

Weeshie

at Seventy three years and nine months...

Christmas Eve was always a memorable time for me as a young altar boy. Midnight mass in the Cathedral was special, serving Bishop Moynihan, the church packed, walking up the isle from the back of the church to begin the ceremonies, the wonderful smell of incense, the alter lit up by hundreds of candles, the choir in full voice singing all the beautiful Christmas carols and Tom Donoghue as always playing the organ. Giving out communion to hundreds was a trying time as you would have to hold the palate under the chins of all as we were warned a little particle of the host might fall. The hand would literally go numb from the weight of it. This I remember distinctly for some reason.

Joe Smith the butcher and his lovely little wife Maggie live just four doors up from our New St Home. The had a tiny little shop, Joe would walk the sheep and cattle in through the shop and out through the kitchen to slaughter them in the back yard. Joe would collect all the fat from his kills, turn it into tallow and every Christmas would produce the biggest candle in town. On a few occasions I was asked to hold the seven foot casing as Joe pulled the magnificent gleaming white candle from its holding. Then further up the street was Callie McCarthy's toy shop and it was like an Aladdin's cave of toys. Here Santa toys were left and would be collected just before the big event. The shop sold caps, which let off loud bangs when the trigger was pulled on the cowboy guns. This was the first ever present I remember getting from Santa,

cowboy hat, gun, a six shooter and holster

Lower New St and our playground down the Demense would echo to the sound of gunfire for a week after Christmas.

I have been living in the beautiful town of Killarney for seventy three years and nine months of my life. The other three months were spend in the town



of Mallow Co cork where I was born. St Patrick's Place is right in the centre of Mallow and when my dad, a garda, was transferred to Killarney in May 1941 I was just three months old.

“So I really consider myself a nearly? Born and bred Killarney townie”

40 Lower New St, now Chapter 40 Restaurant, was our home from 1941 to 1959 when we then moved to St Anne's House next to St Mary's Parish Hall, the old building was demolished some years ago and a lovely new building now stands in its place.

Growing up on the side of Lower New St was an amazing experience; all manner of life existed there in my young days. It was unlike today, a real hub of activity. Just across the street from our home was the ESB offices, people coming and going paying their bills all day, the Garda Barracks was also just across the road, always action there, and just down the street on the left was Mrs Devans Offices where huge queues of people were to be seen lining up to collect their dole money winter and summer. Next to that was the Killarney presberthy where the priests lived and there was about ten or twelve always coming and going. And the funerals from the Cathedral just around the corner passing our home, it was all bicycles and horse and traps back then. Cades Mineral Water Factory where I worked summers stood where Dunns store is now and across from the post office John Tarrant ran his lovely bakery and confectionery shop. I worked summers and Christmas there also, up in the morning at 6am to begin the baking of the bread with John Gee.

The Presentation Convent just as to day was always a hive of activity, the Bow House was just above our home and Dr Ivo and Dr Billy O'Sullivan had their practices across and below Christy Healy's shop. The Gas Works were just up the concrete lane, always a strong pungent smell hanging in the air from there as it belched out smoke from its towering chimneys. The old saw mills and the Killarney Technical School were just above the Post Office and the Johnson family was the first to deliver pasteurized milk to the street, these lovely people lived next door to Christy Healy's.



Christmas was always a wonderfully happy time in our home in New St. My mother would hang the big long colourful decorations from one corner of the kitchen/sitting room to the far corner, the Christmas candle was always put on the front window and the youngest in the family, Genie was given the honour of lighting it on Christmas Eve. The big event was the arrival of the postman, my mother loved sitting down in front of the fire with a cigarette and ritually open the bundles of Christmas cards which always arrived, Indeed in the weeks leading up the big day she would spend hours writing cards, addressing them and sending us to the post office to post to friends at home and abroad.

Every year my mother would make it her business as a Cork/Kanturk born woman to buy the Christmas edition of the Holly Bough, from Bunny Courtney's paper shop, -the paper, a Cork tradition since 1897, and a celebration of the magic of Christmas and the magic of Cork over the years. She loved this paper and spend hours browsing through it. But the much awaited, highly expected event was the arrival by post of a big fat goose from my father's people, farmers, in Tipperary where he

was born. This would come wrapped in a canvas bag, stitched tightly at the ends. No one could open it but my father and this was a ritual in itself, cutting away the stitching, making sure not to damages the bird in any way and then the magic of extracting pounds of salty homemade butter from inside the belly of the goose and always a long letter in his father's scrawling handwriting. This would be read to all the family at the table. That goose always got a quick death when mam landed it in the middle of the table for the Christmas dinner which usual began around 4.00pm.

However there are memories of sad Christmas also when Sheila, Kathleen Ann and Jimmy who all emigrated in the hungry fifties might not be able to come home for the festive season and then when they did there was great sadness when they left New St for the Killarney Railway station with their big brown suit cases on their journey back to Manchester. I would travel over to Jimmy for holidays and see Man United in Old Trafford; this is where my love for the Busby Babes began. A dark pall of sadness hung over the home for a few weeks when they left.

“These memories of emigration remain firmly etched in my Christmas memories”

I can still see clearly in the mind's eye all those great neighbors of Lower New St, many, sadly now gone to their eternal reward. The Johnston's, Patsy Cahill and family, Johnny o: Leary, the builder Charlie o Brien's family, the Culligans lived down the Green Lawn, Paddy later became Garda Commissioner and played basketball for Ireland and all the boys were great Legion men and basketball players. Michael Clifford lived where Dunn's store is now, died in building accident in England, his daughter Michele in the chief world news correspondent for Sky TV.

Just across the street from our home Jer, Dodo and Maureen o Sullivan lived, great people. Jimmy Doyle, his dad was affectionately known as The Colleen Bawn and his mother a cousin to the great Mick Galway. Christy Sheehan and family, the McLennan's lived down the Green lawn and of course the McNeill's just a few doors

down from us had a little shop/pub and father was a rep for Bush radio.

We had our own football team and a few subs, Stephens's day would see a full blooded game on in the seminary field as one side of the street took on the other, no quarter asked or given. I remember Nell Brosnan, lived as a recluse on her own three doors down, years later I learned that this lady had been a nurse on the front in the World war and seen some terrible sights. And of course the Healy's of the famous corner shop, our meeting point, great family, a story in itself for me here perhaps at a later date.

Memories are precious, priceless and part and parcel of human nature. Lower new St shaped my life, left me with youthful amazing Christmas memories, far too many to recall here.

“Killarney the greatest place in the whole world, for me definetly Heavens Reflex”

