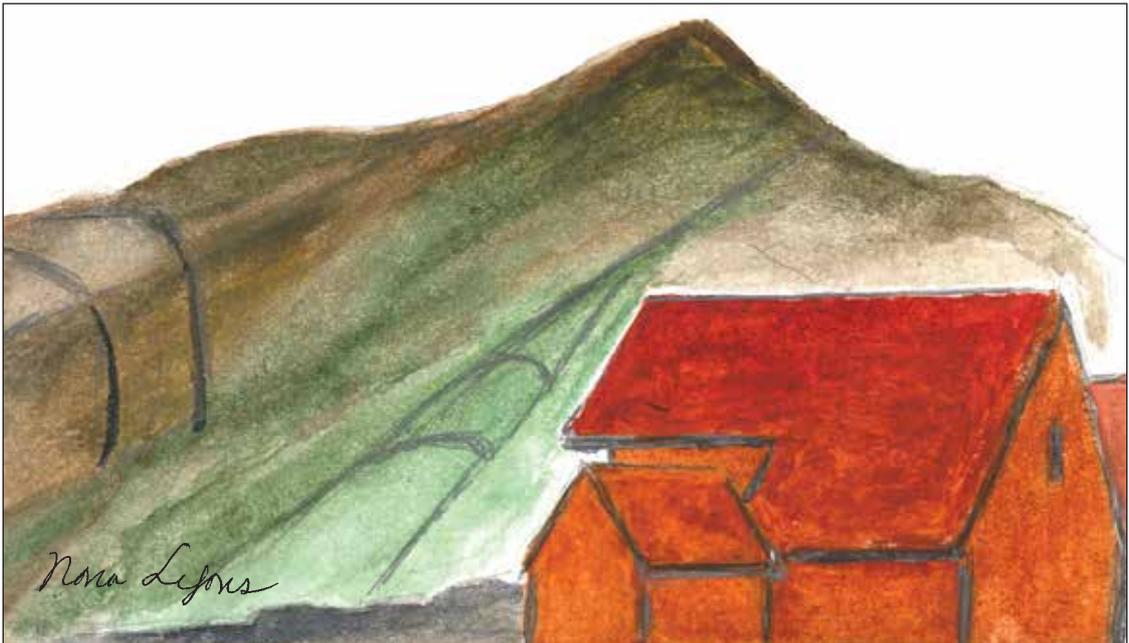


Knowing Ireland

Nona Plessner Lyons



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Preface

For someone coming to live and work for a year in a country only briefly before visited, there is an air of expectation, a sense of possibilities. And if there is an interest in the place and its people, and a connection to it through one's ancestors, a visitor is open to coming to know it in a new, expanded and deeper way. But what is the knowing like and how does it happen?

My husband Bob and I came to Ireland in September 2000 to spend the year in Cork. *Twelve years later we left.* The following narratives gathered here are the recordings of some of my encounters, the personal ways I came to know Ireland and some of its people, its history, its sometimes dark past, its hard achievements, and its present hopes. These are one set of perspectives.

Another set is from my own search for relatives, those earlier ancestors who made their way from Ireland to America, and thus pointed our way to Ireland as a possibility as well. Our encounters and discoveries are recorded here.

This history is dedicated to my grandmother, Catherine Griffin Hennessy of County Kerry, Ireland, who paved the way for all of us to America, and to her daughter, Norah Hennessy Plessner, my mother, who made sure she retold that story to us.

Nona Plessner Lyons
Kennebunkport, Maine

1. In the West of Ireland

Friday, 29 September 2000

On a bus heading south to Cork

Today and yesterday we made a journey to the west of Ireland, through Galway, then north to Connemara and, then, south to the Burren and the Cliffs of Moher. Right now Galway Bay is spread out before us as we make our way in the afternoon sun home to Cork via Bus Éireann. The light on the Bay is white and it stretches as far as the eye can see, following the long reach of Galway Bay. Surrounded by marshes, the land around the Bay is marked with green, green fields, etched with grey stones everywhere and occasionally dotted with Celtic ruins. And all is encompassed by distant mountains, now mere shapes above the hills.

Clouds are everywhere, a signature feature of the West of Ireland. They are always moving, big patches of white contrasted with black or grey carrying ever-present rain. At any given moment a patch of clouds can suddenly obscure the horizon. Today at one point we caught a distinct view of the three Aran Islands from a mountain road. Suddenly we looked up and the islands had disappeared marked only by what looked like fog. The clouds give an incredible dynamic to the whole landscape. They are, of course, coming off the Atlantic and they seem layered deep. And yet, as suddenly, they seem to part and a patch of blue appears.

Then there is the landscape of the region. It seems starkly unique and it often carries with it the human history, the story of the lives of people present and past that you can feel if not literally see. Take the place immediately across the River Comb that separates Galway City from the small spit of land across its edge. Here was the place known as the Claddagh, where the earliest Irish people settled, not welcomed or allowed into Galway's Protestant community. The land of the Claddagh is today marked by narrower and narrower fields all separated by grey-white rocks that seem ubiquitous and mark the ownership of land. The strips get smaller and smaller and you know that no one could make a living from such scarcity.

And everywhere you go and everyone you meet seems ready to tell the history of this land. In the Burren on our way to Moher, we found a spit of land dotted with a fat Martello Tower, seemingly abandoned. As we were leaving the farmer who owned the land came out of his house and we stopped to say hello. We marveled at the man, Mr. Fahy,

when he told of how his family had farmed the land for six generations and how one of his sons today had to travel 25 miles to get to one strip he owned and needed. When we asked how this was so, the man said: "Now, we had a bit of a problem back in 1652 with a man named Cromwell. He took the land from the Irish."

Mr. Fahy then went on to say how a great ancestor had bargained with a soldier of Cromwell's for the land, probably in exchange for money so that the soldier could return to England. But those Irish who remained wound up with irregular small strips of unjoined fields. Mr. Fahy told of one farmer who in order to plough his small field opened the front door of the house and led the horse through the house and out the back door. But the stories seemed so present to the farmer. And they are *his* own stories.

And the day before, as we came out to Galway on the bus, suddenly when we reached a place called Gort, the home of Lady Gregory, the bus driver was overheard to tell some American tourists about this place, the west of Ireland. "A lot of writers have come here," he said. "It is a beautiful place and so serene. They must find it "inspirational." He then went on to give an example:

"You know the Irish poet, Seamus Heaney, the winner of the Noble Prize. He translated that story about Beowulf, that ancient poem by that medieval man.

He has also written a poem called the 'The Ploughman,' a poem I love. It is about the poet's father, a farmer who ploughed his fields as his son came tripping and falling along behind him. The father finally bends over and picks up his son and carries him on his back. But then the poet ends by saying how now it is he who follows his father, who is tripping and falling as he goes along, and so he must carry him. Like life is circular," the bus driver said, "that is what the poem seems to say."

Thus it seems that history, story, lives today, lands of yesterday are all a part of what is before you in the West of Ireland.

And of course the land is spectacular.

2. At Sundays Well

October 8, 2000

She could have been part of the tableaux, of the stone statue of Our Lady of Lourdes with a small child at prayer. But then this second kneeling figure moved its head and a small green cap went slightly up and down as worn hands formed the sign of the cross. It was a Sunday morning and, on a steep incline just above us, Our Lady of the Rosary Church was letting out along a road in Cork called Sundays Well and, a woman was at prayer.

Sundays Well runs like a ribbon from the River Lee below, near our apartment then up and up along what must be a ridge of massive rock. Cork is like a huge saucer with the river at its base. A walker up Sundays Well is rewarded by the spectacular views of Cork and the surrounding countryside that come into view as you ascend early on a clear and rare sunny Sunday. People suddenly approach as we near St. Vincent's Church at nearly noon. The Church, perched above the city, is famous for a wonderful brass band. They often play at Mass. UCC (University College Cork) owns one of the beautifully designed buildings attached to the Church grounds. It used to be a seminary, but was purchased last year by the UCC Music Department. The building looks straight down across the River Lee to the main campus of the University.

Continuing along Sundays Well, we stop to buy the paper at the local news store and then climb another hill to the famous Cork Women's Gaol. It is a massive structure, enormously forbidding with tall stone walls and towers that clearly cut off all the beauty of the views. We wonder about the women and what they endured there and why.

But turning back along the hill, we find a passage along the road that leads to stairs that take us down to the River Lee again and a small suspension footbridge. We cross it as a mother encourages her kids to "sway" the bridge! The River is a lovely sight and right next to it is the Fitzgerald Park. Lots of little kids and dads and moms. We watch the kids testing themselves on the playground with its tempting challenges. Lots of cheers and tears.

Onward we head to return the video--Love Divided, is one, a chilling, real-life story of 1950s Ireland and the torn relationships between a Catholic husband and a Protestant wife. When she refuses to send their two girls to a local Catholic school, the outraged parish priest sets up a boycott of all Protestant businesses in the village "until those girls are returned to us." The woman, who refuses to acknowledge the "authority of the church" over

their life choices, flees with her children to Scotland. Over the months the town breaks out into violence--even against the aged father of the wife. Finally, the husband and wife are reconciled and he sides with her. It ends when the Catholic bishop tells the pastor that President De Valera says it must stop - the petty incident is an embarrassment to the Church when it is trying to launch a worldwide attack on Communism! It was a telling story of a not-too-long ago Ireland.

Yesterday, while shopping in Cork we met a new friend and her husband--she who participated in the Frank O'Connor International Short Story Festival. I happened to mention to her about my experiences at UCC and the tension people spoke of around being Irish and being reflective--of not being sure if the Irish would take to reflective practice. My friend shook her head. She understood immediately. Oh, she said, she was from the North and when she came to Cork, she was shocked by the passivity of women--so self-effacing. "But", she said, "they will not take responsibility for themselves. The women in the North would not put up with some things-- like medical services. Here women sometimes have to drive 60 miles to get health care for their children."

It was pretty amazing to hear, these observations from the past, the assumption of absolute Church authoritarianism and male privilege. They have left deep scars. As the woman in the film says as she looks back on the event, she and her husband are not sure they did the right thing. But she only wished they had a second life to live together!

We deepen our knowledge and experience about Ireland. We wonder what was the lady on the hill praying for?

3. At the University

November 2000

The sun was brilliant and warm. It shone through the wide windows that line the tower-like stairwell up to the second floor of the newest building on campus, the beautiful glass and granite structure of O'Rahilly. Beyond, outlined through the windows, lay the path to the ancient quad, the site of the Aula Maxima, the great hall. Standing like some ancient monastery, the guardian of a set of treasured Ogham stones, it is the heart of University College Cork, UCC. Founded in 1845 under Queen Victoria along with colleges at Galway and Belfast, the three created the University of Ireland. On this warm fall day, some 8,000 to 12,000 students will move across the campus, speaking a medley of English, foreign languages, and Irish, still very much alive here. Heading up the stairs of O'Rahilly, I continue to make my way to the 2nd floor and my first faculty meeting.

It couldn't have looked more familiar--the plain rectangle of a classroom, the chalk board at one end, a desk, an overhead at the side of the chalk board, some 25 chairs scattered everywhere--the remnants of the last class. But there is new carpeting on the floor and the chairs are new, too, cloth, just plump enough for comfort. I arrive with the Administrative Assistant and shortly the Chair and the rest of the faculty appear--some fifteen in all. The meeting, called to order by the Department Chair, starts promptly and efficiently: a review of the minutes of the last meeting; "business arising" created by the brief review of the minutes; then on to the critical issues, especially the forthcoming visit to the Department by the President. For this meeting, three issues are identified by the Chair as strategic: space, staff, and computers. These will be the focus of his remarks to the President on the day of the visit.

Happily, there has just recently been an approval of three new staff positions and people hired this fall; the terrible situation of the lack of computers for Education students will be alleviated by the availability of thirty new computers to be housed on the property of the Irish Distillery--some 15 minutes away from the main campus, right across from our apartment. Space is another thing, not yet solved. As I listen, I am grateful for my very small office, in its own wonderful, small building even though the office can hold only two people with a computer and desk. It does have a fine large window and a space heater.

The Chair insists that the President needs to know just how good the Ed Department is-- the best in the country, deserving of the resources it is requesting. Presently, the De-

partment has one of the largest certification and masters level programs for educating new teachers in all of Ireland--this at a time of increasing teacher shortages and a looming teachers' strike. When a faculty member suggests that perhaps we should have some planned presentations during the visit to make these points more forcefully, the Chair is firm that any elaboration of the issues will be up to each individual to make during the 30 minutes allotted for questioning. The meeting ends shortly after, efficiently and swiftly handled--with no extraneous comments, and potentially eruptible issues headed straight for a future "appropriate small group meeting."

It somehow seems familiar: policies set in far off places. Education still the step-child of the institution--lacking in personnel, classrooms, and basic resources. The President of UCC, a graduate of the California Institute of Technology, sees UCC as the potential premier tech institute of Ireland. At present that translates into faculty-student ratios in Science of 1 to 13; in Education, 1 to 30. To get desperately needed space for more computers, the Education Chair and the Chair of Applied Social Studies, whose buildings are contiguous, small houses, are plotting to get the President to endorse their request to build an extension off the back of the buildings, one story high to house the needed computers. Technology reigns--but not computers for students--even future teachers of the Celtic Tiger. Computers are available only for electronic systems soft-ware program development.

UCC and Ireland have problems with expanding their technological capacity, for in spite of the Tiger there are vast contradictions. Just last week, Galway City complained that they were without sufficient electrical generators for the city's need. But Galway is not scheduled for new generators from the government-run electric company until 2003! Here in Ireland that situation is all too typical. You have the sense of the great leap forward and then a missing connection-- the infrastructures may not be there. Roads, for example, are still in some places largely hedgerow-wide even though they must do for busses, cars, trucks that try to make their way at rather remarkable speeds. Some new, very good roads--between Dublin and Cork are the result of EU monies, and they cannot be built fast enough. Major roads can suddenly give out and a traveler is back again in the hedgerow. Cities are daily getting worse as cars increase at rates doubling in a year what was once a ten-year total for all of Ireland. Dublin, people tell us is impossible, "Do not drive there!" And there are not enough taxi cabs. Cork with its warren of medieval, one-way streets takes a crash course to learn how to get around, especially in or out.

And there are other sometimes more frightening realities. With the new "mad cow," and BSE, scare, even with only a very minuscule percentage of animals affected in Ireland, diseased animals are being buried. The animals cannot be incinerated. There are no incin-

erators in Ireland! Plans of the moment include putting the carcasses in cold storage. This fall in spite of mounting a major TV campaign encouraging people to have flu shots, there is a shortage of vaccine. You must order the flu shot. At the UCC hospital this fall a child being treated at the hospital contracted some kind of virus which could not be identified. A visitor is constantly surprised if not amazed at developments. But what is also surprising is just how resources are allocated. This past week, the UCC Business Programs sponsored a visit by Michael Porter, the Harvard guru who, since the 1980s, in seven books, has been touting the virtues of "The Competitive Advantage." In brief, Porter claims that to remain competitive companies, etc. must learn to give "added value" to products and services. He was flown in to Cork on a corporate jet to give one lecture on Ireland's economic situation (--it must become more competitive). His fee: €100,000. The next day he flew off to England to give a second lecture for a similar fee. To put this in perspective, the entire yearly budget for resources (not salaries) for the UCC Education Department is €100,000. The Department scrounges for computers, staff, space.

Meanwhile I have my first meeting with UCC students, a class of apprentice teachers. My colleague and I have invited them to join our research project responding to some of our questions as they construct a Teaching Portfolio for the first time. We are interested in how they respond to the task of making a set of reflective entries about their own learning as teachers.

They will respond to some questions; we will help support and scaffold their work creating a portfolio. They and we are excited about this project. On this first night of class we give them a survey asking them to name the number of times they had been asked to be reflective in their undergraduate and graduate careers; to name a significant reflective experience of their own; and to say what they have learned. In our discussion that follows we ask the number of their reflective experiences. One male student raises a hand: "Zippo," he says. "I am a science student. I have never been asked to be reflective in a single course." Surveying the full group, 20 out of 22 students say the same. They do not remember ever being asked to be reflective, ever asked about their own learning. I wonder again about value added. For what? At what real cost? For whose competitive edge?

Ireland is a complex place, sometimes with many contradictions.

4. The Woman of the House

October 2000

She wasn't a very tall woman or an imposing one. But she had dark, bright eyes and an alertness about her that commanded your interest. Little would escape her scrutiny. We met her on the late October morning we arrived at our B & B in Ballyvaughan for a visit to the Burren, that stark and beautiful part of the West of Ireland. She was helping to serve breakfast and when she told us that her son Conor and his wife were the owners of the B & B, we joined enthusiastically in the conversation. Teresa was her name. We had met her husband, Tommy, at their farm the last time we were in Clare a month or so ago. In fact, we had come to the B & B because her husband had told us about it, urged us to try it, and laughed when he told us it belonged to his son. Yes, Teresa said, Tommy had told her how we had stopped at their farm and, having struck up a conversation, how Tommy had wanted to show us the Millennium Monument he had created on the edge of their property to celebrate the year 2000. We had gotten out of the car and oh'd and ah'd over the monument. It was impressive. "Ah," Teresa said, "it's his thing. He is very proud of it. He is expecting you to come. You are very welcome to go over to the farm. In fact, do you want him to take you around today?" We would decline, since we had planned a trip to the famous Cliffs of Moher. But could we come tomorrow on our way back from Galway? We would return in the early afternoon. It was agreed. But would she and Tommy join us for lunch today? Sure that would be lovely.

Lunch was a large, generous bowl of seafood chowder in a little restaurant on the edge of the Bay directly across from Galway City. You could barely see it across the rain, and clouds and the threatening sky. But there were to be the daily predicted "sunny periods" and we were hopeful. Tommy and Teresa arrived just after we did and we chatted away over hot chowder, hearing more about how they, the Fahy's, had acquired their land six generations before from one of Cromwell's soldiers. One son now ran what had been Tommy and Teresa's farm, Connor had the B & B, and another son had just opened a bagel factory, a bid for the growing tourist trade. A daughter was a nurse off in England. Connor himself was also in computer software. He had spent nearly 10 years in the States working for a large computer company, but had grown tired of it, and had come home with the new Irish economy to build and open the B & B. He still did some computer work. Tommy and Teresa were quietly very proud of these children and their successes. Teresa helped out at the B & B but,

when she did, she always wore a beautiful black cashmere sweater.

Tommy is a tall, big-boned man. He seems weathered by the hard work of a lifetime of farming and the searing winds that come in off Galway Bay onto the strip of land that is their farm. But the first time we met him we had witnessed another side of Tommy, the caring and proud member of a family with a long history: He had built his Millennium Monument to honor it. The monument is like a huge stone triptych. It has three parts, each one depicting memorabilia to particular family members: Tommy's father who had fought in World War I as a soldier for the United States, an uncle who was in World War II, and the original ancestor who had first acquired the land in the 1600's. The rough-hewn monument had names and dates and inserts of symbolic pieces of memorabilia. Tommy was so proud of it, in spite of working so hard to finish it before the New Year: he had wound up in a hospital with a heart attack on New Year's Eve 2000, he didn't mind telling.

Now at lunch Teresa told us of their family, of how their children got into the jobs they were in and how they had made their way in the world. Connor, who owned the B & B, had cleverly built his own home underground. The B & B was constructed of three square buildings each attached to the other but hardly noticeable from the outside. The land of the 12-acre site visually ran up to a mountain of brush and granite stone of the Burren, all visible from the rooms of the house. It was five minutes from the waters of the Atlantic. Now, at the off-season, we had the quite beautiful place to ourselves. Teresa told how years ago Tommy had found the land for Connor. He was good at things like that. Lunch ended as we made arrangements to stop by on the following day on our way from Galway. And so we were off to the Cliffs of Moher in spite of the punishing and treacherous wind that began to blow up.

The following morning, we left after breakfast for our trip, but promised to stop by the farm that afternoon, to come with all the relatives who were travelling with us on this visit. And we did. After a fine morning in Galway, largely spent browsing in Kenny's bookstore, we made our way back and followed Galway bay to find the flaggy shore road Teresa has suggested we take to the farm. The Martello tower at the end of the road was our marker. Fortunately, you could see it for miles. The road went precariously close to the waters of the Bay and, on this day, waves were hitting the edges as the wind had picked up again: There were warnings that it would move to storm force. But as we rounded a bend, we gratefully caught sight of Tommy on his tractor pulling bales of hay out to the cattle standing rigid against the now rising wind. We "helloed" and Tommy urged us to hurry to the house where Teresa was waiting. We found Teresa at the door ready to greet us, saying: What a

cold day! Wouldn't we have some tea? or soup? Both sounded great and we were ushered into a dining room as the warmth and wonderful smell of a peat fire greeted us.

As we put away hats and coats, Tommy came in and disappeared into the kitchen. Shortly he returned with a bottle of Paddy's and several glasses. It was 3 o'clock and we had a drink against the chill of the day. We settled at a large, square dining table and, as we did, Teresa entered carrying lunch--bowls of hot soup. Then a full salad. Tea and dessert. Teresa served everyone but, I noticed, she never sat down herself, making sure we had all we needed.

I wondered: is this a version of the typical Irish mother, the compliant woman, so revered in some Irish traditions? Later we watched the gathering wind of the storm from a large picture window. Teresa came and stood next to me and told me how Tommy had built the house himself in 1959. It was a pale cement covered house, of several rooms, with features of the 1950s still evident. A large, corner cabinet sparkled against the dark wood with the medals and trophies their children had won, mostly for sport, but many for music, for singing or playing a variety of instruments. I commented on how beautiful the farm was, in its stark way sitting there on that small peninsula. Standing there you could see the bay beyond the picture window, past the land that sloped down to it.

"Yes," Teresa quietly commented, "Tommy sold the old house that used to be down there, the old family farm, his parents place. But he sold it. We were living here and renting it out. But one night in his pub, he sold it to an American. I didn't learn of it until the next day."

I was amazed to hear the story. The property is clearly of great value as well as great beauty. But Teresa went on:

"I said nothing. There was nothing to say." I was more amazed at that. Competent, efficient, smart Teresa. Not saying anything? Tommy interrupted to ask if we would like to join him that evening at his local, his pub. At about 11-- PM! He went there regularly each night, at 11 or 11: 30. We declined. And thanking them for their wonderful hospitality, a wonderful afternoon, we braced ourselves against the wind and left saying we would see them in the morning. But I couldn't help wondering: who was Teresa? Was she a remnant of an older image of the silent Irish woman, a view surely breaking apart with the new Irish prosperity, but perhaps still there? I wondered. But the next morning another Teresa and a more complex picture came into view.

At breakfast, Teresa was there as usual. We began talking about the how it happened

that they got this land, 12 acres in all. The B & B stood alone on a large tract of land. Teresa said: "Tommy found it. He's very smart about things like that. He was always looking around for land for the children. He has been doing it for years. He can wear me out with his ideas. And he is a great negotiator. But not always. Once he wanted to buy a property he had found and I didn't particularly approve of it, I didn't think it was so good. We went to the bank to get a mortgage. I deliberately sat behind Tommy. I did not say a word. I put my head down and just sat looking away. Finally, the bank manager noticed. We did not get the loan."

How complex this woman was. The stories she told opened a window on her and perhaps on certain women of her generation. In contrast to John B. Keane's Big Maggie, that image of the awakening Irish woman of the 1960s loudly claiming her rights against an oppressive church and pervasive patriarchy; or, to Brian Friel's portrait of the two Mundy sisters who disappeared into the night to make their way in a foreign land when there were no longer jobs in the Donegal of the 1930's, or even to Kate O'Brien's country girls, there are women like Teresa. With little resources of money or land in their own right, they found ways, more subtle ways to live and move and to act on the world they lived in. Largely working through others, some like Teresa, through their shrewd intelligence managed to join their husbands, direct their actions--crafting their acts even through such a thing as silence. The woman of the house might be silent but on the other side of silence what might be going on or about to happen? That might take a mountain of words to understand.

The wind had finally died down and, after breakfast, we took our leave for the drive back to Cork with new friendships and new insights to ponder.

5. In Dublin and Cork at Christmas

All across Dublin and the countryside a frost was lightly forming, creating a magic for the season. The city seemed to shimmer in 'white light. Along the street of Georgian houses, a walker could catch sight through windows of tall Christmas trees, fires burning in decorated fireplaces, with candles surrounded by garlands of greens. Inside places of business, meetings were being concluded and papers and computers put away. It was dusk, on Thursday, December 14th, 2000.

People hurried along juggling boxes and bags, bunches of red berries clutched in their hands. A plant store at the end of the block featured old fashioned Christmas trees, holly, boxwood, sculptured, and special ornamental trees. A group of early party goers went by laughing and talking in animated voices. In the growing darkness and winter chill, we walked briskly along Harcourt Street, across its double lane of traffic, down a half-block to the bus stop. A line had already formed, as we took our place to wait for the Number 16.

We were on our way to Drumcondra, just outside of Dublin City, and a lecture at St. Patrick's College. A philosopher friend was speaking and we wanted to hear her. But first we would have a quick dinner at Fagan's Pub. The day before Bertie Ahern, the Taoiseach, had taken Bill Clinton to Fagan's, his local, just before the President went to address people gathered in Dundalk on the border of Northern Ireland. We couldn't resist Fagan's since it was right near our stop for the College.

The double-decker bus finally arrived and we all got on and we even managed to get a seat near the front, so we could hear the driver announce our stop. The bus lumbered towards the great pillars of Trinity College, turned left, and snailed through traffic, over the O'Connell bridge, past glittering shops and the wonderful statue of Parnell, around the Hospital and the Gate Theatre, and up the hill and north into small, little neighborhoods. Some twenty minutes later we arrived at Fagan's.

The place has been there since 1907, a fine Victorian pub, situated on one of the four great roads of ancient Ireland which enters Dublin from the north. The front of the old building faces the street and a long extension on the side and back looks up towards a park and the College beyond. The old building houses the men's bar, no women allowed. A glass door framed in dark oak leads into the newer, larger space and another bar. Up a few wooden steps are tables, comfortable chairs, and bar stools-a place to eat dinner.

It was amazingly quiet. The clientele seemed subdued after the exuberant celebrations of the night before. Then a thousand people had come out to glimpse Bertie and President Clinton. Two days earlier, President Clinton with Hillary and Chelsea had been heralded into Ireland with the greatest of fanfare. They had first been taken by helicopter to Phoenix Park in Dublin and the home of the American Ambassador. Later the President went on to Drumcondra and on to Dundalk to greet men, women and children who had come out to meet him. It was DUNDALK 2000--an enormous gathering of 8,000 people that overflowed the town center with cheers, many hand-shakes, special songs, and speeches of thanks. The people of both North and South Ireland were clear: they wanted -to thank President Clinton for helping to bring peace to Ireland-for having started what they see as an important process, something he and the people believe must continue, will be continued no matter what. The people see the President as one, who against the advice of his statesmen, had worked in their interest for peace. We heard it from cab drivers, a guard at the Bank of Ireland, people in pubs. One cabby said, "We'd take him, if he would become our President! It's a shame you can't have him for another four years."

The most common sentiment was, "He brought peace to Ireland. He sent us George Mitchell. He stayed with us. We thank him for that. And he's come back for peace when things have stalled." The President himself had ended his speech in Dundalk, urging, "Make sure your children's tomorrows will not be your yesterdays." Then, he had gone North to Belfast.

On the following morning, after selective, serious gatherings of diplomats from North and South at his hotel, the President had left for Stormont, the Parliament building of Northern Ireland. He would meet with Unionists, but only in the corridors. Security would not allow him to address the Northern Ireland government, so strong were the feelings of some and fears of others. He agreed to the corridor meetings. Television cameras caught his progress along the hallways in the company of Tony Blair and David Trimble; and, later alone, a viewer could see that some Unionists refused to shake Mr. Clinton's hand. One man had a stark look of hatred as he boldly stared past the President, his hands securely wrapped around his own body, a dark scowl covering his face. When the President left, there were those who reported that he had left a new construct, a basis for how to proceed with a next step in the peace negotiations. Time would tell.

Having finished dinner, we hurried out of Fagan's to go on up to the College to hear the lecture. But, later, we thought: maybe we had already witnessed a significant lecture. In the season of Christmas, celebrated throughout the Christian world in the memory of a mes-

senger of peace, we had seen the people of Ireland come out in joy and hope, thrilled at a new possibility for an end to violence. They seemed to recognize and be grateful to another emissary of peace who was about his work in the world.

18 December 2000

That Sunday we were to head back home to Cork shortly after noon. We decided to visit the chapel of University College, Dublin, the one both Gerard Manley Hopkins and James Joyce knew. We would give it another try, we said. We were distinctly remembering the year before when we first visited the chapel. We had stumbled into a Mass and the end of the sermon. As we took our seats, the priest, concluding had nearly roared something about sin, "Do you not smell the stench, the stench of sin, how pervasive it is?" It could have been right out of James Joyce's Portrait of an Artist and the scene of the mission sermon. Later a friend wondered if perhaps we had witnessed some kind of tourist pageant held at the church. We didn't think so.

We decided to revisit the Chapel that Sunday of our last morning in Dublin. We walked past Stephen's Green and came at 11 just as Mass was beginning. At the sermon we eyed each other to leave. But as the priest concluded, he looked out into the audience and sternly commanded: "Whoever owns that dog in the aisle, please take it out of here." Shocked, we sat there for a moment. Earlier we had noticed a blind man enter the church and walk down the center aisle with a dog on a halter. His dog had to be the priest's target. Angry, we left the church along with at least one other person. But the next day we read in the paper that we had missed a second act. When a sacristan had told the priest that it was a blind man's dog, the priest responded. "I do not care. Please have that man remove that dog to the back of the church so that others do not fall over him." The blind man refused. It turned out he works for a service agency for the blind. Having to have the last word, the priest then said, if anything happened the man would be responsible.

We were reminded how often the messages of peacemakers can easily be marred or destroyed by their supposed followers, even their disciples.

Christmas Eve in Cork

We finally found a Christmas tree. It was December 23 and we had rented a car and driven out to Kinsale in the West Coast of Cork, hunted the sparse florists and nurseries on our journey and not found a tree. Coming back to Cork at dusk, we walked over to the old Coal Quay and --miracle-- a vendor still had a few trees of varying sizes. One suited us--a Scotch pine about six feet tall-a little bigger than we anticipated-told the vendor our dilem-

ma: we did not have a tree stand. "Just put in a bucket with a rock or two," he said, picking up a battered bucket. When we explained that we did not have access to a large supply of rocks, he produced a heavy wire arranged as a circular stand with a prong in the middle. "Now," he said, "I could give you this. Just drill a hole in the bottom of the tree and it will work." Great we said but we don't have a drill--no tools at all. "My drill needs recharging. Go shop and come back in 15 or 20 minutes. We will see if this can work."

So we carried the Christmas tree home with the stand attached to its bottom. The next day we found a second string of lights, some tinsel, and a few more gold Christmas balls. We decked the tree, made a star from a gold cardboard piece of packing, and put some red candles with pine sprigs along the mantle above the electric fireplace. It was a fine tree.

That evening we chanced to watch what turned out to be a wonderful program. After seeing some festivals and hearing songs in Irish, we were amazed to find at 11pm an ecumenical celebration coming from Derry. It was a serious ceremony for peace, joining clergy from the Churches of Ireland and Rome. Catholic and Protestant clergy, ministers of state both North and South, were there with ordinary citizens. With hard-hitting words, these men and women announced how "we have hugged our hurts" and falsely proclaimed in the name of justice acts that had led to death and destruction. One clergyman began, "I am Presbyterian and I am not leaving. Neither are you. We must recognize this truth." As footage of the horrors of Omagh, Dublin, Belfast were shown on screen, we saw a review of the terrible history of Northern Ireland. An interview with a former Ulster volunteer fighter, revealed his own journey to disgust at the killings and destruction of lives. He had re-discovered Christianity and committed himself to peace.

In memory of those who died, a selective list of names of people were read: a child 18 months, a woman 84, a man 31, a young boy. Each name was on a scroll and shown to the congregation gathered in the church as the name was read aloud. Young dancers in white, gracefully carried the scrolls up to the altar to be permanently placed there. Two men, former fighters--a Catholic and an Ulster volunteer--unveiled a sculpture of guns made into a ploughshare with a dove of peace on top. The service ended with handshakes of peace among the congregation.

We had Christmas dinner with some friends and their family. They reminded us that the list of a death we daily hear reported on the news from the North used to be bombings and mass deaths. We are reminded that in this season of peace, we are living in a war scarred country. But there has been progress. Christmas Day: It snowed here for the first time in 20 years. It is for us a time of miracles!

6. The Irish History Lesson

December 2000

It had seemed like it would be interesting, a lecture entitled, "Ethnic Cleansing in Ireland? The Case of County Cork, 1911-1926." So at dusk we hurried from our computer labors across campus to the UCC Student Dining Room, grabbed some dinner, and made our way to the Boole Library basement and the Lecture Hall. The room filled as people in ones and twos came in. A woman and her companion sat down next to us and said, "Isn't it good to be coming to hear something about ourselves?" As the lecture began, we were not too sure.

A tall man across the aisle from us caught our attention. All through the lecture, listening intently to the historian, he clutched a sheaf of notes, hand-written, filled to the margins, and at least a dozen pages long. But as the speaker concluded, he leapt to his feet when the Chair asked, "Are there any questions?"

"Now," the man began, "just since tea time, I've been looking into the idea of ethnic cleansing. It says, and I quote, 'those who do not belong.' But I also have been looking into Irish history. That's what all these notes are. Irish history is filled with Protestants. So it is hard to see just how that idea of ethnic cleansing applies in Ireland in what you have been saying. Protestants the victims of ethnic cleansing? Just listen to the names of Protestants who have lived here easily in Ireland, in the past as well as now."

Out come the list and a litany of Protestant names began. Yeats, Grattan, Parnell, Emmet to name the first. But on it went. "And it is as true today as it was in the past. So how can you talk about ethnic cleansing? Here in Ireland? Not of Protestants. But now, if you want to address the question of whether Ireland was ever oppressed. Do you not think we were oppressed since the Normans invaded 800 years ago?" Strong sounds of encouragement came from the audience and the man went on, the Chair hurriedly trying to stop him.

The lecturer, a young historian, Peter Hart, from Newfoundland and Queens College in Northern Ireland, the author of "The IRA and Its Enemies", stood at the podium and listened quietly. When he could, he responded to the man. "I agree with almost everything that you have been saying." He had tried in his lecture to be careful. His purpose, he said, had been to raise the question of how to explain the precipitous drop in the actual number of Protestants living in County Cork from 1916 to 1923. From the records it appeared that

some 30% of Protestants had simply disappeared. What had been their fate? Was it, could it be called ethnic cleansing? He described patterns of Protestant leavings and the patterns of violence that had characterized the years from the Easter uprising of 1916 to 1920 and the offering of the Government of Ireland Act by Lloyd George that partitioned North and South Ireland, to the Treaty which created the Irish Free State, and the Civil War that followed. He acknowledged that ethnic cleansing was a 1990s term which had originated in the Bosnian war. That he said had been a situation of the systematic extermination of people. He concluded that it was not accurate to describe the situation in County Cork, Ireland of the 1920s as ethnic cleansing. He said he had raised the issue in part because people in Northern Ireland were using the term today to speak of the Protestant experience in Ireland.

As he concluded his statement, it was clear that the historian's question had fueled the anger of a decidedly vocal group who had come to hear the lecture. Loud cries of those wanting to be heard made their appeals to the Chair. "Hear this man," yelled one, pointing across the lecture hall. "This man has been waiting all this time. Let him speak."

So began the second hour of Mr. Hart's lecture. The History Club was sponsoring the lecture as part of a year-long series. The 200 people who packed the hall clearly had come armed with their own histories, especially a distinctly older group. They were at the ready to have their say. When the Chair tried to keep order for the questioning, there came one cry: "I'll not be put down the way they put Kevin Barry down."

The historian had differentiated between ethnic cleansing and ethnic violence. He would acknowledge ethnic violence. Clearly that had happened in those terrible times of Civil War. The Protestants had shifted power when Ireland finally got independence-even if it did lead to a Civil War and Irish fighting Irish. Although some Protestants fled Ireland, many remained. Some declared loyalty to the new Republic of the South. But there were clear losses of Protestants from 1922-1923. The historian discussed shootings by the IRA, farms of Protestants sold or appropriated as realities. Contrary to popular belief, most Protestants in Cork were small farmers or tradespeople who daily lived and worked next to the Irish. They were not just the owners of the "big houses." And they remained an important part of Irish life. So ethnic violence might be a better term not ethnic cleansing.

Then, one very strong-voiced man asked all assembled: "Was it not ethnic cleansing when during the Famine the government allowed women, children and babies to die, left them to die?" To the anguished cries of agreement to this, the man went on addressing the historian: "From listening to you the only people killed were Protestants. That is NOT So. Catholics were killed. You came here to propagandize!"

More people rallied to his claim, clamoring to be heard. Looking across the aisle to a friend, the loud man yelled to the Chair: "There's a man with his hand up for a half hour. Let that man speak! Let that man speak!" as others tried to get the Chair's attention. The next speaker commented on the sources of information that the IRA had in Cork and Bandon, a small town in Cork county of mostly Protestants. The audience was not having the historian's perspective.

"No IRA man ever killed anyone. My uncles were all in the IRA. I know that for a fact." Now another man addressed the historian: "You put up that chart showing the sharp decline of the Protestant population from Church attendance records. If you put up a chart of Catholic church attendance today, would you call that ethnic cleansing?" Hoots of agreement came from the audience.

Finally, the Chair attempted to bring the meeting to a close with a last comment from a young woman, who clearly was to be heard. "Since," she said, "it was impossible to be heard before over the din and the bully behavior of the men, I will not be denied."

"Now," she began, "most of your presentation has been about men. What about the women?"

She clearly implied issues of the role of women in this history. What role had they played? She also asked, if you are talking about ethnic cleansing, what about the issue of rape? Very few rapes happened, the historian replied, "but there were reports of rape by the Black and Tan and by the IRA." A voice from the crowd, yelled: "Where, where? Where were the reports of rape by the IRA?" The historian replied. "Well, there was an allegation on the floor of the House of Commons." Another voice was heard, "The House of Commons! Why would you even bring something like that up?" But the historian went on. "Women were used as couriers by the IRA."

But most women then were expected to be in the home. Many did keep and save the farm or the family business when the fighting of the Civil War disrupted home life both for Catholics and Protestants. He concluded, "I want to emphasize that here I have been trying to argue not that ethnic cleansing was at work but how ethnic violence seems to beget ethnic violence. And violence has unintended consequences."

The evening ended with loud applause; too quickly over for many with many more notes or life stories not given an audience. The Chair called for attention and announced, "These public lectures are not supposed to be like football games or hurling matches." Chuckles were heard. "But if you have passionate interest in the 'Italian States in the 19th

Century' come to the next lecture two weeks hence!" Loud laughter broke out. We went out into the night and, as we reached the perimeters of the campus, Bob commented: "Were not the Penal Laws the finest example of ethnic cleansing in Ireland?" A young man coming along the path behind us commented, "I'm from West Cork and all of my family were Republicans. Wasn't that just grand tonight?" Maybe. But we wondered. Had the woman who sat next to us been right, had we heard "our own story" after all?

Telling the story of the evening to some colleagues the following day, one said: "It is always there just below the surface, isn't it--the violence."

Every morning for the last month there has been a radio announcement of a "sectarian" killing in Northern Ireland. The history of ethnic violence is still being written in Ireland.

7. If Angela Could Talk With Billy, Again

As we entered the small bookshop in Ennis, a clerk was stocking a bottom shelf with copies of Alice McDermott's Charming Billy. Last Christmas we had given a half dozen copies as gifts.

"That's a wonderful book," I said.

"I thought so too," the clerk replied: "But people here don't seem to like it. It really hasn't sold that well."

"Why is that?" I asked surprised.

"I'm just not really sure," she said.

Puzzled, I continued browsing until, finally, we had to leave to continue our journey back home to Cork. But yesterday a friend reminded me of Ennis. Arriving at my office, she stood in the doorway and exclaimed excitedly:

"Last night my book club met to discuss Charming! Billy. To a person, NO ONE liked it. Some people in the group said they couldn't even finish reading it. I could hardly get into it myself. At first I thought it must be because I was reading it at night. But it was more than that. The story just didn't seem to make any sense. I finished it, but some people said they just couldn't and I understand that."

She went on: "Sometimes I couldn't even follow who was telling the story, who was narrating." I admitted that at one point I, too, had difficulty keeping the story straight. But I had found it quite compelling, unlike my friend or the Book Club. Why was that, I wondered aloud. A native-born Irish woman who had lived in the States for some ten years and had gone to graduate school there, my friend offered her own insight.

"It may be that people didn't want to hear this story," she said. "I think here in Ireland people really do not understand the experience of the Irish in America."

But then she went on, "To me the story seemed so drab, at least the lives of the people were. And they were not very attractive people. Billy himself just seemed to be a drunkard. And his friend Dennis didn't make sense. Why did he tell Billy that lie, that Billy's girlfriend had died? Why didn't he just tell him the truth, that she had gone back to Ireland to marry someone else? She did not want to marry Billy, even though she said she would.

People do get over these things. Why not just tell? Why didn't Dennis do that. He let Billy go through his life thinking that she had died. It also seems to me that that is an ethical issue. And it is never addressed in the book. It didn't seem to bother Dennis at all!"

I agreed that you could see the issue as an ethical one. But then my friend asked: But what about the girl, Eve. Why did Eve keep the money Billy had sent her? Was it all about money? It was his money. He had sent it so that she could come back to him quickly. But she kept the money and used it to buy a gasoline station in Clonmel, to start a business for herself and her husband to be.

She said: "I think the issue here is that Irish people may not want to face or know about the sacrifices those who left made to send money home. They never really look at where the money came from or what life was like for the people who sent it. They never ask, "What was it like for them in America?"

"It is a very interesting question," I acknowledged, "and yet that is what seems so real, so attractive to me in Charming Billy. That story -- their life in Queens in the 1950s and 1960s -- I think that is what Alice Mc Dermott has captured. Plenty had to hold two jobs. They had to. There were so many Irish who worked for Con Edison, or the Tel company, or the City of New York and held two jobs. Dennis worked at the local shoe store on Saturdays and nights probably not just to make ends meet but to think of the extras, like a week or two of vacation; and, a week or two of vacation you could afford seemed then like making it --even if it were a slim edge. People like Dennis and Billy lived in small houses or apartments that dotted Queens. These weren't the tenements of lower Manhattan of earlier immigrants. They had an air of quiet respectability about them. There was shrubbery and trees. Some were attached houses. But the neighborhoods could be claustrophobic as any small town. It would have been great to have a small bungalow as Dennis and Billy had through Dennis's mother, out in Long Island. It probably was barely patched together, no heat, paint caked on the window sills. But it was located in a place near those great glistening white beaches, and the beautiful homes of eastern Long Island. It would have seemed like paradise -- something out of *The Great Gatsby*, only quiet wealth. And for Billy to meet Eve there, she working as a nursemaid to the children of a well-to-do family, was bound to make their relationship seem magical. So the story made sense to *me*."

But just then I thought of Angela's Ashes, the raging success of Frank McCourt. "I wonder," I said, "if there isn't something like what you are suggesting also going on for readers of Angela's Ashes. I know lots of Americans who read that book and loved it. It is still a best seller in the States. But I couldn't finish it. I never could get into it. The story seemed

repetitious to me, not at all compelling, in fact, tedious. McCourt does not seem to me to be a reflective man. Things just happen. He can laugh at life but it seemed it was just a list of experiences, awful experiences that were so unrelenting. The Ireland of that day seemed grim. The people of Limerick uncaring, cruel to those in need, denigrating them.“

“But,” my friend said, “I loved that book. To me it is my experience of growing up poor in a large family in Ireland of the 1960s and 70s. He caught it.“

“Could it be,” I wondered, “that American-Irish really do not want to know about what the hardships of life in Ireland were all about in those years? We know of the famine years. But that almost seems like some calamitous happening, a Holocaust too awful to contemplate, almost to get our head around. And then it wasn’t always a history available to us. It wasn’t written about. We haven’t thought about it, had it really in our minds. But Irish people who lived through those years, 1950 to 1960, lived in great want. Maybe we in America do not understand it.”

My friend became quiet and said, “I remember my mother serving my father meat as we children watched and were hungry. We were given nothing. There was not enough meat for every one of the children or even for my mother. Women who had fifteen children, almost always pregnant.”

Could it be, I wondered, that Frank McCourt captured and told the story, a story some knew and wanted to have told, wanted others to know about? Could it be that Alice McDermott’s story similarly was one some people knew and wanted to hear? But were there other, competing stories, ones not captured in either book? Billy and Denis had their lives filled with returning from World War II, finding a job, making their way, getting married. But by then--unlike Ireland of the 50 and 60s--there was no such poverty in America. Nor was there anger at the government of the past. Franklin Roosevelt had cared and post-WW II became a good economy in America. But looking back, people then rejoiced in a two-week vacation--considered it a great advance. But was it? In spite of a generally good economy? At that time, it was not so good in Ireland. And if people in America sent money, what was the expectation?

One day at the Cork Museum of Art, we admired a painting called “The Letter from America.” It depicts 19th Century Ireland, a family having a letter read to them presumably from those away, in America. The guard at the museum told us, “And if the letter came and there was not money in it, it would be tossed aside.” What, we pondered, had been going on there?

Two stories overlapping in time, so different in experience; overlapping in places, known but not known, the one perhaps forever mysterious to the other. Or, was it perhaps that one could not admit and live with the idea that one did know? And underneath were there sacrifices, sadnesses, even cruelties left unspoken? Pretend a largess that didn't need acknowledgement in spite of drab lives and sacrifices necessary to send a letter from America when the edge of largess was quite slim? And did others in Ireland acknowledge that things were so much better because of that letter, when underneath was a terrible poverty, cruelty even from your own. There is a deep sadness underlying Charming Billy, underlying both books. In Angel's Ashes it is masked by that great Irish gift, humor. But I wonder, if Frank McCourt's Angela could speak to Alice McDermott's Billy, what would she say? Or he to her?

8. If Angela Could Talk with Billy, Again: Postscript

Last weekend, unexpectedly and to our great interest, the History Department at University College Cork sponsored a symposium called, "THE LOST DECADE: Emigration, Culture, and Society in Ireland of the 1950s." The conference drew scholars from all over Ireland and the U.S. It was headed by Professor Joe Lee, the UCC History Chair, and the clear star of the Department and the Conference. Lee set the theme with a keynote address, "Perspectives on the Irish Diaspora," laying out the terrible decade of the 1950s as a time of enormous emigration out of Ireland as 400,000 people left the country. Some call it "The Exodus," the time of "The Vanishing Irish," "a Dismal Era." But, Lee cautioned: Does it not need to be seen in a different light, as the beginning, a time of thinking consciously about being Irish.

The historians at the conference reviewed the decade of the 50s-the same decade of Billy, and Eva, and Dennis of Charming Billy - and characterized it grimly as: "spiritually empty, culturally repressed, and a time of suffering from psychic and cultural malaise." It was also a time of a vanishing way of life when agriculture was transformed as it declined. The GNP at mid-1950 was less than 1%. Farm families declined by 80,000. While historians argue that agricultural changes may have been inevitable, they gave few details of the actual lives of Irish people who stayed at home.

But it was a sobering account from the conference historians. They mentioned, too, how immigration patterns were changing. Immigration to America, for example, had come to a halt in the 1930s and '40s and stayed that way right up to World War II. There was a Depression in America and no jobs. America only recovered with WWII and the post-war boom. But by then the boom in England was attracting Irish immigrants, eager to go without restriction to England - if just for a while. Ireland of the 1950s saw no such boom and the human flow continued - a crisis proclaimed by all.

On Saturday afternoon, the conference shifted to take up the Irish in America of the 1950s. Titles of presentations included: "A Great Time to be in America," "The Perception of Ireland in U.S. Media," and "Irish Immigrants in Post WW II New York City."

Then, a novelist at the conference raised an intriguing issue: "Inadmissible Departures: Why the Experience of Emigration Figures So Rarely in Irish Writing of Mid-20th Century." A discussion followed. The novelist's question: Is there at the heart of the emigrant experience a silence, a fear to speak? Why? Some had called the emigrants of the 1950s "A Lost Gen-

eration.” But others wondered, “We who remain in Ireland, are we also a lost generation?” Now the discussion turned to writers and playwrights of the ‘50s and ‘60s, to Tom Murphy, John McGahern, John B. Keane, Brian Friel. Some terrible dark stories emerge from these works of fiction, some even suggested: Was there a crisis in writing for the 50s generation? Is that why it figures so seldom in story?

Then, a woman historian at the conference raised her hand and emphatically asked. “But what about Alice McDermot who wrote Charming Billy and Wakes and Weddings? To me she writes about the Irish experience as no one else is writing about that. What I believe her work captures is my own experience here in Ireland. Her works are about the Irish in the 20th century.”

But there were no comments. Not many people it seems had read Charming Billy. But when I talked with her and mentioned Angela’s Ashes, she squealed, “I hate that book - even though my mother grew up in Limerick and says it is all true what he says!”

Exhausted and filled with lots of ideas and impressions we went home. There we had Joe Lee’s book, Ireland: 1912-1950 and I began dipping into it. I wanted to pursue a point Joe Lee had made - the unusual case of Irish female emigration patterns. Female emigrants from Ireland matched in numbers that of males - a unique fact in history, the Irish probably being the only people in the world for whom this has been the case. Equal numbers of men and women emigrating assured the possibility of regenerating themselves.

But then a strange thing happened. Reacting to what seemed a terrible rise in emigration numbers, the people, the government and its new leaders who followed De Valera’s reign into office in 1954, began talking about the “disappearance of the race”, the Irish race, and asking, Who was to blame? As some suggested, perhaps it was the emigrants themselves. Some even speculated that it was the women, their heads turned by that new phenomenon, the movies. Women were being lured away by images in films, especially to America!

Blame, exoneration, deception, - who was to blame? A tissue of subterfuge emerged. Discussions focused on the psychic impact of emigration on those who stayed, the price paid by the society. A whole psychology appeared in political discourse, news accounts, a national dialogue carried on. The psychic cost, Professor Lee speculates, has just begun to be explored.

Then I thought again of Charming Billy. The whole story of Billy and Eva and Dennis is structured on a lie, a subterfuge to hide a psychic pain. Dennis never tells Billy the truth of

Eva. And Billy when he goes to Ireland and discovers it for himself-that Eva is alive with a husband and children, and a thriving business. Billy never admits to the lie.

At Billy's funeral, Dennis tells his daughter the story. She asks: "Did you ever wish you'd told him the truth?" "Yes," he says without hesitation. "I suppose. It's a bad business. A lie like that. I never told anyone and Billy never told anyone. It's hard to be a liar and a believer yourself."

In telling the story, Dennis uncovers more about himself, hints at his own pain, his subterfuge, but it is not ever really named. Revisiting Charming Billy and Angela's Ashes, I wonder are these two stories, joined perhaps by covering subterfuges? A generational subterfuge, but to preserve what? Now, I ponder anew, what might Billy say to Angela? Or she to him?

9. Spring Rites At the Edge of the Sea

24 February 2001

Today we travelled to the edge of Ireland, the most southwesterly tip called Mizen Head. It was a spectacular day--bright sun, the clearest skies, no spots of rain! Daffodils lined the road out of Cork that follows the River Lee west. There the land is rich with tall trees, low green hills, and farms as far as the eye can see. 'We had left at mid-morning: our destination, West Cork.

At Béal na Bláth we headed south towards Bantry, keeping to the middle road that goes through Dunmanway and Drimoleague, turns sharply left then south towards Ballydehob instead of Bantry. Along the way, we kept catching sight of great mountains in the distance, stark roughhewn, brownish slabs, Burren-like limestone. Here the land slowly begins to rise, climbing with tufts of green between brown rock, a place for sheep and cattle. But as you start down again to head toward Schull, suddenly you catch your breath, as the land gives way to long, long, views of great, massive peninsulas of grey rock, rising out of the shimmering ocean, one set etched against the next, extending into the sea like some giant majesty.

At the approach to Schull, the land slopes downward again now to meet the sea, and on that road there is a turn-off, a place to stop. Then, you notice it. As if lined up with the mountain behind and the sea before, there lies an ancient Celtic table, an altar, a massive slab of stone held in place by just as massive stones at its edges, turned upright to hold the one placed on top. A marker sign gives dates defying time, 1200 BC. It is an altar, a place of worship, a place of sacrifice, some memorial that an ancient people created. Probably, you realize, they had some of the same sense of awe we feel as we stand there marveling at the sea, the headlands. Now we stand and marvel at the traces of men and women. Who were they? We had come here in two hours. How long had it taken them? How long had they stayed? We wonder at these people who had created something commensurate to what they saw before them.

At Schull, we stop. The bay is before us, a protected harbor, shimmering in the white light of the sun, and there on the water are some dozen or so small sailing boats, white and red sails up, all in a line. It is some kind of race. Voices come across the water shouting commands as each boat in turn moves out, carries out its task, turning against the wind, some nearly capsizing as the wind picks up. We park at the pier and see that this is still a working

harbor. Boats, nets, lots of lobster traps lining the narrow pier, boat yards all speak of the sea. To the right we spy a walkway that follows the harbor out toward the ocean, past houses that line the approach. We find a fallen willow tree and pick some pussy willows.

Hungry, we stop across the street at the East End Hotel, have some chowder and decide to stay over as we realize it is after three o'clock and it is about three hours to Cork and we still have not seen Mizen Head.

But the trip cannot be shortened. We follow the signs to Crookhaven twenty miles south and go out still following the ocean. We pass an amazing sandy beach, that has behind it another rivulet of ocean water and sculptured swirls of sand from the water running through it. The road into Crookhaven is curled, just like an old shepherd's crook and goes around the harbor making a long sheltered inlet.

At last we arrive at Mizen Head and see that we are on a great high cliff, the sea, seemingly endless, immense before us. We park next to a rescue boat, now up on land. There is a lighthouse but we cannot see a light and, as we park, we realize the great light is on the ground, probably for some repair. The place is clearly closed for the winter. We get out and marvel at the great cliffs, even if all enclosed by a wired fence that would prevent the curious a too-close-to-the edge look. But below we can see the ocean, as great waves hit against the rock and enter caves too dark to see, gulls swirling all around, finding holding places in the massive rock. It is a mesmerizing view. We see what looks like a whirlpool in the ocean but probably only water going over a rocky outcrop. It is magnificent.

A sign says there are 99 steps before us to go down, not to the bottom but to a white suspension bridge that we see connects two separate great cliffs, one we stand on and another the farthest tip, where the lighthouse stands. Down we climb. But the bridge is closed. We peer between the rocks and cannot see the bottom. Out before us the sea stretches as far as the eye can see, remarkably quiet. It is now 5pm and we notice that the light is beginning to dim. We should head back to Schull, not realizing a sight more beautiful awaits us.

We take the road back and around Crookhaven, not going into town and then catch an alternative route to Schull. The light begins to fade quickly. Suddenly the bright sun is setting, yellow and rose against a darkening horizon as we again catch sight of the ocean. Earlier we had noticed that there seemed to be smoke rising here and there on the landscape. Now, below us at the edge of the ocean on a land spit quite far away, we see real fires burning. At one place, the ruin of an ancient castle seems surrounded by a circlet of fires. And ahead of us, still at the edge of the land, more fires burn. It is now dark and the rings and light of the fires is vividly clear. They remind us of the Lughnasa fires of summer. And

you can almost see dancing figures in the firelight. We wonder: is this some ancient rite of spring? Some custom of the country?

Although puzzling, it is starkly beautiful in the quickening dark of such a calm, clear night. It seems a fitting sight to see. Some ancient remnant of the past, the past of a great people. We ponder the people, the Celtic people. A visitor here cannot be ignorant of them. They have left traces of their lives all over this landscape altar tables, burial grounds, ruins of houses, monasteries, great round towers. These remnants are not inconsequential. There exists an old poem whose authorship is unknown but some see it as an exclamation of the founding Celts about themselves and their land:

I am the wind scouring the foam
I am the breaker of the sea
I am the growl of the ocean
I am a roaring bull
I am a hawk on the cusp
I am the sun through the dew
I am the salmon which leaps
I am the wonder of art
I am the spear which wins the battle
I am the wild boar of courage
I am the pool of plenty
I am the word of knowledge
I am the god who seized the fire of creation
Who gives meaning to the light from the sun?
Who can confabulate the age of the moon?
Who can read the secrets of the trees?
(If it is not me?)

No one knows what this poem means. But it seems that it could be the same people who created the monuments who could also ask: Who gives meaning to the light from the sun? Who knows the age of the moon? Who can read the secrets of these people?

10. Border Crossings

Intimations of an Apocalypse

28th February 2001

A terrible plague seems to have descended on England and stands poised at Ireland's door, a virus that afflicts animals of all kinds--cattle, pigs, lamb, even deer. Strangely, not humans--not directly, not yet. To people here, it seems to have had a prelude with mad cow disease that began to increase precipitously last fall in England with serious cases growing in numbers. Now it's form is foot and mouth disease. It began in England around Christmas time but wasn't made public until it was spreading like a wild fire. This morning there are 70 confirmed cases reported in the United Kingdom. There is an alert in Northern Ireland because of a suspected connection with some sheep that were brought in from England to Northern Ireland.

3rd March 2001

This morning there was an announcement that some sheep in the south, the Republic of Ireland--were being watched on one farm in Wexford. At noon animals from three more farms were under surveillance. Tensions grow. Slowly consciousness sees that consequences are dire. There seems to be only one way of dealing with the disease: that is, to kill and then burn the affected animals.

Afflicted animals develop blisters on their hooves, then on their tongues and their mouths. The animals become unable to stand or move. It is a dreaded disease and there is no known cure. In England, authorities have begun burning the animal carcasses. Images are grim. Last night on television, a viewer could see what looked like a wall of fire on one farm, stretching across a field and lighting up the night sky. It was expected that the fire will burn through the night.

This morning concern in England was high with the report that some 4,000 cattle at a location in Dartmoor were waiting to be exterminated. No more could be accommodated there. It is horrible to contemplate, to see the bodies of hundreds of dead animals being placed on pyres, to know that more are on the way. If you miss the seriousness of the situation, it quickly makes its own point.

Friday, 4 March, 2001

The Wexford animals turned up negative. But Ireland barely missed a catastrophe. Nothing much was said when reports first came through from England two weeks ago.

Then, with increasing numbers mounting from England, a public outcry became discernable. Yesterday, a woman called a popular, well-listened to radio program to report an experience of a neighbor. The neighbor, a student at an agricultural college in England that was closed because of FMD, was returning to Ireland by bus and ferry. On arriving in Ireland, she noted there were no controls at the border, no interrogation of the passengers, or of what they were carrying. She was shocked and her shock was contagious. It seemed that the Irish Agriculture Department was asleep on the job. Then, on the same program, a couple of Irish farmers called in to talk about the earlier F&M scares in Ireland in 1941 and 1967. The picture they painted was painful. Stories came flooding into the radio station. Questions asked. Trucks, were seen passing over the border into Northern Ireland, movements of animals going on at night, with suspected un-tagged animals. What was that about? The Irish minister of Agriculture seems only to be mumbling words. England seems immune to its dangers.

Sunday, March 6, 2001

Suddenly, today came an electrifying announcement: the people in Dublin who run the St. Patrick's Day parade, a mammoth four-day event, announced that the parade was cancelled. The implications are far-reaching. School bands, musicians, other artists, tourists who have been planning to come to Ireland from all over the world, will all be disappointed. Money to be lost to Dublin is impressive. But the woman who made this decision with her colleagues rang the fire bell in the night. People are now listening. Other events are being cancelled: rugby games, horse-races, except for the Cheltenham race in England, other gatherings are stopped. Decisive actions are being implemented here in Ireland. All movements of animals are being halted. There are injunctions not to visit England, travel to any farm, even take hiking trips in the country. Farmers are being asked to intensify the use of disinfectant.

It seems all the stops are out and prevention of FMD has become a major national effort in Ireland. People are being stopped at borders, getting on and off of airplanes, on roads. Lorries carrying animals must have proper papers (tags on all animals). Last night the Minister of Agriculture put a ban on farmers even moving their animals on their own farms.

Everyone and everything must be disinfected. There are mats at the entrance to

stores, even at Cork's trendy Patrick Street stores. It is as if people have at last awakened to the consequences. Our trip to the West, to Kerry, found us noting all kinds of farms posted. Historic sites are close and posted visitors are not to walk over the land.

13 March, 2001

This morning came a frightening new announcement. A farm in County Tyrone on the border between Northern and Southern Ireland has discovered that some lambs are infected. Ms. Brede Rogers, the Minister of Agriculture of Northern Ireland said that up to 60 sheep from the known source of the outbreak of the disease in County Armagh cannot be accounted for. France announced it fears the disease has spread there. If confirmed, it would be the first outbreak of the disease in Europe. Horses from Britain and Ireland have been banned from being sent to Australia. British marksmen are being sought to help in the slaughter of animals. Last night, TV news reported that so far a total of 400,000 animals might have to be slaughtered with 80,000 waiting in the wings.

Radio is carrying an announcement: "This is an important message from the Department of Agriculture. We all have a part to play in keeping Ireland safe from Foot and Mouth Disease." We will see.

Wednesday 14 March, 2001

The disease is confirmed in France. Some suspect it may be in Italy. We wonder if we are witnessing the beginning of the Black Plague. Charges are flying: "British authorities just don't seem to get it, to be taking it seriously." The farmer of the stricken herd in France used harsher language. When an English reporter approached the farm in Mayenne, Western France, the farmer angrily shouted: "Go away. This evil has come to us from your whore of an England, once again. I have nothing to say to you." The Irish Independent reported that the young farmer, in jeans and yellow cap turned on his heel and walked back into his farmyard. This is the first case of foot and mouth to reach the continent and the first case of any kind in France in 20 years. The farmer, Mr. Francis Leroyer, had spent 30 years breeding his herd of cattle. He had called a vet on Monday when he noticed blisters in the mouth, tongue and udders of six of his cows. His entire herd was killed overnight. France has now halted livestock exports. It is ironic, it is spring and the beauty of the lambs is being destroyed. Bertie Ahern has been urged to disassociate himself from a junior Irish minister who described Britain as "the leper of Europe."

Thursday March 15, 2001

Britain announced tonight that more than a million animals need to be slaughtered.

This applies to animals on farms adjacent to ones with known cases of FMD, even if they are not contaminated. There are growing fears that there may be a revolt from farmers.

Tuesday 20 March, 2001

The radio just reported the news that 300 troops are being dispatched in England to farms to help in the killing of infected cows and sheep. Those farms in close contact with affected ones are ordered to have their animals slaughtered. Piles of carcasses are rotting on their land as the farmers are increasingly protesting this mass slaughter of unaffected animals. The specter of burning animals and new spring lambs frolicking on the hills are incompatible images to those whose lives are involved. As one farmer's wife movingly proclaimed "Let Tony Blair come here and hold the animals as they are slaughtered and see what that means."

Now issues of compensation are being raised, who will pay for all this loss? The European Union? the government of Great Britain? It is also reported this morning that beef bought in good faith for sale this spring cannot be sold since their provenance and source are now known to be uncertain.

Day of Dread: 22 March 2001, 10:45 AM

The dreaded news is come. It is confirmed in Ireland, foot and mouth disease is found in some sheep in County Louth. The test was done in England last night. I am listening now to the radio as the story is breaking. The Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern, has just requested that the Irish Dial, the Parliament, be closed in order to prepare a news release at 11 AM, fifteen minutes from now. The outbreak occurred in Louth, the country in the Republic right on the border of Northern Ireland. The news reporters are surmising that since it is in a highly restricted area, it has been cordoned off, perhaps it can be contained. The identification came from the intense surveillance of all animals in the area. So the hope is that it may not be wide-spread.

A reporter is now interviewing a farmer in the area. He had just begun to hope that they were over the usual incubation period and that Louth may have been out of the woods. He is still hopeful to keep it contained. The 11 o'clock news briefing by the Taoiseach confirmed the earlier announcement. The Minister of Agriculture will continue the ban on the shipment of animals out of Ireland. But now all products meat and dairy are under review. Restrictions will continue on all movements of animals. Everyone is urged to follow the strictest regulations already in place. It is a sad day indeed, for all of Ireland. We pray it may be contained.

Friday 23 March, 2001

This morning effects of FMD having been discovered in the Republic of Ireland are being revealed. The stock prices of Irish dairy products with large international markets - the Kerry group, Glanbia are dramatically down. The tourist houses and hotels are nearly at a standstill. While many sports events have not been cancelled, many more have. There is a clear air of sadness in the reports and newspapers. "Do I go out this morning to feed my cattle or to slaughter them?" one farmer in Louth asked.

The slaughter of animals in the entire area of Louth a process called a cull will involve 10,000 sheep and 2,500 cattle. In all, a total of some 12,000 animals will be slaughtered today in a desperate attempt to prevent the spread of the first confirmed outbreak of FMD in the State in nearly 60 years.

The Minister of Agriculture will ask the EU to consider only the region of Louth as under a ban, not the entire Republic. But in the meantime Japan has joined other countries in banning all Irish animals. If the disease were to spread in Ireland, it might mean further product bans from Latin America. It will limit dairy exports but more severely meat exports. Processed meat will now need to be heated to get rid of any contaminants, as will powdered dairy products. Bertie Ahern, the Taoiseach, spoke on the local radio. There will be some reduction of jobs. It has happened in the UK.

Yesterday, another event was noted. The massive Russian Space Station MIR fell into the Pacific Ocean after fifteen years of orbiting the earth. It was an event marked by intense observation of the skies by scientists. The ancients would have noted the heavens as intensely but for other signs that day: for anything that might have foretold such a calamitous happening as the coming of Foot and Mouth Disease to the Republic of Ireland. What would they make of the coincidence of Ireland's fifteen years of unprecedented success and growth? And what would they have made of the coincidence of a heavenly "meteor" falling to earth on the day of discovering Foot and Mouth Disease, with the incredible number of entrails of animals to be read and sacrificed on fiery pyres? How would they read these signs? For what do they, could they portend?

11. Nipping at the Feet of the Tiger

The Irish Secondary School Teachers' Strike

9th June 2001

This has been an amazing year to live in Ireland. An economic boom is transforming cities like Dublin with growth that is sending modest housing costs soaring into the millions and nearly bringing all ground movement in the city to a standstill; yet, in the midst of this spectacular economy, the specter of foot and mouth disease hovered; had it taken hold, it could have destroyed the boom and devastated the country. That didn't happen because of the lightning swift action of the government that closed all farms, stopped the movement of animals, and put in place necessary safeguards at borders country-wide. But perhaps the most poignant of all changes in the land has been that of Ireland's secondary school teachers, especially the members of ASTI, the Association of Secondary Teachers of Ireland, one of Ireland's three teachers' unions. From a respected position as a national leader, it is now scurrying to survive, to keep its reputation, even--some say--its mandate.

A year ago, breaking loose from its colleagues, ASTI stood alone in defiance of a national, government-backed process called "benchmarking." Benchmarking would have created a teachers' salary scale, arrived at by an impartial group of business people through a method comparing teachers' work with that of similar jobs. ASTI refused to join the process, claiming it would have only a limited decision-making voice in benchmarking deliberations. Last fall it went on strike, closing schools sporadically; then, stepping up action by refusing to do any extra supervision of students, for which teachers are not compensated. But it angered parents and students most when it threatened to refuse to correct national student exams, called the Leaving Certs. These exams, that all 17,000 students take at the end of secondary schooling, determine student placements in higher level education through a point system. A similar testing system, Junior Certs, monitors the shift from junior to senior high school. The Leaving Cert tests are similar to the SATs, but of a different order: they test subject-area content.

When the government refused to negotiate with ASTI, tensions rose and there were some dramatic actions on the part of students and parents-even accusations that nearly resulted in fisticuffs. Some students refused to respond to teachers at all. The common media interpretation was very anti-teachers: teachers were short-changing students, even endangering their futures given the impact of the Leaving Cert exams. Then, in April there finally

was a break-through. In the end, however, ASTI was forced back into the benchmarking process--some say beaten, others argue with no long-term damage. Maybe.

If you visited a secondary school in Ireland it is quite likely that it is housed in what looks like a seminary or a convent or a private Catholic school. There are religious statutes on the well-kept grounds, in the corridors and, of course, in the chapel. Students study religion as a required subject as they do the Irish language and other subjects. At most schools, students, girls and boys, wear uniforms with school colors--with some skirts for girls that seem either incredibly short or long.

But the defining character of Ireland's schools at this time of year are the Leaving Cert exams. They began a week ago Wednesday with English, then math and Irish, followed by history. They ended this week with chemistry, classical studies, Latin and other studies and subjects as well. All students in the country take the exams at the same time, sitting for them in their own schools. The point system will determine a student's eligibility for post-secondary colleges and technical schools, and whether or not the student pays. In Ireland, college level programs are TUITION-FREE for all students--if you acquire sufficient points on the Leaving Cert exams. And you can apply to any college, as long as schools have room. Thus, the pressure is enormous for students and teachers.

At this time of year, the entire country seems focused on the Leaving Cert experience. But this year has been special because of the strike. For the past several months newspapers have carried special inserts with sample exam questions for each subject area to be tested. Students have been cramming or, as the Irish say, "grinding," working with grinds for the past several weeks. This past Monday radio news programs carried messages of good luck to exam-taking students, and the newspapers were full of advice on how to approach the testing situation.

The hype, of course, has focused on whether students will pass with results similar to those of past years, given the loss of 13 school days due to the teachers' strike. Some parents are already asking that the government pay if there are any challenges by students to have an exam re-graded! But there is also a growing concern voiced increasingly by people that the Leaving Cert is itself in need of revamping. With exams focused more narrowly on facts, critics fear that the enormous weight of the exam is forcing teaching to the exam, and a particular kind of learning that can in no way foster the development of mind and student thinking.

The Leaving Cert came into being less than ten years ago. It followed the initiation of mandatory secondary education that was put in place in Ireland only in the 1970s. These changes were the result of deliberate governmental policy and were enacted at a critical time, when the Irish economy was at a real low. There were no jobs in Ireland. Then, in the 1970's and 80's a major national commitment was made to education. Teachers, like other workers, agreed not to ask for pay raises so that free secondary education might be extended to the largest segment of school age children. Then, post-secondary, free college or technical education came about in the 1990s. Of course, the payoff for Ireland came in the 1990's with a U.S. and western Europe-wide boom.

Then, this highly educated nation of largely young people were graduating from college just when U.S. and foreign investors were heavily locating their European offices in Ireland: they immediately employed Irish workers--and the boom was on. With the emergence of the feisty and incredibly successful Celtic Tiger, largely attributed to Ireland's generous tax breaks for investors and its highly well-educated workforce, teachers along with other workers were looking for remuneration for their contributions.

It was at this point that the government created the Partnership for Prosperity and introduced the idea of arriving at salaries and raises through the benchmarking process. It asked that all parties agree to let the benchmarking initiate change. Some workers, however, really were concerned with how they would be part of the negotiations and who were the bench markers. ASTI took its skepticism to a vote and the secondary teachers pulled out of negotiations while their colleagues in two other unions, elementary teachers and administrators stayed in. They then embarked on their strike actions, thinking that the government would agree to negotiate separately with them, and, of course that did not happen.

Now with the exams over, the next hurdle is grading. Student results will be known in the summer. It might then be that the real future of ASTI and Ireland's secondary teachers will be known as well.

As an interested foreign observer, I must say watching the proceedings was a bit frustrating. It was hard to read any discussion of what exactly benchmarking was. In fact, most recently I read a story in the Farmer's Journal that was more informative of the process as it applies to farmers keeping track of their own productivity, than any thing I ever read about its application to teachers. I also found a kind of mean spiritedness towards teachers from

the newspapers and the usually very informative radio news. It was hard to understand how teachers would themselves be represented in the process. And it was a mystery why the government delayed so long to get the teachers to the table. I would love to know how the NEA or the AFT would have assessed the situation.

It is clear that the fact that the other two unions did not go along with ASTI was seen as its biggest handicap. They will follow the benchmarking process. It will be interesting to see what exactly teachers are offered re: salaries, etc. But the real effects will be known this summer, both of the student exam results and the benchmarking process. ASTI and the other unions have said they will then decide what follows clearly indicating that some new job action has not been ruled out. But it seems for now the Tiger has nipped back!

12. Haunted by Ghosts in the Microfiche

Tralee. March 2001

The slightly blurred microfiche of the 1901 census slowly rolled before my eyes revealing townland names in the Barony of Raghticonnor, that ancient division of northern County Kerry that still organized the lives of people there in 1901. I was looking at data from the townlands of Ballyconry and what is officially named "Listowel Rural," the cluster of towns, seemingly infinitesimal but amazingly named and known, if not always appearing on maps. We had come to the Tralee Library to search the microfiche because the librarian in Dingle had told us that Tralee had a fine Historical Documents collection. We were looking for my family, especially for records of the life of my grandmother, Catherine Griffin, who had come to America out of County Kerry in 1889. Two years ago at the National Library in Dublin, I had located her birth record: the 15th of May 1868. Now, I was searching for her mother, Mary Nolan Griffin, my great grandmother. I had suddenly realized that all of Mary Nolan's five children had left her for America. I wondered: was she alive in 1901 when the first census was taken in Ireland? Could I find her presence somewhere in the names and lines and boxes of that report? Just some clue as to her whereabouts?

The week before I had been at University College Cork's Special Collections searching that earlier census, Griffith's Evaluation of 1851. That census had been taken of all landholders and land user tenants, so that taxes might be collected from them. In looking at Griffith's, I had focused on Ballyconry where I knew from the Dublin records that our grandmother had been born. In Griffiths of 1851, I had in fact located in the vicinity of Ballyconry many Griffins, Nolans and even a Maurice Hennessy--the name of the man grandmother had married in 1893 in New York, even though we know he came from Limerick. In Tralee, searching the 1901 Census, I find again the same family names that appear in the 1851 Evaluation, but dramatically reduced in number. I wonder where they all have gone. Had they all left Ireland for America? And although I conclude that I need additional dates before own my search can go forward, I cannot get my great grandmother out of my mind. Where was she in 1901? Mary Nolan Griffin, this great grandmother, would have been some 76 years old in 1901, if she were alive. I know that she was married in 1855. I had found the records from the Church in Ballybunion where she had been married; it noted the marriage of Mary Nolan to one Thomas Griffin. In 1875, her husband, Thomas, had died tragically at age 40 from what is called the dropsy. He had been in business with another man, fishing the River Shannon for salmon. Stories in our family suggest that Mary Griffin had then become the

caretaker of the cottage they lived in on property owned by an Englishwoman who raised and raced horses in Ireland. I also know that Mary Nolan Griffin had six children, but had lost one daughter in childhood, unexpectedly in an accident. It was said that on hearing the news her hair had turned grey.

The last daughter remaining at home, my grandmother, Catherine, left Kerry in 1888-89: The last son, Cornelius, left for New York sometime later. But when exactly is not clear. His sister, my grandmother, had gone to meet his boat in New York, only to discover an envelope and a hand-written message: "Have decided to go straight through to St. Louis. So won't stop now, but will write later." He never did. So, if Mary Nolan were alive in Ireland in 1901, she would have been without any of her children. But, if so, where was she living? And with whom? An aunt or uncle? The Carmody's, her friends? Or Mary Mulvihill who had witnessed the birth of her daughter Catherine, signifying the event on the baptismal record with "her mark," still visible today? As I sat in Tralee and watched the microfiche roll by and searched for a trace of Mary Nolan Griffin, I wondered.

Nothing did turn up in that search. But as I pursued the microfiche, I found that I had to pause at certain information. It was as if I were discovering ghosts in the microfiche. Lives hinted at, etched in census details, revealed under the headings of: ages, relationships of people to one another, education, "rank, profession or occupation," the number of rooms in a house, or, the language spoken. I found, for example, in rural Kerry a listing for a Johanna Griffin--no relative-- but "mother-in-law" to a Thomas and Ellen Tidings--not a name we knew. In 1901 she was 69, could not read but could speak Irish and English. More chilling was the entry for one woman and her daughter, she 60, the daughter 29, unmarried, living all alone. The daughter a domestic, somewhere. The census boxes revealed that they were living in a one room cottage. There was no electricity in Ireland until the 1950S. In those poor communities, what would life have been like? For them or for another, Nora Downey, listed simply as "Beggar." And, then, I laughed when I read the entry for Mary Stack, "head of family" who in 1901 was living with two older sons, and their seven children. Under the heading of "Marriage" this head of family had been listed by the census taker as "Married." But a different, stronger hand--was it perhaps Mary Stack's herself? --had crossed out married and written in "WIDOW" and under the heading of occupation was written, "FARMER-ESS." Mary Stack, the "farmeress" was 54 and could read and write and speak in--large print--in IRISH! -Perhaps the saddest ghost I encountered in the microfiche was in a line in The Kerry Evening Post of Saturday, January 4, 1868.

There among the ads for transporting flax by railroad to Belfast, and Hallowsays Pills for disorders of the stomach, the news from London of alarms of the operations of the Fe-

nian “enemy” in England and Ireland, and some late New Year’s greetings was the following notice: “Bridget Hayes, the woman who tried to drown herself in the River Feale, is charged with a fine of five pounds or a sentence to spend three months in jail.” I thought of Tony Morrison’s Beloved and wondered if Bridget had been trying to save the life of a child from the one she had lived. So the ghosts appear in the microfiche of ads and census data and old newspapers. Small details of lives noted--the number of people who entered the Tralee Workhouse, the number discharged, the total number of inmates at 609, as against 624 last year, the increased cost that year of the Christmas fare supplied to paupers, Christmas 1867--the large moments untold, unrecorded, only guessed at. Who, I wondered, might today be searching for Bridget Hayes?

Today, I went back to the Library and began again my search for the Griffins and Nolans, this time enlarging, my scope to the countryside around Ballyconry, into all the small - tiny communities there in North Kerry. As I scrolled again the microfiche, I was stunned to find in the listing of the family members of one, Timothy Griffin, not someone recognized as in our family, the name, “Nona Griffin” age 8, listed as “a scholar,” as are all the children of school age. I think a friendly ghost has come out to greet me!

