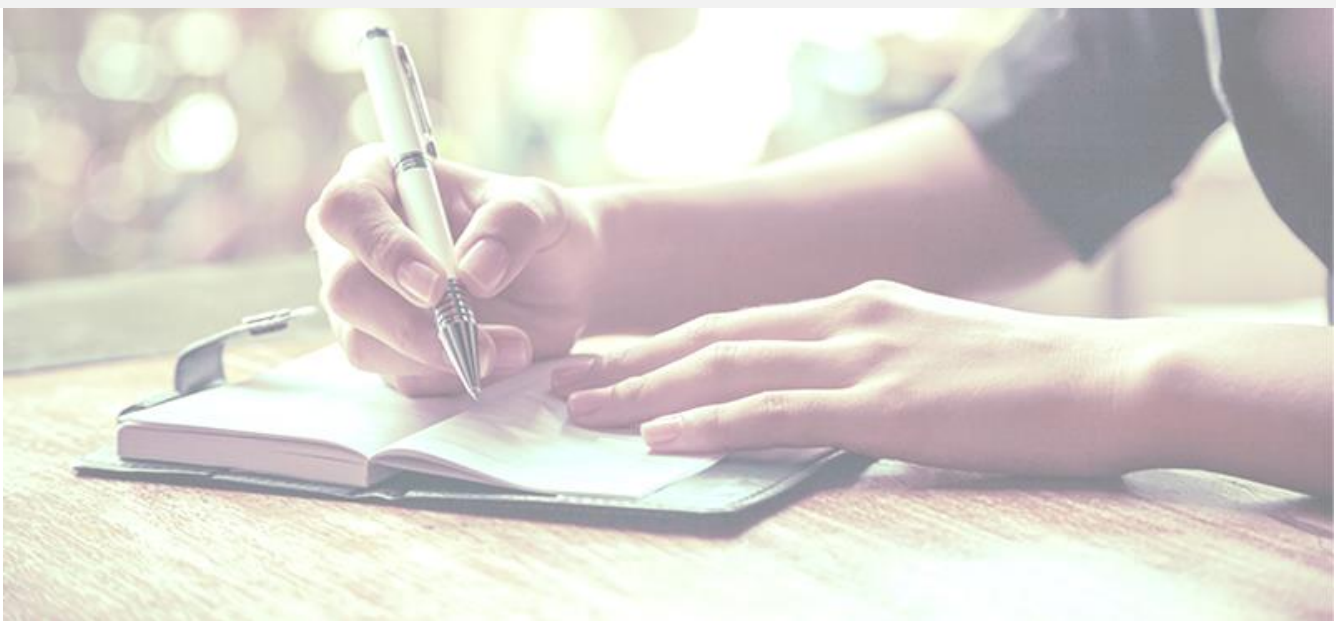




# All-Ireland Mothers' Union Poetry Competition

Winning, Highly Commended and Commended Entries



**Theme : Covid Times**

*"When I write I can shake off all my cares. My sorrow disappears,  
my spirits are revived!" Anne Frank*

# All-Ireland Mother's Union Poetry Competition 2020

## JUDGE'S REPORT

The poems submitted for the Mother's Union poetry competition were a privilege and a pleasure to read. Poets responded to the COVID TIMES theme in all sorts of wonderful ways. These poems were considered anonymously, read again and again. The range of the poetry was impressive, covering every aspect of life in COVID Times. Thank you to everyone who took the time to enter the competition and share their experiences. Mother's Union members are a very talented group of ladies.

### WINNING POEMS (in alphabetical order)

- BLUE HANDS
- Dislocation

A great poem will reach out, not only to the mind and imagination, but will also touch the reader deeply in their heart. It is a sign of a good poem when it shares the poet's personal world in an honest and authentic way that enables the reader to share the experience and relate to it. The two winning poems, **BLUE HANDS** and **Dislocation** both stood out.

**BLUE HANDS** is a very moving poem that had me in tears when I read it first, and remained as powerful on each re-read. **Dislocation** is an excellent poem, does not mention COVID, yet subtly demonstrates it, hinting, with the beautiful language choices, the context of this un-named menace. Both **BLUE HANDS** and **Dislocation** deserve to be winners.

### HIGHLY COMMENDED POEMS (in alphabetical order)

Other excellent poems also impressed and deserve a special mention:

- A Mothers' Union Poem for COVID
- Be Careful What You Wish For
- Blackbird
- Footprints
- Moments in Time
- Swapping a Wedding for Weeding
- Zooming Through Covid

**A Mothers' Union Poem for COVID** captures the experience of Mother's Union members.

**Be Careful What You Wish For** makes a valid point and expresses it beautifully.

**Blackbird** shares a moment of joy sparked by hearing a blackbird sing along with a broadcast service.

**Footprints** gives a special meaning to the footprint signs now seen everywhere.

**Moments in Time** uses repetition very effectively to highlight special moments in a lifetime. **Swapping a Wedding for Weeding** shows the effect of changed plans and worry for family – a wedding day spent very differently than originally planned.

**Zooming Through Covid** is a humorous and clever take on the Zoom experience.

### COMMENDED POEMS (in alphabetical order)

The various aspects of the experience of life in COVID Times is shared in the remaining poems.

A list of commended poems:

- A Penny Tale
- Covid
- Covid Times – A Limerick
- Covid Times - What a Shock 2020
- In Lockdown
- Lockdown!
- Lockdown Birthday! 2020
- Memories of Lockdown
- Survivors of Lockdown
- The Ups and Downs of COVID 1

Overall an impressive collection of poems.

There is value in every one of them, and all the poets who submitted to this competition are encouraged to keep on writing and sharing their talent.

Poetry is needed now more than ever.

## Winning Poems:

### BLUE HANDS

She stood beside the bed – blue from head to toe;  
Her wide, brown eyes peeping out from the blue  
Swimming in glistening tears that dropped silently on  
blue gloved hands, holding feeble hands of love.  
She knew it would be the last time her hands were held;  
She knew it would be the last time to hold these hands;  
Where did all the time go to – why was she always so busy?  
Why were we always so busy? always trying to catch up  
Catch up on what?  
Never did a hand feel so good and never did it feel so bad;  
She closed her eyes, a small smile appeared on her wrinkled face  
Brown eyes wept quietly, while the blue hand  
gently touched the face of love one last time.



*Olive Thorpe, New Ross /Fethard-on-Sea MU, Cashel, Ferns & Ossory*

### Dislocation

I walk unyielding pavements by the roads  
past nature clipped, pruned, mown, confined  
by hedges, fences, walls and wire  
past soaring trees with tarmac round their roots  
their seeds adrift on stony ground.

I think about a dark brown path  
soft underfoot  
that leads me up the hill through lush wild woods  
the brackish ponds  
the smell of green all round  
the sun that spotlights curling ferns  
through leafy gaps in beech and thorn  
and then legs aching  
breathing short  
the top is reached,  
the fallen tree its roots exposed,  
the bench nearby  
and there  
the open country stretched away  
and Strangford gleaming in the mist-filled light.



A car goes roaring past too fast  
exhaust fumes linger, air is stale  
I turn for home on dusty paths.

*Valerie Reilly, Belfast Cathedral MU, Connor*

## HIGHLY COMMENDED POEMS

*(in alphabetical order)*

### A Mothers' Union poem for covid

A Mothers' Union poem for covid our task  
Put pen to paper for a poem we were asked

We were so content with the lifestyle we had  
we just didn't think things could get so bad

Corona virus came to stay, people were told to stay away  
From work, from gyms and cinemas too not even allowed to sit in our church pew

We clapped for our NHS and the health care workers  
They all rose to the occasion not one a shirker

The food was rationed, something this generation had not seen  
And horror of horrors the queues for checkouts and gasoline

No christenings, no weddings, no funerals to visit  
To keep our branch members in touch we received emails from Kathleen and Brigid

Renee and Doreen did their best to share information and for all to keep in touch  
They contacted us all by telephone and email as we sat on our couch

We remembered International Widows' Day with a lavender plant to love and display  
Our members were delighted to be thought of on this day

We also said thankyou to the unsung heroes, the postmen, retail and binmen galore  
They all loved our MU thank you bags and bookmark a gift for evermore

We now look to the future, who knows what it will bring  
But with prayer and faith to our Lord we will sing.

*Irene Hewitt, Templemore MU, Derry & Raphoe*





## CAREFUL WHAT YOU WISH FOR-----

Be careful what you wish for---

I want-----

Just a day or two, or even a week---

Just a chance to do ---nothing! Expect ---no one!

No need for putting on a show---no need to bother!

No need to go out! No meetings! No hassle!

Just a chance to ---chill---

That's all that I seek.

Be careful what you wish for----

I want-----

No decisions-- clear my befuddled head----

Run----no, not run-- just slouch around in nightclothes ,

There's no one there to see---- no one to judge!

No need to wash those dishes yet! No need to clean!

Just a chance to be---

*Another* me instead.

Be careful what you wish for----

For now----

Six months of doing nothing----but still not at *my* will.

Stayed home---went nowhere-----saw no one—touched nothing!

Still mustn't go out much. Still too many risks.

Who would have thought it--- those long, long weeks ago

*All* chance was lost-----

When a man took ill?



*Margaret Hanthorne, Derriaghy MU, Connor*

## Blackbird

A sunny Sunday morning  
My favourite garden chair  
Church service on my laptop  
I'm joining in the hymns

A sweeter sound comes pouring  
From high among the leaves  
For those few precious moments  
We sing in harmony

So full of joy and wonder  
He lifts his hymn of praise  
I smile to hear its beauty  
And lift my heart in thanks



*Margaret Rowlandson, Templemore MU, Derry & Raphoe*

## FOOTPRINTS

Covid times have been hard to bear, staying at home and not able to share.  
But after Lockdown, out I go, taking it easy, taking it slow.  
Mask at the ready, worried, unsure -  
until I see footprints on the shop floor.

Why should these footprints on which I stand  
make me feel safe and make me feel calm?  
Then I recall a poem with the wonderful story,  
telling of our Lord and His glory  
of two sets of footprints on an outgoing tide  
belonging to people walking on sand side by side.  
One pair belongs to the Lord and the other to a person  
who finds companionship that is for certain,  
but when only one set of footprints is seen  
where before there were two sets had originally been  
It is said this is when the Lord carries you on his back  
to help in times of trouble and get you right on track.

So remember dear friends in this time of uncertainty and danger  
of the one long ago who was born in a manger.  
So follow the one set of footprints in shop or were found  
Knowing that you are being kept safe and sound  
as the Lord carries your burdens and guides your way  
In the knowledge you won't stumble or stray.  
Kept safe in His love and assurance for ever  
As we keep those bonds which we will not sever.

*Betty McLaughlin, Holywood MU, Down and Dromore*

*What is this life if full of care  
We have no time to stand and stare.  
W.H. Davies 1871-1940*



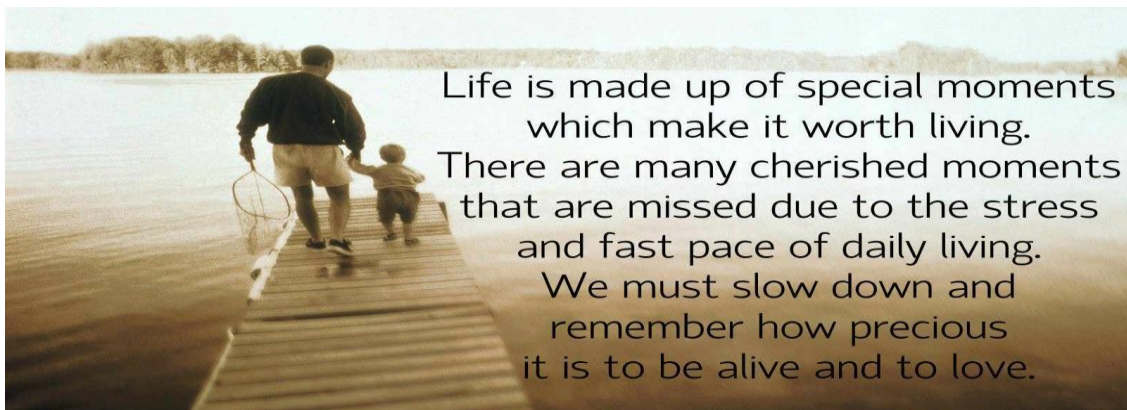
## Moments in Time

It came like a thief in the night  
Silent and deadly to give us all a fright  
'Over Seventies' stay indoors, keep a low face  
Cocooned like a butterfly chrysalis, warm and safe.  
TIME to watch the leaves unfurl and blossoming flowers to see.  
TIME to observe an artistic spider spin its intricate web, just for me.  
TIME to absorb the silence and stillness, to do so is so rare,  
Until the blackbird's sweet song penetrates the dewy air.  
TIME to witness the beauty of a sunrise peeping over the hill  
And see a glowing cat tiptoe the 'high wire' at its will.

TIME to think of days gone by  
Some of the memories make me want to cry.  
A broken, war worn Father returns from the cruel sea  
With bright shining medals for us to see.  
With ration books and hand me downs, recycling as they call it now!  
My darling mother worked day and night to keep us well, I don't know how.  
TIME to remember as an eighteen year old  
On a blind date my future husband to behold.  
Married fifty four years, once poor as church mice  
But love kept us going, we wouldn't think twice.  
TIME to think of our darling family living over the brine,  
We have not embraced since last Christmas time.

TIME to pray daily for the heroes, the sad and the kind  
For God is my strength and refuge, what ever I find.

*Jean Stephens, Drumachose MU, Derry & Raphoe*



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## Swapping a Wedding for Weeding

It's my last day at work and there's the break bell  
A quick call from New York – they've arrived safe and well  
But '*Breaking News*' now and they're closing the school  
The kids are delighted – 'We're off early, that's cool!'

My heart sinks down deep – is this the start of it all?  
The flights?! The Wedding?! Wait for the hammer to fall?  
They're stranded abroad – can't get any flights home  
New York's streets near empty as they wander alone

Flights eventually found and to the airport they speed  
'Please keep them all well' is the prayer that I plead  
The Wedding's forgotten – just get home safe and sound  
It's strange how quickly new priorities are found!



They're in isolation now for two weeks – to be sure  
And the country's in 'Lockdown' without a quick cure  
The numbers keep rising and the outlook is bleak  
They say on the news reports week after week

But the weather is wonderful so my husband and I  
Spend our days in the sunshine doing job we've 'let lay'  
So on the date of the 'Wedding' and those painstaking plans  
We instead weed the garden on our knees and our hands

*Phyllis Young, Inver MU, Derry & Raphoe*



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## Zooming through Covid

The answer to Covid, it came to our aid -  
When life as we knew it began to fade.  
Locked down in our homes as if in a tomb  
It flew to our rescue, our new friend called Zoom.

Experts galore, all those in the know  
Appeared via Zoom, wise words to bestow.  
Our ears tried to listen but eyes searched their room -  
We'd become nosey parkers, abetted by Zoom.

Those curtains are awful, they don't match that chair,  
Their pictures show little artistic flair.  
That pasty face smacks of weeks in the gloom,  
Exposed in the harsh light glowing from Zoom.

Meetings appear as squares on the screen.  
But....is it my turn, should I intervene?  
What etiquette does this Zoom mode require?  
And how do I choose appropriate attire?

Coffee on Zoom is a new way to meet,  
With cuppa and cake in our favourite seat.  
Glad to see one another, there's laughter and hoots,  
But we won't dare to mention those growing-out roots!

Soon this time will pass, normal life will resume,  
And we got through it all with our new friend called Zoom!

*Moirá Thom, Christ Church Lisburn MU, Connor*



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**COMMENDED POEMS**  
*(in alphabetical order)*

**A Penny Tale**

This may not be what it would seem  
My eyes are big my coat like cream  
Forgive me reader if I brag  
I have a tail that loves to wag  
Oh this lock down is a dream.

Long walks now are so much fun  
Exciting places to sniff and run  
Smelly mud for rolling and things unseen  
My coat grows thick and hard to clean  
No rain to date just lots of sun.

I jumped in a lake to chase a duck  
It swam away just my luck!  
Special treats for being good  
Being bad as if I would!  
Why do I love this new time zone?  
I am never home alone!

My name is Penny  
Of whom there are many  
Better than Euro I hear you say  
Never mind come what may  
To my people I am Number One  
Happy not to be home alone!

*Geraldine Crothers, Holywood MU, Down and Dromore*



## COVID

Hello dear Friend...how are you? Oh! I miss your friendly face,  
The days are long and tedious ...though I love my little place.

I long for cafe latte that they serve with cream on top,  
And cakes and buns delicious... bought at the corner shop.

They tell me that it's vital that my family stay away  
It's for my own protection....that's what 'the experts' say.

My home is spick and span now, but no one ever visits,  
Our Mother's Union put on hold...I truly...deeply ...miss it!

My hair has changed its colour, I'm piebald at the root,  
I took the scissors to it... the pixie cut I suit!

My garden is immaculate, there's not a weed in sight,  
The first time in my lifetime...it's an absolute delight!

I even got the paint brush out and spruced up the hall,  
It doesn't bear close scrutiny....the ceiling was too tall!

Who would have thought a tiny thing....unseen by human eye,  
Could wreak such terrible havoc and cause the world to sigh.

So many lives lie broken.....and families torn apart,  
Where is the silver lining. with so many broken hearts.

Things will return to normal...but a new world we will find.  
And all this mess and mayhem... we can blame it on mankind.

*Irene Hewitt, Templemore MU, Derry & Raphoe*



## Covid Times

### A Limerick

Covid Times didn't worry animals on the farm  
Calves and lambs were born with no harm  
Silage made, green fields flourished  
Yellow gorse bushes where bees nourished  
All beautiful, all calm, no alarm.

*Joan Blake,  
Ballycanew/ Leskinfere/ Monamolin MU,  
Cashel, Ferns & Ossory*



## What a shock 2020

Ugly Corona 19  
popped up its head

So Lock down  
Keep a distance  
Wash – wash your hands  
Stay at home  
Work from home  
Mum and Dads  
Teach you kiddies  
Sneeze into the elbow  
Mask up  
“Dear Lord” help us to obey  
Be a Comfort  
Keep each other safe  
Thank you



*Georgina E.Byrne, Gorey Hollyfort MU, Cashel, Ferns & Ossory*

## IN LOCKDOWN

What does it mean? This lockdown, this  
Interminable thing of sunny hours and longer  
Days that stretch the imagination into making  
Future plans, even though we have to  
Stay at home.

The telephone rings and fills the void of  
Familiar faces; when out of doors a  
Simple smile at social distance is  
Blown towards us with a gestured hand,  
A kiss perhaps.

The garden needs digging and that dreaded  
Scutch grass taken out and burned. But there's a  
Colourful 'Corona Corner' of flowers where we can  
Sit, apart; when to talk out loud and sing a song  
Is gladly accepted.



Isolation is a strange novelty. We dream of  
Holidays of yesteryear and look at old photos  
In the album, now treasured. The good old days  
Of memories. A new normality begins to dawn on us  
In our vulnerability.

Doors open, friends and neighbours deliver some  
Daily bread of kindness with good humour that  
Lifts the spirit and warms the heart as we  
Try to loosen the chain which holds us  
In Lockdown 2020

*Gladys O'Neill, St.Mark's MU , Dundela, Down &  
Dromore*



## Lockdown!

It came on us suddenly with no time to plan  
Our daughter is stranded - no return to Japan  
Three of us grounded and confined to our home  
Not allowed visit or to wander or roam

The first time in ages we've spent time together  
Drive each other crazy? - it's get bad or get better  
In truth there's been moments of biting our tongues  
When we've wanted to yell at the top of our lungs.

But there's been no murder or other major crime  
And we've truly been lucky to have had this time  
To spend with each other, to help others in need  
To re-watch old films, to paint or just read.

And of course technologies keeps us chatting to others  
Sisters, father, nieces, friends and brothers  
Zoom quizzes, on line gaming and photos galore  
More time catching up than ever before

Now during this time many lessons we've learned  
It's not what we have or how much we can earn  
But family and friendship and the good we can do  
Not just for our loved ones but for all strangers too

Life's plans can now change any hour of the day  
No matter our wishes or what we may say  
We just have to be patient and trust in the Lord  
And strength to withstand this will be our reward.

*Phyllis Young, Inver MU, Derry & Raphoe*



## Lockdown Birthday! 2020

L Let's celebrate my birthday,  
O Once a year it comes around,  
C Covid 19 got here before it,  
K Knocked my party to the ground!  
D Don't despair, it didn't spoil it,  
O One I never will forget  
W We'll have a virtual showdown  
N Needless to say, we're not 'bate' yet!

B Blessings are always with us  
I In our lives no matter what,  
R Relatives and friends still join us,  
T Technology now means a lot!  
H Happy times are still so special,  
D Deliveries of cards and flowers,  
A All the love still freely given,  
Y You filled my day with happy hours!!



Thank you!!

*Violet McIlvenna, Maghera and Upperlands MU, Derry & Raphoe*

## Memories of Lockdown

We organised a meeting slot  
For a weekly get-together  
Saturday afternoon was our time  
Regardless of the weather

Our sons, daughter & partners  
Liked the quizzing and the craic  
As I asked all the questions  
And they sent the answers back

It was the highlight of our week  
To see them all on screen  
So happy and contented  
It's every parent's dream

We couldn't give them all a hug  
Or cuddle them real tight  
But someday soon when lockdown stops  
The world will be alright

Hold your family closer now  
And shower them with love  
Take nothing more for granted  
And trust in God above!

*Irene McGonigle, Donaghedy MU, Derry & Raphoe*



## Survivors of Lockdown

We wondered how we would spend the time,  
Corona Virus had locked us down,  
no friends, no family to see, not even for a cup of tea.

Our daughter did the shopping after standing in a queue  
and friends from Church rang often to see what they could do.

The lockdown was just torture to a farmer now retired,  
he needed something new to do to keep him occupied,  
he thought about it for a while, and then he told me with a smile

A bedroom I could decorate, and you can help me with the paint,  
He worked all day this farmer fellow, transformed the room in blue and yellow.

Success had now gone to his head, for while I was sleeping on my bed,  
He climbed a ladder as quiet as a mouse and then proceeded to paint the house.

For two whole days I scolded him, but he paid no attention,  
but when he did I tell no lie, his words I dare not mention.

The jobs all done, and we did have some fun but then it was time for a rest,  
We sat reminiscing, thought of family we were missing  
our two grandsons and their Mum and Dad.

Old photos came out,  
but there was some doubt of names we could not remember,  
when our wedding ones we saw, with laughter we did roar  
for the looks that we had then are now all missing.

We enjoyed some glorious weather and God has kept us safe together,  
The lockdown's harsh restrictions we've survived  
but come tomorrow morning we'll be off to wake Bundoran if we're let.

*Vi Breen, Swanlinbar MU, Kilmore, Elphin & Ardagh*



## The ups and downs of COVID 19

Oh Witch Corona  
You keep us all at home  
You don't let us out to play  
We can't even go to school or work  
Because you might give us your germs  
We can't see friends or family  
We can only talk on the phone

Oh how I would love a great big hug  
From my dear ones, that I call my own  
And especially my granddaughter  
But that cannot be done.  
Instead I give a kiss to the teddy bear  
Which was her gift to me



With the aid of Whatsapp and Video links  
We celebrated birthdays with singing and drinks  
But it wasn't the same as having them here  
Where we really could celebrate their new year.

*Margaret Sides, Edgeworthstown MU, Kilmore, Elphin and Ardagh*

