

## WE GREW UP IN GRANGE (CIRCA 1956-1964)

By Brendan Madden and Tommy Hourigan

When it was decided that a book about Grange Parish would be written, we wondered if we might write an account of our childhood and growing up in Grange. Very quickly, we concluded that such a story, if it were to be written, should be confined to our lives up to around thirteen or fourteen years of age. Many of our escapades in later years are best remaining unrecorded, at least for now.

A single year separates us in age; one (*Tommy*) was born in July 1951, the other (*Brendan*) in July 1952. We have been best friends since commencing primary school at Grange, and our friendship has endured. When we were young, we had arguments and disagreements, but these were always resolved quickly. So, we spent a lot of time together while growing up.

As we thought about the notion of writing a story, we wondered if we had anything of interest to recall and relate, something that people might read – so in some respects, this article is a gamble.

Life in those days was simple and straightforward, even if tough and hard in some ways. Life did not have many of today's complexities. Technological development was confined mainly to industry in general, aviation, the automotive industry, warfare equipment and the emerging space programmes.

Everyday life was unencumbered by technology. The microchip had not arrived, and computing power, such as mainframes, involved massive equipment that had miniscule processing power by today's standards. That equipment took up a lot of space, used a lot of electricity and required particular environments. Those huge machines at the top end of the scale generated considerable heat, requiring cooling by forced air circulation or water. (*Ref IBM Archives*)

The Internet, so vitally necessary to living in today's world, started as ARPANET, a 1960s defence force project in the US which had the objective of connecting several supercomputer sites in the country with one another so that if any one of them was destroyed by a nuclear explosion, for example, then the remaining computers would continue to function. (*Ref learnthenet.com*)

There was no inkling of the explosion in electronics, information and communications technologies and their mass production which would follow over the

decades. There were no personal computers, no mobile phones and little electronic gadgetry. The electronic calculator had not arrived. Battery operated watches were uncommon; indeed battery operated *anything* was unusual. Motorised transport and television were available, but ownership of either was the exception rather than the rule. That trend was reversed before long.

For most of us then the living styles and standards that we take for granted today did not exist and couldn't even be contemplated. Running water, indoor sanitation and central heating were absent during much of that period. Shopping complexes, cinemas and fast-food outlets either did not exist or were inaccessible owing to distance constraints. Even if available, we had little money.

Clothing and footwear in those times were sufficient for purpose but basic. The abundant choice of clothing and footwear that we know today could not even be dreamt about then; the ubiquitous track suit and training shoes had not yet arrived. Wellingtons and boots were the most common footwear for everyday activities and school attendance. Perhaps there was a pair of shoes minded with excellent care for special occasions, such as they were, and for attendance at church for Mass and other religious activities. Clothing and footwear were, as a matter of course, passed on to younger family members and relatives. Occasionally, the postman delivered a parcel from overseas, mostly from America. The clothing and footwear that far away cousins had outgrown or grown tired of caused great excitement and competition among siblings vying to become the new owner of each item.

A new pair of wellingtons once a year was an incredible indulgence and the almost intoxicating odour of the new vulcanised rubber brought a feeling of happiness and contentment. Such was the importance of those new wellingtons that the unique smell can easily be recalled from the subconscious, more than fifty years later.

Woollen stockings (socks) were frequently knitted for family members by mothers and daughters, and some young fellows even acquired the skills. The more accomplished knitters were able to produce other types of warm, colourful and decorative garments for family, friends and neighbours. Upon entering a home in those days, it would be as common to find knitting needles, balls of wool and partially knitted garments as it would be to find several mobile phones pressed to ears today. There was no concern that knitting needles might emit harmful radiation, and those who were knitting could do so competently while carrying on an attentive conversation with others.

Most boys of our ages wore short trousers, often of corduroy. These were generally ill-fitting, requiring suspenders (braces) to keep them from falling down. Belts were not that common. The braces presented an opportunity for devilment, and often elasticated braces were pulled from behind by another boy and released suddenly, inflicting pain on the back of the misfortunate wearer. The 'game' became known as "slabash" and was the cause of many a row and fight.

Toys were scarce, but Santa Claus usually did not disappoint. Santa continued to come to many children who were beyond the upper age demarcated for the scope of this article. Toys were very simple: board games, rag dolls and cowboy guns were popular. Technology in toys had not developed beyond the cap-gun and the cork gun operated by compressed air. The antecedents of 'Barbie' and her contemporaries did not wear fancy clothes, flutter their eyelids, cry, talk, walk, drink or pass water, unless of the most expensive and exclusive type or perhaps they came in a parcel from America.

The younger reader may have concluded by now that life in those days must have been utterly boring. Our contemporaries will know that life, despite its simplicity, was, in fact, enjoyable. We used every opportunity and available means to create our fun and, admittedly, to get into devilment now and then, but such behaviour was innocent and without malice of forethought or intent.

The most widely practiced fun for the boys was playing field games – hurling, football and soccer. We played on the roads, in the fields and any place that had enough space for some of us to congregate – at Lower and Upper Grange and beyond. We were seldom without a hurley and ball. We convened to play these games at “Paddy’s field” in particular, and this was the scene of many a battle that continued for hours, especially in summer-time. Paddy Carmody, local farmer and absolute gentleman, owned this field, which is located adjacent to the former home of Mary and George Clancy and family, Upper Grange.

Mary Clancy and her husband George (known to us as Georgie) were very supportive of our game playing, permitting us to “tog out” on their property and supplying drinking water as well as encouragement. Their sons, Jack and Seoirse, were usually in the thick of matters; both were good athletes. Georgie Clancy, who died in a tragic workplace accident in 1962, was a good-natured man and not adverse to fun and games with the children; he often togged out himself to join in the sport. When not playing, he was likely to be encouraging us from the side or advocating *harder pulling* with the hurleys. He was a most likeable rogue in the best sense possible. We liked Georgie a lot. Tony Clancy, uncle to Angela, Jack and Seoirse was also involved with us. Tony, over many years, in association with Tom “Toastie” O’Connell of Lower Grange, nurtured Gaelic games in Grange and the wider parish of Bruff. They were directly responsible for youngsters being able to play these games competitively. They ferried young hurlers and footballers to play in matches all over South Limerick in particular and beyond. Our generation owes those men our profound gratitude: they were indeed marvellous mentors and enablers and had important positive impacts on our physical and character development.

The said “Paddy’s field”, as can be seen today, is good agricultural land, probably the best land in Paddy’s farm at the time. It is understandable, therefore, that we didn’t

have Paddy's permission to play there, and as we did so frequently, the grass in that patch was not permitted to grow luxuriantly. Consequently, Paddy's cows and bullocks lost out on grazing. Paddy's home was some distance from the field but, no doubt, when a crowd of youngsters assembled there to play games, the resulting noise carried some distance. Now and then, Paddy appeared at the furthest extremity of the field and shouted at us in annoyance to "get out!" When that happened, we ran out of the field *as fast as lightning* and hid wherever we could. Silence had prevailed for a while, perhaps ten minutes, before somebody announced that Paddy had left. Within minutes, the abandoned game was resumed. It was unusual for Paddy to appear twice on the same day. And so, the routine went on year after year. We played field games in Lower Grange too, in fields off the Old Road and the New Line.

Those early years of game playing, at Paddy's field and other locations, laid the foundation for several excellent hurlers, footballers and, indeed, soccer players to come out of Grange. Many went on to play representatively and win honours. Grange family names, as follows, come to mind: Clancy, Brosnan, Lombard, Ryan, O'Brien, O'Connell, O'Donnell, Higgins, Madden, Barry and Hourigan. There were others as well. We remember three exceptional athletes of those days for particular reasons.

Jackie O'Connell of Lower Grange was always, and remains to this day, a real gentleman, humorous and kind. However, when Jackie took to the playing pitch, he took on a new persona, and he would put his body in danger's way to win or play the ball. He was strong and resolute, almost impossible to mark. Jackie, in adult years, went on to become a marathon runner. Evidently, he hadn't lost his single-mindedness and athletic prowess, and he continues to pound the roads and by-ways with regularity.

Tony Brosnan of Upper Grange was an exceptional athlete and player of hurling, football and soccer. His strong physical build, skill and determination made him remarkable and to mark him was a nightmare. Like most splendid athletes, he was a gentleman.

The third was female. Mary Ryan of Upper Grange and later of Athlacca (married to Ged O'Leary), sister of Bridget O'Brien of Ballyblake, was a talented camogie player. She learned her craft while playing with the boys at "Paddy's field". Mary was fearless and very skilled. She could compete and *hold her own* with any of the males of her age group, and very few would willingly mark her. In a camogie game, she reigned supreme. She was fondly respected by the boys, and she was a lovely person.

Almost ritualistically, on Saturday mornings and at other times as well, we went hunting rabbits and any other wildlife that we could chase with dogs. We had, at any particular time, an assortment of mixed breeds, mostly of the terrier and sheepdog strains. Brendan had two exceptional rabbit hunters. One was a sheepdog called Bran. She could detect a rabbit at a very long distance and would pursue it forever. When Bran died, she was replaced by Blackie, a small terrier,

who was equally as good at hunting. At the same time, Tommy had a large sized terrier named Sandy; however, his hunting reputation was dwarfed by both Bran and Blackie. At one time, Sandy ran away from home and was missing for three weeks. One evening, Tom Toastie O'Connell was driving a group of youngsters, including Tommy, to play an underage hurling match at Bruree. Some miles out from Bruree, Tommy spotted Sandy on the road. There was great excitement as Tom O'Connell loaded the wagging and highly excited Sandy into his grey Austin A40. Sandy remained in the car during the match and was brought back home to Grange that evening. He died at home of old age, some considerable time later.

Rabbits were very plentiful in those days and hunting them was great fun. It was not that we caught that many with the dogs, although Bran or Blackie would occasionally snatch one in the bushes or briars – it was all about the chase. We walked and ran without a second thought for miles and miles, and we usually arrived back home tired and hungry and, hopefully, without having gashed our prized wellingtons. We covered terrain throughout Grange, Knockfennel, Holycross, Rahin, Caherguillamore, Ballycullane and farther afield.

Brendan acquired a ferret, and this gave us options for pursuing rabbits. The method was to release the ferret (of yellowish colour) from his box into a rabbit burrow, which was a warren with several entry/exit holes on the surface. In so far as possible, pieces of netting were placed over the potential exit points. Then the fun began if rabbits were at home. The activity underground could be heard clearly as the animals pounded through the warren. Eventually, a rabbit or maybe more than one would attempt to escape through an exit and become entangled in netting. Sometimes a rabbit bolted through an exit that hadn't been noticed and consequently had no netting. The dogs gave chase but, for the most part, the animal went free. Most netted rabbits were released, although the odd one was taken home. A netted rabbit had to be retrieved immediately as the ferret would show no mercy.

One day, our ferret became lost in a warren in a field known as "The Ranch" in Lower Grange. He had killed more than one rabbit underground and in so doing had blocked his exit options. Eventually, we identified the likely location of the ferret owing to the bell that he wore around his neck. We went home and came back with shovels. It took several hours for us, scrawny youngsters, to dig out the ferret.

Another method of catching rabbits was by a snare. In the early days of snaring, we made our own devices. Constructed of light wire, the snare was simply a ring of the material about six inches in diameter with a running knot. The rabbit put his head through the ring while moving along a well-worn rabbit path. As the rabbit attempted to exit through the ring, his head became ensnared, and there was little chance of escape as the snare was anchored to the ground by a strong wooden peg. Popular places for laying snares were entry/exit points to warrens or to dense

ground cover, where active rabbit runs were evident. In today's world, rabbit hunting as described would be frowned upon by many, being regarded as cruel. We agree we didn't consider our sport in that light in those times.

We were fortunate to live near Lough Gur, the Camogue River and several streams, so fishing became a natural pursuit for us. Our earliest fishing involved catching tiny fish of not more than one and a half to two inches long, known to us as "briceens". These were found in local shallow streams and the method involved was to pull jam jars without lids, or such-like containers, through weeds in the water. The fish were thus trapped in a container by swift hand movement. We brought those briceens home and kept them as pets in jam jars full of water. Of course, they died within a couple of days. We were undeterred, and we repeated the routine over and over and over again.

As we became a little older, we ventured to Lough Gur and soon learned that the lake was teeming with what we understood to be fish named roach. In fact they were, most likely, the rudd species that is found there today in good numbers. We saw that there was almost constant surface activity quite close to the lake shore. We didn't own fishing rods and equipment and so we had to improvise. Small hooks were purchased cheaply enough at Kiely's hardware shop in Bruff. Rods were another matter but eventually we learned how to improvise using bamboo, which was available in abundance at a location near Lough Gur House. Initially, we used light twine as a substitute for fishing line; eventually we were able to obtain light fishing line in Bruff. The bait was an easier matter as we used worms and bread. We fished fairly successfully for rudd and eel using the method described. Our favourite lake locations for fishing were at the base of Knockfennel and at what we called "Casey's side". The authors developed a life-long love of fishing that was born during those formative years of our lives.

In those early years, the ability to improvise and be creative presented other opportunities to have fun, although some of it was not without danger. We made catapults and bow and arrow contraptions out of materials that were available. The catapult required but two ingredients. The first was a suitable cutting from a bush or tree branch. A sturdy piece in the approximate shape of a 'Y' was required. The bark was removed to leave bare wood that dried out quickly. The second was a piece of rubber, cut from a discarded tube from a bicycle or motor vehicle. A strip of the rubber was cut approximately twenty inches in length and an inch or so wide. Both ends of the rubber strip were knotted to the upper extremities of the 'Y', thus providing a rudimentary catapult. Small stones were the usual ammunition.

A bow was made from a slender red sally branch and a piece of strong twine. Sally bush was available not far from where bamboo was found. Sally was ideal as it was flexible and would bend without breaking, attempting to return to its original

– almost straight position. The sally was cut to size, approximately a yard long. Shallow slits were made at each end of the sally and twine was tied in such a way as to leave the sally with a permanent bow. Of course, the twine was permanently tensioned. Arrows were made from straight sticks about two feet long, cut from hedging mostly, cleaned down to bare wood and tapered down at one end.

We derived great fun and sport from those home-made contraptions. We had competitions for distance and accuracy and target practice using bottles and tin cans. Many a crow and starling and other bird species, sitting contentedly on a tree branch or overhead wire, was disturbed by a whirring stone or arrow passing close to them. Occasionally the target was found. Our accuracy had a much higher success rate as we targeted hay barns and such-like. Thankfully, nobody ever suffered injury.

As said earlier, we had little or no money. However, from time to time, opportunities arose to earn small amounts. For example, we did chores for adults that sometimes brought reward. During August-time, mushrooms grew profusely in particular fields. We recall two fields in Knockanure, owned by the Shinnors family at the time, which produced copious amounts of tasty mushrooms year after year. We picked these and brought some home for consumption – often they were cooked immediately on top of a Stanley Range fire, smothered with butter and salt and eaten with great gusto. They were delicious. Not all picked mushrooms were taken home, some were stacked on “traces” plucked from the fields and displayed at the side of the main road in the hope that passing motorists and cyclists might be enticed to buy them. Sometimes they did, and a few pennies were pocketed.

The authors went through a purple patch of money-making, but it was hard work. The Shinnors shop sold lemonade and orange in glass bottles. The drinks were made and bottled by O’Sullivans of Kilmallock and every bottle carried the maker’s name, embossed on the glass. At some stage, the shop commenced taking back used bottles, to be returned to O’Sullivans for re-use. A bottle returned to the shop was rewarded with a refund of two pence (sterling), perhaps it was three pence. There were 240 pence (pennies), equivalent to twenty shillings, in a pound sterling. A sixpenny coin was known as “a tanner”.

While rooting at a dump area one day, for anything of interest, we came across a number of O’Sullivans bottles that could have been there for a long time. They were intact, so we washed them in the stream that flows out by Grange Church from Lough Gur and took them to the shop. To our utter amazement and no little joy, we were paid a refund, an enormous amount of money to us. We often recall how, with the proceeds, we bought a Gateaux Swiss-roll, Macaroon chocolate bars and lemonade. We proceeded to an area that we knew as “the quarry” and gorged on our purchases. The quarry is a depression in the field, known as the “Barrack Field”, that is immediately behind, what was then, the home of George Shinnors, Veterinary Surgeon, and his family.

After that day, we scoured and mined every ditch and likely location throughout the parish for discarded O’Sullivan’s bottles, and, amazingly, we recovered scores of them, some from the most unlikely of places. A little industry of short duration was born. The sale of Swiss rolls, Macaroon bars and soft drinks by the local shop improved for some months. We were early entrepreneurs of a kind: like good business practice dictates, we re-invested some of our profits in O’Sullivan’s by purchasing more lemonade. It was important for O’Sullivan’s to remain in business so that we would continue to benefit from discarded bottles.

In autumn time, a longing for apples came upon us, and we visited local orchards to pluck some of the *low-hanging* fruit. Most of those visits were illicit and were carried out under the cover of dusk. Tony Clancy’s orchard was the one most frequently visited, but none was beyond our attention, such as the Hartigan (Lower Grange) and O’Connell (Upper Grange) orchards. There were others too.

We mentioned Lough Gur already but only in a single context. The lake was a magnet that drew us to it with regularity. As well as fishing there, we swam in it, walked its shores and sunbathed. We climbed Knockfennel in particular, enjoying the panoramic view that unfolded below us and into the distance. We gazed at the towering *Galtee Mountains* and pledged that one day we would visit. We did so repeatedly over the years following childhood. As dusk threatened, we marvelled at the lights of towns near and far and then scampered urgently across the hills to reach home before darkness.

We often swam in Lough Gur during the warmer weather. The most popular point for swimming was at the north-eastern end that has now been developed as a fantastic public amenity. The concrete diving board that we used is still there, but it is now submerged. The stronger swimmers amongst us swam from that point to Bolin Island and back again, with confidence and without fear – three of whom were Jack Clancy, Tony Brosnan and Declan Madden. That fearless trio also swam from a point at the base of Knockfennel to Ash Point and back again, while the rest of us were satisfied to be spectators. We also swam with many other children at various points on the Camogue River. A favourite spot was known as “Peggy’s Hole”, located a short distance from the present day Troy family home in Lower Grange. There was a combination of shallow and deeper water to suit all swimming abilities. It was a great place for a quick dip to wash away hay seeds after a long day in a meadow or a hay barn.

During the winter/spring of the *big freeze* in 1963, when Lough Gur was frozen over for weeks, children and adults walked across the lake from the Grange side to Gearoid Island. Paddy Casey (Tim’s father) had tested the strength of the ice by driving his tractor onto it, and as the ice had withstood the weight of the tractor, people considered it safe to walk on it. Vast numbers of people walked and skated



on the frozen lake that winter. An abiding memory is of the loud, sharp, rifle-like noise that repeatedly came from the lake ice as it hairline cracked throughout the length and breadth of the lake. Traditional wisdom at the time was that ice behaving thus was strong thick ice, and people were content to accept that ‘wisdom’.

We went to Grange National School where we were taught by Mrs Rita O’Donnell of Holycross while in junior classes and by Master Tom Lynch in senior levels. Master Lynch, a Corkonian, lived with his family in a house located on the Old Road, approximately one hundred yards from the school. He was an avid gardener and kept flower, fruit and vegetable gardens, which always looked luxuriant but very tidy. For some reason, best left to the reader’s imagination, we recall his strawberry beds, gooseberry bushes and blackcurrant bushes in particular! Master Lynch’s wife was also a national school teacher and served for some time at Patrickswell NS. Mrs O’Donnell, for the most part, cycled to Grange each school morning.

To be fair, we were provided with a reasonably sound primary school education by those teachers. However, with the benefit of hindsight, there were deficits – not in what was taught but in how children were encouraged, or as it transpired in the case of some children, discouraged to learn. The ‘punishment’ approach featured by way of well-intentioned learning incentive, but in many instances it had the opposite effect and this method, by admission in their later years by some former pupils, stunted some children’s eagerness and willingness to learn.

We were taught geography in the senior classes – a number of classes together. The children stood around a large wall map of England, which showed all the industrial cities and towns. Pat Clancy was an intelligent scholar, and he knew his geography. Consequently, while Master Lynch asked various children to recite the cities and towns associated with different industries, such as steel, wool and cotton, Pat was charged with holding a cane in order to point out the locations recited by the child. Of course, Pat knew all the answers ‘by heart’, and he tried to stay marginally ahead of the reciter to prompt the correct locations. On Pat’s part, this was assistance fraught with risk, because if Master Lynch detected the choreography that was at play, he would not have been a happy teacher.

During lunch and other breaks, we played a contrived game called “handball”, where the bigger and older boys, mostly, made up two teams. We played the game across the full width of the school yard, parallel to the school building. The game was simple: a small sponge or rubber ball was batted by hand from player to player until a goal or a point was scored. Players competed physically for possession of the ball. Goal posts were two pullovers or coats laid on the ground. The cross-bar was an imaginary line, subject to interpretation, and this caused many an argument as to whether a goal or a point had been scored. There is cause to mention Pat Clancy again; he was a wizard at this game. He had ‘fast-hands’, which he also demonstrated on the hurling pitch.

At some stage during our years at Grange School, a school library was established. This was a tremendous development and a great asset for those who wished to read and widen their knowledge base.

Our school could be cold during winter. Each classroom had an open fireplace and fires were lit, subject to fire material being available. As winter approached, it was practice for the children, boys and girls, to collect firewood in their localities and bring bundles of it to the school. The contributions were stored in fuel sheds, where there were also some supplies of coal and turf, provided by the State.

Paddy Burke, also known as “Louis”, was a man well beyond middle-age, who lived alone in his cottage in Upper Grange, not far from the Madden and Hourigan cottages. Paddy was a very precise man and always neat and tidy in his dress. He kept his cottage in immaculate condition, and his hedges were cut and manicured to absolute perfection. Paddy was easily irritated by children, and he would give chase when provoked, which happened quite frequently.

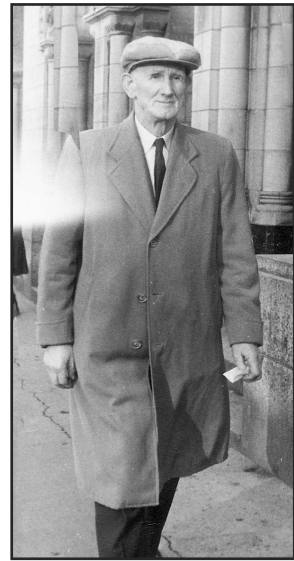
It was routine for Paddy to walk to a nearby well each day, carrying two chipped white enamelled buckets, to draw water for his domestic use. On the way home from the well, he walked up the steep “boreen” that went by the school, linking the Main Road with the Old Road, the location of his house. Approximately half way up the steep incline, Paddy invariably stopped to catch his breath. He would put down his laden buckets and lean in over the wall, gazing in the direction of Limerick City. As it happened, Paddy’s favourite place of rest was overlooked on the opposite side of the “boreen” by an old and huge evergreen tree (in Master Lynch’s property), probably around fifty feet tall and densely covered with foliage.

The authors decided one day, in pure devilment, to climb the tree, which was no challenge to a pair of monkeys, and to await Paddy’s arrival at his resting place. We had with us an assortment of objects that could be thrown onto the road, including small sticks and pebbles. Paddy arrived – and our cowardly fun commenced. Pebbles and other material rained down on Paddy and his buckets. He became utterly irritated and furious. He knew that the offending objects came from the tree top, but he couldn’t see the culprits, and he was unable to climb the tree. He shouted all kinds of expletives and threats, but we sat in silence, in some fear at that stage that we would be discovered. Eventually, Paddy went home, and it was a considerable time later, in approaching dusk, when we ventured to climb down. We kept our naughty escapade to ourselves for a long time after.

Cowboys and Indians was a favourite game that many children could join in playing. Not owning a toy gun or toy knife was not a deterrent as a rudimentary imitation weapon could be fashioned from a tree branch in jig time, or a hurley could become a rifle. However, if you owned a toy gun, it was advantageous because it almost gave you the right to be a cowboy. Being a cowboy was favoured as Indians

tended to be killed earlier on in the game and thus eliminated from playing. Often, both cowboys and Indians who had been 'killed' earlier came back to life and re-engaged in the action – that frequently caused rows and fights.

Such a conflict erupted one day on Paddy Carmody's property in Upper Grange when a large number of children were playing out a battle. The authors were there, as were the O'Brien brothers (sons of Bill O'Brien), who resided at the lodge house inside the gates at the entrance to Lough Gur House, as well as many other children. A disagreement descended into a real fight involving toy gun butts and makeshift weaponry, but mostly fists with the odd kick thrown in for good measure. It lasted for quite a while and became known as "The Skirmish on Paddy's Hill". Nobody sustained severe injuries; perhaps egos were bruised.



Paddy "Louis" Bourke of Upper Grange.

However, we were all healthy and active cowboys and Indians just a few days later.

As Hallowe'en approached each year, we commenced preparations for the night, the most important being the making of a monster's head, carved out of a large turnip – pumpkins were not readily available. It took some time to prepare the turnip. First of all, it was necessary to source a large turnip from a local garden, which proved easy enough. A piece of the turnip was sliced off the widest end and discarded. Then the inside of the remaining piece was scooped out until the turnip wall was about half an inch in thickness, leaving a large cavity inside. The skin of the turnip was then removed, and the remaining piece was permitted to dry out and toughen up. The next stage was to remove carefully pieces from one side of the turnip, leaving slits or openings for two eyes, a nose and a mouth.

The monster was then ready for decorating, which involved brushing on different coloured paint, such as we were able to source. If available, transparent coloured paper was fixed over the eyes, nose and mouth openings. A light was required, which could be placed inside the monster's head, so as to illuminate it during darkness outside. Initially, we used a candle for this purpose and then progressed to a bulb from a bicycle flashlight wired to a battery from the same appliance. It was easy to set up. In reality, the candle solution was more effective, as the light flickered, adding to the visual impact in the darkness.

It was in the next stage that fun turned to devilment and danger. On Hallowe'en night, under the cover of darkness, a crowd of us gathered at Grange Cross Roads with the monster and lighting ready for action. In those days, road traffic was light and travelled slowly in comparison with today, yet some vehicles would pass in either

direction in the space of an hour. We saw the lights of oncoming traffic a long way off, especially coming from the Limerick direction, owing to the straightness of the road. Such oncoming lights were the signal to locate the monster and entrails in the middle of the road. We delayed as long as possible, permitting a vehicle to approach, before lighting the candle or switching on the bulb. Then we scattered over walls and ditches in all directions, hoping for the desired effect – that is to say – *frighten the life out of the driver*. We drew mixed driver reaction over the years: some slowed down and realised what it was, drove around the monster and continued their journey; others stopped and got out of their vehicles, looked around, and drove off, having moved the monster to the side of the road; on one occasion at least, the driver took our monster away.

In any event, we were satisfied when a driver reacted, all had fun. The dangers involved did not occur to us at the time.

It is impossible to ignore the impact of religion on our young lives. Religion, in the form of Catholicism for the most of us, was experienced at home and in school, and the doctrines of the faith were drummed into us from an early age. First Holy Communion and Confirmation were major life events and attendance at Mass on Sundays and Holy Days was mandatory. The Sacraments of Confession and Communion had to be regularly taken. The Rosary was recited in many homes each evening. When a Retreat came to the parish, provided by the Religious Order of Redemptorists from Limerick City, a week or so of soul-searching ensued, fuelled by lively and colourful sermons from the pulpit. During a Retreat, it was likely that many children who had received First Communion would do the Stations of the Cross each day.

Confession could be a harrowing experience for a child, especially during a Retreat, as there was a feeling, rightly or wrongly, that a Retreat Priest would probe your sins more vigorously than the priests of the parish, even those sins that you instinctively might not usually divulge. Consequently, preparation for a Retreat Confession required the greatest attention and self-examination: *since my last confession, how many times did I lie?; how many times was I disobedient at home?; how many times did I forget to say my prayers?; will I tell him about the swear word?; what about the sweet that I stole from my sister?; how many times did I talk during Mass?; and then as one became a little older, what about the 'bad' thoughts?, and so on*. It was a great relief to come out of the confessional, unscathed. A peer might ask you, "What did you get?" meaning what penance was imposed on you? And so, by comparing penances, it was possible to make a judgment as to how awful a sinner you were in comparison with others – that is if everybody told the truth! If you fibbed about the magnitude of your penance, then you chalked up the first lie for your next confession. Penance was usually in the form of a number of "Our Fathers", "Hail Marys" and "Glory Bes" to be said by the penitent. These were recited promptly, even if somewhat mechanically.

We served at Mass, and our mothers kept our soutanes and surplices in pristine condition. On Mass morning, having put on their Mass serving garments, the serving children posted a sentry with a view of the church gates until such time as the officiating priest was seen arriving – then the sentry ran to the sacristy to report the news. For no significant reason, the children liked to know which priest was coming.

Of course, we didn't play all of the time. We helped in the gardens. The fathers of the authors kept extensive vegetable gardens, critical for feeding large families. We helped to weed, dig drills, draw and spread cow manure from neighbouring farmyards, plant seed potatoes and vegetables, close drills and eventually dig up the grown potatoes and vegetables, cabbages, lettuces and others. We drew water from sources such as wells and water pumps for domestic use, in times before running water was installed in our homes. We went to the local shop for "messages" for our mothers. As we grew towards the ages of twelve and thirteen, we became useful to those who saved and harvested hay. We worked usefully in the meadows and the hay barns. We were permitted to take charge of horse and hay float and draw hay from the fields to the barns. We were tough for our ages, and we enjoyed the money received for work done.

We have described some of the games and playings that provided our recreation during those growing-up years, but there were others as well. We contrived to jump imaginary horses over fences made with sticks, and we raced available bicycles, on a shared basis, around obstacle courses made from anything suitable and available. We raced each other with and without egg-and-spoon (a potato became an egg), competed at high-jump and long-jump and had sack-racing. We flew home-made kites (we continued to do 'that' into later life!).

In so far as we could, we followed the foxhunting fraternity on their horses and marvelled at the baying fox-hounds, the unfamiliar accents of many of the horse riders and the contoured plump posteriors of the fairer sex in their tight fitting riding breeches, resplendent in magnificent red and green coats and hair pulled tight in buns, topped by hunting head-wear. We must have been approaching 12 or 13 years of age as those posteriors certainly made an impression as they moved rhythmically off and back on the saddles!

We partook with adults in the chasing and trapping of live hares, destined for coursing events. Bicycles were scarce, but discarded wheels were used for racing: a child could race a wheel (rim only or with tyre) along a road, using a hand palm or a stick to guide and accelerate the moving wheel. We fashioned makeshift transport from 'soapboxes' fitted with discarded shoe polish tins for wheels. The wheels were nailed to the boxes, remaining attached for only short periods. Occasionally, discarded pram wheels became available, and these were much more serviceable than shoe polish tins. When twine or wire was attached to the contraption, the

primitive transport was pulled by one child while another sat on the small box with legs outstretched; alternatively, the box occupant free-wheeled down a severe slope. The contraption didn't work for very long, but there was fun while it did. Of course, the boxes were retained for sliding down slopes during the mud, ice and snow seasons. We played home-made skittles at cross-roads. We used our imaginations and creativity to make fun in endless ways.

Our recreation was severe on our clothing and footwear. Consequently, our marvellous and overburdened mothers were constantly mending, patching, cleaning, scrubbing, washing and drying; largely without the aid of running cold and hot water, washing machines or dryers. What a contrast with modern living: nowadays, children are most unlikely to soil their clothing while texting, tweeting and surfing!

We are conscious that this memoir, now coming to a conclusion, is very largely about the escapades of boys, with little mention of our peers, the girls. This is largely because we were of such ages, when most boys regarded girls as creatures sent by God to annoy them and to disrupt their playing and devilment by getting in the way; and who were apt to bring home stories of questionable behaviour by the boys. Consequently, the girls were avoided most of the time, unless it suited to be in their company. Some might say that nothing has changed! As we reached double digit age, we began to wonder if, maybe, God's aberration wasn't that bad at all, and we became more receptive to female company and wished that the hunt would return again soon!

Dear Reader of like age to the authors, we hope that you enjoyed this trip down memory lane and that it brought a smile or two to your countenance.

Dear much younger Reader, thank you for reading our story, hopefully not out of any sense of obligation, but rather through a fascination with or dis-belief of our simple youth many decades ago. Should you pen your own childhood memoirs, at some time into the future in the autumn of your life, the early lives of a younger generation who may, in turn, be fascinated by accounts of your youth, will most likely bear no resemblance to your young life experiences. Consider how technology may advance over several decades into the future – is it possible that your memoirs will not have to be read at all, perhaps they will be uploadable on demand from the “cloud” to the human brain in a nanosecond, followed by instantaneous cognition, while the brain owner relaxes in a chartered time capsule, on its way to a futuristic holiday destination on another planet or in a far-away galaxy?

In any event, we hope that the childhoods of future generations will be as happy as ours were, growing up in our beloved Grange.

This article is dedicated to all of our Grange contemporaries, living and deceased, and to the many others who positively influenced our growing-up years.