



THEY'RE OFF: Runners at the start of last year's Cork City Marathon on Patrick Street. This year's race is on Bank Holiday Monday.

Sugar rush from a stranger saved me

It was all of a year ago, but I still cannot forget how a lady, a complete stranger, saved my life.

My blurry memory says she stepped off a path somewhere in Blackrock and met me with a fistful of jellies; she sugar fixed my failing body. An unofficial superhero, I hope and pray she'll be nearby this year too.

Having had its marathon under lock and key, in something of an ivory tower, for twenty-one years, I was a willing conscript in last summer's coup to release it. Stood amongst the huddled masses on Patrick Street that morning, I gawked around like a school kid skipping class. At long last, Cork was to be transformed into the people's ... playground.

It hurt though. The veterans of foreign street efforts warned of the first five miles. Beware they said. But we didn't, and probably won't either this

DAVID YOUNG took part in last year's Cork Marathon and says it is a tumultuous day — and will be again this Monday

Monday. It's still too fresh to be any other way. The buzz cajoles you to sweep through South Mall and rush to Blackpool and back, while skipping naively to its ethnic beats.

And so you tear along Horgan's Quay, and hurtle on to the Tunnel. But then the incline hits you — a bloody hill. Some pull over to pee; you look away; yet the voice in your head pipes up, wanting to know: How far to go. You sense your 'wall' around Mahon. By now the head's tilted back, and you're cursing the sunshine and your lack of shades, and privately invoking orange-flavoured rain.

Last year the 'hottest day' arrived without invitation. Cork's collective intuition hollered 'emergency'. Unmasked, folk unravelled garden hoses; they emptied their cup-

boards (and possibly attics too) of all spare water-bearing vessels, glass, plastic, even paper. And selflessly, in doing so, they kept thousands of their fellow citizens from almost certain expiry in the midday sun.

Men and women, on the cusp of retirement, wistfully recalled, in a heated blast of Bank Holiday nostalgia, what it was once like to expand the city's lungs.

The generations that have followed since may not even have heard the romantic anecdotes of water stations and different routes running by their homes. But all that has changed. All cities ought to have one — and Cork has got its own back.

A mojo of sorts, you might say. This year's the back-to-back.

First-time witnesses spoke of something spe-

cial: almost like stumbling across an emotion long thought of as impractical. For many, it was a watershed moment, a rite of passage into a new era of confidence. Cork offered itself a new vista. And boy, did it like the look of it.

On paper, it may be an individual endeavour of lunatic proportions: One person vs 26 miles, and its 385-yard companion, tacked on for good measure. Yet this ludicrous odyssey into the abyss of physical endurance, with no guarantee of survival, becomes one hell of a community event.

The stretches of Model Farm Road and Poulavone took heavy tolls. Many folded while others leaned on new-found friends.

A nod, snatched words of encouragement, a shared water bottle — small things made the difference.

A suited man in Bishopstown jumped into the passing hordes to run

alongside and resuscitate the spirits of a senior gent, a friend, who could barely speak. He survived.

Only a handful could have encountered the Musketeer kid on the Carrirohane straight.

No more than four years of age, he ferried water bottles as big as himself, to what must have seemed like ailing giants. No theme park could compete. Could he ever forget?

Each city has its own way and its own dates. The June Bank Holiday is now a Cork thing. Watch the buzz grow and think of how you could save a life with an innocent bag of sweets.

Without one lady's timely and telepathic intervention, and sustenance thrust into my palm, these words wouldn't have made it to ink. A stranger? Yes, but no danger there.

● Don't miss tomorrow's two-page preview of the event.

Poverty is blighting our kids' lives



A monthly column by Fergus Finlay, Chief Executive, Barnardos

CUTBACKS, cutbacks. This is the message we are hearing from our politicians these days. The economy is slowing down and the only way for us to deal with it is to tighten our belts.

The only thing is — when they talk about belt-tightening, have you noticed that it's always someone else's belt that needs to be tightened? And it's usually people whose belts are already hurting, they're pulled so tight. The cutting we're seeing now is in hospital beds, services to elderly people or people with a disability, children in need of protection. You'd have to wonder why are they always the first target of the cuts?

There are actually two reasons. The first reason is that it's easy. Some reductions in public spending have to be managed, and they involve a bit of pain and sacrifice across the entire spectrum. Some can be inflicted at the stroke of a pen — cut out a home help programme here, delay the building of a mental health facility there.

And the second reason is that the more vulnerable people are, the less likely it is that they will have a powerful lobby speaking up on their behalf. If you're in government, and your expenditure cuts are going to affect some powerful interest group, you have to brace yourself to withstand all sorts of pressure. But if your cuts affect, say, vulnerable children, you can simply deny it's happening.

Child poverty in Ireland can be beaten. Every child in Ireland can be given a real chance to be the most they can be. That will require more than resources, critical as they are. It will also take imagination and creativity, cooperation, and leadership.

Right now, 100,000 children live in consistent poverty in Ireland — with inadequate nutrition in inadequate accommodation, and often surrounded by the sort of pressures that can blight a childhood and shape a life. Most of them live in communities that are neglected and marginalised.

How many children will be adversely affected by these circumstances? The answer is we don't know — many children grow through poverty to become fulfilled adults. What we do know is that the combination of child, family and community poverty can be lethal.

When a child has little or nothing, when he or she is knocked around by life, that can be pretty bad. When poverty has also inflicted other stresses and strains on his or her family, that's worse. And when that family is part of a community that is itself marginalised and alienated, that's when poverty acts like a wasting disease, destroying lives little by little.

I could reel you off a list of place names, and you'd recognise them immediately as the communities I'm talking about. When you visit them you realise that those communities nearly all have disadvantage built in to them. They lack many of the basic amenities the rest of us take for granted — a safe place to play, or decently heated and dry houses. I was in a community in Dublin the other day that was built more than 30 years ago — several thousand houses, in row after row, and not one tree. And we also know that there are aspects of poverty in Ireland that are actually getting worse, despite our overall wealth. For instance:

● The consistent poverty rate for persons in lone-parent households increased from 27.2% in 2005 to 32.5% in 2006.

● The consistent poverty rate for children aged 0-14 (in all household types) increased from 10.2% to 11.1% in the same period.

● In addition to lone-parent households, other high-risk groups were the unemployed (a consistent poverty rate of 22.8%) and households with no workers (22.4%).

There is no escaping the fact that these figures are a reflection on public policy. And now public policy, it seems, is being dictated by the fear of a return to the bad old days of the 1980s. At least, some of the commentators and spin-doctors would have you believe that that's where we're headed.

But in the 1980s, Ireland was a poor country where growth was going backwards. Now, we're a very rich country where growth has slowed down. We need to be investing in major improvements in essential supports, to help people break out of the cycle of poverty.

By Jupiter, it's the red belt of Venus

JUNE nights are of course the shortest of the year, so we really don't see many dark skies. Here's some interesting things that may catch your eye.

Have a look at the northern horizon around midnight and you may catch some Noctilucent Clouds. Like ghostly glows these are very high altitude clouds that reflect sunlight while the lower (typically

Night skies for June by DAVE GRADWELL

(Irish!) clouds are in the shadow of the earth.

Take a look out as soon as it gets dark and you'll be very unlucky not to see a satellite flying over. These usually move at the same

speed as an aeroplane but have no red/green lights and are silent. You may notice some blink on and off as they roll in orbit, catching the sunlight. Track them across the sky and watch as they disappear into the earth's shadow. Check out www.heavens-above.com to see when some of the brighter ones are flying by.

I always think that the

moon looks very spectacular as it tracks low along the southern sky. Due to an optical illusion objects closer to the horizon seem larger and the moon can seem huge as it rises during the summer.

Watch also for the Belt of Venus. This is the red band of light seen around sunrise or sunset and is caused by the scattering of red light. Sometimes visible is a dark

band of the earth's shadow between it and the horizon.

If you notice a bright object low in the south after sunset, it's the giant planet Jupiter. Have a look through binoculars to see its four Galilean moons.

The summer solstice is on June 20 when the sun reaches its highest point in the sky for the year. The moon will be full on the 18th and new on the 3rd.