



1 Lifestyle

Total eclipse of the heart Meet the stargazers who have fallen in love with astronomical events [Pages 30&31](#)

+ Terminal trouble Dublin Airport chaos is like a punishment for going on holiday [Page 31](#)



A fresh start: Meet the brave midlifers who have left their [pre-Covid](#) lives behind

It's called the 'pandemic pivot', and for those who seized the opportunity to reinvent their lives and careers in lockdown, the future looks bright, writes **Suzanne Harrington**

In chaos lies opportunity, said Sun-Tzu a very long time ago. Fast forward to now, where we've watched our previously tidy lives unravel unnervingly over the past year and a bit. We've had to adapt at warp speed. Given how humans so often dislike change, there's been constant chat about getting back to normal, but what if your pre-pandemic normal was not making you happy?

Has the chaos of Covid prompted the opportunity of midlife reinvention? Or for some of us, was the idea of reinvention bubbling under all along, with the pandemic shoving it forward?

It's called the pandemic pivot. According to Forbes, millions of Americans — one in four — are looking to shake up their career Etch A Sketch and start afresh, having had time to question the conditioned pursuit of money and status over meaning and purpose. As Covid stopped the rat race in its tracks, the brevity and fragility of life was thrown into stark relief.

A global study in 31 countries by the Microsoft Work Trend Index shows how 40pc of workers are planning a job change this year. Some have been forced to change tack because their usual work dried up overnight, while others had a shift in priorities around how they wanted to spend their time.

That's what happened to 43-year-old James Harrington, a secondary school teacher from Cork, who used the pandemic as an opportunity to pivot away from his profession of 15 years. "It took me ages to become confident as a teacher, but I wasn't loving it," he says. "When I saw a colleague retrain for a new career, it inspired me to make a change. Covid accelerated everything." He moved cities and retrained as a psychodynamic counsellor, a field which had long interested him.

'Making the change has left me feeling confident, optimistic and determined to succeed'



Privilege: Civil celebrant Trisha Bonham Corcoran says she's honoured to do civil funerals
PHOTO: FRANK McGRATH
And (below) Jennifer Haskins and fiancé Raymond Rieke
PHOTO: STEVE HUMPHREYS

"Working with large groups of 11 to 16-year-olds can be quite thankless despite its occasional rewarding moments, whereas working one-to-one with someone who actually wants to be there is much more satisfying," he says. "And at this stage in my life, that is much more what I am about, and what I want. I enjoy the process of seeing people opening up and learning about themselves. It's satisfying to see people become more confident and self aware."

"Making the change has left me feeling confident, optimistic and determined to succeed. For a long time as a teacher, I tried to fake it to make it, until I realised that I didn't want to fake it anymore. I wanted to do something where I could be real."

Unlike James, Trisha Bonham Corcoran (52) was happy with her career. Pre-Covid, she was a freelance prop maker.

"My diary for 2020 was looking pretty healthy," she says. "I'd been building it up since we decided to downsize and renovate a derelict cottage in Meath. New county, new life, new challenges. Things were finally looking rosy."

That was until Covid wiped her prop-making

diary clean. But Trisha's new direction — as a civil celebrant — had already been seeded.

"Just before the pandemic, we lost a beloved family member and had a civil funeral," she says. "People said it was the most meaningful and beautiful ceremony they had experienced, that it was the perfect way to go. That it was so personal. So when Covid prevented people expressing their grief because of all the restrictions, it inspired me."

Trisha retrained with the Irish Institute of Celebrants.

"The landscape of death in Ireland has been altered as we have all had to adjust how we mourn," she says. "Now I can hold space for bereaved people to grieve properly. As a celebrant, I spend a lot of time getting to know the family of the person who died, as well as learning about the person themselves."

It is, she says, an altogether more intimate and personal experience than a traditional church funeral.

"The pandemic gave me a chance to step back, and retrain," she adds. "Having experienced loss, it's a huge honour to be able to do this kind of work. It is a calling. I'm now training to be a celebrant for other occasions



— weddings, births, family milestones. It's hugely rewarding. It feeds me and lights me up — helping others is a privilege. To be there for people to celebrate all of life's moments, from our first breath to our last, really hit a chord with me."

It's not just work, but love which has been shaken up in the pandemic. Like the friend who finally left an unhappy 12-year relationship, spurred to do so during the pandemic, as he realised life is too short to be miserable; or the friend who took a gamble and moved in with someone she'd just met at the start of lockdown. It worked.

Continued on Page 30



'If there were cracks pre-Covid, they became gaping holes'

Continued from Page 29

They're in love. As is Jennifer Haskins. The owner of Two's Company dating agency is a matchmaker, unique amid a world of swipe apps in that she works with real people in real life (pandemic notwithstanding, where, like everything else, she worked via Zoom).

She says people are craving authentic connection in a world of online "window shopping and deceit".

"I try to help people open their minds and open their criteria," she says. "To let love in — love and happiness does not stop at any age. I've got people on my books in their 80s.

Love is an undeniable human right. Everyone is allowed to love."

She says it's been a privilege "to have been a little ripple in bringing people together" over the years, and the pandemic has shaken people out of dead relationships.

"If there were cracks pre-Covid, they became gaping holes," she says. "Lockdown meant being unable to avoid each other, which made it impossible to keep up a charade. More and more people have been presenting to us.

"My advice is to satisfy yourself that you have done absolutely everything in your power to

work on your relationship, but if it still isn't working, then you owe it to yourself and to the other person to let go and let love in again."

This happened to Jennifer. Four years ago, long separated and in her mid 50s, she got chatting to a man in a hotel foyer in Dún Laoghaire when he asked her if a nearby chair was free. Still talking, he invited her to walk on the pier. She said yes.

She wondered if he would be a good match for any of the women on her books. They swapped numbers and met again; she liked his openness and honesty. They began seeing

FIRST PERSON

'Everyone should try to see a total solar eclipse — it's as if life starts again'



I've always been interested in astronomy. I remember watching Neil Armstrong walk on the moon, on a black and white television, in 1969. And I remember we had a Ladybird book on space in the house and I loved the pictures in it.

My father bought me my first telescope in 1973. I pointed it at the brightest star in the sky and found out it was Jupiter. Then, in 1990, I bought a mammoth Newtonian telescope with a pillar mount that weighed about 10st. I put it in the garden and spent years just observing.

A total solar eclipse occurs when the moon completely covers the sun and casts a shadow over part of the Earth. People like me and my wife Valerie, or 'eclipse chasers' as we are known, travel to specific parts of the world at specific times to witness the phenomenon.

My first experience of a total solar eclipse was in August 1999. Astronomy Ireland arranged for a group of 60 Irish people to travel to Bulgaria's Black Sea Coast, and none of us had ever seen a total solar eclipse before.

There were thousands of people on the beach in a tiny town called Shabla. We were

DUBLINER **Aubrey Glazier** and his wife Valerie travel the world to witness the astronomical spectacle, when the moon fully covers the sun

given a pair of eclipse glasses for the partial phases — it's dangerous to look at an eclipse with the naked eye — and then we waited for the announcement of 'first contact', which is when the moon touches the sun.

It took a whole hour for the moon to get from one side of the sun to the other. I remember there was somebody there with a laptop and timer and he knew the precise seconds at which the solar eclipse was going to occur.

Eventually, the sun became a crescent and someone screamed 'eclipse glasses off'. The last tiny piece of sun disappeared behind a lunar valley and when someone gave me their binoculars, I could see streamers coming out of the sun. It lasted two minutes and 22 seconds and we were all in a state of utter awe.

Some people were screaming, as if someone had just scored a goal for Manchester United or Liverpool. Some people were paralysed,

they just couldn't move. Somebody had a tape recording of the event and when I listened back, I could hear myself shouting 'Maximum magnificence!' at the top of my voice.

After that experience, I knew I had to see the next total solar eclipse in Lusaka, Zambia in 2001. I didn't even have a PC at the time, but I managed to get in contact with Paul, a friend from Lusaka who I had met at our Baptist church in Dublin.

When I arrived at the airport in Lusaka, I could hear people singing and welcoming the tourists. I discovered that the president of Zambia had made the date of the total solar eclipse — June 21 — a national holiday. It was a huge deal. They were talking about the eclipse every single night from 8pm to 10pm on Zambian television.

On the day of the eclipse, we went to a field in Fringilla, in the north of Lusaka, where there

were 5,000 people camping and a rave party going on. Most of the people were first-timers. I met two Finnish guys and they told me they had taken five flights to get there.

It's funny, Paul is such a cool and laid-back guy, but when he witnessed his first total solar eclipse, he became a totally different person. He couldn't believe what he was witnessing.

In March 2006, a group of six of us, including my now-wife Valerie, travelled to Nigeria for my next total solar eclipse. I initially met Valerie shortly after my first eclipse. She remembers thinking, 'This guy is crazy', and she said she never thought she'd end up marrying me.

But something changed on that trip. She experienced her first total solar eclipse and I began to see her in a different light. I proposed the following November.

After getting married, Valerie and I began to travel the world together to witness total solar eclipses. We travelled to Siberia in August 2008 and saw the eclipse on a beach surrounded by birch trees. It was the most beautiful site to see an eclipse. In 2009, we experienced the longest eclipse of the century in the Sea of Japan. We were on an enormous



Commitment: Raymond Rieke and Jennifer Haskins

each other. Four years later, on her 60th birthday, he asked her to marry him. She said yes. "Covid made me realise all kinds of things," she says. "I was not getting any younger, yet I was married to my business. The pandemic made me re-evaluate and reflect. I realised I wanted to be married to Raymond and to live a better, lovelier life. It made me rethink everything, including how I felt about marriage and commitment."

"I have spent 13 years helping to create loving relationships and in the process, I found mine."



Stars in his eyes: Aubrey Glazier with his eclipse glasses and (far left) Aubrey has seen 11 total solar eclipses
PHOTOS: GERRY MOONEY

cruise ship, the Costa Classica, with 900 people, many of them astronomers.

I remember one of the astronomers getting up to deliver a talk and saying: 'You know we're all nuts, don't you?' The travel organiser kept saying we were 'going for the bullseye'. The eclipse was going to last six minutes and 42 seconds, but there was a point on the Earth where the eclipse lasted longest, and that's where he had us positioned.

That particular eclipse was amazing. Venus was like a headlamp in the sky and, even after totality had finished, Venus was still shining in the sky for 20 minutes.

In July 2010, we were on Ana'a atoll, a beautiful coral island near Tahiti, to see my sixth total solar eclipse. In 2012, we were in Cairns, Australia. In 2013, we were in the mid-Atlantic Ocean on another cruise. And then, in 2015, we flew to Denmark to experience the eclipse from an aeroplane with 60 other eclipse chasers.

We were up above the clouds and somewhere between Iceland and the Faro Islands when we saw a 3 minute and 40 second eclipse from an aircraft window. It was one of the most intense I've ever seen — the corona [the atmosphere of the sun] was so white and almost dazzling.

In 2017, we were in Wyoming in a town called Lander. It was called 'The Great American Eclipse' because the Americans love to hype things up. In 2019, we were in Argentina.

Valerie and I are evangelical Christians and we attend Grosvenor Road Baptist Church. We both read *The Bible*, which we believe is God's word, every day. I always think, if God had not decided to make the sun and the moon appear the same size in the sky, would we be husband and wife today?

Whenever we see an eclipse, all we want to do is come home and tell everyone. When there was a partial eclipse over Ireland back in June, we handed out eclipse glasses to our neighbours. I was almost as excited as I was when I saw my first total eclipse because I was getting to share the experience with people.

Witnessing eclipses used to punctuate my life, but then another corona struck... Now, I don't know when, or if, we'll travel again. In saying that, I'm so grateful for the 11 total solar eclipses I've seen. Valerie has seen nine — more than any other Irish woman.

Everyone should try to see a total solar eclipse, even once in their life. It's as if life starts again when you see one. It's like you've just entered a new phase in your life.

When someone tells me they're a first-timer, I always say: 'You're in for it.' And then, of course, people keep chasing them because of the intense beauty of the experience."

As told to Katie Byrne

Navigating Dublin Airport this weekend was the worst possible travel experience

I thought I'd struck it lucky on Sunday morning when the plane hit the tarmac of Dublin Airport 20 minutes ahead of schedule.

With a quick exit and no bags to collect from the carousel, I was hoping to be tucked up in my leaba with a cup of tea and a humongous Toblerone by 1am at the latest.

The dream was very much alive as I dashed through the airport terminal, towards passport control — and then things took a turn for the worse. The first rude awakening was the sight of hundreds of people bottlenecked around a stairwell. The second was the tannoy announcement about delays at passport control.

I meandered my way along the queue of disgruntled travellers, but the real fun started outside the airport, where there was another interminably long line of people waiting for very few taxis.

After a quick mental calculation, I concluded that I'd be better off getting the bus — but things weren't much better in that queue. When the number 41 eventually came into sight, the crowd went full Dunkirk. Queue-skippers and elbow-jostlers took prime position; the rest of us were left standing there, mouths agape, as the doors closed and the bus pulled away.

After missing out on a coveted bus seat, I had no option but to go full Dunkirk too. This is every man for himself, I reasoned, as I hijacked a taxi that a Spanish gentleman had the presence of mind to order. The taxi driver was delighted when I pushed myself against his windscreen with a €50 note. The passenger wasn't too keen on sharing, but I'm afraid he had no choice...

It was bedlam, and yet my experience was nothing compared to the unfortunate travellers who were departing from Dublin Airport on Sunday morning. Some people queued for two hours at security; some missed their flights.

It was the worst airport experience imaginable, and



Katie Byrne

here's the thing: travelling abroad during a pandemic is already challenging as it is.

The new airport essentials are passport, tickets, money, mask. There are laborious forms to fill in and extra precautions to take. If you're half-vaccinated, or unvaccinated or less than 14 days from being fully vaccinated, you have to get tested pre-departure and again before you come home.

Most of the elevators can only take two people at a time — something to bear in mind if you're travelling with someone



Holidaymakers have faced long queues at Dublin Airport

who needs one. Little airport luxuries like trying on make-up (hands off!) are part of a bygone era. As for airport pints, they aren't that enticing when you're doing something you've been told not to do for the last 18 months. Most people just want to get on their flight before somebody tells them they're not allowed to.

Meanwhile, you're dealing with a lot of understandably anxious people. Most of the travellers — and staff — that I encountered at the airport last weekend were friendly, but there's always going to be that one person who makes you feel like you're carrying the bubonic plague when you dare to sit near them.

I flew during lockdown (yes, yes, I'm a terrible person) and while I took all the necessary precautions — double mask on plane, bubble at the destination, two-week quarantine period back home — I was surprised to encounter a woman raising a ruckus about the lack of social distancing on board.

An aircraft is a steel tube designed to carry large numbers of people over long distances, with limited toilets and re-circulated air. The concept of social distancing on board is laughable, but I digress.

I made my return trip to Dublin on Sunday a little bit easier by changing the way I travel. I treated myself to a top-row Ryanair seat and bought a bumbag at Malaga Airport (laugh all you want, but it's the most efficient way to carry masks, sanitiser, passport, phone, etc).

These little tweaks saved off a mini meltdown but still, we have to ask what airports are doing to make an already challenging situation easier for travellers. Dublin Airport knows exactly how much footfall to expect. Likewise, they should know by now how much longer it takes to check extra documents.

Irish people have the right to travel freely to dozens of countries, so why then do travellers feel like they're being punished for doing so?

Praise you, dad-dancing minister Gove

You've got to give it to Tory MP, Michael Gove, who was spotted on the dance floor of an Aberdeen nightclub at the weekend.

Appearing to be on his own, the 54-year-old Cabinet Office minister (below) danced to techno and jungle music until the early hours. His moves were described as "Dad dancing" and likened to Mr Bean, but can we take a moment to celebrate his spontaneity and general joie de vivre? Good for him.



Rise of the secret double-jobbers

The pandemic and the opportunity to work from home seems to have led to two distinct groups of workers.

The first group have actively disengaged from their jobs and are doing the bare minimum required to get by.

The second group have gone into overdrive and are dealing with job insecurity by working extra hours and even extra jobs.

Bolstered by the ability to work remotely, a growing cohort of employees are taking on a secret second job. They have two bosses, two salaries and, presumably, a thousand balls to juggle.

The experiences of secret double-jobbers are detailed on the website *overemployed.com*. Billed as "the secret door to financial freedom", the platform tells resourceful workers how to successfully work

two jobs without getting caught and/or burnt out. Pointers include not telling anyone about your secret side gig ("Remember, loose lips sink ships") and giving managers exactly what they want ("When you feed into people's perception of what they want from you, you're more likely to get what you want.")

Apparently, it also helps to be distinctly average: "Don't cause attention. Try not to be recognised. Don't add more work for yourself."

In one sense, you've got to respect the sheer gall of the people who pull this off, not to mention the hustle. Yet, in another sense, we have to ask what's driving these people to work themselves into the ground.

The pandemic has triggered an array of psychological issues. Perhaps some of these issues are beginning to manifest in the way we approach our work.

I remember one of the astronomers getting up to deliver a talk and saying: 'You know we're all nuts, don't you?'