



*Tommy Delaney standing outside of the Wayside Cafe which was run by my great aunt Harriett Windsor in 1943. (Now Spar)*



*Pat and Tommy Delaney*

## *Growing Up in Enniskerry 1940 - 1966*

TOMMY DELANEY

### **1940 to 1944**

The memory of first three and a half years of my life is of course a blur. However starting early in 1944 I do have memories of incidents in my life that my Mother told me “Tommy you could not remember that, you were only three and a half” but I do, so here we go.

We were living in the upper gate lodge cottage of Chatterton’s house on Kilgarron Hill. Daddy was working in Northern Ireland at that time along with many Enniskerry men who had found work through Lord Powerscourt in the north, because many of the men up there were fighting in Europe during the Second World War.

One day Mammy told me that Daddy was coming home from Belfast and that if I stood at the front gate I would be able to see him coming up Kilgarron hill. The front gates at that time were wrought iron and to me it seemed they went all the way up to the sky. So I am standing at the gates at the time Mammy told me he would be coming up the hill from the bus down in the village, and suddenly there he was walking up the hill carrying a cardboard suitcase in one hand and a small dray in the other, it was painted bright red with two wheels with wooden spokes and the wheel rims and the axle hub were painted black and it also had two shafts. He had made it for me after he finished work in Belfast. He worked for the fire service up there and could be called into action at any time as there were frequent bombing attacks on Belfast.

I liked living there. Mrs Chatterton used to give Mammy fruit and vegetables from the garden and people going up and down Kilgarron hill would sometimes stop and talk to me and even give me sweets. The picture “Henry IV” was being filmed in the field across the road in Powerscourt estate and there was a door in the stone wall and some of the extras in the picture would come out for a smoke break, and some of them gave me a wooden sword and shield; they were props used in the picture.

1944 to 1948

We were a family of five at that time, Daddy, Mammy, my brother Pat two and a half, and my sister Kathleen was one. Mrs Chatterton decided the cottage was too small for a family of that size so we had to leave. We then moved down to live with my Granny Arnold on the Bray Rd. My Grannies house at that time was the second on the right as you headed to Bray, I was sad to see it had burned down when I was at home two years ago. This was a great place to live it had a big garden with a pond with fish in it.

The back garden went all the way up to Dunne's field, this area of the garden was part wetland and part wooded; there was a footpath which ran from the back yard up to Dunne's field. When snow fell in winter time I would go up to the field and go flying down the hill on a sled that my grandfather made up at the forge. Two of my Uncles, Gussie and Joe Arnold would come with me and one time my Uncle Gussie was "Driving" the sled and we went flying into the thorn bushes at the bottom of the field and I had cuts on my hands and knees as well as my face. I believe my Uncle Gussie sheltered behind me.

My Grandfather was the village blacksmith and one of my favourite things to do was go up to the forge and watch him shoe horses and donkeys. I got to know some of the local farmers who sometimes kept me entertained with some "Tall Tales".

When walking to or from the forge I would go up through Dunne's field then through the property occupied by the Silver Vale hotel then continue along the Beech Walk which passed by the Cemetery attached to St Patrick's Church where I always stopped (and still do when I am home) and read the inscription on the headstone erected in memory of a little girl buried there.

I became friends with Johnny Roe who lived up the road towards the village and at an early age he taught me how to hand fish in the river, I also learned from him how to make a net out of chicken wire to catch fish which I think was illegal. The Roe family were good neighbours they had lots of friends who visited from outside of the village and always had great parties to which I was sometimes invited.

The family living down the road from Granny's was the McGurk and Holden family's. Granny used to send me down to their house to buy some buttermilk from Mrs McGurk. Mr Holden who also lived there was as I remember a man whom you could

set your watch by, and always had a cheery hello when you met him.

We moved to live in Monastery in 1946 but because I enjoyed living at Granny Arnold's so much it was about another three years before I move to live in Monastery full time, so as I proceed you may find me switching from stories of Monastery to ones about Granny's.

When we moved to Granny's house I had two uncles still living there, they were Uncle Gussy and Uncle Joe. Uncle Gussy was the oldest of the two still at home and then there was Uncle Michael who at the time was serving with the RAF and was stationed in Japan and Uncle Dick who lived in Dun Laoghaire and worked as projectionist at the Pavilion Cinema.

Uncle Gussy would take me with him when he went to check his "snare line" to see if he had caught any rabbits. I think the snare was supposed to be more humane than the rabbit trap, but I am not sure if being a rabbit at that time I would have been more comfortable bleeding to death from being caught in a steel trap or being eaten by a hungry fox who happened by at night, or the more humane strangulation in a snare, but that's the way it was then and rabbit was an inexpensive and tasty meat to have for dinner.

Talking about rabbit traps, Granny had a cat who had a front leg cut off by a trap while roaming through the fields at night and Granny was sure the cat was in pain and asked Grandfather to take it up to Dunne's field with the 22 rifle and put it out of its misery, but he did not want to do it saying the cat would manage but Granny persisted and eventually he gave in. He carried the cat up to the field then set it down and stepped back a bit to take aim. Well the cat must have decided that things were not as they should be and took off. The great white hunter raised the gun and fired hitting the cat in the lower jaw. How did he know that's where he hit it? Well, when the cat showed up a couple of weeks later, acting very nervous, and who could blame it they noticed its lower jaw had been badly injured by the gunshot. Now Granny was beside herself and asked Grandfather to put it in a sack and dispose of it in the river which flowed just across the road from the house. Well again he did not want to do it but Granny persisted and one afternoon the river was in flood from heavy rain he decided to do the deed again and put some stones in a sack to weigh it down and dropped it in the river.

That very night as they were asleep upstairs the cat, all wet climbed in through the bedroom window and there never was an attempt ever again to harm that cat and as

long as I can remember the three legged cat with a crooked jaw lived what appeared to be a contented life. Many readers may read the tale about the cat in dismay and wonder about me including it in my story, but that's what growing up in Enniskerry was like back then.

Many of you will remember the hydroelectric dam which was located just below the chapel down on the river in Knocksink. This dam provided power to Powerscourt house and some of the businesses and houses in the village. My Grandfather Arnold, as well as running the forge, also took care of the dam. The dam was used as far as I know just to provide electric light so in the afternoon about an hour and a half before dark he would head over to Knocksink and sometimes he took me with him, we would walk over a wooden catwalk above the dam to the wheel which opened and closed the sluice gate at the bottom of the dam. When the dam was not in use the sluice was left open to allow the water and fish to pass through. When he closed the sluice gate the river would begin to back up until it reached the top of the dam and started to flow over it. There was a large pipe buried beneath the ground which carried water from the dam area to the powerhouse which was located about eighty feet from the dam in the direction of the chapel and lower Knocksink gate. This powerhouse had an upper floor and a lower floor, the turbine was located on the lower floor and the water coming in from the dam powered to turbine. I can still remember the whine the turbine would make as it started to speed up.

There were fringe benefits to having the dam where it was, the local lads were very aware that when the sluice gate in the dam was closed the water downstream drained away and this left pools of water where the fish and salmon were confined until water began flowing over the top, this gave a narrow window of time for those who liked the taste of fresh caught fish, or the opportunity to sell a fine salmon to a local hostelry. My uncles were not afraid to borrow the key to the lock for the sluice gate which my grandfather kept in a waistcoat pocket which was hung on a nail in the forge and head over to Knocksink (along with some of their friends) and close the water off and do a little fishing, this was done mostly when the salmon were running. I am sure there are some of you out there a few years older than me who remember taking part in this sport.

**1945 to 1948 (Saint Mary's School)**

I must say these are some of my favourite memories, with Mrs Corcoran teaching Infants and baby infants. I was there I believe for two years and to this day I still remember Mrs Corcoran using bright coloured chalk to help us visualise what the numbers one through eight etc, looked like, four was 4 large dots arrange as the four corners of a square, and so it went. Do you remember?

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I then went into Miss Smithers' class I enjoyed being in her class and I think most of us boys have fond memories of being there. After that Mammy sent me to St Peters in little Bray, there was a teacher working there named Tony O'Rourke I think she went to school with him in Enniskerry when she was young. I enjoyed my time there and stayed until 1952.

Getting to Bray involved taking the Enniskerry to Bray bus number 85, there were two crews who operated the service Tommy Reid, driver and John O'Reilly, conductor. Christy Healy as conductor with Mutt Maguire, driver. Christy was a character and was never short of a salty or sharp comment if you were late and he had to hold the bus for you, now those of us who came running down the Monastery Rd, Church hill or Killgarron hill with our breath in our fist were often late and had to listen to Christy' comments.

**1952 to 1955**

My first secondary school was Westland Row Christian Brothers and let me tell you I hated it and told Daddy and Mammy that I was not going back for a second year. Why did I hate it you might ask? And I will answer "Brother [ ]". There were two brother [ ]s teaching there one was a soft spoken kind gentleman and the other was not, and I had the other one for most of my subjects. He had arms like tree branches and hands like shovels and I felt those hands on the back of my head, or as he came down on my hand like a ton of bricks with the leather strap. The hand at the back of my head was because I was guilty of sitting quietly reading as instructed by him, and the other was because one day I ran down the stairs at lunch time and

sprained my ankle and made the mistake of telling him I had run down. He gave me six of the hardest smacks on the hand that he was able to and informed me that the reason for doing so was to remind me that in future I should walk down the stairs, he then shipped me off to hospital with a student who had a car.

I went to good old Bray Tech from there and was very happy having teachers like Miss Fox, Willie Griffin, Brendan Carroll, and Dan Grace. Miss Fox was very interested in photography and liked to develop and print her own pictures as I did and we had many conversations about that. When lunch time came at Bray Tech some of us would like to go down to the sea-front often at the harbour end particularly when there was a storm blowing, I remember being down there one time with my friend Seamus Doyle and a chap from Shankill, I believe it was the day the lighthouse fell into the sea, we got soaked and the teacher sent us down to basement to sit by the oil furnace to dry out.

I believe that I had the greatest friends growing up in and around Enniskerry and those friendships have left me with a treasure of great memories of the countless days, weeks, months, and years we spent in each other's company. I met Seamus Doyle when we moved in next door to Mr and Mrs Doyle in 1946 on the top road in Monastery, we lived at number thirteen. Seamus and myself quickly became friends and that friendship lasted for many years both at home and a several year stint in Birmingham, with the odd weekend trip down to London, eating and drinking at the Friar Tuck and just having a good time.

The friendship continued when we returned to Enniskerry. The early years in Monastery meant going over to Knocksink to get firewood which many people in Monastery did in those days. It was not just collecting firewood; but the summer months were spent trying to build a pool for swimming by building a dam of rocks we called it "the flies bend" because there was already a fly hole and a boat hole. We went to swim there as friends and as family's and our mothers would bring sandwiches and we would have a picnic.

## **1953 to 1966**

The memories that I have of life in Enniskerry in the fifties and sixties years are very good except for the death of my brother Pat in a tragic accident on the

Dublin Rd just up from Darlington's gate at the Barry's Wood bus stop. He got off the Dublin bound bus at about 1.05pm on Sat. the 31st of January 1953 and ran across the road behind the bus. A car travelling towards the village struck him and he died a short time later in Loughlinstown hospital. He was almost 11 years of age. This time was extremely difficult for my parents.

The friends I enjoyed being with were Seamus Doyle, Jack Kearns, Dick Seery, John Murphy, Jack Behan and quite a few others who touched my life at some time or another, including those other friends who made up the diamonds band, Colm Corcoran, George Mc Nulty, Noel Keogh and Kevin O'Connor.

Dick Seery was Enniskerry's answer to a character out of the TV series *Happy Days*, He wore blue jeans with the bottom of the legs turned up about 4 inches, he also wore western style shirts had his hair combed back at the sides always had a smile on his face and the local girls just drooled over him, and he was it seemed perpetually attached to his bike which he kept in excellent shape.

I remember one Sunday Dick, Seamus Doyle Jack Kearns myself set off across the old long hill on bikes to Roundwood, continued to Sally Gap then home via Glencree. This was the best part of the trip as we all know it is downhill all the way to Enniskerry (except for Shop River). Some other adventures we pursued were wandering through Powerscourt estate—who among us did not do that—we used to go into the old cemetery next to the house and look into the small holes in the door of an old burial vault (using a flashlight) and look at two skeletons on the shelves to the left the coffins had long ago decayed and one of the skulls was lying on the ground.

There are many more memories; too many to put down on paper at this time, and I recently spent an afternoon with my lifelong friend Seamus Doyle reminiscing on those long ago days and it was a very enjoyable visit.

*Tommy Delaney lived in Enniskerry from 1940 to 1966.*