebenstreit

I think I can safely say that I am the number one lover of seashells in County Clare. There is a beachcombing guy up by Fanore who might dispute my claim, but he does not know the depth of my regard for these wonders of nature. In fact, I have devoted my artistic career, such as it is, to showcasing these exoskeletal remains from the denizens of the not so deep.

Irish shells don't have the magnitude of their equatorial counterparts, but their diminutive size only makes them all the more jewel-like. The palette of colors found in shells from our coast spans nearly the whole color wheel. At times the shades may be muted, but the spectrum is still quite unexpected and spectacular. And from the pointy European Screw Shell to the button-like European Cowrie, the marine architecture finds a variety of ways to diverge from a single norm. No two shells are ever exactly alike.

Seldom are the best shells found on a lovely sand beach walk. You have to explore the nooks and crannies for caches of assorted cast-offs from the animals living above and below the tideline. Carrigaholt by the pier, Spanish Point off the cliff walk, or Bishop's Quarter along the high edge may reward you with stunning red Periwinkles, perfect pink Painted Topshells, or pearly Jingles. There is no certainty in this seashell treasure hunt. One day they are there, the next they are not. Perhaps, sand covers them. Perhaps they get ground up before they make it to shore. There are storms that generously deposit shells and storms that completely decimate the shoals. You never know.

Success in shell hunting is uncertain, but for me, it only takes one perfect periwinkle to create an exquisite tidal pool sculpture on a brooch or necklace, one shiny limpet to make a spoon or cup. The quest for these abandoned suits of stone is not new. I follow in the footsteps of artisans from around the world as far back as 100,000 years in our collective past. Closer to home, and only 2,500 years ago, some anonymous maker put 85 perforated shells in a Burren cave that is now an archeological site. Someone gathered those shells and sat for hours filing small openings to make beads that were left as a precious grave offering for their little child. That person would easily understand my own passion for using our Irish shells to make beautiful things.

People, it seems, have literally always used shells for tools, treasure and ornamentation. From the first shell employed as

a cup for water to the plastic replicas used as dishes today, the shape of shells has appealed to our sense of beauty. The French Rococo art movement got its name partly from the word shell and was inspired by grottos covered with those very artifacts of marine life. Shells, and the creatures that make them, have not only affected our aesthetic, but also our financial, political and environmental landscapes. For instance, the Tulipmania of the 17th century was mirrored by an expensive 18th century passion to collect rare shells. Conchylomania, as it was called, resulted in singular shells selling for more than a Vermeer or Van Dyke painting. Empire building early in the 19th century had European powerhouses racing to discover new Australian coasts. The French lagged behind the twin British mission because the French captain shared my affliction and dallied too long looking for new specimens of those precious calcium carbonate husks.

The very world we inhabit has been affected by the ability of the ocean to dissolve greenhouse gases and combine with calcium to trap CO2 in calcium carbonate, the main ingredient for shells. There is speculation that ice ages have been moderated during man's evolution due to ocean changes from this chemical interaction. The worry, of course, is that further carbon trapping will lead to excessive ocean acidification, which may be okay for some exoskeleton marine life like crabs or lobsters, but not so good for other shell-bearing animals. The warming seas, I'm sure, are already changing where and when we can find our favorite shells, both common and rare varieties.

But what seems rare sometimes only means that the collector isn't looking in the right place. Because I have only seldom stumbled across the odd-shaped pelican foot shell on Carrigaholt beach, I assumed they were scarce in Ireland. Then I found a little rocky beach in Portmarnock by Dublin where they are common enough to break your back bending over every two minutes to collect yet another. It is the same with the erratic winkletrap that shows itself up by Kinvarra about once every five years. But just across in Belgium, I find them by the handful.

The treasure hunt continues for the hopelessly charmed such as myself, but we should all seek out the delicate and durable splendor found lurking in our Irish tidal pools. Bring some home to look at or play with when your world becomes constrained. They are good companions.



*Lelia Ni Chathmhaoil - Poly Carbonate & the Bard with their Loyal Steed, they came in with the tide*



*Joanne Lee - Squid Magic -*



## BEACHCOMBERS

Lara Curran

It helps if you have a keen eye.  
Although, oftentimes things just offer themselves up,  
Emerge from the stone at your feet,  
As though waiting for you all along.

Where I'm from, we follow the coast west.  
Whatever way the current flows,  
That's where you find the most gems.  
An old bike wheel, perhaps, its thin spokes fanning out like sun rays.  
Or maybe a long chunk of rotting wood, pocked with nails and woodworm,  
Its surface cratered like the moon.

There's lots of wood, you can't take it all.  
Some short sticks of driftwood, churned by endless waves,  
Made smooth as the stones beneath your feet.  
They can fit in your pockets.  
Someday you might find your heart's desire -  
Then you'll need more help, more hands, or even someone with a trailer,  
To carry this gnarled, softened, pale tree trunk home.  
You may let your mind wonder about those currents -  
- could this be one of those giant redwoods, pulled across the Atlantic?

There is lots of fishing rope. Always.  
Some as thick as your arm,  
Some as long as the coast.  
Some with bright blue buoys attached,  
Some trailing Lobster pots.  
Ropes twisted from brightest plastic, fibres fraying at the ends.  
Sky blue, turquoise, jade green, sometimes red.  
So much fishing rope you wonder how the sailors keep a hold of anything.  
You might spy spoons or knives or forks, peeking up between the Claddach stones,  
Their florid handles glinting in the sun - if they're shiny, take them home!  
There will likely be bones on your shore.

Whale bones, fish bones, sheep bones, cow bones...it's hard to say.  
You piece together a strange creature -  
Is this a hip bone? Could it be a tooth? Do whales have teeth?  
You will find lots of clothes too.  
Single shoes, wellies, woolen jumpers, battered rain coats, forgotten hats.  
Best not linger too long on these.  
License plates, sea-glass, a brass letterbox, strange mechanical parts, bright scraps of plastic,  
twisted radiators, knotted pipes, endless bird feathers.  
A hair gel tub from the '70s -

- Have you been at sea this whole time?  
- You must be special, we'll take you.

Our home is built with shore-gems.  
Bolstered on the outside with bouys and driftwood,  
Adorned inside with shells and glass.  
I don't think we'll ever be done,  
This act of creation is how we learn.

Years ago, there was a big storm.  
In the morning, there were tree stumps, unearthed by the waves.  
Their roots were spread along the beach,  
Encased in peat and sand,  
For seven thousand years.  
They were there all along, we just couldn't see them.  
That was to the east.



## THE PERENNIAL QUEST FOR MEANING 3

There was someone who said  
'Though, It seems that I know that  
I know, But who I would really like  
to meet, Is the one who knows that I  
know that I know.'

*Inspired by Alan Watts*

*Roger Cummiskey - James Joyce the Pluralist*



## SAVED BY STILLICIDE

Jenny O'Connor

Spunout to a standstill  
our hands, in time, stood still.  
Now stunned. And still. We stand.  
Heads back and tongues out  
for drips of understanding:  
That still-life... Is still life.

A breezy glistening silence  
twinkles and echoes  
in the space now carved.  
Spideogs and bumblebees  
punctuate the air  
And reclaim our wandered gaze.

A grounding has instilled in us  
the Art of standing still..  
But if and when we spin again, remember:  
Time spent could be even better still.

## YOU

Alan Waters

You are an alluring planet, with all of your majesty and all of your beauty and that alternating innocence pulling everyone and everything towards you. Your light and dark facets shimmer down to a mysterious inner core, a core so deep even your own self could not comprehend how compelling your gravity is.

You are a tiny tiny particle, you are so small you can dance through the empty halls of an atom. You are the most powerful and purest bullet in the universe and you are glowing in a frequency screaming that of divinity, and divine you are.

You are an alluring planet and within your mysterious core there is a tiny tiny particle, and it's the most powerful bullet in the universe. It's name, is your name. You are so compelling, you are so piercing, your name echoes through the busy minds of those that you encounter. Remember that.

## MOTH IN THE MOONLIGHT

Cara Kursh

There is a split moment when something turns from one thing to the other. You don't necessarily have to even be looking for it, for it to happen. It's in the split second where a moth wanders absently outside the periphery of the false light it feels it worships and accidentally gets a glimpse of the moon above it. All of a sudden its grace is realized. The long held belief that it is impossible to have clarity in one's own purpose is dissolved, in the fresh air and the gentle light of the moon. In that split second it propels forward, navigated by space itself. Like the moth in the awkward dance with the light of a desk lamp, it is easy to feel that you are failing. If you keep your heart open and seek out what is true, you will be led by what has been decreed by nature.

## BRIDIE'S WISH

Chanelle Marzouk

Bridie's Wish

Where it all began  
and where it will return  
My patience on this journey  
My visions in the storm  
The will to keep moving on  
Knowing all will come again  
With a fine set of stories now  
and a colourful song  
We are fresh we are new  
Again inspired and reborn

## WALKING THROUGH WORLDS.

Alice Karvelli

A dream poetic prose piece, out of which (with the addition of) one more have been transformed into an audio piece which can be explored here:

<https://soundcloud.com/blackarrows-in-blackholes/walking-through-worlds>

### PART 1 A multi-tide of parts, echoing the Shape of their Invisible Vessel

I was a Multitude... my eyes could see only from one moving Body, one moving vantage point... yet I could feel from beyond, and at all times all the rest of my bodies  
In Dark silhouettes we were flying across the fluid hilltops with hopes to converge into a vague centre but it was not about meeting or conjoining it was more about feeling the space between our Dream-bodies as we traced its edges and tasted its qualities.

And we were all singing.. emanating frequencies creating sound, becoming sound, morphing sound, embodying sound ...



Alice Karvelli - The Guide who walks through Worlds

inside our dream veins liquified... and woven in living-breathing latticework... of lifelines connecting uneven running along criss-cross paths upon an undulating landscape of melting hills and trees dancing in the background

The abstract Chaos pattern of the perpetually transforming schematic, self-organising in my Hive Mind manifested through dark shadow bodies echoing each other in an effort to trace the space within this greater Vessel... of ours discovering, and at the same time creating it The thinking cells of an organism trying to understand itself by following a ray of Light endlessly refracted into an a-canonical Mirror room with each mirror constantly shifting and moving in space, It is as though it is trying... frantically, in existential desperation to gather its parts together and beam itself back to Source, without knowing exactly how just being completely immersed in the exertion of its efforts, trying to hit every possible angle in its reach within Space and within Time

### PART 2 Hive Mind Taking over

The sky hung huge overhead. Full of white slashes cutting through it, separating its colours ...like all the planes had been on the warpath.

And the big Hive mind was taking over - all of its parts. Leading them to Annihilation through assimilation... and whether there was redemption waiting there beyond that point - I could not tell. But the feeling was foreboding.

Like an Invisible tidal wave it chased us throughout the Landscape: The me and the You that sought escape were relentless...in our frantic running. Through fields of open sky we could see the birds align themselves above us in strange new ways vein-like formations, leading towards Indeterminate - yet certain d o o m.

And in the hills below... strings of animals coiling - tentacle-like and streaming towards a magnetic pull beyond the horizon.

*It had them*

Through cities peopled at high cost, we ran and in our fleeing, from the corners of our eyes we saw - the multitudes of Others... integrated and aligned, marching in neatly streamlined mechanical rows... like insect soldiers tuned to the call of their Great Queen.

*In a sudden moment the Thing had me....* Central nervous system held hostage by an iron grip, in an involuntary process of alignment. Spine arching backward in a helplessness - that nonetheless the Self in me stubbornly... refused to accept.

*Still fighting. Always fighting*

- a fight internal for all that freedom was ever worth to a living Self.

It seems the most important endeavour of our kind Is to break free from mind-shackles; cruelly worn and ruthlessly binding us together.

But the struggle against seemingly unbreakable bonds will surely make them hurt more... with no guarantee it's not a mere exercise in futility.

The other Voice Within promises

*Our only relief feels something like freedom*

*And the only freedom from this Fight, is in Surrender*

At least it's a good thing, there is no Forever. But for now - the Fight - is still on



## RETURNING HOME THROUGH THE UNKNOWN

*Oonagh Devi*

Softening into the Unknown

On the other side of which a New World awaits.

Yet the Old Paradigm digs its claws into our psyches, clinging on for dear life.

Ugly shrieks indicate a knowing of its impending death.

The shadows are becoming more defined, sharpened by much needed rays of light that seer through illusion.

Desperate acts of a dying beast reveal the truth we have refused to see.

It is the final act of the play that has gone on for too long.

During which the audience were distracted into becoming the cast; unconsciously but diligently working as cogs in the machine of mass production.

Obedient soldiers take orders for breakfast leaving no appetite for food for thought and no thirst for wisdom.

Numbly satiated to the point of complacency.

It is only now we realise that we were tricked into fighting a war of deceit to keep us consumed.

We became what we were fed; fearful and separate.

We were pitted against each other by the real enemy, whose costume is no longer convincing.

The wolf cannot disguise itself as a sheep anymore.

The veil is becoming thin.

The curtains have closed, and the lights have come on in the theatre of life.

We glare at each other like stunned rabbits wanting to move and keep busy, but frozen by forces beyond our control.

Heads buried in the sand can now smell the fertility of the soil.

What was once seen as mud is honoured and revered as the wisdom keeper for the Earth Herself.

This is the moment our ancestors have been waiting for, where we remember our true nature and use the excess as compost for healing, growth and change.

We are now faced with the goalless task of Being

Something our productivity conditioned minds grapple with, not quite knowing what to do.

How do we untrain the abused circus performing monkey to go back to swinging and playing, and lazily eating insects from a companion's coat?

The answers lie in the stillness of the pure state of Being.

When we merge with the Unknown

When we interweave the mysteries of the Void into the soft silken fabric of our souls,

We are welcomed by an activating cosmic hug from within.

Tingling with the knowing

That we are

Home.

## GO IN GENTLENESS

*April Kirkham*

Often the biggest question is, "What's going to happen?" It can be quite easy to tangle ourselves up in worrisome thoughts, which only serve to block us from functioning effectively today. Keeping us from doing our best and staying in the now.

Doing our best and participating fully today, that is all we need to do.

This is a death to the life we once knew, an adjustment to a new way of living. The good news of surrendering ourselves and our life to a power greater than ourselves is that we come into harmony with a grand plan. One greater than we can imagine. There is so much information out right now, it seems to be impossible to navigate what's right or wrong. True or false, something I consider and watch for in the information I watch, see, or share is symbolism, especially if you see occult symbolism.

Or simply if your innate human intuition tells you something isn't right; chances are it's not! To listen to ourselves, to trust instinct & intuition is to pay tribute to that gift. What a disservice not to heed the leading's and leanings that so naturally arise from within. What is more freeing than to laugh at our human weakness & be grateful for our strengths. To know the entire package of "us" ~ all our feelings, thoughts, tendencies & history is worthy of acceptance & brings healing feelings. To accept our circumstances; for anything to change we must accept ourselves, others & circumstances exactly as they are. Allowing ourselves to be who we are & accept others as they are. Hard to imagine for many who have lived in systems of the right~wrong justice scale.

We do not need to justify taking care of ourselves in whatever way is right for us by condemning someone else, alienating, excluding or shaming another because their shelter looks different to ours. There is a reason why the universal laws exist & there is a reason why there must be truth in plain sight, nothing is by coincidence in the matrix. Whether manipulated through mixed media~informed consent has to be a choice for us! We can opt out, but that means "they" will make it difficult for us to use the system that we have become dependent on. It's tempting to rest in superiority of being right & in analysing other people's motives and actions. It is more rewarding to look deeper. We do not have to spend our life reacting to others & to the course they would prefer we took with our life.

This is awakening, we are in another transition that will yes awaken all of humanity & hopefully break us free from the old ways, letting the old system go or it will create a system where there is more dependency.

When you wake in the morning & see that your survival depends on human agencies to receive your basic human fundamental rights, that should cause you to ponder, what's really wrong in the world? Why am I not growing my own food? Why can't I understand my own health, and have to rely on another human to understand it for me? Why do I drop my children off to strangers, because I have been programmed to believe that other humans can educate my children better than I can? Why do I rely on "entertainment" to deliver me all the insight behind what's going on in the world, which leaves me feeling physiologically not well?

Denial is a protective device, a shock absorber for the soul, we can only let go of our need to deny by allowing ourselves to become safe & strong enough to cope with the truth. Steiner years ago said that "they" would make it difficult for us to be human.

The physical form we've all grown so attached to is temporary. The attack on our physical bodies in scenarios at play now, the physiological ones, those do the most damage.

The most detrimental thing that's happened to us is that we came to believe we couldn't trust ourselves. Fear & doubt are our enemies, panic is our enemy, confusion is our opposition.

Those waiting on Donald Trump to save us all from this new reality, don't worship that idea & put your hope into that idea. Do have faith, just don't put all your faith in man, because when man fails you, you are gonna lose your shit. That is not to say certain men (women) aren't capable of creating change, I'm just saying the real change starts with us. As we well know "be the change you wish to see in the world."

Perhaps we are overwhelmed because we feel the burden of having to change the entire world, instead just focus on changing our world that is enough.

We will know what we need to know when it's time to know it. No one can save us but us.

Get out of the cities, find communities and if you can't find one start one, food~scape with your neighbors, live off grid, but don't forget the one spiritual shield that we can't see~universal life force energy, the physical form doesn't matter, and right now we are being detached from the material and being forced into the spiritual and creative. Fear is the real enemy, fear is the real control, fear is the real killer, fear comes from man, love comes from god the universal flow. Tap into it, seek out the right shelter. Feel the confusion and chaos - then let it go.

We aren't certain what our next step should be, what it will look like, what direction we are headed, that is the time to stop, ask for guidance, rest, that is the time to let go of fear. If we are wrong or need to change our mind- we will be guided into that. The path will show itself; we will know in time trust in that. Do not trust fear, do not trust panic, trust that we will be guided into truth, and we will know whom to trust.

We can trust ourselves. You may have to push forward, but you don't have to push so hard. Go easy at no day, no hour, no time are you required to do more than you can do in peace, go in gentleness.



## THE GRAND OLD SCHEME OF THINGS

*Roisin Taylor*

Hurling through space, spinning too fast to notice.  
Miniscule creatures, burrowed on a tiny fertile planet we call home,  
Encircling a burning mass of flame,  
The heart of our bite-sized Galaxy – Our Milky Way.  
Microscopic in the grand scheme that houses us all, “our” Universe.  
Home to Galaxies, stars, planets, moons and all forms of life –  
Known and yet unknown.  
A Universe full of mysteries and loopholes,  
Vast and possibly endless.  
Looming black holes scattered throughout,  
The Justice System of the Void,  
Enter at your own peril.  
What lies within?  
Another Universe mirroring our own,  
An ending?  
Would you risk entering to find out?  
Write to me when you know its secrets, curiosity has me dreaming –  
Does it just keep going, expanding and growing?  
More universes with more solar systems and black holes –  
Leading to even more universes...?  
Does that concept make you feel small?  
Perhaps.  
But is it not also comforting?  
To know that it matters not, in the grand old scheme of things.  
Become aware that we live on a rock,  
Floating in space, within a Universe,  
With so many possibilities we cannot comprehend.  
So take your worries and fears of everyday life,  
And remind yourself –  
Life is but a twinkle in the sky, gone before you know it.  
Live it, Love it, Learn from it,  
But do not fear it.  
Embrace your smallness in the grandeur  
Of our home away from home,  
Accept it – accept yourself –  
Live your life in the knowledge of it.  
And laugh.  
Laugh at the foolishness of it all.

## NOTES FROM AN OUTPOST

*Marlene McCormack*

Unprecedented, Singular, Strange  
  
A quietness surges through the Landscape  
What we do gives way to who we are  
  
Thoughtfulness blooms in a phonecall, a  
Handwritten note, a loaf of brown bread silently  
Offered to an elderly neighbour  
  
There is patience, there is compassion  
There is a funny polite dance we perform in  
Supermarkets  
  
There is Loneliness  
  
A quietness surges through the Landscape  
And we hear the birds all the time

# 4 STRANGE IS ONLY STRANGE UNTIL IT ISN'T

In this section, a selection of our contributors ponder 'the new normal' and what it means to them...

*Tagline credit Ann McMahon*

*Giulia Canevari - Arranging Myself and Flowers*



## ARRANGING MYSELF AND FLOWERS

*Giulia Canevari*

“Today I found myself reflecting that after all these weeks in quarantine I had, once again, re-invented myself.

In my life I have been jumping around passions a lot and until now I realized I scared myself out thinking I am never in one place, “I should” be focused on one thing and persevere... but you know what... That is truly not for me.

Thanks to this quarantine and thanks to the many times I jumped and threw myself in the new abysses of unknowingness... I feel I can once more re-invent myself. This time with no guilt.

I studied art pretty much all my life, the last 5/6 years I got involved in organic growing and loved every bit of gardening. The day before they told us to stay at home I was all ready to sell my paintings to Limerick Art fair, quit my part time gardening job and be a full time artist with ecological aspirations. Every week I felt different, I could finally focus on my passions and jump from one another without fear. I started sketching self-portraits one week, then back to gardening another week, and finally I found time to read about flower farming. I bought two different books and read them in two days. Flower farming unites all the devotions I cultivated all my life: I can sing while I am preparing the soil and picking flowers, I can spend hours looking online for the best colours of bulbs in the market which will grow well together next year, I can look at shapes, textures of plants and flowers mixed with local wild treasures (if not protected!), I can sow, read about plants and treat them with no chemicals, the way I like to do it. I can spend hours outside in the muck. Which is always a bit of fun.

Thanks to this extra time at home with no distractions I got the time to dream for a future goal that I am slowly developing, and hope to show the results of this new passion in the next coming weeks! I obviously just started, but I have been already enjoying myself picking up bunches and studying flower arrangements for my own kitchen table! Is beautiful to love yourself, thank yourself every morning with a smile, get up, cook yourself some breakfast and pick some flowers to cheer yourself up!

-Lahinch

## REFLECTING IN PUDDLES

*Cassandra Considine*

Dearest Reader,

These strange times have forced me to reflect on my life as I know and knew it and I feel compelled to share with you some changes this epidemic has brought about in me. We all know the feelings of anxiety and fear shrouding us as a people. Unsure if we should walk the dog, walk yourself or even do a shop! The radio, tele, our phones, are roaring rising numbers and tolls at us and rising the hysteria of the populous with it. Even the beaches aren't free from reminders. For years we've been questioning the consequence of social media and I've realised now is the perfect time to revert to my childhood skill of selective hearing. You know the one, where Mam would call you in from play and you never seemed to hear her? That's just the type of skill we should be utilising during this sensory bombardment.

Perhaps a little childishness is exactly what we need. Alright,

I know we can't set the clock back and I have no intention of attacking the reader with a tangent on good times gone, before mobile phones, computers and high-waisted leggings but hear this young reformed woman out. What have I enjoyed most in my life? The twenty pairs of high heels that now decorate my bedroom shelves, the expensive dresses I worked so many hours to acquire or the obnoxious restaurants I'd wait weeks to get a table at? How irrelevant all these things are now. How wonderful that irrelevance is. You see that was for me, an epiphany of sorts. Because tell me, where does one wear the high heels and the dress when all the restaurants and venues are closed? Along with my inflated ego, they have been made obsolete, a thing of the past. The old me, like the cooper from the rare old times. My trade, my life, this once trendy, fashionista is a memory now. And good luck to it!

As a child I understood the amazement of standing in a river, in a pair of wellies, watching the water flow past me and feel my feet cold and dry underneath me. As an adult I've been given that opportunity again, to experience that joy again. The material world I've lived in has been stripped and locked away and I'm left with views of fields and streams and boharins that were once blocked by shopping bags and meal plans. How wonderful it is to don my wellies again, 15 years later and feel the same rush of fun as I stamp through cowpats and baa at nearby sheep. Milking cows never seemed so magical and young calves so soft and sweet. Fishing out rockcrabs from a pool without being pinched has brought me pleasure I could never find in my 25 euro Wagu Beef Burger. The smell of baked cakes brings me more comfort now than unboxing a new leather handbag ever could. For the first time in years the phone gets left behind, as I defy old rules and assault my body with freezing April waters. The hair straightener is a dead thing now. My wispy curls are good enough for me, I wonder why they were never good enough before?

I don't want the reader to think I'm the preacher type. I'm not here to tell you Netflix is wrong and to buy a pair of wellies, that's not my point. My point is I saw a sea otter out in the bay last night at sunset and I've never seen one before in my life. Surely they've always lived there and I just never took the time to notice one before and that's wrong but, for a change, I have the time. The time to blow in a blade of grass and hear it squeal. The time to neigh at a neighbouring donkey and await his reply. The time to walk under bridges, through puddles and over stones. The time to be the messer my mother told me not to be. Time is something I have plenty of at the moment, time to enjoy childish wonders of world around me. The beauty in my world, that my busy life could not stop to notice, is melting into my soul, like Easter's chocolate on young tongues. These strange times have brought with them a changed woman now and all for the better.

So, dear Reader, in these times of uncertainty there are always silver linings. One of them being that there is one less, painted and pompous, peddler of notions and one more prevailing, pioneer in wellies.

Written with Love,

C. Ni Chonsaidin.

## COLD HANDS, WARM CUPS

*Tara Darlene Smith*

March 24, 2020

(Four days before official lockdown)

09.30am

Lahinch Promenade

County Clare

“Good morning, Thomas.”

“Good morning, Tara. And hello, Sophie.” Thomas smiled at my golden retriever, who strained against her lead to get closer to him.

“I know what you're after.”

Thomas always had dog treats for just such a moment. I smiled at the thought of him pausing whenever he left home to refill his pockets. Sophie crunched away on a steak-shaped biscuit for a few seconds of bliss, while Thomas and I tried to embrace the awkwardness of not being allowed to hug.

“When this is all over, I'm insisting on inappropriately long hugs,” I said.

“Absolutely!” Thomas grinned.

He was looking well. Bundled up in a tan coat, his green-blue eyes were vibrant against the Atlantic backdrop.

“Let's make our way,” Thomas said.

The morning was fresh and calm, but the empty carpark hinted at tensions unseen. I scanned the waves as we chatted, and admired their tiny white caps.

We interrupted our conversation to say “Hiya,” or “Good morning,” whenever we passed anyone. But unlike pre-pandemic Lahinch, no one greeted us first. There was a subtle battle each time. Would they look up and smile? Would they avoid our greeting? I'd never had to fight for scraps of kindness before, not in Clare.

“Have you noticed people are really keeping to themselves lately?” I asked.

“Yeah, but I still say ‘hello’ to everyone anyway,” Thomas said.

“Me too, I can't help it.”

Thomas and I were good soldiers, and lifted the downturned eyes and mouths of everyone we saw. I was alarmed that there was any resistance to connection within our community. But as we kept walking and talking, Sophie's tail swished against the back of my leg, and I relaxed into the moment.

“Did you ever watch that cartoon The Care Bears?” Thomas asked.

“Of course I did! I loved the green one with the shamrock on his tummy.”

“What was that thing they used to do where they'd shoot love out of their bellies to each other from far off?”

I laughed, “Do you mean the Care Bear Stare?”

“Yeah, that's the one. Sure would be handy during social distancing.”

We looked at one another and fell into a giggle fit. Our laughter turned wild, fed on itself. Then we lost track of what was so funny.

Soon after, we walked the pathway along the dunes. Thomas reached into his pocket and Sophie tilted her head, hopeful for another treat. This time, he pulled out a dark teal stone shaped like an egg. Sophie sniffed at his palm and lost interest, but I was intrigued.

“I like to bring these to the beach and bury them in the sand for someone else to find.”

“It's lovely!”

“A small person could find this and wonder how it came to be

there.” His eyes danced at the thought.

“Grown-ups wouldn't mind that either, I bet.”

“Oh sure.”

Thomas beamed at the idea that something so small might bring others joy. Then he said, “I brought this one for you to bury, Tara. Wherever you'd like.”

Part of me felt a little in love with him right then.

“Thank you, Thomas! That's amazing,” was all I managed to say.

We took the steps down onto the sand, took a right, and walked to where the river meets the sea. We paused at the water's edge. I breathed in deeply, and studied the curves in the sand.

“This is the spot.”

Thomas stretched out his left arm, I stretched out my right, and he dropped the stone into my palm without getting too close. It was warm from his hand, smooth, and heavier than I'd expected. I knelt down and only buried half of the stone. The blue was brilliant against the pale sand. There were a few tiny rocks nearby, and I placed them in a ring around the stone. “That will be pretty easy to spot.” Thomas laughed and shook his head.

“Don't be telling me how to bury my stone. I'll draw an arrow in the sand pointing at it if you keep it up.”

We shared another giggle, and then turned into the wind and walked back. I'd forgotten all about our plan to get coffee after our walk until Thomas asked, “Want to get a takeaway from the Cheese Press?”

I hesitated. Normally I'd have said “Let's go,” but I was overwhelmed when I thought of the current reality: the inescapable smell of hand sanitizer, bright yellow notices on every door, and people with pinched faces rushing past.

“Ennistymon doesn't feel like Ennistymon right now.” Tears welled up in my eyes. Thomas' voice softened.

“How about you come up to mine? I have that good Anam coffee, too.”

I hesitated again. I hadn't been inside anyone's home in weeks. The virus had enough strength to turn coffee with a trusted friend into risky behavior. My tears started to flow.

“When we spoke about coffee and a walk, where had you imagined we'd go?” Thomas asked.

“I hadn't thought it through.” I was too choked up to say more, but Thomas was a natural fixer.

“How about I bring down the French Press and some cups? Everything's been sanitized and boiled clean.”

I nodded, and suddenly felt like a little kid who needed minding.

“I'll bring everything over to that bench by the surf shop. We can keep our spacing and enjoy a nice coffee.”

“Thank you, Thomas.” I looked in his eyes so he knew I meant it.

“Not a bother. How much milk do you like?”

Within a few minutes, the wave of emotions passed with some deep breaths by the sea. I let Sophie nap in my car nearby, and then Thomas joined me on the painted white bench. The French Press was like a silver chaperone between us. We faced forward as though in a car, and watched the gunmetal sea dance under a blanket of gray sky. Words fell away. All that mattered were warm cups in cold hands. And the smile that returned when I pictured someone finding the stone we'd buried.



## NORMALLY

Lulu Sinnott

There is no normal. Every year we look back at who we were, and wonder about how far we've come, thank heavens for what didn't happen, what might have happened, what did happen. This year we experienced our society being put to sleep for a season, but we have no timeframe for what length that season is, or what we might wake up to. The actual experience of being housebound has been mixed, different for everyone, depending on their circumstances. I'm solo, in a huge unfinished house, but solitude is familiar to me, and this time is like a great self-imposed retreat. I'm unable to jump in the car and go where I want, but that leaves me time and energy to be in the garden, to sleep, to plan and dream ahead. I walk for an hour by the river early each morning; birdlife is deafening this year, with more birds visible because of less human activity. Or is it because I have more time to look? Glimpses of otters and minks, water-skeeters, butterflies and a million buzzing flying insects are my daily treats. The abundance of birds also extends to the less appealing ones - this year the crows are driving me insane, trying to nest in the chimneys, in the empty part of the house, in the sheds. Or is it because I have more time to see them?

I have a job of sorts, reading on Skype for my grandnieces and grandnephew in London, while their harried parents (in two different households) try to work from home. Articles abound about parents "home-schooling" but this bears no resemblance to the home education we indulging in with Clarzy. Ours was a highly social, out-and-about kind of education, whereas homeschooling in a lockdown is basically doing your homework without any of the fun bits of school. However, anecdotally, I realise that some parents have twigged that you can just do the minimum to satisfy the school (or not) and then allow the kids to follow their passion, and self-educate. I know a few families who regard this as a tremendous opportunity to spend time together that isn't a holiday, just down time. Others have very obviously repainted everything imaginable, weeded the garden within an inch of its life, decluttered heaps (there's a problem with illegal dumping of same, according to the guards). However, I read an interesting paper on how academics are coping with the pandemic. Those who are turning out papers, writing a book, endlessly busy, may be the ones who are simply not facing reality, or indeed, may use it as an excuse to avoid getting involved in any domestic or family responsibilities.

Comparing urban lockdown to rural lockdown is basically two different countries. In Dublin, a friend was asked to move on when he sat in the park to have a smoke. The guards were very nice, but they don't want people to gather. For me, I could move around fairly easily if I wanted, but I choose not to go further than the shops. The weather has been a gift, but I can understand how people living in cities must feel trapped. This week, there's a feeling that all the bluster and cheerleading is fraying round the edges, and people want to break out of their house arrest. Realistically, people who are at higher risk have to take more care for a longer time, but at some stage, there will be work, business, shops, transport, and it will be tricky. However, looking to Iceland, where they tested most of their small population, they discovered that 50% of those who tested positive for Covid 19 had no symptoms whatever. So, many people will sail through this with less trouble than having a cold. Our lockdown wasn't done to avoid the virus altogether - most of us will have it, or have had it, at some stage. It was

done to avoid flooding the hospitals, who are overwhelmed so badly with regular flu every winter. But until everyone can access tests, the statistics mean nothing; current thinking is that testing is picking up about one in ten cases. So, in all this, our job is simply to stay as well as we possibly can be, realise that the best is yet to come, there will be gigs and festivals and family gatherings, there will be weddings and babies and even the decent Irish wakes and funerals, there will be beaches and pubs and picnics and hugs. Just not yet. Just wait and see.

## NOT THREE BAD

Juno & Eliza Mullen

### Juno's Opinion.

It has been great in London except for staying home and work and friends not being there and the fright that we may die or be in serious pain but except for that it is great I guess it is not all bad I guess we have got a paddling pool and we can watch tv more often and obviously it is better for my sisters health.

Juno Mullen, aged 10, London

### Elisa's Opinion:

It's different now. We don't go to school, can't see friends and teachers. We see them online. It's strange, we hardly ever go out, but we're always calling people. It's not really the same calling people. When you see them, it's better. It's hard to do homework online. You write it on a piece of paper, take a photo of it and send it off online. There's more time to be together. We're lucky that the weather is really sunny, cos if it was raining, we'd all be stuck indoors. I had been asking Dad for a paddling pool, and this year we bought one. Now we've got a pool and a trampoline, a swing and a wagon to pull. The good things are that it's quite quiet (in London), there's less pollution, but it's very strange. The neighbours get deliveries in boxes and we often play with the boxes. Dad goes out and finds stuff - he found the trampoline thrown out, a chair and table, a scooter for my brother, a dolls house for my dolls. He cleans the things and then you can use them. People have time to have big cleanouts and throw things out. It's alright, but it's not the same, not being with friends.

Elisa Mullen, Aged 10, London.

## QUARANTINE ROMANCE

Cara Kursh

We are stocked up with red wine and fire logs. Cheesecake and strict essentials.

A few weeks into isolating ourselves we've got a bit of a routine going. Whoever is happy to get up first will make breakfast for the both of us, then we go our separate ways and do our own thing inside the house. At little intervals we will meet to share memes or hugs and then we will go back to whatever we were tipping away at. I can hear you downstairs making up parody rap songs for your friends and laughing at texts.

I will have planned what to make for dinner through the day, thinking about all my favourite flavour combinations and trying to balance with the unhealthiness or healthiness of the dinner the night before. Yesterday was burgers and chips, so today I am looking forward to making a lovely fish dinner with steamed veg along with homemade lemon and garlic mayonnaise.

I plan a week from now that we will have a date at the kitchen table, we are both delighted at the idea. We will get dressed up and meet downstairs. Light some incense and candles and drink cocktails.

Spending all of this time inside can make you silly.

When I am feeling giddy and burst through the door, singing a made up song, executed poorly. You spring forth at the challenge, adding a line and a shimmy of your hips to go with it, equally as poorly executed and we both laugh at what was sporadically created, at ourselves and each other simultaneously. The full license to be completely overwhelmingly nonsensical by someone, and not only that but to have it added to, is one of the most beautiful and freeing feelings.

Every room now leaves a scent when we have been lingering there. Stuffy and stagnant. We open up windows in different rooms and rotate the time spent in each space, like leaving fields fallow to maintain its fruitfulness.

We go out for a walk once a day, people are out in clusters along with their isolation clan, keeping distance between the others. I imagine what the situation might be like for each of them, what they might do to pass the time, what challenges they might face.

The night time is couch time, when we've done enough moving around to warrant being lazy together in the one place we stay up until early morning playing video games and laughing.

It feels like in the space between us there is a soft golden hum, it sings between us on the couch while we play xbox.

After a year of stresses from everywhere else, moving us around like puppets, sitting together on the couch has been so therapeutic.

## CoVID THOUGHTS

Josie O'Connor

I shudder until this title, as they are really just the thoughts I have most of the time but I'm slapping "covid" on it to make it relevant. But we all are taking more of an interest in each others thoughts aren't we - if you chance to come across another person you can have a conversation with in real life it's gold - you'll be savouring it for the whole week so you better make it good. You've got to try some new recipes so you can have something new to share - some news, any news! Anything other than the mounting misery and doom that is being broadcast from every electrical device. Even the bedside lamp is looking a bit wan.

Poaching an egg is a blissful activity - watching its translucent tail swimming like a koi fish, lit up by early morning light. I've been candidly lucky about sourcing my duck eggs - and I'm not about to reveal my source, you know who you are and thank you! When you think the egg is about ready, wait another twenty seconds. Yes, reclaim the twenty second rule! it can be applied to a lot of things other than hand washing - the length of time your milk takes to settle in the coffee, the length of time you have to twiddle the sink hole to get the washing up debris swirling again, the length of time it's legitimately allowed for you to gaze out the window into nothingness until you have to shake yourself away from the void.

By the time this goes to print everything might have changed utterly, and there might not be as much time for whimsical musings but for now I'm basking in suspended time, safe and nurtured. I'm following the slow and elusive train of thoughts that would have otherwise evaporated by the 9am rush to school. I'm reducing my dressing gown to rags with all its wear. I'm chatting to the neighbours, letting them know that I'm stranger than they thought. I'm dousing everything in cinnamon hoping to come up with a new recipe. It doesn't always work. I can't wait to read what everyone else has decided to submit to The Strange Times, I have not tried to scramble together anything glamorous or show stopping - just what's going on underneath the surface of my shell.



Mrs Redhead Photography



## STRANGE DREAM

Carla Beggan

Here I am in this strange dream, sometimes it is possible to avoid the reality of it, but then every time I turn on the news, listen to the radio, go on social media I am hit with the harsh reality that this is actually happening, it is real.

Everytime we go outside our house and encounter other people we realise it's real.

I never thought I would experience something like this in my lifetime, maybe in the movies but not in real life.

For me it has been a wonderful time, but sometimes I feel guilty about this as I know so many are suffering.

Our little baby boy (Conall) was born on March 2nd and we couldn't have timed it better.

The week before I went in to hospital I was thrown a surprise baby shower organised by my pals, I was so overwhelmed and overjoyed by it all, surrounded by my wonderful friends the wonderful food they had all made.

Before and while I was in hospital there was some talk of this strange virus, but there was that feeling of "it won't happen to us, it is far away" but all of a sudden a family in Inagh had the virus.

I was lucky enough to have my partner Stew and my doula Leigh, with me for the birth of our baby boy, 11 days late,

but just in the nick of time, I couldn't imagine having done it without them, I really feel for any mother that has to give birth without this extra help, love and support.

I was lucky enough to have Stew with me every day I spent in hospital, and I had some of my best friends, Stew's mother Allyson, and our other son Django come visit, oh the look on Django's face as he held his baby brother for the first time ever in the hospital.

The day I left the hospital was the day all visitors (except dads) were banned, now even dads are not allowed in.

On the way home we stopped in at my parents house, and both granny and grandad got to hold their new grandson. They haven't since.

We were so lucky to have the wonderful Allyson (Stews mam) with us for the 1st 10 days of Conall's life helping out and giving those cuddles that only a granny can.

At the time I didn't realise how serious this virus was, I thought it would blow over pretty quick, little did I know.

Now I am taking each day as it comes, enjoying this precious time with my immediate family and feeling so grateful for who I am stuck with.



Carla Beggan - *Strange Dream*

## IMMINENT COLLECTION

Tinc Vee Rizraile

'Why Are You Always In My Way With Your Dancing?'

Tinc hails from the West of Ireland and enjoys sideways trees and rain from all directions. Tinc's poetry has gained traction in the underground poetry scene and has recently been let lose on the rest of humanity.

"Adds the twee to thatched poetry." - The Observer

"Agri-cultural" - New York Times

"Just lovely" - Woman's Way

"It's comely maidens dancing at the cross roads meets a lovely cup of tea with mammy" - Irish Times

#1

### Jimmy Mc Mahon-O'Flathery-O'Toole.

The black velvet earlobes of a wandering sheep  
are tantamount only to the clouds,  
Speared with visions of a finer day than this.  
In the ubiquitous rains of a cold day in spring,  
those looming dark clouds,  
thicken the skies like a blanket of ears.  
Sheep ears.  
Like velvet,  
and full of rain.

#2

### Misophonia

Vast cavernous mouth  
Gnawing at bananas.  
Wrapped in bread,  
Warped by teeth,  
Teeth you didn't forget to wash  
Before you sullied the world with your chewing.  
Perched on your throne,  
Masticating the threadbare sanity  
Of those  
At the mercy  
Of your table.

#3

### Why Are You Always In My Way With Your Dancing?

Why are you always in my way with your dancing?  
Legs flung East, North, South and West,  
And those pathetic pirouettes,  
The rippling earthquakes of your flesh,  
appeal to no man or god.  
And if you only please yourself,  
it's your crossroads to bear;  
to make an enemy of every  
shepherd with his flock,  
Colonising the only road  
that leads to anywhere around here  
with your  
incessant  
dancing.

#4

### DeValera's Ireland

The pigs are getting angry,  
Immense and beastly whines,  
Bellowing into the hedges,  
While the hedges bellow back "Swine".

#5

### Road Frontage

It's been gobbled up  
and all that remains  
is bad land you have to  
dig a tunnel to get in at.  
Are we moles or homo-sapiens?  
And that snarling  
mother nature  
gnashing her wicked teeth,  
mocking the simple men,  
devolving back,  
into the pits from whence we came.  
Scrambling towards the light  
in the back arse of beyond.  
Earth smeared from car to car  
and that ghastly stench of acquiescence.  
Don't talk to me about road frontage.



# 5 CHAOS AS A MASTER

How can we settle into a comfortable place in this epic phase of Uncertainty? How can we embrace the Unknown?

## THE HOLE

*Ty Van Brown*

There was a hole.

A square hole, in a sunny field of grass; perfectly square. Perfect in its imperfection. And the perfect me, thought I'd try it out.

It was a little tight. Some might say a bad fit, but... it was snug. In I got. Into my hole of dreams; security and acceptance. I'd be mad not to!

I fit myself in; my perfect body and my perfect mind; well-rounded but soft and malleable.

In I got. Inside my hole, secure and accepted.

As time passed me by, my hole grew deeper. The sides: steeper. But I was secure and accepted, chillin' in my hole; chilled, as the sun seldom reached within.

I forgot about my life outside my hole; concentrated my mind on my work and my four walls. Through them, I witnessed fantastic illusions, whilst at night, I dreamt of being whole (outside of my hole).

Although it grew deeper each day, my hole felt shallow. It was missing something...

A lamp perhaps?

Maybe a leather couch, some blinds and a swanky new cappuccino machine?

I got them all – and more.

Me. Inside my hole, secure and accepted.

One morning I stubbed my toe – HARD! – on the corner of my swanky new cappuccino machine. I screamed out, and my scream echoed back off each of my four walls.

*"Wake up and smell the coffee!"* I thought it said, but that must have been an illusion.

I decided that my hole had become too crowded. It was suffocating me.

I needed some Feng Shui – badly. So I called a man and he came and worked his magic.

My hole became like new again: all empty and serene – just a little deeper.

One day a friend came to visit; an old friend, from my days before I'd found my hole.

He was a little mad. You know, the 'traveller' type; into beaches, beads and backpacks – but a good friend none-the-less. I invited him for a while.

We talked, inside my hole; me and my old friend.

He was 'different', but being secure, I accepted him.

He stayed for tea. No more. He seemed uncomfortable. I don't think that he really 'fit' inside my hole. He brought me a present though – an old mirror. How sweet!

I hung it on one of my four walls and said "goodbye".

That night, I didn't sleep too well.

I woke late; annoyed, but not sure why. I pressed 'Go' on my swanky new cappuccino machine (*some* luxuries are *so* hard to give up) then got dressed in the dark. The sun hadn't yet reached my hole. Through the gloom, I noticed the old mirror.

I took a peek.

At first, I could see nothing. I thought that it must be dirty, so I cleaned it – twice. But no matter what, from whichever way I looked, it was the same. No me, in my mirror; just my hole but... no me!?

I sat on the floor, deep within my hole, and cried, for hours (24 to be precise).

Me. Alone. Crying. Inside my hole, insecure and unaccepted. Occasionally I'd check again, just to be sure. But... no me, in my mirror!?! Just my hole, in a mess... I continued to cry.

The next day my friend called again. He'd been worried. About me, he said, and the deep hole I was in. I offered him a cappuccino, but he took tea.

He sat with me on the floor, inside my hole, and held my hand gently. We talked for hours and he listened. I told him about the mirror and no me!?! – just my hole. He laughed, and I thought again that maybe he was mad, but I was glad I was not alone in my hole anymore.

After a while, he stood me up and walked me to my mirror.

Together, we looked.

"See!?" I said "No me!?! Just my hole." A tear slipped down my cheek.

My friend smiled and told me to undress. Suddenly, I became scared.

More tears slipped down my cheeks.

He just looked at me – calmly. "The suit." he said. I stared at him, confused and afraid.

"TAKE IT OFF!" he snapped. He was serious. I was scared and weak and alone. Reluctantly, I took off my suit and stood there, naked, in front of my old friend.

Tears streamed down my cheeks and made a puddle on the floor of my hole.

He put his hands on my shoulders and turned me gently around...

I closed my eyes tight and cried.

"See!?" he said. I peeked, nervously, through one eye and saw... me! – with tears

on my cheeks. I opened both eyes. He stood, quietly, smiling back at me.

In my mirror, I saw me; scared, but not alone, with tears on my cheeks, in my mess of a hole. I smiled and a tear slipped slowly down my cheek.

I asked him "How?"

He smiled but remained silent and I thought that, maybe, he was mad. Then he spoke:

"Their suits don't fit you." he said. Then sipped at his tea.

*"Their suits don't fit me?"* I thought, standing there naked in my hole, in front of my friend and my mirror... I knew he was right.

I stood there, as tears streamed down my cheeks, insecure but accepted by my friend,



who sipped at his tea.

“Shall we go?” he said, when he had finished.  
I asked him “Where?” – I was afraid.  
“Out of this hole.” he replied.  
It seemed like a good idea to me. So we did.

I stood there, out of my hole, naked under the brilliant sky.  
The sun dried the tears that had slipped down my cheeks.  
I felt warm, there with my friend, naked but secure and accepted.

We began to walk away through the grass; away from my hole.  
My friend smiled.  
I smiled back. Then I asked if “Maybe I should bring my cappuccino machine?”

He frowned, then laughed and said that, sometimes, he thought I was mad. I smiled...

Together, we walked away.  
Away from the hole.  
Me, with my friend, secure and accepted.

~ END / BEGINNING ~

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## ISN'T IT AWFUL

Mike O'Connor

Ophelia spooked the cows  
Brendan knocked over my beans  
Ciara tried to push me off my bike  
today the trees are dancing with Denis

the white Atlantic edge roars across us all night  
haycocks float down the inch  
the beach moved into the car-park  
step out into it you'll never feel better

God but I love a storm  
three floods on the way to town  
the place ankle deep in twigs  
high as kites breathing champagne

\*

advice heard from a radio rabbi on fake news, digital trolls etc  
not everything I think should be said  
not everything I say should be written and  
not everything I write should be published

## STRANGE TIMES

Lauren O'Shea

To be physically disconnected but connected at the same time is strange.  
To be fearful but optimistic is strange.  
To slow down from life and look around is strange.  
To realise the things we can do without, is strange.  
To suddenly have an abundance of time instead of chasing it is strange.

In the deepest of disasters, we have fought.  
In the saddest of situations, we have survived.  
In the strangest of times, we will thrive.

These times are strange but  
Undeniably awakening.

Once we awaken again  
Touch our Loved ones  
Feel those precious hugs  
Let's remember these strange times but let's reconnect with our awakened hearts.



Lucky Aganmwonyi - Strange Time

## GET OVER YOURSELF AND HAVE A GOOD OLE' CRY

Neil Farrell

I think it's genuinely impossible to write something about the COVID19 crisis without feeling like an absolute numpty. You either alienate people by being too optimistic, or you upset them by being too much of a Debbie Downer. Or you just don't say anything at all!

I'm just going to accept feeling like a numpty.  
We all had our relationship with the way things used to be.  
I quite liked my job, for example, which mostly involved making food and coffee, and selling it to people who would come and go. Every day there'd be all kinds of interactions with all kinds of people: locals and blow-ins, old and young, straight and LGBTQ, self-employed and unemployed, conservatives and liberals and Fianna Fáilers and Fine Gaelers and other people who didn't have much of a clue except they were very upset about the whole Sinn Féin thing.

Sometimes the moments I shared with my customers were genuinely moving, or transcendent, and sometimes they were just funny. Much like a barman sees at least two sides of their regulars – sober and drunk – a barista has the privilege of meeting a person in their early morning, barely conscious fug, and then in that joyous flush of endorphins as the caffeine hits their system, they settle their bill and go about business they suddenly feel capable of going about.

I miss those people. They were baffling, sometimes they were rude, and often they spoke far more than they listened, but still it was a massive privilege to be part of their day.

I miss calling into my friends. I miss the crap cups of tea other people make. Mine are just too good.

I was supposed to play a one-man-show in Glór this Summer. Now I just play the world's smallest violin for myself. Every day.

No. The truth is this great for me. I'm having – and can't help but have – a really nice time.

I have new privileges. I get to sit down. I get to write. I get to make music. I get to spend time with the people I love, although as a divorced father of two legendary little girls, and a polyamorous partner to two amazing people, it isn't always what we might call straightforward. But I've got nothing else to do except attend people's emotional needs. It's easy when you're not busy all the time.

We all have our relationship with the way things *are* now. We're figuring out how much to check the news. We're discovering what eating and sleeping feels like, from first principles. Some of us are, only now, figuring out what we *like* in life. Some of us are figuring out, the hard way, what we *don't* like.

Some of us are trapped in loveless or abusive\* relationships.

Some of us are heartbreakingly alone.

Some of us have never, ever figured out how to be bored.

Or how to be sober.

And many of us, it seems, are using this opportunity, to scream into the void about what everyone else *should* be doing.

Now, I wonder about this bit. (I'm going to dare to tread into numpty territory here). There is a lot of shouting online, across both sides of the “factual accuracy” divide. There is a lot of misinformation. There is a lot of failing to achieve social distancing, clumsily oafing about in the supermarket. Or jogging. There are a lot of... people breathing my air. There are a lot of... bastards. And they're stupid. And we hate them. I see this hatred and this anger, and I wonder who is the

audience? Are we preaching to the converted to feel comforted by common sense, or to unite against a common enemy? Are we snarking broadly in order that the two or three Facebook friends that we know *do these things* will see, and change, or at the least unfriend us? The thing is that everyone thinks they're doing this well. Whether by obeying the rules or flouting them or dancing with them.

Are we just lonely? Are we just frightened?

Now, I should say, balanced against this phobia I have of attacking one another is my absolute intolerance for Toxic Positivity. We are all told to be strong, to smile, to enjoy the time with our families. We all do the Irish thing of joke first; feeling second. “Sure we're all grand.” “It's all mad, isn't it?” “Sure it's a welcome break!” These days, we have an infinite supply of Internet resources telling us to breathe slowly, focus on the Lavender, turn your negative feelings into a frisbee, walk 2km and throw it at the forest.

This has been said by other numpties. But, if you're upset, and if you're terrified, and you miss your friends, and you miss how things were, and you don't know what's going to happen next, and you're so bloody angry at the whole thing and you don't even understand why, here's the thing:

That's Okay.

We had a relationship with the world as it was. We're in mourning, and we're in limbo.

There's no way this is “grand”. I don't believe you. I don't even believe myself. There must be some horrible twisted up self-delusion granting me the power to babble about so effortlessly, writing my opinions like a numpty, and *smiling* through this whole thing. I'm not grand. You're not grand. And you mark my words: I can't keep this smiling up forever.

But. In the long game, I'll get through it. And you will too.

And your feelings? The real ones? The ones that sing you the blues and shit in your shoes? The ones that make you feel like a numpty? They can help you do this. They're crucial right now. Have them. If not now, when? You've got the time. Get over yourself and have an oul' cry.\*\*

Neil Farrell is a comedian and musician, and co-owner of the Height Café in Ennis.

\*SafeIreland and Womensaid are resources for women and children suffering from domestic abuse. Mensaid Ireland is a resource for men suffering from domestic abuse. Even during the current crisis these resources are available.

\*\*This is not mental health advice. For those suffering from depression, or diagnosable conditions exacerbated by the current crisis, the answers are considerably more complicated. Mental Health Ireland is a great resource. Samaritans is also a resource for anyone in emotional distress.



## THE TURNING POINT AND THE BIRTH OF THE GOLDEN FLOWER

Jutta Brasil

Maybe it is only me and my affinity with Taoism and Jungian psychology that I am in awe and in a strange love affair with these times of chaos. Before the pandemic I have been in anxious anticipation for quite some time, having observed the signs and symptoms within myself, my patients in my acupuncture clinic, and most of all in Mother Nature herself. Humanity seems to find itself in the last phase of an alchemical journey, the final phase of a transformation which demands old outdated structures, belief systems and behaviour patterns to be replaced by new value systems which synchronise in harmony with all living beings on this living planet Earth. As a collective group we have come a long way, evolving from the first ever people who walked this planet to AI, an artificial intelligence that is unpredictable to us in its complexity and possibilities.

Since the dawn of mankind humans are trying to comprehend 'time' and the origin of our existence. We know that our planets, in fact our entire cosmos birthed from chaos into an order. Organic compounds supported the unfolding of all life. Eastern philosophies, dating back thousands of years, speak of 'The Chaos' marking the beginning and also the end of every organic and psychic life. The founder of analytical psychology, Carl G. Jung wrote: '...in all chaos there is a cosmos, in all disorder a secret order...'. Lao Tzu, the ancient Chinese philosopher, conveyed the alchemical process generated by chaos to a power to change and dissolve dysfunctional structures into more spiritual ways of being and living. This means one must surrender and embrace the process of being in the storm of chaos.

Creation myths all over the world tell us about the Great Chaos. Great Chaos is the mother of which order is born. Joseph Campbell, one of the most acknowledged mythologists of all times, talks about the primordial energy giving birth to spirit in matter. It is the Yin state of creation, Yin in the form of the dark goddess who bears the seed to all life, the seed containing the Yang energy to manifest life's unique diversity which - if left untouched and unaltered - is in complete harmony with itself and all its life forms. Tao, the state of Nothingness and simultaneously Oneness behind the Chaos, drives itself by its own Qi with an irresistible impulsion to manifest. Taoism teaches us that this force is also within each one of us, we may call it the inner tao. As an acupuncturist, manipulating Qi within the meridian system of my patients, I experience so often how a person suddenly gets connected and becomes aware of their own primordial Qi, connecting with their inner tao in resonance to the Great Tao of the cosmos. When this happens, when microcosmos and macrocosmos align, we experience a unity with nature, all living beings, all of existence. The feeling of happiness and bliss will discharge into a sense of deeper knowing that we are all part of the One. Carl G. Jung coined the term of 'individuation process' which is the journey to one's own original nature; one's own authentic being. This impulse, inseparable of the primordial force of Tao, to manifest to the truest and fullest expression, is integral to every living being. Every seed strives to become a plant, celebrating its authentic divine being with its flower and fruit. Lao Tzu and ancient alchemists spoke of the Golden Flower. Its attainment is said to be the highest goal in a human's life. The Secret of the Golden Flower is a Taoist text, using alchemical symbols to describe one's inner journey - out of

chaos - dissolving the yin energy of the lower self to give rise to the divine yang energy of the Higher Self. Taoists call this transformative and lifelong process 'turning around the light', light meaning awareness. This Turning Point symbolises turning one's awareness to one's own inner world, creating golden light within, connecting to higher consciousness bridging the concept of duality.

As Carl G. Jung defines, we all must do this inner journey before we can reap big changes within our human family. Humanity seems to be at the brink of this Turning Point. Collectively we all must do this inner journey, let go the of the focus on externalities and become aware. Collectively, humanity has to atone and must attain the Golden Flower in order to be truly human. By searching for the Divine we must become Human. This means to move into our hearts, be truly compassionate and have empathy with all living beings. It means to become stewards of this beautiful unique planet earth and all its inhabitants.

Earth, too, has consciousness and a drive to attain its highest potential. Earth follows Tao, born out of chaos and ever evolving. Earth always strives for equilibrium within her nature body. Earth is our home, creates the living environment for us and all living beings to thrive and manifest. Earth also protects itself. As our civilisation mistreats Earth, destroys the imperative environment for animals and plants, Earth's own forces maintain equilibrium at all costs. This can be seen in our climate change and perhaps the latest pandemic.

As the pandemic unfolds, humanity has to face isolation measures and lock downs. Huge energy has been utilised to connect digitally and humans trying to compensate for the sudden lack of personal contact and freedom to move.

Yes, the pandemic is threatening humanity. Still, there is a silver lining: scientific data show that our environment, skies, rivers, oceans have improved in only six weeks of lock down. This in turn leads me back to Taoist philosophy.

This lock down, this phase of rest - can it be considered a simultaneous healing for our inner world and Earth's environment? These two worlds are intrinsically connected. I associate this phase of rest, the lock down, with the Weiji. Moving through the time of Weiji means literally 'acting by non-acting'. Taoism teaches us that one must surrender and embrace the chaos. Chaos implies one must master the Weiji phase by going internal and developing a new direction. It means bringing awareness to the chaos and reset our values. The Weiji has the purpose to develop a new way of viewing life, honouring all living spirits vitalising our entire planet. We must go deep within to become human to our brothers and sisters and build loving relationships with our plant and animal kingdom. We must build a sustainable economy which protects our environment and offers equal rights and life quality to all people. I am in hope that our own personal transformations will bring also the transformation of planetary consciousness. This is when our inner tao connects with the greater Tao.

Much love and boundless blessings on your journey through Weiji.



# 6 REALITY BITES

And now for a healthy dose of realism...

Joanne Lee - No.1 Fox



## FOOD SECURITY

Aisling Wheeler

In 21st century Ireland, we tend to take supermarkets for granted. Aisles of fresh, frozen and packaged foods. Everything bright and clean and shiny, individually wrapped in plastic. Peas from Kenya, tomatoes from Spain, Australian wine, Scottish whisky. Who can say where the biscuits come from - they have 40 ingredients!

It's easy to forget that it wasn't always this way. In 1950, most Irish people had never eaten imported fruit and vegetables, with the possible exception of exotic oranges shipped in as a Christmas treat. Shop-bought biscuits or cakes were a rare treat until the 1970s, and even then, they would have been made with Irish-grown wheat, maybe even Irish-grown sugar. Nowadays, our wheat and barley is used nearly exclusively for animal feed and it is rare to see Irish fruit and vegetables for sale. We spend 100 million euro on apples each year, 95 per cent of which are imported. Between 1916 and 2010, the area used to produce potatoes and oats in Ireland dropped by 90%.

While the number of workers on Irish farms has fallen steadily for decades, migrant labour grows and harvests a huge amount of the fresh fruit and vegetables that we import into this country. Seasonal labourers from Morocco, Romania and Algeria work long, back-breaking hours, on Spanish farms, often under terrible conditions, to get those tomatoes into their plastic packets and onto our plates.

Fossil-fueled trucks, ships and planes bring it across the water to our island.

Refrigeration keeps it fresh - often for months or even years.

It's all very convenient and amazingly cheap, but it comes at a price - the environmental and social impacts of this system are going to be disastrous in the long run, and then there is the question "what happens when something goes wrong?"

A lot of systems must be in place, a lot of things must happen at exactly the right time, to get our food into those brightly lit supermarket aisles.

Ireland is at the end of a lot of supply lines - most of our food imports come via the UK and Europe, and we are the last link in some pretty long chains - if there is a drought in Spain, a famine in Russia, flooding in China, will those supplies still make it all the way here to the Western edge of Europe? Since the pandemic started, Russia, Kazakhstan and Vietnam have all put limits on exports of wheat and rice. These countries are all in the top ten grain-exporting nations.

Are we crazy to bet our very existence on those complex supply-lines enduring through a future of climate-related disasters, an exploding global population, or indeed a global pandemic?

Most people probably don't think about these things very much, but the Corona Virus pandemic has brought these issues to the forefront of a lot of minds. When lock-downs started, so did stock-piling of basic foodstuffs. Interestingly, online sales of seeds have skyrocketed in the last 2 months. One UK company that usually processes 100 seed orders a day, had 8000 orders per day in April and had to close their website as it couldn't cope with the volume of sales.

Here in Co. Clare, it is not really that long since food production was nearly exclusively local. An average citizen of Clare born before 1960 could probably kill and pluck a chicken; grow,

harvest and store vegetables, milk a cow and make butter and grind grain to make bread. A smaller, but significant number could kill and butcher a medium-sized animal such as a pig or goat, and, very importantly, select and save seed from grain and vegetables for next year's crop. Every citizen of this country, if they couldn't do these things themselves, certainly knew dozens of people who could.

These days, most people born after about 1980 wouldn't know where to start. And most of the elders, who have these skills, are not physically strong enough to carry all of them out, nor empowered to pass them on. In two generations we have lost the ability to feed ourselves. Stop and think about that.

Disconnected from our food supply, disempowered by lack of practical skills, disenfranchised by lack of access to affordable land and housing, we are more and more dependent on an ever-dwindling number of large companies for our basic sustenance. COVID19 has thrown this into sharp relief, hence the scramble for seeds.

Ability to generate profits (and not necessarily profits for farmers) is the only criteria successive governments have applied to our agricultural system. But what about food security? What about local employment? What about basic skills?

I'm hoping that the silver lining to the Coronavirus cloud will be the national realisation that we have a national food security problem, and that the current enthusiasm for gardening will translate into more community farms, less imported food, more biodiverse agricultural systems and more people who are skilled in the basics of food production. This year it's a global pandemic, but undoubtedly the future will bring climate-related disasters that will affect our food supply. Let's hope we're ready.

## 'KEEP YOUR FRIENDS CLOSE, AND YOUR ORGANIC FARMERS CLOSER'

SJB

On Friday the 27th March 2020, The Taoiseach Leo Varadkar announced a two-week lockdown of the country, advising people that they must stay at home from midnight that night, except for essential work, food and exercise.

This caused quite an amount of panic to spread across the country, and on the morning of Saturday the 28th, the queues outside Supervalu, Ennistymon were snaking around the block by 11am. Shelves started to empty and people were becoming more stressed, impatient and scared as the day went on.

Not wanting to add to the madness, I took a drive up to Moy Hill Community Farm, where just that week they had reopened their Farm Outlet Shop.

Talk about a different world. The sun was shining, the birds were singing and I had the whole outlet to myself. The shelves were all fully stocked with bags of freshly picked Spinach, Kale, Chard, Broccoli, Spring Onions, Salad leaves and a whole host of Herbs. All Organic and grown literally just feet away.

In the last few weeks, more local suppliers have started supplying the outlet and business has been booming. You can now buy various soaps and balms, sauerkraut, vinegars and sea vegetables, freshly ground coffee from a roastery in the Burren and eggs and flowers every Friday!

As the World's food supply chains are being tested, we are so lucky to have Organic Farmers right on our doorstep in North Clare. No chemicals, no food miles, no middlemen. Straight from Farm to Fork. Just as it should be.

SJB

## THE SOLITUDE. THE OUTRAGE

Aine Rynne

It is difficult to know where to begin when trying to assemble words that might reflect the time we are in, without the usual clichéd sentiment of 'we're in this together'. I have difficulty with this particular statement but more on that later.

The other day as if in a dream, I went sleepwalking along empty tarmac country roads, normally full of passing cars and other people out walking. On this day. A handful of cars and one person. All I could hear was the crashing waves and the chirping birds and the sounds of my feet on the silent ground. When I arrived at my chosen spot, a favourite place to contemplate - a spot overlooking the beach and strand below. This stretch of sand and beach is usually full of people out walking, swimming and galavanting. On this day, I was alone. I could barely take it in, the beauty, the calm sea, the fresh salty air was mine and mine only.

So these moments and by now, there are many moments like this when connecting with the here and now in nature is what keeps me going. Of course the other moments are also present - anxiety, helplessness, frustration and more. We all have bad days in the midst of an extraordinary time. But, the days when the birds are cheering us on, keep things on an even keel.

When I think about my friends who are trapped in a system that is now putting their very lives at risk, the lack of any urgent action by the Department of Justice is quite simply astounding in its negligence. I am talking about Direct Provision. Every Irish person needs to know that this system, which not only reduces any shred of dignity the asylum seekers had to dust, it is also about to emerge as the latest COVID-19 cluster.

If the government actually felt the urgency most decent people do, two weeks ago, they would have sourced alternative appropriate accommodation reflective of the crisis we are in. They have instead transferred many asylum seekers to other inadequate hotels where they are *still* sharing rooms and cannot self-isolate if they need to! How is this fixing the issue? What is all the more galling is that there are countless hotels, airbnb's, holiday homes all vacant when they could be used to provide safety. Are we all 'in this together'? Really?

We all need to shout, scream and bombard our TD's with outrage. I am hoarse by now but whatever voice I have left, I will continue to fight for the amazing people I know and are friends with who deserve the same shot in life as the rest of us. I stand together with them and hope they will see much better days ahead. Like us all.

21/04/2020

## BAT SHIT CRAZY

Jack McLaughlin

### Trump Trumps Idiocy

To quote Del the Funky Homosapien on this May Day, "crises precipitate change". Given that we are in the midst of a global pandemic and considering China's global geopolitical aspirations, it should not be surprising that Beijing has seized the chance to recast itself as a more responsible great power than the US. If its offerings of medical aid and coordination actually succeed in shifting the structure of international politics when this pandemic passes, it will be, in no small part, due to the United States. America, by withdrawing from multilateral agreements that combat transnational threats has side-lined itself from acting as a global crisis leader in a way that is unprecedented in the last four decades. China is only all too happy to fill the vacuum. If as now seems likely also that the pandemic results in a global recession and the United States fails to manage international recovery efforts, economic and political power may both shift further in Beijing's favour.

As America's response to COVID-19 is clearly failing, it's easy to simply stare agape at Trump. His press conferences are bizarre and rambling, conflictual and devoid of any semblance of accurate information and are marked by lies and conspiracy theories while the president has actively contradicted his own health officials who 'share' the podium with him. So what are the reasons for Trump's farcical response to the greatest challenge of his presidency? Well from every challenge comes opportunity and Trump has never been one not to take advantage. The factors which have the greatest influence on his response are 1. His looming re-election and 2. International competition with China.

1. Domestically: Asides from a global pandemic, the world faces a devastating economic downturn, unprecedented in peacetime; hot on the heels of the last one. It might be thought that America, the richest nation on earth is best placed to deal with this crisis? Although America may be the wealthiest nation in the world it is also the most unequal society in the entire history of humanity. According to a 2016 GOBankingRates survey, more than half of Americans 69% have less than \$1,000 in their savings accounts. And a disturbingly high percentage have no savings at all 34% in 2016. This is in a nation where the wealthiest 3 individuals own more wealth than the bottom half of over a hundred and fifty million people. The bottom half of America owns roughly only 1% of its wealth.

This trend has been exasperated by the adoption of neoliberalism in the 1980's. Neoliberalism is a socio-political economic project which seeks to privatise public services, deregulate markets and remove barriers to trade. These policies have seen a flight of American capital and manufacturing jobs to countries like China, slashed public services desperately needed by the poorest and defunded welfare programmes needed to protect vulnerable people. Many American hospitals, forced to compete in a 'free market' were already close to bankruptcy before this crisis began.

As most Americans are living pay check to pay check and over 60% cannot cover a single setback of a loss of even 400 dollars, it is understandable that many Americans are scared and feel they need to work despite the risk. They have no



other choice. Trump has responded to calls for Federal aid by states by turning it into an election battleground by adding an anti-immigration clause to funding stating that any federal aid would be contingent on so-called 'sanctuary cities' giving up protections for immigrants against federal deportation. These cities are of course in primarily democratic states. By cutting funding off from these states, he is keeping in some cases life-saving funds from being distributed, further fuelling protests.

Trump faces many challenges regarding this pandemic, most worrying for him personally at least is that he can no longer campaign by rally, that doesn't mean however that he can't campaign. Trump is a media manipulator extraordinaire. In the year after Trump declared his candidacy in the summer of 2015, cable channels ran so many of his "Lock Her Up!" rallies live and at full length, that the coverage amounted to free campaign publicity. One source calculated that the free airtime was worth over three billion dollars.

From Trump's point of view, it makes sense to use these press briefings as campaign events, it is after all free and unfiltered airtime. From the media's point of view, it also makes sense to continue to cover them, despite the risk to the public they bring as it's fantastic ratings for them. It is from these press 'briefings' that most conspiracy theories pass from the ether of the web to the mainstream media. It has also seen Trump make use of the anti-lockdown protestors to attack democratic opponents. Trump while not adhering to a long-term plan is highly adept at adjusting to these new situations and twisting them to his advantage.

By sowing doubt in the minds of voters, by associating COVID-19 with America's rival China he simultaneously defends his own administration's response to the COVID-19 and economic crises, creates a nationalist undertone and sentiment which he is in the best position to take advantage of and casts doubt on his opponent in the upcoming election. Trump said during an interview on Wednesday that "China will do anything they can to have me lose this race," and that Beijing wants his Democratic opponent, Joe Biden, to win the race to ease the pressure placed on China over trade. The accusation is of course ridiculous but brings to mind the story of former US president Lyndon B. Johnson when running for congress told one of his aides to spread the story that Johnson's opponent fucked pigs. The aide responded 'Christ, Lyndon, we can't call the guy a pigfucker. It isn't true.' To which LBJ replied 'Of course it ain't true, but I want to make the son-of-a-bitch deny it.' Which seems to be exactly Trumps strategy regarding accusations of Chinese interference and the possibility that they let created COVID-19.

2. Internationally: Meanwhile this isn't to downplay the very real power politics which are at play. China for its own part has been seeking to assert its sovereignty over the South China Sea. This is an area where \$3.37 Trillion dollars' worth of trade passed through in 2016 and it's estimated that 40% of global liquified natural gas passed through the region in 2017. It also contains vast quantities of natural resources. China claims by far the largest portion of the territory which is delineated by the 'nine-dash line'. It stretches as far as 2,000km from the Chinese mainland south and east from its most southerly province of Hainan.

In the spring of 2010, Chinese officials reportedly

communicated to their US counterparts that the South China Sea was an area of 'core interest' that is as non-negotiable and on par with Taiwan and Tibet to their national agenda. And only last week, China sought to further advance its territorial claims when it announced that the Paracel and the nearby Spratly Islands, Macclesfield Bank and their surrounding waters would be administered under two new districts of Sansha city, which China created on nearby Woody Island in 2012. It also announced official Chinese names for 80 islands and other geographical features in the South China Sea, including reefs, seamounts, shoals and ridges.

The US State Department has obviously taken these announcements poorly and claimed that China is taking advantage of the region's focus on the Coronavirus pandemic to 'coerce its neighbours'. America has always viewed any Chinese attempts to assert their sovereignty in the South China Sea as posing an 'unprecedented threat to the freedom of the seas, including the freedoms of navigation and overflight and the right of innocent passage of all ships.'

So how does Trump's stubborn attempts to reclassify COVID-19 as the 'China virus' help him on an international level? Well it, and other conspiracy theories like it, help to muddy the waters on a national level in a number of countries which is part of an attempt to block any public goodwill China may garner from donating lifesaving aid and expertise. Goodwill which it may seek to leverage as influence to gain further sovereignty in the South China Sea. It also gives naturally conservative governments like Australia who continually compete with China on an ongoing basis an excuse to put pressure on them regardless of the validity of the claims and helps lay the foundation for an Anti-Chia coalition if sufficient international suspicion has been generated.

But just how can trump get away with such blatant lying about fake cures and Chinese involvement in releasing the Corona virus all the while blatantly mismanaging the economy? Well part of the answer may lie in what Karl Rove had to say in an interview with the New York Times back in 2004 when he stated "we're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you're studying that reality... we'll act again, creating new realities, which you can study too, that's how things will sort out." And that is exactly what Donald trump is doing when he acted to defund the W.H.O in the middle of a global pandemic and claims that COVID-19 comes from a Chinese lab. He's creating a new reality by blaming China for everything; the stability and accuracy of these facts matters little as he will act again creating a new reality.

Trump's actions aren't the disconnected ridiculous actions of an out of touch anti-science political hack but are the cold calculations of a classic realpolitik politician and the simple fact is that our own failure to recognise this speaks to the truth of Roves prognosis back in '04, too much time is spent judiciously analysing particular facts separate from their broader context.

1/05/20

## MOTIVATION

Lenka Liskova

Suddenly, it feels like the days are pouring into each other and you might end up asking yourself: "Did the time stop?" Then you realize that there is the Sun coming up every morning and nature keeps going, which brings you to the moment when you see that only the hustle, society, the man's world have stopped. But where does it leave you?

For me, there were a couple of hard days at the beginning. It was hard to cope with all the changes, new rules and mainly the atmosphere of fear and insecurity. Additionally, there are always bogles in the closet. The sensible stuff, we don't want to talk about or even look at, all veiled in shame, fear, guilt, anger, envy etc. The ordinary hustle is helping us to escape (at least temporarily) from everything. It is an overall well working strategy, but what happens when you are all the sudden forced to stop? How to handle the upcoming silence?

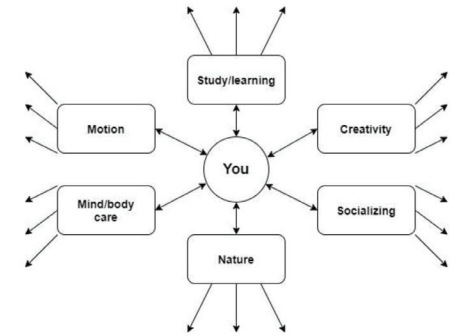
Certainly, there is no chance to face every unprocessed aspect from your life at once, that is a bit too much to take and it is also very dangerous for your mental well being. So, what I did is that I tried to face the most urgent ones, I released lots of stress I "didn't have time to deal with" while running through my ordinary social life. It took a bit over one week to get back on track. Then I started to think: what should I do with all that time I have? How to keep myself happy?

Firstly, I was putting random stuff together and did a bit of this and that. I started to spend more time in nature, making more special moments just for me, I decided to let my creativity to come to light as well as to keep studying and learning about things I find interesting; after few weeks I clearly started to feel that I need to do more exercise and stay more in touch with friends. Finally, it all gave me the clear pattern, which I captured on the paper as a scheme. This scheme offers me the great help in keeping myself active, sane, creative, productive and last but not least I am experiencing more happy moments, more self love and gratitude than ever before.

Because the world pandemic affects all of us, I believe there are people with similar feelings or experiences, who would be happy to stick a similar scheme on their fridge. Therefore I decided to share the scheme, because that is the least I can do to help someone to get through these tough times. I understand that there is a lot more going on and many people are worried about their well being or their elderly, however, it is easier to take care of the greater issues when you are able to take good care of yourself. Obviously, I am not saying that making the scheme is going to solve all your problems, although it might be the nice and easy way to make your life a little bit easier.

Basically, in the middle of the scheme is me and the bidirectional arrows are pointing to things, which helps me to keep my life in balance. These key features may be for everyone a bit different, however, I left my own there for inspiration. The other arrows oriented outside the scheme points out the concrete action/procedure. For instance, study/learning could content the fields of study as well as the different ways of gaining information or being in nature could include walks, sea swimming, gardening, etc. Hopefully, some of you will find this handy, have fun!

Lenka Liskova (25), Milltown Malbay







# 7 FOREIGN CORRESPONDANCE

The following section captures realities elsewhere. The authors are as far-flung as London next door, Chennai to the East and Vancouver to the West.

## ART AND THE ART OF PRACTICE

*Aishwarya Arun Karthik - India*

There is an unquenchable thirst for art but has been marooned in the midst of our skeptic minds. Perhaps, it should be communicating with the society, but rather it's been deeply buried and drenched to communicate with our own mind. Each and every step towards practicing and mastering a form of art gives us the freedom to explore our boundaries and gradually a sense of awe creeps inside us. That's joyous. While this process may seem hard and erratic just like walking through a bamboo forest with eyes closed, it's also plausible that we may benefit from this journey. In these strange times, we somehow have failed as a species, to have a closer look on what practicing an art does to us. Unfortunately, as much as we like to learn an art, we dislike to invest time on it.

Practice is inclusive of experiments. It's just not about exhibiting the skill that we already possess but it's in travelling through the unexplored directions of that skill. When we do so, it's a cue for us that we are not only learning but also progressing. In that process, we get out of our comfort zone - experimenting new things. Apparently, only by getting out of the comfort zone, profound ideas are discovered and eventually mastery is attained. A hunger that's just momentary to learn something may provide us loads of happiness but may get us bored in the long - run and it's unlikely to last. Hence the key to it is to have a "sustainable hunger"- an eternal search when we walk through this bamboo forest as it gets us going.

"I want to write a poetry"- this is just the hunger. But how about all other things that follow? The genre, the structure and the way we are going to spin our words? Well that should be quite a task. It's fundamental that we just should not have a goal (hunger) but also expand our goals which is the very basis to experiment our imaginations in the process of our learning. When goals are expanded, it's going to be duck soup for us to hold on to that "sustainable hunger"- as we are bound to flood our mind with endless imaginations and possibilities, a broader vision accompanying the spectrum of our thoughts.

The very purpose of practicing an art is to explore new dimensions and to reflect on ourselves- it's like the joy to have learned something new. The very spirit of performing an art is to give, give and just give. To give joy, insight and other interpretations to the audience. This hunger to practice an art may fade after a period of time which is a part and parcel of the process and that's when we are in the necessity to hold on to "sustainable hunger". The rest of the journey continues on how well we are able to navigate this "sustainable hunger". This in turn may open the door to newer visions and possibilities.

## HITTING THE GROUND RUNNING

*James Hopest - Scotland*

Today (whatever day it is) I'm going for a run. Practically the only structure to my life right now: once per day—rain or shine—I go outside. Actually this may be the most structured my life has ever been. Going to the supermarket does not count.

In only a few minutes from my house, I join the rugged trail path, surrounded by livening spring greenery, bright and nameless wildflowers pushing winter back to the memory banks. Along a trickling stream I run past some of my friends—not my real friends of course, just other people wearing sports clothes. Mainly pretending. On these paths the smell of mummy's washing powder is far more pervasive than sweat. We nod at each other, do that fake half-smile. People readily move out the way. It's great. If they don't move you just have to do a little cough.

On any pre-Covid day if I went for a run and said "hello" to anyone I passed, there would be a fair chance of non-reply. But presently I experience an unusual array of disgruntled interactions. People are forced to talk to each other, or at minimum look at each other in mutual understanding as to why there is an "unnecessary" ten-foot gap between us. There's an imperceptible undercurrent that we are all experiencing something together. Looks of hidden worry. Hope, somewhere an acknowledgement that these seemingly silly interactions are only temporary. People are now saying hello so much I struggle to swim through my internal dialogue of trying to judge when I should preemptively say hello or just nod or maybe remain silent. Finally, caught off guard, I make a mini version almost like the noise I make when I'm disturbed sleeping.

The paths are a lot busier than normal. Walkers, joggers, cyclists everywhere. Where did all these people come from? Have they just moved here? The environment, too, is different. What are all these birds doing here? So many? And to hear them instead of traffic. To smell the gorse instead of diesel.

Does this permit me to wonder if we have sacrificed nature in the name of something else? Work we often don't enjoy? Overwork, stress, pressure. Pressure on our bodies and our mental health. I don't believe that we shouldn't work, of course. Not only is work necessary to survive as a species, a lot of good comes from a job well done. But the way we work, on average, as a society is bordering on insane; to consider stressful or dull as "normal". That's factually wrong. Why is that normal? I have no idea.

For those off work completely, and those who have gained some time by working at home, many of these problems are being solved by going outside and visiting our old friend nature. Exercise is a great stress buster (and yes, walking is exercise). It keeps us healthy in a western world that has for years been slipping into a health crisis, both physically and mentally. But there's more.

Unfortunately, especially right now, by neglecting the great outdoors we are inevitably surrendering a greater part of our souls to screens. That might not necessarily be a bad thing. But compared to going outside for a while, it probably is. It's not like we need to spend more time in front of our



computers. And look, aside from the likely decline in mental and physical health as a result of doing so, the biggest winners are embarrassingly few: Amazon, Zoom and studio lighting companies—yes, for those influencers and politicians to look extra pretty. A handful of other companies will grin at the new data they've amassed, others will smile at advertising profits. And across whole populations, more exposure to adverts mean a measurable increase in consumption of advertised goods. It seems where our money ends up, and therefore the employment, is being pushed evermore distant, evermore in the hands of fewer and fewer entities and ultimately fewer and fewer people. Strengthening our immediate communities, for a long time touted as a possible solution to this problem, has for obvious reasons become even more difficult. The high street was already dying and Corona just dropkicked it in the face. Probably the best thing to ask is, well, what can we do about it?

Our current ways of enacting change are out. For many it's too late to chose a sensible government. Mailing parliamentary

## THE BEST SONG LEFT UNPLAYED

*Colin Dempsey - Taiwan*

**A short story set in China past about a daughter's return for a promise her mother could never keep.**

Ayi had just returned home when she found Qiqi sitting inside. Qiqi's ironed cardigan stood out against Ayi's shack. Cockroaches wormed their way into cracks in the floor. Ayi's lone extra shirt lay crumpled on the ground. The only possession Ayi had was a cobweb-covered dizi. Her day had been the same as it'd always been; rising early to consume some noodles, working in the fields for the day, then retreating home to wait until she fell asleep. She'd lived this way for years, whether as a farmer or a noodle chef or a ring forger. Ever since she had been cursed to live without care she had no reason to change it.

"New shoes? They look cute," Qiqi said.

"I had to get new ones after someone stole my other pair," Ayi replied. Her heels penetrated through the soles of her dilapidated shoes. The pain would've bothered her if it impeded her work. Qiqi's shoes were kept with the utmost care. "Oh no! What a shame," Qiqi said, rolling her eyes.

"It's been years, why are you here?" Ayi asked.

"I want to make things better. My wedding is coming up and — do you have to do that right now?" Qiqi raised her voice. Ayi had started stripping off her clothes.

"Funny how I breastfed you and now my body terrifies you," Ayi said as she unclasped her bra.

"No mother," Qiqi pulled her hair in front of her eyes. "I just want to talk. Can you listen to me?"

"I always listened to you."

"You heard me, but you never listened." Qiqi said. Ayi was naked now, dunking her clothes in a barrel of water.

"Check if those clothes behind you smell bad," Ayi said.

Qiqi didn't need to sniff them to be overwhelmed by their stench. She grabbed a bedsheet and draped it over Ayi's body. Ayi remained focused on washing her garments.

"Now that you're covered can we talk? As you know I'm getting married soon," Qiqi paused, hoping to bait a reaction out of her mother.

"And?" Ayi asked.

"It's tradition for the bride's mother to send her off to the groom at the wedding. Even though Father thinks otherwise I

want to keep to that tradition."

"I see," Ayi said.

Qiqi inhaled. "I still think we can break your curse."

Ayi chuckled. "If it weren't for this curse I would've smacked you years ago for being so hard headed."

"Mother!" Qiqi shot out of her seat.

"Like I said when you were little; my curse is eternal. I brought you with me to return the stolen necklace to the shrine after you begged me to do so. Before that, you tried destroying the necklace I stole. And before that your father consulted every priest in the village," Ayi said. She rang her shirt out onto the floor.

The veins on Qiqi's forehead looked ready to burst. "You don't think it's worth trying for my wedding?"

Ayi shrugged.

"I know, you don't care. You can't care," Qiqi spoke like she was confessing. "This is the last chance we have before I'm married off, and who knows when you'll see me again."

"I've dealt with you leaving before. It was you and your father who left under the moonlight, right?" Ayi finally looked at Qiqi. Qiqi's face boiled red. She held herself back from shouting. "We're going to the water wheel."

Qiqi tried to pull her mother with her but the bedsheet slinked off Ayi's body. It was incredible how many pores a person could fill with dirt.

"Get dressed, we're going," Qiqi said.

After a short walk they arrived at the village's water wheel. Qiqi's quick steps were punctuated by brief breaks to shout back to her mother to hurry up.

"Why did you want to come here?" Ayi asked.

"The day before you got cursed we played our dizis here, remember?"

"Of course," Ayi said, holding her lower back. "But I'm sore and tired. I want to lie down."

"Lay down on the grass," Qiqi responded as she crossed her arms.

Ayi laid down on the lush grass. "Good thinking Qiqi."

Qiqi stiffened. "That night you got cursed you promised to teach me how to play a new song. You never kept that promise because you didn't care enough to teach me."

Ayi nodded.

"I found out how to play it in my new village. Maybe if I play it here with you, it'll break the curse," Qiqi pleaded. As she rummaged through her bag to find her dizi Ayi began to speak.

"My curse made me apathetic, not stupid. I know you did everything you could to help me. If I could appreciate it, I would."

"Don't condescend me! This will work!" cried Qiqi.

"I know I pushed you and your father away. While I never felt guilty, I knew I was at fault. But my guilt didn't come through as shame. It was a cold morning with two empty beds. I wasn't upset when you left because I couldn't be. You deserved a mother who could love you. After you left I never tried to break my curse. If I did, I would've tried to find you. Traveling here after years of silence, trying to help me, shows that you deserve someone that will love you as much as you love me."

Tears stampeded down Qiqi's face. Ayi's head rested on the grass.

"Go home, enjoy your wedding, forget about me. It's been thirteen years. We're both different people now."

Qiqi smashed the dizi over her knee and hurled it at Ayi. A million words welled up in her mouth but she knew they'd affect her more than her mother. She turned and left, leaving the last gift her mother gave her snapped in half.

## A MOTHER'S DAY LETTER

*Hugh Mullen - United Kingdom*

Dear Mother

What a lovely day!

The apple and cherry blossoms blooming in neat matching rows in front of the terraced houses. The Spring sunshine; still low, but bringing real warmth and not just its memory. Daffodils sprouting everywhere, making one wonder how they can hide in plain sight for the rest of the year. Swathes of yellow, variations of shades, weaving in the breeze. Do they self-propagate or are they all planted there by man's hand?

Central London streets devoid of traffic, noise, hub-bub, tourists. In the quiet, the buildings proudly show-off their architectural heritage. The intensity of the light makes their edges sharper and the contrasting light and dark is so strong it is almost an additional dimension. Peddling past, one can take in the things one normally never has time to see. There is now no risk of a mindless pedestrian lolling across the street and into one's trajectory. There are no taxis, uber drivers and builders from Essex in their white vans looking to vent the frustrations of their life and their useless anger at a vulnerable cyclist. Now, there are London Planes sprouting buds and shedding skins. You might even hear a bird as the traffic subsides.

The parks are full of all sorts. Everyone seeking a sense of normality and an expression of freedom. Every size of dog and every shape of ball. We meet another family in Regent's Park. The usual mix of languages – English, Spanish, German on this occasion. A brightly coloured kite catching the breeze and jolting higher, with tassels fluttering. Each child has a turn. Hard to see at times as it seems to swim to the giant egg of the sun.

All the talk everywhere is of the same thing. What will happen? How one is affected? What is happening in Italy? What is the Government saying today? What will it say tomorrow? School arrangements.

In a dream sequence, someone like the brother walks close by on a park path. Very like the brother. I squint. We seem to make mutual recognition at exactly the same time. The person I expected least to see and me likewise for him. Emily off cycling a Boris Bike. Can't walk currently. Needs a small operation to fix an out-of-place steel bolt in her foot, put there to fix a bunion. But the operations have all been cancelled. Conor killing time walking with Constance and Nancy. After the introductory talk, a game of football kicks up between the 5 children present. Adults occasionally involved in the game betwixt conversations on the only topic which can ever be discussed anymore. Strange new rules of the game invented for the occasion and by those unfamiliar with what the rules should be. Is that the football game or just life now?

Conor sells things which nobody wants to buy anymore. Emily sends people to places where they no longer want to go. Suddenly unemployed. An enforced new vocation for us all – teachers to our home-schooled children.

Later, we venture across to the zoo to see which of the world's wild enclosed creatures can be spotted from the outer perimeter. We usually look in at the endangered creatures. Now they look out at the endangered ones. Trying to remember whether it is a camel or a dromedary which has two humps. Sudden screaming from the bushes. Raul has fallen into the nettles. He sounds like he is on fire. A fruitless search for dock leaves, which eventually appear too late to be of use. Are they really ever of use or just a placebo?

The afternoon in the park followed a morning cycle out into Kent. So many cyclists out. A whirl of coloured lycra and

chain rings. Most look like the usual grizzled Sunday morning crew. Expensive Italian engineering, gritted teeth, shaven legs, wrap-around narrow sun-glasses, stubble. Others look like they have used the allowance of exercise to venture biking in the countryside for the first time. Over-dressed and studying maps on their phones. You wonder whether they will get back from whence they came once they have downed the hills to Westerham and are forced to climb back up.

Before I went out, I was talking with a friend who told me they had prohibited cycling in Spain and Italy. Not because the cyclists would be passing infections between themselves, but because they take up valuable medical resources if they have mishaps on the roads. So, perhaps we should not be venturing out to the countryside or to the parks on foot. And soon will be told that we cannot. Spring will have to reveal its beauty while nobody is allowed to watch it.

So, the beautiful day might be one to cherish particularly well as it may already be a memento of how things used to be but will be no longer and for how long nobody knows.

That was Mother's Day for me. How was it for you?

Much love

Hugh Mullen

## HUH.

*Kay Foley*

As Covid's reach grew ever nearer, and our great leaders were busy flinging military metaphors around as fast as the germs were spreading, local mutual aid groups were springing up all over the UK.

Who might I be able to help I wondered? I did a mental sweep of my street to see who fell into the old and vulnerable category so that I could offer to buy food or pick up medication. I've lived on this terrace of small Victorian houses since the 1980's, and with half of them now under private rental or social housing, it caters to quite a young demographic.

And so the text messages started coming through – from neighbours offering ME help. One offered to be my 'buddy' – suggesting regular phone calls to check in on how I was doing. Another sent me a link to the local council, who were delivering food packages to the vulnerable.

What was going on? Ah yes. I realised at 65 I was the oldest resident of this street.



## WHEN DIRT BECOMES HONEY

*Tashana Poblete - Canada*

A few months ago, a co-worker asked me, “What would be your perfect day?” Without hesitating, I told her that I would take a day where “everyone would leave me alone” to make art, strum on my guitar, read a book, go somewhere new and far...

So, sometime during quarantine, I asked myself, Is this any different from my greatest dreams?

Obviously, the pandemic is far from a happy dream and is more like our darkest existential timeline. But, in my honest, slightly guilt-ridden reality...I've been calmer than I ever have. And I think the reason for this, ironically, is the cumulative effects of growing up in chaos. I've always thrived in the scope of everyday life out of my own hypervigilance, while thriving in acute, chaotic situations due to my self-reliance. In this acutely chaotic situation, I am able to go back to things left unintended to, like this painting that I started earlier in the year.

This piece is about the transformative power of love, in any

capacity. Painting this initially came from a place of realizing how deeply loved I was, and how much it made me think about my own perspective of myself. As I ruminated on it more, though, I realized that this viewpoint of looking down at one's own hands is equally, if not more, representative of seeing how you have changed yourself out of self-love. Because even while love from another shapes you irreversibly, but it is still not with so much power as the love from within yourself.

I know that I am not the only one experiencing this paradoxical sense of calm in these times nor am I the only one using this paused reality to slow down, do what I love, and heal fully. And I know that there are people who are experiencing more panic, fear, and loneliness than they ever have before. No matter who you are, we are all in need of love right now—and figuring out how to feel that in yourself, in a world that only guarantees constant change, might always be our greatest struggle.



*Tashana Poblete, Vancouver, BC, Canada - When Dirt Became Honey (Acrylic paint, 8x10 canvas)*



# 7 METTA ANALYSIS

Metta is a Buddhist practice of Unconditional Love and in this assortment it's all about the Love, Gratitude and Memories.

*r\_f\_photography\_86*



## PRETTY LIFE

*Aishwarya Arun Karthik*

Half asleep-my hands searched for the phone to turn the alarm off. A morning gaze and a warm cup of coffee as soon as I woke up. My dining table was shattered into pieces like how a lover's heart would be torn into pieces in the longevity of its love. "It was a 50-yr old table made of rosewood", that's what my mom had told me or at least that's what I remember. I called up Linda, my childhood friend who chose my company over Audrey's though she knew I was terrible to handle. When asked, she used to tell me this - "You are terrible, explosive but honest. Audrey, well I liked her but we didn't connect well although she tried to help me in my studies. She was judgemental and probably that made us repel".

Linda, "Listen my table's broken and that's not why I called you. I have no idea how it broke. By the way, could you visit me?" Linda was always around me and she gets me blueberries every time she comes to my home. It felt home to call her, as always. Blueberries placed on the broken rosewood table - Linda walked around. "Honey, are you alright? Looks like you haven't had a good sleep". I walked into my room to show her my diary that I always had kept in the drawer. I patted gently on her cheek and handed it over. She was on page 34, the most recent page that was put to use. "Now this says why you didn't sleep. But wow Susan, looks like a poetry after so many days".

" we are those flowers  
blooming when happy  
we are those thorns  
pricking ourselves  
when angry -  
we are this universe's children

intertwined-  
the sun from behind

was our hope  
for this evening  
and tonight -  
we will all sleep  
singing some song  
until the morning sweeps in -

eureka!  
we have mastered  
the art to live our life  
somehow -"

Linda hugged me like a child and started weeping. We both turned into a sober for the next one hour. With blueberries aside, we started to speak after a while. Susan, "this poetry didn't rip me apart, rather it cleansed my heart. It caused both joy and pain. In fact, that's why I cried. Years ago, when we lost our parents in that car accident, life made us a loner. I didn't feel much pain. May-be I was too young to realize? Well not sure. You know what? I have been a strong person in all walks of life but never had the courage to cry and express. You were the one to kindle my emotions and bring them out. Every single time".

I watched the sunset whilst Linda watched her favourite

television series. "What do you think about life, Susan?"

"For me, life was always about you and I". Linda smiled.

The rosewood table was discarded. Sipping some tea, the 70-yr old ladies reminisced about Audrey.

## GOLDEN YELLOW

*Martha O'Brien*

I had to do it. The Deep Golden Blooms  
Spoke straight to my Soul.

She was somewhat bemused. However,

Thereafter, Yielding to its' Beckoning Call,  
She skidded to a Halt at every single Spiked Shrub. As if

Drinking Sweet Honey Drops from  
the Lush Honey - Locust Tree, We

Gathered Handfuls of Soft, Sunrise-Yellow Petals,  
The Dark Green Needles Prickling and Pricking  
Our every bare Palm and Finger. Beaming

A Smile, She Slowly Counted, One, Two, Three...

Whoosh.. We released them all into the Warm,  
Blue, April Sky. Like

Fireflies to our Beating Hearts.  
Fluttering. Falling. Fluttering. Flying. We

Laughed and Celebrated in the  
Magical Down-Pouring of our

Golden Gorse-Flower Confetti.  
23/4/2020

## STAR

*Jo Winifred McKeown*

Star was no ordinary dog. She was Star in name and Star by nature.

When my son and I made the move over 13 years ago from Drogheda to Co. Clare, we knew we had to have a dog in our lives.

After seeing an advert in the local health food store: "Good homes wanted for puppies" we called the number.

We met about 7 puppies in a barn with the mum and a donkey!! We will never forget the moment all the beautiful pups ran to us and said hello. But one in particular was the friendliest and jumped and played with my son the most out of all the pups. Any preconceived idea about having a boy or girl dog was gone!!

When the time was right we collected that puppy when she was old enough to leave her mum!!

We noticed around the heart area she had star shaped fur and so that's what we called her.

And so our journey began together. She traveled on Luke's lap in a box filled with straw! And from the moment we got her she traveled and moved everywhere with us!

One of those journeys was up to meet other family members. On one of those visits we visited with my sister and her son. Star was out in the garden and when she came back in the door we noticed she had something in her mouth! We realized she had found a dummy in the garden and it was in her mouth the proper way round.

She was always making us laugh with her ways. Always wanting a stick on a walk and going for the biggest one in the woods so taking our legs out as she ran by us. Recently these sticks became treasure and she would bring the stick all the way on her walk until got to car then try take it into foot well of car

with her!! She equally loved a ball with passion. Leaping and bounding and catching them from the sky. During her lifetime a lot of tennis balls was had!!

She loved her food and would come into the kitchen in her own home or others when cooking was happening and lay on the floor observing and waiting to be given something or waiting for something to fall on the floor so she could Hoover it up!!

Once during a family barbecue she stole a piece of chicken on a stick straight from the hand of my nephew while he was busy chatting!!

Everyone who met Star loved her. And she loved them. She taught us how to open our hearts. To love unconditionally. And to be loved unconditionally.

To be excited over the little things like putting shoes on, picking up a collar, saying the word sausage or stick or ball...that life was to be lived and loved and shared. She gave her stick or ball to all she met she was unselfish in the most wonderful wonderful ways.

As I sit and write this in these strange times, tears flow freely down my face.

Our beloved Star passed away on Saturday 25/4/20.

Strange times have turned into stranger times.

Her bed is empty. Her water bowl empty. Our home is empty of her. A bone, a ball, many sticks remain in the garden untouched since Saturday.

The imprints she made in our hearts remains.

In the felt sense that we knew her, we loved her, and she loved us. So much.

Cherish every moment. Love fiercely because one day it will all change. This we know to be true now more than ever.



*Mable O'Brien - 'Lost in the Night' (ink on up-cycled paper)*



# 8

## PICK 'N' MIX

The tail end of our anthology of experiences has some entertainment for your leisure: poetry, cartoons, a crossword and jokes. For children of all ages.

## HEEDLESS AT THE START BUT IN THE END... EXALTED

Alice Karvelli

The voices told you... LISTEN

- Listen - - Listen - - Listen - - Listen -

- Listen - There will be signs upon your way - omens - warnings - one among them am I - But you will not take heed And that is as it should be, as You came to learn through pain and not through caution

You will accept it all, willingly And you will be grateful as you are, for Water in the deserts Each year will carve its marks upon your face And you will wear them all with pride over the tugging anguish

But sometimes... You will burn with the fire of a thousand suns As you think and dream and feel - the Lover The one and only one That lies beneath the skin of every flesh that you consume And consummate In ritual celebration of your animal form In each mind that rolls with yours in Time

## JUST FOR LAUGHS

Ok so a car full of blondes are driving towards Disney land and the come to a huge sign that says "DISNEY LAND LEFT"

....

So they went home.

\*

At what time does Sean Connery arrive to the Wimbledon Open?

.

.

.

Around Tenish.

\*

Did you hear about my friend who died of Heartburn? ... Yeah, I still can't believe Gav is Gone

\*

Please remember my friend Michael in your prayers; he's addicted to brake fluid. He said he can stop whenever he likes..

\*

There's 2 conspiracy theorists going to heaven, they get to the gates and they can ask anything they like, so one of them asks, 'Was 9/11 an inside job?'

St Peter says, 'No, it wasn't'

Then the two conspiracy theorists look at each other and say.. 'This goes deeper than we thought'

and Space With grace, you'll find A promise of completion And sometimes... You will breathe stars out of your eyelids, as you shape The world around your path Leaving in blood-puddles of your footsteps Flowers of sharpened thorn to grow Turning their heads towards the darkest corners, as though The sun shines out of their core instead of In the skies above them

Your Memory... is a Temple of Worship.

Walk alone And walk Together Hold onto hands and paws Strands of hair and branches Streams of water, wind... and Void

But bring the fire wherever you go From the depths of your deepest cavern And when you face the cold of Soul Let it echo and roar Around your burning fire-Core Until your last breath. You did not come here to lose.

You came here to choose.

There's a plane with 5 passengers on board...Donald Trump, Boris Johnson, the Pope, Nicola Sturgeon and a ten year old school boy.

The plane is about to crash and there are only 4 parachutes. Trump says "I need one! I've got to save the USA!" grabs one and jumps.

The Pope says "I need one, I've got to save the Catholic church! He takes one and jumps.

Boris says "I'm the smartest man in England!" He takes one and jumps.

Nicola says to the ten year old boy, "You can have the last parachute, I've lived my life, yours is only starting."

The ten year old says "Don't worry, there are two parachutes left. The smartest man in England took my school bag"

\*

How does bob Marley like is donuts? With jammin... With jammin... With jammin!

\*

So I walked into a bookshop the other day, and I asked the woman, 'Do you have any books on Turtles?'

And she looked at me, 'Hard backs?... and the little beady eyes?'

\*

A man comes across his buddy looking very down, 'What's wrong with ya?' He asks. 'Ahhh, I'm not doing great. It's my wife, she's going through the change' his friend replies. 'Ara don't mind that' the man responds 'mines going through the notes'



# CROSSWORDS

Marlene McCormack

## Prelude to a Crossword

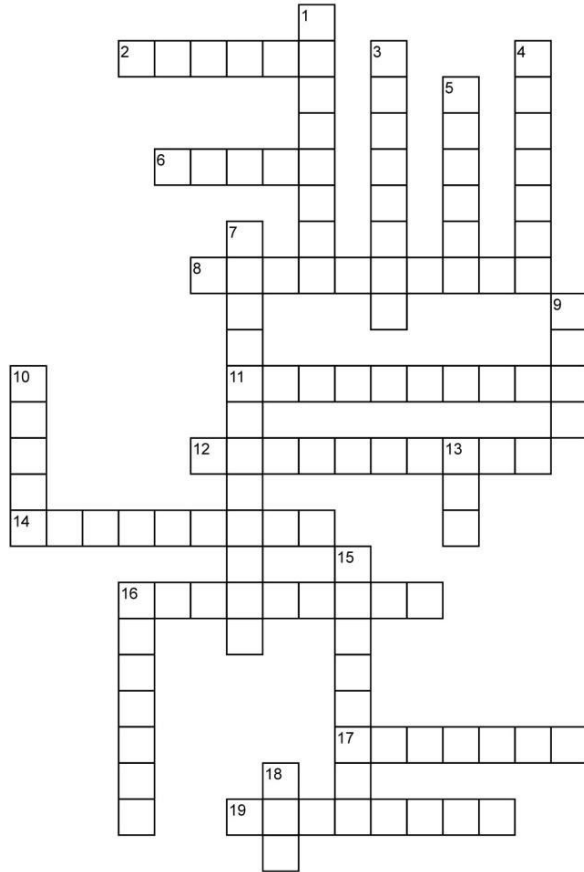
During this time of isolation the idea stole upon me to compose person specific crosswords for family and friends. Entwined with inside jokes, local histories and regional curiosities this one is for my Community

### Across

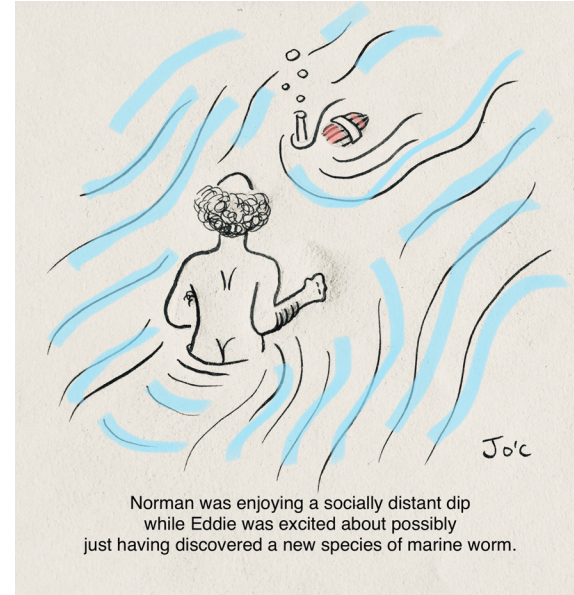
- 2 Fleet of Warships (6)
- 6 Name shared by village and river (5)
- 8 Potions Supremo unsuccessfully tried for witchcraft (5,5)
- 11 Pollnagollum is held in its depths (6, 4)
- 12 This Cupid has no wings (6, 4)
- 14 What's big and yellow and invented by a man called J.P (9)
- 16 Moher's favourite O'Brien (9)
- 17 Flower found in antigen (7)
- 19 Number of pubs Ennistymon historically boasted (5, 3)

### Down

- 1 She ain't a beauty but hey she's alright... for a headland (4, 4)
- 3 Falls (8)
- 4 Locomotive Line (7)
- 5 Collective noun for Crows (6)
- 7 Sunken City (12)
- 9 Horned and Feral emblem of golfers (4)
- 10 Willies instrument of choice (5)
- 13 Coolest card in the Deck (3)
- 15 Stage time for Merriman's Comic Reckoning (8)
- 16 Fraudulent Airhole (7)
- 18 Terrestrial Penance may be served by spending a day here (3)

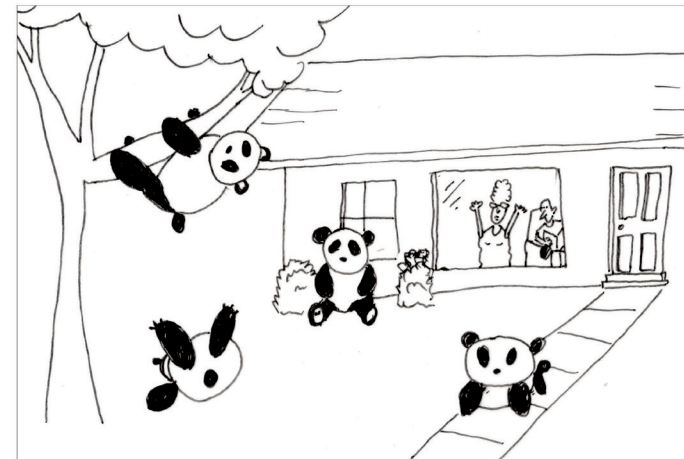


Solutions  
 Across 2 Armada, 6 Inagh, 8 Biddy Early, 11 Slieve Eiva, 12 Willie Daily, 14 Submarine, 16 Cornelius, 17 Gentian, 19 Forty Two  
 Down 1 Hags Head, 3 Cascades, 4 Railway, 5 Murder, 7 Clilstifann, 9 Goat, 10 Pipes, 13 Ace, 15 Midnight, 16 Convent, 18 Bog



Norman was enjoying a socially distant dip while Eddie was excited about possibly just having discovered a new species of marine worm.

Josie O'Connor



Look Leonard! The news were right. It's a worldwide Panda-mic!



Solidarity! To beings of all shapes, sizes, senses & stripes... <3  
On a closing note, we want to honour all the people who have  
been ripped from reality during these times. This poem we  
received conveys our sentiment perfectly.

---

## THE ORPHAN FROM LONGFORD

*Martha O'Brien, 31st March 2020*

She came from an orphanage in Longford.  
She moved to Dublin. Had a family.

She made her own way. Fought her own corner.  
She was brave, determined, unstoppable.

She did lots of work for the community.  
Giving back to that world that treated her well.

Mary O' Rourke was her name. Now,  
She has died. From Covid-19. At 69, only.

No funeral. No celebrations. No sandwiches.  
No pints. No honouring her.

"She didn't deserve this" Her son speaks  
on the Joe Duffy radio show.

She didn't. We honour you now  
Mary. In this very moment.

---

For the consummate collective Grief we are experiencing as a  
species; and for the people left behind, we acknowledge you in  
your suffering.

### **Ar dheis Dé go raibh a n-anamacha.**

We express the STRONGEST and most sincere gratitude to  
everyone who is putting up the good fight; from the grossly  
benevolent actions of our front-line heroes to the minutiae of  
ripples generated through random-acts-of-kindness – WE  
APPLAUD YOU. Even if you are only managing to be kind  
to yourself; that is enough.

Thank you for You & All the Things that you Do.

the strangetimes2020  
Leigh Brosnan & Myriam Riand