

# “Hello World”

A celebration of life in lockdown

2020/2021



---

# “Hello World”

A celebration of life in lockdown



DCU  
Age-Friendly  
University

2020/2021

## Anam Production Team and Contributors

### Production Team

Christine O'Kelly - DCU - Coordinator  
Cathy Fowley - DCU/Silver Thread - Writing facilitator  
Diarmuid Kennedy -DCU - Music Composer  
Rachel Gallen - Podcast Producer  
Owen Sindorf - Video Producer - Communications Student -  
Quinnipiac University (an AFU Global Network Member)  
Hannah-Lucy Joyce - Voice Coach  
Caoimhe Gilmartin - DCU - AFU Marketing Intern

### Contributors

Caoimhe Gilmartin  
Myra Gleeson  
Mary Masterson  
Michael Morris  
Colm O'Rourke  
Brendan Shanahan  
Bernadette Spellman

### Thanks to

Elaine Shanahan, Teacher  
Pupils of Hansfield Educate Together National School, Dublin

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

1

Foreword

3

Caoimhe Gilmartin

7

Michael Morris

11

Christine O'Kelly

15

Bernadette Spellman

17

Diarmuid Kennedy

19

Cathy Fowley

21

Brendan Shanahan

29

Mary Masterson

33

Myra Gleeson

37

Colm O'Rourke

ANAM is Dublin City University's Arts and Culture platform, encompassing a wide range of creative and cultural activities on DCU campuses and in our communities. Anam is the Irish for soul, and gives an indication of the importance of arts and culture in the University's identity.

This DCU AFU project, 'Hello World', gratefully acknowledges their support.

DCU  
Age-Friendly  
University



# 1

## Foreword

In 2020, as our world changed suddenly, a group of participants in DCU Age Friendly initiative started a creative project. Each in their own home, in front of their own screen, they gathered to think together about what they were living. Christine, Cathy and Diarmuid are staff members, Caoimhe a student; Brendan, Myra, Michael, Colm, Mary and Bernie are participants in Age Friendly initiatives.

In the form of letters, poems and music, their creative offerings give a voice to those who might not be heard, they tell stories of loss, of grief for people, for lives, for a world they loved, but also of wonder at a world they rediscover, of pleasure in the beauty of small things, a fondness in recalling memories and in the end, they tell stories of hope.

Bernie penned a letter to the world to give a voice to Michael, her husband, who lives with Huntington disease in a nursing home. Brendan wrote a song, and then a dialogue between an older Dubliner and a young world – children from a local school illustrated his piece, and one student gave their voice to the world, responding to Brendan's older voice.

Colm wrote poetry, about Brent geese visiting our shores, and about life, its fleetness and beauty. Michael wrote a letter to his love, his wife lost to cancer many years ago, but whose memory sustained him. Myra wrote an ode to the sea, the sea she swam in as a child, and rediscovered with glee as part of a group of women sea swimmers. Mary examined the world around her, the changes we saw over the year, and Christine channelled Scarlett O'Hara at the end of her piece.

These stories, poems and reflections find a home in this digital book, but also in a podcast and a series of videos. These are available on the Age-Friendly University webpage, at [www.dcu.ie/agefriendly](http://www.dcu.ie/agefriendly).



# 3

Caoimhe Gilmartin

## Hello World,

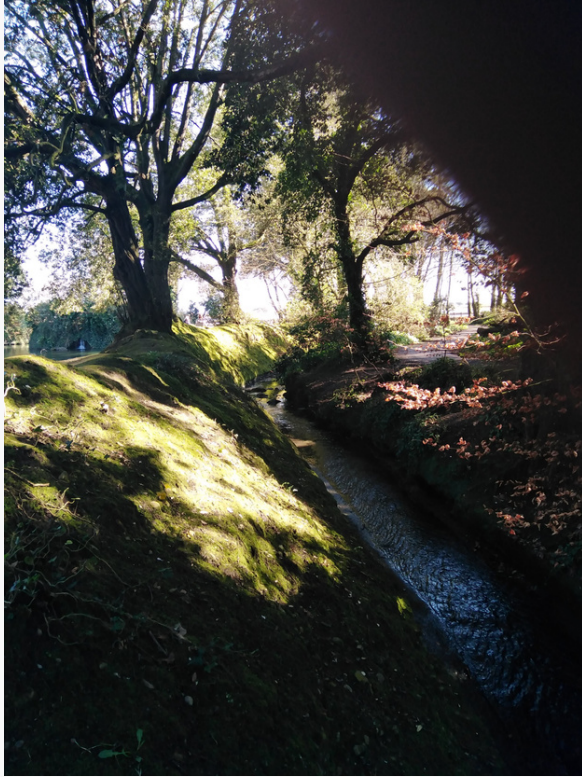
I want to tell you about how my world turned upside down last March.

My lifestyle as a college student; meeting new people, nights out and social gatherings were to be forgotten. My world was transformed from travelling up and down the country weekly to being isolated with my family for months. Two kilometres outside my home for exercise, no visitors, no shopping trips, no family gatherings.

Jigsaws, Netflix, baking several times a week and Zoom quizzes all became the norm. Sunrise walks, sunset walks, distancing from anyone I came upon. Visiting my grandparents for birthdays, outside the kitchen window, passing in a homemade birthday cake.

No hugs, no shaking hands, no contact.  
My world was a lonely place to be.

But there we were, all in this together, all sharing the isolation that the pandemic brought upon us.



We watched the news nightly, waiting for the case numbers, waiting for the press briefings. Clapping for healthcare heroes.

Summer. Things took a turn; my world became lighter. The weather improved, the cases fell and the restrictions slowly eased. This peaceful time reminded me of my old world, my world before COVID.

But as Autumn came and schools reopened, things went downhill. Darker mornings and darker evenings, higher cases brought further restrictions. Online lectures, college from home, isolated from friends.

World, it felt like March all over again.

Christmas alone, Christmas Eve Zoom parties, family isolated in all corners of the world.

But at last, St. Stephen's Day, the first batch of vaccines arrive.

Hope is on the horizon.



# 7

Michael Morris

## Dearest Sue,

Just as well you're not around now, every day is a bad news day.

We're almost a year into the Covid catastrophe now. Forty-six people died today. When you were here, almost 24 years ago, the worst you could get — with the awful exception of your malignant melanoma — was a bad dose of the flu, and because you smoked you reckoned the cigarettes gave you immunity from that. “There are no flies in a chimney,” you used to say, thinking or joking that smoking killed off the bad bacteria. It might do, and then again it might not, but it did contribute to your leaving me.

But let's talk about what you've missed.

In the 24 years they have progressed on cancer containment. No cure yet, but then if there was a cure what would all the charities and pharmaceutical companies do for funding — millions come from the people of many countries to help find a cure, and some millions from governments, with many millions siphoned off to keep company CEOs in the comfort they feel they deserve. That's our world.

The pennies for the black babies are no longer needed but much more is needed for famines in the same countries. Famines created by wars and greed and ignorance and religion. Incidentally, some of the grown-up black babies are coming back to serve in our churches as priests, and they are doing a fine job. Did I mention the Irish are not very religious anymore?

You would be mortified if you knew I hadn't gone to Mass in the past ten months, all because of Covid and the social distancing. That's a slight fib. I went up at Christmas-time to the midnight Mass — 9 o'clock on Christmas Eve, with a ticket clutched in my hand to gain entrance, and a scattering of people allowed in to socially-distance. It went perfectly well, with every one keeping well apart and even leaving aside the handshake near the end. But the priest spoiled the whole effect by giving out Holy Communion with his bare hands. I didn't partake! I went home and had a whiskey and raised a glass to the baby Jesus in the crib under the Christmas tree.

Did I mention there was only bad news? Sometimes the bad news is tinged with the hope of goodness coming through. The stories of the 9,000 babies buried in the grounds of various convents and mother-and-child homes have finally been told. The report is out now and there is a whiff of a cover-up already. The Irish might not be religious, but they are adept at covering up for the Church and State when there are wrongdoings. Many of the children, now grown up and still with us, are trying to obtain information about their births, but it looks like it's being brushed under the sewage tank. There is talk of a 70-year embargo, by which time all survivors will have died and the embarrassment will have died with them.

As you can see, hypocrisy is alive and well and living as an aftertaste in the bishop's palace and Leinster House.

We will continue trying to contain Covid — that's the good news! There are three to four vaccines now available, thanks to the unified efforts of government and companies around the world. Now all we have to do is switch off the anti-vaccine campaigners. The good side of Covid — and there's always a good side — is that with pubs and restaurants closed the people have discovered the outdoors. They have found the hidden parks, up to now frequented only by dog-walkers and young children and their mothers. Now we have the leotard and track-suit brigade in all their glory, trying to shed years of idleness and pounds of flesh, tightening their thigh muscles and discovering new tracks and pathways in the parks and finding a sense of entitlement over the ordinary walkers who just want some fresh air. And if you stand in their way, be prepared for a barrage of profanities — after all, they are entitled to be there and to sweat and spray and breathe heavily, at no distance at all. It's you who should get out of their way.

I need you now more than ever, if only to contain my anger — you were always good at calming me down. Anger at stupidity, anger at politicians, anger at many things.

You were also always good at pointing out the good in my life. You never knew your grandchildren, the four lovely children of our son. He has grown into the most wonderful and caring man. The children take after him.

If you were here now, I would have someone to be with. I would have quiet nights with you embarking on your latest art project and me scribbling away. There would be someone else to love our grandchildren and someone else to see what a fine adult your son has grown into.

Despite the pandemic problems, you would be there to show our grandchildren the other side of life, the beautiful side of making beautiful things. You would be the beautiful person you always were.

I love you forever,  
Michael



# 11

Christine O'Kelly

## Hello world,

Another new year and thank God I'm still here.

Moving from being in the eye of the hurricane (which I quite liked) to being on the edge of a desert dragging a bunch of stuff (think empty pots and pans), staggering about, wondering...

Where the hell am I going?

COVID brought a new perspective to my life, coinciding with a number of life changes - a mother no longer needed, a grandmother in name only, I'm nobody's daughter now, facing an uncertain work future under the tyranny of Zoom, new management, new priorities trying move forward.

For God's sake - don't you realise we live in unprecedented times...

Challenged by the prevailing attitudes towards a growing segment of the population I've spent my last 20 years trying to change.



it's horrifying  
the hypocrisy, all that hand-wringing and rhetoric...  
Just scratch the surface of society and the old  
prejudices still lie there, lurking beneath: ageism,  
stereotyping, exclusion, loneliness, isolation,  
restrictions...

But we are keeping YOU SAFE! From living?  
Everything is VERBODEN !

Who really gives a damn?

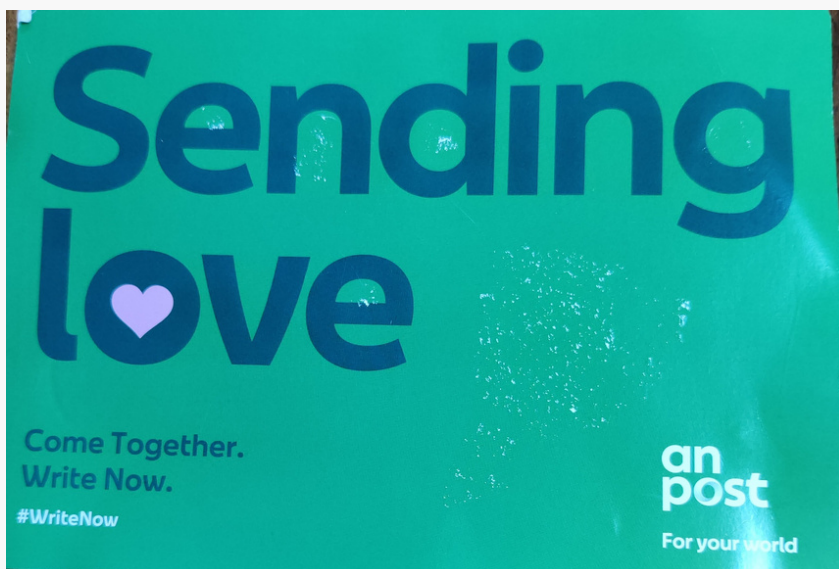
The irony is, old age comes to us all - if we are lucky  
enough.

But I'm a glass half-full kinda gal.

The promise of longer days of light, the company of a  
few good friends and the opportunity to meet new  
people make it an interesting journey to keep me  
going day to day.

Isn't the advice to live in the moment, and after all (in  
the words of the great Scarlett O'Hara..)

TOMORROW IS ANOTHER DAY



# 15 Bernadette Spellman

Dear world,

I want to tell you about my small world since March 2020. My life changed drastically after March 16th.

World, imagine what it is like to live in a nursing home and to have family and friends come to visit regularly. This was my lifeline to you, World. I love to go to other resident's rooms when my wife visits. We chat, tell jokes, look at photos and sometimes sing. Imagine the lovely, fluffy, cuddly King Charles Pet Therapy dog coming to see you every week. Imagine looking forward to your meals everyday in the dining room with friends and then joining them throughout the day for various activities.

That sounds okay for someone in the late stages of Huntington's Disease, eh World?

Now, World, imagine suddenly being told:  
Do not leave your room under any circumstances.  
Strictly no visitors whatsoever allowed.  
No activities or entertainment for the foreseeable future.  
The Therapy Dog will not be making weekly visits.

From the 16th of March staff arrived to my room in Hazmat suits spending as little time as possible there.

Then World, imagine being told  
you have this deadly virus Covid  
19.

Imagine your temperature  
soaring, being weak and  
confused, having no taste or  
appetite.

Imagine not being able to see  
your wife and two sons while  
feeling so sick and all human  
contact is through visors,  
masks, gloves, and scrubs, with  
as much distance as possible.

Imagine the darkness, even  
though the blinding sun was  
shining through the window  
every day.

Imagine the loneliness,  
heartache, worry and fear.

This, my dear World, I did not  
imagine, I lived through it all.

But World, you keep on turning  
and a vaccine has arrived.  
Dare we all imagine a new you,  
World?

I hope and I pray.



# 17

Diarmuid Kennedy

## In our time

Your mother  
my mother  
9 months between  
10 mourners a-piece  
an empty church  
an empty street  
you, me  
stirred to silence  
so different  
from our fathers  
cold comfort  
ghostly  
grim  
somehow fitting  
their fading lives  
alone  
touch-less  
cocooned

You saw yours for the last time  
ailing  
jaded  
alone  
but for your  
words  
your disregarded mask  
a furtive kiss  
a promise of better

I saw mine for the first time  
in six weeks  
still and pale  
dressed in her favourite umber blouse  
lips pursed  
firm  
regal as ever  
only her ice cold hands  
would greet Death

one pandemic  
two mothers



# 19

Cathy Fowley

## Out of place

June  
I stood  
Clutching a flower  
In a grey and windy carpark  
From afar  
I saw them walk  
Head bent  
Carrying the unbearable weight  
Of her slight body  
As they disappeared inside  
I left  
Drove to the sea where she used to swim  
And sent her a flower on the waves

February  
I sat  
Alone at my desk  
A blue packet of tissues beside my laptop  
One rectangle on the screen,  
Beside other grieving rectangles  
When we should have jumped on cars, trains, planes  
To sit on a hard bench behind you.

One pandemic  
Two countries



# 21

Brendan Shanahan

## Conversations between the World and Me (Extracts)

Me: Hello World, how are you?

*World: The Polar bear is Hot ... The Ice is Shot... The  
Habitat is Gone...  
Echoes of a Song...*

Me: Hm, apart from that, how are things?

*World: You'd be Amazed... At the size of the Wave...It  
touches the Sky... Like a Mountain High...*

*The beat of the drum, it's more than just begun  
The heat from the sun, it's a smoking gun  
The rising of the seas, the howling of the breeze  
The felling of the trees, the silence of the bees  
The Bees have gone:*

Me: I see; would it be fair to say that things are not  
going too well?

*World: Hm, you could say that. Who are you and what  
are you up to?*



Me: My name is Brendan and I live in Whitehall.

My favourite pastime is to swim in your sea in Dollymount and walk along the beach. So far, I have not been attacked by any jellyfish, seals or other monsters of the sea. Your waters are currently cold and I have been advised to buy gloves for my hands and swimming socks for my feet. You're only young once is my attitude and I am considering these pieces of advice studiously and with great care, before I disregard them.

On a sunny day, Dollymount is a very special place, especially when the water is calm and the boats sit on the horizon as they go in and out of Dublin Bay.

I thank you for that.

*World: It's good to hear that you have managed to avoid sea monsters. I too am young at heart and I will attempt to ensure that crocodiles and such like do not make their way into the Bay, but if they do, they will be small ones so as to give you a chance of getting out of the water; more or less intact.*

*Tell me, how is your mental health?*

Me: I read somewhere that cold water swimming helps prevent Alzheimer's. I swim on my back and when my head hits the cold water it freezes and probably kills anything that needs to be killed.

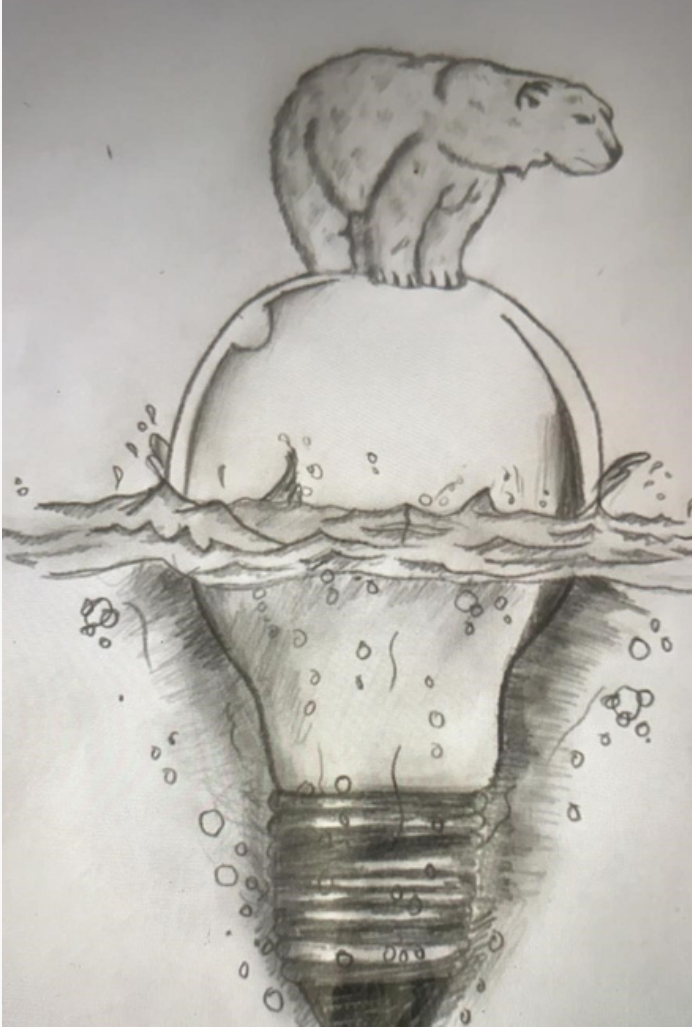


Whether there's a connection to Alzheimer's or not is an open question. Some say that if the water temperature is 12 degrees, then you should not spend longer than 12 minutes swimming and if 10 degrees no longer than 10 minutes and so on. I swim for about 5 minutes and on that basis should not be entering the water at all! We are a Nation of experts who know everything about everything. Millions of us know more about viruses than epidemiologists and our politicians know more than everyone else combined.

*World: Hm, apart from that, do you ever go on a rant?*

Me: The answer is yes and when I do, I talk to the trees and the birds and the grass and the cat and the dog and occasionally to other people. We are all on some spectrum and I see myself in the middle. Now if that sounds challenging and a little vague and perhaps even incomprehensible, it's perfectly understandable and you should not feel bad or stupid or inadequate.

*World: You sound complex. Let me share with you what complexity is about. I have people setting fire to my innards and poking around inside me on a daily basis with serious knock on effects. Smelly stuff is being released that I cannot control. The process is not complex but the unintended consequences are. Sticky tape solutions will no longer work and hopefully the penny will drop soon.*





Me: Hm, “smelly stuff”; very succinctly put. Australia is burning, jungles are disappearing, cattle are blowing off, and ice is disappearing.

Thank you for sharing. Now if you don't mind, the water is beckoning and as I don't see any sinister objects that resemble crocodiles or jellyfish, it's time to make a splash.

See you later.



# 29

Mary Masterson

## The Year of Covid

We looked from afar and we were shocked by the numbers,  
Yet these numbers were people, not statistics to be broadcast.

They spread rapidly, worldwide.

Our solution?

Sterile environments, ventilation machines, hazmat suits!

Medical staff looking like creatures from a science-fiction film, overworked and pushed to their limits.

Corona continued to spread and the world continued to fight back.

We were hoping and praying we could be spared,  
But it landed on our shores and took hold, our island no longer a safe place,

Our lively and active lives soon to be no more;  
Cocooning, social restrictions, work from home,  
isolation  
Masks our new reality.

Schools, shops, hotels, restaurants, pubs, all closed.  
Exams cancelled, jobs lost.  
The future uncertain for so many people.

Our homeless people left to wander empty streets.

Hospitals, nursing homes closed to visitors,  
Our weak and vulnerable isolated in the hope of  
keeping them safe.

Our older generations now locked inside.  
Despite our best efforts some of us lost our loved ones;  
Our were broken hearts left to heal alone like never  
before  
Fear, desperation, loneliness and mental strain  
consuming our daily life

Yet communities rallied together, sharing goodwill  
towards our neighbours, our innate spirit to help, a  
sense of doing.

Holidays and long-haul flights became staycations  
Our commute to work became a walk around our  
garden, our parks and our beaches.

Wi-Fi and technology reigned supreme. We learned to  
adapt.

Kitchen tables, bedrooms, attics... now our new office and hub of communication, dreaded Zoom calls our new way of conversation.

I am a member of a choir and musical group. We meet every Thursday using Zoom and our classes have been a great success. More then ever they have allowed us to have a socially distanced gathering being social. As I connect and scroll across the screen, I see other participants doing the same. Then we each adjust our voice to sing alone at home.

Together yet set apart.

Just imagine doing this? Closing doors so one else in the house can be disturbed or hear you?

Imagine holding your phone or laptop mid air as you negotiate your way around your home desperately seeking a signal... any kind of reception to connect you to a Zoom meeting?

Well, this is me, on a regular basis, being the main character, taking centre stage in my own drama.

The panic when a connection fails! Luckily for me, my daughter can navigate the streams and codes of technology as she restores my screen and sound to work again, discreetly laughing as she, once again, leaves the room.

All too soon the class ends to a chorus of goodbyes, stay safe , see you next week!

The after-choir chat, stories and laughter of shared experience are no more. The buzz of singing together deflated like air escaping from a balloon. Our social bubble burst.

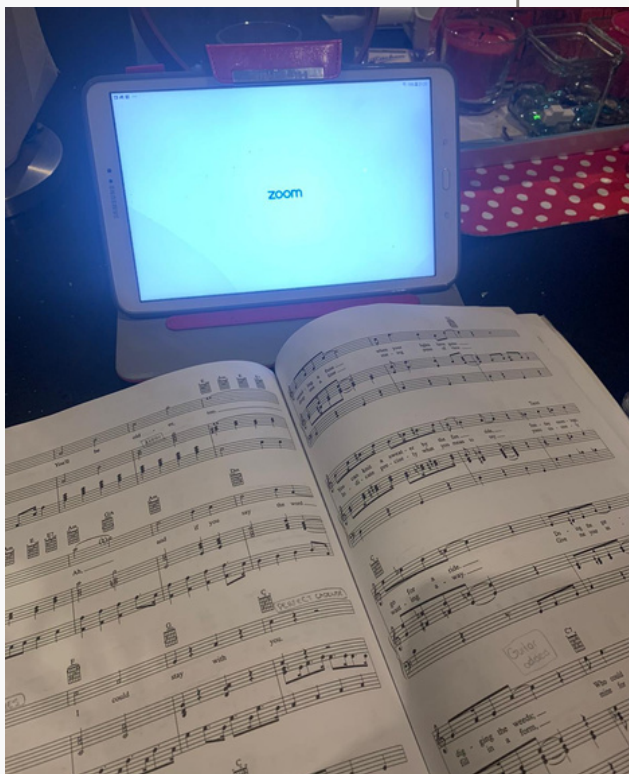
School lessons, family quiz get together, yoga classes, music lessons - now compulsory, virtually, through our phones and laptops. Our need to stay at home more important than ever to help prevent further spread of this disease.

We ask , when will this all end?

Scientists and pharmaceutical companies competing to find a solution, anything that might fight this Covid.

The arrival of a vaccine, several of them, a breakthrough, and our fear and doubt now turned to hope.

Here's hoping,  
Cheers



## Swimming in Covid

Swimming is the unwritten rule in my family, almost a religion with generations of grandparents, siblings, uncles and aunts, cousins and babies following the rule. My grandparents lived in Portmarnock, in a house called Kilinure; it was an open house. Fun, food and swimming were the order of day and my grandfather, Pappa Fogarty, could control dozens of his grandchildren walking down to the sand dunes onto the Silver Strand as we marched playing the Dummy Band. Each child was given an imaginary musical instrument and if you made a sound Pappa made you run to the end of the line.

There was no need for food on the beach because we knew Granny Fogarty was cooking up a storm.

Walking or running up the beach to the rocks, checking to find new mysterious shells or crabs and flat stones, our final stop was Robswall, a beach shaped like a hug with small rocks to jump off into the waves with shouts of *Look Pappa!* Each child was encouraged to paddle, swim or jump but no sandcastles: the beach is too stony for that.





At a quarter to one, two cars would appear with Wild Uncle Noel and Holy Auntie Kathleen shouting "hurry up Granny is expecting you in five minutes!" Forget about safety or wet swimming suits. Food called. Leaving the view of Lambay Island behind, we fought to get into the cars. Arriving to the back of Kilinure we raced upstairs, three children at a time jumping into Pappa's massive green bath, shouting and laughing. Then, sliding down the bannister and telling Granny Fogarty "we're starving!" At the long dark wooden table we sat waiting for food by elbow fighting as we listened to Pappa's stories of years ago.

Time passed and my siblings and cousins moved away to live in different parts of the world; oddly enough they all live beside the sea. Two generations later, family children know the stories of Pappa and the dummy band and Granny Fogarty feeding thousands of cousins. Kilinure was filled with fun laughter animals and love and over sixty years later I still swim in Robswall.

\*\*\*

Covid's vicious arrival locked down Dublin, so the world and its oyster appeared in massive numbers in Robswall, scaring the hell out of me. Deflated, fuming and mad as hell, I drove the coast road to Fairview; getting near Bull Island, I swung a left over the wooden bridge to Dollymount and parked near the golf links. Walking to the beach a large sign appeared Women Only.

Being a naturally nosy person, I set off to investigate and stopped in my tracks from the surprise of seeing dozens of women swimming, chatting or laughing, all with social distancing; this was different. Grabbing my swim gear, I stepped down into Dublin Bay for the first time in decades. It was pure heaven. Soon I was chatting and laughing. This was almost like being normal. Resting my chin on the water I watched five ships sail down the Liffey like massive white swans majestically heading out to Dublin Bay. My heart nearly stopped with pure joy.

Kathleen, my new swimming friend, introduced me to most of the gang of women. Girls, mothers, daughters plus gangs of friends enjoying being young and free even for just for one hour.

Every day is different. One morning I arrived at 07.00am; it was still dark with multi-coloured lights sparkling in the docklands. A group of women were bobbing up and down in the sea when suddenly the black clouds split open and a massive orange light crossed the sky. Dublin was covered in light from Dalkey island to the Sugarloaf and across the Dublin hills it lasted just about seven minutes. But gentle thoughts of Pappa and Granny Fogarty filled my mind, as I sang a Dummy Song and silently laughed knowing Pappa and Granny Fogarty would approve. No matter where, their family swam in the world.

# 37

Colm O'Rourke

## Up There

I like being up there  
Where brisk breeze blows through my hair  
Though there's not much of it remaining.

A small bald patch chose to accelerate  
To saucer, side, then dinner plate size  
Leaving just enough hair to decorate the edges.  
A wise, sage, dignified pate, which I conceal under a hat.

"So tell me, where is Up There" asked the man who joined  
me on the bench.

To the hills I pointed  
That's where I want to be anointed  
But not just yet, as I've plenty to do, if I don't get the 'flu  
Or have Covid inspecting my respiratory system  
To become yet another victim.

Today 'Up There' is 'Down Here',  
by government order  
With daily seascape 5k ramble  
Waves on rocks, gulls wheeling,  
Waves on sand, clouds peeling,  
Gently revealing patches of blue  
While the hills relax on the  
horizon.

Change will come again  
Then with determined stride  
I'll head for the slopes  
Past the furze and and the goats  
Past the sheep and the deer  
Until I'm finally in the clear

Up There





The copyright of each text remains with the author, all  
photographs taken by the authors. " Photo on page  
38 courtesy of Mountaineering Ireland.  
Drawings by the students of Hansfield Educate  
Together D15  
and authors' grandchildren

## CONTACT

DCU AFU  
[www.dcu.ie/agefriendly](http://www.dcu.ie/agefriendly)

[Christineokelly@dcu.ie](mailto:Christineokelly@dcu.ie)