Memories of Churchtown 1954-1972

by Gerry Murphy (originally published in The Annals of Churchtown 2005)

You can take your memories with you everywhere and you can colour them to suit yourself. They can help you to understand why you are what you are and why you do what you do. You can recall them through rose-tinted glasses or otherwise as you please. You can keep them to yourselves or you can share them with others. That time for me to share them with you is now and I chose to recall them through coloured glasses.

As I reflect on what Churchtown means to me, my memories are drawn to the many wonderful people and events that served to shape me as a person. While I was born at Mount Alvernia Hospital on 5th April 1954, naturally my memories begin more or less when I started school as a five year old on 19th May 1959. I was a reluctant student and clung for as long as possible to my mother's leg in the school corridor until I was forcibly removed to join the new Junior Infants class on my first day at school.

In 1959, the school building was just 12 years old, having replaced the previous school on Kerry Lane which had been opened in 1846 under the patronage of the Earl of Egmont's agent, Sir Edward Tierney. What a grand symbol of an independent Ireland, and a prosperous Churchtown, this new primary school must have been when it opened its doors in 1947. Twenty years later, on the 30th June 1967, I and a small group of 13 and 14 year-old youngsters left Churchtown National School for the last day. I remember this day vividly as even then I knew it was the end of one era of my life. This class of 1967 was the last group of students to sit the Primary Certificate, which was abolished that year, and this was also the same year that free secondary education was introduced in Ireland.

Of course, the late 1950s and 1960s were all far removed from the Celtic Tiger economy that we now experience in Ireland. In so many ways, the Churchtown of that era was a Celtic Cow economy and it had been so for almost 100 years at that stage. As I grew up, the Creamery was the focal point of our parish economy, with Patie Fehan and Bill O'Flynn, under the management of Michael Ahern, running an operation which was by then owned by Ballyclough Co-Operative Society.

I recall the wonderful co-operative spirit that abounded as everybody helped to unload the churns and tip them into a rectangular stainless steel vessel that weighed the milk. A small sample of each farmer's milk was taken by the manager, who later checked all the samples for butter fat content which determined the price paid per gallon. Each supplier had a 'Supplier Number', which was handed down from father to son and we were supplier 'Number 67'. Every supplier was issued with a monthly card recording each day's delivery in pounds, not gallons. The weight of your milk was entered in your 'creamery card' every day and your average butter fat content was determined every month. Milk was paid for monthly, less deductions for goods purchased from the Creamery store such as calf feed, pig rations or butter for the house. Home-made butter-making had disappeared and by the 1960s all butter was made in Mallow. Butter was wrapped in greaseproof paper and packed so that each block weighed one pound. Each creamery had its own registration number and many had brand names for their butter.

Sometime in the 1960s, quality testing of milk arrived. An appropriately dressed white-coated inspector came on a random basis to check each supplier's milk. The test was on-the-spot and if your milk didn't measure up, you would be bringing it home again. If you didn't have pigs, then disposal of rejected milk was an additional nuisance. Meeting quality standards was not overly difficult and rejection was a rare occurrence.

Milking cows requires enormous discipline and dedication. Cows don't observe weekends or holidays, and so it was when I was growing up on our dairy farm when everything had to be scheduled around daily morning and evening milking sessions. Cows were milked by hand by a small team of people, including my mother. Some women from non-farming families supplemented their household income by milking their 'quota' of cows morning and evening, seven days a week, for local farmers. As the years rolled by, it became more difficult to find anyone to help with weekend milking.

Milking automation, which arrived in the 1960s at our farm, reduced some of the tedium of the job. Our first Gascoigne milking machine was installed in the 1960s by that great Ballyhea raconteur, Paddy Regan (father-in-law of my good friend, Maurice Gilbert). The installation seemed to take an enormous length of time as it involved lots of talk about Irish and world affairs led by Paddy Regan, but eventually the system was commissioned and the resulting automation brought many benefits. It allowed my mother and others to retreat from the daily milking chore, which could now be managed by one person and a helper.

The daily gathering of farmers at the 'kramery' (as it was pronounced) was a sight to behold. Every imaginable mode of transport was employed — donkey and carts, horse and carts, horse and butts, cars and trailers, and tractors and trailers. Once the milk was handed over, and news and gossip exchanged, almost everybody left the Creamery precinct for the village shops — Flannery's for the newspaper and O'Brien's, which I always recall for its wonderful sliced cooked ham and the way Mrs O'Brien had for wrapping ham and other 'messages' in brown paper and then tying them with twine which she could break with the flick of her finger. Anyone else attempting this trick would lose a finger.

Simcox's shop will always be famous for its ice cream wafers cut to order and priced from one to sixpence. Other delicacies at Simcox's as far as I was concerned included gob stoppers, bull's eyes, lucky bags, sherbets, bottles of Nash's of Newcastlewest lemonade and 'as advertised on TV' products that began to make their way to Churchtown, such as Macaroon bars and an orange drink called Sinalco. Adults could buy loose tea and sugar. Strange names now, but in everyday use then were tapioca, sherbet and pearl barley. In most houses there was no fridge, just a 'safe' to keep food cool.

Sweets were many and varied, but chocolate-topped 'cream' cones were my favourite. These horrendous calorie mountains caused more tooth decay than all the other sweets combined! I once had a dream that my entire bedroom was filled floor-to-ceiling with cases of these cream pies. You could keep your sherbets, macaroon bars or lucky bags, but not those cream cones which I still see in the shops occasionally. I was a fat child.

If you wanted a watch or some jewellery and you wanted a really posh one, you could buy one from advertisements inserted by Dublin-based jewellers Dore's of Dame Street'. If we saw an advertisement for some coveted item in a sale at Clery's, we could clip the advertisement and post it with the money to our Uncle Stevie (Hickey), who worked for the ESB in Fleet Street in Dublin and who was then expected to drop all and get whatever it was you wanted. He was a patient man.

Flannery's was a pub and grocery, where beer was once bottled, bread was baked and horses were kept in stables at the rear of the Market House. You could arrange fire insurance cover here too, with Sun Insurance of London as a lovely sign in the shop proudly proclaimed. As a young boy, I remember visiting the stables and rambling though the Market House, which the Flannerys had acquired from the Countess of Egmont.

Flannery's and the Market House are, of course, very special to me now as on the 18th August 1997 I became 'caretaker for the next generation' of this once great den of enterprise.

Little did I think then that I would have the pleasure and the privilege of organising the restoration of this building, with the help of Maurice Gilbert. In March 2004, with the restoration completed and the business re-opened, I was pleased to sell Boss Murphy's to Rick FitzGerald and Donal O'Sullivan. I was equally pleased to retain the Market House, which is such a special building.

Smells are so evocative. The smell of cows or milk at the bustling creamery. The smell of ripening corn or home-made bread in the oven. For me, one smell stands out amongst all others and that is the smell associated with haymaking. Haymaking in 'the Leap' (as my family home and farm is affectionately known, even though far more of the land and the house and farmyard is in the townland of Walshestown) was a time-honoured ritual before automated hay baling arrived. Luckily, I saw hay made the old-fashioned way, with large cocks known as 'wyndes' standing up to 10 feet tall. These huge wyndes were only a part of a great process that began when a 'bawn' field was closed off to grazing in the spring, to be mown in late June or July. Assuming good sunny weather, a few days after mowing the hay was ready for turning.

Now sometime in the 1920s, my grandfather — John Murphy — had invested in some horse-drawn equipment made in Ipswich in England. This equipment included a giant East Anglian, horse-drawn hay-turning machine. It had been banished to the back of the hay barn by my father, who was more convinced of the hay-turning abilities of man and 'pike' (or fork). So, he would assemble a team of men and boys to manually turn what looked to me like huge fields of hay, using 'shank's mare' and a simple pike. Then, when the hay was saved, we would use a horse-drawn 'wheel rake' to gather the swaths (rows) of hay together, which were then gathered into larger clumps using an all-timber horse-drawn device called a 'Tumbling Paddy' or a metal 'Skeeter'.

The biggest field in Leap was called the Goaling field as it was used for many years as the parish hurling pitch and it covered over 17 acres. In a year when this field would be set aside for hay, it was a sight to behold a group of up to eight men and boys in a coordinated line each turning a swath of hay to the sun. Synchronised manual hay-turning could have been an Olympic sport. In wet weather, the entire process might have to be repeated two or three times. However, the 'bawn' hay crop was never lost to the weather, though if it wasn't saved within two weeks the 'good had gone out of the crop and while it might fill animals' bellies in the winter, it would certainly not fatten them'. Saving 'bog' hay was another matter all together and happened much later in August when the land was drier. If the weather was really inclement, bog hay could literally float away.

Once the wyndes or hay cocks were made, they were tied down either with a twine or a hay-rope called a *súgán*. This was important as the wynde was liable to be blown away by a high wind if the hay had not settled, which took a few days. The task after a wynde was made and tied was called 'kicking the butt', whereby the loose hay at the base of the wynde was pulled away and the butt finally kicked in neatly.

Wynde-making was a job particular to either the very young or the old. The wynde-maker would rise up with the wynde and create a geometric beehive-like mound. It was not as arduous as piking up the hay, but it was a responsible job since poorly built wyndes would let in water and some of the hay could rot black. If my memory serves me correctly, I remember Dan Twomey, Clashelane, and Paddy Flynn (always known as 'Dines') from the village as master wynde-makers. I also recall standing on wyndes myself and think I was quite a good wynde-maker in my day.

The wyndes were left in the open field for a week or two, depending on the condition or moisture content of the hay when it was saved. Hay with too much moisture tends to 'heat' when it compacts and so wyndes made in poor weather need more time in the field to be aired.

Tea was delivered by my mother to the hay field in the afternoon and, depending on the number of people working, it either came in a 'ponny' (a metal can) or in a large milking bucket. My mother would always be sure to have the most wonderful apple tarts, currant cakes and scones available for our afternoon break. These breaks were always welcome and were usually filled with discussions about past haymaking (and haymakers who had gone to their eternal reward) and GAA matters.

Bringing in the hay wyndes also had its own technology and language. The wyndes were manually pulled up on to a timber horse-drawn cart with a wooden base or 'float' that was capable of being tilted. A front pulley and metal barrel on each side of the float allowed two people to literally pull (or 'float') the wynde up on the timber base to a point where equilibrium was reached and the base levelled on its fulcrum. The wheels of the float could be metal or later rubber tyres were used.

Once the wynde was loaded, the driver and companion stood at the front of the float and, with their backs to the wynde, headed for the hay barn. Depending on the journey from the actual field to the hay barn, two floats could be required to keep the men in the barn busy. Tea and apple tarts and currant cakes were also very welcome in the hay barn and my mother rose to this challenge as well. Great pleasure would be taken by older men to put young lads like me under pressure by ceaselessly piking more and more hay, which had then to be distributed around the 'reek'. Working high up in a hay barn under a galvanised roof on a very hot day is exhausting work.

The main meal was always in the middle of the day and it was called 'dinner'. Bacon and cabbage was very popular, with fish only on Fridays. Churchtown was a long way from the sea so fish was rare. Fried eggs, white sauce and potatoes were plenty good enough for me any Friday. Breakfast was not eaten until after the cows were milked, which meant you had worked up a great appetite, and evening 'tea' was eaten at the end of the working day after the cows were milked again.

On 3rd September 1967, I left Churchtown with my brother Pat to attend St Augustine's College in Dungarvan, County Waterford, as a boarder. My five years in Dungarvan will have to be the subject of another book. My fond memories of those five years, from 1967 to 1972, are of the summers of freedom spent in Churchtown, well away from the rigours of boarding school in Dungarvan.

My grandmother was a Clare woman called Margaret Cullinan and she was married twice. Her first family were O'Keeffe. Some years after her first husband died, she married my grandfather, John Murphy, in 1915. John's father, William, had married twice as well, which made family trees all very complicated for me to understand as a youngster. William's first wife was Margaret Ryan from Ballyhea and his second wife was Margaret Bourke from Coolasmuttane in Newtownshandrum. My grandfather and his father were well-known fiddle players locally and their history and music is set out in the book, published in 2003, called *The Boss Murphy Musical Legacy*.

The O'Keeffe's had a pub in the village, beside Flannery's, and when Margaret married my grandfather, who was farming at Leap, she changed the name over the door of the pub to Murphy. They ran the pub until my grandmother gave it to her son, my step-uncle, Paddy O'Keeffe, in 1933. Paddy ran the pub, fondly known as 'The Ramblers', until he sold it in 1951 to Paddy Downey. Paddy O'Keeffe married Mary Kate Dunlea from Walshestown and when they left Churchtown with their three children, Eileen, Willy (or Billy) and Mary, they settled in Monkstown, County Dublin.

The house next door to O'Keeffe's pub was purchased by my grandfather on the 25th July 1921 for £345 (€438). In 1959, my uncle Bill, William Murphy, who had by then inherited the house sold it to Michael Thompson for £95 (€120). The reduced price is stark evidence of how the economy of Churchtown has suffered from 1921 to 1959. In 1972, Denis Sullivan purchased the house for £400 (€508) and joined it internally to O'Keeffe's. In 1998, both premises were acquired for £45,000 (€57,138) as part of the development of the Boss Murphy holiday facility.

Paddy O'Keeffe played a role in the Churchtown GAA hurling team that won a North Cork Hurling Championship in 1929. This famous parish victory served as the years passed to strengthen his bond with his boyhood home. In fact, Paddy and his son Willy only left Churchtown physically — spiritually, they never left and appropriately they are both resting now in St Brigid's Cemetery where so many of their Churchtown friends are buried.

As well as hay, our summer was also a time for visitors and holidays away from Churchtown. Visitors are always welcomed by youngsters, though they can add to the workload in a busy household. In our house, our favourite visitor was our Dublin cousin William J. O'Keeffe, or 'Willy Keeffe' as all in Churchtown knew and loved him. To announce his imminent arrival, Willy usually sent a post card that arrived after he came! With his black Mercedes, his exciting auctioneering job, his fine clothes and fun-loving personality, Willy represented an idyllic Churchtown émigré in my youthful eyes. His visits were spent visiting old friends and nights in the village pub, though he only drank 'Cidona'. Willy's father Paddy and his sisters Eileen and Mary were also welcome visitors to Leap.

A real tragedy for me was when Willy would arrive and we would be too busy at haymaking and would not be able to accompany him on his 'visitations'. One of his most important visits every year was to the home (and public house) in Liscarroll of Paddy O'Brien. Willy would also spend quite some time with his first cousins, where we would all be stuffed full with the most beautiful cakes made by his cousins Olive (now Corbett) and Betty Dunlea. If his father Paddy was accompanying Willy on his trip, then we would also visit O'Shea's pub in Dromcollogher and be reminded of the terrible fire that took place there on Sunday, 5th September 1926, when the death toll from a catastrophic cinema fire reached 48.

My Uncle Bill, who died in 1984, remains a most influential figure in my life and was equally proud of all his nephews. He was born in 1916 and went to national school in Churchtown. He often told us that as a small boy he wore a 'dress' rather than trousers, which was the fashion at the time. Uncle Bill had film-star looks and a singing voice to match, but his opportunities in life were severely curtailed in the 1940s when he was involved in a very serious tree-felling accident and he spent almost a year recuperating in the Orthopaedic Hospital in Cork. Uncle Bill's disability was a great tragedy for us all, but it did not stop him leaving the greatest legacy to me. He instilled in me the desire for grand ideas and fairness on the field of play, which led me inexorably to understanding the reward that comes from serving others. This legacy is worth more than money can buy. Luckily my father lived to see quite a substantial part of the renewal of Churchtown village. My great regret is that Uncle Bill and Willy Keeffe can't be with us now in Churchtown to enjoy all that has happened.

Life, when I was growing up, had its own language, as demonstrated in my remembrances of haymaking. We must have been awfully undisciplined in those days as there were so many words for admonishing youngsters. You could be called a scamp, a scut, a blackguard, a ruffian, a scoundrel or, worst of all, a pup. Now if 'pup' wasn't bad enough and a person was really 'cross', you could easily have the added appellation 'young' placed in front of 'pup' to add to the disgrace. If you were a 'young pup', you were in serious trouble.

It was certainly 'young pups' who were responsible for pushing geese down a person's chimney at night or assembling a donkey and cart in someone's kitchen while they slept upstairs or taking down farm gates. Luckily, all this blackguarding or scutting happened before my time.

Other good insulting descriptions were amadán, mope, blockhead, baluba, caffler, mallet head, jennet, donkey, scourge, hangman, wretch, bould stump, scamp and a greedy gut. A 'strap', or even 'a right strap', was confined to women. If these descriptions were not adequate, they could be increased by adding the word 'thundering' or 'melted'. If someone got their comeuppance, it was said that 'it would soften their cough'. If someone really annoyed you, they might 'give you the pip'.

Collecting 'cippins' as fire wood was common place. Going 'up' to Cork (which was actually to our south) and down to Limerick (which was north) and 'wetting' tea were all north Corkisms. The worst thing you could be accused of doing was 'shaping'. A 'shaper' was a show-off. One could make a 'dirty dig' by saying something biting. Everything good was 'deadly'. 'Collies' were the little fish or minnows we caught in jam jars in the streams.

Youngsters were expected 'to keep their traps shut'. People who did things out of the ordinary were having 'fagarios'. You had to 'shame the Devil and tell the truth'. And if you did not behave, 'you'd have the Devil scaled'. If you were clever, you were 'crabit' and 'full of brains'. If you were unbalanced, 'you suffered from your nerves'. Youngsters were always suffering from 'growing pains' as an excuse for missing school. If you were too sick to eat, you were given 'goody' — a mix of bread, hot milk and sugar.

Getting into trouble in school was easy as when you were asked what you were doing, your answer was invariably almost immediately interrupted with the further accusation that you were now 'giving cheek'. You couldn't win. An adult could threaten 'to warm your behind' or, worse still, 'redden your arse'. If this happened, you were probably 'beyond the beyonds' and at the very least 'a holy terror'. 'Devilment' was rife and an adult would want 'eyes in the pole of their head' to make sure nothing untoward was happening out of sight.

If you were hungry, you would 'eat the leg off the table'. An older youth who was found to be acting in a childish manner was 'fit to be married'. 'The sorrowful mysteries' (of the Rosary) brought us back to reality and life was sometimes 'a valley of tears' and it was quite in order to 'offer up' every misfortune. Luckily, all our troubles could be explained away by sayings such as 'God is good' or 'It was meant to be' or 'It's the will of nature'. We were encouraged to be resigned and 'it was not to be' was another great excuse for disappointment. The final infuriating consolation when you didn't get your own way was to hear you'd 'have no luck with it anyway'.

'The youth of today have everything' was common knowledge back then too. A blackguard could very easily cross over the line and become 'a fine bucko'. You could be 'bulling for fight' and you could be 'crousted' or 'belted' with stones. You could easily 'get a skelp of an ash plant' if you misbehaved. The word 'Hi!' was used to attract attention and usually yelled loudly. If you were really wasteful, then you were likely 'to end up with a ponny [mug] around your neck in Mallow Union [the poor house]'. Adults had long memories.

There was an animal language, too. Pigs were 'hurrished', cows were 'howed' and hens were 'chucked'.

The feminine of a 'shaper' was a 'gazebo'. Older women were convinced that there were an awful lot of gazebos around when the mini skirt arrived in Churchtown! However, one of these was definitely not Annette O'Donovan from the village — a daughter of Dick Donovan's brother Ned — who won Miss Teen Ireland in 1967. Annette went on to represent Ireland and came second in an international contest. Her picture appeared on the front of the *Evening Press* and she became part of the Churchtown legend. Her sister was a member of the famous Bunratty

Singers and necks were stretched in parish houses whenever they appeared on 'The Late Late Show'.

Pronunciation and accent in north Cork has its own unique quality. The pitch in the voice is consistently an octave or more higher and the accent is less melodic than the City or West Cork varieties. A lot of the harsher pronunciation is a relic from Irish-speaking days. Words beginning in 'sc' or 'sn', like snow, would be pronounced was a special emphasis on the 's', so it came out as 'schnow'. Stop was 'sthopp' and meat was 'mate'. The town of Mallow was called 'Malla' from the Irish. Leave would be pronounced as 'leabe' because there was no 'v' in Irish but rather a 'bh'. Lots of families added the suffix 'sie' to the first name, so Anne became Annsie and Patrick became Patsie.

Our near-neighbours at Leap were the Dunlea, O'Connor, Twomey and 'Morey' (as the O'Callaghans were called) families. As already explained, the Dunlea family was related by marriage to the O'Keeffes. The Dunlea girls — Olive and Betty — were the socialites from our part of the parish in the 1960s, renowned for their willingness to travel the length and breath of Munster to dances and still be able to rise and milk a 'bawn of cows' and get to the creamery (nearly) on time the following morning. Olive married Walter Corbett and she and Betty continue the tradition of hospitality, card-playing and confectionery that makes their home such a welcoming place.

On the Leap side of our family farm lived the Twomeys and the Moreys. Sean and Con Twomey lived here with their sister Mary, and the O'Callaghans (or Moreys), with their family reared, lived next door in retirement. Up the road in Imogane lived Catherine O'Brien (Cowhey) and the large Sullivan family, all now gone to their reward.

When the O'Callaghan parents died, their house passed to their daughter Kit and her husband Edward Fitzgerald, better known as 'Ned Fitz' who returned from England to take up employment as a groomsman in Egmont Stud, run by another branch of the Flannery family — Frank — and more recently his son Edward. In my mind, Ned was a wonderful man who did not suffer fools gladly and was great company in a pub. He had no time for 'pints', which he regarded as 'pig's mess'. His father, Tom Fitz, was also a revered name in the parish and though he was long dead he was often mentioned in our house.

Ned was most generous to me as a teenager and regularly slipped me a pound so I would not be embarrassed in a pub. Pub etiquette was very important to Uncle Bill and Ned Fitz, and great emphasis was placed on who was 'in position' or entitled to buy the next round from Jerry O'Sullivan, who was the publican in my young days in Churchtown. The name over the door had changed from Flannery to O'Sullivan, but most people called the pub and grocery 'Jerrys'. Paddy Joe O'Mahony worked behind the counter, as did Nora O'Sullivan.

Other pub regulars that made an impression on me at that time were 'Pakie the Post' Murphy, who played the accordion, and Bill Callaghan, a most dapper man with brilliant one-liners, mostly to do with racing. I remember bringing him home one night and as we pulled up outside his front gate, the dogs started a great hullabaloo. Bill's instant remark that 'One must expect dogs around gentry' was so typical of this man's quick wit.

Women's liberation was coming to north Cork too in the 1960s. It manifested itself in many ways, including a demand for 'lounge bars' where women could enjoy a night out. Liscarroll had 'The Old Walls' and Ballyhea had its 'Lodge'. Both of these pubs had large lounges for entertainment. Nothing like this happened in Churchtown and when I left in 1972 each pub had just one room for drinking and selling groceries.

About 1970, one of Churchtown's most successful emigrants returned after an absence of 30 years. Denis O'Sullivan was now a successful business man in Toronto in Canada, but

everyone in Churchtown still referred to him by his nickname as a youngster around the village — Foxy Denny. He regularly flew into Shannon for a weekend of music and *craic* in Churchtown.

Shortly after his return, Denis acquired his old family home and then my grandmother's and Uncle Bill's house, which he knocked together as one house. With a base in Churchtown, Denis became a regular visitor. He was most generous and extremely popular in Jerry Sullivan's. It was usual when Jerry got fed up with serving drink for 'the crowd' to retreat to Buckley's in Annagh or Denny's house next door for more singing and carousing. Uncle Bill loved music and with sufficient encouragement was good for a song. 'Pal of my cradle days' was his usual contribution. Denis himself was a great singer and loved to bring the house down with some ribald ballad. His daughter Gail Mortimer and her husband Jack still retain Denis' original family home, on the former site of the last RIC barracks in Churchtown.

Tim Lynch who was a regular in Jerry's at the time and could, under severe pressure, be persuaded to sing. His contribution was inevitably that great Cole Porter number, 'When they begin the beguine'. Tim, who sadly passed away in December 2004, was a well-read man with a great interest in current affairs and good company for a young chap like me.

Paddy Flynn would usually ramble in for a pint. Because of his diminutive size, Paddy was known as 'Dines' after an English jockey called Johnny Dines. 'Dines' worked for us at Leap — and even lived in — on the farm for many years. He always reminded me in the pub about my temper as a child and how I had once thrown a fork across the table at him. His sister Birdie was the Church Sacristan for many years.

By the early 1970s during school holidays I was Ned Fitz and Uncle Bill's driver to and from the village. I recall one hilarious event when Willy Keeffe 'was in town' and Ned proposed that we go to a pub somewhere near Doneraile called 'Benny Dicks' where we would be guaranteed after-hours drink. Willy, who was a non-drinker, set off in the black Mercedes and there was no way we could find this pub. Instead, someone proposed that we all go to the dance in the Grand Hotel in Fermoy, which is where we all eventually wound up. There was still one problem to overcome in that Uncle Bill was not wearing a tie and we had to borrow one from a hotel staff member. It was a hilarious night with such a mixture of young and old.

William O'Connor and family were also our other neighbours on the Leap side. William's father was the first Creamery Manager in Churchtown and he had the unenviable task of putting the company back on a sound financial footing. This he managed to do with great success. After the Parish Priest, the Creamery Manager was the most revered citizen of our parish.

Hunting, shooting and fishing were favourite pastimes of a small group of people. Patrick Dunlea and Ned Dwane I recall meeting after shooting a snipe beside the old disused lime kiln in Leap one day coming from school.

The Duhallow Hunt was, of course, a sight to behold for a small boy. Large horse boxes would arrive in the village and men and women dressed in riding jodhpurs and the odd red coat would eventually 'tally ho' out of the village towards Burton or Altamira to 'rise' a fox. Most farmers were prepared to facilitate fox hunting through their lands.

The fishing expert in the parish was the great hurler, the late Pat Behan, who was responsible for delivering the odd complimentary Awbeg pike to our table. He was a really talented hurler and he played with great honour with one of County Cork's best GAA clubs in neighbouring Ballyhea.

Honouring birthdays was never a big issue in our house as we grew up, but I have vivid memories of attending a number of Oliver Ryan-Purcell's birthday parties in Burton Park and Noel O'Brien's at Clashganniv. Oliver's father, John Ryan-Purcell, inherited Burton Park from his

aunt whose family had originally purchased the beautiful house and estate from the Earl of Egmont.

Oliver's birthday parties were held in the large basement rooms in Burton. Meals were served in the upstairs dining-room, adorned with huge family portraits and stuffed deer heads. As well as being great and generous neighbours, John and Rosemary Ryan-Purcell were, it seemed to me, pillars of the community. I recall the whole family — parents and six children — proceeding to their regular seats on the left-hand aisle of Churchtown Church every Sunday. In the 1970s, after I had left Churchtown, Burton with its own population of youngsters became a centre of sporting and artistic activity for the area. Hockey and drama were all part of a great eclectic grouping of events. I am sorry I missed this Camelot period at Burton and I look forward to its return.

John Ryan-Purcell was years ahead in his thinking and built up a herd of beautiful pure bred Jersey cows, famous for the high butter fat content in their milk. As milk was priced based on its butter fat quality, every cow that John had was 'worth two cows' for others. He was also interested in the politics of farming and once had an article published in the *Irish Independent* about sugar beet, which impressed us all greatly.

Burton Park is by far the 'jewel in the crown' of Churchtown's houses. One can only imagine what it must have looked like before it was burnt in the 1690s, when it was many times bigger than it is now. While Burton Wood was reduced in size considerably by John Ryan-Purcell in the 1960s, there was still enough forest to facilitate the most extravagant 'bows and arrows' war games on Sunday afternoons. How none of us aspiring 'Robin Hoods' never lost an eye was definitely miraculous.

Noel Brien's (we rarely used the 'O' in front of any name when I was growing up) birthday parties were always musical affairs, no doubt influenced by his father's — Donal — great interest in music. At Noel's party, you were expected to do a party piece, which was not something I enjoyed having been classified as a 'crow' in Churchtown National School. I remember one party where Danny Relihan sang all the verses of 'This ole man he played one, he played nick knack on my drum …', a song that seems to go on forever, and being enthralled at his ability to remember the words, not to mind being able to sing.

The memory of Noel O'Brien's grandfather, Dan Brien, and his uncle, Vincent — and Dermot and Ignatius or Nash too — was still very much revered in our house and great regret was always expressed at the loss of Noel's uncles to Churchtown. Vincent had left Churchtown for his new stud farm at Ballydoyle in Tipperary in the early 1950s and brought many of his staff with him, including Bill Callaghan's brother, Maurice.

Vincent O'Brien's loss to Churchtown was immense. The memory of his famous racing victories while still training at Churchtown, especially with 'Cottage Rake' at Cheltenham, were recited over and over again. The bonfires and victory parties when 'Cottage Rake' returned to Churchtown from Cheltenham were fondly remembered, especially the generosity of the horse's owner — the Vickerman family — who paid for free bars in the village.

As children, we were also aware that Churchtown House had bred and owned some very fine horses, including an Irish Derby winner, 'Loch Lomond', in 1919. This was some 17 years after a horse bred by Flannerys had won the same race in 1902 — 'St Brendan'. Churchtown has a long and successful racing tradition.

Going to Mass was an automatic weekly event. In the country it marked time. Lots of families had their own seats in the church going back generations, which I believe they had paid for as part of a contribution to the building of the church.

I recall especially people like Tom Gaffney who always sat in the middle aisle, three-quarters way up the church, and Jack Linehan, in his long black coat a few seats down to Tom Gaffney's left. Bess Relihan, also sitting to the left on the middle aisle, was by far the most committed choir singer. Bess' husband had died a young man and she had to raise a young family. I recall hearing about the 'American wakes' that took place in Brien's when her older children left for America. Uncle Bill was always especially concerned for the Relihan family and hated the fact that they had to emigrate to find work. He made a present of our family piano to the Relihan family when he realised that none of us were going to do anything musically.

A major religious event was celebrated on St Brigid's Day on 1st February each year, when people visited our local holy well known as 'Biddy's Tree' in the townland of Mountbridget. People brought little white rags and tied them to the tree after drinking some water from the well. As youngsters, we might also go to the holy well during the summer and on the way were likely to call in and visit the Twomeys in Clashelane and the Twomeys and Moreys in Leap.

This was a time when religion was taken very seriously and priests were very revered. The memory of the Eucharistic Congress was still fresh in the minds of my father and Uncle Bill, and they still had the papal flag that they carried to one of the huge Eucharistic Congress gatherings. In our house Uncle Bill was also the custodian of the Sacred Heart lamp, which he kept filled with paraffin oil and lit every night in his bedroom. My father had total belief in the power of St Anthony. He also supported a missionary priest in India who wrote the most interesting letters once or twice a year. Primroses were picked in our 'screen', or woodland, and placed on our May Altar on our upstairs landing.

Lent was taken very seriously and all dances were cancelled. Gradually, this Ramadan-like fundamentalism broke down diocese by diocese and with the aid of a car people could travel to a diocese where 'the law of God' was being flouted.

When Pope John XXIII set up the second Vatican Council, we prayed for its success every Sunday in Churchtown and when the time came for the new vernacular Mass to be celebrated, we practised the responses for weeks. In school we were all equally concerned about the faith (and fate) of the 'black babies' and always contributed to the ubiquitous little red box with the black baby on top, who ingeniously nodded his head every time you dropped a penny through the slot. 'A penny for the black babies' was regularly added to a child's school allowance in those days.

The teachers also organised the sale and distribution of a range of religious magazines, like the *Far East*, *Africa* and *The Messenger*. For children, the main interest was the Pudsey Ryan column in the *Far East* or the birthday list in the weekly *Irish Catholic*. In Fifth and Sixth class, there would be visits from Vocations Directors from missionary orders of priests and nuns or the Irish Christian Brothers.

Despite the fact that I have been born tone deaf, I still love music. When the pipe band stuck up at the carnivals in Churchtown, it always stirred me. There was not enough traditional music in the parish when I was growing up. My generation was in-between the demise of the cross-road dancing with live musicians at Sheehan's Forge and the revival of music lead by Noel Linehan with his 'rambling house' nights at Boss Murphy's. Our music came largely from the wireless or from vinyl records if you were lucky enough to have a record player. Music also came from the show bands that played in the local dance halls, such as the Majestic in Mallow, the Highland in Newmarket or even the Red Barn in Youghal.

Of course, my grandfather, as well as being a farmer was also a very well-known amateur musician, but he died in 1955 and I have no recollection of this great man apart from seeing his fiddle and his music scores in our house when I was growing up. While my father and

siblings had invested in a wonderful mahogany gramophone that once played John McCormack's 78rpm vinyls, it had given up the ghost by the time we were ready for music. My first experience of a record player and LPs (long playing vinyl records) was when we borrowed a player and two 'records' from Jimmy and Mary O'Sullivan. One LP was of Irish rebel songs and included the 1978 ballad 'Roddy McCorley':

> And many a red-coat bit the dust before his keen pike-play,
> But Roddy McCorley goes to die on the bridge of Toome today.

Slim Whitman was the second LP. I played both records over and over again and they must have gone back very worn indeed. A short time later, in the early 1970s, my brother John invested in our first record player and we began to purchase LPs by mail from Virgin in the UK. This was when Richard Branson's empire was still operating out of a garage.

'Oh Boy' was the first rock and roll song that stirred me. This was also the start of the flower power era. 'San Francisco' 6,000 miles from Churchtown, but it was getting closer in 1969. People in Churchtown may not have been 'wearing flowers in their hair', but it was getting longer and so were sideburns.

I was too young to know the Costelloe and the Hickey youngsters in the village, all of whom had already left Churchtown when I was a youth. They may have been gone, but they were always remembered and their emigration was seen as tragedy for Churchtown. Of course, I was not too young to remember the Costelloe's mother Lil as a most devout and religious woman.

Dr Matthew Twomey was Parish Priest for as long as I could remember. He was a towering intellectual and native Irish speaker, who ensured that the church and the parish house were in the best of condition. Dr Twomey's passion was greyhound racing, at a time when the clergy were not allowed to go horse racing. The parish house where Dr Twomey resided was known as Castlemaccarthy and it practically straddles the boundary of Churchtown and Liscarroll. It is now home to Josephine and Walter Ryan-Purcell.

The fact that Churchtown and Liscarroll are one parish but each have their own church, school and GAA clubs leads to its own rivalry and I recall a little verse that was oft repeated when youngsters from the two sides of the parish met at the Carnival or at GAA matches:

> Hay and oats for the Churchtown goats,
> Eggs and rashers for the Liscarroll dashers.

or, depending on your allegiance:

> Hay and oats for the Liscarroll goats,
> Eggs and rashers for the Churchtown dashers.

The 'Stations' were a major religious event in the parish as was the 'Mission' week, when the whole parish was threatened with eternal damnation. For a small boy, the most exciting feature of the Mission was the grey and green stalls selling religious icons of all descriptions. A great trade would take place in miraculous medals and scapulars, some of whom would be nailed to rafters or high up in the cow byre or hay barn to ward off evil spirits and bring God's blessing to the animals or crops.

The 'Stations' were held twice a year and rotated between houses representing a group of townlands. The Station list would be read out at Mass and even still it is like a mantra to me: 'Leap, Walshestown and Ballindillanig at Patrick Dunlea's,' Dr Twomey would announce, along with another half-dozen Station house masses and always finishing with the immortal words, '… and Churchtown Village, here in the church, all in one station'. In the countryside, the Station Mass arrived in one's house every four or five years or so. In my early years it revolved around a Station breakfast after a morning Mass.

Preparation for the Station was intense, with great cleaning and painting going on for weeks. For many housewives, this was their best excuse to improve the house as against the farm. A special altar would be created by moving a large chest of drawers to the 'parlour' or best room, and covering it with bed sheets. Brass candlesticks completed the altar. Mass was preceded by Confessions, where most everybody retired to a quiet private corner of the house to tell their sins and receive their penance. The curate would usually accompany the Parish Priest at the Station and this would ensure that Confessions would not delay matters.

Mass over, the women of the house and helpers would set about catering for the attendance of 20 or more visitors. A long table was set up in our 'breakfast room' for the children and most of the visitors. The priests ate in the 'parlour'. All were fed a hearty breakfast, consisting of porridge and boiled eggs and toast. It would all be over by 11am, but in some houses the party might go on into the evening and night.

The Church 'dues' or contributions were collected twice yearly and the names and amounts were read out from the Altar. Dues would range from an awesome £100 to a few shillings, which was as much as most parishioners could afford. A 'big' farmer might give £5, but no matter what one contributed it was read out for all to hear.

The great annual event organised by the local branch of Muintir na Tíre was something every boy and girl looked forward to for months. This was our annual Carnival. The highlights of the carnival were the opening and closing fancy dress parades, lead invariably by a local pipe band, the Sunday afternoon gymkhana, one or two inter-parish GAA matches, a number of dances in a marquee behind the old school and the nightly games of 'Pongo' in the Community Centre.

Great creativity went into the entries for the fancy dress parade. I remember one spectacular skit on the Rose of Tralee, with men dressed as women raised high over the crowds sitting in their thrones (the front loader of a few tractors). Another creative entry I remember was in 1967 around the time of the Arab-Israeli war and a float entitled 'Egg-mont shelled'. One real danger of taking part was that you could be christened with a nickname associated with the part you played in the parade for the rest of your life. All carnivals and parish events were filmed by Patrick Irwin from Annagh.

Every year at the carnival there was a donkey derby, but I was too young to remember our 'Jack the Donkey', who was like 'Arkle' as far I was concerned having heard all the stories being told and re-told about his famous victories. Apparently Jack was an amazing animal who really did win very many carnival races. Donkeys are creatures of habit and so the route for the race could easily have a major influence on the outcome. So, for instance, a donkey who went to the Creamery every morning from the Burton Road and went straight up the village with his driver to Flannery's for the *Examiner* could insist on this route, irrespective of the actual race route or the protestations of his jockey, much to the hilarity of the onlookers.

'Pongo' was based on a wooden board with 25 boxes and maybe 15 numbers painted thereon. You won the minor prize by having a vertical, horizontal or diagonal line. The big prize was for a 'full house'. All this was some years before 'bingo' swept the country.

For country youngsters to be in the village every night for a week was a wonderful treat. If we were lucky, we would have enough cash to buy a bag of chips from a van outside the old school, a bottle of Nash's of Newcastlewest red lemonade or a sixpenny ice cream wafer from Mrs Simcox.

A number of people stand out in my memory as the driving force behind the Muintir na Tíre carnivals — Michael Hedigan of Carrigeen, Nat Simcox, Mary O'Connor of Granard and Patrick Irwin of Annagh. In later years, Dr Twomey became a virtuoso at extracting money from people at the 'spinning wheel' in the centre of the village.

Of course, we also had the Cahirmee Fair carnival in Buttevant to look forward to as well. Buttevant was an amazing sight around the annual fair on 12th July, with literally a hundred or more 'traveller' vans and trailers (some horse-drawn) and the main street filled with horses and salesmen of all descriptions.

Festivals were also organised in Kanturk, where they celebrated the legend of 'The Boar's Head'. The Charleville Cheese festival was an elaborate event that was well supported by local industry, especially Golden Vale. Mallow had 'The Rakes Festival', called after the famous Irish dance set, 'The Rakes of Mallow'. Newmarket had their 'rat races' in the Highland Ballroom.

On Saturday we would sometimes go to the Creamery with my father and stay over in the village for a few hours in Dorney's to play with Ben, Eamonn and Patricia. Robert was much younger. This trip to the 'big smoke' was always a great event and, as well as visiting Dorney's, we would see other village characters such as Willie Holohan who lived in George's Street and was a philosopher in his own right and happy to recite from poems like the 'Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam', which fascinated me.

Mick Thompson also lived on George's Street as he had bought Uncle Bill's house. When Mick decided to turn the sitting-room into a garage for his car, it was much to the amazement of our household and most other people in the village too I suspect. Maurice Mahony, who lived down the Black Road and was retired at this stage, was a regular visitor to the village and loved to sit outside Flannery's pub and watch the world go by. Denny Booney or Jim McGill could also be seen standing at their front doors.

Travellers would arrive on a regular basis, with some taking time to camp near the end of our passage. Coming from school as a youngster, you would approach these people with awe. I remember one man who was a real 'tinker' as he was able to repair and make tin cans. As I was growing up, the only transport the travellers had was based on the horse.

I always associate the GAA in Churchtown with Ned Dorney. Ned and his colleagues over the years made a huge voluntary contribution, but unfortunately the GAA of the '40s, '50s and '60s were just not able to find the resources to purchase and develop their own field so we never had a 'base' for GAA activities when I was growing up. Instead, I played 'Under-14' football for a combined Churchtown and Liscarroll team. Liscarroll was well ahead of Churchtown in developing its own sports facilities, but thankfully Churchtown has caught up in more recent years.

Churchtown GAA tackled the problem of having no GAA field in the 1980s and with much fund-raising purchased a field from Nat Simcox just west of the village. This field is now a credit to all involved and a superb facility. When that legendary Gaelic Games' commentator Michael Ó Muircheartaigh visited Churchtown on 29th July 1997, with the great Wexford All-Ireland hurling medallist Tom Dempsey and the Liam McCarthy Cup, it was so good to be able to show him what had been achieved by the GAA in Churchtown and talk about our plans for a new stand and players' facilities. Of course, so much more has been achieved since 1997.

There was always 'help' available when I was growing up on the farm. However, farmers were going in for more automation and many could not afford to keep up with industrial wages. In the late '50s, there were four people employed on our farm — two in the house and two in the yard. Mary Twomey was our permanent housekeeper and she was assisted by Anne Relihan. In the yard, Paddy Flynn ('Dines') was busy with a younger helper. I recall Mickey Brown, a really clever young man who has done very well for himself in England, and Donie Sullivan in these positions. Mickey Brown returned from England on a visit some years after emigrating and brought us some great magic tricks, which he generously gifted to us and from which we derived so much fun over the years. Anne Relihan, Alice and Bill's daughter, also emigrated and now lives in Kentucky in the USA. Pad Relihan was the last permanent farmhand in Leap and I worked well with him. Pad and I made a good milking team.

Pad Relihan's passion was GAA matters and every Monday the sports report of the *Cork Examiner* was the most sought-after document at dinner time (middle of the day). Coming up to a Munster Hurling Final, the tension would be palpable and if Cork were meeting Tipperary it was even worse. 'The hay saved and Cork beat' was the Tipperary war cry and hearing it was enough to upset us all, not to mind Pad who would be apoplectic at the prospect of Tipperary 'bating' Cork.

The 1940s and early 1950s were the heyday of hurling star Christy Ring. They were spectacular years for Cork hurling, with All-Ireland victories in 1941, 1942, 1943, 1944, 1946, 1952, 1953 and 1954. My father, Uncle Bill and Pad remembered these days fondly and so 'the famine' that occurred from 1955 to 1966 was very hard going for us all. Cork's victory over Antrim by a cricket score of 5-16 to 4 points in 1943 was seen as unfair by my father and Uncle Bill, who felt the victors should have eased back in the second half so as not to embarrass the northerners. They were right too.

Interest was so intense in our county team that work would stop to listen out for the train that would pass at Shinanagh carrying the team to a big match. The trains passing though nearby Ballyhea marked time for us.

In the '30s and '40s, other summer visitors to Leap were my grandmother's nephews and nieces, the O'Dea children of Aunt Nora from Kilrush in County Clare. All the O'Dea children — Peggy, Maureen, Birdie, Kevin, Charlie, Jackie and PJ — were equally important, but PJ had set himself apart as he went on to win many Football Railway Cup Provincial medals representing Munster. PJ and his wife Mary now live in Chicago. My father and his brother and sisters went to Kilkee for family holidays because of its proximity to Kilrush.

When it was time for summer holidays for my generation, we headed west for the bright lights of Ballybunion. And on our way we headed 'back' through Dromcollogher, Abbeyfeale and Listowel. As we passed through the village of Duagh, my mother always recited the ditty:

Abbeyfeale, Abbeyfeale,
Abbeyfeale, Abbeyfeale,
Abbeyfeale, Knocknagoshel and Duagh!

followed by another famous statement:

Arise Knocknagoshel and take your place amongst the nations of the Earth.

Ballybunion in north Kerry was where people from north Cork and west Limerick went for their summer seaside holidays. Fathers had to stay at home to milk the cows and save the hay, so it was usually mothers and children who stayed over in Ballybunion. Our annual ritual involved bringing all your own food to one of the many guesthouses in 'BallyB', as it was affectionately called. The landlady and her staff then prepared and delivered your own food to your table during the week.

Dry days in Ballybunion revolved around morning and afternoon trips to the beach, punctuated by trips uptown by the children to Mike's gift shop. Adults enjoyed Collin's or Daly's seaweed baths. Wet days in BallyB were still quite enjoyable for children, who usually purchased water pistols and made sure that their guesthouse was properly saturated. Mrs Houlihan was the name of our landlady and after a number of years you were treated like one of the family. Year after year, you would meet the same people taking their holidays and great friendships would be struck up. These were the days when the famous Kerry playwright John B. Keane was becoming a household name and my mother would often advise us that he was on the beach with his wife and children. My father would add that John B. had worked as an assistant at Jones' pharmacy in Doneraile as a younger man.

Nights were spent at Bert Patterson's 'fit up' marquee, watching a variety programme followed by a two or three act play. Plays were usually tragic, like 'The Coleen Bawn'. Amusement arcades along the main street sprung up as slot machines came to Ballybunion in the very early 1960s.

The 15th August was the big night in Ballybunion and the two big ballrooms in the town — the Central (now the Golf Hotel) and Horan's — would be packed until the doors were closed. The Central had a first-floor balcony and I recall one memorable night looking at a crowd of Cork and Kerry youngsters abseiling up the balcony.

We were in Ballybunion for the moon landing in 1969 and what excitement it created in my 15-year-old mind. Ever since I started working on my first metal 'Meccano' set, which we received from my Auntie Birdie, I was interested in everything scientific and mechanical. The moon landing was the most awesome scientific feat as far as I was concerned then and still is to this day.

Apart from the *Examiner*, our Pye wireless was our link with the outside world. We listened to Radio Luxembourg for pop music and Radio Éireann for the news, sports and entertainment. At that time, Radio Éireann was not open all day. It would close down for a few hours in the afternoon. There were also a series of 15-minute sponsored programmes which were very popular. The 'Mitchelstown' programme was a favourite, playing Irish music. On a Saturday afternoon, Leo Maguire's Walton's programme was essential listening, with Joe Lynch (later Denny in Glenroe) usually providing a song or two. I loved 'The Clitheroe Kid' on BBC Radio on Sunday evenings; this radio show started in 1958 and continued until 1972. 'Sing Something Simple' with the Adams Singers still echoes in the recesses of my mind, as does the first time I heard Val Doonican singing 'Elusive Butterfly' on a sunny June morning having my breakfast before heading for school in Churchtown.

Our wonderful wooden Pye wireless was littered with exotic placenames and radio stations such as Hilversum, Leipzig, Prague, Luxembourg and AFN (American Forces Network). As a short-wave radio enthusiast, or a DX-er, I was fascinated with picking up station signals from far away and exotic places, and started corresponding with as many of these stations as possible. Letters arrived from all over the world — Radio Station Peace and Progress, Radio Kiev and Radio Moscow in the USSR; Radio Finland, Radio Sweden, Radio Canada, Radio South Africa, Radio Australia, Radio Peking and HCJB broadcasting from Quito in Ecuador, to

mention just a selection of the stations I was able to pick up on that trusty Pye wireless. Ellie Mary and Nora O'Keeffe, who ran the village sub-post office at the time, were always intrigued with all the foreign correspondence that arrived for me as a mere youngster.

The arrival of TV in 1961 heralded a new era in home entertainment. Our first television was purchased in time for the Grand National in 1963 from Tadgh Healy's furniture shop in Buttevant. Tadgh had a rather eclectic collection of goods on sale and he was friendly with my father as they shared an avid interest in racing. Hutch's in Buttevant was the main electrical shop and Tony O'Neill's pub was popular with Churchtown people too. Buttevant was also famous for a private school run by a Mr Kelleher and his wife, where strict discipline was enforced and so attendance was regularly threatened on Churchtown youngsters who 'did not do their lessons'.

Our heroes were then TV stars and we collected *RTÉ Guides* for their pictures. 'Tolka Row' was the first 'soap' before we ever heard of the expression and the comings and goings of Jack Nolan, his son Seán, their aunt Anastasia, neighbour Mrs Philomena Feeney and other characters kept rural Ireland informed about what life was like in Dublin. The nation was on a knife edge the night Jack's son-in-law, Mossie Walker, died from complications associated with a bunion removal! This was years before 'The Riordan's' hit our screens as regular Sunday night entertainment.

The biggest radio and TV advertising campaign of this period was the 'hunt for the elusive Jim Figgerty', the man who put the figs in the fig rolls which ran as a 'teaser' campaign and had the whole parish and country captivated. We envied Dublin people when we saw advertisements in the *Evening Press* for TVs that could be rented and operated on a 'pay per view' basis. Basically, you put your money in a slot which turned on the television for a set number of minutes.

Television was not without its risks though. We were constantly reminded that TV would 'ruin our sight' and woe betide anyone who faced the full brunt of the radiation from the flash as the TV was turned off. This type of advice fell into the same category as Pad Relihan's conviction that the SS Innisfallen hit the rocks every time it crossed St George's Channel on its trip from Cork to Fishguard, or Uncle Bill's certainty that when he went to Kilkee for his annual holidays the tide always 'came in at five o'clock' and that 'one hour's sleep before midnight was worth two afterwards'. There was another theory — that you could predict racing results by studying the cartoon strip 'Mutt and Jeff'. The people were not for turning in their beliefs.

Agricultural contractors were powerful figures in those days as they could decide on life and death harvest issues, like the rota for hay-cutting or baling. If the weather was due to break and local amateur meteorologist Morgan Brislane of the Windmill had announced the arrival of clouds of rain-bearing 'woolpacks', you wanted your hay saved as soon as possible. Jim Sampson, who lives in the beautiful Parson's House in the village, was an important local contractor. As far as I could see, his response to pressure from farmers for priority was to work 24 hours a day. Mick Galvin was a most daring tractor operator and was capable of taking a baler into parts of a bog where no other person would boldly go. Timmy Brien of Walshestown House was also involved, as were the O'Brien brothers, Pat and Mossie, from Liscarroll.

Politics were always just below the surface and I was acutely aware of Northern Ireland issues from 1966 on, when my Uncle Roger (Tony) Hickey introduced Uncle Bill to a Dungannon-based civil rights organisation. Our house was, like most everyone else in Ireland, firmly behind the pre-Civil War Sinn Féin of Éamon de Valera and Michael Collins, and would have sympathised with the anti-Treaty forces during the Civil War, but would have been very unhappy with the killing of Michael Collins by the anti-Treaty side in August 1922. Things changed so badly for the farming sector during the 'Economic War' of the 1930s that the farming community

deserted 'Dev' in their droves for Cumann na nGaedheal, which was later to become Fine Gael. Uncle Bill changed, but not for too long before he found a soul mate in Joe Sherlock's Socialist Worker's Party politics. Remarkably, even though it was well within living memory, there was little rancour about the Civil War when I was growing up in Churchtown.

John Leary was the most political person in the parish as far as I was concerned at the time, though the nearest we ever got to electing a TD was when Michael Broderick of Walshestown ran for Fine Gael in a bye-election and got very close to a seat. Michael Broderick served as a County Councillor for many years, including having the honour of serving as Chairman of Cork County Council.

Uncle Bill kept us informed about the War of Independence era and raids on our house, checking for 'warm beds'. He had one particular story about a nasty raid on the house by a Charleville-based group of 'Free Staters', as the Regular army was called, where they were threatening to shoot my grandfather in the hall and, according to Uncle Bill, only the intervention of my grandmother and himself as a 5-year-old saved the night.

Uncle Bill had the highest respect for the British people, whom he regarded as 'very fair minded', but he did not think much of their governing classes. He was informed by books like *Rebel Cork's Fighting Story* and Tom Barry's *Guerrilla Days in Ireland*. He told me all about the burning of Cork and the great sacrifice of Terence McSwiney, Tomás MacCurtain and Kevin Barry. I remember the night internment without trial was introduced into Northern Ireland in 1969 and listening to the radio news late into the night with Uncle Bill, who was, of course, appalled by what was happening.

Uncle Bill spent a short time working on a farm in England in the 1930s and he regularly advised us about what life was like in Market Harborough, where he was based. His period in the LDF (Local Defence Force) during the 'Emergency' (or Second World War) was also often mentioned.

A different type of politics was celebrated every November in Churchtown when a church gate collection was held to commemorate 'Poppy Day', with funds going to help ex-British Army soldiers mainly from World War I or the '14-18' War, as we called it. In hindsight, when I hear controversy about commemorating Irish people who fell fighting for Britain, I am reminded of just how mature the people of Churchtown were in reconciliation terms. All our family contributed to the collection and as children we wore the Poppy on the appointed Sunday.

First Communion, in St Nicholas' Church in Churchtown, was an important event from a spiritual viewpoint. It had a material connotation as well since the most asked question after your Communion by adults and children alike was, 'How much did you make'. An annual ritual after First Communion every year involved the communicants going to the school for a snack after Mass. The snack consisted of hot cocoa and a sticky bun, and this event was a time-honoured rite of passage. Cocoa was as important as maté tea was to South American Indians as far as the people of Churchtown were concerned, or so it seemed to me back then. Apart from the ubiquitous yellow Fry's containers in every home, the school was provided with vast quantities of cocoa courtesy of the Muintir na Tíre.

Our First Communion went off nicely under Dr Twomey's guidance and the tutelage of schoolmaster Pat Collins, who drove to Churchtown from Ballyhea every day in his little Hillman Imp. The schoolmaster was a key village figure and their names struck both respect and fear into adults and children alike. I regret that physical punishment was part and parcel of school life when I was in Churchtown National School. Thankfully, this is no longer the case.

'Mr Tierney' and 'Mr Wall', whose career spanned both the old and the new school, had retired before my time, but their reputations as teachers was understood by all. In fact, Mrs Wall

was still offering some teaching support when I started in 1959 and I can recall her unsuccessful attempts to get me to sing that old Irish song *Bheir me o oro bhean o*.

Of the assistant teachers in the three-teacher school, I remember Miss Kelleher (later Mrs O'Regan), Miss Kennedy and Ms Bowler (now Bernie Roche, who lives in Douglas in Cork). Miss Kennedy I met in another guise many years later when her husband, Michael Murphy, opened a chemist shop in North Square, Macroom, a few doors from the Bank of Ireland branch where I served from 1978 to 1982.

Communion for the lucky ones involved a trip somewhere. Mine was celebrated with a trip to see the 'planes' at Shannon Airport and meet my uncle, Sean Hickey, who brought us to see the world's first duty-free shop. This allowed my mother to cast judgement on the quality and value in Aran knitwear, which was a huge product line aimed at transatlantic Shannon fliers. Mother was well able to judge as she was a wonderful knitter and managed to turn out Aran sweaters for her children in a range of colours.

Confirmation meant a visit from the Bishop and because the Bishop's time was valuable and Churchtown and Liscarroll was in reality one parish, the event rotated between the two churches. When it came to my turn for Confirmation, we had to make the trip to Liscarroll. On the day, I recall that getting to Liscarroll on time was a major task as time-keeping was not my father's forte. However, the day passed smoothly and after being confirmed by Bishop Aherne of Cloyne, we retired for the afternoon to Joe and Eily Murphy's (no relation) house near Liscarroll village. It was less exotic than Shannon Airport, but very enjoyable nonetheless as we knew these Murphys well — they were also 'BallyB' people.

Liscarroll is important to us Murphys for more than my Confirmation, of course, because it was here the family lived before Daniel Murphy left Liscarroll for Egmont, Churchtown, in the early 1800s. His son, William, leased the farm at Leap in the 1850s and later purchased it under the Ashbourne Land Act in the 1890s. Another branch of the Murphy family left Egmont for Ballinagrath in Ballyhea.

When I was growing up, Jack Murphy of Egmont was still active. He was married to Josie Donovan of Cullig House. Her brother, Dick Donovan, inherited the family farm in Cullig and he was a most generous man. When visitors would give you a shilling (€0.03), Dick would think nothing of giving you a half-crown (€0.16) or even a red ten bob note (€0.65) if the mood struck him.

Dick's brother Matt, who worked for AIB Bank, and I were to cross paths years later when we both married into the Gallagher family. Another brother, Fr Moss, was Parish Priest in Kilnamartrya when I worked in Macroom and Sr Enda and Sr Ursula were well-respected nuns. Jack of Egmont's son Donal was ordained and said his first Mass in Churchtown, which was a very important event for the parish as well as for his family in Egmont. His untimely death brought sadness to us all.

Up to the 1950s, the Murphy's owned the 'tithes' to the fair and the Fair field itself in Liscarroll. Liscarroll was also the scene of the battle of strength between a British Army officer and my great-great-granduncle, William Murphy, the hammer-thrower whom Ballyhea-bard Con Brien commemorated in a long poem published in the *Cork Weekly Examiner*:

'Twas back long ago, in the year '68,
When the landlord and agent were running the State,
Now big William Murphy, well known far and wide,
A fine able man, without swagger or pride,
Was famous for throwing the sledge and the weight.

Our house was a horse racing house and apart from going to race meetings my father and mother followed English and Irish racing in great detail and loved to place small bets. My mother had an uncanny ability to pick winners.

Mallow Races on Easter Monday and in August was always obligatory, as was St Stephen's Day racing in Limerick' Green Park track. Limerick was always cold as I recall, but we were well able to keep ourselves warm running from the parade ring to the Tote with tiny bets. It was rarely possible to wait for the last race due to farming pressures, so the last race was usually watched from a good vantage point in the car park. Even if you were lucky, there was certainly no hope of collecting your winnings on the last 'bumper' race in Limerick as we were heading out of the car park almost as soon as the last horse was passing the finishing post. You had to keep your Tote ticket until another race meeting or else post it off to Merrion Square in Dublin and await a cheque, which would duly arrive.

Liscarroll Races every March was a different matter entirely. This was point-to-point racing and it was viewed from the 'Stephen's Rock', overlooking the famous castle. For youngsters, the main attractions were the hawkers and the stalls rather than the horses. One game stall involved buying a straw with a ticket rolled up inside which you extracted to see if you qualified for a prize. The man who ran this stand roared at the top of his voice all day, 'Have a go with your old pal Joe!'; when things were slack around his stand, he would invent a prizewinner by shouting out in his loudest voice, 'Hairy Mary from Tipperary, come down here and collect your prize'. It was hilarious.

Other stalls were less flamboyant and they sold everything from brushes and tools to Sacred Heart pictures and other religious paraphernalia. At the 1964 races, I invested my savings in a semi-coloured picture of the late John F. Kennedy. Clearly the assassination of President Kennedy in November 1963, so soon after his visit to Ireland, had a huge impact on me as a 10 year-old. Television was making the world smaller.

My father travelled to Cheltenham a few times, but his favourite trip was to go to Listowel for the races in September and stay in Ballybunion. Each year the same group — Tom McAuliffe from Ballinguile, Michael Broderick from Walshestown and John Thompson from Ballinatrilla — were the core party who travelled to the races. By the end of September, the hay was well saved and the cows' milk yield would be beginning to fall back a little and my father could enjoy his short holiday. During his Listowel break, I often took responsibility for the milking and going to the Creamery. This continued until the mid-1970s and I am grateful to have had the experience.

Father also liked to keep a brood mare and was lucky on a few occasions with a good sale. One sale of a yearling for over £500 (€647) in the RDS in Dublin in the early 1960s was communicated home by telegram — it was such a vast sum of money at the time. This yearling was later christened 'Zephyr' and went on to win in England. That sale allowed my father the extravagance of his one and only new car — a beautiful white Ford Cortina, registration number JZB 802. The smell from the red seats of that wonderful machine as we journeyed home from Charleville on its maiden voyage is still with me.

Our friend and neighbour Jack Roche was a great man for new cars and the latest farm equipment. He was a farmer who had a golden touch. When we were getting our new Ford Cortina, Jack had a Ford Corsair. Jack was very good to me and followed my career with great interest. He enjoyed the atmosphere in public houses as distinct from the drink. His preference was a bottle of Carling Black Label and sitting in 'Dannixes' in Buttevant with Ned Fitz discussing horses was a favourite pastime. Jack bred thoroughbred yearlings and he travelled to the horse

sales in Newmarket in England and the RDS in Dublin many times with Ned Fitz as his assistant. We would all be most interested in hearing the stories of their exploits.

Jack was the person who was responsible for one of the most defining moments in my life when, as only he could do, he discovered though contacts that I was successful in my application to join Bank of Ireland. I recall so well Jack's excitement at our red back yard gate as he told me, 'You got the bank'. Not only that, but he had an idea where I was to be stationed: 'Somewhere in the east,' he said. This was September 1972 and in October I started 3-weeks' training in the Hibernian Bank, 27 College Green, Dublin. The big question every one of the 20 or so trainees wanted to know was where they would be based and we were not advised until early in the third week. Jack's 'intelligence' was on the ball and I was transferred to Bagenalstown, County Carlow.

As already explained, men in space fascinated me. But not everyone in Churchtown was convinced by the TV pictures of the astronauts. One village sceptic always maintained that no-one ever left Earth and that the Americans filmed it all in the Californian desert. Another widely held view was that space travel was 'a sin against nature' and would 'definitely affect the weather and the crops'. Any over-wet or over-dry period was cited as definite proof of this theory.

The outside world was confined to shopping trips to Charleville, Buttevant or Mallow, with Limerick and Cork reserved for special purchases, Ballybunion for summer holidays and every few years the possibility of a few days in Dublin with the O'Keeffes or my mother's brother Stephen Hickey and his wife Terry.

Of course, we had school day trips to Cork, Limerick and Dublin, and I had the real privilege of departing from Buttevant railway station before it closed on one of these trips, which I recall for the wrong reason. On this occasion, I had a ten shilling note (€0.64) with me for the day, which was quite a lot of money at the time, and I was so afraid of losing it I carefully put it in my sock. But my forgetfulness, which continues to this day (and probably worsens as the years progress), meant I could not remember where I had put it and I had the upset all day of thinking I had lost my allowance. Luckily, the teachers loaned me some money and I was able to enjoy the day trip. It was not until late that night when I was taking off my sock that out popped the ten shilling note.

Charleville has a most imposing Main Street and the common wisdom was that there was a 'money' side and a 'sunny' side. Ball's, which was a precursor of the modern supermarket, was on the money side of the street. The children's favourite shop was Spillane's ice cream parlour, which was surely an anachronism in the Ireland of the 1950s and '60s. Here you could buy glass bowls of ice cream in a myriad of flavours. Mr Spillane, with his glasses and large figure, had his counter at the rear of the shop and 'diners' would sit on benches along both walls. No trip to Charleville was complete without an ice cream from Spillane's.

If Ball's was the most famous grocery business, then Murray's was by far the most famous clothes shop in north Cork and south Limerick. Michael Murray, Senior, was a most imposing figure who was office-bound, mainly leaving the shop to be run by his family and the most helpful assistant 'Tom'. Tom fitted out our whole family time and time again and was almost like a family friend. Goods were regularly offered 'on appro', so one could decide if an item was really as nice as Tom said it was in the privacy of one's own home.

Murray's sales were awaited eagerly. A fantastic circular letter, running to many pages, would be dispatched to regular customers inviting them to have the first of the bargains. These letters were read in detail in our house and we were delighted with the many bargains that Murray's procured for the benefit of the people of north Cork.

Charleville had our nearest cinema, but as youngsters we did not attend there often. My first trip to the cinema was to see 'Darby O'Gill and the Little People', which clearly captured the imagination of the parents of Ireland at the time. But by far the most exciting visitor to Charleville was the legendary sharp-shooting cowboy Kit Carson and his assistant Annie Oakley. For me, to see Kit Carson live in Charleville was a wonder that was only matched some years later when we all went to see Bertram Mill's Circus in Limerick. My father bought a Coco the Clown mask or 'hi-fiddle' for me, which I treasured.

We never had to worry about going to Kanturk since it came to our farmyard every week, when a large van with a driver and sales person called on behalf of Burke's. This was service. Jack Madden was Burke's representative and he brought far more than the groceries. He brought all the news as well. The van was like an Aladdin's cave of goodies and we were usually allowed to have a look when the serious shopping was completed. Groceries were sold on account, which had to be settled every couple of months. As the years progressed, the vans got smaller and Jack Madden became driver *and* salesman in a 1960s-style business downsizing operation. The first supermarkets had arrived.

Uncle Bill always enjoyed Jack Madden's weekly visit for the chat and an opportunity to buy cigarettes. Uncle Bill's income at that time depended on the sale of apples from our orchard of about 30 large apple trees. The apples would be collected mainly as windfalls from the long grass, where they were assured of a soft landing, and stored in barrels or baths in sand or later on cardboard apple trays. Uncle Bill handled those apples with great care and they provided the household with the raw material for apple stew, apple tarts and even apple jam for the entire winter. The surplus apples were sold in as much as it was possible to sell them. Speaking of apples, my mother had an amazing ability to peel a whole apple with a knife in such a way that none of its flesh was lost and the peel never broke in the process.

The arrival of Dunne's Stores in Mallow in the 1960s was a great bonus for shoppers, but was a nail in the coffin of rural shopping. Mallow was an important town with a mart every Friday which my father liked to attend. He also made a point of attending Kilmallock Mart on a Monday, which meant he was very adept as a judge of livestock.

My mother had a small source of income from the sale of eggs. We had a large hen house, or hennery as we called it rather grandiosely, and a flock of Rhode Island Reds, usually purchased as chicks from Whittaker's in Cork and delivered as baby chicks to Buttevant by bus. The hens provided us with eggs for the household and surplus eggs were sold in Charleville, which provided some 'egg money' for my mother. In time, the cost of feeding and tending the hens made egg production at this level uneconomical and it became cheaper to buy factory or 'battery'-produced hen eggs in Ball's shop in Charleville.

Pig killing was not uncommon. I recall vividly at least one major pig killing event. The screams from the pig were unbelievable, but the resulting pork steak encouraged us to forget the screams very quickly. The pork steak was a real delicacy and some was shared with neighbours. Sausages were made as well that day, with Alice Relihan in charge of production. When the meat was carved up, the bacon backs had to be salted. All hands were on deck for this operation. After salting, the bacon was placed in a timber barrel and preserved in even more salt. We had no freezer in those days, but we were lucky to have a small cold cellar. Pig killing on the farm did not continue and the job was outsourced to a local abattoir, but the salting and preserving ritual continued for very many years.

I had my own ventures into business as a youngster too, when I tried to become a duck egg and a lettuce magnate. In between, I recall a beetroot project.

The duck egg project involved purchasing ducks and my main source was a woman who regularly helped my mother in the house called Mrs Jewitt. Mary and Jerry Jewitt, who always travelled on his red Honda 50, lived with their children in a new house in Ballindillanig, just a mile from our house. Mrs Jewitt was very fond of me, even making me a large tent sewn from white fertilizer bags, and always insisted that I was to give her my 'first pay packet'. She christened me 'Duds' as a pet name. Anyway, the duck egg project was not as successful as the original business plan suggested, mainly due to the unwillingness of the ducks to lay. One of the ducks I had acquired was a beautiful 'Muscovi', who was really only interested in learning to fly and preening itself.

The lettuce business grew out of a need for additional pocket money in Ballybunion. The plan was beautifully implemented, but fell down when it came to distribution and marketing. There I was in Ballybunion, having carefully shifted four apple boxes of lettuces and could I persuade any shop or individual to invest in my organic lettuce? I must have sold three or four heads in total and had to write off the crop. A valuable lesson was learnt — if you don't have good distribution, you're goosed.

My mother, Nora Hickey, was raised on a farm in Newtownshandrum and went to Primary school there and afterwards to the Convent in Charleville. The Hickey family of Kilmagoura were my mother's people. My maternal grandfather, who was from Dromina, had purchased the farm at Kilmagoura and was a well-respected cattle dealer and farmer. He died far too young, leaving a widow and seven young children. I recall my grandmother in Kilmagoura and also her visits to Leap. She was an elegant and clever woman, who had qualified as a nurse but was unable to work outside the farm with so many young children and farm responsibilities. Her maiden name was Kiely and her family hailed from Feenagh in County Limerick. Her brother, Paddy Kiely, had a sweet shop just up the road from Spillane's ice cream emporium in Charleville and it is not possible for me to see a 'tipsy' cake without recalling our regular visits to that tidy little shop.

My mother's brother, Michael, was fascinated by greyhounds and greyhound racing, and we travelled on a few occasions to see his victories in Cork and Limerick. All his dogs were registered with the suffix 'Kilmagoura'. I recall the day my grandmother was buried in Shandrum and was fascinated to see Michael Hickey offering mourners at the funeral whiskey after the burial from the boot of his car, as was the custom at the time. I also remember earlier that day going through the railway gates at Shinanagh and, as the gates were opening, the lady said to my mother, 'Sorry for your trouble'. I was very young, but the expression has stayed with me and I always use it myself at funerals as it says all that has to be said despite its quaintness. I also remember children who had lost a parent wearing a black armband or a black diamond on their sleeve.

Most farmhouses had a good room, which was called the 'parlour'. Now the parlour was a special area of preservation that was only used on state occasions, such as the four-yearly Station Mass, visitors at Christmas or after a family funeral. In our case, the parlour was used only once for a funeral, when my maternal grandmother died and my mother invited her siblings and spouses to our house after the funeral Mass and burial in Newtownshandrum.

The graveyard at Kilbrin beyond Liscarroll is the final resting place of the Murphys. Here are three cemeteries within one wall — a very early cemetery, where there are Murphy family members buried but not well marked, and a slightly more modern graveyard, where the Murphy plot is located. Then at the other side of the field is a modern graveyard. The cemetery in Kilbrin overlooks most of north Cork.

I remember Kilbrin for another reason as an impressionable youngster, when a boxing match broke out at a GAA match in which Churchtown was playing. I also had the unwelcome privilege of playing football in an under-age competition in Ballyhea, where the match had to be stopped after a parent decided to take on the referee under the Queensbury rather than the GAA rules. My GAA experiences on the field of play for Churchtown may have been very limited, but I have the highest respect for the contribution the GAA has made to life in Ireland.

Playing is important to all youngsters and we were no exception in our inventiveness. We made a lot of our toys, especially bows and arrows with which we played in Burton Wood on Sunday afternoons. Tory tops and conkers made great toys. I made my own bi-plane with a few bits of timber. One wing was then tied to a 30-foot length of baler twine. I could get the plane to take off in a small arc and by gradually letting out the string could get it to fly in a 30-foot orbit until I either got too tired or suffered a 'reeling in my head' and the control tower collapsed. On one rare occasion, we were able to ice skate on O'Connor's pond near our Goaling field. There was no swimming because my mother reckoned that only swimmers drowned. Luckily, she did not see any real danger in cycling and so I managed to learn to cycle myself by racing freewheel down the hilly 'passage' to our house.

Bikes were really important to my parents' generation, but were becoming less so in my youth. My father was a great cyclist in his youth and had no problem cycling to Thurles for a match. He cycled to Secondary school in Charleville, meeting up with Paddy Regan in Ballyhea on the way. He had a cycling strategy which depended on walking, not cycling, up steep hills and conserving your energy, which works very well. As a young girl, my mother thought nothing of cycling from Newtownshandrum to Limerick.

One's first bicycle is also a very important occasion and I can still recall the excitement. My bicycle was a beautiful shining red Raleigh and it was purchased in Hurley's in Charleville, arriving in time for Christmas. It cost £12, which was a lot of money at the time and I contributed almost half the cost from my savings, which were held in Churchtown sub-post office under the watchful eye of Nora and Ellie Mary O'Keeffe. The bike arrived in very bad weather and so I was confined to cycling it around the house. I became an expert in manoeuvring it around the dining-table without falling off or touching the ground.

When the time came for me to travel to school on my new bicycle, my father decided it would be better to cycle it home first rather than attempting the two-mile journey in the morning. So, on that first day, he actually cycled back to Churchtown on an adult bike while steering my new Raleigh at the same time. This allowed him to accompany me on a bike on my first cycle home from school.

The bike allowed me to get home from school a bit earlier as we seemed to take forever on foot. Walking to school through the fields had died out by 'my time', though the track was well known. We were also lucky enough to be driven to school at the same time as the milk was going to the Creamery in the milking season. Coming home was usually our own responsibility. When parents collected their children from school, they would always pile in as many pupils as would fit. It was a community effort.

The best Christmas we had was the year when two tricycles arrived from 'Santy' Claus. My one was red with a step on the back, so it doubled as a scooter if it was the thrill of speed you were after. The 'trike' was built to last and I don't know how many record-breaking attempts I made on it between the back door and the cow stall, which was the only concrete area on which to ride.

One Christmas, Tadgh Healy in Buttevant decided to provide a Santa Claus facility and, to ensure that the event would never be forgotten, he had a photographer on the spot to record

the visit for posterity. Now, what we didn't know at that time was that there was a real Santy in the North Pole and the shop Santas were only impostors, more kindly referred to as helpers. Without this 'intelligence', a rude awaking took place when 'Dines' was examining my prized picture and announced with a definite air that Santa had a striking resemblance to one Phil Joe Keane. The game was nearly up for Santy.

Daily reading material for adults was provided by the *Cork Examiner*, *Evening Echo* and the Dublin-based *Evening Press*. We got the *Examiner* daily and the *Evening Press* every evening for the racing nominations. Three columns stood out for special attention in the *Evening Press*. First, the Dubliner's Diary — a nightly review of the parties and receptions of Dublin presented by Nuala O'Faolain's father, 'Terry O'Sullivan', and read in bed each night by Uncle Bill, who summarised the more interesting bits. I think Uncle Bill was more familiar with Dublin social life than most Dubliners. In hindsight, I think we were always expecting to read about our first cousin and hero, William J. O'Keeffe of Finnegan Menton, in Dubliner's Diary and had to be satisfied in the end with his occasional picture or mention on the greyhound page.

Uncle Bill also read and relayed to us the contents of J. Ashton Freeman's wildlife series, while my mother would always read Fr Nash's Diary or 'Thought for the Day'. 'Spot the ball' and the huge £5,000 prize crosswords were a very important part of selling Sunday newspapers and most families had a go at these competitions at some time or another.

The *Vale Star* had not yet arrived and so the weekly newspaper was *The Corkman*. The 'Churchtown Notes', written by Denny Connell in Liscarroll, were read with great interest. Books were purchased in Dick's in Charleville and we were good readers. Adventure stories about the South Seas, like R.M. Ballantyne's 'Coral Island', were my favourites. Comics were a vital part of every boy's life and I started with the *Beano* and the *Dandy* before migrating to a weekly subscription to *Tiger* and *Hurricane*, where I was able to follow the exploits of Roy of the Rovers, Skid Solo and other heroes. Uncle Bill opposed the purchase of English comics and recommended unsuccessfully *Our Boys* or *Ireland's Own*, but Kitty the Hare stories had no special appeal to me then.

The mainly black-and-white, pocket size 64-page comics never captured my imagination the way 'DC' comics, showing the exciting exploits of Batman and Robin or Superman, did in living colour. Horse racing may have been the sport of kings and my family, but I was more interested in the hobby of kings — philately or stamp-collecting. My collection started the same as so many other boys — by replying to a little box advertisement in an English comic. They got your name and sent you a set of invariable fake stamps from non-existent countries and a never-ending supply of 'approvals', which you could buy or return. Once I had to purchase a postal order for ten shillings (€0.64) because a book of approvals I returned was lost in the post and I was afraid of the damage to my name and reputation as I did not feel my excuse was credible. This was a valuable and an expensive lesson since ten shillings was a vast sum of money in those days.

Christmas I always associate with visitors, especially our cousins the Smyth family who lived in Ballybeg, a few miles south of Buttevant. Auntie Peggy and her husband Mick Smyth and their four boys would arrive, laden with their post-Christmas 'equipment' — usually mechanical diggers and automatic guns. Our cousin Noel spent an entire summer with us one year and added to the excitement around the house and farm.

After second Mass on Sundays was a most boring time for us youngsters as my father and Uncle Bill could leave us in the car for what seemed like an eternity to chat with their friends. During this time, one Jack Lewis, who lived 'a long way down the Black Road' towards Ballyhea, would invariably make his way to our car to entertain us children and await the return of my

father. Jack would then come to our house and after his lunch would do a household job like polishing boots and shoes. This went on for years, though his visits became less frequent in later years as he went to Jimmy and Mary Sullivan's house, where he was treated very generously for many years.

Ned Daly was an interesting visitor from Rathcormac in east Cork. He was a master hurley-maker and a huge GAA fan. Uncle Bill had the fortune to be standing beside him at a match somewhere and a friendship was struck that endured until Ned's death. Ned arrived by racing bicycle and cut a great dash. His visit usually lasted no more than a day or two, but it added to the excitement nonetheless.

Another village character was Tom Murphy, who helped at Dunlea's with Mick Relihan when required. Tom was into game hunting and went to the Isle of Mull for a few months, working on a deer cull. He came for his tea one evening to fill us in on the exploits and it all sounded so exciting.

'Doc' Sherlock was another occasional visitor who was loved for his boyish roguery. The 'Doc' was a most intelligent man who had spent a number of years in university studying medicine and, while he never qualified, he was always known as 'The Doc' in Churchtown.

Fields on our farm had names and personalities. We had the High field, the Lawn or Stone field, the Middle field, the Goaling field, the Watering field, the Screen (wood), Dunlea's field, the Horse bog and the bog itself. The Goaling field was the field with the most stories as it was the location for so many hurling matches I suspect even before the GAA was set up formally in Thurles in 1884.

The Lawn or Stone field has its own huge megalithic standing stone and graveyard. Legend had it that a giant had hurled this massive rock from the Ballyhoura Mountains ten miles, so as to pin some unfortunate under a natural monument. We were very sure about the truth of this story as, on close inspection, one could be persuaded that the giant's finger and hand prints were clearly visible on the stone. I often wondered why the field was also called the 'lawn' and only stumbled on its etymology when reading Grove-White's extraordinary topography of north Cork in which he describes the stone as a 'Dallaun'. I'm certain this became 'lawn' in everyday speech.

Dunlea's field was famous as the field where we grew tobacco during the war. I know the crop was huge in foliage terms, but my father always maintained that the resulting tobacco was of poor quality and not a success. The stories about the workers being invisible under the tobacco leaves were retold time and again whenever this alternative crop was discussed. The passage into the Horse bog had its own story too — about the stones being transported by cart from Churchtown by female labour and about the great flax crops in olden days. Holes associated with flax-curing are still evident in the bog.

The woodland or 'screen' near the dwelling house was planted as a shelter from the winds in winter. Sheep holes were another feature of the farm walls or ditches. These little passages let sheep roam freely, while cattle were confined to specific fields. Water on a farm is vital and we had a few sources — a pond at the end of the Goaling field that hardly ever dried up and an Awbeg tributary river in the Watering field and in the bog. We also had a freshwater well not far from the bog and a disused well in the farm yard.

The class mates I remember best from school are my brother Pat, Sean O'Leary, Ted Buckley, Oliver Ryan-Purcell, Thomas Gaffney, Bridie Cronin, Donal Cronin and Mary Breen. The master taught Fourth, Fifth and Sixth class, so the room would contain about 20 pupils. In total, the school had about 85 to 90 on the roll at that time.

At Christmas, Miss Kelleher organised a draw one year where you got a ticket each time you paid in a few pence. The top prize from the choice as far as I was concerned was the most beautiful yellow metal 'digger' with a bucket mechanism that simulated reality. This was a machine to die for and the lucky winner was Ted Buckley from Ballinguile.

Almost from our front door you can see Templeconnell Castle, which we would occasionally visit on foot across the bog. Near the castle was a fulacht fiadh. We usually examined a number of deserted houses down a long lane near Sullivan's farm in Imogane on the way to the castle. This lane was called 'the *suil*..

The front of our farm house faces south, as did all older country houses, to take advantage of the natural heat of the sun. There was little interest in trimmed front lawns in those days. In front of our house was a kitchen garden which had various crops over the years, from potatoes to beetroot and lettuce. Occasionally it would be left fallow. A lane and privet hedge ran the 30 yards south to a high metal gate that was itself the subject of legend.

In the 1860s, William Murphy had two sons studying for the priesthood and his uncle — also William Murphy of Liscarroll, the weight-thrower — had four sons priests. These four priests took their mother's maiden name as well and were known as 'Wigmore-Murphy'. A chalice belonging to one of these men is still preserved in the church in Liscarroll. Anyway, the story that was handed down was of all six Murphy priests assembled in front of our house and some of them exercising themselves by vaulting over the big metal gate.

As a youth I was more familiar with the eastern side of the parish, though I would say that everybody knew everybody else. If they didn't know your first name, they certainly knew you were 'young Murphy from the Leap'. Denny 'Booney' (O'Sullivan) and his sisters Hannie and Susie lived in the village. Denny was an imposing figure, with a moustache and a pipe. The 'Booneys' were very well regarded by the Murphys and the feeling was returned. As a youngster, they would look me up and down and after some deliberation all agree that 'You're a Cullinan'. Now I was no-one to disagree with this pronouncement as they knew my grandmother and I didn't since she had died ten years before I was born. Uncle Bill was very attached to my grandmother and regularly praised her good looks and business acumen. He also explained the sacrifice he had gone through after her death — by mourning her for a year. This involved not going to dances, which was the only entertainment in those days. These dances were late-night marathon events that didn't start until midnight and went on until daylight.

If Uncle Bill was to be believed, then when he was a young man a dance in Liscarroll was the place to go for waltzing and foxtrots. This was the era of the 'big band' and the wireless. Din Joe may have been presenting Irish dancing on the wireless from 'Athlone', but the youth of the time were also listening to Glen Miller and Victor Sylvester from the London Palladium on their wirelesses. The highlight of the dancing season was to attend a Hunt Ball, which was very much the preserve of the rich and famous. Investing in a ticket for a Hunt Ball was a major extravagance.

Big families were common and anything less than four was small. The big families of my era were the McMahons of Mountcorbitt. Paddy McMahon was our postman for many years. While Churchtown had two postmen before the van arrived it was not always serviced from the village, but from Buttevant Post Office. In fact, the postal address back then was just Buttevant, County Cork. Now, when the post was delivered from Buttevant, Jim our postman brought more than post. He provided a social service up to and including hair-cutting. Yes, Jim found time every so often to cut all our hair as an ancillary service to delivering the bills.

Tan Simcox, one of the GAA stars of the parish, was my first employer in 1972 when he hired me and a friend from boarding school, Brendan O'Shea, to 'pike' bales for him. Even

though Tan did the hiring, his father Nat did the paying. From working for Tan Simcox, I graduated to cleaning out some outhouses for Pat Lynch. This was the summer of 1972 and, having completed my Leaving Certificate, I was looking for a more permanent position! Luckily I was accepted by Bank of Ireland and I left Charleville Railway Station for Dublin on Sunday, 16th October 1972, and began training the following morning in the Hibernian Bank at 27 College Green in Dublin. It took me just a few months short of 25 years before I returned and established a base again in Churchtown in 1997.

Like the salmon who returns to the place it was spawned and has its own unique sense of place, I have sought to define the place I call 'home' in these memories. I hope I have been in some way successful and that I have not offended by my words or by my omissions, and if I have the fault is mine alone and I regret it.

The opposite of memories, I suppose, are dreams and thankfully my dreams for Churchtown still far outweigh my memories.

Ends