# STORIES FROM THE WATERSIDE

*A unique collection of short stories celebrating Ireland's waterbodies*


Local Authority Waters Programme

The Local Authority Waters programme is a shared service of all Local Authorities in the country, working with local communities, relevant stakeholders and state agencies to develop and implement River Basin Management Plans in Ireland, in line with the EU Water Framework Directive.

The Stories from the Waterside was a fantastic opportunity for us to engage with people during the Covid 19 lockdown in 2020. The huge public response to the competition and the wide range of themes illustrate just how important water is, not just as a utility, but also how it connects with us at a much deeper level.

We would encourage all with an interest in water to get actively involved. Volunteering is a great way to do this. Engaging in public consultations such as the River Basin Management planning is important too, as it informs decision making at the local and national level.

For more information on getting involved check out
www.watersandcommunities.ie

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# FOREWORD

This selection of short pieces from the *'Stories from the Waterside'* competition vividly reveals that our relationship to our local rivers, lakes, ponds, shorelines and canals are rich, intense and diverse.

For many writers, memories of a waterbody conjure up stories of lost and dreamy childhood freedoms, when time stretches and where anxieties fall away, freedoms that too few children enjoy today.

Fishing is a recurrent theme, sometimes expressing ecology's key insight, that the abundance of any one species depends on the health of its whole interlinked habitat.

Other writers remind us of the social and economic importance of water, that clean water comes from community stewardship of complex ecosystems, not from taps.

For many, spending time near water and the places it lies and runs has healing, liberating powers, sometimes experienced through fascination with plant and animal species, sometimes in a more holistic way.

Welcome to these stories from the waterside!

Paddy Woodworth

**Journalist, and Author of Our Once and Future Planet: "Restoring the World in the Climate Change Century" (Chicago 2015). www.paddywoodworth.com**

# FEATURED STORIES

# FEATURED STORIES

# AN ODE TO BORO

*BY ANITA FOLEY*

The tiny stream beside our house was a favourite place to play. The bridge was a source of politics for our neighbours who claimed that either side of the small bridge was of equal importance. The question; “Are you on the Knoxtown side or the Killegney side?” became a well know statement and point of mocking among locals. We straddled the two, standing with one foot on the bridge and the other on a young ash tree.

We would hide under the old bridge, scuffing knees on the damp stones, slick with mud, when the stream dried up in the summer and the pheasants called. Catching a friend when they fell into the cold and dark waters one winter. Shivering and soggy as he went under and was pulled out as quick.

Hideouts and cry corners, secrets told and adventures unfolded by that old bridge, where primroses grew in abundance, their sweet scent awakening the spring. That tiny stream gurgled and meandered its way through Clonroche and Killegney. Surging quickly and making its way to the river Boro.

Between Killengney, Clonroche and Rathnure flows the river Boro. It rises at the foot of the majestic Blackstairs Mountains and emerges into the well-known Slaney.

The stone bridge in Killegney beside our small, two room primary school, was quintessentially picturesque. A postcard of the Irish countryside.

Cows grazing in the fields nearby, bluebells and pussy willows growing wildly. Dainty sap green fronds of Sally willows dipping elegantly into the river. Quenching their thirst. A recalling of my sister falling unceremoniously into a bed of nettles, soft and stinging.

The wailing and the reminding for years to come.

Just beyond this, a hidden walkway through woods, by the bridge behind an ancient rusty gate. We would follow the river along the way, cresting the hilly banks and collecting armfuls of bluebells, while blackbirds thrilled above.

Upstream from Castleboro we used to fish for brown trout and sea trout with our

father. I never remember catching any, but the nostalgia of walking through the forest to arrive at the fishing spot is still clear today.

Scurrying under canopies of oak, pine and birch trees, crunching of leaves underfoot, snapping of twigs. The babbling of the brook and the excitement rising. Watching and helping, but probably more hindering. Not having the patience to fish, instead following the dragonflies with their gossamer wings and the dancing midges. Transfixed at the boatmen skimming the water. Baffled at how they barely broke the surface.

Light dappling through young beech trees, auburn and copper leaves falling silently on the inky black surface of the river Boro, in autumn. The vivid memory of seeing a Kingfisher, the first and only time, a brief snap of turquoise and amber. Then disappearing in a flash, but the brash colours lingering in the mind forever.

By Rathnure, through the woods where cowslips and wild garlic grow beside mossy stones. A wonderful recollection of catching tadpoles in jars by an old fallen tree, with our mother. The glistening stream shallow and lined with water cress. Bright yellow flag irises emerging by the banks. Bees humming and painted lady butterflies chasing through the air.

Feeling the fern fronds, soft and tickly, as they unfurled. The see-through waters running quick and clear. Stones and pebbles visible beneath as frogspawn bobbed on the surface. Millions of tiny eyeballs staring up.

The squeals as we touched the wobbly jelly with furtive fingers.

Hopping home with jars and hearts full.

# WOODSTOWN - TRÁ MHILIS SUMMER 1958

*BY NOELEEN FOLEY*

The sea and sky merge seamlessly on the horizon. We stop on the brow of Mattie's Hill and gaze at the sea at Woodstown, glistening and shimmering in the distance. It never fails to thrill and excite us.

"The tide is out." Our war cry goes up.

We cycle, freewheeling down the hill, shrieking with excitement. As we arrive we breathe the sharp smell of the sea. A hazy mist is getting ready to lift, to disappear - our playground ready.

Broad beams of sunlight glint on the roofs and windows of Duncannon. Across massive mudflats, Dollar Bay can be seen in the distance; the stretching, silky sand, muddy, sticky, black as ink. We sink as we walk toward the skyline, squelching mud

mashing between our toes, a soothing and familiar sensation. As seasoned pickers we know what to look for, tell-tale ribbons of mud, small, rising sandy mounds, a sure sign of the harvest beneath. We start to dig, digging, digging and then that glorious sound, metal hitting shell. I dig gently, teasing, sifting, and there they are, my white shelled beauties. Rinsing it in a shallow pool, I open the first one, knuckling one shell into the other, twisting until it clicks, it opens, a yellow snap-dragon face. I suck. Briny water runs down my chin, silky flesh slips silently down my throat.

The race is on. Who will pick the most? Nature is generous, and soon our buckets fill to overflowing. The sun warms our backs as we kneel and dig. Later we are careful to watch and listen for the approaching, incoming tide. Hearing it, now rushing, rhythmic, and gathering pace, it is time to stop. We gather seaweed and cover our crop. We splash and paddle in the warm eddying tide.

Hungry - picnic time - we run into the sand-dunes. Hunkering into soft sandy burrows we are sheltered by clumps of bracken and tufts of marram grass. We feast on thickly buttered Harney's or Walshe's blaas filled with 'red-lead' - stringy strips of home- cooked corned beef, home-grown tomatoes and scallions. Leahy's doughnuts next, sugar- covered and greasy, they leave a sticky rim around our lips which we wash away with slugs of Big Brother Red Lemonade.

A flat sandy lane leads down to the cottage of Anastasia Barry, the cockle woman. Cockle shells everywhere, strewn on pathways, pressed onto flowerpots overflowing with vibrant Geraniums. Cockle shelled archways rise over streams of garden flowers. Fragrant are the Hollyhocks, Sweet William, Cowslips, Wall-flowers, and Nicotiana mixing with sea air. A Lourdes grotto has been created from shells - some painted blue; Mary elevated, Bernadette at her feet, cemented into a cockle shell carpet.

Anastasia weighs up our harvest. She pays us a shilling per bucket. Not much for our crop, but enough for a fish and chip in Delicato's, on the way home. She will set up her cockle stall early on Friday morning outside Dr. White's chemist shop. She displays the cooked cockles in an enamel basin, covered with a snow-white muslin cloth. Her sales measure is an old tin tankard, battered to hold less.

We pass along the Woodstown Bog Road, as we cycle home. A grey heron rises, flapping. Reed-warblers sing in the rushes. As we near the city, the blue overhead fades and the sky fills with pink crushed clouds, like raspberry ripple ice-cream, a sure sign that tomorrow will be another perfect day. We'll return again, Woodstown, Tra Mhilis, our generous, unique, and wonderful friend.

# AGALLAMH LE BRADÁN ÓG

*BY JOHN LALOR*

Scéalaí: Cad is ainm duit?

Bradán: Airgead is aimn dom.

Scéalaí: Sin ainm ait!

Bradán: Tá dath airgead nó geal ar mo chraiceann.

Scéalaí: Cad as tú?

Bradán: Sin scéal fada. Inseoidh mé an scéal duit anoin:

I mí Deireadh Fómhair I 2018 bhí tuile san tSiúir. Bhí m'athair agus mo mháthair sa fharraige timpeall chósta Port Láirge. Shnámh said suas an abhainn már tá sé níos furiste taisteal nuair a bhíonn an uisce domhain. Bhí an seasúir iascaireachta críochnaithe agus bhí na hiascairí sa bhaile. Thaistil mo thuismitheoirí suas go dtí Gleann Eartharlach faoi scáth sléibhte Galtees i chontae Thiobráid Árann.

Timpeall na Nollag rinne mo mháthair poll sna chlocha congarach le Droichead an

Cheapach. Leag sí na mílte uibheacha oráiste sa pholl agus ansin chuir m'athair milt orthu. Chlúdaigh sí na huibheacha beaga ansin leana eireaball. Fuair m'athair bás seachtain ina dhiaidh sin. Níor ith sé aon rud ón lá a d'fhág sé an Atlantach agus bhí sé lag agus tuirseach. D'fhill mo mháthair ar ais chuig an fharraige chun scadáin agus séacha (shrimps) a ithe. Níl fhios agam cá bhfuil sí anois. Tá boladh spéisialta san Eartharlach. Tháinig mo thuismitheoirí go dtí an áit a rugadh iad féin mar d'aithnigh said an boladh álainn.

D'ith na bric donn cuid des na huibheacha. Ní raibh morán bia ann agus bhí ocras orthu. Fadó shnámh eascainn tríd na clocha agus d'ith said na huibheacha freisin. Níl morán eascainn ann anois. I mí Márta 2019 tháinig mé féin, mo dheartháireaha agus mo dheirfiúracha as na huibheacha mar bhí an uisce níos teo le teacht an Earraigh. Alevin a thugann eolaí mar ainm orm anois. Bhí mála beag faoi mo cheann darbh ainm sac buíocan (yolk sack). Bhí sé lán le bia blasta. Bhí sé deacair na eite a aithint. Dé gnath faigheann 99% des na huibheacha bás-bhí an tádh liom!

Tar eis cúpla seachtaine tháinig cruth éisc orm. Gilidín (fry) an t-ainim a bhí orm ansin. Bhí ocht eite orm. Ní raibh aon truailliú ann agud bhí mé in ann snámh san sruth a bhí tapaidh agus lán le o2. D'ith mé feithidí beaga gach lá a bhí ag gluiaseacht ar bun na habhann agus cuileoga a bhí ag tuirlingt ar bharr an uisce.

Tháinig athrú orm san Fhómhar i 2019. Parr ab ainm dom ansin. Bhí spotaí arm o chraiceann agus sort barraí liath ar gach taobh dom. Bhí mé cosúil le breac donn óg. Ach bíonn níos mó spotaí ar sprochaille bhric. Bíonn dath dubh ar spotaí bradáin ach bíonn spotaí dearg ar an mbreac. Ochón! Ochón! Fuair chuid de mo chlann bás-go bhFóire Dia orthu. Lá amháin bhí ráth i bpoll domhain san abhainn. Chonaic mé scáth mór dubh ós mo chionn. Cailleach dubh (cormorant) a bhí ann. Bhí stoirm san fharraige agus de réir sin d'eitil sé intíre. Chuaigh mé i bhfolach faoi planda. Bhí gob uafásach ag an gCailleach dubh. Bheir sé ar chuid de mo chlann agus d'ith sé iad.

Scéalaí: Tá brón orm! Cad a tharla ansin?

Bradán: Tá me dhá bliain d'aois anois. Smolt is ea an teideal a tugtar dom. Tá arthrú ag teach ar mo chorp, tá dath airgead geal orm. Caithfidh mé dul go dtí an taigeáin. Rachaidh mé síos an Eatharlach le mo chaired go dtí an tSiúir. Feicfidh mé Caisleán na Cathrach agus na déagóirí ins na canú i gCluian Meala. Tiocfaidh mé go dtí an inbhear i gCarrig na Siúire. Taistileoidh mé thar Dún Mór go dtí an tAigéan Atlantach agus le Cúnamh Dé tiocfaidh mé ar ais go áit mo bhreithe i gceann ceithre bliana!

# CUIMHNÍ ÓIGE: UISCE AGUS INBHEAR

*BY MÁIRE NÍ LAOIRE*

Bogaimis siar chuig na seascaidí i gCorcaigh. Bhíomar inár gcónaí i mBaile an Locha – ach loch ní raibh ann! Bhí taithí againn ar dhul go dtí an "Lough", ceart go leor, ach bhí sin i mBaile Féitheán, thart ar dhá mhíle go leith ó Bhaile an Locha de shiúl na gcos. Is cuimhin liom dul go dtí an "Lough" uair amháin maidin lá 'le Stiofán agus é fuar go maith. Bhí bronntanas Nollag, slat iascaireachta de dhath an uachtair, plaistic de chineál éigin, ag mo bheirt dearthár mór. Arán brúite timpeall an duáin a bhí mar bhaoite againn. Ba bhreá liom a rá gur rugamar ar liús nó péirse ach níor lúb barr na slaite oiread agus uair amháin an mhaidin bhinbeach sin.

Sea, bhí sé i bhfad níos taitnimhí dul ag iascaireacht go dtí na Garraí Brící a bhí níos gaire dúinn, thart ar leathmhíle ón teach. Bhí sé ar nós oilithreachta againn maidin Domhnaigh i rith an tsamhraidh agus muid óg – Pop (m'athair), mo dheartháracha agus mé féin a bhí i gceist. F'fhan Mam sa bhaile ag ullmhú rósta an Domhnaigh. Bhí slat iascaireachta cheart, spáid agus mála iascaireachta ag Pop agus bhí maide, téad, líontán agus próca agam féin agus ag an mbeirt eile.

Tar éis Bóthar na Sceiche Airde a fhágáil bhí orainn léimt thar chlaí, ansin crágáil síos le fána trí pháirc mhíchothrom i dtreo an inbhir, ag seachaint poll agus bualtraí. Bhí buataisí ruibéir orainn. Bhí siad riachtanach mar de réir mar a bhíomar ag gluaiseacht le fána ag déanamh ar an inbhear bhí an talamh ag éirí níos boige agus an lathach ag éirí níos tiuibhe. Thaitin siosarnach fuaim an diúil liom agus na buataisí á dtarrach as an lathach. Bhí boladh bréan ón lathach agus tógadh an boladh míchumhra sin ar ais go dtí an teach nuair a stealladh na héadaí le lathach. Ba chuma linn ach ní raibh Mam sásta. Ar aon nós shroiseamar an log, áit a raibh uisce de ghnáth. Dhreapamar seanfhalla míchothrom agus b'shin ár gceann scríbe. Bhí an t-inbhear ar an taobh eile den fhalla agus bhí titim mhór ar an taobh sin, go háirithe nuair a bhí an taoide tráite.

Toisc go raibh Pop ag caitheamh buataisí ceathrún eisean a chuaigh ag tochailt lugaigh fad a bhíomar triúr ag falróid thart. Bhí iarsma de mhonarcha na mbrící le feiceáil anseo is ansiúd – corr-bhríce buí ag gobadh amach as an lathach nó as an ithir. Níl aon chuimhne agam ar bhríce dearg a fheiceáil. Caithfidh gur anseo a bhí déantús na mbrící a úsáideadh chun ardán tithe a thógáil ag Crosaire na Gráinsí

d' oibrithe muilte olann na Dúglaise. Tá daoine fós ina gcónaí san ardán sin agus tá cuma chluthar ar na tithe. Tá an bríce dearg ar na ballaí agus an bríce buí mar shonra. Tógadh tithe ar an talamh ard a bhí sna Garraí Brící féin. Tugtar aitheantas do stair na háite le hainmneacha ar nós "Brickfields" agus "Brickfield Downs" ar na forbairtí nua seo a fhéachann síos ar an inbhear.

Gar don uisce bhí leaba luachra, rabhán agus locháin bheaga ina raibh mionéisc, ribe róibéis agus portáin bheaga. Faoin am a chríochnaíomar an taiscéalaíocht bhí na lugaigh bailithe ag Pop. Thosaigh an iascaireacht ansin. Doingean a bhí á lorg againn ach is mó lannach a bhí san uisce, áfach. Is cuimhin liom an doingean ag giosáil sa bhfriochtán. Níor bhlaiseas riamh ó shin iasc chomh blasta briosc leis.

Tá "Lough" an lae inniu soaitheanta fós ach is sa chuimhne amháin a mhaireann na Garraí Brící.

# THE GRASS IS ALWAYS GREENER

*BY SIOBHAN HEALY*

The grass is always greener on Instagram #wildatlanticway. Scenes of brilliant green fields with cliffs, beaches and meandering coastline, sun breaking through cumulus clouds. A mythical fairy land, beautiful, stunning, spectacular. The images on my phone inspire me to get in the car and drive for an hour and a half until I reach the ring of Kerry, appreciating the quiet roads in winter. I don't know where I'm going exactly. I'm looking for an experience of something that matches the Instagram images.

I'm following the road and I'm not sure where I am. The sea appears in front of me. I pull into a viewing area and get out of the car. My legs are stiff and its drizzling. I can't see far, the colours are muted, grey green grass, steel grey sea. It is nothing like the tiny images that propelled me out here.

As I stand in the drizzle, I am overwhelmed by the size of the sea. I can't see the big view of it, but I can feel the huge body of water and its continuous movement. The sea mist is on my skin and clothes. That sea smell both fresh and putrid fills my nostrils. The salt taste is on my tongue and the sound of the stones being dragged backwards and forwards tirelessly, drowns out all other sounds. My edges blur and my heart opens out towards the hidden horizon. For maybe a minute or two, I am completely absorbed. The wildness in my soul exults in the elemental vastness and dangerous beauty of the sea.

No photo will capture this. No words will do it justice. This is not for Instagram. This is being alive, naked and free.

I can only touch this state. I cannot stay in it long. I am wet and cold, and I am drawn back to the comfort and shelter of the car. It is painful to leave that experience of the sea behind me, which was so much more than I expected. I turn the radio on, the conversation is comforting. I am back in the human realm. I will stop and get a coffee and a sandwich in the next town. And yet I am not unchanged, my hair is wilder, my eyes too.

# LOVELY LOUGH CARRA

*BY MICHAEL KINGDON*

The first time we met she was winter-cold and grey. A chill wind furrowed her face. Her bones showed through broken skin and blunt teeth appeared amid a lather of foam. Even the sky was weeping, as if mourning her aged state. I passed by.

Spring brought me back on another dark day with low cloud driven inland from the open Atlantic. It poured over far-off hills, a river of cloud leaving inches of rain in its wake. At midday the sky went apart to reveal impossible blue and admit widening beams from above. The light fell on sodden gorse and set aflame a blaze of glorious colour and when we walked among it we found the orange cream of cowslip and sulphured primrose; we found the edge of the stream lined with kingcup gold and on the fen a dazzling, crowding horde of miniature suns craning to drink full measure, a new constellation of dandelion, daisy, water avens and more.

Afraid to miss a moment we hurried to the lake and stood amid shards of broken blue, as if the sky had shattered and fallen to decorate the wild ground. Spring gentians, here, in Mayo! And there again was Carra, boisterous and blue, her white-topped waves leaping at the flowered shore, each one holding shades of every colour seen.

'You thought you knew me did you?' She splashed and sang. 'Come! Come! There's more within!'

We spent the year at her side, or what of it we could, and came to know her moods. She looked best with the wind from the south and especially so through the long days of midsummer, when islands and islets became orchid droves and the eager breeze a balm of cinnamon and clove.

Wild rose and woodbine clambered about those wooded isles. As we sat in the dappling shade of Scots pine and ash, whitethorn and whitebeam, blackthorn and buckthorn, and saw drifts of Painted lady scouring low bramble for ripened fruit or watched feisty Speckled wood vie for the sunniest seat in the glade, or had Holly blue skip past on her way to nowhere, or studied the Grayling as she angled her wings to the sun we became as children, utterly absorbed in Carra's green tresses and the treasures wrapped within.

There came one day the water sparkled uncommonly blue, beckoning us offshore of Annies where we were greeted by a hovering carpet composed of incalculable thousands of damselflies. Great trout leaped and splashed to snatch them from the air in such numbers that we thought every fish in the lake must have converged on one small, emerald bay.

Entranced and enthralled by our surroundings we found books and read to learn of the hardworking herdsmen and shepherds who farmed the land which feeds Carra's streams, of the quarryman and the woodsman who dwelt in the cottage on furrow or rise, of de Staundun and Moore, Lynch-Blosse, the Blakes and the Brownes, historical figures who fell for the allure of this most lovely of all lowland loughs.

Who, before I, had found and marveled at the endless array of wonders spilled from Carra's skirts? Who had dipped between the softly rounded mounds of Twin Islands, scaled the walls of a Medieval castle, caught a silver Carra trout, found otters, the nest of a rail, eaten on Pleasure Island and slept on another in one glorious day? Who had rowed home over that silvered mirror of night-lough, with moon and stars above and below, lighting and leading the way? Who's dreams has Carra filled, as mine?

# CURRABINNY

*BY RAY O'FOGHLU*

At the back of the house where I grew up there was a wet ditch, draining some good agricultural land.

As I child I would go there most days with my net and bucket. Down through the shoulder high wheat, the dog ahead of me, jumping occasionally to find his bearings. I can still feel the rough awn of the grain on my skin.

Beneath the overhanging gorse and amongst the rushes I'd sweep my net through shallow pools. Tadpoles and water insects were common, fish were rarer but the occasional stickleback caused excitement and would be seconded home to live out its days in my garden pond.

There was always something to be seen. Waterboatmen, newts, caddisfly cases, flag iris and the bulrush.

I didn't know the names for them back then but I knew what they were and I certainly knew where to find them.

One autumn the local forester asked the children in the area to help him plant some trees on the margins of these wetlands. He mentioned the trees we were planting love the damp ground and disperse their seeds by wind. We spent the whole evening planting trees. Returning home at dusk he pointed out the bats foraging the treelines overhead.

Beyond the pools I fished there is a beach. Well, a beach of sorts, a stony strand, part of a matrix of coves and estuaries which make up Cork Harbour.

On the low tide here mudlflats stretch all the way to Haulbowline.

Stepping on to the shell rich shingle, the crunch underfoot would lift the gulls, curlew and oyster catchers from their feeding positions. Even now call of the curlews call transports me back to this exact spot, in the misty early morning, the haunting shriek reverberating across the flats and echoing off the harbour walls.

At the edge of the flats were rocky reefs. Here I knew the best stones to find shrimp,

crab and blennie under. I knew the mud where the razorclams lay, the sand to find ragworm in and the slightly different texture where the lugworm hide.

I remember August evenings in this cove, watching the mackerel, now deep in the harbour, erupt in feeding frenzies just off the shore.

The mackerel are breaking!  The mackerel are breaking!
Diving terns hammered the water surface, emerging with streaks of silver. In the aftermath dead or damaged sprats would be thrown onto the shore by ankle high waves.

This event was always thrilling to me and felt like the climax of the summer.

In time, I grew up and moved away from Currabinny.
Later, as a young adult and student of environmental science I was given new perspectives on these formative experiences. The green slime that would foul my net each summer now made sense and I learned how it and other pressures on our waterbodies threaten to destabilise the intricate webs of life upon which we all depend.

I still return to Currabinny often.

The wheat and sugar beat in the field have yielded to dairy. The wet ditch remains as it was as does the shingle strand, although neigbours say they don't see the mackerel anymore.
I see this place now through adult eyes.  A scarcely acknowledged wasteground.

A coincidence of geography, wind and tide.

A habitat, sustaining itself against the odds.
The trees we planted that day were alder and are thirty feet tall now. As promised, they have crept west and form a humble corridor between Currabinny Woods and Lough Beg. Tall grass grows in their dappled shade.

Last year I sat at their feet for hours observing sand martins feasting on insects overhead

# THE DRAKE

*BY PATRICIA MURPHY*

There were wild ducks on the river then, presided over by a magnificent drake. The Black Dinin River snakes down through our village tumbling over the rock face into deep pools locally known as the Sheep hole, the Horse hole and Harry's pocket. Harry's pocket was our favourite haunt. Two large rock boulders divided the river there, making shallow pools; the absence of overhanging branches allowed the sun's rays to warm rocks and water. Each boulder served as a picnic table, a place to laze and dry off after a swim and trail your fingers in the shallows and dream.

Shoals of pinkeens gathered at the water's edge, and we whiled away our time trapping them in two-pound jam jars, counting each catch before returning them to the pond. The riverbed held a treasure trove of small smooth stones eminently suited to rock skimming, a craft we both excelled in. A pair of otters had also set up home there.

That summer, my sister and I first spied the drake. His head was dark green with double crested feathers at the back. His breast feathers were speckled brown-red with dark grey tips to his wings; the female less endowed with showy plumage. He would sit on the warm river sand at the far bank preening his glistening feathers, sleeping on rare occasions with his head tucked under one wing. He seemed to know what a fine specimen he was, and, when he had an audience for his fine aquatic displays. Sometimes he would turn his head to one side and watch us, only to take sudden flight at our slightest movement.

We planned to capture him, and to keep him captive in the empty rabbit hutch.

Early attempts failed miserably. We consoled ourselves the reason the drake outwitted us was his ability to fly. Tall reeds and wild rhubarb abounded along the riverbanks and the crafty drake often hid himself in their cool shade. While we conducted futile searches up and down the shallower pools he would quite unexpectedly skim the water not two feet away flying just above the water's surface, put on the brakes and land just out of our reach, leaving water rippling in our hands.

Further recesses and darker corners of the river we had thus far avoided, half fearing the otters. We tucked our summer cotton dresses into our knickers, holding hands cautiously edging our way; still he eluded us.

One day I spied him head down in the river mud. Scarcely breathing I clasped my two hands over his wings. "Can you fly now?" I asked him. He struggled, but all to no avail.

We spancelled him, tying a roll of bandage to one leg, and securing the other end to the inside of the rabbit hutch. Magnanimously, we left the hutch door ajar- our concept of freedom.

In a nocturnal farmyard dispute, our drake had one eye picked out- probably by a turkey cock.  Dad ordered us to carry him back to the exact spot where we had found him. He turned his head just once. The sightless eye though healed, had marred his natural beauty. A single quack on his part once the signal for his family to join him brought no response. He flapped about in the pond, a sad and desolate figure. Tears pricked my eyes.

A salutary lesson in life was learned; childhood innocence was lost. Dad's comment "the otters will surely get him now" rang in my ears. We walked home in silence.

# THANK YOU, KINGFISHER

*BY LUCY HOOD*

The gurgling rush of water rustles the air, my heart beats quickly; a river, flowing, bubbling, pours below the shade of whispering trees.

I looked over my shoulder, seeing the other children clanging sticks, shouting war cries, running around proclaiming what side they were on. I'd had enough of stick battles now and was drained of energy; perhaps I would compete again soon, but now, I was only interested in how the loud burble of the chatting grown-ups could not drown out the gushing of the water.

I rushed down the bank, my crocs squeaking in the dew, finding a soft cushion of grass, I knelt down, resting my weary hands on my knees.

What a fascinating place this was, at first I had thought the long field where we were camping was amazing, it was smothered in tents, containing people I knew and people I didn't, friends to run around with and new children to play with. Normally isolated from other children in my countryside home, it was thrilling to spend days racing with my friends, making afternoons stretch out with excitement and imagination games. I grinned, looking at the tumbling water, and now, a river as well, what fun!

I leaned my head over the bank, staring deeply through the ripples.

A world of stones and swirling weed, meets me. Squirmy things wriggling and wiggling though pebbles, fish, and some other creature, slimy and slippery snuffling itself deep into mud. Warblers, and tits, flit over the river, whizzing their golf ball sized bodies into trees. I sit back, fiddling with a stem of grass, the trills of birdsong tickling my ear, the fresh scent of water brushing my nostrils.

A flash of blue cuts the air.

I stir my head, my eyes wide as the vision grows clearer, a bird zipping over the river, racing with the wind, claps the air with a flourish of shimmering wings, set alight with sunlight dancing on them, glinting the deep rich blue.

My mind spins, as the bird glides through the air, getting lower and slower until with

a rustle of wings, he flutters onto a post.

I hold my breath, he's so close I could reach out and touch him.

My eyes drink in his feathers, they were more than blue; turquoise and greens shimmer with thousands of water droplets sprinkling his back, glowing like jewels in the sun, multitudes of colour swirling every time he ruffled his wings. He chirped and turned around, revealing a chest of flaming orange, blazing up to his neck and throat, a long beak peering between two glittering black eyes.

I gasped, my heart leaping, a Kingfisher!

He studied me, cocking his head, taking in my eager face with a sharp eye, watching.

I look back at him, excitement tingling through my body.

A real Kingfisher! Not a picture frozen in a book but a breathing, warm one.

The Kingfisher patters around the post, his shoulders hunched, dipping his beak over the rough surface; our eyes meet again, he puffs up his chest, slowly plumping his feathers over the wood. He gazes contently at me, letting out a trilling cheep.

The sound is short but caresses my ear, it's water trickling over stones, bubbling foam gushing; my lips smile, it's the song of a bird of the water, my eyes glow, "Thank you, Kingfisher".

The Kingfisher inclines his head, raising his iridescent wings, a gust of wind lifts them, and he wheels, flapping to the canopy of a lush, swaying tree.

# THE BLUE

*BY ODHRAN LAFFERTY*

Today my friends went to the disco. Today I was left wondering what happened to my invitation. Today I realised that they are not my friends. So, instead, today I went to the beach. I've always been unlucky when it comes to friends, many times resorting to my own company. I have many speeches about love and loneliness, as I've had much time to think about it. These speeches stay with me… for I have nobody to give them to. Sharing is hard, when you have nobody to care for… However, there's always been one friend there for me, no matter what. One friend who is more blue and graceful than any other: The Ocean, The Foyle, but my favourite of all the names which it were called, The Blue…

The Blue was like a deep, beautiful woman. Many times on the beach, I'd imagine her walk elegantly out of the shallows and sit beside me on the rocks. We'd both stare into the distance talking about anything. She was understanding and gentle, and she'd speak with an experienced tone, like what she said, she knew was true. I never doubted her once. Both of us, in blue, silk robes and wings, we'd sit on rocks with our feet in the shallows. Both basking under the springtime Sun, a bendy straw in something tropical, we'd wistfully discuss the little things in life.

"Little things" she'd say, "are the things that mean the most." And she'd point out how she knew I was blue every time I came to visit. She'd always cheer me up though.

The distance was just as green as the grass and trees around us. Her hair was long and a glassy teal, like the lough on a cloudy day. As much as we'd laugh about the pure trivia of life, we'd often comfort each other while in a sad mood. We both missed something we knew didn't exist, we missed what we didn't have yet. She was the only person who would tell me,

"The key to happiness, is to stop wanting." Yet, we wanted to stop wanting. Both of us knew that it wasn't as easy as it sounds.

People are too often sad that they are not in love, or near it. Romance was something neither me nor The Blue considered ourselves capable of, but we both knew, platonic love is equally as valuable as romance, equally as fulfilling and euphoric. It was that love which we shared. Every time I was sad, or distressed, I'd run. Shoes

on, or off, I'd run to the beach and call out for her. She never failed me. One thing we'd find in each other was momentary bliss. We promised not to forget a single word each other said.

One day, The Blue tried to explain to me she had to leave. I couldn't understand, but I did not stand in her way. The Blue was gone, and without her warmth, was the iciest winter I'd ever known. With troubles in life, with wounds, I thought I couldn't make it without her. There I was on the pier, ready to end it all. I was about to let myself fall in, until I remembered what she said before she left,

"In times of cold, be The Fire that thaws the ice…" And then it made sense.

This summer I sit on the beach, with a tropical drink in hand, I'm The Fire, The Red… Although she's far off now talking to someone else who needs her, I raise a glass or two, to you… The Blue.

# RESPITE

*BY TRACY HOOD*

The stress had built up in me to the point where I felt I was going to explode. I could no longer cope. Grief, sorrow, anger, self-pity all swirled around my confused, tired brain. Mum was so ill, I knew she was dying, it could be days, it could be weeks, it might even be months, but one thing was for sure, her care and comfort was my responsibility, a responsibility so huge that it weighed me down to the point where all rational thought had disappeared.

I ran, I didn't know where to go; I couldn't go out, mum needed me nearby, where could I go? I stopped by our little pond, fed by drains running onto our land from Cullenagh Mountain. Here I slumped onto the grass and cried, great heaving sobs releasing weeks of pent up emotion surged out of me until they slowed to silence, and then I just sat. And sat. And sat. Quiet, still, depressed. I had lost the ability to move.

A flash of movement caught my eye and a fluttering, spotted ribbon shot out from the weed, broke the surface for an instant, caught a bubble and disappeared again almost before I had registered the vision. I waited for it to reappear so I could get a better look. Was it a newt I thought with excitement? More likely a developing tadpole, but that frilly membrane was so big, I had never seen anything like it before. I lingered, never stirring, squinting through the surface tension in anticipation, until I realised it was time I went back to the house. Mum might need me, and I was able to move again.

# TO THE MARSH

*BY ANTHEA LACCHIA*

I smile as I make my way towards the marsh, binoculars dangling from my neck. A logbook and pencil are nestled in my pocket. Under my arm, I'm carrying a rather heavy book about Irish birds. You never know when you might need it!

I have grown accustomed to this walk-through suburban landscapes: the tarmac's twists and turns, the local corner shop, and, roughly twenty minutes in, the first glimpse of the sea, its glistening waves always propelling me to my final destination. What secrets will the marsh reveal today? Quiet curiosity fills my lungs.

As I walk my mood becomes more meditative. My thoughts drift back to a time when Dublin was a lonely place for me: the quiet apartment, weekends stretching out endlessly; the weekly trip to Tesco; the heartbreak of failed relationships echoing through the grey pavements.

On a Saturday in September I dragged myself to a meeting of a local wildlife group. The smiles and introductions raised my spirits. Friendly faces invited me to peer through large telescopes. Curlew, whimbrel and sandpiper. Suddenly, a whole new world came into vision. From that moment on, nature had hooked me in. I began to learn about wetlands and their unique ecology. Species by species, I started to recognise the birds of my local marsh, one at a time, slowly. The marsh has a way of drawing you in.

The sea breeze brings a rush of colour to my face as I turn the corner and finally reach the edge of the marsh. Pools of brilliant blue water sit inside dark muddy banks partly covered by bright green algae. In the distance, Howth's rugged headland stretches out above the glistening waves of Dublin Bay. The DART passing by is periodically reflected in the brackish waters, where salt and freshwaters meet. The marsh whispers its secrets to those who will listen.

Grey Herons and Little Egrets are the custodians in this place, where passing seasons give way to different residents. Brent Geese and teal are common winter visitors, while warmer months draw in dunlin, knot and black-tailed godwits. The marsh holds a particular appeal for wading birds, who, unfettered by the nearby traffic, choose to shelter here to escape the high tides of Dublin Bay.

I scan the waters for bird life. Immediately, redshank and greenshank come into view. I reach for my binoculars. Moorhen, shelduck and curlew. I make a note in my logbook. Every species I record confirms it: the excitement is still there. I start to look for snipe camouflaged among the reeds. None today. That's okay. The marsh does not reveal everything at once. Its mystery is what keeps you coming back for more.

Two hooded crows are hopping up and down ahead of me, clumsy in their dance routine. A pied wagtail greets me from a nearby branch, before disappearing inside a maze of reeds. I follow the path along the northern edge of the marsh. Muds are decorated by trails of creatures I have yet to see. Razor shells are strewn across beach deposits, the remnants of someone's dinner. A chaffinch sings its repetitive tune from deep inside a patch of brambles.

Over the years, I've come to realise that there are a handful of places where I will never feel alone. One of these places is Booterstown Marsh.

# FORDING THE RIVER LEE

*BY KARA PALKKI SMEMOE*

Sunday morning, I went to deliver a magazine to my friend who wanted it. Eight am and the sun was already three fingers above the trees. Quiet, well, quiet from human noise. The birds were fully awake.

After slipping it through her mail-slot I turned towards the river and enjoyed the crunch of gravel under my boots and greeting early morning runners.

I was looking for the trail to the pebble beach where we first launched our paddle board. It was too shallow there for the paddle board and ever since then I had been wondering if the river could be forded.

On the opposite bank is a slip where one could clamber out.

The Hill was calling me.

I needed to go up.

The river, what could be the worst thing to happen?

If I fell in, I could walk home wet.

If I could cross, I could climb the hill sooner than if I walked past home and down across the bridge.

If I walked towards home, the magnetism of duty would overcome the pull to climb the hill and I would regret it.

I took off my boots and socks and put them in the bag on my back and hitched my dress to my knees.

A Golden Doodle, drunk with freedom, bounded onto the pebble beach just as I was taking my first step in. It nearly barked, but then realised we were about the same business and grinned at me before crashing away through the bushes.

One step at a time.

The slime on the pebbles.

The softness of the fibres of plants.

Each step shifting underfoot before stabilising.

Coolness, hardness.

Next step.

Safe

Next step

Fine Over

Over and over

Then the current and depth increased, and I breathed my heartbeat to calmness and pulled up my dress and under things to mid-thigh.

One step

Swoosh

Gurgle

Next step

Fine

I nearly fell laughing four feet from the opposite bank and slowed myself to cautiousness until I stepped out of the water. Then I put down my shoes and sat on the bag to rinse my feet and put on my socks and shoes and smiled at my own adventure.

Skirting the field towards the hill I felt like a maiden again. I realized that I have been myself all along. I am the same person inside, but some pleasures you have with others and some pleasures you have alone. I am glad that Motherhood and being a wife hasn't erased that part of me.

# BAGGING TROUT

*BY KATE CARTY*

My childhood summers were spent running wild with brothers and cousins and neighbours in rural Mayo. My neighbour took us fishing. He was a farmer, a small wiry man who played cards, cycled everywhere on a large black bike and smoked roll ups he made with tobacco, stored in a small tin which he retrieved from the depths of his right pocket.

This fishing was not the demure sport of chance with a rod and line. We carried a very large net down to the neighbour's house under cover of darkness. There were five or six of us from Grandma's and a few more locals. We looked like the twelve disciples as we followed him and his lamp— if there was no moon— across the meadows laden with buckets and sticks and fizzing with excitement.

I remember the stillness of the fields in the darkness, the steamy breath of the cattle and the scurrying of mice or mink as we climbed over ditches; someone's hand pulling me up out of the drain. The scent of honeysuckle all around.

Then suddenly we would land at the waterside. My neighbour had fished the Mullaghanoe since he was a boy, it had yielded salmon and trout when there was little else for him to eat. I was always fretting that we would be caught by the local water bailiff and locked up. My neighbour would laugh at us when we threw ourselves down under a hedge to hide when we heard a strange noise nearby: "Don't be worrying yourselves one biteen, I know the whereabouts of that bailiff fellow, he won't be troubling us tonight."

My neighbour supervised operations from the bank. Two of us would be directed where to stretch the net across the river. Each end of the net was wrapped around a thick four-foot broken branch which two of the lads held upright in the river, one on each side adjacent to the shore. Then the rest of us walked up the bank against the current of the river for about a hundred yards before easing ourselves into the water armed with sticks.

We squealed as the cold water gushed into our wellingtons. We then waded up the river swishing the sticks from side to side yawping and yelling so the trout would swim down into the waiting net. The river was never more than waist deep, but we had fierce craic when someone fell into a groyne or tripped on a big stone.

Sometimes we were ‘skiting’ for hours before we caught a single fish. Sometimes we had a dozen or so silvery trout flapping furiously in the conical point of that enormous net.

My neighbour’s son would beat their heads against a stone. I had no stomach for the killing, but I feasted on them at breakfast. Nothing has ever tasted quite as delicious as those trout, coated in seasoned flour and fried in butter in the black skillet by my Auntie: crisp and golden, their pink flesh melting in my mouth. The salty juices soaked up with Grandma’s freshly baked soda bread.

Those nights in the river when we squelched home at dawn sopping wet and freezing cold, seem to yield us so much pleasure. Was it the unerring kindness of my neighbour or our intense camaraderie or the primitive hunting instinct or the nefarious excitement of possible detention by the law?

Decades later, reminiscing at my neighbour’s funeral, I realized how groundless my fears were when another neighbour told me: “It was your neighbour himself; sure did you not know?; ‘twas himself was the water bailiff.”

# HOME THOUGHTS FROM ABROAD

*BY SEAN BYRNE*

There was a gentle rain that first evening in Pemberton as I sat on the veranda in the fading light, tying flies and dreaming of fishing trips past. I especially remembered those fish caught in mountain streams in the West. Small trout that danced on the water in anger when hooked and swam away with a derisive wave of the tail when released. And big trout from the Midland Lakes, trout that never showed on the surface until it was time for the net. But most of all, those wonderful trout from the River Boyne, with bellies the colour of butter, like pirouetting rainbows they leaped against the setting sun.

What I wouldn't give to be sitting on the banks of that great river now. To sit with my back to Bective House with its sombre grey-stone exterior and to face the skeletal ruins of that ancient abbey where 800-year-old ghosts guard its naked walls. I could sit for hours in that spot listening to the water as it bubbled over the weir.

I was standing below Mary Lavin's house early one morning. There was a crashing noise on the opposite bank. A stag appeared, its antlers catching on the lower branches as it ran. A pigeon took to the sky disturbed by the noisy stag. A hawk circled above and when it spotted its prey, dived and took the pigeon in its claws. It disappeared again as quickly.

My thoughts were disturbed by the sound of footsteps on gravel. He came towards me, water dripping from his Akubra hat. He carried an old cane fly rod. His weather-beaten face smiled at me. We sat on the veranda and spoke initially of flies and rivers and trout, both captured and lost.
He was eighty-five years old and migrated to Australia in 1939.

He lived a life of regret. After sixty years in Western Australia he still called Ireland home.

I was amazed at his capacity to remember his birthplace in perfect detail. He spoke longingly of his beloved Lough Corrib and its famous trout. Big, deep-bodied fish that lived on the bottom of the lake and only came to the surface when the Mayfly danced its final sequence.

"Then they would come up," he said, "mighty trout, with their short snouts and fat

yellow bellies. The splash, the lifting of the rod and the line running across the water like an express train, that's what I miss." He mused.

"Did you ever go back," I queried.

He shook his head. "not even for a holiday."

"Why?" I asked.

"I was afraid that it would be somehow different, and nobody would know me."

"You regret coming to Australia?" I inquired.

"I don't regret coming here. I've had a good life in this country. A wonderful wife, now gone, children, grandchildren and a nice home. No, I don't regret coming to Australia," he paused briefly, "but I do regret leaving Ireland."

"I don't understand." I said.

"It's simple," he answered. "The feeling for home is a seed planted at conception and it never leaves you. Australia is just not home to me."

He left and I sat there thinking. I saw a little of myself in him. Maybe in forty years' time I would be that same person, regretful and sad.
I promised myself, that next year I would go back to Ireland and fish the rivers and lakes of my boyhood. If things have changed, well so be it, at least I will have laid that ghost to rest.

# FINN MACCUMHAILL AND THE WETLANDS

*BY FERGAL DUFFY*

From a young age, Finn mac Cumhaill knew that he was different to the other youths. And the other youths had always sensed a peculiar outlandishness in the young Finn. Because of this, they shunned him, mocked him, and excluded him from their activities. You see, Finn was different. He preferred nature to people. It's not that he disliked people. It's just that he felt a deeper affinity with animals, trees, rivers, lakes, and mountains. And it wasn't just the great phenomena of nature that he loved. He was just as intrigued and fascinated by the little and commonplace things. A bug was just as exhilarating as a sunset.

Finn was particularly drawn to the sort of wild overlooked places where no ordinary person would ever be found, lest they be considered a fool. But it was a strong impulse that Finn had to go into those uncultivated and untameable places. Into them he ventured alone, seeking a sort of wild wisdom. There was something at work deep within Finn, something that had yet to be articulated, but which drove him further and further into these forsaken regions to discover a wisdom that could not yet be found within the conventions of society.

And so, after many years of wandering, having learned the mature wisdom of trees, the healing wisdom of wild flowers, the enduring wisdom of mountains, Finn

ventured into the territory of wetlands until he came to Áth Éigis, The Ford of the Seer, where dwelt a wise old man who had spent his life sitting in deep thought on the margins of lakes and rivers, immersed in bogs, marshes and fens, absorbing the wisdom that these watery places had to offer.

"What", asked Finn, "can I learn from wetlands that I haven't already learnt from other parts of nature?" It was then that the seer recited this poem to Finn.

*Behold the Dromore Waters winding westward*
*from Béal Átha Beithe*
*on through majestic Dartrey A string of paternoster*
*lakes like a lacustrine prayer bead*
*each lake a contemplative station for meditating upon*
*the metamorphic mysteries of wetlands*

*Consider the dragonfly*
*spending much of its life as a lacklustre nymph beneath the surface*
*of murky margins and there will remain for several years*
*until some creative stirring within its soul impels it to*
*clamber forth from the opaque sludge.*

*And squatting on a common reed will shed its skin*
*and emerge tremendously transformed vernally vibrant and vivacious*
*and with wings transparent transcends its darkened past*
*aglow in the blazon glory of a splendorous second birth*

*Apprehend, young Finn, how years spent submerged in swamps*
*contributes to its brilliance how those darkened waters*
*hold potential for resplendence.*

The seer's words were not lost on Finn. He perceived that just as there are wetlands without, so too are there wetlands within. Just as the dragonfly is twice born, so too might he be: once from his mother, and then, a spiritual birth from out of the mires of the everyday world. Finn also perceived that to learn from wetlands, to hear them speak, would require a poetical and ecological perception, for which he would need to develop all his senses. For what Finn had learnt from wetlands was that there are worlds within worlds, with which he must become symbiotically attuned. To learn how to render these invisible worlds visible, Finn went off to study poetry with the great old seer Finn Éigis, who lived at Linn Feic, a pool on the River Boyne, within which swam the Salmon of Wisdom.

# TRANSFORMATIVE WATER

*BY KATE RAMSBOTTOM*

"Here! Hand me that pump Har, and I'll have these cans filled in no time at all", said John. Looking up, Har counted five more neighbours with their tractors and trailers behind John, waiting in line to use his water pump by the Timogue River. Irritable as hell, he handed it over, saying "Are ye all here, anyone at all missing?" It was a mystery to Har how on earth the whole neighbourhood always seemed to know when he would be heading to the river to fill his water tanks. While his sarcasm was notorious, Har was also widely known for never seeing a neighbour stuck.

When Ireland joined the EEC in 1973 every farmer wanted to expand. In Ratheniska however, farmers were hampered in their efforts because their wells ran dry every summer. Water could be so scarce that some people even put locks on the handle of their yard pumps! Cattle are thirsty animals and when Har bought that water pump he hoped to make the process of collecting water from the Timogue river as painless as possible. He hadn't reckoned however, on his neighbours acting like

they had shares in the damn thing, as they lined up behind him at the river's edge to use it.

That morning Har was in a hurry as he had promised Old Joe that he would help him pull beet. Joe's farm was in Kyle, on the opposite side of the river from Ratheniska, and when he eventually got there, he found Joe looking for help to pull a bullock out of the well. He grabbed a rope and went over to the well. He could just make out the head of the bullock by the bubbles the animal exhaled; he managed to get a rope around it's neck and pulled. The beast came up so quickly though that he toppled Har into the well. Typical Har, though soaked to the skin he still pulled beet all day, wondering what else could go wrong!

Needless to say, he was as sick as a parrot the next day. But while lying in bed, he had time to consider the implications of there being such a tremendous water source at Old Joe's farm on the other side of the Timogue, while the wells in Ratheniska were dry.

He called a meeting of the neighbours, and a committee was hastily formed. The County Council was lobbied to send an engineer to investigate the possibility of this being a suitable source of piped water for the area. Those engineers weren't long about finding the source of that well on Joe's farm and the sight of the water gushing up from that spring filled the Ratheniska spectators with even more joy than they knew when their team won the Co. Hurling Championship in '61 ! The Ratheniska Water Scheme was born!

Finding that water source transformed our neighbourhood. Farmers no longer feared a dry summer, housewives no longer suffered shoulder strain working the darn pump handles in the yard! In short, life improved.

Telling me this story, Har turned on the tap in his kitchen, took a sip of water and toasted old times and departed neighbours. I added, "Let's not forget Old Joe's bullock".

This story was told to me by Har Ramsbottom, Moore Valley.

# THE GHOSTS OF CLONEA

*BY DERVAL GIBNEY SHERIDAN*

Night was closing in, smothering us in darkness. I sat on the old, rickety bench watching the fire twist and swirl in a never-ending dance. I held my marshmallow out on a skewer and waited until it was brown. I picked it off and plopped it in my mouth savouring its warmth and softness as it melted away. I looked around at my three cousins, Karen, Katie and Luke, and my uncle, and godfather, John.

The burning embers of the bonfire illuminated John's' face as he spoke, "You know there's an old legend about this beach." "Really?" I asked. We sat on a high peak of grass outside John's house; it overlooked a small stretch of Clonea beach that was mostly secluded from others. "Oh yes, long ago the locals lived not far from here just over to our left." He pointed out into the abyss and continued.

"It is said they would come to this very beach when the sun went down, to spread tales passed on to them from their ancestors and celebrated the passing of another day. It was something of a sanctuary. However, a disease began to engulf their whole village, and with the limited number of healers and medicine, the locals had no cure. They lost a lot of loved ones during that time and they didn't feel like celebrating anymore."

"In fact, the only cemetery at their disposal became over-run, so they turned to the sea. They crafted rafts out of some trees to carry the bodies, laid tons and tons of forget-me-not flowers on top and pushed them out into the vast ocean. It was a way of saying goodbye to their lost ones as they floated out into the horizon, the foamy waves carrying them away. So, the beach became a place of mourning not a place of celebrating."

John gazed into the depths of the ocean; I stared at him completely engrossed in his story. "Then one night the villagers heard something, the sound of people laughing coming from the beach. They threw on their overcoats and made their way down to the sand. Some were overjoyed with what was before them some were petrified or shell-shocked, some were even angry. People came from far and wide trying to find answers, explanations, but the thing is, what those villagers saw has no explanation because they saw ghosts. Plain and simple. They were dancing, talking, and recalling stories, all-in-all they were celebrating! Even though there was never an answer to the questions why and how, the locals always thought the dead knew

it wasn't a happy place anymore. That the dead came back to show the living that dying does not always have to be sad, that you should celebrate how they lived. But again, it's just a theory."

He finished up and looked at my cousins and me smiling. Karen was laughing hysterically; Luke was shaking his head saying "LIES!!" repeatedly; Katie grabbed on to my arm and looked like she had just seen a ghost; while I stared at the beach, thinking. I don't know whether John's legend about the ghosts of Clonea was true or not; all I do know is I never slept a wink that night, listening out for the sounds of laughter, secretly hoping I wouldn't hear a thing.

# THE LINGAUN

*BY GABRIELLE FOGARTY*

I grew up with the sounds of the Lingaun river. My first headlong thrust into life echoed her frenetic gush from the womb of the mountain. As my mother kept vigilant watch over me, Slievenamon too stood guard over her offspring.

My first tentative steps were in unison with her erratic attempts to form into a babbling brook. Her gentle murmurings were the lullabies that crooned me to sleep. My infant gibberish was in unison with her first sweet song.

Then I learned to crawl on the red tiles of the kitchen floor that bore the hatchet marks of the old teacher who chopped the wood, ignorant of their beauty. The Lingaun picked her way round mountain heathers only to jump and dance over stony outcrops and then she fell down, down onto the ledge below.

When I fell on to unyielding ground it was her pure clear water that cleaned my wounds and numbed the pain with its sudden sharp coldness. My journey too would force me around and over the stumbling blocks and sometimes stormy waters of life.

Together we played. I sailed mighty ships on her in the summers of my childhood. Pirates tried to steal my gold. I fought off soldiers and Indians and as Tarzan I swung from the trees and with a mighty roar, I thumped my chest and fell into her coolness.

I learned to stand on her rocky bed with feet of blue until inured to the icy water I would lift her stones and form a dam. The rising water levels enabled me to learn. Two plastic barrels under the old wooden door meant that my raft was too high above the stream. However, when these containers were half filled with water and tied securely with rope, I could then man the seas, capture the enemy, survive the doldrums and overcome ferocious storms where the waves were higher than the school that they knocked down!

At morn the rising dew created smoke from the fires of my imagination. In the cool air I guided and manoeuvred my trusty vessel away from the danger whilst I rescued hundreds of innocent people, the Red Indians of yesterday who had nearly mortally wounded my brother with their powerful arrows that pinged off the sides of my vessel.

As the sun rose higher in the sky a cooling swim was welcome until whales and mighty sharks surrounded me and my crew. Five year old Declan cried real tears of fear before finding safety on the mighty seaworthy vessel that I had created with only a little help from my brother, who tended to stray off duty quite frequently to assuage his hunger pangs and to answer the calls of nature.

It was many the summer I spent on the Lingaun fighting the neighbour's children who had dared to trespass on to my prized territory. The river was mine! I fought tooth and nail to preserve its sanctity! I knew every pebble, stone and rock. My steps were sure with my knowledge of every mossy spot where extra care was needed.

The gentle cows often came to admire my ship or maybe they were just thirsty! They loomed large, their dinosaur heads stretching up into the massive trees only to be felled in one foul swoop by the giant meteorite. I paddled furiously to the safety of the land on the other bank. Tomorrow I would have to battle against the volcano that left only Declan and me to save the world and of course we would get plenty of help from my best friend the River Lingaun!

The End.

1. Tree planting and riparian biodiversity work
2. Silt trapping or 'Slow the Flow" Natural Flood Retention Measures such as the addition of large woody debris to drains
3. Rain garden and SuDS
4. Innovative techniques for monitoring water quality and biodiversity
5. Rainwater harvesting on roof of buildings and use of recycled water
6. Coastal or lake nature safari and stewardship project by local fishermen and recreational users


Living in a catchment that has healthy water can help a community to have a better quality of life. A healthy water catchment provides high-quality drinking water and supports local livelihoods like tourism, agriculture, recreational angling and water sports. It also supports local ecosystems so plants, animals, fish and insects that depend on having healthy water can thrive and flourish.

epa Environmental Protection Agency An Ghníomhaireacht um Chaomhnú Comhshaoil

# HER FOR BETTER WATER QUALITY


7 Fish passage project

8 Planting of native wild flowers and vegetation in habitat restoration project

9 Citizen science project led by anglers

10 Bespoke breeding boxes for birds and mammals

11 Wetlands to promote wildlife and reduce pollution and flooding

12 Removal of invasive species and biosecurity planning

13 Putting a plan together; where it all begins. Feasibility studies and planning involving all of the community in the catchment.

14 Outdoor biodiversity classroom

The online website catchments.ie shares science and stories about Ireland's water catchments, and people's connections to their water. Also check out watersandcommunities.ie and see how you can get involved?

A catchment is an area of land where rainwater collects forming rivers, lakes or other bodies of water.

# MEMORIES AND REFLECTIONS

*BY MARY JONES*

We had it all - to ourselves

The lakeshore of Lough Mask in Tourmakeady was a few fields down behind our house and the rocky shoreline with its Alder trees growing on the banks, was a haven for us children seeking adventure as we roamed along its shores. It was all of that and more. It was freedom to play, explore and imagine in an unspoiled heaven of nature where few men would ever have roamed.

We would set off down through the fields, jumping over gates, pushing through ditches and avoiding any farm animals that we might see. Hopping along from large stones to boulders, we maneuvered our way along that shore; clear water and the wind blowing gently. It was afternoon and the sun gave us the energy to be spies. Spies for whom? Or what?

We had heard about the old house along the shore which some famous man from the film “Jaws” had bought. But that did not mean much to us. We sneaked up to the house along the graded sweeping green lawn and peeped in through the windows. The place was old, forlorn and empty and we thought of how it might be haunted. The history of the past made no impression on our youth back then.

Running down to the shoreline again we came upon a stream, trickling into the lake and a great big wooden box straddling it. “Treasure” we thought and went to open the lid. Inside were tens of huge eels swirling around. It was the most amazing thing I had ever seen. I had never seen eels before and never as big since. People trapped them and sold them I heard afterwards.

Back at my house we spent many hours trying to catch “leebeens” in the little stream flowing along by the garden. How we spent many hours trying to catch them in jam jars but we never managed. They were always quite agile and quick but we spent hours bent down looking at these tiny little fish - we didn’t think then how they could have been the small fry of the famous trout that anglers came to fish on Lough Mask.

The larger river just a field over and which passed under the bridge at Treanlaur was

always dangerous looking after heavy rain. It took it's clear and raging waters down from the Drumcoggy mountains to the lakeshore. We would stop and watch the "cúr bán" or white froth and marvel at the force of nature.

Back in the woods near Tourmakeady village we followed the Glensaul river and the "eas" or waterfall was a sight to behold falling 20 meters from it's rocky height. We rambled through that wood of oak; a wood as old as the land upon which it grew. Further on at the "dock" where a pier was built for small fishing boats we swam in shallow waters under the watchful eye of our parents. We saw lizards sunning themselves on warm stones. The call of the cuckoo brought summer and the corncrake woke us in the early morning.

I have never walked that shoreline since. As children we had great freedom to do so. Nobody took any notice of children wandering about. And everywhere was our playground and adventure land. I've been back to the waterfall and the dock a few times. It's still unspoiled to some degree. But the hidden places of my past have almost all been found. But we as children had it all to ourselves and that is a memory I will cherish forever.

# REFLECTIONS ON THE RIVER SUIR

*BY ARTHUR O'DONNELL*

"Flow on lovely river – flow gently along" *(Lyrics from 'The Rose of Mooncoin'.)*

The River Suir threads its way through the lush lowlands of South Tipperary, as it does through the pathways of my memories. Growing up in Carrick-on-Suir the river was a constant presence in our young lives. As children it was our playground; bait fishing off the old bridge with worms, creamery offal, or lumps of meat from Frank Laurence's butchery or doing death defying dives when the tide was in, much to the disapproval of the Sunday Mass goers.

Mastery of the art of fly fishing is the gift of the few and dry fly fishing, a skill shared only by the elite. As boys during balmy summer evenings we watched in awe the graceful fly casting of the old timers, masters of their craft. We tried to emulate them while avoiding their taunts, "you're like John Duffy (circus ringmaster) cracking the whip". Part of the skill of fly fishing included the tying of flies varying with the seasons and time of day. My idol was Mikey Tobin, master of all things to do with the river. He was expert in the use of the pole - a technique acquired from years of practice in maneuvering the locally adapted river boat - the cot. This skill was ably demonstrated by his negotiation of the weir at low tide. The cot had to be fixed facing the flow of water and pushed as if tacking, before a final shove to shoot the torrent.

On summer evenings he would launch his cot, pole in one hand and fishing rod in the other. Sometimes, his wife Nellie sat up front, dressed in her summer finery, comfortably sitting on a cushion and sporting a parasol to shade her from the sun. What a picture; the boat being poled gently upriver, the swish of the line as it was fed out of a singing reel, the excitement of the strike, the arch of the rod, the run of the fish and the skilled play before netting a wriggling silver trout. Fishing upstream until they came to Ikes and Mikes where they stopped for a pint and a mineral, then fishing down river, having the satisfaction of a day well spent and tomorrow`s dinner secured. Mickey wore a Fair Isle pullover and tied his flies using wool from the jumper to match whatever coloured bodied fly was on the water, one imagines that when winter came, there was little heat left in it.

At times, more adventurous escapades took us further upriver. One memory that demonstrates the trust that our parents bestowed on us stands out. On this occasion our mother drove my brother Tom and I to Clonmel, from where we planned to swim the twelve miles downriver to Carrick. We set off at a great pace until we came to Poulakerry where tiredness overtook us. We had a brainwave, we would make a raft from reeds. This worked very well for a while until it became waterlogged and had to be abandoned. There was nothing for it but to resort to swimming again. When we eventually arrived at the Cottage Quay and within sight of home, we were met with a high tide. We ended up walking home on the towpath.

Seventy years on, I still fish the river Suir, grateful for the skills and stories passed on by the old fishermen of my youth and thankful for the freedom allowed us by our parents to explore and enjoy this lovely river.

Go ndéana Dia trócaire orthu go léir.

# THE BANKS OF THE BOYNE

*BY DAMIEN MCGUIRK*

When I was a boy, my father would take me to the Boyne to fish.

Back then he would tell me I was too small to hold a fishing rod of my own, so I was more than happy to accompany him, happy to be in his company, and happy to watch him.

I was always happy to be close to the river, as was dad.

For us, the Boyne was a chest full of treasures, waiting to be discovered.

I loved watching dad fish, watching his skill while casting worm or minnow into the flowing water. Watching how he would let the current move his bait across the river bed, watching his body movements that might give me a clue he was 'on' to a biting fish, and seeing the tell-tale 'tap' on the rod tip that would confirm he was!

I remember the first time I saw a trout in my father's hands. I marvelled at the colouration; the shape and the form of this beautiful creature, spotted with brown, flecked with gold and red. Catching a wild brown trout was like catching a gold bar, like catching the prince of the river.

To me, my father was the fisher king.

Back in those days it was the norm to take the catch home 'for the pan'.

If we didn't cook it ourselves, it would be donated (via request of course) to friends and neighbours. I remembered my first taste of fried trout, done in a bit of flour and butter. Absolutely delicious, with some brown sauce on the side.

Dad would fish sparingly.

If he got up to the bag limit, that was considered a 'good day out', and he would finish at that.

My turn came later, when I was eventually shown (and trusted) how to cast, how to set up a rod, and how to bait up a hook under my father's watchful eye.

Our trips to the river began to take on a different slant, in that if we went out and dad caught a trout (and I inevitably came up blank), I'd hear him mock football chanting in my ears 'One-Nil! One-Nil!!!'

That gentle slagging stopped when I finally 'broke my duck' and landed my first rod caught 'brownie' on a windy April Day in 1979.

That was a day forever burned into my memory. That was the day I ran home, high on adrenalin, holding my prize aloft. It was my turn to crow 'Ooo-o-ne Nil!! ' for a change!

That was the day I fell hook, line, and sinker, for fishing.

That was the day the goddess Boann finally caught my soul.

In the years that followed, my skills evolved into the delicate art of fly fishing, and indeed, into catching and releasing all my trout.

I have enjoyed every blessed minute, and indeed, my father did too when he could.

Even in the autumn of his years, we would still sit and chat about the 'ones that got away' and those golden days on the banks of the Boyne that we both shared. We did this right up to the day when he made his final cast.

I will always look back to that precious time we had together.

I will never forget the gift of fishing he gave to me.

Gifts of fond memories, gifts priceless beyond measure.

So today, as I carefully release yet another beautiful ‘brownie’ back into my beloved river Boyne, I release it in silent thanksgiving.

This one is for you Dad.

Love you forever. xxx

# SHORELINES

*BY PADDY O'CONOR*

At the water's edge

Grains of wave-washed sand

Years of my childhood.

Today as a storm force ten wind whipped the normally tranquil harbour into a white fury, I walked the shoreline. As I listened to the gentle scrunch of rough sand under my feet and watched the unleashed waves hurl themselves at the unshaken rocks, I walked, in memory, the calm shorelines of my childhood.

I remembered long, slow holidays in The Old Head Of Kinsale, holidays when days seemed to merge together until we felt that we lived outside time and that we would never again have to face the realities of school and homework.

Youth was our world: we thought we were the first to discover it and we could never envisage being anywhere else. The rich and golden sands sparkled in the sun on the twin strands of Garrylucas and Garretstown. When did we begin to call them beaches? The word strand is so much more open and free. Garrylucas was our favourite and it is still beautiful although its lustre seems to have faded over the years. Or has the fading been simply in my mind? There we played football and cricket; we ran races and held long jump competitions. We swam for hours, always insisting that the water was "lovely" and "really warm", as we shivered our way back into tee shirts and shorts, and, all too often, woolly jumpers.

There too, we picnicked, yes, we picnicked, as a fresh South-Westerly wind whirled around us, swirling grains of sand into our eyes and our sandwiches. The sandwiches – what an apt name! - always tasted wonderful, flavoured by the sand, the wind and the salty sea. We crunched the sandwiches and slurped down mouthfuls of Tanora.

After the picnic the patient mothers would return to their Foxford rugs to "sunbathe".

The mothers showed tremendous dedication as they soaked up the few sparse rays of sun that fell in their directions. The children, fed and watered, then became hunter-gatherers among the rock pools.

I walked Garrylucas strand in all weathers, searching for flotsam or jetsam: I was not fussy about which. I never found anything of any great interest or value but I continued to hope.

Along the strand on Friday mornings we would sell the mackerel we had caught the previous evening. The Catholic Church's rule regarding abstinence from meat on Fridays was a godsend for us as it ensured a ready and eager market. The profits were usually enough for us to replace lost fishing tackle and splash out on a few bars of chocolate and an illicit packet of cigarettes.

As we grew older, we grew more daring. When we reached the age of about twelve we would occasionally sneak from our beds at about 4.30a.m. and walk quietly along the road to Garrylucas. There, at that early hour, we would re-enact the events of a normal day. Seven or eight young lads would meet, swim, run along the strand and eat a picnic.

We would savour the early morning chill of the salt water on our skin. We would watch the sunrise bring its message of hope and renewal to a reawakening world. Then we would return quietly and contentedly to our beds, to sleep until lunchtime to the bewilderment – real or feigned, I'm still not quite sure – of our parents.

Not long after the summer of the early morning picnics we began to notice girls, and soon everything changed. But that's a story for another day.

# MÓINÉAR NA HABHANN

*BY LILE NÍ ANNRACHÁIN FROST*

Tá abhainn bheag thíos ón dtigh inar rugadh mé, i gCiarraí, Abhainn na Gáile, nó An Ghái. Bhí páirt lárnach ag an abhainn sin agus ar Dhroichead na hAbhann i mo shaol agus i mo shamhlaíocht agus mé ag fás aníos.

Dob é an droichead san croí-lár an tsaoil dom fhéin agus dom bheirt charad, Máire agus Mairéad, agus sinn in ár ngirseacha óga.

Is ann a thagadh An Sorcas, lena h-ainmhithe choimhthíocha, a chapaill rinnce, leis na gcleasghleacaíthe ban aclaí ag seasamh ar a ndroim, lena hataí árda agus a bhfeisteas drithleach, iad ag sodar timpeall i bhfáinne, agus na banmharcaigh ag baint lascanna as a bhfuipeanna, chun iad a choimeád in ord. Tá trip trup a gcrúb agus fead na bhfuipeanna san aer fós im chluasa! Samhlaigh na sceitimíní a thagadh orainn nuair a chualamar an ráfla go raibh An Sorcas ag teacht! Agus nuair a chonaiceamar an Oll-Phuball ag dul suas chuamar ar mire ar fad!

Is ann leis a thagadh na tincéirí, lena gcarbháin allúracha, ildaite, a dtinte chnámh san oíche agus a bpannaí stáin.

Ach is as bheith ag súgradh ar bhruach na habhann a bhaineamar an méid is mó taitnimh. Thosaíodh sé san Earrach le teacht na cuaiche. Bhí seanchas ag baint le sin. Dá dtiocfadh an chuach ró-luath ba chomhartha dhroch-aimsire é.

“ Má thagann an chuach ró-luath Díol do bhó agus ceannaigh arbhar “ an seana-nath a bhí ann! Ach ar theacht Mí na Bealtaine, bhíomar cosúil le gamhna geala Samhraidh, ag rith, agus ag pocléimneach, an bealach ar fad ón dtigh síos go dtí Móinéar na hAbhann, mar a bhí na bláthanna cumhra earraigh ag fás, an feileastram buí, an caisearbhán, bláth na cuaiche, an magairlín meidhreach irl. Dob é an magairlín is mó a shantaíomar, lena dhath gheal, chorcra. Ní phioctaí an caisearbhán mar bhí piseóga ag dul leis! Deirtí go bhfiuchfá an leaba dá bpiocfá é, agus bhímís ag magadh a chéile dá bpiocfaimís é. Pis-en-lit a ghlaotar leis air sa bhFrainc. Bhí spleodar orainn nuair a thángamar ar na bláthanna a thaitin linn, agus bhailíomar le flosc iad, chun iad a thabhairt abhaile do Áltóir na Bealtaine. Faid is a bhí gairm na cuaiche agus glaoch an traonaigh le clos sa chúlra. An londubh is an chéirseach, an druid, an fhuiseóg is Siobháinín bhuí ag eiteallaigh go ceolmhar ó thom go tom, ag bailiú ábhar nide. Anois is arís chífimís Corr Éisc ag seasamh go ciúin san uisce éadoimhin

ag faire ar bhreach, ach " ní breach go port é "! B'in an tEarrach, sa Samhradh bhí sé de chúram agam na góislíní a thabhairt chun na habhann i gcomhair uisce. Chuirinn scairt ar mo cháirde agus avay linn, cosa anáirde! Ba thaibhseach an radharc é iad a fheiscint ag sleamhnú isteach san uisce, leis an mháthair agus an gandal. Níor chaitheamar aon chloca leis an ngandal, mar a dhein Jimín Mháire Thaidhg sa scéal úd fadó! D'fhanfaimís ann, gan cíos, cás ná cathú orainn go dtí go gcloimís mamaí ag feadaíl orainn, ag fógrú go raibh sé in am tae, agus raghaimís fhéin agus na góislīní abhaile le faobhar ar ár ngoile. Sa bhFómhar ní théimís mórán chun na habhann. Bhí sé ag druidim i dtreo na dúluachra, sinne ar ais ar scoil, na cloig curtha siar, na duilleóga ag siosarnach agus ag titim agus na héin imirce dheasaithe ar na sreanganna leictreacha, a gcomhdháil dheireannach roimh imeacht dóibh!

Sa Gheimhreadh, is minic a dhúisíomar, tar éis bháisteach throm agus aimsir ghruama agus bhíodh talamh íseal Mhóinéar na hAbhann báite faoi thuillte.

Roth na bliana ag casadh!

# SIONNACH THE FOX

*BY PAULA R. STANLEY*

Our ancestors moved in around 1792 and made their way from Dublin to Longford as each lock was built. Sionnach, our family name, and Sionna, his wife, were the first red foxes in the area and by 1817, when the canal was fully operational, they were in every square mile of it.

I have my earth on the far bank near Ferns lock. It's the 17th lock on the canal and looks across to Agher on one side and Enfield on the other. I love the wanderings I can have here, so much to see and do. I live near Bertie the Badger and Susie his wife and they're kind and gentle with us all. They know we're about as they sniff the air and give a happy hello.

We have a family of otters who live up the road from us. They live on the Rye river at Collinstown and are regular callers to the Royal. Mr. Otter, Bert, has told me that he loves the journey up to us and he has made many new friends along the way.

We've noticed that the Peacock Butterfly and the Holly Blue are back and have settled in well. They dance over the holly and meadowsweet and have welcomed some new butterflies that are settling down around the banks. I heard the teacher from the Gaelscoil telling the children that they're called Marsh Fritillary. They can be noisy at times but a look from Father Fox settles them down.

I've never felt the need to move inland. There is so much here to keep me happy and occupied. I've become great friends with Pavel who came here from Poland and who sits at night fishing. He whistles gently. When he sees us on the far bank he serenades us with a few words of a love song. His rod is a twelve foot float that he casts and let's sit gently in the water. He sometimes throws a bit of bait over the water to me.

Tonight, it was a sweetcorn and bread paste. He knows this is one of my favourites and he always laughs when he sees me looking to soak up every last crumb of it. The fish are so lucky. They get this heavenly gift from Pavel and then after he catches them, he lets them go straight back in.

Tonight, he caught a Carp and it must have been about 4 kgs. He took a photograph

of it and I heard him say to Paddy, as he passed by on his evening stroll, that he'll 'post it on his page'. I don't know what that means, but I hope he got the cubs playing behind him. I think I'd love to be on his page and everyone to see how good looking we are here on the canal.

I prefer to sleep during the day as I'm really a night animal. Mam always told me to not call myself a 'night owl' as she said I was getting 'the species mixed up'. I know I'm not an owl as I can't fly but I have to tell you that I have tried, to fly that is, especially when I hear the bats that swish in and out of the canal at night. They go with such speed and sometimes overstep the mark and swoosh straight into the Shaw Bridge. I overheard the lead bat telling them to 'tune their radar in'.

Aren't we lucky to be able to share this lovely place with one another. Here's home. Beautiful, friendly and welcoming.

# TRUSK LOUGH, A WATERWAY NEAR ME

*BY BREDA BRADLEY*

Trusk Lough, a mountainy lake, a tarn, lies 5km from the town of Ballybofey. It is a popular spot with locals who go to fish, swim, walk or meet up for a chat there. On a sunny afternoon you will see the people come, some walk, some drive or cycle, drawn to the place. On days like this the colony of wild ducks that live here become connoisseurs of bread, they turn their noses up at the bulk of it on offer and the margins of the lake become rimmed with the white flotsam.

On winter afternoons they are not fussy, they will eagerly come for any stale morsel offered. The lake is the summer home of a group of whooper swans whose gaudy glamour draws the crowds to admire their grace, like glowing chalices they consecrate the water.

The lake shrinks and grows depending on the weather. After a particularly rainy spell it becomes bloated by the multitude of mountain streams that race to expel their watery spoils. This water is often dark brown, red with the rust that seeps through the ground, the color of ochre or Mediterranean pottery.

The lake has a pebbly shore, a great place for stone skimming competitions, to the right of the beach the land is marshy, splurges of spagnum and rushes and water gorging plants thrive here. To the left a path leaves the pebbly beach and winds around the lakeshore. The path is rough and stubborn bog shrubs wage an eternal battle for territory. Alder and grey willow, rowan and gorse all compete for supremacy.

Close clumps of heather carpet the edge of the path made bright with tiny bell flowers of lilac through to deepest purple. Rock speedwell shines like sapphire and tomential winks hidden amongst the grass, orchids shed their perfumery scent and bog cottons dance in the wind. This path takes you halfway around the lake, then leaves the shore and heads upwards to the bog where at its summit, views of the Bluestacks make the steady climb worthwhile.

This is the place to come to hear the cuckoo in mid-April. The lake is also a favourite haunt of the lark, you can spot them high in the sky singing love songs to the blue eye of the lake far below. I have often spied clumps of otter dung but only once did I see the sleek brown head of an otter breaking the surface.

People come to fish here and catch wriggling eels darting minnow and fat brown trout. My grandmother told me of a doctor who worked in the town a long time ago who would swim the lake winter and summer. I often thought of his lonely swims, shallow water near the margins but the lake deepens into a dark bowl over the centre, black waters, who knows how deep, gouged out by an ancient ice ball aeons gone by.

The lake has made the news several times because the northern lights can sometimes be seen here, a kaleidoscopic sky. In one photo taken by a local astronomer the dense starlight of the milky way is reflected in the lake's dark glassy water. But for me the lake needs no pyrotechnics, in winter or spring summer or autumn its waters whisper soothing promises of peace for those with ears to hear and eyes to see a very ordinary beauty.

# RIVERSIDE MAGIC

*BY MARGARET ANNE DOWLING*

To have been brought up on the banks of a river – for me, the meandering Shannon – was a privilege granted to few only, I didn't realise it as a child. To be sure, I had a vague notion of the river's probabilities – a place to paddle, swim, fish in, stroll along its banks or picnic on the grass margins. But the river's true magic, I didn't really grasp.

Until now.

It took the passage of time, travel abroad and a raging pandemic for me to realise how fortunate I was to have had Majesty on my doorstep. Mine had been a cosy childhood world untroubled by war, famine, plague or any of the ills of the outside world. From a window at the top of our house I had a view of the river at all times and in all its moods – placid, still, hurried, choppy, even at times bursting its banks – but best of all with ribbons of wispy mist suspended over its surface on early summer mornings.

Being in lockdown of late and living away from the sight or sound of the river I have settled for a garden. But nothing to stop me closing my eyes and calling up old archival footage: the river with moored boats bobbing on its surface. Locals strolling along its banks. The bridge of Athlone spanning the river. Presiding over the lot and reflected in the water the church of St. Peter and Paul – a perfect backdrop for early childhood photos. Then, on the opposite bank, berthed beneath the shadow of our 12th century castle, a pair of leisure cruisers – the St. Kieran and St. Brendan – which for a shilling or two would ferry you down to Lough Ree cutting through the water like a scissors through silk.

Cutting also through the water – dazzling in their whiteness – was a year-round gaggle of those noble creatures the locals liked to feed - swans. Their grace and gliding mystical beauty has come down to us in legend. Little wonder considering their beauty they are associated with the gods and goddesses of the pre-Christian Celtic peoples.

They were thought to have had links to the Otherworld community which could only be reached through waterways – lakes, ponds, wetlands, streams, cairns and mounds.

The Shannon itself is steeped in myth, its true name being Sionann, after the granddaughter of the sea god Lir. The story goes that Sionann fled to the Otherworld to visit the Well of Wisdom despite being warned not to go.

She caught and tasted the Salmon of Wisdom and became the wisest person on earth. When the well abruptly burst Sionann drowned and was swept out to sea. She was later proclaimed goddess of the river.

Local folklore has it that Sionann's murmurings can be heard at certain times especially if one lives close to a weir. Athlone's weir wall to the rear of the old Franciscan Church was, and is, not just a beautiful sight but also a beautiful sound.

The steel-grey water shimmering past the Friary, slips over the weir in a murmuring rush turning frothy white as it bounces off the rocks beneath. One can easily imagine that the murmur we hear is the sweet-tongued feisty Sionann, with her long kelp-like hair swishing above and below the weir as she keeps up a flow of animated chatter.

The town is silent now and our world a little shaken. What the future holds is hard to predict but some things will never change: the sounds, sights, smells and enduring magic of rivers.

# THE FISH THAT GOT AWAY

*BY ERICA BIRCHALL*

As children, myself and my younger brother often heard our Father tell stories from his childhood about the river Greese across from his family home on the 'Blind Lane' as it is known locally. He told us about how himself and his younger brother Denis would catch trout and how with pollution over the decades big fish were now seldom seen. Or not at all.

Little did we know that we would live in that same house across from that very stream in the early 90's.

I remember how mischievous and curious we were; there's 11 months between us and back then we were attached at the hip. If my brother went fishing for pinkeens, I was not too far behind, usually armed with a sieve or colander and if those were not readily available, Granny's crystal vases came in very handy!

This Summer day was beautiful. The river is beside a paddock where my uncles sheep used to graze. We had our wellies, our sieve and colander and we agreed that we were to stay close to the sides and 'fish' under the long grass at the banks because that is where the fish hid. No talking either because we would scare them away.

Usually we would have caught a few pinkeens, but the stream was unusually quiet. We did not have long because our babysitter was due to arrive and under no circumstances were we to get wet! I can still remember my Mam calling us from across the road to "get in now!". I of course, being the well behaved one started gathering my accoutrements ready to go home. I called for my brother, but he did not budge, he kept telling me to shush that he was going to catch a big one! I started wading towards him to try and reason with him "we'll come back tomorrow" I said, but it fell on deaf ears. I was turning around to leave when he screamed and fell backwards into the river, he had the sieve and I could clearly see he had caught something huge. I remember the fins. I started to run towards him to help but slipped and fell in the river too. At this stage we did not care about being wet, we had caught a huge fish and we were going to bring it home to Dad and he would be proud as punch.

I eventually reached him; he was struggling to keep the fish inside the sieve. There

was an inner struggle there too about what was right and wrong. The fish needed water and we had nothing big enough to fill with water. Empathy won in the end and we let our prized and rare catch go. We both looked at each other and said, “we’re dead, we have no proof!”. Soaked to the skin and feeling dejected, we went home. Of course, our parents did not believe us when we said we were wet from catching a trout. They laughed, we cried in frustration.

Although, I think now over twenty-five years later they might believe us.

If we had smart phones back then, I could see the picture and caption on Facebook now:

‘First catch for Dunlavin boy as he reels in BIG ONE’

# THE TRANSIENT NATURE OF LIFE

*BY PAUL BENNETT*

Flowing beautifully and calmly through Mullingar for over 200 years, the Royal Canal is a great reminder to us of Irish innovation, engineering and good old hard work and graft. No longer a hive of commercial and business activity on the banks, the waterway is a valuable source of leisurely recreation for locals off the banks with its nature trails and walks.

The canal conjures up many pleasant memories for my family. My late Grand-Father was a proud Mullingar man. With his flat cap in situ and his daily three-piece suit, he often fished on the Canal with his fellow townsfolk. A time of rationing and food scarcity, the canal would have been a thriving place to fish, chat and get the local gossip. A bottle of Stout and a pack of Wild Woodbine would have been shared amongst the men. I am sure Dev and Churchill were the hot topic of discussion back then.

My father was reared not far from the banks of the Royal Canal. He has many fond childhood memories of long summer evenings spent near the canal. The canal was an open playground for young curious minds.

Like Tom Sawyer, my father and his childhood friends were never far from adventure or innocent mischief near this body of water. My father also reminisces of winters running or walking across the canal when it was entirely frozen over. Mullingar's version of Russian Roulette. A care-free childhood without the restraints of hesitation or fear. How we long for that for the youth nowadays in our anxious society.

My own experiences of the great canal are both past and present. I remember strolling nonchalantly across the Carey Bridge every day to my secondary school. The canal was an ever present sub-conscious feature in my teenage angst mind.

Playing football during lunch break, the canal always became an unintended part or obstacle during our kickabout. Once a volley or hoof went astray, the ball would sometimes go over the school fence and land in the canal. The job of retrieving the ball was sometimes more exciting than the game itself. With hormonal impulses and frustration, we would yelp out orders to the would-be ball boy (or water boy).

We even became creative in our endeavours to fetch the ball from the canal that we created our own nets and rods. I tell ya, you don't see that on Match of the Day.

Years later when I did dwell with my Dublin Darling, the canal was a rich boardwalk for romantic strolls for love's young dreamers. Holding her gentle hands close, I chatted excitedly and fervently throughout those walks. I would try to impress her with my faux knowledge on the canal and on fellow Dubliner Brendan Behan. I can say one thing for Behan, he was right when he said, "a man is already halfway in love to a woman if she listens to him".

Now my beloved wife, we have three adorable kids. Watching the kids on the canal walk, running with energetic strides and infectious laughter is a sight to behold for us. The simplicities of life like having a family picnic, feeding the ducks, and watching loved up pairs of swans are those precious moments that we treasure.

Our only hope is for our kid's generation to appreciate and respect this majestic waterway that glides through this unassuming county town. As Robert Frost once said, life goes on and like life, the Royal Canal will go on and flow eternally forever for others to enjoy.

# THE BURN

*BY MARGARET O'DOHERTY*

It isn't a river. It doesn't need a name. It is The Burn, a word that means a small stream and describes it perfectly. It isn't deep enough to be dangerous. In dry weather a child can cross it by jumping from one brown rock to the next.

Despite its short length and minimal depth it is crossed by three bridges, one on a secondary road and two on country lanes. These bridges, built over a hundred years ago to carry a horse and cart, stand up to cars, tractors and lorries. The men who built them probably couldn't read or write but understood mathematics and engineering. They spanned the water with three arches using principles that go back to ancient Greece.

In the lowest bridge, on the quietest lane, there is an accessible arch. It can easily conceal a small girl, sitting on a dry ledge with her bare feet dangling into the cold, flowing water. The seaside, with its dangerous tides and currents, is out of bounds but I wasn't going to come to any harm in a few inches of water. I could go alone and sit unseen by the odd person who might pass overhead on their way to check on cattle.

Bracken and other ferns grow along the bank, their curling fronds dipping into the water. School books tell me these are primitive plants, older than flowers or trees. They were here before humans or animals of any kind inhabited the earth. Those millions of years are incomprehensible to me for I can still count my own years on my fingers.

Hours are spent watching the water flow from its boggy origins to the wildness of the sea. I am always hoping to see a tiny fish, but every possible sighting turns out to be a twig or a leaf. Like the sticks and little boats made from rushes I float from one side of the bridge to the other, the water carries them along until they eventually tumble over a small waterfall. It is another of my solitary haunts where I watch the water flow into a deep dark pool called Poll an Phúca.

My elderly neighbours, sitting beside an open fire, told tales of the little people. I said I didn't believe those stories but perched above the pool I wasn't so sure. Was there a spirit hiding in the water or among the rocks who could take the shape of a goat? My fear of seeing it is matched by my longing to have my own tale to tell.

All I ever saw was the fresh water of The Burn forced into the saltiness of Lough Swilly, where its identity is lost forever in the vast Atlantic Ocean.

# IN THE GLEN

*BY MORNA SULLIVAN*

An inter-city express train rushed by the top of Valentine's glen. The crows circled above the tree tops as the pines, oaks and chestnuts whispered secrets to each other. Then once again, the glen was silent.

"It's beautiful here. So peaceful," said Claire.

"Most of the time," the old man looked down at the river gushing down the hill. "But people have recounted hearing a girl crying and moaning in these woods on some nights. Some believe the glen is haunted," Tom told his granddaughter. "On hot summer days almost seventy years ago, Pat, Bill and I searched for trout, jumped in the Three Mile Water to cool down, and plotted how we would avenge a rival gang."

They walked down the dusty path mirroring the river's course.

"We swung across the river on a long rope tied to one of the biggest chestnut trees that clung to the sides of the riverbank, trailing our toes through the water to cool down as we skimmed the surface," Tom continued. We caught mice and frogs and scared our sisters with them. We salvaged wood washed downstream and then that last summer we made a raft."

Claire listened intently as he continued.

"At night we sat on rocks in the river, dipping our toes into the coolness as we drank bottles of cider and smoked. On a roughly made fire on the riverbank our fish cooked, flavoured by the wild garlic that nestled in the dark crevices along the river's course, long before we'd ever heard of barbeques."

"The river was crystal clear then. We swam in it and had water fights. Now it would be an obstacle course, dodging tyres, old bikes and trolleys from the Spar. People don't have any respect for the river now, the way we had."

On either side of the river, tall firs and ivy clad oak trees clung to the steep banks. He pointed to a pine tree, fallen across the river, providing a more conventional crossing, "We'd have had fun shimmying across that," he smiled.

Three art deco viaducts strutted like giants across the Three Mile Water river meandering down the wooded glen before it gushed down into Belfast Lough. As they walked further downstream he pointed to large boulders. “This was our other crossing. We used to jump across and push each other off the next stone. We climbed on the viaduct and jumped off the steel girders into the river below.”

They walked down the sloping path, their steps gaining momentum as the river gathered pace, twisting and turning down the glen.

“It’s still here!” Tom pointed to the mighty chestnut towering over the rippling river. He smoothed the bright green velvet moss growing on one side of the old tree trunk with his wrinkled hand. “But it’s a different rope,” he grinned. “I’m glad the river’s still being enjoyed.”

Soft ferns waved and dipped their leaves into the rushing waters below them as they followed the bend in the river.

“But then the next summer we didn’t go back. It wasn’t that we’d grown out of those sort of things. We just didn’t go back. After her murder in the glen. It just wasn’t the same. We heard things.”

“Did you know her?” asked Claire.

“Yes. Few are still around who remember her. But long after the rest of us have gone, and what happened that night has been forgotten forever, the trees will keep whispering secrets to each other and this river will still run down Valentine’s glen.”

# LUNAR MOMENTS

*BY MAIREAD MURPHY*

My water story begins with the moon- the phased journey of my being governed by and piloted by the ebb and flow of energy through the universe. Each month the moon journeys around the earth creates tides that ebb and flow, high and low and carries a power that I believe is rooted in my soul through the tidal movement of the sea.

I was born by the sea in Wexford where my father was a lighthouse keeper. The sea is in me is the best way to describe my person. When I need nourishment for my soul I am drawn to this powerful force of nature and particularly to the great Atlantic that has such a powerful voice through the tides.

This power of a sea/moon scape was very evident to me in Mulranny beach in Co Mayo in 2007. The sea nourished me on magical days after chemo - water based poison administered to kill and to cure all in one. Freeing myself from its grips I journeyed to a place of peace by going to the sea when the moon was radiant in its nightly appearance. There I discarded the wig (my camouflage for the world) and dived into the salty magnificence of the Atlantic Ocean. There I felt power, vastness and acceptance. I was like a grain of sand in the universe. I lay on my back in this salty ocean, staring at the moon and stars, and my thoughts and feelings became one with nature. I was then and am now a grain of energy - 90% water, 10% matter and 100% human.

Being literally a drop in the ocean has such a freedom of thought. Mulranny beach, Keel beach, Bertra beach, Louisburg beach have all served me well since those nightly, meandering soul searching, escaping trips to Mulranny. The magnificent Atlantic Ocean never disappoints and is in constant motion displaying the wild and wonderful dance of the moon. The waves are the ruffles of a petticoat wrapping my body and soul in energy, allowing me freedom to be…… a grain of energy… at one with a greater force and power outside my control.

Freeing, Empowering, Engaging and Fulfilling my person is cheap, easy and taken for granted until now! I know what works! I know where I'll be when I can travel 20Km from home.

A drop in the ocean, a powerhouse of energy healing from within lying on my back watching the sun, moon and stars! I'll dive into the blue waters with a longer head of hair than in 2007 and thank my lucky stars to have survived!

# IN DAYS GONE BY

*BY ALANNA LARKIN*

Growing up I was incredibly lucky with the location of our house. We lived right beside the River Shannon and Lough Derg. From a noticeably young age my brothers and my dad would take me out with them in the boat, or even just go for a swim in the lake.

We were members of the local fishing club for as long as I can remember. We'd always take part in the fishing competitions and open days and support it as best we could. It was very strange, being the only girl there, which now would bother me but back then I didn't mind. I was out doing something I loved with people I loved. What more could my younger self possibly want?

We knew all the best fishing spots, or so I thought. Sometimes we wouldn't be as lucky as we had hoped to be. But it was always a nice chance to go out in the boat and see the cormorants or the mayfly perched daintily on the surface of the water, that was of course when the water looked like a freshly polished sheet of glass. I could spend hours upon end just looking down and watching all the minnows swim around under the water, unaware to our presence on top.

Of course, there would be days when the water would be a raging, angry, resentful king, with his white horse for waves heading toward the side of our boat, ready to attack until we would defeat them with a single glide over them, only to start our battle again when the next wave would come to beat the boat. Those were the best days. Granted there is beauty in the quiet days when a single dip of your oar could ruin this calm face of water. But in my childhood, I lived to see another battle between our boat and the waves.

As I got older, we would go out longer, be bolder, explore more of the lake. In fourth class, when Canada decided to call my brother to investigate its beauty, we took a trip down the river, it was his way of saying goodbye to our lake, to thank her for all the precious time she had given us. We cherished the beautiful memories she had formed for us under the waters surface and let bubble their way into our minds eye forever more.

Once this brother left, boating slowed down for us and we discovered kayaking. One had to acknowledge it was much more work to go kayaking than it was to go out in

the boat, but it was worth it. In the kayak, going up the river, it would make me feel far more vulnerable but the wildlife I saw was more than worth the feeling. At thirteen years of age I saw my first kingfisher, and I know for a fact that the image of him flying by is one that will stay with me forever. I had never expected to be so lucky to see one when I was so young. I have relatives who are much older than me, reaching their 70's I'm sure, and they yet have to witness one of nature's greatest wonders.

Last year, I did my first "big swim" as part of Water Safety week. I swam out to where, as a young girl I would have fished. Mind you, I didn't take the time to reflect upon the days I had spent there because of the number of weeds trying to tangle me in their slimy hold.

I'm fifteen now, and I'm finding my way back to the water more and more as each day passes. With every breath the lake takes, I feel myself take a step closer. When lockdown came along, I decided that it was time to try my luck back on the lake. Most days now I find myself yearning to be back out in the lake and see the river once more. Once my brother left, there were tender, somewhat sad memories because from a young age he shared his knowledge with me. He taught me to listen to the bird calls, to know where the lake got shallow, to know how to go and see the white-tailed sea eagles without disturbing them on their nest as they warmed their young, working hard as first time parents. I learned of invasive species and how to deal with them and do my bit in stopping the spread of them.

Lough Derg, to me will forever be my home. I've created memories big and small there. I've felt safe and at ease on the calm surface and I've felt trills and triumphs as the boat rose against a wave in an epic battle. I have felt the sun warm upon my face on a summer's day in the boat and felt Jack Frost nipping at my toes on a frosty evening.

There is a magic on our lakes and rivers. There is something special in each droplet of water, something that one can't pinpoint until they see it for themselves. Being caught on the lake as the skies open above you and the downpour of rain begins is like being part of a spell. I recall the first time I was caught in a situation like that. It was a grey and dull day, one that you would never expect to be magical. But I was proved so wrong. The steady drops of rain filling the water found their way into my heart and helped me see that there is so much more than just a wet, cold, bitter drop of rain. It was like watching a curtain fall over the lake, a protective barrier between you and the rest of the world. One in which I would want to conceal myself in forever.

In days gone by the lake was my sanctuary, a place to hide, a place to be the little tom-boy I was without the sharp comments of other kids biting at my confidence. And I pray, that in days to come, children will find the same love of nature and peace that I found in our Irish waters.

# A DREAM SHARED

*BY BELLA STRAIN*

Many years ago a man named James Quinn (Jimmy your great grandfather) was rearing his family in the countryside and had the mains water supply flowing past his house, the only problem was the water was not filtered and had to be boiled for ten minutes before you could drink it. Jimmy together with his neighbours got together and formed a group water scheme which he worked on until his death, sadly without success.

Another man returned to his home in Buncrana, from England with his wife and young family and he also had a dream to build a dam at the top of the Illies to provide clean water to all in the local areas. This man was Eddie Fullerton and when he mentioned the dam at first he was laughed at. Eddie became a member of Donegal County Council and kept working on his dream as he could see the benefits it would provide.

Finally the dam was approved to Eddies delight but his delight was short lived as he was murdered in his home a few days later on the 25th May 1991. Construction of the dam began in 1995. Jimmy also died before his dream was fulfilled but the neighbours kept it alive and when the dam was approved people were delighted as they expected clean water for everyone.

Pipes from the dam had to flow through the local farms and they were all promised a free connection when the job was complete if they allowed the pipes through their land. One lady Mary Grant got the promise in writing and when the Company tried to look for payment when the job was complete for the connections, she had her piece of paper.

Both men were now dead and the dam was complete holding three and a half million litres of water neither of them getting to see it.

Breaking news; “it was reported water from the dam was going to be piped to Letterkenny thirty miles away” and the locals bypassed. The group water scheme called a meeting and decided to protest the following morning at the place where the interconnector was being put on the water mains. Not having much experience of protests they got legal advice and arrived with their placards to find a lone digger and driver at the scene. He enquired what was happening and was told why they

were protesting, so he said “if there is a protest I have to stop work.” This was great news and having the local journalist there plus the radio station great coverage was had the following week. The following week they tried again and the head engineer came with the local guards but as the protesters were not breaking the law they could do nothing. There followed three months of fierce activity and every politician that put their foot in Inishowen was picketed including the then Taoiseach Bertie Ahern. There were reports in the local papers every week and on the local radio, and finally an article in the Irish Independent.

The people who gave their land got their water connections free of charge and the people of the group water scheme had emergency pipes laid to provide them with clean water, while it took another six years to do the planned job for the area.

People stood up to the authorities and had the dreams of two wonderful men fulfilled in the process, “The Fullerton Dam” proudly stands at the head of the Illies providing clean water to thousands of people every day.

# THE BARGEMAN

*BY STEPHEN HOGAN*

My grandfather was born in the late 1930s. He lived in Athlone, Co.Westmeath. His parents (my great grandparents) owned a cinema beside the River Shannon in Athlone town bridge.

When he was 4 years old he had the easiest job in the cinema. His job was to check everyone's ticket. To check tickets, you had to take the ticket which was divided into half and take the half and discard it. He would occasionally go fishing down at the docks.

At that time, the main transport of goods was done by barges. These open steel 20 metre barges would take 60 tonnes of Guinness, coal, or wood from Dublin down the Shannon and into Lough Derg. As the barges came through the lock my grandfather would run down from the bridge to the lock and hop on the barge in the lock and get a ride back to the bridge.

From then on, he became fascinated with barges. Most of these barges had 15 bollander engines with a top speed of 3 mph. Barges belonged to the grand canal company. When they were going on a trip it took 2 hours to warm up the engines.

In the 1950s the trains started to take business away from barges, then the waterways were closed in the 1960s. When the grand canal company shut its doors all the barges were sold. These barges were exceedingly difficult to manoeuvre. My grandfather's friend Sid Shine first had a small barge which my grandfather at the age of 10 would go with him on trips down to Lough Derg. Sid Shine was a bargeman, a musician and a great sailor. He bought a barge called "the fox" this was a maintenance barge which had a crane on her and had been used to pick up buoys and maintain them and this is where my grandfather spent all his free time.

At 23 he married and was on honeymoon on the barge "the fox" when he saw a barge half sunk under a bridge at Lanesborough. It was full of old bicycles prams and rubbish and the deal was done for 10 pounds.

This barge was called "Miranda". My grandparents fixed it up and lived onboard for the first 3 years of their married lives having 3 children onboard.

The big thing at the time was to go on rallies on the river. My grandfather remembers one time on a rally, the bearing went on the kelvin engine and he took the engine apart and fixed the bearing with a lot of solder. So, he needed graphite to finish the job, so he got the others onboard the boat pearing pencils to use the graphite.

My grandparents moved to Dromineer in Tipperary on Lough Derg they built a house and used the barge for holidays. Their family grew to 9 and they had many happy trips and holidays on the barge. Now my parents are bringing me on Miranda and showing us the fun, they had when they were young. I love going on holidays on the Shannon now and we have travelled as far as Lough Ree.

My grandfather is an amazing barge man at 82, he will dock Miranda skilfully.

# RIVERDANCE

*BY CAROL BEIRNE*

Riverdance. Where does that word take us? The O2 arena? possibly. No doubt it would be Bill Whelan's stunning classic that was first performed in 1994 during the interval of the Eurovision Song Contest springs to mind.

That however is not the riverdance that filled me with wonder and fascination; the one that I am referring to is the one that performs daily on the River Lung in Co.Roscommon.

Much to my shame it was a sight that I had not experienced before. For generations this stunning river has offered it's hospitality to many fish such as the roach, bream, rudd, eel, trout, perch pike and many breeds of aquatic bugs. The reason for my presence on the shores of the river, was not to fish, but to paint. I am a member of a local art group and the theme for our group this particular week was "water" pure, simple and humble.

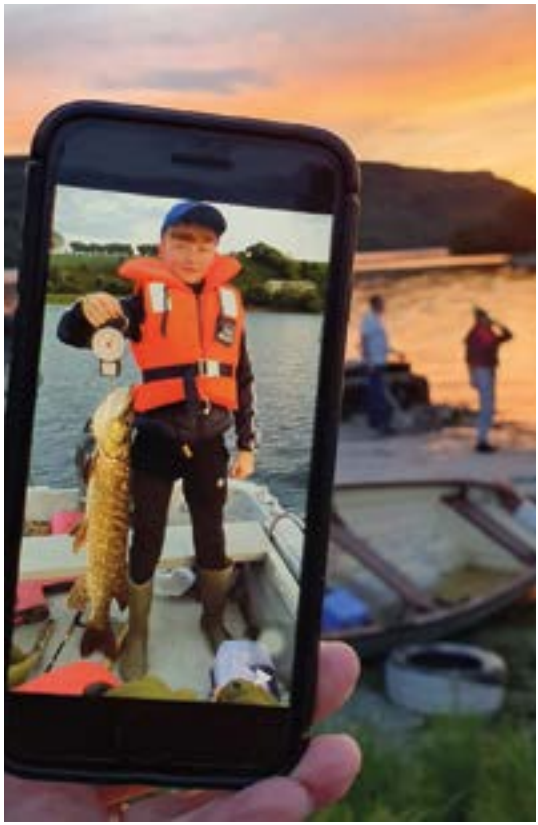
As I sat down amidst the beauty and splendor of this river the beat of my heart resonated through the silence. I took out my easel and brushes, then, as if waiting in the wings, the performance began. An orchestral delight of instrumentalists led by the robin, then the song thrush, then the wren, followed by the chaffinch. A medley of songs unfolded. The gentle ripple of the river set the tempo as precise as a metronome. Unaware of their captive audience, the opening dancers took to the stage. The banded damselflies and dragonflies executed their dance with fine precision. The caddis flies revealed their hidden talents to perform their leaps and jumps. The warm April sunshine then lured the bees to take part of this magnificent spectacle of music, song and dance. This breathtaking execution was not created by man but by nature alone.

Vision is a gift an artist brings to society. My day on the banks of the river Lung brought to me an unexpected vision of "Riverdance" in its purest unadulterated form.

# THE UNKNOWN FISHERMAN OF COUNTY CLARE

*BY DONAGH MINOGUE*

My name is Donagh, I am ten years old and I am a fisherman. My earliest fishing memory is when I was two years old; I was in a place called Kilkee in County Clare with my older brother and my parents. My Dad set up a line of feather traces; he attached a two-pound weight onto a rod and cast it out into the sea. He then started to wind up the reel and when he lifted the rod up from the water, I saw he had caught four or five mackerel. I will never forget how I felt, excited, thrilled, and proud, from that moment I was hooked on fishing.



My parents then bought me my own fishing rod and they began to bring us to local lakes and rivers. I learned many skills such as how to set up a rod, tie feathers, hook on weights, cast out and reel in. Of course, the best part was catching the fish and we spent many hours by the water having great family fun.

I fish at many waterways in County Clare, from the local lakes of Lough Clonmacken, Drumcullaun, Caum, Inchiquin, Ballycullinan, Ballyalla, Lough Derg and a local unnamed lake we call 'Carthys Lake' and also along different parts of the Inagh River which flows through Ennistymon and onto Lahinch.

I also fish off the coast of Clare in Kilkee, Kilrush, Cappa, Liscannor, Doolin and Fanore.

I have caught, Pollock, Mullet, and Mackerel in saltwater and Trout, Pike, Perch, Rudd and Roach in freshwaters. My favourite fish to catch is the Pike because; he's a great 'fighter' and can be very difficult to reel in if he's very big. The largest pike I have caught so far was at Lough Ballycullinan, he was 23 pounds 1 ounce and he put up a 27 minute fight, he got very tired and surrendered to me. I did not keep him as I was only practicing so always 'catch and release' during those times. If you overfish the waterways, the wild fish population drops and has to be replaced with farmed fish. I eat all types of fish but would prefer the taste of a wild fish over a farmed one any day.

I am a member of the local Anglers club and have made fishermen friends of all ages. Sometimes my parents allow me to travel out on a boat with a few fishermen onto Lough Inchiquin, Corofin. I enjoy the opportunity and it's also a different fishing experience than shore fishing, and we have great fun driving around exploring the lake.

To be a good fisherman you need to be calm, patient and practice a lot. You also need the right tackle and a bit of good luck. I buy my equipment online and from local fishing supply shops. It is also very important to be safe around water. I always wear a life-jacket and never take any dangerous chances. At the lakes it is important to fish from a proper jetty, as the edge of lakes can be treacherous.

I enjoy travelling around the beautiful countryside of County Clare, fishing at the local waterways and discovering new ones on the way. To me fishing is the best pastime in the world; everyone should give it a go. I know I am very lucky to live where I do and have been given such unbelievable opportunities, it has made me the boy I am today. When I grow up I hope to become a professional fishing sportsman.

'Keep an eye out for me'.

# UISCE, UISCE - LEIGHEAS AR GACH

*BY GALARUNA UÍ RIAIN*

Uisce, uisce I ngach áit gan braon le n'ól. Is minic muid ag clamhsán anseo in Éirinn go bhfuil iomarca báistí againn anseo- tuilte agus aibhneacha ag cur thar maoil. Tailte clúdaithe le h uisce sa gheimhreadh agus sa bhfómhair nuair atá t-arbhar aibí agus réidh le baint.

Ach ní orthu siúd atáim ag smaoineadh ach ar an bhfarraige mór timpeall na tíre. Chónaigh mé cois farraige ar feadh cuid de mo shaol, nuair a phós mé fear a bhí ina choimeadaí teach solais amuigh ó chósta na h-Éireann. Bhí mo bhaile ar an gcósta.

Chaith sé sé seachtain amuigh sa teach solais agus coicís sa bhaile. Bhraith sin go mór ar an aimsear. Bád beag a thóg na fir chuig an teach solais in éinigh le bia don tréimhse amuigh agus a bhagaiste pearsanta. Ar an gCósta ó thuaidh, thiar nó ó dheas, is mór an tionchar a bhí ag an aimsear. Le galaí agus tonntracha árda is annamh nár cuireadh moillar an faoiseamh a bhí beartaithe gach coicís. Mar sin eolas faoin aimsear agus gaotha cois farraige a bhí tábhachtach nuair a tháinig sé in am do m'fhear céile teacht I dtír. Mar sin is mór an tionchar a bhí ag an bhfarraige ar ár saol.

Tar éis a sheal san iarthar chuamar go Corcaigh, chuig teach solais a bhí ar an mór- thír- ní raibh turas I mbád riachtanach. Bhí cuan Corcaigh amach romhainn. Bhi mo shaol ansin an suimiúil- báid agus longa ag seoladh insteach go Cóbh agus Corcaigh. Chuaigh piolóta ó bád beag ar bhord na longa móra- a threoraigh isteach iad go Ceann Scríbe- cois cladaigh nó ar ancaire. Ní chuimhin liom aon galaí móra ná tonntracha árda sa chuan. (Is minic a bhí iasc again don dinnéar)

Chaith m'fhear céile dhá bhlian ansin nuair a fuair sé fógra go raibh sé ag aistriú go Carraig an Tuscair , amach ó chósta Loch Garmáin. Bhí tránna deasa thart ar an gcalafort i Rosláir. Bhí sé áisiúil d'ár gclann. Bhí said in ann snámh agus súgradh sna dumhaigh gainimhe agus eolas a fháil faoi na h-éanlaith mara agus na héisc.

Chaith m'fhear céile dhá scór bliain ag obair ar na tithe solais, dhá cheann I gContae Maigheo- An Carraig Dubh agus Oiléan an Iolra, dhá cheann I gContae na Gaillimhe- Ceann Léama agus Inisoirr, Carraig an Tairbh I gContae Corcaigh, an Tuscar I Loch

Garman agus Oileán Reachlainn agus cinn eile thart ar an gCósta.

Anois níl éinne I mbun na h-oibre sin. Tá na tithe solais ansin fós agus tá said riachtanach do thrácht na mbád agus na longa ach is tré teicneolaíocht atá said ag feidhmniú.

Is maith an cuimhne atá agam faoin am a chaith mé cois farraige. Chaitheamar seal eile intíre agus is minic a thugamar turas cois farraige. Is leigheas é ar gach galar!

# THE END

## INLAND FISHERIES IRELAND

Inland Fisheries Ireland is a statutory body operating under the aegis of the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (DCCAE) and was established under the Fisheries Act on 1st July 2010. Its principal function is the protection and conservation of the inland fisheries resource. Inland Fisheries Ireland promotes supports, facilitates and advises the Minister on the conservation, protection, management, development and improvement of inland fisheries, including sea angling. Inland Fisheries Ireland also develops policy and national strategies relating to inland fisheries and sea angling and advises the Minister on same.

The Stories from the Waterside competition encapsulates the relationship between people and water through unique stories including people's own memories and folklores that have been passed down from one generation to the next. Inland Fisheries Ireland has a history of helping people connect to their inland fisheries and Stories from the Waterside gave people an opportunity to tell their own stories, from growing up beside a body of water to going fishing with a family member, these stories make up a special collection that belong as part of the history of Ireland's waterbodies.
*Sadhbh O'Neill, Communications Assistant, Inland Fisheries Ireland*

## WATERWAYS IRELAND

Waterways Ireland is the North/South Implementation Body for the inland navigable waterway systems of Ireland and was established under the British-Irish Agreement, 1999. The Statutory remit of Waterways Ireland is to manage, maintain, develop and restore the inland navigable waterways, principally for recreational purposes. The waterways under our remit include the Shannon Navigation, Shannon Erne Waterway, Erne System, Lower Bann Navigation, Grand & Royal Canals and the Barrow Navigation. In addition, as part of the organisations Heritage Plan, Waterways Ireland is committed to protecting the unique waterways heritage for all to enjoy.

Stories from the Waterside illustrates the very real tangible and intangible connections that individuals and communities have with their local waterway. It is this connection which Waterways Ireland wishes to support and encourage as part of our remit to open the waterways up to a variety of users. In addition, the memories and traditions associated with the inland waterways are an integral element of its rich heritage tapestry which we seek to document and preserve for this and future generations.
*Cormac McCarthy, Environment & Heritage Officer, Waterways Ireland*

## THE HERITAGE COUNCIL

The Heritage Council, established as a statutory body under the Heritage Act 1995, provides policy advice for government on heritage issues that include sustainability, landscape management, high nature value farming, navigable waterways and climate change. Through our publications, promotions, social media and the very successful National Heritage Week we focus on contacting, informing and engaging as wide and as varied a range of people as possible. Our Heritage in Schools Scheme, in particular, plays a key role in encouraging interest

and participation from an early age. We also support a wide range of professional development programmes that to date have dealt with landscape, museums, archaeology and traditional building skills.

Community involvement is at the heart of the Heritage Council's vision for national heritage. Our work with local communities supports jobs, education and heritage tourism in our local areas, delivering a rich tourism experience and excellent practice in the care of our nation's valuable heritage assets. Finally, the Heritage Council has a complex national brief across natural, cultural and built heritage which places a heavy and welcome reliance on us to work with others to achieve common aims together. In addition, the Heritage Council provides core funding to several bodies in order to support the needs of the sector and to help achieve shared aims.

The Heritage Council is delighted to partner with such a varied group of organisations, all of whom seek to advocate for the tangible benefits that clean water can offer society. By reaching out to the public we get valuable insights as to what is important to people. These stories can be private and emotional: all aspects that rarely reach corporate reports that are usually referenced when important decisions are taken in relation to water and or land use. These are all important values that the Heritage Council wants and needs to hear, and the Council will certainly use them to inform policies that have direct impacts on our rich water-based heritage. This year, 2020, Water Heritage Day falls on Sunday 24th August and is a collaboration between The Heritage Council and the Local Authority Waters Programme to celebrate water and our connections with it.
*Lorcán Scott, Wildlife Officer, Heritage Council*

## HERITAGE OFFICER NETWORK

The Heritage Officer Network works in partnership to engage, educate and advocate for heritage. The network of Heritage Officers was established under the Heritage Officer Programme which is a key strategic partnership between The Heritage Council and local authorities. The role of the Heritage Officer is to raise awareness, provide advice and information, collect data, conduct research, develop policy, promote best practice in relation to heritage matters and to prepare and implement a County Heritage Plan in conjunction with a County Heritage Forum and The Heritage Council. Its vision is that heritage is valued by all and is at the heart of modern society, identity and well-being.

In capturing these 'Stories from the Waterside', people were encouraged to engage with their natural, built and cultural heritage. The rich oral traditions and histories of these waterbodies and their environs that were gathered as part of this initiative lends character and depth to our cultural and natural landscapes. The ways in which people have interacted and continue to interact with these waterbodies present opportunities to inform our understanding and appreciation of wildlife, material culture, biodiversity, folklore and society.
*Joseph Gallagher, Chair, Heritage Officer Network*

First published for Water Heritage Day 2020 by the Local Authority Waters Programme (LAWPRO). This publication was produced in partnership with The Heritage Council and The Heritage Officers Programme, Inland Fisheries Ireland and Waterways Ireland. The idea behind Stories from the waterside was to engage people around their local water bodies and to capture their stories, we believe that idea has been realised in this collection of short stories.

# STORIES FROM THE WATERSIDE WRITING COMPETITION

Ireland has a rich heritage of storytelling. It is part of our national identity and defines who we are as a nation. Stories bring local places to life and help us to remember and cherish what makes those places so special and to pass on this knowledge to future generations.

Our rivers, lakes, streams have long been associated with Irish mythology, inspiring legends and folklore through the ages. They are beautiful; forever changing with the seasons. Nature is at its best where there is water, and people have lots of stories and memories around water. With changes to our countryside, some of this is being lost.

> *"This selection of short pieces from the **Stories from the Waterside** competition vividly reveals that our relationship to our local rivers, lakes, ponds, shorelines and canals are rich, intense and diverse."*
>
> **Paddy Woodworth, Journalist and Author**

The lifestyle changes brought about by Covid 19 restrictions in 2020 has brought people closer to nature and provided an opportunity for reflection. The ***Stories from the Waterside*** competition was launched to tap into those stories and encourage people to reflect and share their memories about these special places. Memories and reflections on how things were, how they are now and hopefully will be again.

We received a huge range of themes around water from factual and funny stories about wildlife, fishing, heritage, traditions and crafts to how water and nature can inspire the imagination and replenish one's wellbeing.
With 470 entries it was difficult to select out the winning entries. This compilation from the short list is a celebration of those stories and we hope that you the reader enjoy them.

A special thanks to all of the competitors for sharing their stories, for the interest and time they took to putting them down on paper and for capturing the magic of waters. This book will be a valuable resource for future generations.

If you would like to learn more about Ireland's waterbodies *(i.e. streams, rivers, lakes, estuaries, canals, groundwaters & coastal waters*) and how you can get involved in improving our precious water quality, why not get in touch with us or our partners?

Each waterbody has something special about it and that is what is really important. For more information check out ww.lawaters.ie and catchments.ie

The story-writing competition was organised by the Local Authority Waters Programme (LAWPRO), in partnership with The Heritage Council and The Heritage Officer Programme, Inland Fisheries Ireland and Waterways Ireland, and was put in place to engage with people around water and to capture their stories.

**Further details can be found at www.watersandcommunities.ie or find us on Facebook @LAWPROteam and Twitter @WatersProgramme**
**For more information contact LAWPRO at 0761 06 6230 or email us at info@lawaters.ie**

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Cover Photo of Lough Ree captured by Catherine Seale-Duggan