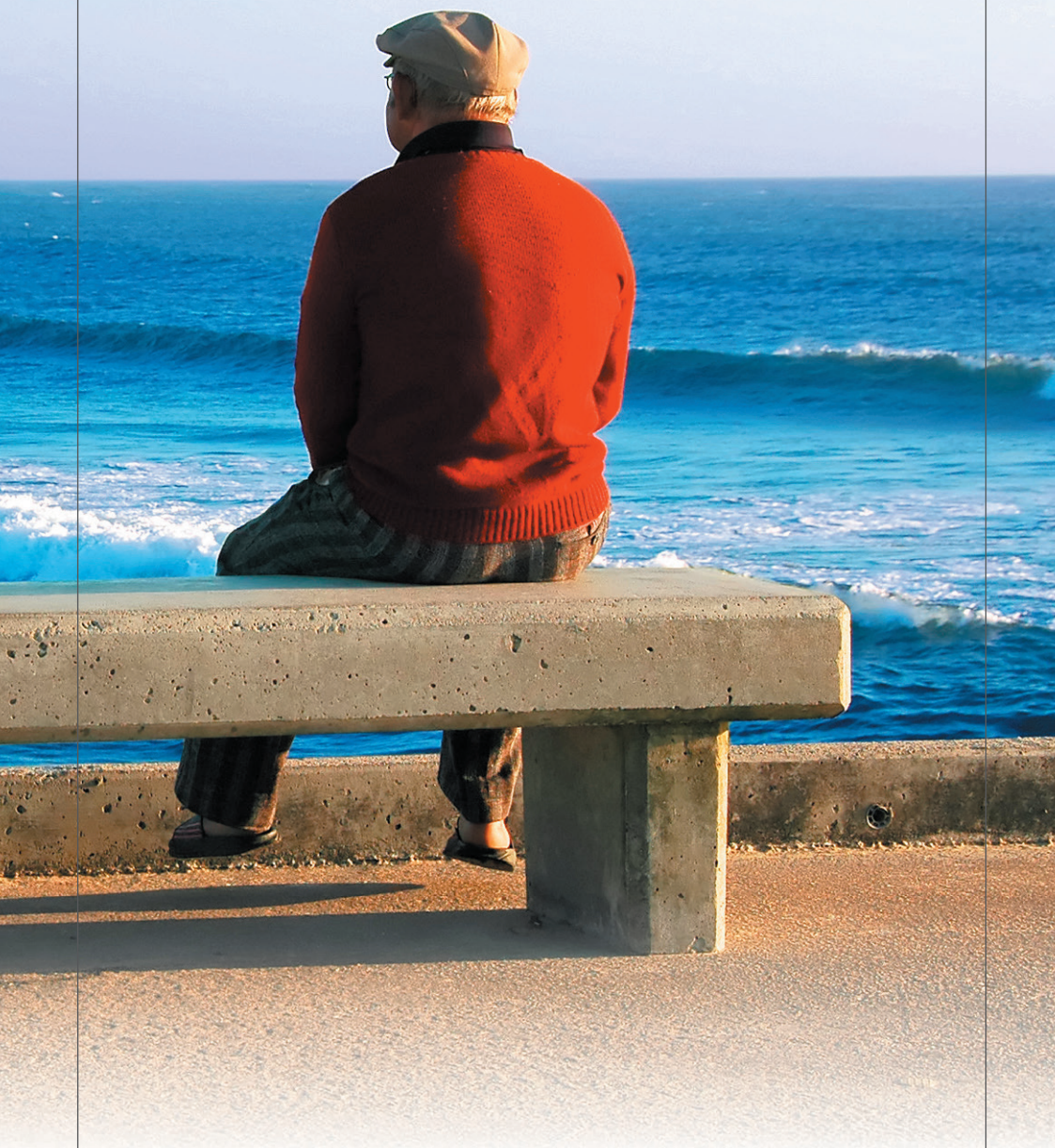


# *Voices of Experience*

CLIMATE STORIES FROM CORK COUNTY







# Foreword

**Mayor of the County of Cork,  
Cllr Gillian Coughlan**

**Chief Executive, Cork County Council  
Tim Lucey**



We are a nation of storytellers, evidenced throughout our history and culture. Storytelling is a powerful way to make abstract facts more immediate for ourselves. In the Summer of 2021, we invited older citizens of Cork County to share their climate stories. This book recognises the unique knowledge, insights and wisdom older people have to share. It is a collaborative project between Cork County Council, the Cork County Age Friendly Programme and the Cork County Older Peoples Council. A climate story is an account of climate change from personal experience such as how a person may have noticed climate change in their own life, how a locality has been affected by climate change and what message could be given to future generations.

Many of these stories convey the emotional weight of personal experiences of climate change, such as loss of biodiversity, changes to the county's coastline and the impact of severe weather. Although climate change is often portrayed in terms of a bleak future, many of the storytellers in this book imagine ways of responding positively. Stories are approached not just with anger or fear but with wistfulness and a gentle nostalgia for what has changed. There are beautiful descriptions of honest moments and treasured memories from authentic voices which stop and make us think.

Right now, we have a multitude of scientific and technological tools as well as the knowledge we need as a species to change. The challenge remains in persuasion, emotional appeals, behavioural change and action. Of course, stories will never be enough but a problem this large requires a range of solutions from a multitude of diverse angles.

We are proud to share these stories in an effort to help kindle change and hope you enjoy the stories, poems and photographs from Cork's older citizens. Thanks to all who shared their story with us and we hope that you not only enjoy but are motivated to think about climate change.

# Note from from Chair of Older People's Council and Age Friendly Cork County, Ms Liz Maddox



On behalf of the Older People's Council and Age Friendly Cork County, we are delighted to be part of this innovative initiative which involves older people in the climate change discussion. This book presents an intergenerational learning experience using the power of storytelling.

Storytelling is one of the ways in which people connect with each other. It's how we bond with people, how we understand people and it creates a sense of fun and enjoyment through the connections we make.

This is also a learning experience. Stories about the past are key to shaping our future and by looking at the past, we can learn what needs to be done to safeguard the future.

In this book, you will read stories about the changing seasons, the impacts of climate change to our flora and fauna, our birdlife and the upsurge of traffic patterns, packaging, waste and coastal erosion. We also read about the changing patterns of agriculture compared to fifty years ago. All these developments are players in worldwide climate change, accumulating over the years.

Life has changed so much – sea levels are rising, weather and seasonal patterns are shifting and we are being warned by experts that we have to alter our behaviours to save our planet and our world, from climate destruction.

One could despair in gloom but on the contrary, in this book, older people show optimism and hope. The biggest message is that we can adapt our ways to halt the destruction.

The overpowering message from our 'Voices of Experience' is that it is not too late to turn things around. Climate change can be managed, even halted, if the world listens to what can be learned from the past and we change our ways for the future. As one of the contributors says:

"We all have the power,  
We may feel it slight,  
But we do have the power,  
Everyone can do something"

**Words of Jennifer Sleeman (91) and daughter Katey (61)**

Sincere thanks to the contributors who took the time to write these stories and to Cork County Council for collating them into this poignant and impactful book.



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# *Liz Downes*

## Mitchelstown

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*“The saddest part is we have less  
butterflies, ladybirds, field mice, and frogs”*

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My name is Liz Downes and I was born and reared on a farm in Mitchelstown in the late 40's. I had a beautiful upbringing, fantastic parents and I was the youngest of 5 siblings .. better known as the baby of the family. Living on a farm was fun and challenging and not like today where modern technology has taken over the work load.

After a very cold, dry hard winter it was great to see the long evenings returning. It was springtime and nature was at its fullness. The flowers were coming alive that brought colour, brightness and a beautiful odour as you passed by. The farm yard was full of life, young calves, hens laying eggs, pigs making funny noises while the pet sheepdog was trying to catch the cock that kept pecking him while asleep. Dad was busy spreading cows manure on the land to aid growth , which will be cut for hay later in the year. We had a wonderful array of vegetables growing in the garden and eating and cooking apple trees in the orchard. Mam did all the home made baking, apple tarts, scones and brown bread, and she made homemade strawberry and marmalade jam that tasted like a piece of heaven. What a wonderful time to be alive, beautiful clean air, warm sunshine, no litter to be found anywhere, neighbours talking from their front half door with a mug of tea in one hand and a piece of bread in the other that they shared with the chickens that surrounded them.

Summer holidays were wonderful, lots of warm sunshine, long days and very bright evenings. I can remember my Dad looking up at the night sky and if it had a bright red colour you were sure of very warm dry weather, as he used to say tomorrow we can cut the hay. Sure enough the following day the horse was tackled, the mowing machine attached and all was ready to cut the hay. I remember helping my Mam in bringing tea and sandwiches up the fields where the grass tickled my toes that were looking out from the top of my sandals. A big bottle of stout was very welcomed by the workers who helped my Dad with the hay making. I used to try and catch the small frogs who were hopping around the dry grass and also the colourful butterflies who hovered around my head. The birds chirping, the grass hopper and the bumble bees all added to the natural environment at that time. I used to make a lovely necklace from the fresh daisies that were growing all around us.





Myself and our neighbour after making wynds of hay in the early 50's. Source: Liz Downes

Autumn was a similar time to the above only the leaves were stripping the trees and falling on the fresh green grass. An Autumn shower was very welcomed by farmers, gardeners but definitely not by us at that time. The winters were very cold, with a blanket of snow covering the landscape always around Christmas. Jack frost (another name for a hard frost) often coated our windows with ice and as my Mam would say the snow and the hard frost were very welcome "it killed all the bugs and germs" that were nesting in the sheds and barns.

I used to dread the bad thunderstorms and lightning that lit up the whole place. Our sheepdog named Rover would run into the kitchen and stay under the table until the last blast of the rolling thunder and lightning disappeared out of sight. I used to jump into bed with all the blankets pulled right over my head and I would be shivering and praying and in dread of it.

Now we can have four seasons in one day. We are encountering more floods, the rays of the sun are more penetrating but the saddest part is we have less butterflies, ladybirds, field mice, and frogs. All is not lost yet in protecting our planet. Reduce, reuse and recycle, walk or cycle, plant a tree but more importantly educate our young people in how they can apply the above in making the world a better place to live in.



*Neighbour bringing the churn of milk to the creamery with our sheepdog tagging along.*  
Source: Liz Downes

# Margaret Walsh

## Ballineen

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*“When I was a child and when we shopped we got everything in paper bags; tea, sugar, biscuits, sweets, everything was weighted and measured.”*

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The climate is changing; the yardstick for me every year is how soon will we see the daffodils budding. For a number of years now, I am alerted to how early spring is coming by the early appearance of Daffodils. It amazes me every year that the daffodils are budding earlier and earlier; in twenty five years I have noticed the budding period has gone from February/March, back to unbelievably, this year, it was November. These daffodils grow in a cold windswept graveyard, Our own garden daffodils do not bud quite as early; the altitude here is higher, so I get great pleasure in seeing these early buds and look forward to brighter days ahead.

These past years have proved to me that the seasons are changing; when it is Winter, its not as cold as it used to be; one expects to wear heavy clothing around Christmas time but there have been some years that the sun was shining and a warm cardigan would have sufficed outdoors. This past year, we had only two mornings in what is considered a bad or dangerous frost on the roads; the last bad or heavy snow was in 2009-2010.

Flowering shrubs have budded very early only to be affected by frost. They recovered of course, but the new phenomena are some shrubs budding twice!

Our Winters have become more Autumnal; Our Springs have become more Winterish and our Summers are starting late as Springs. Our Summers are short and extending into Autumn.

Since I was a child, and teenager, the traffic on the roads then cannot be compared; the main road would have some traffic with plenty of lulls; if a car or tractor passed me on the byroad, I would be looking after it, it was so rare. Now, if I park on the main street in our village, I have to wait my chance to open the car door, its like taking a chance to quickly get in or out of the car, so I've decided to drive into a car park or drive around the turn onto the byroad, it's safer.

On water and flooding; I think there is a lot more rain now and storms. A big reason why we have flooding is, there is a lot of land reclamation where water is redirected and the old wells are closed up. Building is allowed on old water plains or runoffs, it must be remembered that water will always find its own level. Over-fertilization of the land and the run-off into our waterways is extremely damaging.



Wild Garden. Source: Margaret Walsh



What can your average person do about it? This is a difficult one

We can cut down on unnecessary journeys; that will only cut a little of the pollution. The world is waking up to this problem now and they have set themselves a target of lessening their pollution and as families we have to decide what carbon footprints we are going to leave. Recycling our waste and heavy fines for littering our beautiful country. Laws made and adhered to for polluting Land Rivers and Seas.

Of course each person has to do their piece to protect the environment. So much is affecting climate change; Climate Change and Protecting Our Environment go together. We can't turn back the clock but we will have to change a lot of things.

When I was a child and when we shopped we got everything in paper bags; tea, sugar, biscuits, sweets, everything was weighed and measured. If we went shopping for clothes, the items were wrapped in brown paper, everything was paper, no plastic. The chips were wrapped in white paper and the meat from the butcher was the same or brown paper.

So much paper means a lot of trees need to be cut down but plastic possibly causes more pollution. There are major decisions to be made by governments globally. The problem has to be tackled, because there are many businesses that create huge pollution, and that is affecting our climate change. Each person must do their share to protect our environment and reduce the climate changes for future generations, I hope it is not too late.

# *Katey & Jennifer Sleeman*

## *Clonakilty*

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*“If she can do at 92 then what can you do?”*

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My name is Katey Sleeman (61 years old) and my story about Climate Change comes from growing up with my Mum Jennifer Sleeman (92 years old) who has been a Climate Change Activist for at least 50 years.

In my twenties (1980s) my Mum would put a meal in front of her family (6 kids) with the announcement that the meal came from only a mile from our home. I can remember being a factitious child saying “what about the salt?” but I did understand and remember what the message was that she wanted us to hear. From her childhood as a daughter of a fruit farmer in South Africa to being a dairy farmer in North Cork my Mother’s happy place has always been with her hands in the earth. No gloves for her!

Her passion and dedication for Fairtrade in Ireland came from her youngest daughter Patricia’s experience of working on a Fairtrade farm in Nicaragua in 2001. Patricia saw at first-hand the devastating effect that Climate Change had had on the El Nino, creating floods with livelihoods and lives lost forever. On hearing this my Mum asked “How can we help?” Hence the Fairtrade campaign started in Clonakilty by my Mum with an amazing committee of local people both from religious and political backgrounds. Clonakilty is very proud to have become the first Fairtrade Town in Ireland in 2003. After that and for many years my Mum used her free travel, as she was definitely a Pensioner at this stage, to travel all over Ireland encouraging towns, villages and cities around Ireland to achieve the Fairtrade symbol as she saw that this was one way she could do something positive in supporting those and many other Farmers all over the Developing World. And it is so no coincidence that it is these countries that are being the worst affected by Climate Change!

More locally, she successfully campaigned to stop an 18-hole golf course from being built on an important piece of marshland outside Clonakilty. She gained huge support from people in Clonakilty and the Irish Society Protection for Bird which really stopped the development. It is now wonderfully diverse habitat for many many migratory and indigenous birds and all the other flora and fauna for future generations.

So, Climate Change has been part of my family life for decades. On speaking to



Katy and Jennifer Sleeman. Source: Katy Sleeman

her about this project she has found it difficult to write herself, so I asked her questions for the future generations and here are her answers

**THINK:** What she wants us to do is to **THINK!** Think about taking things back to their source to slow down Climate Change as we cannot stop it now.

- **THINK** when you are electing your political representatives...have they got a concrete policy on Climate Change and if they haven't, ask "Why haven't they?"
- **THINK FOOD MILES:** about what you eat and how many miles our food has to travel to get to us and really do we need that product? Are our expectations of what we should have compared to what is actually grown locally sustainable and realistic? One of her favourites is "Strawberries from Egypt in October!" So, eat local and seasonal and grow your own.

#### **NOTE: FOOD MILES**

- **THINK** about travel...do we need a car or can we take the bus or cycle
- **THINK** where does our water come from? Other than the tap?
- **THINK** about the energy you use in your home.. can you turn off that unnecessary light, insulate your home, turn down the central heating, small changes always have an impact

If everyone did something it could slow down Climate Change but we will all suffer without positive action. We need to take note of the rising Earth temperature. Many years ago, Mum was told that when the glaciers in the Himalayas start to melt that the Earth is in big trouble...she informed me today that has happened and the subsequent flooding has destroyed many lives and livelihoods for ever.

My mother is now bed bound after a nasty fall however she had announced that she is now going meat free for May, not because she is sentimental about animals but that the energy that goes into food production from meat is so much more than from plants. So if she can do at 92 then what can you do?

Time is short, we must make radical changes in how we live and treat the Earth so that there is an Earth that is habitable for future generations.

I am very proud of my Mum and I think she is an example of the following statement. She proved that we can all make positive changes in our own locality and also internationally. Thank you for reading this.

*"We all have the power, we may feel it is slight but we do have the power, everyone can do something"*





Katey and Jennifer Sleeman. Source: Katey Sleeman

# Kay Donnelly

## Youghal

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*“We now need a good plan aimed at involving everyone in the community doing their part locally, in conjunction with nationwide action by our government.”*

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COASTAL EROSION....One of the effects of Climate Change.

In 1962 Youghal experienced one of the worst storms in living memory. Many locals still remember the devastation caused by high seas, gale force winds and heavy rain. For those who were too young, and people who did not live in the town at the time, they can see the aftermath of the event captured on Cine camera by an amateur photographer.

It shows a Ketch, named 'The Three Brothers' owned by Capt. Arbuthnot who lived at Myrtle Grove, grounded and breaking up on the Front Strand. The Buoys which marked the sand bar at the mouth of the harbour were torn from their moorings and flung onto the shore; one at the Strand and the other at the Green Park. Craters can be seen at the entrances to many houses in the Front Strand area. Gas pipes were exposed where the road was ripped apart near the Railway Station, and the front wall of Hurst's shop was completely blown away. Nearer to town, the walls of Green Park were torn asunder and flung all over the grassy area of the park and the sea walls around the Town Hall were knocked down, allowing tons of sand to pile up around it.

That event happened overnight but today we have an even greater threat due to Climate Change, namely Coastal Erosion. This is not happening overnight like the storm, but has been causing damage for many years, eating away at our coastline, robbing farmers of their land and property, causing sandy beaches to disappear over time, and washing away important landmarks all over Ireland.

Claycastle is a high grassy mound on Youghal Beach. It is a landmark which appears in many old postcards and photos. Hundreds of people can be seen in these photos, picnicking and watching Side Shows. Today, along with its nearby sand dunes, it is gradually being eroded by the rising sea levels that accompany Climate Change.

As a frequent walker on the beach for many years, I had noticed evidence of coastal erosion occurring on a continuous basis . It took a series of high tides in November of 2019, combined with S.E. winds and heavy rainfall, to make me realise just how serious the situation is, and how much of this landmark is



Kay Donnelly. Source: Kay Donnelly

disappearing. Not only is there erosion at sea level; along the top of Claycastle, several crevices digging deep into the upper part of the mound, are getting worse every time we have a storm. This is not being caused by the sea, but by wind and rain so that the mound is being eroded from the top as well as at the base. The hundreds who gathered there for entertainment in my grandmother's time, would not find it a safe place today.

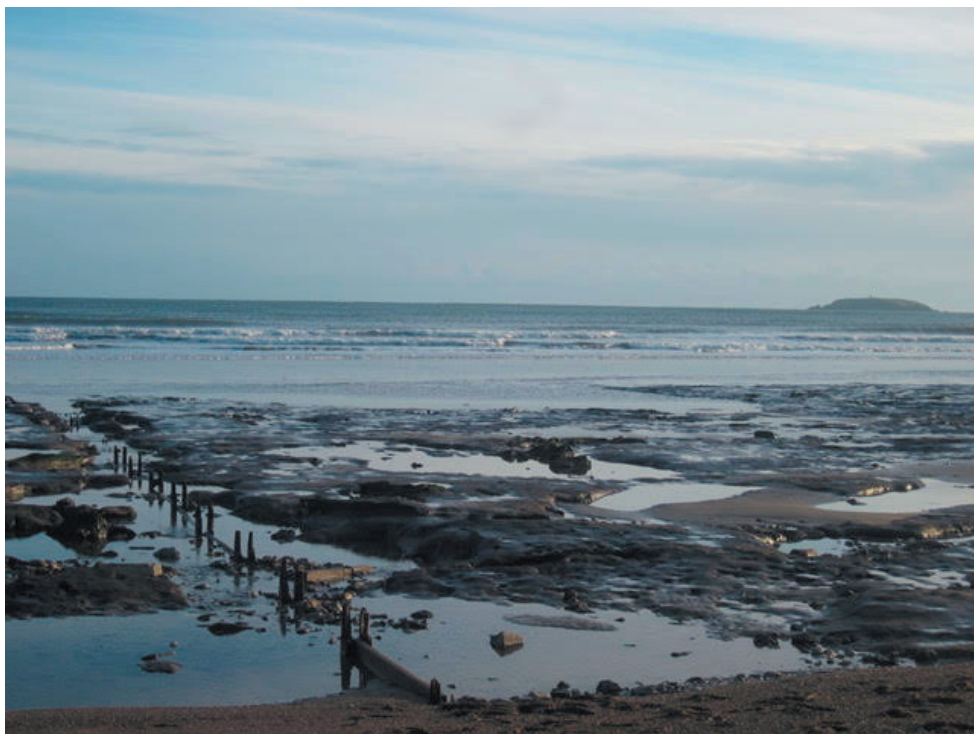
A major area of concern to coastal communities, regarding Climate Change, is the effect it is having on sea levels, including the height of waves, the temperature of the sea, and its rising salinity and acidification. We are all responsible by our everyday habits in contributing to these problems; dumping much of our rubbish into the sea and sending harmful emissions into the atmosphere.



Source: Kay Donnelly

Changing times have ways of bringing out the best in people. When the Covid virus arrived in Ireland, the whole country was galvanised into action. Overnight, people adapted to a totally different way of life and had to make many sacrifices. In the course of a few weeks, plans had been drawn up and implemented with very good results. We proved, that we could act quickly and decisively to an acute threat. We now need a good plan aimed at involving everyone in the community doing their part locally, in conjunction with nationwide action by our government.

In the mid 1950's, the 'Youghal Tribune' printed a letter it had received from Connie Kelleher a student at the Christian Brother's School. In his letter he pointed out, that Claycastle was falling into the sea and he called on the Local Urban District Council to take steps to protect it. Nobody listened then, will somebody listen now?



*The old yew wood exposed after rough tides, Youghal. Source: Kay Donnelly*

# Timothy Coakley

## Rosscarbery

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*“On a personal level, it is normal now to see men wearing shorts in Winter time”*

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Can any change including climate change be stopped? Around 500BC Heraclitus, the philosopher, claimed that “Permanence is an illusion as all things are in perpetual flux”. However, if we were to fully accept this dictum all forms of recklessness may become accepted but we must agree that change cannot be halted. *Caithfimid glacadh leis.*

In my life time, I have noticed many differences as a result of what we call climate change which comes from meteorological variables over a time spanning from months to millions of years.

We have two references which tend to overlap here: generally when we talk of climate change it tends to really mean global warming on a local level. Our capacity to control the climate is limited to the calculated aspect of certain human behaviours which impact on global warming. Did human behaviour influence the Ice Age, the Big Wind 1839 or the Beast from the East 2018?

An old name for Ireland is Hibernia- this came from the Romans and means, reputedly, “Land of Winter” as the weather was so bad during their brief visit here but the name refers to a time around 2000 years ago! Periods of bad weather are not new to this place so when we speak of perspective we need to take the longest possible time frame.

The sheer volume of wind we now experience is considerable: look at old aerial photos of farmyards and see how poorly secured silage coverings were. On a personal level, it is normal now to see men wearing in shorts in Winter time- that was not the case some decades ago and drought can now happen in any season. Locally, nature has responded to climate change: we won and lost.

The curlew is rare like the lapwing, I have not seen a cuckoo in years but we gained the egret and the hoopoe.

The scale of whale sightings is remarkable and the wild fuchsia is now more widespread whilst whortleberries are virtually extinct. In olden times, dates were set for each farm corn-threshing many weeks in advance and I cannot remember any changes having to be made due to rainfall- that procedure could not happen today.



How can we create a new and better future? By preventing pollution from our modern life styles. Period. Our *modus operandi* requires an overhaul but who will deliver? The business of everybody often becomes the task of nobody!

Why is Ecology not part of the school curriculum? What are we waiting for?

Farming practices have much influence in this procedure; the excess usage of chemical sprays and artificial nitrogen cannot be accepted anymore. Large scale commodity production on farms seems to dominate irrespective of any cost to the environment.

Furthermore, it is not quantifiable how such methods may impact on our environment on a long term basis and this is before we get to the matter of water quality and air contamination for which we cannot wait any longer for correction. We have an inalienable right to excellent water supplies - do the actions of some



question this right? How can funding from the public purse be used to support methods of farming that are clearly not sustainable when it could easily contain means to enhance farming and, consequently, the environment?

Hypocrisy must not be entertained: telling others how to behave with little order in our own place. Yes, dealing with our climate can show us how contrary this issue is but we have no choice. We must take it and we cannot leave it.

What is our policy on food waste? Maybe I should ask "do we have a policy?"

Is there any report on any environmental issue that can jerk us into action? Hardly.

What other concerns made me think of climate change today? The sheer decline in the bee population – perhaps our most important pollinator but this fact in not a news item at all. Why?

I will end with a line from Shakespeare which may give us some hope: "The web of our life is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together".



# Geraldine Walshe

## Kilworth

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### *Entrust*

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Hope is a dream  
Of a finer world  
Worthy of grace and innocence



Nature reset  
A future from the long-ago past



To perceive Earth and sky in communion  
The winged-beauty of birds  
Eternal plaintive music of the wind  
To learn again the secret language of snow  
Falling on aged-trees  
Assemblage shroud of stars  
Whisper a silent hosanna



Hope is a word  
Unsurpassed incomparable  
Cherish the dream



# Marie Guillot

France, United States and East Cork

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*“All in all, we may be provided with evidence of the urgency of acting and with means to do so, but the climate changes that must occur first are in our minds”*

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## Climate Changes, so WHAT?

During my childhood as a French baby-boomer, I could hear my elders comment on the weather changes, due in their opinion to the various new technologies (by-products from the recent war) and to the space-related research across the world, which were going to destroy our planet.

The girls of my generation were encouraged to study in the field of their choice in order to become independent, if it came to that. But, make no mistake, they also had to acquire house-keeping skills, thus ensuring a proper care of their future families.

At that time, good domestic habits were more a way to save money rather than the planet: no waste allowed, either in food or electricity; all equipment repaired and reused; no-nonsense purchase, and so on.

Metals were recycled locally, collected by trucks; fabrics from old clothes were converted into new ones; chinaware and furniture were passed-on to the younger generations.

Like everyone else, I learned that slow and climatic and geological changes were constantly occurring to the Earth, historically recorded along the centuries. But, from the Seventies onward, there was a new awareness concerning the future of this planet, due to a brutal acceleration of the evolution's progress.

The scientific observation of a global warming was the first alarm, induced by a level of pollution never seen before and growing fast. With ice melting fast, disastrous water floods were now threatening lands and living creatures on a worldwide scale.

If I was well aware of the pollution problems, I must admit that it was only from the general News that I learned about the *actual climate changes*; not from a personal observation of the weather on a daily or yearly basis.

On the other hand, the obvious and drastic depletion of our natural resources was a major eye-opener for me: there was an absolute necessity for changes in the energy field. Peat, coal, oil and even radioactive ores were not renewable and the world started to look into other solutions, such as *water, wind and sun*.

As a matter of fact, the latter trilogy had been part of the daily life on the planet for centuries, but only on a small scale, sporadically and locally.

Along my working years in the industry, between Europe, USA and South East Asia, I got involved at times with the implementation of new options concerning recycling, materials, processes and equipment. The introduction of new practices meant enormous investments, new expertise and sometimes strong fines for non-compliance. The adjustments took time; the effort was so huge that, at first, most participants were reluctant, not convinced that it was worth it.

Now living in Ireland, I have witnessed major changes in the country during the past decades, step-by-step, with a specific emphasis on the wind energy. Here is a recent input I am happy to report: *'The Government has fast-tracked the development of seven off-shore wind farm projects as part of its goal of significantly increasing renewable energy generation over the next decade.....The Government is currently aiming to have 70% of the country's energy coming from renewable sources by 2030.'*

All in all, we may be provided with evidence of the urgency of acting and with means to do so, but the climate changes that must occur first are in our minds.



# Mona Lynch

## Douglas

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### *Ignorance is bliss*

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I have hidden behind that platitude for 80 years.  
The flood, after a day's torrent in December 1948  
that broke the dam on Waterloo Road, Blarney  
made Mary and I scuttle up the stairs and stop at step four.  
The Christmas snow drift that blocked the road  
in Grange Co Waterford 1962.  
Needed council diggers to shift.  
Left us abandoned in a pub for a night on a chaise longue  
with a bucket of turf, and a lesson on turning the wheel  
to keep the fire going on the last night of our honeymoon.  
Was that normal bad weather?



Maybe I have not raped the rainforest,  
but I have gulped my share of palm oil.  
I have enjoyed many a threshing where cut after cut  
through corn and nettles silenced Corncrakes.  
In 1986 when hurricane Charlie lashed our shores  
And J1 visas swept our young across the Atlantic  
We lost three sons from this house.  
Hurricane Katia came in 2011, downing trees and toppling poles.  
We were celebrating my 70th in a coastguard cottage,  
it blew out more than my birthday candles.  
Ophelia, she was the one who had it in for me.

She whipped the roof from my sons' school gymnasium.  
whirled it over neighbouring gardens,  
landed it squarely on our patch,  
"Let no one be out of doors at 12 o'clock" we were warned.  
Dutifully we watched from windows and saw it land.

At sixteen I was godmother to a baby boy,  
now an energy consultant to an international organisation.  
He tells me what happened to our Carbon Dioxide emissions in the late 50's,  
shooting up beyond levels steady for 800,000 years.  
We humans raised those emissions rapidly as discovered.  
by scientist Charles Keeling and known as the Keeling Curve.  
He told me about our own John Tyndall who discovered the effect of CO<sub>2</sub>  
emissions and the Greenhouse effect.

But there is hope.  
I am learning about sustainable fabrics.  
I am cooking vegetarian dishes for my grandchildren.  
They made me dump my fabric conditioner,  
it gets into the sea and its tiny molecules harm the fish.  
My enemies the snails and slugs feasting on my plants,  
must be left for the frogs, toads and hedgehogs.  
Well, if it means the damage we have done is stalled  
and nature can take over as it has done in Chernobyl.  
Then I am part of a work in progress.



Knowledge once gained casts a light beyond its own immediate boundaries.

*John Tyndall Physicist*



School Gymnasium, Douglas after Storm Ophelia. Source: Mona Lynch

# Bart Bambury

## Wilton

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*“I wonder if a softer spoken Greta Thunberg might make a far greater impact on world affairs. After all she has the concerned youth of the world on her side.”*

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Life: That has to be what it is all about!

My father Tom, beannacht Dé leis, was born in 1916. He was a woodwork teacher and principal of a Vocational School. Among my earliest memories are of beehives in the back garden by the river, a vegetable plot, Rhode Island red hens and a chicken-wired large pen where pheasants were raised for release into the wild. Indoors, off the stairs, was an aviary where canaries and finches were a continuous source of wonder. As children we observed the progress of life from egg to songster. We were tasked with ensuring the inmates received a regular supply of water, seed and groundsel. He never owned a field but native black Kerry cows were his special passion and thrived in rented 'accommodation'. They were prize winners at the Royal Horticultural Spring Show in Ballsbridge and provided milk which my mother Han converted into butter using a table top churn. The school environment also reflected his interests with an educational focus. Indeed many of his pupils became avid beekeepers.



In the late 60's, as a young primary teacher, I was beginning to master the newly introduced environmental programme. My classroom walls were awash with the multi-coloured art pieces of leaf prints created by my 4th class pupils. The window sills were adorned with a variety of jam jars and pots for growing seeds and bulbs. Much of my leaf identification research was conducted on the SMA farm which today accommodates a shopping centre and housing estates. A pair of 8 x30 binoculars, as recommended by RSPB (Royal Society for the Protection of Birds), allowed me become more familiar with the seasonal life of our feathered friends. Tom voiced a concern on an early visit to Martina and I in our new suburban home that I did not grow vegetables in the back garden. Indeed he might be impressed this lovely May morning by the Lee at the number of apples and pears being borne by potted dwarf fruit trees and a wall length of flowering blackberry demonstrating great promise of fruitfulness in that very same garden. I believe I have finally identified the essential ingredient that permeated all his work and actions. He had a deep rooted regard and respect for life in all its wondrous aspects and this gift he certainly passed on to me.



The remembrances outlined above allied to my core belief in the importance of life, provide the essential building block in my meagre effort to outline my elderly position on climate change. The issue has become a major concern for commercial, public, political, educational and research interests globally at the present time. 'Back in the day', people like my father and I had an interest in and an aspiration to learn more about our environment and the problems associated with it. Protection and conservation were the key words.



In recent retirement years, particularly during the Pandemic, I have had reason to create closer links with my local environs and really discover the wonder and beauty that was just beyond my doorstep. Lockdown rambles helped me become more observant and more attentive to the geographical, historical, botanical and wildlife wonders of my immediate locality. I also discovered I could take this wonder home to my garden. I was provoked to apply my reasonable digital competency to zoom into the free webinar world of organic gardening (Fingal Co. Library), Viking Cork (CHAS), Corkcumnavigation (Meitheal Mara) and a host of other interesting forums from the comfort of my Wilton home. With the relaxation of travel rules I was introduced to the beauty of the Owenabue valley during masked, yellow vested, socially distanced, walks with my good friend Frank. The ever changing roadside flora received our special attention, allied to itemising distant vistas, ring forts and the seasonal activity of the farming community.

Dear reader, as I enjoy the last quarter of life's wonderful game, I continue to respect and marvel at my world and all living in it. I try to ensure that I do all the right things as advised or directed - by science, Local Authority, state and European agencies. My actions, although important, will never impact greatly on the world stage. I do have concerns about issues being presented dramatically in a manner that can only frighten young and old alike. I wonder if a softer spoken Greta Thunberg might make a far greater impact on world affairs. After all she has the concerned youth of the world on her side.

I certainly believe that a caring and informed new generation will always do a far better job than the generation that went before. As I 'do my bit' in the final quarter, I must believe that a whole new world awaits my wonderful beloved grandchildren Ethan, Auden, Pierce, Daniel and Charlie as they step into the first important quarter of their lives.

Go mbíodh gach rath is ádh leo ar an aistear iontach sin.



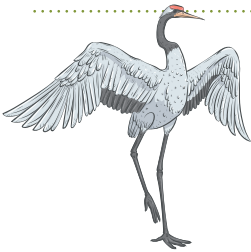
# Gerard O'Callaghan

## Mallow

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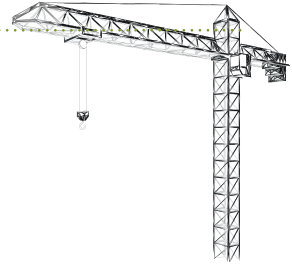
*“Is it too much to hope that quality of life will become more important than balance of payments?”*

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### **Crane Versus Crane.**

The summers are warmer,  
The winters are colder,  
I notice it more as I get older.



That would be my observation of Climate Change, in a nutshell. However, there is much more to it than that. I feel that people today are much more conscious of how they impact the planet in their daily lives. Words like carbon footprint, ecosystem and ozone layer are well understood by most people now. The practicalities are still a little slow in becoming realities, but we're getting there. When I think of summers and winters, it brings me back to my youth of 60 years ago, growing up in Mallow...

In a field of dreams by the Blackwater, the Bed-Tree always held a special place in our hearts. It was old, yet strong with the wisdom that only old trees possess. From the "bed" area you could continue to the top of the tree and watch the flowing river, as it meandered through the Paddock on its way to the sea. Many a mullet and minnow (which we called "collies") we caught here in jam jars, as we paddled over the Green Stone. I also recall a crab-tree nearby where we devoured the irresistible crab-apples. We would also sample copious amounts of a certain green leaf, which we called "Bread and Cheese" for some reason, even though it tasted nothing like either bread or cheese!

Back to today and I believe that Governments need to step up in order for things to change. The effects of Climate Change affect everything from waste disposal to transport and everything in between. Thankfully, many young people are active in making us aware of what can happen if things don't change. Most people's attitude to recycling has improved, and, while the arrival of hybrid cars and electric transport is promising, some kind of Government incentive is necessary to encourage these initiatives.

In the past, we had some good practices such as using rainwater, collecting food waste to feed animals, particularly pigs. We didn't use packaging, as loose tea,



sugar, etc were sold over the counter. Of course, there were no plastic containers, as you collected your gallon of milk from the creamery.

I can remember my mother quoting some sage from long ago, who said that "In the end, Man will destroy himself". That doesn't seem so outrageous now as it did then. Let's hope it doesn't come to pass! Speaking of my mother, she and her friends picked "cipins" in the woods by the river, and they would use them to start the fire at home later.

How would I imagine a better world? I would like to combine the best of today with the best of yesterday. I'd love to see more feathered cranes than mechanical ones, quieter and safer roads, more conversation with real people, more open spaces and good quality affordable housing. Is it too much to hope that quality of life will become more important than balance of payments? Time was when we didn't even know what balance of payments meant. Our parents just managed to keep the wolf from the door to feed us with the weekly wages. Maybe I'm looking back with rose-tinted glasses, but...

*In the summertime, the Paddock was green, and the sun shone high in the sky. Foliage grew from every crevice, and it really was a natural environment. The shelter of the trees provided respite from the sun and birdsong blended with the sound of the rolling river along the way.*

Enough of my reminiscences. To sum up, we need Governments to show more leadership in this important area and not put the cart before the horse. We all need to take responsibility, to revive the best of old practices and get them to mingle happily with the new. Is there time? Let's not look back in anger and regret but be active and positive for the future of our beautiful planet.



# *Julie Williams*

## Skibbereen

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### *A Considered Purchase*

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Considered purchase  
The winter coat  
Balaclava & leather shoes  
Blanket security for winter  
Walks to school  
Keeps minds alert  
Unconsidered  
Warmer climes  
Relaxed clothing  
Falsely smug  
Deposited by gas guzzlers  
Considered  
Better times  
The blanket security  
Slips from cold hearts



# Ger Morrissey

## Fermoy

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*“This beautiful area of Fermoy cries out for our care.  
We must decide how to protect and save it from further  
destruction”*

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### Let's Go Down by the River

Having moved back to my hometown of Fermoy, I can't help but notice the damage wrought by Climate change to the once majestic river Blackwater. Every day, I cross the bridge spanning the town, and I feel such sadness looking at the eroded weir, and the crumbling steps of the fish pass. I don't think salmon could leap upstream now, the water is so low I imagine it would be easy to cup my hands and scoop out the small fish swimming along the visible river bed. It is as if the river's life force has been drained from it, and a far cry from my childhood memories of the river Blackwater.

I learned to swim, at a crescent-shaped section of the river, we called it The Strand, because of the small bank of sand, leading into the water. Reeds grew in abundance nearby and it was lying on a bed of those reeds, I learned how to relax in the water. We respected the river's power though, always mindful of local folklore 'the Blackwater takes three souls each year.' But that fear was forgotten when we caught callies, gudgies and tadpoles and dropped them into our jam jar fish tanks. Picnics were shared with friends on the banks of the river and to local teenagers, it was the romantic spot where kisses worked their magic.

I stroll down the Barnane walk and more memories ambush me. Summer regattas, dances in the rowing club, music, and laughter shared by young and old. Tree roots grow under the aging tarmacadam, but other than that the pathway to the stile which gives access to the next section of the walk is easily accessible, after that less so.

Family walks along Barnane were the norm when I was a child, somehow I don't think many parents would be comfortable bringing small children beyond the stile now. My walk through the green fields eventually brings me to The Strand, and tears blur my vision. It is now a shallow bed of rocks. This is our fault; the thought runs through my mind.





Weir showing dried-out salmon pass. Source: Ger Morrissey

We are responsible for this. Yes, the climate has changed, but only because of us. Our, throwaway society has destroyed parts of this wonderful world. We need to change our 'want it now' mindset.

This beautiful area of Fermoy cries out for our care. We must decide how to protect and save it from further destruction. The weir is due to be reconstructed, I hope it will be. Once that happens, hopefully, the river Blackwater will return to its majestic self as it flows through our wonderful town. Perhaps then, the powers that be will consider sympathetically developing the Barnane walk, and future generations will derive the same enjoyment from it, as mine did. Standing by the banks of the river, I imagine what it would be like to meander along an accessible track, listening to the gurgling water, or watching the swans, cranes, herons and ducks.

I hope it will happen, but for now, I continue my sometimes-tricky trek until I reach the end of the Barnane walk, and emerge onto a curving road. Directly across from me, is Glenabo woods and shaded by a canopy of tall trees, another trip down memory lane begins for me.



# *Leonne O'Regan*

## **Wilton**

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### *Reverse*

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I slowed down  
Life sped up  
Fast not fasting  
consume it all  
even on credit  
Make waste...  
spend without thinking  
Click-click-deliver-  
Too much of everything  
Not enough time  
Open the mind  
And eye to see  
Heart to feel  
Clouds rain down  
Micro plastic toxins,  
Nature's demise.





My granddaughter at Lough Inchiquin at Gleninchiquin Part, Tuosist, Kenmare.  
Source: Leonne O'Regan

# Liam Mc Laughlin

## Castletownsend



*“Who would ever have thought we would miss the house fly and the Vapona strips? But, they’re gone.”*

My earliest memory of climate change was around 1990. It was coming up a little in the news and at work in the context of sustainability, another term that I knew little about at the time. While my own knowledge and awareness of the topic was very poor, it was not a new concept. As far back as the 1850’s, a fellow Irishman was one of the scientists who first predicted the “greenhouse effect” from carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. He was John Tyndall (1820-1893) from County Carlow and a prominent physicist. The Tyndall Institute in UCC is called after him. From the 1950’s, scientists were becoming very concerned about the potential for severe climate change from humanity’s burning of fossil fuels. In 1988, it was clear what was happening and how bad it could become if action were not taken.

What action has been taken? Since 1988, when we first knew beyond doubt of the consequences of climate change, we have emitted more carbon dioxide than in all of history before that. Personally, I was no more aware and no more concerned than most of society. My own experience is very much in parallel with that of most other people. From my own observations, it is very clear how much change we are experiencing as a result of climate change. I was just a bit slow getting to this realisation.

I live in West Cork and can see the changes here. I also travel extensively, ironically working on climate change mitigation with the UN and other international agencies. I have heard personal stories from speaking to local people in countries as diverse as South Africa, Malaysia, Russia, Spain and Mexico among many others. These stories are not much different to my own experience in West Cork. Different issues affect different regions in different ways. But the root cause and the commonality is undeniable.

In West Cork, in recent years we have seen unprecedented flooding and huge sums being spent to minimise the potential future damage. We also have first hand experience of more frequent and more severe storms. These storms are memorable, not only from the damage, but now from their names. Who will ever forget Ophelia and her younger brothers and sisters? We see frequent isolation of our islands, which cannot be accessed at times due to storms. They are also experiencing damage to their marine infrastructure including essential piers.

The floods are frequently being sandwiched between periods of drought. We see plants moving northwards within Ireland to follow their preferred temperature.

What will happen to them when they get to Malin Head? Insects are following them, as they must. Supposedly birds will follow the insects. The swallows were 3 or 4 weeks late this year. Who would ever have thought we would miss the house fly and the Vapona strips? But, they're gone. At least it is easy to clean the windscreen of the car. Will a clear windscreen help us to see what is ahead and to take the action that is critical to achieving something of a sustainable lifestyle? Continued inaction is not an option. If we do

not achieve net zero carbon emissions in a planned way, nature will achieve it for us in very unpleasant ways for much of humanity and our fellow animals and plants.



How do we explain to our grandchildren what we have done to their futures? How do we explain that we failed to convince society and our leaders of the need for meaningful action? The school children already know what we are doing to their futures. August 2021 is the third anniversary of Greta Thunberg sitting outside the Swedish parliament to start her personal school strike. Now there are 14,000,000 school children striking every Friday for over one hundred and fifty weeks. They are screaming for help. I am personally, so, so, ashamed that we are not listening



Students from Skibbereen Community School marching through town, March 2019.  
Credit: Andrew Harris

# *Cathryn Duane*

## Douglas

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### *Irish Weather*

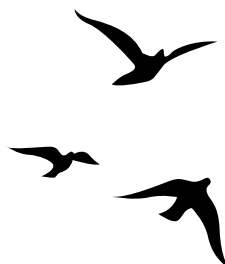
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Irish weather is like no other  
Ever-changing day in day out.  
It's the topic of conversation  
from morning to night.

The Irish are experts  
When it comes to the weather.  
Be it Joe Biggs or mé féin  
It's enough to drive one insane.

With nice soft days and Irish mists.  
Raining cats and dogs, storms, Thunder  
and lightening, sunshine and showers.  
A dolly mixture of rainbows.

It keeps life balanced.  
Sunshine in short supply  
Rain and wind in abundance.  
Dull dark days lead our thoughts  
To brighter days ahead





# Mary Frances Douglas

## Youghal

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### *“Whiteout”*

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I stood there on the footpath, or I should say sidewalk, as I am in New York now. Staten Island, to be precise. Staying with my cousins Bill and Sonja and their children in a lovely leafy suburb. I was working for the past few months for the Irish Tourist Board on 48th and Fifth Avenue, right in the centre of Manhattan. This was Monday morning early and today was quite important as I was to help give a slide presentation on the beauties of the Irish landscape to a small group of Canadian travel agents who had flown in over the weekend.

It had been a very cold winter but today was really extreme. The temperature was below Zero but, according to the local radio station, there was a wind chill factor of minus 30 Fahrenheit. Sonja was concerned. She was surprised that I was expected to travel into work in these conditions. But I could not let people down. It was not in my nature and besides, I was an incurable optimist. However, Sonja insisted that I wear a pair of ski leggings and ski long sleeve undershirt under my smart cream blouse and navy trousers. “Just for the journey. You can change in the office Ladies room.” So, I had set off down the hill bundled up with warm clothes, winter boots, woolly hat and scarf and extra thick gloves. Looking discreetly at the other commuters waiting for the bus, which would take us across the Verrazano Narrows Bridge into the Wall Street area, I noted they were all well wrapped up against the elements.

It was just 8 a.m. I was allowing 40 minutes for the bus journey and then another 40 for the uptown ride to 48th Street on a different bus. I was due in the office at 09.30 and the presentation was to be at 10.30. Plenty of time, I thought. I was used to being punctual as I had been flying with Aer Lingus prior to this exciting offer of a trial year in New York. After all, you can’t turn up late for a flight if you are a member of the crew!

By now, it had begun to snow again. A steady damp, downward spiral. I felt myself getting damp and cold. I wished I owned one of those big rainproof, fleece lined anoraks. I clearly wasn’t prepared for the New York winter. My feet began to feel very cold. I stamped them but they still got colder. Then I noticed my neighbouring commuter stamping up and down for about ten feet or so and turning around back to his place in the queue. Others began to follow suit, including me. It was





*Central Park after large snow storm in the early morning*

becoming impossible to just stand there with the freezing air on my face and my woolly hat becoming wetter and wetter as the snow got heavier. There were mutterings about the bus delay. I noticed that I could no longer see the clear line between the sidewalk and the road. The snow got heavier. My feet got colder. My hands started to ache. Two women had a quick discussion and then turned back up the hill of Livingston Avenue. They had obviously decided they had had enough. Or the bus wasn't coming. Or both. I felt a prickling of ice around my nose and cheeks. My feet began to get numb. I found it harder to walk. I could barely make out my fellow travellers now. I suddenly realised that, if I stayed here any longer, I would be too numb to trek back uphill. I peered through the whiteout. No sign of any traffic on the carriageway. I made the decision. An exhausting twenty minutes later, I knocked on the door. Sonja's smiling, astonished then horrified face welcomed me.

"Oh! Mary Frances, you look like the Ice Man. Don't try to remove your hat or scarf until you have thawed out! "

I stumbled into the warm living room. Staring back at me in the big wall mirror was an alien creature. A head and face covered in frost, with tiny icicles hanging from its snowy hat and under its nose.

Since the 1970's New York's climate is changing. Most of the state has warmed an average 2.4 degrees Fahrenheit. Heavy rainstorms are more frequent and the sea is rising about one inch (2.54cm) every decade. Higher water levels are eroding beaches, submerging lowlands and exacerbating coastal flooding.

Here in Ireland, the most evident effects of climate change can clearly be seen in the increased temperature. Temperatures have risen by 0.7 degrees Celsius between 1890 and 2008 and, most significantly, by 0.4 degrees Celsius between 1980 and 2008. These temperature increases have affected the growing season in farming. We have had more frequent storms which has caused extensive flooding in our coastal cities and farmlands. As an island nation we are especially vulnerable to rising sea levels.

We must all do our bit as individuals and nations to prevent further damage and protect our beautiful planet for future generations.

Based on true event in January 1977.

# Maureen Smyth

## Fermoy

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*“Since moving to Co. Cork, Fermoy and living on a farm in early 1973, I see big changes. We had severe winters, burst pipes, water frozen and power cuts in those years, but not now”*

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In the days before we knew about global warming, weather patterns were very different to today. Much more variations between Seasons. Summers long, hot and dryer. Summer began in April and we still had a scorching August, which was the main month for seaside holidays in Ireland. I remember lots of summer dresses and everyday was a day for a picnic. I lived in town then – Mountrath, Co. Laoise and we had large walled gardens full of roses for months. Banana sandwiches and homemade Lemonade was the highlight of picnics. Locally we had the River Nore and all the children of the town spent afternoons swimming in the river which was free of pollution.

One of the best weather indicators in our house was the old Barometer in The Hall. The onset of Autumn was indicated by the Foamy Cuckoo Spit on the thistle. After that evenings got shorter. In 1978 we had heavy snow in May. The winters were much colder with lower rainfall. Wool coats, hats and scarf were the order of the day. Lots of people knitted their own hats and scarf and also wool socks for men. I remember every year at the start of winter getting a new pair of Fur Boots, lamb's wool. I also remember getting chilblains on my toes.

In 1950, there was heavy snow that remained on the ground for several weeks. Favourite pastime was skating on frozen pool. Children had great freedom then.

One of the big changes I notice is the amount of wind we got. We really only got a lot of wind in the month of March, East wind but now we get it all through the year.

Since moving to Co. Cork, Fermoy and living on a farm in early 1973, I see big changes. We had severe winters, burst pipes, water frozen and power cuts in those years, but not now. Animals sheltered under hedges and trees and there was very little pollution or sickness in animals. The Birds and Bee numbers have reduced greatly. We still have flooding here on fields beside the river Blackwater. In 1986 we had Hurricane Charlie which caused extensive flooding. We have not had anything like that since. River Blackwater in Fermoy froze in 2010 and remained frozen for 10 days. It is supposed to have happened previously in 1940. Ireland is not as susceptible to Climate Change as other countries except for erosion of the coastline.



Salmon and Trout population has diminished by nearly 80% in the River Blackwater and we know that as my husband is a keen angler for the past 60 years. Due to some extent from the formation of an Algae skum on the bed of the river which promotes growth of a river weed white flower that rises to the top that dies in the water producing more Algae. The fresh water mussel population has almost diminished.

Hopefully, the Government will become more aware of what's happening to our Rivers and Seas!



# Cumann Na Daoine

# *Weathering the Changes*

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*Stories about Climate Change from members of Cumann na Daoine's Spring Chickens Older Adults Club & Youghal Active Retirement Association*

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Cumann na Daoine is a community resource centre in Youghal and we held an event named 'Weathering the Changes' for members of Cumann na Daoine's (CnD) Spring Chickens Older Adults Social Club in collaboration with Youghal Active Retirement Association (YARA).

The event, which was themed to the County Council's Climate Change project, was attended by 15 people, and helped make links between Spring Chickens, YARA, the Youghal Blue & Green Community Network and CnD Community Garden Club, who provided access to the venue for the workshop in the Millenium Park, Youghal.

The session lasted for 2 hours: there were three 'note takers' who encouraged participants to tell their stories, using the prompts supplied by the Council project along with some questions relating specifically to Youghal. A member of YARA made recordings, of both snippets of conversation and full stories.

After the event, notes were compiled and recordings transcribed with the local radio station CRY104fm providing assistance to the community group in downloading the recordings and in editing.

The 'Weathering the Changes' event also served to start up a broader Cumann na Daoine project for older people, which incorporates storytelling and crafts, with an intergenerational theme added through a further collaboration with Foróige youth service.

Participants in this project enjoyed the experience and are keen to participate in future sessions. Future sessions and activities will enable wider participation from our memberships (Spring Chickens with 60 members, YARA with over 100). The Youghal Blue & Green Network, an environmental group led by CnD and formed of individuals and organisational representatives, will also re-connect with this group to develop environmental awareness and share older people's learning in a number of environmental actions.

'Weathering the Changes' was funded by Creative Ireland as part of the larger In Our Element project.

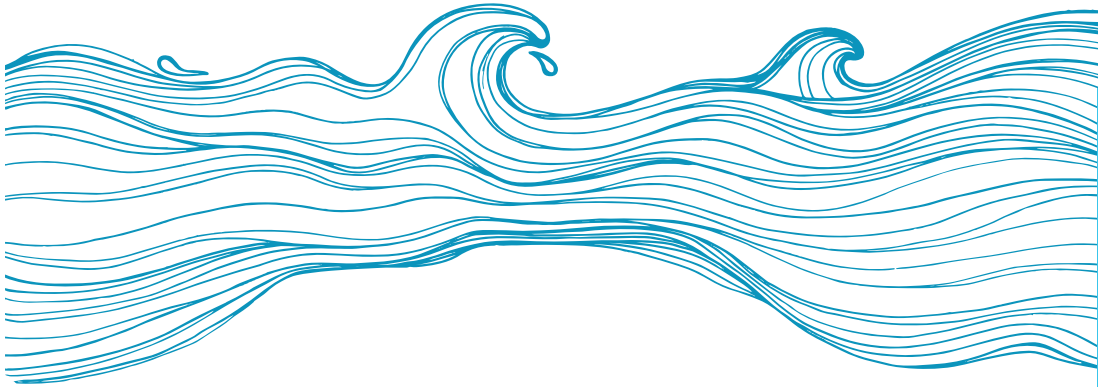
*Cumann Na Daoine*



These stories were collected at an event in Millenium Park, Youghal in June 2021

# Stories about Floods

"I live in the town, in the flats near the Quay side. There's a car park/garage next to the house and water gets in so I have a sandbag and a waterboard to protect my home. With easterly winds, high tides and rain, the tide comes up the double slip, up Browne Street (which is near my home), up and along the Main Street, down by Supervalu and the Community Centre and meets up with itself."



"I remember in the '50s the floods came up Brown Street to the Post Office – you could actually come up that street on a boat there was so much water. But I think now there are more and better weather forecasts and warnings so people can prepare earlier. There seems to be a greater frequency of high-tides but I'm not sure if this is correct? The fishermen are great – they always know what the tides are doing and they are almost always right."



# Stories about Weather Surprises

"I think weather events are more dramatic, like last week when the heat was 26 degrees (not usually that hot) and now we get very heavy rainfalls compared to the 50s."



"Another thing is 'snow' – my children who are in their 20s never saw snow until a couple of years ago, around 2017 or 18? Whereas I remember making plenty of snowmen in my youth. A few weeks ago we got hailstones the size of big stones – I have never seen that in my life before."

# Stories about Storms

"In Green Park, the wall was blown down. Well, I would estimate it was sometime around the 60s. That was a severe storm and it blew the wall of the Green Park. I was a married man with three children here in town at that stage. It isn't that long ago, it's only fifty years ago. That was a big one alright. Two years ago - that one blew down trees where I live. Big huge trees got blown down and they broke all the walls and were out on the road. I had to get someone out to get them out of the way because it was blocking traffic, and it was a pain. Are storms getting worse?"



"I used to go under the table during storms, I thought they were angrier when I was young. Others think storms are angrier now - they are being named now and that they are more powerful. Storms seem to be more frequent and corrugated roofs which I think were well secured were blown over the past few years."



"It's that we are older and we have the worry around it. The big storm comes and we're like 'Oh, what's going to flood?'"



The after effects of the 1962 storm, with the permission of the Horgan Family



The boardwalk in Youghal



*Youghal boardwalk during storm, Photo courtesy of Cork County Council staff member*

# Stories about the Shoreline

"That's the thing about the climate change - the coasts. You see a difference in the coasts. I suppose the big difference I see, if you consider the quays as a part of the coast line, is when you look at the Mall Dock, as we call it, you know the place near the town hall there. Well, when I was a child that was covered in stones and they were covered in seaweed and you couldn't go swimming there or anything.

"As well as that, near it there were slaughterhouses- down where the car park is now, behind the quays- and all the stuff from the slaughterhouses went into the sea, as you know. I remember we'd be out fishing and they'd come out and call 'Stop fishing now.' and then they'd let out all the stuff.

"The water would turn red. As well as that, on the Mall Dock, near the pier head there wouldn't have been any stones; but it would have been very low down and it was all mud. People used to go there digging for lugs, you know what the fishermen use when they're going fishing. With the changing times - the fishermen would tell you it's because of the change in currents and mud banks - you can even see over across the ferry and over by Piltown the mud banks there are building up and the sand is all shifting from Redbarn and out there by Claycastle and all.

"It's all shifting around and most of it is shifting into town. There's actually too much of it comes into the Mall Dock and the Council have to go and move it out of it. Then, I suppose, the coastline out along- the big difference I can see out there is the fact that if you go out there, you know where the car park is now, say if you were to take a spot from the Butts rifle range to Claycastle and look at the sand dunes there, they're all disappearing.

"Every time we have a storm they're going back. So if you walk along the beach there you can see it. Every time there's a storm or rough tides and that, there's more and more leaving, even though they've put stones all along there and everything. It's doing no good. It's all getting washed away. the walls and were out on the road. I had to get someone out to get them out of the way because it was blocking traffic, and it was a pain. Are storms getting worse?"



*Before Moll Goggins Corner was closed off due to coastal erosion, with permission of the Horgan Family*

# Stories about the Shoreline



Youghal, County Cork



"You can see the coastal erosion out the front beach: the storms have exposed the ancient Yew Woods tree stumps. I was walking out the 'far off' and overheard 2 kiddies tell their Mum that the beach has gone."

"The quay in Youghal along the Mall Dock is covered in stones and seaweed. The pier head near the Mall Dock was very low down, difficult to access and covered in mud but fishermen went looking for worms there. Presently mud banks are building up and sand is shifting into the town and the coastline out along the sand dunes down by the riffle range to Claycastle is disappearing."

"What I really notice is the changes to the beach – the amount of sand moved up by the promenade covering all the rocks. A few weeks ago I saw the seafloor exposed closer to Redbarn and the new boardwalk. You could see the original bog content of it. This is the first time I ever saw this in my lifetime in Youghal, in 70 years. It's totally clear to see that there is huge coastal erosion – you can see the coast shrinking and the level of litter has really increased, especially plastics."

"In Kerry there was a beach I used to walk on but now has completely disappeared from the force of a storm; the sand is gone. The power of the ocean is amazing."

# Stories about Farming, Trees and Green Spaces

"We used to use netting and sticky rolls to catch the flies – not anymore. Not as many flies – is that related to the weather? Frequent weather changes, so fast, was it always like this? When we're out driving, the windscreen isn't covered in insects anymore – there's so fewer these days."

"There's a large green area to the rear of my home surrounded by a hedge and backing onto Brú na Si up in Blackwater Heights. The field is now overgrown with a managed pathway all the way around it. The Council are leaving it to grow wild for the wild life. The knock-on effect is that the walkway is enticing people to meet outside and chat and enjoy the wild planting, which is good for the community."

"In my previous home, I planted  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an acre of wildflowers in my garden to draw in wildlife because there were no bees, butterflies and birds in the nearby meadows. I noticed my neighbour was using Lyosophate weed killer in her garden... so I told her how harmful that is and said 'use salt instead and pull them up on a damp day.' My neighbour said "I just didn't think" and stopped using it, and the bees and birds came back after a season of wild planting, with buddleia and lavender to draw them in."

"Farmers are de-ditching land which is detrimental to biodiversity. There are less bees, lady-birds and flies in general."

"People are replacing their gardens with decking and concrete, it's very sad: we need earth, grass and plants to attract the birds and wildlife."

"There are no horslips anymore – the lilac coloured flowers"



"The other thing is the number of trees that get blown down in storms is huge – there have been over 500 fallen trees in the golf club but some of this might be to do with the type of tree they were planting – shallow roots. They planted 300 native Irish over the past year. I lament that so many trees around the town have been cut down, presumably for safety reasons. But the trees planted here in the Millennium Park are beautiful, that they are well established and a lovely variety. Since the lock down people realise the importance and value of the French Gardens in Emmet Place and pay more attention to green spaces. But the state of the Loretto development! All the old trees cut, some as old as 200 years. There's not enough new trees being planted."



# Childhood Memories of a Changing World

"I wonder how much memory affects how we perceive the way things happened; but when we were little, when summer started my Mum would pull the suitcase out of the cupboard, and we'd get our summer clothes out - you'd get your new sandals for the summer, you'd get your new summer frock and that was to do you. We would wear our summer clothes all summer and I don't recall ever being cold. Then, a few weeks ago there was a sunny day and I was like 'Oh, where's my shorts? I haven't unpacked my summer wardrobe for years', because it seems to me these days it's so changeable that I always want to have a fleece with me, or a pair of boots in case. Now, maybe that's just my perception of how it was when I was little - that everything was perfect and rosy; but it does seem to me that it used to be more steady, the weather. I remember we would then start school again in September and they said 'You can't wear your summer uniform because it's the autumn term.' and we'd be there sweltering in jumpers."

"One of the things I think about when I think about the weather is that when we were growing up and went to school, everybody walked to school. I mean there was nobody not walking, apart from people who lived outside town - they might come in in a pony and trap or something. We walked, whatever the weather was like. If it was bucketing rain you walked to school, and when you got into school you could be drenched and the piping system in the school, the central heating, I can remember that. There were these big huge pipes along the sides of the rooms."

"We seemed to cycle every day of the Summer holidays and there didn't seem to be tempests, or storms, or huge rainfalls that interfered with that sort of existence, you know?"



# What We'd Say to Younger People...

"A million little things are so much more important than one big thing: take the time to do that one thing. Start environmental studies early, in school."

"We have an incredible, astonishing planet and we are so lucky. It is a living thing and we must care for it, or it will die. Stop using pesticides and plant one area of your garden with wildflowers; do not accept plastic packaging from supermarkets."

"The ice caps are melting. What we can do is reduce emissions. So smell the flowers: life isn't all about money. Know what's growing in your garden and focus on what you can do."

"We made a mess of things, please help make it right."



# *Afterword*

## **Cork County Council's Role in Climate Action**

*Director of Service, Environment Directorate, Louis Duffy*

2021 will be remembered by all for the COVID19 pandemic that has already taken over five million lives and caused great disruption across the globe. It will also be remembered as the year when Global Climate Change Impacts were so extensive that Climate Change Denial began to reduce significantly. The scientists have warned us for decades that it would happen, but it takes decades for the impact to be felt.

Scientists talk in numbers that often people have difficulty conceptualizing. What does a 1.5°C change in temperature or a 1 metre rise in sea level mean? Met Eireann records show that the average annual air temperature at Cork Airport has already increased by over 1°C in the last 50 years. When and how will it affect us individually? We know that there are more severe weather events, but for the most part, life still goes on as normal. That is not the case in other parts of the world. For example, 13 EU States have declared that they are affected by desertification; climate migration has begun in Southern Africa, where changes in rainfall patterns have caused rivers to dry up and the land to become worthless for farming, forcing people to move to farm better land. It is expected that Climate change may force over 120 million people to migrate as sea level rise and weather pattern changes reach full impact.



*Pictured at the Launch of this Initiative: Tim Lucey, Chief Executive, Elizabeth Maddox, Chair of the Older Person's Council and Cllr. Mary Linehan Foley*

## What is Happening at a National and Local Level?

Climate Action includes everything that we do to reduce or respond to Climate Change. There are two broad areas – Mitigation covers actions that aim to reduce the impact of human activity on Climate and thus slow down the change; Adaptation covers the actions that we take to reduce the impact of Climate Change on our lives.

Looking first at Mitigation, the United Nations Paris Agreement reached in December 2015 (COP21) set targets for a reduction in Greenhouse gas emission (the main cause of Climate Change) with the aim of limiting global warming to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. An Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change confirmed in 2021 that unless there are immediate, rapid and large scale reductions in greenhouse emissions, limiting global warming to 1.5°C or even 2°C will be beyond reach. The target of 1.5°C was reaffirmed in 2021 at COP26, with the added position that the change must be fair and not impact on poor countries.

Adaptation deals with how we respond to severe weather events, coastal erosion, sea level rise, long term droughts, soil erosion, desertification, loss of biodiversity and other consequences of Climate Change.



*Council Staff Responding to Severe Weather Events*

Our Government has brought in new legislation and Climate Action Plans to guide and support the required actions. Public consultation and engagement are ongoing so that community groups and individuals can be part of the change process. Significant funding has been made available for scientific research, energy efficiency and carbon reduction measures, adaptation measures such as coastal protection and flood defences. There are supports for renewable energy systems, higher standards for building construction that reduce energy needs, waste management policies that support the circular economy, funding for active travel to reduce the need for carbon fueled transport, carbon taxation policies that make low carbon options cheaper and funding for enhancement of biodiversity. Targets are being set for each Government Department or sector and these will be monitored. All of these and other Government actions will encourage the transition to a lower carbon economy and manage the impacts already brought on by the changes that have occurred already and will increase until we reach carbon neutrality globally.

## The Role of Local Government and Cork County Council

The local government sector has a critical role to play under the Government's Climate Action Plan 2021, which sets ambitious and binding targets for all public sector bodies to reach by 2030 and identifies local authorities as key enablers of change. The sector has established a national service known as CARO that works to identify best practice in Climate Action, research additional measures that should be taken, develop guidance for all Local Authorities, and has implemented a training programme for the 30,000 elected representatives and staff of Local Authorities. Cork County Council leads the Atlantic Seaboard South CARO which is preparing guidance on Climate Action for Roads, Coastal Erosion, Local Authority housing tenants and the establishment of Woodlands as Carbon Sinks.

The Council has signed a Climate Action Charter with central government committing to achieving national targets in respect of our own activities and those of Cork communities and businesses. Through our County Development Planning system, we plan for the sustainable development of our county. Cork County Council has also prepared Biodiversity plans for many Cork towns and has adopted ambitious measures for Biodiversity enhancement in the public realm.

As a Council, we also act as an agent for the OPW for flood relief. Four major flood protection schemes are now in operation, 6 are in development and 9 more are included in the OPW 10 year capital programme.



*Mallow Flood Defence Wall*

We also work on behalf of Irish Water and the Transport Infrastructure Ireland to build new and enhanced infrastructure designed to cope with future Climate Change driven requirements.



Response to severe weather warnings starts with a Severe Weather Assessment Team call and this team puts the actions in train to prepare and manage the Council's response to the event. Where an event is predicted to cause widespread damage or disruption, the full Senior Management Team will come together to coordinate the response and manage the recovery process, supporting not only Council services but also the Health Services, Water Supplies, Electricity Networks and other major disruption.



*Crisis Management Team Meeting, County Hall*

In relation to Mitigation, Cork County Council set up Ireland's first Energy Agency in 1995 and since then we have focussed on increasing our energy efficiency under an ISO accredited system covering all of the Council's energy use, including buildings, fleet, and public lighting where 30,000 lights will be replaced in Cork County over a 2 year period from 2022. We have carried out audits and retrofit programmes across our portfolio of buildings and continue to seek improvements to meet national targets. We are the contracting authority for replacement of roadside public lights with LEDs in all the Southwest region. The Council's Housing Directorate has retrofitted 5,000 social housing units to reduce their energy requirements. The Council also supports communities in their local actions.

Our Local Climate Office plans for and monitors the Council's own Climate Action performance. The actions are extensive and across all directorates, so coordination is critical. Carbon reduction targets have been set by government and once baselines have been established, these will form the basis for further actions. The Council adopted its first Climate Adaptation Strategy in 2019 and reports performance against the targets therein annually. Our Environmental Awareness Team delivers an extensive programme of Climate Change information with the aim of helping individuals to understand and implement the measures that we can each take to play our part in making the difference.

## Why this Compilation of Stories?

While the Climate Action targets are agreed and applied by Central and Local Government, Public Bodies Action alone will not meet the country's commitment. The actions that we as a nation must take to reduce the extent and impact of climate change requires every individual to make changes and this will only happen when people feel that it is the right thing for them to do.

As a society we have always listened to the experience of those who have lived through times of change and learned what we should do from them. Climate Change is no different and the experiences of the contributors here are an invaluable and personal reflection on what has already happened in our County and gives the reader a sense of what might change in the future.

When it comes to discussing climate change, older people have an advantage: they have watched it happen and have experienced its impacts. This book has presented individual experiences of the changes that have already occurred in Cork over the last 50-60 years. The one degree rise in annual average temperatures in Cork has occurred in the lifetime of the contributors. True stories are often easier to comprehend than science and statistics and in collating this book, we aim to give these stories a voice to bring the emotional aspects of climate change into focus.

We wish to thank all of the contributors who wrote to us with their 'Stories of Climate Change' throughout the County and also to Youghal's "Cumann na Daoine's Spring Chickens Older Adults Club" and "Youghal Active Retirement Association" who held outdoor workshops.

We hope that it will make the reader think and start making the changes that we all need to make to protect our future.



Severe flooding at County Hall, Cork



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