

## *Memories of Glencot, Enniskerry*

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I first went to Enniskerry before I was born! My grandmother had brought her terminally-ill daughter from England to have one last holiday in Fethard-on-Sea, her own native village. This was in the summer of 1939, and war broke out while they were there. The family persuaded my grandmother to stay in Ireland ('don't bring Frankie back to the bombs') and so she had to look for a small place to rent rather than stay in lodgings. She saw an advertisement in the paper for a place in County Wicklow, somewhere called Enniskerry, which looked suitable, so up they went.

My mother went to join them when her own husband was about to go off to the war. It was from there that Bill Seery, who lived in a cottage on Kilgarron Hill, took my mother in his taxi to Holles Street Hospital the night before I was born, in August 1941. My father arrived on embarkation leave the next day and, being a Sunday and there being no buses, he had to walk from Dun Laoghaire to Enniskerry, using Cattie Gallagher as his guide. He knew that once he got there, he could get to The Scalp and then on to Enniskerry. He stayed in Prosser's hotel. A young waitress there was so busy looking at him that she poured his soup into his lap! Auntie Frankie died two months later and is buried in Curtlestown. My father was killed by a Japanese sniper in Malaya in early 1942, and so we stayed, on and off, in Enniskerry until it was time for me to start school and we all went back to England.

The house – it is really a hut and is still there – was called Glencot. It was in the grounds of a large bungalow called Glensynge. Glensynge was owned by an English lady, Mrs Lang, and she lived there with her unmarried daughter, Elsie, and a companion, Irene Oldfield. I think they were Quakers. They had a large number of dogs and numerous cats. They were known to be animal lovers so any strays got taken to them! The grounds were extensive, some cultivated with a lovely lawn and shrubs, a big area where they grew soft fruit, a small orchard and a large vegetable garden. They



*Mrs Lang, the old lady on the right of the photo, owner of Glensynge; Irene Oldfield, the companion; and me, aged about 3. My favourite dog, Jessie Carr, is on Mrs Lang's lap, and Monty the black labrador is at the front.*



*This is Glencot, with my grandmother, Mary Cooper, at the window, and my mother, Betty King, outside. I have no idea of the date. I'm wondering if it was before I was born.*

kept bees and Elsie Lang was often to be seen in full bee-keeper's outfit. They also had several ducks which laid quite a lot of eggs and a lovely pond.

Dotted around the grounds were a few small dwellings which they rented out. There was one amongst some fir trees, lived in by a school teacher. I have forgotten her name. In another larger one was an old Indian Army officer called Pat Wilkinson who was a friend of Irene Oldfield's. He had been a student at Trinity College, knew Lady Gregory and was at the opening of *The Playboy of the Western World* when some of the spectators rioted. He had several cases of beautiful Indian butterflies which he had caught and had mounted while serving in India. In another dwelling was a Mr and Mrs Harty and their daughter, Mary, with whom I used to play. Further up the hill near the road was a family called Ryan, with a daughter called Doreen, who also played with Mary and me. I don't think any of these dwellings had running water or electricity. There was a communal 'toilet' somewhere in the grounds which the tenants took it in turns to clean. It consisted of a hut, placed over a stream, over which had been built a bench with a hole in it. I don't remember being bothered by it at all – just that my visiting English aunt used to find it very difficult!

Glencot consisted of three rooms: two bedrooms and one all-purpose room. It had a small wood-burning stove on which the kettle sat and a two-ring cooker which was run on oil. It was very cosy. Lighting was by oil lamps and there were candles in the bedrooms. We filled our jugs and saucepans and bowls from the beautiful spring water which gushed out of the wall below Glencot. It was surrounded by buddleia trees and to this day the smell of buddleia takes me straight back to Enniskerry. For nearly a year, when I was 3, my twin cousins came to stay, and they used to sleep in a little hut beside ours.

We used to go out with Miss Oldfield to walk the dogs every afternoon. I can't remember all their names, only Monty, the black Labrador, Ben, the greyhound, Jilly-pup, the golden retriever, and my own best pal Jessie Carr, a little mongrel with a curly tail who used to run round to me every morning when she was let out. We collected wood for the stove during these walks, and to this day I have difficulty walking past a nice-looking piece of wood!

We used to walk across the Bog Meadow to Mass on Sundays, and indeed I used to run across it alone to meet my gran coming home from daily Mass. There were scarcely



*This was taken at my aunt's grave in Curtlestown. I'm about 5. My grandmother, Mary Cooper, is behind me. May O'Rourke is on the right of the picture, and Aunt Maggie is on the left.*

any cars then, and everybody knew everybody so it was very safe. We used to get Bill Seery to take us up to Curtlestown for the annual Pattern. But a lot of people used to walk all the way. There were of course the lorries taking the men up to Glenree to cut the turf. There is nothing like the smell of burning turf! I used to love going to Mrs Windsor's shop and if I was lucky I'd get an HB ice cream. There was another shop called Quigley's round the corner. What did they sell? Is there anyone who remembers?

We got our meat from Mr Magee. I remember standing at the end of Magee's yard and hearing the pigs squeal as they were slaughtered. John Magee was behind the counter as a very young man. I thought he was very tall. Occasionally boys would knock at the door selling rabbits for a few pence, and I watched in amazement as my gran skilfully skinned them. I was only aware of the scarcity of tea because a tramp once knocked on the door and said 'can ye spare a grain of tea?' and my gran said 'we haven't enough for ourselves'. I did know that there were food shortages in England because if we went over we'd always pack some things in with our luggage, and we regularly sent my other aunt a bar of chocolate hidden inside a rolled-up newspaper.

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Only the older people will remember that you could roll up a newspaper in a special wrapper and send it at a cheap rate.

There were regular shopping trips into Dublin, which I hated unless we were going to Bradleys near Trinity College to buy me shoes. You always got a ride on their rocking horse and were given a big balloon to take home. And lunch at Bewley's was always a treat. The Dublin and Bray buses used to start and finish outside the Protestant school. There was a bus once an hour. I always felt sick on the Dublin bus but the conductor used to tell me that he'd always been sick on the bus when he was a little boy and look at him now!

I used to play with Guard McGrath's daughter – Deirdre I think her name was – and Mairead Tallon. My mother and grandmother became friends with the O'Rourkes – Mr O'Rourke, and his daughter May, and Aunt Maggie – in the big house just below Glensynge and the derelict bus garage. It was a lovely house with a huge garden with a tennis court, and it had trees with delicious plums trained along the wall beside the driveway. When the old people died, May sold up and moved to England.

There was the occasional drama. One day a lorry's brakes failed as it was coming down Kilgarron Hill, and it crashed into the wall of one of the houses by the Protestant school. I just remember the smashed lorry and wall, and not whether the driver was badly injured. A more pleasant excitement was the occasional showing of films in a building along the Bray road. I don't remember what the building was but seem to remember a garage being nearby.

After we moved back to England and up until my late teens, we spent every summer in Ireland. Bill Seery used to meet us at Dun Laoghaire and take us to Windgates on the Greystones side of Bray Head where my mother had a small holiday house built. Over the years since then we always came back to visit Enniskerry, to look at Glencot, to visit Irene Oldfield and Pat Wilkinson when they were still there, to visit my aunt's grave in Curtlestown. It's a place of bitter/sweet memories, and for me, the one place where my parents and I were together as a little family, Enniskerry, then Bray; where my dad caused quite a stir by changing nappies and pushing the pram – unheard of in 1941 Ireland for a man to do any such thing!

*Denise Haddon (nee King) lived in Enniskerry from 1941 to 1945,  
returning annually (more or less) ever since.*