



**As I see it**  
by Julie O'Leary

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WHERE has the glorious sunshine gone? Come back I love you. The weather last week resembled that of the Mediterranean. It was fabulous! Summer was really in full swing. On Bank Holiday Monday I set off on an adventure with my three brothers and their friend to the beach. We had such a laugh!

My little Micra was heavily laden with all things needed for a fun day at the seaside, so much so that I no longer appeared to have a back window! I couldn't complain too much, seeing as my wheelchair took up most of the space, along with the picnic basket, body boards, towels and other paraphernalia!

I had never driven to Garretstown on my own before and armed with directions from Mum and Dad and the proficient navigators of Philip and Colm, my initial apprehension subsided and I assured myself that I had been driving long enough to handle anything that came my way — so off we went!

On arrival at the beach we found a perfect little parking space, it was as if someone had left it there just for me. We unpacked all our gear and the lads set off to find us the perfect spot to set up camp. Colm bounced me over the stones in the wheelchair and we settled in for the day, devouring the picnic that was prepared before leaving. Halfway through my sandwich I decided to text Mum and put her mind at rest, because no matter how confident she is in the abilities of her four offspring, I knew she would hold her breath until she knew we were safe and sound! A mother's work is never done, certainly not my Mum's!

After our picnic and lathering ourselves in sun cream we ventured into the water. The sea was calmer than I have ever seen it, and before long I was in up to my waist and had discarded my sticks! A thick smoke-like fog had descended on the beach and it was hard to see people unless you knew where to look for them. After about half an hour we returned to camp to find Diarmuid happily guarding our belongings and singing and dancing along to tunes on my ipod.

Then suddenly there were panicked cries coming from a woman who had lost her three-year-old daughter Sophie in the fog! I was so proud of Philip and Colm, the way they sprung into action without a second thought to help the distressed woman. I saw them disappear like lightning into the fog in search of the little girl, and sure enough they returned triumphant about fifteen minutes later, they had spotted her and she was safe!

I smiled to myself as I thought how my brothers were no longer little boys but considerate gentlemen. I admire them all greatly for the people they are turning out to be, and that day on the beach I realised just how much we are really growing up. Going to the beach was such a big deal on a Sunday when we were kids, it had to be organised well in advance so Dad and Mum could take the day off and we had to be home in time for milking! Now we can strike off independently and manage fine.

The magic of the beach will never change, and the six of us will always be the one unit, it will always be more special when we are all there. Growing up with my brothers and going on adventures is more fun than you could imagine. I hope we never stop growing together!

**My career:** Catherine MacSweeney — wedding accessories shop

# Little touches for the big day

- **Name:** Catherine MacSweeney
- **Age:** 35
- **Lives:** Aghada, Midleton, Co. Cork
- **Job title:** Proprietor of The Mulberry Tree
- **Salary bracket:** Unfortunately not as much as it used to be when I was a PAYE worker.
- **Education background:** St Aloysius College, Carrigtwohill. Arts Degree in Economics & French from UCC and a Diploma in Human Resource Management from CIT.
- **Hobbies:** Scuba diving with the Daunt Club. Currently learning to play golf.

**Describe your job in five words:** Fulfilling, exciting, stressful, busy, fun.

**Describe yourself in five words:** Focused, driven, fun, love weddings!

**Personality needed for this kind of work?** You need to be open, creative, focused, communicative, professional, patient and helpful.

**How long are you doing this job?** I opened The Mulberry Tree in April 2002.

**How did you get this job?** When I left college in 1992, I went straight to Japan on The JET Programme — a government programme to bring native English speakers to Japan and integrate them into the school system as teacher. I worked in rural Japan as a JET for two years before moving to Tokyo where I worked for the Nikkei English language paper in marketing.

From there, I became the marketing manager for the *Financial Times* in Japan and Korea, which was an amazing experience.

After five years in Japan, I moved to London with the *FT* where I worked as marketing manager with *FT* Conferences for a further two years before moving back to Cork.

I worked with a software company in Dungarvan and a trading company in Cork before deciding to branch out on my own three-and-a-half years ago. I



launched The Mulberry Tree three years ago and haven't looked back since.

**Do you need particular qualifications or experience?** Not at all — a knowledge of publishing software packages would be helpful but passion for what you do is far more important. Knowledge can be employed, but passion cannot. My background in marketing with a blue chip company has definitely been a help, where I learned to never compromise on quality.

**Describe an average day at work:** The Mulberry Tree designs bespoke stationery for weddings according to your colour

scheme or your theme. We work with couples planning the big day and craft a design or concept that reflects the tastes of each couple. We then apply that across the various details that make up the wedding — providing an attractive and matching design, for example on invites, candles, favours and albums.

We also have a rental service whereby customers can rent candelabra, chair covers and vases to design their own wedding venue.

Throughout the design process we keep customers informed of the stationery's development to ensure the final design reflects exactly what the customer wants

for their wedding.

The shop opens at 10am and closes at 5.30pm each day and is closed on Mondays. Monday is the day where I do the banking and all those necessary evils.

Each day is different as I work in the shop as well as designing and making the stationery and unity candles. I deal with customer requests and queries as they come in. When there are no customers in the shop my colleague Shirley and I get down to the business of making the wedding and birthday invitations.

We work as a team and divide the labour between us.

**How many hours do you work a week?** About 56 hours per week. Am I mad? **What do you wear to work?** I wear smart/casual to work. It's important to look presentable as someone that customers would wish to work on their wedding. As a treat, I get gel nails fitted to keep my hands looking presentable. My hands are constantly on show.

**Is your industry male or female dominated?** The wedding industry has pretty much a mixture of both male and female entrepreneurs.

**Does this affect you in any particular way?** Not at all

**Is your job stressful? Rate it on a scale of 1-10:** Yes, it can be busy and stressful. I'd give it an 8.

**Do you work with others or on your own?** I work with Shirley, who has been with me for 18 months. Two ladies work for me from home also on a part-time basis, helping me to assemble invitations.

**When do you plan to retire or give up working?** As soon as I win the Lotto.

**Best bits:** Being part of the joy and happiness that is a wedding day.

**Worst bits:** The difficulty of juggling a business I love with the necessity to make money can be quite difficult. Keeping on top of the accounts and keeping the business turning over is almost a full-time job in itself.

**Advice to those who want your job?** There will always be those who encourage you and those who don't when starting out as an entrepreneur. Actively seek out those more positive influences and push yourself to achieve what others tell you is impossible. It's also important that money is not the driving force of your passion.

**Any other comments?** The Mulberry Tree website will be launching soon. Email [info@themulberrytree.com](mailto:info@themulberrytree.com) and we will contact you with details of the launch.

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