

# Tackies, Rushers & Peggy's Leg



*A collection of  
childhood stories by  
Limerick City Adult Learners*



## INTRODUCTION

This booklet came about following a successful story telling competition run by the LCEN (Limerick Community Education Network ) during the Aontas Adult Learner Festival in February 2011. To enter the competition adult learners attending courses in community centres across Limerick City were invited to submit original short stories with tales of childhood or to retell a favourite childhood story with originality. Organisers of the competition were very impressed with the standard of the entries and felt that others should have the privillage of reading these evocative tales. This is how the idea of the storytelling booklet was born and it has offered the LCEN the opportunity to showcase some of the talents of adult learners involved in community education across Limerick City.

We would like to congratulate all the adult learners who have contributed to this booklet and hope that others out there who have considered returning to education will be inspired by the writers in this booklet.

**The LCEN would like to thank all who were involved in bringing this booklet together. Tutors, staff and volunteers from the following communities and projects around Limerick city supported and encouraged local adult learners to participate in this initiative:**

### **Southill**

- LEDP
- St. Enda's
- Moyross
- Headway
- Queen of Peace
- St. Mary's
- St. Munchin's



## FOREWARD

I often wonder how the world works! What brings something our way on a particular day at a particular time? Why do we decide to go with it, give it a try, throw a bit of 'is feidir linn' at it?

It is what I did when, at a community education computer course, we were asked would we like to participate in a creative writing competition. Sure why not, I said to myself, and I gave it a go staying true to that wise quote of 'stick to what you know'. I was surprised and delighted to win in the childhood memories category. This win, then lead me, to join the Queen of Peace Creative writing group.

The joy of having found such an enthusiastic fireball of energy that is Sheila Quealey our tutor and the inspiring and creative bunch of characters in the class has awoken in me the desire to scribble furiously and see what comes of it all.

We hope you enjoy our entries and perhaps we can conjure up some old memories, inspire with new ideas and maybe, as a result, it will bring us closer to finding out how the world really works.

**Noelene Nash**

*There was a young lady called Peg  
Who was fond of showing some leg  
Her rushers so horrid  
On lean legs so florid  
For tackies instead she did beg!*

**Clare Dollard**



## CONTENTS

THE POT OF JELLY.....	5
CHRISTMAS MORNING.....	6
“DEMOLITION DAY”.....	7
MISSING.....	7
THE FRIGHTENED ALTAR BOY.....	8
THE RING.....	10
MEMORIES OF CHILDHOOD.....	11
THE ROOM.....	12
JAMPOT.....	13
BONFIRE NIGHT.....	14
A READING OF THE THREE BILLY GOATS GRUFF.....	15
THE NON-PINK PRINCESS.....	16
EILEEN.....	18
THE GOOD OLD DAYS OF BALLINAGUARD.....	19
FINDING MY VOICE.....	20
MY FRIEND ERNEST.....	22
FIRST DAY AT SCHOOL.....	23
CHILDHOOD MEMORIES.....	24
THE BLUE SERGE SUIT.....	25
MY NEW OLD BIKE.....	26
THE LOOKING GLASS.....	27
CHILDHOOD MEMORY.....	28
REMEMBRANCE.....	29
TO REMEMBER CHILDHOOD IS TO FEAST UPON THE SENSES.....	30



## THE POT OF JELLY

THINKING back to my childhood, my first clear memory is when I was about three and a half years old; my mother dressing me, combing my long hair and putting on a big blue ribbon in the style of those times. She was getting me ready for a birthday party. Our big house was rented out in one and two roomed flats, better known as a tenement house.

As she gently combed my hair, she told me how to behave, to say “yes please and ‘no thank you’”. She said to be polite and don’t grab. You can eat everything from the table except the jelly. The tone of her voice told me she was serious and was almost pleading. The warning about the jelly was the last thing I heard as I made my way down the dim stairs.

John, who was celebrating his second birthday, lived with his fireman Dad, his Mam and his year old brother. The lino covered room they lived in was medium sized. It had an iron double bed and an open fireplace that was used for cooking as well as heat, a press, table and chairs and a three legged washstand and basin. John’s Mam, known to the grown ups as Dolly, was a tall pretty woman, whose thick curly brown hair was held back with a shoe lace. She brought us in - there were five or six other children - and made a fuss and had us sing Happy Birthday to John and started to cater to us. Every thing was nicely arranged on the table. The thin slices of bread and jam looked very inviting, as did the biscuits, sweets and a huge glass jug of lemonade.

In the centre was this china container holding about three pints of set red jelly and beside it a pot of cold custard. It was so hard to say “no thank you” as I longingly looked at the jelly. I wondered what she thought as she must have seen the look on my face. And I wasn’t just being good. I could remember the tone of my mother’s voice, and knew she had her reasons.

We had a great time at that party, and many years later, remembering about the different families who had lived and left our house in Henry St, I found out that the white container with the blue flower pattern was used every day, except Sundays, as a chamber pot!

**Mabel Mescall**



## CHRISTMAS MORNING

WHEN I was very young, about eleven or twelve years old, life was very hard for most people especially at Christmas. I come from a large family of ten children, but at the time of this story there were eight of us and my mother was expecting her ninth. A couple of weeks before Christmas I went with my mother to our local phone box. Nobody had phones in their houses except the nurse at the top of the road. We used to go every Friday night to talk to my grandmother in England and my 'posh' aunt. I looked forward to this each week. It was like a treat to me. On this particular night I remember it was very cold and wet and I buttoned my coat up as far as it would go and pulled my hat down over my ears. Finally it was our turn to use the phone, as we had to stand in a queue and wait our turn. On this night my grandmother promised to send over all our clothes and presents from England so my mother wouldn't have to worry about anything at all except the dinner. It was great; my mother was so delighted that she couldn't stop smiling and we almost ran all the way home from the phone box.

The weeks flew by and there was no sign of the parcels. We, the children, didn't really know what was happening at the time. We were just excited about Christmas and the younger ones were waiting for Santa. It was still early enough on Christmas Eve morning so my father went to the G.P.O. and asked the postmaster if there was a parcel there for us but the postmaster said that he had looked and didn't see anything there with our name on it. He came home and was so disappointed looking my mother knew he had no luck. There was nothing more they could do. Mam washed the best clothes that we had and was drying them around the fire. Dad went up the hill to Georgies shop and bought, on tick, colouring books, jigsaws, cutting out dolls and guns with caps in them. That was about all they could afford and they hoped for the best.

That night about seven o'clock there was a knock on the door. It was the postmaster with two big parcels in his hands. He told my mother that he couldn't get us out of his mind all day and decided to go back to the depot to have one more look. He searched every corner of the depot and down at the back he found them. My mother was so grateful to him that she said she would never forget him as long as she lived. The following morning Christmas was here and there was great excitement in the house. Everybody was up by five in the morning and ran down the stairs like a herd of elephants. There were brilliant toys for each and every one of us and the best shoes, coats, hats and dresses we had ever seen, all style going off up the road to mass. We were all delighted with ourselves and my mother and father were even more delighted. We had a great Christmas but it nearly didn't happen for us. All thanks to the postmaster, he saved the day.

**Mary Cashman**



## “DEMOLITION DAY”

THE old tenement lies empty, no earthly sound within, no children’s laughter fills the air.

All running feet are still. These walls hold many stories, If only they could tell,  
The joys and tears that filled the lives, Of those who dwelled within.

The house is old and battered now, Its task it has fulfilled,  
Just silently waiting for demolition to begin.

**Mary Cunningham**

## MISSING (a true story)

SUMMER 1957 was a year like all previous summers; the temperature soared almost to boiling point. Weeks would pass without a drop of rain thus scorching almost everything growing in the soil. Rosaline was my best friend. We were both six years old. Every day we played together. We would then sit under the hedge that surrounded our front garden. This would help us to cool down, as it had plenty of shade from the sun. The conversation would always be based on how hot and thirsty we were. Today was different, the only thing on our minds was the new ice pop advertised on every bill board and shop window. Its unusual shape and vivid red colour was the main conversation of every child. We formed a plan! Aunty Teresa lived one mile from our house. We decided to visit her. She didn’t have any children so it was a guarantee that she always gave a penny to every child who came to visit her. This would cover the cost, and our dream would come true. Not telling anybody our plan, we slipped away quietly hand in hand. We reached her house. She was thrilled to see us, but shocked! She questioned why we were alone without our parents. Not having a phone those days she didn’t have any way of contacting our Mam and Dad. After our long walk she told us to sit and rest for a while, and then brought us a tray with lemonade and chocolate biscuits. Our eyes opened wide as she reached for her purse taking out and giving us one penny each, explaining to us that our parents would be traumatised with worry searching for us. “Come, I will take ye home”, she said with a smile of concern. Passing the shop on our way we asked could we spend our penny. “Of course” she replied. The plan worked out perfectly. We approached home, our lips covered in red dye, as we licked our ice pops unaware of the worry we had caused. We were hugged and kissed by our crying parents. They explained at the same time, the trauma we had caused and the possible danger we could have encountered. They thanked everyone that had helped out in the search for us. A lesson we learned from dearly.

**Creena Hickey**



## THE FRIGHTENED ALTAR BOY

I was born and reared in Limerick in the forties and fifties in St. John's Parish, under the shadow of the tall tower and I served as an Altar Boy in the cathedral.

One winter Sunday night, my mother got me ready and I set off to serve Benediction. I was only eight years old and I was looking forward to getting in to the cathedral out of the cold. When I got to the church I watched the big boys playing football outside under the new church lights for a while but I got so cold that I had to leave them. Then I went around to the dark back of the church where the high trees were blowing. I got to the sacristy door and pushed it open. The big heavy door made a creaking noise as it opened before me into the hall. I had to find the light switch and turn on the lights. When I went from the hall to the sacristy the lights went off and a big dark figure came in off the brightly lit altar. I dropped my bag of vestments and, screaming at the top of my voice, I ran out of the church to where the big boys were playing football. They asked me what happened and they went into the church to get two of the men at Benediction. They said they would go over the priest's house for Fr. Casey – later to become well-known as Bishop Casey - as he was the only man for getting rid of ghosts in the parish. Unfortunately, Fr. Casey was out.

I was too afraid to go back in the church so the big boys brought me home to my mother. The Benediction went ahead with one of the bigger boys serving instead of me.

The next Monday, my vestments were brought to school by the Parish Priest who came in to see how I was. I told him the full story and that I was not going around the back of the church in the dark again on my own. So, he said that was alright and I could come in the front door and walk up the aisle of the church across the altar in future. I was happy enough with this as I wanted to continue my work in the church as an altar boy.

The event was the talk of the parish for a couple of weeks and I became a bit of a celebrity at the age of eight.

Looking back on the event, as an adult, I began to understand how my frightening experience might have come about. I believe that the whole



thing arose from a new two-way light switch which had just been installed in the church so that the sacristy light could be turned on and off from inside and outside the room. I figure that the Parish Clerk, who was always telling us ghost stories, came in off the altar and turned off the lights after I turned them on.

But, as a young child, I truly believed that I had seen a ghost on that dark cold night.

**Eugene Heffernan**



## THE RING

IT was all her fault. Just because she was a year and a bit older than me she thought she could be my boss. She was. “If you swallow that you will be as great as God”, she said. He sounded like a great man altogether. So I swallowed. Pandemonium reigned supreme while I was busy choking. My Mother raced in from the hallway screaming to God while thumping my back good and hard. The grin on my sister’s face made me believe that she really wanted me dead. Nobody told HER to swallow the barm brack ring. God wasn’t helping as my mother pounded on me like a drummer in the throes of musical passion.

“Run down to the phone box and dial 999 for an ambulance” she shrieked at my older brother. The culprit sat awash with tears amidst the debris of our Halloween party. The pointy nose and orange hat looked rather silly on her now that she was almost a murderer. NEE-NAW, NEE-NAW, the ambulance went as it landed at our gate. Big burly uniforms and a long slim stretcher advanced up our hallway. Shovels of hands pressed on my chest while a plastic mask was placed over my face.

“Are you awake?” said the nurse, stating the obvious as I looked straight at her.

“Your Mam left these for you” she said. “She’ll be back later”.

Out of the Bescos plastic bag came the biggest packet of Kimberly biscuits I had ever seen. There must be at least 24 altogether, I thought as the nurse took them away again. I waited a week, no sign of the biscuits. The nurses waited a week, no sign of the ring. The non emergence of the ring in its natural way caused great consternation. Numerous potions later it was agreed that I’d have an operation.

“Tomorrow”, I howled. “You are going to cut me open tomorrow”. God heard me that night because at sunrise the ring made its grand entrance. It was feted like a new born baby. Maybe I should have given it a name. Thrilled to be home, I was treated like lady of the manor - for one day only. Every so often in the weeks ahead I would produce the stained ring covered in cotton wool from its neat blue box.

My guilty sister would stand to attention. Should I complain to the hospital, I wondered, that some thieving nurses stole my Kimberly biscuits?

Maybe not. Some other day I might need their help.

**Claire Dollard**



## MEMORIES OF CHILDHOOD

I had lovely times when I was young playing with my friends, playing house, having a shop with broken glass for money. My mum would bring orange juice and water over for us to have tea. Our doll's pram and our dolls were our babies. My mum and other mothers would knit in the garden watching us all playing. My brother, Michael would be my best friend. I was an only girl so he looked out for me. I was a tomboy, up trees and going in the middle of tyres. He would roll me down the hill. I would not stop until I hit a wall. I loved it. We would swing off trees with a rope until the rope broke. That was the end of that. We did not tell my mum. At night we were put to bed at 7 o'clock but would not go to sleep until 9 o'clock. We would sing songs, the girl next door, her name was Irene so we would sing 'Good Night Irene' and they would sing 'Patsy Fagan' to me. It was great fun, our parents were very happy for us.

On Christmas morning we would have a great time playing with the toys Santa brought us; cowboy suits and guns for my three brothers and dolls and piano for me. We would get up at 7 o'clock in the morning and go out on the road to meet my friends to see what Santa brought them. Then my mother would call us in to go to Mass and then have breakfast. Out we'd go again playing for the day, then bed at 7 o'clock singing again. My mother's friends would call to visit her while I would still be singing upstairs. My mum would say "do you hear Maria Callas up there" and they would laugh. We got up early in the morning to walk to St. John's school. It was a nice school and my Nan lived down the road so we went down to her for our dinner. Sometimes we would stay with her. They were very happy times. We loved her. On a cold day she would bring cocoa to the school to make sure we were warm, and fresh bread with butter. There was nothing like it to this day. I loved my Nan. She came to my house until she died aged 86 as my mum died when I was 18. My brother, Michael, loved taking out my doll's eyes to see how they worked. I would not tell my dad as he would get cross with my brother and put him to bed. We had a dog name Tipp, he would bite anyone who put their hands down to him but I would dress him up in my young brother's clothes and put him in my pram. The priest called one night to see my mum. He saw the pram and thought it was a baby but it was Tipp. He put his hand in and, guess what, the dog bit him. He did not call again for his dues. We laughed and were put to bed again. I still love dogs.

Thanks Mum and Dad for a lovely life.

**Patricia Weight**



## THE ROOM

It came back to me so clearly  
From the depths of my mind  
A warm memoried haven  
The coal fires, chairs beside  
Leaving them empty to keep  
My recollections happy.

The curtains drawn, the breeze outside  
Shaking the old window frame  
Lino shines from my skating  
Drapes reaching to the floor  
Music from the record player  
Beating in my thoughts

My sister, that I never met  
Yet know so well  
Smiles down on me  
From a painted picture  
I hear my brother's footsteps  
Walking, dancing above.

A faint smell comes upward  
Lavender wax from the floor,  
Kapok filled cushions  
I feel their lumpy support  
Gives me a sense of welcome  
Lets me visit, and renews my soul

**Mabel Mescall**



## JAMPOT

HYPER was the only word to describe her. Miss tore backwards and forwards across the room mouthing pleasantries to Daddy God and Mammy Mary. We pupils sat there astonished at this behaviour. She taught us all subjects and, whether it was reading writing or arithmetic, she still managed to invoke God and Mary. Sometimes she even called on the intercession of her Guardian Angel. Winter, spring, whatever the season, she always dressed the same. Attired in a long, slim, flowery summer dress with short sleeves she never wore tights or socks. Her brown hard shoes clipped and clopped across the room as she raced from right to left.

If you were her star pupil that day she would reward you with a quarter of a curranty bun. They were meant to be handed out whole with a carton of milk to the really poor students. AWW-VIOLINS PLEASE! She could have done with eating some of them herself 'cause if she turned sideways she'd disappear.

Myself and my pal Catherine were in charge of the library, if you could call it that. It was just a press with a few books hanging off hooks and it was at the back of the classroom. It was an honour to be chosen for such a prestigious position. It also meant that you got to move to the back of the room away from her prying front row eyes. A sneaky kick under the chair would rock the books and they'd all fall off their perch. Naturally we'd have to get up and re-arrange them. We went too far this time though. Once was ok, twice forgivable but three times. Screeching to all the saints in Heaven - there are a lot of them- she raced down to us, disgusted that her prize protégés could be so bold. Then she threw us out into the corridor.

The laugh was soon wiped off our faces. The Reverend Mother was on the prowl. She sauntered towards us, wooden spoon in hand. Any thoughts I had of being a nun when I grew up evaporated there and then. "And what have we here?" came from her lips with no lipstick. We called her "Jam pot" as she spent most of the day teaching cookery but alas not today. "But, But, But" spluttered Catherine as I just extended my hand and took my punishment. I didn't even cry. Niagara Falls wouldn't have gotten a look in with all her tears. Then she returned us to our classroom and to our front row seats. Miss almost genuflected in her presence. She then included St. Jude in her out loud prayers for our sinful souls. Two months later we were again promoted to librarians extraordinaire.

I stuck a compass in Catherine's bum and in retribution she poked me with a set square. Please Daddy God and Mammy Mary let the Reverend Mother be busy eating jam or marmalade or...

**Claire Dollard**



## BONFIRE NIGHT

THERE is a car park there now in the field where, once as children, we played “Follow the Leader” and where the bonfire was lit and enjoyed every May eve. Bonfires were lit throughout the countryside and cities to mark the beginning of summer. My friends and I would be out collecting firewood for weeks before the big event. We would knock at our neighbour’s doors asking for firewood. We would be told “come back later, I have to see what I have”

My friend, Brid’s parents had a large garden. Every year they gave permission for the firewood to be left there until the bonfire. Every day on our way to school, we took great pride in our collection of firewood as it was getting bigger by the day. A couple of days before the bonfire night my sisters and friends went house to house asking for a “penny for the bonfire”, so we could have a party.

We collected enough pennies to be able to buy six large bottles of Shannon minerals, a couple of bags of penny sweets, peggy’s leg and cleeves toffee. I lived across the road from the field where the bonfires were lit every year. The night we waited and planned for was finally here. Some of the older boys had brought the firewood earlier that day to the field. We picked up any piece of wood and threw it into the piled load of timber.

One of the older boys lit the bonfire. We all cheered. It was a cold dry night; the heat from the fire warmed us. Young and older neighbours came and joined us; they brought their chairs to sit on. Mrs Ryan brought her accordion, as she always had done throughout the years, and sang some lovely old songs. We all joined in and sang along with Mrs. Ryan. Sparks from the fire looked like they were dancing to the moon - up and up they went!

Young and old were there that night, enjoying each other’s company, singing songs, telling stories and sharing the lemonade and sweets. All too soon it was time for my sisters and me to go home, as we had school in the morning.

When we were in our beds that night we could hear Mrs Ryan playing her accordion and singing to her hearts content. The shadows of the flames of the fire could be seen on the window and the smell of the bonfire was lovely. We were tired but oh so happy.

**Marian McNulty**



## A READING OF THE THREE BILLY GOATS GRUFF

MY name is Theresa McNamara and as a child I did not have the privilege of having stories read to me. I feel this is a very important part of a child's imagination and when I had my own son I always made time at night to tell him a story. When I started working in early childhood education I discovered that many of the children I was working with hadn't heard or been told childhood stories. In the class room of the community pre-school in which I was working I found a book about the Three Billy Goats Gruff. My co-worker at the time said it was a very popular story with the children. While I had told my son the stories of The Three Little Pigs, Goldilocks etc, I had never heard of this story. The staff and I, with the involvement of the children, made props to go with the story. In this story the children can participate verbally and physically.

The story incorporates colours, numbers and size so the children are learning without even realising it. When I read the story the first time to the children, I knew by the expression on their faces that they were very involved and that it had come to life for them. They continued to ask for it to be told to them every day. It had to be told to them in a very enthusiastic way, as the other staff members found out when they told it in my absence! I believe story telling is so important for children and always try to ensure the story is relevant to each individual child. I had heard about the LCEN story telling competition and decided to enter with a recorded reading of this story with the children in the pre-school. I was so surprised when I won and as the children were so much a part of this, I treated them out of my winnings!

**Theresa McNamara**



## THE NON-PINK PRINCESS

THERE is a princess, who doesn't like to wear a dress.

Her name is Kate. Funny and smart, she is great.

Kate's mind is fantastical, her smile, just pure magical.

Kind, gentle and brimming with care, she truly is quite extraordinaire!

However, Kate is like no princess ever before, and her funky ways are hard to ignore.

What? No dress? How peculiar a demeanor one must confess.

And, oh! How she likes to have fun! Why, this Kate doesn't do things the way others have done....

A friend to all of earth's creatures. Nature and the outdoors, are just some of the things Kate adores!

Her silly and laughy form, most definitely not the princess norm.

Joyful and free, isn't it how all should be?

Yet, with princesshood comes a certain convention, a list of rules much too long to mention.

Who knew? That there's a right and wrong way to be a princess! That there would be so much expected of you...

Well, what a load of hullabaloo! No two people are the same, we all have a different point of view.

We are told to fit a certain mould, that everything must be nice and controlled.

A fine day in July, would give Kate great cause to cry.

The spoken word, nasty and mean, she has over-heard.

"Kate is stupid and weird!", the other princesses mocked and jeered.

"And she doesn't like pink, strange for a princess, don't ye all think?"

"This carry on is not right for a princess," they proclaim! "Her zany manner she needs to tame."

Being a princess is very tough, and now Kate believes she isn't good enough.

"Perhaps if I change," she reasons, "they wont find me so strange."

Therefore, lonely and dismayed, Kate put in motion a grand charade.

"I will wear that dress, and do what is assumed, if that's what it takes to fit in and impress."

And for a while, everything went as Kate intended, but soon she began to feel less then splendid.

"These days everyone thinks I have it made, but look at the terrible price I have paid."



“I am just a big fake, I wish for the real me my heart could just break!  
” Kate’s world is now grey and flat, she misses the rainbow days and her silly hat! A silly hat, well what’s wrong that?  
And if we like what we like and it’s somehow not cool, are we really breaking some major rule?  
And hey! Who gets to decide what’s cool? That’s what we say!  
Because Kate can now see, you make your own rules if you want to be free!  
And it’s really ok, if what’s right for you, doesn’t work for me. Now let’s be having some harmony!  
So, no more pretend, to yourself be a friend, and don’t dim your light, just so you’ll blend!  
The End!

**Lucy Pratt**



## EILEEN

AS the days turned into weeks and the weeks into months I knew Eileen was never coming back. Eileen, one of my best friends and classmate, was tragically killed by the bus as she walked to school. No words can describe the grief and horror we, her classmates, felt when we were given the awful news. I have absolutely no memory of the funeral or the days immediately following her most tragic death but I can recall every detail of her life. Innovative, entertaining, fearless, loyal are all words that immediately spring to mind at the mention of her hallowed name. Eileen was blessed with the wonderful gift of mimicry which gave our class some of the most hilarious moments imaginable.

Just imagine the scenario, you're a very young nun, newly professed, and you are teaching twenty five lively ten year olds who are full of life and very bright ideas. Such was the lot of Sr Angela, a very saintly, innocent woman who had her work cut out for her dealing with us lot. And of course Eileen was the ringleader!

One fateful day Sr Angela was talking to a parent outside the door when Eileen decided she would take over the teaching just on a temporary basis. She proceeded to explain to us the intricacies of maths, and anything else that entered her head, all in Sr Angela's voice which had us in knots laughing. School was never such fun. Just as Eileen turned back to the blackboard to write even more complicated sums, Sr Angela returned. She immediately tumbled to the situation and to her eternal credit sat quietly on the nearest seat and beckoned to us to keep quiet. Eileen was only getting into her stride at this stage and was thoroughly enjoying herself. She sounded like a born teacher and if you closed your eyes you would be convinced it was Sr. Angela. Eileen went rabbiting on for another while much to the amusement of Sr. Angela, who was finding it increasingly hard to stifle her giggles at this stage. I can still see Eileen's shocked face when she realised that Sr. Angela was in the audience!

Another great memory was of our production of Cinderella with Eileen as one of the ugly sisters. She got much acclaim for the lively quick wit and humour she brought to the part.

Eileen's dad was governor of the prison and I remember the first time she invited me to her house after school. I couldn't sleep for nights with excitement. I had these visions of seeing men in striped pyjama like suits with a ball attached to their ankles (the cinema has a lot to answer for!). The reality was very different. They had their own quarters and of course had nothing whatsoever to do with the prisoners, much to my disappointment.



Eileen's last summer was a very eventful one. I'm very glad I shared so much of the summer holidays with her. We got up to much mischief and held many jumble sales and in our enthusiasm attempted to sell some of her mum's clothes and even her baby brother! (Luckily her Mum rescued them both before it was too late!).

A lot of water has passed under the bridge since those wonderful and much recalled days. I can still remember the poignant verse on Eileen's mortuary card but I'd much prefer to think of those halcyon and never to be forgotten days before a beautiful life was cut so tragically short.

**Rita Ryan**

## **THE GOOD OLD DAYS OF BALLINAGUARD**

WHEN I was young, long ago, in my father's house, we were poor in material things but rich in love. We all prayed together when we were small but when we grew up, we met our friends at the house and we went for walks with them. We had great fun because we got up to great mischief and made up loads of games to annoy our neighbours.

One game was to tie a thread on to the knocker of someone's front door. We would pull the knocker from a hiding place and people would open their door and see that no-one was there and they would look very puzzled. Meanwhile, we hid and had a great laugh at them. Then we would pull the thread again and they would come out again and start giving out to us; "Ye're at it again...will ye go away and leave us alone". There was this man who would come home every night from the pub on his bicycle quite drunk. So, we decided to catch a couple of goats and tied each one at either side of the road at opposite ends of a chain. When the man came to pass by on his bike, we would pull the chain to either side of the road so that he would fall and he could not make out what was going on. One night he heard us laughing and he called us "a shower of bastards" and threatened to "catch ye whoever ye are"... So, one night I was walking on my own when I came to the Fairy Fort and a load of foxes passed me and frightened the life out of me. I presume that somebody was getting me back for all the trouble I caused. I then proceeded along the rest of the road. When I came to a very dark bend I saw something coming toward me in a white sheet. It kept coming closer and closer. I stood still - I could not move but when they took off



the white sheet, I could see it was the man living there waiting to frighten me. When I told my friends we decided that we would do a lot more the next night to get him back. The next night, we decided to remove the gate off the hinges of his house and hide them by the side of the road. The farmers had carts ready for the morning so we decided to take off the wheels and hide them, but when my father was going to the creamery in the morning he met all the neighbours for a chat and he was told what happened. When we came home from school we were asked what we got up to the night before and we said we only went for a walk. “But did ye do anything wrong?” my father asked. “No”, I said but he told me all about the farmers telling stories earlier in the day. I pretended it wasn’t me and that it must have been someone else, “we would never do anything like that Dad” I said. My father, however, put two and two together and we were not allowed to go out at night with our friends anymore.

**Catherine Keane**

## **FINDING MY VOICE**

IT was September 1955. I was 15 years of age and in my Inter Cert year. The consultant who examined me gave Mama a letter for Dr Steven’s Hospital in Dublin. Mama assured me that all would be well and soon I would be able to speak properly. I was born with a cleft palate. Luckily, I did not have a hair lip. However my speech was very nasal and only immediate family could understand me. In school I was called “the girl with the bad talk”. I found this hurtful and very embarrassing. Reading in class was tough but most teachers helped me out. Written tests were no bother to me and I always got top marks. That was a bonus for me. Growing up and especially in school, my sister Noreen was my main prop and carer. I had pity for her as she always looked out for me. She is a super woman and to this day, I feel very safe when she is around. Dublin was a long way from Co. Limerick. We went by train. I felt so nervous that day as the train gathered speed. It was fascinating to be able to go to the toilet on the train. And the fields sped by so quickly. I enjoyed getting a quick glimpse of cows grazing in the fields and horses running and jumping. All too soon the train pulled into Kingsbridge Station and we crossed over to Dr. Steven’s Hospital. After answering some questions and signing forms Mama walked with me to my bed. It was a big ward and the walls were painted pale blue. There was a curtain around my bed. Mama dressed me in my pink flowery nightdress. That nightdress is still etched in my mind to this day. About nine



o'clock Mama kissed me good night and left. Early next morning Mama was in and walked with me as far as the operating theatre door. By then I was half asleep and when I woke up there was blood on my lips and on the pillow. Mama was there to assure me that all was well. No harm would happen to me when she was near. My mouth was full — full of what I did not know. The split in the roof of my mouth was no longer there. The doctor did his rounds and explained that the surgery went well but it would be a while before I could speak. I was not allowed to speak for five days and so I communicated by writing. Even though I was fifteen years of age, I vividly remember being nervous walking to the bathroom and afraid that one of the other patients would ask me a question and I would not be able to answer them. After a few days I met the speech therapist. She was an elderly lady and very kind. She explained in detail through diagrams what exactly was done in the operation and how I would have to exercise the palate to speak properly. She went over the exercises slowly — some of them were — whistling! I had always heard that whistling was not ladylike so I made sure I tried that when nobody was in earshot. Another exercise was sipping through a straw, and blowing out candles, but the most important one was reading out loud in front of a mirror. I longed to read and Mama brought me lovely interesting colourful books. Mama also bought me a fabulous red coat which I wore going home. After two weeks, I was allowed to go home and I felt the train went faster than ever. We got a taxi or hackney car as it was called then, from the station and arrived home safely. I ran in the back door and straight into Dad's arms. He kissed and cuddled me and that welcome was fantastic. My siblings treated me like a porcelain doll. In a few hours it was as if I had never been away and we were chatting and having fun again. Next day we were out picking blackberries and looking for bird's nests. Those memories are amazing. Returning to school was a bit daunting as some of the girls said "Let's hear you talk now. What did they do to you?" Some of the memories are a bit hurtful but that is life and children don't mean any harm. I studied and did my exercises diligently. In April the following year I was called for my second operation. That went very well and I was home in a week. In June I did my Inter Cert and got honours in every subject. After Leaving Cert, I trained as a primary school teacher and had a very fulfilling life in the class room. I was very sensitive to children with special needs. I have had a wonderful life and I am grateful to my parents and family for all the support they gave me.

**Ann O'Sullivan**



## MY FRIEND ERNEST

WHEN I was growing up, I liked going fishing. I grew up in Weston. And my friend there was called Ernest Roach. At a certain time of year, we used to go out stealing apples. It didn't matter if they were sweet or sour, red or green, we loved stealing them and bringing them home. One day I met Ernest near Our Lady of Lourdes chapel and we were going to skin an orchard. I remember it like it was yesterday. Ernest was on top of the hill and he dropped a half a crown. I had a great time stealing it off him. I went to the pictures which cost me sixpence and I got sixpence worth of Cleeves Toffees. Afterwards I went into Dick Meskell's shop on Henry St. I bought a Peggy's Leg and a Gifter bar. I had no lunch so that had to do me 'til dinner time. With the rest of the money, I bought a few comics; The Beano, The Dandy and The Topper. I enjoyed every penny of the half-crown.

Ernest was a good swimmer and, when he went swimming, he could wear anything. Sometimes he wore nothing at all and jumped right into the water in the nude. The two of us used often go swimming in a part of the river called The Cats Hole. Sometimes we would catch eels, pike, trout and if we were lucky, we might get a bit of salmon – but the time had to be right for the salmon. We had to be there at the right time of the year. Ernest and I had a great time during the long Summer evenings. We often played Follow the Leader – a game that I liked unless Ernest decided to jump naked into the river, forcing me to follow him. He was always good to find a bit of mischief and I enjoyed following him around and watching his escapades. Some years passed and both Ernest and I grew up and our boyhood evenings were no more. One day, as an adult, I got some very traumatic news; Ernest had drowned in the Abbey River, near the Island Field. I could not believe this news. Ernest had always been a good swimmer and I could never have imagined him drowning. They said that he might have got tangled in some long weeds growing in the water. The place where he was swimming was dangerous. You would have to be a very good swimmer to go in there. I often think of Ernest. I will never forget our times together and the fun we had when we were young. I especially remember him during a long Summer evening.

Ernest Roach R.I.P.

**Michael Hennigar**



## FIRST DAY AT SCHOOL

IT was very early in the morning when my mother called me. “Come on” she said, “its time you were up, today is your first day in school!” Now I was cranky because I was still sleepy. I had never been up this early before. Mam got me breakfast and then got me ready for school. She stood back and said “You look very smart in your new uniform; you’re not a baby anymore”. She looked a bit sad when she said this but then it was time to go. When we got to the school the other mothers and children were waiting for the nuns to open the gate and let us in. We were handed over to these strangers. They didn’t look or dress like our mothers, they wore long black veils and dresses. Now most of us children were in tears; our mothers were gone, would we see them again? Then I remembered Mam’s words: “Now you be a good girl and I’ll be back for you in a while”. My tears stopped then. Sister Michael taught infant class and was also in charge of the cloakroom. She said, “Hang up your coat and get in line” and then we followed her into class. We all got our own desk and sat down. Then Sister said, “Get out your copy and pencil and we will begin with our ABC lessons”. The morning flew and before I knew it the bell rang for our morning break. When I came out into the playground my brother was waiting for me with my lunch. He sat with me while I was eating. I talked non-stop about all that I had learned that day. “So this means that you liked school”, he said “and that we will have no more tears tomorrow!” I said, “I really didn’t cry as much as the other children you know”. Then the bell rang. It was time to go back to class. Sr. Michael gave us chalk to draw numbers on the black board. As time went by I was getting a bit tired and also very worried. “What if these nuns wanted to keep one of us, would our mothers mind?” I thought. I remembered that I had thrown a tantrum the week before when I didn’t get my own way, and my brothers had said, “if you keep this up, Mam will put you into the convent”! I was really worried thinking about this and tears were starting to well up in my eyes. The bell rang again and Sister said put on your schoolbags and get in line to collect your coats. When I got outside in the yard there was my mother coming down the street to meet me.

I knew then that my first day in school wasn’t so bad after all!

**Mary Cunningham**



## CHILDHOOD MEMORIES

MEMORIES keep coming to me as I look back on my childhood years, a carefree childhood full of joy, freedom and love. The youngest of seven siblings, I was spoilt, indulged, cared for. I was reared in the countryside, before the age of electricity, running water, television. Who needed electricity when a good oil lamp was available for light, a turf fire for heat and books in abundance for long wintry evenings? Besides there were card games and the endless ghost stories. In Summer time we roamed the fields and byways to our hearts' content. We had our own means of amusement – and neighbouring children joined us to enhance our sport. I remember, in particular, May Day when we collected wild flowers, primroses, daisies, buttercups to embellish the May altar where a family rosary was said each evening. Then there was threshing Day when the neighbours all came to lend a hand. We were neighbours. I can still remember the huge apple tarts baked for the occasion and the cups of sweetened tea which we children distributed all day. The same was true of harvest days, or hay days. No combine harvesters in those days, just pure labour as men, women and even children bent over the long sheaves tying them expertly together or tossing the sweet smelling mown hay on the long dray. There was always place at the back for the endless rides to and from the fields. Our neighbours were like our extended family. They too, cherished and took care of us and the many eccentric characters provided amusement. Take the local sacristan of the Protestant Church. One Sunday morning having slept in, he rushed off to ring the Church bell. On arriving at the Church, he realized to his dismay that he had forgotten the key at home. Being a hot day he dumped his coat and ran home to discover he had left the key of his home in his coat pocket. The time of the service had long passed and so too had his job. We watched for hours as he ploughed his field. He never tied the laces of his boots and when the clay filled them, he lay on his back, put his feet in the air and unloaded his burden.

Another memory dear to me is Halloween. The kitchen floor was prepared for dancing early in the evening and the night through. Christmas was, of course, unique. The preparations for the feast – making the plum pudding, the Christmas cake, the plucking the turkeys- were all very much part of the joy of the season. I still clearly recall those wonderful Christmas mornings opening the presents Santa left at the foot of our beds. Our countryside has changed; values have changed; modern amenities have made work easy even on the farm but I wonder if children have the same comradeship, the freedom and love of those, our days

**Teresa Byrne**



## THE BLUE SERGE SUIT

THE old man had been measured and fitted for a two piece suit. He and his wife had chosen very good quality serge material. The suit was delivered. Three weeks later the old man died. His wife, in her grief, quickly gave away all his belongings. The new suit went to a neighbour, Esther. She and my mother decided as a joke to offer it to my father. They tried their best to stifle the laughter as they watched the surprise and then his amusement as he unwrapped the parcel and held up the two pieces. The suit was wrapped and put in a drawer. The following Friday morning before starting work, my Dad who was one of a working gang who put up telephone poles, persuaded the driver of the work lorry to stop at a pawn shop, but he refused to turn into High Street, where the pawn shop was in case he would be seen. He parked at the top of William Street, and sat uneasily waiting while my Dad went into the already busy shop. It was crowded with people redeeming goods they had put in on the previous Monday. He went to the broker's son, knowing he would not be as sharp as the father, and after a quick look at the collar, the son labeled the suit and put it on a shelf. He gave my Dad 50/= shillings and his claim ticket. He did not know my Dad would not be going back to claim that suit.

I wonder how long it was on the shelf before they looked at it, and what was their reaction when they eventually realized it was not being collected, and they saw the generous allowance in the back of the coat for the poor old souls hump, and the pants which were original hipsters, as they were about three inches higher than the top of his leg, making life easier for his carer, as he sat in his wheelchair. My Dad threw away the redeem ticket as the driver with relief moved out into the traffic, and my Dad looked forward to a few pints at the end of his workday.

### Mabel Mescall



## **MY NEW OLD BIKE**

DURING the summer something strange went on,  
My legs for my bike had grown too long!  
I said to my Dad “I Need a new bike”.  
He said “If you’ve the money you can buy what you like”!  
I had no money but I had my old bike,  
And I thought to myself surely someone would like a bike like this,  
It looks almost new and then I knew what I must do.  
Into the papers I put an ad about the bargain that was to be had.  
Two weeks later and still no reply,  
I said to my Dad “I don’t know why no one is interested in my old bike?”  
Then an idea came into his head,  
“Your Brother’s old bike is still in the shed”.  
With a couple of small jobs a few things to do my Brother’s old bike was as  
good as new.  
Now I’m happy I’m sure you would like,  
If you saw me cycling my new old bike.

**Mary O’ Hehir Flannigan**



## THE LOOKING GLASS

ALICE stood before the two large oak doors. She felt scared of what lay behind them. This was to be her new home she thought. “I will leave you then miss”, the driver said, as he started towards the car with the motor still running. He wasn’t waiting around either. As she heard footsteps her heart began to pound in her chest. Then the door opened. “Come in Miss Alice”, said a stern grey haired woman. “Your aunt is in the library. I will take your coat and doll”. She could have the coat but not Missy, Alice thought, she handed the coat to her, but held on to missy for dear life.

The woman said nothing and opened the library doors. Alice could see the back of a chair and a glowing fire in the hearth. “Come here girl and I get a look at you”, croaked a voice from the chair. The woman peered at her through her glasses. “Yes, Yes”, she said. As she looked her up and down, not a trace of a smile on her face. Alice never felt so frightened in her life. “Now go to your room and freshen up, and we will have supper shortly”. Alice turned and followed the stern looking woman up a flight of wooden stairs.

She opened a door. “This will be your room Alice”, she said. “I will be back soon.” Alice looked around. A big bed stood in the centre of the room. She walked towards the window to look out. She felt so lonesome and felt a lump rise in her throat. “Oh Mammy, Daddy, why did you go and leave me here?” The tears began streaming down her face and she turned only to face a huge mirror, her reflection made her gasp. She looked so unhappy and so did Missy. “You’re all I have now”, she said. She felt tired so she lay on the bed and drifted off.

Through a haze she heard a knock on the door. “Miss Alice it is time for supper”, she said. Alice wanted to stay where she was between waking and dreaming. When everything seemed to be ok the stern woman walked in. “Hi Alice, I’m Mary”, and she smiled broadly. She entered the dining room cautiously. Her aunt sat at the head of the table. “Come sit beside me”, Alice could feel the fear again but her aunt smiled. “I know you’ve been through a hard time Alice”. “I know you miss your mammy and daddy, but I will help you anyway that I can” and she pulled her into a hug. Alice wept. “Mary has a little girl your age; I bet ye will be the best of friends”.

As Alice undressed for bed that night, she looked in the mirror .Was that a smile behind her eyes she thought as she held her doll? “I think we’re going to be ok Missy”, she beamed as she hugged her in tight.



## CHILDHOOD MEMORY

WHEN I was younger my friends and I would go up to the handball alley and play house. They were very happy days for us and if the weather was warm we would go out to Sandy to swim and pick blackberries on the way home. We would be covered in purple dye from the blackberries. That was how we spend our summer holidays. They were the best days of our lives, having so much fun running around the fields trying to dry our clothes before we went home.

If the weather was bad we would pray for ice so we could skate down hill 16(that's what we called it). We would wait for our parents to go up to Murphy's Pub so we could snake out their basins to skate down the hill. There was a woman called Mary Ambrose. She was a witch, no one could stand near the wall, she would come out roaring and shouting. It was great fun to us. She would call us all the names under the sun, but we just kept going up the hill to skate down it. It was the best place in Weston to skate. Everyone around Weston would all take turns skating down the hill.

I hated school. I thought I would never get out of it. They were days I would not like to go back to, the nuns were very hard on us, they turned me off school for the rest of my life, but I met lovely friends there and still talk to some of them now.

**Catherine Keogh**



## REMEMBRANCE

I love to look back and reminisce on my childhood. I grew up in the fifties. Those were the days of Rock-n-Roll and being carefree. We lived in my grandparent's house so you can imagine it was a tight squeeze at bedtime. But that was a sign of the times. In winter it was cosy. If we got a good summer, God help you because you were eaten alive with hoppers. I remember myself and my older brother would have a competition to see who would catch and kill the most. The noise we would make used to drive my mother mad. She would make a run for the stairs and we would dive under the covers. Then she'd shout up, "I'll leather the arses off ye if I go up". One night she tried to catch us out. When she got near the top of the stairs she banged her knee. She came into the room like a screaming banshee. She screamed at the top of her voice, "I'll give ye cracking hoppers. If I put my hands on ye, I'll break your backs". I won't mention the French she used! My father was the complete opposite to my mother. He was "The Quiet Man".

He was the kind to keep his head when all around him were losing theirs. He worked all over England, Scotland and Wales all through the fifties. He'd send wages every week without fail. My mother would get it every Monday morning in a registered envelope. She used to say "it's bad luck to pay out on a Monday". He used to write loads of letters home and we made sure to answer each and everyone of them. He worked building roads and he and the crew lived in huts. One of the men was a barber and anytime they wanted their hair cut he would do it for sixpence (2 cent). My father was the cook. Every Friday night the men came in they gave him two pounds and he kept them well fed for the week. They all mucked in with the washing and drying and ironing of the clothes.

In those days the friends they made were friends for life. In later years whenever I went to London, if I went into some of the pubs they used to frequent, the minute I was introduced to some of the people who decided to make their homes there, when they heard I was my fathers' daughter they were around me like moths to a flame. He was held in very high esteem and it made me feel very proud of him.

Then we come to my Grandmother and Grandfather. My grandfather went to fight in the First World War. He joined the Royal Munster Fusiliers when he couldn't get work. He had six children at the time. He went on to have fourteen. He had to go to Cruises Hotel to sign the papers to join up. His first posting overseas was to Egypt. I can just imagine the culture shock. Then came "the war to end all wars". He used to cry about it when he'd have a few drinks taken.

My grandmother told me of an incident that happened to both of them at that time.



She received a telegram to say he was missing in action. I can imagine how she felt. She was just after having my Aunt Teresa. That time women breastfed their babies. Her milk dried up so her good friend and neighbour Maggie who just had a baby herself took Teresa and fed her with her baby. That's what you'd call real friendship and beyond.

Then came the good news my grandfather was alive. He'd got a dose of mustard gas the Hun was using at the time and had ended up in hospital. My grandmother was overjoyed when she received the telegram. All the time he was missing she never received a penny from the British Army. Only for her parents she and the children would have starved. They lived in a small cottage-type house in Carey's Road. When those houses were demolished they came to live in Prospect.

When they came up first the Corporation had put gas cookers in the houses. My aunts and my grandmother were delighted. That was short lived. "No way are you getting that shaggin' gas in this house. You'll get it over my dead body". My grandfather said. That was the fright of getting the dose of the mustard gas in the war. He developed a bad chest and suffered with it to the end of his life so all the cooking was done on a range while he was alive.

**Ann McMahon**

## **TO REMEMBER CHILDHOOD IS TO FEAST UPON THE SENSES - Sight, Taste, Smell, Hearing and Touch**

### **Sight.**

I remember the first time I saw the sea; it was in an exotic place far, far away, that took FOREVER to get there. It felt like it took us days to get to that funny sounding place, Bally, Ballyunion, Ballybunion, that was it!! I got out of the car and stared and stared. This was the biggest sandpit I had ever seen! My legs not too long released from the constrictions of a nappy started to run. I took off at top speed not heeding the cries of "come back a minute, slow down, we are not ready to go yet". I just ran and ran, the sand hot and prickly under my little toes. The water was still so very far away and it felt like I had run for ever and ever. Then I saw it. I fell to my knees and looked up. There up on the cliff with a flag waving from its top was a beautiful princess castle just for me. WOW.

### **Taste.**

Ah yes the taste of childhood for me had to be the Peggy's Leg. Forever afraid of being snowed in as we lived in the country, we had a stock press. It was always



filled with soup and tins of stuff that held no interest to this little girl. The box, I saw, was that of the Peggy's leg. They called to me, begging me to open the box and have one, just one. Peeling the paper down, pupils wide in anticipation, the pure unadulterated pleasure of the firm to gooey texture, letting it melt away in your mouth. This little bit of Heaven was only ever marred by the trouble I got into when it was discovered that I had scoffed over half the box, and cries that the devil himself made me do it, didn't save me.

### **Smell**

A long day was spent in the city, sitting, waiting, playing the odd game of packman on the machine. It was dark as we started the long journey home. The strong smell of petrol, Guinness and salted peanuts almost suffocating us in the back of the car. Along with those smells and that of cigarette smoke I knew my new clothes would stink when we got home. The strongest smell of all was that of fear, as the car drove ever so slightly, ever so often, up and down the ditch all the way home.

### **Hearing**

Sitting up on the countertop in the kitchen after washing the floor I heard uncle Gaybo and Dear Frankie on the radio like old friends. Even at such a tender age I was a fan much to my friend's amusement. Gay introduced two songs by Bruce Springsteen which was to make me a fan from that day. I was listening intensely while looking all the time at the telephone. I was expecting to hear it tinkle rather than ring, if you lifted the receiver in another room it tinkled in the kitchen. Thunder Road came to an end and Gay Byrne told me it was time for the news. Still no tinkle from the phone, maybe she was asleep. I decided I better check and went round the front of the house to peer into my mother's bedroom, she was asleep, which was best, this way she was feeling no pain.

### **Touch**

We lived near a river and it was here we spent all our summers. There was an Island in the river which was created by a great giant rock. I was tall enough now to climb up on to the island which was probably a good thing on this particular day. We had been swimming for quite a while when I was seen to jump up in the water scrambling fast to get to the top of the rock. I sat there wrapping my arms around myself. Pulling my long damp hair off my face, I pulled my knees up under my chin, hugged my wet cold skin and tried my best to stop shivering. I stared down into the water watching and waiting, wondering what the bloody hell was that long slimy thing that brushed off the length of my left leg. From that day to this I don't like fish, not even to eat.

**Noelene Nash**



Limerick Community  
Education Network

LIMERICK  
REGENERATION  
AGENCIES



Limerick City Adult Education Service  
*Learning for Life*



*Cover Images By  
Margaret Wallace*