

Reminiscing Project “Back in My Day”



Volume 1



Comhairle Contae Thiobraid Árann
Tipperary County Council



Reminiscing Project

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This is a Tipperary Age Friendly Older Peoples Council project which capture stories and tales of the past, listening to the voices of older people across County Tipperary.

Introduction

The people who feature in the pages of this publication are unique. They lived in a country that has by now changed beyond recognition from that of their youth. The world in which they were young has vanished. Their parents had overcome the aftermath of the civil war, suffered the traumatic years of the economic war and witnessed the horrors of World War II and its aftermath. They were born into a traditional, conservative, closed and economically backward country. Their forging of a new country and a new society is not alone worthy of record but an achievement to be admired and treasured. For a long number of months now they have witnessed a pandemic stalking the land, claiming comrades and friends and yet they have soldiered on as they always have done. Their humour and serenity continue to shine through.

These are their stories. ...

Chapter 1: School and Growing Up

Although many decades have passed, school continues to be an abiding and powerful memory in the minds of all who reminisce. There is a great variety of experience and it is that very experience that paved the way for the new and changed Ireland in which we live today.

Coming to school was the first major childhood ordeal - "My mother took me through hedges and ditches", "My mother drove me in a baby ford", "Going to school in my bare feet and getting drowned to the skin". "I had a fine pair of hobnail boots on walking the two miles to school in 1947". Walking three miles in bare feet to a school at the foot of Slievenamon as a four year old must have been daunting and we can feel the lonesomeness and hear the sobbing of a pupil on the 1 ½ mile trek in 1952. Not even allowed to sit beside her brother, she was scared. Many had magical experiences at school and one lady was very proud of never having missed a day. The teacher stood them around in a circle facing the fireplace, all reciting prayers after her. She taught them to count on used thread spools tied on a piece of twine over the fireplace. The subjects varied from art and science, algebra and geometry to Latin and Greek and with over thirty pupils in most classrooms or even forty two in a one teacher school teaching was a herculean task. They wrote on slates and perhaps the boy who "slung" the slate at the teacher on his first day had a sense of foreboding for the future. Time and again, it is the memory of corporal punishment that dominates - "hitting on the hands with a stick for not knowing something, slapped for being wrong or late, I was scared, a very strict male teacher". "School was hard and I hated it". "Pupils were regularly asked by adults "How many slaps did you get today?!" Fear was a constant companion of childhood and yet another person to be feared was the dentist when eight pupils were bundled into a hackney car and taken together for extractions with no parents present and returned to the school to make their way home in the evening. Other teachers were "lovely, taught knitting, sewing and crochet, how to darn a sock or turn a heel, no bad memories of school, it was the making of my future life". Needless to mention, the outside shared dry toilets with the timber bench and the hole in it were nobody's favourite and it is hard to believe that there was even school on Saturdays. Most pupils brought a sod of turf to school every day for the classroom fire but nevertheless most speak of the cold in the classroom that never seemed to give way to stoves or roaring fires.



The church had a huge presence in schools. With a large crucifix over the fire, the priest visited often and asked catechism questions. Once a year, the diocesan inspector came and asked every individual a question. The children wore their good clothes on the day and got a half day when it was over. There were May altars and Sacred Heart altars. The names of those who contributed to the priests' collection were called out in class to be entered into the ledger by the master. The missionary nuns also came to the school to collect money "for the black babies".

The outstanding memory is of the games played in the school yard or school field-hurling and football, basketball and table tennis, skipping, hopscotch, ring a rosie, tag, broken statues, rounders, little races, I spy and handball although the tragedy of a handball doubles partner dying at a young age from TB is still remembered. All testify to the physical health and resilience of the pupils and their ability to make use of the simplest of materials for hours of enjoyment in the days before every toy had to have flashing lights and a keyboard.



There seems to have been quiet time too for reflection and personal growth long before subjects like mindfulness came to the fore. The images that really impressed me were those of the girls playing shop with leaves, grasses, sticks and pebbles for groceries and the everlasting camaraderie of the journey home from school as they sheltered under a railway bridge from the pelting rain and so excited when the train passed overhead.

Hints of dark times also permeate-the injections and the sugar cube for polio, kept at home because of the sirens during the war, the poverty and the cocoa, the discriminating treatment on socio-economic grounds, a sense of education favouring the well to do and particularly the fact that perhaps due to the death of a father, primary school was the first and last experience of the education system for many as they left to work for farmers or emigrated. The money was either handed up to the parents or sent home as remittance.

Yet, all in all, those never to be forgotten days of school and growing up in harsher but simpler times still hold a fond resonance for all the contributors.

Chapter 2: Family and Household

There is a distinct contrast between family life today and that of our correspondents. Families were much larger and even though there were very few “facilities” as we understand them, there was hardly ever an idle moment. One speaks of a family of fourteen on a small rural farm. There were often nineteen in the house and the older members helped with the younger children. One lady lived down a lane with four houses where an elderly lady would offer them mi-wadi when they called in for cake and a chat. The servant men on the farm lived in the boys’ room across the yard the term “boys” was often used for the younger male members of a family for whom it was obvious there was not enough room for all and they would have to seek their fortune elsewhere. In most cases, the grandparents lived with the families. In another house there were six brothers and four sisters described as “not saints nor devils” and everyone helped out. Many girls stayed at home helping the mother who seldom worked outside the home. The young girl would typically help with the ironing where the brick was thrown into the fire until red hot and then inserted in the metal frame of the iron and used until the brick went cold. In towns too, families were large “eight to nine in the house up to 1949” and they played in the streets with no cars. Another speaks of thirteen in the family and for all, the homes were ones of happy memories” where we made the home happy but fought as well”, where birthdays were celebrated and where communions and confirmations were celebrated by going in a drive in the trap. Even if “my mother gave me a clip in the ear and I ran away with a friend and wouldn’t answer her call”, large families with their ability to improvise, consider, help and be entirely free of any self-centred behaviour stood the children in good stead throughout their lives.

For many, particularly the seven who lived in a two up, two down cottage, the presence of a grandparent was inspirational. As the father had to emigrate to sustain the family, he “wired” money to the Post Office in town where Mam collected it every Saturday. One of the children worked on the farm next door for half a crown a week and when the time came the eldest sister emigrated also at the age of fifteen. If the father had a grand steady job, he placed the £5 wage packet on the mantelpiece every Friday evening-they never had a bank account.



One grandfather hitched up the ass and cart every Friday and headed into town for the pension and a few pints. On his return, he would warm himself at the range with his pockets full of bull's eyes for the children. When a father died and the mother had to go out to work for instance in the clothes factory in Cahir, it was the grandfather who took over the rearing of the children, gave them their dinner when they came in from school and had a big fire lighting in the grate. Eventually when one of the children became a successful hairdresser in Clonmel and bought a car, the mother could retire and spend many happy years with her children. Another grandfather, born in 1902, was a stonemason living in one of four artisan dwellings with an open fireplace where all food was cooked. There is a wonderful description in the accounts of a grandmother living with a family. The grandmother was twenty-five years younger than him. Her wardrobe consisted of two black shawls, two black blouses, two pairs of boots laced up high, pink and blue bloomer knickers and black skirts with black aprons. Another recounts plaiting her Granny's hair and receiving a 3d bit. The women all wore skirts and head scarves then.

In the present era of exponential growth in diets, organic health foods and fads, it is apt to remember that home grown and produced healthy food was the staple diet of all our contributors. However, the butter maker is recorded as spreading butter on his bread with a butter pat and consequently suffering coronary problems. One of a family of ten "loved rabbit stew, roast chicken from our own hens, homemade egg, custard, stewed apple and rhubarb". White and brown soda bread and currant bread was made in a pot over the fire with the coals or sods of turf heaped on top-that house had no electricity until 1963. Bacon and cabbage seems to have been everybody's favourite with some taking a shine to a pig's head. Almost every family killed a pig at home and shared the victuals with the neighbours. A special treat was a Marietta biscuit with butter while another treat was an apple or an orange. We must remember that during the forty days of Lent, families fasted by having one main meal and two supplementary meals called collations. Many doing hard physical work were hungry during Lent, a time when dances were also prohibited. Because the open fire was the only heat source and so important in the preparation of food, whoever was up first lit it. Looking back, many felt "that spuds had a lovely taste, the butter was nicer and vegetables tasted better when you grow your own". "The spud would nearly peel itself." "Colcannon was my favourite dinner with the first of the new potatoes. No matter how I do them now, I can never have them like my mother's." With up to sixty hens under the eaves, eggs formed an important part of the diet. Generally, it was the mother who looked after the hens and collected the eggs. Day old chicks would often arrive by bus or in one recording, the travelling shop is remembered with roosters and cocks along with apples and seed potatoes. It also sold household goods such as threads, wool or laces. There was always plenty of work to be done around the house including God's work which included saying the rosary every evening which included the trimmings which were much longer than the five decades. Evening devotions took place every Sunday and there was the annual May procession. Preparations for the First Friday visit by the priest involved a lot of dusting and cleaning as did the weeks of preparation before the stations when the house got a thorough makeover. Providing fuel and water was family work. Almost every child carried water from the well, mountain stream or pump in the yard and collected kindling or dead branches (cipins) from the hedgerows to start the fire.



The boys generally cut sticks for the early stages of firelighting. Many enjoyed going to the bog to save turf although the work must have been backbreaking. Milking, saving hay, cutting scolláns, sowing and gathering potatoes all featured and the favourite parts of saving hay were making sugáns or riding the dray car from the meadow to the haggard. Even dandelions and nettles were collected in spring". Compulsory tillage during the war was a huge burden but there was some consolation in getting sixpence a gallon for blackberries in order to go to the matinee. There was also sixpence for a rabbit so snares were plentiful and lamping widespread. In the home, children learned life skills from their parents. Fathers would paint, mend shoes, thatch, set potatoes, sow vegetables and display a wide range of household skills watched and aided by their children. An unusual job, long since died out, was the operation of a lime kiln on some farms with its layers of burning timber and stone and the emergence of the blue flame to signal that the process of converting stone to lime was complete. Mothers would knit, sew, darn, iron, wash, dust, polish, make butter, milk, feed calves, light the oil lamp at dusk, bring home the messages, turn coats with the motto" wear it out or hand it down". Generally flour was bought in a four stone bag. When the flour was used, the flour bag was washed and made into pillow cases or if you had a few they would be made into sheets.

Under the Four Pole Continental Big Top * Remember it's DUFFY'S - That Is Your Guarantee * *

JAMES DUFFY & SONS

CIRCUS

WILL VISIT THIS TOWN FOR ONE DAY ONLY
CLONMEL WED MAY 11

LES AFROS - Direct from Belgium
 BRIGITTE - Direct from Brussels
 BUFFALO BILL, Inc. - Direct from U.S.A.
 AMY ORLAY - Gipsy, Poetess, Entert.

CHANDOO - The Top Mystic from India, Tricks with Death
 ALSO APPEARING
 THE 3 KURACKENS HORSESS, PONY'S, CLOWNS
 BARE BACK HORSE RIDERS
 L'ORCADE DE L'AIR - THE HUMAN BAT

THE 2 MALLARDS Acrobatics
 THE SENSATIONALS 1966 SHOW BAND
 JACKO JINKS
 IN HONEY FANTASY from Switzerland
 MASTER RICK'S - ILUSSIONIST

* Prices in half all classes
 Our 1966 Programme is the Best Ever
Twice Daily 4 & 8 p.m.
 Admission 5/6 4/6 3/6 2/6
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 No Half-price for Children at Night Performance

Later they were used as tea towels. The mothers did the most unpleasant jobs like using the washing board until the hands were raw, starching the white surplises for the altar servers or emptying the chamber pots from under each bed on the dung heap outside in the yard. They also kept the fire going, sometimes with the help of the bellows. A more pleasant job was polishing the silver once a month! For most there was no running water, no phone, no television, no electricity, no car. One really telling quote was "we had no television but we had Mam and Dad"- what a wholesome house that must have been! The radio, run on dry or wet battery was a great draw

although we can still sense the disappointment in the voice of the girl so many years later when she describes how they could not listen to the wireless from Thursday on in case the battery ran out for the match on Sunday. Tipp V Cork matches were the height of excitement in packed kitchens and outside windows at the time. Only a couple of cars are mentioned-"a black Hillman two door which was my father's pride and joy" and "a blue Ford car in which my father would not allow me sit". The cars had to be started by cranking lever. Nights were filled with board games, singing, playing music and of course playing cards often for geese or turkeys although one great yarn tells us that it was often the same turkey in every house! Maybe once a year Duffy's circus arrived. A frugal life, centred on one's family home and community full of joy, happiness and wonderful memories that lasted a lifetime.

Chapter 3: Work Days



Whereas the family memories of households, the work in the home and the food that was eaten had much in common over the decades, the adult working experience is varied and wide ranging. Many of our contributors continued to work on the farm, initially without much heavy machinery. Farms in many cases were small and families were large so there was an amount of under employment and many took to working for other farmers in the area. One correspondent worked on a pig farm and also worked with a local farmer at labour intensive tillage and ploughing, eventually driving a combine harvester and tractor and checking on cattle. Having helped out on the farm at home, one lad "married a good looking farmer" and continued to help out. For others there wasn't enough work on the land so they moved to a nearby bacon factory in the town. The work on the farm could be physically daunting. "Lifting bales of hay in summer was a killer". Other chores on local farms involved thinning beet, making hay, milking cows and hunting cattle". "By six or seven we were able to milk cows". It was great being at a threshing when everybody involved around the place celebrated with a barrel of stout. Everybody was so happy in the evening". Sowing potatoes, cabbage, garlic, carrots and parsnips attest to the self-sufficiency of many families but picking potatoes in November was a trying task.

"We had a lot of tillage, maybe ten acres of beet, mangles and turnips and we were the ones that did all the thinning. "We weren't allowed to wear trousers then so bags were put on our knees. We crawled through the drills on all fours, up and down drills that were over a furlong long."

"Helping out at the fair day was great". But the paucity of work on the farms led many to the emigrant boat. "I had to go to England at fourteen and a half as there was no work available and my family could not afford the cost of the secondary school". "I went to England when I was eighteen. I worked there for many years and loved the country. The English were very kind people. I worked in Reading". A longing to see the world also led to emigration. This voluntary journey led one lady to work in Thailand-washing babies in orphanages. She then had a video shop in Thailand, worked in China and Barcelona in restaurants before returning to set up her own video shop in Thurles. For many who stayed, life was exciting and challenging. "Worked in the local post office, loved meeting people, lived upstairs and worked in the Post Office downstairs". Another lady finished her leaving Cert in 1965 and went to Dublin to the Civil Service".

It was a pensionable job and at least we had a week's wages-this covered rent, clothes, food and train fare home". Other jobs mentioned are drapery assistant (sometimes six days a week), cooking at the Big House, a nurse in a sanatorium, working in the bookies when she was eighteen which she hated, working at a cinema, a dressmaker, a housekeeper for a doctor or working in a small country hotel. Many did not lack entrepreneurship and most seemed to enjoy their work such as helping granny tidy the house and doing some gardening. One lady worked in the supermarket doing the books, ordering and checking goods. She then met some progressive farmers and began a bulk buying group for the purchase of animal feed, diesel, silage wrap and fertilizer. Next ,she started a relief milking service for farmers to allow them to take days off and managed that for twenty years.

Later she was the transport and office manager for a large transport company. Surely one of the most interesting jobs was driving a judge around the eastern and western circuit-he was brought to the pub in the evening" and "used to fall out". Another contributor ,whose Dad worked in the council, worked with the same council for thirty years". "I loved my job, great company and messing. Worked everywhere in Tipperary. Started at seven in the morning and would get home at 10:30 at night - tough work in hot weather."

The world of work, when you could get it, could be interesting and stimulating but we are left with the feeling of too little work for too many people and an economy that had yet to catch up with the remainder of Europe and where emigration and lack of opportunity stalked the land. Despite all, people were happy and were compensated by a vibrant social life and the making of great and lasting friendships.

Chapter 4: Marriage, Relationships and Friendship

It was all so different when it came to socialise, make friends, begin relationships and eventually marry. The principal opportunities for meeting up were the local dancehalls and sporting occasions. Many girls had brothers who played hurling, many played camogie but there was also mention of sports that have faded away such as walking races and skittles. One correspondent loved playing golf and established great friendships although, unfortunately, he now has Parkinson's disease and can no longer play. A lovely picture of living on Slievenamon during their youth emerges from the accounts. Many emigrated but the Land Commission built houses in the valley and everyone could visit each other as visiting was also a very important part of socializing. They played football in the village and went to matches in Clonmel and Thurles. One young man was allowed to go to the pub with his father when he was home from England. Cinemas were popular as not everyone could afford to rent a television. Cycling was also good fun. They played cards in neighbours' houses. One woman met her husband because his brother drove the bus to the Bingo. But few can beat the lady who met her husband by placing an advertisement in the Farmers' Journal. They had a big wedding and went to Cork afterwards. She wore a costume for the ceremony. Others met on walks, one woman married the man who whistled past her shop every day and many were married locally to girls whom they met out walking. In the country, there were a few outstanding organizations that fostered social interaction. At sixteen you joined the pioneers. Every summer they went to the seaside for a day and didn't return home until daylight. Very few young people drank alcohol. For the over seventeens there was Macra na Feirme. They ran competitions in drama, public speaking, debating, farm tasks etc. They travelled to other Macra clubs in the winter with a car taking seven or eight people! Talent competitions were a great draw, tea was served and tickets were raffled. During Lent, there were no dances and so they learned plays such as "The Belle of Boolavogue" and performed them in the local hall. In summer there were field evenings with stock judging, agricultural quiz, household quiz, best sponge cake and sometimes flower arranging with lots of sideshows such as best dressed lady. Tea and buns were served afterwards in a well cleaned out shed. One couple, having spent their honeymoon in Cork, Kerry and Clare, returned on their way home to the field evening in Golden where they had first met.

COLLINS BALLROOM

CLONMEL

Easter Dancing Programme

EASTER SUNDAY, APRIL 18th

JACK HANLEY

Dancing 9-2 ☉ ☉ Licensed Bar ☉ ☉ Admission 7/6

EASTER MONDAY, APRIL 19th

GALLOWGLASS CEILI BAND

With M. C. Conchubhair O Riain, Clonoulty.

Dancing 9-1 ===== Admission 5/-

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 21st

THE VICTORS

With PAT McGEEGAN and ART SUPPLE

Dancing 9-1 (—) Admission 6/-

Coming: The DRIFTERS, MIAMI, ROYAL BLUES, CAROLINE, MEMPHIS, DERMOT O'BRIEN

Of course, going to Mass on Sunday was where you met all the neighbours for a chat. One man used to go shooting for rabbits and pheasants on a Sunday afternoon "until the farmers ran us." One girl tells of meeting all the girls at a crossroad and playing handball and skipping.

But the great agent of social interaction which led to so many marriages was the local dance. "Met my partner at the local dance-went out for five years." "Dancing in Collins Hall where I met my husband." "Usually went to dances in Ballypatrick with the showbands on a Sunday night". A marquee was set up in Ballypatrick for dances and buses came from Killusty to see the local showband-could be 1,200 at a dance". Dance halls did not allow

alcoholic drink". I met my husband in a dancehall in Dublin." "I met the love of my life in a dancehall in April and got married the following January". "Went to the hall in the local town dancing. It cost 6d to go in. Women wore short dresses, men wore suits. It was always packed". "We did set dancing, no jiving. Cost five pence to get in, started at eight and finished at ten." "I met my husband at a dance in Donegal town". "I met my wife at a dance at Cloughjordan where I was playing the music".

Another lady met her husband when he came into her shop to buy cigarettes. Cigarettes were the utmost cool accessory although one woman who felt really cool with a cigarette in her hand when she met her husband for the first time was advised to see his father who was dying at a young age from smoking-that finished the cool smoking! The dances finished at twelve in the winter and one in the summer. They then had to make their way across the dark fields.

I think that the best story from the dancehalls is from the dance in the village hall for the Legion of Mary. Halfway through the dance, the music stopped and they all knelt down to say the rosary. But the girls spent their time not in prayer but looking at the soles of the boys' shoes-you could tell a good dancer by his shoes! Getting ready for dances was great fun. One girl in a house with electricity palled with girls in a house with none who came home with her on the weekend to have their hair washed. Mammy had a vacuum cleaner with an attachment that would dry your hair and the girls loved it.

If you had a boyfriend you met him at the cross. He would never call to the house unless it was serious. Las Vegas in Templemore and the Premier in Thurles were big dance venues. Ladies on the left and fellows on the right "like a stampede at a cattle mart when the music started". However, the reply to "Dance please?" was often "Sorry, I am dancing" or "Sorry I am promised".

Weddings were generally early in the morning and tended to be small, mainly family occasions". Only the four of us at the wedding due to the in-laws!". "The wedding reception in Kilsheelan and the reception in Clonmel with 52 guests, mostly family as my husband was one of ten". "My wedding was a lovely family occasion in Costelloe's of Limerick and Raheen Church". "It was snowing on my wedding day. We went to Salthill afterwards. I bought a coat and went for a walk on the beach". "Very small wedding, I wore a navy suit, money was tight. We went home afterwards and I went back to work after three days". "Family members on both sides only". "We got married in Nenagh in 1972 and had the reception in O Meara's Hotel". "We had a small wedding in Carlow and honeymoon in Athlone."

Many miss their old friends particularly if they have passed or emigrated. The only method of contact for many years was writing letters. Some are still friends with the children of their own friends. "My best friend at 2school was my best friend throughout life. Old friends are best". "I had two great friends growing up and still have them today". But there is sadness too in the quote "Of the friends I grew up with, only a few are left".

There wasn't much mischief or devilment-stealing apples and gooseberries "A lot of mischief with the fellas, devilment at work with shaving foam", "We never got into mischief, we hadn't the time".

The reminiscences of socialising, marriage, relationships and friendship show a vibrancy and a love of life and living that is full of real joy and happiness and has outwitted the slings and arrows of life. Their memory of youth is still inspirational today.

Chapter 5: Traditions, Sayings, Pastimes, Social and Sporting Activities

It is in this final chapter that the gap between then and now is at its widest and much that is described would be totally foreign to younger readers. Ireland underwent a sea change in the lives of our contributors but what leaps from the pages of their reminiscences is the joy of living when one is young along with a simplicity and integrity that is so difficult to find in today's world. One contributor mentions his favourite song "Stop the World" and that is what we attempt to do in our final set of memories.

Music is always central to young people's lives. Showbands, country and western and céilí music were the favourites although one person loved the Edge and U2 while another really enjoyed classical music. Small showbands like the Melody Makers or the Conquerors played at weddings, dances and parties. There were often great sessions in the homes where people sang along to songs such as "Tipperary so far away", "Slievenamon" and emigrant songs like "A mother's love's a blessing". A few of our contributors played the music, whether drums or accordion, for sets and sessions. Of course, listening to music on the wireless was everybody's pastime. But it is the big names that recur again and again particularly at the carnivals - Big Tom, Joe Dolan, Johnny McEvoy, Brendan Bowyer, Dickie Rock, The Dixies, Sean Dunphy and of course the much beloved Big Band leader, Mick Delahunty. For most, dancing and playing sport were their favourite pastimes while one woman rounded up and rode out ponies for Mrs. La Terrier at Kiltinan Castle and in the autumn went foraging and picking blackberries to sell and earn some money. One person was a referee and umpire and officiated at some big matches and many underage games. The mothers gave him some hassle and one day he got a belt of a handbag!

Religion was central to their lives in a manner that is difficult for today's younger generation to understand. Rosary and Angelus were said every day and night with the "trimmings" of the rosary often much longer than the central part. "The family who prayed together stayed together". Mass was compulsory on Sundays and feast days when "compulsory" meant "compulsory" and very few missed mass.

For the Protestants among the contributors, religion didn't feature much at home and this contributor became a Buddhist in recent years. Monthly confession and communion were also a feature as was abstinence from



some food or treats during Lent which was called fasting. Women wore hats and scarves at mass and sat in the left side pews. Men sat on the right. The wealthy had allocated pews. Every five years, there would be a mission-confessions and sermons about purgatory and hell, loads of indulgences to be had and a travelling shop came with the mission selling icons, prayer books and rosary beads. There was a procession up Slievenamon on 15th of August every year which people did for penance. Other processions such as the May procession and the Corpus Christi procession were also held. Benediction on a Sunday night was enjoyable as there were a lot of hymns. They even learned Latin to serve Mass. "Religion was pivotal to our family-my parents were good living and devout."

There was also another type of religion ,maybe harking back to pre-Christian days, described in detail by one contributor-"piseógary". Her father was a great seanchaí and described the customs on May Eve-setting the eggs in a meadow against a neighbour, sprinkling holy water on the land to ward off evil spirits and malevolent neighbours. It was believed that most witches were female and could turn themselves into a hare. Children were warned against picking a comb off the road in case it belonged to a banshee-if she followed you home ,you would have to hand it back to her on a shovel in case she would also take your hand. Her crying is known as keening, heard late at night when someone is about to die. There were other stories of headless horsemen and about the landlord that grew a tail. The same correspondent details the use of herbs and plants to cure illness. This knowledge was passed down by people known as "quacks." Certain families had the "cure".

Goats milk was used instead of cows milk for asthma and eczema. Comfrey was called "knit bone" and most children got three feeds of spring nettles loaded with iron to boost their immune system. The milk of dandelions cures warts and celery seeds can relieve pain from arthritis and rheumatism. Each contributor had their own special memories of local characters. "Mike of the Hill who passed away at 104", "the tailor who made short pants for us", "the farmer, shouting and singing on the way home guided by the horse who knew its own way", postman Bill pushing his big Post Office bike up the mountain", Buzz Lawrence who played the accordion in people's houses", the local man who showed films in the local hall", "An old fellow called John T who made baskets in his spare time", "a local man who said everything backwards"- a colourful combination in what was sometimes a drab grey world.

The sheer joy of life and living emerges from the pastimes of the era. Plays, singing contests, travelling shows, carnivals, circuses, singing at parties, golf, camogie, hurling, football, cycling, a session at the neighbours, listening to the wireless, reading books, especially romance novels", an old book is like an old friend", playing skittles on which small bets were placed and some pitch and toss, playing cards, one contributor mentions going to mass as a pastime-these were the warp and weave of social interaction in the years up to the late sixties.



If memories of pastimes brought a twinkle to the eyes of our contributors then the recollection of local shops and businesses brought a tear. In almost all cases, places, buildings described as the centre of life in the village, have disappeared. "Yes, there were shops but they are no longer there", "Where we lived has been redeveloped, no longer any shops or businesses", "The village shop and pub, once the focal point, now closed", "Local shop and post office beside the church now closed to the detriment of the village". There is a great description of the village of Loughmore and how everything gradually closed-the mill that cut the timber, the creamery, the post office with the only phone in the parish where after an hour you got to speak, a shop and petrol pump, ruins of an old RIC Barracks, grocery and hardware shop selling everything from a needle to an anchor, forge with all the blacksmith's tools, a ball alley and the village pump. The mothers brought the children and two buckets on the bike to school-one bucket for separated milk and the other for fresh water from the pump. There was also an old schoolhouse and car houses where the wealthy people parked their traps going to mass and a dispensary – all demolished.

Sometimes, old sayings are a bulwark against sadness and loss. Apart from the well known ones relating to hearth, home and health a few were very redolent of the time. "There's nothing worse than seeing a lone man in a meadow", "There's no hitch on a hearse", "Sweep the four corners and the middle of the floor will sweep itself", "Nothing for nothing in Borrisokane, come to Nenagh and you'll get the same", "Small boats must stay near the shore", "Better an old man's pet than a young man's darling" and we can still hear the mother's voice ringing in the young girl's ear in the quote "'Money doesn't grow on trees" was famous from my mother.' When we look back across the years, some outstanding achievements come into focus. Many remember fondly their wedding day, others great sporting achievements while now and again a single life saving achievement echoes across the decades. Such is our last piece of reminiscing which we may entitle "The day I saved a life". This heroic story from thirty years ago relates how the leader of a Montessori School saved the life of a child of three months who had turned blue and had stopped breathing for forty minutes. Dashing at top speed to Crumlin Road Hospital, ignoring traffic lights and speeding rules she saved the young baby's life, an achievement she counts as her bravest moment. Why am I not surprised? The lives we have been describing in these pages moulded and formed the type of person who took on every challenge in life and was equal to the task. Today, we can only envy their growing and rearing, their essential goodness and generosity of spirit, their moral fibre, resilience and dogged determination through thick and thin and hope that the next generation will have even a fraction of what made this generation one of heroes and heroines.

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Reminiscing Project “Back in My Day”



Comhairle Contae Thiobraid Árann
Tipperary County Council

