



I'm busy doing nothing – as long as it puts in the endless hours

THESE are testing times. Knock away the supporting structures of work, routine, leisure social interaction and a sense of security and we all turn into creatures of flabby resolve. Our commitment and patience are wearing thin. Thrown upon one's inner resources, it comes as a bit of a gunk to discover I'm a trifle short in that department. Is there anybody out there who, like me, spends each day in resentful repetition of necessary sanitising tasks and vast tracts of empty aimless time? The current highlights of my life are a daily drive to the local shop to pick up the papers, a once-weekly visit to the supermarket to exchange brief mask-muffled platitudes with chance-met acquaintances and interminable phonecalls to friends to ascertain if their days are as dreary as mine.

How often in a busy life B.C. (Before Covid) I've yearned for the luxury of doing nothing. Now I have nothing but time, I don't know what to do with it. I can spend an entire afternoon carrying a

Anita
ROBINSON

single vase round the house trying it out in various locations, only to end up restoring it to the place it has stood for the past 30 years. This is either a re-affirmation of my good taste, or a damning indictment of lack of imagination. Television affords little but repeats and vintage films. *Easter Parade!* In November? Aw c'mon! Newscasts are invariably irritating and depressing: papers and magazines offer recipes that won't put weight on; stress relieving exercises to remove the weight you've already put on; 'cosy cashmere' loungewear, more expensive than the sofa you're lounging on and, to stimulate the mind, a 20-title booklist of worthy must-reads, half of which would make you lose the will to live.

My trouble is, I have few accomplishments. I don't bake. My first newly-married Victoria sponge came out of the oven like two Farley's rusks. I don't paint either walls or pictures – just my nails. I used to play the piano, but I've lost my touch. Now I just dust the keys

occasionally. I abhor all sport because it makes you hot, dirty or wet and mostly all three. Besides, I'm useless at it. My hand-eye co-ordination is such that I couldn't hit a barn door with a bakeboard. Anything that involves balance or using hand and feet together defeats me. Roller-skates were (literally) a bloody disaster. I was, briefly, an erratic but determined cyclist – mostly to facilitate meeting boys in Brooke Park. Miraculously, I managed to pass my driving test at first attempt, though I attribute my success entirely to giving the anonymous examiner's daughter first prize in a public speaking competition the previous week. I have an uneasy relationship with any outdoor activity that requires flat shoes and I loathe picnics, whether on damp grass with wasps or soggy beaches with sandflies. You may conclude that this somewhat limits my leisure options. My mantra for life is, "If at first you don't succeed – give up."

As I write, the Man Who Does the Garden is felling a 35 foot tree, genus unknown. I am watching from the comfort of the livingroom. My sole gardening skill is the kiss of death to all growing things. I have actually killed ivy. When we built here three decades ago, we decided on a low-maintenance garden. I pointed at random and somebody planted a variety of deciduous saplings. The Loving Spouse toiled weekly to keep the grass down and hit the tree nearest our neighbours' house a fearful blatter with the lawnmower, knocking it askew, which, as the tree matured, became more pronounced, till it threatened to fall on the neighbours' roof. Now the livingroom looks unnaturally bright and the lilac and rhododendron, huddled in the shade for years are drawing audible sighs of relief, welcoming light in the gloom at last.

As am I – for I have managed to secure a scarce as hens' teeth hair appointment first thing on Friday morning, prior to a socially distanced lunch with friends at noon. I am ecstatic...!

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ON THIS DAY

NOVEMBER 16 1970

Two Gunned Down in Belfast

THE two Belfast men, gunned down at Westrock Drive, Ballymurphy, yesterday were not assassinated by the IRA. The IRA Publicity Bureau in Dublin said last night that the men, Arthur McKenna and Alexander McVicker, both 35, were not Republicans and the Movement was in no way associated with the shootings. Both men died on their way to hospital after being shot – one through the head and the other in the back – while pushing a van that had broken down.

An eyewitness to the daylight horror, ten year old John Harley, said: 'I was in Westrock Drive when a man wearing a white coat and a black hat pushed me over the railings and drew a gun from his pocket. He began shooting and when he stopped he jumped into a blue mini-van.'

McKenna, of Whitecliffe Crescent, was the father of five while McVicker of Monagh Road had four children. According to the police, McKenna had been beaten up by a gang of men at a club on the Falls Road on Saturday night. McKenna's wife, Mary (33), the mother of three boys and two girls, said that her husband was never involved with any political or extremist organisation.

'No-one came to tell me that my husband had been murdered,' she said. 'I was told about two hours afterwards by a relative. My husband was a man of few words. He was very kind and helpful to everyone in the area. He was a member of the Ballymurphy Peace Committee. (This unprecedented gangster-style double murder not only shocked West Belfast but was a foretaste of events to come. According to a Ballymurphy community worker, Claran de Baroid in his memoir, both men were well known petty criminals. The RUC ascribed the murders to the emerging Provisional IRA.)'

'Violence Harms Minority Cause' – CCDC

THE Central Citizens' Defence Committee (CCDC) has published the following advertisement in *The Irish News*: 'For the past two years history has been made before our eyes. In NI there is a determined demand for justice and democracy, a vigorous effort to secure for the minority a proper democratic voice in shaping the future.... Street violence is a recurring problem. Violence is OUT. Why? Because violence is totally unproductive and is morally unjustifiable. Because violence harms the minority cause....'

'A number of groups are contributing to this situation. Some call themselves Republicans but the vast majority ... repudiate their extreme tactics.' (A spontaneous reaction to the chaos of August 1969, the moderate CCDC, led by businessman, Tom Conaty and Falls Rd priest, Fr Padraig Murphy, found itself marginalised by the violent men and quickly faded into history.)

EDITED BY ÉAMON PHOENIX
e.phoenix@irishnews.com