

# Ballyfermot Memories

*A selection of stories and  
anecdotes and poetry  
of Ballyfermot*

compiled by

THE BALLYFERMOT HERITAGE SOCIETY

# Copyright and Acknowledgements

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# Preface

Talking and recording people about their memories of growing up in Ballyfermot and the surrounding areas down the years, As they recalled their lovely memories it became very apparent how these memories were very precious to them and should be recorded not only for their own children and grandchildren but for generations to come. Also it is a great help to students studying their local history. The Ballyfermot Heritage Group would like to thank all who have shared their Precious Memories to this book.

Ken Larkin  
30th November 2014

Any opinions expressed within the individual memories are those of the individual contributor. Ballyfermot heritage Group accept no responsibility for any of the opinions so expressed

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The Ballyfermot Heritage group also remembering Thomas Davis, and Jackie McMahon R.I.P who contributed so much to Ballyfermot and the Ballyfermot Heritage Group over many years/

## My Ballyer Childhood Memories

*Siobhain Kennedy, Ballyfermot Road*

Happy are the days that I can recall  
Like when your Mother hugged you right after a fall  
To be petted and pampered by more than a few  
When the world revolved just around you

To think of the old games we used to play  
Most of them not around today  
There was piggy and skipping and blind mans bluff  
And we'd run and tell our Ma's When the boys got too rough

But O' I think the best of all was trying  
To juggle the balls off the wall  
There was jack stones and marbles  
I thought they were great  
And you'd race down the road on just one skate  
There was relievie and chasing when things got too slow  
There was donkey, spin the bottle and queenie-io

On Sundays coming back from mass you could smell the roast  
The Da would make us all a fry and I think I liked that the most  
It was over to the Deeler on a Sunday afternoon  
the sixpenny rush way a boom  
Skinny Malink Melogen legs was the favourite song  
And skip skip skip When Br Aibey got things wrong



*Caption*

Uncle Paddy would arrive with Daddy from Croke Park  
And a jant on his scooter he would give us all before the day was dark  
Then the treat of the day, jelly and ice cream for our tea  
We would sprinkle on the Cadbury's flake Uncle Paddy would bring  
Then off up to bed and Daddy would sing

In the summer we had trips to the sea  
Cockles and winkles for our tea  
Out with the pins to prod and to poke  
We would wear the scabby hard bits for a joke

The Layer and Pheno nowhere was safe  
Playing nick-nack and swinging on the gate  
The Furry Glen was a treasure trove  
So many of nature's wonders to behold  
An abundances of chestnuts to harden by the fire  
To have the best conker was everyone's desire

At Halloween there were games galore  
Dressing up to go round the doors  
Back home with your goodies the fun would begin  
Snap apple, ghost stories and money in the basin  
Money in your dinner the auld barney brack those were the days we had the craic

These are the Ballyer memories that I can recall  
The good auld days the best of all  
Bernadette Murray Ballyfermot Avenue 27th March 2014

I lived in Ballyfermot till I was ten. My memory then, was back field, the lanes, going to the Phoenix Park down Chapelizod Hill, the Nuns always moaning in school. I returned to Ballyfermot when I was seventeen it was different I was over playground. When I was 18 I would to go Murrays on Saturday night started to drink in pubs. I had kids at 25 so slowed down. It will always be home to me.



## Belmont Claddagh Green

*Monica Belmont*

The memories of growing up in Ballyfermot I have are, everyone left their key in their doors or on a string in the letter box. Every neighbour helped each other from cup of sugar to a chat or shoulder to cry on. We went to mass every Sunday. We had to go to the assumption church as at St Matthews Church wasn't build. We played piggy beds outside the house with an old polish tin. When it was icy we put water on the ground so we could slide later. We played ball against Ruanns wall. And skipping everybody got involved even the adults at times. When there were any strikes, like bins, buses, electric, everybody was up in arms and all marched together. I remember the May Day parades they used to all come to the Tarmac across from our house. When we went to school we would cut down the back road pass the lawns, there use to be a club called the Elephant club can't remember what was done there. As we got older we'd cut through to Dirty Aggies for our loose cigarette and match. The lowest bus fare I remember paying was 4p. And if you missed a bus you could run and jump on as there were no doors then. And there were a conductor and driver.



## Ballyfermot Crescent

*Frankie Carolin Memories*

We moved to Ballyfermot in 1950, from Camden street, there was a Cavendish furniture shop in Grafton street, so loads of mothers got new furniture from there on the never never for their new houses in Ballyfermot, when we all settled into Ballyfermot Crescent. Cavendish's sent a poor unfortunate man on a bike out to collect the money owed on the furniture. Well the poor man had as much chance of collecting money from those who had none as the Vatican had of electing me as Pope. At 10 year old I was sitting listening to school around the corner, a knock at the door, me ma who I always thought had x-ray eyes, said Frankie if that's the b\*\*\*\*\*cks from Cavendish's, go and tell him im not in. so I opened the door, and thinking im great, as all of us chisellers did then say the words that would make me the butt of all jokes for ever, me mammy told me to tell you she's not in.



## Spiddal Road

*Francis Daniel McDonnell*

Those were the days... Upstairs on the 78, the smell of Tayto and chewing gum, windows fogged up and sitting in a fog of cigarette smoke.

The 18 bus to Sandymount strand for sunburn and sandwiches.

A walk in the country.... Up past the bungalow and Cherry Orchard Hospital, out past the farm picking blackberries.

Fasting for communion for mass before school during lent.

Fizz bags and cream pies from dirty Aggies

The Backers.

## Memories of 1960s in Ballyfermot

*Joe Coleman*

I remember it was Easter time and it was 50 years since the rising, we had no school as we were on our hollers, but they had a big platform and a big flag pole in the grounds of our school Mary Queen of Angels. The place was crowded as someone from the Government was coming and one of the lads from school was selected to read the Proclamation in Irish. I am sure the school has a record of this great day in Irish History. My self and a few mates decided to go, we said that we would have fun scutting the buses and having the craic, as we called it then.

After about an hour we got fed up so we decided to go to Dirty Aggies and get some smokes. We got five woodbines and three snow cakes and we made off for the grave yard as we sat on the old grave stones and settled down to eat our snow cakes, we noticed we were not alone as some other lads had a peep in on their way up to the Canal, nicknamed the naller, one of them gave us a large bottle of TK lemonade as they were after robbing a few bottles from Ruane's on Claddagh Green from the mineral lorry, we thanked them and off they went on their way. So we started to mill the snow cakes and I said "Seconds on yeh". Because if you were last to get a gulp you would have to put up with spits and crumbs from the snow cake. Well the weather was not bad at all, no rain. We lit up our smokes and started to tell ghost stories all about the going on in the graveyard. You wouldn't go into the graveyard at night time as it was too scary.

We decided we would move on so we got out of the hole in the wall, into the lane, made our way up the lane and by the swamp up through the Backers and out over Nugent's wall. That would leave you on Oranmore Road beside the bus terminus of the 78 bus where one of our favourite bus men was a man called Noely Harrington. He used to let us stand on the platform make sure you held on to the bar so you wouldn't fall off. He would let you off at the next stop. Everyone loved Noely, It was great because the first shop was on Spiddal Park nearly outside our house. I remember when I broke my leg playing football in the park it was tarmacked after that anyway my mother God bless her was not well. I think she was having a baby and could not bring me down to the hospital so Mrs Gartland put me sitting in a small pram she wheeled me over to the bus terminus and asked the busman would he help me getting on and he did he made the bus a special and off we went to Doctor Stevens Hospital right up to the front gate and you know who the kind busman was, yes it was Noely. We became great friends after that and I gave up the football.

Mrs Gartland was a great neighbour and a great friend to our Family; she lived on Oranmore Road just across from us. All our neighbours were great people there would help everyone out; we all shared what we had. I was twelve years of age that year and I heard on the wireless that Nelson Pillar had been blow down, so the next day I got on my bike and cycled into town. What a site met my eyes. There was rubble everywhere the Garda and the army were all over the place and they had what was left of Nelson's Pillar cordoned off with steel barriers. Anyway I managed to get a small piece of the Pillar for keepsake and still have today, that was forty eight years ago as I record this today in 2014. The same year England won the world cup and I made my Confirmation,

As the song says don't forget your shovel if you want to go to work. Well here is a great one about the shovel. I remember my da Sean Coleman going to work on the 6.20am bus nicknamed by some people the dockers bus. He had his shovel to go to get a days work digging the coal on the boats. The bus would leave from the terminus on Oranmore Road and it would bring all the workers down to the North Wall where you would have a good chance of getting a days work if you had your own shovel. Those were the days back in the 60s. Dublin was a very strange place back then, as we had Lyons making tea, Birds making custard, and Lambs making jam. I can remember me ma Mary Coleman saying to me will you do a Ronnie Delaney over to Boylan's in Claddagh Green and get me five players mild and don't be there till your back.

The summers were very warm back then we use to make darts out of ice pop sticks and a nail and we use to get the tar in the joints of the road which use to be real soft from the sun and this allowed us to make the darts. We all made up our games and another thing I remember was when someone died you're your Granny, Uncle or Aunt use to put a small white card on the front door with the person name on it even if they did not live there, the curtains would be drawn, the mirrors covered, and no wireless till the funeral was over. They had a great respect for the dead. We use to go on outings to the seaside on a Sunday to Portmarnock, Rush, or Portrane, all the family would go together on the bus. Bill Bailey and Peter Sutcliffe use to run the buses from Moycullen Road. We left about



*Mr and Mrs Coleman with their son Philip*

10.30am and spend the whole day on the beach, the songs we would sing on the bus was “ging gang gooly” me ma would send me to Ruane’s Shop to get sixpence worth of broken biscuits and we would bring banana and tomatoes sambos and we would buy a kettle full of boiling water on the beach and we would eat the sambos with the sand in them, but we did not mind it was a great day out, We would be back home about 9.30pm and only fit for bed “ah” great days.

I remember Brendan Boyer singing the “Hucklebuck” on the wireless. There was a young fellow who lived across the road at that time nicknamed Redser Brady and he use to be in our house and me ma and da use to get him to do the Hucklebuck and he would be dancing round the room and the shapes out of him sure we had great craic and then the Beatles would come on with “Yellow Submarine” and we use to all sing along changing the words to we all live on bread and margarine. Winter time you would get your box cart or your pram and head off down the Ballyfermot Road nicknamed the mainer down past the Dealer past Markievicz park, and to the turf depot on Lally road it was a good distance when you think of it, Most of our neighbours got their turf docketts on Monday and you would get 6d old pence for collecting and delivering the turf, the box carts, trolley’s or prams would only hold four bags of turf and it was hard work for us young fellows but that was part of growing up in Ballyfermot in the 1960s. We use to go mitching from school and then there was a bastard sorry but he was one of the worst Meleedy was his name and many young boys were sent to Daingean Co Offaly, for mitching from school. Meleedy was the school inspector and could be seen sneaking around Ballyfermot watching for kids who were not in school. All the mothers hated him.

We would go to the Gala on a Saturday and watch Old Mother Reilly. I remember the song we sang about her.

“Mother Reilly Sells Fish three ha’pence a dish, cut there heads off cut there tails off Mother Reilly sells fish”

We made a song about almost everything. Do you remember big Harry in the Gala we even made a song about him.

“Harry the hippo swallowed an elephant. Pull down his trousers and you see his trunks, Harry the hippo swallowed some whiskey now Harry the hippo is elephants, he’s drunk.”

Just a few more memories from the 60s they use to have the May processions, all the girls would wear their communion dresses and vales, and would walk from Our Lady of the Assumption Church up Ballyfermot Road, Blackditch Road, Claddagh Green, Spiddal Road, and end up in Spiddal park where they would have the holy Rosary. Nearly every house had a holy statue or a holy picture in side their window or on the shelter over their front door and some would have altar and flowers. I remember seen cowslips and Daisy’s in vases beside the pictures of our Blessed Lady and the Sacred Heart. It was a big thing in those days when mothers were walking

by their own houses they would be very proud, to see their little altar and their holy picture and of course their flowers. We made a really nice alter for the ma and as our house was one of the last houses to pass before the crowds went into the gates of the park. I remember the crowds coming around by our house and my mother looking up to admire our alter. I can still see her face as she got closer. The look of total shock on her as she passed by, someone had changed the lovely picture of the Sacred Heart and put a big picture of John Lennon in its place, she was disgusted. We all ran and hid I never found out who the culprit was, but I have a good idea. Anyway I think that was the last alter we ever had. We all had a great laugh and seen the funny side. Getting back to me da, he was born in Dublin in 1922 Sean Coleman was his name and he passed away on the 5th March 1980 aged 57. He was a great da and husband to my mother he name Mary Coleman who also was born in Dublin on Valentines Day 1926. My ma passed away on the 23rd of February 2000 she was 74 years of age. I wrote a little poem about my da after he died hope you all like it is called

### The Quiet Man

Me da he was a quiet man. A scholar and a gent  
He worked so hard for all of us. To pay the bills and rent.  
Me da he was a quiet man, and every where he went.  
You would hear the people whisper. He truly is a gent.  
Me da he was a quiet man, and he loved his little bet,  
And every Saturday afternoon. He'd watch the TV set,  
He never used to win a lot. But every week he tried.  
Three doubles and a treble. Until the day he died.  
Me da he was a quiet man. He was fifty years and seven.  
Now it is three doubles and a treble. In a bookies up in heaven.

*R.I.P Da and Ma Coleman from Joe*

Only for our parents we would have no memories. Yes the swinging sixty's were great awl times, to be growing up in Ballyer. I remember coming home from school and me ma would have a big plate of hot porridge. And the sugar and milk ready for us all in the front room. I use to be lovely as you were starving with the hunger. We got the porridge most days our dinner and sometimes you got custard, or semolina. You ate what was put in front of you. Some times me ma would send me down to the stew house with the big pot on the pram to get the pot of stew. That was a real treat, as in those days people did not have much money and most family's had at least six or more kids to feed. I often wondered how they managed, but they did. They were a different breed of people in those days. Into the Pawn on a Monday with me da's suit and he would get it back on a Friday. So he would have it to go to Mass on Sunday morning. Poverty was never used to explain how things were, as it was normal to struggle to make ends meet. But you would never go hungry as our neighbours shared everything with each other and that was what made the difference. Yes the 60s were hard times for our parents, but also there were good times as well. . Because brought the people together and shared everything the had, and gave everyone a great sense of belonging and working together as a community. The spirit of the people was so strong, and that's how Ballyfermot became a great community.

In those days the kids of Ballyfermot had nothing, but we had everything. Today our kids have everything, but they have nothing. It is amazing how the tides turn around. My Granny use to come to visit us on a Sunday and she would bring us macaroon bars, that was a treat for us. She was my Ma's mammy and she lived in 6 Pearse Square off Pearse Street, she would get the number 3 bus into town and then the number 78 bus to Spiddal Park. The ma use to send me over to Mrs Garlands house to get a lend of a cup and saucer as all our cups were broken and we use to drink out of jam jars. My Granny's name was Mary Cashel and she was a real awl inner city Dubliner a great woman and she called Ballyfermot "Bally Far away out in the country" she use to say. As Brendan Behan said "out beyond the pale where they ate their young". Today Ballyfermot is one of the most successful community's in Europe. As I record these memories I have just been informed that the Gala the heart of our community has closed its doors for the last time, it is so sad to hear this. Tommy and Eileen Kearney took over the Gala 33 years ago and sadly today it is no more. 12/2/1994 another part of Dublin and Ballyfermot history has gone. Eileen and Tommy Kearney were a big part of our lives on Spiddal Road and great neighbours. Tommy sadly passed away some years now.

I hope you have enjoyed these few memories of the Ballyfermot in the 1960s. Always remember that yesterday is tomorrows past. So record your memories and make them last.

## Memories of Ballyfermot

Poem by Joe Coleman 1995



It was summer time in '54, well that's what I was told.  
I don't remember very much, I was just six weeks old.  
We moved into our new house, with rooms three up and down.  
It was Spiddal Park, number two, four miles from Dublin town.  
The first few years passed very quickly and I was nearly four.  
Our neighbours came from Cabra, and Keogh Square in Inchicore.  
New shops were built on Claddagh Green, a total lot of eight.  
Ruane's sweet shop, the veggi and Mario's who always opened late.  
I remember the penny snow cakes and the two penny chalk racing cars.  
The yellow chicks from the ragman, for some old clothes and jar.  
I remember the dolly mixtures and the penny lucky lumps.  
The halfpenny cleeves, and the nancy balls you were sure to come up trumps.  
A penny worth of broken rock, or a bag of hot fish crumbs  
No matter what we got or had we shared it with our chums.  
Those were the days when I was young, I'll remember them forever.  
But it is sad today when I look back, we've all changed like the weather.  
I remember going to school and paying for the drill.  
A penny for the black babies, I often wonder still.  
I remember Fr Daly and dear old Canon Troy.  
They would put the fear of God in you, when I was just a boy.  
I remember Ballyfermot when I was just thirteen,  
and joining Mary's youth club across the road on Claddagh Green.  
I remember all the fun we had and all the games we'd play.  
Fair play to Mary's Youth Club. It's still going strong today.  
I remember playing marbles and the gullies in the shore,  
And this is the house that Jack built, you don't see that anymore.

For those of you who do not know, it's proper name was jackers,  
and when we'd finished playing the game, we'd end up out the backers,  
and backers was our favourite spot, we'd play there all day long.  
Today you see it's all built up and all our fields are gone.  
If the kids today would learn to play like us in days gone by,  
They would be proud to walk our streets, and hold their heads up high.  
I remember Ballyfermot and the old games we use to play  
Kick the can, spin the bottle, knock on doors and run away.  
There were no such thing as skate boards, when I was very small.  
We'd play hide and seek, and blinds man's buff, and over the garden wall.  
I remember the wooden bridge where we'd sit and watch the trains,  
and the fields were full of flowers, and the girls making daisy chains,  
And the boys would all be in the swamps, and they'd be catching frogs,  
And the bigger lads were with their dads, and they be cutting logs.  
I remember Ballyfermot and the stories we were told.  
Of banshees and headless horsemen in bygone days of old.  
I remember Lynche's Lane and Chapelizod down below,  
And the pick-a-rooney special to the tip head we would go.  
We did not have much money then, we all had empty pockets,  
But we got by, I'll tell you why, we all had Frawley's docketts.  
I remember Ballyfermot and me in my late teens.  
I could get a sub in Tim Young's pub and a pint in Billy Dean's.  
I remember Ballyfermot and Moycullen's old tin hall.  
It was over at the terminus, beside the backers wall,  
and Spiddal Park was just a field and covered with green grass.  
But today you see, believe you me, that too has come to pass.  
I remember Ballyfermot and the California hills,  
We'd go there every Sunday for all our spills and thrills.  
I remember Ballyfermot and I remember Parker's farm,  
And I remember poor Ned Marlow, sure he did no one any harm.  
and Downey's pub, the holy hour you'd be locked up safe inside,  
And Bannon's on the 7th lock, well that was bonafide,  
And Nalty's with the swinging door, two of them I think.  
There Ned went in one day on his horse to have a drink.  
I remember the stew house where the Nuns gave out the dinners.  
The bigger the pot, the more you got, you be sure to be a winner.  
I remember dirty Aggies and the stuff she use to sell  
Lose cigarettes and gur cake, I remember it so well.  
I remember John Stonehouse and the church in Markievicz Park.

I remember the Pump on Blackditch Drive and road it was so dark.  
Played conkers in the autumn, and dressed up on Halloween,  
And so Christmas Eve at half past eight, no children could be seen.  
For we were all put up to bed, and we'd think about our treats.  
And on Christmas morning when we'd wake up, our socks were filled with sweets.  
I remember Ballyfermot and the days that passed us by.  
Noely on the buses – sure he was one nice guy,  
And big Harry in the Gala, he'd stand right out at the door.  
Larry the waste man, with his horse and cart, you see him no more.  
Where I live now I used to play and it was really a trill  
My friends have gone, new houses there, they call it Cloverhill.

## Ballyfermot Crescent

*Sharon Molloy*

When I left Ballyfermot to live in country I was ashamed to say I was from Ballyfermot, because I used to hear people say Ballyfermot oh that's the place where they eat their young, so I used to keep my mouth shut, did not want them to look down on my children. but finding this page has given me the courage to say , I was raised in Ballyfermot, and had a brilliant childhood there, that may come as a shock , but I have meet many people from Ballyfermot who felt the same. I feel ashamed of myself now for denying my roots.



*First 18 bus from Ballyfermot*

## Growing up in Ballyer

*Eddie Ned Byrne, Kylemore Drive*

We the Byrne Family moved to Kylemore Drive in 1958 from Mount Brown when I was 3 years old, my Mother and Father went on to rear a family of 12 kids in that 2 bed roomed house on Kylemore Drive. Growing up we had the Playground [The Layer] the Lawns, the Canal [The Naller] the old Graveyard [The Graver] and the Gala Cinema as amenities. The only indoor swimming pools at the time were the Tara Street and Iveagh Baths in town. Once you ventured over the railway bridge on Killeen Road you were in the country, we had Norton's Farm on the right hand side of Killeen Road, were Semperit used to be and Spenlow's farm on the left hand side of Killeen Road. My Grandparents lived at number 5, the 7th Lock Cottages Killeen Road at the time and that well known family, the Ellis family had a pig farm near the top of Knockmitten Lane. The local pub for them was the 7th Lock [Bannon's]

I can remember the great 5 a side soccer competitions in the Layer and when we got older we used to go youth hostelling with the CYC [Catholic Youth Council] who operated from the playground on Kylemore Avenue at the time. We started going camping in the Glen of Imal and then going to Oakwood in Wicklow Gap. The CYC then took over Coolure House where my friends and I spend many a very happy times both working at and chilling out with the lads, Tommy & Ritchie Heffernan, Franer Hogan, Padser Earley [RIP] Breno Farrell [Rip] Breno Maher, Dots David O Rourke [RIP] Nollaig Mc Dermot, Joe Bradley, Christy Mc Bride. Louis O Neil [RIP] who ran Oakwood and Coolure for the CYC was a great friend and inspiration to us all and to the kids from many of the area around Dublin and the inner city. We all went to the Dealer [De La Salle] Schools,



the lower, the middler and finished up in the ender before going to the TEC on Kylemore Road.

I meet the Mrs. Marion in Coolure House in the 1970s both of us became voluntary youth workers thanks to Louis and the CYC and we continued to do the same when we moved to Tallaght over twenty years ago. We retired from youth work in 2008 after we helped set up Knockroe Lodge youth training and recreation centre in Carlow for the young people of Killinarden. I was honoured and privileged to be voted Tallaght Person of the Year in 2003 for my voluntary youth work in Killinarden. Ballyfermot was and is still a great place to live in my Mother, Sister and Brother still live on Kylemore Drive in Ballyfermot, the playground is still there but alas the Graver and the Gala are gone. However there is a new Civic Centre and Leisure Centre to help with the new generation of young and older people Ballyfermot.

## Ballyfermot Poem

*Eugene Coyne*

Do u member the scrumptious feast we'd bring to the Gala flicks,  
bulleyes ten a penny and the black liquorish sticks.  
We'd go into dirty Aggie's to get some Nancy Balls,  
and we'd chuck our empty fizz bags from the balcony down to the stalls.  
I remember 'Harry the Hippo' always on the beat,  
roaring at the kids "sit down in your bleedin seat".  
I remember the 'follin upper' such terrors wud spell-bind you,  
and how we'd try to save 'the chap' by yelling "look out behind you".  
I remember the mummy's curse when we nearly done our pee,  
for the monster kept looking at Golly Cleary and me.  
Ah, weren't dem the grand auld times when musketeers were three,  
out of the Gala cinema from Dracula we'd flee.



## Ballyfermot Bound

*Paul Murray*

With creaking cartloads of household jumble  
They left their tenements quarters behind  
At the cobblestone core of Dublin's heart  
To follow the Liffey banks westward wind  
Bidding farewell to old neighbourhood friends  
While anxious mothers wiped away tears  
And fathers slipped them a pound or two  
As rents would be due in those weeks ahead  
When they made their beds upon greener ground  
For young jackeens were Ballyfermot bound

Pat the outdoor markets in Thomas Street  
Where John's Lane proud steeple reaches for clouds  
Laden with longings and candle-lit prayers  
From newlywed coupled in lofts nearby  
For a three bedroom dwelling all their own  
With kitchen bathroom dwelling all their own  
With kitchen bathroom and washing line  
Where sheets would billow white children played  
Sweet daisy-chain games in Blackberry fields  
A wildflower choir land of bumblebee sounds  
Sheer heaven for dreamers Ballyfermot bound

Now with though times past and steep hills climbed  
The harvest was good for workers and wives  
Who toiled together for growing clans  
On promised headlands above cityscapes  
While Anna Liffey winds through woods below  
Where kids go fishing and racing skiffs glide  
Pasts riverside walks where older folk stroll  
Remembering songs they sang on that day  
While trekking those dustyroads out of town  
Young hearts with high hopes Ballyfermot bound

## Back then in Dublin 10

*Peter Abbey*

### **The Convo**

Our family home was on Claddagh Road in upper Ballyfermot. The terms upper and lower had absolutely nothing to do with class distinction, Ballyfermot was a working class area on the outskirts of Dublin City centre. It was said locally that if one resided on the Gala Cinema side of Le Fanu Road you lived in upper Ballyer and if you resided on the Church of the Assumption side then you resided in Lower Ballyer.

My first school was the Dominican Convent (The Convo) situated in Lower Ballyfermot. They say a child's first few weeks in school can be traumatic and it was for me, but not half as traumatic as it was for my mother. I'm sure she thought that the ritual of her youngest child attending school for the first time was just a formality, sure she never had any trouble with my five older brothers or my three older sisters, but there is always one, and that was me.

In 1969 I was six years old and the only place I wanted to be was with my mother, where ever she went I followed. If the Starship Enterprise had landed in Ballyfermot back then a young Dr Spock would have labeled me as the humanoid form of the species cling-on, because where ever my mother went I clung on. I had my mother tormented and after weeks of putting up with my reluctance to attend school her patience began to diminish. One particular morning after her numerous calls I climbed down from my bunk and made my way downstairs towards our scullery, the scullery door was always kept shut tight so the heat from the opened oven wouldn't escape. I heard my name being mentioned so I put my ear to the door. As well as my mothers voice I could also hear the voices of my brothers, the eldest Martin, second eldest Pat and the twins Jim and Richard, it was just as well none of them suffered from claustrophobia.

"I don't know what I'm going to do with the Peter fella," said my mother.

"Every morning when I place his schoolbag on his back he reacts like a wild stallion been saddled for the first time – Then when he realises that the schoolbag is staying on he turns into a mule – A stubborn mule – He has a mind of his own that child."

"Its just a phase he's going through Ma.– He will soon snap out of it." said Pat.

"I'm praying to god he does, I have blisters on my hands from my rosary beads." replied my mother.

"I'll tell you something for nothing Ma," said Jim. "That aul-wan doesn't help you in your task of getting our Peter to school."

“Aul-wan.” retorted my mother. “Is that the type of grammar they are teaching you in the Tech.” (Ballyfermot Vocational & Technical School)

“They don’t teach us that kind of lingo in the Secco,” (St John’s Secondary School.) laughed Richard.

“Where does the word lingo come from – You’re just as bad.” replied my mother.

Jim laughed even louder.

“And who might this woman be – The one you referred to as an aul-wan.” asked my mother.

“Mrs Clegg” replied Jim.

“Who is Mrs. Clegg?”

“Yer one who turns up randomly and hurls abuse at our Peter.” said Jim.

“I don’t know the woman that well but I won’t have you calling her or anyone else an Oul-wan.”

“She doesn’t even live around here Ma.” continued Jim. “ She just appears from nowhere – Has she nothing better to be doing than making it her business to be outside our garden gate the odd school morning – Standing there wearing her headscarf, knee high boots and see through rain coat – And then she starts hurling abuse at our Peter.”

“She means well.” Said my mother. “She just has a problem getting her point across.”

Richard rowed in behind his twin. “I agree with Jim that woman is a mystery – Where ever there is a situation she just suddenly appears.”

I pushed the scullery door in just as Jim was on his way out, he bent down and whispered in my ear, “Don’t mind that aul-wan Mrs. Clegg – She is going to get her comeuppance one of these days.” The thought of that happening brought a smile to my face.

In order to get me in good humor for her ordeal ahead my mother treaded on egg-shells around me. “There you are Peter love – Sit down there – I have a clean vest and stockings warming by the oven for you.”

As Richard left the scullery he remarked. “You never did that for us Ma when we were Peter’s age.” How Richard was still breathing after the look my mother gave him was beyond me.

“Mrs Clegg is one to talk.” continued Martin, “A workmate told me there was a rumor doing the rounds that her husband had a run in with the man from the gas company – Apparently when the gas meter man came out of a house in Chapelizod Mr. Clegg jumped him, and legged it with the leather satchel containing all the single shillings from his collections that day.”

“Do you think I came down with the last shower Martin Abbey.”

“Well that’s the rumour going around Ma.”

“As you said it’s just a rumour – That doesn’t give you the right to be judge and jury. You can’t be casting aspersions on a person because of hear-say.”

“You must be the only one who hasn’t heard the rumors’ Ma.” said Pat. “ Sure even our Bran and Windy the Mooney’s half breed sheepdog next door heard the rumors about her husband and his little heist on the gasman.”

“ Listen I’ve only came in contact with the woman outside our garden gate, and I’ve never met her husband – So I’ve no right to bad mouth them – Now get out of my sight the pair of yeh, isn’t it time you two went to work .” Said my mother.

After the rest of my family had gone to work and school the stage was set, the drama that had become a common occurrence on school mornings between my mother and I would commence. Desperate situations called for desperate measures, and the bribes of something extra special from Santa Claus if I went to school unaided fell on deaf ears.

As soon as she pulled our front door behind us my water works would automatically turn on. Unlike a lot of mothers in Ballyfermot mine didn’t have a portrait of the crying boy in the house; she gave birth to the crying boy. The last thing my mother needed when she got five minutes to herself was to have a reminder of me, the crying boy looking down on her from over our mantelpiece.

Outside our garden gate some of our neighbors would be waiting with their own children for the walk down to school. As we walked down our garden path my mother would plead with me in a whisper, “Come on now Peter love – Don’t make a show of me in front of the neighbors’.”

“I don’t want to go to school today Ma – I’ll go tomorrow – I swear.”

“If I had a pound for every time you said that I would be a wealthy woman.” she whispered back.

After a couple of tugs on my arm she would get me as far as the garden gate, and if the mysterious Mrs Clegg was there she would be the first and only one to voice her opinions.

“I don’t envy yeh. Missis.” She didn’t even know my mothers surname...

“Having to put up with his shenanigans on school mornings.” Then she would look in my direction. “You know what you are – You are an impudent little get – You have your poor mother’s heart broken.”

A couple of the neighbors would throw in a few kind encouraging comments.

“You’re a grand lad Peter – You’re getting as big as a house – Come on now all your pals are waiting to walk with you.”

But as usual Mrs Clegg couldn’t keep her tongue still for long, “I know what I would do with him – A few pucks around his ears would soon put an end to his carry on I’ve heard of boys been put in homes for less.”

The neighbors would roll their eyes to heaven at the severity of Mrs Cleggs solution to my reluctance to attend school.

“There is no need for that” said a neighbour, “Would you like us to publicly flog the child – You are only making the situation worse.”

But as always Mrs Clegg would have the last word, “God bless yeh Missis – You have the patience of a saint – But you would be better off heeding my advice” and ending on that she would wander off alone to where ever she came from.

So after surviving Mrs Clegg’s abuse and zero tolerance attitudes, my mother and I set off to school with my hand held tightly in hers. The walk down to the Convo was a long haul for her, there were many times on the way when I would grind to a halt, a hard tug on my arm would see me progress another hundred yards or so, this pattern would continue on a daily basis all the way to the school gates.

The sound of the hand-held bell been rung by one of the nuns was the signal for us to form a line. My mother stood beside me in our class line with her hand firmly on the harness of my schoolbag. When our teacher led us into the school building my mother escorted me into the classroom and leave until I was sat down behind my desk. As she left the classroom my teacher would offer her words of comfort.

“He will be grand Mrs Abbey, – As soon as you go out that door he will settle down.”

My teacher was right, for as soon as my mother exited the room and I realised that I was staying in school for that day at least, I could be as bright and co-operative as any of the other six and seven year olds.

The method that our teacher used to teach us words in Irish was quite simple. She had a portable blackboard and she placed pictures of people and objects on it with their corresponding words in Irish beside them. Bike - Rothar, Ball - Liathroid, Dog - Madrai, Postman - Fear an Phoist, Daddy - Daddi, Mammy - Mammi, and their two children Sean and Maire. It never occurred to me then but I’m sure our teacher was wary of doing any thing that might upset me, like she never asked me any questions regarding the Mammi of the Irish speaking family for fear that I might start fretting for my own.

Another exercise we did was measurements, for this we used a piece of equipment called the meter stick. In 1970 Ireland was in the very slow process of introducing the metric system into our schools. The meter stick had a long handle attached to a wheel, one full revolution of the wheel measured a meter. Every day our teacher nominated two boys to do measurements, they would leave the classroom and measure the distance between specified points within the school building, one boy pushed the meter stick and counted the revolutions while the other wrote down the results. If the weather was fine our teacher would let the two nominated boys out to measure specified points in the schoolyard. It was a task I was never nominated for,

maybe my teacher assumed that if I set foot outside the school building I would have absconded, and she was right in her assumption. I would have been out the school gates on Lynches Lane and up Ballyfermot Road as quick as my feet could carry me. I could just imagine the look of shock on my mothers face after she opened our front door to see me standing there with the state of the art meter stick in my hand. Then when she got over the shock, I could inform her of the distance it is from the school gates to our house using the new metric system, the exact distance in meters she has to drag me to school, how impressed she would have been!

My second year in the Convo was a lot easier on my mother, I eventually started to settle down, I did have my bad days though and on occasions my sister Theresa was summoned from the girls side of the convent to bring me home. I thought Theresa would be happy because I was getting her some time off school but I was mistaken, she was never impressed and she let me know it on the walk home.

I was told by my mother that my attendance still needed to improve or else there was no way I would be allowed to make my holy communion, the threat worked because my attendance greatly improved. The preparations for our communion day were expected to be of the highest order because a rumour had surfaced that Canon Troy might be taking part in our communion mass, so the nuns made sure that we were well rehearsed when the time came for us to receive the body of Christ.

For our first confession we made the short journey to the Church of the Assumption. I was in a quandary as I didn't think I had any sins to confess, so I decided to invent a few. So here I was about to confess my fabricated sins and tell lies at the same time, I would enter the confession box a saint and come out a sinner, it was supposed to work the other way around. The priest took up his position between the two confession boxes and closed the half doors behind him, he pulled across the velvet curtains above the half doors and switched on a small light that lit up above his head.

My classmates and I were seated in two pews with a gap of one pew between us; the two seated pews were in line with the doors of the confession boxes. The idea to use the two confession boxes was to speed up the process, so as one boy exited from one box the priest was instantly hearing another boys confession in the opposite confession box and vice versa. If the procedure that our teacher had implemented was to go to plan, the two lines in each pew would be near equal length right up until the last two boys had entered the confession boxes. As I moved up the pew and got closer to the confession box I started to feel ill. Over and over I rehearsed my fabricated sins under my breath. Before I knew it there was now only one boy ahead of me in our pew, and that boy was the class bully. I was nervous but judging by the look on the bully's face I could see he was very scared. He had his hands clasped so tight together I heard his bones crack, his face turned pale as the door

of the confession box opened and it was his turn to enter. My stomach was doing somersaults as I waited for the bully to finish his confession. I waited and waited and waited. He was taking what seemed like ages in the confession box, being the bully maybe he had more sins to confess than the rest of us. During all this time three boys had been in and out of the opposite confession box, and I noticed that the line of boys in the other pew was decreasing quicker than our pew, it seemed that our teacher's time saving plan had hit a snag. Suddenly the priest's face appeared out from behind the curtains between the confession boxes, he looked over at me and said in a low voice, "are you not going into confession son?"

"I can't." I replied.

"There is no need to be nervous son."

"I'm not nervous", another lie, "There is already someone still in the confession box."

He didn't believe me and came out from behind the half doors to check for himself. The priest pulled open the door of the confession box and there was the bully, he was in the kneeling position, had his hands joined and the tears were streaming down his face, I was enjoying the sight I was seeing.

"There is no need to get yourself in that state – How long have you been in there." asked the priest.

"I don't know." answered the bully through his tears. "Three times father I went to start my confession and every time I started you closed the sliding door over the grill on me."

"I wasn't aware you were there son." said the priest. "You were kneeling down – I left strict instructions with your teacher to make sure that all boys stand up in the confession box so I can see their faces through the grill."

Our teacher came and took the tearful bully to the end of the pew as I made my way into the confession box. When the door was open the inside looked bright but as the door slowly closed behind me it began to get darker and darker and then suddenly it was pitch black. As I stood all I could make out was the outline of light surrounding the grill on the priest's side. Suddenly the door over the grill was slid open and I was faced and talking into a big hairy ear pushed up tight against the grill. I started to talk really fast, " Bless me Father for I have sinned this is my first confession and these are my sins – I stole a penny apple – I called Mrs Clegg a nose parker and told her to fuck off..... I also...." the priest interrupted me.

"Slow down child slow down – Take your time."

"I'm finished father."

" Ok then – From what I could gather you stole a penny apple – By stealing you have broken one of the ten commandments – Thou shall not steal –Your second sin is two sins in one – Calling people names is not nice and the f -word is a nasty word.

So I suggest in future if you want to tell someone to get lost, replace it with another .

F-word like Fizz – Telling a person to Fizz off doesn't sound as vicious – Now have you any other sins to confess?"

"No father."

"Then for your penances say a Hail Mary for each of your three sins and an Act of Contrition to show God you are truly sorry."

I sat down in a different pew and said one Hail Mary; the bully was the last boy to receive confession, a case of keeping the bad wine till last.

Another big day we had to prepare for was when a camera crew from R.T.E came to our school, our class was chosen for a slot on a program that was presented by Bunny Carr. A week before the camera crew came we had to do individual paintings of our choice, and when the camera crew arrived we would talk through our paintings with Bunny. We didn't have school uniforms back then, so our mothers were requested by the nuns to make sure that their children wore their Sunday best on the day that RTE came to our school. Some of the mothers were taking aback by this request because as far as they were concerned they always dressed their children well. One disgruntled mother was overheard saying, "The cheek of them nuns – All the clothes that my son wears are of the highest quality – They may be hand-me-downs but they are all quality."

On the day the R.T.E camera crew came there wasn't a dirty face or a runny nose in sight, over sized hand-me-down clothes were altered to measure and the local barber was a busy man the previous day. Bunny Carr looked very smart as well in his immaculate black tailored suit, and before he departed he praised us on our drawings and paintings. Our five minutes of fame was broadcast as part of a religious program that went out one Sunday evening. It was weird seeing myself on our black and white television, I was on screen for about thirty seconds, seen standing behind a boy as he talked through his painting with Bunny.

On my communion day my mother dressed me in a brown jacket and a matching pair of short trousers, I also wore a white shirt with a brown tie under a light brown cardigan. The lapel of my jacket was decorated with my communion medal on a white rosette. Before my parents and I walked to the Assumption Church I posed for photographs in front of the lilac tree that stood for years in our front garden.

"He is a credit to you Mrs Abbey." said Mrs. Mooney as she looked on with our lovely elderly neighbor Nelly Kelly.

Our communion mass was endless, and the rumour that Canon Troy might put in an appearance was just that, a rumour. The longer I waited to receive the body of Christ.

The more nervous I became, eventually we were summoned to the altar.

The priest approached me. “Body of Christ.”

“Amen.” I replied and stuck out my tongue, my mouth was dry and the host stuck to the roof of my mouth. I tried not to do what we were continuously told during our rehearsals, that no matter what happens we were not to chew on the host, we were to try and swallow the host all in one piece, it was easier said than done. I tried to dislodge the host with my tongue from the roof of my mouth but to no avail, so I waited until I returned to my seat, knelt down, covered my face with my hands and had a good chew on the body of Christ.

Photographs were taken in the church grounds as I mingled with my new fellow soldiers of Christ. I was standing close to the bully as his parents talked to mine, and although I was in my parents company I still had my wits about him. After the parents finished talking I whispered to my mother. “Their son is a bully – He goes around kicking and punching everybody for no reason at all.”

“They’re not his Mammy and Daddy love, they’re Nanny and Grand-Da.”

“Why aren’t his Ma and Da here”? I asked.

After a pause she bent down and whispered in my ear. “His Mammy died Love – She is up in heaven looking down on him.”

I can instantly remember trying to comprehend the bully’s situation and putting myself in his shoes, I felt pity for him and the devastating loss of his mother. However I didn’t linger to long on his heartache, I was ever so glad my mother was alive and I was also glad that a lot of my Aunties and Uncles were alive, because it was time to collect the communion gosh. I visited my relations in East Wall and Finglas. There were no communion cards handed out, it was cash in hand. The paper money was placed between the pages of the prayer book that my neighbor and God mother Mrs. Mooney had bought me, and the coins I received were put into my short trouser pockets, they were bulging. There were many bus journeys that day and on the last bus home from town the bus conductor reckoned I had collected more money than him that day.

On the following Monday we wore our communion suits into school for a class photograph. On the main road and again out of nowhere Mrs Clegg the mysterious woman approached me, I was just about to tell her to fuck.....fizz off but held my tongue when I noticed she was putting her hand into her purse. She handed me some coins and said. “You are a credit to your mother – I know I have been hard on you but sometimes you have to be cruel to be kind.”

I accepted her money gleefully but not her sentiments.

But maybe my mother was right, Mrs Clegg meant well, she just had a strange way in getting her point across. She was indeed a harmless and mysterious woman, she vanished out of my young life as quick as she entered it, after that meeting I never saw or heard of Mrs Clegg again.

As we continued our walk to school I asked my mother, “Did you notice anything unusual about Mrs Clegg’s purse when she gave me the communion money.”

“No.”

“Her purse was bursting with single shillings.” I replied.

My mother laughed.

“What’s so funny Ma.” I asked.

“Maybe the rumors were true son –I hope her husband didn’t have another run in with the gasman”. We both laughed.

My days in the Convo were coming to an end and it was time to move on to primary school. My mother had the choice of sending me to one of two primary schools in the

area. The De La Salle (The Deller) down beside the convo or The Mary Queen of Angels (The Mayer). She chose the latter of the two because of its location, it was situated in upper Ballyfermot and closer to home, so if I did act the maggot again she wouldn’t have far to drag me.

My last day in the Convo was also my first day in the Mary Queen of Angels. After our morning break a pal of mine Peter Hyland and I were left inside the head nuns office to be collected by a teacher from the Mary Queen of Angels, we were to spend the rest of the day in our new primary school before we broke up for the summer holidays. While we waited inside the nuns office we looked out the window to see our old school pals been marched down to the Deller by a Christian Brother, I seen the bully who was last in the line give another lad a toe up the hole, he was a very lucky boy the Christian Brother didn’t see him.



*He's a Credit to yeh Mrs Abbey*

### **Long Hot Summers – Long Cold Winters**

During the summer months our coal shed door was rarely opened and our local coal merchant was put on short time. We always seemed to have long hot summers back then, and every sunny Sunday our family availed of the great weather by taking a trip to the seaside. Some of our neighbors went to Portmarnock and Dollymount, but we always went to Howth. Our mother would have our towels, swimming trunks,

and the sandwiches all ready to go before we got out of our beds. The excitement of going to the seaside would always get the better of my brother Tom, so much so that he would let the whole road know that the Abbeys were off to Howth beach for the day, it was a blessing that no burglars lived on our road.

Being an employee of C.I.E entitled my father and our family to free rail travel, so the train journey from Amiens Street station to Howth didn't cost us a penny. The benefit of having free rail travel came in very handy because every summer our parents also brought us to the Galway races in Ballybrit.

The railway line entering Howth station ran behind a low wall at the back of the beach. When the train slowed down entering the station we were told to keep an eye out for our Aunt Theresa, Uncle Kevin and our cousins from East Wall.

Locating them would be difficult because the sun drenched beach was always packed with families, some who arrived on the beach milk bottle white and returned home beetroot red. After we located our relations it was straight in for a dip, my mother believed the salt water was good for the body. After our swim the kids would go crab hunting and later the sandwiches were opened and devoured, sand and all.

Anyone who wanted to have a cup of tea with their sambos would have to wait until my father and uncle Kevin returned from the beach hut that hired out teapots of boiling water, we had to supply the tea leaves ourselves. After a long day on Howth beach we never had any trouble sleeping at night, the sun, the swimming and the sea air knocked us out.

Besides going to the seaside the other option we had as regards swimming was the Grand Canal (the naller), we swam at the seventh lock close to the Hills Pub. Many a man under the influence fell out of the Hills Pub, rolled down the slope from the pub and ended up sleeping it off beside the hump back bridge. Swimming in the chambers between the locks was very dangerous and unlike me one would have to be a strong swimmer. Some parts of the canal were polluted and many a cat's ninth life ran out at the bottom of the canal. Local people who fished in the canal said the only time they ever caught anything was when they got in for a swim, and it wasn't fish.

If we wanted to go to a swimming pool (the baths) the nearest one was in Pearse Park behind the Star picture house in Crumlin. It was only after constant pressure from the Ballyfermot Community Association on the government to release funding that plans for the Sean Dunne swimming pool were drawn up. Additional funding came from door to door collections by the different road committees in the area, and when it came to putting their hands in their pockets to raise funds for local amenities the people from the area dug deep.

As kids we also spent a lot of time in the back-fields (the backers) behind Oranmore Road. We spent many a day in the backers' ankle high in frogspawn or

just getting lost in the Wheat fields. The Phoenix Park ( the pheono ) was also on our doorstep, we entered the park through the swinging gates in Chapelizod.

Many days were spent visiting the dog pond, the furry glen, climbing up the war memorial monument and just generally exploring the enormous park. The Pheono was also where we knocked the chestnuts down from the trees, back home I'd drill a hole in the biggest chestnut with a manual hand held drill that my father purchased with a few books of green shield stamps, an old shoelace was put through the hole in the chestnut and I was ready to conquer Ballyfermot.

My older brothers told me that when they were kids, they rolled around old pushbike wheels with sticks, and if a boy was lucky enough to have the rear wheel from a racing bike with the three cogs on it he boasted that his wheel had gears.

Not something that impressed me but I do remember been impressed when a pal of mine Joe Harrington got a trolley. Joe's dad made him the trolley or a boxcar as the Bash Street Kids from the Dandy called them. The trolley was made of wood, two small lengths for each axel with a longer piece of wood connecting the two, the seat was an old kitchen chair with the legs removed and the steering mechanism was a length of rope attached to the front axel. After numerous times free-wheeling down the hill around the corner from our house I asked Joe. "Did your Ma mind your Da taking the wheels off her pram for your trolley?"

"I don't know" replied Joe. "But Da told me that as far as he was concerned my mother had pushed her last pram."

If these comments attributed to Mr. Harrington were an ultimatum to his wife or just a lucky guess I don't know, but Mr Harrington was true to his word, his wife never had any more children. The youngest in Joe's family was his sister Marion; she was Mrs Harrington's pride and joy because she had waited a long time for Marion to arrive. During her child bearing years Mrs Harrington was heard to quote Shakespeare a lot,

"If at first you don't succeed try and try again." Marion was the only girl after a succession of eight boys. Suffice to say with nine mouths to feed Joe didn't have his trolley for very long, two days later and unbeknown to poor Joe his dad had transformed his trolley into a handcart over night, one of Joe's seven brothers had got a job delivering newspapers and the more he delivered the more commission he received.

During the winter months the job of fetching the coal was a constant argument between my brother Tom and I. Being the two youngest it was our job to fetch the coal. Theresa was the youngest girl but she refused to fetch the coal as she regarded the job as a boys job, and she would get highly annoyed when we interrupted her and Katy Mooney when they were rhyming off penny packet of Rinso as they played ball against our coal shed door.

When it was my turn to fetch the coal Tom always argued that I only half filled the coal scuttle, known that it wouldn't be to long before it was his turn to refill the scuttle again, my mother always took my side in the arguments.

"Your little brother hasn't the strength to lift a full scuttle of coal – Who do you think he is Samson? – Anyway – After the job your father done on Peter's hair last night he has lost the little bit of strength he had – And you can wipe that smirk of your face it's your turn for the chop tonight."

"No way." replied Tom, "Da is not putting his clippers near my hair – I'll settle for the bowl over my head from the barber down in Bolands."

Maybe Tom was right, the barber in Bolands was the less severe of the two demon barbers. Our older brothers used to tease Tom and me because we got our hair cut by the barber in the back of Bolands hardware shop on Ballyfermot Road. My brothers boasted that they got their hair styled not cut, and this was done in a hair salon not a barbers. They thought they were something special because they got their hair styled in the Como, a gents hair salon in Thomas Street.

The reason my father cut my hair was because at times I refused to go to the barbers. The times I did visit the barber in Boland's, he'd place a plank of wood across the arms of the chair to raise me up to the height of the mirror, I think that was the beginning of my fear of heights. Long hair was all the fashion but my hair style never had a shape to it, my mother often referred to me as the wild man from Borneo.

I liked my hair long because it hid my sticky out ears, and when my father cut my hair I was always scared that he would cut one or both of my ears off.

"Will you hold your head still Butch." He often called my brothers and I Butch.

"I am keeping my head still."

"You are not." he'd remark. "You're bobbing and weaving like Cassis Clay."

Our house had two fireplaces, one in the sitting room and one in our front bedroom.

It was a strenuous job carrying the coal scuttle from our coal shed up the stairs to our front bedroom, and again this would aggrieve Tom. Que my mother, "Even with a full head of hair like Samson, poor Peter could never manage that."

On winter mornings my mother lit the oven and left the oven door open wide so it would heat up the scullery. If my father had time before he went to work he would set the fire in our sitting room. Care was always taken to ensure that the ashes from the previous night were cold before he put them in the bin. Setting the fire was an art itself. Old newspapers were rolled up tightly and placed on the zip firelighters, sticks were placed on top of the newspapers and surrounded by a mound of coal, then all my mother had to do was put a light under the firelighters when ever she wanted.

On winter nights we'd pull the sofa over to the fireplace and watch the tally with the light switched off, the flames from the blazing fire would produce our shadows on the living room walls. There was something cosy about sitting around an open fire as the gales blew and the rain lashed down outside, and any one who got up to leave was warned to close the door after them so as not to let the heat escape from the room .

One Saturday evening as some of my family sat around the fireside Pat entered, he was all spruced up for a night out on the town. He was dressed in his best flared trousers and wearing a big collared shirt. I was in the corner polishing his platform shoes in return for a few bob. Pat stepped over to the mirror that hung over our fireplace. He viewed his hair that was freshly styled in the Como earlier that day. To get a closer look he stood on the fire surround, he fixed the one hair that was out of place; suddenly he let out a painful roar as he balanced himself on one foot.

"What ails you son." asked my father.

"I've burned my fucking foot." groaned Pat.

Immediately my father looked in the direction of our Theresa.

"Did you do that toast by the fire."

"Yeh."

"Why didn't you put the hot poker back under the fire grate when you were finished." She replied "I forgot. – Anyway how was I to know he was going to prune himself in front of the fire."

In all the commotion during Pat's accident the calmest person in the room was the instigator of it all. I could understand Theresa's tranquility, there was nothing more pleasurable than eating a slice of bread toasted by the fire, smeared with lots of butter and a sprinkle of sugar. I made sure Pat paid me first before I handed over his polished platforms and my grinning father remarked, "You better hot-foot it out of here son or you'll be late."

What was seldom was wonderful and when it snowed we always made the most of it, many a snowman was made and the snowballs flew. Any kid who had no gloves would compensate by wearing a pair of stockings on their hands, my hands were never cold because I always wore a thick pair of Irish army stockings that were issued to my brother Martin when he joined the Defence Forces.

The bus conductors who collected the fares on the old double decker buses were easy targets for us snow-ballers. We'd stand at a bus-stop and wait until the conductor went to ring the bell at the entrance of the bus, and there he was met with a barrage of snowballs. Another great thing about the snow was the slides. As the temperature dropped at night we would make slides on our road, if the slides weren't slippery enough we'd throw buckets of water over the road and the freezing temperatures made our road as perilous as an ice rink.

During the winter our sitting room was the warmest room in the house and the fire was the hub for a lot of things. When there was no drying out my mother dried the clothes by the fire, after our baths as kids we also dried ourselves by the fire. Also and very importantly the fire was the source for our hot water through our boiler system, and I like to think I played a big part in keeping the home fires burning by fetching my half scuttles of coal from our coal shed.

### “The Maryer”

When the time drew near to start in my new primary school the Mary Queen of Angels my mothers knitting needles were replaced by her rosary beads. St Jude was the patron saint of hopeless causes but I think my mother placed her faith in a small statue of a black man that stood on our altar alongside a statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary. My mother was stunned and relieved when I walked off to my new school alone and without a care in the world, and from that day on she was forever indebted to Saint Martin and his powers of persuasion.

My first observation in my new school were my new classmates, they were all taller than me, and a lot of them were wearing long trousers as I looked on still being able to fit into my short communion trousers. When I told my mother of my observation she quickly solved the situation and bought me a few pairs of longers in Fitzgerald’s in Thomas Street, the trousers were still too long on me so my eldest sister Mary took them up on her sewing machine.

In a lot of the schools back then some teachers were freely allowed to dish out their own forms of discipline. Some resorted to a cane or leather across the hand while some resorted to thuggish behavior. These forms of discipline were wrong and unacceptable, thankfully the days of them disciplinary measures are long gone.

From third class on I had Mr Twomey, the master who collected me in his car on my last day in the Dominican Convent. For my last four years in the Queen of Angels I was a pupil of Mr Twomeys. Like all the other classes in the school we made claim to having the hardest master, and during playtime in the school shed we held debates on the subject. One thing I can never remember our master doing was punishing us for our academic failures, preferring instead to make light of them.

One day while examining the previous night’s ecker (homework), he called down to a boy sitting at the back of the class.

“Gearoid O’Hara.” He always called us by our names in Irish.

“Yes sir.” answered Gerard O’Hara as he rose from his desk.

“I’m examining last nights exercise Gearoid and yours doesn’t make good reading – You have managed to get all the sums I set wrong.”

There were giggles in the classroom and a big grin on O’Hara’s face.

“For example Gearoid – You have come to the conclusion that 21 divided by 7 =

14 – 36 divided by 9 = 27 – 81 divided by 9 = 72 – and so on and so on Gearoid.”

O’Hara shuffled uneasy as he stood.

“I can see the mistake you have made Gearoid – You have misread the mathematic signs – You have subtracted instead of dividing – Are you not familiar with the division sign Gearoid – But to your credit if the sums I set were subtraction you would have got them all correct – You have just misread the signs Gearoid.”

At this stage of the inquiry into O’Hara’s absent mindlessness or his short sightedness Mr Twomey finished off with what he usually said to a boy who made an error.

“You have the brains Gearoid – You just weren’t concentrating on your work – Your mind was elsewhere – You weren’t focused on the job in hand – Always give full concentration to whatever you are in the process of doing – And as in this case always concentrate on what’s in front of you.”

“Yes sir.” replied O’Hara as he sat back down in his desk.

“What do you want to be when you leave school Gearoid.”

“A bus driver like me Da sir.”

“A good occupation to have Gearoid – One that employs immense responsibility and concentration – But I suggest Gearoid that before you get behind the wheel – Be sure to treble check the number on the front of the bus so you will remember what route you are on.”

I quickly settled into my new surroundings, so much so that when I came home at lunch time my mother had no fears of me not returning back to school. Every day during lunchtime my mother sent me next door to bring our elderly neighbor Nelly Kelly into our house, with her dog Pete always in tow. As she linked me on the slow walk from her house to mine she’d forever tell me what a wonderful person my mother was. Once inside our house her opening sentence was always the same.

“I must have worn out my welcome by now Mrs Abbey.”

“Not at all Nelly – Sit down there and I’ll stick on the kettle.”

Every Thursday Nelly would send me up to Boylan’s sweetshop to buy the Irelands Own, her favorite ice pop a little devil, a walnut whirl for my mother and what ever I was having myself, and Mrs Boylan would give me the change from the postal order that I cashed weekly for Nelly in the sweetshop. When I returned home from school I would link up again with Nelly and make the return walk back into her house, again with her complimenting my mother no end.

Mr Twomey educated us on the history of our country through its language, its song and our national sports. Our day for sports in the schoolyard was Tuesdays. Our allotted time was from twelve o’clock to half past, but we never had a full half hour as the ritual of reciting the Angelus at mid-day robbed us of five minutes.

I think our master was a keen supporter of the Gaelic Athletic Association and its ethos, sportingly and politically. But much to the dislike of Mr Twomey we didn't play Gaelic football; we played soccer that foreign game they played across the water. The only time I took an interest in Gaelic football was when Dublin reached an All Ireland final, because if Dublin won our school would get a half day off after one of the Dublin players came and paraded the Sam Maguire Cup around our school. Thanks to Kevin Heffernan and his team we received a few unscheduled half days off school during the seventies.

In the school yard our coats and jumpers were put on the ground for goals and a game of fifteen -a -side soccer would commence. I often wondered how our master would have reacted if one of my classmates had plucked up the courage and asked him to referee our soccer match, the scene where Oliver asks Mr Bumble for more food springs to mind. Anyway we never got the chance to ask him because as soon as he seen us picking the teams he was off on a wander around the schoolyard, with one hand placed behind his back and the other holding his pipe to his mouth.

Over the years Mr Twomey taught us a number of Irish ballads. He'd chalk out the words on one half of the blackboard and there they stayed until we could sing it from memory. One of the many ballads he taught us was Boolavogue, and after many many emotional renditions of Boolavogue if Father Murphy from Old Kilcormac had called on us we were ready to answer his warring cry at the drop of a stick of chalk. "Arm, Arm," he cried "for I've come to lead you for Ireland's freedom we'll fight and die."

Our master had a passion for our native language, our Irish lessons lasted twice as long as any other subject. Every day we opened our Irish books to see what Daddai, Mamai and their two children Sean and Maire were getting up to in their lives. It never mentioned which part of Ireland this Irish speaking family were from, but I remember at the time thinking it wasn't Ballyfermot, because all the families I knew had a minimum of seven or eight children. As hard as I tried I found it hard to learn Irish, I could read Irish from the book but when it came to translating it into English I struggled, and as for holding down a conversation in Irish the word mute would be appropriate.

Irish was one of my weakest subjects but this was no reflection on Mr Twomeys teaching methods, you can lead a horse to water but you can't make him drink it.

Sean O'Suilleabhain was a classmate of mine who unlike me had no problems speaking his native tongue. Sean was our masters favourite pupil, because there was nothing more that Mr. Twomey liked than to converse in Irish, and Sean was the only pupil who could do it consistently and at a good level. Many years later I met Sean and told him I was amazed how he mastered the Irish language so quick at school, and only then did he reveal his secret as to why he had a big advantage

over the rest of his classmates. Sean’s mother was from Kerry and a fluent Irish speaker, and from a very young age Sean spent many summer holidays down in the Gaeltacht areas of Ireland. He enjoyed his trips to the Gaeltacht so much that when he got older he continued to visit on his own. Another revelation he revealed was when he was eighteen he was sent home in disgrace from the Gaeltacht, after he was caught in a compromising position with a girl in the female quarters of the house he was sharing. The lady of the house (bean an ti) who walked in on Sean and the girl immediately reported the scene to the local Gaeltacht committee. Speaking in Irish during the enquiry to decide Sean’s fate the Bean an ti explained that the girl and boy were naked on the bed and Sean was shouting aloud. When she was asked what exactly she heard Sean shouting she answered in English, “Oh-God – Oh-God thanks – Oh God thanks.”

The Gaeltacht committee was outraged and immediately sent Sean home. If only Sean had remembered where he was and had instead translated his outburst of passion into Irish. By speaking in English Sean had broken the sacred rule in the Gaeltacht, under no circumstances was the English language to be spoken. There was no compromise, it didn’t matter if one was under pressure, under duress, or as in Sean’s case under a girl in the throes of passion. I know what our old master Mr. Twomey would have said to his favorite past pupil. “ You weren’t concentrating on what you were doing Sean– You weren’t focused on the job in hand – Your mind was else where – Always give full concentration in what you are doing or in the process of doing – And as in this case.....Oh forget it Sean O’Suilleabhain.”

While attending the Queen of Angels our elderly neighbor Nelly Kelly passed away. I remember at the time trying to figure the out-come of this mystery called death, it kept cropping up in my mind. There were the three outcomes we read about in our catechisms during religion, heaven, purgatory and hell, or was the graveyard the final resting place. One thing I learned very quickly was that Nelly wasn’t coming back, and my mother had lost a great friend.

Shortly after Nelly passed away I refused to go to school, back to my old ways. It was a bolt out of the blue to my mother. I didn’t attend school for three weeks and even the threats she would inform my father didn’t make me go back to school. During my third week of absence my mother brought me over to Dr. Forde’s surgery on Claddagh Green. I couldn’t understand her decision because I wasn’t unwell, well not physically. She explained to Dr. Forde how well I was progressing in school but had suddenly stopped wanting to attend. He took on board my mothers comments and tried to get me to add some input into the conversation, but I just sat there like the stubborn mule my mother used to say I was.

Dr Forde made an appointment for me to see a child psychologist. The meeting took place in the new extension built onto the dispensary on Ballyfermot Road.

He questioned me about my reasons for not wanting to attend school, was I being bullied, was it the teachers, but it was just a re-run of my visit to Dr. Forde's, I was always told never to talk to strangers. From then on I listened as I was the topic of conversation between my mother and the psychologist. My mother explained that I had become very clingy, more clingy than ever before and I just wasn't myself, I was then asked to leave the room by the psychologist and shortly afterwards my mother and I went home.

Later that night and out of the blue my mother mentioned our recently deceased neighbor Nelly into our conversation. She explained to me the circumstances of Nelly's passing, how Nelly had lived to a great age, and any fears I had that my mother might be joining Nelly sometime soon were silly. My mother's words erased a big worry from my mind, and that night it was nice to fall asleep on a dry pillow, something I hadn't done for a few weeks.

So after being absent for three weeks the thought of returning to school was still daunting. I didn't need a note so I presume the shrink informed the school of my situation. I was still a little apprehensive and to make matters worse I was late on my first day back. I knew all eyes would be on me as I made my entrance into the classroom. It seemed like an eternity the time it took for me to turn the handle on our classroom door. I opened the door and entered, "A big Cead Míle Failte Peadar Abbey – Bualadh bos for Peadar." said Mr Twomey. He shook my hand and then lifted me up onto his desk and told me to take a bow, the scene was the complete opposite to my planned low key return, but it broke the ice, and the boy who had kept my desk warm for three weeks was ordered to another.

Stand to attention,  
For the school inspector.  
Employed by the state,  
As a truancy detector.

Enter Mr. Meleedy,  
Wearing his light grey Mac.  
Threatening us with a home from home,  
In Dagan or Letterfrack.

The visit from the school inspector each term always scared the living daylight's out of me. When he entered the classroom we all had to stand up, he looked very official and important wearing his light grey mackintosh coat over his suit. He'd run his eye over our roll book checking to see if there were any boys who were frequently absent. Every now and then he would lift his head and slowly cast his

eyes around the Classroom as if he was sniffing out the guilty ones, if his ploy was to put fear into us it worked, especially on me.

In 1974 a second parish was established in Dublin 10 and St Mathews Church was opened on upper Ballyfermot Road. It was there in 1976 that I made my confirmation.

Months and months before we made our confo my classmates and I spent everyday memorising the questions and answers in the back pages of our catechisms. In my case it was a waste of time, because the only question the Bishop asked me was what name I had chosen for my confirmation.

I'm sure there were many boys in Mr Twomey's classroom down through the years that he marked down as potential scholars; I don't think I fell into that category. Whenever I hear the song Brooklyn Roads by Neil Diamond I am reminded of my last school report from the Mary Queen of Angels, there are a few lines in the song that concurred with Mr Twomeys final analysis of me,

“Got a good head,  
If he'd apply it.  
But you know yourself,  
It's always somewhere else.”

*4th or 5th class Mary Queen of Angels*



### “The Message’s.”

After Nelly passed away we adopted her dog. Nelly always said on entering our house that she didn't want to wear out her welcome, but her dog Pete was the complete opposite, our k-nine friend got his four paws under our coffee table and there they stayed. Pete was a rust colored mongrel a little bigger than a Jack Russell. He could always sense there was someone at our front door before they knocked and he'd run to the door growling very loudly. One man who dreaded calling to our door was Mr. Leahy the insurance man from the Royal Liver. Pete used to save his most frightening and ferocious growls for him. Being an astute insurance man I'd say Mr. Leahy had a secret insurance policy out on himself, in case one day he was ever savaged by our now dog in residence.

When ever I walked to the shops on Claddagh Green to get the messages for my mother Pete always followed me. My first port of call was always Boylans sweetshop (the sweeter) to buy something for myself. I'd be spoiled for choice as I eyed up all

the goodies on and behind the counters. There was a part-time assistant employed there who never gave us kids time to choose what we wanted, it was case of get what you came in for, check your change and then be gone. I don't think the person ever understood the phrase, "Like a child in a sweet shop," even though faced with the reality of the situation every day. The Boylan's, the local girls and Bridie were the complete opposite, one could take all the time in the world to choose, and if we changed our mind after purchasing an item they would gladly exchange it.

Trigger bars, calypso bars, penny toffees. Peri Crisps, curly wurly, Fizz Bags, Bulls Eyes, Bom Boms, Lemon Drops, and all different kinds of Ice Pops, the fare on display was endless. I was like a pig in shite, another phrase lost on the part time shop assistant.

Also on the block was Mario's fish and chip shop, the chipper. My brothers and sisters often sent me up to the chipper. The only gripe I had about the chipper was the shop counter, it was very high and I could never see over it. I used to enter the chipper without Mario seeing me and just shout out my order. When it was ready Mario would call out in his Italian accent, "Are you-a-still-a-there," then on my tip toes I'd reach up and hand over the money in one hand and receive my order in the other with no eye contact with Mario, who only got sight of me from behind as I walked out of the chipper.

Alec was the local butcher. One day a woman was in the shop and she asked him.

"Have you err a sheep's head Alec."

"Well I hadn't the last time I looked in the mirror." replied Alec giving me a wink.

The woman wasn't amused by his little joke, "Ahh I'm only pulling your leg." replied Alec as I turned away sniggering.

Behind the counter there was a big walk in freezer and in the middle of the shop floor was the butchers table. There was very little meat left on a carcass by the time Alec was finished wielding the tools of his trade on it, much to the disappointment of the local mongrels whose owners often asked him to throw in a bone with their order.

Lavells fruit and vegetable shop was next to the butchers. When I was sent up to Lavells for potatoes my mother always warned me to make sure the shop assistant didn't stick me with marbles. Mr. Lavell was an expert when calculating the weights on the large scales, he never gave me an ounce under the required weight and he most defiantly never gave me an ounce over the required weight. One summer my brother Pat worked part-time in the fruit and veg shop for a few weeks. Unlike Mr. Lavell Pat had problems calculating the weights on the scales, if I asked for a half stone of potatoes Pat would give me a stone at no extra cost. As well as the scales he seemed to get confused with the size of the apples, when I'd ask Mr Lavell for a

penny apple that was what I got, but when I asked Pat for a penny apple he would give me a granny smith, again at no extra cost. I always wondered why my mother sent me up to the shop more often than usual when Pat worked there, and was it just a coincidence that Mr. Lavell was always on his lunch break.

Also on the block was the rent office, paying the weekly rent was an easy transaction that even a child could do it. You told the man from Dublin Corporation (The Corpo) your address and he issued you with a blue receipt, my mother stored all her blue rent receipts under the cutlery tray in a draw.

Facing Lavells on the opposite side of Claddagh Green was Ruane's grocery shop.

My father didn't eat pan bread so my mother always made sure to get over early to Ruane's before all the plain loafs were sold out. The freshly cut slices of corned beef, ham and hard cheese they sold in Ruane's were delicious, and any one of these foodstuffs wedged between two thick slices of my fathers plain loaf were a bellyful.

The rest of my family settled for the sliced pans from Johnson Mooney & O'Brien, delivered by our bread man Mr. Long who used to leave the sliced pans on the little window sill beside our front door.

One scorching hot summers day my mother left a bottle of milk on the sink unit, directly in line with the incoming sunshine through the scullery window. That evening when she opened the bottle she realised that the heat from the sun had turned the milk sour. She carefully replaced the cap on the bottle and sent my sister Theresa over to Ruane's to see would they exchange it for a fresh one, she also gave her the money to buy a fresh bottle if they wouldn't change it.

"Tell the girl I bought this bottle of milk in the shop this morning and when I opened it the milk was sour." she said to Theresa.

"But you didn't buy it in Ruane's Ma," replied Theresa, "We get our milk delivered by the milkman – That's telling lies."

"You're right love," smiled my mother, "But its only a little lie – Anyway the girls in Ruane's don't know we get our milk delivered to our door do they." She gave Theresa a wink and sent her on her way. In the shop Theresa followed my mothers instructions. Maureen the shop assistant removed the cap and ran her nose over the bottle.

"Your mother didn't buy this bottle of milk here." said Maureen.

"She did so – She bought it this morning", replied a deviant Theresa.

"We don't sell sour milk – Did your mother forget to put the bottle in the fridge." asked Maureen.

"No she didn't."

"Are you sure?" asked Maureen again.

"I'm positive," answered Theresa. "We don't have a fridge."

“Ok” laughed Maureen, “But there will be no exchange the next time.”

Theresa took the fresh bottle of milk and walked towards the door, she stopped, turned around and said, “ Anyway Maureen – There won’t be a next time – Cause from tomorrow on my Ma said she is going to get her milk delivered by the milkman.”

Back home Theresa explained what happened in the shop. “I told her in future we are going to get our milk delivered.”

“But we already do – That’s telling lies.” replied my mother.

Theresa just gave my mother a wink and walked away.

“Hey Missis – Aren’t you forgetting something?” asked my mother.

Theresa handed over the money that was giving to her in case Ruane’s didn’t exchange the soured bottle of milk. My mother checked her palm. “I gave you more than that luv.”

“I know you did – But for doing your dirty deed I rewarded myself – I bought the Buntie on the way home.”

Beside Ruane’s was Mann’s hardware, a shop that I always enjoyed going into.

As one entered there was a class cabinet on the right hand side that ran from the shop door up to the counter. It stocked an array of items that always caught my eye. There were magnifying glasses, pen knives, compasses, torches, ropes. Water bottles and general outdoor utensils. In other parts of the cabinet there could be anything from a timple to a teapot. I was always amazed at Mr. Mann’s attention to detail, every item in the cabinet was placed with care so as not to obscure another, and all of the items were individually priced with a small tag attached with a small length of string.

The hardware was always well stocked. Mop heads, brush heads and handles, cut glass, paraffin oil, clotheslines, cards of wooden pegs, nuts and bolts, nails, bins, buckets, tins of paint, brushes and light bulbs.

As meticulous as Mr Mann was as regards the layout of his display cabinets, he was also the same when ever I was buying an item from his shop. One time I went into the hardware to buy a light bulb and he talked me through the process.

“Now son – I am removing the 60 watt bulb from its carton – You did ask me for a 60 watt bulb didn’t you.”

Looking over his classes he’d wait for me to verify my request.

“Now I am going to place the new 60 watt bulb into the socket on the wall – I am now going to flick the switch – The bulb is illuminated and in perfect working order– can you see that – I am now very carefully replacing the new bulb back into its carton.”

I often wondered was Mr. Mann as meticulous with all his customers or just my family. Maybe he had received information from Ruane’s next door about the stunt my sister Theresa pulled with the sour bottle of milk, he probably thought I would

return with the wasted bulb in the new carton and claim it wasn't working.

Although the hardware was well stocked, it was a common occurrence that when one needed something desperately from the hardware it would be closed. It always seemed that every time a fuse blew in our house it was closed and if a neighbor didn't have a spare fuse lying around in their fuse box it meant a trip down to what we called the far shops on Ballyfermot Road.

One time after noticing I was frequently scratching my head my mother looked through my hair. After she released me from the headlock she wrote out a note and told me to give it to Mr Boylan in the chemist, the money was wrapped up in the note. I thought the note unusual because every other time she sent me to the chemist she always told me what to ask for verbally.

"Is there something wrong with me Ma." I asked.

"Nothing to be worried about luv – Your head is walking off yeh."

So on the way over to the chemist I walked really fast in case my head overtook me.

I had't a clue what the contents of the white paper bag were that Mr Boylan handed to me in the chemist

"Tell your mother I have sold out of plastic ones – So I have given her a steel one instead – If she doesn't want the steel one bring it back to me unused and I will refund her." I had no idea what Mr Boylan was referring to, plastic or steel, so I just nodded my itchy head. Later that evening my mother rubbed the liquid contents from the white paper bag into my scalp and hair. She told me it was a special shampoo to get rid of head lice.

"How did I get head lice?" I asked.

"You picked it up from someone in your school."

It was the answer that all mothers gave, it was never their child that starting the chain.

I had no problem when she rubbed the alleged special shampoo into my hair, but twenty minutes later when she produced the steel fine comb that was when all hell broke loose. The teeth on the comb were so fine that at times my hair got tangled up; my suffering could be heard in my outbursts. A ploy she used to get me to keep my head still was to give the head lice names.

"Oh look there's Forty coats from Wanderly Wagon – Keep your head still."

"Ma you're reefing the hair out of me"

"Oh look – There's Batman and Georgie Best – But they won't get away from me."

This continued until she was satisfied that she had rid my hair of the dead lice.

Afterwards my hair was washed with proper shampoo and right enough my itching stopped.

The next day on another visit to the chemist while buying a pair of silver grey nylon tights for my mother a young boy entered, he gave Mr Boylan a note, the scene was familiar because the day before I was that boy. Mr Boylan removed the money from the note, read it, and disappeared into the back of the shop. I noticed the boy scratching his head so I moved to the other end of the counter.

Out loud I said to the boy, "If he comes back and says he's sold out of plastic ones and only has steel ones left tell him you don't want it – Cause it will reef your hair from its roots."

The boy gave me a puzzled look, and right enough Mr. Boylan returned and repeated what I had just said to the young boy. I caught up with the boy outside the shop and told him, "Tell your Ma to watch out for the ones on roller skates."

Again the boy gave me another baffled look. I don't think he knew what was in store for him when he got home, and after having had a steel fine comb dragged through my hair I was glad I wasn't in that young boys plastic sandals when he got home.

### **Football Crazy**

I was football crazy at an early age I guess,  
I played it in my street, my school my home.  
An early memory is my mother looking for Georgie Best,  
As she searched through my hair with a steel fine comb.  
No time after school to do my ecker,  
I was out playing football until it got dark.  
On town journeys I would sit upstairs on board the double decker,  
Just so I could get a view of Richmond Park.

When the Triple Crown was on the telly we played rugby, when Wimbledon was on we played tennis. When the Irish Open was on we played Pitch & Putt, but one sport we played all year round was football. We played on our road in all kinds of weather, and like the girls who played skipping and piggy on the road we didn't have to worry about been knocked down, as there weren't that many car owners back then.. Not a day passed without us playing football, and at night the green lampposts that lit up the road became our floodlights. One or two of the neighbours didn't take to kindly to us playing football outside their houses because many a window was hit. We also played football in a field on Claddagh Green that housed St Mary's Youth Club, much to the relief of the neighbors. Other times if we had enough players we would go down to the nearest full sized soccer pitches to were we lived which were in Le Fanu Park, known locally as The Lawns.

Before St Matthews Church was built in upper Ballyfermot Tom and I were supposed to attend mass in the Church of the Assumption in Lower Ballyfermot.

On Sunday mornings when my mother thought that we were in the Assumption Church practicing our faith, we weren't. We never made it any further than The Lawns.

We were followers of football and if Father Wall had asked us to name the twelve apostles we would have struggled, but had he asked us to name the first eleven and sub of any of the top teams in England we wouldn't have had to think twice.

We used to go and watch the Cherry Orchard schoolboy teams play on Sunday mornings. Two players who played were Don O'Riordan and Dave Langan, who both went on to sign for Derby County in the old English first division. Another player was the legendary League of Ireland player Jackie Jameson. My pals and I used to dream that maybe one day we could follow in the footsteps of the local lad Don O'Riordan, and sign for a first division club across the water.

My pals and I had our own road team, Hylo, Liamy, Tubba, Keaner, Guss, Joey and Jack. Matches were organized against boys from neighbouring roads, with bragging rights the prize to the winners. There was never a referee, and regardless of the playing surface, grass, tarmacadam or the home teams road no player held back with their tackles. As well as some rough play there were plenty of skilful and speedy players on show. When my pals and I from Claddagh Road played against the boys from Moycullen, Carna, Spiddal and Oranmore Road the games of football were tribal, I wonder was it just a coincidence that these roads were named after areas in Galway, the land of the tribes itself.

The names Phealan, Strickland, Burke, Johnson, Jacqueline Plunkett, Carter, Dunne, Carey, Roche, Foley, Brown, Keenan and Mitchell were just a few of the names from neighbouring roads that we played against.

My first and only schoolboy team was Ballyfermot United. Our managers were Arthur Roach and Joe Kelly, of course we would never dream of calling them by their first names, we addressed them as Mr. Roach and Mr. Kelly. As soon as I'd read the fixtures in the Evening Herald on a Tuesday I couldn't wait for the following Saturday to arrive to play our match. On match days our team would meet outside Mr Roach's house on Kylemore Avenue. On the way there I had to walk through the Lawns and pass the old ruin of a graveyard that was situated in the corner of the Lawns. It was surrounded by an old stonewall that had fallen to ruin, and through the gaps in the wall one could see the cracked and broken headstones. On some of the headstones one could still make out the chiseled inscriptions, but the majority of them were overgrown with weeds and nettles. The graveyard reminded me of a scene from the old black and white horror films that were shown late at night on BBC2. I always got an eerie feeling whenever I passed the old graveyard. On misty match day mornings I was half expecting to see a hearse being pulled by a team of six black horses, with the devil himself at the reins, laughing as he drove off with the souls of the dead.

Mr. Roche's house had a side entrance out to his back garden. It was there in a long barna building type shed that we got changed for our home matches on the lawns, often referred to as the home of football by our managers.

The shed also doubled up as a storeroom for the goalposts and corner flags. After we changed into our football gear there was the job of carrying the wooden goalposts up to our pitch in The Lawns. The players carried the two crossbars between them while Mr. Roach carried the four up-rights. People passing by who witnessed Mr. Roach struggling with the four wooden posts on his shoulders must have thought that rehearsals for the local annual passion play had started early. He also carried a haversack that contained the tools for bolting the goalposts together.

When our home matches were over we'd do everything we done earlier in reverse, goalposts dismantled and carried back down to Mr. Roach's back garden, sometimes we wished we could play all our home games away.

Our first set of gear was white jerseys with blue trimmings on the neck and sleeves, with a small number under the v of the neck, with blue shorts and white stockings.

It wasn't until our second season that we got to wear the traditional blue and red stripes of Ballyfermot United. We played in the Dublin & District Schoolboys League. The youngest age group back then was under twelve and it was straight into eleven-a side football on a full size pitch. Although we played under twelve most of our team were only ten and eleven years old, so we had a couple of years playing in the under twelve age group. In our first season we played in the 12A league, we were no match for the likes of Home Farm, Stella Maris and Belvedere, the better schoolboy teams of that era. In our second season we dropped down a division or two, well three to be exact to the 12D league and again without much success.

Wining games wasn't the be all and end all as far as Mr. Roach and Mr. Kelly were concerned, their big reward was to see local boys playing and enjoying football in a competitive league, a big deal to us kids back then. As concerned as we were about some of the heavy defeats we suffered, our managers never dwelled on them, the encouragement was always there, and with Mr. Kelly running up and down the touch line roaring us on we always gave our all. Mr. Roach and Mr. Kelly remained our managers for a few more seasons. Football to them was never about winning at our age, it was about enjoying the football and making friends, and win or lose you walked off the pitch with a smile on your face, or if you had a good game you were carried off shoulder high by Mr. Kelly. They never turned any boy away, we were a mixed bunch of good and very good footballers, and I'd like to think I fell into the last category. I wasn't the tallest lad on our team but according to Mr. Roche there was no substitute for skill, and this he reckoned I had in abundance, but my big head deflated a little when I heard him say the same to all the boys.

In order to build up my strength Mr. Kelly recommended I drink cabbage water. So on Sunday afternoons when Mr. Kelly called to our house to collect weekly funding for our new club house, I always made sure I had a mug of cabbage water in my hand. Then as soon as he was gone so was the cabbage water, gone down the jacks because it tasted awful. After many twelve and a half pence's from me and other funding the old Elephant Supermarket on Blackditch Road was purchased and became the new home of Ballyfermot United Football Club.

Some members of the Ballyfermot United schoolboy teams I played with were Mikey Martin, John Redmond, Gerard Kavanagh, Christy Sullivan, Tony O'Connell, Derek Condon. Richie Mackey, Dave O'Grady, Peter Galvin, Mick Roach, and Damian and Kieran Phibbs.

Whenever my pals and I played football on our road or in school a boy would take the name of his favorite footballer, and give a running commentary using the players name as we played. We seemed to think that by taking the names of George Best, Peter Osgood, Pele or Kevin Keegan we would inherit their football skills.

One time a classmate of mine called himself Baurenbeck.

"Who is Baurenbeck?" I asked.

He pulled out the Shoot magazine from his schoolbag and showed me an article about the great Franz Beckenbauer, who was about to participate in his third world cup finals in West Germany in 1974. My classmate had called him Baurenbeck.

I remember this boy sometimes struggled whenever he was asked to stand up in class and read aloud, some words he had trouble pronouncing. Back then he would have been classed as a slow learner, but looking back now I wonder how much of his reading difficulties were down to the medical condition we now know to be Dyslexia.

I was no different to the others boys, I also assumed the name of my favorite footballer and I'd do a running commentary as we played.

"Pat Abbey beats one player – He nutmegs another – He shoots – He scores."

All that was missing was the music from Match of The Day.

"Who the hell is Pat Abbey – What team does he play for?"

These were just some of the questions I was asked whenever I assumed the name of my favourite footballer, my favourite footballer was my brother Pat.

Pat and I spent many hours in our back garden where he would teach me some of his football skills, and we also held keep it uppy competitions to see who could juggle the ball in the air the longest using our knees, head and feet. My other brothers would also join us in a game of head tennis using the washing line for the net.

During the seventies Pat played for the Ballyfermot United senior team. I always went to watch them when they played their home games on The Lawns, and my father or brothers would bring me to the away games.

During the seventies Pat's team won many trophies. The 1974/75 season was their most successful, that season they won four trophies, the league, the Arthur Lynch Cup, the Polikoff Cup and the Leinster Junior Cup, the only cup to elude them that year was the F.A.I Junior Cup. The venues for these numerous cup finals and semi finals were usually a League of Ireland ground, Richmond Park, Glenmalure Park, Tolka Park and Dalymount Park. For the finals there was always great support for the team. Four or five special buses would depart from outside Tim Young's Pub, which was the teams watering hole before The Ballyfermot United Sports and Social Club was opened. The buses would be full with family members, girlfriends and club members sporting scarves and rosettes in the red and blue colours of Ballyfermot United, or the Ballyer as Mr Kelly called them.

As well as Ballyfermot United another great club from the area was Cherry Orchard. Back then the two clubs very rarely met at senior level, maybe they were affiliated to different leagues. One occasion they did meet was in the cup, I think it may have been the Leinster Junior Cup, a major cup competition that was open to all football associations. Both teams played their home games on The Lawns, but Ballyfermot United were drawn out of the hat first so the match was played on Ballyfermot's pitch. With two great teams from the area playing against each other it created a lot of interest, it was the first time I was ever at a match in a public park where the pitch had to be roped off. There was a large crowd and the Ballyfermot United committee member who went around collecting donations at half time made a few bob for the club. The match ended in a draw and the replay took place a week later on Cherry Orchards pitch, and again it was attended by a sizable crowd. For the record Ballyer won the replay by three goals to one, with my favourite footballer scoring one of the goals.

My father always had a soft spot for Pat's quadruple trophy winning team of 1974.

To distinguish that team from past and future Ballyfermot United teams my father gave them a title of their own, he always referred to them as "The 74 team."

Tongue in cheek he often remarked that there were only two great football teams in the seventies, Ballyfermot United the 74 team, and the Brazilian world cup winning team of 1970.

As well as the people who were involved in running football teams other men who also gave great service to football were the referees who lived in the area. Tommy Burns, Barney Byrne, Sean Jones, Joe Carey and Mr Smith, all referees who gave great service to the D.D.S.L for many years. There was no backchat to these men in black whenever they refereed a match. There were times when they refereed our schoolboy matches and if we were losing by a high score they would sometimes give us a couple of penalty's for no apparent reason, just to make the score a little bit more respectable. A lot of my pals played for Ballyfermot United at schoolboy

level. One funny incident that stands out was on a cold Saturday afternoon on the Lawns, when we went to watch a mate of ours Mixer play. The first place we always looked for Mixer was on the touch-line, because he was always a substitute. As we got nearer the pitch Tubba said, "I don't see Mixer – maybe he hasn't shown up."

"He might be playing." I said.

"They must be short of players if Mixer is playing," joked Hilo.

After looking on the pitch there was no sign of Mixer, we were just about to leave when Liamy noticed a familiar stance on the touchline, and right enough it was Mixer, wearing a new blue snorkel jacket over his football gear. The subs didn't have track suits back then. He had the jacket zipped up all the way and the fur trimmed hood up over his head. "I dig the new snorkel jacket." said Hylo.

"Me Ma bought it for me yesterday – She said I was catching me death every Saturday standing on the side-line," we all laughed.

"Have you any smokes " asked Liamy.

"No they're back in the dressing room." replied Mixer.

"Would you not nip back in and get us one. – You're fuck all use to anybody here on the sideline." said Liamy.

"No way – You're not smoking in front of my manager – He's forever going on about the effects of smoking – He said smoking slows sportsmen down – especially footballers." Mixer was adamant.

"So it wont effect you then." said Tubba.

"Where did your manager hear that?" I asked.

"He said he seen it on an anti-smoking advertisement on the telly years ago – In it Steve Highway Irelands non-smoking speedy winger races against a greyhound and wins – The gist of the advertisement was that if Steve Highway was a smoker – He wouldn't have had the speed to beat the greyhound – Research has shown that smoking slows sportsmen down."

"Steve Highway is fast but I can't believe he beat a greyhound." I replied. "Did the advertisement mention anything about smoking slowing greyhounds down – Maybe the greyhound was a chain smoker."

We all burst out laughing except Mixer.

"You could have a point there Peewee." said Hylo. "The other day I was in Dirty Aggies and two greyhounds strolled in and ordered two loose cigarettes."

After we finished rolling around the place from laughing Mixer surprisingly got the call from his manager to warm up, one of his team-mates had got injured.

"Give us a smoke before you go on." asked Liamy.

"Me smokes are in the dressing room I told yeh."

Liamy was gumming for a smoke and wouldn't let up on Mixer.

"What's in that pocket there." he asked pointing at the pocket on the left arm sleeve of Mixers new snorkel jacket.

“Will you ever fuck off.” replied Mixer as he warmed up.

When the time came for Mixer go on as a substitute, Liamy removed Mixers jacket the way a corner man would remove his fighters robe before a boxing match, offering words of encouragement as he did so.

“Now don’t let us down Mixer – This is your big chance – Show that manager of yours that smoking doesn’t slow you down – It only stunts your growth.”

As soon as Mixer set foot on the pitch Liamy unzipped the pocket on the sleeve of Mixers jacket, and right enough his hunch was right, there he found a box of ten major. Meanwhile Mixer was observing Liamy from the pitch and yelled out.

“Put them smokes back yeh bollix.”

As Liamy started to run away from the pitch Mixer yelled out again.

“Come back with me smokes yeh fucking bollix.”

Tommy Burns the ref blew hard on his whistle to stop the game and approached Mixer.

“What ails you son – Who are you effing and blinding at.”

“At him,” replied Mixer, pointing at Liamy in the distance. “He has legged it with me fucking smokes.”

“Do you know they say smoking slows you down son.” said Tommy.

“Well it doesn’t seem to be slowing him down does it,” replied an incensed Mixer as he again pointed at Liamy in the distance.

“Well now,” responded Tommy, “We’ll put it to the test - We’ll see does smoking slow you down – You can go and try catching him – I’m sending you off for using bad language.”

I felt sorry for poor Mixer. It was his big chance to impress his manager but had only lasted one minute on the pitch, his only consolation was that his new snorkel jacket was still warm when he put it back on again.

St Patrick’s Athletic were my local League of Ireland football club, I spent many Sunday afternoons down in Inchicore supporting them. Before kick off I would buy chocolate and fruit from the woman who sold their wares from prams inside the turnstile gate at the top of the old terrace, I always made sure to hold a few pence back for a cup of Bovril at half time.

Back then the players took to the pitch through a door at the back of the old stand and walked down to the front and out onto the pitch, Sometimes at the matches I’d sit in the stand so I could maybe get an autograph or two, but for the majority of the matches I would take my place on the grass bank behind the goal opposite the shed end.

My boyhood dream was to play for St Pats, or even to play just once in Richmond Park the home of the Super Saints. Three of my favourite players were Leo Flanagan.

Jackie Jameson and Dermot Keeley. Leo Flanagan played in midfield and stood out for two reasons, one was for his passing ability and the other was for his mop of ginger hair. Jackie Jameson was the opposite to Flanagan, Jackie had very fine hair. Jackie had a great step over and many times Jackie bamboozled opposing defenders with his skill, for a man so tall he had exceptional skills on the ground. His close control was excellent and his vision with his back to goal was second to none. Dermot Keeley was a tough tackling no nonsense defender, and if any player was willing to go in where it hurt it was Dermot. Sometimes I looked away when Dermot went whole-hearted into a tackle, I may have looked away but many a centre forward jumped out of the way, with the thoughts of having to turn up for work on the Monday morning after the game on Sunday, Dermot was hard but fair.

During matches in Richmond Park there were many times when the ball was kicked into the Camac River that runs alongside the ground. There was a man positioned at the corner of the shed end of the ground in a green pair of fisherman's waders, and his job was to retrieve the balls from the Camac. He'd wade in and wait until the flow of the river took the ball downstream in his direction, where he would fish it out with a big net. During Dermot Keeley's time playing for St Pats the man who retrieved the balls from the Camac was kept very busy, he spent so much time in the Camac that at one stage the club committee was going to buy him a frog suit. I'm sure it was always in the back of his mind that at some stage of the season he might have to save the opposing centre forward from drowning, who was in possession of the ball when Dermot cleared it into the Camac.

My eldest brother Martin had a trial for Bohemians while he was still serving in the Irish Army. He was approached by a scout after playing a game for Collins Barracks in the Eastern Command Cup on the grass esplanade beside the Barracks.

He received special dispensation from the army to try out for Boh's. I remember him arriving home after his first training session with Bohemians under the lights in Dalymount Park and he wasn't impressed. The Great Billy Young was the Boh's manager at the time and Martin said they didn't play any football during training, it was all running, sprinting and more running. His second and last training session was a few nights later and again afterwards Martin complained his body was aching. He said he had exerted more energy in two nights training with Bohemians than he had exerted in his three months infantry training in the army. Martin quickly decided that part-time football with Boh's wasn't for him, and instead settled for his cushy job of chauffeuring the top brass in the Irish Army around.

Some league of Ireland clubs invited famous footballers over from England to guest in a game or two; they were usually players who had just finished playing professionally or nearing the end of their careers. Three of the more famous names were George Best who played for Cork Celtic, Bobby Charlton who played for

Waterford United, and Gordon Banks who played a game for St Patrick's Athletic in 1977. Banks was the goalkeeper in England's World Cup winning team of 1966, and his save from the great Pele during the 1970 world cup finals in Mexico is rated as one of the best ever. Gordon's already long and distinguished professional career was curtailed by a car accident that resulted in him losing the sight in one eye, but somehow St. Pats had cajoled him to come over to Inchicore to play for one game.

I don't know what his match fee was but if it was based on a percentage of the gate receipts then it was well worth his while, because Richmond Park was packed that Sunday afternoon. I can't remember who the regular St. Pats goalkeeper was at the time but I always wondered how he reacted when he was told he was been dropped for the game, was he fuming or did the fact that he was been replaced by the great Gordon Banks ease his disappointment.

I took up my usual spot on the grass bank behind the goal with Tom. We couldn't have been in a better viewing position to see what was to be the talking point during the match and for a long time after. St Pats were playing Shamrocks Rovers who were then managed by ex Republic of Ireland manager and Leeds United legend Johnny Giles. At the time Rovers had taken a brave step and decided to go full time and create a professional set up, two of their professional signings were Ray Tracey and Eamon Dunphy. The talking point of the game was a world class save by Gordon Banks. The ball was cleared from a corner by the St Pats defence out to the edge of the eighteen yard box, there waiting for it to drop was Eamon Dunphy, he hit the ball full on the volley, from where we were standing behind the goal we could see the ball heading for the top right hand corner of the net. For a couple of seconds Banks looked as if he was glued to his position on the goal line when suddenly he sprang high to his right hand side and pushed the ball around the post and out for a corner.

Everybody who was at the match couldn't believe what they had just witnessed and the applause rang out all over Richmond Park. After Banks made the save he quickly rose to his feet and brushed himself down as if he had done nothing special. Okay it may only have been Eamon Dunphy and not Pele that he saved from, but you have to remember that Banks only had vision in one eye. Thanks to Gordon keeping a clean sheet that day St Pats went on to win the match one nil. Not only did Gordon Banks do the St Pats fans a great service that day, he also done future generations of Irish football fans a great service. The reason been that when Eamon Dunphy retired from football he went on to be a football pundit on TV and radio, I'm sure if Eamon had scored that day he would have availed of the many opportunities he had in the media to remind us of the day he scored a goal against one of the greatest goalkeepers in the world. Gordon Banks is one English man I would never begrudge a world cup winners medal to.

St. Pats also had another legendary goal keeper who played in goal for them called Mick O'Brien. Mick was from Ballyfermot and played for a few League of Ireland clubs. As well as been remembered as a top class goalkeeper Mick is famously remembered for breaking the crossbar while swinging from it during a League of Ireland game. Mick was playing for Athlone Town at the time and the match was held up while the crossbar was repaired. After emergency repairs Mick continued to swing from the crossbar and broke it a second time. The incident was caught on film and was broadcast all over Europe on many sports programs.

When Mick signed for St Pats and took his place in goal at the shed end of Richmond Park he was always greeted with applause and chants of Mickey the Monkey, because of the swinging incident with the crossbar. Mick always seen the funny side of these chants and the more we chanted the more he would play up to the crowd. When ever he threw the ball out to a team mate he would follow his throw with a forward roll like an acrobat, or pull the shorts down of an opponent just as a corner was been taken. Mick was an entertaining character and at games the crowd would focus more on Mick in goal than the play further on up the pitch.

My first international match to attend was Ireland versus the U.S.S.R. in Dalymount Park in 1974. It was a qualifying game in the European Nations Cup; Tom purchased the tickets in Elverly's on Suffolk Street.

Because the match took place on a Wednesday afternoon I had to ask for a half-day off school. That morning I handed my note to Mr. Twomey who placed it in the role book without any response. When a pupil was granted a half-day from school he usually went home at half twelve, so I was surprised to hear Mr. Twomey call down to me after we finished reciting the Angelus at twelve o'clock.

"Peadar Abbey – Shouldn't you be going somewhere."

Releasing me early from school took me by surprise and as I quickly put on my duffle coat his next comment was even more surprising, because I didn't think he had much interest in soccer.

"Tell me Peadar – What parish in Ireland is our centre half Mancini from?"

He was referring to Terry Mancini, Terry was born Terry Sealy in England who's Irish father passed away when he was very young. His mother remarried changing his surname to that of his step father, and although Terry was born in England he qualified to play for Ireland because his biological father was Irish. After explaining Mancini's situation to Mr Twomey he gave me a confused look and replied.

"So unlike the GAA he doesn't have to be born in the parish – Well I think that covers everything with reference to Mr Mancini – The man with an Italian surname – Born in England – and is playing for Ireland – Strange state of affairs – Enjoy the match."

Tom and I were at the end of the ground where Don Givens scored two of his three goals in the three nil win. Liam Brady made his international debut for

Ireland that day. He was only eighteen at the time and I couldn't get over how skinny and frail he looked in the flesh, it was obvious to me he wasn't drinking his cabbage water, and Mr Twomey's interest in questioning Terry Mancini's Irish credentials must have put a curse on Mancini, because he was sent off during the first half of the match.

Back in the seventies the mere mention of Ireland qualifying for the world cup finals would be greeted with howls of laughter. I remember asking my father.

"Da – Do yeh think we will ever qualify for the World Cup Finals."

A couple of my brothers were in the room at the time and laughed..

"Don't laugh it's a valid question." said my father. "Butch we had a great chance to qualify for the 74 finals in West Germany and blew it – I blame the manager at the time Liam Tuohy". "Why?" I asked.

"He should have selected the up and coming Ballyer 74 team – That team would have easily qualified us for the world cup no bother."

This time my brothers broke their bollix laughing.

During the summer months there were five and seven -a - side football tournaments held in housing estates all over Dublin, two of which were held in Ballyfermot.

One was the Colepark five -a- sides which were played in the school yard of St Johns Secondary School, and the other was the Spiddal Park seven -a -side both played on tarmacadam. Unfortunately for commuters the Spiddal Park tournament was played beside the 78 bus terminus on Spiddal Park. At times there would be three or four buses parked up at the terminus while the drivers and conductors watched some of the matches, it wasn't a good time to be waiting for a 78 bus when the tournament was in progress. Over the years the teams that entered these tournaments became well known on the five and seven -a -side circuit around Dublin, The latecomers, The Reids, The Gunters, The Jets, The Whizz Kids and The Hills were just a few.

There was one junior five-a side tournament that was held in the field beside the community centre on Ballyfermot Road. It was run by Johnny O'Brian and Willie Twanley. Over the years my mates and I had some success in the tournament going under name of the Untouchables.

As a kid football took up most of my time, if I wasn't playing football I was watching it. We purchased our first colour television in 1974. I remember it well because it was just before the start of the world cup finals in West Germany. The man who delivered the twenty two inch Pye television set gave me a free world cup chart with all the fixtures and times of the matches displayed on it. It was great watching the games in colour and the reception was a lot easier on the eye.

One other big plus about our new telly was how easy it was to tune into our local T.V station B.C.A.T.V, Ballyfermot Community Association Television, a

local station that broadcast once a week. On Wednesday nights we would tune in and watch the non-stop draw and programmes on local issues, news and sports. I remember watching two pals of mine John and Frank impersonating Frank Spencer and Columbo on B.C.A.T.V.

The team I supported in England was Liverpool. Around the age of ten or eleven years old I was so sure I was destined to play in an F.A. cup final for Liverpool that I even tried to learn the hymn *Abide With Me*, the hymn that was sung by the two finalists and fans just before the kick-off in Wembley Stadium.

Whenever my brothers Martin and Pat went over to Anfield on the B & I boat to watch Liverpool play they always brought home loads of Liverpool merchandise. At one stage the four walls and ceiling of the boy's bedroom were covered in posters, pennants, scarfs and rosettes in the Liverpool colours. Martin, Pat, Jim and I supported Liverpool while Richard and Tom supported Tottenham Hotspurs, my sister Liz had an interest in Birmingham City, well more of an interest in their rising young star Trevor Francis.

My other childhood heroes were cowboys. Two television programs I never missed were *The High Chaparral* and *the Virginian*. I remember going to the pictures to see *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* in the Savoy on O'Connell Street, my father said it was a must see film and with cowboys been my favorites I couldn't wait to see it on the big screen. I remember been in the horrors because Tom and I were late for the start of the film. We arrived in the picture house just at the scene where Paul Newman carries Katherine Ross on the handlebars of a pushbike Newman is wearing a bowler hat and there wasn't a horse, a holster or a colt 45 in sight. For the next three minutes or so Paul Newman continued to carry the girl on the handlebars and then done some stunts on the pushbike, while the song *Raindrops Keep Fallen On my Head* is played.

I wasn't impressed and turned to Tom, "This isn't a cowboy picture."

"It is a cowboy picture." said Tom.

"No it's not." I replied and rose from my seat, Tom nearly choked on his popcorn.

"Where are you going." he asked as he followed me up the aisle.

"I'm going home – That is not a cowboy picture."

"It is a cowboy picture." insisted Tom.

"No its not – Their not cowboys – You never see the *Virginian* or *Trampas* wearing bowler hats do yeh – *Laurel and Hardy* wear bowler hats."

Poor Tom couldn't get a word in edgeways.

"And another thing cowboys don't ride pushbikes – You never see *Manoalito*, *Uncle Buck* or *Blueboy* from the *High Chaparral* riding into town and tying their bikes to the hitching post outside the saloon. – Real cowboys ride horses, wear cowboy hats and guns and holsters."

*My father's  
favorite Team  
Ballyfermot  
United.  
The 74 Team*



Tom was fuming and had we been in the Gala picture house in Ballyfermot he would have let me go home on my own, but because we were in town he had no choice but to follow me, if he had let me get the bus home on my own my mother would have been up for murder.

Another memorable visit to a picture house was when Mary and her boyfriend Ken brought me and Tom to see the musical *Oliver* in the Ambassador cinema. Afterwards Mary brought Ken home to our house to meet my parents, my mother was chuffed, and the fact that Mary's fella was in the legion seemed to please her no end. After he left I was suspicious and confronted my mother, "You told me Mary's fella was in the legion."

"He is in the Legion." she replied.

"Well why he wasn't he wearing his uniform." I asked.

My mother looked confused and looked towards Richard for guidance, Richard started laughing, "When Ma said the legion she meant the Legion of Mary – Your thinking of the Foreign Legion."

"What's the difference?" I asked.

"Well they say that you join the Foreign Legion to forget women – And you join the Legion of Mary to shift woman." Needless to say my mother wasn't impressed with Richard's summing up of the Legion of Mary.

### **Our House**

We lived in a three bedroom house. My parents slept in the smallest bedroom, the three girls shared the medium sized back bedroom and the six boys shared the largest bedroom at the front of the house. There were two sets of bunk beds in the boys bedroom, the eldest boys Martin and Pat had a bunk to themselves, and I shared a bunk with Richard and Tom shared a bunk with Jim. The girls bedroom had two

single beds, but unlike the boys the eldest didn't get a bed to herself, Mary had to share a bed with the youngest Theresa leaving Liz to her usual lap of luxury.

Back in the seventies large families were common, so with our parents and nine children in our house there was always hilarity going on, or as we used to say back then "We had great skit."

One evening Tom entered the boy's bedroom sporting a popular hairstyle at the time called the perm, or as it was sometimes called the afro, needless to say Tom's hairstyle created some amusement from my older brothers. "Look at the state of your hair," said Jim. "Weren't you warned before about playing with Ma's curlers."

"Perms are all the rage now, I got it done in Peter Marks – Only hippies like yourselves get their hair done in the Como these days." said Tom.

"You look like Harpo from the Marx brothers – Where is your horn? – Honk, honk." replied Jim.

One rule that never changed in the boy's bedroom over the years was the time the light was turned off at. The boy's bedroom light was turned off at exactly the same time every night, and that time was when Martin said so. It didn't matter what the rest of us were doing or in the process of doing, it was lights out when Martin the number one son said so. Before lights out he always ensured he had an arsenal of shoes within easy reach from his bottom bunk, because the rest of us had a tendency to converse loudly about our day or plans for the weekend ahead.

"Jim the lads are heading to Nalty's on Friday night for a few beveys if you're interested," said Richard.

"Yeh." replied Jim. "We might head into town afterwards and catch the late night showing of the latest Bruce Lee film."

With that a platform shoe would fly across the bedroom in the direction of the bunk beds that Richard, Jim, Tom and I shared, one of us at each end.

"What was that for?" shouted Richard.

"Shut up and go to sleep." answered Martin.

As try as we could Tom and I could never hold in our laughter, so again another platform shoe would fly in our direction,

"And if yis don't stop them pair laughing I will keep firing," continued Martin.

"I can see why you didn't get best shot in your battalion," sniggered Jim.

"We were trained to fire a few warning shots first." answered Martin as he threw another platform in mid-sentence.

Martin's shoe throwing tactics kept us quiet for a short while but it never lasted.

"Will yeh move your feet away from my perm." shouted Tom.

"My feet are no where near your perm." Jim shouted back.

"I'm warning yis – Shut bleeding up." roared Martin as another platform shoe flew across the room.

“Goodnight Jim Bob.” said Richard in a low voice.

“Goodnight Mary Ellen.” replied Jim.

“Goodnight Harpo.” said Martin.

“Goodnight Groucho.” replied Tom, and with that the last of Martins arsenal flew across the bedroom, during all this uproar Pat slept for Ireland.

One Friday evening Mary was on her sewing machine when Martin came home from the barracks.

“The very girl Mary – Will you take up a pair of flares for me?” asked Martin.

“No way – I’m busy making a uniform for my boyfriend Ken.”

“Can he not afford to buy his own clobber – I’d give him the elbow if I were you.” said Martin.

“I’m making Ken a Garda uniform for the Legion of Mary fancy dress party in a few weeks time.”

“You have loads of time to do that later.” pleaded Martin.

“Go on then – But I’m only going to do a rush job on your flares.” replied Mary.

“You’re a saint Mare,” answered a chuffed Martin.

As it was Friday, payday, I followed Martin upstairs as he always gave me a few bob. As we reached the boys bedroom door he put his finger to his lips ordering me to be quiet, we could hear aggressive shouting coming from the bedroom. After pausing outside the room for a minute our curiosity got the better of us, so we entered. We were faced by the twins who were barefooted and wearing white karate suits.

“What’s the read.” asked Martin. “Are you two going to the Legion of Mary fancy dress party as well.”

The twins were quick to dismiss any link with the Legion of Mary.

“Fuck off – We’re not in the Legion of Mary.”

“Well what’s the read with the karate suits.” asked Martin.

“We have joined a Karate club.” the twins answered together.

They continued to simulate karate moves on each other, and as they threw a punch or a roundhouse kick at each other they would shout out in Kung-fu speak

“Mi garri – Chew dan.” shouted Jim as he threw another shape at Richard.

Martin threw his eyes to heaven. “ Jaysis I’d say Bruce Lee is shitting himself.”

Martin picked up a card that was on his bunk bed and read it aloud.

“Jim Abbey – Membership Number 256 – I Adhere to the rules of the Kempo Karate Club – and swear to use my expertise in the art of karate only in self defence.”

“That’s my membership card.” said a confident Jim. “It also doubles as my Karate licence – If any sham starts a row with me – I have to produce my licence and warn him that I am an exponent of the art of karate.”

“Will you ever cop on.” replied Martin. “Is this after you pick yourself up off the deck from the kick in the bollix your man lands on you while your searching for your licence to kill.”

“No,” Richard interrupted. “We would try reasoning with our aggressor first – And if he continued to ignore our warnings, only then – And I emphasise only then – would we have to revert to self defence.”

“Jaysis – Thanks for putting me wide,” quipped Martin.

“I’m telling yeh – We are not to be messed with.” replied Jim.

As well as Bruce Lee another phenomenon during the seventies were the Bay City Rollers. When the band played in the Star Cinema in Crumlin many fanatical fans went to the concert, my sister Theresa been one. After the concert local girls could be heard walking up Ballyfermot Road singing about their obsession that was the Bay City Rollers.

“WELL WE SANG SHANG – A –LANG  
AND WE RAN WITH THE GANG  
SINGING DO – WAP – BE – DO – AY  
WE WERE ALL IN THE NEWS IN OUR BLUE SUEDE SHOES  
AND DANCING THE NIGHT AWAY.”

When Theresa reached home we could hear her chanting at our front door,

“B - A - Y -- B - A -Y — B - A - Y - C - I - T - Y  
WITH YOUR R - O - L - L - E - R - S  
BAY CITY ROLLERS ARE THE BEST.  
THEY PLAY NEAR, THEY PLAY FAR,  
THEY PLAYED UP IN CRUMLIN STAR,  
WITH YOUR R - O - L - L - E - R - S  
BAY CITY ROLLERS ARE THE BEST.

On her way up our stairs Pat called Theresa, she stuck her head around the boys bedroom door, “did yeh enjoy the concert.” asked Pat.

“It was fab.” replied Theresa.

“Step in and lets have a look at yeh.”

Theresa was dressed in a blue denim jacket with tartan trimmings, and a pair of flared trousers with tartan stripes down the outside of each leg. She also wore a tartan scarf covered in badges of Woody, Eric, Les, John and Alan.

“Did your boyfriend Noel enjoy the concert,” inquired a sarcastic Tom.

“He is not my boyfriend – We are just good friends.”

“You kept that very quite Theresa,” remarked Martin, “Does Rhinehart know about this other fella Noel.”

Rhinehart was Theresa’s pen-pal from East Germany and she wore a bracelet that he had posted over to her from Berlin.

“Poor Rhinehart,” said Richard. “He’s risking his life smuggling love letters out from behind the iron curtain and you’re off gallivanting”

“We’re only pen-pals – I’ll never meet Rhinehart in person.” said Theresa.

“What if one day Rhinehart decides to make a break for freedom and jumps over the Berlin Wall to pay you a visit – Love has no barriers Theresa.”

“God you’re hilarious – Like I said Rhinehart and Noel are just friends.” repeated Theresa as she left the room. In an instant Martin the protective elder brother started to make inquiries about Theresa’s friend.

“Who is this Noel fella hanging around our Theresa?”

“He’s from lower Ballyer – He paid for Theresa’s concert ticket.” said Tom.

“Did he now.” said Martin with a hint of scepticism in his voice.

“Well when you see this Noel fella again tell him from me – That just because he buys our Theresa a ticket for a Bay City Rollers concert it doesn’t give him the right to mess our Theresa around – Tell him to keep his shang- a-lang in his tartan trousers.”

Half the young population of Dublin claimed to have been present in the Dandelion Market on Stevens Green when U2 played one of their early gigs in the late seventies.

I wasn’t one of those people, but I do make claim that in the mid-seventies when the satellites played a gig in Keoghs front garden on Moycullen Road that I was in the crowd. The Satellites were four local lads and a good band they were too, they sang cover versions of songs by the Rollers and songs by the show bands that were big on the scene back then. Another time I seen the Satellites play was during the annual community week celebrations in Ballyfermot. For community week all the different road committees ensured that every house on their road was decorated with coloured buntings. On this occasion the Satellites played in the front garden of Ballyfermot’s world renowned Irish traditional music family The Furys. Before the Satellites took to the garden on Claddagh Road the father of the Furys Ted played a few jigs and reels on his fiddle, I was amazed at the speed of his hands and fingers and how he could get so many different sounds from his fiddle. After Mr Fury finished his set the Satellites started theirs. If the boys in the crowd were a bit subdued in their support for the band the girls were the complete opposite, they went crazy when Ballyers answer to the Bay City Rollers performed.

Another band that were also very popular at the time were Slade, especially with the boys, it was more macho to be a fan of Slade than it was the Bay City Rollers. Alvin Stardust was also very popular, Alvin made a flying visit to Ballyfermot in the seventies, and he visited a newly built boy’s centre on Sarsfield Road beside the Old Pine Tree public house. He mimed to one of his big hit songs dressed head to toe in black leather and wore his trademark black glove. I think there were more kids outside admiring the little red sports car that Alvin arrived in than were inside the

centre to see him mime. As I've mentioned it was only a flying visit, for as soon as he finished his song he sped off in his little red sports car before one of the admirers did.

All kinds of music was played in our house, Irish ballads, country and western, pop and



rock. My sisters were fans of The Carpenters, The New Seekers and the Four

Seasons, and sometimes Liz and Mary used to go and watch an Irish band called the Bye Laws.

My Brothers were into Bob Dylan, Neil Young, Horslips, Rory Gallagher and Johnny Cash. The album "Live in San Quentin" by Johnny Cash was a firm favourite with all of us, although we wouldn't have been to pleased to have been incarcerated in San Quentin, or any of our local prison institutions for that matter, thankfully the Gardai never had any reason to call to our door.

There was one time though when I did have a confrontation with a Garda, it happened beside the Sean Dunne swimming pool in the Lawns. Not only was the swimming pool a great amenity for the people of the area but it was also the location for the local toss school. On Saturday evenings and Sunday mornings local men gathered at the side of the swimming pool and formed a toss school.

My mother always warned me to stay away from the swimming pool when the toss school was in progress, but I never heeded her numerous warnings. It was common for the pitcher of the toss school to ask someone to keep look out for the Guards, so any young lad who happened to be playing around the pool would be giving a few pence to keep sketch. One day as I was kicking my ball against the swimming pool wall I was asked to keep look out, it was money for nothing as most of the time the Guards turned a blind eye to the illegal toss school. But on this particular Saturday afternoon as the shouts of heads a fiver and harps a tenner rang out I got the shock of my young life, I spotted a Guard on foot walking in the direction of the toss school across the playing pitches in the Lawns. At first I thought he might have been a postman, and then nearly shit myself when I realised that there was no post on Saturdays.

"It's the bluebottles." I called out, but there was no response from the men at the toss school. I yelled out again. "It's the shades." But my warnings were drowned out by the shouts of heads a fiver and harps a score. For my next warning I yelled out at the top of my voice. "It's the fucking Guards – it's the Guards I swear." and to

my relief this got a reaction from the men and they briskly walked in the opposite direction of the on-coming Guard. In my haste to make my own escape I let my ball fall from my hand and it rolled in the direction of the on-coming Guard, I should have left the ball and legged it but as I picked it up the Guard grabbed me by the earlobe.

“Leave me alone – I was only playing football I swear.”

“Save it for the judge – Acting as lookout while the hard-chaws take part in illegal gambling.” replied the Guard in a culchie accent.

“I was just playing football.” I replied.

“Look there’s a pound note on the ground – Pick it up so I can use it as evidence back at the station,” said the Guard still holding my facey down by the earlobe.

“Get a move on I haven’t got all day – I have to get this uniform back in your sister’s wardrobe.”

The Guard let go of my earlobe and I looked up, it was my brother Jim, wearing the Garda uniform that Mary had made for her boyfriend for the Legion of Mary fancy dress party, and he toped it off with my fathers peaked C.I.E hat.

“Jim – What are you doing?” I said shocked but also relieved.

“How many times were you warned by Ma to keep well away from the toss school – Now let this be a lesson to yeh.”

“I wont go near the toss school again I swear – But can we keep the pound note.”

“Does a bear shite in the forest.” asked Jim.

“Well Yogi Bear does.” I replied.

“Well that’s a yes then.” said Jim.

As we walked home it was funny to see the reactions from people who mistakenly took Jim for a member of the guards. Boys who were playing football on the road quickly stopped and threw their ball into a garden, older boys playing cards on street corners quickly dispersed,

When my mother opened our front door to us she got the shock of her life. It took her a couple of seconds to realise the guard was in fact our Jim.

“What in Gods name is going on here.” she asked.

“I was just playing a joke on the lads playing poker on the corner ma – You should have seen them scarper.” laughed Jim. My mother and I weren’t the only people fooled by Jim impersonating a member of the Gardai, the next day my mother had a few inquiries from the curtain twitchers on the road.

During the seventies almost all of my brothers and sisters were in employment.

Mary worked in town in a dress making factory as a sewing machinist and it was there that she learned her dress making skills. In 1974 she was working close to where the Dublin bombings took place in Talbot Street. It was common for her to meet up with my sister Theresa who attended Georges Hill Secondary School and

go shopping around town. I remember my parents getting word of the explosions and how worried they were for my sisters well being, there was a bus strike at the time and thankfully Mary and Theresa had already started to walk home before the bombs exploded. The first they heard about the explosions was outside Newsbeat on Ballyfermot Road from a neighbor of ours who informed them that my parents were worried sick about them and to get home as quick as they could. My parents always counted their blessings that they didn't suffer the fate of other families who lost their loved ones in the Dublin and Monahan bombings in 1974.

Liz worked as a receptionist for Coca Cola based in Chapelizod holding down a job Liz formed the Liz Abbey School of Irish dancing, and having been a former All Ireland champion herself she was well equipped to pass on her dancing skills to the girls from the area. Every Monday and Thursday evenings the television and the rest of my family were moved up to the front bedroom while the dancing classes took place in our sitting room. Most of her pupils were local girls but Liz was always on the look out for local boys to join her dancing class, but unlike my brother Tom I declined Liz's bribes to become one of her pupils.

My participation in the dancing classes entailed having to go downstairs every five minutes to open our front door to Liz's pupils. Due to the popularity of Liz's dancing school a bigger venue was soon needed, so my father, brothers and Mary's boy friend Ken built Liz a dancing studio at the bottom of our back garden.

It meant no difference to me, we had no side entrance so I still had to open our front door to let the dancers through the house out to our back garden.

There were two ways to really infuriate Liz, one was to call her Lilly, and the other was to call her dancing studio a shed. She provided a great service to the local girls who wanted to learn Irish dancing.

There was no great expenditure back then on expensive dresses, make up or false tan, and the only wigs worn were the ones worn by the male judges who came up from the country to adjudicate at many of Liz's competitions. Their costumes were very basic, all a beginner needed was a white blouse, green skirt, white stockings and a pair of pumps. The advanced girls wore the same but with a brown shawl embroidered with a Celtic design, which Mary made on her sewing machine. Numerous times Liz and her dancers went on trips over to



London to give dancing exhibitions in schools and Irish clubs. On these trips Liz

had a super eight movie camera and at a later date Liz would once again take over our sitting room and relive the trip with her pupils.

In the early seventies our next door neighbor Mr Mooney leased out a plot of land in Kill County Kildare. He was very good to my brothers when they were younger and over the years he offered them part time work. I was no exception, and although Mr Mooney paid well I quickly decided working the land wasn't for me, I used to moan when my mother asked me to fetch a head of lettuce from our vegetable rack, never mind dig up and box a few hundred heads of lettuce for Mr Mooney.

With a little input from Liz Richard landed a job in Coca Cola as a helper on their delivery trucks. It didn't take him long to settle in and before to long he became shop

steward representing the drivers and helpers. One or two times he had to get up on his soapbox and advise his discontented comrades on the errors of the company's ways. One morning between deliveries he slipped into the Como on Thomas Street to have his hair cut. On his return to the factory that afternoon his boss noticed Richards hair was a lot tidier than it was earlier that morning.

"I hope you didn't get your hair cut on the company's time." Said the boss.

"It grew on the company's time." replied Richard.

"It didn't all grow on the company's time." said his boss.

"I didn't get it all cut." replied Richard.

Richards twin Jim followed my eldest brother Martin into the Irish army. Like Martin before him Jim completed his infantry training in Collin's Barracks. After his passing out parade our family along with our cousin Pat Abbey and his family went to a pub beside the barracks, where they kept us amused with stories from their training days in the army.

Jim was in the defence forces at the time of the kidnapping of the Dutch businessman Dr Tiede Herrema by the I.R.A. After two weeks searching for Dr Herrema, the army and the Gardai were no closer to finding the kidnappers and their hostage. Jim returned home one night moaning about their lack of success, he complained his feet were walked off him, and the aul-wans in the country areas where they were searching never even offered him and his battalion so much as a cup of tea. So as he settled down to a well earned cup of tea in our sitting room my father said to Jim.

"You will soon have a big fat wage packet with all the overtime you're putting in searching for Dr Herrema."

"I wish." replied Jim. "We don't get paid overtime."

"You'rE coddin me." Replied my surprised Father.

"I'm telling yeh we don't get paid overtime."

“Jaysis.” replied my father. “I thought yiz were paid overtime and that’s why you were purposely taking your time in finding Dr Herrema – You would be worth a small fortune at this stage.”

“At this stage I have a pain in my arse.” replied Jim.

“It might be a long shot son – But before yiz leave the barracks – Check out the officers mess – Dr Herrema and his kidnappers might be right under your noses.” said my father. a tired Jim just had enough energy to crack a smile.

Eventually when Dr Herrema and his kidnappers were hunted down to a house in Monasterevin in County Kildare our Jim was a much happier soldier. Afterwards he had to put in for a new pair of army boots, as his old pair like himself were worn out in the search for Dr Herrema.

Pat was serving his time as a sheet metal worker in Browns. Browns was situated in the same industrial estate as the soft drinks company Cantrell & Cochran (C & C) just off the Killeen Road. Cantrell & Cochran employed a lot of local people as did another employer Semperit Tyres. Pat often came home for his lunch hour on the nippers pushbike, carrying the nipper on the crossbar. The job title nipper was given to a young lad whose duties entailed nipping to the shops for the workers and generally nipping here and there for supplies. As well as been gifted with his feet my favourite footballer was also gifted with his hands, he could turn his hand to any D.I.Y job.

With some of my brothers and sisters now earning my mother was grateful for the extra house keeping money, the rest of their wages they splashed out on themselves. After starting in Coca Cola, Richard bought himself a massive blue velvet jacket. On one occasion he was invited to a friends wedding and asked my mother to give his velvet jacket to the lad from Madrid cleaners, Madrid cleaners were a door to door dry cleaning service. This she did and told the lad that the velvet jacket had to be returned on Friday as it was needed for a wedding on the Saturday. My mother’s instructions fell on deaf ears, because Friday came and went and there was no sign of Richard’s jacket, he was like a demon and had to attend the wedding on the Saturday without wearing his massive velvet jacket.

On the morning after the wedding over breakfast Jim said to Richard.

“I was going to borrow your velvet jacket last night, but when I looked in the wardrobe you had got there before me.”

Behind Richards back my mother was making zip up your mouth signs to Jim.

“Anyway .” continued Jim . “It was just as well I didn’t wear your velvet jacket to the disco last night– Because your man from Madrid cleaners was there wearing one the exact same as yours – Same colour and all.”

I could lip read the words Jesus Mary and Joseph on my mothers lips.

“I’ll break his bleeding neck.” snarled Richard.

“What’s bugging him.” asked Jim.

“You will do nothing of the sort.” replied my mother in a calm voice.

“It’s probably his own velvet jacket .”

“It’s a bit of a coincidence isn’t it .” snapped Richard.

“It serves you right anyway – Door to door dry cleaning I ask you – Gone all posh now are we – Why didn’t you just walk down the main road to Prescotts and leave your jacket in to be cleaned yourself .” replied my mother.

On Monday afternoon Richards velvet jacket was left hanging on the handle of our front door, it was dry cleaned but a little creased, and we never saw the lad from Madrid cleaners again. Richard should have counted himself lucky that he got his prized velvet jacket back, because there were times when I was tempted to trade his velvet jacket with the ragman. The ragman would have given me everything I asked for in return, Indian head-dresses, gats, yos-yos, maula, spud guns, colouring books, crayons, and we probably wouldn’t have seen him again either.

My brothers spent some of their earnings on motorbikes, Honda fifties been popular at the time. My sisters bought clothes and jewellery and Liz splashed out on a car, a brand new Fiat 127. Liz thought she was the bees knees in her little run-around, all the car was missing was the sticker across the top of the windscreen with Liz’s name on the drivers side and Trevor Francis on the passengers side.

Liz decided she wanted off road parking, so with the manpower of my brothers and now brother-in-law Ken a drive-way was made for Liz’s canary yellow Fiat 127.

The drive-way was laid well but there was one problem, Liz found it difficult mousing the footpath on entering the drive-way. Her solution to the problem was to have two wooden ramps made. I don’t know who made the ramps but the word constructed would have been a more apt word, because these two ramps were gigantic. I had a pain in my arse with these ramps, for it was I who had to carry them from our house to the footpath and back again every time Liz drove her car into the drive. I could be on the toilet or half way through my dinner and my mother would call me, “Peter – Liz is outside – Will you bring out the ramps.” if I heard it once I heard it a thousand times. Sarcastically I told her that if she ever had no more use for the ramps she could always sell them on to Evil Knievel, in case he ever decided to jump over 14 buses again in Wembley Stadium. When she drove into our drive I always warned her to go easy on the accelerator, because if she hit these ramps at any speed she would end up taken flight over our house and landing on her dancing studio at the bottom of our back garden.

I suggested that it would be a good idea to leave the ramps permanently at the footpath, it would save me a lot of time and energy, but Liz’s reply astounded me.

“No – They might get robbed.”

I could just imagine the report on Garda Patrol.

“We are seeking your assistance in tracing the where-a-bouts of two large wooden ramps – Stolen from the footpath outside a house on Claddagh Road – We are asking anybody who may have seen the get away vehicle – Which we believe may have been a fork lift, to contact the Gardai in Ballyfermot.”

During the mid-seventies three of my family got married in quick succession, Mary was the first followed by Pat and Martin. Our house became a little bit quieter but more roomier especially the boys bedroom, I missed the laugh we used to have when all my brothers and sisters lived at home. The only consolation was that Tom and I got a bunk bed to ourselves and likewise Theresa, who also got a bed of her own.

### “Tech or Secco.”

At thirteen I had the choice of two schools in the area for my second level education. One was St Johns Secondary School (The Secco) and the other was the Vocational & Technical School (The Tech). I chose the Tech because the majority of my brothers were past pupils, Richard been the odd one out his preference was for The Secco.

During the summer holidays before I started in the Tech I felt really confident and self assured in myself, a visit to Mario’s chipper even gave me more confidence.

“A single and a batter burger please.” I said to Mario.

“Ah at last.” replied Mario. – “Its nice to see the face behind the voice.”

It suddenly dawned on me as it had Mario, I could now see over the high counter in the chipper, I had taken a stretch and was now a teenager.

On my first day in the Tech all the new first years were asked to assemble in the gymnasium, where we would learn which class we were assigned too. There were a lot of past pupils from the Mary Queen of Angels and a few faces from my time in the Dominican Convent that I recognised. One face I had hoped never to lay eyes on again was also there, it was the face of the bully from my time in the Convo.

I never really gave any great thought to my full name until that day, because with the exception of my family everyone called me by my nickname Peewee. The nick-name Peewee was to giving to me by an older lad on our road after he had seen the film Boys Town on the telly. It starred Mickey Rooney and Spencer Tracey, and was based on a priest by the name of Father Edward J. Flanagan who set up and founded a home for disadvantaged and delinquent boys. Peewee was a small boy and resident of Boys Town in the film.

The principle called out the names for each class in alphabetical order according to ones surname, followed by their first name and then their middle name. As I sat on the gymnasium floor with the other new first years I became very anxious as regards my middle name, I started to break into a sweat, the principle continued.

“Now we move on to class 1H.” And then he called out my name, “Abbey – Peter Augustine.”

I was mortified. It sounded to me as if he had said Augustine in slow motion. I could hear sniggering and some laughter, I didn’t move a muscle which probably made my situation worst because he repeated my name again. “Have we an Abbey – Peter Augustine in the house.” The sniggering continued as I rose to my feet sporting a big reddener on my face. All I needed now was when the principle reached the letter F he’d call out the name of Fitzer, the bully from my time in the Dominican Convent, but much to my relief his name wasn’t called for my class.

When I arrived home I quickly hunted down my mother who was out our back garden hanging out the washing, there was great drying out that day and the strong breeze eventually cooled down the big reddener that was on my face.

“There you are Love – How did your first day go.” she asked

I was in no mood for small talk. “What’s the read with my name Ma.?”

“You were called Peter after your Grand-da Carrick.”

“I know that – I’m talking about my middle name Augustine.”

“Why – Augustine is an unusual name.” said my mother.

“Who are yeh telling Ma – All the boys at registration thought so – They never stopped laughing and sniggering.”

“You’re in good company son. All your brothers have Augustine as their middle name as well.”

“Your pulling my leg.” I replied.

“I am not indeed – And all your sisters have the same middle name.”

“No way – Is their middle name Augustine as well?”

“Don’t be silly love – All your sisters have Monica as their middle name – Mary Monica – Elizabeth Monica and Theresa Monica.”

After she finished pegging the last of the washing on the line she continued.

“And also – If I had been blessed with a fourth daughter – I would have called her Harriet – Isn’t Harriet Monica a lovely name – Harmonica for short.”

She waited for a reaction from me and then the penny dropped, I got her little joke and we both broke into laughter.

“Were there any other boys in the school with unusual middle names.” enquired my mother.

“Yeh – There was Ignatius – Bartholomew – Vivienne and Valentine.”

“I bet you found them names amusing.”

“Yeh.” I replied laughing.

“Well a little bit of advice Love – If you can’t laugh at yourself – You cant afford to laugh at anyone else.”

Maybe I did over react to my unusual middle name. So from that day on whenever

anyone asked me my middle name, I lied and told them it was Andrew, the name I had taken for my conformation.

I was assigned to a class that was to sit the two national exams in three years, - the Group Certificate in second year and the Intermediate Certificate in my third year.

I was only two days in the Tech when I was confronted by a lad during the morning break, I could tell by the decrepit state of his technical drawing folder that he was probably a second or third year. He growled at me, “Give me any fucking money you have or I will box the head off yeh.” I froze on the spot. I noticed Fitzer coming up behind the lad and immediately twigged that my assailant and Fitzer the bully were a double act. I was about to hand over the money I was given to buy a 2H pencil but as I fumbled in my pocket I heard another aggressive menacing voice.

“Leave him fucking alone yeh bollix.”

I lifted my head and there was Fitzer with the pointed end of a compass in the face of my assailant, whose face was turning white by the second .

“Now fucking scram.” ordered Fitzer.

The lad sidestepped Fitzer and walked away but I knew what was coming next, I was waiting on Fitzer to point the compass in my face and demand my money.

“Are yeh all right Abbey?” he asked. I was flabbergasted.

“Don’t mind that bollix, he tried the same act with me earlier – Your lucky I had Tech drawing this morning or I wouldn’t have had my compass to threaten your man with”. I was still in shock and muttered. “Well you certainty made your point.”

“I remember you from the Convo.” continued Fitzer, “Sometimes you had to be dragged to the classroom by your Ma – You were a spacer.”

“I haven’t forgotten you.” I replied. “You were a bit of a bully back then.”

“Ah I wasn’t that bad.” laughed Fitzer. “Anyway when I heard some of the tales and seen some of the disciplinary measures that a few of the Christian brothers in the Deeler dished out I kept my head down and tried not to make eye contact.”

“Do you remember when you cried your eyes out in the confession box during your

first confession.” I asked.

I could tell by the big grin on his face that the incident wasn’t lost in his memory .

“I still have nightmares about that – For ages after I always went asleep with the light on – I was afraid in the dark.”

From that day on Fitzer and I became good school pals, and he jokingly told me that if I ever again mentioned his ordeal during his first confession to anyone else he could quite easily change back to his alter-ego the bully.

Sometimes when we both had coinciding free classes we'd pass away the time in the school library or sometimes we'd visit his house. I remember my first visit to his house because it created an uncomfortable moment. Without thinking I asked him.

"Will your Ma mind me going to your house."

It was only when I had the words out of my mouth when I remembered, but it was too late. "No my Ma's dead." he replied "She died when I was younger— I live with my grandparents."

It was an awkward moment. I didn't know where to turn. I should have remembered, Fitzer was the boy whose mother had passed away when he was in the Convo. I'm sure he must have been thinking, god this fella is a barrel of laughs bringing up all his bad memories, first his ordeal in the confession box and now his deceased mother. I didn't know how to reply and didn't as we walked to his house, and there was no way I was going to ask about the where-a-bouts of his father in case I put my foot in it again. At his front door Fitzer put his hand through the letterbox and pulled up the front door key that was attached to a length of string.

"Are your grand parents in?" I asked.

"My Nan should be."

As we walked into the hallway we heard a soft voice call out.

"Is that you Cormac?"

It was unusual to hear Fitzer being called by his first name and as I sniggered he gave me an elbow in the ribs.

"Yeh Nan it's me."

"What has you home early?"

"I had a free class Nan."

In the sitting room there were a number of photographs on a china cabinet. One that brought back memories was one of Fitzer and his grandparents taken in the church grounds on his communion day, there was also a more recent photograph of Fitzer when he made his confirmation.

"Where are your manners Cormac – Are you going to introduce me to your pal?" said his Nan.

"This is Peter Nan – Peter Augustine – Peter Augustine Abbey." replied Fitzer grinning from ear to ear.

"Peter Augustine – What an unusual name." said his Nan.

"Would you like an Oxo Peter Augustine?" asked Fitzer.

"No thanks." I replied.

"Would you prefer a few sweets Peter Augustine?" asked his Nan.

Before I had time to say yes please she produced an old biscuit tin from underneath the coffee table, and when she removed the lid it was full to the brim with an assortment of sweets, I took a handful.

“Don’t be shy Peter Augustine God gave you a pair of hands.” I didn’t have to be told twice.

On our way back to school I asked Fitzer how his Nan had so many varieties of sweets.

“My Auntie works in Woolworths on the pick and mix counter – Every evening before she leaves she skys a load into her handbag and pockets – If they ever decide to weigh her just before she clocks out she’s fucked.”

Science, technical drawing, metalwork, humanities, art and German were all new subjects for me. I wasn’t looking forward to my German lessons considering how bad I struggled with Irish in primary school. If I couldn’t master my own native tongue what chance had I with a foreign language. I knew a few German words like swine-hunt, snell, and Englander from following the exploits of Captain Hurricane in the Valiant every week. Not surprisingly when our German teacher Herr Morrissey heard my few words of German he suggested that I spend more time with my head in my German schoolbook than war comics.

I found my first year in the Tech very hectic, the classes lasted for periods of fifty minutes and then you were on the move to a new classroom and a different subject. We had a fifteen minute break in the morning and an hour for our lunch break. During the morning break boys broke up into different groups, some would share a cigarette, the tall lads slagged the short lads and vice versa, and both the tall and short lads combined to slag the teachers.

Sometimes a few fights broke out between past pupils from the Deeler and the Maryer, just to prove which schools reputation was the toughest. These fights were just a few short bouts of fisticuffs and pushing and shoving, but nothing serious.

My favourite subjects in the Tech were P.E and Art. We had Miss Sherlock for P.E in first year and from second year on we had Mr Hunt. With all due respect to Mr. Hunt the change didn’t go down to well with the rest of my classmates. Miss Sherlock was a fine thing and when she put us through our paces on Friday mornings it was the only time all of IH were present in class.

My brother Tom also had Mr. Hunt when he was in the Tech. Tom was an all rounder and under Mr. Hunt’s tuition he won track, cross country, basketball and volleyball medals while competing for the school in Leinster and All Ireland championships. When Mr. Hunt heard I was Tom’s brother I think he had visions of me emulating Tom’s sporting achievements. He often said to me in jest. “Your brother Tom excelled at all sports – Are you sure you’re an Abbey?” Mr. Hunt gave up on me, coming to the conclusion that maybe my mother had returned home from the Rotunda Hospital with the wrong baby back in 1963. I was one of the smallest and skinniest boys in our class, I’m sure if the school sporting curriculum had access to horses, Mr Hunt would have earmarked me as a potential jockey.

My other favourite subject was art. In first year our art teacher was Brian Kavanagh. Brian was from Ballyfermot and the coolest teacher in the Tech. I enjoyed the relaxed attitude in his class compared to our other subjects, he was the only teacher who let us address him by his first name. In the art room there was a stereo record player and Brian would have music on during classes, sometimes he would let us bring in LPs of our choice.

One day a classmate jokingly asked Brian if there was any chance of the school hiring a female nude model to pose for us. Brian informed us that the art school funds didn't cover nude models. Another classmate suggested that maybe if our P.E teacher Miss Sherlock had a free class that coincided with our art class, maybe she might agree to pose for us, for arts sake. Trying to keep a straight face Brian politely told us to get back to what we were doing, and then hired up the stereo that was playing the LP Sergeant Peppers Lonely Hearts Club Band by the Beatles. I enjoyed the art classes so much that it got me thinking to what I might do when I left school.

Other teachers I had were Mr. Edwards for maths, Mr. O'Cleraigh for Irish, Miss Murphy for Humanities, Mr. Rooney for metalwork, Mr. Morrissey for German and religion, Mr Cox for tech drawing, and the task of educating us on the male and female reproductive organs fell to our poor science teacher Miss O'Mahoney.

My science classes weren't my only introduction to sex education. One day while fetching a hairdryer from my sister's bedroom I noticed a book sticking out from underneath the mattress. I pulled out the book and on the cover there was a naked pregnant woman with her arm covering her breasts and the other hand covering her vagina, the title of the book was *The Joy of Sex*.

As I thumbed through the book there were drawings of a man and woman engaged in different sexual positions. One illustration showed the couple in the missionary position, and another was the male seated on a chair been straddled by the female.

As I looked at the illustrations of the man and woman engaged in different sexual positions my eyes were widely opened. I remember thinking, "Yes – This is what I want to do – When I get older I want to be able to sketch like this – I want to become an artist."

Yes the book *the Joy Of Sex* was a real eye opener for me, and although we never saw any hanky panky on the Riordans, I now had a fair idea of what Benji and Maggie got up to when Tom and Mary Riordan went to evening mass.

Fitzer and I often went on the mitch during our time in the Tech. Sometimes we would hide out in the Lawns and have a kick around with a tennis ball. We wouldn't be the only boys on the mitch, often there would be enough boys from the Tech and the Secco to start a five a side game. Sometimes if I had money I went on the mitch on my own, I would hop the bus into town and go to the pictures. The

mid seventies was a good year to skip school and go to the flicks, I must have seen Star Wars and Grease two or three times when I should have been in school.

At the end of my third year I sat the Inter cert exam, and again the teachers put great emphasis on the importance of good grades. Unlike my Group cert my Inter cert grades didn't make good reading, I received three E grades, one for Irish, German and Technical Drawing, no great surprises there, and my other grades were just average. When the newly built Senior College on Ballyfermot Road was opened I turned down the opportunity to go there and do the leaving cert. As for third level education and college there was no chance. At the time very few boys or girls from working class areas went on to further their education in the prestigious college institutions and with my grades I was never going to rebuke the trend anyway.

By this time all my education had been done in Ballyfermot and aged fifteen it was time to go out in the big wide world.

### **My Parents**

Both my parents were from East Wall. My mother lived on St Mary's Road and my father lived close by on Boolavouge Road. My father was one of eight children born

to my grand parents Patrick Abbey and Elizabeth Ball, that also included my uncles Jim, John, Tony and Michael, and my Aunties, Kathleen, May and Mags.

My parents moved to Ballyfermot in the fifty's. My father was employed near-by as a crane man in C.I.E Inchicore Works. He took great pride in his job and was very seldom absent or late. Every work morning he had a set routine that he very rarely strayed from. When the little hammer alternated between the two bells on his alarm clock he'd rise from his bed. He'd head straight into the boys bedroom, often tripping over the platform shoes that Martin had thrown the night before.

"How many times have I warned yis about them shagging plantations – Put them under your beds when yis take them off."

He'd turn on the light, open the curtains and then call my older brothers.

"Martin – Pat – Jim – Richard – Up – Now." He always started with the eldest and worked down, so I presume Jim was the first of the twins to exit the womb. My brothers would slowly poke their heads out from underneath their blankets like tortoises poking their heads out from their shells.

Downstairs he'd let the dog out to the front garden and while Pete had his first piss of the day on the sour bellies my father took in the milk bottles Over a cup of tea in the scullery he'd pack his working bag. My father was sure of two things in life, one was death and the other was that when ever my mother went on tour to London with Liz's Irish dancers she would bring him home a shoulder bag for work as a present.

The bags usually had the name and colours of a London football Club on them. During his working life my father was seen wearing a West Ham United, a Queens Park Rangers and a Chelsea shoulder bag. After one trip to London my mother surprised him with a Manchester City shoulder bag. He was chuffed with himself because whenever he received a new shoulder bag he would support the team who's name was on it, and he was getting cheesed off supporting losing London clubs, so he hoped he might have better luck supporting Manchester City.

During the forty nines years he was employed by C.I.E. the contents of my fathers working bag didn't change much. There was a small green bottle that contained his milk, a small bag of sugar, his employee bus pass, his smokes and cigarette lighter, a small transistor radio, the previous nights Evening Herald, and until Tupperware came along, his sandwiches were wrapped in Johnson Mooney & O Brian pan paper.

After he finished packing his bag he'd stand at our opened front door and wait for the bus to pull away from the terminus. While he waited he'd roar up the stairs to my brothers to get them up, never taking his eyes off the bus.

"If I have to go up there boys I will drag yiz down – I'm not godden."

I'm sure there were a few neighbours passing by who might have thought that my father was shouting up to the bus driver and conductor to get a move on.

As usual there would be no sign of my brothers responding to his constant roars.

"I don't know what sort yiz are – Yiz wont go to bed at night and yiz wont get up in the morning."

I don't think my father ever found the answer to that early morning conundrum.

Meanwhile in the boy's bedroom a hand would reach out from one of the bottom bunks and feel around for a platform shoe to bang on the floor, to give the impression that the boys were getting up.

"I'm telling yiz boys – If I have to go up there I'll brain yiz."

After hearing my father slam our front door, and allowing him enough time to walk around the corner to get his bus, Richard would jump from his bed, have a quick look out the bedroom window, pull the curtains back across, turn off the bedroom light and hop back into bed.

My mother would be fuming when my brothers did eventually get up for work.

"Why don't you boys get up when your father calls you?"

"We do." said Pat.

"You do not indeed – As soon as you hear him pull the front door after him you all turn over and go back to sleep."

"I don't." replied Jim. "I wait until I hear the spring slam our garden gate shut and then I turn over."

“I don’t take any chances eider.” laughed Martin. – “ I make sure his bus has passed the house and then I turn over.”

“Well one of these mornings it will all fall back on you – He’ll come back home and catch you all asleep – And we’ll see who finds it funny then.” replied my mother.

Unlike my brothers my sisters didn’t have to be shouted out of their beds for work, in fact they used to advise my mother not to recall the boys after my father had left. They recommended she stay in bed until it was time to get the rest of us up for school, but my mothers answer was always the same.

“How can anyone sleep through all the roaring and shouting your father has to do to get the boys up.”

“Well it doesn’t seem to work does it?” replied Liz

Mary and Liz got themselves up for work, especially Mary. Mary was a great help to my mother around the house, she hung out the washing, done the ironing, and tidied up, and all this before she went to work in the morning. Mary was the only member of the Legion of Mary whose membership was delayed a few times because they couldn’t find a halo big enough to fit her.

My father got off the bus for work just after the Old Pine Tree public house. He used the entrance known as the Kyber Pass into Inchicore Works. The Kyber Pass was a laneway beside the Seven Oaks Convent on Sarsfield Road and was a short cut into the back of the works. The Kyber Pass was mentioned a lot by my father when I was younger. He claimed to be the fastest runner in Inchicore Works, on the basis that he held the quickest recorded time for a sprint through the Kyber Pass by an employee. When ever there was Athletics or Ronnie Delaney came on T.V to talk about winning his Olympic gold medal my father would remind us of his own little claim to fame.

My father was employed in the works as a crane man. His job was to heist up the bodywork of the locomotives so that they could be serviced. He was a very well read man and the cab of his crane was a miniature library. He always encouraged us to read and the day I joined the children’s library in Drumfin he gave me his old battered dictionary for looking up words that were alien to me.

Once a year, C.I.E held an open day in Inchicore Works for the families of the employees. We always attended the open days to have a gander at the old and new locomotives. My father would give us a tour of the works and the Diesel One workshop where he worked. I remember looking up at the gantry and cab of the crane that he operated, and asking him was he not scared being up so high. “Not at all son,” he replied, “I get extra money for being up so high, we call it height money.”

Every year as we walked home through the Kyber Pass after the open day my brothers would annually throw down a challenge to my father. “Why don’t you try

and break your own record for the fastest sprint through the Kyber Pass Da – At least this time you will have plenty of witnesses.”

His reply was the same every year. “There’s no point lads - My achievement will last forever – And as for witnesses I have many, its common knowledge in the works.”

I used to think my father was real cool the way he hopped off the old double decker buses before they actually stopped. My mother often argued with him over this as she considered it foolish and dangerous.

“You make me laugh – You give out to the kids on the road for scutting on the buses and there you are hopping of the bus at the corner before it stops – One of these days you will hurt yourself – Look what happened to Mr Prone.”

Mr Prone was a neighbour of ours who had the misfortune of breaking his ankle after he hopped off the bus on Claddagh Green before it stopped. Mr Prone was forever having accidents, my father nick-named him Accie Prone, Accie been short for accident. One time Accie was running to catch a bus but didn’t notice that a small shore was opened on the footpath, probably left open by some boys after a game of in the mowel. Accie’s right foot hit the shore at speed and resulted in three broken toes. Another time Accie was knocked unconscious on the footpath by a rather chubby girl who was swinging on a rope around a lamp post. During all his accidents an ambulance had to be called, so a neighbour was despatched down to the two green telephone boxes that stood on Ballyfermot Road across from St Matthews Church. Mr Prone was a lovely man but you could also say an unlucky man, if he had fallen into my mothers beautiful bed of peony roses he would have come up smelling of shite.

Down through the years my father used the word Moderation a lot. A flutter on the horses was acceptable as long as it was done in moderation, drinking alcohol was also acceptable as long as it was taking in moderation. He enjoyed his few drinks on many a Sunday afternoon on visits to Finglas to see his brothers. When he and my uncles were in company over a few pints they would give the Trinity College debating society a run for their money. One thing my father didn’t apply the word moderation to were his working hours. His working week was usually a five and a half day week with two or three nights overtime thrown in as well .

He was a great music lover and had a big record collection. He had many of Dickie Rocks L.Ps and the album cover of one stood out for me. Dickie is photographed on a beach beside an impressive sports car, he looked every inch the superstar he was and still is, wearing massive shoes, massive clothes and a massive haircut . The title of the L.P was the Wind will Change Tomorrow, and as he posed on the beach back then Dickie didn’t have to worry about which way the wind was blowing because his hair was his own.

As great as the show bands were my fathers favourite singers were the members of the rat pack, Dean Martin, Sammy Davis Junior, and his favourite singer of all Frank Sinatra. One of Sinatra's songs Nancy with the Laughing Face was my father's party piece. Films were another great love of his, especially the westerns starring John

Wayne, and the old black and white gangster movies starring James Cagney, Humphrey Bogart and Edward G Robinson . He also loved the golden age of slapstick comedy. Laurel & Hardy, The Three Stooges, Norman Wisdom, and the Marx

Brothers were his favourites from that era. He was very knowledgeable regarding the movies and had built up a large collection of books on the film industry.

My father was very set in his ways and sometimes he could become a little hot under the collar if any of his set routines were disrupted. One morning after going through the ritual of calling my brothers for work he waited for the 78 bus to pull away from the terminus, and then made his way around the corner to the bus-stop. As the bus approached he became very concerned that it wasn't slowing down, the bus continued at speed and passed him by. As it passed he noticed that the number on the front of the bus read 78B, coming to the conclusion that the driver had mistakenly gone to the wrong terminus and was now speeding down to the 78B bus terminus on Drumfin Road. I wonder was the driver Gearoid O' Hara's Da, the father of a classmate of mine from the Mary Queen of Angels. The bus driver's error didn't go down to well with my father, being late for work just wasn't a part of his work ethic. With no other bus up at the terminus he decided to walk back to our house and wait for the next 78.

As he approached our house he thought it very strange that the boys bedroom was in darkness, sure didn't he always open the curtains and turn on the boys bedroom light before he left the house for work. He turned his key in our front door and made his way up the stairs, he stepped into the boy's bedroom, turned on the light and nearly hit the roof at the sight before him, he let out a roar at the top of his voice.

"What in the name of jaysis is going on here?"

I'm sure my brothers thought they were hearing my fathers voice in their dreams, but when they poked their heads out from underneath their blankets and saw my father standing there they nearly shit themselves.

"How long as this been going on – Get out of them jaysis beds before I brain yiz."

"Did you forget to call us Da." asked Martin.

"Don't give me that – And I'm telling yiz now – That is the last time you will wipe my eye." replied my father.

The biggest grin at the kitchen table that morning was on the face of my mother, her facial expression said it all, she didn't have to utter the words "I told yis so," to my brothers.

My mother Agnes was the second youngest in her family. She had one brother Richard and three sisters, May, Elizabeth and Theresa, born to my grand parents Peter Carrick and Mary Carey. I have no memory of my Aunt May Aunt Elizabeth or my nanny Carrick, who had all passed away before I was born or when I was very young.

A very early memory of mine is attending my Uncle Richie's funeral. I can remember been in a big black car on our way to the graveyard. We passed by what I now know to have been the Dublin Docks, where all his fellow workmates stood in silence and removed any headgear they were wearing as a mark of respect. When my granddad Carrick passed away it left only my mother and Aunt Theresa as the only remaining members of their family. My mother and Aunt Theresa were very close and took it in turns to visit each other on alternative Sundays.

My mother was a very soft spoken woman and very rarely did she ever raise her voice, well not to me anyway. Been the baby of the family had its perks, in a court of law my mother would have got me away with murder.

She rarely had a bad word to say about anyone and had time for everyone. Often I heard her use the phrases, one good turn deserves another, if you cant do any good for someone don't do them any harm, and charity begins at home. Not only did I hear her frequently use these phrases she consistently practised what she preached.

Like the majority of housewife's back then she kept the home fires burning, the four rings and pilot light on the gas cooker alight, and the washing line full. She was also an accountant, a counsellor and a nurse rolled into one.

One afternoon a pal of mine Ian who was about twelve at the time had an accident, so to get a second opinion on his injuries his mother brought him into our house. My mother took a look at him and suspected that he might have broken his arm.

"How did he get himself in that state?" she asked.

"He fell off the coal shed while in the act of setting up a snare to try and catch some pigeons." replied his mother.

"My God – He's someone's lucky prayer." said my mother.

She advised Ian's mother to bring her son to Stevens Hospital to get his arm seen too. When word of Ian's accident done the rounds on our road it caused some amusement. From then on Ian was giving the nickname of Dick, so called after Dick Dastardly, the unsuccessful bird catcher in the children's cartoon Stop the Pigeon.

There was great solidarity between the women of Ballyfermot, whose friendships were formed from their work on various local committees and social gatherings.

If the shops were closed and one ran short of bread, sugar or milk, or was short a few bob there was always someone who would see you right. They always found time to have a yap. Numerous times while out shopping with my mother I would hear the call, “Yoo Hoo – Yoo hoo – Yoo hoo Aggie,” and there trying to attract my mothers attention could be any of the great neighbours from the road, or many of the friendly woman from the area.

It wasn't all household chores for my mother, she enjoyed going out and many a good night was had at a chicken in the rough. For these outings she would ask Mary to put her dress making skills to work and design her a maxi dress.

Going to a relatives wedding was always a big day out for my parents. My mother often said that the dinner at a wedding always tasted nicer because it was handed up to her, so I presume my father's taste buds didn't taste any different at a wedding because he always got his dinner handed up to him.

Like her husband my mother wasn't a big drinker, her tittle was a brandy and ginger ale. When my mother started smoking, as a young woman the health risks attributed to smoking were unheard off, she often said that if she had the information that the youth of the day had regarding cigarettes she would never have touched the dreaded weed.

She liked a laugh and a good sing song, her party songs were Whiskey On A Sunday recorded by Danny Doyle, and another recorded by Sonny Knowles called I'll Take Care of Your Cares for You, and this she always did.

She also loved to read. Catherine Cookson and Maeve Binchy were two of her favourite authors. She was well educated and wasn't slow to voice her opinions on the issues of the day, be it local issues or the political situation in Ireland.

She was well versed on Irish history and on her birthday, the 3<sup>rd</sup> of May she'd remind us that it fell on the same date that Padraig Pearse, Thomas Clarke and Thomas Mac Donagh were executed in Kilmainham Jail for their part in the 1916 rising.

My mother's uncles, the Carey brothers, were playing for Dublin against Tipperary on Bloody Sunday in Croke Park in 1920, when the Black and Tans opened fire in the stadium killing 14 people.

My mothers hand writing was impeccable and I wasn't the only one to have noticed this. Over the years she wrote me numerous sick notes for school and on every occasion my teachers would comment to me on the high standard of her hand writing.

Any time I had a fear or worry it was my mother who comforted me. As a kid a big fear of mine was thunder and lightning, it only had to rain and I always feared thunder and lightning was on its way. I asked her what caused the thunder and she

told me that sometimes Jesus gets tired of been seated on the right hand side of his father, so every now and again he moves the furniture around up in heaven.

After seeing my frightened reaction to spells of thunder she told me there was no need to be scared, that when I got older I would look back and laugh at my big fear of thunder, she then went on to tell me a story about my father when he also had a bad experience with thunder and lightning.

She was seated at the fireside one evening and heard the key been turned in our front door, she guessed it was my father so she made her way to the scullery to put on his dinner. When she got to the hall she was alarmed to see my father slumped with his back against our front door and soaked to the skin.

“What ails you Paddy – You look as if you’ve just seen a ghost.”

After pausing for breath my father replied, “I just had a near death experience Agnes – The bus broke down outside the Gala so I got off and decided to walk the rest of the way – I had only stepped off the bus and the heavens opened – After five steps the thunder roared and the fork lightning lit up the sky – I have never witnessed anything like it.”

“I never knew you were scared of thunder and lightning – Why don’t you run upstairs and get under the bed with our Peter,” laughed my mother.

“For Gods sake Agnes.” retorted my father. “I have no fear of thunder and lightning.”

“Well what ails you then Paddy?”

“As I started to walk home I was joined by Mr Prone.”

“So.” said my mother.

“For Jaysis sake Agnes – If anyone is going to get struck by a bolt of lightning its Accie Prone – And I don’t want to beside him when it happens.”

“So what did you do.”  
laughed my mother.

“I told him I was bursting to go to the toilet and ran on ahead of him.”

That was my father always thinking on his feet. After both my parents stopped laughing my mother advised my father to get out of his wet clothes before he had another near death experience. My father verified my mothers



*Inchicore Works open day Late 1960s*

tale, and my mother was right, now when ever I hear thunder and lightning I have a little laugh to myself at my childhood fear, and more so break my heart laughing at the vision of my father legging it up Ballyfermot Road to distance himself from Accie Prone in case he was struck by a bolt of lightning.

My parents were honest, kind, respectful and loving people. Growing up we were loved and treated as individuals, each of us had our own different characteristics, likes and dislikes. They let us get on with our lives and no matter what career path we chose they always gave their support and encouragement. As kids we were always provided for, we spent summer holidays in Curacloe, Skibbereen and the Isle of Man. On birthdays and at Christmas time we were never disappointed. On these occasions when the older members of my family were young they received what ever my parents could afford, but as time went on the younger members of the family, Theresa, Tom and I got what ever we wanted, especially me.

### **Schooldays Over**

Before I left the Tech I had an appointment with the career guidance officer, the meeting took place in his office beside the library in the Tech. It was very difficult for him to advise me as regards the type of employment I was seeking because I had no idea what direction I wanted to take. The telegram from from Bob Paisley to go over to Liverpool for a trial never came and my plans to be a cartoon artist no longer appealed to me. So after discussing my options with the career guidance officer he pointed me in the direction of ANCO. ANCO was an organisation set up by the government to provide a wide range of skills to help school leavers find employment, and he literally did point me in the direction of ANCO, because from his office window one could see the ANCO training facility situated on Chapelizod hill, less than a minutes walk from the Tech. My first visit to ANCO was to be my last, I got as far as the security hut where the security man informed me that it was the lunch hour and to come back later, I never did.

During this time there was only Theresa, Tom and I still living at home, and I was the only one not working. Tom didn't have to pay a visit to ANCO, the closest he got to ANCO was when he passed it on his way down Chapelizod Hill and straight into a job in Coca Cola. Five minutes later he drove out in a company van, having availed of the free driving licences that the government handed out because of the backlog of people waiting to sit their driving test. Theresa held down a few jobs before settling into an office job in a company called Vapormatic that supplied agricultural machinery.

Although I had left school my parents never put any pressure on me to find a job, so along with my mates I sat on many a wall on many a street corner.

During this time I started to get interested in the music scene. My pals and I enjoyed all types of music. We were punk rockers, rude boys and mods, a bit

of everything, and we also had a pal who sometimes wore a red teddy boy outfit, creeper shoes and all.

Some of the bands that emerged on the scene back then were The Sex Pistols, The Clash, The Police, The Undertones, The Boomtown Rats and U2.

With most of us not having a job we couldn't afford to buy all the latest L.Ps, so we would each buy a different bands L.P and then tape them for each other.

I was more into the music side of the punk/new wave explosion than the fashion side, spiked coloured hair, bondage trousers or facial piercing were not for me.

During the late seventies and into nineteen eighty there was a ska and mod revival.

New bands like The Specials, The Beat and Madness arrived on the ska scene. The Jam, Secret affair and the kings of the mod scene from the first time around The Who began to attract a new generation of fans. E.L.O. and Queen were also very popular.

My pals and I were into the fashion side of the ska and Mod revivals. We wore Black crombie overcoats, harrington jackets, parka jackets, combat trousers, and our jeans were held up with a pair of braces and finished off with a pair of loafers or doc martens. My first live concert to see was the Boomtown Rats play live in Leixlip Castle, my brother Martin gave me the three pound for the concert ticket. The Rats were originally due to play the concert in a specially erected marquee in Leopardstown race course but the gig was cancelled due to safety reasons. Eventually the concert went ahead at a later date in the grounds of Leixlip Castle and Bob and the boys didn't disappoint.

Great amenities for the youth of Ballyfermot back then were the youth clubs.

St Mary's and O.L.V Youth Clubs were the older and more established of the three in the area. The third one was the Ballyfermot United Youth Club that opened in the mid seventies, which was the one my pals and I went to. The youth section of the club was situated in a large room in the back of the Ballyfermot United Sports and Social club on Blackditch Road. On Wednesday and Friday nights boys and girls had a place to hang out and play pool and table tennis, but the best nights were always Monday nights, the reason been that was when the weekly disco took place.

The doors opened at eight o'clock but my pals and I liked to keep the ladies waiting, so we would make our grand entrance at five past. The turntables were set up on the stage where Marty, Marie, Geraldine, or any one of the many youth leaders would take it in turns to play the records. The lighting system consisted of two banks of different coloured flashing bulbs on each side of the stage.

The sight of us boys trying to dance to the punk music caused great amusement from the girls, but in fairness we never called it dancing, we called it freaking out. Dancing to the ska music was a bit more civilised and for this the girls would also

take to the dance floor. The boys would quickly become aware of this and try to impress the opposite sex by emulating the dance routines of the ska bands. We might have dressed like the members of Madness from our trilby hats down to our loafers but that was where the similarity ended, if we had to dance to save our lives some of us would have died in our teens. When the disco music came on the boys quickly exited the dance floor and the girls took over, they showed the boys how it should be done, from the ridiculous to the sublime. Their moves and grooves were effortless as they danced to the sounds of Racey. Michael Jackson, Earth Wind & Fire, Heat wave, Donna Summer, Chic and Sister Sledge. The L.P Off The Wall by Michael Jackson was very popular with the girls as were the dance routines from the films Saturday Night Fever and Grease, and again they had all the moves down to a tee.

When a boy and girl danced together to a slow song we called it lurching. I was very choosy when it came to asking a girl up for a lurch. My choice had nothing to do with a preference for a blonde, red or black haired girl. You see I wasn't the tallest so when it came to asking a girl up for a slow dance I was like a bridge, I had height restrictions, I never asked a girl up for a slow dance who was taller than me. It didn't look out of place to see a girl lurching with a taller boy, but the sight of a boy lurching with a taller girl attracted great amusement from on lookers at the disco.

My pal Redzer was of similar height to myself and thought along the same lines as me. So much so that on occasions at the disco there was friction between us if we both fancied the same petite female. I was prepared to share the slow sets with our intended target but Redzer was never one to compromise. One occasion after he finished lurching with a girl I informed him that I was asking her up for the next slow set.

"No bleeding way man." said Redzer

"Try and stop me." I replied.

"No way Peewee she's mad into me – She was bet into me and in my ear all through the last lurch."

"Well I bet you couldn't hear a word she said. – I could have driven a double decker bus between the two of yiz – The way yiz were lurching I though yiz were playing Ringa- Ringa-Rosey." I replied.

"She's mine – I asked her up first." said Redzer.

"Did you ask her to go with yeh." I asked.

"No."

"Well then she's still on the market."

At the end of the disco the outcome was always the same, Redzer and I ended up walking home bemoaning each other for our lack of success with the girls and then

being put in our place by our mates. “If one of yiz had the bollix to ask the girl to be your bird you wouldn’t be moaning to each other,” they had a point.

I always made sure that when I danced with a girl I really fancied that it was to one of the longer love songs. So during a slow set I always paid great attention to the intro of the slow songs as they were been faded in by the D.J, the longer the love song the longer the lurch. Two of these songs were Three Times a Lady by the Commodores and Reunited by Peaches and Herb. But the longest slow song and a strange choice to play during the slow set was The Green Fields of France by The Fury Brothers and Davy Arthur. The group had great success with the song in 1978 and it stayed in the Irish charts for twenty-eight weeks.

There was a girl at the disco who I had my eye on for weeks, she was pleasing on the eye and most importantly she was my height. So when the D.J faded in the Green Fields of France I was like a greyhound out of the traps, in case my pal Redzer made a bee-line for her first. I had it all planned so as soon as we started lurching to the Green Fields of France I knew I had five minutes and fifty two seconds to impress her. I knew the song was that long because one of my brothers had bought the single that was released on the Banshee label. During those previous slow dances a word never passed between us, with the exception of me asking her “Are you getting up.”

So I decided this was the night I was going to make my big move and ask her would she go with me. I had a good feeling as we danced, she had her arms wrapped around me, or to use one of Redzer’s phrases “She was bet into me.”

So as Finbar sang about the young soldier Willie Mc Bride and lowering him down into his grave I just said the first thing that came into my head,

“They live on my road.”

She moved her head away from mine and looked at me.

“What?”

“They live on my road.” I repeated.

“Who lives on your road.”

“The Fury’s.” I replied.

“Good for you,” she said. “Do you want a blue peter badge?”

I could tell by the tone of her voice she wasn’t one bit impressed, I was dying on my feet. At that moment all I wanted to do was swap places with young Willie Mc Bride and crawl into his grave. After a short pause I took another deep breath and got straight to the point, I talked really fast and all in one sentence.

“Are you going with anyone and don’t be smart and say going where you know what I mean.”

“Who wants to know?” she replied.

“Do you want me to put it in writing for yeh?” I asked

“Oh you’re the one asking,” she was playing it cool.

“Jesus you’re a fast worker”, she said sarcastically. “Four Mondays in a row and I’ve lost count how many slow sets later eventually you pluck up the courage to ask me.”

“I’m very shy.” I replied.

“You weren’t very shy when you were freaking out like a gob-shite on the dance floor earlier on with your mates.”

“So you only had eyes for me then – Did you like what you saw.” I said with a confident air.

“Don’t flatter yourself,” she replied. “You’re not even the best of a bad bunch.”

“Well will yeh go with me.”

“You can just walk me home for starters.” she replied – “And then I’ll see.”

“I’ll take that as a yes so.” I replied and continued lurching.

I was on cloud nine and Finbar’s husky tones never sounded better, then at the end of five minutes and fifty two seconds of lurching to the Green Fields of France we parted company and arranged to meet up outside after the disco.

During my teenage years attending the youth club I can only remember been involved in one fight, it was more of a stand off than a fight. The stand off was between a pal of mine Mixer and another lad, yes Mixer again, and at the heart of their little spat was a girl, there seemed to be a bit of confusion as to who was actually going out with the girl. The confrontation took place in the laneway outside the youth club on a cold misty night, the scene was similar to when the rival gangs the Sharks and the Jets came face to face in the film Westside Story. One could say this was our very own Westside of Dublin Story, without the dancing of course.

On a normal Monday night at the disco the level of testosterone in the air would be high, but on this particular Monday night the level of testosterone was at its yearly high, it was Valentines night February the 14<sup>th</sup>.

As both gangs eyeballed each other the two protagonists stepped forward, Mixer had a quick glance over his shoulder to ensure we hadn’t done a runner.

“Since when did Trish start going out with you.” snarled Mixer.

“Well at least you’ve admitted she’s my bird now.” replied the love rival.

“She never told me.” said Mixer.

“Well I’m giving you the fuckin bad news now.” replied the love rival.

At this stage of the drama the love interest Trish was already in the youth club.

A fight between the two protagonists was looming, and it was clear that the two were going to go home with a few bruises, and one with an undelivered valentine card.

As the stand off continued a shout was heard from the love rivals gang.

“Get the shovels ready.”

Mixer shit himself and took two steps back towards me and whispered, “They have shovels – What are we going to fight with.”

“Yeh fuckin sap.” I whispered back. “The shovels are for burying us with.”

Just as the fight was about to kick off the doors of the youth club swung open and three youth leaders intervened much to my relief. Both gangs were ushered into the disco with warnings that if a fight ensued inside our memberships would be revoked.

As a last act of bravado Mixer yelled out, “This Isn’t Over.” He must have been speaking for himself because it was over for me, my bird was inside waiting for me.

That Valentines night I had planned on leaving the disco with her a little earlier than usual, the reason been I had to slip home and fetch her valentine card, it was too big to bring to the disco. So before I left the disco I said goodbye to my pals, they all wished me well, all with the exception of Mixer. “Why leave now – The fight might all kick off again after the disco”.

“Give us a break Mixer its Valentines night – Anyway she’s not worth fighting for – She’s all over your man like a rash since he walked in – If there’s a scrap start without me.”

I may have deserted my pal in his hour of need but I was in no condition to fight, I was full of arrows, cupid’s arrows.

The first few nights I walked my girlfriend home I was very nervous, it was a while before I made the big move. Eventually I did and after a few sessions of swapping saliva and banging teeth I finally mastered the art of kissing, or wearing as we also called it. Our relationship was going from strength to strength. I had progressed from kissing her on the corner at the top of her road, to kissing her outside her house, and before too long it was a front door job. Afterwards on my walks home at night I would feel very proud with myself and one or twice do a quick impersonation.

“Arthur Fonzarelli eat your heart out – Thumbs up – Heyyyyye– Happy days.”

In 1979 our youth club attended a youth jamboree to participate in the Isle of Mann’s millennium celebrations, we boarded the Lady of Man at the North Wall and it took us across the Irish sea to Douglas. Also attending the Jamboree were a youth club from Cabra. The Lady of Man quickly turned into the love boat as both boys and girls from each club eyed each other up. We were put up for a week in a boarding school in Douglas along with other youth clubs from England and Scotland. It was noticeable that any relationships that were formed between the boys and girls from Cabra and Ballyer were quickly pushed to one side as we laid eyes on our counterparts from England and Scotland.

During our week stay on the Isle of Man we visited the Laxey Wheel, also took a tour on a steam train around the Island and went to the Villa Marina in Douglas to see a wrestling show. I wasn’t really a fan of wrestling and only watched it a few times on the telly on the World of Sport program hosted by Dickie Davis. But been

at a live wrestling show was ten times better than watching it on the telly. The atmosphere in the Villa Marina that night was electric, as Mick Mc Manus and his opponent punched and threw each other in and out of the ring, and the sight of old men and women trying to enter the ring to fight the villain of the piece was hilarious.

While in the Isle of Man we participated in table tennis, pool and soccer competitions against the other visiting youth clubs. The seven- and five-a-side soccer competitions stood out for me for many reasons. We didn't bring any football gear or boots with us while the other competing youth clubs were fully kitted out and even had tracksuits. I remember the youth leader from the London youth club bragging that England had won the world cup thirteen years earlier in 1966, our youth leader agreed with him that 66 was indeed a great year, and then under his breath he muttered it was also the year that Nelsons pillar was blown up on O'Connell Street.

We wore our jeans and runners and our opponents had a right laugh every time we took to the pitch, but we had the last laugh by winning the five a side tournament beating youth clubs from Glasgow, Isle of Mann and the youth club from London in the final.

At the end of the Douglas promenade there was a huge leisure complex called Summerland. It had an indoor swimming pool, a roller rink, badminton, basketball and tennis courts, and a big amusement arcade all under the one roof. For the duration of our stay on the Island we were issued with free passes into Summerland.

At night the bars in the complex were opened and a band took to a stage in the centre of the complex, it gave our youth leaders a chance to have a relaxing drink and let their hair down. At another part of the large bar away from the prying eyes of our youth leaders a few of my pals and I attempted to get served, we were all refused with the exception of one, so he was the one who had to go to the bar to purchase our drinks. He didn't have to make many visits to the bar because after two or three pints we were well under the influence, and those who weren't pretended to be.

As the alcohol kicked in we were up on the dance floor gyrating to the band as they sang cover versions of I'm In The mood For Dancing by the Nolan Sisters and The Chosen Few by The Dooleys. These were songs we would never dare to dance to back at the youth club disco for fear of the slagging we'd get from our fellow punks and mods . If we were trying to impress the girls from Glasgow with our moves from Saturday Night Fever it didn't work. We resembled fish out of water, drunken fish, as we flapped our way around the dance floor. But near the end of the night when the band played Caroline by Status Quo, and followed with songs by Queen and Rainbow they couldn't get enough of us, even under the influence we looked cool playing air guitar and head banging.

When the time came for us to depart the Isle of Man there were a few tears shed by the girls, if us boys were emotional we didn't show it. Addresses were exchanged with our new friends from across the Irish sea and anyone who had a telephone exchanged numbers. As the Lady of Man departed Douglas for Dublin the Glasgow and London girls were quickly forgotten about and it was a big howdy again to the girls from the wild west of Cabra.

During the time I wasn't working I still hung around with my now long time pals. Hylo, Liamy, Tubba,, Joey, Dotty, Willo, Gus and John, and then there was our female friends, Bernie, Sandra, Maureen, Helen, Louise, Michele, Pauline and Anne. There was also a wide range of friends through the football, and from the youth club.

We were still too young to be served in the local pubs so our only access to alcohol was through the supermarkets. Powers Super Market on the corner of Grange Cross was where we purchased our drink. There weren't as many varieties of drink as there are today but Powers always had one aisle that was well stocked with Harp, Smitwicks and Guinness. Getting served alcohol in the supermarket had its problems, and there were often arguments between us as to who should try and get served, none of us wanted to suffer the embarrassment of been refused at the check out.

One Halloween night there was one such argument.

"You go in Peewee." said Willo.

"I'm the smallest, they won't serve me." I replied.

"You're the tallest Mixer you go in." – And put a box of Daz in the basket with the beer." said Liamy.

"What the fuck do we want a box of washing powder for?" asked Tubba.

"Well if he puts another item in the basket with the six-packs, the check out girl might think he is doing a bit of shopping for his ma."

We all laughed at Liamy's strategy.

"I've a better idea." said Hylo. "You go in Mixer – Get a trolley – Put Peewee in the baby seat of the trolley – With that bit of hair under your nose the check-out girl might think your Peewee's aul-fella." again we all laughed.

Some of our strategies were successful and some weren't. When we were refused we'd ask some older boys who were entering the supermarket to purchase our drink for us, some obliged us some didn't. We'd usually drink undercover of the night in the playground in the Lawns. Two or three six-packs later between six of us and we were ready to take on the world and the British Army, armed up to the teeth with some of the Wolf Tones greatest hits, Rock on Rock all, The Helicopter Song and The Men Behind The Wire, these ballads were a bit more hard hitting than the ones I was taught by my old primary school teacher Mr Toomey. It became a regular thing that before we went to the youth club disco we'd have a few bottles of

Smithwicks or Harp in the Lawns, and in order to gain entry to the disco it was just a matter of sucking on a few silver mints and walking straight.

### **Career Opportunities**

One evening my Father arrived home with word that C.I.E were taking on apprentice electricians, he gave my name to his foreman and a few weeks later I was asked to attend Inchicore Works for an interview. I never thought the three E grades I received in my Inter Cert would be of any advantage to me in my quest for employment, but they worked in my favour, as it was quite easy to change the E grades into Bs.

After my interview I received a letter asking me to attend Colaiste Mhuire in Parnell Square for an aptitude test. I was just one of maybe one hundred boys in attendance that day, and I knew there and then that my chances of getting one of the apprenticeships were slimmer than slim. A week later I received a letter stating what I had thought on the day of the aptitude test, I was unsuccessful. But the letter of disappointment also had some good news, for they were willing to offer me a position as an operative in their foundry. I was chuffed and my first question to my father concerned the rates of pay and not what the job entailed, and before I knew it I was following in my fathers footsteps through the Kyber Pass.

When I started in the foundry there were a few young familiar faces from around Ballyer that I recognised along with older men, who introduced themselves as friends of my father. The management and employees made me more that welcome, but half way through only the second week in my first permanent job I made the decision the foundry wasn't the job for me. I informed my mother of my decision but she advised me to speak to my father before I handed in my notice. I was very uneasy about telling my father that I was leaving, because after all he was the reason why I secured the job in Inchicore works, his integrity, good character and work ethic played a big part. One thing was for sure it defiantly wasn't because of my forged Inter Cert results.

If he was disappointed with my decision he didn't show it, but he did advise me not to leave until I had found alternative employment, but what ever decision I made he would respect it.

My last day in the works was the earliest I was up. During the morning break I handed in my notice to the foreman, he wished me well for the future. So after completing my last day and only two weeks in Inchicore Works I walked towards the Kyber Pass for the last time. I had always planned that no matter how long I was employed in the works there was one goal that I wanted to achieve, and that I was about to do.

When I arrived home that evening my father was in the sitting room with his face behind the Evening Herald. "Well Butch did you hand in your notice?"

“Yeh.”

“Did the foreman fix you up with your wages?”

“He paid me one week and said he will give you my back week next Friday.”

If the reality of me leaving a good permanent job disappointed my father I couldn't tell, because he still had his face behind the newspaper.

“Dad.” I said.

“What Butch,”

“Do you still hold the record for the fasted sprint through the Kyber Pass.”

“Yes..... Why do you ask?”

“On the way home I attempted to break your long standing record.”

“What time did you clock son?”

I checked the stopwatch on my digital watch, digital watches were all the rage back then, mine had a black face and when I pressed a button the time illuminated in red digits. I told my father the time I had clocked.

“Congratulations son – I thought my record would last forever – I will inform the lads in the works on Monday, it will have to be logged into the history books of Inchicore Works.”

“Do you want to check the time on my watch?” I asked.

“No son your word is good enough for me.”

During our conversation he still had his face behind the news paper so I gave a clenched fist in celebration of my achievement, then after a pause he said

“I'm sorry to rain on your parade son but your recorded time is null and void.”

“What – Why.”

“You said you broke my record on your way home .”

“Yeh.”

“Well rule 4A states that you have to be employed in the works at the time of ones attempt – So as you had already clocked out for your last time you were no longer employed by the works when you broke the record.”

“No way.” I replied.

“Sorry son – I still hold the record as the fastest employee ever to sprint through the Kyber Pass.”

Again during our conversation he never moved his face from behind the Evening Herald, and as I looked closely I could see the newspaper shaking and I realised he was silently laughing his head off. Then to prove that he was the man of the house he remarked. “Your mother cooked curly kale for your dinner – If you can't eat it all son give me a shout and I will finish it off for you.”

So after picking my jaw up off the floor I made my way to the scullery where my mother was mixing the onions into my curly kale. I was fuming after not getting one over on my aul-fella, but having received my first weeks wages more than made up for the disappointment.

It was a bizarre feeling but my first wage packet reminded me of the seeds of a promise that had been planted in my head a few years earlier by Father Foley. I was around thirteen at the time and was at Mass in St Matthews Church. He gave a sermon after the Gospel and the theme of his sermon was gratitude, his sermon was mainly for the ears of the young people in the congregation. He mentioned that if you were blessed with good parents, now was the time to tell them how much you loved them and how much you appreciated all they had done for you. For if it wasn't for their parental care and guidance and the hardship some endured, us teenagers might not have been blessed with the stability we had in our lives. He also made the point that when one became of age, and started to make their own way in the world, wouldn't it be nice to show some gratitude to your parents. One suggestion Father Foley made was that when one received their first weeks wages, wouldn't it be a nice gesture to hand over all of it to your mother as a small thank you.

So here I was four years later, sitting down in our scullery having earned my first weeks wages. My mother placed my curly kale down in front of me.

"Don't you know I love yeh Ma."

She gave me a baffled look.

"I love you too son."

I reached into the back pocket of my wrangler jeans and took out my first weeks wages, and placed them into the breast pocket of my denim shirt, there wasn't a cat in

hells chance of me handing over my first weeks wages. This wasn't the first time I had reneged on Father Foley. I also reneged at my confirmation when I took the pledge not to drink alcohol until I was eighteen.

I had plans for my first weeks wages. For starters a new Harrington jacket and a wine pair of Doc Martens were to be had, and also my George Webbs needed to be steel tipped. The latest L.Ps by The Jam and The Undertones were also on my list, and also a large poster of Clare Grogan for my bedroom wall.

I half heartily offered my mother a small amount of house keeping money.

"No your grand love – Seems that your idle again you don't have to hand over any house keeping money."

"Are you sure Ma ." I had the money back in my pocket before I even finished the sentence.

"God you don't do sincerity very well – You'll never make it as an Abbey actor." my mother could read me like a book. "And if your father asks tell him you handed over your house keeping money."

I gave her a nod and a wink. "Nobody makes curly kale as nice as you Ma."

"Don't push it son." replied my mother.

I wasn't idle for long after my short stint in Inchicore Works; my sister Theresa got me a job in her workplace. It was nineteen eighty and I was seventeen, I had

a job, money in my pocket, great friends and I was on the market again, HAPPY DAYS.

In the words of the great Irish author, poet and playwright Bryan Mac Mahon: “So that’s my story, and if there be a little lie in it, let it stand.”

*Dedicated to my loving sisters, Mary, Liz. Theresa, and brothers Pat, Jim, Richard, and Tom. Also in Loving Memory of our parents Patrick and Agnes and our loving Brother Martin Always in our thoughts and Conversations*



## The Gala

*Billy Kavanagh*

Do you all remember going up to the Gala on a Saturday afternoon, getting pushed into the crowd with Harry the Hippo’s belly, all in line for the Hammer Horror movies with Christopher Lee and Peter Cushing? Wow! Boy did we hate Christopher Lee, he was one proper Bollix. And then we’d go home and could not go to sleep in fear of Dracula coming through the window or even hiding under our bed? And if they had so stupid movie with Tommy Steele or Cliff Richard, then we’d all pull up the seats and bang on the wooden backs and make noise while Harry and the ushers would run and down the aisles trying to stop the commotion. It was the best entertainment to be had for a shilling. Oh lets go down memory lane.....

## Drumfin Avenue

*Ann Hudson Lipscomb*

Ann Hudson Lipscomb from Drumfin Avenue with her Sister Jeanne Ann was one of the first usherettes to work in the Gala Cinema.

The Gala opened up with a full staff of two senior ushers (Matty Byrne being one) and two junior ushers. There were at least 5 usherettes and two cashiers. There was a big write up and photos in the evening papers. Mr Kelly was the manager. Harry did not arrive till the mid 60s. I don't remember him working there in my day and I left in March 1965. I saw him on the Tivoli in Francis Street. He worked there for years.

Our family moved to Drumfin Ave on the 18th April 1955. We were the second family to move in. There were no street lights and we arrived around 8 pm at night. The electric was not switched on till the next day, can you imagine carting in furniture in the dark

We did have gas, so we could boil a kettle. The dinner came from Borzas chippy on the main road. As kids we were so excited to have our own house as we had lived with our Grand Mother in Killester, which seemed like another country, it was so far away.

Memories of the Gala...there are so many. The crowd of kids for the matinees, especially at the week end. I used to love to work on the balcony, it was nice and quiet! I remember the Furey Brothers and their parents were regular patrons. The local Garda coming in for a smoke and hiding from the Inspector. Many the time he would come in to check and we would have to open the side exit to let them escape. We had a few concerts there too with the Deeler band and show bands appearing... The Casino showband being one.

When you think of all the couples who met up there, the marriages that developed from the Gala and the Ritz ballroom



## Claddagh Green

*Paddy Belmont*

I have lived in Ballyfermot most of my life. My granny lived on Claddagh Road. I lived with my granny for a while. she could remember when Ballyfermot were only fields. There was a van shop that use to stop outside my granny's house. Mrs O Keefe ran the shop and sold all the basics, the van would be there all day and it would close at nine o'clock. It was a long day for Mrs O Keefe.

It is great living in Ballyfermot I know everyone and everyone knows me.

I don't know how, all the neighbours are great and are very hard working people and all look out for each other. I regularly use the Civic Centre and new refurbished library. I have got to know loads of people in the gym in the sports centre on Blackditch Road.

These are all part of modern life in Ballyfermot now. It is only through the hard work of people in the community that we have all these facilities now. Since the beginning of Ballyfermot when the people from the inner city were moved out to the suburbs, people have worked to make Ballyfermot a great place to live in. One of my memories is of going to the picture house, the Gala. I went to see the musical *The Nuns Story*.

The Gala was built in 1955 and it was opened by Canon Troy. It was supposed to be the largest cinema in Ireland seating 1,850 people. At one stage my mother worked in the Gala as a cleaner or as a "dog's body" as my mother would say. Over the years the Gala was a picture house, a rollerblade rink, and a disco. Many a romance blossomed there; it is now a bingo hall. You can get a lovely cup of tea there during the bingo. Upstairs there is a pool table and slot machines. Ballyfermot has a very rich heritage, many people do not realise this. It is only since I joined the Ballyfermot Heritage Group that I have learned about this.

I have read Ken Larkin's books. Ken is a local author and a member of the heritage group, one of the stories I found interesting was about Le Fanu Road.

I was always wondering why it was called that. The road was named after a newspaper publisher and writer Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu Ballyfermot featured in his novel "The House by the Churchyard"



I was talking to another person from Ballyfermot who like most people has lived here all his life, he went to De La Salle School but he never liked school as he said himself “it was not a good experience”. He remembered his First Communion in the short trousers and he was frozen stiff, like everyone who lives in Ballyfermot he would not live anywhere else. When I was about three my family was offered a house in Raheny and my mother told me I lay on the ground and had a tantrum because I did not want to leave Ballyfermot. I am glad I did not move then and I am very proud to live in Ballyfermot.

## Spiddal Road

*Sunny Clarke*

Born on Galtymore Drive, Drimnagh. Moved to Ballyer age five new house Spiddal Road remember it like yesterday, the roads were only getting laid then, used to sit in the park with the night watchman big coke fire Mary’s Youth Club, the Backers where the farmer grew his wheat. The Gala on Saturdays, Pathe News, Batman and Robin. Sundays spent down the lawns watching football. Aggies Shop couple of loose fags and a match then queue for the pictures Sunday night. The Stew House and the Turf Shed where we took our voucher for turf in winter time, and the old dump. Reading the e-mails brings it all back. I’ve not lived there for many years although my family still do to this day in the same house, the names yourself, Phil Coleman.

The Carneys on Spiddal they use to sell logs for the fire had a horse and cart. Eddie and Finbar Fury on Claddagh, they used to keep there horse jam pots in the garden. Larry the slop man and who can forget the queue on Fridays for Mario’s the chipper. Hector Grey outside the church, the De La Salle School happy days. A couple of girls I use to hang out with Kathleen McCann and Margaret Donnelly I would love to hear from them if they are still around, does anyone remember the circus by the Gala I think it use to be on the ground were they built Nalty’s.



## Brian Kavanagh 1953 – 1977

*Beautiful Poem wrote By Claire Kavanagh as a tribute to her Brother Brian*



Has it really been 33 years dear Brian,  
I remember the heartache, the shock, the crying,  
a beautiful young man, with a heart of gold,  
was taken from us, just 24 years old.

...But, from that awful day, to this as I write,  
you have been my Angel, morning, noon and night,  
God only knows how many times I asked you,  
dear Brian please help me, and you always do.

So after all these years of missing you,  
so many people still remember you, as a young man who,  
lit up the room with your lovely smile, your sense of humor and artistic style.

I bought a big fat candle, I will keep it lit all day,  
to remember you with love, in a very special way.  
So on this cold December day, I will try not to be sad,  
cause you were one of 8 brothers, I was truly blessed to have,  
So I send this special poem, it comes straight from my heart,  
with love in every word, right from the very start. ♥ ♥ ♥

This Poem was written by Claire in 2010 and Recited by her at the Peace Corps Anniversary Mass in 2012

## Like a Soldier Coming Home from the War

*Poem by Denis Kelleher*

Like a soldier, coming home from the war.  
We kids stood watch on our imaginary shore.  
Ballyfermot kids, playing in the California hills.  
Running wild running free, waiting for da, before our tea.  
We didn't have no watch, we didn't have no clock. We knew when it was  
home time, our belly's made us stop.  
Or when buffalo bill rode by, cause mammy called him home for tea.  
Or smoke signals from chimney stacks, in the sky we could see.  
Meanwhile John Wayne chased Annie Oakley, with the promise of a kiss,  
and Tonto was giving the Lone Ranger, a pasting with his fist.  
Fred Astaire and Ginger Rodgers were giggling in the bushes.  
and girls with dirty knickers, were trying to hide their innocent blushes,  
and on the armchair run, boys and girls were having fun.  
With old bits of lino or cardboard, beneath their bums.  
Daredevils one and all, under the Ballyfermot sun.  
Ballyer kids with nothing, playing, having lots of fun.  
Like a soldier coming home, from the war.  
We kids stood watch, on our imaginary shore.  
As he disembarked below us, we let out a cheer,  
and ran to him, like the wind ,just as the day before .  
We were Ballyfermot kids, in the California hills.  
Running wild running free, waiting for our da, before our tea.  
Ballyfermot kids, with nothing but holes in our shoes and pants.  
Running wild running free, as we danced our childhood dance

© Denis Kelleher. 3rd September 2013

## Olden days in Ballyer

*Pat McMahon, Lally Road*



Yes in my Ballyer, there was a sense of time and place. Yes it was a bleak, dank, poor out place, and well, we might have been 'poor' but at least we were 'unhappy'. It was gorgeous though in its own way, and homely. As a young child you always had a big bunch of friends for company and to play with, and we all continually invented endless ways to have a bit of 'craic' and keep ourselves amused.

Heading into the Big Smoke (Dublin City) every weekend as a big lad (teenager) was just like visiting your Aunt Annie, she was always in, the light was always on, and there was always a couple of roasters (roast joints - pints) waiting for ye. All of that's gone now, my 'Palace Bar' in Fleet street is now full of total strangers, my strolls up Grafton Street and dropping into Neary's Bar for the odd pint, now in ruins.

Jumping on the Number 79 bus home with Noel's serenade all gone. And what about heading over to the County Bar on Decies Road next day for a meeting with Arthur Guinness, especially after a good home win in Markievicz Park, aghhhh just not the same anymore. I couldn't have put it better than Bagatelle when they sang 'I remember that summer in Dublin, And the Liffey as it stank like hell, And the young people walking down Grafton Street, Everyone looking so well.' All those people back then, they were all so grand, so ordinary, and so decent. Yes, they were so they were.

So to all my old friends from Ballyfermot, the marvellous football teams I played for like - BVS, Thomond Utd, Stars, Lally Utd, Markievicz etc. To all my old pals for their company and friendship during those wonderful years that we spent down by the riverside, over in the Phoenix Park, down by the Strawberry Beds and along the Grand Canal. And of course, to everyone on Lally Road, thanks to all of you for your special kindness and your help during those times when we all badly needed good friends and real neighbours, and not the plastic friends and virtual neighbours you get nowadays.

### **Our Cheiftan**

Well my Mam (Mary Kehoe) was born in 1911 and came from a place called Bridgefoot Street which is situated between James Street and the Quays of the river Liffey in the very heart of Dublin City. Her family came from Bonham Street which was just around the corner from Bridgefoot Street. The Kehoe family's origins were from County Wicklow that's where my Grandfather Christopher Kehoe was born

in 1878. After getting married to Matthew ‘Macker’ McMahon in 1935, Mam, like most of the women of Dublin City in those days devoted herself to looking after her husband and family. And as for our Dad, well he came from a place called ‘Ballydowd’ in Lucan in west County Dublin. The ancient McMahon tribes came from County Monaghan and County Clare. Our chieftain in Ballyfermot was born in 1915 on the 1st April and apart from working as a painter decorator, fixing and maintaining his main mode of transport his beloved motorbike, picking mushrooms and ‘drinking’ took up most of his spare time.

### **Stone Fights**

Well in the year of 1958, little Ms Angela Bernadette Pierce was born on 10th of November in the Coombe Hospital in Dublin; she was reared in Drimnagh, not far from Inchicore and Ballyer. And sure in later years, as children, we had many a good stone fight with her tribe. I remember well, our first battle on the road between the Model School and Cleary’s Pub in Inchicore. Like Queen Méabh she was with her brave warriors. I can still vividly recall her image in the heat of that battle, in the far distance she stood, dressed in an emerald green Gaelic cloak, holding a spear in one hand and a massive metal shield in the other, screaming her battle cry - “Dhroimeanaigh Abú.!” a sight and sound that would frighten the life out of Fionn MacCumhaill himself. And our meagre 300 Ballyer-warriors, our only chance being to block the narrow passageway at the railway bridge close to the Ranch, battling against thousands of those Drimnarians and even prepared to dine in Hell. We suffered spine chilling casualties, including 2 sprained ankles, 1 split lip and 3 bruised heads, but we did come through triumphant.

### **Fishing in Chappo**

Now let me tell you what Mick Dillon’s father told me one night in the NCOs Mess in McKee Barracks, about what happened on the Anna Livia Bridge in Chapelizod. He told me the story of happened one day when he was walking down Saint Laurence’s Hill, from Ballyer down towards Chapelizod Village. The pub they all drank in was called Murphy’s and it was and still is just beside the bridge. Chapelizod’s name comes from the old Irish ‘Séipéal Iosóid’ meaning Iosóid’s (Isolde’s) Chapel. Isolde or Iosóid was an Irish Princess who is supposed to of been buried there around the 12th century, her name is also associated with one of the gates of the original Dublin Castle (located at ‘Exchange Street Lower’). As kids we used to think the name Chapelizod was pronounced ‘Chapel lizard’ were lots of lizards once lived.

Anyway back to the story, Mick’s father looks down into the village from the top of Laurence’s Hill and sees that it is absolutely chock-ar-block (crammed) full of cars, trucks and people on both sides of the bridge, it was total gridlock.? Wondering

what the hell was going on, he hurries down the hill only to find my Oul-Fella and his other-half (Tony) on the bridge, my Oul-Fella is yanking this large fishing rod over one side of the bridge trying to pull in this gigantic salmon from the river, Tony is running down towards the riverside with a large net trying to help catch the big bastard, while ‘himself’ is up above heaving and pulling and giving way and kicking the dog out of his way, as he runs back and forward across the bridge, cursing and swearing, and shouting and bawling, trying to get the fucker from the river up onto the road.

In Chapelizod, to this day, it is said that large tears streamed down the stony face of Anna Livia on O’Connell Bridge in Dublin City when the river Nymphs told her of the language and shenanigans of those pair of mad-things up at the bridge in Chappo, and it did take some time before full order was restored in the village. Well me Oul-Fella and his scallywag eventually got the fish out of the water, and I remember seeing a photo of that man and his big fish, yes he looked just like the cat that got the cream alright. For its valour and courage that Salmon was christened ‘Flóirín Seaimpín Uisce’ (Floreen Champion of the water) in Murphy’s Public House that very night after it was eaten.

### **Dying Salmon**

Well I remember in 1967, I was about 12 at the time and me and Jimmy Logan, yes, scruffy, scrawny me, and Jimmy with a head of hair on him like a mad man’s arse, always catching eels, perch, pinkeens or getting lots of chestnuts from the Chesser Tree and of course getting up to whatever other divilment we could get up to. Yes indeed we were the ‘bees knees’ back then the pair of us. The Chesser was a large chestnut tree at the Liffey, down towards the boathouses near Islandbridge. On this occasion though, life on the Liffey was very grim indeed, there was a salmon disease spreading like wildfire among all those majestic fishes. I remember me and Jimmy as we sat gazing at all these amazingly large creatures in the water, all discoloured, and in extreme distress and swimming unusually close to the shore as if pleading for help. We couldn’t do much for them though; we just sat and watched them. But as I gazed across the river looking at a group of about four or five salmon swirl round frantically. I heard a big splash and quickly looked over my shoulder to my left, only to see that Jimmy had fallen in to the water at a deep part of the river close to the river bank.

I leapt up and ran over only to see my good friend deep down in the water, I recall his image down under, it was just like a living abstract picture, with the water rippling all around his shape and he silently calling to me with his arm outstretched towards the surface, I didn’t know what to do. There was no-one around and nothing to throw in, so I cautiously reached down to him, I was so scared though cos I knew if I fell into the water I would die, as the only swimming stroke I could do was called

‘the brick’ and the technique was all about going straight down to the bottom of the river and staying there for a very long time. I always wished I could be a good swimmer though, the Oul Felle used to console me from time to time by saying ‘don’t worry son you’ll never ever drown, shite always floats to the top’, that’s an old Dublin joke by the way.

Thankfully, Jimmy suddenly began to surface, he grabbed onto my outstretched arm, and in a large heap we landed ashore in a frantic mess, but at least we were all grand again “thank God Jimmy” says I “Jasus you’re an awful bollix though, how did you manage that dip..!”. Jimmy just laughed, he was larger than life so he was, he was full of fun, he was a protector, he loved life and he always carried me on the crossbar of his push bike through all of our adventures and gallivanting down by that great river Liffey, he just loved bikes, Jimmy did, so he did.

### **The Brothers at the Dealer**

I remember well so many of those cosy winter nights, when the lights on our small street slowly flickered to life and heralded the closure of another dreary day in dear old Dublin town. With Mother Nature’s blanket of darkness thrown over all of our little houses, ensuring we’d all cuddle round our hardworking fireplaces and listen to the radio.

Ahh the wireless, the wireless, (radio) with its memories, sure I remember ‘The Kennedys of Castleross’, I remember ‘Radio Caroline’ (pirate radio station broadcast from a boat in the Irish Sea) ‘Radio Luxembourg etc’. Later on we got hold of a ‘radiogram’; this was a piece of furniture like a press with a large wireless on the inside and a ‘record player’ on top. Indeed every school-day in our house, in the morning times, while getting ready to leave for my ‘University of culture and learning’ (the De La Salle Christian Brothers School or as we called it ‘the dealer’), I would be caught in the trance of a beautiful musical melody from the radio called ‘Elizabethan Serenade’, and every morning when it came to its marvellous crescendo, I would say “Ohh fuck not again.!, I’m late and the Brothers at my school won’t be very pleased with me for being late again, and I will probably get into some trouble and get some lines to write, “yeh, course I will, and the rest.!”

They used to bate (beat) 27 varieties of shite out of us just for being late and if you were lucky they wouldn’t tell your Oul-Fella, because if he found out, then, just like all the rest of the kids in Ballyfermot at that time, we’d get another 27 varieties beaten out of us from him, just to make sure we learnt not to do it ever again, until the next day that was. I suppose we looked upon this act (by our Fathers) as like an age-old custom or tradition if you like, that would fondly be kept in the family for many years to come. If there’s one thing the Brothers (De la Salle Christian Brothers) done well, it was to learn ye, yes they learned ye very well indeed.

I used to think that they were code words, code words for “knock the bollicks out of ye”, sorry if I spelt that word wrong as I didn’t exactly devote myself to the actual spelling of the word when the bollicks was being knocked out of me. Of course the fact that I was half blind didn’t help my learning much either. Rule Number 1 for a child in the Dealer was to stay as far away as humanly possible from those mad Christian Brothers, so row 5, 6 or 7 was just about right for me, and if there was a row number 179 I’d be at the far end of it.! By the way in the 18th century a priest, especially a Roman Catholic priest was actually referred to as a ‘bollicks’ or ballicks, the word originally meant ‘nonsense’ and priests used to talk an awful lot of nonsense back then.

On another day at school just before lunch time, one chap from our class who was mad as a hatter, decided to take the Brother’s thick leather strap from on top of the blackboard where it slept quietly when it wasn’t playing a central role in one of our daytime nightmares. He brought the strap over to the railway tracks and got it spliced into 6 nice pieces and then put them carefully back on top of the blackboard. It didn’t take very long in the first class in the afternoon before the Brother got the urge to reach above the blackboard to pull down his weapon of choice only to see the bare handle in his hand with the other 5 pieces fall onto the floor, the class just fell round the place laughing for ages. And yes of course we all did pay dearly for that gut-busting piece of entertainment, but you know what Crocker, even in those days there were some things in life that MasterCard just couldn’t pay for.

One day at school as I was playing at the side of the yard, just rolling some marbles along the white line on the perimeter of the schoolyard. I was only new to that part of the school at that time and all on my own I was so I was, when all of a sudden this broad dark shadow of a Christian Brother appeared over my shoulder, he shouted in an angry voice “you’re not allowed outside the yard”.

This meant I was in breach of rules, cos you couldn’t go outside the white line surrounding the yard, I said “but I’m still in the yard Brother, I’m sorry if some of the marbles rolled over the line”. Well with one swipe of his large hand he helped me up off the ground. He then ordered me to get over to the Head Brother’s office immediately. I really wanted to go to the loo first, but this just didn’t fit into my newly altered schedule. The row of seats outside the Head Brother’s Office was affectionately known as ‘death row’, I immediately went over and just sat there and shivered, as ye do. I didn’t know what was going to happen next, now don’t get me wrong, I mean I didn’t come up the Liffey on a Honda 50 so I did know that I wasn’t goin over for afternoon tea and buns with the boss if ye know what I mean.

The Head Brother’s door suddenly swung open. I hardly seen the previous client being catapulted out the door as the words “you in here now..!” sounded. The Head-Brother stood high in the middle of the room facing and staring on me as I entered.

There was a large turf fire blazing away behind him under the mantelpiece but the room still felt cold, the smell of the turf burning away brought me back to my days working in the turf depot on Lally Road and the great craic we all had. The Brother looked angry and in no mood for negotiation. I was briefly asked to explain what happened, I uttered a couple of words in my defence, and was promptly told to stand still and was put in my dancing position and then I got my hands lashed, over and over, and I learned never, ever to do something evil and nasty like play marbles so close to that line ever again.

### **1960s – Johnny Fortycoats, Bang Bang and Lugs:**

No story about Dublin would be complete without mentioning ‘Johnny Fortycoats, Bang Bang, Yup, and Lugs Branigan. These were all simple people who became larger than life in the 1960s and 70s in Dublin. Fortycoats was the name given to a poor down-and-out character who lived on the streets; he wore a lot of clothes and even a couple of overcoats. It’s thought that there were several ‘Johnny Fortycoats’ through the ages and they all had similar characteristics, I’m nearly sure the last of the Johnny Fortycoats was an ex-soldier.

A lot of ex-soldiers ended up in the gutter in those days, they would have done their time in the army and became totally institutionalised and then after leaving the army were left to fend for themselves. Bang Bang, on the other hand (Dudley was his surname) was an eccentric man who would wonder round the streets of Dublin wearing a cowboy hat and he would shout “BANG BANG” across the road at people going by.!, he’d even jump on the back of a bus and surprise people with his shouts, I believe he came from Bridgefoot Street flats. ‘YUP’ on the other hand did something similar, he’d come up behind people and shout “YUP” and they’d nearly jump out of their skin with fright. I used to see him the odd time while passing Grange Gorman (madhouse in Dublin City), as I’d be heading back in the direction of my barracks from the city centre. Anytime I’d pass him he’d shout across the road to me ‘how ye doin today General’, as he’d salute me, I’d bust my head laughing and wish him a ‘good day’ also and salute him back. I used to imagine Fortycoats in a frantic flurry, running up Lynch’s Lane at the back of the Dealer trying to get away from Yup, unknown to him Bang Bang would be hiding at the top of the hill waiting in the shadows to ambush.

Lugs; Lugs Branigan or Sergeant Branigan of the Garda Síochána (Police Force) got to be famous in his own lunch time in Dublin. I think you’ve guessed why he was called Lugs. He used to do a lot of boxing, and boxing you may know, not only dries up one’s skin something terrible but also causes strange things to happen to one’s ears. He was very good at slapping the head off anybody that got in his way though, his method was called BZT or Branigan’s Zero Tolerance (only messing). But he did take on some of the heavy-duty thugs of Dublin in the old days and rarely lost. He

rarely issued summonses or tickets to ordinary people of Dublin. That attitude by a Garda today probably wouldn't be acceptable behaviour. However he did enjoy the total confidence of ordinary Dubs in his day. And in any case, most of the parents didn't mind in the least if their son came home with a black eye and cauliflower ear after helping Lugs with his inquiries.

### 1960s – Street football

Yes those famous street football matches were actually a very serious daily event in our lives. A typical match would comprise of about 20 fit and half mad persons on either side, ranging from 12-and-a-half to 39 years of age, the duration of a match could be up to 4 hours or more. On a given fine day an average of 12 lives would nearly be lost in the melee and many more would be threatened with death by kicking 40 footballs up their arsehole. We had the Purcells, the Roches, Gibsons, O'Donoughues, Darcys, Duffs, Desmonds, Kennys, Jennings, and Clearys etc. Yes a great gang altogether and a bloody marvellous sport it was to. I remember while playing in goal (goalkeeper) in one memorable match, I was about 13 years old at the time. I remember the match was reaching fever pitch, the daylight was fading, tempers were frayed and my mob were leading by one goal. It was all down to this very last effort on my goal by the opposition and I was the final defence.

The ball came flying in towards my goal with 4 full grown lunatics racing behind it on the attack, so before I shit myself I said one of those prayers that used to take just one nanosecond to say, all of a sudden there it was, the ball, 3 feet away from me in mid air, hovering like a large baldy bumble bee, well a lump came to my throat, beads of sweat ran down my brow, I lunged forward, pulled my fist, wound it tight and punched at the ball as if the devil himself was biting me arse. A split second later, didn't I miss the fucking ball altogether and hit Johnny Corcoran right in the mush (face). He hit the ground faster than the shit that ran down me leg. Don't know where the ball went, but we won the match.

The cheers rang out aloud and I was lifted into the air and congratulated, and we all slept well that night, still don't know if the congratulations was for knocking poor Johnny out or preventing the goal. Johnny's Father managed the first milk round in Ballyfermot in the 1960s. And as wedding cakes and birthday cakes were so expensive in those days his mother used to bake cakes for all her neighbours for those special occasions.

Sometimes when those football events got, emm, a little too loud, a little too boisterous and a little too much to handle for the people who lived in the surrounding houses, the Guards (police) were called, and when they arrived, we'd all disappear into thin air quicker than a bunch of pinkeens in the middle of the river Liffey. If we were caught by the Guards we'd always give names like Joe Dolan, Brendan Boyer or Barry White.

My goodness when I think of those many hours that we spent playing millions of games of football on the road and in the park, sure they were the simplest and best times of our young lives.

And as for the 7-a-side football competitions that we played in the Summer times, they were just so incredible. The best 'save' I ever made as a goalkeeper was at a 7-a-side competition in the grounds of St Johns College, now please compose your selves. We were pitted against a team of travellers, yes Gypsies, yes, real ones. And you know what, them folks were just grand, they had their game of football, they lost and there wasn't even a bad word exchanged between us. But during the match, be the Lord Jezus, one of them just tore down the left wing, he then suddenly turned infield and well he hit the ball such a powerful kick that would have killed a piebald-mare stone dead on the spot.

The ball came roaring across my goalmouth like Halley's Comet it was. I had to sprint a couple of yards at first, then I jumped and dived and spread myself through the air and shouted 'Geronimo. !'. As I graciously went skywards, I couldn't believe it when in full flight I hit the ball with my fist smack bang right over the bar. The crowd screamed and roared all 9 of them. Piece of piss it was.

### **Californian Hills**

Now talking about Cowboys and Indians and our adventures as kids in the old days, if we really wanted a thrill, then it was off to the 'Cali-ers' (Californian Hills) for us all, you thought the Alps were dangerous, well in this place you were armed simply with a large piece of cardboard under your arse, or if you were a little posh, a piece of lino, or if you were a complete fucking lunatic, and we had plenty of those, a piece of corrugated-iron. You'd sit on it while perched on the crest of one of these virtual cliff tops, then you'd get your best mate to push you off the edge, and, well, then you just enjoyed the ride of your life.

The notion of possibly breaking one's snot (nose) only added to the thrill. If you survived, then you got another free go. Now in snowy conditions in the middle of Winter it was a little bit more tricky, you see after your first two summersaults down the uno-slalom you got a little disorientated, and navigation then became difficult, and as the trees, bushes, clouds, rocks and snow all began to intermingle into one large blur, you simply had to aim for something softish to crash into. I'm telling you, running with the bulls at Pamplona was just child's play compared to this stuff. I just don't know how many pairs of trousers I had torn or how many shirts I had ripped or even how many large egos got completely busted in those hills, not to mention how much OMO or DAZ had to be used to clean our clothes. But it all worked out well in the end. Yes, indeed, those tall handsome hills were mighty fine indeed, they were called the Californian Hills by all the kids in the area, simply because they reminded us of the hills of the Wild West were we would have terrific

games of cowboys and Indians. That area now has actually been officially named the 'Californian Hills' by the Local Authority and fair play to them. We used to have our very own gang of cowboys called 'McGovern's Rifles'. Sure we could shoot the left eye out of a small spider at 400 yds while galloping backwards. By the way we got our name from McGovern's Hardware Stores at Islandbridge, that's where we bought the rifles (6p each). Now the rifles weren't exactly fully functioning rifles, the barrels and metal mechanisms were taken out of them, but still we did have gorgeous fun carrying those wooden rifles round with us to fight our many battles.

### **1963 – The Ragman, the Slopman, the Ding Dong man and the Coalman;**

Often, in the middle of those hot Indian Summers we experienced as kids, a strange loud siren-like noise would be heard echoing through those narrow streets and it would create absolute pandemonium in the whole area. Dogs would bark and howl, cats would run for their lives, kids would charge up and down the length of the roads screaming and shouting, and then they would run in and out of their houses like little terrified possessed demons with their eyes popping out of their tiny heads, yes, it was the 'Ding Dong man' in his ice-cream van spreading dementia all over the estate. Well as soon as that van stopped on our road, most times we would manage to get some money to acquire an ice cream from him and then lick it to death in two minutes flat, and then stand and watch one of the other bastards slowly finishing their '99's (a 99 was an ice cream cone with a length of chocolate stuck down the middle of it), sometimes instead of a 99, they would get a 'shit on a stick' (a choc-ice).

Besides the 'Ding Dong Man', I remember the 'Ragman', he used to come round our road every week on his horse and cart shouting 'Any Old Rags' and we'd grab any old battered clothes that we could find in the house and rush out to meet him and handover our bits and pieces, he would then give us a gift of a cheap small toy, like maybe some balloons or a little windmill on a stick or some blow bubbles perhaps.

Then there was the 'Slopman', I'm afraid he didn't give us any gifts for the bucket of leftover food that we used to give him for his pigs.

Now we had a great bit of gas altogether when the, yes you guessed it, the Gasman called. His job was to extract from our gas meter all the schilling coins we had put into it to pay for our gas, and when he was finished we let out a large sigh of relief. You see we had a couple of mysterious little fairies in our house that used to get a knife and help some of those schilling coins that were trapped inside the meter to escape and some of them coins actually ended up down at the local sweetshop.

And as for all those other strange coins that came out of the meter, my goodness there were some turn of the century Lithuanian coins, some Roman coins, there were aluminium coins, there were some pennies and other coins that were shaved,

pared and mashed to the same size and shape of a schilling. I learned later on, that some people actually got away with cutting the shape of a schilling coin out of a piece of lino (linoleum) and using it instead of a proper coin (Jésus somethings you just learn too late in life!.) But the Gasman was always good enough not to notice the odd or missing coins so long as he got his quota and he always left the other strange coinage behind for us to stuff back into the meter. By the way we never managed to catch any of those elusive Fairies that stole the coins from our meter, thank God.

The Binman came once a week to collect our 'Ashbins'. Yes that's right our ashbins were collected once each week, and yes they contained only ashes from our fireplaces. You see any food that could be eaten in our houses was actually eaten, anything else went for slops to the Slopman anything else went into the fire, so all the food in the house was eaten by somebody or something or burned, as for packaging and papers etc well all that stuff went into the fire of as well. So the only thing left to dump out of our houses was ashes from our fireplaces. Sure back then we used to receive our 'light bill' this was in actual fact our electricity bill. You see in those days because we didn't have any electrical appliances like electrical kettles and electric washing machines and fridges etc the only thing we got billed for in terms of electricity was our 'lighting' so the electric bill was simply called your 'light bill'.

But the best moment was the arrival of the coalman. Yes he was the 'crème del la crème' of our transient horse and cart visitors. His 'modus operandi' was amazing. To look at him in action was just remarkable, I mean when you think of it, what kind of super-intelligent vehicle these days could you buy that you could just jump out of while it was still moving and then simply whistle to tell the vehicle to stop, and then with two whistles tell it to automatically go to the next stop.? At the end of your hard day as a coalman if you perhaps overstayed your welcome at the local hostelry and had to be poured out the pub door onto your wagon, sure faithful Ned would get you home safely. I mean even after a night out on the town at least the horse knew the work route off by heart.

Emm incidentally our house scored Zero on the Richter Scale as far as coal was concerned, yes, alas twas seldom this amazing beast paused for a breather outside our place. Coal was very expensive for a lot of us back then. In fact Charlo (brother in law) told me that the coalman (Mr Henny) used to recruit Charlo and his pals to help deliver coal to the top end of Ballyer, and when they got to Oranmore Road they used to get stoned by the kids from one particular family and used to retaliate by lashing back with large lumps of coal from the cart. Many years later Charlo found out that the kids from Oranmore deliberately stoned them on their cart so as to get them to fire back with the only ammunition they had available 'coal'. When the coal wagon was out of sight they used to quickly pick up all the coal off the ground for their fires. Violin and toilet roll please.

On a weekly basis the Coalman, Milkman, Paperman, Breadman, Insurance-man and cheque-man would call to our door for their money. Oh the money-lender was called the cheque-man. I remember though as a young lad giving the paperman a helping hand collecting his money from all his customers and on this particular bleak Autumn Friday night, after 3 hours of running up and down all the roads for him my scrawney legs were just about burned out as we finished at about 11 at night. After receiving my pay of 20p I raced to the local chipper shop and bought myself 4 packets of Toffos (toffee sweets) and after devouring the whole lot of them sweets in record time my jaw nearly fell off my head, never ate those toffee sweets since.

## Blackditch Road

*Memories from Paddy Banks*

Early 60s Ken, we would have been 12 or 13, meeting at Casey's wall top of Ballyfermot Road, near to Cassells shop, start of the road that leads to Cherry Orchard Hospital, we would go into Cassells shop buy some stuff from Marie, I am sure that was her name, she would have been the sister of the triplets on the Ballyfermot road, she or Mrs Cassells would serve you lovely people. we would then proceed to walk to the Canal for our swim which brought us up by Corrigan's farm and the site now of the prison, on up by the old village on the left which was about 300 yards from the railway bridge, they were great Days , and great friends, Mattie Egan Paddy Casey, Ronnie Reilly (RIP) Cecil Johnson, Paddy Walsh, to name a few. A time lost but not forgotten.



## Kylemore Road

*Memories of Marie Quearney Haughan*

Our dad was Irish and our mam Scottish. They met while dad was working in Scotland. Mam always said the reason we moved to Ireland was all the young folk left our small village to live Glasgow or London where there was more life.

Dad knew Jim Larkin and he got us our house on Kylemore Rd. With four small kids we headed by train first to Aberdeen then Glasgow where we got the Boat to the North Wall. Would have taken almost two days. From the day we moved my parents loved Ballyfermot. Mam took great pride in saying to people we met. “we’ve lived in Ballyfermot 48 years and never had the any problems and we have great neighbours. I had a very happy childhood went to a The Dominican Convent school. Had the same nun for 6 years while she was strict she was a brilliant teacher. In those days there was lots of unemployment big classes not all children had school books. But every child had to work no excuses for not doing your homework you did it or at least you had to attempt it. Which I think speaks volumes. As you got older 14/15 you had the club which was run by the nuns and lay people in the school from 7pm - 9pm. It was great we were taught Ballroom dancing, drama, games, ect. We made best friends forever in the Club. Your parents knew you were safe there three nights a week. At 16/17 years we got into football. Mrs Wogan (Wogie) was her nickname started the team named “Sinners United” twenty of us girls trained Tuesdays and Thursday hail rain or snow. We had the Privilege to know Kevin Blount RIP who trained us. A gentleman. Most of us never drank alcohol we weren’t interested in it. Most of us met our husbands through the football. We still keep in contact with each other a couple of times a year. Some of the girls are in Canada, Switzerland, Wales, Australia, and London. If one is home we get together and chat all night long. This is just a short version of life for me in Ballyfermot lovely memories.

## Animal Rescue

*William O Flaherty, Spiddal Road*

It was a bright and breezy day in March in the early eighties. When I suggested going for a walk with my youngest son Colm, he jumped at the idea and we both headed off across what was then know as the “ Back Fields or The Backers” by the local Ballyfermot people. It was a large area of land destined for what is now known as the Cherry Orchard Estate. However at that time it was a sort of no mans land where the horsey people kept their nag’s and the car thieves drove stolen cars into the ground. One day I counted as many as twenty eight cars. It was also a place where it was a good idea to mind your own business and stay clear of the action if possible.



We made our way over the remains of the old footbridge this bridge was actually Gallenstown Bridge because its purpose was to connect the two parts of Gallenstown Lane after the railway was laid down in approx 1845/8.

We then went into the lane which was then relatively intact. After a short time we came to the disused Waterworks filter beds. Turning left brought us into Gallenstown Lane proper, which was at that time, was in a good state of repair. Pressing on we then came to Killeen Lane turning right here brought us to the well known Bannons Pub of the 7th lock a popular place for Canal Boats , Travellers and local people. After the usual stop at Bannons Pub for Tayto’s and Lemonade we headed up along the Canal Bank towards the 8th Lock, at this stage all was going well till we came upon some cattle grazing on the “Long Acre”. The bank was very narrow at this point and what with a deep ditch on one side and the Canal on the other side we had little room for manoeuvre, well to cut a long story short, as we tried to squeeze past them a Calf had been grazing looked up and did not like what he saw and jumped straight into the Canal. Shock was not the word that we felt that day. However we consoled ourselves with the thought that at least they know how to swim, which was all right up to a point.

The calf swam around in a wide circle before coming back to where he went in. The problem was that as he tried to climb out, he kept slipping back down into the

water again. At this stage a cow had come to the edge of the bank staring down at the calf struggling to get out of the water. After about four attempts, the calf gave up and went back into the canal again swimming around in a circle only this time it swam too near a clump of briars overhanging the water and became trapped in them. It looked very bad for the calf at this stage. There was simply nothing we could do. Suddenly the cow, which had been standing on the edge of the bank, jumped into the canal with a mighty splash. It too followed the same circle as the calf. As it came alongside the calf, it struck it a powerful blow with its hindquarters sending the calf free of the briars. The cow then swam back to the bank climbing out with ease, the calf following close behind what was obviously its mother. This time, the calf climbed out – no bother. So much for your “stupid cows”. The two animals shook the water off them selves and continued grazing the Long Acre as if nothing had happened whereas we considered what we had seen to be a wonder of nature.

We continued our ramble coming out at another well known pub, Palmers of the 9th Lock – more Tayto’s and lemonade. Coming along Station Road we passed the ruins of lovely old Cloverhill House otherwise known as “The Mansion”. Just across the road, stood Cloverhill Cottage. Continuing on down on the left side, we came to Collinstown House and just after that Wheatfield’s House. Sad to say, most of the places mentioned in this story no longer exist, however they were all important in their own way and gave a lot of employment in the area.

Its worth remembering too, that they are a part of our heritage and when Landen Road was started all of the places mentioned above were flourishing farms. But that’s the way. Times change and so must we. After all, we don’t want to get left behind now, do we?

## Gone for Ever

*Memories from Anthony O Brien Thomond and Decies Road*

2014 in Ballyfermot as we knew, whats Gone for Ever.....Bolands Gone, 7 days shop Gone, Two Stew Houses Gone, Ritz Gone, Cannon Troy Gone, Elephant Supermarket Gone, Dirty Aggies Gone, Ploughmen’s Shop Gone, Roundabout on Main Road Gone, Coal Man Gone, Semperit Gone, Grave Yard Gone, Dump Gone, Seven Oaks Gone, Baldy Delaney’s Shop Gone, Priest Houses beside Chapel Gone. Lido Gone, Liptons Gone, Glass Road Gone, Lynches lane Gone, Colly Van Kylemore Road, Charlie Selling His Sweets Kylemore Road.....CANT THINK OF ANY MORE,

## I'm from Inchicore

*Anthony O'Brien, Thomond and Decies Road*

A place that has its origins way back in the last century. The Inchicore we know today grew from a small village near the Camac River marsh at Inse Chaoire (Irish Gaelic for “Sheep Island”) where sheep were herded and watered outside Dublin city before going to market. Like most villages it has a road running through it that forms the core of the village. At the tip of the road it divides into a T-junction. My memories of the village have always been of shops of all sorts, pubs and houses along the village road. It is known all good Irish villages have their own chapel and graveyard. Inchicore is different it has two chapels, St Michael's on the main road and the Oblates on the left hand road of the T-junction. The grave yard has the distinction of being the first Catholic cemetery built in Dublin after Catholic Emancipation.



The river Camac cuts across under the village road at right angles, flowing under a bridge you would hardly know was there. The lands are bordered on one side by the Grand Canal and on the other side by River Liffey. Just beyond the River Liffey is the Phoenix Park. The village was never really rural being on the edge of the city, but before the housing estates were built along its borders, it could have been described as rural.

I was born in the village in 1957, in a house beside a pub known as Ward's. Both are now gone. I was christened in St Michael's Chapel. The pub, house and chapel were all within a stone's throw of each other on the village road.

My father was born in the same village in 1936. His home was in a small pocket of cottages known as the Puc located on the Spa Road, a side road off the main village road. Growing up he was an altar boy in the Oblates Chapel and stayed loyal to that chapel all his life. When I had made my first communion, he would often bring me to Mass in the Oblates Chapel and after mass we would go round to the rear of the Chapel where there was beautiful grotto, a replica of the Grotto of Lourdes.

My memories of the Spa Road are when the company Van Hool McArdle established itself there in the 1970's making double-decker buses for CIE. Today, they are distant memories and there is a block of apartments standing on the site of the Puc cottages.

My mother was also born in the same year as my father. She lived in a tenement house which was No. 8, Stafford Street, Dublin 1, now known as Wolf Tone Street. She was only four years of age when her father died of the dreaded TB. The following year her two year old sister also died of TB.

These were cruel times. It left the family living in the tenement with their Grandmother and no bread winner. At that time, there was a huge outcry over the horrible living conditions in the tenements and the scourge of TB. This led to the building of huge housing estates on the edges of Dublin and beyond into the country side. My mother's family benefited from this and moved out to a brand new house in Ballyfermot, which was on the border of Inchicore.

My parents married in 1956 in a Church in Ballyfermot. But there was no getting away from Inchicore. Their first house was rented in the village. Then in the 1960s they won what was known as a newly wed house in Ballyfermot. As a young lad growing up, I spent a lot of time in

Inchicore. I remember over the years, I always had my hair cut in Bill Finnegan's Barbers, which is still there today located directly across from the railway houses and run by Bill's son.

My father worked in Inchicore in the Workman's Club which was located directly across the road from Ward's Pub. It was a men's only members club. It had a bar, snooker, billiards and bagatelle tables. He was a barman in the club and I would often help him fill and cork long necked green bottles of porter in the cellar.

On one occasion I was sitting there, I had all the bottles in line, and easily filled each green bottle in turn from a light rubber hose. When I got to the last bottle I reached over to get more bottles. Not thinking of what I was doing, I put the hose into my mouth to stop the flow. With a large gasp, the hose flew from my mouth. I was choking and the porter was flowing from the hose down a groove in the floor into a drain. My father rushed over and shut off the flow of porter. I was crying, he squatted down and tucked me into his arms asking me was I all right. Over the passing years that cuddle has meant a lot to me, it is the one and only time I ever received that level of personal affection from my father.

My first football team to play with was CIE schoolboys under 12s. Our dressing room and playing facilities were located beside the CIE club in the heart of the Inchicore railway houses. Our manager was a tall grey haired man who lived in one of the railway houses. He was always spotlessly clean standing tall in a white shirt and navy blazer.

Imagine the experience of my first trip away from home was with the CIE team. We went abroad to the famous Blackpool holiday resort in Briton. There stood the Blackpool Tower in all its glory, and those long sandy beaches, with lines of deck chairs exactly like the picture postcards my dad had at home. Every day for lunch we were fed eggs and beans. We started a little whispered chant amongst our selves

“e and b for Georgie Best, what...eggs and beans for Georgie Best...no no no”. The idea being we believed some day we would be as good as George Best, and eggs and beans was not the way to get there.

My fondness of Irish dancing comes from dancing with the Brenda Bastable Scoil Rince in the Gael Linn Hall located directly across from the Model school. It was a rare thing in the sixties to have a male Irish dancer. I never had a problem getting a partner. I still have my broaches to this today.

One memory that is forever clear in my mind is the Annual Summer Open Day in the Inchicore Railway Works. Our Irish dancing school was always invited to participate in the event. They would roll out a purpose built platform in a middle of a large lawn for us, and we would dance away for what seemed like hours on end. I still recall the two, three, four hand reels and my special dance the hornpipe with me up on my toes waltzing left and right on my ankles. I am sure this was the forerunner for the river dance phenomena we have today. I can still hear the fiddle playing, smell the freshly cut grass, see the smiling faces and the people clapping away on those long sunny summer days.

My love of football grew from watching St. Patricks Athletic the local league of Ireland side. We called them the Saints or Pats. In those days my father would lift me over the stiles, with my shinny white legs in short pants dangling in the air. The children got in free this way, it was an excepted thing to do. As I got older myself with my friends would stand at the entrance to the ground and ask the adults to lift us over the stiles. There we were, kids not yet teenagers, standing in the famous shed behind the goal. All around us bigger boys and young men towering over us, chanting, singing and waving their red scarves. My uncle was a Shamrock Rovers fan and he would often bring me to Milltown to watch them playing in their famous green and white striped football gear, and he would lift me over the stiles. Fond memories and the lifting of children over the stiles another tradition that has long since disappeared.

My step grandfather was an old IRA man from the 1920/30s. Except for a few grey hair he was baldy with a blood red face and between puffs of smoke from his pipe, and the occasional spit into the fire place he would tell me stories. He recalled his days on the run and of the brave men that were executed in 1916. He brought me as a young lad on a tour of the famous Kilmainham Jail. Which is located on the main road into Inchicore. He was forever reminding me of the great republican Timothy Coughlin who hailed from the Inchicore village, who was one of the anti treaty members who assassinated Kevin Higgins in 1927. He was forever telling me I should be proud to say “I am from Inchicore”.

My one abiding memory of Kilmainham jail is the long steel stair cases and a haunted cell. It is common knowledge a girl wearing nineteen century clothing is

reported to haunt the prison. She was supposedly held in the prison for stealing food, and tragically died there.

Keogh Square was located beside St Michaels Church; it was originally a British army barracks opened in 1814. In 1924 it was taken over by Dublin Corporation for housing. It eventually housed families, who were put there if they couldn't pay their rent. Looking back it can be safely said the living conditions in Keogh Square were as bad as those in the Tenements. At one point when growing up I had an Auntie living there with her family. One Godless day a window fell in on one of my cousins and the glass sliced off the top of her thumb.

I recall going to a shop just up from the workman's club in the direction of St Michaels Church. Suddenly from all directions came a hail of Garda cars, sirens screaming, and pouring into Keogh Square. I could hear a women screaming. I immediately turned and ran back to my father in the Workman's Club, my body shaking and my heart pounding. Later that day I heard a man telling my father the Garda had carried out a raid on a house in the square and they had taken a young man out who was roaring and shouting like a mad man.

As I recall my days in Inchicore I remember this story about a rare and lovely event that occurred. When I was about seven or eight years old, my father gave me a potato sack full of coke from the Workman's Club to bring home for the fire. Coke is an extract from coal and is an excellent fuel. It would glow red and throw out heat for hours. When I got to the Blacklion Pub which was located on the right side at the T-junction, the bottom was falling out of the bag. I stopped not knowing what I should do.

A Garda who was standing on duty across the road at an AIB bank came over and questioned me about what was in the bag. I told him it was coke. I got the impression that he did not know what it was. He asked where I had got it and what was I doing with it. I told him my father had given it to me to bring home to my Mother for the fire.

He said "go back to the Workman's Club and get another bag". I asked him would he mind the bag for me. He agreed. I ran back to the club and asked my dad for another bag. He went mad giving out to me when I told him a Garda was minding the coke. "You'll get me sacked!" he said loudly. Another barman had to calm him down. I ran back to the Blacklion Pub and there was the Garda still standing there minding my busted bag of coke. I held the new bag out and he emptied the busted bag into it for me.

I thanked him and went on my way. As I got older, I realised the Garda knew exactly what was going on. Times were hard and he had turned a blind eye. I will always remember that Garda and my Dad having a canary and me, an innocent child in the whole thing.

Memories of my child hood days.

## Ballyfermot Wren Boys

*Hughie Lakes Ballyfermot Drive, King Wren Vincent Muldowney*

The wren, the wren, the king of all birds,  
St. Stephen's Day was caught in the furze,  
Although he was little his honour was great,  
Jump up me lads and give him a treat.

*Chorus:*

Up with the kettle and down with the pan,  
And give us a penny to bury the wren.

As I was going to Killenaule,  
I met a wren upon the wall.  
I took me stick and knocked him down,  
And brought him in to Carrick Town.

*Chorus:*

Droolin, Droolin, where's your nest?  
'Tis in the bush that I love best  
In the tree the holly tree,  
Where all the boys do follow me.



*Chorus:*

We followed the wren three miles or more,  
Three mile or more three miles or more.  
We followed the wren three miles or more,  
At six o'clock in the morning.

*Chorus:*

I have a little box under me arm,  
Under me arm under me arm.  
I have a little box under me arm,  
A penny or tuppence would do it no harm.

*Chorus:*



*RTE Promoting the Ballyfermot Wren Boys and Girls Hughie Lakes Ballyfermot Drive, Larry Gibney Claddagh Road, Joe Duffy Claddagh Green, Pat Kearns Moycullen Road, Liam O Keefe Spiddal Road.*

## Growing up in Ballyer '50s, '60s, '70s

*Ken Larkin*

Born to Patrick and Phyllis Larkin on the 25th June 1952 at Holles Street hospital; my sister Gilda was 4 years old at the time. My father died on the 15th December 1953 of heart trouble, in Jervis Street hospital, so I never remembered him. My first memory was living in the tenement house in 31 North Great Georges Street in one room with a divider to the kitchen area; we had to share one toilet with about six families, there was a bath, but this also had to be shared so we had our own tin bath that we use to wash in. The tin bath is still used to this day as our dog looks forward to her wash in it. I went along to the Loretta Convent School with my sister and sat in with her at class as the Ma arranged this with the nuns at the time as she worked in the ESB offices in Fleet Street as a cleaner. The school was situated at the top of North Great Street so there was not too far to walk. I was three at the time. A nun named mother Clara befriended us and she seemed to take us under her wing in the school. That Christmas I was picked by mother Clara to be baby Jesus at the school play as I was the youngest in the school.

Ma would meet us after school and take us to the playground in Parnell Square, or Hill Street to play. It must have been very hard on her to make ends meet but she would never let us know, she had only been widowed four years and was very young. Ma was a very strong-minded woman who knew what she wanted and went for it. A woman that was born before her time and could turn her hand to anything. She had a motorcycle, which at that time was not common for a woman to have. We moved to a tenement in Buckingham Street, which was something similar to the room in North Great Georges Street. There was a dinner house beside us and the nuns used to supply dinners to the poor of the area. This was to be a short stay as we were waiting for a house in Ballyfermot to be vacant and I remember dreaming what the house was going to be like. The good news came in early June 1958. The house in Ballyfermot was now vacant and the Ma was



to go in and collect the keys off the Corporation. The day she collected the keys, I was overjoyed. It was a very dull day and it was raining when the lorry pulled up outside Buckingham Street to load the bit of furniture we had. We all jumped into the lorry and I can't say that I was sad that evening when leaving, as this was to be a new adventure for us.

### **Moving to Ballyer**

As we left the city the lights were fading in the background. It seemed miles from Dublin, hence why it was known as "Bally Far Out". The rain was pouring down and we could see lights ahead in the distance, it was Ballyfermot. We pulled up outside the new house and the Ma opened the door. Gilda and I ran into the house. It was very dark inside as there were no lights in the hall and kitchen. We turned the landing light on, as this was the only bulb left in the house. The people before us must have taken the bulbs with them. We looked around that night but we could not see much and we all went to bed and huddled in together as it was cold, dark and wet.

The next morning the sun was shining through the window and we started to get a good look around the house. There were two bedrooms, a toilet and bath upstairs, a kitchen, parlour room, coalhole, and a small pantry off the downstairs kitchen. This was leading out to a huge back garden that was overrun with long grass and weeds. As we looked way down the garden we could see the houses at the back, it looked a long way off. I could not believe this was ours, a place where I was going to have very happy memories in the future.

Gilda and I started in the local school, the Dominican convent, which was a huge school. The nuns said that it was the biggest school in Europe. It was split into girls and boys. Not too long after I started it was not hard to see who were the tough boys of the school. One day in the classroom, while the teacher was out, this lad started to push me around. I did not take too kindly and hit him back. All the lads in the class gathered around and before I knew it, a fight was arranged by all his pals for the schoolyard at lunchtime. The teacher came in and everyone went back to their seats. I was worried all morning about being bashed. Lunchtime arrived quickly and I walked steadily out of the classroom on the way out to the schoolyard. One of the boys said that I was in for it now, as Martin is the toughest boy in the school. That made me worry more. I looked across the schoolyard and there was a big ring formed by all the boys as I approached the ring. I was immediately pushed into the middle of it and Martin drew out and hit me a punch. We tore into one another, digging at each other, and the noise was tremendous in the background as more and more boys joined the ring. They were screaming "Claim, Claim, Claim" . . . this meant there was a fight in progress. I was to hear and say these words again and again while I was at school. A teacher came across stopping the fight. I thought



to myself I gave as good as I got, and this must have been true as Martin never picked on me again. We were neve4r pals from that day on but we seemed to be able to put up with one another. We were looking forward to our first Christmas holidays at the school and to our first Christmas in our new home.

### **The School Inspector**

After the Christmas holidays we headed back to school and carried on with our day-to-day routine. One day the teacher told us that the school inspector would be paying us a visit the following week. Right enough, in walked this big muscular man, not a smile on his face. He had tight reddish hair and went through the roll book with the teacher. Next he would scream and roar at the class, telling us that we would end up in Artane, Dangan, or Letterfrack. These were reformatories where young people used to be sent by the Government if they were caught mitching or gave trouble in the school. We are hearing a lot of bad things about these institutions today. He would take some of the lads that had been missing from the school up to the front of the class by the locks and roar and scream at them in front of us. Naturally enough they would be crying. We were all scared of him, even the lads that never gave trouble in school. I would have rather faced Martin in a fight any day than face the inspector. I never liked to this man for his bullying attitude and the teacher seemed to be afraid of him as well. I feel to this day that he was the reason why some of the children went on the hop or missed school when they received notice that he was paying us a visit.

### **First Holy Communion**

The first year went in fast and we started preparing for our First Holy Communion in school. At last we all received our little slips of paper from our teacher to bring home to our parents telling us of the arrangements. I could not wait to get home that day with my note. My Ma was out working, she had left the ESB a year earlier and was now cleaning offices to fit in with our times coming from school. I could hear the motorcycle coming and I went out to greet her with the note. It read, "Kenneth Larkin will make his First Holy Communion in the parish church at the nine o'clock Mass on Saturday 9th April 1960. Please have him in the school at 8.30am on that morning to go to the church with the other children. Many thanks . . . Signed: Sister M. Germanus."

The Ma kept this note 'till she died and I have that note now. The following week the Ma brought me into town on the 78 Bus to get my clothes. We only went to the one shop, Sloan's. This was at the top of Parliament Street. I was dressed from head to foot. I remember thinking that this must have been the only shop in Dublin to sell communion clothes, as there were a lot of boys in there with their parents, getting their communion clothes as well. Little did I know that Ma and the rest of the parents there would be paying by the drip, long after we made our communion.

The night before the communion I was scrubbed from top to bottom, the hair washed and fine combed, just to make sure there was no fleas lurking about in it. The new shoes were put beside the fireplace so that we would not be looking for them the next morning, and the suit with the short trousers was left hanging from the door just to take the creases out after it was unfolded from the papers. The next morning I was up early and washed again, just in case Ma missed a bit from the night before, and then we walked down to the school. I was handed a little prayer book that my cousin Marie sent me and a little message inside saying, "to Ken from Sister Mary of Mercy", as she was a Nun at that time in England. I still have that prayer book to this day. All the boys assembled there and together we marched up from the school to the church in pairs. All the mothers and fathers were at the church to greet us on the way in. In we went and marched straight up to the top of the church. Mass began and we were all very holy waiting to receive the Blessed Eucharist. Then the moment arrived, we all had to leave, seat by seat, to go and receive. We were warned before hand not to chew the Communion as it was a sin, we were only to swallow it. After Mass we all marched back to the school and on the way down we were discussing what the Communion tasted like. Some said it was like stale bread, others said it was like toast, and one lad said it was like eating cardboard. I remember we were shocked at this because we were told it was a sin to eat it. Then it was home and brought around to some of the neighbours who handed money to you, nowadays it is very posh, you get the money inserted in a

card. I was brought to Naas to visit all the cousins and on the Sunday into town to the pictures, to spend the most of what I collected.

### **Cardinal Visits Ballyer**

June 1961 saw every road in Ballyer covered in colourful buntings. A Cardinal from Rome was coming to visit Ballyer. Ireland at that time had no Cardinal, the nearest we came was having an archbishop whose name was Doctor McQuaid. We were told in the school that this Cardinal, whose name was Agagianian, was the Pope's right hand man. We were learning his name for weeks before he came. The day arrived. All of the press and TV were in Ballyer. The main road from the Ranch to Our Lady of the Assumption was thronged with people. Gardai lined the paths to keep the people back. We were all buying flags from the sellers at each corner. We could see in the distance the army motorcycles cortege coming up the hill at Markeivicz park. We knew that the Cardinal would be just behind them. As he passed on his way up to the Church. I never saw as many flags waving. The De La Salle boys' band and all the priests of the parish led by Canon Troy, the parish priest, were there to greet him as he emerged from the car and entered the Church. We were not allowed into the church but we did not mind as we had the day off from school and that was just as important as any Cardinal visiting to a nine year old.

We passed out of second class and had to go across the road to Deeler, this was the nickname for the De La Salle. This was a big change for us as we were now going to be taught by religious brothers and masters rather than women and nuns and we thought that we would never see the school inspector again. Every morning as soon as we would go into the classroom brother Ailbe would lead us saying the Hail Mary, Our Father, and the Glory be to the Father in Irish and then we would also have to sing Amhrán Na Bhfian once or twice a week 'till we got it off by heart. The brothers and masters were different they all carried leathers, rulers and sticks and you would get it on both hands if you stepped out of line and did not do your ecker. We also played the Gaelic football and hurling. We were not allowed to play soccer as this was counted as a foreign game. There were three parts to the Deeler, the top school was for first and second class. The bottom school was for third and fourth and the middle was for fifth and sixth class. We all shared one big playground area and you were not allowed cross the imaginary divide between the schools. This school was as big as the Dominican that we just left, there being about 1,500 boys at that time compared to today where there are only 600 pupils. We were only in the Deeler for a week before we got our summer holidays. This was just to get us used to the school and know what classes we were in when we returned after the Summer holidays.

### **Cowboys and Indians**

Not many had televisions in the late fifties and early sixties as they were far too expensive to afford. One lad in school named Damien had a telly and we would all go to his house on Garryowen Road when school was over to watch Annie Oakley. There was no piped television at the time, so we all had to depend on the outdoor aerial and the weather to get a good reception. We would all stand in front of the telly. Then it would start with a gun shooting to the left and then to the right and then it would point out into the room and shoot. We would all fall to the ground on top of one another and pretend we were dead. I can't remember watching the rest of the programme, but that made the highlight to our evening. Then we would all go out playing cowboys and indians and arguing about who was going to be the cap in the game.

### **The Wireless**

Because we had no telly the wireless played an important part in our lives. From 7.30am in the morning the jingle would come on 'till Amhran Na Bfhian at 11pm. The Da had bought this for the Ma before he died. I would listen to the Gaelic matches on a Sunday afternoon and the Ma had a great interest in how Meath was doing as her cousin, Peter McDermott, who used to play, was now managing the team, she never forgot her roots.

On a Saturday, Radio Eireann had the sponsored programmes and the Ma loved the Walton programme as it was all Irish music being played, and as the man said at the end of the programme, "If you feel like singing, do sing an Irish song". On a Saturday and Wednesday evenings there were plays on. I would create the pictures in my head as I listened. The Foley family and the Kennedy's of Castle Ross were other favourites. This is how we passed the long winter months. This is where I was introduced to all the great sixties music. The wireless is still in perfect working order and can be heard bellowing out the music still.

### **Road Games**

There were very tall light poles outside some of the houses on Ballyfermot Drive, so we would tie a thick rope around them and use it for a swing. The higher we could climb the pole and tie the rope the better the swing was. We could stay out in the dark as the light was shining down on us from the top of the pole. Some would have hoops, this was a wheel from a bicycle, and we would run up and down the road with a stick in our hands, wheeling the hoop in front of us. I think, looking back, we thought these were cars. We also used to play soccer between the gates. On both sides of the road there were railings with gates in front of the houses, as can be seen on a lot of the roads in Ballyer today, and we used to use these as goals. The Gardai would often come up and stop us playing on the road, and an odd time,

issue summonses to appear in court. We sometimes gave them the wrong name and address, but looking back, I think they knew and just took our names and addresses to frighten us. Another game was conkers. This was played with chestnuts. There was also jackstones, marbles, and penny in the moule. The girls played skipping and piggy and hide and seek.

### **The Graver**

The Graveyard was up at the side of the lawn on Le Fanu Road. All the headstones were broken down and none of us knew when the last burial had taken place there. It was one of the places we went to play and fight. My Ma, like so many parents, did not want us up there. This was the place that all the gangs used to go to settle their battles. Every street in Ballyer had a gang and fights used to be arranged between us. So we used to meet up there and call one another names and throw stones at each other. After a few minutes the fight would be over and both gangs went off happy, thinking that each of us had won the street war.

### **California Hills**

Sometimes we would have crocks. This was a frame of a bike with wheels and no tyres and no chain. We would bring them to the California Hills. These hills divided Ballyer from Chapelizod, and we would fly down the grassy hills, hoping that the swamp would stop the crock at the end. Once or twice you would not stop and go straight through the thorny hedges. Sometimes I would come home with my clothes torn or mucky and get an earful from my Ma. I don't think I was the only one. There was an orchard beside the hills and some of the lads would keep nicks while we scaled the wall and rob the apples. The Garda station was in Chapelizod at that time so we had to be careful that we did not meet the Gardai coming up or going down the hill from their beat. The farmer that owned the orchard would see us and give us a chase. This made it more exciting as we would have to run up the Chapelizod Hill and we knew we could lose him on the hill because it was so steep. The farmer got sense in the end and he would hide at the top of the hill and jump out at us, and more times than not, give us a kick on the arse and take the apples from us.

I never received any steady pocket money. Like all parents at that time money was scarce, and like many other boys and girls, I had to earn it. On a Thursday and Friday afternoons after school, gigs, prams, trolleys, bikes and even crocks, anything with wheels, used to be seen going up and down Ballyfermot Road, past the Deeler and Markeivicz Park and turning on to O'Hogan Road and left on to Lally Road. This is where the turf depot used to be, and it was a way for young and old to earn a few bob. Widows and people on the dole received from the government, with their pensions, a turf docket. This entitled them to a hundredweight, which equalled

two bags of turf each week. My sister and I used to collect it for my Ma and two neighbours on the road. We had our own handcart, something that you use to see in the railways, for carrying bags. We could carry 4 to 5 big sacks of turf. I always brought the extra empty sack so that if the workers were on their tea break or there were any spillages along the road, I was able to fill the sack and sell it to one of the neighbours. You could earn between one and two shillings per week, depending on how many bags you could deliver. This would have to be collected in hail, rain and snow.

### **“Aggies” Shop**

Aggie’s shop was well known in Ballyer, it was up at Grange Cross. There were flypapers hanging from the ceiling throughout the shop and the flies stuck to the papers. But this was not an unusual sight to be seen in any of the shops at that time, as there were no fly executors then. In the summer the bees could be seen around the cakes in the display cabinet at the counter. However it was the only place you could get buttermilk. My Ma was a great woman for the cooking and making home-made bread and was renowned for her apple tarts. She would send me to Aggie’s for two bottles of buttermilk, small packet of Odlum’s flour, quarter pound of butter, half pound of sugar, a quarter of tea and a half-gallon of pink paraffin for the fire. Aggie got to know me as I think I was only one of a few to go in and buy the buttermilk, and she would always ask after the Ma. She had a quick wit as well. Margaret Melvin from Kylemore Drive tells a story about her sister-in-law. She went into Aggie’s and asked for a bundle of dry sticks for the fire. Aggie replied, “what do you want me to do, toast them for you”. Aggie’s shop played a big part in all our life’s growing up in Ballyer.

### **Characters in Ballyer**

There were many characters in Ballyer, but the three that come to mind were Larry the slop man, Noelly the bus conductor, and Charley, who used to sell the sweets and apples.

Larry came around the roads with the horse and cart and collected any food slops that were left over, for his pigs. We used to collect the jam jars for him and he would give you a lollipop for every jam jar you gave him. He was always on his own and all the kids on the road helped him to collect the slops. The scent from our clothes when he was gone was awful and we could have done with some Lynx if it was around at the time.

Noelly, the bus conductor on the 78 bus, always wore a flower in his lapel and had a joke and a smile for young and old at any time of the day you saw him. He could be heard singing at the top of his voice as he was collecting the fares. I was in contact with Noelly recently, thanks to Joe Coleman from Ballyer. Noelly

Harrington served the people on the 78 bus for over forty years and retired on the 2nd September 1988. He told me he never forgets the people of Ballyer for their kindness. He is now 70 years of age and is still very active. When talking about old times in Ballyer, his name is the first on everyone's tongue and I never saw him in a bad mood, even when we would be skutting on the back of his bus.

Charley had his barrow parked at the Kylemore Road roundabout and when we would be skutting on the bus down to the school, we would jump off at the church and go over to buy the sweets and apples. When reminiscing some years ago to a neighbour on growing up in Ballyer, Charley's name came up. I could not believe it when she told me that she was Charley's daughter and there was not only one Charley, but two. They were in partnership. The other one had his sweet barrow parked up to catch the factory workers up at the top of the Kylemore Road. The name Charley was a nickname given to them by the kids of Ballyer, as their real names were Biney Monks and Thomas Proudfoot, and they came over from Cabra every morning, in hail, rain, and snow. But they will always be remembered fondly as Charley the sweet sellers by every adult and child in Ballyer in the sixties and seventies.

The turf money and the money that I got for collecting old lemonade bottles, which I used to bring back to the shops, and in return you would get a penny back on each bottle, paid for the Gala cinema on a Saturday afternoon, with a few pence left over to go into dirty Aggies for the cleaves and ice-pop. Harry the Hippo as he was fondly known around Ballyer, was the usher in the Gala. He would meet us at the door on the way in and he would tell us in no uncertain terms what would happen if we messed and he caught us. But once inside, we did not think about what Harry had said to us. Gene Autrey, Batman and Robin used to be on first. Then there would be a break. This is when we would run around the Gala with Harry chasing after us, shining his torch. Sometimes you might be caught, other times it was so dark that you could get back to your seat for the next picture without being noticed. I remember being caught by Harry on one occasion and he asked me what school I was in, the Deeler or Mary Queen of the Devils, which he always called the Angels school. When I told him I was from the Deeler he told me to go back to my seat. I must have caught him in a good mood, because he normally threw you out. The school started back at the end of August and after a few weeks into the school term, to our horror, the brother informed us that the school inspector would be in the following week. We thought we could never see that man again after we left the Dominican convent. The brother told us that we better have our tables off by heart and know our Geography, English, Irish, History, and Sums. For the week before the inspector came in you could hear the first to twelve times tables being sung out through the corridors of the top school. The following Monday the inspector

arrived into the school and sure enough we were asked to sing the tables. Some of us knew the tune but forgot the words. Then he would take great interest in the roll book with the teacher. He seemed to be looking for certain boys in the roll book and when he found them he roared their names out to get up to the front of the class. Four boys went up. The inspector had been down Lynch's lane the previous week and caught them swinging on the trees. Lynch's lane ran down between the Deeler and the Dominican school. It was like a bog road with trees and bushes all the way down and little hideouts under the bushes. This lane was about a half a mile long and lead to Chapelizod. Not many people would use this lane. This is where the boys went when they would go on the hop and they would spend the day there and then go home at 3 o'clock when the school was over. He threatened them that they were going to Letterfrack, and I believe some of them did end up there.

### **Annual Sports Day**

Every Wednesday afternoon we would have P.E., and practice for our drill display. This would take place in the schoolyard. Mr. O'Neil, a retired army man, was our P.E. teacher and he would have us doing squats and all sort of exercises. He would prepare us for the pageant, which used to take place at the annual sports day in June, just before the holidays on the schools football ground. We performed one year at Saint Bridget's Cross. The whole school was involved. When the day arrived, every boy in the school would have white shorts, white tee shirt, white socks, and white runners. There was a photo hanging in the school for years after, of the St Bridget's Cross pageant, taken from the air and it looked very impressive. Our parents would come along and cheer us on in all the races. Brother Cyprian would lead the school band and all the brothers and masters were as proud as punch to show what they were teaching us.

### **Sixpenny Rush**

I used to look forward to Wednesday in the Deeler. I was one of the few boys picked to look after setting out the milk crates and sandwiches for each class in the school. The milk and sandwiches were delivered to the school and was given to each pupil free of charge. I heard after that this was because some children used to come to school with no breakfast. On Wednesday we used to get currant buns and Friday it was bread and jam. We used our job to our advantage. Because it was the middle of the week and we would not be collecting the turf 'till Friday afternoon, money was scarce, so we could stuff our pockets with the buns and two small bottles of milk. The school showed a film each Wednesday after school . . . The Three Stooges, Laurel and Hardy, Old Mother Reilly, the Bowery Boys, or a cowboy and Indian film. This was held over in the St Benildus Hall in the school complex. It was

sixpence to get in, also known as the sixpenny rush. So we could scrape up the sixpence and we had the buns and milk as we were watching the film. Sometimes we did a trade off with some of the boys for some sweets for buns. This cinema was not like the Gala, as you had to sit in your seat all the time 'till the film was over. If you were caught running around, you would not look forward to going to school the next day.

### **The Hurling Team**

We passed out of the top school to the bottom as we were going into third class and this is when the hurling and football teams were picked to play for the school. I was picked to play the hurling and we used to travel to other schools and the Phoenix Park to play the matches. Father Daly had a red Ford Cortina and we would be loaded into it for the away matches. The brothers and the mentors were very serious about their football and hurling. Once I was playing a match and a bad decision was made and a riot broke out on and off the pitch. One of our mentors on the sideline came onto the pitch and rounded on the referee, and there was a lot of bad language used by our mentors, and the Ref. gave them as good back. All hell broke loose. We were all kept back to wait for the Ref. after the match as the mentors were going to round on him again. As the Ref. came out of the dressing room he was dressed in black and was wearing a collar. He was a Christian brother and we were told after that he was from Synge Street. It did not make a blind bit of difference, the row started up again as all the boys looked on. We were loaded back into the cars and you can imagine the language in the cars on the way back and it was not from the players. The next morning it was the talk of the school.

### **First Television**

On the 7th November 1962 I was out collecting the turf and delivering it to the neighbours, so I was not in 'till 6 o'clock. My sister met me at the door and the kitchen door was shut. I walked into the kitchen and the Ma was standing over in the corner, and there was a brand new Bush television sitting on a table. I could not believe my eyes. The Ma had been in town the previous Saturday and had put a deposit of £10 17 shillings and 4 pence down in Hardy Ltd of Caple Street and paid £40 on delivery, leaving £22 9 shillings and 8 pence to be paid within the year. I even remember one of the first programmes I saw on the telly that night, it was Grindle. The pope television did not come to Ballyer 'till years after and since we did not have an outdoor aerial, we only had the one station. But I looked forward to 5.30pm every evening when you heard the voice saying "Good evening and welcome to Radio Telefis Eireann, Bealach a Seacht.

### **Confirmation**

We were warned that we should know our Catechism inside out as the Bishop would ask you a question on the day of our Confo, and if you did not know the answer you would not make your Confo. Also we were very worried about the slap in the face that the Bishop was to give us. Again, like my Communion, I was brought into town to Sloan's shop to get kitted out. At last the big day arrived. We were all marched to the Church and directed to our seats. The doors of the Church were closed behind us and only those making their Confo, the Bishop, and priests of the parish were in the church. The parents were not allowed in, and had to go home and then come back to collect us after it was all over. The Bishop was a very old man that sat on a chair in front of the alter all through the ceremony. Then the time arrived to be confirmed, and we were all worried that we would not know the answer to the question that he was going to ask. Up he rose from his seat, and was flanked by two priests from the parish on each side. I think this was in case he toppled over. The alter where we knelt was very long and he passed us stroking each of our faces on the way by. Never stopped once to ask any questions, to our relief. After the ceremony the doors at the end of the Church were opened and as we marched out, all the parents were there in the Church grounds waiting for us. Of course, we were that bit older now and we could not wait to get home to do the visits. My Ma gave me a treat on the Sunday, when we went to Butlins for the day to spend some of the money I had received for my Confo.

### **Saturday Morning Confession**

The Church played a bi part in our growing up. The miraculous medal, May processions, Communions, Confirmations, school retreats, and dropping in to say a prayer when going and coming from school every day, as the Church was left open all day then. Saturday morning there was confessions and the seats would be filled up with boys and girls waiting to go in next. My good friend, Danny, told me that on one occasion he was next to go in and closed the door behind him. Once inside it was very dark, he could hear the other person telling their sins to the priest. Next thing the slide went across and it was his turn.

“Bless me Father for I have sinned, it was two weeks from my lat confession father, and here is my sins.” He went on to tell all his sins. After he was finished the priest gave him his absolution and penance. A he was getting up to leave the priest said to him.

“Danny, I was talking to a De La Salle brother that knew you and he was asking for you”. It was Father Daly, and he knew everyone in the parish. Danny was mortified, I need not tell you, it was a long time before Danny could look Father Daly straight in the face again after what he told him in confession.

Sometimes on a Saturday morning I used to go to the Iveagh swimming baths and it was there I read that the Garda swimming club was looking for members, so I applied. I had to go down the following Wednesday. A man named Mr Larkin introduced himself to the group, a namesake of my own, but no relation. His first words were that he would have us doing five lengths of the baths in six weeks time, and true to his word, he had. We then started training for the Royal Life Saving certificate, which we all passed and presentations were made to us at a party at the Garda Club in Harrington Street. We also used to attend swimming galas. There was an Inspector Finucane, who used to run the club, and he was stationed in Kilmainham Garda station. Whenever there was a swimming gala on he would send a Garda in a squad car up to the house to tell me when and where the event was on, and sometimes I would be brought, in the back of the squad car, to the venue. Now, when a Garda visited a house in Ballyer, it usually meant that someone had died or someone in the house was in trouble. All the lads on the road would gather around the gate and wonder what was going on. Eventually they all got used to seeing the Gardai coming and going. I owe a lot to Inspector Finucane, as he was a very caring man and was a great community man, long before Garda community work was thought about seriously in the Gardai.

### **The Credit Union**

March 1963 saw the founder members of Ballyfermot Credit Union meeting in their own homes. Soon after this, father Hegarty and brother Thomas managed to make a classroom available in the De La Salle school. When the union was organised and ready for business, the large pavilion at the rear of St Benildus hall was opened to them. These facilities continued by brother Augustine and the De La Salle brothers were vital at that time to the foundation and growth of the Credit Union. The people of Ballyfermot should always be indebted to the De La Salle brothers. The work of the officers and committees had to be carried out in their own homes and under considerable difficulties. The income from interest paid on the loans was insufficient to cover rented accommodation, even if it had been available. Within three years, the Pavilion was not big enough to cope with the growth in membership. Father Hegarty met the proprietors of Messrs Bowes Ltd, who were prepared to accommodate the Credit Union in the upper floor of their premises. The growth continued and full time staff were employed. Business was transacted during the day as well as two evenings a week and all day on a Saturday. March 1963 the shares were 7 shillings and 6 pence. Today the membership is 11,000 and the shares stand at 16.5 million. With their new premises standing proudly on Ballyfermot Road, it is a credit to all the committees and staff that were involved down through the years.

### **Changing Face of Ballyer**

The middle sixties saw the rise of the Supermarket age in Ballyer. Powers supermarket took over the Ritz ballroom. The Elephant supermarket was where the Ballyfermot football club is now, and we also had Lipton's supermarket. The shops between Grange Cross and the church roundabout were only built and we got a new pub as well, beside the shops, known as Hardy's. There were plans for the far side of the road as well. The field that divided the lanes from the Parade to the Avenue was being dug up. There were rumours that they were going to build a college, library, and another supermarket, they even cemented the whole lot. But it was left derelict for years and became known as the glass road, as it used to be littered with glass and rubbish. Ballyfermot did get its library, college and supermarket eventually in 1981 on the glass road. The houses were changing as well. The front doors and windows were painted every 5 years by the Corporation and they painted the one colour, varnish brown on the front door and white on the window frames, so that every house looked the same. This was also changing as the Corporation put in place a scheme to buy out your own house and many people were taking this offer up, thanks to the Credit union, and the houses were being painted all colours by the proud owners.

### **Redundant at 13 years of age**

There were always horses around, but more and more, the lads that owned the horses were investing in carts, which the horses pulled. We, the turf collectors, were getting phased out as these lads with the horse and carts were getting the business. They could bring thirty and forty bags of turf and also delivered coal as well. They delivered it earlier to the customer than we could and as they had a special arrangement with the turf depot workers, where they would give them the dockets for all the turf after they collected it earlier in the day, this meant shorter hours for the depot workers. We kicked up about it, but it did us no good, and eventually I was made redundant at the ripe old age of thirteen. But as the Ma used to say "God never closed one door without opening another" and it was not long before the door opened up for me because that summer I got a job collecting the baskets and filling the shelves of the Elephant supermarket and getting more money for easier work.

### **The New Bike**

Every week I would give up a few bob to the Ma and manage to save a few bob as well. I eventually managed to save what I thought was enough for a bike. Off I went into town with the Ma to have a look around. We met the Uncle Dick at the GPO. He was a great friend of the family down the years and had some very funny sayings. One was "I told me da that I had my eye on a bike in the shop and he said

that I might have my eye on it but I will never have my arse on it.” How appropriate on the day I was going looking for a bike. I must have walked the feet off them as we went to nearly every bicycle shop in the city looking at all kinds of bikes, but they were all a lot more expensive than what I had in my pocket. Then we hit on this bicycle shop on the Ballybough Road. There it was, the bicycle that I wanted outside the shop, with no price on it. In we went and there were bicycles all over the place, both new and used. The man that came to us knew my uncle, but my uncle had not known he worked there. Things were getting better and better ‘till we started discussing money. Pointing out the bike to the man he said that it came with a bell, mudguards, chain guard, and a back reflector. The front lamp, carrier and the lock are extra. I cannot remember the price, but I do remember that I was £6 short. My uncle did a bit of haggling with his friend and halved that figure, and the man threw in the front lamp, carrier, and lock. The Ma gave me the £3 I needed. The money was handed over and I was now the proud owner of a new bike.

### **My Day in Court**

I was cycling up to Aggie’s shop one night for the usual for the Ma and a motorbike cop pulled me over. The front lamp was not working on my bike and he gave a summons. I thought no more about it until some months later a summons arrived to appear at Dublin Castle Court. I did not know what to expect and was a bit afraid. The Ma came with me and we sat in the back of the court. A lady judge was sitting and then my name was called out. The motorbike cop came up to the front of the court and stood beside my Ma and myself. The cop seemed to do all the talking and seemed to be on my side. The Judge asked me had I learned a lesson. I said of course I had, and she gave me a caution not to appear before her again. I wonder how many people appear in court for having no light on their bike today.

### **Croke Park**

It was back to school after the Summer holidays and I was still playing hurling for the school. We got through to the Dublin School Finals. The final was to be played in Croke Park and we were all looking forward to the occasion. The big day arrived and as we looked out of the school window the buses were pulling in to take the spectators and us on the journey. I felt like a star, as did the other boys that were playing, as we were brought from class to class before we left, and all the lads and teachers wished us well. The buses arrived outside Jones Road and it looked in our eyes that there were thousands going in to watch us play, but once inside and standing on the pitch, there was a lot of empty spaces, but this did not deter us. The whistle blew and the game was on, and we thought no more about Croke Park. We might as well have been playing in the Phoenix Park for all we cared, we were

so concentrated on the match. We were well beaten that day by a far better team, but I had my day in Croke Park.

### **March 1966**

March 1966 saw great celebrations in Ireland, and to me personally, for a couple of days, great disappointment, and not because England were in the World Cup finals. As it was Lent, most people either gave up something they liked or did something that they would not do for the other eleven months of the year. I decided to go to 7.30am Mass every morning. So it was up on the new bike and down to Mass. I parked the bike in the stone pavement set out for bikes within the church grounds, locked the bike and went in to Mass. Out I came after Mass and headed for my bike, but it was not there. I could not believe that someone had taken it, as it was in the church grounds under the eyes of God, I felt He was at fault as I was doing a good deed. I searched the grounds but to no avail. I had to face home to tell the Ma that the bike was robbed and expect a good tongue-lashing. But she was calmer than I was.

“They’d take the eye out of your head and then come back for the other one,” she said. Off I went to the Garda station to report it. I am still waiting to hear back from them.

Monday 8th March at 8am news came across the wireless that Nelson’s Pillar had been blown up in the early hours of the morning. I had been up to the very top once. It was an amazing sight to see all over Dublin. The republican I.R.A. was blamed because it was March 1966 and Ireland was celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Easter rising. The television was showing the Irish play called the “Insurrection” for a number of weeks up to Easter and there was a pageant organised in Croke Park to reinact the Easter rising. So all the schools of Dublin were invited. The brothers and masters brought all the classes to Croke Park. Buses were organised and before we boarded, we all assembled in the schoolyard, as one of the pupils from the scholarship class was picked to read the proclamation. It seemed to go on for hours as we were dying to get going. Finished at last, all on the bus and away we went. When we reached Croke Park we looked down from the seats and there were guns and cannons, and the army was everywhere. There was a re-enactment of the Easter Rising 1916. Of course we tried to get nearer to the guns and cannons and there was a young F.C.A. soldier who did not look much older than us was guarding the artillery, and would not let us get near. As we walked away I shouted to him that he was one of Ireland’s only hopes, another one of my Uncle Dick’s many sayings that I picked up and did not know what it meant. The soldier took offence, walked towards me and gave me a clatter. My mates jumped on him and then all his mates came along. We were lucky, as one of the brothers came along before we

got hurt and broke the fight up. But the next day we were not so lucky, as we faced the leather and two on each hand for letting the school down.

### **The Last Primary Certificate in Ireland**

This was the Christmas 1966 exam results and the last exam before the Primary Cert. So it was heads down after the Christmas holidays as the Primary was the exam that decided the next school you went to, the Tech or Seco, or so the teachers told us. Some of the lads were planning to leave after sixth class and get a job. But the Ma always wanted me to go on to do the Inter and Leaving.

June 1967 arrived quickly and we set off with our pencil, pen, and ruler. We were waiting to see whom we had as our supervisor. Brother Cyprian or nickname Cypo, walked in and with a loud voice shouted at us to stay quiet and placed a chair against the door to stop anyone getting in. This made me more worried. I never had him in school, but he carried a reputation of being the hardest brother in the school. His claim to fame was the De La Salle boy's band and they represented the school at all the big occasions. Some of the lads that played in this band played with the show bands and are still playing today. He gave us some tips before the exam. I always remember him saying that when you start to do the Irish composition to start with "Is maith is cuimhnim lion" (it is well I remember). "This will open many doors to write about", he said. The composition I wrote was on the first day I went to school (Is maith is chimhnim liom an lá a chuigh mé an Scoile). It was a great tip, as I seemed to be writing forever. About eight weeks later I was one of the many that sat the exam that year to receive the last primary cert ever to be given out in Ireland again.

### **Mount Olivet House**

Mount Olivet was a big house overlooking Ballyfermot Road and Laurence Hill. This was the headquarters for the Legion of Mary in Ballyer and was a place where I have very fond memories. During the Summer evenings of 1966, I used to hang around the roads with some friends, and one of them suggested that we should join this club at the end of Ballyer, as there were some nice birds in it. Off we went and up the driveway of this massive house. Knocked on the door and a middle-aged lady answered. In we went and there right enough were a few nice looking girls. Now what we did not know was that by going in it would mean one meeting per week for an hour and a half and at the start of that meeting you would have to say the rosary and then you would be expected to do a bit of charity work as well by delivering Catholic papers to roads in Ballyer, selling some Catholic papers or holy pictures at the book barrow on a Sunday morning after Mass, visiting Stewards hospital on a Sunday afternoon and playing with the handicapped children, or some other good

deed, and reporting back on what you did at the next meeting. Most of the mates that started with me did not hack it for long, but I started to make new friends, both boys and girls, and we are all still great friends to this day. This is where I attended my first dance, which were called reunions and they would take place on a Sunday afternoons. We could bring cakes that our mothers made and there would be minerals. When it came to the dancing the boys would stand in one corner, talking about whom they were going to ask up for the slow set, and the girls would stand in another. As soon as the slow sets started we would dart across the floor to ask the girl that we liked up to dance, nine times out of ten another fellow was there first. Our leaders, Nicholas Brennan and Jim Daly, who are still doing great work in Ballyer today, would be circling the floor so that we would not be dancing too close to the girls.

Every Patrick's Day we started the hikes and would meet at the Church as a group and set off to the Dargle Valley, Pine Forest, or Massey's Estate, and this would continue right through the summer. We also had the ballad sessions on Saturday evenings, where people brought their guitars along and you could hear anything from Bob Dillon to the Dubliners.

It was through the Legion that I met a great friend, Danny, who lived on Kylemore Drive and as time went by I became very close to his brothers and sister and his mother became like a second mother to me. As the years went on we would all meet at his house to go to the football matches, dances, and to play cards long into the early hours of the morning. When we would all meet up at his house there were some great debates about the Catholic Church, football, sex (nothing has really changed since then, as the debates seem to be on the same subjects still). His mother always voiced her opinion and we listened. Nothing shocked her. She was a very homely person and anyone that called was always made very welcome and the first thing that went on was the kittle. Danny and his brother John were my best man and groomsman at my wedding in 1976 and we are still very good mates, along with all the other friends I made in the Legion.

### **The Seco**

The following September we started in St. John's College, nicknamed the "Seco". Just like the Deeler, there were brothers and masters teaching us. The only differences were that we were meeting new pals, as when we left the Deeler, some of the lads went to the Tech and some went to work. We had a different brother or master for each subject. Also we had to go in on a half day every Saturday as part of our teaching. Brother Cadajen was the head brother at that time and we were all assembled in a hall before we started in the school. "You are all young men now", he said, "and this may be the last school you go to before you start to work,

so you have to knuckle down and study”. He was very strict on the dress code, a tie to be worn while in the school and the hair short. Our class was upstairs and we were looking on to the main road. We were at the age now that we were noticing girls and Caritas College, which was the girls’ Seco, was just down the road. While we were waiting for the next teacher to come from his previous class we would be roaring out the top window as the girls were going home for lunch. Many a date was made from the top window of the Seco.

### **The Bus Strike**

The following Summer I got a job in the Martello Tower service station in Sandymount, serving petrol and checking oil and tyres. There was a national bus strike on at the time and the army lorries were on the road picking people up and leaving them into town, and then I would walk or thumb down a lift. Other times, if it was sunny, I would cycle out. One Friday evening I left work to head into town to pick up an army lorry at McBernies, to bring me to Ballyer. I walked to Ringsend library and there I managed to thumb down a lift. A Renault four pulled up and the man asked me where I was going. He told me that he was on the way to Donnybrook, but he must have felt sorry for me as he told me to jump in. As we drove along and exchanged small talk, I knew his face, but could not name him. His hair was very long at the back. I glanced around the car and then I saw a black and white picture of the man I knew and everyone in Ireland knew. It was Charles Mitchell, the newsreader on Telefis Eireann. I said, astonished, “You’re Mr. Mitchell”. He laughed. He drove me straight to the army lorry and gave me the picture and his autograph. I was thrilled to think he went out of his way for me. I could not wait to get home to tell me Ma, and I had an autographed picture to prove it.

### **School Holidays Over**

Back to the Seco and starting into second year. There were a few changes. No more Saturday mornings, to our delight, and we had a new head brother. His name was George and he stamped his authority, even before we went back into the classroom, as there was an inspection on the line and anyone not wearing a tie, or if their hair was a bit long, were sent home and told to get it cut. Two new young teachers started as well, one for science and one for maths. The science teacher came into the lab room and sat down, you could see that he was a bit nervous meeting us for the first time. He got a basin of water and put phosphorus into the basin and the phosphorus seemed to make the water circle within the basin. He then had an idea to make a paper boat, I feel this was to impress us, and sat it over the phosphorous and the paper boat circled the water to our amazement. Next thing there was a loud bang and the water went everywhere. The teacher asked us not to say anything

outside the class, as he was very embarrassed. We of course said “no sir” we would not. As soon as the bell rang we got to the door to leave the science room. We said to any students passing by “you know what that bleeding eejit did”. It soon spread around the school.

Another incident happened to the new maths teacher. As he was at the blackboard someone from the class threw a banger up the front of the classroom. We could all hear it sizzle and it seemed to take some time to explode. Everybody was watching it as the master was writing on the blackboard. Next there was a loud bang. The teacher jumped and the class collapsed in laughter. Not for very long. In came Brother Morris. He was small in stature, but we were all afraid of him when he was angry, and God, was he angry that day. Everyone was called up one by one and had to empty their pockets. Well what was found in our pockets that day was a sight to be seen. One lad had a butt of a cigarette, this was for lunchtime, to be smoked behind the sheds with some of the other lads. Another lad had a gat, another had a small penknife, and another had a half roll of toilet paper that his mother used to give him just in case he would be taken short. There was nothing sacred that day in class. The culprit was eventually found and suspended for a week from the school. We eventually did the Inter Cert and then it was time for me to think what I was going to do next, go to work, or go back to do the Leaving.

### **Working Career**

The uncle Dick knew someone that worked in the Evening Press, so off I went with him one day to meet this man. The Press was printed in Poolbeg Street at that time. The uncle and I were brought up a stairs into a big open area and it seemed to be very dark, even though the lights were on all the time, as there did not seem to be any outside light coming into the building. The printing machines seemed to be very old. We were led into his office. The man explained to me what the job involved. I was looking out the window into the open area and it seemed a very drab place to work. I thought to myself, this was not for me. When we came out into the sunshine I told the uncle what I thought of the place. He was very annoyed but eventually he got over it, although he thought I was mad to refuse the job as the Press workers were all on very good money at that time, but money is not everything. I applied for a stores man’s job in Huet Motors in Mount Street and got it. That was the start of my working career.

It was in Danny’s house one night where we all were gathered as usual and we were discussing forming a football team. I don’t know who selected the name Mount Oliver amongst us but it was well thought out as most of us were in the Legion or had just left. We formed a committee and one of the lads, Camillus, knew a manager. His name was Richie Kennedy, and is still involved in football



*Villa United*

in Parnell Square today. The committee organised raffles, chicken in the roughs, up in the Green acres and also organised buses to bring the people to and from the functions. We even had people like Father Michael Cleary, Sean Connors and Eileen Reid do Cabaret spots. This financed the club. Our matches were played in the Phoenix Park. Eventually the name was changed to Villa United and we had our home ground in the Deeler. More lads were joining throughout the years and a second team was formed. Mr Heffernan from Kylemore Road and Duchy McDonald from Kylemore Drive managed this side and the team had some success throughout the years. Many lads in Ballyer played with Mount Oliver / Villa United at one time or another through the 70s and the early 80s.

### **Housewife Of The Year**

1969 saw another first for Ballyer. Out of a total of 3,200 women from around the country, Mrs Ann McStay, who then lived in 339 Kylemore Road, emerged as the winner overall of the Housewife Of The Year and the first Dublin winner. This was a mother of eleven children, which included three sets of twins. She was also a very active member of Ballyfermot Community Association at that time. She became a celebrity overnight being interviewed by magazines and newspapers from far and near. Winning the competition meant £150 in cash and £150 in electrical equipment. I wonder what her prize money would be today for such a great achievement.

### **B.C.A. – T.V.**

The 1970s saw modern technology come to Ballyer. The outdoor aerials were getting scarce on the chimneys. Shopping stores were starting to get in closed circuit television. Phoenix Relays had finalised the installation of cable T.V. throughout Ballyer.

July 1974 saw Ballyer lead the way in Ireland. Ballyfermot Community Television. Initially operated in black and white, but due to an investment by Phoenix Relays in an outdoor broadcasting television unit, it was not long before programmes were being produced in colour.; Community News, cultural entertainment, documentary and consumer information was televised to every home within the area.

Then Phoenix Relays were forced, on financial grounds, to withdraw their services. A sub-committee became even more committed to the idea of community television for Ballyer. Negotiations were undertaken with the then Minister for Post and Telegraphs, Mr Connor Cruise O'Brien, and after lengthy talks, B.C.A. T.V. became licensed to operate on the Phoenix Relays cable T.V. The only other licence to broadcast then was Radio Telefis Eireann. Having advertised locally for new members there was a huge response. In the Summer of 1979, several pilot programmes were produced, directed, and presented completely by our new "volunteers" from Ballyer. Ballyfermot Community Television went from strength to strength.

### **Conclusion**

Looking back there are so many people to be thanked for bringing Ballyfermot from the 1950s to this present day.

The De La Salle Brothers, Nuns and Priests, for all their great work they have done throughout the years.

All the volunteers that donated their time to the community association from the beginning. All the people that gave their free time to setting up and running football clubs, and youth clubs.

The founder members, volunteers, and workers of Ballyfermot Credit Union down the years, which helped people buy out their houses, and curtailed the moneylenders.

And a personal thanks to the leaders of the Legion of Mary in Ballyfermot, not only for the friends I have made, but also the very happy memories that I had growing up in Ballyer in the '50s, '60s and '70s.

Nicknames or other words that may be construed to cause offence are only there to bring back the memories to the good people of Ballyfermot.

<b>Ballyer:</b>	Ballyfermot.
<b>Ecker:</b>	Homework.
<b>On the Hop or Mitching:</b>	Missing from school.
<b>Keeping Nicks:</b>	Watch out.
<b>Skutting:</b>	Hanging on to the back of a moving vehicle illegally.
<b>Crock:</b>	An old bike with no tyres on the wheels.
<b>Moule:</b>	Shore.
<b>Graver:</b>	Graveyard.
<b>Confo:</b>	Confirmation.
<b>Gat:</b>	Catapult or Sling.
<b>Paying by the Drip:</b>	Hire Purchase.
<b>Gig:</b>	Wooden trolley made of wood with wheels made with Ball Bearings.
<b>Deeler:</b>	De La Salle school, Mount La Salle.
<b>Seco:</b>	St John's Secondary College.
<b>Tech:</b>	Technical School.

And a personal thanks to the leaders of the Legion of Mary in Ballyfermot, not only for the friends I have made, but also the very happy memories that I had growing up in Ballyer in the '50s, '60s and '70s.

## Joseph Gavin' Memories

My Parents moved to Ballyfermot c. 1955. They were the first tenants at 12 Gurteen Park, which was then the newly built part of Ballyfermot. My Parents had married in 1950 in Crumlin, where both of their Parents lived. When they moved to Gurteen Park they already had three children, who had been born in Crumlin. I was the fourth child and I was born in the front bedroom of 12 Gurteen Park. I was delivered by the family GP, Dr O'Rourke who had his surgery on the first floor of a building, which was over a shop at the opposite end of the block from the Gala. I don't remember the name of the shop, but there was a lane way beside it and the second shop on the far side of the lane way was " Dirty Aggi's ".Two more of my sibling's were born in Gurteen Park, after me before we moved to Cloiginn Rd. Just as a matter of interest, my Parent's moving to Ballyfermot was a continuation of the clearing out of the Tenements and general conditions of squalor in the City centre. My Fathers family had lived in Ship Street and my Mothers family were from Bow Lane - James's street. Both families had been re housed, I think in the 1940s in the new suburbs of Kimmage and Crumlin.



I was born in Ballyfermot in October 1955, just five months after the Gala opened. My family left Ballyfermot when I was about 10 yrs old and I have not lived in Dublin for over 40 yrs. Reading the article on the Gala brought fond memories flooding back. Every Saturday myself and my siblings were dispatched to the afternoon matinee in the Gala regardless of what film was showing. Looking back I think Saturday afternoons was seen as "Alone "time by my parents. We like most of the other Inhabitants of Ballyer, had very little money, but every Saturday we were sent to the Gala, hail, rain or snow. We eventually had a family 13.I remember very well Harry the Hippo. He was a very portly man but he cut a fine swagger in His uniform and was a figure of authority to the hundreds of young boys and girls who formed a long, impatient line outside the Cinema. Harry would parade up and down the line, keeping everyone in check. If you were unfortunate enough to be caught "Messing" by Harry, He would catch you by the ear, and would remove you from your place in the line and frog march you to the very back, where he would place you before removing his hold on you ear. Writing this few lines has brought even more memories of Ballyfermot flooding back in my mind. I think I will just lie back for a while and let them flow freely.

## Growing Up In Ballyfermot

*Jenny Hendricks West*

Our family moved from Garden Lane, off Francis Street, to Ballyfermot early in 1955. I was two and a half years old and my twin brothers were six months old. Later that year, my Mother gave birth to another set of twins. My sister survived but my baby brother, Anthony, only lived for a day. My sister was so small that she slept in my dolls pram. It was a beautiful miniature version of a Silver Cross pram. (I was the eldest grandchild in my Dad's family and a bit spoiled!)

We lived in Gurteen Avenue and there were very few cars so the kids had the run of the road. We played chasing, skipping, beds, relievio, and marbles and swung on the lamp-posts. There was a laneway between Gurteen and Drumfin with a steep slope that was very popular with roller skaters.

### Schooldays

The only schools in Ballyfermot when I started school in 1957 were the Dominican Convent and the De La Salle. I remember kicking up a riot on my first day because my best friend was put into a different class to me. She was five and a half and was put straight into Senior Infants. My first teacher was Miss Supple and she helped me get over my little trauma. At the end of the first year, Miss Supple decided that a girl called Muriel and I should skip Senior Infants and go straight into first class – so I got to be in my friend's class after all. The classes were huge. There were 52 of us and it was very rare that everyone would be present. We moved from St Gabriel's to St Raphael's and had a nun teaching us for the first time – Sr Melchior. For fifth and sixth class we had a wonderful elderly teacher called Mrs Carroll. We did the Primary Certificate at the end of sixth class and as the minimum age to start work was 14, most of my classmates got jobs.

My two brothers went to school in Baggot Street. There was a bus that left every morning from the 'clinic' and brought them back there in the afternoon. By 1959 there was a school at the end of the road – Mary Queen of Angels. My Dad was adamant that the boys should go to the De La Salle. He didn't think a school run by lay teachers would be disciplined enough. I remember Fr Daly calling to the house to let my parents know that he wasn't very pleased with the arrangement.

My sister started school in St Louise's. They were very good to her. Her teacher insisted that her hearing be tested and she was right. After she made her First Communion, she was transferred to a special class for the deaf in the Dominican.

When I finished primary school, I went on to secondary school in St Dominics.



*Jennifer with her Class Dominican Convent 1965*

Less than 50 out of 500 who finished primary that year went on to secondary school. There were 24 in my class, but by the time we got to sixth year, there were only ten of us. Our classrooms were in the convent building. We could see the nuns underwear fluttering in the breeze from the corridor windows.

I liked studying science but the science teacher, Sr Sylvia didn't like me very much and advised me to study French instead. Our domestic science teacher was Sr Leo and she tried hard but was sometimes a little out of touch with reality. Our geography teacher was Miss Cullen who was known as Flossie because her hair was like candy floss. Geography class usually meant one of us having to read a chapter from our text book. The chapter on igneous rock was fun. Shists was mispronounced and dear old Floss never noticed. Shops or the lack of them!

Our closest shops were in Drumfin Park. Coyles is still there and hasn't changed very much. Dorans is twice the size it used to be having taken over where Herlihy's used to be. Then there was Christine's drapery and the chipper. On the other side of the park there was the butchers, hardware shop and Nolan's newsagents. Getting to the shops was so much easier when the laneway was there.

The shops I remember on the 'main' road were Joey's chipper, Doyles butchers, Bolands which was also the Post Office and, of course, Dirty Aggies. There was a ballroom on the corner which later became Powers supermarket. I remember my parents going to dinner dances in the ballroom when my Dad was involved in running the Soccer Roads League.

There were no houses opposite the Gala and no shops between Grange Cross and the church roundabout. Hector Grey sold goods from a van on the waste

ground beside the church on Sunday mornings. I remember the excitement when the Elephant supermarket opened on Blackditch Road. There were no shelves. Everything was stacked in boxes. As time went by and more shops were built, Ballyfermot was a good place to shop because there was so much competition – Quinnsworth, Gubays, Liptons (think I have the names right.)

### **Churches**

The big Assumption church is where I made my First Communion and Confirmation. It was a scary place especially for Confirmation day. It certainly wasn't a family occasion. Only priests and teachers were allowed into the church (and the bishop) and the doors were locked. It was terrifying hoping the bishop would not ask you a catechism question. I was only 9 because in those days you had your Confirmation in fourth class. There were so many priests then and so many masses and they were always packed. I remember particularly the childrens' service on Holy Thursdays. Fr Daly would be in the pulpit roaring at all the kids. It was a very unreligious experience. The altar was enclosed and the priest said Mass with his back to the congregation. Mass was in Latin and participation was minimal. In St Dominics, we spent the first few weeks of a new year learning all the Latin hymns so that we would sing at the closing of the forty hours adoration.

Back then, the Dominican nuns were not allowed to leave the school grounds. If a class taught by a nun had to go to a church ceremony then one of the lay teachers would have to supervise them. The Sisters of Charity were a different matter. I remember being terrified of Sr Colmcill in her big white bonnet. It didn't seem to matter that you didn't go to her school; she knew who you were anyway.

Canon Troy was another larger than life figure. He wasn't too fond of St Dominics and its pupils. Flossie definitely didn't like him because he once reversed into her car. We also wore the wrong coloured uniforms. He was a Kerry man and preferred the green and gold of Caritas College.

Before St Matthew's church was built, we used to go to Mass in St Louise's school. It was a bit odd! I still think of St Matthew's as the new church even though it is about forty years old. My son was christened there and my daughter had her First Communion and Confirmation there. They were definitely more family oriented ceremonies than mine were.

### **Miscellaneous Memories**

- Harry packing us in two to a seat in the Gala. At 9d each, it cost three shillings for my brothers, sister and I to go to the cinema. There was a matinee organised once a year by the church/schools. It was always a holy film!
- Travelling to work in Ballsbridge on the new 18 bus at a cost of 1s 5d.

- Visiting my cousin in Dr Steeven's Hospital in what was known as the 'Honda' ward because so many of the patients had been involved in motorcycle accidents.
- Going to Irish dancing classes in a hall at the back of Bolands. The dance school dresses were red.
- Walking through fields to visit relations in Bluebell when Kylemore Road ended at the railway.

## Heading for this

William O Flaherty described how Mr Fothrel, who farmed adjacent to the graveyard (old Ballyfermot House) lent a horse to his dad (who was from Wexford) to get the family's belongings to Ballyfermot from Swords where mother (from Charlemount, Dublin) and family were living. This is because William's Dad had previously worked for Mick Dunne of The Lees, Swords. William's dad brought the horse from Ballyfermot the day before the move so as to give the horse a rest for the return journey. This would have been in the 1930s (1937). Farm labours moved from farm to farm based on getting jobs by reading the newspapers.

William's family had to sleep in the cow shed on the first night as the previous farm labour, Mr Christopher Connelly refused to move out of the provided lodgings as he had nowhere to go. (In those times the labourer would get, in addition to lodgings, milk, potatoes and access to a water pump). Mr Connelly eventually got work in the paper mills nearby. (The context of this event arose from the Lord Wyndham Act 1903 ruling that if a labourer lost his job he would not automatically lose his lodgings. However, given that the labourer would not be getting cash once the job was done on the farm, he would automatically have to move on)

Williams recalls going to Chapelizod School, which he enjoyed, but moved on a year later. This was because William's Dad last task consisted of taking slates to Bannon's @ 7th Lock (where there used to be a pub). After unloading Mr Bannon asked would William's dad like a drink which he accepted. However in the meantime Fothrel's son came to get the horse but the reply he received, unfortunately, was 'I brought the horse here and I will bring it back and if Mr Fothrel does not like that he knows what he can do!'

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*Liam Keogh*

Recorded Interview with Liam Keogh on Friday the 30th November 2012 Copy of recording with Ballyfermot Library. By Liam Keogh, aged 91 years

It was in the mid 1920's that I first became aware of the annual Lourdes Pilgrimage to Lourdes, organised by the Oblate of Mary Immaculate Fathers in Inchicore.

This was a time before air travel was available so the journey to Lourdes was a long tedious one. It entailed a bus transfer from Inchicore to Dun Laoghaire, a boat trip to Holyhead, a five hour train journey to a seaport in the south of England, another sea crossing to France and finally another train journey through France to Lourdes which is situated at the foot of the Pyrenees Mountains in the south of France.

The Oblate Pilgrimage began with an early Mass in the Church of Mary Immaculate Inchicore which was attended by the Pilgrims and others who came to wish them bon voyage. There was great excitement as the travellers boarded the special buses to bring them to Dun Laoghaire.

It was mainly the more affluent people who could afford the cost of the pilgrimage.

Fr. Sweeney (from the Donegal gaeltacht), the Superior of the Oblate Fathers would lead the Pilgrimage. He had a great devotion to our Lady of Lourdes and was appointed a Canon of Lourdes by the Pope.

Fr. Sweeney was a very idealistic man and he came up with the idea of erecting an exact replica of the Lourdes Grotto in the church grounds in Inchicore as it would create some of the atmosphere of Lourdes for people who could not afford to go on Pilgrimages. He sent Brother McIntyre (a lay Oblate Brother, who was an architect) to make sketches and take measurements of the Grotto in Lourdes and, on his return, he started on the project.

Fr. Sweeney was a wonderful orator and a preacher and he made just one appear from the pulpit. He had a plan to organise a scroll containing the name of every family member whose family had subscribed five shillings to the fund and this scroll would be placed in a metal box and cemented into the niche under the feet of the Statue of the Virgin Mary.

The labour for the building of the Grotto was provided free. The tradesmen and general workers from the Great Southern Railway Works Inchicore came after finishing their day's work at 5.15 pm would arrive at the building site with their shovels, spades, wheel barrows and tools of the trades at 6.00 pm and work until it got dark.

A metal structure was erected and this was covered by coloured cement which looked like stone and this was moulded into the exact contours of the Lourdes Grotto. After the building was completed, Father Sweeney made arrangements to have chiming bells cast. These bells were installed in the church and would ring out every fifteen minutes and every hour would ring out a verse of the Lourdes Ave Maria. The bells were installed just in time for the Eucharistic Congress of 1932. Later the statue of the Crowned Virgin was erected. Fr. Sweeney made an appeal for unwanted gold and jewellery to be melted down and made into the Crown for the Head of the Statue. This statue is at the entrance to the Grotto Square.

Every year, a Novena to our Lady of Lourdes is held between 2nd February and 11th February. There is early Mass in the morning, rosary, a sermon and benediction at 8.00 pm and the Novena concludes on February 11th with a torchlight procession.

The 11th February is the anniversary of the first apparition in Lourdes.

On one occasion during the 1940's Fr. Sweeney organises a perpetual Rosary to be recited in front of the Grotto. This continued non-stop night and day for nine days and concluded with a Sermon by Father Sweeney, which was broadcast by Radio Eireann to the Nation. Work was slack in the Inchicore works and workers were on a three day week. He was praying for more work for the men. The day after the nine days Rosary was finished, the Inchicore Works received a huge order for new carriages and trains to be built and all the men were back working full time. They had overtime for months afterwards.

A wooden gazebo was erected to protect the volunteers who took it in turns to lead the prayers.

This is only from my memory as I remember the times.

## Le Fanu Road

*Kevin Kavanagh*

God ken, a book-full of memories growing up in Ballyer. Born there in '51. Played in the match box field (lawns) the jungle, (Nortons Field, where Semperit was) the meadow and the broken bridge, (C & C). Collected blackberries on old Killeen rd, where the gypsies lived in their old horse drawn caravans, spendloves. Larry Quinns, the pig man, or the slop man as he was also called. The backers, (clover hill). The Ritz, I was too young to get in. I often wonder, is Bolands the only original shop left in Ballyer.

## Kevin O'Connor

### *Hughie Lakes*

Both Hughie Lakes and Kevin O'Connor fund-raised for 'Our Ladies Hospital for Sick Children'. Kevin did not like the idea of collecting at Church gates as oppose to Hughie, but wanted still to help out.

It was when having a chat during October 1996 in the Wren's Nest corner in Tim Young's that Hughie came up with the idea of the Wren Boys. Kevin had the initial idea of collect 1 million pennies by going to the local pubs at the week ends.

During the Christmas period of '96 they had a head shaving charity event in Tim Young's. 25th December 1996 they had a swim / dip at the 7th lock to launch the group. Vinny Muldowney, who was a neighbour of Kevin, was nominated as the King Wren (Rí Drolin). The following day they had a parade from Liffey Gaels to the Cherry Orchard Club (where the tyre garage is now) and stopped at each pub to sing a song. Each pub got their own rendition of the verse

"The wren, the wren, the king of all birds  
Saint Stephen's day was caught in the furze,  
We got him there as you can see,  
And pasted him up on a holly tree.  
Hurrah, my boys, hurrah,  
Hurrah, my boys, hurrah.  
Knock at the knocker and ring at the bell,  
What will you give us for singing so well?  
Singing so well, singing so well,  
Give us a copper for singing so well."  
On the lines e.g. The County Bar is a very good pub  
Is a very good pub  
Is a very good pub

Over the two years they raised £2000 (punt). Monthly meetings occurred in the pub unless it was for something serious. Unfortunately for the 3rd consecutive year circumstance of life got in the way and prevented the Wren boys doing a tour of the pubs. There was disappointment on the spectators side as they were expecting them. Unfortunately the Wren's Boys fizzled out after a number of years.

## Kathleen Coates Currivan's Memory

What was always called Killeen House was the house occupied by the manager of the paper mill. When we were small kids in the 50's a Mr Montfort was manager and he had two daughters.. The main entrance to the mill was at the junction of Killen Rd .and the New Nangor, where Toyota is now and that was how you got into the house too. It was up behind the mill. You could see the house from Knockmitten Lane but you had to cross Cassells stream to get into it that way. There was a pitch and putt in front of it later on. It's kind of hard to get your bearings there now, but somewhere around got into the house too. It was up behind the mill. You could see the house from Knockmitten Lane but you had to cross Cassells stream to get into it that way. There was a pitch and putt in front of it later on. It's kind of hard to get your bearings there now, but somewhere around Diageo. A beautiful house! The Cunningham's were the last people that I knew of who lived in it. Brian Cunningham came up from Waterford to manage IPP Products on the Naas Rd. but of course that burned to the ground in a colossal blaze in '69. We lost contact with them after that.

### Remembering Christmas Past

*Brenda Farrell*

Sitting here remembering Christmas long ago when we were innocent and so so young. All of us having a bath one after the other then into ours pj's maybe watching a Christmas movie on TV. Ma would be in the kitchen cooking the turkey and ham that she had been paying off for the last six months in the butchers. The Christmas club they called it. Jesus they had it hard our ma and da's trying to get Santa for six of us and all the rest. New clothes and extra food goodies and Santa. Looking back now I understand how hard it was and the Christmases we got very little. But every Christmas was special and we as children never knew how they done it. But that's the way it was suppose to be. They made it magical. Just like to say a big thank you ma and da. I wish you were still here with us hugs and kisses to you both in heaven. Love you always. Breda

## Growing Up In Ballyer

*Ballad and Poem Ken Larkin*

I remember waiting that day for the Lorry to pull up.  
We had our Furniture ready just to load up.  
We were moving to a housing estate the year was '55.  
My Mother, Sister and myself our whole lives were to come alive.  
We loaded our Furniture the bit that we had and we pulled away  
from Buckingham street indeed I was not sad.  
The new adventure was starting we did not know it yet.  
As the lorry roared towards Ballyer and the night was very wet.  
The lorry turned off Ballyfermot Road and on to the Drive.  
I was guessing as to what house that we would all reside.  
Then we stopped outside this house with 2 rooms up and down  
Number 33 was on the door and it seemed miles from Dublin town.  
We started in the local school and the games we began to play  
Were Conkers, Marbles, Skipping and Piggy these games are  
replaced with Computer today.  
Our Communion and Confirmation came along and our  
Parents did us proud and we were dressed in our Sunday best  
as we went out on the Town.  
So we moved on to Mount La Salle this was the school to be in  
The brothers and the teachers taught us all how to win.  
They taught us Gaelic and hurling and we played it after school.  
They did not let us play soccer because they did not know the rules.  
Then we did our primary cert, as we had to leave that school and  
so we had to move on to the college or tech to start another renewal.  
We moved into St John's and had to buckle down.  
As our teachers told us this was the best college in town.  
We had to go in on a Saturday morning to Focus for our Inter.  
We worked hard that September but lost heart by the winter.  
I remember the Stew house where the Nuns gave out the meals.  
Sometimes we would go there to buy the penny deals.  
I remember the youth Clubs in Ballyer and Mount Olivet too where I have many  
happy memories of all that passed through.  
I remember the Ballad sessions we had on a Saturday night.  
When all the young people carrying guitars, would assemble through the night.

Ballads would be sung Poems would be recited and all the members remained very united.

Mount Olivet football club is where we played the Soccer.

We met and trained and played the game and we We were there for each other.

Hardy's was the venue where tactics were discussed.

Plans and dreams were made there. But often we fouled up.

Saturday was the Gala day where we spent our turf money.

We would head to dirty Aggie to buy our cleaves and goodies

And when we would get to the Gala door big Harry would

greet us with a roar. Saying, "If you mess I will be here and you will get in no more"

As I drive through Ballyer and the memories come flooding back

I think of all the bygone days the lads and all the craic.

I try to tell my kids of the days that have gone past

So they can pass it on to make the memories last.

## The Stew House

*Brenda Farrell*

God I remember the stew house. There was many a family fed there. If you brought old news papers you would get current cake to bring home. I hated going. But bellys had to be fed. All our neighbours used it at one time or another. Back then you could not afford to be proud. Hand me down clothes from one child to another. School books from one sister to another. Playing skipping Red Rover, Rounder's, Hide and seek. All the old games out on your road till all hours of the night in summer. There was no fear of a car running you down. Or mad men running off with you. Everyone looked out for everyone. One mammy was everyone's mammy. If you fell down two or three mummies ran to pick you up. If there was a fight all mummy's stopped it. No such thing as your child's fault everyone got a wallop. Ha ha we are all the better for being born in Ballyer. I have to say I'm very proud to be a Ballyer girl. Even if I live in Australia now. I will always have my memories.

## GROWING UP IN BALLYFERMOT

# Landen Road 1948

*John Deering Kylemore Avenue*

My Family moved to Ballyfermot in 1951 two years before I was born. Like many of the new residents to the new scheme they came from the inner city. They had lived in Blessington St., which was within a short walk of O'Connell St. and they'd enjoyed the nearness of amenities, schools, shops, churches and parks. It was also a good, local and settled community. However, the cramped and unsanitary living conditions in the inner city, were a breeding ground for many diseases i.e. T.B, Polio etc. and a constant worry for parents of young children. Moving to Ballyfermot would alleviate that worry somewhat, but would provide its own challenges.

The 1950's in Ireland were a difficult time, unemployment was rife and the immigration boats were full, going to places like Britain and America. Stagnation and paralysis by the Government led by De Valera, didn't help. Ballyfermot at that time was a reflection of the countrywide situation. Within a short space of time, the new estate of Ballyfermot, saw the mass arrival of people with no connection to the locality, or each other. There were many people of different backgrounds, i.e. Dublin, country, employed, unemployed, dysfunctional, aspirational, and almost all with medium to large families. Having a steady job of course was beneficial, but low wages and long hours made making ends meet, difficult. My Dad worked on the railway and came within that category.

Although Ballyfermot's facilities were few in the beginning, Dublin Corporation to their credit had built blocks of shops like on Decies road, Grange Cross and later in Drumfinn and Claddagh Green. The schools and church came on stream quite quickly after that. The Gala cinema, built mid-fifties was a palace compared to the flea pit in Chapelizod called the Oriel with its bench seats and roaming gangs of ruffians. The ushers and usherettes in the Gala took no nonsense and if they came calling at the end of your row with their strong shining torches, you knew you were in trouble. One such usher was Harry the Hippo, he was as the name suggests a big man, but also quick witted and used it to put unruly young and not so young in their place. There was even a 'ballroom' called the Ritz where the 'teddy boys' hung with out with their funny haircuts, and drain pipe trousers.

The depressed fifties were replaced by the upbeat sixties with a new Taoiseach Sean Lemass. The opening of RTE in 1961 set the scene and the huge aerials that were tied to chimneys all over Ballyfermot, were a symbol of the new age. Windy nights were often followed by mornings with many aerials hanging off roofs, which meant no television reception until they were remounted. Early popular home-grown

programmes like Tolka Row and the Late Late Show were mixed with imports like The Fugitive and the Virginian.

The founding of the Ballyfermot Credit Union in that period released many households from the loan sharks and the cheque companies, with their high interest rates and default penalties. My mother was one of the first to join and her account number was in the first hundred. The visit of JFK in 1963 saw a great turnout of people including myself from Ballyfermot to see him at Parkgate Street as he drove to see President de Valera at the Aras. The old ‘walk on buses’ had a large Stars and Stripes flag on the radiators of the buses.

I started school in the 1960’s in the Convent school which is now the Resource Centre. I remember a nice teacher named Miss Lally in first class and would have liked to have met her in later life. The Convent school gave way to the De Salle School (The Dealer) where more robust teaching methods were employed. Bros. Abie and Cyprian ‘Sipo’ were some of the names that loomed large in the lives of school kids in Ballyfermot at that time. Mind you, the class sizes were 50 plus, with their fair share of unruly kids, who probably did need a strong hand. Another name was Herbert the school attendance officer a short, stocky, red-haired, crew cutted, ex-army ogre with a reputation like the child catcher in Chitty Chitty Bang Bang. He was the nemesis of all those who knew Lynch’s Lane a bit too well. (Lynch’s lane was where the mitchers hung out, when they should have been at school).

In the early days Grange Cross could be said to have be the village centre with its variety of shops with their own styles and character e.g. Ruane’s, Herlihy’s, Boland’s and Prescott’s dry cleaners. Then there was Aggies, with the formidable Aggie herself, whose presence and demeanour struck fear into anyone who might expect service with a smile, or freshness of produce, for their hard earned money. However it’s been said that she did have soft side and could be generous to those in need.

There have been changes in Ballyfermot over the decades. Once known as Bally-far-out, it probably could be called Bally-not-far-from-anywhere now, because of its closeness and central position in the city. The spirit and will of its people has been a shining light throughout the decades. It has given birth too many celebrities and people of note who can thank Ballyfermot for the good upbringing and schooling, which was and is second to none. Not saying there aren’t problems and improvements to be made but Ballyfermot has come a long way from those pioneering days and has a bright future.

