

(10) Late Bronze Age – circa 1000 BC - <http://irisharchaeology.ie/work/>

(11) Citation by *Voices from the Dawn* – <http://www.voicesfromthedawn.com/lough-gur/>– Roche, Helen, “The Dating of the Embanked Stone Circle at Grange, Co Limerick.” *From Megaliths to Metal: Essays in Honour of George Eogan*, Ed John Bradley, Barry Raftery, John Coles, and Eoin Grogan. Oxford: Oxbow, 2004. 109-16.

(12) Citation by *Voices from the Dawn* – <http://www.voicesfromthedawn.com/lough-gur/>– Feehily, Patricia. “Summer Solstice Wonder at Lough Gur Farm.” *The Limerick Leader* 27 June 1998: 1.

(13) Citation by *Voices from the Dawn* – <http://www.voicesfromthedawn.com/lough-gur/>– Ó Ríordáin, Seán P “Lough Gur Excavations: The Great Stone Circle (B) in Grange Townland.” *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy. Section C: Archaeology, Celtic Studies, History, Linguistics, Literature* 54 (1951/1952):

42. In another article Ó Ríordáin again warned about accepted JF Lynch’s folklore accounts at face value: “It is...difficult to differentiate between genuine local traditions and beliefs based on the writings of the late Rev JF Lynch.” (Ó Ríordáin, Seán P. “Mediæval Dwellings at Caherguillamore, Co Limerick.” *The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* Seventh 12.2 (1942): 37)

(14) Citation by *Voices from the Dawn* - <http://www.voicesfromthedawn.com/lough-gur/>– Zucchelli, Christine. *Stones of Adoration Sacred Stones and Mystic Megaliths of Ireland*. Doughcloyne, Wilton, Cork: Collins, 2007. 76.

(15) Citation by *Voices from the Dawn* – <http://www.voicesfromthedawn.com/lough-gur/>– Damery, Patricia. “The Horned God: A Personal Discovery of Cultural Myth.” *The San Francisco Jung Institute Library Journal* 23.3 (2004): 18-19.

(16) Citation by *Voices from the Dawn* – <http://www.voicesfromthedawn.com/lough-gur/>– MacNeill, Maire. *The Festival of Lughnasa*. London: Oxford University Press, 1962. 346+.

The author, along with Ó Ríordáin, warns “...we are forcibly reminded of the resemblance to the anecdote about a specific stone circle which... was the source of the medieval literary legends of Cenn Croich.”

(17) Citation by *Voices from the Dawn* – <http://www.voicesfromthedawn.com/lough-gur/>– McNamara, Tom. “Grange Stone Circle.” Personal interview - 25 June 1979.

(18) Citation by *Voices from the Dawn* - <http://www.voicesfromthedawn.com/lough-gur/> - Windle, Bertram C.A. “On Certain Megalithic Remains Immediately Surrounding Lough Gur, County Limerick.” *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy. Section C: Archaeology, Celtic Studies, History, Linguistics, Literature* 30 (1912/1913): 293-94. The excavator of the Lough Gur monuments, Professor Ó Ríordáin, believes that early visitors had “Circle B” in mind “as the object of their admiration since it is likely that the cottages which stood in D in the early nineteenth century and the road which cut it in the west, already existed in the previous century to the detriment of the monument.” (Ó Ríordáin, Seán P. “Lough Gur Excavations: The Great Stone Circle (B) in Grange Townland.” *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy. Section C: Archaeology, Celtic Studies, History, Linguistics, Literature* 54 (1951/1952): 37.)

(19) Citation by *Voices from the Dawn* – <http://www.voicesfromthedawn.com/lough-gur/>– The destroyed circle was meant to be 52 m (171 ft.) in diameter with 72 stones, larger than the Líos without its wide bank. The most frequently noted legend about Stonehenge and Merlin has him relocating the stone circle from the Curragh of Kildare.



John Joe Hourigan and Peggy Halpin on their wedding day in 1950 with Paddy Bulfin, best man, and Sarah Halpin, bridesmaid.

JOHN JOE HOURIGAN (1908-1989)

By Tommy Hourigan

It is with great pleasure, pride, gratitude and fond recollection, that I pen this tribute on behalf of my eight siblings and me. I set out to acknowledge and celebrate the life of our father, John Joe Hourigan, a wonderful son, husband, father, grandfather and servant of Ireland as a rural postman over 56 years, the earlier years being in the role of telegram boy. He was also a very good neighbour and friend to many.

It is not possible to pay tribute to John Joe without including his beloved wife and our mother, Peggy (nee Halpin of Cahernorry, Co Limerick). They were a tremendous team, devoted to each other, sharing the selfless objectives of rearing, providing for, protecting and educating their children. Like parents of their time, they provided so much with so little, with scant consideration for their own needs and comforts.

Our father died on 18th February 1989, at the age of eighty. Kieran, the youngest of our family, was particularly close to our father, and as his death approached, Kieran provided great assistance to our mother in lovingly caring for John Joe at home. Other siblings were of great help too. Our mother, some fifteen years John Joe's junior, died unexpectedly just a little more than a year later on 26th March 1990 at the Limerick Regional Hospital – she was 66 years old. While she was ill at the time, we remain of the view that 'a broken heart' was a contributory factor. She had lovingly nursed John Joe at home during his long illness, and he died in his own bed with Peggy praying for him and attending to his needs. He passed away peacefully, surrounded by his family.

John Joe departed this world, having faithfully cared for a grateful wife and family, and having devoted his long working life to a large community over a number of generations. In delivering a critical public service, he walked (in the early years) and cycled almost half a million miles, a distance equating approximately to twenty circuits of our planet Earth or a return trip to the Moon.

The 1911 Census

The 1911 Census recorded that John Joe (three years old) lived with his father, Thomas Hourigan (forty years old), an agricultural labourer, his mother, Kate (28 years old) and brother, Thomas (one year old) in a dwelling house in Lower Grange,

identified as “House No 17”. This was the original of the house that was later occupied by the late Nora Hourigan, widow of James (Jimmy) Hourigan, who was a younger brother of John Joe. The census also indicated that in addition to a private dwelling, the property included a “piggery” and a “fowl house”; it also recorded that Thomas and Kate were married for six years, four children were born alive, of which two remained living. Thomas and Kate both could “read and write”.

As our family has no record of Thomas (Junior) in later years, it is possible that he did not survive. In any event, by the *1911 Census*, two of Thomas’s and Kate’s born children had died. This points to the high mortality rate in infants and children during those times when living conditions were challenging, medicine was significantly less advanced and life-saving immunisation programmes had yet to be introduced.

It is interesting to note that in the mid-1940s in Ireland, about five hundred children died every year of vaccine-preventable diseases, such as whooping cough, diphtheria, tuberculosis and polio. Today’s death rate for these illnesses is zero. (irishhealth.com – Prof Denis Gill, Consultant Paediatric Nephrologist) The devastation that such deaths must have inflicted on parents and households is unimaginable nowadays – thanks to the immunisation programmes that were introduced and developed since the early 1950s.

John Joe’s other siblings; James, Peter, Agnes and Christina, all born after 1911, are long deceased. However, I am glad to say that we have many cousins living today.



John Joe Hourigan with his mother, Kate, and two of his children.

Marriage and Children

John Joe, like his father before him, married a much younger woman. He and his bride, Peggy Halpin of Cahernorry (daughter of a blacksmith), were married on 20th September 1950 and honeymooned in Lisdoonvarna. I am the oldest sibling and given my date of birth in 1951, I might surmise that County Clare was of some importance to my beginnings. The wedding photograph herein shows John Joe and Peggy with the best man Paddy Bulfin, John Joe’s good friend and Sarah Halpin, bridesmaid, Peggy’s sister. Peggy and John Joe made a handsome couple.

Following marriage, John Joe and Peggy resided for a few years at the gate lodge on the Flavin farm on the Limerick side of Lower Grange. The lodge was just inside and to the right of the imposing gates to the former Croker Estate. Those gates exist to this day, and I have clear memories of standing inside them

as a very young child, looking onto the road. I have a few very precious memories of those early years in my life, which include the lovely woods and their flowers, the horse and float during the hay season when my father assisted the Flavin families with 'saving' and harvesting hay, and the river that still flows gently on, overlooked and seemingly guarded by the ruins of the former 'Great House.' The Flavin family of the time were very kind and generous to my parents.

The New Cottage

In 1955, John Joe and Peggy were provided with a new cottage in Upper Grange by Limerick County Council. This is the house that is currently occupied by Kieran Hourigan and his family. The two adjacent new cottages were provided for Bill (William) and Bridie (nee Clancy) Madden and James and Mai (nee Harty) Ryan. The Madden, Ryan and Hourigan families became close and good neighbours over many years. In my own case, relocating provided me with childhood friendships, some of which have endured to this day. Each house was set on approximately an acre of good land, which was important to all three households for growing food to sustain families.

I have an abiding memory of the house move from 'the lodge' to our new cottage. John Joe borrowed a horse and hay float from the Flavin family to transport our meagre possessions. I accompanied him on one journey, and I recall clutching my rubber hot-water-bottle during the trip. I suppose it was a 'comfort blanket' of a sort. My sister Kathleen and brother Tony were very young at the time.

The new cottage brought substantial benefits. The 'ownership' of a home through the County Council, with electricity and three bedrooms, even though there would not be running water and indoor toilet facilities for years to come, must have brought great security for our parents. Gardens in the three adjacent cottages were developed quickly to grow many types of vegetables. Bill Madden, a gardener by trade, grew both vegetables and beautiful shrubs/flowers. Jimmy Ryan kept a garden and also had livestock. John Joe, usually back home from his postman duties by three o'clock each afternoon, cultivated vegetable gardens extensively. He had two gardens. 'The haggard' was used to grow early potatoes and other vegetables such as cabbages, carrots, parsnips, turnips, onions, lettuces and others. The bigger garden grew late potatoes as well as vegetables. These were all carefully harvested and were a critical source of food to sustain a large household, eventually two adults and nine children. John Joe worked his gardens diligently for many years, mostly by hand. The time available to him for gardening and other activities increased when the postman's working week was reduced from six to five days. Eventually, the fertility of the earth dwindled from constant use. Our brother, Tony, has kept up the gardening tradition.

A great advantage was the proximity to Grange National School, situated adjacent to our cottage. Most of my siblings and I completed our primary school education there, as John Joe did himself. The school, having become redundant

subsequently, stood decaying for decades; however, at the time of writing it is good that local community groups in conjunction with the local authority are considering steps to preserve the building. Hopefully, this building, constructed initially in 1867, will be maintained into the long-term future for the benefit of the community as a whole.

Another advantage of the new cottage for John Joe was the fact that he passed his mother's home in Lower Grange while going to and returning from his work. He cycled to Grange Post Office in Lower Grange each working morning, from where he commenced his post round, and, of course, he completed the return journey home after work. While she lived, my grandmother, Kate, to whom I was much attached, was visited by my father on most working days and other occasions. Often, I arrived at her home before my father did, and, despite my young age, I was aware of the deep affection and bond that they shared. My grandmother was widowed before I came to know her; she was a lovely lady, kind and gentle. We seldom left her without some item of food to take home. When Kate died, our father was heartbroken. Etched in my memory is the scene at the removal of her remains when it was necessary to remove her bedroom window to extricate her coffin from the cottage.

On his way home from work, John Joe stopped frequently to talk with the neighbours to bring salient news or to have a 'cuppa'. When I accompanied him, I recall many such stops at Bridie Dillon's house in Lower Grange (*mother of Maureen O'Carroll*).

John Joe – Postman

John Joe worked in the postal services for 56 years. His service commenced as the telegram boy, and then he progressed to postman. When he retired in March of 1982, he received a certificate from the Department of Posts and Telegraphs signed by the then Minister for Posts and Telegraphs. The certificate reads as follows – *Department of Posts and Telegraphs to John Hourigan. On the occasion of your retirement from the Department of Posts and Telegraphs, I desire to express to you my appreciation of the Faithful service you have rendered to the State during a period of more than 56 years.*

When John Joe retired, Martin Ryan wrote as follows under *Rural Roundabout* in the *Limerick Leader*:

“As he pushed his pedal cycle along the winding country roads of Caherelly, delivering the mail to the scattered rural homes, John Joe Hourigan had covered almost half a million miles in the service of the community for more than half a century. It was a nostalgic day that brought a tear to his eye. A few more letters to deliver... just a few more of the familiar faces to greet... and then it was back to the post office to hand up his postbag.

“The route that he had travelled on his pedal cycle for 53 years was today being covered for the last time as the postman for the district. The miles were shorter... or the load of mail lighter than for many years... and the letters seemed

to quickly drop to the last one. The delivery of the last letter, on the last day of a long and faithful career, was a moment of nostalgia.

“His mind rolled back through the years. As a young postman, he took up duty in the area in the



L to R: Fr O'Dwyer makes the presentation to John Joe Hourigan on the occasion of his retirement. Also pictured: Peggy Hourigan and Joe Wingfield.

early 1920s, and today he was recalling the friendship of the people, the warm ‘cuppa’ which he so often enjoyed on his rounds during hail, rain, snow and sunshine, delivering the good news and the sad news to the families of Grange and Caherelly. He was recalling, too, the families that he had known as he trod along the route. Some had gone, but he could still remember them. He had delivered post... he recalled... to three generations of one family... four generations of another family. And then there was one family... the Mitchells... and he could recall delivering post to five generations. What a memory.

“Times had changed. The twelve shillings a week that he earned for the thirty-mile daily route had increased over the years, just as the 2d postage stamp had increased thirty times, and the knickerbockers uniform had become more modern. During the first few years as a young postman, he had walked the daily route, and the bicycle was a scarce mode of transport the first days he cycled along the roads of Caherelly. ‘I was the only postman in the area with a bicycle. They had one in Bruff, but the other offices had none’, he recalled for me as he reminisced over the years surrounded by well-wishers and messages of congratulations and thanks being poured on him. ‘The people were always very nice, and I got on very well with them’, said John Joe. ‘Me and the people. I was one of them, and they were one with me. I could go into any house and make tea if I wanted it. I knew them all very well’, he said.

“There were three roadside letter boxes on his route which he collected on his way back to the post office. As well as the letters he collected from the individuals along the way ‘I often took back as much as I brought out’.

“On this night, the former school house at Caherelly was packed to the door with parishioners who had gathered to pay tribute to John Joe, with presentations and good wishes. Rev Fr O’Dwyer said that John Joe had been delivering the post in the Grange and Ballybricken areas for close on sixty years. He had delivered post to five generations of one family in that time. He had made his daily rounds in hail, rain and snow and had become a friend to everyone. Father O’Dwyer said that he had been out of the parish for some years and could not



Retirement of John Joe Hourigan, seated L to R: Tommy, Peggy, John Joe, Nuala and Kieran Hourigan. Standing L to R: Ger Hannan, Ann (Madden), Kevin, Tony and Eileen (Enright) Hourigan, Kathleen (Hourigan) Hannan, Marie (Hourigan) McCarthy, Liam, Helen (Keane) and Joe Hourigan, Ger McCarthy.

believe his eyes when he came back and saw that John Joe was still with them, as he had been before he had left.

“He said that they had gathered on that night to pay a well-deserved tribute to him for all he had done for the area and for his long and faithful service. When it had become known that he was retiring, the people of the area were very generous, and he was delighted to present him with a mantel clock and a fat wallet of notes. For Mrs Hourigan, there was a bouquet of flowers.

“Joe Wingfield, Postmaster of Kilmallock, said that he had known John Joe for a long time. The people of Grange and Ballybricken felt the same about him as he did. He wanted to express a word of thanks to him for all his service to the post office and to wish him a happy retirement.

“In his reply, John Joe thanked the people of the area for all their kindness to him over the years. He thanked Rev Fr O’Dwyer for all the trouble he had gone to, Breda Bulfin, Postmistress at Grange and Mrs Kerins, Postmistress, Caherelly, for all the cups of tea. He thanked Joe Wingfield and Mrs Wingfield. ‘I could not thank you enough’, he said.

“His son Anthony said that they were all very proud of their father, and he wanted to thank the people of the area for their generosity in making the presentations. He also wanted to express the thanks of the family to his mother for he felt they had worked as a team.”

Delivery Route

John Joe’s route commenced and ended at Grange Post Office. Between leaving in the early morning and returning in the afternoon, the miles brought him through the countryside that he loved so much – from house to house, from townland to townland, up and down boreens, into dead ends and out again, up and down long entrances to farmhouses, up tough inclines and free-wheeling down the other side and even across a field or two in order to take advantage of shortcuts. Most mornings, as he commenced his route, possibly even before a letter was delivered, a ‘cuppa’ beckoned at the home of Kitty and Mike O’Brien, and then, fortified, his journey began in earnest. Many hours later, if there was just a letter remaining in his bag for Tony Barry and family, then the thirty-mile route was at an end, and a relaxed discussion with Breda Bulfin was the prize.

Dedicated to the Job

Our father took his work very seriously, and his philosophy was “mind your job and do it well”. Every working morning, without fail, John Joe polished his boots and brushed his uniform and hat. He took great pride in being properly attired and presented for the job. During inclement weather, when his uniform or topcoat or footwear became wet, he dried each item in front of our No 8 Stanley Range fire or the two-bar electric fire, in readiness for the next day. There was no central heating.

My siblings and I have other reason to remember the clothing issued to postmen by the Department of Posts and Telegraphs. The clothing was heavy and warm, and during the cold season John Joe would spread his uniforms, current and old, on our beds at night to supplement the bed clothing. These provided remarkable insulation from the bitter cold. His very old uniforms and hats became effective ‘scare-crows’ in the gardens.

The people on John Joe’s delivery round were very generous when he retired. But this generosity was evident over many years while he worked. From time to time, he arrived home with pork steak, bacon and black puddings or other food items. Many people on his post route ‘killed’ pigs and fowl and shared with John Joe. The generosity of people was especially marked at Christmas time when households made him gifts, mostly cash. He received a significant amount of cash gifts, and I have no doubt that this generosity went a very long way towards ensuring many a “Happy Christmas” for all in our household during our childhood years.

John Joe was a decent, honest and hard-working man, and he was widely appreciated by those whom he served. He was a kind and gentle man, a good listener and a man trusted with a confidence. Over the years, when written communication was the traditional medium available to most people, he delivered countless joyous and sorrowful messages, some from far away shores, to many homes on his round and shared in the range of emotions of the many recipients. Of course, delivery of a parcel from overseas was a happy occasion as relatives sent home clothing, footwear and other welcome items.

When I was a very young boy, I recall my father having been brought home from work by car and put to bed; I cannot remember another occasion like it. He was clearly upset and distressed. It transpired that he had come upon the tragic death of a young man at his home. He knew the young man and his family very well, and the tragedy hit him hard.

As a younger boy and in my teenage years, I accompanied (on my bicycle) my father on some occasions on his post round, as did some of my brothers. I experienced, first-hand, the warm relationship that he had with those he served, and their appreciation for his dedication and friendship. I also learned that post boxes could not be emptied before certain times, gates had to be shut, and I identified

dogs whose ‘bite could be worse than their bark!’ Over a number of years, my brothers and I acted as relief postman during John Joe’s two-week summer holiday. We were well instructed on how to behave and perform the job to his standard. I have no doubt that he had ways of monitoring our performances.

Our Mother

While John Joe was a great father and provider, our mother, Peggy, was a tremendous wife, mother, a homemaker and in later years, grandmother. It should be said that John Joe was also very ‘good around the house’, which was a great help to my mother. He was good with the children. They were a team.

She worked tirelessly every day from early morning until late evening doing all the tasks that were necessary to care for a family, growing in number and getting older. Eventually, there were nine children, the oldest being fifteen years senior to the youngest. When it came to finances and scarce resources, she could make a little go a long way. People of that era were exemplary budget managers and home economists. She was an excellent cook, and we never went hungry nor lacked the basics in clothing, footwear, school books and other necessities. Nowadays it would be challenging for people to appreciate how difficult it was to run a home and care for children without running water, indoor toilet facilities and central heating, not to mention bathing facilities.

In the case of our family, like many others of the time, before running water became a reality in our locality in 1972 through the Lough Gur Water Scheme, water had to be drawn by bucket, daily and as required, from a local well. As we grew up, this chore fell to me and my siblings. Water was drawn from the well each morning before we left for primary school and again upon returning home in the afternoon. This well, located off the main road almost opposite Grange School, still has flowing water. In later years, and prior to the installation of piped running water, our near neighbour, Paddy Carmody, installed a private supply of running water, including an outside tap in his farm yard. Paddy kindly allowed us access to the tap; this made life easier. Paddy, a bachelor, was an absolute gentleman, and he was fond of Peggy’s cooking. Every Sunday, for some years, our young sister, Marie, delivered a piping hot dinner to Paddy, who was most appreciative. Marie was fond of Paddy, and the fondness was reciprocated.

The availability of fresh milk was a critical requirement for a mother caring for a large family including very young children and infants. During the 1950s and early 1960s, I recall, as a young boy being oldest in our family, waiting outside Shinnors’s Shop, frequently into the early hours of the morning, for glass-bottled (*pints*) pasteurised milk to be delivered from Limerick. At times it was bitterly cold. The arrangement with the shop was that the milk could be taken upon delivery. Delivery times were haphazard, usually during the very late evening and early

morning hours. I distinctly recall my relief and sense of achievement when the rattle and clatter of milk bottles in their crates could be heard from the milk truck, a good distance away, as it made its way along the main road from Limerick. Then the sweet bottle music and the approaching truck lights meant the wait was over – at least for another day.

Our oldest sister, Kathleen, was of great help to my mother. Indeed, she was like a second mother to the younger siblings. Our two other sisters, Marie and Nuala, were also helpful as they grew up.

Some of us, especially the boys and perhaps the author, in particular, were somewhat ‘wild’ in our youth. Our brother, Liam, while no saint, tended to be more sensible and steady, and our mother, being well aware of this, tended to defer to Liam when a need arose. Liam was a very effective peacemaker at home from time to time, a kind of “Henry Kissinger”.

For some years, Peggy kept hens and ducks, and we had a plentiful supply of eggs as well as having the occasional hen or duck for dinner. My very young brother, Joe, observed how the ducks were dispatched by my father and one day he ‘took care’ of a duckling. Peggy was not pleased.

For a number of years, we kept and fattened a pig for killing. Peggy was mainly responsible for looking after the new bonham and feeding it daily over the months until sufficiently fattened. Invariably she became attached to the animal. On the day of the killing, she did much of the preparatory work, boiling water and other essentials, but when the time came for our neighbour, Paddy Bourke, to expertly dispatch the pig, Peggy took to a bedroom wardrobe and covered her ears. Our brother, Tony, was allowed to stay at home from school to assist in collecting the blood that would be used in making black puddings; he seemed to relish the task. Nobody else was ‘up for the job’, despite the prize of a day out of school. As the national school was adjacent to our house and within shouting distance, those of us at school knew when Paddy had completed his task.

On the following day, the pig was expertly sectioned by Paddy for home curing in a wooden barrel containing salted water. Black puddings were made using pig’s blood and other ingredients. Carefully cleaned pig intestines were used to encase the pudding ingredients. The puddings were then boiled and rendered ready for frying. The neighbours were treated. Bacon and rashers were guaranteed for a number of months. John Joe liked to eat the pig’s head; personally I could never eat it.

Peggy had a decent singing voice and could play the accordion. She bought an accordion with the intention of teaching her children to play music. As it transpired, none of us showed much talent in that direction, although Kathleen was probably the best of us.

Peggy was an excellent story-teller. I recall her telling the children about her family and times and events in the past. Sometimes she would pull out old photographs and reminisce, telling the stories behind them. A favourite subject matter of hers was her time during training and nursing at Saint Joseph's (Mental) Hospital, Mulgrave Street, Limerick. She spoke fondly of colleagues and patients and particular 'characters' drawn from both cohorts. She told us about the antics of the live-in trainees in what was a very strict regime. A favourite story related to how some of the trainees, herself included, 'sneaked out', contrary to regulations, to attend dances, and how those remaining behind covered up if necessary. A favourite story of mine was about time she spent in London during World War II, particularly her first-hand experiences of the bombing of the city. To me, those war stories were both absorbing and frightening, but always fascinating.

John Joe away from his job

As already said, John Joe tilled his gardens for many years while rearing his children. He also had an ability to repair bicycles and did so from time to time for people. I recall the Hartigan sisters from Rahin who were his customers. He was also very adept with a 'hay fork' and helped many neighbours and friends over the years to save and harvest hay. People such as Paddy Carmody, Mary Carey, Joe O'Shea, Mike O'Brien, Donie O'Dwyer, (nature's true gentleman), John O'Keeffe, Jimmy Fitzgerald and many others, all deceased, come to mind. This help often resulted in a welcome 'few bob'; people were generous and appreciative. I frequently accompanied John Joe as I grew up and my abiding memories of those early years include horse-drawn machinery and the occasional grey coloured Ferguson 20 tractor. At every opportunity, I sat on a stationary tractor and played at pretend. It was customary for the hay owner to bring tea to the hayfield in large tin cans as well as sandwiches for the working men and women. The rattle of Guinness bottles in message bags was frequently a feature. As hay was subsequently harvested in barns and reeks, usually adjacent to houses, the 'women of the house' often cooked huge meals for the helpers.

Paddy Carmody, neighbour and farmer and John Joe were good friends. Paddy owned mechanised transport when very few owned motorcars in the late 1950s and early 1960s. During those years, Paddy drove to championship hurling matches from time to time, and John Joe accompanied him. I was brought along to some of those games. Neither man was a habitual drinker – as I recall, they would both drink two pints of Guinness after the match before setting out for home. As well as my lemonade, I occasionally managed the odd slurp from my father's pint.

One particular summer, Paddy and John Joe went to a game in Thurles. They travelled in what I believe was Paddy's first van-like vehicle. This vehicle had at

times to be pulled by a horse in order to start it. By midnight, there was no sign of the men returning home, and my mother was at the gate, frantic with worry, waiting for a sign of approaching headlights. Paddy was a bachelor, so there was nobody waiting at his gate.

Sometime in the early hours of the morning, the men arrived back home, safe and sound, and the transport had not let them down at all. Apparently, the men had more than the usual two pints and elected to 'sleep it off' in the cinema before starting for home!

At this point, I also remember a great friend of our family, Mary Carey, a long-time widow, who lived close by. She was known to us all, adults and children alike, as "Mrs Carey". She was a lovely and kind woman. Sometime after our house acquired a television set, it became customary for Paddy Carmody and Mrs Carey to visit our home on Sunday evenings to chat with my mother and father and to watch *The Riordans* on TV. That soap opera was the weekly highlight for many at the time.

As the older children of our family grew into adulthood and 'left the nest' from around the mid-1970s to set up our own homes and families, John Joe had a new lease of life. He assumed a 'clerk of works' role for each building project, and when he acquired a motor car, mobility was no longer an obstacle – he would drive anywhere. Some of my siblings were a little nervous of his driving prowess! He built boundary walls, fences and had a hand in any activity possible for him. Of course, he developed new gardens for us. As I recall, my wife, Ann, and I had a first class vegetable garden in the suburbs of Limerick City in the early 1980s, all developed and maintained by John Joe.

Religion

Peggy and John Joe were devout Roman Catholics and attended Mass and took the Sacraments regularly.

In the early years of growing up, I recall how the Rosary was said on most evenings in our house. Our mother would lead, and my father and those of the children who could, recited a decade of the Rosary. We knelt in a rudimentary circle on the kitchen floor, resting arms on chairs. As the family grew, it was necessary for two or more children to share a chair. While the Rosary was recited in great earnest, there was a certain amount of devilment going on amongst the children. One objective was to have a sibling laugh or lose concentration during his or her turn to recite; this was achieved by winking or nudging or 'making faces'. All of this could result in a 'clip on the ear' for the errant reciter, much to the glee of the other children.

During the phenomenon of the 'moving statue' of the Virgin Mary at Ballin-spittle, County Cork in summer 1985, my mother, in particular, was anxious to visit the grotto and to see for herself. My wife, Ann, and I drove Peggy and John Joe to the grotto, and with a lot of expectation, we all spent a number of hours gazing

intently at the statue in the company of a large number of other visitors. Peggy felt that that there was movement, but as I recall, John Joe remained sceptical. All of this made for interesting conversation on the journey home. We had a good day out.

As recorded by [Wikipedia](#), similar occurrences were reported shortly afterward in Mount Melleray, County Waterford and at around thirty other locations around Ireland. They were not all Marian apparitions, some involved other divine figures and saints who appeared as stains on church walls. Thousands gathered at many of the sites out of curiosity or to gaze in wonder and to pray. Up to a hundred thousand were said to have visited the Ballinspittle Grotto alone. The Catholic Church remained reticent or highly sceptical, but a bishop was reported to have declared the whole phenomenon ‘an illusion’. However, there were many who ‘believed their eyes’ – convinced that extraordinary events had occurred.

Around the time of our father’s retirement, he and my mother went on a pilgrimage to Lourdes. This was the religious event of their lives, not to mention the excitement of flying for the first (and last) time. The pilgrimage was a tremendous experience for both of them.

Conclusion

We have always been and remain a close family, even though we are geographically scattered to an extent. Over the years, since our parents died, we encountered tragedies including the untimely deaths of beautiful children, leaving their parents and families devastated and broken-hearted. The father of one of these children, a relatively young man, died in a tragic building site accident, just a few years after the death of this child. Our sister in this case and her family and our brother and his wife and family in the case of another child are remarkable people. Coping has been difficult, to say the least.

At the time of writing, all of John Joe’s and Peggy’s children are living and are located as follows: Tommy – Raheen Limerick; Kathleen (Hannan) – Shannon Town; Tony – Upper Grange; Liam – Ballyneety, Co Limerick; Marie (McCarthy) – Dooradoyle, Limerick; Joe – Cappawhite, Co Tipperary; Nuala (Dooley) – Newry, Co Down; Kevin – New York, USA; Kieran – Upper Grange.

Like so many others, emigration in search of work and adventure has featured in our family. In years gone by, Liam moved to England for some time but returned home to settle down. Joe, Nuala and Kevin went to New York; Joe and Nuala returned home to settle in Ireland. Kevin remained in the USA and made a life for himself, he runs a successful business and married later in life to an American in 2014; Kevin was always cautious!

Having paid loving tributes to our parents, it must be acknowledged that the selfless living described in this account was common for parents in the society of the era. May God reward them all.