

MOIRA AND MAUREEN REMINISCED

Compiled by Mary Gallagher and Tommy Hourigan

On a May afternoon in 2015, we arrived at Moira Dillon's house at around 5 o'clock in the afternoon to meet with Moira and her cousin Maureen O'Carroll (nee Dillon). We were invited in by Moira, and she informed us that Maureen would arrive as soon as she had looked in to ensure that a neighbour was well. This was the first sign we had that Grange must still be in good shape, one neighbour looking in on another. Our cars were parked outside Moira's house, and these two strange vehicles had set off a community alarm system within a short space of time. First of all, Moira's neighbour, Mickey O'Connell, called on the phone to ensure that Moira was well and later on another neighbour, Paul Hourigan, called Maureen on her mobile phone, again enquiring if all was well with Moira. Earlier, as one of us sat in a car awaiting the arrival of the other, there was a good visual inspection of the stationary car and its occupant carried out, all in the interests of protecting Moira's well-being, no doubt. It is good to see such community vigilance and concern for the welfare of a neighbour.

Before Maureen arrived, Moira proceeded to talk a little about herself. Her clarity of thought and recall seemed to deny that she reached her 87th year in February of this year, 2015. Moira has spent her lifetime in Grange, a locality that she clearly loves, and her attachment to the people of her parish became evident as she talked about her life and people. She recalled going to school in Grange and her teachers, Mrs Power, Mrs O'Donnell and Master Lynch.

Moira made her First Communion in Grange Church, and she recalled walking to church in her white outfit on Ascension Thursday. As she said, "there was no going around in cars in those days". Moira made her Confirmation in Bruff and travelled there by pony and trap. The children lined up in the yard of Collins's public house – that is where the cafe is now located alongside the church. Their veils and other pieces were put on there; then the children marched into the church. For their Confirmation, Moira and another girl wore blue dresses, but Mrs O'Donnell had said that all the children were to wear white. The two girls in blue were in an awful state about their non-conformance, but when they saw that Angela MacInerney was wearing a cream costume, they became much happier.

Abbie and her husband, Timothy (Timmy), both worked for the Hartigans (house is now the home of Jerry O’Riordan and family). Abbie was very religious, and she and other ladies from the Old Road visited Grange Church every evening without fail. Abbie was lucky on a couple of occasions, winning in the pools. Tommy Bulfin collected something like a shilling each week on behalf of Father Houlihan for the pools draw. Moira recalled that Jackie O’Connell won a cow one-time in a draw. When Moira finished school at 14, she went to work for the Hartigans at the end of August that year. She learned how to milk cows and performed other chores on the farm and in the family home. Pat Hartigan was married to Mary Butler from Bruff, a sister of Jimmy Butler. The Butler family had a public house in Bruff at the time. She recalls, as part of her duties, drawing water by bucket from the pump at Lower Grange, which is still situated across from what used to be the Bulfin residence, though no longer in working condition. Water was drawn for domestic use and also for general use – there was a big storage tank in Hartigan’s yard.

It was at this stage in our conversation with Moira that Maureen joined us. It was a lovely afternoon and Moira had the porch door open to the outside. She suggested to Maureen that she might close the door, but Maureen said that she had left a house that had an open fire running; so, the door remained open.

Maureen was born in 1943 and has lived in Grange ever since, except for a very short period when she lived in Hospital with her husband Philly after getting married. On her first day at school, she got a slap from the teacher and as she said herself, “I never forgot it”. She was just a four-year-old pupil on her first day at school.

Maureen’s mother was Bridie Dillon, and her father was Mick Dillon. Coincidentally, Bridie’s maiden name was Dillon as well but she was not related to Mick’s family. Mick was a brother of Timothy Dillon, Abbie’s husband. Moira has one sister, Joanie, and two brothers, Dan and Thady. Bridie and Mick were married in England and lived there for a while before they came home to Grange to live in the house that Maureen now resides in. Maureen’s grandfather, Owen Dillon, had died, and Bridie and Mick came home to be with Maureen’s grandmother, known as Mam Dillon. Mam’s maiden name was Shinnors, apparently sometimes known as Gennery.

When Maureen left Grange National School, she went to the Technical School on O’Connell Avenue in Limerick. When she graduated from technical school, she took up employment with Davis Printers, a company still in operation, just off the Ballysimon Road.

Returning to her employment history, Moira informed us that after a couple of years at Hartigans, she took up work with O’Donnells of The Yard (where the Wallace family now lives). She worked there for four or five years, milking cows

and performing housework. At this juncture, Mary Gallagher recalled how she and her siblings would be “taken down there” to meet Monsignor O’Donnell at The Yard, when he visited there occasionally. She recalled the ‘genuflecting’ that was necessary. Mary’s family is related to the O’Donnells. Thomas O’Donnell of The Yard and his brother Michael of The Hill relocated from Lough Gur when they acquired two farms in Grange. Michael was the grandfather of the well-known Mike “Barlow”.

Maureen had one brother, Eugene, who died of cancer 19 years ago, at the age of 57. Maureen’s mother, Bridie, died in September 1984 and her dad, Mick, died five years later in 1989. Moira recalled that John Joe Hourigan also died that year. Abbie died on 24th January 1970 from cancer at the young age of 69. She died just a month before she was due to qualify for an old-age pension in February. Timothy died in 1981.

Maureen was of the view that her musical ability, which she played down, came from her mother’s side. Bridie’s father played the bagpipes, and other family members played the accordion and mouth organ. She recalled how Peggy Hourigan would write out music for her using a combination of symbols.



Philly and Maureen O’Carroll.

Having worked for seven or eight years at Davis Printers, Maureen retired to take up “real work”, as Moira put it, having married

Philly O’Carroll. Maureen met Philly at a dance in Hospital, and she said that it was their mutual love of and ability at dancing that brought them together. Maureen went far and wide to dances including The Fog in Ballysimon, Dromkeen, Hospital, Effin and other dance venues. Moira never went dancing – as she said – “I couldn’t get a step from a leg”. What Moira missed at dances, she made up for in going to the races. She went to Knockea and Bruff, walking to and from the events. “You wouldn’t have much money”, said Moira, “but enough to spend a few bob on the Wheel of Fortune”.

Following her period in the employment of the O’Donnells, Moira worked for the Barry family, just over Grange Bridge on the Limerick side. She took over from Biddy Madden of Upper Grange, and she worked for Mrs Barry for many years and loved her time there.

Recalling the characters of the Old Road, in particular, Moira and Maureen both remembered Jim Kirby and described him as a great storyteller and a man with great sayings. Maureen recalled one great saying of Jim's when he was tired – "I am not worth two grains of a goat's s..t". Moira shared this saying with a local lad who got great mileage from it.

Maureen's grandmother, Mam Dillon, was well known for her midwifery services, and she delivered many a child at home in those days. There were no painkillers available. She delivered Moira's siblings, Joan, Dan and Thady, amongst many. The two ladies recalled when Sadie Kirby's mother was due to give birth and Mam Dillon was called to assist. At that stage, Mam was advancing in years, probably in her early 70s, and, due to difficulty with walking, she had to be carried on a cart pulled by a number of people from her home to the Kirby house. Mam successfully delivered twin boys, Paddy and Tom. Sadie's grandmother, Mrs Grattan, who lived to be more than one hundred years old was in the house when the twins were delivered. She was in an outer room, sitting by the fireside, while Mam attended to the birthing. There was just one set of clothing, at one side of the fire, awaiting a new arrival. Mam delivered and brought out the first arrival and announced that a twin was on the way, to which Mrs Grattan responded that one was enough! As the ladies told this story, Tommy became a little confused stating his assumption that Mrs Grattan had birthed twins! At the absurdity of this, Moira went into convulsions of laughter which lasted quite a while. Moira has a tremendous sense of humour and a hearty laugh. Mam Dillon died at 89 years of age. Maureen herself was born at home (not delivered by Mam) and some time after her birth, Bridie was hospitalised in Croom, during which time Mam Dillon minded Maureen.

The two ladies spoke affectionately about a family who lived on the Old Road at one time. They were the Maher family who occupied the house that Tom O'Connell and his family lived in at a later time. There were thirteen children, but, sadly, the mother died at the birth of her youngest and the child died also. The mother went to Croom Hospital for the birth, and it was there that she died. Maureen was about twelve years old at the time. Mam Dillon delivered some of those thirteen children. When the children were old enough, a number of them immigrated and subsequently brought other members of the family to England and America.

Moira and Maureen recalled the Doran family who lived nearby. They mentioned Frank and Jack Doran, in particular, neither of whom married. They ran a shop at the house and were expert at making things with their hands, particularly Jack. The shop had a magnificent mahogany counter made by the brothers. Jack made wooden toys, and using string he made the figurines jump. Maureen said that Jack was making such wooden toys over sixty years ago. She frequently tidied up the house and shop for the brothers, for which she received a few pennies or sweets.

In more recent years, when Moira experienced difficulty with her hips, a neighbour, now deceased, used to give her a lift to Mass. One morning, he pulled his car up outside Moira's gate for her to get in the front seat. Moira was trying to get into the car, feet first, but she encountered difficulty. Her driver observed what was going on and said "Put your f...ing arse in first Moira" and that solved that problem. Moira laughed heartily as she recited her neighbour's words.

The two ladies referred to Jack O'Connell. In years gone by, he and his wife, Marion, were the owners of a fine orchard at their home, and Maureen recalled calling there on the way home from school to purchase a couple of pennies worth of apples. The girls made the purchases while the boys thought it a more direct approach to scale the orchard wall and help themselves to the low hanging fruit.

Philly O'Carroll and Maureen kept greyhounds for years. They had dogs running every week at the dog track in Limerick. Philly also kept brood bitches, and he bred many litters of pups over the years. Moira remembered that Timmy Dillon got a greyhound from Philly at one time. Timmy ran the dog a few times and also bred from her. On one occasion, the greyhound broke out and caused mayhem. Breda Dillon had only one thought – to save the hens!

They spoke about the various families that lived in Grange over the years and traced these families including the Maddens, Hartys, Houlihans, Walshes and Ryans as well as other families already mentioned. They recalled little Katie Ryan, who was housekeeper to Seoirse Clancy, Mayor of Limerick, and his family. Katie was described as prim and proper and always attired with a small hat. She was always neat and tidy. Of course, we already knew from the Clancy history that Katie, despite being petite, was not short of bravery as exhibited when confronted by Crown forces at the Clancy residence in 1920/1921.

Maureen recalled the set dancing that took place at the old schoolhouse prior to the Éire Óg era. A number of dancers convened there to dance and participated in the competitions as well. Maureen recalls that her partner was Mickey O'Connell. Others such as Chris Madden used to dance as well. At one stage a man named Dan Godfrey was brought in to teach the Ballycommon Set. "Toastie" O'Connell also attended – he was an accomplished dancer.

The ladies recalled that the creamery and the parish pump were great points for meeting and socialising and for imparting and gathering information. Referring to the local pump (which is kept in good condition), Jimmy Madden when he was alive used to paint the pump green. Gretta Purcell now takes care of that task.

At a point during our conversation, George O'Leary, Fuel Merchant, arrived at Moira's door, and she conveyed her order to him. She also instructed him to leave a drum of gas at Maureen's house. George had noticed through the open doorway that there was a number of people in the room. Moira explained to



Moira Dillon at the Shrine of Our Lady in Grange Church.

George that a couple of people were visiting in connection with a Grange book. George thought there was a bingo session going on! Mind you, looking back now, he could be excused for thinking that, given the ages of the four of us seated in a circle with documents in evidence.

Both Dillon families kept cows going back over the years. The tradition was continued by Moira herself and by Maureen's family for some years after the deaths of their parents. At one stage, Tom Toastie O'Connell took

the milk to the creamery for them, and the Dillon families would roll their milk tankards over to Toastie's house before he departed for the creamery. Timothy Dillon went to the creamery himself at one time. The daily visits to "The Ranch", to inspect cows or to bring them home for milking were recalled with great sentiment as were the discussions that took place during the goings and the comings. Many participants were remembered such as Mai Harty, Nellie Madden and members of practically every family on the Old Road in Lower Grange.

As Moira pointed out, in those days gone by, there were no electric fridges and perishables were placed in a butter box with dock leaves or cabbage leaves wrapped around them to keep them cool. Maureen's father made a fridge of sorts by digging a hole in the ground and placing a 'burco' boiler in it with the food to be kept cool. A sod of earth was placed over the container lid. That arrangement was remarkably effective.

Speaking of religion, Moira and Maureen recalled a time, around the mid to late 1990s, when Father Costello of Bruff would lead a group on a prayerful walk from Grange Church to The Hamlet and back again, during which time the Rosary would repeatedly be said. As Maureen said "It felt strange passing your door" on the way back from The Hamlet to the church. Moira had no such feeling because she went straight in home on the return leg. Father Joe Foley led such prayer sessions as well, but usually in the vicinity of the church grounds.

Moira recalled that in pre-electrification days, lighted candles would be placed around a coffin in the church during the evening prayers. The sacristan, Mrs Carey, took care of these arrangements.

Practically on the dot of 6 o'clock, Moira's black and white cat (more black than white) presented at the front door with his tail up and gave us an exhibition of 'meowing'. Maureen offered the opinion that the cat had arrived for his afternoon tea, but Moira said that she had fed the cat earlier owing to our visit. The cat gave Moira a few dirty looks and the other three of us much more menacing glares before eventually moving off, probably very disgruntled at the infringement on his perfect world.

Maureen and Philly have one in the family, their son, Mike. Mike is married to Carmel Higgins, and they have two sons, Niall and Shane. Niall has a master's degree in science and music technology as well as a degree in applied physics. He plays the drums, and Shane plays the keyboard. Shane is currently studying at Mary Immaculate College in Limerick. The sons have inherited their rich musical talent from both sides of their family.

We mentioned Moira's powers of memory and recall earlier, and Maureen told us that if she put anything away in her house for a future date while Moira was there, and if subsequently she couldn't remember where she left an item, Moira would be able to tell her immediately. Maureen seemed to be a little in awe of Moira's memory prowess. And so we found as we spoke with the two ladies, Moira's capacity to recall detail, whether names, dates or events was impressive indeed. Mind you, in this regard, Maureen did not play second fiddle. We had two hours of great conversation with the two ladies with more than a good share of jollification and laughter. We are afraid that owing to the timidity and gentle nature of this book's readership, we couldn't record all of the stories that we were told, fascinating and funny as they were.

As we left Moira's house, we couldn't but admire her flower garden to the right-hand side as we walked towards the exit gate. It was good to know, from the point of view of the security of older people living on their own, that probably more than one pair of eyes had us under surveillance. There was also the reassurance that Mickey O'Connell and Paul Hourigan amongst others, most likely, were on community alert. No doubt, a black and white cat had us in his sights too, purring a little easier now as he was rid of competition for Moira's undivided attention. We left behind two lovely ladies, Maureen and Moira, having thoroughly enjoyed their wonderful company.