

Weathering the Changes

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

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

Stories about Floods

I live in the town, in the flats near the Quay side. My house has never been flooded. However, there's a car park/garage next to the house and that water gets in so I have a sandbag and a waterboard to protect my home. With easterly winds, high tides and rain, the tide comes up the double slip, up Browne Street (which is near my home), up and along the Main Street, down by Supervalu and the Community Centre and meets up with itself.

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

Stories about Weather Surprises

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

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

So, about twenty five years ago, my husband and I brought my mum to the island of Catalonia in Greece. We had booked a little apartment for the three of us. It was just one bedroom and Mum was sleeping on the sort of sofa bed in the living room. We arrived in the evening, and it was a warm, sultry evening and we were delighted with ourselves. We were a bit jet lagged; but we were thinking "Great we'll be out on the beach, it's great after breakfast sunning ourselves", you know? My mum was a real sun worshipper. So, anyway, we had a bite to eat and we fell asleep. At about three o'clock in the morning, I woke up- I heard this almighty bang, and then I heard a sort of clattering of dishes, and then I heard a lot of muttering and swearing. I could hear my Mum's voice through the thin partition wall, so I got out of bed and went up to the living room. There was Mum in her night dress and she had pots, pans and kettles on the floor near the window, under the sofa bed, where the rain was coming in and she said "There's a storm. It's a tremendous storm. I can't believe you didn't wake up.". The rain had poured in, somehow, through the edges of the window. She'd left it open a little millimeter, you know because the weather was warm, and the rain had poured in on top of her pillow, and her face, and woken her up. We helped her mop it all up and moved her pillow to the other end of the bed and all the rest of it. We all had a cup of tea in the end and we all settled down and went back to sleep. The next day we were up and out after breakfast, walked down onto the path and set up our sunbeds on the beach. We're having a lovely time and we're just sitting relaxing, reading our novels, when we hear this woman say "Oh wasn't it terrible? Did you hear the bang? It's all in the newspapers this morning." We had had an earthquake apparently, and we didn't realise it was an earthquake. It was an actual earthquake.

Stories about Storms

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

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

As someone said earlier, I don't think we had the fear then of the storms, as kids. There was somebody else to worry about that. We hadn't a fear. Even when the rain came we probably don't remember it because when kids are outside on a cold day they don't feel it; but we're wrapped up. I think it's just that we're getting older and we need more layers and we have the worry around it. The big storm comes and we're like "Oh, what's going to flood?"

Stories about Carbon Emissions

Just look at the ice caps. A ferocious sort of melting taking place now and that's totally a phenomenon that was not there fifty, sixty, or a hundred years ago and it's happening so rapidly, apparently, now. Just to comment on that, there's a wonderful documentary by a man called O'Brien- he's a local documentary maker- about the ice cap in Greenland. It's melting at an increasingly rapid rate. Once the ice cap in Iceland starts melting, it's going to feed into the sea and will lead to sea levels rising. Whatever about the flooding, they're predicting a metre rise in sea levels in the next ten years. Now a metre is a lot, so we have to start looking ahead. At that time it's going to come over the quays. We would see the old boardwalk submerged down there. Well, there's the business of the carbon emissions, which they're saying is causing a lot of climate change. If you walk along Claycastle now there are quite a number of cars that come, park and then look at the sea; but a lot of them sit there with their engines running and that's pollution at a very steady rate. I remember one time walking down there and spending quite a bit of time chatting with somebody at the end and noticing there was a particular car with its engine running on the way down and it was still sitting there when we came back, with its engine running. If you take it further- all the buses and the trucks, they all leave their engines running. I say to them "what is the reason? I asked one fella and he said "We have to keep it running so that it's ok during the winter time.", you know to keep the heat in it so it's warm for people; but, as you say it's all small little things. There could be small signs out on the beach that say 'Please turn off your engine. Do you know your engine is contributing to climate change?'. By and large, I don't think there's any one thing we could do; but there's a hundred small things that will help. One of the best bits of news I've had is about an aviation company in Dublin - it's a big company and they buy a plane and rent it out then to Aer Lingus and all the companies. There last week... there's something like four hundred new planes - now this is going on over the next thirty/forty years, you have to put in for them well in advance - and these will be vertical take-offs run by battery...which is really looking into the future. That, for me, has been the best bit of news that I have heard in a long, long time. Okay, it's a way down, twenty or thirty years; but at least it's something. Of course you'll have to get energy into them as well. It's like when you hear this discussion that's going on up in Leitrim, or someplace like that, at

the moment where one of these computerised storage companies, that store electronic information. They take over maybe a couple of hundred acres of land, to store information. Building them there'll be around three hundred people there, but when they're going there'll only be about thirty people employed there. For the amount of electricity which they will require it's unbelievable, relative to what we are talking about today. They are talking about one of these companies using enough money to keep the county of Cork going. This is why they're coming here, I think, because other countries don't want them.

Stories about the Shoreline

That's the thing about the climate change - the coasts. You see a difference in the coasts. I suppose the big difference I see, if you consider the quays as a part of the coast line, is when you look at the Mall Dock, as we call it, you know the place near the town hall there. Well, when I was a child that was covered in stones and they were covered in seaweed and you couldn't go swimming there or anything. As well as that, near it there were slaughterhouses- down where the car park is now, behind the quays- and all the stuff from the slaughterhouses went into the sea, as you know. I remember we'd be out fishing and they'd come out and call "Stop fishing now." and then they'd let out all the stuff. The water would turn red. As well as that, on the Mall Dock, near the pier head there wouldn't have been any stones; but it would have been very low down and it was all mud. People used to go there digging for lugs, you know what the fishermen use when they're going fishing. With the changing times - the fishermen would tell you it's because of the change in currents and mud banks - you can even see over across the ferry and over by Piltown the mud banks there are building up and the sand is all shifting from Redbarn and out there by Claycastle and all. It's all shifting around and most of it is shifting into town. There's actually too much of it comes into the Mall Dock and the Council have to go and move it out of it. Then, I suppose, the coastline out along- the big difference I can see out there is the fact that if you go out there, you know where the car park is now, say if you were to take a spot from the Butts rifle range to Claycastle and look at the sand dunes there, they're all disappearing. Every time we have a storm they're going back. So if you walk along the beach there you can see it. Every time there's a storm or rough tides and that, there's more and more leaving, even though they've put stones all along there and everything. It's doing no good. It's all getting washed away.

What I really notice is the changes to the beach – the amount of sand moved up by the promenade covering all the rocks. A few weeks ago I saw the seafloor exposed closer to Redbarn and the new boardwalk. You could see the original bog content of it. This is the first time I ever saw this in my lifetime in Youghal, in 70 years. It's totally clear to see that there is huge coastal erosion – you can see the coast shrinking and the level of litter has really increased, especially plastics. You can see the coastal erosion out the front beach: the storms have exposed the ancient Yew Woods tree stumps. I was walking in out the 'far off' and overheard 2 kiddies tell their Mum that the beach has gone.

In ancient times there were huge storms in Ireland. The river Blackwater came out of Whiten Bay but that there was a terrible bad storm with terrible turbulence which changed the course of the river. Ferrypoint held its position and the storm knocked down all the yew Trees. These are the trees stumps you can see when you walk the front beach.

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

The quay in Youghal along the Mall Dock is covered in stones and seaweed. The pier head near the Mall Dock was very low down, difficult to access and covered in mud but fishermen went looking for

worms there. Presently mud banks are building up and sand is shifting into the town and the coastline out along the sand dunes down by the riffle range to Claycastle is disappearing.

Stories about Farming, Trees and Green Spaces

What I remember is saving hay early June and if you did not – you were in big trouble but you only got one good week to save. Also, the farmers are de-ditching land which is detrimental to biodiversity. There are less bees, lady-birds and flies in general.

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

There's a large green area to the rear of my home surrounded by a hedge and backing onto Brú na Si up in Blackwater Heights. The field is now overgrown with a managed pathway all the way around it. The Council are leaving it to grow wild for the wild life. The knock-on effect is that the walkway is enticing people to meet outside and chat and enjoy the wild planting, which is good for the community. We used to talk across the railings, there'd be cornflowers, buttercups and daisies. There are no horselips any more – the lilac coloured flowers.

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

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

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

Childhood Memories of a Changing World (Group Collection)

I'll give you one small memory I love. Even when I'm out there still on the beach, walking there from Claycastle to Redbarn, it's the smell and the reeds. You know the reeds and the wild grasses? They bring back a memory for me of a time just lying in those grasses hiding, playing as a child. Even still, every time I go out there where my parents used to bring us when we were younger. The amount of times we spent all day out there, from morning 'til night. We had picnics, you know? Rolling down the little slopes, all day long entertained. It still reminds me of that when I go out there.

My memories in Youghal growing up and connecting with the elements and weather would be living down on the Mall, near the seaside, at the waterfront. As we were talking about earlier, we'd often go to the beach in the town and it's just such a wonderful amenity we have in the town as well. That's one of my happy memories as a kid, being on the Mall and the seaside, and all the kiddies running around the place down there.

One of the things I think about when I think about the weather is that when we were growing up and went to school, like all the bauld brats, everybody walked to school. I mean there was nobody not walking, apart from people you lived outside town - they might come in in a pony and trap or something. We walked, whatever the weather was like. If it was bucketing rain you walked to school, and when you got into school you could be drenched and the piping system in the school, the central heating, I can remember that. There were these big huge pipes along the sides of the rooms and the classrooms were fairly big. Needless to say, you'd take off your coat outside and hang it up in the cloakroom and that; but we were very good for anything that was wet getting it over near the pipes. In the wintertime especially you'd be allowed to spend a little time over there warming yourself up. It contrast to that then, when the weather would be fine - because behind the Presentation Convent where the apartments are now there was a beautiful view, with lovely walks up there and they also had a convent garden up there with apple trees and gooseberries and everything - on fine days, usually on feast days, it might be our nun's feasts or something, we'd be taken on a trail up the hill. Before we'd go up the hill someone would be sent up town to Lumberts or somewhere to get a bottle of that orange that you dilute and there'd be a bottle of that put into a big thing to dilute it for the whole class and maybe a bag of sweets. Half-way up the hill there was a little hut and we used to stop there and have a picnic. We'd have the sweets and the orange and then we'd be out the whole morning, up the hill, which was a nice, fine day. So that's the kind of contrast between a bad day going to school and a good day.

Going over to Redbarn on a Sunday - we lived over between Ladysbridge and Youghal, you could nearly say, so Redbarn was midways and like I said, we'd be all bundled into the back of the car and we'd all get out and be told to go in different directions . You entertained yourself, you know, on the sand. Nothing put us off what we knew was facing us before we went home, because by the time we'd be getting back into that car we used to all have to get out of that car because it would be after sinking in the sand. We'd be trying to lift the car out and there'd be sand flying from the wheels, because there were about twelve of us in the car- maybe ten kids. We were all bundled in on top of each other. There were toes and heels and everything; but it didn't matter. It didn't matter, because we looked forward to going there again the following Sunday and we were praying all week that it would be dry and wouldn't be raining. Even though we knew we'd have to get that car out of that sand. You'd see me out on the beach, very often, walking with Oscar. I think that's what Covid has done for all of us- to enjoy the simpler things rather than going out for meals or going out to meet this one or that one. I think it's just going out and walking and just enjoying all the nature. The one thing I don't understand is when I see people walking on the beach with the music and the earphones on. I don't understand that, because I'm out there to hear all the lovely nothing sound - the no sounds. You can turn on that at home, you know? It's blocking out all the lovely sounds, the peace.

I lived in Tarbert, County Kerry until I was 10 years old. Up to then I would walk down the island road with my dad to Tarbert Island. On the way there was a big woodland and estate owned by the Leslie family. My dad had permission to walk in the woodland belonging to the estate and I remember my dad knew the name of every tree, every leaf; silver birch, oak. It was an enchanting experience and I learned so much.

I have very fond memories of summer holidays as a child. At weekends we always went out for a picnic on Sunday; but there was always a great palava about preparing for the picnic. I remember we had an old leather suitcase and my mum insisted on having proper plates, proper cutlery, proper glasses, proper everything. Everything had to be perfect and my Dad used to pack it all into the trunk of the car and we'd set off somewhere, on a magical mystery tour, and we'd find a nice quiet field somewhere with a farm house nearby so we could get water boiled, or just get some water from the farmer's wife. We always brought a kettle and a little primus stove. We had a tartan blanket and we would set out the blanket and set out everything. What was so funny was my Dad - I'm like my Dad, I'm very fair skinned - he seemed to attract bees and wasps like a magnet, so my Dad never got out of the car. He sat in the car with the front window open and we would have the egg and cress sandwich and the ham sandwich and the bit of coleslaw or whatever, and Mum would say "Hand that in to your Daddy.", and everything would be relayed into the window of the car. Handing in the plate with the food and then taking back the plate and handing in the apple pie and then handing it back and then handing the mug of tea. Of course we just loved those picnics. Absolutely loved them. Just amazing: the simple pleasures of life.

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

I have a story from when we were kids. We used to summer in Youghal and my father bought us fishing rods and when the tide was in, opposite the Front Strand, we used to go in and cast out our rods and reel in the fish. We used to get fish; but the main thing my father said was "Vera, you have to cook them and you've got to eat the mackerel.", because after your children caught them you had to eat them and that was it. We'd have mackerel for a few days.

As a child growing up I was in Sligo, I can remember going to the beach. We would have to walk from the house down to get a bus. The bus would take us to Strand Hill. This was magnificent, in Sligo. We then ended up living in Limerick- I was a number of years older at this stage- and every Sunday we'd get into our car and we'd drive to Lahinch, to get to the seaside. Now, at this stage of my life, I'm living in Youghal and I can walk every day down by the beach and on the thing; but we were talking about the climate and the weather and everything else- again, I can only remember very fine days and when I was at school in Limerick myself and a friend of mine would get on our bicycles and cycle to Shannon Airport, watch the airplanes coming and going all day and then cycle home again at night. We seemed to do that every day of the Summer holidays and there didn't seem to be tempests, or storms, or huge rainfalls that interfered with that sort of existence, you know?

As someone said earlier, I don't think we had the fear then of the storms, as kids. There was somebody else to worry about that. We hadn't a fear. Even when the rain came we probably don't remember it because when kids are outside on a cold day they don't feel it; but we're wrapped up. I think it's just that we're getting older and we need more layers and we have the worry around it. The big storm comes and we're like "Oh, what's going to flood?"

My memory is as a young person. There were nine of us in the family. We were reared on the farm. Our nearest school was Inch School, which we said was three miles away; but I don't think it was. I think it might be two and a half. There'd be four or five of us going anyway. We'd meet with other children along the road going to school and we'd arrive. Now, as children we were always to-ing and fro-ing; but there was one particular family anyway and they were as rough as we were. There were always bits of arguments and things like that; but one memory I would have is that one would be after running home that little bit earlier and when the Mother would come out she'd be "Were you at my son today?" and we'd scatter like hell. What we would have to do then for the next week or so, until things cooled down, we would have to go across the fields and come around, so as to avoid that house. One of the memories we had, we didn't have the radiators in the room we had the equivalent of a furnace, during the summer time we would have to collect timber - bits of trees, bits of roots, or whatever and bring them. There was a coal shed in the school and we would have to have that full, because that was what was going to keep the room itself warm for the winter, when it came, because there was no coal and very little turf. I know there was a turf bog close by; but that was our going to school and that was it.

What We'd Say to Younger People...

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

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

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

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