

Now, Why Is It Ye're Comin ta Ireland?

Mal Bellairs

1997



Figure 1: Ireland.

About my book



Figure 2: View of the Shannon from the front room

All my life, as a radio and TV performer, I have been a talker. Communicating ideas is not difficult for me. The problem is that spoken words once spoken are gone. I feel the need to leave a permanent record of my love affair with Ireland and its people. It began in the 1960's and extends to the present 1997. If I do not write it down, no one will ever know the crazy little things that have happened to us during all these years. When I say "us" I mean the cast of characters!

- My first wife, Jo Morrissy Bellairs and our seven children.
- My second wife, Maria Henslee Bellairs and her three children.
- The people of Doonaha near Kilkee, County Clare, Ireland.

- The Old Grey Beauty Lisrona House, 150 year old, constructed of stone with a slate roof and located on the banks of the Shannon River.

My fellow Americans, what is it like to become part of Ireland? Here is my story.



List of Figures

1	Ireland.	ii
2	View of the Shannon from the front room	iii
1.1	Our home in Wilmette	2
1.2	WBBM Promotional photo of me — I do it all!	3
1.3	The Bellairs tribe in 1969 — Kim, Pat, Jo, me, Keith, Chris, Jerry, Jeff, Rick	4
2.1	Here I am in my studio with the Clancy Borthers and Tommy Makem.	10
3.1	Mal and Jo On the Go started at WBBM	17
3.2	I am sitting at Arthur Godfrey’s desk.	18
3.3	Our last Christmas in Wilmette. ”Picasso” on the front porch.	20
3.4	Me at the mike at WIVS	24
6.1	Liscrona House	48
6.2	Liscrona House is at A.	62
8.1	Kim and Neal at the altar. I’m there with my other daughter, Pat, the maid of honor.	78
8.2	The Old Grey Beauty with Her Original Chimneys	89
11.1	Maria and I.	141
1	Mal’s gravestone in Illinois	150

Contents

I	Finding Our Place in Ireland	1
1	We Need a Bolthole	2
2	The Ripening Period	9
3	Unrest on the Career Front	14
4	What Happened to Ireland?	26
5	Back To Work	40
II	Life in Ireland	46
6	Off to Ireland	47
7	Fate	68
8	The New Life	74
9	Expansion - Inflation	98
10	At Home at Liscrona	100
III	Liscrona Complete	140
11	The Best Years — 1990–1995	141
12	What's Ahead for Ireland	147

Part I

Finding Our Place in Ireland

Chapter 1

We Need a Bolthole



Figure 1.1: Our home in Wilmette

We were in our Wilmette, Illinois kitchen doing the dishes when I came out with, “We need a Bolthole. I was reading a book by an Englishman named Commander Schweppes. You know, he is the man who made gin and tonic famous. He created the tonic part. Anyway, the English use the word ‘Bolthole.’ It is a place where you can go when you want to get away from it all, sort of a retreat.”

“Oh,” my wife Jo replied, “and you think it’s time for us to find one?”

We were at this time in our mid 40’s. I was a radio performer on WBBM, the CBS outlet in Chicago. I was successful doing all the shows I could handle. I loved my work and for some time had been on the air seven days a week. Sponsors liked my shows and I was having a hard time saying “no” to new offers. The term is “workaholic.” Along the way, we had produced 7 children, 5 boys and 2 girls ranging in age from 4 to 21.



Figure 1.2: WBBM Promotional photo of me — I do it all!

The challenge in my life was trying to find a balance between work and family from the 21 year old Keith to Jerry, Pat, Kim, Rick, Jeff and the youngest Chris. My life was full. I was either on the air or at home with the family. I was not one to play golf, go bowling or go night clubbing with clients.

I brought up “Bolthole” because of a slight gnawing in the mid-section. At 45, I knew that at any time CBS brass in New York could decide, “We only want 25–35 year old talent. The demographics are pointing us to a younger market.” I felt a need to look ahead to the future and make some plans. Fifty and sixty sounded pretty old, and we were definitely heading in



Figure 1.3: The Bellairs tribe in 1969 — Kim, Pat, Jo, me, Keith, Chris, Jerry, Jeff, Rick

that direction.

Jo, in her level head way said, “Well, let’s talk about it. Do you think we need more than our home here in Wilmette? Is your ‘Bolthole’ idea like a retirement place?” I agreed that was the general idea. All of us could enjoy it as a vacation home and then somewhere down the road, it could be more permanent. Thus began our discussion.

“Florida?” No, I do not need the heat or humidity.

“California?” Too many people.

“Colorado?” Winter’s too long

“Ozarks?” Snakes.

“Smokies?” Too much Gatlinburg.

At this point, Jo looked off into space and ventured this idea, “Maybe we should return to our roots.” Since her maiden name was Morrissy, and there were Irish Morrissys all over southern Wisconsin, it was obvious what she meant by “roots.” My roots were in Scotland. The Bellairs family emigrated to the U.S. from Edinburgh to New Zealand and to the high country west of Fort Collins, Colorado where they raised Hereford beef cattle.

As I was to hear repeatedly over the next 25 years, “And what kind of an Irish name is Malcolm Bellairs?”

First to Britain

The decision was made. We should travel to our roots and see what turned up.

We left our brood in the capable hands of one of Jo's sisters and took off for London. We did all the usual tourist things, Westminster Abbey, Hyde Park, Buckingham Palace, the Tower, just wandering around and looking. Yes, these were the mid 60's and if we thought we had some strange long-haired types in the U.S., England was miles ahead of us. We rented a car and I did my first "wrong side driving." There were a few dirty looks and some horn beeping but mostly the English were tolerant, heaving sighs and muttering about "bloody yanks."

We drove through the Cotswold area which was beautiful and preferable to the big city turmoil. Since Jo and I were both theater addicts, of course we made for Stratford on Avon, which at that time was not yet overrun by tourism. We visited Ann Hathaway's cottage, the swans on the Avon, the final resting place of Shakespeare beside the altar of the local church, and to top it off, a performance of Macbeth in the theater. We couldn't get seats so we stood in the back and never missed a word. We both hated to leave England, it was wonderful.



We B & B'd our way northward to Edinburgh, Scotland. The Pipers were piping as we prowled around the castle that dominates the city. I could feel the antiquity, the War Memorial that saluted Scotland's fallen sons, and the nearness of Braveheart. This could be what roots were all about!

We continued north to Pitlockry, the gateway to the Scottish Highlands where we discovered McNaughtons of Pitlockry, the home of traditional Scottish wear. Here, I was fitted for my kilt and everything to go with it, including specially woven socks in the matching Malcolm tartan. Jo had her Malcolm long skirt, blouse and a full cape. We were magnificent. We even took home yards of material to outfit our kids. It was genuine Scottish "show and tell" time.

Then we drove north into the Highlands, the mountains, the lakes, the sheep and the heather. Oh the heather ... the waterfalls. One day we took a narrow road to nowhere in particular, through a set of gates and up tiny trails until all of Scotland was stretching out before us to the distant horizon. Yes, I did actually feel I had been there before. We tried to spot the monster at the Lough. He did not show up. We got lost dozens of times and loved it.

Finally we arrived in Glasgow. We were unimpressed. There is an adjective that is sometimes used to characterize the Scot. The word is dour — like the dour Scot, the sexy Frenchman, etc. We found Glasgow to be a dour city. The dull greystone houses just seemed to go on block after block. Please excuse me, native sons of Glasgow. I mean you no harm We just did not see your good side. So much for my half of the family roots.

Off to Ireland!

The airport at Shannon is an intimate place, small and wonderful, and no one seems to be in a rush. For our first night, we had made reservations at Dromoland Castle and were lucky to get a room in one of the four corner round towers. The view of fields and trees and flowers was breathtaking. The dining room, aglow with candles, and what seemed to be tons of silver, the sparkle in my wife's big brown eyes — well — judge for yourself. I have forgotten what we had for dinner. I know we were too impressed to taste the food. We loved Dromoland and we prowled it in many corners, found a tiny pub in the lower depths and shared Irish coffees.

I was to discover in later times that we had behaved like typical Americans, dreaming of knights and castles and fair maidens. The Irish, in their gentle manner, disclosed that Dromoland was in no way Irish. It was owned by American interests who designed the whole complex to please us sentimental travelers. The term used for Dromoland was “up market” and it really was. Over the years it only became all the more “up” and was completely remodeled and enlarged. We returned many times to the scene of our first Irish night. It was a designated spot on our tour when friends visited. A real eye opener. We often came for a Sunday lunch and a stroll through the gardens. When I am in a meditative mood I place myself in the tiny gazebo on the hill and feel the Castle in all its magnificence gently folding me in its embrace.

After Dromoland, we eased our way down through the bustling city of Limerick to a town called Adare. We had read in a travel book about the pride the residents took in their gardens which reminded us of the English gardens we had visited. I believe that was one of the few similarities between the two countries. Ireland was definitely not British. We saw no one in a hurry to get anything done right now. What we did see reminded me of my youth in Colorado. There were farmers putting up the hay by hand, horse drawn mowing machines and hay rakes.

We saw tiny donkeys pulling the milk cart to the local creamery. We actually counted the 40 shades of green. Ireland was slowly taking us over.

We swung south to that spot called Cashel where St. Patrick had baptized an Irish king so long ago. We crawled up stairways and made our way to the very top. Cashel was silent and alone, no guided tours, no renovation in progress. We were alone with the nervous crows, the view out over the valley and two thousand years of ghosts watching us.

We found Irish roads to be a constant challenge. It seemed that at every bend a new crisis would arise — farm equipment, a herd of cows, a couple of farmers deep in conversation, a good old boy on his bike . . . you get the idea. There were no “Dual Carriage Ways” in Ireland in the early 60’s. Since Jo and I are verbal people, we loved our moments in the pubs. We quickly learned that there was a definite way to behave and things to do and not to do. I will get into that in detail some time later.



It was out on the Dingle peninsula that we experienced our first feeling of exclusion. We walked into a dim, smoke filled pub with a half dozen local residents at the bar. They were speaking English. The moment they spotted us they switched to Gaelic. I wonder what it was that we were not supposed to hear. We were now in a corner of Ireland where real Irish was spoken. We saw that they had rooms so we asked for one and the lady agreed and said, “Would you be having a fire?” Yes, it was chilly.

At this point we discovered two more Irish-isms. I know that is not a word but it fits. On entering our room the fire that was offered was a tiny electric heater with maybe one or two slightly pink coils. To avoid freezing to death we leaped into bed and found two more “isms.” First, a very welcome hot water bottle, and then the discovery that at that time all Irish beds featured a concave configuration that forced sleeping bodies to roll down into the valley in the middle. Accordingly, we slept close together and shared our hot water bottle.

We left the Dingle peninsula by way of Connor Pass, a winding road leading up and up till we felt we were in the Alps at about 10,000 feet. The summit is about 3,000 feet but feels much higher. Irish sheep were every where. The road descended to the edge of Tralee Bay, took us through Tralee town and then continued north through Listowel to Tarbert, the village on the south side of the Shannon River.

A new ferry system had recently been developed that crossed the 21/2 mile wide river from Tarbert to Killimer. The Shannon serves as the dividing line between County Kerry and County Clare. The ferries were a godsend for people, cars and businesses. The only other crossing of the river was bridge in Limerick about 40 miles east.



After the ferry crossing we continued up the coast road to Lahinch and its world famous golf course, and like all before us, a few miles north, took a left into a simple parking area, passed a man playing a fiddle and came abruptly to the edge of the earth — the Cliffs of Moher, one of the great wonders of the world. It was blowing a gale, the sea birds were wheeling and swooping . The roaring Atlantic Ocean was smashing its way onto the rocks 800 feet below us.

After many deep breaths of that rich, Atlantic air we found ourselves a little further up the road in a 100 square mile godforsaken area called The Burren, a great rolling mass of gray wrinkled and water eroded limestone rock. My first impression was “Get me out of here!” Later in this book, I will tell you more about the Burren as we became acquainted with it. On this trip we did not even stop.

We stopped overnight at a B & B in Salthill right on Galway Bay. This area deserved more exploration but much too soon it was time to return to Shannon and fly back to Chicago. We had explored our roots. I had browsed through telephone books in Scotland but could find no trace of any Bellairs. We had visited Enniscothy and we found where Jo said her family originated. We could find Morrisseys in church records but none spelled Morrissy. While no cousins had popped up to greet us, we agreed on our transatlantic flight that we had found our “Bolthole.”



We were drawn by the peace and beauty of Ireland, and even more by its people. The Irish men and women and the beautiful children had pointed the way. Where in all the rocks and hills and valleys would there be a spot for us?

Chapter 2

The Ripening Period

I returned to my broadcasting life at WBBM during a time when the station, in fact all of CBS radio, was in transition. They had decided to move from the long established “entertainment” policy to one of current events and information, the beginning of “Talk Radio.” This meant interviews with anyone and everyone who was newsworthy. I made the adjustment. I was on the air for major blocks of time, and since I always talked openly to the listeners about my life and things we did, the subject of our “Roots Trip” was discussed. Chicago has always been quite an Irish town. *Borde Failte*, the Irish Tourist Board, had its headquarters in Chicago. AerLingus flew in and out of O’Hare International on a regular schedule. The Irish people, as George Bernard Shaw once wrote, “are a people of great words and thoughts, a vocal people.” Irish politicians, chefs, hotel owners, travel experts and musicians would eventually meet me across the microphone to get the 50,000 watt exposure they sought.

These fascinating individuals along with the writers, Hollywood and New York actors, athletes, local and national figures, provided my show an infinite number of guests. The soil was rich and my producer, a lady named Lynne Pierce, plowed the soil. These were the tumultuous 60’s and we were involved in all the controversies of the decade.



My interest in Scotland and Ireland deepened. I became a member of the Illinois St. Andrews Society and was asked to MC an annual Feast of the Haggis. This presented Jo and me with the opportunity to try out the Scottish wardrobe we brought home from Pitlockry. We also found ourselves being invited to all the social events that had anything to do with Ireland.

This was a learning time for us. The Irish do give wonderful parties. Our appreciation for Ireland was growing.

One night I came home from work and Jo said, “I just saw the most exciting group on the Arthur Godfrey Show and they’re called The Clancy Brothers and Tommy Makem. They have just come to this country.” Soon after this, the group came to Chicago to perform and were booked for my show. We talked, played their music, and I remember saying to each one in turn, “Tell me about your favorite place in Ireland.” What came out gave me goosebumps. The pictures they spontaneously painted were brilliant. I still have a tape of that appearance way back in the 60’s from their first time in Chicago, ours became a friendship that exists to this day. As I look back, their music and personalities were a dominant factor in establishing my dedication to Ireland.



Figure 2.1: Here I am in my studio with the Clancy Brothers and Tommy Makem.

I had never been impressed with the stage Irishness of Barry Fitzgerald or the tin pan alley songs like, “Does Your Mother Come from Ireland?,” all the Too-ra, Loo-ra, Loora, soupy sentimentality or the really corny “MacNamaras Band.” Coming from the Clancy Brothers I heard something else, the songs of a nation dominated by foreign interests for a thousand years, starting with the Vikings, the Normans and then 800 years of British rule. I began to hear the songs of anger, frustration, love of country, horrible tragedy, and through it all a stubborn, devilish sense of humor that is so uniquely Irish.

By now, I was reading Irish writers and studying Irish history. We were now making personal friends with the Chicago Irish, entertaining them socially in our home and being entertained in theirs.

This we call the ripening period. As I looked back into the early years of Ireland it was obvious that the church created the only records because the monks could write. The Book of Kells and the Book of Armagh are priceless, but even in their biblical work, these monks were flesh and bone. They knew hunger and fear and cold and sometimes left little comments in the margins of the pages they were writing. Here are several.

Early Irish Writing

“A dinnerless Tuesday is a cold thing,
and immediately before Christmas too.”

Fierce and wild is the wind tonight.
It tosses the tresses of the sea to white
On such a night as this I take my ease,
Fierce Norsemen only course the quiet seas.

I and Pangur Ban my cat,
Tis a like task we are at.
Hunting mice is his delight
Hunting words I sit all night.

The earliest name for Ireland was
TIR-NA-OG, which means the land of eternal youth —
the world of life everlasting,
the world for which the Irish Celt
most yearned.

The Romans ventured as far as England and when discussing the island lying to the west of England used a Latin name *Hibernia Insula Sanctorum et Dictum* — Ireland, Land of Saints and Scholars.

A Greek geographer 1st Century B.C.:

“At any time or place you will
find them ready to face danger,
even if they have nothing on their side
but their own strength and courage.”

An unknown historian wrote:

Celtic heritage is no mean tradition.
They have beauty in decorative art and lyric poetry,
imagination in literature, devotion to ideals rather than to mate-
rial gain.
They have vitality and a will to survive and courage in battle.

It seems to me that somewhere beneath the skin of every Irishman is a poet waiting to emerge. Go back to the earliest writing and there lurks the talent for expression.

IRELAND'S OLDEST KNOWN POEM ...

I am the wind which breathes upon the sea
I am the wave of the ocean
I am the vulture of the rocks
I am the beam of the sun
I am the fairest of the plants
I am a wild boar in valour
I am a salmon in the water
I am a lake in the plain
I am the point of a lance in battle
I am the God who creates in the head
The Fire.

We are the Music Makers
And we are dreamers of dreams.
Wandering by lone sea breakers
And sitting by desolate streams
World losers and world forsakers
On whom the pale moon gleams
Yet we are the movers and shakers
Of the world forever it seems.

Out of the mist of Ireland's past these are just two of the little gems that helped me come to grips with the Irish gift for words.

Chapter 3

Unrest on the Career Front

The old uneasiness about CBS and longevity in the radio business returned. I was approaching 50. Jo and I had openly discussed the problem with two of our best friends, George and Marge Kline, our across the alley neighbors in Wilmette. George was a brilliant lawyer, General Counsel for All State Insurance. Also included was Harold Shapiro, lawyer in one of Chicago's premier law firms, Sonnenschein, Levinson, Carlin and Nath. Harold had guided the Klins and us in several property ventures.

One night Harold made the statement that would alter the focus of my life, as well as our family. He said, "Mal, as long as you stay with CBS you're just high priced talent. You give it all back in taxes. You need something of your own that will build equity and provide you with tax advantages not possible as long as you remain in your present employee status."

"And just what do you suggest we do?" I asked.

He fired back, "You go out and buy a station of your own. You and Jo run it together. Mal, it's just like buying an old apartment building. The buyer paints it, puts on a new roof, adds a new furnace, dresses up the outside, raises the rent and eventually sells it, pays the capital gains tax and is left with a handsome nest egg. If you do that you become your own boss, you call the shots, stop worrying about getting old and no longer needed by a big corporation that really doesn't care whether you live or die."

Laying out the yellow pad

This line of thinking occupied us for several months, sitting in the back yard, traveling to football games, coming home from the theater. Over the years, I developed a system that I use whenever I am faced with a really big decision. I get out my big legal size yellow pad, draw a line down the center of the page

and sharpen my pencil. The left side of the page is dedicated to “Yes, go for it,” and the right, “Don’t be stupid, No.” I have heard that President Nixon used the same technique. I suspect he somehow learned it from me. Anyway:

Left side: Yes	Right Side: No
1. You're not getting younger! What will you be doing 10 years from now as you close in on 60?	1. You've never worked in a small station. You cannot even run a control board. You've always been surrounded by record turners, engineers and producers.
2. You're not getting younger! What will you be doing 10 years from now as you close in on 60?	2. You have no idea what it takes to run a business. You probably don't have the stomach for hiring and firing, for becoming involved in employee problems.
3. You've done better than your share financially but you haven't saved much. Sure it takes a lot to put shoes on 7 kids, and take care of two elderly grandparents, but what have you saved for the future?	3. You have no technical knowledge of radio.
4. My wife Jo is a very talented woman, writer, performer and has a fine business sense. The minute you two were married she gave it up to raise children, to be the mother at home when kids came home from school, to carry the home front so you could go off and be the big star. Doesn't she deserve her chance now that the family is getting old enough?	4. You know nothing about FCC regulations, tax law, bookkeeping/accounting, all of the work that goes into running a business.
5. You are well known because of your work on the air. Jo is now doing a series of vignettes with you called "Mal & Jo On the Go," bits and pieces on Chicago shows, restaurants, events, places to go and things to do. Why not move our two personalities into our own business and create the greatest Mom and Pop radio station in the country.	5. You really don't want to leave Wilmette, You've lived there nearly 20 years and you're content.
6. There is urgency. If you wait much longer you won't have the energy to tackle it.	6. It means starting all over, putting up every dime you have and borrowing the kind of money that can cause heart attacks. All this and you with seven kids who still require a lot of raising.
	7. What happens to your career? Are you willing to leave a top career in one of the best stations in the country?
	8. These are high stakes. Are you ready to gamble everything?

YES!



Figure 3.1: Mal and Jo On the Go started at WBBM

The tiny pieces began to come together. We agreed to look around and see what was available. My first thoughts were on a friend named Art Thorsen. Art was the Program Director of WBBM. In addition to his duties in Chicago, he and two friends, a Chicago advertising agency vice president, and a Crystal Lake, Illinois businessman had applied for and been granted a license for a 500 watt daytime AM station in Crystal Lake. They put the station on the air in 1965 with a nice combination of chewing gum, spit and bailing wire. I had picked up a rumor that the station was struggling.

Jo and I had a survey done in an attempt to discover where in the midwest were the areas offering the best potential for growth, essential to any radio station. It was pure coincidence again, but the most recommended area was northwest of Chicago roughly paralleling the Northwestern Railroad from Arlington Heights up to Palatine, Crystal Lake and Woodstock. Wasn't that interesting! Here was a distressed station in a good growth area, and still in the listening area where the audience knew us.



Another piece of the jigsaw puzzle was the fact that we knew people in the Woodstock area which is only seven or eight miles from Crystal Lake. We were friends of Tom and Ginnie Byrnes and their twelve kids. Tom was a writer, a very good one, who had written a book called *All My Darlings*. On one of our auto trips, Jo had read the book to our small ones, a good way to keep them from killing each other while Dad drove. Tom also wrote scripts for companies like Ford on which Jo and I had done the voice work.

Jo and I agreed that if we were to buy the station, WCLR, short for Wonderful Crystal Lake Radio, we would have to relocate to that area. We would want to become an integral part of the community. We worried about our children and what a move would mean to them.

Wouldn't you know it! During this time I was invited to go to New York for a week and replace Arthur Godfrey on his show. We went as a family and had an exciting experience.



Figure 3.2: I am sitting at Arthur Godfrey's desk.

I was asked if I would be interested in moving to New York. I declined with thanks. The mere thought of transplanting the Bellairs clan to that rat race gave me chills.

The indecision continued until the fall of 1968. I could tell that Jo was ready for the move, ready to take the risk, ready to join me in the work to come. I must honestly say that this was the hardest decision in my life. Moving from a powerhouse in Chicago to owning a tiny station in the northwest

suburbs was literally going from something to nothing. My ego was having a terrible time.

WCLR

We agreed. I gritted my teeth. We made an offer. On November 9, my birthday, 1968, we all took a ride out to the area to look more closely at Crystal Lake and Woodstock. We stopped for lunch at Bob Virig's Restaurant across the street from the historic Opera House on the Square and while enjoying one of the Virig homemade apple pies, Jo said, "I could live in this community. I think we'd all be happy in a place smaller than Wilmette, the North Shore and New Trier High School. What do you think?"

After lunch we met with a local real estate agent, Ted Buck, and we went looking. The house we liked best was a contemporary two story in six acres woods. We made an offer with a closing date set for the following May so we would not have to change schools in mid-term. It was accepted, so whether we got the station or not we would be leaving Wilmette. I remember, as Christmas rolled around, thinking about the tree and decorations and where would they be next year? What about all the traditional local parties that we would miss? I hope I did my suffering in silence. I hope it did not show. I truly loved Wilmette and our big yellow frame house at 720 Lake.

One Sunday morning in February the phone rang. It was one of the owners. They, the three partners, had agreed to sell to us. It was a strange feeling. Happiness, relief and sadness completely took over my poor head.

Now came the hard part, arranging the financing and making the necessary applications to the FCC. Harold helped us with the First National Bank of Chicago, bless their dear hearts. Little did they know how little I really knew. I did projections, put on my big front, gave my presentation and they backed us.

The second part of the equation, the FCC application, was more in Jo's department and I recall her spending hours over her typewriter as we filled out forms and more forms. We had to prove that we were not felons or spies for a foreign country.

Over spring break of '69 we rented a house on Hilton Head Island. It turned out to be a bad time. The Reverend Martin Luther King was shot. Fire and riots broke out in Atlanta and Chicago. President Lyndon Johnson, looking like a worn out warrior, came on TV and announced he would not run again. The Vietnam War and the dissent at home had finally gotten to him. Our country was deeply troubled.

We returned home and I went back to work. My phone rang and it was



Figure 3.3: Our last Christmas in Wilmette. "Picasso" on the front porch.

John Calloway, News Director, asking me to drop into his office for a visit. When I had left for vacation, WBBM was an all-talk station. Now, John looked at me and said, “I have news, Mal. I just returned from a meeting of all the affiliate CBS stations. In one week, we go to a brand new format — All News, All Day and All Night.”

I was taken a-back and asked just what that would mean. John produced a drawing of the face of a clock. It was divided into segments — a minute for this, a minute for that — on and on for a full hour. There would be a segment for network news, weather, local news, sports, traffic and specific time slots for commercials.

I then made one of my famous, impetuous comments, “John, it will never work. You cannot just compartmentalize a station into bits. People will die of boredom, and besides, how many times can you repeat the story that Mrs. Jones’ car hit a Mr. Smith’s car, and what do you do on a completely no-news day?!”

John looked at me, gave me that twinkle in the eye and said, “we’ll see next week.”

My Guardian Angel was sitting on my shoulder. During the first week of All News, I received a call from Harold Shapiro who had received a call from our Washington attorney. Yes, at this point we had two legal eagles working for us. Harold reported that the FCC approval was imminent, and it would be made official soon.

Jo and I had the same reaction. “Thank God! Now I won’t be in an All News format.” The timing was incredible. I knew I would have eventually been forced to leave. My joy in broadcasting was in a free wheeling exchange of ideas, live entertainment and a totally ad lib style. The rigid ticking of the clock, segment by segment would have killed me.

In all fairness, I must now eat some crow. WBBM went on quite happily, as did all the CBS sister stations. The All News format was a success and has been repeatedly copied across the country.

One note on John Calloway. At one point when I was still there, John stepped in for somebody and did a fine show. I remember approaching him in the hall and saying, “John, you were great. Get on the air yourself. Build your own show.” John went on the air later on WTTW, the PBS station in Chicago and as the host of Chicago Tonight, he is one of the most admired journalist-reporters in the area. It must also be noted that his format gives him a complete 30 minute show without those horrible bits and pieces. Hah!

Closer...

We moved. It was a wonderful home in Bull Valley. I regret I did not have more time to get to know it. I continued at WBBM and it was a daily drive from Woodstock to Chicago or the commute on the train. I felt like a lame duck politician just marking time.

It came.

A telegram from the FCC. Now the secret that we had kept was published in *Broadcasting Magazine*. The word was out on the street — that is Michigan Avenue — that “Bellairs had lost his mind. No one ever left WBBM willingly. The other comment was, “He just couldn’t handle the All News format.” What was not widely known was the fact that we had been negotiating forever. The timing was strange.

My Chicago career came to an end. As a child, I had been brought to the World’s Fair in 1933. It made such an impression on me that I vowed to come back someday to live and work in “the city with the broad shoulders.” I did it. My break into the radio business had come in May of ’46 when Uncle Sam let me return to civilian life. WCFL gave me the opportunity to learn the skills of broadcasting. I was part of the early days of TV in Chicago — all exciting and wonderful years. My WBBM experience gave me the chance to mature in my profession and work with the greatest most versatile performers in the country; Lee Phillips, Dave Garroway, Paul Gibson, John Harrington, Hugh Downs, Fahey Flynn, Eric Sevareid, Kukla Fran and Ollie, Joe Foss, Jim Conway, the Art Van Damme Quintet, the DoubleMint Twins and Tom Clark. My work with the many musicians at WBBM, who helped in creating our live show, gave me the greatest pleasure. I cherish their friendship and professionalism.

Goodbye Chicago

I requested a meeting with Bill O’Donnell, General Manager of WBBM. Over the last few years, after my first boss Ernie Schomo had left, Bill and his family and I and mine had become good friends.

“Bill, I’m here to give you notice, whatever time you say. I’ve decided to go it alone.”

“Mal, we’d like you to stay. Is there a problem? Is it the news format?”

I explained that I felt I had done just about every kind of program in radio, that from an economic point of view it was time to try the business of achieving equity in a station. We talked awhile and Bill finally said, “Mal,

that's a good idea and I wish you the best. You know, I might just try that myself, someday." Actually, he did and became very successful.

A little side note here is that one of the O'Donnell sons has entered into the movie business with a bang. If you saw *Scent of a Woman*, *Batman*, *Circle of Friends*, or *The Chamber*, well that is Chris, a hot new talent.

WBBM gave me a big farewell party at the Sheraton Hotel. I knew I would miss these wonderful friends.

The next day, we had a big party at the Bakery in Chicago and invited Ad Agency reps, press, and clients. Louis and Sada Szathmary were good friends and went all out to make it special. Officially, we took over the new station on October 31, 1969. It was a Saturday, Halloween, and we even had "trick or treats" as we moved in with piles of boxes and all the records I had accumulated.

WIVS

As of the next day, November 1, the station was renamed **WIVS**. Our Chief Engineer, Barney Carlson, gave me a lesson on the actual operation of the "beast." I was all thumbs. We were a small staff with Jo and me mostly on the air. The station had \$84 in the checking account ! I knew there were plenty of people in Chicago waiting for us to lay an enormous egg. We had burned the bridge and were officially out on the limb. We named the station WIVS because it had to start with a W, consist of four letters, and I always felt that call letters that made up an actual word would be easier for the audience to remember. I recall saying, "This is WIVS but we don't mind if you men listen." Pretty corny.

Climbing the Ladder ...

We dived in with all our strength. I was the Sales Department. Jo handled administrative details. We had a staff of six. We all did everything. It was music and talk, and even a Swap Shop segment that had worked so well on WBBM. The UP wire service was our news department. No memos were needed because we were all breathing down each other's necks. The first month we grossed \$25,000.00. We met our bills.

Our kids were in new schools. We were living in a different environment. We worked it out and did not forget our family. Christmas in the country was a great event. We bought a snowmobile. I did my annual Christmas show that I had begun on WBBM in 1955.



Figure 3.4: Me at the mike at WIVS

Jo loved being so totally involved. The audience related to her in a very positive way. She found the pulse of the listeners naturally without even having to think about it. I kept on as I always had. Working for WIVS as a team was exciting. We could feel the responsiveness of the area. People were listening to “their station.” We never tried to compete with Chicago stations. We wanted to be the best local station in the northwest suburbs. We concentrated on local news, politics, meetings, weather, football and basketball plus a music format designed for adults, not the rock that had taken over so many Chicago stations.

Chapter 4

What Happened to Ireland?

We became so completely involved in the new life that we had not thought of our “Bolthole” in months. Then out of the blue, Jo came into the studio one January day while I was on the air. During one of the records, she told me she had just received a call from the Irish Tourist Board. They were so grateful for all we had said and done to promote Ireland that they wanted us to go there for a week. They offered to assign one of their people, provide the car, and take us wherever we want to go.

This invitation came at absolutely the worst possible time. We had just hocked our souls, to buy a station and now were supposed to whip off to Ireland. Impossible.

So, we made plans to go. At this point I need to introduce you to Pat our oldest daughter at age 21. From the time she was 10, Pat lived for horses, taking lessons, being a Hot Walker at Arlington Park or an Exercise Girl at Sportsman. She had become good friends with Earlie Fires, one of the top jockeys. Pat knew that Ireland was center for almost everything that had to do with thoroughbreds. She asked if she could go too. We worked it out. There were riding establishments near Dublin that Pat had to see.

Somehow, during all our frantic upheaval, Jo found time to do some basic research on Ireland. She was an inveterate reader and really dug into what to see and where to go in Ireland. By inviting us to pick the itinerary, the Tourist Board played right into her hands. She knew what we would do and where we would go. Amazing! For me, I felt as if I were on a roller coaster just thundering along for the ride.

The three of us boarded an AerLingus 707 in mid January. There has always been something special about this airline. The second the door closed you were in Ireland. The appearance of the flight attendants, they all had the Irish twinkle, the good Irish sound, and we were mostly surrounded by Americans with a lot of Irish in them. Some years it would be a roaring all

night party, a group of soccer or football fans going back for a match. Almost always the flight would include children, families taking the kids back to see grandparents. The flights were happy occasions. I have yet to meet a surly passenger or flight attendant on AerLingus.

In those days, flights from Chicago tended to be irregular. Some years AerLingus flew up to Canada for a stop to pick up a few more passengers and continue. Other times the flight would go to Boston or New York and then over the Atlantic. For an extended period of time the company had budget problems and stopped flying out of Chicago altogether. This meant we had to take another airline to New York or Boston and connect with AerLingus. Eventually the Irish Tourist Board office in Chicago was closed and we lost wonderful friends, but back then in 1970 everything was running smoothly.

There is a familiar pattern of flight from Chicago to Shannon. Take off in the late afternoon with a stop somewhere along about dusk, then up to around 35,000 feet and dark. Drinks and dinner would follow. Then would come the movie, but actually, the Irish much preferred conversation. In an amazingly short time, the sky would lighten, passengers would shake out the cobwebs and a surge of electricity would fill the cabin. What one has to remember is the 6 hour time change. When we were having dinner and a glass of wine at about 8:00pm Chicago time, it was already 2:00am in Ireland. It is always a short night. After the hot hand towels were passed, in the good old Japanese tradition, a light breakfast was served and before we really had time to think about the distance we'd covered, we were over Ireland.

As the plane had gradually descended to around 10,000 feet and below, we would begin to see the greens of Ireland, the hedge rows, the hills, and the Shannon River and its huge muddy estuary. To this day, I have never been able to fully accept what jet flight at around 500 miles an hour can accomplish. To think of our ancestors in tiny ships and the miles of cold, rolling Atlantic, contrasted with a meal, a movie, a nap and there you are ... amazes me. So, off the plane and into the terminal to an official who would stamp the passport and welcome us to Ireland. Then it was seek out luggage that was going round and round on the carousel, ours almost always the last to arrive. Then out to past the sleepy customs agents who would just wave us through. I have always felt that the early morning arrival time would enable a person to bring in a grizzly bear and the Irish agent would just wave. It is just not fair to ask any decent Irishman or woman to function before 10am.

You are now in Ireland to be met by someone, or pick up a rental car and go ... on the left side of the road, the adrenaline pumping, the air so fresh! Ah ... I must stop here at Shannon to tell you two stories about the place. Then we will get on with our trip.

Shannon Airport

Let us talk about this piece of real estate, because a certain American was quite involved in selecting its location.

Charles Lindbergh was the man. He flew over southern Ireland on his famous flight to Paris. After hours of monotonous droning of the engine, nothing but rolling waves beneath him, only a map, stars and a compass to guide him, one can only imagine what it felt like to look down and see hedgerows and that magnificent green.

In the early 30's it became obvious that flight over long distances was for real. The Irish realized that the flight path from America to Europe would probably run right over them. So President Eamon de Valera got in touch with Lindbergh and asked him to come for a visit in order to help the Irish find a suitable sight for an International Airport. The big problem of the day was navigation. No sophisticated navigational instruments were available at that time and radar was still to be developed in the 40's during W.W.II. So a prominent natural landmark was essential, something that any pilot could spot even in marginal weather. What could be more prominent than the great Shannon River. It meandered almost due south to Limerick and then turned right and flowed almost due west for nearly 40 miles before reaching the west coast of Ireland and the Atlantic Ocean. It is a large river, nearly 3 miles wide at its mouth near Carrigaholt in County Clare. The southwestern corner of the county ought to be an excellent location.

Lindbergh came and looked around. He found and selected two locations. One was near Kilrush, actually a large flat area near a tiny town called Moyasta on the north side of the Shannon. The second was farther east about 30 miles at the head of the Shannon Estuary. It was more centrally located with Ennis to the north and Limerick about 20 miles southeast. De Valera chose the second because of its central location. Lindbergh had made his contribution. Now, as Paul Harvey would say, "here is the rest of the story."

World War II came over Europe. The only planes that could successfully complete a non-stop run from the U.S. to Europe were the great Flying Boats, the Pan Am Clippers. When it was essential to move important military brass to Europe, these planes could make it to a place called Foynes on the Shannon River about half way to Limerick. The Shannon River was critical to transatlantic flight, the linking of America and Europe. At Foynes, there is a little known Aviation Museum filled with pictures and the actual flight hardware of the day. It is a fascinating stop that teaches us how far and how quickly the technology in the 20th century has progressed.

In addition to being a logical place to land airplanes, Shannon Airport

has made another important contribution to the world..

Irish Coffee

This special beverage was created at the Shannon Airport for tourists and has become world famous and relished by many people in many lands — except Ireland. The thought of adding sugar to good Irish whiskey is beyond the pale to any good Irishman.

Recipe

- In a suitable see through glass cup or mug measure 1 oz. of Irish whiskey.
- About a teaspoon of Demerara sugar, which is a product of Ireland. A coarse ground sugar approaching our brown sugar. If Demerara is not available use a coarse brown sugar — Never white sugar — Use real whipped cream — add nothing else.
- Mix the two ingredients.
- Carefully add good strong black coffee to about one inch of the top of the mug. add real whipped cream.
- Do not mix. The cream will stay on the surface of the coffee.
- One must never, ever, stir the whole concoction.
- Admire the rich brown and white colors.
- Sip slowly and carefully.

On we go

John Kennedy, our Irish Tourist Board host, was waiting for us at Shannon. He was about 6 feet, a twinkle in his eye, a better than average nose, a man with *joie de vivre* who could burst out into gales of laughter at the slightest provocation, who always moved quickly and had very definite ideas on everything.

I could read his mind as he approached us, “Oh my God, two rich Americans and the spoiled brat!” If he had only known! John Kennedy offered us a quite formal “Good morning Mr. And Mrs. Bellairs and Pat is it?” In the

entire time we knew John, and it was years, I could never get him to call me anything but Mr. Bellairs and Jo, Mrs. Bellairs. He was Dublin Irish and very proper.

“John,” I said, “it is very nice of you and Ireland to do all this for us, but we’ve been here before. I’m comfortable driving, and we hate to take up your time for a whole week. Why don’t you just take this time off, have a bit of a holiday for yourself. Everything will be fine.”

John looked absolutely horrified and responded that he could not possibly leave us alone to fend for ourselves. It was totally out of the question. So the two rich Americans and the spoiled brat made their way to John’s car, Jo and Pat in back. I sat in the co-pilot’s seat where, over the next week, I was to die a thousand deaths. John Kennedy proved to be a prime candidate for Formula 1 Driver of the Year. He would laugh uproariously as I repeatedly dug my fingers into his dashboard. All that within the first 5 miles! A week of this all over Ireland!

Permit me to digress long enough to squelch a fable that has always existed in Ireland: “The Irish are a laid back and relaxed people.” That may be true in some instances but not in their driving. Road racing must have originated in Ireland. They go like mad, flat out all the time. They seem to take an enormous pleasure in passing a truck, called a lorry, while going up a hill then ducking back into line just as the approaching car zooms past going just as hard. I admit, there is some strange talent in the Irish driver. He seems to know just how to dodge instant disaster. He does not have to avoid the cows or the sheep. He just barrels through them — somehow they know it is better to get over.

Later, as I drove more and more, I discovered they just looked me in the eye and knocked off my side view mirror. In that year, 1970, there were far fewer cars than we had seen in England and Scotland in the 60’s. Still, Irish roads require total concentration. In my mind, the Roundabout is the invention of the devil, perhaps Cromwell. Instead of a typical American intersection, it is usually necessary to enter a round wheel of traffic while remembering that the driver approaching you in the wheel has the right of way. If this sounds confusing, take my word for it, it is. Simultaneously trying to read road signs and find the right spoke of the wheel to exit makes for the biggest challenge to life in Ireland.



John proceeded to ask what we wanted to see. Jo had done her homework and knew exactly what she wanted to see, as did Pat. John set out first to

take care of Pat's wish, a visit to the horse area. It lays in a semi-circle a few miles outside of Dublin, anchored by Naas and the world famous racetrack, the Curragh, just a few miles south. We visited several stud farms, the main one a true "Horse Raising Establishment" owned by a Lord and Lady Carew. Their daughter is a well known equestrian. Pat's eyes opened wide as she saw the quality of the horses, the great open fields, the complete indoor ring. She also saw some young people obviously at work, and she was told that these people had scholarships. They tended the horses, mucked out stalls, did whatever was required and in exchange received free riding lessons, board and room. Pat tucked that away in her head for future reference.

Jo had read about a fascinating new project going on in Kilkenny. The Irish were determined to reestablish their own native arts and crafts and were constructing a design center across from Kilkenny Castle. We saw the projects: the ceramics, weaving, painting, silversmithing, wood working all going on in the stables of the castle. The old stalls now housed young working artists. A display and sales center was in front. It was wonderful to be in on the rebirth of such talent. Over the years we saw the effects of this government sponsored effort reflected all over the country. Even John, in his sophisticated Dublin way, was impressed. After centuries of oppression, it seemed that the Irish had lost confidence in themselves. They needed a good dose of the old "I'm good and I know it" pill.

John soon proved why he was there with us. His knowledge of Ireland was complete. Jo might have known where she wanted to go, but when we got there, it was John who knew where to eat, who to meet and where to stay. I think John knew intuitively that we were serious about Ireland, not just enjoying a freebie. We became very comfortable with each other.

Cashel

We returned to Cashel, but this time with a friend of John's, a woman who knew everything about this old castle on the peak of the hill looking out over 2,000 years of Irishness. If you've been there you know what I mean. We were still free to climb the stone steps all the way to the top and carefully walk the narrow steps and paths. John politely declined to climb with us, something about the height. Since then those stairs and steps were sealed off so visitors have to make do with organized tours and lectures. Over the years, Cashel has gone through long periods of restoration. We were lucky to have visited twice when it was a raw, naked, untouched piece of majesty.

That night, John booked us into the Bishop's Palace, a small but most impressive hotel located in the town of Cashel at the foot of the Castle. At dinner we looked up at the tower, the juts and angles of Cashel all lit up

with spot lights. That view, the light and shadow, that silhouette, is carved into my mind. To me Cashel is sacred. I have taken pictures from all angles. One year I caught it just right. That Cashel hangs over my desk.

On the craft side, in the town of Cashel, on the main street, there is a silversmith who is one of the finest in the world. A visit to him is required.

Since I am discussing our daily driving exploits with John, I need to mention that I am not alone on the subject of driving on Irish roads.

A Dave Barry Quote

I look forward to Dave Barry columns. I think he is one of our most talented columnists. How he can find a good laugh in almost anything amazes me. Dave has books on all subjects of human frailty that remind me of Robert Burns, “Would someone giftie gie us, to see ourselves as ithers see us.” This is a special talent, and I have to quote a little piece of what he found in Ireland.

“Towns are connected by a modern state of the art system of medieval roads about the width of a standard bar of hotel soap. The result is that motorists drive as fast as possible in hopes of getting to their destinations before they meet anybody coming the other way. The only thing that prevents everybody from going 120 miles an hour is the nationwide system — probably operated by the Ministry of Traffic Safety — of tractors being driven very slowly by old men wearing caps. You encounter these roughly every two miles, rain or shine, day or night. As an additional safety measure the roads are also frequented by herds of cows, strolling along and mooing appreciatively at the countryside reminding you very much of tour groups.”

Ballymaloe

Our second visit to Cashel was even better than our first. We headed south toward Cork and Ballymaloe.

Jo had a surprise waiting for us. She had read about a place just getting underway that was out of the ordinary. Ballymaloe, once one of a network of Norman castles across the countryside southeast of Cork, had very recently been converted into a small hotel and restaurant.

Myrtle Allen and her husband bought Ballymaloe in 1948 and there she began her life as a farmer’s wife, mother, and developed into an internationally recognized writer, hotelier, hostess, and most important, chef. We feel we discovered her that January in 1970. Over the years, she became a television personality. She has produced any number of articles and cookbooks. Her recipes are fun to follow and always include little bits of Myrtle, herself.

Since Jo and I had always been fascinated with restaurants, had helped create a Gourmet Club specializing in ethnic food, we fell totally in love with Myrtle Allen. She began one of her first books by saying, “I would like to thank my husband. Nobody can cook well without somebody who will eat. The more discriminating the gourmet, the better the cook.”

In the beginning, Ballymaloe was the home and farm of the Allen family. They loved the place so much that when the children were growing up, they did not like the idea of moving to a smaller home. So they turned the lower room into a restaurant and slowly the rest of the house became a hotel. Only one small corner of the original castle remains, hooked on to what is really a big, rambling house.

You might be interested in the fact that Myrtle does not plunge a lobster into boiling water. She follows the theory that he dies painlessly in slowly warming water. She hopes it is easier on the lobster’s nerves. She says, “It certainly is on mine.”

The Allens took great pride in raising most of their needs on the farm. I enjoyed standing out in front and watching the lambs bouncing around after their mothers. To complete a menu being close to the ocean meant that seafood was always available.

Myrtle had a special recipe for her bread. It is true, every woman in Ireland makes her own bread, well almost, and every recipe is just a little different. That goes also for scones. How I love a real Irish scone with home made strawberry jam.

The proof of the pudding, as they say, is that John was so impressed with Ballymaloe that from 1970 on, whenever he was escorting people around Ireland, he always took them to Ballymaloe. He and the Allens became good friends. How about that!

I also recall that one year in cold, blustery March, we visited Ballymaloe to find an unusual guest out front, a helicopter. A family from Dublin had arrived for a meal. The wind rose and the helicopter stayed for those days. The Irish standard of living has been rising steadily. Do not relate the Ireland of today to the potato famine days. A personal helicopter flown by “himself” did catch my attention.

The main reason we came to Ballymaloe was to sample Myrtle Allen’s cooking. For a minute let us consider eating out.

Irish Dining — It is Different

For us in America dining is a pretty simple affair. We make a reservation, go into the restaurant and are ushered to a table. There we order a round or

two of drinks, and then get around to looking at a menu. Not so in Ireland, and most of Europe for that matter.

In the small to middle sized (up market inns and hotels) it is different. You begin in a lounge, more like a friend's living room. There you chat, order a drink, usually a sherry or a glass of wine, never a hard drink like a martini. Then whilst (a good Irish word) you sip on your sherry, the maitre d' will present the menu. Over pleasant chit chat you make your selections and within a few moments you are summoned to dinner. Your soup that you selected is at your place. Dinner has begun. To me, this is a beautiful routine. In Ireland, dinner is for dining, not sitting and drinking. I remember how upset Louis Szathmary, owner of the Bakery restaurant in Chicago, used to become when his guests seemed to prefer drink to dinner. I have friends who used to complain that they were being rushed when The Bakery followed the European style. Americans want it their way and that is just impossible in the good Irish manner. Yes, after dinner it is quite normal for guests to return to the sitting room for coffee, brandy or some other after dinner drink and lots more conversation, sometimes story telling and sometimes if you are lucky, the singing begins.

This was the dinner routine we discovered in England and Ireland back in the 60's and there at Ballymaloe in 1970. We thought it was very civilized. If you have ever experienced it I hope you did not feel hassled when dinner arrived so quickly. The after dinner conversation is always fascinating.

Make peace with the fact that the Irish handle the fork and knife just opposite from the way we do. Were we showing our independence when we switched hands? I often wonder.

The other thing you will notice about Irish dining is that the volume is kept down. The Irish at adjacent tables do not want to hear your conversation, and they surely do not want you to hear theirs. It is fascinating to listen to a whole dining room.... "chewing."

Another stop on Jo's "wish list" was a visit to ...

Shanagarry

We had observed some very original ceramic ware at Kilkenny and Jo had read about this family of potters and glass blowers in a little town called Shanagarry, just a hop and a jump from Ballymaloe. That seemed like a reasonable distance to us, so after a bit of hopping and jumping we found ourselves walking up a path littered with pieces of pots that had not made it through the kiln. We entered a small building where three people were "throwing" on foot-powered wheels. We met the elder Mr. Pierce who was

the head of the business, and before we left we acquired a complete set of dinner plates, cups, saucers, beer mugs, and serving bowls. We bought everything we could get our hands on.

We have used our Shanagarry place setting nearly every day since. From time to time we have had to replace a few due to “oops” and “woops” but for the most part our rich brown and white Shanagarry has been a part of our life. As we were leaving, Jo spotted a strange glob of melted and then hardened ceramic about two feet square. It had been a tray of cups that had just had too much heat and had sort of dissolved into a strange mass. Jo said to Mr. Pierce, “Would you sell us that” and she pointed at it. His reply was a laugh and “What in the name of God would ye be wantin with a disaster like that?” He gave it to us, and that no named disaster hangs on our wall today. It certainly is an original.

I am not sure whether the Pierce sons were there at that time. It was perhaps a year or two later that Simon Pierce made his mark with his blown glass. He changed the entire glass market. Up to then it had been mostly Waterford Crystal and Galway Crystal. The Pierce blown glass was thick, heavy and his goblets were special, completely different from the delicate, intricate cutting of Waterford. Simon’s style was simple. I have used the word “globby” for it. Well, anyway, it became very popular. He had an impressive plant near Kikenny and did very well. We always sought out his seconds because we thought any imperfections only enhanced his work. We looked for air bubbles and goblets with a little tilt.

Later, Simon married an American. He moved the business to New England where he has a whole complex of plant, shop and an Irish restaurant. We have never been there but friends report it is quite a place. The Pierce name on pottery and blown glass has become famous. Their work is highly praised and sought after and is found in all the better shops. I admit, we take pride in the fact that we were there in the early days.



With John Kennedy still at the helm, we continued on our grand tour. We worked our way past Cobh, the harbor pronounced Cove, where in the 1880’s, so many Irish took a last look at Ireland before sailing for America and to the streets they thought were paved with gold.

Kinsale has the feel of Europe. It is a deep water harbor surrounded by steep hills and houses built up the sides. It is a town that has always been full of personality, a sailing and deep sea fishing center. The weather is usually a little milder being on the south of coast of Ireland. One could have a good life in Kinsale.

Continuing on, we headed west to the Bantry Bay area and the west of Ireland that Jo and I had explored on our first trip, only this time we had John painting his word pictures and telling his stories. We stayed that night at the Great Southern Hotel in Killarney. At that stop I have a specific memory of Pat. Here is the story. It was cold. Ireland in January is cold and damp and the higher hills are crowned with snow. The temperatures never have the swing that we midwesterners know, but ranges from 38 to 50 degrees are common. Many Irish hotels feature a useful and considerate device consisting of hollow metal pipes, heated with water, that serve as towel racks in the bathrooms. I remember Pat draped over one of these towel racks desperately trying to thaw her body. We often laugh about Pat and her aversion to Irish winters. The days are short and the nights are long. There are always reasons for customs, habits and traditions. When I think of the Irish living in their thatched roof cottages, with flagstone floors and a single turf fireplace to the house, I begin to understand why the Irish day never begins till about 10 am. You would not think of rising at dawn. You would freeze on the spot.



Still on the subject of cold, I remember our arrival at Dingle. We headed directly for Benner's Hotel, went into their small sitting room heated with the turf fireplace and all ordered Irish Whiskey. Once again, John had saved our lives.

In Dingle, a great old fishing harbor, we found an actual home of boat building.

They were hand making the traditional wooden 30 to 40 feet fishing boats. Those Irish craftsmen were a sight to behold. I had my trusty old 8mm movie camera with me and I still take pride in the workmanship I was able to record and preserve. It is sad but that plant no longer exists.

Here began the saga of Jo's cocktail table. A boat begins with a length of tree. The first step is to make 4 lengthwise cuts making the tree square. The left over pieces, the bark and an inch or so of tree is just waste. Jo said, "That piece, about 10 feet long and about 2 feet wide would make a beautiful cocktail table." That hunk of wood, about 200 pounds worth, was subsequently trucked to Limerick, put on a train, taken to a ship, moved across the Atlantic to New York, shipped to Chicago and was one day was dumped at our front door in Woodstock. I cannot even tell you what it cost. I never dared to keep track. That piece followed us from house to house. We never had time to create the table and now one of my son's friends has the most magnificent, raved about cocktail table in the midwest.

Dingle Town has become one of the major tourist centers in Ireland, and for most of the summer every facility is “chock-a-block.” In the early 90’s, Dingle’s biggest tourist attraction became a gregarious dolphin who took up residence in the bay. He happily greets and smiles at all tourist who come to view him.

The week had flown by. John Kennedy accepted us as being decent people. Actually there was a bit of a thing going on between Pat and John. This sophisticated, debonair, jolly Irishman was new for Pat and she liked what she saw.

Our last stop was in Galway, and this time instead of the B & B in Salthill, we stayed at the Great Southern Hotel on Eyre Square in the center of the city.

Two things happened. Early in the morning, after our night in a suite with 20 foot ceilings and great high windows and our rooms filled with genuine ornate Victorian furniture, I awoke to the sound of animals. I looked out our front window and here came a farmer driving a herd of at least 100 sheep. This to me was a bit strange, right in the middle of the city.

The second Galway experience again had to do with the area in front of the hotel. The grassy central area of Eyre Square had recently been named Kennedy Park in honor of President John F. Kennedy who visited Ireland and Galway in 1963. There was a very nice brass memorial in his honor and he will forever be remembered, not only in Galway but in every corner of Ireland. Most Irish homes follow a custom of displaying a picture of the Pope and another of Jesus Christ. To those two was added a picture of John Kennedy, the late president, not our guide. Obviously he was high on the list. Also, it was the answer to the questions all Americans are bound to get, “And do you have any Irish connections?”

We have always been very grateful to Ireland for that trip. We were beginning to know a lot about its people and its rich history. John helped us to move beneath the surface. We said our good-byes and vowed to come back when I had done a lot more work on Irish writers and their books, plays and poetry. So while I am thinking about it, I will list a few.

Ireland’s Most Talented Communicators

In the 20th century, 4 Nobel Prizes for Literature:

1923 — William Butler Yeats

1925 — George Bernard Shaw

1969 — Samuel Beckett

1995 — Seamus Heaney

Then off the top of my head I recall:

Oscar Wilde	James Joyce
Sean O'Casey	Dean Swift
John B. Keane	Oliver Goldsmith
Maeve Binchy	Richard Sheridan
John Banville	John Millington Synge
Brian Friel	Hugh Leonard
Brendan Behan	

Music —

From Willie Clancy to U-2 and Bill Whelan's Riverdance, Traditional to Contemporary.

Theater

The National Theater, The Abbey and the Gate in Dublin and dozens of durable, successful theaters all over Ireland. Do not forget all the movies and all the actresses and actors, and I have barely scratched the surface. As I am writing, a book turned into a movie called *Michael Collins* is getting great reviews. It is also causing quite a stir in Ireland because it deals with the 1916–1922 troubled times, the struggle with Britain over the North.

A fine example of Irish writing: John B. Keane, columnist, playwright, owner of a pub in Listowel.

John's Bits

There was this elderly Kerry couple, Sean and Mary, who lived way back at the end of the road. As always, they walked the three miles for Sunday mass, their routine over 40 years.

Then a new priest came to their Parish, a young high toned fellow from Dublin. He used all kinds of words and terms that Sean and Mary had never heard. One Sunday on their way home, Sean said to Mary, "About Father O'Malley, the man's using words, I've no idea what he's talkin' about. Tell me Mary, do we have sexual relations?"

Mary thought for a moment and replied, “No Sean, if we had we’d have met ’em last year at your brother’s wake.”

Chapter 5

Back To Work

Station WIVS was moving along. Jo was doing her thing and I was doing mine. We were in the black, so that was good. We had lots of laughs, did our shows and naturally we talked a lot about Ireland. The audience was part of our family. So of course we had no secrets from them. It was a different kind of station. Off the air, we both were making speeches and appearances all around the area. We were on the Woodstock Opera House Restoration Board and there has never been a more beautiful little theater to restore. What a history! Orson Welles, Geraldine Page, Shelly Burman and Paul Newman had all trod those boards. We all hustled and brought in money from dollars in a “Buy a Brick” campaign to large corporate and foundation gifts. John Eggum was one of our biggest heroes with a substantial gift from the Regenstein Foundation.

Pat goes back

It did not take long for our visit to the horse country in Ireland to affect our family. I think it was early in the spring when unexpectedly Pat announced, “I am going back to Ireland. I wrote to the Carews and they have offered me one of the scholarships. The best part is that while there, the Irish National Team will be training for the Olympics so I’ll get to meet and learn from the best riders in the country.” She was so excited.

She packed her belongings and a few weeks later we drove her to O’Hare. I remember exactly how we sent her off. “Pat, you remember how we have talked about our ‘Bolthole.’ While you’re there in Ireland, if you have time, please look around and see if you can spot a place. It shouldn’t be big. It shouldn’t be in a city, but somewhere out in the country — a place with Irish character.”

John Kennedy met Pat and got her moved into her horse heaven. She loved her work, mucked out the stalls, and did get to meet and even ride with the Irish Equestrian Team. What more could anyone want.

Sometime in the fall we got a letter from Dublin. Pat had taken a huge fall and bashed up a shoulder. One of Pat's friends, a girl on a similar scholarship, had a father who was a well know orthopedic surgeon. He had packed Pat up, moved her to the family home in Dublin and was monitoring her progress day by day. As soon as we heard, we rang him. He said he felt that surgery was not the best idea, at least for awhile, and he would like to be in charge of her. He refused to take a dime the whole time she was there. Now how is that for kindness!

Riding was out of the question but Pat did not want to come home, so she found herself a little house in the Ballsbridge area of Dublin and set out to find a job. She became a shop girl in a craft and wool shop on Grafton Street. It was a year later that she confessed to us that financially, things were very rough. I wish we had known. We could have helped more than needed. Her pride really shut us out.

County Clare

She and John would meet from time to time. They enjoyed each other's company but there was nothing serious going on. However, and this is where it gets interesting, John invited her to go for a weekend out to the west. He wanted Pat to meet some people in Kilrush, Lawrence and Ann Archer, an English stock broker and his wife, who had simply packed up and moved from London to Ireland to hand craft wooden boats, all this at a time when wood was being replaced by fiber glass. Lawrence had taken over a building in Kilrush that had been a railroad station. It was a brick building about 40 x 60 and there he was sawing, planing, and joining. Later that year we visited him and although not knowledgeable on wooden boats, his work looked terrific and he was happy. Sadly, his English wife was not. The move from London to a small agricultural center in the west of Ireland was too much. Anyway, after Pat and John had visited and admired boats, the Archers suggested that they have a meal and go about 10 miles west to a little town called Doonaha and a pub with the name Lynch over the door. It had the reputation of being a real, traditional pub, one of the best in the west, and they all felt that Pat should see the real thing. John Lynch, the publican, was famous for his stories, his ability to "pull a pint" and the pub drew patrons from all over the world. It was known as a "singing pub" which meant that at some point nearly every night the singing would start. A bit

later, I will devote time to Lynch's Pub and the tiny community of Doonaha. That area was to become the center of our life in Ireland. It was here that we learned about Irish customs, tradition, pubbing and even John's famous Kerry Man jokes.

The foursome arrived at the pub around 10:30, about the time pubs come to life. John Kennedy knew John Lynch and yes, he always addressed him as Mr. Lynch, which drove John crazy. "Nobody in Ireland is that formal with me, Why does he do that?" The answer is there is a vast gulf between Dublin and the west.

In the course of the evening Pat thought of us and asked John Lynch if he knew of any place in the area that her mother and father would like. She told him a little about us. John responded, "There's an old house down the Glosheen Road, about a mile from here. No one is living there now. It is fairly large and was built about 1840 by some people named McDonnell. It was the big house, and at one time they owned most of the land around here, employed many people and raised the meat, fruit and vegetables for most of Kilkee and Kilrush. You might want to take a look." They floundered around in the middle of the night and then came back the next day to see for sure. They could not get into the house, but they reported that they walked around and peeked in windows.

I do not believe I mentioned before that we communicated with cassettes. The result was we could just talk our letters back and forth. It was a good system. Well, we received a cassette from Pat that radiated excitement, "Mom, Dad, I've just seen the greatest house. It is made of cut stone with a real slate roof. It is called a manor house. It's on 27 acres with a real woods, and little fields and it is on the banks of the Shannon river with a big field in front and the river is 3 miles wide. It's got the greatest view. It is really private, actually at the end of the road and it is for sale and if you don't buy it right now, I'll never look for another place for you. Oh, I forgot it is priced at about \$50,000. Do it, do it, do it!"

Liscrona

This was obviously a completely impossible situation. We had gone in debt to buy the radio station which we had been operating for just a little over a year. We had no excess funds that we could use for even a modest down payment. We had children in college. We were in no position to think of anything as crazy as a house in Ireland. What was it called. Yes, it was "Liscrona House" which in Gaelic translates to Fairy Ring, whatever that was supposed to mean.

Just for the fun of it, we took the cassette and traveled back to Wilmette to see our friends, Marge and George Kline, our across the alley best friends. In the past, we had done many strange business things together, like buying two of the early motor homes and renting them out, or buying a 50 acre piece of property on a Wisconsin lake. We knew each other very well. Also the Klins had been part of the brain trust that had pushed us to go out on our own and buy the radio station.

We talked. Then George said, "I know this is bad timing for you. Would you like to own the place, you crazy people?"

"Yes, we would love something over there, but we've never even seen it. This was just a cassette from Pat. We know you're interested in her life in Ireland. But to be absolutely honest, there's no way we can think of something like a place over there, until we smooth out the radio debt."

George was always great at putting deals together. I could see his brain beginning to float ideas around. Then he said, "Suppose we do some negotiating. We don't know anything about the owner or anything else. What if Marge and I came up with a 50% down payment and then you could take over the remaining 50% over a period of years. That would give you some breathing room, spread it out so you've got time. What do you think?" My response was, "I never expected you guys to get involved in an Ireland project. I think that's asking too much of friendship."

Marge and George then reassured us that owning a place in Ireland would be a wonderful experience. At that point I said, "Well, if at some time in the future you would want out of the deal, we will buy you out in any way you want so you will not have lost any money. Additionally, we will do all the maintenance and work that needs to be done. That will be our share and will show our appreciation. How does that sound?"

Once again, we enlisted Harold Shapiro to represent us. We found out that Lisrona was owned by a man name Ted Cavanaugh, who lived in Kilkee. The story we got was that Ted's mother had won some money on the Irish Sweepstakes which enabled Ted to buy Lisrona with the purpose of turning it into a small hotel. He had divided some of the rooms so he had been able to make a total of 11 bedrooms. Lisrona was a substantial house. He had installed central heating, no small matter with two foot thick stone walls to deal with. He had obtained a liquor license and on the lower level he had set up his own pub. Ted played the organ and loved to sing and tell bawdy stories. He even had the drawings of a pitch and putt golf course all ready to construct out in front in the eleven acre field.

The idea was good. He did some positive things to the house but he had two problems. His wife did not like the idea of living so far away from the rest of the world. Lisrona was quite isolated. Also, she did not relish the

routine of changing beds, cooking meals, etc. Ted's problem was that all he really wanted to do was be the entertainer in the pub. So, after all the preparation, the inn never got off the ground. However, the secluded pub idea was a success. The "good old boys" used to love to come and drink and we heard many tales of how the narrow one way lane that led to Lisrona was negotiated in the wee small hours. I think the hedge row took quite a beating. The other advantage was that the traditional "closing time" that is observed in Ireland, just never existed.

So Ted went broke and moved back to Kilkee. I think his wife was so disenchanted she left him. Ted opened a little souvenir-gift shop and was quite the man about town. Many years later Ted met his end in the way all men secretly envy, in the bed of a local lady who was obviously much too young for him. His finale is now part of Irish folklore. I cannot prove it. We never really got to know Ted. Every step of the way was negotiated by our law firm in Chicago, our solicitor in Dublin, and Ted's solicitor in Kilrush. Our payments went to his representative.

The back and forth began. John Kennedy was very helpful to us in the process. He was able to help us understand the way real estate deals are done in Ireland. Even the legal language is different. We needed him to translate.

We made the first approach only to find that at that time Ireland was worried about so much of the country being bought by foreign interests. A law had been passed that a foreigner had to prove a direct Irish heritage before a purchase of land or a house could be finalized.

The proposed buy had to be publicized and if a genuine, on the scene, Irishman wanted the land, his claim would take precedence. We had no objection to that. Jo was our Irish connection with tons of Irish relatives. The notice went out and there were no Irish takers. Actually Lisrona House was too large for a typical Irish family, and being only 27 acres, it was not enough to support a local farmer. No one else wanted to try the hotel project. It was too isolated.

The back and forth continued. We had the plans for the golf course and the floor plan of the two story house, and a couple of pictures. We had never seen the condition of the house. We had never been inside. How stupid can you be! About the only question we asked was, "What does Lisrona mean?" We were repeatedly reminded that Lisrona had a genuine woods on the property and it was very unusual. There were almost no trees in the whole area, only hay fields separated by hedge rows. These were real trees, big ones, that had been there forever. This fact alone made Lisrona unique.

Liscrona — What Does That Mean?

If you live in a house and it has a name you ought to know what it means. Please ask so I can tell you.

It is a Gaelic word that means Fairy (*Lis*) -Ring (*Crona*) — Fairy Ring. In the very old times the Irish were not home builders. They were nomad families, moving from place to place. A family would be the related men, women and children and their animals, probably sheep, a cow for milk and whatever they could take with them as they wandered. It was a dangerous life because there were always those who would steal anything they could grab. To provide a degree of protection the family took to building a round circle of earth usually eight or ten feet high. One central opening was left. At nightfall the family would gather inside the circle, a barrier thrown across the opening, and they were reasonably safe.

Time passed. Eventually these people settled down and built houses. However, a superstition centered around those old rings. Anyone who destroyed or in any way disturbed a ring would be lost. His luck would be gone forever. It was like Hell on earth. Consequently the rings remain scattered in farmer's fields all over Ireland.

We were fortunate to have a Fairy Ring not 300 yards from Liscrona. Hence the name.

If you look at the sketches and maps I have included, you will come to know a lot more about the west of Ireland than we did in 1970.

We had a Dublin solicitor, Donough O'Connor, working for us. His office was in Dublin. Harold Shapiro was our lawyer in Chicago. Transatlantic communiqués were zipping back and forth. We could have certainly benefited from a fax machine. John Kennedy and Pat also had their fingers in the pie, and we must not forget Ted Cavanaugh in Kilkee and his solicitor in Kilrush. The big agreement came in the early spring. Over a number of bottles of Korbel champaign we signed the papers. The pound at that time was 2.44 so we paid 51,250. George came up with half and we paid off the remainder in semi annual payments between 1971 and 1976, We divided the legal fees. It was an unusual arrangement because in Ireland almost all real estate is purchased for cash.

We never knew what Ted paid for Liscrona or what he spent in capital improvements. I suspect he came out fine. I hope so. He definitely wanted to get rid of his Big White Elephant, which then became our "Old Grey Beauty."

Part II
Life in Ireland

Chapter 6

Off to Ireland

The Klines and Bellairs boarded an AerLingus flight in early June. Marge and George Kline, Mal and Jo Bellairs, youngest son Chris, 11, next son Jeff, 12, next son Rick, 18. Our two oldest sons Jerry and Keith were grown. They never did make it to Ireland and I am sorry about that. It just never worked out, and they were always involved in their own busy lives.

Our daughter Kim was in college in California during most of this time, but her college offered a semester in another country and Kim had gone to the campus just south of London. The semester had ended and Kim had moved to Dublin to be with Pat. So Pat and Kim and John Kennedy met us at Shannon. They had all three spent the week before at Lisrcrona, cleaning like mad, buying a set of dishes and other housekeeping things. We had bought the house furnished so we were in pretty fair shape. Our “advance party” had really cleaned and scrubbed and polished. After all, we bought Lisrcrona sight unseen and Pat, the one who got us into this, was about to have a heart attack. What if we hated it?

We all met at Shannon. Klines rented a car. We rented a VW mini-bus, and we headed west trying desperately to keep John in sight. The road kept getting rougher. The hedge rows kept getting higher — closing in on us. By the time we reached the quarter mile lane that led to the dead end at Lisrcrona’s door our family had become very quiet. Tensions were obvious.

There it was. The Old Grey Beauty, 140 years old and gazing serenely out over the Shannon, was welcoming another set of owners. None of us will ever forget the waves of emotion that swept over us.

To say that from that first glimpse we were utterly captivated is just understating it. We loved everything we saw. Every door we opened was a thrill. The outer reception, the inner reception, the 6 upper bedrooms, the living room with the view south across the Shannon toward County Kerry, the winding oak stairs leading down to the kitchen, bar dining room and



Figure 6.1: Lisrona House

more

bedrooms ... Ah ... we explored and exclaimed and laughed and cried. We have never been happier. All this — unseen by us till this moment — our Bolthole! And there, just to the east of the house, was the woods that we had heard about. Some of the trees were 3 feet in diameter. It was the real forest and not another one in the horizon. Imagine, we owned a whole woods!

Doonaha

Doonaha, with a population of 27 lies on the *Slina Mara* (Gaelic for scenic route) between Kilrush, Querrin and Carrigaholt. When we arrived in Doonaha in 1971, it consisted of 5 houses, one derelict building that had been a store, a Catholic Church, a one room school and Lynch's Pub.

One of the houses was an active working dairy farm and every day Boss Cow would lead the cows down the main street to the barn for milking. The cows all understood the rules of the road and never gave drivers a problem. If you happened to be walking it was a good idea to look down frequently. With the aroma of cattle and the perfume emanating from the village turf fires, the sounds of children playing outside the school, it was a peaceful and lovely area. The postman arrived once a day with mail and newspapers, always a special occasion. The Pub served as the store so fresh, warm bread was delivered daily, along with other supply trucks stopping a couple of day each week. Yes, the Guinness barrels came on schedule. Guinness was critical to the men of the area. As you know, Guinness was and is the life-blood of Irish males.

In 1971 our parish extended from Cross further back west, to Carrigaholt, Doonaha and Querrin, so the Pastor, a Father Lynch (no relation to John) was kept busy hopping from church to church. Ours was The Church of the Holy Gohst and mass was Sunday at 10 am. The interior of the church was fairly standard for older churches. The seating areas were in the shape of the cross. The women sat on the right side of the arm of the cross and the men on the left. Visitors and those who were a bit more integrated would sit in the main middle section facing the altar and the priest. The front rows were almost always empty. The men would linger outside leaning against the wall, having a last smoke, until the start of the service. Then they would drift in and fill up the very back of the church. These were our neighbors, the working farmers and their wives and children. It was always a shock to us to see the families divide with the women going to one side, the men to the other or the very rear of the church. But, it was always understood. You went to mass. It was as automatic as breathing. Also, you were on time, maybe only by 10 seconds, but never less on time. There was the 5 minute bell and the road filled with walkers, bikers, tractors and cars.

Mass was said like lightning. The priest spoke and the responses came tumbling out. The prayers, having been said at least a million times, came out in a sort of mumble. Irish Catholics in Doonaha were not demonstrative. It was a serious, no pause, business. A good priest became a great priest when he got it done in about 29 minutes, and the “Our Father” was always in Gaelic. The old boys in the back watched the time, believe me. Then they were out the door to exactly the same places along the wall for another smoke. . . . Since the rain and wind almost always came from the west, that wall protected them in the same way all the animals sought out shelter from the hedge rows. Oh yes, the men wore suits, probably the same ones they had owned for decades, and they wore caps. As we passed there would be a moment of eye catching, a bob of the head and a quick, “How do,” with almost a salute to the cap. I soon learned to wear my cap and bob the head in the proper fashion.

There was an absolute routine for “after mass.” The men would gather to chat, the women in their groups, the children in theirs, and depending on the weather, the whole congregation would amble down the road, the only street of course, to Lynch’s Pub. There the old boys would have their first pint of the day, the oldest getting to sit the closest to the turf fire. That also was understood. And out came the pipes. The women would gossip. I always wondered how they had so much to talk about. They would usually need a few grocery items. The little ones would rush to the penny candy counter and John Lynch would patiently, with twinkling eyes, help in the decision process. The Pub was the center of the social life of the community.

It was the gathering place where you met your neighbors. The church was the actual hub of the wheel. All the spokes, from baptism, first communion, wedding and funerals all centered at the church then moved to Lynch's.

I recall just one homily that Father Lynch gave in that summer of 1971. He literally roared at the men of the parish "for cuttin the hay on the Sabbath. It is a day of rest ordered by God and you're all goin' to Hell." I felt the discomfort of the farmers, however I thought the priestly duties had gone a bit over the edge. In Ireland, when the hay is ready to be cut and dried and brought in to shelter, you had better get on with the job. It does rain in Ireland. I am not sure whether that homily had much effect. Just a note here. In those days, the hay was cut with horses pulling the mowing machine, put in rows with a rake, and then farmers followed with the pitch fork to create the neatest little round stacks you have ever seen. Those little stacks were then moved to the farmer's back yard and converted into one large stack protected by a galvanized metal roof. There were no stacks out in the fields, the kind we put up in America. The sight of the teams and the equipment, the smell of the new mown hay, and the milking of the cows really took me back.

The one room school was the center of life for the children. When we arrived in 1971 there were about 24 ranging in grade from 1st up to about our junior high. The teacher held a very respected place in the community and had to be good at all levels, moving from one grade to another and another. I do not see how she ever managed to keep control and teach but it was done. Looking back over the years, I can tell you that those children received a wonderful education. We watched them grow up and move into adulthood. Those youngsters from the one room school became highly successful. School is no joke in Ireland. It is serious business. Back in the horrible old days when Ireland was dominated by the English, schools were not allowed, the Irish were not even allowed to speak their own language and that's when the hedge row school was developed. The teacher taught wherever he could find a place that was safe — even behind bushes or trees.

The practice of their Catholic faith was forbidden. If mass was said in a tenant's house, the family was turned out and the house was burned. The Irish people were not allowed to own any piece of land and the law held that no one could vote who did not own land, a very clever arrangement. I do not intend to get into the history of Ireland and its people. It is a very sad tale, but somehow the Irish were tough enough to hold onto their traditions, educate their children, keep their sense of humor and in the end, win for themselves the Republic of Ireland. Their many revolutions were almost always a disaster. The "Troubles" went on for centuries, and Ireland is still a divided country.

I strayed, didn't I? I went from a one room school to the history of Ireland. That big, big picture about this small island is not the purpose of this book. I hope I have at least introduced you to one tiny village.

The main worry that plagued Doonaha was the same one that concerned all of Ireland. It was the diminishing population. What would happen to the school if there were not enough children to keep it open? To have Doonaha school closed and their children transferred to another would have been terrible for the village. Most of the old boys, the ones who sat by the fire at Lynch's Pub, went to that school and sat at the same desks. The school would have its centenary celebration in 1986. More on that a bit later. The good news is that the school is still open in 1997. It was a big day when they received their own computer. The importance of education at all age levels is critical in every corner of the country.

If you want to read more about the "Struggles," I would suggest *Trinity* by Leon Uris followed by *The Terrible Beauty*, *The Year of the French*, *Michael Collins*, and finally *Angela's Ashes*, a beautifully written book about poverty in Limerick in the 30's and early 40's.

John Lynch

This Irishman has a unique background. He enjoys dual citizenship. John was born in Providence, Rhode Island of Irish-American parents. The date was June 29, 1917. The family was comfortable and surrounded with relatives. One day word came from Ireland. John's parents would inherit the Lynch Pub in Doonaha provided they would return to run it. The family returned to Ireland. John has told us many stories of his school days, the severe teacher who wielded a long ruler and used it regularly. The school master was a severe disciplinarian and took no nonsense from anyone. John remembers the cold in the school, the small stove, the turf fire and how little it warmed the threadbare children.

When John grew up, he in turn inherited the pub. It was a relatively small building directly across from the school. People entered through the traditional double door which offered a chance to close the outside door before opening the inner door. The Irish wind can be fierce. Inside on the right was the pub proper, about 20 x 20 featuring a turf fire that never went out. The walls were once white, but because of the smoke were closer to cream color. The Irish have always been avid smokers. The wood work had been varnished so many times, it was nearly black. There were 4 chairs, hand made with hand woven seats. Male bottoms had weathered those seats into a comfortable hollow. On the left was John's throne, the counter that

separated the pub area from the bar and the general store. John could pull a pint, reach for a can of beans and supervise the penny candy department, all within about three steps. Oh yes, there were three barstools across from John and again, the old boys would call for “a pint John,” climb aboard the stools and watch the pulling. It is a real ballet and it takes about 3 minutes, minimum.

Now, we are talking about a pulled pint, never a can or a bottle. The dark, amber Guinness is fed into the glass in a gentle manner, flowing down the side of the glass, 1/3 to 2/3 full and finally to within about 1/2 inch of the top. The surface holds that whipped-cream head and is never more than 1/2 inch thick. It is imperative that the buyer receive full value and the entire production is watched with an eagle eye. In other pubs I have actually seen the pint rejected when it was pulled too quickly and too much head was on the top. The pint was simply pushed back to the bar-man or woman. Not a word needed to be spoken. The job had to be done perfectly. It is a real downer to have the pint pushed back to be filled properly. I never saw this happen when John was behind the counter.

John, in his early days, was something of a man about town. He owned one of the first automobiles and in his spare moments provided a taxi service. John played the field and saw no great reason for getting married. Irish men have always seemed to put off the trip down the aisle as long as possible. Then something happens. He marries and children appear like magic. I think he was in his late 30's when John found a striking, dark haired Irish lass named Annie. She was from one of the local farming families. John's best friend, Michael Galvin, was his best man. Michael lived close by. You will hear a lot more about John and Annie and Michael, who married a young woman named Nora. Michael and Nora built their home next door to the school. We could never have lived in Ireland without them.

Now John and Annie were a team and on schedule produced 4 sons and a daughter, who of course went in due time across the street to school. Running a pub and store is a full time chore, but in addition, they had several milk cows, some calves and at one time even a few pigs, and farmed on land they owned. On more than one occasion I have been present when, after Annie had completed her last Irish jig, the last of the patrons eased out the door about 2:00 am, only a couple of hours after legal closing. The next thing I knew, Annie was on her hands and knees scrubbing the flagstone floor. Then, the next morning she was up to milk the cows and get children off to school. She also smoked all the time.

I have described the pub section. Let us go into the family area where they live. A door opened straight into their family kitchen. On overflow nights the pub and the kitchen all became one, and the crowd was “chock-

a-block” which translates to back to back. It was a struggle to get a drink order. There was one more door, beside the fireplace, that opened on the right to one of the family bedrooms. I think there were 2 but I am not sure. That was private property. So you see, living space was tight, so tight that each night about 10:00pm two sons would appear with a ladder and climb up through a trap door into a space directly over the bar. That is where they slept. With all the talk, the singing, the music, we were always at a loss to see how sleep was possible.

Lynch’s Pub was the country club, the social center, where everyone gathered. It was a famous place. This was where we got to know some wonderful people, our neighbors. Visitors came from everywhere because they had heard about this tiny place out in the real Irish boonies. They came from all over the world. Government officials came for their pints. I have heard singing in Gaelic, Spanish, German and French. They brought their instruments and both played and sang for the Irish, what can I say! They all can sing, know all the words to every song that has ever been sung and even if you’re not a singer, when your turn comes, it is time to produce something, a poem, a story — they call it a “party piece.” We loved our nights in Lynch’s Pub. Often we would make our way back to Liscrona when it was getting light in the east. And through it all, John was unflappable. He and Annie would pull pints and sometime during the night John would sing his songs, one of which was “They’re Cuttin’ the Hay in Doonaha Bay.”

John was truly the Mayor of Doonaha.

It was here at Lynch’s Pub that we sat back and I watched evenings unfold. We studied behavior patterns. We were coached by John, and after all his experience, he was a fine teacher. We also learned to keep our mouths shut and let the Irish come to us. To the Irish most Americans come on too strong with the “we’re Americans and we know best!”

Pub Life

Let us take a look at pub life. It is clearly understood by everyone. If a patron becomes rowdy, starts a fight and is generally obnoxious, the Publican will issue a warning. If problems continue, he can say, “You are out,” or words to that effect. At that point the individual can no longer enter. It is a very serious penalty because it is enforced. To be black balled from the Pub is to be cut off from friends and all the companionship. That power is seldom used, but when the Publican speaks it is best to listen.

There is only one thing that worries the Publican. He has a license to protect and he is subject to certain rules. The most complicated one is simply called "Closing Time," and the local Gardai (the police) are the enforcers. The problem is that the time seems to fluctuate. There are summer hours for closing, winter hours for closing, exemptions given for certain occasions like local fairs or celebrations. Pubs must close on Sunday afternoons. That rule makes sense. If they did not close they would never get the good old boys home to be with family for the Sunday lunch. Then there is the additional problem that some Gardai are very strict. Others are not. It all seems to come down to the question of the Gardai's mood at the moment. Is he cracking down or does he just drive by and keep going, hearing no evil and seeing no evil. If the Gardai decides to use his muscle, he can issue tickets to all patrons caught in the Pub and worst of all cite the Publican. In court the fine is stiff and if repeated the Pub can lose its license to sell spirits. That would be the end of the Pub. It is a very complex and ever changing game that is played in earnest. Over the centuries the Irish have learned how to cope.

In the west of Ireland most men begin to trickle into the pub about 10:00pm. In the summer months the farmers work in the fields till late because it is still light till nearly midnight. There seems to be agreement that the danger time is after 1:00 am. Here is the way it used to work in Doonaha. At 1:00am John would put the shutter over the windows and lock the front door. That was the signal for one more round. Earlier in the evening all cars were driven behind the pub into an open field, and those on the street were moved about 100 yards to the east so they were next to the church. No cars were close to the pub. I guess if the Gardai made their drive through the village, they were supposed to assume that all the people were in church. All this while the walls of the pub were absolutely vibrating with music and song. This is a particular form of "Irish Pub Ballet" that is performed every night and is probably different in every village and town. The Irish understand it. I even have a hard time trying to describe it. Hotels have a different set of rules. For residents there is no closing time. Casual visitors can not enter after the legal closing time, but once inside, who is to know? Amazing, is it not? Here is a good Irish toast for you to remember..

St. Patrick was a gentleman
Who through strategy and stealth
Drove all the snakes from Ireland
Here's a toasting to his health.
But not too many toasting
Lest you lose yourself and then

Forget the good St. Patrick
And see all those snakes again.

While we are at it, how about two more.

Health and long life to you
The woman of your choice to you
A child every year to you
Land without rent to you
And may you die in Ireland.

Here's health and prosperity
To you and all you posterity
And them that doesn't drink with sincerity
That they may be damned for all eternity.

May the road rise to meet you
May the wind be always at your back
The sun shine warm upon your face
And until we meet again
May God hold you in the hollow of His hand
May the roof above us never fall in
And may we friends gathered below never fall out.

Finally, the simplest toast of all:
"Slante"
Pronounced "Slawn chu!"

Irish Laughs

Since we are talking about life in the pubs, particularly Lynch's Pub in West Clare, we might just as well get acquainted with Irish humor expressed in "Kerry Man jokes." These are examples of great ethnic humor. In our country, to be politically correct, you dare not touch a joke that has to do with almost anything ethnic. No so in Ireland. County Clare lies just north

of County Kerry, and there is nothing a Clareman enjoys more than a good Kerry Man joke. John Lynch, one of the finest Clare Publicans in the world, loved to spice up the conversation with, "Have you heard the one about the Kerryman?" We will call them John's bits! I have made a collection of some of his best.

John's Bits

Why do you never get ice in drinks served in Kerry?
The fellow with the recipe emigrated.

Have you heard about the Kerryman who went to a drive-in movie?
He didn't like the show, so he slashed the seats.

Why do Kerry dogs have flat faces?
From chasing parked cars.

Two Kerry men were passing by a nudist colony. They decided to peep in over the wall and see what was going on inside. So one Kerryman stood on top of the other's shoulders. "Are there men and women there?" asked the lower Kerryman.
"I can't tell," said the upper Kerryman, "they've got no clothes on." *****

More of John's Bits

First Kerryman: "How much did the garage charge for towing your car home from Dublin?"
Second Kerryman: "\$100."
First Kerryman: "That was a bit steep wasn't it?"
Second Kerryman: "I made them earn every penny of it. I kept the hand brake on all the way."

A Kerryman wrote the following letter to the editor of a newspaper:
Dear Sir, Last week I lost my gold pocket watch, so yesterday I put an ad in your Lost & Found column. Last night I found the

watch in the trousers of my other suit. God Bless your newspaper.

Two Kerryman were in a space rocket. The first left the rocket on a space walk, and when he returned he knocked on the capsule door.

"Who's there?" asked the second Kerryman.

Two Kerryman had been lying in wait for over 3 hours in order to ambush their sworn enemy. Finally one Kerryman turned to the other and said, "He's late, I hope to God nothing has happened to the poor fellow."

How would you get a Kerryman to climb onto the roof of a Pub? Tell him the drinks are on the house.

I heard this one on three different occasions within one month. Ireland is a small island and stories travel like the latest gossip.

"I met this wan at a dance last week," reported Mike, "a real posh on. I asked her could I drive her home, and when we got to her place she asked me in for a cup of coffee. Well, I wasn't' thinkin' of coffee but I thought there might be a bit of Paddys somewhere so in I goes. We were not sittin' down when she says, "going to get into something comfortable and relax." I didn't know what she was talkin' about but in a minute back she comes in a nighty and sits down beside me. Then she put the lights out."

"What happened then?"

"Well, I can take a hint. I knows when not wanted. I grabs me cap and went home."

This next joining of funny, simple words, which I saw in an Irish Pub, illustrates the Irish ability to use language to express a thought.

"PROFANITY MAKES IGNORANCE AUDIBLE"

The Pub Approach

I shall now deal with protocol, the proper way to enter an Irish Pub in the West of Ireland. The protocol will cover the 60's and 70's and does not

discuss those “high and mighty Dublin people” and their customs. This is grass roots stuff, County Clare by the banks of the mighty Shannon. In a way, this city-county attitude is similar to New Yorkers’ feelings about the barbarians who live west of the Hudson River.

One never makes an entrance. One slips in the door and looks around. It is doubtful that anyone will look at you but you can be sure you have been spotted. If any eye contact is made, a slight bob of the head is permissible. If one enters with a female it is necessary to find a place to sit some distance from the bar. If one enters with a male companion it is acceptable to move toward the bar and catch the eye of the bartender. If one is a lone female it is not right for that person to enter at all.

All ears are adjusted to hear what one will order. Best is to say simply, “A pint please.” That is very proper because it means Guinness and brands one as having good sense. A man must never under any circumstances order a “glass” of anything, that is a half pint. Only females ever drink a glass. Men have to be men. There are other beer and stout producers in Ireland and if one is slightly eccentric it is acceptable to order something like a Harp or Smithwick. There is danger here because it must be pronounced properly, “Smitik” never Smithwick.

If one wishes to make a slight impression and is a little more affluent, one may order “Irish please.” If one is judged by the bartender to be a Yank, with a slight turn down of the mouth he’ll question, “Ice?” There is usually a small bucket nearby with five or six ice cubes at the bottom. Be careful. Ears are turned your way. With the same slight sneer on your mouth reply, “Water.” With a slight sigh of relief the glass with the ounce of Irish will be pushed toward you accompanied by a small jug of water. Just a slight addition of water is allowed. It is always possible to order one’s Irish by name, Jamesons or Paddys if one is being patriotic and Bushmills if one does not mind drinking whiskey made in the north of Ireland. John Lynch always orders “A touch of the Protestant,” which means, “I’ll drink what I choose and enjoy the attention.” Again, be careful. The name is “Jemisons,” not Jameson. Pronunciation is critical and one must always add the water in whatever quantity, oneself. There is an old Irish saying, “Never tamper with me wife, or add water to my drink.” Time will pass. The Irish are a very curious lot and sooner or later if one is patient, one of the patrons will be unable to contain himself and he will direct the opening shot your way, “Weather’s terrible,” or “Weather grand.” The door is open and the response should indicate a degree of tolerance. If it is cold one may say, “Oh, I don’t mind. Back home it get down to 30 below.” If it is hot, the response indicates it gets up over 100 degrees. Like magic, the door is open, “Ah, and where might be home, is it a it Yank you are?” Of course he knows

you are.

At this point several more patrons show interest and one will ask. “And where about in the states?” The next question will have to be, “And have ye any Irish connections?” It sure helps if one has, because every Irishman has an incredible number of “cousins” in America.

This is a ballet that is performed over and over. It happens exactly as I have described it. The Irish are the greatest talkers in the world and once one has crossed over the mine fields, the evening opens to talk on other subjects. The Irish are well read, and in many instances know more about us than we know ourselves. They know our history, our politics, our relationship to the world and our national policies that sometimes irritate and confuse them. Through it all one gets the impression that Americans are loved as individuals, but American government is highly suspect. They are amazed at our degree of isolation from the rest of the world and how little we know or care about anyone outside “the good old U.S.A.” Sometimes it can become a little sticky when we are accused of being the “arms sellers of the world” or “big bullies who love to brag about our wealth and power.”

Back to pub conduct. Here is a tip that should be useful. One must be careful about buying an Irishman a drink. Americans, for the most part, are kind, generous people and want desperately to be loved. Certainly the best way must be to buy a round. Be careful. The minute you do, that old boy on the bar stool next to you is obligated to buy back, and he might have come in for his one drink of the night and not have another pence in his pocket. It is seldom proper to buy a round for the whole pub full of patrons unless one is known by the group and has a special reason like:

1. Celebrating the 4th of July, or Christmas or New Years Eve.
2. Celebrating the birth of a grandchild.
3. Leaving for America the next day.

Finally, just remember that an Irish pub is the core of the community. It is the most important gathering spot in the area. To be accepted in the “club” is a great accomplishment, and you better have a “party piece” just in case! You must sing, recite a poem, tell a story. Do something.

Earlier I discussed the proper procedure for “pulling a pint.” This is standard everywhere in Ireland. Everything else is subject to local customs. Of course the attitude toward women has changed. The “for men only” attitude no longer exists. Dublin might be very modern, but as one travels west, the old conservative ways are still apparent.

Enough on pubs! No we didn’t spend all our time at Lynch’s. We were in love with the Grey Lady.

Exploration

This was the period of discovery. We were learning about Lisrcrona, the property and the area close to us. We explored the woods and fields on the property. We learned that there was a certain way to climb down the cliffs and reach the great rock slabs next to the Shannon. We learned that the river has an 8 foot tide and we were able to watch high tide move to low and back twice a day. We spotted the freighters and the sail boats on the river and could see there were beautiful sailing conditions on the Shannon from its mouth back up river for about 15 miles and there were almost no sailors taking advantage of any of it. At night we learned to spot the navigation lights blinking on the buoys and to watch the lighthouse beacon at Kilcridon Point. I have always loved being near water, and Lisrcrona House was about 200 yards from the cliffs. Our view from the living room was straight south across the wide Shannon to Knockanoor Mountain in County Kerry , and on a clear day we could see all the way west to the Blasket Islands about 50 miles away. Also to the south we could pick up MacGillicuddy Reeks, the mountains near Killarny. We lived exactly where the Shannon joined the Atlantic Ocean.

Lisrcrona was isolated. Our closest neighbors lived in Doonaha, about a mile away. At first we had visitors who just dropped by for a drink. They did not know that Lisrcrona had become a private house. We did not realize that we still had a legitimate liquor license that had considerable value and possibly could have been sold to someone. We just let it lapse.

We and the Klines had a couple of wonderful 2 week vacations there at the house, because neither of us could spare more time away from the U.S. That frustrated me because we could see the dozens of projects that needed to be attacked. A house by the sea that stands alone and unoccupied rapidly begins to suffer, and to be perfectly frank, there was not the cash available to spend on improvements.

One of our most urgent concerns was the fact that Lisrcrona was totally bald. An earlier owner had taken down the six tall chimneys. The only logical reason for this treatment was this: If the chimneys on a house were down, the house was judged to be derelict and the taxes were reduced to almost zero. Many years later, we did attack the problem. In the early days we just had to make do. Yes, the damp was starting to creep into the house around aged window frames and between the uncaulked stone blocks of the two foot thick outer walls. I tried to scrape the walls inside that suffered from a white powdery residue and then re-paint. It did not do much good. I felt like the little Dutch boy with his thumbs in the leaking dike.

We purchased our groceries in the tiny shops in Kilkee and Kilrush. We

found that we were obligated to bring our own string bag to carry our purchases. Every Irish woman carried one. We quickly bought one. No plastic bags were in sight yet and no frozen food. The Irish definitely thought “small” with tiny packages of everything. Women shopped every day so there was no need for stocking ahead. It was the social event of the day. We learned that the sign “victualler” meant butcher shop. I think later on I will develop the food availability, what was in and what was out, and maybe a few recipes that we have made part of our American life. That area was still to be explored over the years.

In 1971 Ireland dropped English currency and adopted their own decimal system. The Irish £or pound became the Punt, and then it was a simple punt divided into 50 pence, 20P, 10P, 5P, and penny. The Irish were still struggling with the problem when we arrived. The punt fluctuated in value in relation to the value of the dollar and still remained closely tied to the British pound.

We found that a hardware store was essential to life in Ireland. Williams in Kilkee and Brews in Kilrush got to know us very well. Many names were different., One example is the word emulsion. It means paint.

Liscrona was heated with oil-hotwater and there were two large, ugly tanks out behind the house. We knew one day they would have to go. We had two functioning fireplaces, one in the inner reception and one in the living room so we had to find a source for turf. We did and we learned how to start fires. There is a definite technique. Our kitchen six burner stove called a cooker was fueled by two large bottled gas tanks which stood outside the kitchen window. We also inherited a refrigerator-freezer that was so small it be called a “teenie-weenie.” It brought on plenty of laughs.

We needed to learn how to become part of the community. I am sure they were just as curious about us. The fact that we went to church was a plus. We obviously enjoyed Lynch’s Pub which was also positive.

We learned that life on the farms centered on the milk cow, her nurturing and the milking. The land in the west of County Clare was poor, suitable only for the grazing of cattle. The quality of the soil would not support anything like alfalfa or grain. Land was life and after the final troubles ended and the land was divided up among the Irish, every tiny field was fertilized and the natural grass hay cut and stored. The herds were milked daily with delivery to the local creamery. Milk was the financial support of every soul. The dependence on weather, sun, rain, drying conditions of the hay and the milk production of the herd made up most of the conversations in the pubs, before and after church and at every crossroads in the west.

If you check the map, you can see that Liscrona House is on sort of a peninsula. It extends from Kilrush all the way out to Loop Head, the



Figure 6.2: Lisrona House is at A.

furthest point of land. You have seen how it gets narrower all the way out. That area is called Corcaboshkin in Gaelic. There is a phenomenon about this area — the underground telegraph. One word mentioned in Kilrush or Querrin, or Moyasta or Doonaha or Kilkee or Cross is heard plainly at Loop Head. The Irish are great talkers and gossipers, and rumors, good or bad, travel that telegraph. We learned never, ever to say a negative word about anyone because all the natives are either cousins, brothers, sisters or in some way related. I know we, the Yanks, were enough to keep them going with stories for years and years.

With the Shannon River on the south side and the Atlantic Ocean on the west, Corcaboshkin was a peninsula inhabited by handy people living lives of daily struggle. The potato famine and the massive emigration of the Irish from 1850 left many decaying derelict cottages. We would often drive by one of the old houses with the roof gone, maybe the four stone walls left, perhaps a hanging door and a falling down chimney, and we'd wonder where the people went. Did they just walk away? What is the story behind that rotting door?

John Kennedy took us to a gorgeous place out near Loop Head. It was on the Atlantic side of the peninsula and was called the Bridges of Ross. If you saw the movie *Ryan's Daughter*, part of it was filmed at the Bridges. When we first visited, the old wooden tracks that supported the movie cameras were still there. John taught us not to go to the left from the parking area but to go right and follow a trail till you butted into a huge mass of rock. There was a sheltered V shaped area that gave protection from the wind. It was an

ideal place for a picnic, with crashing, roaring breakers nearly surrounding us.

We went there for years, took dozens of people and swore them all to secrecy. We called it Bellairs Point or the Rendezvous. We seldom met many people. I will mention three exceptions. On one occasion our 12 year old son Chris was along. Above the picnic area, serving as our protective barrier from the sea, was a rock wall about 40' high. It was climbable and you know how 12 year olds are. Chris climbed and came back with wide eyes.

“Dad, there’s a woman up there lying in the sun. Dad she is naked!”

I suspect that was the only exposure that he ever had to a real mermaid.

Another time, we found a man all by himself doing sketches. He turned out to be an English geologist who was studying the coast of Ireland, especially the tortured layers of rock in the area and how they were created back when the land was formed. We had a long visit and he answered many questions and, yes, he shared our lunch of wine and cheese and fruit.

The third memory concerns a woman who was sitting there looking out toward the breakers. We talked, and she disclosed to us that her husband had proposed marriage to her at this spot, that recently he had died and she had returned to remember. Gulp!

I guess Bellairs Point wasn’t really our private property after all.

So began the peeling of the orange, the sifting through the layers of Ireland that had preceded us by thousands of years.

The Close Shave

I think it was 1972 when we returned to Lisrcrona for the second time. The Klines came again, Jo and I, Chris and Jeff and Pat. John Kennedy came from Dublin to join us.

Our son Jeff is a fisherman. I do not know where he got it, but he just loves to fish. John Kennedy had helped us arrange something very special for Jeff, an actual lobster boat trip with two young Kilkee fishermen. They had their lobster pots out near the Loophead area. They agreed that on the day of our arrival, they would wait and take Jeff along. It was a wonderful opportunity. Also, there are no lobsters in all the seas that compare with the big, wild one that grow in the icy Atlantic waters.

We flew from Chicago and when we reached Ireland, the country was completely fog bound. There was no way we could land. The plane flew on to Prestwick, Scotland where we sat on the ground and waited. By the time we did make it to Shannon, picked up our rental car and made it to

Liscrona, the fishermen had left. They waited as long as they could and were sorry. They left a note saying they would take Jeff later that week.

We had one sad son but he was happy to know he would have another chance. We had gone to bed and I believe it was about 3:00am when Pat came into our bedroom and woke us to say that the boat had not returned and she and John were joining the neighbors to go out to Loophead and search for them.

Two days later, both their bodies were found in a small cave beneath a sheer stone wall. One of the fishermen was an under water demolition expert in World War II so had experience in swimming. Neither man was wearing a life jacket. The assumption was that he had helped his partner get to the cave, but could not get him out. The tide had risen and drowned them. Later the boat was found split almost in half. The locals felt that the boat had been close to land and one of the rollers was very high which in turn created a very deep and shallow trough. The boat had struck a submerged shelf of rock and split. Both men had found themselves cast into the cold water. Our son Jeff was saved by the fog that had gotten in our way.

Fishermen live a very dangerous life in the sea that surrounds Ireland. The tide and the weather can be extremely treacherous. It is so cold that for centuries Irish fishermen never have learned to swim. They were just philosophical. "Oh, ye'd only prolong the agony. Get done with it!"

This was not the only time we were in Ireland when the call came out to join in walking the cliffs. That is part of Irish tradition. The body must be found and given a decent burial. Jeff requested that he accompany us to the funeral. On that day in a subtle way, he stopped being a 12 year old boy.

The Bear

Earlier I told you about our first experience with the Burren back in the 60's. When I told John I thought it was a pretty frightful area he said, "Mr. Bellairs, you haven't really seen it. Also something new is going on up there!"

The result was that in 1973 John drove us up to a cave that had been discovered in the Burren. It was called Aillwee Cave. That's the Gaelic word for bear. The bones of a prehistoric bear had been found deep in the cave, hence the name. The cave was near Ballyvaughn at the north end of the Burren. We drove up a narrow twisting, one way road about half way up one of the grey limestone mountains. There we found a simple house trailer and a man selling tickets. I think it was 50P.

The cave was just a hole in the mountain. Light bulbs had been strung. The cave did not go back very far. It did not seem like a very big deal.

Maybe we walked a couple of hundred yards back. After seeing American caves, I was not convinced that this was a good expedition. The Irish were impressed. We tried to be.

My, what has been done to the Ailliwee Cave. It is now a must see for all tourists. They have improved the road, provided for parking, and built an elegant entrance of natural Burren stone. The interior is large enough to include a nice souvenir shop, even a restaurant and a bar. From an environmental approach it is perfect. All this, and a cave that is now opened, with guided tours included to a depth of about half a mile. Now I received my Burren education.

It is a vast labyrinth of underground caves and fissures. It was on this trip that John got us out of the car, and we walked gingerly over the rough, gouged limestone. He pointed out plants and tiny flowers, even orchids, that made each square yard appear to be a separate rock garden. One does need to get nose-down into those cracks to really appreciate the corner of Ireland called the Burren. It is totally unique.

The long lens view from the Burren picks up first the three Aran Islands, lets you gaze across miles and miles of Galway Bay and pick up the mountains of Connemara on the distant horizon. The close up view of some of nature's most rugged landscape once caused one of Cromwell's soldiers to utter this truism: "There's not a tree to hang a man, water to drown him, or earth to bury him."

I was wrong. The Burren is a small area, just 100 square miles. It is rugged and beautiful once you get up close and look.

Back at Lisrona, every day we were faced with the real world.

The Bathroom Dilemma

We had a big one, and this one could not be ignored. Typhoid fever or worse lurked. Ted Cavanaugh, by law, had created two bathrooms on the lower level adjoining his pub area. In one of the bathrooms there was a tub. Lo and behold, we began to see raw sewage coming up into the tub.

George Kline and I scratched our heads, prowled around outside, ran lengths of wire here and there and came up with nothing. We were about due to leave and I did what I should have done earlier. I went to visit Michael Galvin. Remember, he and his family lived across from Lynch's. Michael had the reputation for being able to do almost anything. He had built his own house and he functioned all over the area as "Mr. Fixer." We had met Michael a few times, so I went to see him.

"Michael, I wonder if you can build us a septic system. We are in a real

mess and have to go back to the U.S. There must be an old system of some kind since people have lived here for so many years, but we cannot find any sign of it. Do whatever needs to be done. We can't go on without being able to flush a toilet."

The Irish in most cases are slow to volunteer. They are a bit shy, and never say, "Here, I'll take over."

It was not till later that I was to discover that Michael, as a young man, had worked for many of the previous owners and he knew more about Lisrcrona than anyone. He knew its history, all the good things that had been done as well as the bad. Had I not gone to him, he would never have come to me. It would not have been proper.

Over the years Michael and Nora, their children John and Geraldine, have become our family. Michael is the brother I never had. We truly are bonded at the hip, the heart and the head. Our life in Ireland was possible because of them.

Over the winter, Michael took on a horrible job. He had to probe for the possible location of an ancient sewer system. He dug holes in a large semi-circle out in front with no success. Finally, in desperation, he took a can of paint, dumped it in a toilet and then went down to the cliffs some 200 yards from the house. He waited, and finally there was a splash of color. The paint had made its way down to a concealed opening on the cliff side. He took a sighting from there back to the house, dug a final hole and hit the system, 200 yards of stone shaped like a tunnel. It was the same stone that had been used in the construction of the house 140 years earlier. So back there in 1840 they had flushing toilets when most people had to make do with an out house or the open field.

Michael tied all the sewer lines into the old system and the job was accomplished. We never had any problems again, at least in that department and he never went into details about the days he spent digging and probing. With that twinkle in the eye he said, "Mal, those toilets will be good as new 200 years from now, and that sewer system will last forever."

I realize, if you have any plumber in you, you are now asking how they developed water pressure. I will explain. In the old days, there was a well just outside the kitchen and one of the do it yourself hand pumps. Each morning one or two of the workers had the job of hand pumping water from the well up to a tank in the attic. There they had gravity to supply the house for a day. On one occasion, we were able to meet a man named O'Brien who worked at Lisrcrona as a boy. One of his jobs was the pumping of the water. His father was the gardener and his mother was the cook. As we sat in our living room with him, his comment was, "Ah, I'd never have thought that I'd just sit in the grand house." He also told us a strange story that I will

tell later.

As long as we are on the subject of utilities at Liscrona, here is one for you. Liscrona was one of the first houses in the west of Ireland to have electricity. The owner named Griffin, back in the early 1900's, installed a whole wall of storage batteries in one of the out-buildings just off the kitchen. He also purchased a generator. His system was simple. The batteries supplied lights for the house, probably a small number of the most essential. When the charge in the cells got down to a certain point, the generator kicked in and re-charged the batteries. So they enjoyed an unusual degree of sophistication for the time.

The bits and pieces of Liscrona's past kept coming to us and it was fascinating. Stories from Michael kept popping up at the most unusual times.

I must mention that there was another great fixer-upper who was a lifetime friend of John Lynch. His name was Packie Keating. He and his wife Mary, lived with their children in Carrigaholt. Packie was the auto mechanic for every car in the neighborhood. Additionally, he was a fisherman and owned his own boat. He also played the concertina and loved his nights in the pubs. Packie was a great Irish character who came to rescue us late on night when a pipe broke and turned our stairway into waterfall.

Chapter 7

Fate

“Man does not live alone.”

We had spent short vacations in Ireland, never long enough. The family was doing well, the station was making good progress, and we were about to buy another one, the FM station that was licensed to Woodstock. FM was just beginning to become a factor in broadcasting.

Just before Christmas of 1973 I was heading out the front door of the station when I met Jo coming in. She said, “We have a problem.” Indeed we did. In January Jo had surgery for breast cancer. It came suddenly and violently. It was a total mastectomy, and when the surgeon came out to see me, he reported that it was all through her body and she had about a year, no chance for more, but they would begin radiation as soon as possible and chemotherapy after that.

It was a very hard year. We all just kept going. Jo never complained. She fought it as hard as she could. She kept on at the station because she said it helped her. We did buy the new station. Our family held together. We suffered but kept going. We even went back to Ireland in the summer of 1974. She wanted to go. The hardest part was watching her quietly touching and loving every inch of Liscrona. She knew that her share of the dream was ending. We knew how she hurt. There was nothing to say. In early '75 John Lynch's Annie died quickly from a massive stroke. With all the pressure and work and her constant smoking, it was inevitable.

In August of '75, actually August 22 at 7:40am at Lutheran General Hospital, Jo left us. I thanked God that she had been able to meet her roots on her terms. She was a splendid wife, mother and partner.

The Black Hours

I suppose we all experience tragedy in a similar way, at least to some extent. For me, the night hours were the worst. I dreaded the silent, dark from about 2:00 till 4:00am. I would pay bills, write commercials for the station, then take a shower and get breakfast for the kids, get them off to school and go to work on the air for 3 or 4 hours. Throughout this time there was one very consoling thought. Thank God we had plunged ahead and bought Lisrona. Of course we should have waited till we were in a better financial position and could afford it. But, if we had been sensible, Jo would never have been able to be a part of Ireland. The “Bolthole” would never have happened for either of us. She got to experience the Irish life. She baked her own Irish soda bread, loved the aroma of the turf fires, the pure music of the Irish speech, the sparkling, invigorating breeze that swept over us every day. The dream that we fashioned in 1965 actually became reality for a few years. Nothing could take that away from us.

I was left with a major career problem. After the death of a loved one, most people can do a pretty good job of going ahead with life. If you are a teacher you can teach. If you are a fireman you put out fires. My dilemma in my profession was that I opened a microphone everyday and my very soul, my mind and everything about me went out into the space occupied by listeners. I was professional enough to realize that while most everyone listening knew Jo and me and our family and they had sympathy for us, a radio performer’s job comes down to a personal relationship, “What have you done for me lately?” They do not care to hear you moan and cry over your problems and pain. They have plenty of their own.

During some of those long nights I shared with myself alone, I had the chance to work on my own head. The history of my life began to play a part. As a child I had undergone some severe family problems. As a boy in school I had, without ever being counseled, discovered the truth, “You must go on. Things happen. You have to look at life as a long corridor with many doors. You walk along and when you reach each door, you open it, walk through and close it. Don’t look back. There is no alternative. Keep going.” It worked for me then. Now it had to work again.

I would not suggest to any of you that this a perfect way to face life. I have never gone back to a high school reunion. I never have returned to a Pasadena Playhouse theater get together. I didn’t retain the army buddy friendships from W.W.II. The old days were remembered, some lovingly and some with a shudder. I just gently closed doors and moved on. I know I have missed a lot, but for me it was a matter of survival. My deepest regret is that I wish I could have helped my children more during this time. In the

movies dear old Dad always comes up with just the right words that help. I did the best I could. It was not enough. Their grief went on a long time. I know I was inadequate in that instance, and it still bothers me.

Back To Work

Later that fall, the three youngest, Chris, Jeff and Rick, and I took a camper down to the Smokies. We camped in the park behind Gatlinburg, hiked the trails, cooked over our own fire, and watched the leaves changing color and falling. I felt just being together would be good. We were plugging along a day at a time.

We were becoming a genuine family radio empire. Pat, Kim and Rick were all on the air with me, and our next to oldest son Jerry soon joined us. Our staff was growing and we were making steady progress.

I will not attempt to conceal the fact that when Jo died a very large part of my love for the stations went too. Together we were a team. She was the business head. I was the show biz-sales partner. After Jo, it was much more difficult because I never liked counting dollars or doing awful paperwork things like FCC reports and taxes.

The Miracle

It really was, and I will do my best to fill in the details. Every year Jo and I would go to a Notre Dame football game, usually with David and Adelaide Meskill and Gwen and John Miller, long time friends dating back to 1950. We would drive down, do the tour of the campus, stop at the Grotto, have our tailgate picnic and attend the game. It was a fond memory of an idyllic time. The trouble is, I did not yet realize how "fond" it really was.

One day, I took a call from a Woodstock neighbor, John Strohm. He and his wife Lillian had invited Tom and Ginny Byrnes to go to a Notre Dame game and stay overnight in South Bend. Would I like to join? I said yes.

I did not realize what would happen to me when we reached the campus. I saw Jo everywhere. When we reached the Grotto, I thought I would die. I was frightful company at a social outing. I cannot remember who the team was, the score or anything about it except that it became a dark, dismal afternoon. We had dinner and afterwards both couples went to their rooms and I to mine. This was the first time I had been alone in a hotel room since 1941 and the loneliness just poured over me. Was I ever feeling sorry for me!

I sat down on the edge of the bed and looked out into the misty night. How could I possibly go on without the most important part of my life, Jo!

I was thinking of her when it happened. I suddenly recalled something she said some weeks after her surgery when we were driving down the road to the station. Out of the blue she quietly said, “I don’t have to worry about you. You’re a man who likes sharing life. You’ll be married in six months.”

It was the only time she ever mentioned to me that our partnership was ending. We both knew it but did not discuss it.

I had the strangest feeling that night in South Bend. It was as if she were there talking to me, telling me to get off my rear end and get on with life. In the past we had talked about my belief in “closing the doors” and I felt she was telling me to close her door and realize I had a family and friends and a whole life in front of me still to be lived, and that was what she expected of me, nothing less. She really let me have it.

This happened. I cannot explain it, but every word is true. I think there are some things we do not completely understand, like love and faith. Jo talked to me. She brought me out of despair.

Please understand. She did not actually talk words to me that I heard. She planted ideas and thoughts in my mind, and she was not finished so I paid attention.

“You are simply not a loner. You need a partner, a person to bounce ideas on, a woman to share your life. As a widower, you’re a lonely mess. Now go and find her. If you really enjoyed our years together, realize there is someone out there. I’m going to point you toward her. I’m not jealous. I want you to start again and create a new team. Perhaps I’ll even give you a clue.”

I went to bed and had my first night’s deep sleep in months.

I Know You Won’t Believe This!

We were driving back from South Bend that Sunday. My mind was going over the event of the preceding evening.

It came to me — the clue was Maria Henslee.

Now I need to back up a little. Maria was a widow. Her husband Ned, one of the partners in the law firm of Henslee, Monek and Henslee, had died a few years back, about the time we moved to Woodstock. My son Rick and her son Mark were at Woodstock High School and were good friends, and both were music nuts. We had worked out a number of live music concerts that were held at the Woodstock Opera House. Rick and Mark acted as the producers. Maria’s daughter Sue was quite musical, folk songs were her

specialty, so she and a partner, Jeff Biel, were also involved in concerts. All this tended to bring our families together.

In about 1972 or 73 Sue and her husband had gone to Europe on a cross country back packing trip and had gone broke. Maria knew that we were going to be in Ireland, so came to visit us with a check to be given to Sue. I picked up both of them later in Kilrush, wet and bedraggled, and we dried them out at Lisrona, and fed them up. So Sue met Lisrona way back in the early days of our stewardship. While Sue was visiting us she mentioned that her mother, along with a man named Cliff Ganshaw, was about to invest in the Old Courthouse on the square in Woodstock. The idea was to create a nice restaurant with shops on the upper floors. At that time we were negotiating to buy the FM station, and I was nosing about for a visible studio location.

When we returned to this country, I met with Cliff and worked out the space. It was on the 3rd floor and was just what we wanted. Also, since we were good friends of Louis and Sada Szathmary of the Bakery, I was able to introduce Cliff to Louis, who subsequently became the Courthouse Inn Restaurant consultant. The deal was done and Maria invested in the restaurant. If this had not happened, I am sure the historic building would have been razed and turned into a parking lot.

I have gone into some detail here to show you how our two families were drawn together. After several of the music concerts, Jo and I joined the Henslee family at their home to celebrate the affairs.

I had the clue — Maria Henslee. She was a very nice person and I liked her. She was the opposite of Jo in appearance as well as personality. Jo was tall and dark. Maria was quite petite and blonde. Maria was quiet and reserved where Jo was much more the one who could take on wild tigers.

The return trip was over. We were back in Woodstock. Look what one weekend at Notre Dame had done for me! Jo had sat beside me on the bed in that South Bend hotel and given me the shove I needed.

Jazz

On Monday night I called Maria. I have never been one to dawdle. I knew that the Northern Illinois Jazz Band was coming to Woodstock High to perform on Wednesday evening. In a dazed and slightly confused voice she agreed to go with me.

There was a real buzz when Maria and I walked in. The matchmakers and all of Maria's friends had a juicy one to chew on.

Over the next few days, we did things together, dinners and shows. I met

her other children, Ann who worked in Chicago, and Edward, a lawyer with the Henslee firm. I felt a sense of peace returning. I am sure my on the air work improved.

I have no intention of going into a detailed accounting of “our romance” but later on — a lot sooner than some people thought was “proper,” I bought a bottle of champagne, sat Maria down on her couch and told her what I had in mind. I remember saying, “Maria, what are you planning to do with the rest of your life? I can promise you this. With me it will never be dull. How about it?”

Result — we were married at St. Anne’s Episcopal Church, Maria’s church, and then again at St. Mary’s, my church.

“You’ve got a whole life to live. Don’t spoil it for yourself and everybody else. Get on with it! Close the door behind you and walk on down the hall.”

Chapter 8

The New Life

Maria and I now had a larger family, ten children between us, and I picked up my second mother-in-law. My mother had her own place in Woodstock. Maria's mother lived with her but was in for a shock. She had been visiting Maria's sister Dorothy in Washington. When she returned home to Woodstock, she found a brand new son-in-law. She was almost 93 and I thought she took it very well.

St. Patrick's Day was near. The Woodstock Square was doing better than it had in years. The Opera House look grand. It even had air conditioning. The Courthouse was full and the Inn was doing well. Up the curving staircase were two businesses, a jewelry store and Jim Witherspoon's Mens and Womens Wear. On the third level Lynn Krause had opened up one of the nicest craft and art shops in the area. The Old Courtroom was available for private parties and our new station was nearly finished. We had probably the only Victorian radio station in the country, complete with furniture and light fixtures and a special wall paper designed for us by Jim Pearson, the art teacher at Woodstock High School. It featured his drawings of the four dominant features of the Square — the Opera House, the Courthouse, a Civil War statue and the Spring House. I finished hanging the paper about 4:00am the day we opened the new station. Louis Szathmary came out from Chicago with his staff and staged one slam-bang heck of a party in the Courtroom for all who chose to come. After that we invited everybody to come to the Opera House where Bobby Clancy and several of his friends did a big Irish show. The town was jumping. I wore my kilt. We hired a piper and we paraded from the Courthouse to the Opera House for a genuine Irish party.

The Wedding

We heard from my daughter Kim in California. She and her love, Neal Esterly, wanted to be married. How about August in Doonaha at our local church with the reception at Lisrona House? Neal was a great young man, and they made a perfect pair. They had been college classmates and we had met him earlier. Maria and I said yes without any hesitation. Here was another of my off the top of my head decisions. Maria had never been to Lisrona House so she had no idea of what she was getting into. I did. Lisrona had not been lived in for two years. Jo was too weak to go in '75. John Kennedy had used the house for friends, and that we found out had only made matters worse. When we left in '74, Lisrona simply was in poor shape. Two years of standing alone in the wet, the damp and the salt air had not helped The Old Grey Beauty at all.

But, we had agreed and all I could see was the fun of a local wedding and a huge party at Lisrona. Somehow, I do seem incapable of seeing the down side of things.

The first step was a letter to Father Con Duffy, our new parish priest. Since Neal's family was Episcopalian, better known in Ireland as Church of Ireland, I knew permission from the Bishop was required for a "mixed marriage." That turned out to be easy.

The advance party gathered in Dublin in early August and proceeded to Lisrona. It consisted of Maria and me, Chris and Kim. It is sad that we had not reached out into the local community for help in the attack on the house. It was certainly available. I just never thought of it. As I feared, the Old Grey Lady, was down at the heels and at that moment I began to realize what a good trooper I had married. Maria knew a lot more about what had to be done than any of the rest of us.

We scraped walls, we painted. It took us at least two days to clean the kitchen. The gas range, oven and broiler were my personal challenge. The accumulated grease you can only imagine. The Irish for the most part do not view absolute cleanliness in quite the way Americans do. They think we are pretty silly and make too much of it. Every pot and pan, dish and cup, everything, had a greasy film. The entire lower level was a blue and black tile. Over the years, instead of scrubbing, coats of floor wax had been laid on layer upon layer. We spent days on that project on our hands and knees with steel wool, hot water and strong soap. Windows were washed and opened in a desperate attempt to rid the house of its moldy smell. I have never seen people work so hard. Maria was a natural interior decorator. She had an incredible feeling for positioning furniture, rearranging pictures and making do. Also, for years she had been on the Altar Guild at St.

Anne's in Woodstock so she was a genuine flower arranger. Our masses of wild flowers, ivy and every type of growing thing enabled her to move the beautiful outdoors inside the house. Her comment, "You can camouflage a lot of problems with candles and plants."

In about ten days we almost killed ourselves, but Liscrona was presentable and she seemed to know it. Liscrona always was at her best with a full house of happy people banging in and out.

One evening the good Father Duffy came to call. We needed to get together on the time for the wedding. As we sat and chatted he suddenly turned to Maria and said, "Now Maria, just what is it ye have against the Pope?" With wonderful poise she answered, "Well Father, I just think we probably don't place as much importance on him as you do." Father seemed to turn that over in his head a few times and he said, "Oh." He never brought it up again.

At mass the next Sunday he addressed the congregation. "We are having a wedding here on Wednesday. I'd appreciate the ladies coming in and giving the church a good scrub."

The airlines became much busier than normal. Friends and family came pouring in. We arranged for Neal's family to be housed at Mary and Tom McGrath's Green Acres, a farm house B & B just a few hundred yards south of the church, on the banks of the Shannon. We filled Liscrona with our family plus Marge and George Kline, David and Adelaide Meskill and Maria's sister, Dorothy.

Pat flew in and she and Kim took two projects on themselves. One was the wedding cake. Kim insisted on a traditional Irish cake. I do not think she had ever seen one. The girls took off for Kilrush to find the baker, who turned out to be horrified. You see, the Irish cake, like Christmas cake, is turned out weeks even months, before the wedding. It is "cured." Usually three layers high it is covered with a white frosting, that as time passes, gets harder and harder. I think it forms a kind of protective shield over the cake with a surface like plaster. Two little plastic figures, the bride and groom, crown the cake. After a period of weeping, wailing and cajoling, and my girls are good at it, the baker agreed to take one of his cakes in the early stage of preparation and sell it to them. We now had a wedding cake.

The second project the girls took over was the decoration of the church itself. Actually, Maria could have done a perfect job with all the native flowers around us, but those headstrong females said it had to be done the way the Irish did it. So, off they drove to Ennis, about 35 miles away. I know Maria was hurt but she also understood that it is not advisable to argue with the bride to be.

The Esterlys had asked us to arrange the rehearsal dinner because they

would be arriving at the last minute and they just did not know how to go about finding a place. Maria and I went to the Old Ground Hotel in Ennis. It is one of our favorites, all covered with ivy and steeped in tradition. We set it up and it went quite well. Perhaps a bit stiff at first because we were just getting to know each other. The hotel people were wonderful.

The day before the wedding things began to fall apart. Pat had arrived with a bad cold which she promptly turned over to her sister. Kim was flat, and I mean flat. I got on the phone to Father Duffy. "Father, a bit of a problem here. What are you doing in a few days? Can we set it up for later?" Now I challenge anyone to try to make that last minute adjustment any place in America. Churches and hotels are engaged months in advance. Without any hesitation whatsoever, our beloved Father Duffy said, "Whenever you say."

We set another date, Friday, called the florist in Ennis and put him and his flowers on hold, and the rest of us had an ongoing party. We toured, had picnics, got Packie Keating to take us for a ride on the Shannon in his boat. Meanwhile, the girls coughed and spluttered their way back to reasonable health.

The Big Event!

The florist arrived with his load. The church was decorated. Over the past month, Michael Galvin had painted the whole interior. Our friendly florist was so pleased with the affair he was invited to stay and he did. He moved in and stayed for 3 days.

Maria and I were in the food business. Again, I do not know why we did not seek help. We just took it on ourselves.

Oh, I must tell you about one bit of local business that involved me. In the old days when Lisrona was an active pub, there were all the tanks, tubes and paraphernalia for pulling pints of beer and ale and stout. I decided it would be fun to get all this high tech equipment working for the party. I contacted a local who arrived. He and I then set out to recreate the pub. We began to sample our work, tank by tank. Maria reports that she sat there observing us become the best of friends, swapping stories and sampling our work. I remember part of that afternoon. "Twas a grand day," and the mass of tubes, pumps and kegs all functioned.

The night before the wedding, Maria and I were up a good bit. We had a huge beef roast in the oven, a large ham, and we had decided to teach the Irish about bagels and lox, so we had purchased several smoked salmon, loaves and loaves of Irish bread, and all the cream cheese in County Clare. We had a ton of food ready or in the process.

That wedding on August 24, 1976 was the social event of the season. Father Duffy had even arranged for two nuns to come from Kilrush to play guitars and sing. He assured us that this was a very special concession. Normally it wasn't done.



Figure 8.1: Kim and Neal at the altar. I'm there with my other daughter, Pat, the maid of honor.

Kim was beautiful. Neal was handsome with his dark wavy hair and his great good looks. They were the perfect couple if I do say so. The church was full. The Irish neighbors packed the pews. Even the good old boys had taken the day off. This was an occasion.

At the end of the wedding I arose and invited everybody to come to Lynch's Pub, and they came. I had told John to just keep a tab. Even the

nuns came, so we had music and singing and laughing. It was one of the events of my life. At one point I looked outside and the school wall was lined with little faces. All the children were watching to see the bride. So we took ice cream bars out for all of them.

Sometime later I again got enough silence to tell the neighbors that we were now going down to Lisrcrona and they were invited to come. The Irish then did what they wanted to do. Those who felt they knew us and were comfortable did come down. Those who didn't, quietly slipped away. It was accomplished with great dignity.

I remember this next point. It is carved into my memory. Kim, when she reached our lane took off her shoes, and she and Neal walked to Lisrcrona eating the wild blackberries that were everywhere along the hedge row.

Was this a wedding reception!

Packie Keating had told us not to worry about music. He would take care of that. The Irish took over. Packie produced his concertina, his daughter Gerry her saxophone and son John his trumpet. They set up in front of the fireplace in our dining room. The men rearranged all of the tables and chairs for the dancing. The women went to the kitchen to take over the food for Maria. Nothing was said. They all just moved in to help. We had on helluva time. The party covered the whole house, inside and out, and it went on and on. At one point Kim and Neal even cut the wedding cake, or should I say made the attempt, while a big, noisy bee hovered over them lusting for frosting.

Later that night, we practically had to force Kim and Neal to leave. They retired to a hotel in Kilkee and the next morning came right back so they would not miss anything.

The Irish cleaned up the house, put it all back in place, told us we had the most beautiful house in Ireland, and we agreed. Lisrcrona loved it. She was not old and frayed at all. She was our "Grey Lady."

The Down Side

There was a very definite down side to this whole wedding affair. I could conceal it from you but I will not. If am to be honest in this book, I have to tell the truth. We missed Jo terribly. This was the first time my children had been at Lisrcrona without their mother. They saw her in every doorway and heard her in every room. I had remarried quite soon. It was probably too soon for them. I know you can replace a wife but not a mother. She is with

you forever. I never realized that bringing a new wife into their mother's home could create the degree of discomfort it did. I should have known.

Maria and I both realized what was happening, and there was absolutely nothing to do about it but tough it out as best we could. I was very sorry for Maria because I had placed her in a most difficult position. I hurt for my children but I felt that they would not have wanted me to sit down with them and say, "Now let's talk this through." I am happy to say that over the years everything smoothed out for all of us, and my children have enjoyed having two mothers. I feel that Maria's children have accepted me as father.

In the depth of my being I believe it is possible to have two complete lives. Jo was the critical element in my first life and Maria in my second. I have been lucky. I realize that not every widow or widower can escape years, even decades of loneliness. I feel so sorry for those who are unable or unwilling to seek that second life. Someone said, "Life is for the living." I believe that. I suppose it is a combination of luck and effort. I felt that Jo Bellairs and Ned Henslee approved of the decision Maria and I had made. We have never had any regrets.

The Ghost

The Irish are filled with stories of fairies and spirits, so would you not expect that in an old house you could expect.....

No self respecting house can exist for 150 years without having at least one or two ghosts. So as far as we know Lisrcrona only has one and his name is George. He never was mean but he enjoyed playing tricks on people. When we first bought Lisrcrona the locals told us about George and there were those who told us straight out they would never spend a night in the house. There is a legend, never confirmed, that one of the early owner's sons took his life in the house. Perhaps that was the origination of "George."

One night in the early 1970's our friend John Kennedy was staying at Lisrcrona by himself. It is a lonely place in mid winter when the wind is howling from the southwest and the rain is belting down and there is no sign of life anywhere around. Anyway, John decided to take a hot bath. He reported that he was standing in the bathroom stark naked bending over the tub when a hand reached out and firmly touched his right shoulder. Then the toilet flushed. John dressed and moved to Kilkee. Since then he has never stayed in the house alone.

Pat and Kim were staying at Lisrcrona by themselves. Understand that electrical outages were common during the '70's, so candles were always kept handy. The girls had been advised to lock the doors at night. I am not sure

why but they did. The front door locks itself. The downstairs door, off the kitchen to the outside was locked by a huge old fashioned key and in addition there was a wooden bar that was seated in a recess on each side of the door. On this particular night the girls were reading in the living room when the lights went out. Not having anything else to do they decided to light candles, go down to the kitchen and bake cookies. The stove operates on big tanks of bottled gas so it was possible.

As they made their way down the curving stairs the candles began to flicker. The kitchen door that they had locked and barred was standing wide open. Good old George was at it again. Both girls swear this is exactly what happened.

Another story, and the strangest of all, took place just before Kim's wedding. Pat and Kim were sharing one of Lisrona's front bedrooms. It was evening and they were admiring Kim's wedding gown. The phone rang and it was Neal telling them he was coming over for a visit. I guess there is some sort of a superstition that the bridegroom is not supposed to see the gown till the wedding, so the girls put it on a hanger and took it across the inner reception and then hung it in a closet in a little used room. Neal came, the evening passed and the next morning the girls came to Maria and questioned her, "Maria, did you bring my dress back into our room?" We found it just now lying in a heap on the floor." Of course Maria had not been playing the evil stepmother. How did this happen? I love to tell that story and watch eyes widen.

Here is one more that we have tried to understand. I was on one of my frequent trips to Shannon to pick up friends. Maria decided to go into the east woods and pick some flowers for the house. Later when I returned she reported the following. "I went out the front door and up the driveway to the opening into the woods. Just when I reached that point, I had a cold chill hit me and I became very afraid. Something awful was right there with me. I turned and came back to the house. It was really bad." This was not normal behavior for Maria. She is not the scary type. We talked about it. I said perhaps it was the going from the bright sunlight into the cool darkness of the woods. We could not quite figure it out.

Sometime later we were visited by an elderly gent who said he used to ride his bike up the lane to the property. His parents were employed at Lisrona. Remember, he was the one who told us about pumping the water. His name was O'Brien. He said, "You know there was something funny. I was just a lad but every time I'd get to that place, up there by the trees where the path goes into the woods, I'd get this really weird, scared feeling and I'd pedal like mad away from there. I always wondered why I felt like that."

We had volunteered no information to him, but he pointed to the exact

spot that caused Maria to be alarmed.

When you live in a house where people have lived for 150 years, is it possible that some essence of that past remains? We have thought about it a lot. We have no answers.

From Woodstock to Woodstock

Maria and I came back to England, Scotland and Ireland in 1977. I wanted her to see some of the world that Jo and I had explored in the '60's. We flew to London, landed at Heathrow and I wish you could have seen me leaning over the bonnet (hood) of our rental car with a cockney giving me directions on how to get to Woodstock. I made about three round trips of the airport and finally did escape. The reason we wanted to go to Woodstock was that a Formula 1 race was going to be run nearby and I wanted to see it. Maria, not a racing fan, was grinning and bearing it.

Woodstock was everything you would want in an old English town, from flower gardens to shops to architecture. We visited nearby Blenheim Castle where Winston Churchill was raised and the village where he was buried. I could not help reflecting on his comment from 1922 when the Irish and the English were at last coming to some kind of settlement and Churchill said, in effect, "If you don't agree to our terms I'll bomb you off the face of the earth."

At that time airplanes and bombs were a reality. Whether England could have fulfilled that threat is questionable, but the result was a long negotiation after which the 32 counties of the south became the Irish Free State and the 6 counties of the north remained a part of the British Empire. It was a bad deal then and history has proven that it is a bad deal today. A divided country leads to nothing but troubles, the "Troubles" that plague Ireland even today. The Republic of Ireland and Britain continue to struggle with the problem.

Heading northward, we toured Scotland, had a wonderful stay in a real castle in Fort William, climbed a little way up Ben Nevis, the tallest mountain in western Europe, and then flew to Ireland. This visit to Lisrona helped Maria to understand that this was really her house and that she was not just a visitor. We explored together. Maria was particularly sensitive about us being perceived as "the rich Americans." We certainly were not, but unfortunately the Irish did seem to view us in that light. I mean all Americans. We were still the people who came from the country with streets paved with gold. To make matters ever more touchy, we bought the house the landlords had once owned and where many of the local families had worked. We tried

hard to go easy and not say or do anything that could be misunderstood. The Irish are very sensitive. Yes, church helped. So did our big wedding. They talked about that for years. I know they also wondered why we had not just gone to Dublin and bought a house. Why did we come out to the west of Ireland where the land was so poor, the weather rough and we were without any “Irish connections?”

Many times the Irish would say to us, “And just what is it you do down there?” Our explanation that we would repaint a room or hang wallpaper or go out and cut ivy off the trees in the woods never seemed to quite satisfy their curiosity. Why were we so content? Well, one look at a full moon shining down on the Shannon, or one sniff for the air so clean and sharp, or a fisherman arriving at the door with a just caught salmon, or just the quiet acceptance by neighbors — there are the starters.

The Connection

One afternoon we had gone up to the pub to talk to John, pick up our newspaper and any mail and just sit around by the fire. We heard a very English sounding voice question John. “Mr. Lynch, I wonder if the Americans who bought Lisrcrona are in the area. I’d like to meet them. My cousin is visiting me and I’d like to show her the old family home where she was born and raised.”

John said, “They’re sitting right there at the fire.”

So we met Elinor Gloster, resident of Kilkee. Her family had a small seaside home where she had lived since being bombed out of London in WW II. Her cousin named Dorothy Tweedy was a Griffin, the family that owned Lisrcrona from 1900 to 1932.

This meeting was a break for us. We were leaving for America the next day but we invited Elinor by all means to come down at any time and John would give them the tour of the house. We were delighted to discover a contact with owners from way back, and we promised to be in touch on our next trip.

This unexpected meeting was one of the best in our 25 years in Ireland. I cannot wait to tell you how it turned out.

Christmas

In 1978 there was a plot. Call it “Let’s have Christmas in Ireland.” It was started by Kim and Neal, Pat and Ann, Maria’s daughter. How could we

resist. It would be about two weeks long with a flight back home on New Years Day.

Maria, Ann and I flew from Chicago. The rest of the group would arrive a couple of days later. Yes, it is cold in Ireland in December, but for some strange reason the Irish did not seem to notice. They were running around in light sweaters. Worst of all, we saw their doors open every morning. Every house was letting the fresh air in. The shops, without noticeable heat, were like walking into a freezer. We were midwestern Americans where the temperature falls to 30 below zero. Nevertheless, our Irish oil fired furnace blazed away. I doubt if our indoor temperature reached 65 degrees. I remember that was the year we bought a special Christmas present we enjoyed for years, an AM-FM radio and record player. We brought records with us. The morning I left to pick up Pat, Kim and Neal the weather was really brisk. It had snowed. It never snows much in the west of Ireland because the gulf current comes up the coast, warms the water and the air, and deposits plenty of the "soft," otherwise known as rain, but this definitely was snow. As I drove east toward Ennis, the snow became ice and the Irish drivers were having a struggle. Cars were spun out along the road. The radiators were freezing, and I saw many men just standing and looking at the steam rising from the engines. It could have been funny but I needed to get to Shannon. It is always exciting to be around Irish drivers, but on ice they reach new heights.

Before I left, I had made sure that the heat was on and Maria had Nat Cole's "Chestnuts Roasting on an Open Fire" ready to greet the family when they arrived.

I made the pick up and we returned to home base. The music played. We did all the proper hugging, and then I noticed Maria had her coat on and was looking worried. The furnace had stopped! We put in a frantic call to one Tom Kelly, our resident plumber, heating expert and electrician. He promised to come as soon as possible. Understand that Ireland takes two weeks off at Christmas time. Nobody works. It is Christmas!

We built up the turf fires. We even turned on the gas oven in the kitchen "cooker" and we piled on the sweaters.

Tom arrived as it was getting dark. He and I went to look at our sick furnace. Then we took a flash light and went out to the oil tanks. You will recall that I told you they were outside in the back. To this day, I remember a fine sleet rattling on my coat. We traced the pipe that ran from the tank to the furnace. There was the problem. Over the years, the pipe had chosen this day to rust out. Oil was not reaching the furnace. It was running all over the ground. Now why did it have to wait all these years to collapse just when we needed it? Tom closed the valve and we went inside where he

opened our aged furnace. I held the flash light and shivered. He discovered that the loss of oil had also done damage to some bearings. He said, “Mal, this is bad. This is an old furnace. I can run a new pipe but I don’t know where I can find the proper bearing.”

We went inside and consumed several large Irish whiskeys. He promised to do all that he could.

That night was not unlike one of the early polar expeditions. I remember Ann went to bed with all her clothes on, every jacket she could find and even a hat and gloves. To his day, I get nightmares when I remember Maria’s feet — solid ice blocks.

To make matters even worse we had planned a big party for the next night, and we were not about to call it off. We called the invited guests and encouraged them to bring portable space heaters. We gathered our tables in the inner reception room where our turf fire was doing its best, closed off all the doors and stood ready. Guests arrived with four space heaters. I also noticed that the lady guests were all wearing light dress-up type dresses. The Party began and the heaters worked away. At that precise moment, Tom arrived so I went out to join him. Wonder of wonders! He had cannibalized another furnace and recovered the essential bearing. We replaced the old length of pipe and with a husky roar, the furnace started. He and I went in to clean up. We were both an oily mess and I said to Tom, “You haven’t had anything to eat. Come on and join us!” He did and was recognized as the hero of the day. Great CRAIC!

I know there is a story around that you never know when an Irish worker will show up. Well, here we were, at Christmas, with a horrible situation and Tom Kelly stuck with that old furnace. He fixed it. He could just as easily have said, “It’s Christmas and I’m busy. Call someone else.” I love that man! It was also one of the best parties we’ve ever had and enabled us to spend Christmas at Lisrona. Without heat, we would have been forced to leave.



The Tree

Lisrona House on its 27 acres of fields and woods had a number of trees eligible to become our Christmas tree. I took our saw in hand and we all went out to choose the best one. The problem was that they were all about 20 feet tall.

No matter. We cut one and trimmed it down by stages so we could get it in the front door. The rooms at Liscrona House are high with 12 foot ceilings, so it still required a pretty big tree. We scrounged around, built a tree stand and we were set to decorate. The agreement was that each of us would bring ornaments. We made long strings of popcorn and draped them on the tree. We invested in a couple of strings of light from Brews in Kilrush and , you know, we had a mighty respectable Christmas tree. With Fred Waring albums pumping out music and Handels Messiah to add a classical touch, we were in business.

While we are at it, I must tell you about our holiday guest. It was a mouse. He came out from behind a radiator, surveyed the tree, and climbed up to get at the strings of popcorn. That began his nightly ritual, a kernel in his mouth, down the tree, behind the radiator and to his home. I can imagine him telling his family, "I have just died and gone to mouse heaven. We have a food supply for a lifetime." Each night we enjoyed his company. He was our floor show. The next year I found a tiny furry mouse ornament and gave it to Maria. Every year it hangs on our tree, our Liscrona House Mouse.

Christmas in Ireland is certainly not the extravagant affair that we see in the United States. The decorations are minimal. The presents are simple. Christmas, St. Stephen's Day and New Years all constitute one big holiday. The pubs radiate a special warmth. The weather is cold, but the millions of candles in the windows supply a glow in the night and a feeling that all is well.

By the way, did you know that Handel's Messiah was first performed in Dublin?

Dorothy Tweedy

Even before the furnace crisis we had gone to Kilkee and met with Elinor Gloster. We talked about getting to see Dorothy Tweedy who was living west of Galway in a little town called Oughterard. Since our time was limited, we were able to settle on just one day, Christmas Eve. Elinor called Dorothy, who agreed to find a place for lunch.

We all piled into the VW bus, our vehicle of choice in those days, and headed up from Kilkee to Galway and west. We found the house. It was tiny and very, very Irish. It was located beside a beautiful, fast running salmon stream. The holly bushes were a mass of red berries and ivy was everywhere. We talked and talked and then drove down to the local hotel for our luncheon. It was only later that I found out that they had opened just for us. After all, it was Christmas Eve and everything was closed. Talk

about Irish kindness!

Much later, when it was time for us to start back, I remember saying to Dorothy, "I'll bet you have dozens of memories about Lisrcrona you could share with us. If you ever have the time and the energy, we'd really appreciate anything you could write." Dorothy at that time was having severe arthritis problems, getting around was very difficult, but her mind was sharp. She agreed to think about it. That was the only time we saw her. About three months later, we received a large envelope. I am letting you read what that dear, dear lady wrote to us¹.

It was foggy as we drove back toward Galway and of course I took the wrong road. That would not have mattered except Elinor Gloster was anxious to get to Kilkee for the Christmas Eve mass at the Church of Ireland. The result was that we arrived just as it concluded. Her priest saw us and said, "Well now, no problem, let's just go in and we will do it again."

So in we went and he began mass. It just so happened that I glanced up at the wall and there was a plaque with Tom Griffin's name. He was the owner of Lisrcrona from 1898–1932, Dorothy Tweedy's father.

We had one minor crisis a few moments later. The priest announced, "We will now sing." Maria and Ann can sing. The rest of us are what I term musically impaired, but we were rescued by the grit, grit of a starting record and a recording of Noel, Noel burst forth from the Westminster Choir. We all started to laugh. That choir singing in Kilkee seemed incongruous.

Mass completed and Elinor content, we dropped her off and continued to our nice warm house. It was a crystal clear night and we looked across the Shannon. There were thousands and thousands of twinkling lights, the candles that the Irish traditionally place in windows. We hurried inside and did the same.



We opened our presents in the morning. We had drawn names and were allowed to spend no more than £5 on the gift for that person. We had done considerable thinking about it. I only remember one present. Maria drew Neal and she gave him a reversible neck tie. Being a true Californian he never wore a tie. To this day when he is cornered and has to wear one it is always Maria's present from 1978.

We made 10AM mass at our church, greeted our neighbors, stopped at the pub as always and came home to prepare our dinner. It was the traditional turkey with all the trimmings. We had even brought cranberries from

¹Her package is not known to have been kept by anyone.

Woodstock, because we were not sure. We had plum pudding and I made the hard sauce² that I had learned from my Scottish grandmother.

We spent a roaring New Years Eve at the pub and at midnight when we all joined hands and sang, "Should old acquaintance be forgot," followed by the Irish National Anthem, there was not a dry eye among us. I was allowed to buy a "round."



For Christmas

May peace and plenty be the first
To lift the latch on your door,
And happiness be guided to your home
By the candle of Christmas

In the New Year may your
right hand always
be stretched out in friendship
and never in want.

Looking Back to about 1840

With help from the locals and Dorothy Tweedy, we have been able to piece together some dates and names of the people who have lived at Lisrona. I wish there were some way to penetrate the unknown period from 1840–1900. We are fortunate to have met Dorothy Tweedy. We used to send her pictures and write letters telling her about our life in Ireland. She stayed in Oughterard for a few more years and then was forced by age and her arthritis to move to a retirement home in Dublin. She longed to return to the "west" and felt very lonely in Dublin. She died five years ago. Her mind was sharp when she wrote what you are about to read.

THE OLD GREY BEAUTY
also called "OUR GREY LADY."
A HISTORY OF LISCRONA HOUSE

²find Dad's hard sauce recipe.



Figure 8.2: The Old Grey Beauty with Her Original Chimneys

DOONAHA, NEAR KILKEE
COUNTY CLARE, IRELAND

1. Builder - Mr. MacDonnell of New Hall (near Ennis) 1840's to 1898, a descendant of the Earls of Antrim
2. Thomas Griffin - 1898-1932
3. Robert MacLochlan, November 19, 1932 - December 23, 1953
4. Michael Nolan, December 23, 1953 to August 11, 1955
5. Col. James Hannon, August 11, 1955 to July 5, 1965
6. John Lloyd - July 1965 to 1968
7. Ted Kavanaugh, 1968 to 1971
8. George & Marge Kline and Malcolm & Jo Bellairs, 1971 to 1979
9. Malcolm K. Bellairs & Maria Bellairs, December 13, 1979 to August 1995

This grand old grey cut-stone manor house was built in the 1840's by a family named MacDonnell. Liscrona was their summer home. The family came from New Hall, near Ennis, and MacDonnell is reported to be a descendant of the Earls of Antrim. The MacDonnell family crest is on the south side of Liscrona. The Griffin crest is on the east side over the main entry. The stone for the house was brought from a quarry near Ennis and the workmanship and color are still admired by all who see the house. The

family at one time owned over 2,000 acres of land from Carrigaholt all the way to Querrin. There were two entrance roads, the one they used went north of the house up past the stable area and to the Doonaha Road. In 1901, the year of the "big wind," as natives remember, a new hay barn had just been completed, when the wind destroyed the whole building. This is the area where cattle and horses were kept. The stone foundations are still there.

We believe Tom was Irish and Dorothy's mother was English. Dorothy's family, the Griffins, were all Protestant. They were one of the landlords who were very rough on the Irish peasants. Many of the landlords' homes extending out to Loophead were burned during the Troubles, but Liscrona was spared. One interesting note is that when Dorothy visited, she saw the Irish flag that we fly. She was dismayed, to say the least. The old wounds and scars were still there...on both sides. Now here is Dorothy Tweedy's story which will take us from 1898 until her widowed mother sold Liscrona in 1932.

THE GRIFFIN ERA - 1898 to 1932 About 1898 my father, Thomas R. Griffin, came back to Ireland from Australia hoping to make a living by engineering. He could only get employment as Assistant County Surveyor to West Clare County Council. Having married my mother, he rented Liscrona. The owner was a Mr. MacDonnell of New Hall (3 miles from Ennis) - a descendant of the Earls of Antrim.

Liscrona had been used by this family as their seaside home. There was a lot of land attached, farm buildings and stables, etc. were to the north of the house up a hill. There was a back avenue up to these buildings which led into a lane and from it to the main Doonaha Carrigaholt Road.

My father had horses, cattle, sheep and fowl and killed his own meat. We had a bog and all our own vegetables so were practically self-supporting. He employed about six men - four permanent.

At the time of my birth in 1902, Liscrona was very prosperous and beautifully kept with a lovely lawn in front and at the side of the house. I have no idea when the house was built but probably about the same time as Domoland Castle as the same architect was responsible for both buildings;

it was quite an old house when my parents went there. My father did very little to the house as his interests were outdoors, but my mother took great pride in polishing the lovely (oak?) floors.

We had two greenhouses and grew grapes and tomatoes to market in Kilkee. Early on my father got a first class gardener from Dublin for a whole year and this gardener taught my father and a local man all there was to be done in the four seasons. He made a lovely walk west of the house with a flower bed at one side and shrubs at the other, a gravel path separating the flower bed and shrubs.

I noticed the shrubs were still there. He also made a tennis court to the left of the wood, as it was surrounded by meadow the tennis balls were always getting lost. It was also very difficult to keep free from weeds, especially crowfoot - it was a very good court though and we had tennis parties for people from Kilkee and cousins from Kilbaha. We kept a dog cart (2 people in front and 2 with their back to the horses) , an inside trap also called a governess cart (2 people facing each other and knees touching) and a pony cart.

A man came to the house for about two hours every morning to bring in the turf for the numerous fires and to clean the boots, shoes, and knives. In those days, knives were not of stainless steel and had to be cleaned daily - but they cut. They had to be cleaned on an emery board and rubbed with a cork. There were also numerous boots and shoes to be cleaned daily as the roads were muddy and we walked a great deal; at least once a day to Doonaha Post Office and to chat and buy something at Mrs. Collins' Pub (???to the present John Lynch), oranges were 4 a penny and a lovely sticky sweet, called a Bull's Eye, were 12 a penny. There was also a penny "secret" containing a small toy and a tiny sweet.

About 1912, my father bought Liscrona outright from Mr. MacDonnell and employed a person to rub out the MacDonnell crest and coat of arms and chisel on his own instead. It cost 20 pounds which my mother thought was a shocking waste of money!

My earliest recollection of Liscrona was a servant in a check dress and white apron and cap bringing round early

morning tea at 7:30, a small tea pot and thin slices of bread and butter. She must have been up at 6 o'clock to get the coal fire going to make the tea. Then she had to carry hot water cans to the bedroom. Then breakfast at 9 o'clock preceded by family prayer, my father reading a portion from the Bible and my mother gabbling some prayers to get on with the days work. Grace was always said before and after meals. (The maid was paid from 12 pounds to 20 pounds per annum.)

Another thing I remember is women coming to the back door with braces of live chickens under their shawls. My mother would pinch the chicken breasts and legs and after a lot of bargaining pay three shillings per pair for the fat ones. They were then sent up the yard to be fattened for the table.

In winter, when my father and mother went away, the farm hands would gather in the evenings with lanterns and sticks and we would all go into the wood and dazzle the little birds sleeping on the bows of the trees and the men would slash them down after which we would pluck the birds and have them for supper. Needless to say, this only happened when our parents were absent.

When Liscrona was first built, laborers got 6 pence per week, the coppers being thrown up to them from the windows. On one occasion, as a great joke, the coppers were heated in the fire before being thrown out and when the men grabbed them they yelled with pain.

Liscrona was very damp in the early days. It was obviously built over a spring as there was a deep well in the yard where the water was pumped from daily. Now, no doubt, there is an electric pump.

Except for putting tiled fireplaces into the livingrooms we did not do much to the house. The next owner, Mr. MacLochlan, did some improvements which my father had wanted to do but could not afford - i.e. put a lift from the kitchen to the dining room and building a garage at the north side of the wood below the tennis court. We had to drive the car right up to the rear as cars in those days could not be left out at night as they had canvas hoods and were far from weatherproof.

In summer a maid in a black dress and white apron and

cap would bring a heavily laden tray out to the stone table in the centre of the wood which had a stone seat beside it. There we had our afternoon tea when the sun was too hot to have it under a copper beach tree to the side of the house. This copper beach has now gone to make a road for an oil tanker.

The 1914 war changed life at Lisrona for the worst. Money was short and labour hard to get both outdoor and in and "The Troubles" that followed also affected us. We had an IRA maid who let men "on the run" into the lower part of the house where they slept feeling safe from police interference.

We kept our bicycles in the front porch and one night at midnight there was banging at the front door and my father was told to put the bicycles out and we would not be touched. This he did and the men said "thank you" and my father was so relieved that he asked them in for a drink. This they refused and rode off. The Sinn Fein in those days were all strict Teetotalers. Next day the main road from Doonaha to Kilkee "was cut" (big trenches dug across). Another time they broke into the house and took my father's hidden guns. My father was away at the time and my mother did not know where they were hidden (as my father had only confided in the gardener) - but they walked straight to the hiding place.

The great beauty of Lisrona House were the unique big chimneys. Each chimney was really 6 small ones placed so close together that they all had the appearance of one chimney. They were made of the same stone as the house. One of the recent owners had these lovely chimneys removed as he said they had become dangerous but it was thought locally that all he really wanted was the lead around them which was even then fetching tremendous prices. Their disappearance has really spoilt the appearance of the house.

In the beginning of the century one of the thrills of early summer was the spectacle of the British Fleet of about 30 warships cruising up the river. We ran onto the lawn and waved flags and towels frantically and they waved back. They went up as far as Limerick. Their return journey never caused the same excitement as it meant they had passed for the year - and in 1914 they passed for the last time.

One of the things we children loved in the spring was the cutting off of the lambs' tails and my father would grill them over a fire for us. When the wool was all scorched off we would eat the tails in our fingers and delicious they were! It may have been an Australian custom. I never heard of it being done since.

On a lovely calm summer evening we would suddenly hear the roaring of the sea against the shore to the west off the house and we all knew then that the fine weather was about to change to rain and wind. Once a priest was asked by his parishioners to pray for fine weather to save the harvest and he replied "what is the use of praying for fine weather when the wind is from the west."

When my father first went to Lisrcrona he thought nothing of rowing across the Shannon to Kerry in a two man canoe and he even had an office in Listowel. He brought a bicycle in the canoe with him to ride there from Tarbot. On one occasion he brought a niece and her English bridegroom across when they were honeymooning at Lisrcrona. A storm got up and they couldn't return for a day or two. The Bank Official bridegroom was so horrified by the experience of being without his nightwear and razor that he never came to Ireland again and my father was in disgrace with that branch of the family for the rest of his life.

Soon after this my father gave up going to Kerry as the tides and sudden gales were too dangerous and my mother's nerves could not stand the suspense of awaiting his return. Once he had to be rescued by Glynn's boat which passed up once a week. I never heard of anyone but my father crossing to Kerry from Lisrcrona by canoe.

Christmas was a wonderful time at Lisrcrona starting in November with my mother baking pudding, cakes and mince pies. Everybody had to stir the pudding for luck and I can remember my baby brother being held over the basin, mistaking the object of the exercise and being sick into it! Then in December there was the getting ready of parcels of presents for the many poor children around Doonaha. We carried the presents to their homes, some of which could be more properly called hovels. The poverty was terrible and children went to school in bare feet, ragged trousers and threadbare Jerseys - their faces blue with cold and

their noses running. A few ragged books under each arm and a sod of turf for the school fire. Any child bringing in an extra sod was allowed to sit in the front near the fire.

It was the custom in the olden days on Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve for every cottage to have a lighted candle in all their windows throughout the night. The sight of these lights across the water as seen from Lisrcrona on these occasions is something I shall never forget.

On St. Stephen's Day the Wren boys came around. About six at a time dressed up in anything they could lay their hands on and carrying a poor dead wren on a bush. Their faces were blackened and masked so we never knew who they were and they danced and sang and we threw coppers. They sang: "The wren, the wren, the king of all birds, on St. Stephen's Day was caught in the firze." I cannot remember the rest.

Everything changed after the 1914 war. The Land Commission took over our land only leaving us about 40 acres. After this the long avenue was no longer ours exclusively and instead of the fields at each side of it belonging to us they were divided amongst farmers and hedges were put up at each side of the drive. Consequently the drive became very wet and muddy because no longer would the North wind keep it dry and all the farmcarts using it made it very rough and no one was responsible for its upkeep. We still had the yard and 2 men.

My father was passionately fond of daffodils and there was a thick border of them down the drive. The night after his coffin had passed by every daffodil plant was dead and stranger still, there was hardly a sign of a dead flower, they seemed to have disappeared. As it was March 17th (1927) daffodils would normally be at their best.

Mother kept the place on as long as she was able and about 1932 she sold it to Mr. MacLochlan for, I think, 600 pounds. He looked after it well and loved it dearly until old age made it impossible for him to carry on. After he sold it Lisrcrona fell on very hard times eventually becoming a hotel. A big bar was put in and rooms were divided up to make this possible and there are now about 9 bedrooms upstairs instead of the original 4.

Happily for Liscrona it has now fallen into the hands of someone who loves it and hopes to restore it to its former loveliness.

Dorothy Tweedy née Griffin 1978



Isn't that a beautiful piece of writing. We were thrilled to receive it. I think it is obvious from Dorothy's writing, that Liscrona was spared because Tom had been kind to the locals during "The Troubles."

A retired army officer named Robert MacLochlan bought Liscrona from Mrs. Griffin in 1932 and lived there with a housekeeper. He was a recluse who like to shoot and walk the paths along the cliffs. Liscrona's size was shrinking all during the 20's and 30's due to the redistribution of the land following the end of the hostilities in 1921. We almost met MacLochlan in 1974. He had been living in Kilkee, almost blind and becoming senile, but when we tracked him down, he had just been transferred to an old soldiers' home and we missed him.

Liscrona then came on tough times. A solicitor named Michael Nolan from Kilkee owned Liscrona for several years.

Next on the scene, in 1955, was a man named Hannon, a retired Colonel of Engineers. We have been told that he was one of the builders of the Burma Road during World War II and that he is responsible for some of the exotic plants on the property.

In 1965, Hannon sold Liscrona to an eccentric named Lloyd who spent his time writing and writing. Some of his strange convictions and countless rejection slips we found rotting in the old garage that houses the water pump. In 1968, "the writer" had sold it and he and his daughter moved to Clare Castle on the bend of the river, on the road between Ennis and Shannon. At one point, we received a letter from the daughter which I am including. Jo had found her name and written the following³.

Griffin — The Final Chapter

You have read how Tom Griffin's body came back to Liscrona and the mysterious death of the daffodils on St. Patrick's Day 1927. Shortly before that fateful day, Tom and daughter Dorothy were in Kilrush. Tom owned a Model T Ford, one of the few cars in all of County Clare. Dorothy was sitting in the back seat of the car. Tom came out from a shop and started to crank

³attachment missing

the engine. It caught and ran over him, killing him. It was Dorothy who climbed over the back seat and stopped the car.

In 1993 Maria and I were walking the sandy beach at Glosheen, just a quarter of a mile from Lisrona. We came upon an elderly man who asked us if we were the owners. When we said yes, he told us this story. “When I was just a lad there was a tragedy in front of my house. A car ran over the man who owned Lisrona and a little girl came screaming up to my father. He was the first one on the scene. There was nothing he could do. I’ve never forgotten that day.”

Nothing goes unnoticed or forgotten in Ireland.

Kline Finale

One year Marge and George Kline went to Ireland with their two daughters. The word filtered back that neither girl was enchanted. So it was in 1979 that George decided they had no future in Ireland. They owned considerable property in the U.S. and he felt it was time for us to buy their half of Lisrona. I asked him to put together any numbers he wanted and we would agree. I was so grateful that they had made Ireland possible for Jo and me that I would have walked on nails if he had asked. Once again, Harold Shapiro was called and he put together a payment package. We signed the papers. The transfer was completed. We had kept the bargain. The papers in Dublin now read: Lisrona House, Malcolm and Maria Bellairs.

Chapter 9

Expansion - Inflation

1981

Both our AM and FM stations were growing — more employees, more clients and we were outgrowing our space in Crystal Lake. The studios in Woodstock were really not a good idea for many reasons, so we began to consider joining both in one facility. We found the right building, bought a lot of new equipment and refinanced the whole debt. Then the economy reared its ugly head and we came as close to complete disaster as any small business in America. If you recall back then the prime rate rose at that time to 21%. Have you ever tried to meet a payroll and all operating expenses plus debt principal and interest at 21%? We reached a time when Maria and I decided we would need to sell Lisrona in order to keep Lake Valley Broadcasters afloat. The stations were doing very well but that 21% was just impossible.

Our banks were sympathetic but we were in big trouble. Since banks do not enjoy owning radio stations, they agreed to give us some time.

Another Miracle

One day, my phone rang and it was my old friend from WBBM, Bill O'Donnell. Bill said, "Mal, remember when you left 'BBM you said you wanted to see what 10 years of station ownership would create? Well, how do you feel? I've got a good friend who listens to your stations every day. He's the owner of a big conglomerate named Katy Industries and he's interested in adding some broadcast properties."

That is how I was introduced to Wallace Carroll, one of the finest gentlemen I have ever known. Wallace is an Irish-American educated at Boston College, an engineer, a tool and die maker, self made multi-millionaire and

friend.

One day, Wallace and Bill and one of his associates came to our home in Woodstock. We talked, and in twenty minutes over a bottle of Irish whiskey, I sold Lake Valley Broadcasters to him — both stations. I named the price. Wallace said that it seemed fair to him, and now we could call in the lawyers and begin the old rat race with the FCC. I agreed to continue doing my show but I wanted to be talent only. I did not want to be in charge and they should start a search for a general manager. It was a handshake agreement and I would go on for at least a year to help with the transition. We were out from under the debt that had been killing us.

I remembered the hours of talk with Harold Shapiro and George Kline about my being in the business for myself and the similarity to buying an old, run down house, restoring it, improving its value and then reselling. The radio stations had worked out for us. The area was growing so it was inevitable that radio properties would prosper, especially the FM station which we had picked up for a modest sum. They were now much more successful and naturally more valuable.

Chapter 10

At Home at Liscrona

Now we had time and the dollars to concentrate more on Liscrona.

Our Flag

To us, the 27 acres of Liscrona property were a piece of the United States of America in Ireland. We decided to prove to one and all that we were in reality, a bit of America. I asked Michael to do a project for us. We talked about a pair of flag poles to be erected in front, one on the right and one on the left. The plot was hatched over the transatlantic phone. Michael got the picture. I went to the VFW in Woodstock and I asked them to order flags, big ones, one United States and the other Irish. Both came just before we were to leave for Ireland.

As we drove up our lane to the house there were two flag poles about 20' tall, painted white, set in a concrete base in a kind of sleeve so they could be taken down in winter. The ropes were ready to be attached, along with the snaps adjusted to the size of the flags. Michael had known exactly what to do. In 2 minutes we had our flags up flapping in the breeze — a beautiful sight. From that day on, whenever we were in residence, the flags flew. Every day Shannon River traffic sailed past our house. On more than one occasion, a passing freighter would give us a friendly toot as I would be either raising or lowering the colors.

Michael and I had a little game we played. We never spoke of it. We both enjoyed it. As you face the Shannon, I would raise the American flag on the right hand pole, the Irish on the left. Whenever Michael raised the flags he would reverse the flags, Irish on the right and ours on the left...it was our game.

Over the years, dozens of our friends have visited Liscrona, many when

we were not there. The flag raising and then lowering at sunset became our tradition.

My friend John Miller, an ex U.S. marine, was so serious about it that we would be required to march across the lawn to the pole for the lowering. All we needed was the sound of the trumpet blowing retreat. Believe me, the flags were always folded properly when John was in charge.

A number of times local boy scout troops asked us if they could camp out in the fields. We always gave them permission and they used the flag poles for their own ceremonies. We would watch from our living room as 15 or 20 scouts with leaders would do the Irish raising-lowering. Sometimes we joined in with them. We loved it. Our two flags flying side by side made us feel very good. I longed for a small cannon to add spice to the flag ceremonies, but I fear the local Gardai would have misunderstood our good intentions.

We gave the scouts permission to prowl the woods for campfire wood, and they did a fine job helping to keep everything tidy. It was interesting to us that in Ireland we found their scout troops consisted of both boys and girls, and there did not seem to be any problems. They were fine young people. What pleased me the most was their interest in our woods. On more than one occasion, I would come upon them doing my job, cutting the ivy off the trees, slashing away at the blackberry brambles and cutting back dead branches. In return, we baked them cookies. Lisrcrona loved young voices.

John Returns to America

Maria and I had an idea. John Lynch had done so much for us over the years, advising, answering questions, telling stories, making us feel at home and keeping our accounts straight, that we felt we should do something for John. We invited him to come to the U.S. with us, stay in our home where he would see many of our friends who had visited Lisrcrona. He could also plan to visit his friends and living relatives at the same time. The visit would come in August, and it would be about 3 weeks in duration. We suggested that he buy some light clothes, Irish wool in the states in August being a definite threat to an Irishman's blood pressure.

John was excited. This was his first visit to America since his family had left. I am including a couple of articles written about his trip¹. It was quite an event.

Before we left, I recall one of John's little granddaughters saying, "Granddad, is America as far as Kilkee?" The truth is, the Irish do not have the

¹Articles have not been found yet.

same wanderlust that we Americans have. One year when we drove John to Dingle with us, about 60 miles, we were amazed to find out that it was his first time there.

About half way across the Atlantic on an AerLingus 747, I had quite an experience. I arose from my seat and entered the nearest toilet. The tap was flowing and the water was just about to slosh over the top. I opened the door and called one of the flight attendants. She let out a nice squeak and ran for the phone to call the captain. I figured we'd be a swamp if something did not get done in a hurry. So, I dropped to my knees, not a very nice position in a toilet that has been used hundreds of times. I pulled off a wall panel, scrounged around and found a valve. With three wide eyed young flight attendants, exclaiming from the open door, "Glory be to God, he's saved the ship!" I closed the valve.

To express their undying gratitude in preventing the plane, St. Bridget by name, from becoming a swamp, I was given a package containing two bottles of champagne.



Maria and I had left our car with the kids just outside New York so we took a limo to the hotel as planned. John's American experience had begun. About half an hour later there was a tap on our door. John was in the room next to us. He was wringing wet.

"Mal, will you show me how to work the shower? I'm for sure getting drowned!"

Another half hour passed and John returned, "Mal, there are two beds in my room."

"Yes John, what's the problem?"

"Well, if the place fills up will they rent the bed next to me?"

"No John, you get both beds."

There was a pause and John commented, "Now that's a terrible waste!"

Obviously John had been worrying about the fact that he was carrying considerable cash and he was concerned about hiding it so that person in the next bed couldn't find it. You cannot be too safe, and after all, he was in America the home of lots of bad guys. With John's problems out of the way, I put Maria to bed and John and I both drank a bottle of champagne that I had earned on the flight.

We planned to leave the next morning and after retrieving our car, we were to drive up to York Beach, Maine where our Wilmette friends, Dave and Adelaide Meskill have a summer home on the ocean. John told me that

he had made plans too. He wanted to go to Canada, then back with us to Chicago. Then he wanted to fly out to California to visit our kids, and as long as he was there he would go down to see some of Mexico. Then he would fly back to us and in a few days fly down to Miami to visit his elderly godmother and Disneyworld, and finally fly up to Washington D.C. and then to Providence, Rhode Island to visit cousins. I suggested that might be a bit much and we decided to take it a day at a time. Let John see the size of America for himself.

The next morning when we left, I put a map in his lap. John tended to drop off to sleep frequently. When he would wake up he would say, "Where are we?" I would show him, and about the third time he said, "Is that as far as we've gone?"

We had a fine reunion with Meskills. All of us had lobster. John had steak. Incidentally, he likes it done till it is like a brown, black slab of wood. "That's well done, can't stand the sight of bloody meat," said John.

We traveled on to Niagra Falls where John stood midst the spray and roar and said, "Any Irish plumber with a wrench could fix that in 20 minutes!"

John loves his jokes. We continued across Canada, stopped somewhere for the night and at the end of dinner, I ordered Irish coffee which came with powdered sugar, the spray can of whipped cream and a green mint sauce over the top. John gave up on Canada by muttering, "Man should never put sugar in good Irish whiskey." It was awfully *awful* Irish coffee.

Upon arriving at our home, John got in touch with all his Irish relatives on the south side of Chicago. One was Jimmy Powers, brother of our dairy farm friend Paddy. Jim came to call and took John up to Milwaukee's Irish Fest. Of all things, another Irish bash. John returned somewhat dejected, "I've heard all that stuff a million times. Besides I got my ears sun burned."

By now John had figured that California and Mexico were too far away but Florida was a must. His godmother must be seen. So off he flew. Upon his return he reported that the old lady drove like she was chased by the devil, up to 90 miles an hour with cars passing on both sides. Yes, they did do Disneyworld.

"Ah God help us, there were queues everywhere for everything, and the weather was fierce. I found the only place that was air conditioned. I spent most my time there — the men's room."

So after his taste of Florida in August, John flew north to Washington. He visited Maria's sister Dorothy and then went on to Providence where he met relatives. He visited the cemetery and reported that there were a lot of changes everywhere he went.

Upon his return to Ireland, John reported he was happy to be home. He said he kissed the ground. I am not sure I believe that part of the story.

More likely he thought about it.

Here are a couple of asides on this man, John Lynch, The Remarkable Publican. John kept a book, actually a number of books. In them he gathered the names, addresses and comments of all the people who came to Lynch's. On one occasion, David and Adelaide Meskill were paying their first visit to Lisrona and naturally they visited Lynch's Pub and met John. It was 1974. They signed the book and included Wilmette, Illinois as home. John said "Hmm," went to his kitchen, came back with a ladder, climbed up into the loft over the bar and returned with an old beat up book. He said, "I had someone here some years back, a woman from Wilmette." He opened to the page and the date was 1946. When David and Adelaide returned to Wilmette, they tracked her down. Yes, she remembered John.

John is our teller of Kerryman jokes. He has a million of them. They do not depict Kerry people as being too bright. I am sure they have Clareman jokes. Those that you have been seeing scattered through these pages are just a few of John's favorites. His eyes light up when he has a new joke to tell. He even tells his Kerryman jokes to visitors from Kerry and no one takes offense. The Irish are unpredictable, but humor is an essential part of life².



In 1990 I was asked to do an article on Irish golf. With wonderful courses all around the west of Ireland, many of our guests came to test their skill. I have listened and watched. I am a terrible golfer myself, but I put this one³ together for North Shore Magazine which is popular all over Chicagoland. I have always enjoyed watching other people play golf and I wish I could be a Greg Norman, provided I could just play the game without all the practice, lessons and work.

A Golf Story

The Irish are extremely good at the game of golf. They usually carry a small bag with no more than 3 or 4 clubs. They never seem to hover over the ball testing the wind, doing practice strokes and all the rest. They just walk up, take a look and knock the heck out of the ball.

A golf story overheard in the clubhouse:

²In case you've forgotten, the Kerryman jokes are on page 6.

³missing attachment

“I’m listenin’ to these gents. It is about 165 yards to the green — par 3 and easy. Up comes this Yank. I didn’t know what sort of a golfer he was, but I’ll say this, he was very well dressed.”

“This should be good for a 7 iron and a putt,” says yer man to the caddie whose face was red from strugglin’ with the size of the bag. With that yer man hits the ball and it goes about 10 yards tricklin’ along the ground. There was silence for a minute and, God help us, I hope yer man didn’t hear us roarin’ in the clubhouse.

The caddie was chewin’ his gum and he didn’t move a muscle of his face except he got out the putter and says, “I’m afraid it is goin’ to be a hell of a putt, sir!”

The Team

I think we began to get smart in the early 80’s. We could see the many things that needed to be done to Liscrona. So we brought Michael into the picture and had a long talk.

We laid out jobs that were essential, not the ones to beautify the house but the ones to protect her from becoming derelict. These were projects like rewiring the house, new gutters and down spouts, new windows, roof repair, a new heating plant, a new pump for the well and work on the storage tank, and we were in need of a new bathroom. These were the essential jobs and Liscrona was crying for help.

This is the way we worked. At the end of each year’s visit, we would sit down with Michael and lay out the jobs to be accomplished over the winter whenever he had the time, outside work in good weather and indoors in the cold and wet time.

I am not going to make an attempt to get to my diary and report our inch by inch progress, but over the next ten years, Michael saved Liscrona and made her more beautiful than it had ever been. Yes, he was even able to rebuild three of the chimneys. He worked from pictures we had and actually duplicated the originals. That was a cosmetic touch we appreciated.

As soon as the house was protected from the elements, he started to work inside, replastered old walls, and completely blocked out any signs of damp. He built two new bathrooms, created an entirely new kitchen, removed old carpets and restored the hard wood floors to their original state. There was no inch of Liscrona that did not get a total going over. Of course, each year we were doing our share with new linoleum for the lower level, new carpet in all the bedrooms, new beds, a new refrigerator, reupholstering chairs and Maria the interior designer was having the time of her life, making it all go

together. We even bought electric blankets for every bed.

All these projects never stopped our good times and the steady stream of guest who came to visit. Michael was able to do remarkable things.

As we moved along through the decade we enlarged the team. Nora, Michael's wonderful wife became in charge of the house, the inside. She and Maria went through it together so she could see how Maria liked everything done. Then Nora took over. Liscrona became her house and she took pride in every room.

The old days of the house being vacant and cold were gone. Michael had installed a heating system that automatically turned on for a couple of hours in the morning and a couple about sunset. There was no longer a musty odor. Also Michael or Nora visited every day just to see that everything was going well. There was also Nora's kitchen window that had direct view of our lane and no car could approach without Nora spotting it. We also enlisted John Lynch to be our money handler. We opened an account in the Allied Irish Bank so John could pay all the bills, and we had plenty of them. It would have been nearly impossible for me to have tried to keep accounts from America.

I have to tell you that we were so thrilled with every step along the way. Every year when we would arrive, Michael's eyes would be shining with pride as he would walk us around to look at his accomplishments. Sometimes he would surprise us with unscheduled jobs. His judgment was always right. We never were displeased with anything he did. I really believe that Michael and Nora lived for Liscrona and the chance to see us acting like little children, jumping up and down with excitement. These were wonderful years for all of us.

Then there is the side of Nora that appealed to my stomach. Each year when we arrived for our visit, and always beset with jet lag, Nora and Michael and John would be waiting for us in the kitchen at Liscrona. Fresh flowers would be everywhere, the turf fires would be going and Nora would have breakfast ready. Her scones and homemade strawberry jam bring tears to my eyes just thinking about them. The tea, the Irish soda bread and then a rhubarb tart with Irish cream . . . recollection slays me.

This delivery system would go on week after week. With Nora's baking and the fresh vegetables from Michael's garden, the Irish tender loving care was certainly appreciated. It continued from the early 80's as long as we were there with no sign of let up. The generosity extended to our guests who would report to us how they had fallen in love with Nora and her world-class baking.

The projects continued. Year after year we gave parties for a steadily increasing number of Irish friends and we will admit how proud we were of

the results. Liscrona loved parties.

Outside

Michael began to think about the exterior of Liscrona. Our fields were tidy because we rented the land to a neighbor farmer named Paddy Powers. Our agreement was that Paddy would keep the hedgerows trimmed and by cutting the hay the fields would stay in shape. In the fall, with the help of a moveable electric fence, Paddy was able to bring his herd of about 35 cows for grazing. We loved looking out our living room windows and watching the old girls chomp on our grass.

Michael's first exterior effort was directed to a large area just east of our front door, another area about 40x40 just south of the house, and another area on the west side. In the old days, beautiful lawns surrounded Liscrona. Over the years, while we were rescuing the house, these places became an overgrown wreck. Michael brought down his own tiny lawn mower, and after a good scything and a generous application of fertilizer, Mother Nature came to the rescue. Grass does grow in Ireland and there is no need for a sprinkler system. We told Michael to go out and buy the best self propelled mower he could find. From that moment on, the sight of Michael going round and round was a weekly occasion. The lawn on the east side became the scene of many a ferocious croquet match.

With the 20 foot tall and shiny Escalonia bushes that lined our driveway and now our lawns, we were becoming respectable.

The next year we returned to Ireland to discover that Michael had gone to work in back. He had removed the two ugly oil tanks and put two new ones inside one of the small out buildings near our back door and next to the attached room that held our furnace. Then he rebuilt the 8 foot stone walls that extended in a semi circle around the rear of the house. This created an enclosed courtyard. Over the years previous owners had used this space as a junk gathering spot, just throwing things out in back.

When Michael removed all the mess, we saw weeds and plenty of neglect. He and I set out to spade up this whole hunk of real estate and remove the weeds. Michael would settle for nothing but examining every shovel full and extracting every root. We dug and dug. My hands blistered. My back ached. I thought I would die. Michael went along accomplishing twice as much as I with no physical problems at all. It was a joyous occasion working and talking together. Maria would bring us lunch and jugs of water. It was a hot period, well, at least to us slaving away. We finally got to the raking part. The soil was without weed, a root or a clod. Michael hand sewed the whole plot and then went up to the woods and cut a big branch. I could

not imagine what it was for. He walked back and forth pulling the branch behind him. I understood. It was to put a little soil over the seed. He stood back, admired our work and explained to me that we had waited to attack this job till August because that was the proper time to plant grass. He said we would have grass in two weeks and we did.

From that time on, the lawn in our back yard protected from wind by the house and our wall, was a favorite place for lunches, reading the paper, the cocktail hour. Warm sunny days in Ireland are like pieces of gold. Over the years we created a rose garden in front of the wall. We named it Jo's Garden. Michael cared for it, always knowing just when to water, to feed, or spray for bugs. Michael was a superb gardener. The ivy and climbing roses grew to nearly cover the wall, just what we wanted.



Just remembered and interesting development. One day when we were digging away in the back, we came upon a large clump of bullets. With age they had welded themselves into one mass. Michael analyzed it this way. Back in the early days an owner had taken his ammunition and concealed it in the pile of turf at the rear of the house. It had been forgotten or lost and gradually worked down into the soil. We did not know how stable those bullets were. Michael took them away for another burial.

The next year when we arrived we discovered Michael standing out in front with a look of fiendish glee. Maria took one look and started to cry. We had an extension of the big stone wall that ran at an angle from the corner of the house up the driveway toward the garage. There Michael again cleaned the whole area and created gardens on both sides of the front of the house and all along the wall. There were masses of sweet peas, peonies and more plants and flowers everywhere. It was entirely unexpected and a joy to see Maria's face. Michael was mighty pleased with himself. That season Michael and I found Liscanor slate and made a nice stone bench where we could sit surrounded by flowers with a direct view across the Shannon. Oh Michael! I sit there still! In my thoughts and dreams here is the garden featuring Peggy and Jim Hughes, best friends from Milwaukee.

Our Green Fields

I want to talk about our land. Fields that grow hip high native grasses and flowers are fun to watch. I mean by that the fertilizing, the growing and the cutting. In the old days, it was done by horse and manpower. As the years

progressed, the hay was converted to silage, all one quick process of cutting and storing, then the baling process, great round bales. Machinery replaced sweat.

My relation to our woods was like father to a child. To the east of Lisrona we owned a wonderful forest, I would guess about 8 acres. The trees had been there for 150 years, beech, maple, oak even palm trees and plenty of brambles and dead wood. We had huge rhododendron bushes, a whole carpet of bluebells in the spring, two species of ferns, ivy and sometime in the past someone had planted many pine trees. On the perimeter we had a 20 foot tall wall of an evergreen called Escalonia. Since the growing season never completely stops in Ireland, this woods was a magical, living place. My greatest satisfaction was working in the woods for days and days, year after year. I would take my slasher, a long sturdy staff with a curved sharp blade. I would slash away, cutting out the brambles and the ivy off the trees. Ivy is the devil. It grows up and around the tree, saps its energy and eventually kills the tree. Each year I had a lot of it to do over again but I made headway. I loved the being alone in my "primeval forest." As I sat to rest, the little birds were all around me. We provided a home for owls, hawks and whole families of pheasants. When the weather was cold or windy or soft, I could always find shelter in the woods and go about my business. Maria knew that if she needed me or if it was lunch time, she could ring the bell on our front porch and I would hear her.

Since all my life I have been involved in talking, I got my greatest pleasure from silently growing blisters on my hands, cutting the brambles to make way for forest plants and new trees now given space to grow. I could see I was making a difference. I found complete peace there in the woods.

I let it be known in the area that when trees died, it was okay, (with Michael supervising) to take out the trees for firewood. These old trees were useful for many families because in West Clare there are almost no woods. The old dried wood could be added to the turf fires, and on a cold winter night it was appreciated. I repeated many times that under no circumstances should any live tree be touched.

Each year when we arrived, I would make a bee line for the woods to see what was going on. I loved Lisrona's woods.

North of the walled rear garden we had our apple orchard. It was almost inaccessible but Michael and I fought our way in, and after several years our orchard came back to life. In the early days this orchard produced a great quantity of fruit. One of the rooms in the lower level of Lisrona was called "The Apple Room." Each fall the apples were brought in and individually wrapped in paper. Over the winter Lisrona supplied the shops in Kilkee and Kilrush.

Most fields in Ireland are rectangular in shape and outlined with stone walls or hedgerows, but we had one round field. It was revealed to us that it once was a pony ring used by children.

The locals always seemed amazed at the joy we American city people found in our fields, hedgerows and woods. I am reminded of the old saying “so close to the woods you cannot see the trees.”

It seems that there is always color in Ireland. The hedgerows of firze, or by another name “gorse,” turn a rich gold color twice year. The rhododendron are multicolored from early spring to summer. The fuchsia, whole hedge rows of it and often 20 feet tall, are a rich red with summer blossoms. Masses of wild flowers take turns from May till Christmas. The ferns turn a lovely bronze in the fall along with beautiful Irish heather. Red holly berries are a part of Christmas time. Finally, roses love Ireland and bloom till Christmas and begin the process again in late February.



O Come Ye Back to Ireland
Our First Year in County Clare
by
Niall Williams and Christine Breen

There is the title of a book if I ever read one. We were fascinated, bought the book in the spring of 1988, just before we departed for Ireland. All the way across the Atlantic, Maria simply devoured the book. Of course, it dealt with our neighbors. The town of Kilmihil is only 15 miles from Lisrona.

I will pick up the story two years earlier in 1986 when Niall Williams and his wife Christine Breen left good paying jobs in New York and all their American comforts to return to the rugged rural life of Ireland. Christine had inherited an old cottage and a few acres near the tiny community of Kilmihil just a few miles east of Kilrush. The only heat in the house was from the turf burning fireplace. Niall had to learn to cut the turf from a nearby bog, a back breaking job. They had no phone, almost no furniture, and they did not know anyone. Christine set out to salvage an overgrown garden. Niall's assignment was to become an instant farmer.

I well remember that summer of 1986, their first exposure to Ireland. It rained all summer. I do not remember going anywhere when the windshield wipers were not flapping away. The weather made headlines. Farmers fields were flooded. Cows had to be sold because there would be no hay in the winter. We were warm and dry in Lisrona, but we felt the anguish of all our neighbor farmers. What a time it was for Niall and Christine.

That is the subject of the book, which in addition to all their problems, was further complicated by their desire to start a family but to no avail.

We loved the book and when we got our jet lag under control in May of 1988 Maria said, "I'm going to call them." She found that by this time they did have a phone. She reached Niall, told him who we were and asked them if they would be able to come over for dinner and swap some Irish stories. One question was answered when Niall said, "We'll have to find a babysitter." They had adopted a baby. How nice for them.

The result was that we got together in July. It was a great evening. We had much in common and Niall filled us in on the complications in becoming authors of a best seller. He related how Americans would come storming up the road to "discover" if Niall and Christine did actually exist. They would demand to see the old chair that is mentioned in the book, insist on tours of the garden, the farm and the house. These two had become celebrities and were paying the price of public adoration. With a real gleam in his eyes, Niall told us about a "care package" they had received in a large box. When opened, they found two Chicago Bears winter sideline jackets. A note said, "The Chicago Bears and Mike McCaskey." Evidently, Mike, a man with Irish-ancestors, had read the book and reacted to Ireland's cold and damp. Niall and Christine admitted they practically lived in those jackets.

Then there were the letters, hundreds of them, and a large proportion said, "What a wonderful life you're having! We'd like to do the same. Can you advise us?"

Niall told us that one woman was particularly turned on to the idea of moving to Ireland. She reported that she had a substantial sum of money, wanted to buy a small inn or a B & B and emigrate. Niall wrote back to her suggesting she consider all the changes the move would cause, the weather and the having to start over in her life. He did not want her to jump too quickly. As it turned out, she went right ahead, came to Ireland and bought a two story B&B at the end of Dingle close to Sleah Head. She look right out toward the Blasket Islands, the pounding Atlantic ocean and the wind swept coastline. The paint on the outside of her establishment is fairly extreme and the walls are covered with large painted teddy bears. The inside of her B&B is filled with assorted types of her bears. Do not ask me why. The four of us did have quite a discussion about what gets into people to cause them to make such drastic moves.

At one point, Maria came right out and asked Christine if she could continue to take the difficulties of their life style. Her reply was a simple, "I don't know."

So far as we know, they have managed. Christine is a better than average painter and there is a lot to paint in Ireland. Niall has written and

directed winning one act plays as well as a play that was produced at the Abbey Theater in Dublin. He also produced a local version of “West Side Story,” no small feat. Two more books have been turned out, and not too long ago Charles Kuralt arrived with camera crew and spent almost a week documenting life in Kilmihil with Niall and Christine. They have received priceless television exposure in the United States which is critical for those who write books.

So back there in July of 1988, after a big meal, lots of talk and armed with a box of our homemade chocolate chip cookies, they left for home leaving us the open invitation to “drop by.” We never did. It seemed to us that they had plenty of Americans doing just that without our adding to the list. We wished them well and admired their courage.

The autographs in the front of the book that they brought us read:
To Mal and Maria,
Thank you for the wonderful evening and the chocolate chip cookies.
All the best,
Christine Breen Niall Williams

Patriotism Expanded

It was Maria who hatched this one. It also became a tradition. We were there on the 4th of July. The Fourth is just another day in Ireland but Maria decided something should be done. There were just four of us at Lisscrone but Maria decided we should have a parade down Doonaha’s main street. Since this is the only street, we could hardly be ignored. Maria made tri-corner hats for the four of us. I carried our flag. Maria carried the drum, a big kettle with spoon. Pat and friend carried pot lids to substitute for cymbals. We waited till we knew that Lynch’s would be full. We drove our car to the top of the street by the church, got out, formed our parade and proceeded down the road, banging away. Our audience was not huge or receptive. Nora Galvin, alone, heard us. She came to the front door and waved a dish towel at us. Encouraged by our success, we burst into the door of the pub and I mean burst. All together we sang:

We are Yankee Doodle Dandies
Yankee Doodles do or die.
Real live nephews of our Uncle Sam
Born on the 4th of July.
Yes, we are Yankee Doodle Dandies.

We have traveled from afar.
All the way to Doonaha
A riding on our ponies
We are the Yankee Doodlers!!!

Well, the old boys almost died. They howled, roared and almost fell off their bar stools. Nothing this bad had ever happened. We ended up being forced to sing our song three more times. Then we bought a round for the house.

Our first 4th of July had been noted. Maria was toasted by the crowd. She was the hero! After all, it was her idea.

The Next Year

The story of our first 4th of July spread throughout the community and the next year the Irish were waiting for us. Obviously we had to top the preceding year's celebration. By luck, we had a larger group for the parade. We had one of Jeff's friends with a trumpet. He could actually play it. We had a kazoo section and a lot more percussion. The parade was almost a parade and when we marched into the pub we passed out small American flags for one and all. Lynch's was more crowded than ever but still something was missing.

Next Year

We had it! Fireworks! Of course, they were totally against the law. No plane would allow them as luggage. The Irish customs guards hated any form of explosives. That was understood.

Somehow a supply arrived and the word got around that when it was dark, about midnight, there would be fireworks. Everyone turned up. All the children came. Most of them including parents who had never been close to fireworks. No, we did not do a Chicago type show and we did not have explosives. We had sparklers, some sky rockets, roman candles, cones, that sort of thing. Michael Galvin and I took our supply inside the school yard behind the wall and the crowd formed in the road on the other side. It was so exciting. We passed out sparklers to the children and you have never seen such eyes. Anything that went up in the sky caused such oohs and ahs! We were a huge success. Life in the pub and out in the road continued till very late. The Gardai, happily for us, did not make an appearance. On a scale of 1-10 we were a 10.

And so it went on year after year. One year our dear friend Ed Wolowiec who owns the Port Edward Restaurant in Algonquin came to visit. Ed is a talented musician and he brought his flute. The Irish love music. Ed also brought green T-shirts with “O’Curry Arms, Doohaha, Ireland” on them. Everyone in the parade wore one. He played and played and you have never heard such silence. Ed admits he is not James Galway, but for us all he was “The Best in the West.” Now we had to plan for yet bigger and better for the following year.

Maria bought me a set of bagpipes. No, I could not play them, but they made a fine decoration on the outer reception wall. Here was my idea for the next year’s festivities. Ed owned a small stereo cassette player with two tiny speakers that could generate considerable volume. I went to a friend in Woodstock who has a recording studio and found a tape of a pipe doing MacNamara’s Band. We made a cassette and took it and Ed’s cassette player with us. On the big night our troop once again slipped up to the church and formed up. Maria tied the pipes on me. Really, it was the only way. They were flopping all over. Someone alerted the Pub and everyone came outside. There I did a solo. Maria pushed the start button and I marched down the street pantomiming like crazy. The crowd got into it and started singing. I stomped around, squeezed the bellows or whatever you call it, and faked like mad. I will never know for sure but I do think some of them thought I really was playing. One of the old boys came up to me later and said, “That was grand. You know there’s good money being paid to pipe at weddings.” I did not tell him I only could play one song.

One year, I cannot remember which, we went to Michael and asked him about live music for the affair. Michael knew everyone and hired a group called the Bannermen. They came every 4th of July for a long time and became family. After the parade they would play for dancing. Then all would go outside for fireworks and back for serious pubbing. These were good times. The 4th of July made its mark.

Over time, we had many a long discussion about Irish food. One interesting fact was that there was no such thing as Irish corned beef and cabbage. They just did not know what corned beef was. Perhaps by now they do. Irish bacon and cabbage is different in that the bacon is like a chunk of uncured ham. Combined with cabbage tit is a staple food of County Clare people. I doubt if Dubliners know about it.

We decided to bring American corned beef to Ireland. Just like fireworks, it is not legal to import meat products. Somehow the word went out to all people coming to Ireland. Purchase a good sized corned beef. Wrap it carefully and freeze. Bring it! At the 4th of July affair we provided food, loaves and loaves of bread and trays and trays of corned beef. The Irish are

great eaters with huge appetites. You should have been there.

We were aware that the whole community looked forward to our 4th of July parties. We loved the togetherness we all shared. I believe the summer of 1992 was a climax. We decided to start with a big picnic on our front lawn and we invited the village and many families from the area. It just so happened that it was a perfect day, warm and no wind. We moved all the tables and chairs out to the front. Gwen and John Miller were there and we all worked like mad. Maria and Gwen made tons of potato salad. I set up my Weber grill out front and we had a hamburger, potato salad, beer bash to end all. Everybody came including the Bannermen and their wives. There between our two countries' flags we had a genuine home town picnic.

Later that evening the weather turned on us and by the time for fireworks, the rain was coming down in sheets. We stayed inside and danced, sang and partied. I promised we would do the fireworks before we were scheduled to leave on August 3rd.

Word went out. August 2nd was the night. We had a much larger than normal supply of fireworks. A contact in Japan and Ireland had obtained the "good stuff" and by some quirk of fate it had arrived intact.

The crowd assembled outside and the night was calm. Well, we really did it. We rattled windows for miles. Our sky rockets out did anything we'd ever presented before. We even amazed ourselves. Michael and I were brilliant.

As we reached our smoky climax and were congratulating each other, we saw the headlights of a car hurtling toward us. The local Gardai pulled up, rolled down his window and without any sign of good humor gritted out, "And what's going on here?"

If you remember that was the very day that Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait. I, still high with delight over our celebration, came out with, "Didn't you hear, the Iraqis have just invaded Ireland!" It was not the best reply. With a steely look he said, "I should have known you'd be mixed up with this. Now let me tell you what you've done. The lighthouse across the river in Kerry saw the rockets you fired and thinks a ship is sinking in the river. He called the rescue service in Shannon Airport and they are about to send a helicopter to the rescue." With that he reached for his phone and called Shannon. "You can call it off. It is just the bloody Yanks having themselves a party."

He gave me a stern look and one of the locals behind me whispered, "Ah, take no note of him. This keeps them on their toes." With that he rolled up his window while growling, "Let's have no more of this!"

He roared off and everybody cheered. We retired to the pub and the rest of the night I could not buy a drink. I became the Hero of County Clare. At one point there were 6 pints of Guinness and three Irish whiskies on the bar

in front of me.

/hcc

In 1993 on July 2, the Sergeant came to call. We invited him in for a cup of tea. We talked about the weather, our guests, the big football match and finally as I was trying to figure out just why he had come, he let it slip out, "Oh about the 4th of July!" So that was it.

I responded, "Sergeant, we haven't any fireworks at all this year. Our source has dried up."

With relief he said, "Well, I just thought I ought to inquire. We'll miss the excitement."

It was obvious. I had been forgiven for my sins.

What is this Turf Stuff?

Americans who visit Ireland are always curious about "turf." I think in America it is more often called peat, right? First of all, turf is only possible in an environment that is wet, where organic material grows all year long and layer after layer grow and die on top of each other. This decomposed product, when extracted from the land and dried will burn. It is the basic fuel for heat and cooking in Ireland except in the cities where oil and coal and gas prevail.

Here is how it works in the rural area where we lived. Each family either owns or rents a piece of land in the bog. In the summer after the hay has been cut, often the whole family will "go to the bog for cuttin the turf." It is a hard, wet, dirty job, with the strongest men using a long, narrow type shovel called a slane. Turf is extracted in layers. If you have traveled through the bog areas you have seen the long trenches. The cutter, working knee deep in the muck, slices out a wet block of turf and flips it up out of the trench. His wife or the kids will make small piles in such a way that the air can blow through and dry the brick sized blocks. After several weeks of drying time they will return to the bog and load the turf in a trailer or wagon and take it home. In the old days a donkey bore the load with a large woven basket filled with the turf on either side of him, like saddle bags. The neat, round, black stacks of turf are a part of every farmer's yard.

In many homes the turf fire never goes out. Sometimes coal is added to lift the heat level. Wood is usually not available.

In recent times a process has been developed to compress the turf into hard black pieces, similar to our charcoal. It is generally considered to be too "dear."

Also huge machines have been created that actually move through the

bog and mechanically do the cutting. Usually the bogs are too small to handle their size. The farmer still goes himself to lay in his winter supply of turf. When you see a farmer whose face is fire engine red, you know he has just come from the sun and the wind and the back breaking work in the bog. The smell of a good turf fire is superior to any perfume in the world.

*Turf Note: When starting a turf fire, go first to a hardware store and buy "Fire Starters" in packages of 12. The fire starter when lit will start the turf burning in its slow fashion.

Patience is required.

John's Big Fright

John Lynch was nearing his 65th birthday when he experienced what his doctor termed, "a slight heart attack." John has always been quite aware of his health, his weight, his blood pressure and the IDEA that exercise can be very harmful. Over the years, John's monthly letters to me always briefed me on his health, and usually concluded with, "Well Mal, so far I'm cheatin' the undertaker."

You can easily deduce that his "heart attack" was of some concern to John. He was in his bed contemplating just how close he was to the great beyond. It just so happened that his bedroom was located just off the bar and the door was open. Two of John's old friends were sitting there by the fire, puffing on their pipes and having a pint when after a long sigh one said, "Ah, tis a sad thing. Looks like poor old John will only be needing one more clean white shirt!"

The implication was obvious. John heard this, rose out of bed and has continued "cheatin' the undertaker" ever since.

John Became 65

I have been sitting here for sometime wondering just how to approach this delicate subject. The good times are easy. The bad times fight me. I do not want to be judgmental and most of all I don't want to hurt my old friend, John Lynch. If I am to be honest, however, I am obliged to describe the event that shook a community and changed our life in Ireland.

John had become 65. That is the age when the Irish can retire and go on pension. Now, John did have that small heart attack, and he was growing weary. He was tired of the noise, the smoke, the pulling pints hour after hour and all that involved running the pub.

John made the decision to retire and give the ownership of the pub to his daughter Roseanne. She was young and attractive, a nurse by profession, and we knew her well. She had even traveled to the U.S. and visited us. There were four brothers, but John decided on Roseanne who by this time was married to a local, a farmer named John Harvey.

So Roseanne and John Harvey took over and made some critical decisions. They decided to build a whole new house just west of Lynch's Pub using a portion of the building for family living quarters and the remainder for their pub which would be named "O'Curry Arms." The old pub would be closed, stripped and converted to a house they could rent. I have to assume that the memories Roseanne had of growing up in the tight quarters of the old pub, her brothers sleeping up in the loft, etc. must have been the one thing in the world she would not want to continue.

The project was begun and over a period of time the largest house in Doonaha was constructed. John had his bedroom upstairs. The bar was a plain and simple area with a modest grocery corner, and a simple fireplace. There were small tables and benches for patrons.

It was the end of an era and it nearly killed us. While it was none of our business, nevertheless, we were hurt and we were not alone in our feeling of loss. We missed John's always being there. We missed the old chairs and the fireplace. At one point Roseanne said that her business was with the young people of Ireland. They were her customers of the future and they were all tired of that old stuff. Yes, sentimental. I have always felt that Ireland gave me something I could not find anywhere else in the world, and a big part of that was the warmth of Lynch's Pub. I will not linger over the facts of life in Doonaha over the next two years.

Roseanne's family was growing. She had a difficult job being both mother and a publican. She and John Harvey both disliked the business and eventually the O'Curry Arms was closed. She returned to being a nurse and John went back to farming and construction jobs. The result was a final death blow to that tiny community.

There was no longer a place to gather. When mass was over there was no meeting at the pub to pick up the newspaper, have that pint or just talk to neighbors. It was the same thing after funerals, confirmations, weddings and baptisms. There was no longer a place for the old boys to sit by a fire and just talk to each other. The children lost the place to buy their sweets. Mothers could not drop by for a loaf of bread or a pound of butter. There was no place to gather and watch the telly when Clare was playing Kerry in a big match.

The street that used to be packed with cars was empty. Happy people crowded together and singing their hearts out in Lynch's Pub were no longer

there.

It all just went away. Sad! Silent! Dark!



Irish Justice!

One of my favorite memories of Ireland concerns an experience we had one Sunday afternoon as we waited in a long line for the ferry to transport us across the Shannon. There had been a greatly anticipated football match in Killarney between the County Kerry and County Clare teams. The crowd making its way back to Clare was large. The single line of cars extended for at least half a mile.

It so happens that there is, in addition to the ferry landing, an oil fired power station located at the point of embarkation. The entrance to the station is about 100 yards from the ferry and it is necessary to keep a lane open so employees can come and go. Consequently, a large warning is painted at that junction. "NO STANDING!"

On the day in question, Maria and I were the second car before that opening in the road, the "NO STANDING" zone. We were indeed surprised to see a car come whipping down the road past all the other cars and pull into that very open spot. There were four adults in the car. After a few moments of consideration, an Irishman in the car in front of us opened his door, got out and walked up to the sedan firmly lodged in the "NO STANDING" zone. He tapped on the window and said, "Ye can't be here. See the signs. Get back to the foot of the queue!" I heard every word. There was no response. All four passengers looked straight ahead. The request was repeated in a firm but not belligerent tone. No result, except they locked the doors.

With that "our man" walked past to the car behind us. Three men emerged and all four walked back to the scene. Again, he tapped on the window and repeated his request. No reaction.

With that, the four men each went to a wheel and knelt down. They let the air out of all four tires, made no comments, and just returned to their cars. The ferry came and we all pulled around the car sitting there with four flat tires. We sailed away.

I have often wondered just what those four people did about their problem. There were at least 3 miles from the village of Killimer and possible assistance. Did they carry a hand pump with them?

Irish justice had been administered, no bashed in windows, no profanity, no obvious rage!

Moral: Do not jump queues in Ireland!



Since, by this time, you have shared many of our experiences in Ireland, I think we ought to talk about eating or buying and preparing meals when you are living there. The dumb story that the Irish do not know how to cook food is just that . . . dumb. However, the Irish do have preferences that are sometimes difficult for Americans.

Irish Meals

Examples:

1. The Irish like meat well done and I mean really well done. The sight of pink in a steak is not acceptable.
2. The Irish like vegetables such as cauliflower, carrots, turnips cooked like meat well well done. They can do without hot, spicy food or gourmet type sauces.

When traveling around the country and staying in B&B's the breakfast is large and pretty much the same wherever you go. Coffee or tea, juice, dry cereal, rasher (bacon to us), one egg or two up or over and half a broiled tomato with toast. For some reason the lady of the house will serve you store bought white bread unless you ask for her brown bread. I think she feels white bread is what Americans prefer.

Usually breakfast is so substantial that lunch can be small or ignored. One kindness to the Irish is this: ask for breakfast no earlier than 9:00 if possible. Early rising is hard on the Irish.

For the Irish, lunch is the big meal of the day so for us we went for "pub grub." Enter the pub and find the menu at the bar. Soup is a good starter, usually pureed and excellent. It is smart to check on the sandwich. To the Irish a sandwich can consist of 2 slices of bread with 1 slice of cheese, or 1 slice of ham. It is smart to specify your choice of bread and then go into detail on what you want between the slices. They will oblige. If you forget to be specific, you will be sorry. The Irish make a wonderful curry that is fine at lunch. A glass of Smithwicks (Smiticks) with curry is great. Remember the proper pronunciation.

In Irish operated hotels and restaurants the main meal is the big one, usually with soup to begin. Seafood is some of the finest in the world with wild salmon, turbot, hake and white fish leading the parade. Beef and lamb are fine. I prefer lamb to almost any red meat. Then stand by for vegetables, the carrots, cauliflower and three kinds of potatoes — boiled, baked and french fried (called chips). Irish love their potatoes, and they have huge appetites, eat with enthusiasm and are big on desserts which are always top drawer. Save room for a dessert.

Tea time is observed in Ireland. In hotels it is tea and sandwiches and a sweet. For the working farmer in the summer time it is a late afternoon break for some food before going back into the fields to work till dark, about 9:30 pm. A big vegetable salad is popular.

There are a number of fish and chip and hamburger establishments in Ireland but they always seemed a bit greasy to us. Franchise restaurants are now established in the big cities but not in the country.

The gourmet restaurants in Ireland are some of the finest in the world. Some have Irish chefs, others can be French or German or Italian. As the world gets smaller, the knowledge of fine dining spreads to all lands. You just have to ask around.

Now, let us pretend you are living in Ireland, a short time or longer and you have to feed yourself! It serves no purpose to talk about buying groceries in Ireland twenty years ago. Suffice it to say:

1. Shops were very small and always crowded.
2. No freezers so no frozen food.
3. No plastic bags.
4. Limited variety of fresh vegetables.
5. Packaging always in small quantities.

In today's world it is all different. There are the supermarkets. Frequently we visited Quinnsworth in the Shannon Industrial Development Complex and in Ennis when we needed to stock up. There we saw a piece of equipment in the vegetable department I have not come across in the U.S. It consists of a scale to weigh the product, tied into a window with pictures of all the fruits and vegetables available. The technique is to place your selection on the scale and push on the picture of the product. The scale weighs and prices, and out comes a sticker to apply to the plastic bag of your selection. Few products are prepackaged and priced the way they are here in the U.S.

Other than that, the large stores have everything that we enjoy here. They serve as all-purpose stores with the variety of goods similar to our major chains. In smaller towns, stores tend to be smaller. However, they are able to carry all but the most exotic products. Fresh bread is delivered daily. One vegetable fascinates us — tomatoes. They are always the same size, halfway between golf ball and a tennis ball. I have no idea why this standard size is so important to the Irish, but it is.

Except for root vegetables that are grown in Ireland, everything else must be imported and naturally the price rises, items like tomatoes from Israel or Spain. Incidentally, corn on the cob is not common and when it is on a restaurant menu it is always offered as a starting course.

Irish love their sweets and the candy department is always very obvious. Cadbury is everywhere.

Yes, the Irish are very particular about their tea and usually add milk and much too much sugar. Tea is preferred to coffee.

Irish dairy products, produced in quantity and exported all over the world, are wonderful. There is cheese of all kinds and the finest milk. The cream and butter, especially the cream, bring tears to my eyes, along with the fresh bread, delivered while still warm. Ah!

We have always had a great love for Haugh (pronounced Hawk) Victuallers, our local meat market in Kilkee. This is the old fashioned meat market with sides of beef and lamb suspended from hooks, sawdust on the floor, and the big power saw designed to deliver just the size and cut of whatever you desire.

It was here that we learned how to do bacon and cabbage, a mainstay of the area. We also realized it was proper to order mince, not hamburger. Mince is a 50–50 combination of beef and lamb and is specially ground for each order. We were able to show just how thick to cut a steak, lamb and pork chops. It was the simple measuring device of thumb and index finger. “About this thick.” Irish lamb chops, beef steaks or leg of lamb are superb, and, of course, home grown. Irish beef tends to be a little tougher than American because it’s grass fed, not corn fed and heavily mottled in the American fashion. I have a long standing joke with young Haugh, the butcher. When we really had a special urge for a beef filet, I would ask him to go to the safe and get out the tenderloin. He would bring it out. I would specify how many and how thick. I called it his “meat from the safe” because it was so expensive, that is “dear.”

At Lisrona we had a head high broiler and I always enjoyed broiling cuts of beef or lamb right up there where I could see what was happening.

Oh yes, the rashers are great and a bit different from our bacon without all the sugar or smoking we find here in America. Pork is available and pork

chops are great. I must also not forget their roasting chickens. They tend to be free range and are the best in the world. I think we lose some flavor in American mass production of chicken.

A visit to Haughs was always a highlight of the day, good conversation or shall I say great craic.”

I have left seafood till last. Since we were right on the Shannon and the Atlantic, where the fishing is some of the world’s best, we fared very well. A ring on the phone to one of our local fishermen was all it took. Within a day, our front bell would ring and there would be our neighbor with a beautiful wild salmon, averaging from 5 to 8 pounds. I would scale the fish and usually cut and freeze individual steaks. We had a salmon poacher but seldom needed the whole salmon for one occasion. I prefer my salmon broiled with just lemon juice, butter, salt and pepper. I contend that sauces and other embellishments detract from one of the greatest fish in the world. About sauce, in Ireland when you are having lamb chops you can always find real mint sauce, not the mint jelly served in the U.S.

There is a time in the spring and early summer when the sea water warms a little and the mackerel come in. Their slender, shiny black and white markings are beautiful to see and are very tasty. Nora taught us how to clean, prepare and cook mackerel. We found a local fish called Hake to be excellent. At a pub-restaurant, the Long Dock in Carrigaholt, a hake pie was a special dish. We loved it. Whiting and pollack are plentiful.

All along the west coast the lobster boats are very evident and we had our source for lobster. Yes, they too are “dear” because of the demand from Europe. I have always felt the struggle to cook and serve and eat lobster is too much. I prefer salmon. I admit though, a good lobster salad or lobster bisque is hard to beat.

Oysters are available except in the months that don’t have “r” in them, May, June July and August. The reason is simple. Those months are the spawning season. Also salmon fishing is suspended for a 3 or 4 month summer period, same reason. The Oyster Festival in the Galway area in September is a big event. The Irish themselves are not too enthusiastic about shellfish.

We even found to our surprise that we grew our own mussels down on the cliffs below Liscrona. Our son Jeff went down frequently, brought them up to the kitchen and proudly prepared them. Imagine, home grown mussels.

You can see, from what I have written, that there are no shortages in Ireland but since many items have to be either flown in or shipped in, that cost has to be covered in the price structure.

I will never forget home made strawberry shortcake, rhubarb tart, apple pie, gooseberry tart, all with Irish cream. Oh the Irish cream, it whips in about 30 seconds.

If you are doing the cooking and following Irish recipes, be sure you are armed with a metric conversion chart. Either that or take your own recipes from the states.

In addition to the daily shopping routine, is the stop for the newspaper. The Irish have an insatiable need to know what is going on and TV does not satisfy their needs. In the old days the papers would be dropped off at Lynch's Pub. After the pub closed, it just meant a stop in Kilkee, Carrigaholt or Kiltrush. The weekly Clare Champion comes out on Fridays and is devoured by all. The Sunday newspaper is nearly as important as mass attendance. The Irish "need to know" is just a part of being Irish. You receive good marks when you too are up on the latest.



I have suggested some of the difference between Irish and American dining. Here is another major gulf between us. It is found in two words, "rich" and "poor."

Who is Rich?

I think most Americans think of the Irish as poor. Most Irish think of us as rich.

Why is it that most Irish social life is conducted in the nearby pub? It is because Irish homes are small, and quite often there aren't enough plates and silverware to accommodate guests. Possibly there are not enough chairs for more than the immediate family. Part of this is by design. The Irish don't see any need to gather things the way we do. I am sure they could if they felt it was important.

They see no need for closets full of clothes for men or women. A man has his dark suit for church and any other big events. His wife always looks nice. She has what she needs but she sees no reason to spend money on a large wardrobe.

There is no emphasis on jewelry either. More than anything, Americans should never reflect a "you poor Irish" attitude. They are very proud people and resent anyone being sorry for them. I do not think there is a lot we can do about their feeling that we are all rich.

I will give you an example of what happened to us one year at Easter time. Our priest, for a good bit of Lent, was talking about the Easter collection. More than once he said he did not want to hear any clinking of coins.

The result was that the Easter collection was unusually large. I made the comment that they could now pay off all their debts. I was told, "It all goes to Africa." This small parish was steadily supporting missionaries in Africa, one of whom was a local priest, who had built a hospital and a college with money sent from Clare. Now tell me who is rich and who is poor.

One time I asked John if there was something we could do in the community. We felt that we were so lucky to be there, and Maria and I just wanted to be a part of it. Any money gifts we ever made were just given away. John thought awhile and said, "Well, the altar boys are looking pretty threadbare. They've been wearing the same outfits for 50 years. They've been patched, they're too small, and they're black. We hear they're now being allowed to wear red. That would be nice."

Maria and I went to the Irish version of the Yellow Pages and found the address of a shop in Limerick under "clerical vestments." Off we went to the city, found the shop, explained what we wanted and were told they only carried priests attire but perhaps there was a place that could help us. The clerk gave us directions to an order of nuns who did wonderful lace work and all kinds of religious attire. His directions were complicated but we got the gist of something about a park and "next to Don Derry." We drove around and around and were totally confused. Finally I stopped the car and saw a woman waiting for a bus. I approached her, described what we were seeking and she said, "Oh you mean Dawn Dairy." She pointed, "The nuns are right across the street, next to the park, about right down there." We drove through a large gate, saw a huge castle like building, parked and approached the front door. It was just like a scene from Sound of Music. The great door opened and there stood a larger than life Mother Superior, in complete habit from head to toe.

We told her about our 4 altar boys and their needs and she listened nodding her head, "Ah, yes, perhaps we can help. The sisters are at lunch. Would you take a seat over by the garden. We'll come for you directly." In due time another nun arrived and she invited us to come in. First of all she insisted on showing us ten of the sisters at work.

"Our sisters do the finest lace work in Ireland. Nancy Reagan was here not long ago and took home some lovely lace."

We then entered a little song and dance period, with all the sisters, sewing away but eavesdropping. Sister said she probably had what we needed but only in pieces and they would need to be sewn together. "Wouldn't that be something you could do my dear?"

Maria quickly declined, "No, I couldn't possibly do it right." It was obvious to sister that here was a sale ready to be made and we had not even asked about price. Finally, with a deep sigh she said, "I'll just have to let

the Monsignor wait on his order. He won't be pleased." She then went to four boxes and produced exactly what we wanted in size and the color, red. She took me into her office, referred to paper and pencil and handed me the number. I paid in cash on the spot. Maria and I picked up our treasure, said our grateful farewells to the smiling sisters and took off for home.

We headed straight for Doonaha and stopped at Nora Galvin's front door. Nora is what Maria calls "Mrs. Church." Nora does everything, the cleaning, the flowers and sees to it that the priest is fully briefed. We handed her the boxes and I have never had such a feeling of satisfaction. She said, "How did you ever get it done in one day. It would have taken us till Christmas." Actually, it never would have been done.

The West Clare telegraph system then went to work. The next day there was a wedding and when all four altar boys appeared in RED you could almost hear the gasp from the packed church. Mission accomplished!

The Yanks had pulled it off. On another occasion, we shared the cost of padded kneelers for the pews. Prior to this time we all knelt on bare wood. This was not an act of kindness or charity. This was done just for us. Our knees used to kill us, the Irish never seemed to notice. Later there were some gentle, smiling comments about the tender Yanks. No one ever complained about the padding. The wonderful Irish! They accepted these gifts. They never fawned over us which would have made us feel awful. They understood. We understood.

Irish Fun and Games

Never let it be said that all Irish are preoccupied with sitting in pubs draining pints and telling stories. They relish all kinds of entertainment.

Sporting events lead the list. As soon as children learn to walk they start kicking balls. Soccer, Gaelic football and hurling are played at every level of skill and the competition is fierce. Team loyalty is bred into every person whether its a match between parishes, towns, counties or countries. The World Cup (Soccer) is bigger than our Super Bowl and World Series combined. The men who play in these matches are national heroes. When age finally forces retirement, they usually open pubs and spend the rest of their lives showing off their pictures and being admired by their fans who never forgot them.

Then there is the part of Ireland that revolves around the horse. The country has always been perfect for breeding and developing thoroughbreds. Weather and food conditions are ideally suited for these animals, as is the Irish temperament. Nearly every major town has its own track so there is

a race meet going on somewhere in the country nearly every week. This is called flat racing. Then, there is racing over the hurdles and show jumping. The Dublin Horse Show in early August is host to top international teams. Irish bred stock are sold around the world to those who love racing. It is sad that for economic reasons the Irish have been compelled to part with their finest.

Most towns in Ireland have their own festivals, smaller but similar to our county fairs. In the country events like “reverse tractor racing,” “tossing the sheaves,” “baking bread” and “slow bike racing” are popular. One in which only men are eligible is “hanging up the clothes.” A clothes line is hung, a certain number of clothes and pins provided and men compete for the best time in getting everything hung. Women love to watch and taunt. Every event in Ireland is adjudicated and woe betide the judge who doesn’t take it seriously. Pub singing is always part of any festival. The elimination process moves from pub to pub and the level of talent is always extraordinary.

Certainly the Irish love sports, but their ability to entertain themselves extends far beyond football and nursing a pint in the pub. In the west where we lived, there was not much interest in movies or TV. Concerning television, the exception would be any major sporting event and late show on Saturday night hosted by Ireland’s answer to Johnny Carson, a talented radio and TV star named Gay Byrnes.

Most Irish communities have created their own theater groups. I recall one year the Kilkee Players wrote and produced a musical based on the life and music of Percy French, one of Ireland’s talented composers. The show was a hit, so good the troop took it on the road for a whole season. Kilrush even has its own opera group that goes on singing year after year.

From the late 1980’s we have seen a definite increase in live music in the pubs and it is not all Irish. Country western is popular as well as rock which seems to have infected the whole world. Also dancing has grown in importance and Irish set dancing is everywhere. Groups of set dancers always remind me of our square dancing. Why shouldn’t it? We learned it from them. There are dance competitions and Michael and Nora Galvin have won dozens of cups and trophies. They are beautiful dancers.

On the subject of competition, a few years ago, Ireland issued a challenge to the world, an international barbecue event. It is held in a most unlikely place, the tiny village of Fanore, in the middle of the Burren. Teams compete with grills, pork, beef and all the hot sauces, meet every summer.

A look at any newspaper proves my point. Ads for all the upcoming events fill page after page.

Life is never dull in Ireland.

Recreation

One day, Maria and I took a long walk in Kilkee. With Kilkee Bay beneath us and George's Head, the great stone promontory to the west, we climbed up a hill, walked through a gap and came upon a most magnificent sight. The Atlantic was pounding in and breaking against a wild confusion of cliffs. We have gone there many times since to relish Ireland at its frothy, crashing best.

When we came back to our car, we decided to stop at the new golf club for a cup of coffee. We saw a sign in the window, "Bridge, Monday night, 7:30." Maria is an excellent bridge player and she taught me the game. We had no idea what we were getting ourselves into but we decided to come the following Monday. It was one of the best decisions we made in all our years in Ireland.

The Irish we met were some of the best bridge players in the world. One entire room was set for the event. On most nights, there were from 30 to 40 players. Their game was Duplicate Bridge. At home we mostly played Party or Rubber Bridge. The Irish did not recognize that as bridge. We discovered that at times these people played 2 or 3 times a week. They were mad for the game and always played with the same partner year after year.

The Irish welcomed us, took us under their wings, and taught us the protocol. Some were natives of Kilkee, some were visitors on holiday. From that day on, every Monday night was reserved for bridge. These evenings gave us the opportunity to meet Irish people other than our Doonaha neighbors. It was a broadening experience. Each player paid 1 Pound to play and the competition was fierce but good natured.

Subsequently, Maria and I had several bridge parties at our home. We set up three tables and included supper with bridge. One time we even taught our guests "the old fashioned American Rubber Bridge." They were good sports about it. After the game was finished, we'd all gather in an area and tell stories and talk and talk, which is what the Irish do better than anybody. I got to retell all my ghost stories and they loved it.

We made great friends. Maria and I miss those Monday nights. The Irish taught us a lot about bridge and definitely improved our game. In all those years I think we won only once or twice. On each occasion the Irish cheered. Time passe, we became a part of the group and were no longer treated as "Americans on holiday." No more questions, "Have you Irish connections?" We belonged!

Friends Make the Difference

“Man does not live alone” is a saying familiar to all which had a great impact on our Irish experience. It would have been impossible for us to live alone at the end of the road with only sea, sky and fields for company.

One of the greatest compliments we ever received came one year shortly after Maria and I had arrive at Lisrcrona from America. We were in Doonaha walking along when a neighbor approached and said, “Welcome home.” It meant that we were accepted. Further proof came slowly. After about 15 years in residence we became aware that the Irish had started to gossip with us. We were let in on the juicy little tidbits of the neighborhood. Prior to that time it was more of the “Are ye enjoyin’ yer holiday?” We had moved from being visitors to being a part of the fabric of West Clare.

As far back as the early 70’s Jo and I had urged our friends to come see what we had found. David and Adelaide Meskill and Gwen and John Miller sampled Lisrcrona back at the time when the Old Grey Lady was not at her best. Though they never said so, I suspect they thought we were quite mad. One of my business associates, a public relations genius named Sue Snow came to see Lisrcrona with husband Bruce. That began for Sue a love affair with Ireland that continues to this day. Bruce was not well but he was great for things Irish. When he died, he was buried wearing his Irish cap and sweater. He was another American who made it to Ireland just in time.

One interesting fact is that over centuries, the Irish of the west have settled on certain areas for their holidays. The Limerick people went to Kilkee, Ennis people preferred Lahinch. It was natural that we should meet more Limerick people. We discovered Connie and Emmett Ryan, Noel and Pauline McDermott and Norene and Pearce McCrann at Lynch’s Pub. Lynch’s was their favorite because it was recognized all over Ireland as one of the traditional singing pubs and John was famous as the host. We loved being there for the “sing songs” that just seemed to break out. Usually Emmett would become the MC. He would go around and around picking the people who were there dying to be called on. So, our Limerick friends became part of our life and we gave them full use of Lisrcrona.

I wish we had kept a book the way John Lynch did. Over the years, Lisrcrona was busy. We loved sharing a real Irish experience with friends and Irish Americans looking for a place for family reunions. I regret I have lost track of the number of people who learned about Ireland from Lisrcrona.

On at least three different occasions, we gave a Lisrcrona Holiday as one of the auction items of The Lambs, a home for disadvantaged folks. We felt good that Lisrcrona was able to put money to work for the Lambs.

I think it was about 1992 that AAA, the Chicago Motor Club asked Maria

and me to host a tour to Ireland. We agreed as long as it could be to “Our Ireland,” not the typical hotel to hotel tour. We took 24 friends and showed them our life in the west with a visit to our home, a stop at our school and church in Doonaha, and all the places we felt were special. The skies were blue, we enjoyed the professional guidance of a charming tour director named Mary Gibbons, and there were no hitches. That tour was a high point.

To the best of my knowledge only two people, in all those years, came to Liscrona and stayed only one night and bolted. Two young TV executives from New York were on the verge of a long tiring presidential election — I have forgotten which one. They wanted to get away from the excitement and rest up for a few days and they heard about Liscrona. They came and were terrified by the silence and the dark. They arose after one long night and fled saying pitifully, “There aren’t any street lights.” So much for New Yorkers.

It is true, the silence was absolute. You could hear your heart beat, and in our bedroom it was so dark you could lie there and feel you were both blind and deaf.



Then there were the times when the storms would blow in from the southwest across the Shannon. The waves would crash on our cliffs and the wind would cause our woods to scream. A force 9 gale generates winds above 90 miles and hour and we were grateful for 2 foot thick stone walls and windows with strong shutters. Only one hurricane was ever reported in our area and Liscrona weathered it without serious damage. Good builders they were back in 1840.

When the winds howled we loved watching the white caps pounding away. Many nights we were lulled to sleep by the rhythm of the sea music, which began with a deep WHUMP as a wave broke followed by the rattling of thousands of round rocks as the water receded and the boulders tumbled over each other.

There were many times when we would deliberately get up and out of bed and go to our living room window to watch the moon shining down on the Shannon, as the dark clouds hid and then again revealed its shimmering magic. We were two people caught up by the power of nature. To this day I never see the moon without seeing the Shannon River shining — shining!

Doonaha Center Stage

In the years that we were a part of Doonaha there were two events that were unique to this tiny town. One was the “School Centenary,” and the other “The Eugene O’Curry Commemoration.”

The school centenary celebrating 100 years of Doonaha School, was held on July 18, 1986. Graduates returned as far away as Australia and the U.S. to mark the day. The concelebrated mass of thanksgiving in Gaelic was at 5:00 pm. One of the priests was Father Lidane, who was a student of the school and went on to do outstanding missionary work in Africa. An open air dance and concert were held on the school grounds. We presented the school with a new Irish flag since they had the pole but no flag.

Interesting to note: When Doonaha School was founded it was held in 2 thatched roof cottages and the enrollment was 90, in 1986 it was a one room school with 22 children. Emigration!

Shortly after the centenary came the “Eugene O’Curry Affair.” This Irishman was born at his father’s forge just a mile from our house. Eugene grew up in the 19th century to become one of Ireland’s most famous historians. He was the one to take on the ancient almost impossible writings of the Irish and translate them and so doing preserve the past. Much of what is known of the early times was done by Eugene O’Curry who was born in Doonaha in 1794 and died in Dublin in 1862.

A group of Irish decided it was time to do something special so the old forge was restored with patched up stone walls and a new thatched roof, and a large plaque was created and unveiled on November 7 by the president of Ireland, Dr. Patrick J. Hillary.

Liscrona became involved in this event as well. Here is how it unfolded. A talented young dancer and piper named Aggie O’Connell grew up in the Doonaha area. In time she moved to London and created a “Marching Piper Band.” It was made up of youngsters, boys and girls of Irish parents living in London. Under the iron hand of Aggie, the group became famous and the committee decided it would be wonderful to bring Aggie’s group back to Doonaha for the big dedication.

One day after mass one of the ladies approached us and asked if it would be possible to house a few of these young people. Maria asked, “How many are there?” The answer was “15, but we couldn’t ask that of you.” Maria said, “We’ll take them all, but we’ll need some help.”

What followed is one of our most cherished memories. One day we looked out our front window, saw a big bus slowly being guided by a young woman, splendid in her black slippers, green socks, plaid kilt, red jacket, black leather belt and sporan. We dropped everything to rush out and become the best

hosts in the world, just oozing with friendship. The band came out and simply stood there, obviously frightened, not knowing what to expect. Then came Aggie, a real sergeant major, of considerable girth and obviously the one in command. Aggie marched up to us, bowed slightly, and said, "We will inspect the quarters." So in we went, parading from room to room as she drew up her plan for the bivouac. Aggie had put the fear of God in these kids. Something like, "If you get out of line, you die!" In a few minutes she came out, made the bedroom assignments and off they scurried.

They were with us for three days. These were the sweetest, most lovable young people I have ever met. We had a terrible time understanding them. The blend of Irish and Cockney was difficult. In spite of the communication gap, it did not take long till we all made friends. These were city children from the streets of London. They fell in love with our fields. They kept bringing Maria bouquets of wild flowers. They would just go outside and run for the sheer joy of it. We ended up giving a birthday party for one of the boy drummers who turned 17 during their stay.

The band played, the High Mass was said in Gaelic. The march to dedicate the plaque was led by the pipes with all of us bringing up the rear.

I knew I had made the grade when, on the last night, one of the girls rushed up to me and blurted, "Sir, ave ye got a spare lice. I broke mine and I cannot dance in me bare feet." Aha! She wanted a shoe lace. I ripped one out of my shoe.

Dear Eugene O'Curry and dear Maggie and her London-Irish pipers, drummers and dancers. No, you have not lived until you have experienced 10 pipers tuning up in your living room.

The local ladies came to help with meals. It was a long party. Lisrcrona relished a new experience.

The Rescue

One summer day, we turned the house over to an Irish American family and they were having a family reunion. Two of the guests were young men from Los Angeles. They set out to take some pictures. One walked down to Glosheen beach about a quarter of a mile from our property. The other walked straight down through our front field to the edge of our cliffs above the Shannon. His purpose was to get some good shots of Lisrcrona. He apparently faced the house and then took several steps backwards, slipped and fell about 30 feet down onto the rocks. He was hurt and couldn't get up. The other man finished his picture taking on the beach and came back. Good thing that he walked down to the cliffs to look around. The 8 foot tide

was coming in and there was his friend flat on the rocks below.

A frantic call on the phone to Lynch's found Roseanne, the nurse, who happened to be there. She jumped in the car and drove down. She knew every minute counted, and it was going to be very risky to try to move the injured man. She called the Rescue Service in Shannon and in just a few minutes a big red and white helicopter came fluttering down the river. By this time the word was out and the whole village had gathered to watch. The helicopter hovered. A doctor was lowered to the scene followed by a stretcher. Just as the rising tide reached them, the doctor and two locals loaded the poor Americans aboard and the helicopter lifted him up and set the stretcher down on our field. He was checked out there and then flown to the hospital in Ennis. He had a separated shoulder, a nasty cut on the head and I think ended up feeling quite embarrassed.

Doonaha had a wonderful time. The story made the newspaper, the locals talked about it for weeks. Roseanne's quick action and the response from the Rescue Service averted what was developing into a very serious situations. If not discovered, he could have drowned.

Yes, this was still another experience for Liscrona.



Year after year we kept discovering the little things that make Americans different from the Irish. We had to learn them the hard way. I will make it easier for you and call them:

Tips for the Beginners

The Irish speak English, but it is quite different from our. In the first place, Americans are loud. The Irish are quiet. This is most obvious in an eating establishment. We Americans just project. I have no idea why they feel the need to lean toward each other and whisper. Get used to it and stop telling the whole room about Aunt Lucy's arthritis back home in Kansas City.

Beware the word "sorry." When an Irishman or woman uses the word there is no apology implied. It is more like a warning. "I'm coming through so get out of the way." This term is particularly dangerous when spoken in an Irish grocery store where the aisles are narrow. Serious injury could be imminent. I did learn how to use "sorry" in a very constructive manner. When the Irish mumble something at you that you do not get, you just say, "sorry," with a slightly quizzical expression and he know he has to say it all over again — for the deaf American.

Pronunciation offers many a challenge. For instance their “th” is pronounced as a hard “t.” One day Maria asked Michael if the pretty blossoming tree she was admiring was a Blackthorn. He replied, “Yes, it’s a ‘Blacktorn.’” She said, “Oh, a Blackthorn.” He agreed, “right, a ‘Blacktorn.’” On another day, I was watching a golf match and the announcer informed us that a certain player was out because of an injured TUM. I got it in a flash. Here are more!

“**DESPARATE**” Awful, like driving conditions between Ennis and Kilrush.

“**FIERCE**” Used to describe any temperature over 70 degrees.

“**CHOCK-A-BLOCK**’ Belly to belly, back to back — the crowd was extremely large.

“**GRAND**” Anything that is good or better than good as in the weather is grand!

“**I KNOW**” When you are talking and the Irishman is listening, “I know” simply means that he is following your line of thought. It doesn’t mean he knows. It is like the Japanese — Ah so!

As long as I mentioned the Japanese, I would call your attention to the similarity between the Japanese and the Irish. First of all, the Irish will never come right to the point. Any discussion on why you really came to see him and the decision to be made must wait for all the essential preliminaries.

Secondly, the Irishman hesitates to say “No, you’re wrong. It won’t work that way.” He will wait you out saying “I know.” He will agree with you completely for a long time and then subtly you will become aware he is saying “You’re wrong. It won’t work that way.”

Listen very carefully. In almost every instance, he is right. Sound Japanese? You bet.

“**BLOODY**” Never use the word. It is like our “F” word, and is only used by people you do not want to know. Strangely enough, I have heard our F word many times without eyebrows going up at all. It is just another adjective, spelled feck as in “a fecking good fight.”

Just remember — It is almost impossible to completely understand the Irish 100% of the time, and remember, even tiny Ireland has many distinct dialects.

Dublin Irish is easiest, because it is close to British English.

The Cork accent is one thing.

The Clare Accent is another.

Donnegal irish has touches of Scotland.

Northern Irish is easiest to recognize but very grating on the American ear. You will note they all speak very quickly to each other and they have learned to slow it down for us.

“UP MARKET” Spoken with a slightly curled lip — Any restaurant that serves a la carte. Any price that is higher than it should be — example: rates at Dromoland or Ashford Castles.

“TOO DEAR” Pretty darned expensive. Up market applies to places, dear applies to cost of things. A fine difference.

MALE — **“GOOD MAN”** similar to a slap on the back.

FEMALE — **“LOVELY”** a term of approval heard most often in a pub sing-song immediately following a patron’s rendering of her “party piece.” I have told you that the party piece is whatever is performed before the entire group. It need not be good but something has to be done. To refuse is bad form.

“CRAVE SILENCE” OR A LOUD “WOOSH” heard most often in a pub sing-song as the MC attempts to get control of the audience so a patron can perform his party piece.

“BLOW IN” A term not always complimentary, used to describe any individual or family that moved into the neighborhood after the one using the term. Especially applicable if the person or family came from a different county in Ireland. “He’s a blow in from Cork.” “He’s a blow in from Dublin.” For some unknown reason, we were never considered blow ins. I cannot explain it.

“HARSE” The Irish pronunciation of horse.

“BITCH” Only used in reference to a 4 legged female dog, never in description of a 2 legged female person.

“CRAIC” Gaelic, pronounced crack — great party and wonderful conversation and fellowship. Last night we had a craic. Usually combined with chock-a-block.



The Irish love being compressed into a small, smoky, noisy mass. And how they do smoke! “Fags” are really “dear.” No matter. It is the togetherness that counts. There is very little air conditioning in Ireland so whatever air is in a room just gets used over and over. Deoderants have never been on the list of high priority items, and a suit coat may have been in use for 30 or 40 years without ever having visited a cleaning establishment.

My Worst Nightmare

We were in America. Sue and Paul Olsen and friends were visiting Lisrcrona. Yes, after Bruce Snow’s death, Sue had remarried and happily Paul too fell in love with Ireland. They were off somewhere on a short trip. Nora was in her kitchen working, and she heard a chain saw from somewhere west of their house. When Michael came in, she told him that there was that unusual sound from down near Lisrcrona. Michael hurried down to see what was going on. There he discovered one of our neighbors with his car, a trailer, and chain saw loading up lengths of wood. He had cut down 2 or 3 of our live big trees in the middle of our woods. Knowing Michael and the way we both felt about our trees, I would guess he went completely off the wall. Among lots of other things he said, “You know how Mal feels about these trees. You know you were allowed the dead wood. Why did you cut live trees?” The answer was, “It burns better.”

Michael ordered this individual out of the woods and off our property. This was a neighbor we had known for years and part of a family Michael had known all of his life.

Our trees had now driven an angry wedge into the community. Michael and Nora were so crushed they were unable to pick up the phone and report the incident to me. Sue and Paul, being on the property, took pictures. They were told the whole story, especially about my standing orders in regard to tree cutting. When they came home even they were reluctant to call us. They knew how I would take it. They had been with me on too many trips back through the trees, my own personal beautiful trees, not to know how I would react.

Finally, they came to see us and the story came out. I think I experienced the sensation of rape and how awful it must be for the victim. I felt truly raped, and worst of all by a neighbor, a man who had been in our house many times, a man who knew exactly how I felt about the Lisrcrona property and those trees.

I do not believe I have ever been as angry. I was ugly. I made calls, I screamed, not at Michael or Nora, they felt as bad or worse because they felt as though they had let us down. I never received an apology. All I got back was, "After all, it is only a couple of trees." That man did not see any difference between live trees or dead trees.

I was tormented by this affair and I felt a crisis was approaching. After all these years, I again felt like an outsider. I never felt "at home" at Liscrona after that event.

I recall one day when Michael and I were discussing the tree problem. I said, "Michael, why did he do it?" After a few moments of deep thought he said, "Mal, the man is a farmer. He sees value in his milk cows, his hay and the turf that he cuts. The only reason for a tree is that when cut, it helps heat his home, looks nice and preserves his turf supply. You just happen to have the only trees in the area."

This was very hard on Michael. He represented us at Liscrona. He had to order one of his neighbors off our property so Michael was caught in the middle. I have no way of knowing, but I doubt that our neighbors had much sympathy for our trees.



Looking back, I know now that I was experiencing growing periods of discomfort about many conditions in Ireland.

Molly Hagan, Maria's niece⁴. Can you see my fingerprints on every tree? A spring picture with carpet of bluebells.

I began to become uncomfortable with the Irish political process, the true welfare state mentality. I would see men lined up each week for the dole. These were men who, as far as I could see, never intended to work again. I could see the cradle to the grave protection promised by the different political parties. I could see countless young, brilliant Irish men and women, leaving Ireland, using all that great free education they got at home working all over the world now.

The excuse given was that there just were not jobs in Ireland. To me, it seemed they were leaving because they couldn't make a decent living. With taxes starting at about 50%, a small work force was being asked to support the whole population with free everything. It didn't make sense. Then every day I would read in the paper about "Industrial Disputes." Just when a business seemed to be doing well and making a profit, there would be a

⁴a missing photo?

strike over some frivolous grievance. The Irish are very stubborn people and time after time I saw logical negotiations being ignored over “principle.”

Then the EEC was formed, the European Economic Commission and most countries joined. Ireland presented itself as the country cousin, that poor tiny island off the coast of the mainland, reaching out with both hands for all the money and grants the rich European members would give them.

I told myself many times to stop acting like a typical American free enterprise, sink or swim, fish or cut bait capitalist. I tried to convince myself I should live in Ireland for my own pleasure, enjoy the sea and the sky and the fresh air of this lovely place, and stay far away from all the things that were bothering me. The Irish seemed to be happy with what they had. Who was I to criticize? After all, it was their country and I resent negative comments about the U.S.A.

Finally, one day as I was sitting on the rocks looking out over the Shannon, I saw the reason I was grinding my teeth. “Malcolm, you are an American. You enjoy this place and its people, but you can never be or think Irish. It is time again to look to the future.”

Maria and I talked it over for the thousandth time and I placed a phone call to Jackson, Stops and McCabe Real Estate in Dublin, spoke to a Marcus Magnier and invited him to visit us.

He came with his camera and tape measure.

Maria and I realized that the one thing we could not slow was the passage of time. We were no longer even middle aged. We were getting old. None of our children had the time or the interest in taking over the continuous expense and responsibility of caring for Lisrcrona. We were determined not to let this Grey Lady start to deteriorate.

All of us, our whole family, experienced heavy sadness. This was like selling one of our children. We knew the clock was ticking and we could not change it.

It was not the tree problem at all that caused our decision. It probably was the trigger that forced me to face reality. We felt that a five year plan would give us time to find the right people to love Lisrcrona.

The Night I Jumped Out of My Chair!

Our visit to Lisrcrona in the summer of 1994 featured an event that had a profound effect on me.

I was reading a book and keeping an eye on TV. Maria had retired but I was keeping track of “EuroVision ‘94.” This is an annual competition that is beamed to all of Europe. Each country, during the course of the year, selects

its top vocalist or group along with an original piece of music. Judges are selected from different countries and performances are rated on a numerical scale. It is a huge 3 hour event, and it is taken very seriously. The competition is held in the country that won the previous year. In '94 Dublin had the honor because they had won in '93.

I have watched EuroVision for a number of years, sometimes impressed with the talent and more often bored with the attempts to duplicate American rock and roll, not my favorite form of entertainment. On this evening, toward the end of the competition, the host country presented a seven minute combination of Irish dance, music and singing. It was called *Riverdance*. I sat there absolutely glued to the television set. At the conclusion of the seven minute performance, the audience of about 4,000 rose, shouting and applauding. Something rare had just happened to those in attendance and watching on television. Over the next few days, everybody talked about *Riverdance*, the bolt of lightning that Ireland had loosed on Europe.

It was obvious what would happen next. The seven minutes were expanded into a full two hour performance with an international cast of 180. *Riverdance*, the show, played in London for a year and then was brought to New York's Radio City Music Hall. We saw it on the best of day, St. Patrick's Day, March 17, 1996. It was electrifying, and again, the capacity audience cheered, stomped, whistled and shouted.

There is a medieval line that goes like this, "I am of Ireland! Come dance with me in Ireland."

By now, most of you have seen the show on stage, on television, or you have purchased the video, so I do not feel I should go into greater detail. Two theatrical events top the list for me, the original cast performance of "My Fair Lady" in New York and *Riverdance*, the show. That 7 minute event in 1994 excites me every time I think about it. I also believe *Riverdance* will have a profound impact on Irish music and dancing in the future. Wait and see.

P.S. Two days after I wrote the above words, the 1997 Grammy Award for best music show of the year was awarded to *Riverdance*. For the first time, I saw Bill Whelan who wrote the score. He accepted the award for the 180 dancers and musicians currently touring the world with two companies.

Part III
Liscrona Complete

Chapter 11

The Best Years — 1990–1995

As we entered our five year plan, these were in many ways, the best years. We had the time to stay for longer periods. With Michael and Nora in complete charge, we were one big happy family. We took them on trips around the country. They took us to special “Pub Nights” that we could not have known about. Michael and I spent hours in the gardens with him teaching me all the tricks of the trade. Nora kept the inside of Lisrona so beautifully, and she and Maria had much to talk about. We all knew that the end was coming. We did not know when, but we squeezed each day, each month, each full moon, each rainbow, each season.



Figure 11.1: Maria and I.

One year, we gave one of our fields to a local who had a mare in foal and needed a place to keep her. Each day we would visit the expectant mother and take her apples. She would come to us and we would brush and comb

her.

I continued working in the woods. Often, Michael would come to visit and we would work together. Then we would go inside and have scones and coffee with Maria and Nora. Our supply of scones and bread “runneth over,” along with Nora’s home made strawberry jam and apple tarts.

When we were not in residence, we gave Liscrona to more and more Americans seeking an Irish experience. We stressed the fact that Michael and Nora were family, and under no conditions were to be treated as employees. Without exception, glowing reports kept coming back to us.

We were not in a position to stand back and say, “Liscrona, what more can we do to you?” Well, Michael planted trees in the woods to take over the empty space created by the chain saw. One year, we went to Kilrush to a furniture store and bought all new beds to replace the ones that were getting old. We certainly made his day. Of course that brought on all new sheets and pillows and electric blankets. We bought an electric dishwasher and Michael hooked it up.

There was one room that had remained a kind of “catch all.” It was the Apple Room of earlier times. We redecorated with new furniture, and after Michael painted the room, we were all pleased with the result. All along, Michael’s feel for color was exactly like ours. He never sought our advice. We never gave him specific instructions. He just went ahead and did what he knew was best.

By the end of our visit in 1994, we were able to see Liscrona as a finished product. In the beginning, we determined to keep it an Irish house, to preserve and protect it. We had restored Liscrona inside and out. We were content.

The Waiting

We hoped that it would be an Irish family would buy, or second best, an Irish/American family, but all along we realized that Liscrona was not an easy property to move. Its total isolation that we loved was a negative. Actually, Liscrona always was one big white elephant.

We had watched Galvin’s daughter, Geraldine, grow from a tiny girl to a very attractive woman working in Dublin. There was a handsome young man from Kilkee named Neil Ryan and he was the significant boy friend. We had always told Michael and Nora that come hell or high water we would be there for the wedding — whenever.

In the spring of ‘95 the word filtered back to us that a German named Tobias Eichmuller had visited Liscrona. Michael took him through on the

tour and reported that Herr Eichmuller had said that Liscrona was the nicest house he had seen in Ireland. He said he would be back with his architect and his wife. We did not pay much attention.

The details are not that exciting. We had arranged for the Limerick law firm of Holmes, O'Malley and Sexton to represent us. They turned out to be critically important to the negotiations. It is not easy when Irish, Americans and Germans all get into the act. Gordon Holmes and his wife Hillary became our good friends. The firm took on all our problems and helped us to reach a final agreement.

Maria and I returned to Ireland in June and July of '95 to complete the property inventory and to sort out the personal items we wanted to keep. Pat returned to be with us. After all, she was the first to see Liscrona and she wanted to be with us for moral support at the very end. We packed foot lockers and boxes and took them to the post office in Kilkee.

On the last day, we realized that Michael and Nora and John would be down early the next morning to see us off. None of us had the strength to go through with the final wake. That final evening, Pat, Maria and I shared a bottle of Dom Perignon and toasted our 24 years in Ireland. We rose early. I had already packed the car and turned over the keys. I closed the door. We drove away. I never looked back. The cycle was complete. I said,

"Thanks, Ireland — for everything!"



The wedding of Geraldine and Neil was set for June 29. Many years before we had told the Galvins that whenever the wedding happened we would give them Liscrona for the wedding party. Geraldine and Neil waited one year too long. I set the wheels in motion to get us to Ireland. I had a difficult time renting a car the preceding year, 1995, because I had reached 75. The rental agency and I had gone round and round and I ended up paying a stiff penalty. My valid American license and insurance meant nothing to them. It was purely my age.

This time around, I hit an absolute stone wall. The Irish auto insurance companies had made the decision that they would simply not insure anyone over age 75, and the thought of driving an uninsured car in Ireland is out of the question. I even wrote a letter of complaint to Matt McNulty, the head of the Irish Tourist Board in Dublin. He wrote back agreeing with everything I said but — he had to abide by the decision of the insurance powers. So I called off our trip.

In a few days Geraldine discovered that there was a firm in America named Auto Europe that had become aware of the driving problem for older

drivers. They saw that there was money to be made and decided to insure our age group between 75 & 79 provided we drove a car with automatic transmission, not stick. I called our travel agent, Pat Walsh and sent him in pursuit of Auto Europe. Just like that, we had a car. I have been driving cars with manual transmissions for most of my life, but I had no problem going along with their policy. We restarted all the travel plans and departed for Ireland with an auto rental contract that was almost signed in blood.

We arrived at Shannon as we have so many times. I marched up to the Auto Europe desk in the central lobby and produced my contract. With a lovely smile the young lady set about the paper work. Everything was grand, simply grand, until she made a call and turned to me.

“Mr. Bellairs, you have a problem.” My blood pressure immediately reached 190 and I said, “Yes, and just what is my problem?” “Well sir, the car we have reserved for you, an automatic mid-size Toyota, has not been returned yet. In fact, there are three people already here who are waiting for a car. The only thing I can suggest is that you go down the hall to the Burren Bar, have breakfast and come back later. We really are sorry. If you could only drive stick . . .”

“What did you say?”

“I said, if you handle stick we’d have no problem. We have several.”

I exhaled and assured her I could drive stick.

Then she added, “That’s wonderful. Now this is a Ford. It is a smaller car. I could save you about 40 pounds. Would that be all right?”

“Yes, by all means. Let’s save the 40 pounds.”

She set about redoing all her paperwork.

I said, “Gee, sorry you have to do this all over.”

With another happy smile she replied, “Oh we just love you for being willing to drive a stick shift car!” Maria and I laughed all the way to Ennis.

We did some touring around the country, ended up in our familiar chairs at Nora’s table with Michael supplying the Irish whiskey and Nora following with scones, jam, soda bread and her apple tart.

I will not attempt to conceal the fact that Maria and I had a hard time. We felt disconnected, the old “ship without a rudder” sensation. We stayed with Mary McGrath at Green Acres. She and husband Tom are great friends. Our favorite “bridge people” came to visit.

We drove down the Glosheen road past our gate but did not enter. We heard about the new owner’s plans for Lisrona and wished we hadn’t.

The day of the wedding was clear and bright, the result of Nora’s prayers, I know. The bridal party was elegant. Michael and Nora were radiant. Neil’s family consists of 10 handsome brothers and sisters, all in attendance. As I sat in that church, I saw the altar where our Kim and Neal were married

just 20 years earlier and I saw so many of the same people who had taken part in our celebration. I had a lump in my throat the size of a grapefruit. I was asked to do one of the readings and I nearly did not get through it. I felt like a sentimental, out of control, old fool. Looking out at those faces, probably for the last time, was pure agony.

The reception was held in a perfect spot, Castle Oaks, about 5 miles east of Limerick. The evening was without a flaw and the party went on and on.

The next morning we slipped away, spent several days in Kinsale at a B&B called the Moorings, with a view over the bay. Go there someday. You will love it.

On our last day we checked in at the Limerick Inn, and asked our dear old Limerick friends to join us for a final dinner. We invited them to come see us in America and I think they might just do it.



Afterward on the plane, the door closed with a thump. The runway blurred, the nose pointed west, and we slid into the clouds. Slan! It is Gaelic for good-bye. I do not believe we can ever go back. Another door was closed with all our love. In our 24 years we made a difference.

A house that was nearly derelict in 1975, was alive and well in 1995.

I have admitted that my party piece had to be something other than a song, so I memorized William Butler Yeats' "Lake Isle of Innisfree." The Irish of course knew it too, but never seemed to tire of my rendition:

I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,
 And a small cabin built there of clay and wattles made; nine bean
 rows will I have there,
 a hive for the honey bee, and live alone in the bee-loud glade.
 And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes dropping
 slow,
 Dropping from the veils of morning, to where the cricket sings;
 There midnight's all a glimmer, and noon a purple glow,
 And evening full of the linnet's wings.
 I shall arise and go now, for always night and day
 I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore;
 While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements gray,
 I hear it in the deep hearts core.

In our final visit to Ireland, I added the following:

I will arise and go now, and go to County Clare.
And a great house I'll restore there, of stone and slate it is made.
Roses, ivy and woods, out to the east,
And Maria and I will live there, in Lisrona by the sea.
I will arise and go now for always night and day,
I hear Shannon waves breaking with low sounds by our shore.
While we live in America 4,000 miles away, we miss you in our
 deep heart's core.

Thanks Ireland!

Chapter 12

What's Ahead for Ireland

I worry about it. I remember talking at length with Roseanne Harvey after she took over Lynch's Pub and built a new, sterile O'Curry Arms that had no Irish personality at all. I talked to her about merchandising — music, dancing — the Irish touch. She never heard me. I watched as the O'Curry Arms literally dried up and closed. Our neighbors too, yearned for Lynch's Pub.

We stood on the sidelines for years as the Irish have exhibited embarrassment over their "Irishness." They did not seem comfortable with their traditional Irish music. They appeared to be unaware of the beauty of Ireland. They just seemed to feel inadequate. How many times had they said to us, "And why is it you come to Ireland?"

We watched the development of the Common Market with all the talk of a single European currency, a breaking down of national boundaries and a policy of giving money to Ireland by the richer Common Market members. This created a situation that placed Ireland on a dole similar to that which Ireland gives its own citizens.

It appears that the wonderfully rich culture of Ireland is in danger of being pushed aside in favor of "being modern like the big important nations." In an attempt to be more like all the rest of the world, I feel that Ireland could lose its most precious asset — itself.

For years, I have watched Americans and Europeans come to Ireland to visit, to buy property and to try to fit into "Irishness." The natives of the country cannot seem to understand why we come, looking for something that is not glossy, plastic or polluted. Finally, including an article¹ that speaks for itself. The Irish Tourist Board, by their own words, is out to change "our international holiday image." Read this in its entirety and perhaps you

¹Attachment missing.

will join me in saying, “Please be careful Ireland. What you have is a rare and fragile beauty. You are an endangered species on this planet. Please be careful.”

Taps

After we returned to America and before the new owners took over, we had given Lisrcrona to Sue and Paul Olsen and their friends so they could enjoy a final visit to Lisrcrona. After all, Sue had been coming to visit us since the early 70's and she was going through the same grief we felt.

She reported to us that on the last night of their visit they invited Michael and Nora and John Lynch down for dinner. Then they all sat around and “remembered.” It went on until quite late. Then they all got up and went outside to the flag pole where the American flag was flying. They gently lowered the flag, folded it properly and brought it back with them. glad Maria and I were not there on that occasion . neither one of us could have gotten through it.

The New Owners

I owe you a little on the family that took over Lisrcrona, the people who saw in this spot what we loved. We have not met this German family in person, as yet. Tobias and Petra Eichmueller. They have three daughters. Tobias is a lawyer, about 50 and that makes him the same age I was when we bought Lisrcrona. We never met personally. All negotiations were conducted by our lawyers. I have several of the letters we subsequently received from Tobias. He sounds like a fine gentleman and I will include several of his communications² so you can read for yourself. Sure he won't mind.

We left him the complete Lisrcrona House history and sincerely wish for his family the joy we had experienced since 1971. Sometime in the future, when my own wounds have healed, we hope to meet them — but not at Lisrcrona. I want to remember the Old Grey Lady as we left her that morning in ’95.

²Missing attachemnts

Afterthoughts

Epilogue

Mal never returned to Lisrona, of course. His health declined, air travel became difficult, then impossible. He never returned to Ireland. He died in 2010 at the age of 90.



Figure 1: Mal's gravestone in Illinois

The family that had purchased Lisrona House broke up and abandoned the Old Grey Beauty. She was derelict for some time, pipes broken, water on the floor, mold on the walls. It would simply have killed him to have seen her suffer once again. In 2012 we heard that she had been purchased by an Irish family and she may be rescued again.

A note from Keith

Mal's original text would have been a handwritten manuscript. He credited a high school teacher who encouraged him to drop his typing class for his career in radio and television. (He took a drama class to replace typing.) I don't know who transcribed the work for him, but it seems true to his words. As Dad said at the beginning, he was a talker. You can hear him in the printed text; there is a poetry here that results from Dad's voice behind every word as he wrote it.

In places, the text indicates that Dad had specific photos, maps and sketches that should go with the text. I am afraid those may be in a box somewhere with a stack of yellow pads. So we have included family photos that illustrate the story. Mal loved to carry a camera and some of the photos are his.

We have not fact-checked this memoir. There are certainly errors. But it is the world as Mal remembered it. It is not all of his life, but clearly the important part.

In some places, I have added chapter headings. But usually Dad had put a fragment of text to indicate the change of topic.

The family will update the book from time to time with photos of our own. The most recent update was compiled on May 13, 2013. If you have comments or updates please feel free to send them along to: keith@bellairs.org.