

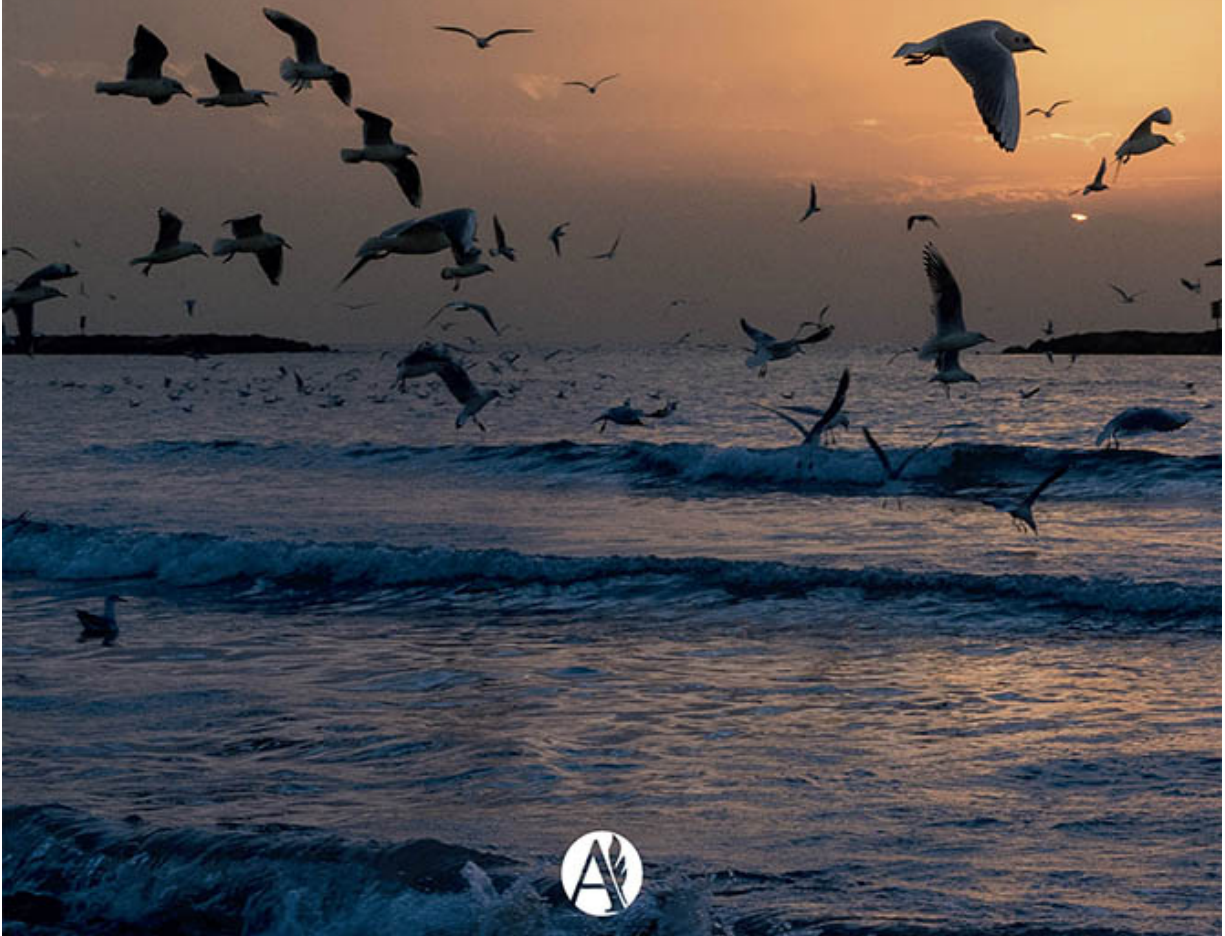
John P. Healy

The Murmuring Waves



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EDITORIAL AUTORES DE ARGENTINA

Healy, John P.

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www.autoresdeargentina.com

info@autoresdeargentina.com

*I would like to express my deep gratitude to María
and her family, especially to Claudia and Marcos
for having received me so willingly into their family unit
those many years ago and accompanied me jubilantly ever
since.*

*I wish to thank especially those who graciously read earlier
versions of this book and encouraged me to continue writing
and consider publishing it.
Without the helpful suggestions and observations of Michael
Bettancourt,
María B. Alvarez, Pat O'Donnell, Frs. Michael McKee SMA and
Seamus Nohilly SMA this material would never have reached
the publishers.*

*In memory of M.A. Healy who knew how to sing
his way through a life that was never easy.*

When the Irishman is found outside of Ireland in another environment, he very often becomes a respected man.

JAMES JOYCE

INTRODUCTION

My neighborhood was absolutely quiet. I mean so quiet that nothing or anyone seemed to move. The sensation was eerie. I felt like I wanted to shout “help” to see if anyone would respond. Even the neighboring dogs were silent, of course there was nothing to bark at.

The usual hum and retarding of the engines of the planes flying overhead on their approach to the local airport had disappeared. The surrounding world seemed motionless.

There were many days when I wondered was there anybody living in the street besides my wife and myself. Such silence and lack of movement of people or cars was almost disturbing and unknown. What is happening? Only the local food stores are now open, no supermarkets or shopping centers, no hairdressers or other unessential business operating. It’s a world we had never known, at least in this part of the globe. But we were not alone in this new reality.

We are in the latter half of 2020, a year not to be easily forgotten, that has marked absolute disorder on a global scale. I have been more or less confined to my house since March due to the pandemic of a virus known as Covid-19. What is this that has brought so much of the world practically to a standstill for several months? It is something unknown to generations for over a century. We are making history.

It has taken our world by surprise and there have been many interpretations. Is this some kind of divine punishment for the corruption and neglect of our common home, earth? A revenge on the capitalist world of greed where the enrichment of the few is at the cost of the poverty of the many? After all did not this virus begin apparently in a city of China called Wuhan. Theories of conspiracies have gone their rounds in the media and social networks. Our world has truly become a global village where all and everyone is interconnected and affected.

How strange! The life-giving air we breathe has become contaminated and we are obliged to wear face masks for protection. The virus, we are told is transported through human saliva, even through its minute particles or aerosols which are suspended in the atmosphere for a certain time, has become a danger, like the smoke in closed spaces in other times. Particularly in Eastern spirituality and the Hebrew tradition, the breath has always been considered the source of life and divine presence as we read in the book of Genesis chapter two verse seven: *Yahwew fashioned man of dust from the soil. Then he breathed into his nostrils a breath of life, and thus man became a living being.*

Human communication, one of the hallmarks of our species, is limited to mumbling through the face mask. Psychic disorders, due to the lack of this essential element of communication and contact, are beginning to affect all ages. The wisdom of nature itself is calling upon us to question the world we have created, consciously or unconsciously. Our 'common home' feels threatened and we are the ones responsible. Thoughts such as these have been flowing through my mind during this prolonged period of social isolation.

Of course the economic interests of the Big Farma have also been accused. We now see the race of the different laboratories and pharmaceutical companies to produce a vaccine. Good intentions of making the vaccine globally available at a low price are also been announced and so we wait patiently in our confinement, out of fear. Due to my age bracket I am considered one of the vulnerable citizens and extra caution is advised. My life, to some extent, has been put on hold.

The only similar, but much more limited, situation of fear and isolation that I personally have had was back in the 1950's when we experienced a polio epidemic. This was prior to the discovery of the Salk vaccine and its availability worldwide. That scare arose shortly after the arrival in late 1954 of my family to the city of Cork which was one of the centers worst affected in Ireland. The difficulty arose when we decided to return to Galway during the following summer on vacation. Our relations in Galway weren't too happy with us coming from Cork in the middle of the polio epidemic. You could say we were stigmatized and should have stayed away. Looking at it from the viewpoint of the year 2020, I can only wonder will this become a more common occurrence in the modern globalised world.

I, being a young adolescent at that time, was not fully aware of the incapacitating consequences of the disease, especially for many young children whose life and mobility was changed forever. No such incapacitating disease has affected my life or mobility as I approach my eightieth year, so I have been lucky healthwise throughout my life and up to this day. For this as for so many other aspects of my life I feel very grateful and in some manner called to share this gratefulness.

Now far from that pleasant, spacious house in Cork, called “Brandon”, where I spent many hours cutting hedges and assisting my dad with the vegetable patch, this is Córdoba, Argentina and there is no hedge to be cut and no vegetable patch to be attended in my much smaller house. The confinement has allowed even more time for reading and considerations not previously entertained. It has also obliged me to devise forms of physical exercise in reduced spaces. I invent dance routines to the rhythms of popular music, aimed, it states, at burning calories. My wife is sometimes tempted to join me and is entertained at my efforts.

What has occurred during those intervening years? Is this current and long term confinement going to bring inevitable changes to our own lives and that of our entire world as we have known it? One of the many questions being posed and going the rounds.

Of course there is a history of epidemics that has plagued humankind for centuries, but then the known world was much smaller. Long distance travel was only for the adventurous and those seeking new trading routes and stations. Globalization was unheard of, much less information on demand and instant. Millions died because medical cures were few and vaccines were unheard of. What shocks us now is that hundreds of thousands are also dying, not only from cancer and coronary and related diseases, but from a virus pandemic that seems to have taken us by surprise. We have confided and trusted so much to science, technology and the wonders of modern medicine. Have we been let down? Was our confidence overdone and misplaced? Our order and wellbeing have been disrupted; we continue to be vulnerable to nature and nature takes its course.

So I begin to wonder have I been manipulated unknowingly for so many years? Have the good intentions of state, church and science succeeded in hiding from me the fragile reality of my human nature? Perhaps I have simply been subjected to the whims and moods of many others while I was trying to forge my life from my innocent childhood to a liberated and responsible adulthood. What has happened in between? For now it's confinement and perhaps liberation from a world engrossed in its selfish and twenty four seven satisfactions. It may be a window opening to a life of horizons perhaps unforeseen.

One of the opportunities I have had during this period of confinement is to reread the many letters exchanged between María and myself and which she had carefully stored. Hand written letters, a rarity in our modern world, can be surprisingly meaningful even when the correspondence is between two people who were mere acquaintances. How much history has been recorded in such letters over the centuries! The willingness to share the simple and perhaps very ordinary and mundane issues of life can lead, even crossing oceans, to the awareness of the sentiments and motivations of the other.

This epistolary exchange inevitably creates a desire to meet and know more profoundly the author of those written words that somehow come to life. So it was back in the pleasant summer days of 1986, while I was reading one of those letters and enjoying the sunshine and breeze coming in off Galway Bay. Like the regular murmuring waves creeping up on the sandy shore, a friendship was growing which was to blossom in an unexpected manner.

CHAPTER 1

Beginnings

Michael John was born in Galway city to John Healy and Bridget Egan, the only boy of five siblings, and so from childhood, was always someone special within the family. After finishing school he started working as a clerk in the offices of the company then known as Irish Shell and BP in November 1932. After some years working there, in 1939 he was transferred and became the store keeper of the company depot in Westport which supplied fuel to the surrounding area.

My parents, Bridget Duffy and Michael John were married in Westport, Co Mayo in 1940. They had three sons, John Paschal, Michael Alphonsus, and Gerard Joseph. When I was born in 1941 my parents still lived in a house situated on the beautiful tree-lined North Mall, which was rented by my mother's family and where my father was lodging. There he met the woman who was to become his future wife. The ground floor of the house was rented by the bus company as an office. I, a little chubby fellow, with the typical large head and big brown eyes of the Irish male became a kind of mascot to Gerry the regular bus driver on the daily route from Westport to Achill. I can just imagine this well-cared for baby being thrown up into the air and then into the arms of the burly, cheerful Gerry, well known by all who regularly travelled the route.

The town of Westport, based on an original design, is located on Ireland's west coast. It is a delightful community situated on an Atlantic Ocean inlet called Clew Bay in County Mayo. The stonewalled Carrowbeg River flows through the town, and there are some picturesque stone bridges that cross over the river at intervals.

Later my parents moved to a larger apartment on Shop Street, this time the apartment was located over a drapery shop, known as Joyce's. The slightly perfumed smell of the freshly woven fabrics often penetrated the floorboards of the apartment. The entrance to the apartment was through an alley-way which divided the building from a neighboring hardware shop. This alley-way, which was totally dark at night time, inevitably became the source of jokes and scary stories. If it was not the courting couples caught in the act, it was the strange ghostly sounds and visions that caused those entering the apartment to run quickly to the front door. The laughs and comments of visiting friends and relations pretended to explain or laugh away the inexplicable invisible world shrouded in darkness. In my childhood years the boogieman was omnipresent and even if ghosts didn't exist, they seemed to haunt us frequently, especially in the dark.

Those early childhood years, lived among the stories and news surrounding the ongoing world war, produced in me, even if mostly unaware, the sensations of being part of a cruel violent world beyond the confines of my home. Ireland being a neutral country was not directly affected, except on occasions of mistaken bombing by the German air force mistaking the island of Ireland for that of Great Britain. The north east of the country still being part of the United Kingdom was, of course, a legitimate target. To avoid that error, large stones painted white and spelling the word Eire