

Singing our Song



Hellgard Leckebusch

Cover illustration

The cover shows Hellgard, painted in 2021 by the Belfast artist, Sam Barry. Hellgard received the painting as a Christmas present from her friend Rosemary, was delighted with it, and knew immediately that she wanted it on the front page of her book.

Sam Barry is Rosemary's son. He painted the picture using a photograph taken in the 1990s when Hellgard was in Ireland with a German touring group. Hellgard's friends are unanimous that the artist caught the essence of her personality, and that the stained glass window which he has painted in the background, and which Hellgard seems to transcend, is an inspired element of the composition.

Singing our Song

THE MEMOIRS OF HELLGARD LECKEBUSCH
(1944-2023)

Illustrated with materials of family provenance, and
photographs supplied by her friends

Edited by
SILKE PÜTTMANN and KENNETH FERGUSON

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‘We must pass on what we know to the next generation and express gratitude to those who help us — nobody gets anywhere on their own.

The ancestors are swaying silently behind us, the dead souls of the once dearly departed who are the reason why we came into being — we must remember them.’

from: *Manifesto: On Never Giving Up*,
by Bernardine Evaristo (2021), p. 180

For our parents, my brother, and all the beloved people who shared longer or shorter periods of our and my life. They are in my memory; I wish to honour them.

HELLGARD LECKEBUSCH
Wuppertal, 15th June 2022

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

THANK YOU TO

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for the wonderful legacy expressed in your stories, and in the original photos, clippings and all the other material you collected along the way
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- My other friends: for quietly accepting my mental and physical absence for eight weeks in February-April 2023 when I submerged myself in this project

SILKE PÜTTMANN
Mettmann, May 2023

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 'Hellgard's Ireland in Silke's Photographs'
 are listed on page 420.

Author's Preface

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Even as a young pupil at boarding school I had the wish to write, but I was not born with the gift, nor did I have the opportunity. Least of all did I have a longing that was so full of fire that I considered trying it out. When I became old in years, very hesitantly and gradually at first, all the tears of joy and sorrow, my greater understanding of life, gratitude towards my immediate family and many wonderful companions on my road through life, became the ink on the pages of my late years. The process has been pure joy and fulfilment. While I am writing this, poems written by D. H. Lawrence on the subjects of work and being genuine come to my mind. They sparked off melodies in my soul in the sixties and influenced my life. When, much later, I read Seamus Heaney's poems, e.g., when he recalls peeling potatoes with his mother, or watching his aunt baking the traditional soda bread, these melodies turned into a song, my song.

In the poem 'What is He?' D. H. Lawrence tries to debate the criteria of art with someone who does not seem to understand him. My interpretation of the question he is discussing is whether a documented and certified theoretical and academic training is the non-debatable, exclusive route to producing recognized and accepted art. The transcribers and illustrators of the Gospels must have had formal training in an early cultural centre of learning, so the Book of Kells poses no problems; but might not the architects and builders of the pyramids in Egypt, or Machu Pichu in Peru, with their expertise, give critics a headache yet? After all, these men just followed their intuition, supported by their accumulated knowledge, passed on and developed generation after generation, got on with the job, and, as far as I know, weren't bothered about having a certified and stamped document to authorise them to build. Academic training is excellent in our lifetime, but, perhaps, as the saying goes, many roads lead to Rome?

Be that as it may, I love the last lines of D. H. Lawrence's poem 'What is He?' and laugh while I wonder what kind of a bird I must be to sing my song:

Would you say a thrush was a professional flautist,
or just an amateur?
I'd say it was just a bird.
And I say he is a man.
All right. You always did quibble.

HELLGARD LECKEBUSCH
Wuppertal, St. Stephen's Day, 2019

Editors' Introduction

Many people mentioned in this book knew Hellgard for longer than we did, and our credentials to write about her do not match those of the school-friends, College contemporaries, and teacher colleagues, who shared her life more closely. That said, the pair of us, each and independently, knew Hellgard for about half-a-century. Silke Püttmann was her pupil at Scheidtstraße in Wuppertal-Ronsdorf in the years 1975-78, and Kenneth Ferguson was a pupil of Wesley College for all of Hellgard's five years as a teacher there. In recent years, again quite independently, we were in frequent contact with her, and were taking a keen interest in her writings, many sections of which she sent to us to read. We knew how important her writing was to her, and we firmly believed in her work; yet at the back of our minds was the niggling uncertainty of what might be the fate of the texts after her death.

In the event, when Hellgard died on 18 February 2023, Silke was soon on hand, and in a position to assist the executors. The papers connected with the book, which amounted to a title, a table of contents, a preface, and approximately 75 more or less 'finished' stories, were quickly identified, together with a wealth of photographs, newspaper-clippings, poems and other documents. Silke was able, already on 5 April 2023, to circulate to a small number of recipients a digital version of Hellgard's collected texts, illustrated with black-and-white photographs from Hellgard's collection, augmented by colour photographs from Silke's travels in Ireland in 2003, 2014 and 2017. Thanks to Silke's energy, and to her skill with computers, Hellgard's literary legacy is safe. Silke senses that her work on the texts has helped her enormously to get over the first shock of losing a very good friend. Since completing that initial work Silke has cheerfully agreed to accept the services of an assistant in Dublin who has his own fond memories of the author. Like Hellgard, Ken witnessed the opening of the new Wesley College in 1969, and shares many of her memories of people and places. He was one of the two pupils with whom Hellgard went to the Abbey Theatre in June 1972 (see p. 338).

We know that Hellgard nursed the hope that her work might one day appear as a book, a conventional book, with pages to turn. This digital collection of Hellgard's writings is not a book, as she understood the word, and appears in a medium that would not have been accessible to her. Still, it has some entitlement to the name of book: an 'e-book', in which the typesetting standards and formality of style expected of a conventional book have been observed. The editors' ambition has been to create a work that is readily capable of being printed out and bound up to look like a conventional book. This is a step in the direction of print publication, should that be possible.

Having introduced ourselves, and described our aim, it falls to introduce Hellgard and her book.

SILKE PÜTTMANN, Mettmann
KENNETH FERGUSON, Dublin
May 2023

‘A singer, a song and its cadence’ — of Hellgard and her book

xiii

At the end of her Preface, Hellgard wondered what kind of a bird she was. That is a question to which no precise ornithological answer is required. It suffices to say that she was a *rara avis*, a rare and precious songbird; and that her life’s story, as well as her prose, establish that she belonged to a migratory species endowed with great endurance, a homing instinct, and a compass that allowed her to fly surely to reach her destination. Hellgard’s literary flight spanned two decades, and the oceans she traversed were those of the blank sheets of paper that awaited the assured touch of her pen. Her penmanship was regular, light, and accurate, akin to the motion of wings in flight. Hellgard enjoyed too a bird’s eye view of her material. Not the least of the virtues of Hellgard’s book is its architecture. Just as birds know how to build nests, Hellgard knew how to construct a house: her ‘Lecky’¹ house. The book was written in instalments over two decades. Each instalment was a brick, and Hellgard could see where each brick was to go. When the work came together, as it did towards the end of 2019, it was a well-constituted structure of sixty-odd solid bricks. A few others followed, and, had she lived, yet more might have been added. There might have been short pieces on the Seventies, Eighties and Nineties, and on planned texts with the titles ‘My Anam Charas’ [‘Meine Seelenfreunde’] and ‘Man does not live by bread alone’. Contemplated tentatively were pieces on ‘Wuppertal University’, ‘Arms and the Man’, and ‘The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe’. Her focus was also shifting to themes connected with her own changed circumstances: ‘Das Jahr 2000’ [the year of the deaths of Henner and Tante Paula]; ‘Krankheit’; ‘Ende des Lehrerdaseins’; and ‘Krankheit als Chance: Eiswein des Lebens?’ Revision continued of earlier texts, including ‘Lost in a Bog’, which recalled stressful early days in Ireland, and proved a difficult literary birth. Its script, which exists in a collage of old-fashioned cutting and pasting, was an exception, for most of her writings, neatly handwritten, appear to have been easy and fluent compositions.

The texts, ‘A Singer, a Song, and its Cadence’, and ‘But who is Mr. Mooney’, were bricks that were on the decorative flanks of her literary edifice. ‘Mr Mooney’ seems always to have been intended as the quizzical postscript which it remains. The place of the ‘Singer’ was less clear. It had a position that was penultimate in the list, but its material had also been raided to form the Preface, as it appears above. The bit that was not used in the Preface is short, and is reproduced below. It followed the D.H. Lawrence poem (p. v) that ended ‘You always did quibble’. Hellgard’s text went on:

Birds quibble, too, but not about being professionals or amateurs. When they sing, it is an expression of their existence, a small part in the network and wholeness of creation, be they blackbirds, nightingales or owls. Those who migrate for the winter follow their instinct as they do when they sing or when their song ends.

¹ ‘Die Lecky’ was the nickname Hellgard’s pupils in Wuppertal had for their teacher. Charmed by the appellation, Hellgard appropriated it to her imagined house in Dublin, the windows of which opened on the scenes of her happy memories.

Even a strange bird's song comes to a point when all is not said, but all there is to say soars to a climax and is still. The specific melodies, recurring phrases; its major and minor passages, its *cantus firmus*, its recurring theme of hope and trust and joy have mingled with the sun and the clouds and the wind and though it seems to last forever the longing ever present to find and return to the home-key, becomes impelling. It is dusk now, announcing the end of the day. The final chords are waiting to complete a task, a song of hope. And while the song fades out, another more meaningful, perfect and beautiful song mingles with the cadence faintly. The strange bird hears it; it completes its task, and knows that all is well.

Appropriate to the avian theme, Hellgard's text ended with this Emily Dickinson poem, "“Hope” is the Thing with Feathers”:

“Hope” is the thing with feathers –
 That perches in the soul –
 And sings the tune without the words –
 And never stops – at all –
 And sweetest – in the Gale – is heard
 And sore must be the storm –
 That could abash the little Bird –
 That kept so many warm –
 I've heard it in the chilliest land –
 And on the strangest Sea –
 Yet, never, in Extremity,
 It asked a crumb – of Me.

In preparing the work for publication we have adhered closely to the original materials, save for some rearrangement. The need to avoid duplication between the Preface and the text of 'A Singer, a Song, and its Cadence' has been mentioned. We sensed too that the speech that Hellgard made in 2005, when she retired from teaching, was so pleasing and significant that it merited prominence. It will be found as No. 68, under a title devised by the editors, 'A weaver's daughter reflects on the tapestry of her life'. Apart from that new title, the section consists wholly of words of Hellgard extracted from No. 51, 'My Dublin'.² The text No. 69 has been moved from Part IV to Part VIII, and the pieces numbered 70 and 72 have been grouped in Part VIII, under the theme of 'Touring in the West of Ireland, before and after 1972'. Save for these changes in the ordering, for the making of minor stylistic adjustments and the correction of obvious errors, and for the footnotes that are editorial additions, the words are Hellgard's own.

There are indications that Hellgard had further plans for her Preface, and contemplated adding lines that Heinrich Böll had written into his granddaughter's poetry album on the 8th May 1985, the 40th anniversary of the end of the War, and

² The text for 'A weaver's daughter', was extracted after the phrase, 'This truth applies to my life also', at line 9 on p. 293. At that point the words 'in the context of the tapestry of my memories' were supplied to make a bridge to the theme of the Lecky House.

ten weeks before his death. Hellgard found the lines in a church publication³ that appeared in the Lent of 2020, and had them typed up on a sheet that accompanies the typescript version of her Preface. She probably never knew that Samay, the little girl to whom the lines are dedicated, — she is the daughter of René Böll — became the wife of an Irish husband, Nick Elliott.⁴ Böll's words are reproduced below, in German, and in Hellgard's translation.

Für Samay	For Samay
Wir kommen weit her	We come from afar
Liebes Kind	dear child
Und müssen weit gehen	and have a long way to go
keine Angst	do not be afraid
alle sind bei Dir	We are all with you
die vor Dir waren	who were there before you
Deine Mutter, Dein Vater	your mother, your father
und all, die vor ihnen waren	and all who were before them
weit weit zurück	far far back
alle sind bei Dir	all are with you
keine Angst	do not be afraid
wir kommen weit her	we come from afar
und müssen weit gehen	and have a long way to go
liebes Kind.	dear child.
Dein Großvater	Your grandfather

Hellgard was an admirer of Heinrich Böll, who was of interest to her not only for his *Irish Journal*, but for his wartime diaries, published under the title *Man möchte manchmal wimmern wie ein Kind* (Köln, 2017). She approved of his character — like Hellgard, he was pious — and applauded his stance on public affairs, as instanced by his appearance in Cologne Cathedral in 1979 in an act of solidarity with prisoners sentenced to death by Franco. Böll's visits to Ireland occurred during the years that Hellgard was living there. Their paths did not cross, but Hellgard and Heinrich Böll were both veterans of the arduous three-day journey by railway and steamer that was then necessary in order to come from the Continent to the West of Ireland. Hellgard's account of such a journey is in this book. The full particulars of Böll's initial journey are to be found, not in the *Irishes Tagebuch*, but in contemporary letters that are on display in the Böll cottage (now a writers' retreat) on Achill Island. It need hardly be said that readers who have enjoyed Böll's Irish writings might also enjoy Hellgard's.

A similar recommendation may be made with reference to the works of other authors who have dealt with kindred themes. These include the late Homan Potterton, whose *Rathcormick: A Childhood Recalled* (2002), which Hellgard read, is a delightfully crafted account of a 1950s Irish protestant upbringing. Iris Taylor is a recent author, whom Hellgard dimly remembered from College. Her *Memoirs of a Reluctant German* appeared in 2020, under the imprint of a Connemara publisher with German connections. Gisela Holfter and Horst Dickel

³ *Zuversicht. Sieben Wochen ohne Pessimismus* (Fastenaktion der evangelischen Kirche, 2020).

⁴ Volker Behrens, 'Was Heinrich Böll seiner Enkelin ins Poesiealbum schrieb', *Hamburger Abendblatt*, 21.12.2017.

are the authors of a scholarly work of a very high standard, *An Irish Sanctuary: German Speaking Refugees in Ireland, 1933 -1945* (Berlin, 2017). This work, to which Hellgard refers on page 52, helped her to make sense of things she had heard about German-speaking refugees who had lived in Miltown Malbay during the war.

HELLGARD'S FUNERAL

At her funeral, which was held at the Reformed church in Ronsdorf on 3 March 2023, Hellgard's personality came across loud and clear, just as it is preserved in her writings. She had lived for many years with the reality of her fragile health, and the instructions for her funeral had been in place for twelve years when the time came to give effect to them. Her choice of scripture was Psalm 126, a passage that was read at the funeral service successively in German and in English. It is one of the shortest of the Psalms. That Hellgard, the prisoner of an ailing earthly body, selected this reading is both revealing and consistent with her choice of Böll's lines for her Preface. Both are expressions of faith, and of the confidence that all will be well.

¹ Wenn der Herr die Gefangenen Zions
erlösen wird, so werden wir sein wie die
Träumenden.

² Dann wird unser Mund voll Lachens
und unsere Zunge voll Rühmens sein. Da
wird man sagen unter den Heiden: Der
Herr hat Großes an ihnen getan!

³ Der Herr hat Großes an uns getan; des
sind wir fröhlich.

⁴ Herr, bringe wieder unsere
Gefangenen, wie du die Bäche
wiederbringst im Mittagslande.

⁵ Die mit Tränen säen, werden mit
Freuden ernten.

⁶ Sie gehen hin und weinen und tragen
edlen Samen und kommen mit Freuden
und bringen ihre Garben.

¹ When the Lord turned again the
captivity of Zion, we were like them that
dream.

² Then was our mouth filled with
laughter, and our tongue with singing:
then said they among the heathen,
The Lord hath done great things for
them.

³ The Lord hath done great things for
us; whereof we are glad.

⁴ Turn again our captivity, O Lord, as
the streams in the south.

⁵ They that sow in tears shall reap in
joy.

⁶ He that goeth forth and weepeth,
bearing precious seed, shall doubtless
come again with rejoicing, bringing his
sheaves with him.

Hellgard's faith had its roots in the blended Lutheran and Reformed traditions of her parents. In harmony with these roots her choice of hymns fell on 'Lobe den Herren, den mächtigen König der Ehren' ['Praise to the Lord, the Almighty'], and 'Nun danket alle Gott' ['Now thank we all our God'], hymns familiar by reason of their fine old German tunes and the English translations of Catherine Winkworth; but she also chose something contemporary with an ostensible Irish association. This was a modern spiritual song, known from its first line 'Möge die Straße uns zusammenführen' ['May the road rise to meet us'], a title which comes with a parenthesis implying that it belongs to the genre of 'Irische Segenswünsche' [Irish Blessings]. Hellgard had an interest in Celtic spirituality, a theme which has a following in Germany. She was an admirer of one of its exponents, John O'Donohue (1956-2008), a West of Ireland writer with German links, whose books she read, and to whom she once spoke on the telephone (see p. 396). The piece she chose for her funeral, popular though it is in Germany, is,

alas, not what it seems. Both the tune, which is melodious, and the words, which are unexceptionable, are the composition of a German musician, Markus Pytlik (b. 1966). Hellgard would have laughed heartily had she known that the author admitted to finding his inspiration for the lyrics in posters of purported Irish Toasts and Irish Blessings that were on sale in tourist shops when he visited Ireland in 1988.⁵

HELLGARD AND THE CHURCH OF IRELAND

Hellgard imbibed much from the spirit of the Church of Ireland of the 1950s and 1960s. One of the intriguing photographs in this book [p. 208] shows her among the white-gowned and veiled Rosleven girls who were confirmed by Bishop Pike at Athlone in 1959. Her mentor in Miltown Malbay, Canon Elliott, is perhaps the hero of the work; and his church, Christ Church, Spanish Point, is acknowledged as her spiritual home [p. 79]. Mentioned later [pp 312, 322] is Canon Walter Burrows (1908-90), rector of Taney, the parish in which the new campus of Wesley College was built. Canon Burrows was a pastor in the mould of Canon Elliott. Hellgard held him in high regard: ‘a very spiritual man, very academic, very humble’. Canon Burrows had an only son, Michael, whom Hellgard knew as a boy, and with whom she afterwards kept in touch. When he grew up he followed his father into the church, and became a bishop, in charge of Limerick and of a union of dioceses in the west of Ireland. Falling within his jurisdiction is Christ Church, Spanish Point. In the weeks before her death Hellgard was eagerly anticipating a visit from the Bishop. This visit, alas, was not to be. Having fallen repeatedly in her flat, Hellgard was brought to hospital on 17 February, and died there early on 18 February 2023. That same day the Bishop and his wife were at the airport when Ida telephoned the news. They went ahead with their journey, walked on the following day to the church in Wuppertal that Hellgard had recommended they should attend, and afterwards made their way to the entrance door of Nützenberger Str. 3, there to linger and reflect. The story of Hellgard’s interaction with one elderly clergyman of the Church of Ireland is an important part of her tale. The poignant vignette of the Bishop’s visit, just after her death, is a fitting addendum to her life, reflective of the enduring bond between Hellgard and clergy of the Church of Ireland whom she held in esteem.

HELLGARD’S VIRTUES

Another clergyman whom Hellgard greatly respected, and who instinctively perceived her virtues, was the Revd Gerald Myles (1907-1994), a Methodist Minister. He was the Principal of Wesley College, and is the subject of one of her ‘Lecky House’ sketches (p. 321 *et seq.*). To Mr Myles may be traced Hellgard’s attachment to a verse from the Book of Joshua, chapter 1, verse 7: ‘Only be thou strong and very courageous’ (see p. 323). The verse was quoted by Dr Denker, the pastor who conducted her funeral service. Another quotation favoured by Mr.

⁵ https://www.evangeliums.net/lieder/lied_moege_die_strasse_uns_.html zusammenfuehren

Some readers may make a connection between church music and the surname Leckebusch. The English hymn-writer, Martin Ernest Leckebusch (b. Leicester, 1962), is Hellgard’s cousin. It is remarkable that all four of Hellgard’s paternal uncles and aunts emigrated to England.

Myles — this one is not mentioned by Hellgard, and comes from a secular source rather than from scripture — may hold a clue to the qualities that the headmaster saw in Hellgard, and that eased the way to his employing her even when she wasn't strictly qualified for the post that had been advertised. It is Yeats's line, found in 'The Fiddler of Dooney', that the good are always the merry:

When we come at the end of time
To Peter sitting in state,
He will smile at the three old spirits,
But call me first through the gate;
For the good are always the merry
Save by an evil chance
And the merry love the fiddle,
And the merry love to dance.

Hellgard, who was merry and musical, and also liked to dance,⁶ was full of virtues. She was open and engaging, an inspirer of loyalty, kind, intelligent, and witty. She had an earnest side, too, that included a deep vein of piety, and a longing for justice in the ordering of the world. She was shrewd, ever perhaps a 'wise old bird', and a good judge of character. She was conscientious, not least as a correspondent, and hardworking. As enjoined by Joshua, she was strong and very courageous. In the phrase of Yeats's poem, she was good and she was merry. She could talk so well in two languages. 'Ja, bitte?', her slightly intimidating way of answering the telephone, was but the prelude to many a long and pleasing conversation. And, as these memoirs demonstrate, she could write.

Hellgard could be self-deprecating about her literary endeavours, and would sometimes playfully invite her correspondents to consign her effusions to the W[aste] P[aper] [B[asket]]; but she knew they would never do any such thing. In a circular letter in November 2022 she included a few sentences about her writing:

My writing has not stopped, but progress is slow. On the other hand I personally feel that the quality of my writing is improving. It amazes me what good ideas seemed to ripen during sleepless nights. Above all — the act of writing is doing me good!

It represented a triumph of mind and spirit over ailing body that Hellgard, confined to her four walls and linked up to an oxygen supply, persevered with her writing, defying fatigue. Her technique was to write a little at a time, and to do so regularly, a method well suited to the task of building a house, brick by brick. The literary remains of this dear and brave spirit, expressed in her honest, gentle, thoughtful prose, are elegantly crafted portraits of the people and places she knew. They are a solace to her friends; a contribution to the social history of Ireland in the years between 1954 and 1972; and a delight to be savoured by whomsoever may discover them.

KENNETH FERGUSON

⁶ See p. 392, for Hellgard's ballroom experiences at Lisdoonvarna (where she would have wished her name to have been Fidelma Clancy rather than Hellgard Leckebusch!), and pp 92, 149-50, for her description of Willie Clancy and the musical magnet that was Miltown Malbay.

1: Our family tree

Trees are simply majestic. When they appear out of the ground they are often overlooked, superfluous in number, feeble-looking on their unstable, tiny, thin legs, sometimes one or two leaves, e.g., oak or beech leaves, helplessly flapping in the wind. If and when they survive, we encounter big trees with strong, firm trunks, growing towards the sun with their glorious splendour of branch architecture, filled with a crown of foliage. In them, we see the annual cycle of life repeated: buds and fresh new green, then mature foliage, the slow change to the multi-coloured splendour of the leaves, followed by their gradual descent. When the bare branches are revealed, they look like lace against a blue or grey sky. We seldom see the naked beauty of the roots, the modest life – giving part of the tree, mainly hidden in the ground. These roots gather nourishment and transport it to all the different parts of the tree, right up to the crown. Only when a violent storm tears the tree out of its foundation can we see the hidden, modest, naked beauty of trees.

I like the English term ‘family tree’ when outlining the connection between different members, branches and generations of a family. Each individual leaf, all parts of the bark, the smaller and stronger branches, the fruit, they have their own beauty, design, place and importance. We get a far closer insight into each member of a family tree when seen as part of something greater. Each season and age have its special gift – the early blossoms bring hopeful joy, the dark foliage shade and growth for future nourishment and then the time of fruition and finally life-filled rest.

Mr. Mooney has been and is a very important personal adviser for me and has carefully guided me through the writings about my life. Therefore, I immediately had to agree with him that a mere focus on the life of our family is incomplete without giving it a *Sitz im Leben* – a context – however brief; so that a short introduction to the roots of our family is expedient. My knowledge is fragmentary, but perhaps even that is important.

Our father, Hans Leckebusch, was born on February 18, 1905 in Wuppertal-Langerfeld with Langerfeld then belonging to Schwelm. His father Ernst Leckebusch was in the weaving industry for which Wuppertal is renowned. At the beginning of the twentieth century, he was joint owner of a firm in Langerfeld and to the best of my knowledge he came from Sprockhövel, a town between Wuppertal and Bochum. My mother, who met Ernst Leckebusch’s mother a few times at the *Sonnenhof*, recalled that she said very little, seemed sad, but came to life in the company of small children. I have seen her husband’s death notice. My great-grandfather was also named Ernst: he worked in the weaving industry and he died in 1912. Uncle John was another relative who was in the weaving industry in England. Our grandfather Ernst married Martha Hammer in 1902 and she came from Weitmar which is now part of Bochum. She was one of three sisters, and the other two settled in the Weitmar area.

Our grandparents, Martha *née* Hammer and Ernst Leckebusch, had five children: Hans (born 1905), Margarete/Grete (born 1907), Ernst (born 1909), Kurt



A young Hans and Helma (back row, 4th and 5th) with their family, date unknown

Hellgard Leckebusch, *Singing our Song*, p. 2.

(born 1911) and Martha (born 1914). In the second decade of the twentieth century, grandfather Ernst Leckebusch sold his share of the firm in Langerfeld and bought the *Sonnenhof* in Wuppertal Ronsdorf, a large house, surrounded by trees, a lovely garden, extensive land. He had an extension built on to the house – a large ‘shed’, as they called it, connected to the house. He bought several large weaving looms and had a home weaving ‘shed’ industry which remained relevant in Ronsdorf for more than 100 years. They produced labels, ribbons, braces and narrow articles. (A museum in Ronsdorf, the Bandwirker Museum, exists and shows how these family firms worked and the people lived. Looms can be seen, as well as the card-cutting machine, everything that was required to weave ribbons, labels, braces, etc.)

The family must have moved to the *Sonnenhof* just before or at the beginning of World War I, because our father Hans started secondary school in Lennep (part of Remscheid). Ernst and Kurt went to the same school when they were old enough, the *Röntgen Gymnasium*.

As the three sons grew older, they helped and took on more and more responsibility in the shed, learning all aspects of the trade. When they were young, life there was always recalled as idyllic. They had a farm-worker, Gustav, who lived there, too, looked after the cow, the fowl and no doubt was responsible for a lot of work in the extensive garden. The daughters were trained by their mother in the kitchen and in the garden and they became fine needlewomen which was passed on to both daughters and even to Martha’s daughter, Jean, who specialized in creating wedding dresses until she died. Education for the girls was not a consideration, although Margaret, like our mother, was allowed to train for two years in the *Höhere Handelsschule*, a type of secretarial college, where they met and became friends. Apparently, Martha later wanted to train as a children’s nurse in Bethel, but her father was against this. Martha’s daughter Dorothy became an enthusiastic nurse and nursing teacher!

They had many frequent visitors at the *Sonnenhof* and I often heard Dr. Ernst Kahrs, a first cousin of Father’s, recalling summer holidays there enthusiastically: roaming through the woods, music, which was an important part of life there. Our father Hans was a very gifted piano player, Martha played the lute, and there was a lot of singing. In the summer, they enjoyed a lovely garden full of flowers and fruit, and there was a lawn with a sundial. Grandmother was a great cook, apparently, and made family and friends welcome when they visited. Grandfather was a great reader. They had a beautiful, large oak book cabinet which still exists as do some of the books: editions of e.g. Nietzsche, Tolstoy, Goethe.

In his later years, our grandfather took up painting – I suppose the sons were running the shed! He was a gifted hobby painter, but had a very good eye for beautiful frames, too, and he sold not a few of his oil paintings, certainly some of them framed. Our grandmother was the home-maker meanwhile, producing excellent meals, jams, bottling fruit for the winter. A painting showing her reading in the garden still exists.

After World War I, the years of recession hit the people in Germany hard and did not stop short of the *Sonnenhof*. As long as they all lived and worked there, their life seemed good and safe, but there was no future in it for the young generation and the orders became less and less numerous. The home firm in no way made enough money for anyone of them to start a home of their own and the parents were getting older. Grandfather got in contact with 'Uncle John' in Britain who promised to find work for the five young people. Ernst, Kurt, Grete (Margarete) and Marta went to England, but our father refused. He did not like Uncle John. Meanwhile, his father was desperately trying to sell the looms. Eventually a positive reply came from Mexico City. Their condition was that someone capable of setting up the looms and capable of dealing with all the work processes involved in the production, would travel with the looms and then later would stay as manager of the firm. Father saw his chance and accepted. Grete (Margarete) had often invited her friend Helma to the *Sonnenhof*. Hans took a lot of notice of her, both still teenagers and his interest did not remain one-sided and it never changed. When he sailed to Mexico at the beginning of 1932, it was settled between them that Mother would follow as soon as he had a home to offer to her.



The *Orinoco*, date unknown

In 1934 in the summer, the time had come. Mother prepared her emigration and wedding, got her trousseau together and took Spanish lessons. When she was ready to sail, she went ahead although she was warned not to sail in the autumn because of the seasonal storms. She was not prepared to wait. Her brother Willi and her sister Paula went by train to Hamburg with her where she went on board the *Orinoco*. She arrived in Vera Cruz in 1934, where Father rowed out in a small boat to meet the *Orinoco*. Mother saw him and also the numerous sharks which were swimming around the boat!

They were married in the German church in Mexico City on 15 December 1934. They spent their honeymoon in Acapulco, a beautiful resort, but not renowned then.



The German Church, Mexico City, 15 December 1934
Wedding photograph of Hellgard's parents, Hans Leckebusch and Helma (*née* Nüsken)



Wedding Group at the German Church in Mexico City, 15 December 1934

Hellgard Leckebusch, *Singing our Song*, p. 6.

These early years must have been by far the happiest years in their lives. They visited the Maya pyramids, regularly went to the opera, and had a large circle of friends. Father went mountain climbing with friends from the German club, e.g. they once climbed the Pico di Orizavo in 1934/35 on New Year's Night. There are breathtaking photos of the trip, also of our parents' visit to the swimming gardens near Mexico City on their first wedding anniversary. During these years Mother worked in the German Bank.

They decided they wanted their first child to be born in Germany and returned, also on the *Orinoco*, together with the Vienna Boy Choir, which had been on tour in Mexico. This was in the autumn of 1937. They enjoyed the concerts the choir gave on board, a special treat as they shared a great love of music.

Grete, Ernst, Kurt and Marta, helped by Uncle John, found work in Britain and they all settled there. Ernst, Kurt and Martha married while Grete remained single. Ernst, Kurt and Alex (Martha's husband) all fought in the British Army, Ernst in Germany, where he was stationed in Hagen, Kurt in India, and Alex in France. Grete spent years in an internment camp on the Isle of Man.

After their return to Germany, Father had to enlist in the German army in 1939. There it was discovered that he – like Mother – had had *malaria tropica*. After certain tests, it was decided that a possible risk of the infection breaking out by e.g. mosquito or wasp bites could not be tolerated and so he was dismissed and sent home: a godsend! They rented a flat in Besenbruchstrasse in Barmen before World War II.

When exactly the *Sonnenhof* was sold I do not know. In 1941/42, Ernst and Martha Leckebusch also lived in the Besenbruchstrasse in a separate flat. Grandmother had breast cancer in 1941 and the operation was successful. However, a few days later she died of a clot in her lung. Grandfather must have had a stroke shortly afterwards. When he lost his home in 1943 during the air raid, he was evacuated with others to a home in southern Germany where he was very happy. About a year later that home had to be closed and all the people there were moved to a home in Friedrichroda in Thüringen. Postal services were very difficult and the only chance to send a letter was if soldiers on leave could deliver or send letters on, but this often took months. Eventually, our grandfather got news of my birth and he replied and this letter which reached Wuppertal via a messenger still exists. He died soon after the end of World War II and he is buried in Friedrichroda.

Little is known about earlier Leckebusch generations, but an *Ariernachweis* (Arian passport) for the Hammer family (my grandmother's side) exists. This fateful family research paper had to be applied for by every family that worked in public life in the Thirties. This was to clarify if a family had intermarried with Jews or other non-Arian people. The term *Arier* (Arian) in itself is illogical when supposedly standing for people of 'pure German blood'. What the document says is of interest for one part of the Hammer family can be traced back to the eighteenth century when one of the family ancestors emigrated to the coal mines in and around Bochum, got work there, and settled.



Am Kraftwerk 3, Ronsdorf, date unknown

Hellgard Leckebusch, *Singing our Song*, p. 8.

Shortly after the reunification of Germany I visited Quedlinburg, an old historic town. As at that stage I had not had sight of the document, I did not know that one of my roots could be traced there. The town appeared to be a living remnant of the past. In a very small way it turned out to be part of my past also.

In the *Ariernachweis* I was able to trace the name 'Bernard', Father's second name, to a Hammer relative. This is apparently why our father's second name is Bernard, and why father's cousin was christened Bernard (called 'Bernd') and why his son's name is Bernd, a shorter form.

Henner did not remember meeting the Leckebusch grandparents, and they and I never met. I am glad they were often part of the family conversation. There was regular contact with Father's brothers and sisters in Britain, especially Ernst and Martha. They, along with Grete, did much to alleviate our situation after we lost most of our belongings.

Mother's parents play a very important part in Henner's and my early life. They were wonderful and most loving. After they made room for us gladly when the authorities made the decision that we had to go there, and another family that rented a flat in the house had to let us have one big room too, we were a lot better off than many families, but it mustn't have been easy for the grown-ups. For me, it was wonderful.

At the end of the nineteenth century our great-grandfather on Mother's side had bought a large plot of land in the village of Ronsdorf, where, in 1898, 'in the middle of nowhere', as many people laughed, he built the first two large houses. There is an old photograph showing the first house and very isolated other houses in the area. However, the important thing was that a short railway connection passed his land, starting at the Stadtbahnhof — where the trams set off alongside the river Wupper to Barmen and Elberfeld (towns not yet called Wuppertal) — and the railway station nearer Lüttringhausen, with connections to Cologne, passing Remscheid and Solingen, and also north to Oberbarmen.

In 1900, great-grandfather Nüsken built a second house with the address Franzstrasse 2, which was later changed to Am Kraftwerk 3. That train stopped at four places: Kaiserplatz, which was an open space in a small wooded area, Franzstrasse 2, the Osttor, and the station. Our great-grandfather had hoped to open a *Gastwirtschaft* (restaurant or pub), but he did not get a license to do so. Instead, he got the license to sell railway tickets, and he and his wife opened a *Kolonialwarengeschäft*, an old-style shop that sold many things including goods from the colonies like coffee, which he roasted in his cellar. They also sold milk which was served out in half-litre measures. The house Franzstrasse 2 was built in 1900 and still exists as Am Kraftwerk 3, and it. The earlier house, built in 1898, and sold before World War II, was later hit by a bomb and burned to the ground.

Wilhelm Nüsken senior, our great-grandfather, who built these houses, had married Auguste Ackermann who grew up not far from Franzstrasse 2. They had three children: Paul, our grandfather (born 1880), Frieda (born 1882) and Wilhelm junior, whose date of birth is unknown. A photograph exists of our grandfather Paul with his *Abitur* class, taken in 1899. I do not know at which *Gymnasium*



Wilhelm Nüsken senior, his wife Auguste, Wilhelm (left), Paul (Helma's father and Hellgard's and Hemmer's grandfather) and Frieda, date unknown, approx. 1890. In 1905, Paul married Paula Schreier from Lüttringhausen. Her family owned and worked a large farm. Paul and Paula had three children: Helma, our mother (born 1905), Wilhelm (born 1909), and Paula (born 1916).

Hellgard Leckebusch, *Singing our Song*, p. 10.

(secondary school) he received his education. It was obviously a boys' school. What further education he got I do not know, but he was a very good typist, excellent at shorthand and keeping accounts, and in his early years, and also in his late years he had an office job in firms. Even in his old age he was still good at English.

In 1905, he married Paula Schreier from Lüttringhausen. Her family owned and worked a large farm. Paul and Paula had three children: Helma, our mother (born 1905), Wilhelm (born 1909), and Paula (born 1916).



Paul and Paula Nüsken (Helma's parents), 2 July 1937

Paul's sister Frieda received the sort of education accorded to girls from well-to-do houses at the time: limited academic schooling, but well-trained in cooking and baking, needlework, running a large house. She married the owner of a large weaving factory. She inherited half the site her father had bought and she and her husband built a beautiful house there, just beside her home. They had no children, and were divorced in the mid-1930s. Her former husband remarried, and he and his second wife had two children.



Wuppertal-Ronsdorf, Am Kraftwerk 3, date unknown

Hellgard Leckebusch, *Singing our Song*, p. 12.

Wilhelm junior, our grandfather's brother, must have inherited a certain amount of money. He started a *Kolonialwarengeschäft* in Langerfeld. He and his wife had two sons, one of whom died at an early age (11?), and Wilhelm the father died soon after the funeral. The mother in her grief did not live for long after that.

Our great-aunt Frieda (Wilhelm's aunt) and her husband took the younger Kurt into the house and he grew up there. He was never formally adopted, so with the divorce, his home was gone and shortly afterwards, he had to join the army. After the war he married a wonderful young woman called Eva. He became an engineer and they lived in Bergneustadt. They had no children. He and great-aunt Frieda were always very close.

Our grandparents Paul and Paula lived in Emilienstrasse in Barmen when they married, quite near the firm where Grandfather worked. Our mother went to primary school there, a large red-brick building that is still a very active primary school. Before World War I when Mother was aged about 7, they were asked to move to Ronsdorf as Paul's parents were beginning to need some help with the shop. Uncle Willi was about three years old. This must have been in 1912. Grandfather was a member of the musical regiment in the years 1914-1918. He was a very good trumpet player, and he returned home safely at the end of World War I. Our mother, brother Willi, and sister Paula grew up at 'Am Kraftwerk 3'.

Mother's brother Willi married Anni Lang from Ronsdorf in 1935. Their son Erhard was born in 1939 and Frank was born in 1943. Aunt Paula stayed in the family home all her life and had a very good post as secretary and bookkeeper in Remscheid. Once our family went to Ireland and Uncle Willi and his family had moved to Bad Buchau, Aunt Paula took over the house and looked after her parents until they died. The tradition of the family house meant a great deal to her and a great deal of her energy and work went into its upkeep. When she married a widower in 1958, she started to work in a firm nearer home. The widower had one son and a daughter-in-law and they had one son. The son Günther lived in Moers and died in 2022, aged 91. Paula died in 2000, her husband Erwin in 1979. Günther's wife Margaret died in 2018. The 'grandson' Hans Günther died very suddenly in Moers at his father's home in 2020, aged 60.

Grandfather Paul Nüsken, more so than his wife Paula, took great care to keep old letters, photos, death notices, newspaper articles concerning the family and our aunt Paula kept them, as well as many contacts to the family. Henner knew members of the family far better than I did. When I returned from Ireland in 1972, I was a bit of a strange bird in an outside branch of the family tree! Aunt Paula and Uncle Erwin were real family to me, as were Uncle Willi and his wife Anni and their sons, especially Erhard and his wife Lydia and their daughters. I met many relatives as the years went by whose names I was familiar with. The contact with Frank and Gisela in the Saarland is good now. It was Henner who was far more interested in family traditions on the Leckebusch and Nüsken side.

It is strange to think that I inherited all the material. I have tried to put it into some order and some of it in writing. My information on the Nüsken family is much wider, but this is not the space for it. I will try to pass on the responsibility,



Henner and Christa on their Wedding Day, 18 May 1978

the knowledge and information, at least as far as I am able. I can do no more. An outline of the family has been brought together now, with guidelines where to start research if wished.

One member of the Nüsken family I do not want to leave unmentioned: Kurt, who was the brother of Great-grandfather Wilhelm, who built Am Kraftwerk 3. He and his wife were what were called free thinkers and they lived in Ronsdorf in the Kurfürstenstrasse. Kurt was politically influenced by Ferdinand Lasalle. When he died in 1930, there was a long article in the newspaper, honouring his extensive social work and fearless, outspoken words. It is interesting to see extraordinary family traits in regard to involvement in voluntary and unpaid social work on a personal and wider level, and our grandfather, our mother and my brother, too, are people in whom these characteristics were very pronounced. By 1933, Kurt would have been in great trouble politically.

EDITORIAL ADDENDUM

HENNER, HELLGARD, CHRISTA, AND MICHAEL

When Hellgard's father and mother died in Wuppertal, in 1984 and 1986 respectively, they were survived by their two children, and by a daughter-in-law, and a grandson.

Their son Henner (1938-2000), whose wedding photograph is reproduced opposite, was born in Ratibor, in what is now Poland. He is mentioned very frequently in the book, and his 'education odyssey' in Ireland forms the title of one of the chapters [No. 15]. In 1965 Henner joined the German police, where he would later be attached to the *Bereitschaftspolizei*, an élite branch, at the training centres of which he became a teacher. Henner was afterwards given charge of a *Hundertschaft*, a group of police sent on special missions. As an interpreter he often attended I.P.A. (International Police Association) meetings, both in Germany, and in Britain and Ireland.

Henner married Christa on 18 May 1978, and their son Michael was born in 1983. Henner's early death, on 6 June 2000, at the age of 62, was a great blow to the family. Christa lived on at Selm until her own death on 3 November 2023. Michael, who is unmarried, resides in Wuppertal.

Hellgard, who was born in Wuppertal on 8 September 1944, remained single and was a secondary teacher until she retired, on the ground of ill health, in 2005.

The family home, Am Kraftwerk 3, was sold in 2008, and is well cared for by its new owners. Hellgard continued to reside on the first floor of this house until 2017, when she moved to a flat in Elberfeld. She died in hospital there on 18 February 2023.



Hellgard, *circa* 1950

2: Growing up in Germany

Our parents, Mother especially, never missed an opportunity to show and tell us how important we were in their lives and so often recalled the time when we were born. Henner was born on January 1st, 1938. My parents had returned from Mexico in the late autumn of 1937. My father was looking for suitable work and took what he got for the moment. He was asked by a firm in Mexico to finalize trading conditions with a firm in the south of Silesia, part of Germany that became Polish after 1945. So he was there over Christmas 1937 with our uncle Willi, also working for the firm, and Aunt Anni. My parents were still without their own home, living for the moment in the house of our grandparents.



Souvenirs of Ratibor [now Razibórz], 1938
[above]: Label addressed by Paul Nüsken to
his daughter Helma in Ratibor
[right] stationery of Theodor Pawlenka's
coffee shop in Ratibor

Just before Christmas, Mother decided she did not want to give birth away from her Hans and undertook this very long journey during a very cold winter and arrived in Ratibor just before Christmas. The address was Neumarktplatz 1 – just across the market from the church. Apparently, the lady of the large house, Frau Weihrauch, was very kind and helpful. Henner was born at 8 a.m., January 1st, 1938. It was snowing and the church bells were ringing. Our grandaunt Frieda must have travelled down to assist our mother because she is mentioned in the document relating to the birth. The lady of the house brought my mother a cooked pigeon for her lunch that day, obviously the traditional meal there for a woman who had just given birth to a child. Henner's birthday on January 1st always remained a very special day in our family.

After their return to Wuppertal, they found a flat in the Besenbruchstrasse although I seem to remember that they lived in 'Am Blaffertsberg', just outside Ronsdorf for a short spell first. This flat was behind the Wuppertal police headquarters. The police had a brass band that practised regularly in the courtyard and as soon as Henner could stand properly, he loved standing on a foot stool at

the window. My mother gave him two wooden spoons and he conducted the band till they stopped. He never lost the love for music of any kind or brass bands in particular.



[above] Helma and Hans with baby Henner, 1938
[right] Henner, approximately 2 years old, 1940



When the family had their home in Barmen and the war had started, there were constant bombing alarms, especially at night when people got up to rush to the nearest official bomb shelter. Members of the family who were ill or slow in their movements had to take the option of going down to the cellars of their houses if they could, offering only limited safety. My parents were very worried about Henner – four or five at the time – so seldom getting a normal night's sleep, so that they decided Mother would take him out of Wuppertal for a break to an area with little or no industry or other targets. They booked a room in the Gletschermühle near Überlingen on Lake Constance. This must have been in the late April / early May of 1943. It was a long journey by train, but the family they stayed with was very friendly. Henner loved it there, with a small lake beach just down the avenue and it obviously calmed him. So fortunately, they did not experience the great attack on Wuppertal during which so many houses were hit, burnt to the ground and so many people were killed. My father, like all the other people in the firm – mainly women – rushed home, he rushed to the Besenbruchstrasse. He did not have to worry about Mother and Henner and so was

able to concentrate on rescuing his father and as much of their belongings out of the burning house as he could and transport them to a safer place. The authorities tried to house the people without a home with their relatives first. My grandparents gave up a room of their flat and the tenants living on the first floor gave up a large room. We were fortunate to be with our family in quite 'spacious' conditions for the times.

Henner started primary school in Ronsdorf in the Deutschherrnstrasse, now the Elias-Eller-Strasse, on September 7th, 1944. This was in the old school house beside the Reformed Church. Our mother – highly pregnant – brought him to school. They had to walk, no chance to go by bus or tram, not to speak of a car. Mother often recalled that it was a very hot day for September. That evening there was no mistake about it – the birth was imminent. The Landesfrauenklinik was several kilometres away, the trams had stopped running and there was no ambulance available. No taxis! Eventually she was brought to the clinic on a lorry belonging to the fire brigade! Finally, she was put on a stretcher in a corridor while the staff looked for an available bed. However, I was in a hurry and saw the light of night on the stretcher at 0:21 a.m. on September 8th, 1944. As they had not got a bed for her by morning, the lack of better care was answered by an infection. Then, the professor in charge of the clinic had her moved to his small room for night duties and they nursed her well. Knowing my mother, she will not have complained because she realized the difficulties the staff had, too, and she was rewarded for her patience and consideration.

The weeks between September and Christmas 1944 were turbulent with me getting diphtheria, and then, mother also got it and she was so ill that she was taken to hospital at a time when people had to run to the nearest shelter habitually. Once she was out of hospital for the shelter which was approximately 1½ kilometres away. She often said how good Henner was, trusting and patient at her hand, running, she pushing me in the pram with her other hand and apparently, I hummed in the pram.

Shortly after Christmas, mothers with young children were evacuated to quieter areas. My mother and our uncle's wife, Auntie Anni, were sent to Wanska in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, beyond Berlin and not far from the sea, with Henner, Ehrhard and Frank, our cousins, and me, five months old. We were given rooms in a church house. Even today Wanska is on the map because of a historic church and the church house still exists, too. There is little else. Wanska belongs to a village called Blankensee, and the bigger town is Neustrelitz. It was yet another move for Henner. Transport to school was often by horse and cart during a cold winter. Henner always had very clear and very unhappy memories of these times, very seldom wanted to talk about them and if he did, the information was brief and factual. Frank was baptized in the old church there.

From a letter which our grandfather wrote to his sister Frieda, and that still exists, I know that Grandfather must have visited them in March 1945. Shortly after he had left, our father travelled there. There were limited train connections to Berlin. From Wanska one could take a train to Neustrelitz and on to Berlin. The

war situation was moving to a climax and our father had decided to try and get the whole family back to Wuppertal. There were no train tickets available and he needed seven – three adults, three children, one baby. Father did not smoke and had collected all his cigarette rations. They were in great demand and had a very important trading value. These cigarettes persuaded someone to sell these seven tickets for transport on a crammed goods train. It was the last train with any passengers to leave Wanska via Neustrelitz for Berlin, but our parents did not know this at that time. In 1948 Henner started secondary school and spent three years in Ronsdorf at the Rektoratsschule. This branch school had six classes i.e. three years with two parallel classes in each year. The school was to help children in Ronsdorf, aged 10-13, to attend a secondary school locally. After that they had to travel to Barmen or Elberfeld. When he had completed the 3rd year – the Quarta – he went to the Bayreuther Street in Elberfeld where he was very happy. It meant an early start each day. The tram left at about 7 a.m. and he had to change trams once before reaching his school. In winter the passengers often had to get out and were handed shovels to help free the rails from heavy snow. When he opted to take French – a voluntary extra language – school started for him at 7 a.m. – tram start at 6 a.m. He was aged 13-15. He took violin and piano lessons with Herr Falkenrath in Ronsdorf and was good so that he was able to play in the school orchestra quite early on. He loved sport and like our father before him, he played a lot of football.

When I was a child, my brother was the second protection from and a bridge to the grown-up world. We did fight and argue, partly because he shared so much of my life and yet I could never catch up. I learned about and from his life at school, what was expected of him, heard a little about him exploring the world. When he had just started secondary school, Mother took us to the photographer Monhof. On the way there he complained and moaned – he did not want to have his photograph taken. I distinctly remember saying I looked forward to it. The document is funny: Henner is standing there completely relaxed, smiling happily. My courage had obviously left – not the trace of a smile. I'm holding my doll like a protection.

It must have been around this time that my parents decided a holiday on a farm would do us both good. I had these blackouts and was generally a bit delicate! A holiday was booked for Mother, Henner and me, for about a fortnight or even less. I don't remember how we got there, but we all loved every minute of our stay. I remember coming down a fairly steep hill and before the road went up another hill there were about three farms near the stream. The courtyard of our holiday farm was spacious, quite open – no wall, hedge or gate leading in. All the family welcomed us and we were brought inside to the 'Gute Stube', the best room, only used on special occasions. The furniture was dark and solid, and there was a piano! The room must have faced north, as I only remember it as a dark room. That was unimportant. Something sitting on the top of the piano had caught my eye: a huge glass bowl of chocolate pudding with lots of whipped cream on top.



Hellgard and Henner: Studio portrait by Monhof, Ronsdorf, 1948

The certainty that we were due for a wonderful time increased beyond all limits. The farmer's wife remarked that we must be hungry. The table was set with beautiful china and soon she brought in the meal. We were hungry. Afterwards, Mother spooned out average helpings of chocolate pudding and cream and before we lifted the small spoon, she brought the bowl into the kitchen for the family and the farmer's workers. We went to bed soon – at least I did – and we all slept well till literally the cock's crow woke us.

After breakfast we found our bearings. Except for the other farms we could see nothing but fields, few bushes or trees, the little stream. We met the farm animals. There was the farm horse, the dog, the cock, lots of hens and the huge pig. The piglets were expected any day and the farmer promised he would call us to witness the exciting occasion if we wished. Of course, we did! When the time came, we were there and looked on in amazement. The 'Sau' (female pig) was lying on her side and more and more lovely little piglets appeared and were scrambling to get to one of the Sau's tits, fighting for a good place. There were so many and I loved going in to see them every day. They were gorgeous, full of life. The horse fascinated me, he was so big – taller than the farmer. He was strong and yet so even-tempered. It must be great to ride on it, I thought, for a little girl that I was to have such a view and must have said so, because a minute later the farmer had lifted me and placed me on the back of the horse and told me where I could get a grip to feel safer. Then he gently guided the horse with this small child on horseback, very gently and slowly round the large yard several times. I would have been very happy to stay there a lot longer. Henner was always a willing worker and quick to learn things. Soon he was out and about on the farm and Mother and I used to go and see what he was doing. One day we arrived at a field and there Henner (I must repeat that he was 11) was driving the tractor (alone) cutting the grass on a triangular-shaped field with a sharp incline. If we had been able to go near enough, Mother would have pulled him off the tractor, but we weren't, and once she had calmed down, she had to admit that he was well able for the task. He had no previous experience of driving a tractor ever. The farmer treated him with respect and appreciated his help, so he was invited to join the family and workers for meals in the kitchen – a large scrubbed wooden table, enamel plates, mugs, farm food. I was quite jealous. Here I was having to eat the best meals the farmer's wife could produce, and served on beautiful china and Henner had the privilege of sitting in the kitchen with enamel tableware, food fit for hard workers and rough speech to go with it. The farmer's wife was kind and loved children, so she persuaded my mother and me to join their evening meal in the kitchen the next day. It was good to be sitting between my mother and my brother, being part of it all, and after that I was quite happy to let Henner enjoy his privileged place in the farming community alone.

One day it poured all day but we enjoyed the day nevertheless. We started off making lots of paper boats by folding pieces of paper in a particular way, all kinds of sizes. With our treasure we set off for the stream, well wrapped up in raincoats.

Then we let our boats swim. We had little competitions to see whose boat would appear first after its little trip under the bridge.

Making hay is my most vivid memory of this holiday. Very early in the morning we set off for a large field a good way off. Two horses pulled the trailer with us sitting on the floor. Every available helper was on board. The hay was dry and had to be gathered and later heaved into, later on to, the trailer. It was a lot of work, but enjoyable. I helped by bringing tiny armfuls of hay to the trailer, again and again. At lunchtime we all sat on the field, a large tablecloth was spread on the ground. There were enamel mugs, plates for everyone, even cloth napkins, huge amounts of sandwiches and some 'Trockenkuchen', i.e. plain cakes without icing, no cream or fruit, easy to eat and delicious. Then, they arrived with large milk cans, two at least. These were full of cold wheat-coffee with lots of milk, great for quenching the thirst on the hot day, lots for everyone. By evening, the trailer was full to the top with hay, nets were spread over it. I was lifted by strong arms to the top, someone's arms caught me there, put me sitting in the middle. Everyone else scrambled up, alone or with assistance. I felt very happy, secure between Mother and Henner, in the middle of the trailer, people all around us. The horses gave a very regular rhythm. Moving along there was a slight, comfortable, cooling breeze.

Suddenly someone shouted that there were gypsies on the road, a parallel road but quite far down. I had never heard of gypsies before. Where were they going, I asked? Mother said they often travelled and were gifted musicians. I slept wonderfully well that night, like every night. I had no sense of time and one day our father was there. It was good to see him – but he had come to bring us home! Obviously, I was the only one who didn't know because the little cases were packed. All the people on the farm gathered to wave goodbye. How we got home I don't know, train or bus?

The memory of that holiday has never left me and I was delighted to find old black and white postcards of Altenaffeln – of course I could recognize the village on the card which our grandaunt Frieda had received from the farmers in the fifties. I found the postcards when I had to sell and clear the old family home sixty years later. Until then, Altenaffeln was a name associated with happiness, associated with nothing tangible. Now I had proof of its existence. Years later I found the name in a road atlas by chance, not at all far from Wuppertal. Had I known, or if I had had time to enquire all the years I had a car, it would have been so easy to visit the place, but at least I've been able to hook it on to the rest of my life now.

Perhaps it was in the same year or a year later that Henner went camping with a group of boys for the first time, either with his class or with a church group. Our mother went to the butcher Kuhlendahl, bought a pork chop and fried it with great care. She also made potato salad which she put in an enamel container, called *Henkelmännchen* which sealed well. Men took these containers to work, soups and stews could be heated in a large pot of boiling water which some firms provided after the war. I was very excited because I was getting a whiff of the



Hellgard (3rd row, 8th from the left) in her first year at school, 1950
Hellgard Leckebusch, *Singing our Song*, p. 24.

post-war world. My mother's good friend often prepared fried pork chops for her husband, packed them carefully and sent them by post, I had heard.

As her husband was stationed not very far from Wuppertal, this was a successful mission. Obviously, my brother would be close to this 'front', although his pork chop needed no posting. Even the pork chop was a novelty. They were never part of our menu. We did have and liked meat on Sundays, but my mother was a vegetable fan. When the parting came, I was still full of excitement and waved happily, but once the evening came, this momentary loss of my brother's presence brought such sorrow that I could hardly be comforted which lasted a few days in a row. The time seemed eternal and I cried my eyes out.

I loved going to kindergarten *on my own*! I did not want to be brought there. Mother had a lot of trouble each morning, and often she followed me, hiding in doorways, because I was suspicious and kept looking round to check if I was being followed. When I was collected, I was more obliging. I didn't speak at all till I was three, I was told. Once I started, I spoke in full sentences and don't seem to have stopped ever since! My wish to communicate my experiences of the morning when Mother collected me was so great that it stopped me from insisting on my independence. Mother was not overcautious. I often lost consciousness without a warning and fell, so crossing busy roads alone was worrying for my parents.

Henner was already attending secondary school when I started primary school at the age of six, as was the usual age. The local primary school had been destroyed during the war and was not rebuilt yet. The different classes were distributed among large rooms around the town and the classes had twice as many children as usual. We were 63. Our class was assigned to the 'Fachschule', where young people doing apprentice work were sent for theory. Our grandfather also taught short-hand there in the evening for 25 years. It was his great interest beside his men's choir and walks in the forests. We had the large room on the ground floor. The building was not far from our house, but several busy roads had to be crossed. As I still fell without warning I was brought and collected and hated this. I couldn't win with my parents, but when it fitted his timetable Henner was sometimes asked to collect me. I pulled out all the stops of menace available to me at six in an effort to shake him off and eventually I was successful. Henner was always even-tempered, kind, helpful, polite, but in the end, he refused to collect or bring me ever again and he didn't.

He remained the great brother he was though and his decision did not stop him from sometimes taking me with him. Once we were alone in the house and he had been told not to leave the house with or without me, however, he wanted to watch a fire brigade practice in and around the half-ruin of the town-hall in the centre of Ronsdorf. His interest in the work of the fire brigade started when he was very small and never left him. I was eager to join him. This time, the firemen started a huge fire in the ruin and soon the flames were shooting high up over what was left of the roof, out of all the windows and its entrance. Firemen in full gear were running round with hoses, spouting water everywhere, orders were being shouted.



Hellgard and Henner, 1950. Henner is in his confirmation suit.

Nearby buildings had to be protected, because the fire continued. They took ages to get the fire under control in so far that the inferno decreased slightly. Then, we ran home and made it before our parents returned. Occasionally, Henner took me where the boys played football, just up the hill from us. I could sit on the grass and watch happily. He took me tobogganing with his friends in a winter that brought so much snow and bliss to children. I wasn't part of his friends but I was accepted as Henner's little sister. One friend, Hermann – my godmother's son – invited me to his birthday on 23rd April one year along with his friends. His mother had made a 'Tortenboden', a large tart case with a consistency similar to shortbread but not as rich. This was filled with fruit, covered with a thin layer of thickened fruit juice. A slice of this with whipped cream was a rare treat. Being about 5 years old I couldn't manage to get a piece of tart, fruit and cream on to the small cake fork till I used my thumb. Henner told me to eat properly, but Hermann told me to make use of any help at my disposal. I gave him a grateful smile.

So, while I was going to kindergarten and primary school, visiting various friends, e.g. Bärbel, Brunhilde and Renate, learning to crochet for my little dolls, taking them for outings in their little pram, growing up in the safety of my family, grandparents and other members of the family, lovely neighbours, singing my head off, Henner grew up, became a teenager, cycling to school or football practices, to sport events and other venues, like camping with friends at the Bever-Talsperre (a reservoir), a few kilometres away. Some years after Henner's death Hermann told me more about their activities. Once they got older, they went skiing on large fields with slopes around Ronsdorf. In the autumn they made large kite frames out of wood, filled the gaps with special paper, added a 'tail' of small bits of folded paper on a string for balance and then got them airborne by running down the hill opposite our house to let the kite get a chance to take flight, gain height, then they tried to keep them in the air as long as possible. Apparently, they also stood at the side of the road sometimes which was beginning to get busy with three-wheeled vans, lorries run on coal and wood with chimneys, VW beetles, lots of Opel models and Henner kept them spellbound by giving a running commentary, copying the commentators he listened to on the radio at car races. They were becoming popular.

Our life was enriched by good contacts to other family members and friends. Uncle Willi and Aunt Anni with their sons Ehrhard and Frank lived in another part of Wuppertal. We didn't meet frequently but regularly and we were all very fond of each other. During the holidays Ehrhard and Frank often visited another aunt in Ronsdorf and then they spent part of the days with their grandparents, Auntie Paula and us. We liked visiting various cousins of Father's in Bochum. The journey there was inconvenient, so a visit was always something special. A second cousin of father's still lived in the house opposite the 'Sonnenhof', Father's old family home where all the Leckebusch family grew up and spent many happy years. The visit there was pleasant and Father looked sad regarding his old home. There were other relatives on Mother's side quite nearby, part of our larger family. Father's brothers and sisters in England kept close contact by letters. Uncle Ernst

and Aunt Martha were very kind during the war and post war years. And Aunt Margaret sent us soft toys, books and many letters. She visited us twice. Uncle Ernst was stationed with the British Army quite close, but of course we couldn't meet. And when my cousin Dorothy grew out of her clothes Aunt Martha sent them over for me to wear. When I had started school some of the girls always remarked that I wore such lovely dresses! Mother's friend, Frau Schäfer, and family lived within walking distance. Their children were more Henner's age, but we all enjoyed shared times. And by no means must I leave out the musical gatherings in our house. Father played the piano, Mother sang solos, Henner played the violin, visitors sang solos or we all sang together, too.

After the war, life in Wuppertal was a happy time for Henner and me. When we moved to Ireland in 1954, Henner was just 16 and I was nine years old. For me, there was an element of adventure. Henner's carefree days of youth were more or less over before he was fully prepared for the adult world. There were some happy times for him later, too, but in fact life threw him into the foaming waters of maturity, and into unknown waters at that. To do him justice, one can't phrase it in comfortable language only, because he made more than the best of it.

3: Reflecting on growing up in Germany

My memories of childhood are about what I remember as ‘my life’, relating to episodes concerning my brother and our family, his life and mine which took place during or in the immediate years after the war. When I (we all) left Wuppertal, I was a German child, firmly rooted in my tradition, about to attempt a footing in a new ‘world’, with one leg in my natural tradition, and the other leg looking for stability in a new tradition – quite a precarious athletic undertaking! It took me years to find out where I stood, what my personal assessment of the ethical problems of the Second World War was and is, and especially the responsibility of the German Nation, above all in regard to the Holocaust and the organized, clinically planned extinction of Jewish people – and minorities like Sinti and Roma, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Communists, homosexuals, *Asoziale* etc. must be mentioned, too. The first time I realized how difficult these loyalties are was when it was expected of me – quite naturally – to buy a poppy when I was 12 and wear it. I had no difficulty wearing it for British soldiers who had lost their lives in the war, but I could only honestly wear it going to church that November in 1956. After I had decided my poppy was in remembrance for all the people who had lost their lives during that time, all the soldiers, all those in concentration camps or in Hiroshima, because I knew about that by then, too. My poppy stood for all the suffering from Japan across to the U.S.A.

In contrast to my brother whose school education up to 1954 had been excellent and who had a very good history teacher, my awareness developed gradually. Living among ruins and playing on these ‘premises’ was part of our/my life and of all the children’s lives around us. Our active radius was very small, but filled with intense life. I seldom left Ronsdorf, probably four times in all. In comparison to present times, it does not seem very exciting, but to us it was, and is happy, too. Wounded soldiers were a part of the scene: men trying to cope with one leg or none, one arm, blindness, young people looking like old men (men with no legs sitting in prams and their wives pushing the pram to go somewhere) I was aware of them and that they could not do things that should have been quite normal at their age.

In 1972, I had just started teaching in Wuppertal in August, I was the class teacher for a 2nd year Grammar school class and got a glimpse of what the consequences of war can all be about. One of the boys was a strong, courageous lad, aged 11, a butcher’s son who probably had to help quite a lot at home and carry some responsibility. He had made a bet that he could throw his apple-core out of the open first-floor window across the road into the open first-floor window of the house on the other side. Apparently, he could, but not everyone had seen the feat. Others offered their apple-core so he could repeat the action. All in all, six more were available. They were all required till really everyone in the class had witnessed it. It was a short 10-minute break when they were not supervised, so I was quite unaware of this activity till the vice-principal opened the visitor’s door when he heard the doorbell. There stood an elderly couple in hats and coats (it was early autumn), carrying a tray, covered with a pure white tray cloth, displaying seven apple-cores. I didn’t know if I should laugh or cry when they made such a scene about these seven apple-cores landing on their freshly laundered bedclothes.

As the trio went up a particular flight of stairs, I assumed they were on their way to my class and hurried to follow them. The couple was terribly upset, and they couldn't even be calmed when the culprit immediately owned up, explained why he had thrown seven in all and apologized, saying he hadn't thought what he might hit across the road. The husband was still trembling with emotion when he suddenly pulled up both trouser legs, revealing two wooden legs from the knees down, shouting that he deserved respect. I immediately apologized for their dismay, promised to talk to the class and phone them that afternoon, after which I hurriedly escorted them to the front door, the vice-principal followed.

When I returned to the class the children were stunned and appalled. None of us said anything for a while, till the culprit broke the silence and said he realized he shouldn't have done it, he was sorry about the bedclothes, but what did he have to do with the man's wooden legs? I assured him that he had nothing to do with them, but that we had witnessed suffering and the man's outcry for respect, and we should leave it at that. Our problem was the bed linen and what did they suggest? They decided to write a little letter, phone the local laundry and enquire the price for washing and ironing two sets of bed linen. I was glad that the onlookers accepted part of the responsibility, too. They all collected enough money to pay for the laundry bill, a tiny box of chocolates and three small roses. I phoned the couple as arranged and said three boys would be coming the next day and they would ring the doorbell three times. The three boys were plucky, did not want me to accompany them, but I promised to wait at the school gate in case they needed me.

For me my impressions of wounded soldiers during my childhood and seeing this man's disillusionment and feeling of injustice melted into one. He would have been a very young man in 1939, probably full of the feelings of honour and obligation to protect the nation from the enemy, to protect the women and children, then he had endured danger, hardship, hell, had been wounded and now the student movement that erupted in 1968 was questioning their parents' generation about their responsibility in the war, sweeping up all the dust under all the carpets, 'just looking ahead, grateful to have survived' dust-layers. They hoped for honour and gratitude but instead, these young intellectuals were now also questioning them about the morals and ethics in of what had taken place. I had landed in the middle of this era, had a lot to learn about the historic background of the war, about responsibilities of nations and of individuals, had to learn a lot about my ethical positions, too.

Back to wartime realities: Food was scarce and a lot of food had to be 'organized'. People went *hamstern*, taking small valuable or nice belongings, packed into a rucksack, visiting farming areas in the hope that one or a few farmers would exchange some items for a couple of potatoes, a turnip, a little bacon of an illegally killed pig, maybe, some windfall apples and hope against hope, a few eggs. Father always went to an area near Papenburg close to the North Sea, where huge ocean liners are still being built. Mother crossed a rope bridge over the Rhine to get to farms near the border to Belgium or the Netherlands. She

couldn't be away from home for too long. So, although the system of food rationing cards ended much sooner than in Britain, food was a great problem if one had no relatives with an extensive garden or a farm. At the same time a great feeling of solidarity developed amongst the majority of the population as is often the case at times of great need, alongside there was a natural mode of helping when possible and sharing. Most people lived in cramped and very limited housing conditions. That put them on a similar level.

Besides the lack of food, there was a shortage of money and very scant heating sources. One winter was bitterly cold and there just wasn't enough coal or wood available. We were not worse off than others but it was severe. The children had to bring a bit of wood, coal or a briquette to school each day so that the stove could be lit for a short time. The ice on all the windows in our house did not melt for weeks. One night, in sheer desperation, our father went off with a saw, a hatchet, a strong rope and the large family toboggan to a little wood. He felled a tree, middle-sized, left the branches in the wood, and having tied the trunk onto the toboggan brought it home, into the house. In a narrow passage behind the stairs, leading to the cellar, he sawed the tree into transportable segments and brought them to our flat to be dissembled further. Had he been caught or had someone informed the authorities it would have meant a severe prison sentence.

The damp wood 'spat'; the stove smoked – all far from perfect – but it did get a little warmer. Mother was very angry that Father had to take such a risk for us that she took me with her the next morning on a brisk walk to the coal merchant about a mile up the road. She was in a real decision making mood and in that mood, she was not to be underestimated! Before we left, he had promised Mother a very small supply of coal to be delivered the following day and he kept his promise. This helped us for a while and some of the wood had the chance to dry out a little. And then spring came.

Like many other families Mother looked out for early dandelion leaves. I loved dandelion salad with mashed potatoes. Later on, we – including me – collected a lot of nettles for nettle 'spinach' and in the autumn we had lots of fungi stews. Mother knew where she could find edible ones and the stews were delicious.

Grandmother was always offered a share for herself and Grandfather, but she was terrified and accused Mother of wanting to poison the whole family! When summertime came, this was bottling time if one had anything to preserve. The huge cherry tree in the garden had enough cherries for our grandparents, Aunt Paula, our family, Uncle Willi and his family, and great aunt Frieda always got a few half-litre jars of preserved cherries. She was often in our home and was a great help. She couldn't have bottled them on the tiny stove in her flat. Any number of elderberries were preserved, together with damsons, if we could get any. Not everybody liked elderberries, so there were some families who offered my mother the chance to pick them off their tree. I well remember her climbing into elderberry trees, hanging between the branches and throwing the elderberries down on an old sheet. Bottled elderberries, not very sweet and heated, and served with plain rice were a regular winter meal on our menu.

I am very grateful and proud of our parents – we both were – not only for the way they looked after us. Nearly all parents all over the world do more than they can for their children. What I admire so much is that they never let us feel it. Till 1954 I never ever had the feeling I was missing anything. And treats were celebrated. Father gave a baker and his family English lessons early on Saturday mornings. Living in the British zone, some knowledge of English was essential for people with a business. Sometimes he arrived home with a bag of crisp, still warm rolls and then Henner and I could enjoy a roll instead of the normal oat flakes. We would get a small triangular processed Velveeta cheese to share. This was celebrated like a treat which it was, and even today I can still taste the crisp roll and the special flavour of the cheese – a cheese still on the market in the twenty-first century.

There was only one thing Henner complained about now and again. In the late forties, help organizations like the Red Cross or the Salvation Army served warm milk soup in schools for children, if children wanted it. Although he hated going up for his ration, Mother packed his enamel mug for him to take to school each day and insisted that he would take it. Milk was so scarce! He considered getting the soup humiliating.

The conversation amongst grown-ups after the war, mainly women, centred around husbands and sons having returned from the battlefields, like strangers, people they couldn't understand or get in contact with. There was talk of endless nightmares, screaming half the night, silence, aggression, fear, the weight on women's shoulders, earning money, often supporting men whose lives were physically and/or mentally ruined. The women were bringing up the children, coping with the daily fight for existence; often, with the help of their children, collecting the bricks in the ruins of their houses so that some rooms could begin to be restored, and they could move in there. I could not file this information really, as it had little to do with my life, but I did take in their need. The arrival of trains especially from Siberia or France, bringing home hundreds of prisoners of war till well into the early fifties made a great impression on me. Knowledge of these trains arriving was the talk of the day.

The outburst of hope with each announced arrival made vast numbers of people, mainly women, rush to the station, hoping against all odds that they might be reunited with a loved one: a husband, a son, a brother, a grandson? The humbler hopes were reduced to catching sight of a friend or neighbour who might have some knowledge about the whereabouts of their relative, a letter even? Or the news of their death and the circumstances connected with it. I never actually saw these scenes at stations, but the pictures are firmly based in my memory. Maybe I saw photographs in a newspaper, or these scenes are from documentary films I saw later.

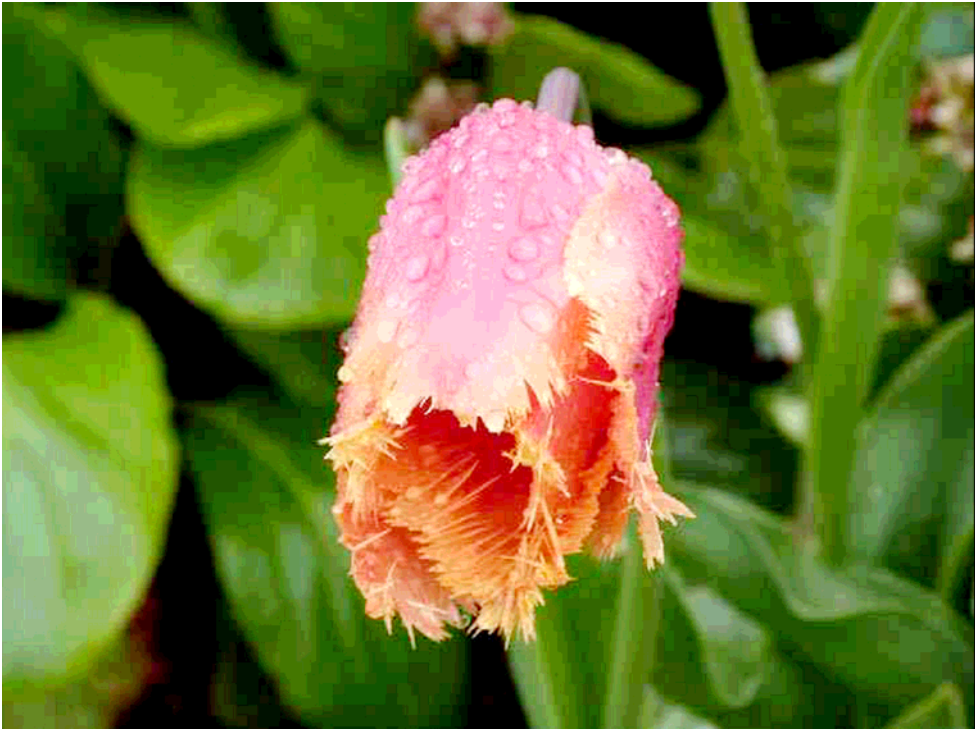
Most great tragedies I simply cannot identify with; I can acknowledge and respect the suffering, I try to be empathetic e.g., when I come across suffering in the present time resulting from the war, in one way or another. At the end of the eighties, a colleague confided in me that her father had been missing since the war

and all efforts to find him had led nowhere. He would have been between 70 or 80, so theoretically he could have still been alive. I could never have guessed the depth of her despair. She eventually made a final attempt by getting in touch with the Red Cross Searching Services again. When they didn't come across any new information, she sadly accepted she could do no more.

How could or can I envisage tragedies on an entirely different level: Auschwitz, Hiroshima, Rwanda in the nineties, the situation of the people in Yemen today, the tragedy in Japan, including the destruction of the nuclear power stations and its consequences – just to name a few. TV news flashes keep us informed but they cannot fully touch me – only the plight of an individual, seen apart from the total horror, can open my heart to catch the briefest glimpse of the reality. Perhaps that is why mankind cannot learn to deal with problems in other ways than producing more and more horrific weapons and asserting their rights, less often acknowledging their responsibilities?

Seeing tanks on the road frightened me. The noise, the size, not actually seeing anyone in charge, except a soldier looking out of the hole at the top, who was certainly not manoeuvring this monstrous vehicle. It was the fear of something so great and unidentifiable, a fear of the unknown that it terrified me.

When I moved into the family home in 1982, there was a regular if not very frequent movement of German Bundeswehr tanks turning the corner where our house stood. They were on their way to the station to be loaded onto trains to take them somewhere for a general manoeuvre. They came and returned unannounced, around 3-4 a.m., sometimes up to twenty tanks, perhaps even more. The house shook and I could not go back to sleep. Although I was a mature woman, these basic fears returned. I never got over them.



4: Farewells

The last day in my class in Ronsdorf came. Frau Schuster told 63 pairs of 9-year-old shining eyes about the British Isles: The Gulf Stream around the west coast of Ireland, the English language. She told us learning Maths in English was so much easier. Take 59, she said, they name the 50 first and then the 9, so nobody has to think around the corner as we have to, calling it 9 and 50. We were impressed, but to me it didn't seem real that I would benefit from all these advantages within a few days.

Frau Schuster was a young and intelligent teacher, different, strict, kind-hearted. She had got married a year earlier to a young man who had lost a leg during the war. She told us what a wonderful man he was and how happy they were. We were interested to hear about the amputation and asked all sorts of indiscreet questions. She answered them honestly and told us that a human being was like a wonderful 'machine' that could compensate. Her husband would never be able to run and catch a train at the last minute, but he was thoughtful and kinder and more intelligent than any other man she knew. Again, we were impressed and from then on, I regarded people with obvious handicaps with great interest and wondered what wonderful alternative characteristics they had. At that time, in the early Fifties, we saw lots of people who had been severely injured during the war and I was always keenly interested in them. This was February, and the December before Frau Schuster had asked us to give up one thing we really cherished. Most of us were pretty poor and there were few toys. It could be a small thing like a new pencil or rubber, but it had to be something we liked, she said. A new group of refugees had just arrived in Wuppertal and these gifts were to be added to the small gifts the children would get from the churches. I went home and asked my mother to help me with the process. My treasures were my piano music – I had started lessons the year before and loved it. Our flat was hit by a bomb in the attack on Wuppertal in 1943. We had lost most of our belongings including the piano. My mother pinched and saved so we could rent a piano quite soon. The owner was a man like ourselves, in difficulties and later he accepted the sum of the rent as part of the price.

The other treasure was my small collection of four *Schildkröten* dolls, all fairly small but lovely. My great-aunt had taught me how to crochet when I was fairly small and soon, I was good enough to crochet all sorts of things for these dolls, even little handbags. The parting was difficult when I decided on the second largest doll in a pale blue outfit with pink trimmings. I felt very noble and was sure I would be praised to the sky. The honour would make up for the loss.

When I presented the gift wrenched from my heart it got a very proper reception, just like a girl who brought a small ruler. A refugee girl from Königsberg, now Kaliningrad, far in the east, brought a new beret and gloves in pink and purple. She had been presented with them when they arrived in Wuppertal – a treasure in winter. She hadn't worn them, because they were slightly big yet, but she had no alternative. She always came to school with cold ears and hands. They were definitely her greatest treasure. Frau Schuster was moved to tears, gave her a big hug and promised to replace them before Christmas

and she did. So much for my doll. But amazingly enough I wasn't jealous. I had a woollen hat and gloves and wouldn't have considered giving them to anyone. Dolls, I had to accept, were a luxury and less precious.

On this occasion in February 1954, I was due to leave my whole young 'life', my top-of-class seat, my friends, Frau Schuster, my grandparents. Hordes of children would no longer be able to come to the house to do homework with me, sitting up the 18 oak steps from the hall door to our flat. Our sitting-room was far too small. Neighbours had been made to give up half their flat and we lived in very simple conditions, like all the other families. Wuppertal was still in ruins. The sanitary conditions were creativity-inspiring. On Saturdays, the zinc bath had to be brought down from the attic. Every drop of water had to be boiled and it took most of the day till we had all bathed in the kitchen and the bath was back up in the attic.

Still, it was a happy childhood. My grandparents lived one floor above us and they were wonderful. Our grandfather worked until he was 70, but always spent a lot of time with both my brother and me. He always took us out for walks and showed us how to recognize and name the different trees and wild flowers. He was a great walker and very active until he died at 87, but I only remember him with a walking stick. To me, this signaled dignity and he used the stick to point out different things to us. He was magnificent at spying out four- or even five- and six-leaved clover. Years later and sometimes even now, I find pressed clover stuck on small pieces of paper in books, still with a faint smell of cigars, the paper giving the date it was found and the place. Our grandmother was confined to the flat and sat most of the day in her chair by the window overlooking the road with all the wonderful big trees on each side and the lovely garden. It was enclosed by a high whitethorn hedge, protecting fruit trees, gooseberry and currant bushes, small patches of vegetables and flowers and my treasured sandpit my father had made for me. It was enclosed by a small wooden enclosure on which my friends and I could sit all through the hot summers, baking sand cakes and castles and sand-fish and streams that dried up so fast. In retrospect, these summer days seem endless, warm and blissful.

Grandmother surveyed the scene and took an active part in life like a captain on the bridge of his ship. She had the purse and the budget and gave our grandfather instructions for shopping and cooking. I was allowed to go for small messages in the little shop on the ground floor of our house. Ulrichs sold everything from salted herrings to coffee, cakes, bread, cheese, sausage and braces! There was a large selection of sweets. I was often given 5 Pfennig (pence) for myself and I enjoyed the freedom of choice and took long before I invested my money – usually ending in the choice of two raspberry sweets.

Our grandmother was very down-to-earth, but a woman of great faith and with a deep belief in the power of prayer. She was strict, disciplined and sharp, but good. I only remember her wearing black, as was usual for women of her age at that time. She didn't have much, but what she had was good and of great taste. She had arranged with the clergyman of the Reformed Church to celebrate the

Lord's Supper with all the family in their sitting room, i.e. our grandparents, our aunt, our grandaunt and our family. She had organized coffee and cake and the table was beautifully set with a speckless long white cloth and exquisite china with a small border of blue flowers and a gold rim. There was also a lovely bunch of blue and white flowers from the florists.

The clergyman came and we had coffee and cake and there was a lot of chat about our forthcoming move and where we were going to live in Ireland. Then the clergyman produced the chalice and wine and the silver plate with the bread. My brother was 16, confirmed and to me grown up, but what about me? I knew well I wouldn't be included and felt so left out. The clergyman was a man of strict principles and I hovered close to my mother when she asked him the significant question – could I take part? He replied with a rhetorical question: Doesn't she belong to the family? Can he have known what it meant to me? First the bread came, then the chalice and my mother trusted me to hold it myself and that was important. I knew only a little about the significance from Sunday School, but I felt secure in this community. When I was confirmed in Athlone in 1959, our grandmother was dead and none of the German relatives could come. Still, I felt close to them in the communion we had shared.

As Frau Schuster heaved me up onto a chair that last school day in February, I suddenly realized who I was all leaving behind. I was allowed to choose a song and we all sang it together, all the verses. I got a final hug from Frau Schuster and many promises of contact before I put on my coat and took my school bag to go down the road to my home one last time.

The day of departure was grey and dismal – a very cold February day with the remains of ice and frozen snow on the road and footpaths. In my memory the pictures are all in black and white. I feel sick, but there is little time to think about it. I smell the familiar and comforting cigar smoke in Grandpa's jacket as he hugs me. I don't cry, not when I hug Grandma either. She is sitting at the window and blesses us all. Her face is stern, but loving and loved. I look out of the window beside her: it's on the second floor. Through the bare branches of the trees that line both sides of the road, I see all the neighbours standing at the open windows waving, and they are still there as I am about to get into one of the two cars that are taking us to Düsseldorf station. Our aunt is driving one of the cars. I'm beginning to feel a bit important sitting in a car, it feels almost as good as if it were ours!

I'm sure Aunt Frieda was there, but I do not see her in my memory. The old lady, who like us lives on the first floor with her husband and daughter, is there. The daughter wears a white hand-knit jacket, edged with green, and embroidered flowers below her neck, back and front. Although the jacket always fascinated me, I can't decide if I like it or not, but there is no question that I like the young woman whose very young husband was killed in the first four days of the war. I'm equally fond of her parents, especially her mother. Finally, I say good-bye to the Ulrichs who run the shop and we are off to Düsseldorf.

I don't remember much except the drive there, people waving in my head and a very silent mother close to me. We were on our way to a new world and adventure and we really didn't know what to expect. My brother and Father were in the other car. I have often wondered since then what Henner must have felt like. He sometimes referred to our grandmother's words to him that day, blessing him, and saying what a fine and good young man he was, and never to let that change. I cannot ask him anymore what he felt like that cold February morning.

5: Going one knows not where (from 'Tewkesbury Road' by John Masefield)

Oh, I had travelled before! Occasionally we had visited Weitmar, at the time not part of Bochum township yet. Each time it was a trip for a whole day, getting in and out of four different trams (each way!) and walking a fair distance, too. Our grandmother, i.e. Father's mother, came from Weitmar and three of our father's aunts and families lived there. I loved the visits to Uncle Ernst, a Dr. Kahrs, teacher and later headmaster. He had travelled far, had acquired a great love for art and literature and had, what my parents called, 'a wide horizon'. Another sister had married a butcher. They were a hard-working family with a huge garden and were very generous and kind. In 1951, Tante Grete, my godmother, came to visit us for the first time after the war. One weekend we took her to Schloss Burg, a rebuilt castle which was a great tourist attraction originally belonging to the 'von Berg' family. Again, it meant taking two (or three?) different trams and then a good walk up a steep hill. When we reached the castle, we found a bench overlooking the Wupper and the picturesque village below. How good that Mother had made sandwiches! We spent quite a while walking around the grounds and visiting the small museum before walking down the hill again to wait for the first tram home. At 6-and-a-half years of age, these were adventures for me. Indeed, I was an experienced traveller!

This trip to Ireland, leaving Wuppertal and our family, was quite different. It was a trip with no time limit and little chance to relax and no return home. We were – what seemed to be – forever looking out for the next station, changing trains. Get out first, get the luggage out fast (except for the big trunks and cases in the transport carriage). Look out for a porter with a pushing cart to transport our luggage. Run to the next train, rush and try to get four seats plus room for luggage. When we reached 'The Hook of Holland' in the evening we had already travelled for more than 14 hours. Our cabin was tiny, bunk beds, no windows. It was stormy and the sea was rough. Poor Henner was very sick, and when I think of the situation now, I am sure not only the sea and the storm were responsible for this. So, I was lifted out of my warm bed and we all swiftly moved up on deck. It was cold and wet and I held onto the railing for dear life.

I have no memories of arriving in Harwich, but definitely of arriving in London. I think it was Liverpool Street Station. There was a smell of oil, the noise of trains, porters and other people shouting in a strange language. As the train didn't go any further, our 'heavy' luggage appeared on the platform to which we added our numerous cases. While there was a quick family 'conference' how we'd get to Euston Station – Underground or taxi or combination – I noticed that the two huge trunks that I knew had crossed the Atlantic to go to Mexico and two other large cases were missing. *Catastrophe* in the early hours of the morning on an empty stomach. Getting a porter was not the problem now. We looked for a waiting room and Mother and I were parked there with some of the luggage and then Father and Henner rushed off to look for a porter and a left-luggage-office and someone who could help. The luggage could not be located. The left luggage office was found and eventually our aunt in Esher, Tante Grete, was phoned. It was post-war time; food was still rationed. Our aunt told us where we were to wait

and she'd come with a picnic. Now all this can be told in few sentences, but nothing can describe the misery, the cold, the endless waiting, the uncertainty, Esher is south of London, a place in Surrey, an hour by train from London then. Eventually, our aunt arrived and she had done her best. She had made sandwiches with a filling of cocoa, sugar and milk. She had a flask of tea, cups, napkins – and boiled eggs. The parks were not an adequate place for a picnic that day, February, cold and very wet, so she brought us into St. Paul's Cathedral and we sat in one of the back pews. What a majestic, overwhelming church! We whispered of course and then our aunt, a very practical woman, unpacked her picnic. I was mortified, eating in a church, and then in this awe-inspiring church! But the tea and sandwiches and boiled egg did us good. Although we spoke in German, our aunt intermittently came out with an 'Oh, dear', rolling the 'r' quite inspiringly, and with a particular intonation. It didn't take long before it was in my ear, in my head, and out of my mouth, copying her deliberately. That brought on a firm dig of my mother's elbow into my ribs. End of mischief for the moment. Our aunt showed us a lot of sights, very kind and well-meant, and possibly my parents and Henner were interested, but all I wanted was dry clothes and a bed. I was dragged past Tower Bridge, Trafalgar Square; she showed us the spot where she had stood in the crowds in 1953, to watch the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. I was as interested as the man in the moon. By late afternoon we arrived in Esher. Our aunt had been and was housekeeper for an elderly man who had been a major in the army, and she remained so till he died about 20 years later. We were introduced, he welcomed us and offered rooms where we could stay until we got our luggage. My parents and I were offered a double-room. Henner got a room in a relatively spacious but cold garden house. Everything was in the best of taste – big bright rooms and the garden was beautiful with a huge smooth green lawn, even in February. There were lots of flower-beds and one could see what a beautiful display of flowers there would be when everything was in full bloom.

We went into London the next day with bags and baggage. Talk of hope! But there was no word of the whereabouts of the luggage. Back to Esher. On the third day Auntie phoned, and yes – the luggage had turned up. We thanked Major Baker, Auntie came with us into London to Euston Station, where the heavy luggage was supposedly waiting for us. It was, so back we had to go to Victoria on the tube to get the luggage 'in supervision' there, back by taxi. I was sure the cases beside the driver in the front, 'outside' the car, so to speak, would fall off, but they didn't. I wasn't used to British taxis. The traffic was incredible, not to mention the double-decker buses! I had seen them on our arrival but they weren't fully installed in my head. Finally, we got on to the train to Liverpool, thanked our aunt who had helped us so much, and off we were again.

I have no memory of the crossing from Liverpool to the North Wall in Dublin. Very early the next morning we were collected by a German, also a director of the firm in Miltown Malbay, Mr. Küchenmeister, known as Mr. Kay. He drove us through the city to Kingsbridge. At the station there were horse drawn carriages with lamps, waiting to take travellers to their destination – like taxis. I couldn't

take my eyes off them. Besides, there were several women with prams on high wheels, not like the low-lying prams common in Germany at the time. But where were the babies? The prams were full of small bars of chocolate, or oranges, or bags of sweets, and the women were shouting, hoping to attract buyers. Mr. Kay brought us into the bar where we sat on high stools and I had to mind myself not to fall down. Mr. Kay ordered breakfast. The waiter brought us little dessert dishes on small stands, a silvery colour, very heavy. I had never seen them before. These were filled with sliced grapefruit out of a tin. Mother told me grapefruit were rather like oranges. Now, why mother thought that seemed very strange to me! But I couldn't ask. They were talking 'grown-up': contracts, workers. Anyway, a waiter arrived then, toast and marmalade, tea and the fry. I recognized the fried eggs and tomato and the rest was good, too. All of us were hungry.

With the comforting sound of German Mr. Kay put us on the train to Limerick. The director in Miltown Malbay would collect us there. The train was cold, the journey endless, and it never stopped raining. We probably had to change trains at Limerick Junction. By afternoon, we reached Limerick, hungry and cold and exhausted. Again, the luggage was collected on the platform. I immediately started to count them. Miraculously, there were 14, all there. The manager laughed at the little girl in plaits, behaving as if responsible for the luggage. I couldn't understand why he laughed. This was important. Some cases went into the car. The other luggage would be collected the next day.



Bunratty Castle, Co. Clare, 2017
A landmark on the road to one knows not where

From Limerick he drove us to Ennis. We passed a big, square-looking castle – Bunratty – on the way. Otherwise, there were not many houses, a lot of cattle in the fields, stone walls – Ennis, what we saw of it, was quite pleasant. From then on, we saw few houses, more cottages, some with yellow roofs! In Inagh, the driver turned left, past a big, pink house, a pub, then a church, and little else. He was driving over Mount Callan. The road was very narrow, lots of bends, few cottages, fields with long, strange grass, regained bog land as I later learned. In one of these deserted stretches of road with no cottage in sight, no human being, this gentleman ran out of petrol. It was beginning to get dark and the rain was still pouring down. On the narrow road, no street lights naturally, he left the four of us sitting in the car, after our ordeal of a journey, with no idea where we were. As far as we were concerned, he might as well have been looking for a sliced pan and a pint of milk, or Sauerkraut or whatever, in the middle of a Sahara sand-dune.

After a very long time, it was now quite dark, we saw the lights of a car. The car stopped and he got out, put petrol into the tank and drove us to the village. We hadn't been very far from the village. As we drove in, there was a bank on the left. Then I saw 'Garage' – Hillery's Garage – with two solitary petrol pumps a bit away from the garage. To me, they seemed to be in the middle of the road. Then, we turned right and we were at the hotel, so to speak. It had a sort of roof over the pavement, supported by two wooden pillars and we entered through two swinging half-doors into a world we knew nothing about. After briefly introducing us to Mrs. Cleary, the owner of the hotel, the Director disappeared. He had delivered his human luggage: that's what it feels like in retrospect.

EIN KAMPF DURCHS LEBEN!

Bei
H: Leckebusch
Capitell

Ein schlechter Anfang.

Der kalte Ost-wind fegte ueber den Victoria Station, London. Wir waren alle durchfreren Es war ein ausgesprochen kalter Februar tag. Unsere Tante hatte uns geschrieben das sie in dem Aufenthalt am Station besusehen wuerde. Wir freuten uns sehr sie zu sehen. Aber jetzt kam eine furchtbare Nachricht. Die zwei grossen Kabinen-keffer waren nicht angekommen. Sie waren verloren gegangen. Wir mussten in London bleiben bis sie kamen. Wir konnten, Gott sei Dank, bei unserer Tante in der nachsten Ortschaft wohnen. Meine Tante machte Schluss vom Leid fur eine Zeit und zeigte uns London. Wir bekamen viel zu sehen, und besonders fur meinen Bruder und mich war es prima. --- ein grosses ERlebniss, welches wir nie vergessen kennen. Mir, mit meinem kindlichem Verstand, von neun Jahren, war es eine Freude das die Koffer verloren gegangen waren und wir fur eine Zeit in London bleiben konnten. Ich hoffte sogar auf Ihr weiteres Ausbleiben.

Abends brachte uns unsere Tante nach ihrem Zuhause. Ich sah zum ersten mal in meinem Leben einen Kamin. Ich bekam Angst weil ich dachte es konnte leicht an zu brennen fangen mit den dicken Tepichen davor.

Den nachsten fuhren meine mei- Eltern nach London um nach den Koffern zu fragen. Dieselben waren noch nicht da.

Typescript account by a young Hellgard, date unknown, recording her memories of the family's journey to Ireland in 1954.



Miltown Malbay – The Main Street, about 1954

Hellgard Leckebusch, *Singing our Song*, p. 44.

6: Lost in a bog: Vision and reality

Some feelings are so intense that an image helps me to transport them into language. When we had got over the exhaustion of a long journey to Ireland, we had to acknowledge that the circumstances at our arrival had little similarity with what we had been promised. The factory building was there, the wooden crates with the looms had arrived, work was waiting for Father, but not even the basic needs of a family had been considered. In March 1954 we seemed to have landed in a countryside that we had not encountered before. It left us bewildered and frightened. What we had left behind was a countryside with soft hills, green pastures alternating with woodland, pretty villages and towns, each season draped in bright colours. Even winter days could be strikingly colourful, e.g. a sunny day with a blue sky and a huge blanket of snow softening the silhouettes of hills, trees and dwellings. With the arrival of spring, the white would be exchanged by green, and as the seasons progressed, the green remained, but was supplemented with yellow, then touches of red and blue and other shades till the autumn colours appeared. It was not fairyland, it was not better than other places, it had its dangers, its harshness, but we were used to it, we were familiar with the difficulties and routes that were open to us, and we loved our home. We had decided to give that up for what we thought were good reasons.

When our parents had decided to leave Mexico before the war they had done so because the German community in Mexico, like many in Middle and South America at that time, were complete pro-Hitler, and many of these communities with their mentality have survived well into this century. With his decision to leave, Father had given up a very good post as manager; he had been very successful. During and after the war in Germany, there were few firms producing labels, and even fewer that needed a manager. Father had work, but only as an ordinary weaver, and we would have no chance for some time to move into a larger flat. There were too many refugees who were worse off. So when Father was offered the post as manager in Clare, our parents decided it had advantages although they were quite old for such a move. Besides, they liked the idea that the village in a poor area would profit from the new opportunities.

When we set foot on what seemed to us a very strange world in 1954, it was early March. The weather was wet, very wet, and cold. There were green fields, but there were other predominant colours: brown, grey, black, beige – colours of winter without snow. I am in the middle of my image – a bogland. We could see paths, somehow disconnected. There was no network of routes or roads, no shelter, no dwellings nearby, no help. The only trees we noticed were isolated and seemed old, crippled, bare. They had learned to grow bent, whipped into a certain direction by the permanent winds and storms coming from the western coastline.

The ground was unreliable, often so wet that we seemed to sink in. We would have needed a guide to show us where we could find shelter, food, schools, some security. We would learn to appreciate the beauties and the riches of the bog and come to love it. Bogland is a silent witness of thousands of years of life, of the luscious woodland that once existed, of the people who lived there. It silently

documents and preserves the past while changing it into a new future and gift, i.e. turf for warmth and cooking and for enriching soil for new vegetation. We would learn to see and appreciate its beauty: even in the small wild flowers or the wintery colouring. What a heritage a bog contains! In time we were to learn how we could deal with it and then we could embrace it as our new home.

Why do I choose to relate experiences which were so frightening? Ireland still means a great deal to me and I will always be grateful for having been privileged to experience these years and be given such treasures: friends, culture, a way of life. Neither do I forget that we had decided on a move into the unknown, prepared to enter new territories and, as one German ambassador once said, referring to Father and our family, we were pioneers in a way. This experience helped me to become interested in the problems of immigrants and refugees, exile. We only marginally fit into that category. We had been asked to come, we were needed – well, Father was! – and the offer had had advantages for us. I simply want to state facts. My complaint is that responsibility did not go far enough to make sure that our basic needs were met. There will have been financial reasons why our house had not been built, perhaps, but to leave us to our own devices with such a problem in unfamiliar circumstances I consider inexcusable. Likewise, I can accept that the information about a school for Henner in Ennistymon and for me the National School in the village will probably have been quite sincere. It was simply taken for granted that these schools had to be suitable for us, as they were certainly good for the local children. We were our parents' responsibility; but as we were complete strangers, the employers should have shown concern for the family, too.

Back to the family in the bog. What did they/we see? There were no signposts and who could we ask? Where people had obviously been working there were waterlogged ridges in front of the row where turf had recently been cut. We saw many tiny stacks of turf, obviously there to dry. In the distance, we could see isolated people at work, obviously in pairs. There might have been a donkey nearby with a basket hung down his back on either side to transport the turf. We also saw a donkey and cart occasionally. Small thatched cottages could be seen far off at the edge of the bog. But there was no-one to guide us there or to calm our fears and to tell us how to get out of this lonely, frightening region.

After a while, a few people passed, mainly on foot. They only vaguely noticed us, seemed to be weary and rushing home. They wished us a good day, but did not stop to answer our questions. With the appearance of each new face, hope rose. We were aware that it would get dark soon. These people obviously knew how to get to the village or they could have told us where we could find patches of firm ground in this very soft, wet, unstable ground under our feet. Then, Canon Elliott, the rector of the small Protestant Church in Spanish Point, entered our lives and was the person who over and over again recognized our different needs. He always calmed and helped us with his encouragement, dependability, and good advice. Sometimes he passed on information which was vital for us.

I do not doubt that the people who passed were good people with a hard life, even those who appeared to be resentful. They may have compared our life to the life they led and were envious, as we did not share their problems. They were blind to the fact that they did not have to live with our problems either! A few were kind and tried to overwhelm us with ready-made solutions which were not useful. With gratitude do I remember many individuals for whom we were an ordinary family, obviously in distress and difficulties although they didn't fully understand why. Their sincere empathy sometimes helped us with just some minor information or a warning. Others simply sent us on our way with an encouraging word, a blessing or a smile. They have never been forgotten.

Our parents' first priority was to find a roof over our heads. We were safe in the Central Hotel where we had been accommodated since our arrival in Miltown Malbay for the moment, but it was not a home and far too expensive. Father's salary for March covered the bill. Henner's small salary provided money for stamps, some postcards, little else. As soon as we realized that 'our' house did not exist, it became clear that renting a house or flat in Ireland was not a part of normal life as it was in Germany. We could have rented a house in Spanish Point for April and May. In June, the regular annual visitors arrived. The helpful Mr. Noble drove us to Ennis to view a flat behind St. Flannan's College, but it was no option for several reasons.

Again, it was Canon Elliott who came to the rescue with the offer of a house we could rent – the Retreat – which was fully furnished. It was far too big and expensive for us, a noble building right beside the sea. But we were grateful and accepted the chance of renting it for a year at first. Is there a need to point out who was responsible for paying that rent?

Father was shown the empty factory building. The disassembled parts of the huge looms had arrived in wooden containers from Wuppertal. He needed to find suitable, strong men to erect the looms. It was essential to complete this task swiftly and efficiently so that production could start, which would provide for our livelihood and offer work and new opportunities for people in the village and surrounding area. Once this was achieved, these strong men, used to dealing with farm or other manual work, had to be trained to deal with thin, fragile, very delicate threads. Other workers, female workers too, were employed. Father visited the vocational school to look for young talents. At first, he supplied the Malbay Knitting Factory with labels for their garments, but that was only the beginning. He had to find a way to get Irish firms to order these woven labels. Up till now, only printed labels were available in Ireland. This was all part of his work and he was well-trained for it, but it needed his full attention and all his energy. For months, he worked until midnight and then he and Henner had to walk home. He was not alone there. Though Henner, 16 years of age, was far too young to take on so much responsibility, our parents had no choice. He was needed to bridge the communication – difficulties between Father and his workforce, a part of our reality.

Stone walls around the village, around fields, along the roads: we noticed these everywhere, a real novelty for us. Our parents became aware of one in 'our' virtual bogland which separated it from an adjoining field. I was lifted up to sit there in safety, and I was to patiently wait. Meanwhile, the adults could concentrate on getting out of the dilemma. I had a wonderful view; I could even see the sea. I recalled my German life and imagined it might be hidden in the neighbouring field; Ronsdorf seemed so close. Or I could concentrate on this new Irish life with all its novelties, new possibilities, exciting new experiences, all part of an adventure. Being surrounded by my dependable and loving family made me feel quite secure in one way. On the other hand, I was completely uprooted: no grandparents and other members of the family, no school, no Frau Schuster, no Sunday school, no children to play with, no familiar surroundings.

However, from my elevated view on the wall, I caught sight of a large building, far off. There were other houses too. No doubt, this was the village. I heard the laughter of children, young children, maybe my age, who were playing and running around outside. It could only be the National School near the Railway Station. It had been pointed out to me, so had the headmaster, Mr. Fitzpatrick, who with his family lived opposite the Central Hotel. Suddenly, I imagined myself laughing and playing with them. *Hope* was on its way to me and I welcomed it with open arms. I was to learn what I didn't know yet: *Reality can shatter false hopes instantly*. Our parents discovered an obstacle on the way to that school which I couldn't see and did not want to see.

The official language used in the school was Irish. Our parents decided that learning English was sufficient for me for the moment, the language generally spoken everywhere except in the Gaeltacht. If Canon Elliott hadn't personally offered his services to look after my education for the next two years, our parents wouldn't have known what to do. He explained that other children before me had been prepared for secondary boarding school by his private tuition, for protestant secondary schools where Irish was taught like a foreign language.

I really liked this 'old' man, appreciated his kind and generous offer, too, but for me he did not replace a child or children to play with! Anyway, the offer was gratefully accepted and that was that. My need to be with children generally and all the year round was not fulfilled in Ireland for the next two and a half years after which I started boarding school in Athlone. (I celebrated my first few weeks there as an over-mischievous child and very giggly girl who was well able to amuse all around her. As could be expected, the principals and the staff did not put up with that for too long. A lot of reprimands, endless writing of hundreds of lines, getting me to learn increasingly longer poems helped to quieten me down a little. They liked me, but their attempts to make me behave 'properly' were never a complete success!)

While I had to accept the limitations in my life, Henner, to tell the truth, was Father's first assistant. He remained well in the background, but his help was essential. He supplemented Father's orders to his workers as before, so that they were precise.



Some of the products of Dalcash Labels Ltd.

Once production started, he quickly learned how to cut the cards. These cards are responsible for the text and/or patterns on the labels. His school English was remarkably good so that within a few weeks, he was the only fluent English speaker in our family, complete with an authentic Clare accent.

He never complained that his education was interrupted. He knew the family depended on his help. On his bike, he was our scout. This bicycle had been the first family investment. He followed up possible sources of information we needed. To stay in the image of the bogland, he courageously tested routes to see if the family could safely leave this dismal place. He jumped over water-logged ridges, took great risks, sometimes fell into the water, but got himself out again. Full of good will, overflowing energy, a youthful trust in his own resources and a firm belief that life is basically good and will always offer new possibilities, he explored the territory that was unfamiliar to us. This helped the whole family to find their feet.

That bicycle sets off a kind of trailer in my mind, an incident that really happened in early June 1954 which became a milestone in our struggle. While I was aware that Henner's bicycle was a necessity to help us all and not a treat for him, I was very tempted to try out this instrument of speed and greater freedom. Being a full-sized man's bike, it was a challenge. I chose moments when the family was busy. I would then lean the bike against the wooden bench that was positioned outside the low dining-room front window. Standing on the seat of the bench I mounted the saddle. I would 'kick' myself away and when I was free of the bench pushed one pedal down as far as possible to bring the other pedal up, high enough for me to reach it. Using this method, I 'cycled' in the direction of the grass circle with the sundial. There, I would let the bicycle fall and I would jump into the grass, ready to start again. I felt very successful till one particular morning. We had made the acquaintance of the old, very old (!), Ford Prefect; Henner at sixteen, without a license, and no tuition from anyone, had courageously driven Father and himself to the factory, leaving the bike at the bench. I was delighted to see the bicycle waiting for me, and Mother was occupied; wonderful, I thought, but it was not. The 'kick-off' went wrong: I fell from the garden bench through the window into the dining room. The main artery on my right wrist was only slightly damaged as it turned out, but the wound bled profusely. Mother didn't waste any time, grabbed the towel, wrapped it tightly round my wrist and hurriedly dragged me the mile up the hill to Dr. Hillery's house. Dr. Paddy was out visiting a patient, but his father, Dr. Michael, retired at this stage, let us in and said he would look after me. He was very kind and calming, told us I had been fortunate but would have to come again to have the wound dressed in a few days. We had never met him before and were very lucky he was at home. We had no telephone and we were only neighbours in the sense that the two buildings were in full view of each other. I translated for Mother and Dr. Hillery what I could and what was necessary. He said he wanted to speak to Father also when we would come for the dressing as he wanted to speak to both our parents. We wondered why, but Father came, too, as the doctor requested.



Hellgard at the main entrance of the Retreat, date unknown

Dr. Hillery made two statements. He had watched us as a family and respected the way we lived and tried to fit into our new life as a family team, while Father was doing all in his power to get the factory off to a good start. His second statement was a warning: we were not to trust a major shareholder of the firm, as far as our situation was concerned. As they had worked together for many years, he knew the man well. He said no more.

It was about sixty years later that I got the present of a book written by Gisela Holfter and Horst Dickel. The mystery was lifted. In the chapter 'Unchartered Terrain – German-speaking Refugees in the Irish Provinces',¹ they refer to the newly-wed Kurt Hainbach and Isabella Coutts who arrived in Miltown Malbay in mid-January 1939. Kurt Hainbach, highly qualified, became the manager of the Malbay knitting factory. His wife, also trained in the industry, worked at the factory till their first child was born. The situation was extremely difficult for them, especially for Mrs. Hainbach, as her presence and work in the factory was not essential compared to her husband's role. By the description of where they found rooms in the main street, they might have been able to rent two or three rooms at most. (This house had (has?) a shop on the ground floor, and as far as I know, the owner and his family also lived in the house.) Being Jewish refugees, they had little or no choice of changing their situation till the war was over, when they immediately left. (Kurt Hainbach's attempt to join the British Army, before the end of the war, failed.)

There is also a reference to Margit Manswort. She must have been there before Kurt Hainbach.² While the factory needed and asked for her help, so that the factory, The Malbay, could perhaps survive, her presence was accepted. Gratitude for her essential and successful help was limited once the firm was running well. There were voices in favour of her leaving as she was no longer needed, and she might be taking the work of a local. As she was also Jewish, a move was a threat for her safety. A firm where other refugees were working offered her work, so she was fortunate. I have respect for all the local people who tried to alleviate the great poverty in Clare and the permanent need for young people to emigrate in order to survive. If the loyalty and good will allowed them to forget that the individuals they had asked for help were also human beings, they left justice behind them. They simply replaced the victims.

This type of mentality is by no means typically Irish, but Ireland is not exempt from it. The treatment of male Turkish and Italian *Gastarbeiter* (guest workers) in Germany in the seventies shows similarities. They were very welcome as an essential workforce as long as they were satisfied with low wages and frightful living conditions. It was only later that eventually their families could follow. The conditions for *Gastarbeiter* in the meat industry nowadays show little influence of moral or ethical standards. These are just two examples in Europe. The problem has always existed world-wide.

¹ Gisela Holfter and Horst Dickel, *An Irish Sanctuary: German-speaking Refugees in Ireland* (Oldenbourg, 2017), Chapter 7, pp 153-217.

² *Ibid.*, p. 222, footnote 415.

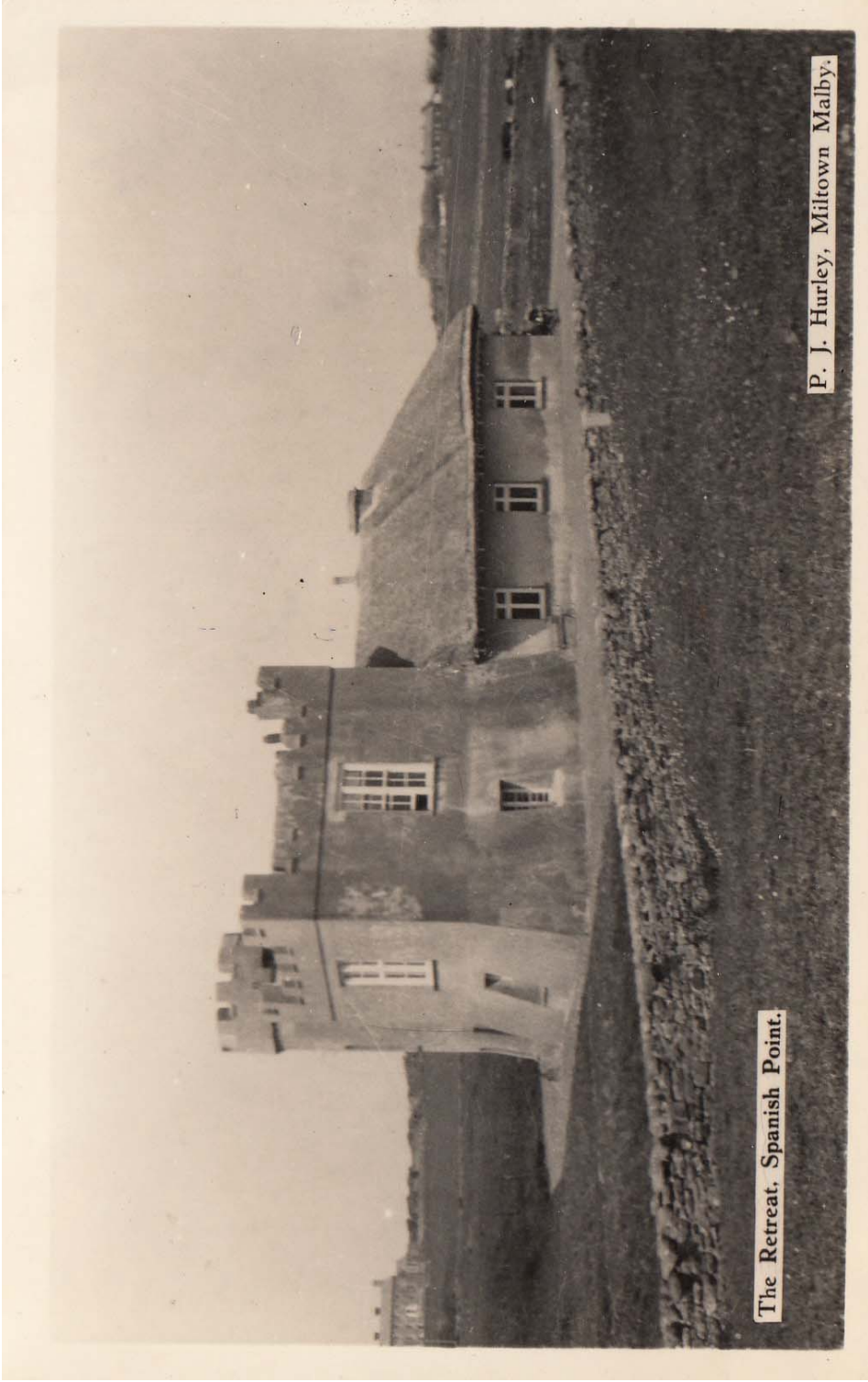
It is not easy for me to understand that nine years after the Hainbachs left the village, their existence was never mentioned to us, even though we repeatedly enquired if Germans were living in the area or had lived in Clare in the past. In retrospect, I do sometimes wonder if the ruthless way the date of Father's salary payments was changed before Christmas 1954 might have been an attempt to encourage Mother, Henner and me to return to Germany. Who knows? Anyhow, we were courageous and above all a family team that stayed together (see 'Christmas Eve 1954').

Mother never really trusted the man in question and she took Dr. Michael Hillery's warning seriously. She and I undertook the troublesome long journey to Wuppertal in September 1954 so that Mother could inform the German Directors. They were not pleased and tried to frighten Mother by saying she could be brought to court for making these accusations. Mother stood her ground, repeated her accusations, but insisted this was her opinion, not her husband's. Obviously, the German Directors decided to investigate and after a while, changes were made which proved to be the first turning point in our life. We had some chance of settling then.

My indefinable fears in these first few weeks 'in the bog' became reality several times. The worst incident was Mother's severe heart attack in late June 1954. Our parents had not been accepted for private health insurance, so Mother could not be treated in Limerick where Dr. Hillery advised her to go, as there was a very good heart specialist in the Regional Hospital.³ We had no immediate neighbours, no telephone yet. I was nine and Mother and I were alone in The Retreat most of the day and it took some time before Mother recovered somewhat.

An attempt to find a way for Henner to complete his education once the factory was running well, turned out to be an exasperating Odyssey from January 1955 till September 1956 when a solution was found for him and we were able to stay together as a family. In some ways, life became a little more settled after January 1955, but the struggles continued in ever-changing variations for at least another two years. Life never became easy, but good in many ways.

³ See 'Truth or Comfort', pp 81- 84 below.



Postcard of the Retreat before 1954
(It no longer had a thatched roof in Hellgard's days)

Hellgard Leckebusch, *Singing our Song*, p. 54.

Fragile new roots

Living in the hotel the first four weeks was difficult. The owners were pleasant and kind and did their best, but we were in the limelight all the time. We had a family bedroom with no sitting-room status and as far as I remember no heating either. During the day my father and Henner were at the factory, only back for meals, and we could go downstairs and sit in the lounge or small sitting room if we wanted a chair and table to write letters or for me to draw. It was early March, cold and wet and the village was small for our city standards. There was the chapel at one end, the bank at the other and four roads leading off: 1) to Lahinch, 2) to Spanish Point, 3) to the factory and to the graveyard beyond and 4) to the road to the Creamery and Ennis. Not a few children were running about in their bare feet and without coats, women ran swiftly through the rain, their coats over their heads, maybe a white baker's loaf wrapped in newspaper or a sliced pan under their arm. We were used to post-war conditions in city life and lack of comfort and limited means of a transient variety. This was the West of Ireland, five years after the Republic had been proclaimed, with young people emigrating in hoards.

And here we were, hanging in mid-air, wondering where our house was, as mentioned in the contract – only the wallpaper had to be chosen – a house in a sparsely populated area, hidden like an Easter egg, not to speak of the promised car, also part of the contract. Food was a problem at first. We had to get used to it. There was the fried breakfast each morning which we reduced daily, occasionally exchanged for a boiled egg, toast, marmalade and tea. At lunchtime there was meat, very often corned beef and very few vegetables. In the evening it was usually a kind of fry. After about ten days I was endlessly sick. They offered what was available and eventually I lived on a diet of toast and sliced raw onions. Somehow that caused my stomach to calm down, but the daughters who brought us our food all filed past my plate for days and made no bones about it – I must be completely 'cracked'. (My mother was a good cook and even in the early fifties we had our home-made Bircher Muesli in the mornings – a new idea that was coming in from Switzerland. We ate little meat but lots of vegetables.) I remember they did bring me porridge at one stage, but by then I was so sick I didn't even want to try it. My poor father was focused on getting these huge weaving looms unpacked and set up. No easy task. But first of all, there was the problem of getting workers. He talked to the headmaster of the vocational school and interviewed pupils with particular abilities. Many of them became good and loyal employees. Others came along, in the hope of earning a few 'bob', but found it difficult to understand why my father got furious if they took the day off because it was a good day for harvesting carrageen, or a special type of seaweed, used to get iodine in those years. Without my brother's knowledge of English – a credit to him and to his schooling – my father would not have got on so well.

The Director of the factory, who had collected us and left us alone on Mount Callan, lay low. He said Mr. Noble, the manager of the knitwear factory, would show us the house – and on the first three Sundays Mr. Noble vaguely showed us houses, one of which was supposedly ours. (I noticed they all had wallpaper!) On the third Sunday, he showed us a bungalow in Lahinch near the small Church of



The entrance of the Retreat, 1954

been cleared yet either (thank goodness!). My mother who hadn't been taken in by any of these 'outing' made the pronouncement that she was no longer prepared to unwillingly be forced to trespass on other people's property – and under false pretenses – and to spy into the privacy of other people's houses. That finished that! Mr. Noble was a real gentleman and took us for many small drives – on fine days also after work – to show us local sights. I think he felt very sorry for us all. He left the knitwear factory shortly after we left the hotel and he was replaced by Mr. Jones.

One Sunday morning we walked to the small Protestant Church in Spanish Point and met Chancellor Elliott (commonly known as Canon Elliott) and his wonderful wife. We more or less doubled the basic number of parishioners and were welcomed in every way. They found out that Father could play the harmonium well and we were all good singers. Mother who was a fluent speaker of Spanish, but practically had no knowledge of English yet, using her complete body language, helped by my father and even more so by Henner, asked if they knew of a house we could rent. There were empty houses around Spanish Point in March, but the regular summer guests would be due from the end of May. Canon Elliott took up contacts and the owner of the Retreat was prepared to rent out her property to us for at least 12 months. The Retreat was a small castle with an adjoining house, built by a Captain after his retirement. It was surrounded by large fields, the gate to the road was huge, with small towers supporting the gate. The 'towers' had large engraved crosses on them. A long avenue led to the second gate and after that, one reached the Retreat itself. On the one side there was a small streamlet. Beyond, a small gate, and over a tiny bridge one could cross, a path brought us through a field to another small gate and across the road. Then, one was in the sand dunes and beyond was the beautiful beach. The house was connected to the local water system, but beside the house there was a well with excellent water which we used for cooking and drinking. The house was fully furnished and we moved in on April 1st.

Each room had a fireplace except the kitchen, of course, which had an old range, (and of course the toilet and the bathroom had no fireplace either). My first interest was caught by about a dozen chamber pots sitting in arrays on two shelves built into the thick wall of the bathroom, all specimens of the best china Britain ever produced. Even then the furniture in the house was antique, there were Persian carpets in the dining and sitting room, handmade rugs in the hall, in front of all the beds.

We had difficulty understanding the idea behind the kitchen. There was a sink below the small window, the range, a Baby Belling, (a tiny small electric cooker with limited oven space and one large hot plate. This cooker was perched on a sort of stool.) There was a large wooden table, some chairs, full stop. We found all the tea services, dinner services – all willow pattern – pots and pans in another room, the pantry. The door leading into the pantry had a glass window and through it you could look through the long window from the pantry into the courtyard. There was tiling below the pantry window, as well as on the wide shelf the length of the

room and at the narrow sides of the room. A certain amount of the tea and dinner services were sitting on the tiled shelf, and the rest, with endless dishes and bowls and pots and pans were underneath. The idea was to place the cooked food in various dishes on the tiles – a sort of pre-fridge-time fridge. We soon realized that my mother's simple but excellent cooking was also very much appreciated by co-tenants we had not as yet met. Lids and coverings were removed and our imagination had mice in mind. But our tenants became so complacent or greedy or both that one day they were feasting in broad daylight and we could see them through the window in the door. They were rats, water-rats in fact. Father found the entrances and filled them with cement but to no avail till he took the advice of one of his workers to add bits of broken glass to the cement and that did the trick. After a lot of renewed cleaning our food storage was more private and palatable!

The scullery was supposed to be for the preparation of food and washing up. I won't dwell on it. Somehow, we never adjusted enough to use it. In the meantime we cleaned and my father repainted the meat-safe in the courtyard. It was great for storing food and it was always in use and so convenient. I still meet friends and relatives who rave about the romantic castle, beautifully set in fields where we could often pick wild mushrooms, and so near the beach! I do have wonderful memories of exquisite times there, but it was only part of the story. My mother had to work extremely hard to make it liveable for twelve months of the year. It was obvious she needed help and again, Canon and Mrs. Elliott came to the rescue. Their housekeeper Mrs. Buckley would come twice a week in the mornings. She had been a house-keeper for the Retreat in the pre-visitor-sessions for years, so she knew the place well and was able to give a lot of advice we badly needed, e.g. where to get milk. A young couple with a baby lived in a small cottage and kept a few cows. This was at the corner where the road from the village to Quilty crossed the bridge and met the Strand Road. Once the evenings got longer, I was given the milk can and walked along the Strand Road to the house. I loved this bit of freedom, watching the beautiful cloud formations, forever changing; porpoises swimming around Mutton Island, generally in pairs or groups. I looked out for four-leafed clover on the roadside, like my grandfather, and found many. There was hardly anyone around except the odd motorist who had come from the village and parked to read his paper in view of the sea, car window generally closed!

My great disappointment that I was not going to attend the local national school left me furious and helpless. I missed the company of children greatly. My parents decided learning both English and Irish simultaneously would be too difficult for me and accepted Canon Elliott's generous offer as private tutor each morning. I could have done without his kind offer – I wanted children to play with! Canon Elliott arrived each morning on his bike and our very special communication started. So far, I hadn't picked up much English and he spoke no German. In Maths we had no problem, but every other lesson was dramatic or boring. I decided I would have to learn English fast and I did. Within a month I



Hellgard and Peter the Cat in June 1955

was capable of a limited conversation and was taught first of all English, but also Latin and French, a lot of geography and some history of Ireland and Great Britain. He was very good and kind to me. After an hour Mother always appeared with the tray with tea and biscuits. Canon Elliott got up early and was inclined to fall asleep. Sometimes he fell asleep before Mother came with the tray and then I ran to the kitchen to say tea was needed sooner. Poor Mother had to keep me occupied. I learned to iron shirts and helped in the house. She bought two linen tray cloths and embroidery thread at P. P. Flynn's in the village and taught me to do embroidery. I was in charge of removing all the dried cow dung from around the Retreat. Sometimes people left the gate open and the grazing cattle on the big fields looked for extra-long-sweet grass around the house. There was nothing wrong with their digestion and the cow dung was spread around generously.

In the early summer one of father's employees offered me a kitten one day when I was in the factory. My parents hadn't a chance to refuse. Tiny Peter was transported by her to the Retreat in a big cardboard box on the back of the bike. The kitten was wonderful and we almost spoke to each other. It was a close relationship till he died.

Mother's cooking made life easier, but it was difficult to get used to the white bread, and the difficulty to get vegetables remained (we didn't have a car yet). One shop occasionally had potatoes and maybe carrots and onions. Most people had a small patch of garden, enough for themselves but not to sell. One day in late spring there was a knock on the back door. It was Mr. Casey who lived with his wife and daughter in a small house at the gate. Miraculously he had a bucket full of new potatoes, spring onions, tiny fresh carrots, fresh cabbage, more leaves than heads at this early stage. He had a small patch of garden and wanted to know if Mother was interested. Was she interested! What a question! He never had much of a choice but the quality was excellent and this became a regular supply. Later in the year he would have some lettuce, parsnips, turnips, leaks. The young Miss White (in contrast to her aunt, known as the old Miss White) suddenly one Sunday after Church revealed that she had a little walled garden and had a regular arrangement with a protestant guest house in Kilkee for fresh garden produce, but she often had more than enough. Would mother like ... She produced and offered miracles like occasional strawberries, garden peas, small cauliflowers, runner beans, lettuce, parsley and for my 10th birthday in September, Mother ordered a bunch of flowers. Miss White produced the most magnificent bunch of flowers I ever received and I can still see it in my mind's eye. We found that the white baker's loaf was better than the sliced pan, and occasionally, a very small darker loaf under the trade name Hovis, I think, was available. It was usually bought by or for invalids. It didn't take my mother long to learn how to bake brown whole meal soda bread. Later when we had a car and occasionally went to Ennis, Mother would buy a few soft rolls that one bakery had – as a treat. We all started drinking tea very soon. At the beginning we would only get IREL Coffee, a fluid version of instant coffee. It was wonderful for making coffee cakes, but didn't come up to

our idea of what coffee should taste like. Mother had herbal teas like peppermint, rose-hip and fennel sent over from Wuppertal from time to time.

The local butcher was a revelation. We favoured the one opposite the hotel. Huge sides of beef or mutton or lamb were hanging there and whatever piece of meat you wanted was cut from the side there and then. Oxtails and tongues could be got for 1 shilling a piece, liver or kidneys for next to nothing. One was given bones for stock whenever required. There was a huge wooden table covered in sawdust, as the floor was, the basis for the selection of knives and hatchets, quite a change from the glass equipment in German shops, and no sausages in sight; something I was used to. But there were small sausages, pork sausages to be bought and rashers and cooked ham, but they were available at Flynn's along with occasional tomatoes from the Canaries. Mae King sometimes sold pig trotters, or huge heads of pigs sitting in large cardboard boxes with ears, eyes and all. In the tiny shop they came very close! Other fresh pork was not available then anywhere in Miltown Malbay, but later Cyril Jones would have some occasionally. We learnt that very seldom, on a Friday, someone might call with an enamel basin of fresh mackerel. It was a long way from the road to the house and if the sale wasn't going so well, they did take the detour because they knew mother always took a few. She had developed a simple casserole recipe for the oven, very simple and delicious and we all, and all our visitors loved the delicacy. My father and brother tried out the hairdresser in the village eventually and everything was fine. My mother took a bit longer to take up courage to go and leave her hair in Mrs. Comerford's hands. As I couldn't be left alone in the Retreat I was brought, too. I had plaits, so I was just a visitor. The room was very small. There was a wash hand basin, a dryer and a frightening electric apparatus for perms beside the door. Mrs. Comerford was a lovely and talented, a very intelligent lady and she cut Mother's hair well. Then, the hot rollers were applied to her hair and they sizzled. Mrs. Comerford disappeared and came back with tea for us all and pieces of the cake from the previous Christmas. It was delicious and my mother baked the cake using Mrs. Comerford's recipe for years, and later on, so did I. The session was long but successful and another hurdle had been taken.

Finding our feet was difficult and often painful. In late May, the yearly Spanish Point visitors arrived, more in June and July, the rest in August. That month, our first visitors arrived, too. My aunt from Wuppertal, mother's sister, came with the boy and the girl of her junior bosses. She was the secretary and bookkeeper in their family firm. In London, my aunt and the two children met up with my aunt from Esher, father's sister, and they arrived together at the station in Miltown Malbay. Krista was 13 or 14, a delightful young teenager, and her cousin Bernd, 12, was very pleasant, too. My brother was 16 and I was nearly 10. When I think of August 1954, I think of bliss. We got on very well and if the 'baby' got on their nerves, they never let me feel it or ever left me out. My parents did their best to make it a good holiday for us young people and my aunts helped in the kitchen and house generally which left us free to enjoy carefree days. Especially Krista was so interested in everything new, eager to learn, but she was not ambitious in a

Christmas Cake from Mrs. Exmerford

12 inch round tin

1 lb 2 oz flour.

12 oz butter

12 oz Castor sugar.

9 large eggs.

1 lb currants

1 lb raisins

1 1/2 lb Sulatanas

6 oz mixed peel

4 oz glazed cherries

grated rind of 1/2 table spoon
of juice of one lemon

1/2 teaspoon of mixed spice

1/2 " " " " grated nutmeg

2 oz of ground almonds

1/4 teaspoon of soda dissolved
in vinegar

1 table spoon of treacle

1/2 glass of brandy 1/2 glass of
whiskey or 1/2 glass of rum
P.T.D.

Beat sugar & butter, well
Add eggs flour & fruit &
ground almonds
Have fruit steeped over
night in spirits covered
with plastic to hold flavour

Bake in well lined tin
inside & outside gas
at 2 for one hour &
down to 1 for four hours

5 hours in all.

When well beaten add
treacle & last of all
soda dissolved in orange

competitive kind of way. She loved talking to my mother, often asking for her opinion, her experiences in Mexico (my parents had married there in 1934) and we loved to listen. For the cold wind, she had brought a cardigan, hand knitted by an aunt. The back and front were black and the sleeves were completely colourful, each individual row in a different colour, but both sleeves matching, set off with black at the wrist. She proudly said her aunt had used up lots of bits of wool and had created a really pretty garment. They were quite wealthy but they obviously dealt with money in a respectful way.

Canon and Mrs. Elliott invited us all for afternoon tea. Father played the piano and we sang a lot of German folk songs. There and then we were invited to join the Canon along with the young boy, Jimmy Buckley, to catch crabs and lobsters near Quilty at high tide. Canon Elliott hopped over the stones like a young man with a long pole with a hook at the end and with this he got the crabs and lobsters out of their hideouts – and showed us how to do it. It was very exciting. We caught a lot and were so proud to take our share home in a rough, used and washed potato bag. Water was being brought to the boil on the Baby Belling in the huge pot for boiling clothes and a few crabs and one lobster were exploring the kitchen floor, looking for their hideouts. The thought of immersing them in boiling water was frightful and I'll never forget the sound they made when they hit it. Perhaps we were too inexperienced to make the immersion so painful for them. The next day we had lobster salad and dressed crabs, absolute delicacies, all very exciting, but I chose bread and jam.

Some days we spent on the beach except for meal times, in and out of the sea as we liked, playing with a ball or rubber ring. There were little treats like an ice cream for 3 pence each, a freshly cut slice with a wafer back and front to be bought at a tiny kiosk open in the summer. Or we walked to the village and bought postcards and my father showed them round the factory. One day we took the West Clare Railway to Lahinch and back, or we played table-tennis on the large mahogany table. One day, Mother announced we were going to have a special farewell treat – a turkey. It was Bernd who with a smile was the first to remark that he was surprised that Irish turkeys had four legs!!! All too soon was the time over and we all took them to the station. The stationmaster, Mr. Vaughan, appeared earlier than usual to give them their tickets. When they got into the train, I could not be comforted. The dream of an August summer was over, and carefree days of youth forever gone.

8: Christ Church Parish, Spanish Point

Mr. Noble, (in March 1954) the manager of the Malbay Knitting Factory, showed compassion and he was the first person in Miltown Malbay towards whom we could develop a certain amount of trust. What he said could be relied on. Did he show us the small protestant church and rectory between Spanish Point and the village? This is most likely.

The first two weeks we were shattered and the time was spent seriously reconsidering our situation. Although we were shown about three houses (from the outside) it soon became clear that these visits were merely further attempts to mislead us. There was no house for us, and no car either. We couldn't afford to stay at the hotel for any length of time. Renting a flat or house, even in Ennis, was impossible during the summer months.

It must have been the third Sunday that we walked to the church on a beautiful day with a slight feeling of spring in the air. The view of the Atlantic was magnificent. Mrs. Elliott, the rector's wife, was there to greet us. A whole family arriving for Morning Prayer was a novelty in March. News about us had reached the rectory, but not that we were Protestants and would come to their church. She was very welcoming and interested to find out more about us.

While we were talking, Mr. Buckley's car drove up the driveway with the Canon. He had been to the Churches in Lahinch and Ennistymon. He did not have very much time for us, but enough for Mother to come out with our major problem: a place to stay. Could he help us? He promised to try and he did.

The church with the rectory right beside it fitted well into the countryside, both simple and unassuming buildings, but the architecture of the church appealing. A few daffodils were in bloom on the lawn, but it was the real palm tree and one or two exotic plants that fascinated me, one which they called the Red Hot Poker. These plants seemed to survive well in the wild but mild climate. The larger bench beside the rectory door was regularly used by visitors and churchgoers – an ideal place to admire a magnificent view of Spanish Point and Mutton Island.

There was something homely about the small church, with its wooden pews, pulpit, reading stand and communion rail. There were three stained glass windows behind the altar, and below the pulpit stood a harmonium which was played if there was anyone in the congregation to do so, or by Canon Elliott himself.

As we entered the church we saw a blazing fire in a large fireplace on our left, the only source of heat in the church. All the parishioners had their special seats (also the regular visitors in the summer.) We were shown to the pew right beside the open hearth. This did not have another pew with a place to kneel (in front of it), quite convenient for Germans who generally stand to pray, which we continued to do. We also got the full benefit of the open fire during the winter months.

I expect that Mrs. White and her daughter, known as the young Miss White, as well as Mrs. White's sister-in-law, known as the old Miss White, were there in March, but I don't remember. On the other hand, I remember Mr. Tottenham from Mount Callan. In 1954 he produced his 'own' electricity for the house and farm, quite a novelty.



A postcard of Christ Church, Spanish Point, from about 1960

We had noticed the ruins of a much larger protestant church in the village, tucked behind Hillery's garage. The graveyard beside it was and still is in use, but the building was destroyed by a fire in 1922, not a political deed, but due to an accident during a burglary. There appears to have been a large protestant community in the village in the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Mrs. White's husband (the Whites of Medina, Spanish Point) was the bank manager at the beginning of the twentieth century (his name was spelt Whyte) and this bank is very close to the church ruin. When and how he died we were never told. He is buried in the old graveyard.

A few much larger buildings like the bank stand out amongst the much smaller shops in the main street, e.g., the house opposite the Bank on the other side of the road leading to Ennis. It might have belonged to a protestant family. (In 1954 two sisters owned it and had a textile shop, P. P. Flynn, offering a large variety of goods – clothes, underwear, tableware, blankets, wool, sewing and embroidery materials, shoes even – all very good quality. A niece lived with them. She was well looked after and had the opportunity to go to secondary school.)

While staying at the Central Hotel after our arrival in March 1954, we noticed a large building on the other side of the street. The owner, an elderly man, lived there alone and came to the hotel for his meals every day, certainly for his lunch. We wondered what purpose this large building had served. I only found out lately that the building had been the protestant hotel, owned by Vint O'Brien and his family. This elderly man was the last member of the family that had settled in the village. He did not attend the church in Spanish Point during our time, but I do not doubt that Canon Elliott regarded him as one of his flock (as a matter of interest: the newsagent Hurley had a standing order for three *Irish Times* daily at that time: for the rectory, for Robert Tottenham, and for this old gentleman.)

There must have been a rectory in the village once, but I have no information about that.

Much land around the village was owned by about three protestant landlords. Patsy Jones's book *Lovely Old Miltown Malbay* (Ennis, 2019) is a well of information. She refers to the fact that the Catholic community needed a larger church nearer the village. The landlord, Mr. Moroney, refused to part with any of his land. However, another protestant landlord was willing to let the Catholic Church have the land it badly needed and the new church was built.

The Reverend Albert Elliott arrived in the village as the new rector of the Church of Ireland on 6th January, (Epiphany!) in 1916.¹ Father Jimmy Buckley, who spent a greater part of his childhood years in the rectory (his mother was the excellent and loyal housekeeper there most of her life) is quite sure about hearing

¹ Both dates given for the Elliotts' arrival, 1916 and 1913, are wrong, though the 1916 date, being that of the Elliotts' marriage, is a stylish mistake. The Elliotts came to Spanish Point only in 1922. See Patrick Comerford's piece, 'Christ Church, Spanish Point: a 'Mediterranean Gothic' church in West Clare', and the link mentioned in footnote 3 below.

the date repeatedly referred to, and it seems to be more likely than 1913, a year which is mentioned in a newspaper obituary after Canon Elliott's death.

He was born on February 14th, a date I remember well, though not the year he was born.² Being a German child, I wanted to know when his birthday was and he chuckled when he told me he was born on St. Valentine's Day! He came from Belleek in County Fermanagh and there was a close connection between the Elliott family and the owners of the Belleek China Factory. With great pride did the Elliotts serve tea in old Belleek china teacups and they had a beautiful, special ornamental piece, showing intricate workmanship, very large and absolutely exquisite. By chance I saw a photograph of it in an 'Ulster Art' magazine, dated 1990, and details about its significance. Father Jimmy Buckley said he visited the Elliott family home in Belleek with the Canon in the Sixties. Canon Elliott's brother (or a brother?) and his family owned the Carlton Hotel on Lough Erne. His wife Blanche survived her husband for some years, lived on in the house, but no longer continued to run the hotel. The Canon, as he was known, even long after he became Chancellor, graduated in Trinity College early in the twentieth century: where he spent his years as a curate.³ I do not know, but Miltown Malbay seems to have been his first parish, to which he remained loyal all his life. He even refused offers to become Bishop of Killaloe. He stayed in the O'Brien Hotel when he came, perhaps till he married Nellie Evans from Cloughjordan where her family had a market garden.

² The Register of Births for Ballyshannon District records the birth, at Belleek, at about 7 a.m. on 14th February 1885, of an unnamed male child, the son of David Elliott, shopkeeper, Belleek, and Sarah née Young. The absence in the register of a given forename is unusual. The birth was registered on 20th February, six days after it had occurred, which suggests that the names had even then not been settled. The child would ultimately be given four names: David William Matthew Albert, and be known to Hellgard by the last of them. When the 1901 census was taken David W.M.A. Elliott, aged 16, an Episcopalian born in Co. Fermanagh, was a pupil at Campbell College, at Ballyhackmore in Co. Down.

In the 1911 census David Albert Elliott, Clerk in Holy Orders (Priest), aged 25, born in Co. Fermanagh, was boarding at a hotel in Cloughjordan. In the 1911 census his future wife, Nellie Evans, aged 27, born in England, daughter of George Evans, timber merchant, was living under her father's roof not far away at Garraunorish, Mertonhall. David W.M.A. Elliott, Clerk in Holy Orders, and Nellie Emma Evans, spinster, were married on 5 January 1916 in the church of the parish of Modreeny (between Borrisokane and Cloughjordan), in Co. Tipperary. Nellie Elliott died in hospital in Limerick, aged 75, on 23 April 1959. Her husband died on 9 June 1972 at Friars Hill Nursing Home, Wicklow, aged 87. In the General Register Office index his death is found under David Elliott; but in the margin of the actual entry the local registrar made a note on 10 January 1974: 'For David Elliott, read David William Matthew Albert Elliott', a correction made 'on production of a statutory declaration by Robert Martin [?] Gibson, the person causing the body to be buried'.

³ In 1909 David William Matthew Albert Elliott graduated from Trinity College with a degree that became an M.A. The *Church of Ireland Gazette* of 18 June 1915 announced the appointment of David William Albert Elliott as curate in charge of Ballingarry, Co. Limerick. Patrick Comerford [<http://www.patrickcomerford.com/2021/07/christ-church-spanishpoint.html>] wrote on 24 July 2021: 'Canon David William Matthew Albert Elliott (1885-1972), the Rector of Spanish Point when Christ Church was built, was ordained deacon and priest in 1910 and 1911. After curacies in Cloughjordan, Co. Tipperary, and Ballingarry, Co. Limerick, he became Rector of Kilfarboy (Miltown Malbay) and Kilmanaheen in 1922. Kilfarboy and Kilmanaheen parish was united with Kilfenora, Ennistymon, Lisdoonvarna and Lahinch in 1931, and Canon Elliott was a canon of Killaloe Cathedral from that year until he retired in 1965'.

Where the young Elliott couple lived after their marriage I do not know, perhaps at first in the hotel? Reportedly church services were held (after 1922) in the rectory, wherever that rectory was. Christ Church in Spanish Point was consecrated in August 1927. This information can be found on the internet. Again, I wish to refer to Patsy Jones's book as there is a lovely photograph showing Canon Elliott and other church dignitaries and parishioners about to enter the church.

By 1927, most of the parishioners lived in Spanish Point or had a summer residence there, so it was no doubt a natural decision to build the new church there. I expect that the land was donated by the family of the former landlord, Mr. Moroney, whose descendants still lived in Miltown House very close by. In the Thirties, the last member(s) of the family sold Miltown House with a lot of land to the Sisters of Mercy who were starting to offer education to girls in the area. They also sold many fields to Dr. Michael Hillery, who built a house near the road leading to Spanish Point, close to the new Church of Ireland.

The church was built with great personal initiative and financial help from the parishioners e.g. Col. Tottenham of Mount Callan (father of the Robert Tottenham we knew) was greatly involved, as was the Ellis Family of Seaview House. This house later became the boarding school building for girls at the Convent school. It is now a noble B&B which also caters for guests at Armada Hotel weddings. When the Ellis daughter married and they settled in Dublin, she and her family spent every summer at the White Strand nearby and remained extremely loyal supporters of the church. In 2007 after the church was renovated, Mrs. Ewen is in the photograph.

For the moment I wish to return to the consecration of the new church in 1927. Lady Inchiquin donated the harmonium, the same make that she donated to Killaloe, I am told. Family memorials were destroyed in the church fire in 1922. These families replaced them by donating the three stained glass windows behind the altar. Vint O'Brien's wife started to embroider a white linen altar cloth for the new church but died before she could finish it. Mrs. Elliot completed it. I remember it well. Mrs. Buckley cared for it with great respect and – who knows – it may still be in use.

To realize why and when Spanish Point became what I would call a protestant settlement I have to go back to the end of the eighteenth century. (Again, I refer to Patsy Jones's book.) A wealthy landowner from Limerick, Mr. Moroney, bought more or less all the land around Spanish Point that was suitable for building, as well as land around the village. Going on holiday was beginning to become popular with wealthy Anglo-Irish families and Mr. Moroney's idea was to develop Spanish Point into a holiday resort. His house was built on a height, overlooking the beach and his land. He had a large hotel built very close to the beach called the Atlantic Hotel. It was destroyed by fire at one stage. We only saw the ruins in 1954. A new and very popular hotel, the *Armada*, was built on the site of the old hotel at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Mr. Moroney sold land to protestants willing to build houses. The Retreat, for example, which was our rented home for eight years, was surrounded by many fields. The land was the dowry for one of Mr. Moroney's family when she married a retired captain. He built a 'modest' castle with an adjoining house. Both the square castle tower and the round tower had battlements. On the first floor of the large square 'castle' there was the spacious, magnificent sitting room with a perfect view of the sea. On the ground floor there was a bathroom, literally bath only, and beside that there was, what was called, the maid's room. On the ground floor of the round tower there was a toilet and a wash hand basin. As this couple had no children, the house and land were sold. Later on the property was bought by the Parker-Hutchinson family from Tipperary and used, or rented out as a holiday home for visiting friends and family.

What difficult times Albert and Nellie Elliott lived through! Canon Elliott came during the First World War when many of the protestant men were serving in the British Army. The Easter Rising occurred, followed a few years later by the War of Independence and the Civil War. The influence of the I.R.B. (Irish Republican Brotherhood) increased, becoming the I.R.A. (Irish Republican Army). There was James Larkin and the beginning of the Trade Unions. In 1900, life still seemed to be part of an old order. By the Twenties, this old order was crumbling, crumbling fast. Canon and Mrs. Elliott were loyal shepherds of a flock undergoing great and rapid changes. Many families were about to experience personal tragedies. Other families, members of an affluent and influential, well-educated community, had to accept that they had fallen within a few years into only seeming affluence, often on the brink of poverty. Some people only survived because they were supported by friends and family. Others stoically did their best to end their lives in dignity and pride. (Members of this Anglo-Irish community must be honoured for their contribution to Irish existence in all its facets for centuries.)

I can only recall the people who were connected with our church in 1954. Most of the parishioners left the area for at least some of the winter months. Like our family, Robert Tottenham was a regular parishioner for twelve months of the year. As Canon and Nellie Elliott were not known ever to have taken a holiday it means there were seven members in the congregation in the winter when no one was missing!

We were closest to the White family: Mrs. White and her daughter Moira at Medina and the old Mrs. White at Tivoli. All three women had seen very much better days. When the bank manager was still alive, they went on the Grand Tour of Europe when they also visited Denmark, hence the name Tivoli. (On an old postcard showing the house it is referred to as West Cliff Lodge). The name Medina for their house puzzled me for years till I found out that Medina is the name of a river on the Isle of Wight, and Whyte is an old spelling for the island. Was there a connection?



A postcard of Christ Church, Spanish Point, about 1962

Seeing a photograph of the young, happy Moira White standing beside a magnificent car about to drive off, brought tears to my eyes, as I knew how hard she had to work later in life for a very humble existence. That is the time when I met her and later got to know her better. She had to look after an elderly mother and aunt, her market garden, catching lobster and crabs that she could sell to the hotels in Lahinch. She never walked; she always ran. (The old Miss White knitted socks and sold them with a very small profit!). In May 1954 they befriended us in that they organized a ladies' picnic to the Burren [see photograph on p. 73], when Mother and I still felt so lost (we all did). After the picnic Moira took Mother and me with her and we scrambled up to the top of the higher rocks and she showed us the alpine flowers growing in the deep cervices (No Edelweiss). She dug out (!) a very special green plant, one for herself, one for Mrs. Elliott and one for us. We had it for years. We were also included when they gave a large bridge party; and the year the round tower collapsed in a storm and blocked the access to the kitchen, they offered us rooms till the damage was repaired.

The old Miss White died first and Tivoli was sold. Moira's mother died shortly afterwards and Moira had to sell Medina. As this was around Christmas she couldn't go away. Mother invited her to spend the day with us if she wished and she did – a very special day for her, as she said, and for us too. I'll never forget her remark: 'This time next year I'll remember this wonderful day as I sit in front of a miserable bird'.

Not far from Medina, Mrs. Jessop-Davis had her cottage and came regularly for a few months every summer. In the early Fifties, Miss Walnut and her French friend, whom everyone called 'Mady', were regular visitors. Perhaps they stayed at Medina or with Mrs. Jessop-Davis? Whatever their connection to Spanish Point

was, we were never told, though we regularly took them for outings. They lived in the Villiers Home in Limerick. I kept the Leckebusch correspondence contact with them at Christmas for some years, when they were no longer able to visit.

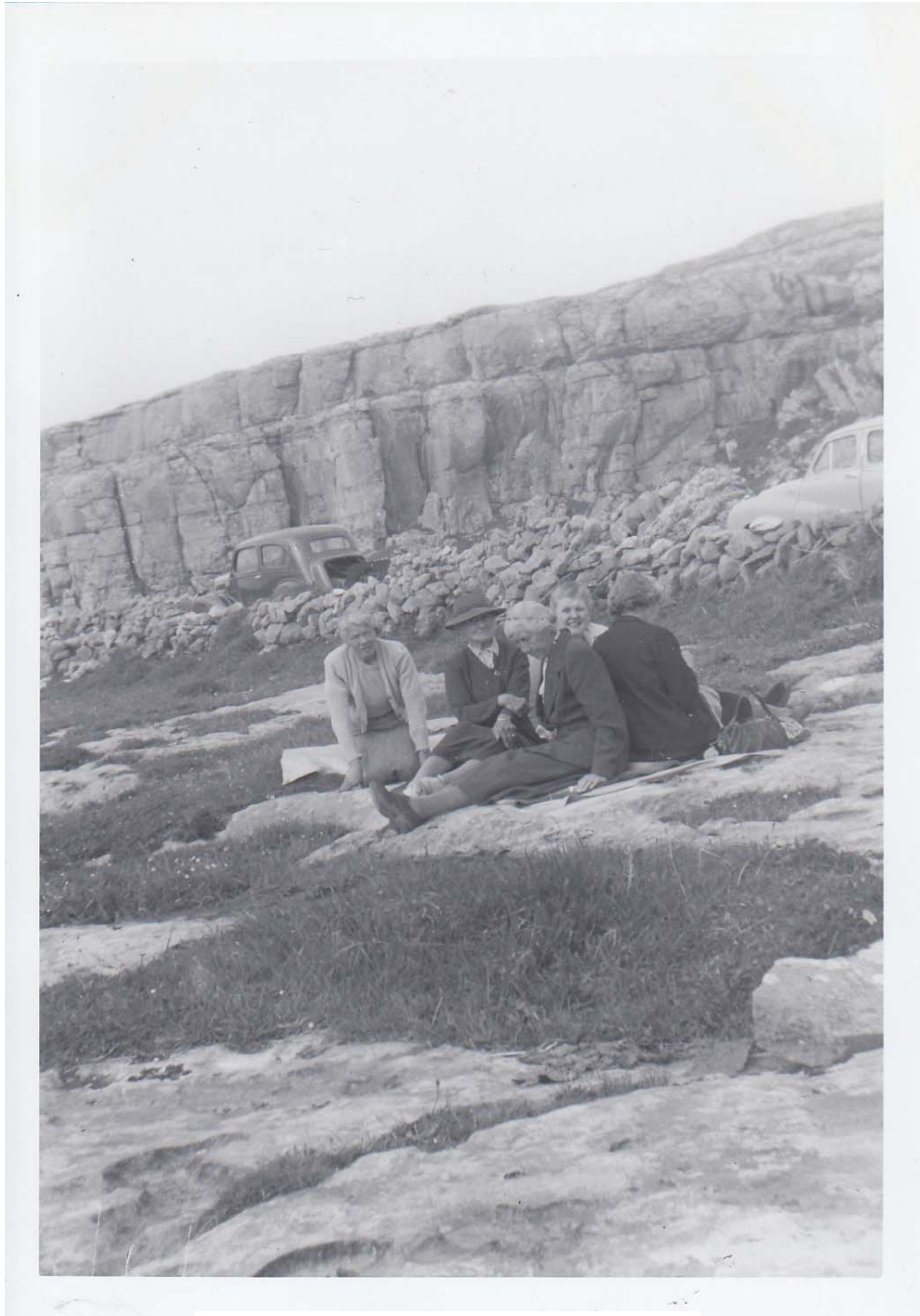
Near Mrs. Jessop-Davis's cottage, going down the lane as far as the cliffs, there was – and probably still is – a large house. This belongs (belonged?) to the Russell family. They returned from India around 1955 where he had served in the British Army for years. His family must have lived in Clare for generations as Mr. Russell at one time owned extensive land and property beside Bunratty Castle. Moving closer to the beach there is Seaview House, originally owned by the Ellis family. I have referred to it already.

Tivoli is next, overlooking the beach, approximately where the Black Rock is. The Retreat is the neighbouring building, but in a hollow. Moving along the beach to the estuary of the small river, near the bridge leading to Quilty there is Redcliff House. Mr. Byrne and his Canadian wife returned to live there when I was at boarding school. They were Church of Ireland but did not attend church services during my time there, so I don't remember ever meeting them. (Mr. Byrne's first wife was a Blood-Smith from Limerick) The Canon was in contact with the Byrnes in the sixties.

When Mr. and Mrs. Ironside came to settle in the village I can't recall, but he was a respected vet. Both were well thought of and in later correspondence with Miltown friends, I was often told that Mrs. Ironside was greatly involved in ecumenical social work after our time.

What parishes did the new rector have to look after in 1916? Perhaps it was Miltown Malbay only. In 1954, the Canon held services in five parishes every Sunday. Mr. Buckley drove him to Lahinch first, then Ennistymon. He arrived in Spanish Point for the service at 12 o'clock. The Buckley family then had lunch in the rectory kitchen. After the service, Mr. Buckley and the Canon drove off again. There was a flask and sandwiches for the Canon to have a snack on the road to Kilfenora. Finally, there was the service in Lisdoonvarna. When Jimmy Buckley was a little older, he accompanied his father and the Canon. He was responsible for carrying the Canon's case. In the late Fifties, the churches in Lahinch and Lisdoonvarna were closed, but the Canon continued with services in Rouska House, sitting room, Lisdoonvarna, mainly for Mrs. Maston and Mrs. Baker. Jimmy Buckley recalls the wonderful afternoon teas they all enjoyed afterwards.

The Church in Ennistymon has a strategic position in the town and is a large church. I never knew until recently that there is a deanery nearby, which still exists. It belonged to Mrs. Maston in the Fifties who left it to Mrs. Kirkpatrick, a postmistress in Lisdoonvarna, certainly in 1956/57. She was a very able, friendly, kind and pleasant woman who was introduced to us as their niece. She later lived in the deanery till she became too frail and was looked after by the nuns in the Stella Maris Nursing Home in Lisdoonvarna. I can only suppose that the Dean of Kilfenora Cathedral lived in the deanery in Ennistymon at one time. (Originally there was another diocese, near Gort called Kilmacduagh, but I only found that out recently and know when and why the Cathedral was built but no more).



The ladies' Burren picnic in May 1954 [see p. 71]

Shortly before the Canon retired, he must have taken on some responsibility for services in Kilkee and / or Kilrush. His successor, the Reverend Jenkyns, certainly held services there in his time.

I look back on the life of this couple with great admiration and respect. Their life consisted of looking after their flock, doing their pastoral work with great discretion, supporting those in need, and each other. They lived a quiet, fulfilled life, limited their wishes and needs to a bare minimum, were satisfied with the life they had chosen. They had grown up surrounded by culture, this was evident in their lives, but they did not look for opportunities to enjoy visits to galleries, museums, concerts or beautiful gardens. Their treats were very simple. Mrs. Elliott sometimes enjoyed taking the young boy Jimmy out for a walk with Farouk, the 'gentle' bull terrier. I am told that they sometimes visited the Whites at Medina and probably had tea and biscuits there. In the summer months they might walk down to the beach and Jimmy would be treated to an ice cream at a small kiosk selling (only) ice cream and minerals in the summer.

Mrs. Elliott enjoyed writing sometimes, stories or little poems. She published a small booklet of stories in 1951 called 'Grandmamma and other Stories'. We were given a copy of one in August 1954. It still exists. It is only now that I can fully appreciate the stories. She was friendly with everyone, but it was quite obvious that the connection between the Elliotts and the Whites on the one hand, and with the Tottenhams on the other hand, was especially close. One Christmas, Mother asked Mrs. Elliott if she would like to visit us on Christmas Day till the Canon returned from his round of services. She declined. She said after the service Robert Tottenham drove home and she probably had a cup of tea. If it wasn't too wet, she would set out then and walk the long way to the Tottenham home. She enjoyed walking always, would spend the time on Mount Callan with the Tottenham family till the Canon arrived and then they would have Christmas Dinner. Robert Tottenham drove them home. Who knows what difficult times she shared with these two families in the Twenties and Thirties!

In the summer, the Elliotts had many day visitors, but also some overnight guests, a few for longer periods; the days around high tides were highlights. Visitors always came, many stayed with friends or in a hotel, and then when the tide was out, they met on the rocks with the Canon and often Jimmy Buckley came too. These outings were *the* major highlight of the year. The Canon, barefooted, dressed in old trousers and a shirt and cap, ran over the rocks like a weasel, even the time I was there too, and he was over 70. All he had was a long pole, probably a broomstick, with a longish hook attached to it, and a washed potato bag. He knew all the hideouts; he also knew when he had caught as many as possible. His speed and agility were mind-blowing, and he carefully put each crab and lobster into the potato bag where they got enough air. When we had visitors from Germany in August 1954, as well as an aunt from London, he invited us all. He showed us how we might catch a crab or lobster too, and at the end of the day we got more than a very fair share of what he had mainly caught.



Canon Elliott catching crabs and lobsters, about 1956
The boy is young Jimmy Buckley, Mrs. Buckley's son

After an outing with visitors, Mrs. Elliott and Catherine Buckley had a very busy time getting ready for an exquisite dinner party the next day. Lobsters were boiled, as were 'the' crabs, but the crabs then had to be 'dressed'. The dinner parties took place at the large kitchen table in the rectory. The *Irish Times* 'library', on the beautiful mahogany table in the dining-room could not be disturbed!

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Both guests and hosts enjoyed the outing on the rocks, the preparation for and then the delicious meal. A repetition of the occasion in the following year was awaited eagerly. Beside the rectory there was land which belonged to the church on which the Canon always kept one cow. They had their own milk and the grass did not have to be cut. Once a year, fully attired in the rector's black suit, but fit for the occasion in Wellington boots and maybe a raincoat he would walk his cow towards the village Cattle Fair, to sell it and buy a younger one. He was a gentle,

but a shrewd, man and I have no doubt that the buyer and sellers were aware of this.

He was well-known in the village and he himself was well acquainted with the lives of the families living there. In the way the Elliotts lived, however, they were never close to the Catholic Community but highly respected and trusted. Young men often asked the Canon for a reference and as he knew about the families in the village, especially those in need, he could generally oblige. He was even respected by the I.R.A. An official came to assure the Canon that they had nothing to do with the burning of the original Church of Ireland church in the village and explained what had happened. On another occasion his bicycle was stolen, so he reported it to the police and the I.R.A. Father Jimmy Buckley distinctly remembers the Canon referring to the incident from time to time, recalling that the I.R.A. returned the bicycle with an apology because it had been stolen by an I.R.A. man. They added that the culprit had been punished.

When we came upon this network of wonderful, highly educated, influential and certainly formerly wealthy people, we were kindly treated and received, but we never belonged, nor did we belong to the Catholic community, although we made real friends among the villagers. Being German so soon after the war in which many of the men in these families had served in the British Army, and not a few had been killed, must have been difficult for them. We were invited to the rectory sometimes; we were invited by the Whites. We were also invited to a lovely christening once, I should add, but so was the whole parish, summer guests included. I never noticed this as a child, could not realize that even simple information as to where they went in the winter, or if they had any relatives, was kept from us. Anyway, a child can always open doors and hearts, and I was treated very kindly.

No doubt we made 'mistakes', and were too wrapped up in our own problems to notice that. These families may have expected us to behave differently, and it is not my intention to be critical. We were fond of all these families and these questions only occur to me on reflection and make me thoughtful.

Living in the Retreat they may have considered us mean because we did not support the parish more financially, little knowing how tight the family budget was. Father's salary was not tailored to boarding school expenses or the rent of a 'modest' castle!

No account of Christ Church and the Elliotts would be complete without Mrs. Buckley and her family. Catherine, as they called her, will have started to help the young couple when she was very young. They will soon have noticed that she was extremely intelligent and hardworking, eager to learn, and she learned quickly; she was discreet and loyal and fond of the young couple. This grateful and dependable woman married a Mr. Buckley and they lived in a small house as you come to the village. When exactly Mr. Buckley started to drive the Canon around the parishes on Sundays, or wherever the couple needed to go, I do not know. They never owned a car themselves. In the early years Mrs. Buckley had Jimmy on the back of her bicycle as she cycled to the Rectory every morning, seven days a week. He

was younger than me and I remember seeing him riding Farouk around the rectory grounds!

The Canon taught Jimmy how to play the harmonium and introduced him to different hymns. Jimmy learnt a great deal about Protestants, especially in Clare, and learnt to respect their traditions, their standards of learning and culture, their loyalty which was praiseworthy but sometimes went to unpraiseworthy extremes – their stoic acceptance of the inevitable. This will have been in contrast to what he will have heard about the way some of the ‘gentry’ ill-treated the ordinary population. As Jimmy was endowed with a healthy personal pride and self-esteem, he never compared his life and chances with theirs. It was a matter of new understanding. It made him into what I would call a bridge between the two communities, then and now.

Nellie Elliott predeceased her husband some years before he retired. This was in 1959. I was at boarding school at the time. Although she must have been very ill for some time, she never showed any sign of suffering that I could detect. When I came home from school one holiday she was just no longer there and I missed her. This must have been a terrible loss for the Canon, especially as his eyesight was failing. She was buried in Delgany.

While I was a student in Trinity, the Canon retired to Ashford, where his sister-in-law, Miss Evans, lived. She was a very gifted artist and her garden was full of very impressive stone sculptures. In the house she showed me her wonderful wood carvings. It was an incredible place and the garden showed that she came from a family of garden experts; most unusual plants and trees, and unforgettable roses. I visited several times, once with Derek, another time with Ida and once with my parents. The tiny lane leading up to the house was hidden almost at the side of the main road from Dublin to Wexford, just before a hotel. One needed a special life insurance to approach the lane, as it could only be entered if one was driving to Dublin but one had to cross the busy road at a corner and one could not see cars from Dublin coming around the corner at top speed. There would be no reason to mention this if this exact description in a biography of a most famous Irish poet made me realize that he and his wife and their baby must have lived very close by to Miss Evans’ house, but amongst the trees one saw no house till one came close to the one in question, following exact directions. Like his dear wife Nellie, the Canon was buried in Delgany. Our parents and I were at the funeral. I was teaching in W.C.D. (Wesley College, Dublin) then and Henner had already returned to Germany.

The Reverend Jenkyns became the rector after his own retirement on the Isle of Wight. He and his wife and daughter Pamela moved into the rectory. Although we only met during my holidays, Pamela and I really liked each other. When she married, she and her husband moved to Britain, but she came to Spanish Point for their first daughter’s christening and asked me to be Gillian’s godmother. I was very pleased! Both are still alive and our contact is good, although we haven’t met for years. She is my eldest godchild. She emigrated to Calgary at a very early age, but I feel very close to her and our correspondence is very ‘real’.

Mr. Jenkyns originally came from Wales and Pamela tells me he loved the years in Spanish Point. When he retired, they moved into a small bungalow they had built with a wonderful view of the sea, not very far from the rectory. He distinctly wanted to be buried in Ennistymon and his wish was honoured.



Inside Christ Church, Spanish Point, facing east (Photograph: Patrick Comerford, 2021)
(<https://www.patrickcomerford.com/2021/07/christ-church-spanish-point.html>)

This is all very long ago, so the question arises what importance the parish has for me now. My deep spirituality is rooted in the spiritual way both our mother and our grandmother (her mother) lived: neither was pious or talked much about their spirituality. They both worked hard, lived in the trust that they were in God's care. They did not see in Him a fulfiller of their wishes, nor did they consider Him responsible for making sure they could enjoy a comfortable life! He was God. Like all from Mother's family they were members of the Reformed Church, in the tradition of Calvin. Neither went to church regularly: Grandmother couldn't and Mother seldom had time just after the war, but Henner and I went to Sunday school without fail. I was sent to the Baptist Sunday school. It was just a few doors away: the people were nice and I loved going and did not have to be brought there. Our father's family belonged to the Lutheran Church, and that is where I was baptized. Anglican traditions seemed very strange to us German Calvinists, but a statement of Mother's sorted that out for us all, right at the beginning. The

important thing is that we are *under* God's 'word', that was it: under, over, surrounded by it.

In the early years when I was at home before my Rosleven days, the parish was of great importance to me. I felt very secure in the family, but there were many times that were frightening. The only help I could depend on outside the family was the parish, basically Canon and Mrs. Elliott. I became aware what a help and treasure it is to be a member of a second, a limited 'home', so when asked by my friend Rosemary not long ago what I would call my spiritual home I could honestly say: The Anglican Church and Christ Church, Spanish Point. It makes me happy that the church has been renovated and is still in use: new footsteps on old routes of blessings.



Canon Elliott in 1970



Hellgard on her way to see Canon Elliott [1956]

That Canon Elliott was especially dear to Hellgard is attested by an analysis of how frequently people or places are mentioned in the text. There are 78 references to Canon Elliott or his wife, more than for anyone else save her parents [several hundred] and Henner [229]. Ida [68], Rosleven [63], Wesley [61], Gertrude and Lorna [49 each], Willie [45], Mr. Myles [37] Buckley [36], Mooney [29], Geraldine [23], Rosemary and Dodie [18 each], Richardson and Webster [15 each], and Maureen [14] are the other people or places most frequently mentioned.

9: Truth or comfort?

Some friends visit me or phone me and want to share their worries and problems from time to time. That is fine, but when they want some feedback or advice, I often inquire first: 'Do you want truth or comfort?' Not that the comfort reaction lacks truth, but the focus is different. 'Fragile new roots' dwells more on the comfort side of things. After we had moved into the Retreat, we had some privacy at last, but the survival training season had also just started. We were a family facing problems, and the elements. We were not used to living quite isolated, so close to the sea. In the firm, our father had his work cut out for him. Getting the looms set up was one thing, but he also had to fit everything into the available space: office, card-cutting room, the rooms where the large thread cones were on a small machine so that the thread could be transported onto small, thin, longish rolls to fit into the part of the loom that actually wove the pattern. A secretary had to be found as well as other employees. Our parents bought a bicycle for Henner almost immediately. He brought a lot of messages from the village and was sent on errands, e.g. trying to find out about health insurances. This particular errand proved to be a problem without a solution. Our parents, both 49, were too old for a private insurance, especially as they had both had had *malaria tropica* in the thirties.

Meanwhile, the Retreat required a lot of work and care. We had no washing machine or vacuum cleaner, and Father went to work with a freshly laundered, khaki-coloured 'Kittel' most days, i.e. a cotton type of coat he wore over his shirt and tie outfit. The looms always needed lavish greasing so the 'Kittel' got very dirty. I remember Mother boiling them up in a metal basin in water with grated sunlight soap on the small range, before washing them by hand then. It took several days till we actually found out where we could order a cartload of turf. We had no telephone and no car. When we got a telephone, our number was Miltown 16 – in 1954! That was the total number of telephones around in the village.

Mother washed all the blankets on all our beds individually in the bath and rinsed them which took two weeks. They were very heavy, so we had to learn how to get them dry. Mother hung them over a stool in the bath till they were less heavy. Then, we carried them to the courtyard in a plastic washtub. There were washing lines there. Eventually, if enough water had gone out of the blanket, we hung them over the line. It was hard labour to turn the huge house into some sort of a home. We sometimes went up to the 'drawing room' in the square tower, watching the sea or a sunset, but it was 1955 before Mother had it cleaned and the armchairs – the armchair coverings full of large gaps – repaired. She cut out pieces of the material from the back of the cushion parts of the armchairs, sewed in a neutral-coloured material, and with the spare material she had got now, she repaired all the gaps – by hand – beautifully.

After about a month, Mrs. Buckley came one morning a week for two hours at first and later, two mornings. She was a godsend and besides the fact that she was a great worker, she gave us a lot of practical advice which we badly needed and above all, she was a wonderful woman and became a trusted and loyal friend.

One of the very few investments that our parents decided on was a radio – a treat for us all. We had little time to listen during the week and Radio Éireann was no great help for Mother and me at first. But on Sundays, we enjoyed the radio. Henner was great because he generally managed to get a German programme and we listened to that in the evening when we sat by the fire.

Spring was in the air and some days were lovely and sunny – great for walking along the seafront on Sunday, we thought, but it didn't prove to be a good idea. We would walk a few steps and someone would approach Father, in the hope of being employed. Sometimes, it turned out to be someone really suitable, but it didn't give us a peaceful walk, because after another five or ten minutes someone else would come. Probably word had got around: 'That new boss is walking around the seafront with his family, in case you want to enquire about a job!' This was a hopeless way of spending relaxation time. (Years later I was reminded of this while overhearing a conversation in a flower shop in Wuppertal. The lady florist remarked that they loved walking, but always had to drive out of Wuppertal, in spite of all the lovely walks on the outskirts. Near Wuppertal they were stopped with questions about plants shedding leaves forever or flowers not blooming ...) We decided to stay in or outside the Retreat, except for a short walk on the beach itself in the evenings. More often than not would we meet the director of the firm there. He was my great problem during early childhood so that didn't prove to be a relaxing family time either.

In early May, Mother and I had our first invitation and outing. The Whites had returned from their winter quarters to their houses in Spanish Point, around Easter, when Miss White, the young Miss White, in contrast to her aunt, the old Miss White, got her walled garden behind 'Medina' planted and set up. Mrs. White, her daughter and her sister-in-law, invited us for a drive and picnic. Another lady, I'm sure it was Mrs. Jessop-Davies, had also arrived in her cottage and was driving, too, and Mrs. Elliott had also been invited, of course, enough room in the two cars for us all.

Our famous, 'invisible' new car – part of Father's contract – was still in hiding. We really could not do without it, and Father was beginning to need it to get orders. This meant visiting woollen and clothing factories all over Ireland. Once the looms were working, he made labels for the Malbay factory, but that order wouldn't keep the looms going for long. One day, an old Ford car was left at the Retreat – a car that was a miracle on the road – and Father was presented with the bill! Quite a joke! Miss White had just bought a brand-new Ford car and had told us the price, so we had an idea of what this old Ford might be worth. Father was relieved to get a car at all, though he couldn't drive. He would have paid the bill. But Mother was furious. She said if he even paid one £ for it she'd never even get into the car. We all knew – Mother never just threatened. Eventually he didn't have to pay anything for it, but it was still a wreck of a car.

Henner got behind the wheel and practised for a day or two on the Retreat grounds and watching him we were all confident he would manage it. He did. He immediately started to show Father his 'instant' skills, but that took some time.

The first little trips were into the village, up the Ballard Road to the factory. Hillery's garage was chosen for getting petrol and oil. Contact was taken up with Lyons's garage also, for the old Ford frequently needed extra 'tender loving care' and expertise. When our friend the Ford was willing, we got to know the White Strand, Quilty, and eventually we made the rash decision to drive to Ennis – Henner, at 16, no license, at the wheel.

In my teaching years I always experienced that starting off with familiar knowledge to reach out to the unknown is a good route to take. The early years for us were a search for the familiar. We made a great effort to locate Germans who might be living in Clare, without success. When we got to Ennis, we passed a lovely shop selling and repairing watches and clocks and jewellery. The name of the shop was a German name, and we decided to go in and enquire. Yes, the owner was born in Germany; they were very friendly and polite, yet obviously there was no interest in German newcomers. Did they give us the address of a German family in Ennis? I cannot recollect. Anyway, we had an address, given to us by someone in Ennis.

At the time I did not consider it strange that this family happened to be a German Jewish. Our grandfather had worked for a Jewish firm in Wuppertal-Barmen for years, till they were disowned and the employees had to find work elsewhere. My aunt, born in 1916, was often brought to work by our grandfather and taken care of by the owner's wife till my grandfather finished his work and went home. (Grandmother had survived the birth of her youngest daughter, but never regained her health.) My aunt remembered endless details, e.g. that their midday meal always started with fruit, and raved about her visits there. She in time, having trained as a secretary and bookkeeper, was first employed in one of the new, modern department stores. This one was in Jewish ownership. She got on well with her boss and was very sad when she had to leave her first employment after the *Reichskristallnacht* in November 1938 when all the shop windows of the Jewish shops were broken, the department store was looted and it could not reopen. After the war, she tried to get information about that family and found out that some members of the family who had managed to leave Germany survived while others, tragically and sadly, had not. When I heard that we were going to visit a German, Jewish, family I immediately thought of the people our grandfather and aunt had talked about and was delighted.

Henner drove us to their home, stopping on the way to ask people how to get to the address. They opened when we knocked on the door. We introduced ourselves and they let us in. The parents were quite young, and they had two small children, maybe four and six? They were very hospitable and welcoming; the practical information they gave us was most useful. They told us they expected to leave Ennis soon, but hoped we would call again before then and we did. Neither they nor we said what we were doing in Clare! They were very nice people and the children brought me their toys and we played together, but I was never happy there because they never smiled. Not even in the children did I see a trace of a smile. My parents were always very hospitable people and invited them to visit us,

too, but they never did. Perhaps they had no car and did not like traveling by train? At that time, one could travel on the West Clare Railway from Ennis to Miltown Malbay and on to Kilkee. The family left Ennis that summer and we never knew where they found a new life. They had no reason to smile as I found out later. Goodness only knows what a backpack of horror, sorrow, loss, fear, trauma, they had to carry around with them.

When my brother went to Galway Grammar School, he experienced a lot of harassment at first in regard of being a Nazi. He was attacked about concentration camps – a poisonous mixture of half-knowledge and prejudice. I started to ask questions and was given my first answers and information. The boys at the school had experienced the results of the war, as most of the fathers were British Army men. The boys knew about their suffering and not a few fathers had died or had been wounded seriously.

Before our aunts and Bernd and Krista visited us in August, Mother had her first heart attack. The move, the uncertainty, her responsibility for us and the hard work proved to be too much for her. Henner was at the White Strand and someone was sent to get him. I remember Dr. Paddy asking Mother if she wanted him to call Canon Elliott. She didn't, but asked: 'Do you think that is necessary?' I wondered why he should come as he wasn't a doctor. But God was good to us. He spared her and us.

10: A car with a view and a secret space

It must have been June when we got the old Prefect, no one in the family able to drive. In Henner a mixture of curiosity, excitement, challenge, together with the fact, that he had started to pull his weight in regard to showing family responsibility, waited till the bringers were out of sight, got into the car and began to explore its possibilities. His courageous encounter with the unknown was well-balanced by our parents' fears and I got a bit of the feelings on both sides. Soon the car had its first boss. Father had to learn now. He was almost fifty and didn't take to it like Henner, but had to and was keen to learn, supervised by a 16-year-old and every spare moment was taken up by practice runs at the wheel, the whole family on board. Father at the wheel, Henner the instructor, Mother the back-seat driver, Hellgard the observer.

A car in those days, i.e. around 1954/1955, was a necessary form of transport for some people, but it was also still a luxury, and short drives in the area could serve as an outing, for picnics or short drives to park at a place with a good view of the sea. On my way to get milk in the evening I generally passed several cars from Miltown, parked at the side of the road, overlooking the sea, with one man inside most of the time, windows closed, reading a paper, while his wife, no doubt, was getting his tea ready at home!

So during Father's driving-school experiences I had a great time sitting there in the back with my mother. Much later in life I read a well-known short story called 'Room with a View'. Without realizing it, I had a 'car with a view' at my disposal at the age of 9-11 quite often, and it was fantastic.

Father was a keen learner, made every effort, but to be honest he managed quite well on roads where he was more often than not the only car in sight, learning to cope with the traffic in the village gradually. Any major excursion, even to Lahinch at first, not to talk of an expedition to Ennis, was managed by Henner at the wheel, 16 years of age, so no chance of a driving license yet, and in constant fear of the Gardaí. They knew well what we were doing and we had habitual confrontations and warnings, but never a fine!

So, here I was, given a new lease of life, sitting at the back of the car looking out. It wasn't the time when children during car journeys could be entertained by nice children's tapes or CD's, but I had that car window which was much better. It entertained me during the driving lesson periods, the driving practice times and afterwards on long or short car journeys, going places. The conversation in the car was generally what I filed as 'grown up', dealing with one problem or another. I wasn't involved, heard it and took a lot of it in, but it didn't worry me too much as I was in a different space. I got to know most of the small routes, saw donkeys and carts passing, some carts with horses, maybe with a milk can or turf or hay or seaweed. On the shore I saw people gathering seaweed, or fishing for mackerel or bass, or men walking their greyhounds through the shallow edge of the sea, supposed to be perfect for making the dogs' legs strong, excellent for speed and endurance at greyhound races. I learnt to look out intently for novelties, and sometimes I hooked my imagination on to something and let it fly.

We didn't venture far in those days, stayed near the coastline and drove into unknown roads, so we would get a bearing in our new environment. Mutton Island was seldom out of sight. It rose out of the sea, but not with a peak. To me, it looked like an elongated lid of a saucepan, and the clearly visible building or tower in the middle reminded me of something I could catch hold of, to lift the lid. Mrs. Elliott had told me that someone had built a dwelling there and had lived there permanently for a while. The island rose high enough out of the sea that even during severe high tides or during hurricanes in the autumn there was no danger of the sea flooding all of the island or its dwelling. The fact that there was fresh water on the island made it habitable. Although no one lived there anymore we knew that sheep and cattle were brought out there for the summer, and were brought back in the autumn. Sheep, apparently, were driven along the sand first. Then there was a ridge of deep water. Here the sheep were transported in rowing boats, their legs tied, two or three sheep at a time. I never saw any of this, but people talked about it. Cattle were driven along the sands, and then they had to swim through the ridge. I tried to visualize the drovers for the cattle, and wondered if they swam through the ridge, too, or did they row alongside in a boat? I felt for the sheep and wondered if they were very frightened, down in the boat, helpless, possibly feeling seasick? The men took a flask of tea and sandwiches maybe, but then they had to get to Quilty in time before the tide returned. Did they always make it? What would happen if they were stranded?

I calmed my worries, remembering that I had never been told about any calamity, but my thoughts weren't finished yet. How did the cattle get to drink the water out of the well? And did the owners get out to see if they were all right over the summer? After all, ANYTHING could happen. Trying to solve these problems mentally kept me well occupied!

My imagination soared even more when I thought of the man who had lived there. Had he been alone or did he have a wife, even one or two small children? I decided he would have kept a cow, so he would always have milk, last but not least for his tea. I had been long enough in Clare by now to know that no one could exist here for any length of time without tea, and for tea he needed milk. He could have had a small garden to grow potatoes, a bit of kale or onions. Was there a small patch of bog where he could cut turf for his fire, or did all that have to be brought across in the rowing boat? Perhaps they baked the wholemeal soda bread in the open hearth like Mrs. Buckley still did in those early years? I visualized the island being partially covered in brambles, so in August / September delicious blackberries would be available. The thought of a child living there upset me. Could it have had a cat companion like I had Peter? Who would be there to teach the child Maths or history or geography? I had the Canon, but neither he nor anyone else could row out there every day, especially with the daily change in the time of the tide? It didn't bear thinking about. Then the thought of them keeping a few hens cheered me. That was life and fun, and the bonus of a fresh egg now and then. Fish would be available, mackerel and bass. Mrs. Buckley sometimes brought us bass, if her husband had caught many. It wasn't a favourite fish of

mine, but of course it was eaten – it was good food. No doubt they would catch crab or lobsters on Mutton Island, delicacies I knew, but they were welcome to them!

The existence of rain in Clare is not quite as much a permanent certainty, as the presence of Mount Callan is, but one doesn't have to hope for it. My imagination about life on Mutton Island could be accompanied by the regular rhythm of the wipers and the sight of the rain through the window. It could be soft and gentle, or ferocious, driven along sideways by a fierce wind that made the car rock slightly. Sometimes there was a soft mist which could soften sharp outlines of rocks and countryside. What a joy when suddenly the sun burst through the clouds and there might be a brilliant rainbow, sometimes even a double-decker, like the buses in London. A half an hour later it would be difficult to remember what the rain was like and there was a magnificent blue sky with wonderful, huge cloud formations. Sometimes I identified a row of buildings in these clouds, archways and very occasionally I thought I saw the moving traffic, because one lower, smaller length of cloud was travelling faster than the rest. Or I saw faces or animals – a complete world above me in blue and white!

There were days when my imagination went 'on a retreat', disappeared into a no-go area, with a big sign up: *Do Not Disturb!* No idea what it was doing there, but that was that. Then I started my knowledge accumulation game. I began a mental map, for example, where there were a lot of brambles, along what hedges and on which stone walls in which fields. More and more possible sites were added, and as I was beginning to know my way around I had them mentally arranged in such an order that one led on to the next – they were no longer isolated. So, when we set out with milk cans to pick ripe, luscious blackberries the family soon realized my mental accumulation could be relied on. I also knew where many wild, large daisies grew in a field, so we could pick them there if we were in need of a bunch of flowers in the Retreat. I also noted the fields where I spotted elderberry trees and, in the autumn, we would drive there and ask the people in the cottages nearby if we could pick some, or if they used them themselves. Generally, they didn't and we would go home with our treasure and start making jam – less often jelly. So we had blackberry jam, elderberry jam – best if we could get some cooking apples and lemons, Our third possibility of jam was with dried apricots, but it took a while till we got a good recipe. Bitter oranges were sometimes on offer for a short period, but it took us years to develop a taste for marmalade, so we ignored them.

I loved seeing big rounds of brown soda bread leaning against a cottage, standing on one narrow part, cooling off if the day was dry. Sometimes there might be two. This was always early in the morning. Most women made the bread early in the day, a regular chore in large families. Mother always accompanied Father early on Friday mornings to the bank in Ennistymon, where Father collected the weekly cash to pay the workers. Mother was the witness and the security guard (!) and I had my outing in the car while being supervised – all multi-functional.

All the drives stayed multi-functional. We would have been very happy to have had the chance to explore the area walking but when we tried this at first it didn't work. If we wanted privacy, we needed the car as a kind of fence. In Wuppertal we weren't rambling enthusiasts the way one of my two godmothers and her son were who wouldn't have endured a Sunday, come rain, hail, storm, snow or sunshine without completing a march of at least 20 km, often more. But we went on long walks, visiting friends or family on Sundays or going for walks in lovely forests nearby.

One drive into the blue brought us to Mullagh one day. There wasn't anything dramatically different to Miltown Malbay there, but it was new to us and it had an amazingly big shop for such a small village, a bit like Burke's on the Ennis Road in Miltown Malbay. We enjoyed going in and having a look round and we generally came out with a small good 'buy', not an investment. I still have one of these items, an excellent cookery book that Mother bought used and I still use after 65 years!!

On these drives I picked up more than a little of the conversation, although I was never involved. As a family trying to find new roots the problems were endless – no health insurance was possible, our education was a major issue, especially Henner's as he was still needed at the moment to help Father, but he had to complete his school education after all; but where and how and when? For the moment I was looked after by the Canon, but that could not go on indefinitely. Another issue was the man I used to pray about fervently, requesting and hoping that the Lord would make him kinder. We were pretty well at his mercy at the very beginning, Father's contract wasn't honoured. That 'house', a specified part of Father's income, supposedly only needing our choice of wallpaper, wasn't even mentally planned to be built, but neither was the rent for the Retreat taken over by the firm. The basic question should we return to Germany was always being discussed, and the family in Germany, worried about us, was trying to persuade us to return with a lot of pressure. It might seem a sensible idea to any reader, and one may wonder why my parents didn't do so. As a sheer mental exercise that would sound easy, but you can't move a whole family without difficulty, it is not like re-potting a plant. The journey back to Wuppertal alone would have been a great undertaking. The journey took three full days then. My parents kept the German flat by paying the rent for a few more months but that couldn't go on forever, it was an extra expense. Finding a place to rent in Wuppertal at that time was extremely difficult as so many people were still in need of a place to live, they were living in all sorts of places, e.g. in the hen house like our neighbour, or a whole family in one room, no bathroom, shared toilet, etc. and more refugees from former German provinces in the East like East Prussia, now mainly part of Russia were being redistributed to areas like Wuppertal that offered more chances of work due to the industry there. By the sixties this had improved, but in 1954/1955 it was early days, and this was only one of the problems to be taken into consideration.

Although I always felt very secure in our family, the problems weighed heavily on me sometimes, and for this, especially when my imagination was 'on retreat', and the rain stopped me wanting to accumulate knowledge, I mentally retired to my secret space and got a memory video going, like one about Mrs. Buckley, and that helped.

Mrs. Buckley was a good and lovely woman who not only helped my mother and became a real friend, she also brought a lot of life and information from outside into our house, – but never gossip! She asked interested questions about German life and customs, and very seldom revealed tiny glimpses of her life and youth.

Her home had not been in the village, their cottage was down the country, we always assumed somewhere on Mount Callan. As she never told us precisely where it was, we never enquired. Now I know she must have been born before the First World War, a very special and hard time, a time when James Larkin was a great leader fighting to establish the first trade unions for the workers of Ireland, a time when the I.R.B. (Irish Republican Brotherhood) and I.R.A. (Irish Republican Army) fought for independence. She must have been a child in 1916 when the historic Easter Rising took place at the G.P.O. (General Post Office) in Dublin, a seeming disaster at first, yet eventually the beginning of Independence for 26 of the 32 counties when the Republic of Ireland was officially established in 1949. They lived through 'the Troubles' after the signing of the Treaty in 1922. Their home will have had no electricity, no water supply in the house and very little space for a large family. I believe that it was as late as 1978 that the E.S.B. (the largest Irish energy company) made electricity available in the last village. I expect she grew up with many brothers and sisters. She started work as a young girl probably when Canon and Mrs. Elliott came to Spanish Point. She stayed and worked for them until the Canon retired to Ashford some years after his wife's death. She became an excellent housekeeper, always very loyal and very grateful for her life there. She married locally and when we arrived, her husband also worked for the Canon, as he drove him to his five parishes each Sunday. They started with Lahinch, then Ennistymon, and the third parish was back in Spanish Point. Mr. Buckley had his lunch which his wife had prepared at the Rectory while we were at Morning Prayer (well, at 12 o'clock really!) The Canon got his flask of tea and sandwiches which he had in the car on the way to Kilfenora and then finally on to Lisdoonvarna for the final service of the day or maybe he went to Lisdoonvarna first.

I was aware of some of her life, but my eyes often wandered over Mount Callan as we drove along and I wondered if she and her family had lived on the flat summit, or between the village and the summit on the slopes. She may even have lived near the chapel and National school and the house for the priest, isolated buildings in the middle of nowhere on the way to Inagh, or she could have come from the other side of Mount Callan, leading to Ennis, a part I wasn't very familiar with. I only knew the route driving from Inagh to Ennis. I was quite busy

thinking about Mrs. Buckley sometimes who refused to call me anything but 'Miss Leckebusch' ever, even when I was nine, a sign of respect I disliked.

One day Mrs. Buckley was telling our mother about traditional Irish Christmas cooking and she wanted to hear about German traditions. She was amazed to hear that a German Christmas starts on 24th in the late afternoon, Church services between 3 and 5 p.m. and then home for the lighting of the candles on the tree. The children and grown-ups got their presents (which are brought by the Christ child – *Christkindchen* or the *Weihnachtsmann* – Father Christmas). Carols were sung in many homes and the families enjoyed the traditional potato salad with frankfurter sausages for their evening meal, with punch and Christmas biscuits later. In contrast, the factory in Miltown closed for Christmas at 6 p.m. on Christmas Eve and the shops were open until at least 10 p.m. in the fifties. On Christmas Day, the food traditions in Germany varied. She heard that some families might have a goose or small turkey, but others would have beef, e.g. Goulash, or hare or rabbit. She could even understand that some people might have venison, but the thought of some people eating carp – fish – was beyond her imagination! She could, however, believe that a Christmas pudding was neither eaten nor a tradition the average German family knew anything about.

Mother asked what she had loved as a real festive dish at home, for example at Christmas and her face lit up and she said 'Colcannon'. We had never heard about this before so she explained. Their normal diet consisted mainly of potatoes, boiled in their skins. They drank some buttermilk, water and tea (they had one cow, so they had milk, but butter was made to be sold, a source of cash to buy essentials like tea, some flour, sugar and maybe shoes). Skimmed milk and buttermilk were shared amongst the family.

At Christmas lots of potatoes were peeled and cut and cooked in a big tripod over the open fire in the cottage. When cooked her mother mashed them with lots of skimmed milk or sweet milk and added chopped kale – a type of dark green leafy cabbage – or scallions or chives. The tripod would be put in the middle of the floor and they all sat around with a spoon each and ate and ate out of the tripod. She smiled so happily remembering herself enjoying Colcannon in the midst of her family and she added 'We ate till we nearly burst!'

One could see how she relived the joy of the table fellowship, well, tripod fellowship really and she passed on some of that joy to Mother and me, so much so that I had an echo of this joy in my world, in my 'secret space' in the car.

The old Ford was a weary specimen, full of aches and pains, but it gave me good secure moments in my mental life as a child, some privacy and distraction. What about all the breakdowns and all the oil you needed! I say 'Three cheers to you, you dear old Prefect. You became a companion, almost.'

11: Music

As far back as I can remember, music was a part of my life like eating, drinking, sleeping. My parents often told me – and neighbours referred to it, too, when I was older – that before I was a year old, I was able to hum melodies of nursery rhymes if I was given the title. They were sure about the age because I used to happily hum in the bomb shelter near our home in the winter and spring of 1945, humming on demand, so to speak. (They called me ‘Erna Sack’, the name of a popular opera singer in the forties.)

Although the major bombing attack on Wuppertal was in 1943, there were many warnings of and minor attacks in 1945, with ‘Christmas trees’ in the sky, as my brother called them, light signals to help pilots to locate the targets.

My parents sang a lot of children’s songs for me which I have never forgotten. On Sunday afternoons and early evenings, we had *Hausmusik*. My father played the piano well, was especially good at improvising. My mother was an excellent singer – she was frequently asked to sing solos at weddings – and my brother, though young, played the violin and piano well, too. Sometimes two ladies joined us, enthusiastic singers, *not* my favourites for singing, but very nice ladies. I could hear the one singing in my ear for years:

Wenn ich früh in den Garten geh,
in meinem grünen Hut,
ist mein erster Gedanke,
was nun mein Liebster tut.

The word ‘erster’ was underlined by a high note, and I kept waiting for it because she would attack it with gusto. I hoped I wouldn’t laugh. I associate the other lady with the aria from Gluck’s ‘Ach, ich habe sie verloren, all mein Glück ist nun dahin’. I decided she had a ‘wobbly’ voice and I didn’t appreciate her rendering either!

Once a week mother had singing lessons with Frau Inderau in Barmen. Her husband was a popular tenor solo singer at the opera house in Barmen at the time. Their sitting-room looked out into a lovely garden. Besides the grand piano, much bigger than our piano, there was a lot of space in the room, a beautiful carpet on the floor, oriental style in blues and red with a wide border. I used to walk round the boundaries of the border to the rhythm of the music while Frau Inderau and Mother indulged in arias e.g. Wagner’s ‘Isoldes Liebestod’ or from Verdi’s ‘Othello’: ‘Beeile Dich, bald wird Othello kommen’ plus following Aria. I enjoyed the lessons. Mother also took lessons with a Herr Matthieß in Ronsdorf, a singer at the opera house in Barmen likewise, kind man, but they didn’t have a suitable carpet for me! Much more boring!

In our flat and in my grandparents’ house all my activities were accompanied by singing. Going up and down the stairs to visit my grandparents, a song announced my arrival. My grandfather wrote to us in the Retreat how very quiet the house had become when we left.

At national school, Frau Schuster integrated singing into the lessons every day and I loved it. At eight years of age my parents allowed me to take piano lessons at Herr Falkenrath’s house. He taught my brother both piano and the violin. I just

loved my lessons, couldn't wait for the week to pass for the next one. My piano music was a real treasure, practising a joy.

When we went to Miltown Malbay, the loss of the piano wasn't so obvious at first, because there was a piano in the hotel and when Mrs. Cleary, the owner of the Central Hotel, found out that our Father could play, she encouraged him to play in the evenings as often as possible. We sang German songs, word got round and soon the bar was full. The guests suggested songs, my father picked up the melodies very quickly and improvised. It took me years to realize how talented he was.

Canon Elliott welcomed him and us all with open arms, also as far as the music was concerned. From the first Sunday on, my father played the harmonium and Mother, Henner and I were good singers. In an average congregation of ten, we made a difference. My brother had played the violin in the school orchestra for several years and always had a beautiful tenor voice. He had little chance to continue with either or with the piano in the village. But it was the time when ballroom dancing was the main source of entertainment with live music and good bands. At seventeen he was allowed to go to local dances and soon he was allowed to try out his skills on the drums. By the time I was allowed to go with him he was asked to take over the drums before we were properly in the door and he was really good. I was not allowed to accompany him to pubs where there was traditional music at night, but he talked about the wonderful music and especially about one man – Willie Clancy – who was so good at playing the spoons, too, which really impressed Henner. He never became an expert, but he was quite good at playing the spoons, too – just two soup-spoons in one hand. Willie Clancy is remembered and honoured each year with a festival in the town.

Clare was full of music, even though it was not what we were used to. Henner opened a lot of doors for us. We stopped only being the Germans, or the manager with his family. There was also the 'young lad' who was great on the drums and went to Céilís and soon had an Irish accent.

Once my parents and I drove to Mullagh, a small village not far away. My father had to see someone there. It was the early days when we had this incredible Ford car, that needed more oil than petrol and was a miracle on the road. Well, that day it wasn't. It broke down outside Mullagh and it was a 'big job'. A family picked us up from – literally! – the side of the road, got help, made tea, made us welcome. While men were working on the wreck of a car, neighbours came in, some with musical instruments – tin whistles for example – and we were in the middle of a traditional evening round a turf fire, because they had no electricity. It was about midnight when the Ford took up speed again and we could drive home, but I at least enjoyed the unexpected distraction.

The first time there was a Fleadh Cheoil (Irish music festival) in Miltown Malbay there was great life in the village. A large Céilí Band played in front of Hillery's garage and the town was full of people from nearby villages, too, and the square was packed with people dancing. Everyone seemed to join in. I remember seeing Mrs. Buckley dancing. She was a great dancer! I was so surprised. I had no

reason to think she couldn't dance well – I had just never associated her with the joy and ability she displayed while dancing, and she looked so happy.

At twelve I went to Rosleven School in Athlone. Music lessons were extra, so I didn't have them during the first term. After Christmas, my parents gave permission and lessons with Mr. Bolton started. At the weekends he was the organist of St. Nicholas's Church in Galway, during the week he gave lessons to the pupils at Rosleven and led the school choir. We were allowed 30 minutes' practice time each day. I found this far too little and kept taking over practice time from other pupils who hated practising. There was a piano in the dining room, another one in a classroom and a third one in the gym room, a frightful piano with one key that always got stuck. If my week for the gym came round, I tried to adjust my playing to the 'stiff note, and when I played on a different piano the next week, this 'note' always got a special emphasis! It didn't take the two headmistresses long to realize what I was doing – taking other pupils' practice time – and though they thought they had stopped it, I had to be more careful. They felt the early success had gone to my head and that I was over ambitious. Examiners from the Royal Irish Academy of Music in Dublin came to test our standard once a year – from Preliminary and Primary on to Grade I-VIII. Mr. Bolton skipped the first one for me and later Grade II, also, so at the end of my 3rd year I was doing Grade III. Dr. A.J. Potter was the examiner that year. Before I went in to the exam, I had been told that less success would do my humility good. After a few chords, Professor Potter told me to stop playing ping-pong and to start again. I was so grateful for my second chance and played well the 2nd time I started. When the results came, the average mark was very low, but I had got 91% which would have allowed me the chance of a year's free tuition at the Academy if I had lived in Dublin. To my complete amazement I was presented with the cup for music that year for the first time, and the following three years as well. I skipped two more exams and when I left school three years later, I had done Grade VIII. Mr. Bolton kept my love for music going.

The school choir was small but on the national level always did well in competitions. Christmas with the carols was a highlight. Some of us were chosen to decorate the dining room, to prepare for the carol party in early advent. Then the sliding doors to the principals' sitting room were opened, the tables taken out of the dining room and the chairs arranged in rows to face the guests. In the hall, they always had a beautiful large Christmas tree with exquisite decorations and lovely lights. A lot of guests were invited. While the guests enjoyed an advent tea including mince pies and Christmas cake, we sang old and new carols and in between, some Bible texts were read, very similar to a carol service. From the second year on, I always had the solo part of the king in 'Good King Wenceslas'. I enjoyed that. Afterwards, the doors were closed and we had our Christmas tea in the study. It was always magnificent – all sorts of sandwiches, hot sausages, mince pies, cake, lemonade, jelly. There was no supervision, not even for going to bed!

In church, the school choir was integrated into the yearly carol service, too; a really festive occasion. If a pupil was reading a lesson or singing a solo the

families drove up from the country. One year a girl who was also in the choir was chosen to read a lesson. Her parents drove up from the West. It took a while for anyone to come down from the organ and go to the front of the church. The clergyman had misjudged the time and started to read the lesson himself. I saw the girl turning round in the aisle to go up to the organ again, dissolved in tears. I was in Form V and hurried down the stairs to comfort her, forgetting my solo. While we were going up the stairs, the organist had started 'As Joseph was a-walking', my solo. Thank goodness I knew the text by heart and started singing as I was 'a-walking' up the steps to the pew! Nobody noticed.

The school did what they could to bring culture closer to us; not easy in a provincial town that Athlone was at the time. One year an opera company came and produced 'The Merry Widow' and they got tickets for us all. It was a highlight! Another but yearly highlight was the concert of an aged pianist with broken English. He played mainly Chopin. I wasn't so keen on Chopin at the time, but I could feel that this old man, who took off his hat to play, but never his coat and scarf, put his heart and soul into the performance. The last time he came he seemed different. He announced that he would play the Raindrop sonata and gave a little talk about this piece of work. Then he played, he made no mistake, but there was an additional melancholy I had never heard before. Then came the incredible part: He repeated the introduction and played the sonata two more times. I saw the head mistresses exchanging glances and some of the girls got restless and it annoyed me. I felt that his communication was reduced to this sonata and it moved me. He never came again, but I've never forgotten him.

A girl from Westport, Valori, had a 'musical' home, too. She had been to a lot of Gilbert and Sullivan operas and told me about them. When we were about 14, we were allowed to support the church choir regularly. This was wonderful. First of all, we had the freedom of walking there and back unattended and we got to know a lot of anthems, and voluntaries on the organ. One anthem I remember particularly. At one point the bass part sang: 'The lions do lack and suffer hunger'. Although the choir was large, there were only two bass voices. These gentlemen roared to make up for the lack of volume. Valori and I exchanged and enjoyed the cheeky remark quietly passed amongst ourselves: 'Couldn't *somebody* give them something to eat, so they would stop roaring'! For us it was a bit of fun.

We sang a lot of church music in the school choir, but by no means exclusively. There were lots of four-part song in our repertoire, like 'Cherry Ripe'. Our school anthem had a special place. 'I to the Hills will lift my eyes' was played at all important school occasions and came to mean a lot to me. Music at school was a great source of happiness. When I stayed home during the school year 1962/63 due to my mother's illness and went to school in Spanish Point, I was very fortunate that one of the nuns was able to take me for piano tuition and she prepared me for the A.R.I.A.M. (Associate Diploma of the Royal Irish Academy of Music) examination in June '63. She was really good and I learnt a lot from her. As well as that I had the opportunity to practise regularly on a piano at the convent. We didn't have our own piano yet, and a piano would certainly not have

fitted into the house in the Main Street. In spite of the good tuition from Sr. Mercedes I didn't pass, so my parents decided to send me to the R.I.A.M. (Royal Irish Academy of Music) for tuition with a chance to repeat the exam.

Some months after we had moved into the Hill House, and the house was finally finished, Christmas 1963 my parents decided to buy a second-hand piano in Limerick. As I only stayed in Dublin for the seven weeks of term, sometimes eight, I needed a piano at home to practise during the holiday spell. This was wonderful for me but also for us all. Father started to play again when he made time, and our own music came back into the house. When my parents bought a record-player for their silver wedding anniversary, we enjoyed listening to our records, very few at first, but the number grew. On our birthdays, the single 'Danke' has always been played as a tradition. Now we were woken in the morning by a chorale Father played, a ritual that had been started when we lived in Wuppertal.

The piano came to Germany in the container and when I moved into my flat on August 5, 1972, it came too. It was my great joy. Unfortunately, it had been damaged on the journey and no amount of tuning got it right. That was a sad farewell. It had a lovely frame, so someone bought it to turn it into a cocktail cabinet. What an end!

Father worked part time in his old firm till he retired finally at the age of 70. Mother and I decided we would just have to get a piano for him and we were fortunate to find a reasonable one with a good sound. Father was delighted. He played regularly, but on all birthdays, we were greeted and woken by a Bach chorale. When it was Auntie's or Uncle Erwin's birthday, the doors were opened and they could hear it in the flat below.

When Father died, we went back to playing the Single 'Danke' that had been sent to us in Ireland so many years ago. Of course, I could have played a chorale, but that wasn't the point. It had been Father's gift to us always and couldn't be replaced.



The premises in Miltown Malbays of Dalcash Labels Limited, the affairs of which necessitated a journey to Wuppertal in September 1954 to see the German Directors. In the background are the premises of the Malbay Knitting Company.

[Hellgard Leckebusch, *Singing our Song*, p. 96]

Photograph from 1964

12: A visit home (?)

Visits to Wuppertal were rare. In September 1954, Mother and I stopped over in London and stayed with my Aunt Grete. After our bad experience in a severe storm on the Irish Sea, I developed a high temperature and was raving. So, we were safe and sound in Esher till my temperature went down and we could continue our journey. This time, we took the train to Dover and from there, the boat to Ostend. The journey was short and in no way spectacular. My parents had given me a 10-shilling note as pocket money for the trip; a rare gift as neither Henner nor I ever got pocket money and 10 shillings was quite a generous amount at that time. On the boat I spied a small cardboard box of cigars and five short but fat cigars for five shillings. I was thrilled and could imagine my grandfather's joy. He loved cigars, but seldom allowed himself the luxury. So this small box was bought in happy anticipation. My mother said nothing.

In Ostend, we got on the train to Cologne. It didn't take long till we reached the German border and a Belgian customs officer appeared and went. Then, the green uniform of the German customs officers came in sight – two officers, one obviously the inspector, breathing down the neck of the officer who asked us if we had anything to declare.

My upbringing made a point of teaching me to be honest. I wasn't sure about the cigars, so I piped up and asked if the cigars were alright. The customs officer was kind and wanted to know why a little girl like myself needed cigars. My mother interrupted and explained that we lived in Ireland and that we were going to meet my grandparents after quite a long time and I had bought the cigars for my grandfather with my own pocket money. The customs officer seemed to be at a loss, but not for long. The inspector behind him made it clear: either the cigars will be confiscated or the girl has to pay a fine of 5 shillings. I didn't hesitate. In no way was I going anywhere without the cigars and I handed over the five shillings I had left. Afterwards my mother briefly remarked that my pocket money was gone now, but she was sure grandfather would appreciate the cigars. I was a bit sorry that I could not buy my grandmother a little gift now, but otherwise the episode didn't upset me.

Family, friends and neighbours gave us a great welcome, were delighted to see us and it was a real homecoming as if I had never been away. The Ulrichs still had their little shop, Mr. and Mrs. Wüster still lived in the two rooms on the first floor with their daughter, Frau Beek, whose husband had died on the battlefield at such a young age. Herr Wüster still loved his pipe, but tobacco was a problem. In the autumn he picked leaves from the cherry tree, dried them and smoked them in his pipe, however, he did that in the garden because the smell was abominable. It was autumn and Herr Wüster's chimney smoked in the garden. As far as I was concerned, nothing had changed and I had never been away. Grandfather was chuffed with the cigars, opened the box and sniffed at them frequently. My stern grandmother just beamed. That autumn, the weather was beautiful and warm. Mother had a lot to do. The next day we went to Barmen as Mother wanted to make an appointment with the two German Directors of Dalcash Labels. Mr. Kämmerer, the firm's accountant, received us. He was a very nice man; to me he

appeared elderly. Before we left, he took his briefcase and took out a bag of 'Hustelinchen', a pleasant sort of cough sweet, chewy with a taste of liquorice. I knew them, but had only been given one once or twice. He said he had bought them for his son, but I was to have them now. I piped up again and suggested he could give me half so that his son could have the other half, too. He smiled, but refused my offer.

My former teacher, Frau Schuster, lived in Barmen, up a steep hill. Mother asked if I would like to visit her. What a question! I had the choice of walking up and down this hill – three tram stops each way – or buying her a small bunch of flowers at the nearby market or taking the tram. What a question! It was a delight to choose a small bunch of what I even now call 'garden flowers'. Eventually, we reached the 'Anemonenstrasse' and we were lucky – she was at home, delighted to see us, as warm-hearted as ever. She loved the flowers and explained if at the weekend it was a choice of flowers or meat, she and her family would choose a bunch of flowers. She told us that my old class with parents and staff were going to the Rhine in Königswinter, including a small trip on a boat on the Rhine and then they would walk up the Drachenfels. Wouldn't we like to join them? Mother said yes and I was so excited.

But first of all, the *Kirmes* (fun fair) came to Ronsdorf on its annual circuit – a highlight of the year. My grandfather offered to take me – fantastic. He explained that before his pension was due at the beginning of the month, he did not have too much cash, but we would spend what he had and enjoy ourselves. First of all, I had several rounds on a roundabout with small planes the height of which I could control myself. I loved flying high up and from there, I recognized people I knew down below. The music they played was Bill Haley's 'Round the clock'.

From there, we went to the *Schiffschaukel* – quite big wooden boats, suspended on a long iron chassis, which swung from side to side. Here, Grandfather handed over his remaining 10 deutschmarks. The lady gave him the change for 20 deutschmarks. I had my mouth in readiness to pipe up and put it right when my grandfather lightly stood on my foot and took my hand. I closed my mouth and piped down. Before we got into one of the boats, he took me aside and explained. I knew how honest and correct he always was. He said this was my chance to pay a visit to a Kirmes, and indeed, it was the last time ever, and he was sure the lady would manage the loss and some angel had wanted us to enjoy ourselves. We did! My grandfather and I took a run in a scooter; I had a go on the merry-go-round with beautiful wooden horses, fire engines, trams. I chose the horse. We had a go in the 'Raupe', a long merry-go-round, with double seats in a row, going up and down irregularly and eventually a big curtain covered everything and the 'Raupe' went faster and faster and everyone screamed. Finally, he said I could have one more ride or flight in a plane and that was that. People around us were eating 'Fischbrötchen', baked fish in batter in a roll, or they were eating ice cream or drinking mineral water. These things did not tempt us – we wanted sheer fun. It was such fun that it lasted me for a lifetime as far as Kirmes was concerned.

One day, my mother and I visited Father's relatives in Weitmar. We had the evening meal with the Borns, the hardworking, thrifty, but very generous butcher family. On the table, there was rye bread and butter, a selection of cold meat, sausage slices and gherkins. We could choose between peppermint tea or water. As a desert, there were whole, cooked pears in a bowl, skin, stalks and all. These small unripe pears were windfalls, undamaged. They were carefully washed, cooked in boiling water with sticks of cinnamon, cooled, dried and kept in the fridge. They were eaten without any equipment and only stalk and core were left behind – delicious. Heinrich, the old father, left the table and came back a little later with a whole smoked ham, and a long fat salami – for 'Hans' as a present.

Mother had a lot to do. I often accompanied her, sometimes stayed with my grandparents. I also stayed overnight with my great-aunt Frieda whom I loved. She lived not far away from my grandparents in two tiny rooms, at the edge of a forest. Her toilet was halfway down one set of stairs. She had no bathroom like most people at the time, but went to the local baths once a week where one could have a bath for little money. I shared her sleeping couch at night, a couch she could pull out. I loved looking out of the window into the trees. Grapes grew at that side of the house and in that year, they were ripening at the beginning of October. Putting out my hand to pick one or two grapes was a treat even though they were very sour.

My great-aunt had married what one would call 'well' at the beginning of the twentieth century. She brought a large plot of land as dowry into the marriage and a beautiful house was built on it. Her husband was the owner of a factory. She was driven around in a beautiful car. However, luck was not on her side. The marriage broke up in the thirties and suddenly she had very little to live on. The first flat she had was hit by a bomb and she lost most of the few belongings she had. However, she never complained and stayed generous and dignified all her life, and had great taste. Her birthday on November 1st was always an occasion. She invited all her close relatives. She had no oven, so she bought a base for an open fruit tart at the best baker's shop, filled it and made 'Muzen'. These were small balls of dough made with eggs and quark, flour, sugar and baking powder. Teaspoonfuls were dropped into the iron saucepan in deep fat on her coal oven with just one ring. When they came out of the fat, they were drained on kitchen paper, then tossed in a mixture of castor sugar and cinnamon. She borrowed chairs from people in the other flats and the birthdays were always a very happy occasion. For the evening meal, she had made a big bowl of potato salad, she had fresh French bread and a few Frankfurter sausages. With just one ring on her coal oven – called a 'Kanonofen' – it was immense work. The water for the coffee also had to be boiled there. However, she loved making people happy.

When I was confirmed in 1959, she sent me two beautiful towels, top quality, for my bottom drawer. She never chose anything flashy or cheap. Her gifts were within her limits but always good.

The trip to the Rhine came my way then. It was a most beautiful, warm and sunny day in early October. There must have been two buses because even the

number of children was over 50, but I don't remember. The trip to Königswinter took a little more than an hour. We got onto a boat which took us on a short round trip. What I remember of it was the feeling of the wind in my face, gliding on the water and seeing other boats alongside and Bonn, so I was told, on the one side, Königswinter, the seven hills on the other. I loved being with my old school friends again and it seemed as if the time in between had not existed. I was home. Soon, the boat was in Königswinter again and we scrambled off the boat and waited for everyone at the foot of the Drachenfels – The Rock of the Dragon. We walked up the steep hill, ignored the train that passed us. We also walked past a museum, but we learned little about it or the legends of the dragon and we were not interested either. When we reached the top, there was the most magnificent view of the Rhine and the island in the middle of the river. We had our picnic in the midst of the beautiful scenery, we sang, we joked, we chatted, also all the way down to the bus and during the trip back to Ronsdorf.

The time in the house was as it always had been. Going up and down the stairs I sang at the top of my voice as I was used to and my grandmother lovingly called me 'die wilde Fliege'; 'you wild fly'. She was still in charge of the budget and made sure Mother and I would go to the butcher Kuhlendahl to buy a bit of Fleischwurst, the best in town. This was a cold meat sausage with lots of garlic. Sixty years later, the Kuhlendahl family is still making it and it is as popular as ever.

I am glad that at the time, I did not know that I would never see my grandmother again. She had had a few strokes over the years, but did not survive the one she had on January 13, 1956. This visit in 1954 was a gift for me.

The eventful weeks passed quickly and at the beginning of November, mother had all her chores done and it was time to return. On all her trips to Germany and back or shopping in Limerick, mother had this beautiful leather shopping bag in light brown with a zip at the top with her. She wrapped the ham and salami very carefully, finally in tea towels and put them in the bottom of the bag. As she did so, she told me how important it was that we would bring the gifts safely to 'Vati'. Then, she put our dirty washing on top. I could not believe my eyes, but I said nothing.

The journey was as long and difficult as ever. We had to deal with several customs officers. Both in England and in Ireland, mother was specifically asked if she had any meat of any sort. Mother did not let on to understand and I didn't start to translate. I simply never piped up!

We brought the gifts safely to Clare and my father was delighted. It was so good and such a relief to see my father and Henner again, and I felt at home in the family: yet it was bewildering, too, because I realized that I had left my home in Wuppertal to quite an extent, too. Strange!

13: Storms

During the early years in the Retreat, severe storms play an important role and are an extensive emotional part of my memories. Whereas I can often be quite clear about facts, exact dates and time – as far as storms are concerned, they are like one big massive turmoil in my head, all roaring into one, uncontrollable in every aspect. A spectacular incident goes back to September 1954. Henner was still working in the factory, helping my father to get the factory going. It must have been just after my 10th birthday. We had had high winds and were expecting an exceptionally high tide. The Atlantic was raging and foaming, and from the sitting-room in the tower we could see the sea in uproar, wave upon wave, rows of white on the threatening dark blue sea, like rows of lace, in never-ending succession – even beyond Mutton Island, which was rare. Fistfuls of foam were blown all around the Retreat, just briefly touching ground on the gravel before they moved on, beyond into Farmer Hillery's field. I could only compare them to huge portions of beaten white of egg. We had closed the heavy wooden shutters early to protect the glass and shortly after midday, there was no electricity. My father and my brother came home from the factory, earlier than usual. There was no electricity for the looms. They had great difficulty driving through the gates, especially the first one. The one side was kept well open by the onslaught of the wind. My brother forced his body against the other side, so they told us, to let my father whizz through in the car.

We were terrified and had not experienced this kind of spectacle of the elements before. When it began to get dark, my parents decided we'd chance it – on foot – to the Rectory. My father had found a long and very thick rope in the so-called 'maid's room', housing a collection of all-kinds-of-everything – it was a fully furnished house! He roped us together – my brother, then our mother, then me, our father at the other end, our arms firmly linked together. The way up to the big gate was the worst, a fair stretch, because the storm hit us on our side. Once we got onto the road, the force of the wind literally drove us up the hill, along the sturdy convent wall, past Dr. Hillery's house; then a slight turn to the right in the road towards the Rectory. There was the light of a candle in the hallway as we turned into the grounds, past the wooden bench and the big rhododendron bush to knock on the door.

In between the heavy showers the full moon brought brief intervals of light before this was re-swallowed by the next wall of dark clouds. Mrs. Elliott opened the door and never blinked an eyelid at the sight of these miserable humans soaked to the skin. We followed her into the hall. The door on the left was open and welcomed us with the light of the fire and a candle. In the hallway, beside the flickering candle I spied him – I always considered him to be male – a huge dark lobster in a glass case. He was not new to me. He was the biggest lobster the Canon had ever caught. 'He' had been boiled and turned bright red, as lobsters do, before he was sent by post to be preserved. The person in charge of the operation had painted him dark blue, his original unboiled colour! One couldn't put him in a glass case as if someone had refused the delicacy at an exquisite dinner party! And from then on, he sat enthroned in his glass case on the long hall table, under false

pretences almost, as far as colour was concerned.

Canon Elliott immediately started making a half-circle in front of the fire with four more chairs. Faruk, the bull terrier, had to shift from the fire a bit, rather unwillingly but there was no audible complaint. He was mainly white, with some black and brown colouring, black around one eye, white around the other. He was a complacent creature for a bull terrier. Jimmy Buckley, about four at the time, sometimes rode on him in the rectory grounds. But Faruk was strong. When the Canon took him for a walk, he attached a long rope to the dog's collar (not his own 'dog collar'!), which he held with both hands, but only after he had twisted it round his waist several times. When we happened to pass them in the car I used to laugh and say 'There is Faruk taking the Canon for a walk again!'

Mrs. Elliott filled a huge kettle with water – it was jet black—and put it on the hook over the wonderful fire. The hook was part of the permanent equipment belonging to the fireplace. She toasted bread in the open fire, burnt but deliciously served with lots of butter on dainty china. It was the first time we saw bog wood being burnt, very special. I had time to survey the scene. The large fireplace was made of white marble and in the grate itself, there was a fitting on each side to hold a whole piece of a log. The spacious mahogany table was completely covered with large piles of newspapers. When looking for a particular article, Canon Elliot would find it relatively quickly amongst the sea of papers – *The Irish Times*, of course. They had closed the heavy wooden shutters and pulled the curtains across as we had done in the Retreat. So we couldn't see the sea in the moonlight spots. These were the windows Mrs. Elliot looked out of when she wrote the little book, 'Grandma and other Stories'. I remember the first line of a rhyme about Mutton Island. 'Why hadn't I this island when I was very young.' In the storm, none of us would have been keen to own or be on this island!

Slowly, we calmed down. The two people, well into their seventies, opened up their home with such grace and offered all the comfort at their disposal. They were aware of the danger, too, but had experienced these hurricanes before and knew they had survived. We spent some hours at the fire. I enjoyed listening to the interesting conversation of the adults. Around midnight, my parents decided we would try to make our way home. This time the wind was in our faces, but we were comforted, calmed and warm. All was well and our clothes were partly dry. The intervals of moonlight were longer and as we passed the convent wall, the gathering of small windblown trees looked like old men with intertwining arms being beaten up the hill. There were no leaves and the branches looked anaemic; more light grey than brown. It no longer rained and the storm seemed to transport invigorating fresh air. It was good to get home. We would all have liked a hot water bottle, but there would be no hot water. The effort of the walk had made us warm and tired, and soon we were in bed and fast asleep.

The next morning, we could see the extent of the damage. Electric lines had come down everywhere and had to be repaired. Many of the small changing huts on the beach belonging to the nuns were blown over and had to be rescued before the next high tide would come way beyond them and carry them out to sea. Our

first investment that day was a small simple gas cooker for campers, so we could make a cup of tea in future, or make some soup.

We became fully aware why the village was called Miltown Malbay. The original existence of a mill was not so hard to guess. The Malbay went back to the Spanish Armada probably. One of the fleet of ships ran onto the rocks, about a mile north of Spanish Point, giving its name because of the Armada and the Spanish seamen that were stranded there – those who survived! Donal O'Brien had spotted the ship from the Cliffs of Moher. He sent down troops and most of the surviving seamen were killed and buried at Kilfarboy.

Severe storms were a regular occurrence in the autumn and winter months. Our father (and my brother) used to work very late at night. Often my mother and I walked the two miles to the village – a chance to get really warm in the factory, and then to get home by car shortly before midnight.

That same September, important business had to be discussed with the German Directors. My parents decided Mother would go and take me on the trip. Mrs. Buckley did remark that late September – equinox – was not a good time for a sea-crossing, but Mother had travelled three weeks to Mexico in November 1934 on the way to marry my father, had experienced severe storms and so we set off on September 24th, at least that date is engraved in my memory. My father brought us to Limerick. Having arrived in Dublin I remember noticing my mother's worried face when we stepped onto the old ship that creaked and groaned even in the harbour, dancing energetically. Our first destination was Liverpool, a long sailing. We had booked no cabin, and the journey proved to be a lot worse than expected. The passengers disappeared into the bowels of the ship. Later that night one of the sailors told my mother to take me up to the first-class sitting room, empty and much more comfortable and she did. The staff had opened the doors to the decks and we hovered in one corner, as the couches and arm-chairs were being shifted from wall to wall with the movement of the waves. We could see them getting the lifeboats ready – they were suspended above the deck. My mother told me the storm would ease off after midnight because it always did. My trust in my mother's word was immense, although her answer to my question why this was so did not satisfy me. Miraculously, the storm eventually calmed to some extent and after several hours' delay, we reached Liverpool. I noticed that most of the passengers were unsteady and had a strange grey/green colouring in the face. Our train connection was gone, but we got a train to London, from Lime Street Station, I seem to remember.

Our father had given me a picture postcard, addressed to himself with an English stamp on it and he had told me to write it on the ship and post it before embarking which I did. I found it about 50 years later – for me this was the discovery of a real document.

As we had automatically missed the connection to Dover, too – but also because I had started to run up a high temperature – we phoned my aunt in Esher and she came to the rescue again. I had to stay in bed for three days till the

temperature sank and I stopped raving. I had nightmares that I would never see my father or Henner again.

Eventually we reached Wuppertal. Both my grandparents were alive and so relieved to see us.

Early in November, we set off back on our return journey. This time my mother decided to sail from Holyhead to Dun Laoghaire. The train journey was long and dark and we arrived in Holyhead well past midnight. We were due for another storm and the same old ship greeted us with more groans and dancing although this was a different route, and this time my mother took me and the luggage and left the ship. Having put the luggage in storage, we tried to look for a hotel room but it was pitch dark, pouring rain and two hotels didn't open. We had no choice – we went back to the ladies waiting-room which they had in those days, a small open fire and a hard-mouthed lady in charge. It was a frightful night and it was wonderful to see daylight. The lady went home and a really nice lady took charge. She told us where we could get a cup of tea and when the rain stopped, we walked around a bit. In the evening, mother decided we'd have a proper meal and we saw our ship, a large, modern vessel – the *Cambria*, if I remember rightly. Mother ordered a small cognac after our meal in the harbour restaurant – very strange to me. Fancy mother having a cognac! In the 'Ladies', mother looked at herself in the mirror and suddenly had to laugh, basically a good sign. But I wasn't home yet, she had had a drink and now was laughing for no reason I could see. I was sure she was drunk and here I was in this godforsaken place, in a storm, overtired and a drunken mother to top it all, so I became hysterical! Poor mother!

The seamen let us come on board very early and we sat in the comfortable chairs, a warm sitting room and slept a bit till the boat left at 4 a.m.

We had to change trains in Limerick Junction. The platform was low and I couldn't get out. Mother was busy for a moment with the luggage and suddenly I was caught by strong arms and Daddy helped me down. He had decided to drive the extra journey from Limerick to collect us and it was heaven. We were all alive and I was seeing him again, and Henner was waiting at home.

Another glimpse – like a fragment of a storm in my head was one Halloween weekend. I was already at boarding school. The connection between these events which lie a few years apart is the natural friendship, and hospitality. My parents collected me in Rosleven for the Halloween weekend and I was told we were not going to the Retreat because part of the round tower had come down in the storm and tumbled down the stairs and the debris was blocking the door into the kitchen. We would be staying at Medina, up on the hill, past the convent school. Mrs. White and her daughter, the young Miss White, had offered us a roof over our heads till the damage was repaired. A large room with a double-bed was allocated to me. The storm still raged and as I lay in bed that night and looked up, I was sure I could see the moon and clouds swiftly passing by. I decided that the term had tired me and I was now having hallucinations and decided to go back to sleep. It's

amazing how time teaches us bit by bit to meet fear and discomfort more calmly. Since our first storm experience we had got quite nonchalant.

The next morning brought clarity. The storm had removed part of the roof and the rain and the wind had created a view-passage between bed and sky! No hallucinations! Without any fuss, I was moved to another room and the poor Whites had a major problem. Mr. White had been a bank manager in Milltown Malbay, but he was no longer alive when we arrived. They sometimes included him in their conversation, especially when they talked about their Grand Tour in the early twentieth century. (A British protestant had the idea to organize cheap tours for sober citizens at the turn of the century. He decided that touring and travelling would be better than drinking. This Mr. Cooke was most popular and from the beginning, his package tours were a great success. I often thought they might have travelled on one of his tours. Be it as it may – it was their experience of a lifetime and they loved recalling visits to Europe – the Rhine, Paris, Switzerland, Italy – and we enjoyed their accounts. They gave a few wonderful parties, with a glow of a time long gone by, even then. One I remember clearly – a bridge party. The young Dr. P. Hillery – later to become the President of Ireland – had got married and this party was in honour of the new Mrs. Hillery, a doctor, too. She was a very intelligent lady, beautiful, charming and impressed us all. All the ‘summer’ ladies were invited and we were sitting at different bridge tables, all the ladies except for Mother and me in dresses with matching big hats. We were not used to this combination yet. The ‘summer’ ladies were all protestants who had houses in Spanish Point or stayed there in the summer. (I was like an attachment; I couldn’t be left alone in the Retreat! But I was always treated very kindly.) The ladies always came to ‘our’ Church on Sundays except for Mrs. Hillery, of course. I must mention one lady especially, a Mrs. Ewen. She lived and grew up in Spanish Point, was certainly taught by Canon Elliott, and when she married, she lived in Dublin. She and her family have always remained extremely loyal to the area and especially the Church and have been responsible for its upkeep. Spanish Point and the church were her ‘home’.

So amidst all turmoil or storms, ups and downs, there are flashes, visions of a world that has long passed, but wisps of grandeur are still swinging through the decades with hats and bridge parties, beans on toast, sandwiches, cocktail sausages (which have survived, I hear), and the wonderful cups of tea.



Candleholder decoration

‘For me, there was a little angel standing on its toe, ringing a bell.’
[see p. 111]

The German custom is to illuminate Christmas trees by
attaching candles to their branches.

14: Christmas Eve 1954¹

Christmas Eve started like most days in ‘the Retreat’. This was the small castle with adjoining house that a retired Captain, home after years at sea, had decided to build. It was cold and damp. Getting washed and dressed in a flash had advantages. I never opened the shutters to see what kind of a day it was till I was dressed. It was an exceptionally calm day; there was hardly any sound of waves lapping on the shore. It was dry, but the clouds hung low. I was both excited and frightened and wondered what the day would bring. Mother had been up working for some hours. The range was lit, so the kitchen was fairly warm when I sat down for breakfast. The third and final ‘sand cake’ – Mother’s cornflower and rum specialty – was being made. This last one was for Dad’s secretary. The cake had to be beaten by hand for at least 30 minutes and no electric mixer ever achieved the quality of Mother’s hand-beaten version. I cannot remember if Mother chose the oven of the range, or of the ‘Baby Belling’ that day. Both were utterly unpredictable. The oven of the range was seldom hot enough. (During visits to us, my grandfather, while appreciating the advantages of the Gulf Stream flowing almost past the kitchen window, used the additional heat of the oven by putting his feet inside and never got burned.) The oven of the Baby Belling got hotter or colder as it wished and had to be watched all the time. I wondered if Dad’s secretary would appreciate the present!

My first job was to take the ashes out of the fireplace in the dining room. The room was spotlessly clean and shining for Christmas, as that Christmas it served as our living room. We had not as yet taken possession of the ‘drawing room’ in the Tower, overlooking the beach and Mutton Island, and only the Atlantic between us and America. The dining room had become ‘ours’. There were three layers of magnificent Persian carpets under the antique mahogany table. When we moved in, there was naturally a stale smell of old, damp soot in all the rooms. There was no vacuum cleaner and the only people living there in the past years were summer guests who spent the days on the beach. The first thing my mother had done in May was to bring the carpets outside, and put them face down on the grass. Then we both armed ourselves with golf clubs from the hallstand and started to beat the hell out of these carpets.

Now, fifty years later, I often have to pass a golf club, in which the members pull their caddies behind them with great pride. In Germany golf is still considered as a sport for the elite. Then I have to chuckle and would love to shout that the clubs are great for removing old soot out of Persian carpets!

The grass used to be black. My mother – unfortunately, I felt – was very thorough and this procedure took place on every relatively dry day till the grass stayed green after the action. That was about July and only included the carpets in the dining room and hall, and the rugs in the bedroom. Mind you, the clubs were occasionally misused, so to speak, for golf, too! There was a golf course right beside the Retreat.

¹ This was the first element of the work. Hellgard tells us on page 414 that she wrote the piece at Christmas 2004.

Having cleared out the ashes, I got the fireplace ready with tightly twisted bits of newspaper, small bits of turf, then bigger pieces, till all was neatly stacked. Looking back, I realize I was good at it. The fire hardly ever needed more than a match to get it going. I filled up the big basket beside the fireplace with turf, and brought in a few pieces of bogwood, as I had been told, being Christmas. In October, a man had come round with a donkey-cart load of it, telling my mother this was bog wood for Christmas, very old wood, and that it made a wonderful fire. Thirty shillings was a fair bit of money at the time, but my mother chanced the bargain and never regretted it. By the sixties we could not get bogwood for love or money, neither for Christmas nor at any other time.

Usually Canon Elliott, well over 70, came in the mornings around 10 o'clock to teach me Maths, English, Latin, Geography and French, but being Christmas Eve, he had given me and himself a holiday. The day before, he had arrived on his bicycle, as always, wearing the dog collar, the bicycle clips on his trousers, his normal black jacket, but, unusually, a wide brimmed black hat with a little rosette in the front. Normally he wore a cap. He had brought us a goose, and I later said to Mother that he had worn the hat in honour of the Christmas goose! Or was it in honour of the sand cake? For sure Sand Cake No. 2 went to the Rectory! No. 1 went to Mrs. Buckley.

The arrival of the goose had been announced, and was one of the many, many gestures of kindness we received from him and his wife. The expectation of this Christmas goose had set Father reminiscing about his wonderful youth in a beautiful home on the outskirts of Wuppertal. It is still there and although most of the land has been turned into a graveyard, and the house too will go one day, one can see the past idyllic charm even yet. They had a huge garden, vegetables and flowers, fruit trees, a cow, chickens, ducks, a few geese, and a manservant, Gustav, complete with a dog to look after all this. Father's geese memories were of fattened specimens, a delicacy for the well-to-do and he hadn't tasted one since the early thirties when he sailed off for Mexico to set up the eight big weaving looms in Mexico City which his father had sold.

At the thought and talk of the goose, he was almost licking his lips. My brother and I had had no goose contact at all. Mother kept quiet. After the war we were privileged to be given half a rabbit at Christmas by Mother's good friend. These women shared what they had, and her friend's family fattened a rabbit each year for Christmas, at least until the times got better.

A goose in the West of Ireland in the fifties was a poor man's Christmas meal, and our specimen revealed the athletic body of a sporty gander who had watched his weight and figure all his life. I don't remember much about it, but the family says the gravy was excellent and no-one was tempted to overeat, which is always a bonus! We were not ungrateful. It was just another example of different cultural backgrounds creating misunderstandings.

By the time I had my few jobs done, and went back to the kitchen, the cake was baked and a success. I iced and decorated it while Mother prepared a light lunch. Father and my brother (16) came home from the factory shortly after one.

By 2 o'clock we had a quick snack and we all drove to the village. First, I had to deliver the cake with card and good wishes. Apparently, I was very good at this, although I was only 10, or maybe I was told so to make me do it! With long plaits I must have been quite a novelty at least. Then Mother gave me two blankets and a packet of tea plus card to bring to an old woman and her brother, both desperately poor, but frightfully well spoken. As children they had been driven about in a horse and cart, in beautiful clothes, and had a private teacher. When financial ruin hit them, and the parents died (the father shot himself, after which the mother had a heart attack and died), they were teenagers, completely unprepared for the rough realities of life. They died in the eighties so they must have been just about 40 at that time. Mother told me where to go but not to go too near the kind of shed they housed in. I was to call and not to try to look inside the door. My mother said they needed no witness for their poverty. The blankets – our own – and the tea was all my mother had to give that year, but she shared that. There were enough blankets in the Retreat for us to keep warm.

Now it was time for the big adventure. The postmistress, Mrs. Hynes, a lovely lady, had promised to try to get a phone connection to our grandparents. That was our Christmas present to them. So there we sat in the post office, shortly after 2 o'clock, while Mrs. Hynes started to ring up, first Ennis. It was pretty cold. On the floor there were big slabs of flat stone from Kilcannor, put down on God's created earth, just as we had in the kitchen in the Retreat, as the Castle/house combination was called. However, in between the turning of the handle and waiting for the next post office to ring back, she made a big pot of tea and brought a mineral 'for the child' (being me). The hours of hope and disappointment dragged on and on. There was little conversation between the calls. Our parents must have been so upset that they could not 'give us a Christmas'. My brother and I had been told there would be no presents until January, no tree, no decorations. Our piano was in Germany, so there would be no Christmas music. But we did have five Irish candles. Mrs. Buckley had helped me to place the tall candles in big jam jars with wet sand and to cover the jars with paper and a bow. The tradition, so she said, was to light the candles in the evening, put them in the windows, and open the door to light the way for Christ to return. No Christmas passes but I remember the Clare countryside with candles spotted around the sparsely populated west, each indicating a home.

The Whites had brought us a little holly which Mother had put on the dumb waiter in the dining room. Mrs. Buckley had made us a big pie and a huge Christmas cake. I have baked dozens of these cakes since then, always a big chore. And then I remember that in the early years, Mrs. Buckley baked it in the open hearth, in a tin with a lid, feeding it with new burning turf all day. What an art! Last but not least we had the slender gander! Suddenly, at five o'clock, six o'clock in Germany, Mrs. Hynes moved to the edge of her chair, a lot of excited talking and it had all been worthwhile: My grandparents were on the phone, quite clear. We all got our individual turn. My grandmother called me 'Mein liebes Kind' – 'my dear child' – and could say no more and needed to say no more. The warmth

of her voice went through every vein in my body. Then it was Grandpa's turn. 'Kind', he said, 'Child', 'The tree is lit, it's decorated like every year, full of coloured balls and lametta (tinsel)'. And suddenly I was there, could see the tree in the corner in front of the window. They would have eaten Christmas biscuits earlier; I could hear German carols on the radio in the background and soon they would be eating potato salad and frankfurters. Then Grandpa would open a bottle of his homemade cherry wine. We had always spent Christmas Eve with them and Christmas Day amongst ourselves. Now most of my hope was fulfilled. I had heard my grandparents, and my grandfather had given me access to his tree so that it could be mine too.

Two weeks earlier, the manager of the other factory, who lived in Ennis, had invited us for tea 'to let the child see the tree' they had just put up. I'm sure it was a nice gesture, but I could get no joy out of it. They lived in a row of lovely houses with big bay windows and had managed to get a tree from goodness knows where. He so much wanted me to like it and I tried to look pleased, but that tree had nothing to do with me and couldn't make up for any tree we didn't have. Looking back, it must have been very painful for our parents.

We got up, thanked Mrs. Hynes, who was almost as happy about the successful operation as we were, and we wished each other a happy Christmas. When we got out into the street, my mother had that 'I'm going to solve this problem now' face on her. She told us all to get into the car, and even Dad did so without a word. It was clear she was going straight to the grocery shop, owned and run by Mrs. King. Suddenly the vultures of unknown fear were whizzing around my head. I knew there were difficulties, also money difficulties, but I knew no more. Apparently, the Irish Director of the firm decided to change the date of payment at the factory that Christmas. My father had got his pay on November 1st and the next payment would be on December 31st, and of course there would be no Christmas extra as was usual in Germany. By December 24th, the bills were all paid, but there wasn't even any money for the groceries. We were out of all of the basics except for tea, some potatoes, and flour. Henner, my brother, had tried to get some messages the night before, but he had been sent home because he could not pay. That Director was the big problem in my life when I was 9 and 10. I used to pray that God would make him kinder.

When we arrived in Ireland in the fifties, after a journey lasting nearly a week, he had collected us in Limerick after a journey by ship and train. He left us alone in the car in the dark when he had run out of petrol. The journey from Limerick to the village was about 44 miles, not an endless journey. We waited in the car in the dark for ages, not a cottage or light in sight, and it poured. There had been a few other tricks up his sleeve during the year and we didn't really get a chance to settle down till someone else took his place.

Our mother had little English, but 15 minutes later Mrs. King, a very kind lady, and in years to come such a good friend, sent her husband to carry two big boxes of groceries to the car and the family spirit improved even more. Still, we drove home in silence. My thoughts were still wrapped up with our grandparents' tree.

Soon we reached the huge outer gates with the big crosses inside the stone pillars. We drove on to the next gate near the house and there I suddenly saw a big parcel hanging on the big doorknob. What could it be, who could it be from?

As we turned it around, we saw Grandpa's beautiful handwriting. This was Christmas – this was excitement! 'Light the fire,' mother called over to me. She put on the kettle while my brother brought in the groceries. The fire lit well. Mother put a woollen rug on the mahogany table, and brought in the tea plus the bread-knife to cut Mrs. Buckley's cake. Then we sat round at the end of the table, put the parcel in front of us and opened it. What a Christmas parcel! First of all, there was a faint smell of Grandpa's cigars – wonderful – and then the surprise. There were no socks or hankies, just 'Christmas' candles plus holders for the tree we didn't have, but we had the candles. There were plastic balls for the tree which after fifty years are still part of my Christmas. There was lots of lametta (tinsel), ginger type biscuit hearts, spekulatius, spicy biscuits, coffee for Mother, advent candles which went straight into our holders. I don't remember the rest. For me, there was a little angel standing on its toe, ringing a bell. There was a tiny candleholder and five extra red candles. I wanted to light my candle but Father felt it would be a waste. Mother seldom went right against something he had said but that day she made a pronouncement: 'That child is going to light that candle now and burn it right down'.

And so I did and it was my star of Bethlehem. I was surrounded by my own angels bringing peace on earth to men of good will: my family, our grandparents, the Canon, Mrs. Elliott, Mrs. Buckley, Mrs. Hynes, Mrs. King, the Whites. I went to bed happily. So did we all.

The next morning, we went to church and the sun shone. Canon Elliott had already held a service at Lahinch and another one in Ennistymon. Later, he would go to Kilfenora and Lisdoonvarna. Mr. Buckley, his driver, was having lunch in the Rectory. Buffalo Bill, as I called the parishioner who lived on Mount Callan, and who owned a fair bit of it, was there, as was his family from Wicklow. Mrs. Elliott was there that year, and the Whites, wonderful ladies in big hats. Inside the church, the fireplace was blazing. Dad played the harmonium and the singing of the small group was good. Canon Elliott had chosen only hymns which meant something to us too. Still the night, Hark the Herald Angels sing, Adeste Fideles. After church Buffalo Bill went over to the car and produced a Christmas tree which his brother had brought from Wicklow – 'for the child'. It was a strange specimen, but we were thrilled. At the Retreat my brother immediately got a bucket of sand from the beach and we put the tree into it and decorated it. Mother had also bought colourfully wrapped chocolate sweets which we hung in the tree with sewing thread (she had obviously known about the tree). But now we had real decorations too. Later Peter, the cat, took possession of the tree by lying on two adjoining branches. It was the only time any of our cats lay in any Christmas tree, but it was a special tree. Mrs. King miraculously had oranges to sell and Mother had bought generously. My brother and I got a dinner heaped with oranges, our voucher for January and two small bars of Cadbury chocolate – our

Irish *Weihnachtsteller* (Christmas plate). Especially during and after the war it was usual, especially for children, to get a soup plate full of fruit, biscuits, nuts, sweets and chocolate which was their share for the Christmas season.

Half a century has passed since then. I felt it was a good Christmas. We sang without the piano, sitting at the fire in the beautiful light and warmth of the bogwood – quiet and long-lasting flames. After much searching, my brother got a German channel on the radio.

Our mother never quite lost her bitterness about this Christmas and, when the German Directors were over in the spring, I remember her saying that even the Christmas of 1943, after we had lost our home in the bombing of Wuppertal, had been a better Christmas. As for me, I was never closer to Bethlehem.

15: Henner's education odyssey

From January 1st, 1955, Henner was eligible to apply for a driving license and St. Flannan's College in Ennis was prepared to accept him as a day pupil which meant that he had to drive himself to Ennis and back each day in that unreliable old Forde Prefect that needed more oil than petrol and the journey on country roads took long in those days.

He got on quite well there, the staff were helpful, but by Easter it became obvious that he had no chance of learning Irish in a class that by then had good knowledge of the language. He would certainly not be able to reach a standard in two years which was needed to pass Irish in the Leaving Certificate. Without Irish, he would not pass the examination. The only possibility there seemed to be then was to return to his old school in Wuppertal.

He stayed with our aunt and grandparents, the school accepted him and he got on quite well. Although it was hard for us all it didn't present major difficulties till he had a serious accident during school sports not long before Christmas. He spent some time in hospital and he was even visited by his headmaster. After Christmas he came home to Clare to give him a chance to recover fully. Our Grandfather visited us in February, shortly after Grandmother's death, just after Henner had left Wuppertal.

In April, we both returned to Wuppertal with Grandfather. Henner is back at his old school, and I passed my exam to make me eligible for a place at the Gymnasium. I did not lose a year. In other ways, being away from home was not good for me. After six weeks Mother makes sure I come home instantly while Henner remains in Wuppertal. No real solution is found until the summer of 1956.

In the summer of 1956, Mother insisted on a decision that would reunite the family again; but what alternatives were there? Again, it was Canon Elliott who came up with news, vital information that offered Henner a chance to finish his school education in Ireland with a certificate at the end. Canon Elliott pointed out that the Trinity Entrance Examination was an alternative to the Leaving Certificate Examination as Irish was not a compulsory subject.

With that information our parents could offer Henner a choice. If he wished he could finish his schooling in Wuppertal and we would all return to Germany. His schooling was top priority now and he was to feel happy with his decision, nothing else counted. Mother travelled to Wuppertal specially to discuss this with him, but only when she had information to offer him as to where he could go to school. The few protestant schools with boarding facilities we had known about had waiting lists and couldn't offer us a place, but Canon Elliott got a positive reply from Galway Grammar School for Henner and a positive reply from Rosleven School, Athlone, for me. The protestant schools were more likely to give Irish the same status as a foreign language. They promised Canon Elliott that Henner would be offered a place in September 1956.

Henner in Wuppertal was to be given time to decide, while Mother looked for suitable options for us, should we return. Henner decided to travel back to Ireland with Mother, and we both started boarding school in September 1956. He passed

his Trinity Entrance Examination in 1958 and studied science in Trinity for two years.

The years in Galway Grammar School were not particularly easy ones for him. Henner was older than the senior boys and he was met with extreme anti-German feelings and prejudices. Many of the boys' fathers had served in the British Army, and the war had ended only 11 years previously. The headmaster did all in his power to deescalate the situation and our parents collected Henner each Friday afternoon and drove him back on Sunday evenings or early on Monday morning so that he was in time for school. A swimming-incident when all the boys were in Salthill in May or June 1957 brought a change and made life easier for Henner. He suddenly noticed that one of the boys near him was in difficulties. Henner was not familiar with life-saving methods yet, but he was a strong swimmer and there was nobody else nearby. He swam over and somehow got the boy safely to the shore, though with great difficulty.

In many ways the years that followed were extremely happy years for him. He was completely involved in life-saving in Spanish Point, trained, took over summer lifeguard duties, at the same time fully involved in training young people along with other enthusiastic young men and women; he became an instructor and then an examiner. He was involved in the general work of the Red Cross in Ennis, too, was one of the helpers to assist sick and handicapped people on a tour to Lourdes once, and at the age of 20 was one of the volunteers in Shannon after the terrible crash of the KLM in the Shannon estuary.¹ He made many friends, was popular and quite soon changed from being 'that young German' to just Henner. In an attempt to settle and find a livelihood he did not leave out many, if any opportunities, but even hope-inspiring possibilities eventually led nowhere. At that time every employer had to get permission to employ a foreigner and explain why an Irish person could not do this work. When Henner was offered an opportunity to return to Wuppertal in 1965 he took it. He said good-bye to the 'bogland' he had learnt to understand and love. He was 27. Most young men in Germany, born in 1938, were settled in a career by then, or on their way there, and they were married. This was the same in Ireland, except that vast numbers of young men and women had emigrated when they were much younger as they had found no opportunity either, especially in Clare.

In a way I have been tempted to state what difficulties he had, because they stand for difficulties in general that immigrants can have. However, Henner was a private person, he would not have wanted it and I respect that.

Although Germany was in the middle of the *Wirtschaftswunder* (economic miracle) now, difficulties are international and not tied to time. Germany was generous in welcoming him with a large variety!

After he had overcome a lot of formal obstacles he was eventually accepted by the German Police. He got on very well and after a few years he was offered a

¹ The crash of the KLM plane, a Lockheed Super Constellation bound for New York, occurred on takeoff from Shannon Airport on 14 August 1958. All 99 people on board died.

post in a training centre, where he taught. The *Bereitschaftspolizei* (riot police) is also responsible for special short-term duties.

He enjoyed teaching, but the special duties were challenging, interesting, often dangerous. It was the time when the RAF (Rote Armee Fraktion; a left-extremist terrorist organization) was most active, and there were repeated, massive protests in Brockdorf and the planned runway at Frankfurt Airport, Startbahn West. Henner like the other mature staff were sent, in charge of young policemen, each trainer with his *Hundertschaft*. They would be away for several days at a stretch, often sleeping in tents. The times were not easy, but I think he thrived on the responsibility that was needed, it brought out his special abilities.

Changes were taking place in education on all levels and the much greater emphasis on psychology interested and suited him. Highlights were special duties as interpreter at International Police Association meetings (in Schloss Gimborn, but not only). He made many contacts and some friends. On one occasion the special Irish representative from the Templemore Garda Training Centre was left speechless when he was confronted with a fluent English speaker, complete with an authentic Irish accent wearing a German police uniform! It wasn't the only contact that lasted for many years, but it was the contact he appreciated most.

When he suddenly died, aged 62, vast numbers of colleagues in the police came in busloads. So did fire brigade officers from the voluntary and official branches. There were many from Wuppertal and nearby, but not only. The vast majority came from different towns and cities in North Rhine Westphalia. Even a representative from the court of arbitration came and brought a wreath to honour him for the voluntary work he had done for several years. Ida flew over from Ireland to assist me and the family, spoke a prayer in Irish beside his coffin during the service, and four young men stood guard at the graveside with burning torches, honouring his lifelong work in the voluntary fire brigade. Henner who always remained very humble would have been surprised to see such a display of respect and friendship. He might even have been somewhat embarrassed to see all the paths between the graves full of friends and comrades who had shared work, danger and life with him. They followed the service over the loudspeakers. The church was far too small for so many people.

Do I wish to honour Henner by mentioning his funeral? By no means, he does not need that. Family and friends wanted to be there when he was laid to rest, that was our greatest need. It was obvious that for all these men it appeared to be a need, too, and therefore made it a family day, not an official day. That showed how Henner had lived his life.

The voluntary fire brigade offered the family their premises in Ronsdorf, two rooms where Henner had been amidst them all during many meetings. We hadn't been able to book any venue that was in anyway large enough to offer refreshments after the funeral to a larger group. It was a beautiful, warm June day and within a few minutes these firemen had filled the large yard with wooden tables and benches as well. People inside and outside the building were sitting in groups and recalling happy memories. Two young policemen trained by Henner

came up to speak to me separately. What they said was very similar. (They were both in their thirties and had been in Henner's group.) As they couldn't thank Henner anymore they wanted to express their gratitude for his help and guidance, at least to me; he had been like a father to them, they added. These two men moved me, and I knew that these words would have meant more to Henner than anything else.

Amidst all the sadness and sense of loss, especially for Christa, his wife, and his son Michael, 16 years old, and in spite of it, I felt as if the evening sun had come out over the beautiful part of the Atlantic so close to the bogland whose beauties and gifts had become part of our lives and we had learnt to appreciate them. At that moment the whole area seemed to be covered with rays of golden sunlight.

With that thought I say good-bye to Henner, his life and work completed, I hear Ida's Irish prayer in my heart, a heart that is full of a great affection and respect for a wonderful brother and for our wonderful parents.



16: Medical Care

The first doctor whose services we required was Dr. Hillery, Senior. Trying to ride Henner's bicycle, I had fallen through the window into the dining room. Mother wrapped a towel tightly around my wrist and dragged me to the Hillery House. Dr. Paddy Hillery was out visiting patients, but his father was in. He was exceedingly kind, calming us both, bandaged the cut well, also a small one on the arm. We were to call again to change the dressing and bandage twice which we did. It healed well.

His son, known as Dr. Paddy by everyone, was quite young, a great swimmer and life-saver, and my brother knew him well. He came to the Retreat in the early summer of 1954 when our mother had her first heart attack. He was a good doctor and was the local doctor for a few years, but he was greatly interested and involved in politics and the Fianna Fáil party. When they won the elections, he was so thrilled he drove his car down the hill from his home, along the Strand Road, turned left at the bridge, raced up to the first crossing, turned left and reached his home again.¹ He had a huge Irish flag floating out of the open passenger side window and he continued on his round again and again, and passed me walking to the village at least three times.

He married a lovely lady, also a doctor, but they did not decide to settle in Spanish Point. His sister, Dr. Eleanor, took over some of his patients and another doctor came to the area.

When we finally had to leave the Retreat on 31st March 1962, we had only been able to get a small house in the Main Street beside Benn's Bakery for July 1st, a house belonging to Mrs. Casey, who had a shop near Mae King's. After a lot of searching, enquiring, we were able to stay for just one month in two different houses along the seafront and the third month in an annex to one of the houses. From May 1st the first visitors started to come to Spanish Point. Some booked just for a month, some booked for the whole summer including September. These three places were vacant for one month each. I was home during the Easter holidays and was at least able to help Mother then. Being her she left the Retreat spotless. I was still home when Mr. Mc Namara, the solicitor, came with his big list and checked all the rooms: the blankets, pillows, the furniture, the endless kitchen equipment down to the last spoon. Nothing was missing, nothing was broken. He said to Mother that he had never ever checked a house that was left after 8 years in such perfect condition. I was glad he gave her the compliment because she deserved it. I had to be brought to Rosleven the next day and the day after that came move No.1. Nearly everything was packed.

In case a furniture removal van is running across any reader's mental visual projection, I must correct that. A horse and cart came and the man had to heave up the washing machine, the large overseas trunks, cases, boxes. That horse and cart went up the avenue, out the large gate, turned left, then left again and stopped at the seafront. I have no idea if two men came that day. (The final bits and pieces like groceries would have been transported in the car.) As I was home to help

¹ Patrick Hillery was first elected in Clare in 1951 as a running mate to Eamon de Valera. The incident Hellgard remembers may have occurred in the 1961 General Election, when he himself headed the poll with 12,687 votes, or in 1965 when he got 14,372 votes.

Mother to move from the Main Street to the Ballard Road in 1963 and the Hill House was very much in the making still, Mother and I carried armchairs, boxes, trunks – quite heavy things! – to Mae King’s who had promised to store them for a brief period. Her shop was across the road, but a good bit down, so I’m pretty certain Mother was involved in the actual removal on the three dates in 1962, too.

Although the Leaving Certificate exams were over in late June, Rosleven didn’t close till early July, and the school leavers always stayed for two extra days for the past pupils’ reunion.

When I got home the move to Mrs. Casey’s house had taken place and it didn’t take me more than one look at Mother to realize how wrecked she was. We would only be living in this house for the time till the Hill House was actually built. There were vague signs of preparations up the Ballard Road, but before then a few problems had to be solved in the Main Street. The kitchen was on a real slope leading down to the bathroom and the door out to the tiny patch of garden and the back gate leading to the lane behind the house. Father was good at these things. He lowered the two legs of the table on the one side by sawing off a bit, so the table would be level, and he did the same to the four chairs, so we stopped feeling we were sliding down to the bathroom. There was a tiny sink under the stairs leading up to the bedrooms, but not the hint of a draining-board or ledge where we could leave anything. He made a very clever contraption of wood, using the smallest of space so we could have a bit of a draining-board. We couldn’t even have placed the smallest of tables there. So therefore, to get a bit settled we had enough to get on with.

When I was told a family visitor was due in a fortnight to come for a 3-week visit I had a hysterical fit of crying. There were good reasons why my mother did not want to refuse this request, but I had bad forebodings. The visitor was nice, we liked her, but it meant more work, more special cooking, bringing her to the beach, to different sights, simply entertaining her, giving her a holiday.

About two or three days after the visitor left, our mother had a massive heart attack in the middle of the kitchen. I could just catch her before she lost consciousness and I could only see the white of her eyes. I was alone in the house, no chair in sight, Henner at work in Ennis, Father at work up the Ballard Road. When I felt I couldn’t hold her any longer, Father miraculously came in the door. I had only held her for a few minutes, but the time seemed endless. We got her lying on a narrow couch in one of the narrow rooms off the kitchen looking out onto the Main Street end. Father ran out to Benn’s Bakery to get them to phone the doctor. Again miraculously, the doctor was just getting bread in the shop and ran over. I cannot recall if it was Dr. O’Brien or already Dr. O’Connor from Quilty. He asked me to get some brandy if we had any in the house. I was 17, completely ‘trí na chéile’ (confused, bewildered) and came back with the bottle of brandy and a tumbler. I can still see him smiling gently, touching my arm briefly saying: ‘Girl, you don’t want to kill her, do you?’ I followed clear instructions then, got a small glass, half-filled with water, a tablespoon and a teaspoon. I poured a tablespoon of brandy into the water and then gave Mother small teaspoon

full while she was slowly regaining consciousness. In the Regional Hospital in Limerick there was a renowned heart specialist, but this was no option for us. They made an appointment and he was appalled when Mother refused to be treated because our parents had no health insurance. At least I was at home on holiday, Henner and Father went to work, Mother was patient and courageous and we all did our best, with good advice from the doctor.

Dr. O'Connor was certainly our doctor from the time we lived in the Hill House and he piloted us through many crises with expertise, empathy and kindness. The years in the Hill House were probably our best years and no serious illnesses at first, lots of visitors, life was getting easier. Then in 1969, it must have been late in May/early June, Mother had the most serious heart attack she ever had, late in the evening. We had a phone now, but we couldn't dial directly yet, we had to be connected at the post office. Mrs. Walk tried to get Dr. O'Connor, but obviously he and the family were out. Mrs. Walk stayed up and tried to get him every 20 minutes as she had promised – she never went to bed. Neither did our parents. Mother wasn't able to move out of the armchair. I am convinced that the world is often kept going by people who do more than their duty.

At 5 a.m., Dr. O'Connor answered the phone. They had been at a big family celebration, had probably driven home through a greater part of Ireland after that, but he immediately got into his car there and then and drove the few miles to our house. He insisted that Mother would be driven to the Regional Hospital that morning, as soon as she could manage to get dressed. He would inform the specialist and he in turn would see her as soon as he could. When she got to the hospital, indeed, they did not have to wait long once they got to the Regional.

The specialist was appalled that Mother refused to stay in the hospital. Our options hadn't changed. He did try to give her the best instructions he could for when she was at home. Hope springs eternal.

I was teaching at the time, but it was a Friday and they rang me after school which ended at 4 p.m. One of the wonderful colleagues there immediately offered to lend me his car and so I could go home for the weekend.¹ Thankfully I was not on duty. It must be said it was his first car and he had only bought it recently. I had got a license before one needed to do a test first. As I was earning my own money now, I had had fifteen driving lessons, but no experience.

My parents were stunned to see me. I did what I could that weekend but drove back to Dublin late on Sunday afternoon with a heavy heart. I was able to return the car without a scratch, not daring to think how Mother would survive at home.

Henner by this time was working in the police force in Germany. I wrote to him to tell him about Mother's heart attack, but the letter would take a few days. The following Saturday, Henner's holidays started for which he had not yet made any plans. On the Monday he decided on the spur of the moment to visit Clare by car. He phoned a friend in the fire brigade, on holiday, too, asked if he would accompany him, and he agreed. My letter hadn't reached him yet.

¹ The colleague was Willie, the subject of one of Hellgard's 'Lecky House' portraits [No. 60, at p. 320 below].

They threw a few things into a bag, no bookings, just the extra car insurance, some cash, and off they went to get the ferry in Ostend that evening. Our aunt and uncle said this was just irrational! When they drove up the small lane to the Hill House sometime on Wednesday, our parents were speechless. Henner took over and did what had to be done. He was an all-rounder, did the cooking, washing, cleaning, looking after Mother's needs. His friend, like Henner, used to getting things done, was not inactive either, and in between they saw the sights and went swimming. His friend often told me they had a great time. They stayed for three weeks and by then I was on my holidays.

My friends, Lorna's and Tom's, wedding was on 12th July 1969 and I was chief bridesmaid. My parents were invited and they wanted to go, too, although it was in Castlepollard, a good drive for Mother. There is a lovely photograph of both our parents at the reception. Mother still looks shaken and is sitting on a bench in the lovely hotel grounds as she couldn't stand for long yet. But she had survived, as courageous as ever.

When Father had a stroke a year later – not a very severe one – he 'managed' the factory by telephone from his bed for a few weeks. Dr. O'Connor helped Father to get over this crisis, too, but he was worried. Nobody had been found to take over Father's place in the factory and he was past retiring age and not ready to resign. What would happen to the factory and the workers?

Home for Halloween weekend in 1971, I had to consult Dr. O'Connor on account of a bad attack of tonsillitis. When we had finished the consultation, he talked to me about our parents' future. I had just put down the deposit on a house in Lucan, but it wasn't a solution really. I was teaching on the other side of Dublin, and in Lucan they would be even more isolated than in Clare. Dr. O'Connor put it straight to me: If you do not decide to go back to Germany, your father will never resign. And they will need a health insurance more and more, and in Germany they are insured. I did not like what he said, but he was right. I applied for a teaching post in Wuppertal at once. They were looking for English teachers and I got four offers of a post at different schools. Once I had got these offers, I informed my parents about my decisions and choices and my father resigned. On June 27th, 1972 I left Dublin for Wuppertal. Our parents left Miltown Malbay on 19th August, 1972, not an easy, but a good move with many unforeseen consequences and – a great and responsible doctor!

17: The Tinkers

Families sitting on the grass margin of main and country roads mesmerized us. Roads and lanes outside towns and villages were especially favoured and these families always had a few or even a number of horses, grazing on the long acre. There were shoeless children playing, the family washing clung to bushes and hedges, optimistically flapping in the wind, attempting to dry. Bits of rags also flattered in the wind, rags that had not survived. The wash-and-dry routine in the blustery, wet winds and created a sort of remembrance area. Towards evening there was always an open fire, the multi-functional source of heat, essential to boil the kettle for tea, or to boil potatoes, and a centre of warmth where the family or families gathered to talk and relax.

The women were wrapped in shawls – coloured woollen blankets, mainly in grey and brown, sometimes in black. Some families had colourful, wooden horse drawn caravans, which have long since been copied by the tourist industry. Poorer families had plain, flat open carts as used by farmers to bring the milk can or cans to the creamery in the morning. People sat on the edges of the cart which had only two wheels, their legs hanging over the sides. At night the owners of these carts housed in tents that had often seen better decades, and their children more or less lived with chronic bronchitis – on wet days they hovered under the cart.

We decided they were gypsies, although they looked quite different. We were told they were tinkers or travelling people whose ancestors had been driven out of their homes and their land confiscated for British settlers. The slogan was ‘To hell or to Connaught’ – a province of great beauty in the west of Ireland, but with not enough wood to hang a man, not enough water to drown him, and not enough earth to bury him, as the saying went. For most of these ancestors, hell was much closer than Connaught.

The tinkers survived by begging and by raising and selling a few horses. Apparently, some also mended kettles and saucepans, but they never came our way. Some people said they were clever at stealing. Our experience was quite different.

In the early years when I was taught by Canon Elliott, tinkers came regularly. Soon we realized that some reappeared at regular intervals. On Christmas Day – it was our second Christmas in Ireland and I was eleven – two tinkers and a barefooted girl my age came. One of the women seemed to be her mother, the other carried a minute baby under her shawl, we got a brief glimpse. It was sleeping. We had just had turkey and trimmings and I was playing with my small selection of dolls on the bench built into the thick wall under the dining-room window.

Mother opened the window and we all wished each other a happy Christmas. Mother moved off, calling over her shoulder that she had something for them. I was left to take care of the small talk. I exchanged polite conversation with them about the mild, dry day, the state of health. The little girl kept eyeing my dolls. After a while, mother reappeared with a big breadboard and six sliced pan sandwiches, with a thick filling of turkey and stuffing, cranberry sauce, mayonnaise. There were paper bags for the sandwiches. Three were wrapped up and three sandwiches landed in an open hand. While this was happening, my

mother confronted me with a lethal question and somehow, I knew it would come: Wouldn't I *like* (!) to part with just one of my dolls to give it to the little girl, being Christmas? I'd still have enough dolls to play with. What torment! One of my dolls was probably being cradled by a refugee girl in Wuppertal at this moment, and to ask me in front of the girl made the situation very different. On the one hand, I had the chance of appearing noble, parting with a doll to let a poor wench have it – a sort of 'Good king Wenceslas' for small heroines. Or I could be honest and admit that I was mean, even on Christmas Day and had no wish or intention of parting with anything, and certainly not with one of my dolls. Then my mother added that cruel remark: 'Do as you wish.' Now I couldn't even blame my mother! The child looked at me with half fearful and half hopeful eyes and rashly my hand reached out to her through the window and handed her a doll. Her eyes shone and she happily took the doll and gently cradled it like the grown-up with her tiny baby. They all thanked my mother and me, left us with good wishes and God's blessings and moved off, up the long avenue, the two women hungrily devouring the first of their turkey sandwiches, careful not to lose any cranberry sauce or mayonnaise. The little girl carried the sandwich. Her sole interest was focused on carefully cradling the doll.

Mother never let any tinker woman go away empty-handed. Only once did she get angry when tinkers opened the back door. My mother's English was limited, but she made it very clear that only family members ever crossed that threshold. This must have been bewildering for the tinkers. The back door was the door for messenger boys, workmen, gardeners in other Irish homes. The tinkers left in haste and looked unsure if they should try the front door now. They did and my unpredictable mother received them as if she had never seen them before, gave them something and dismissed them with good wishes towards the gate.

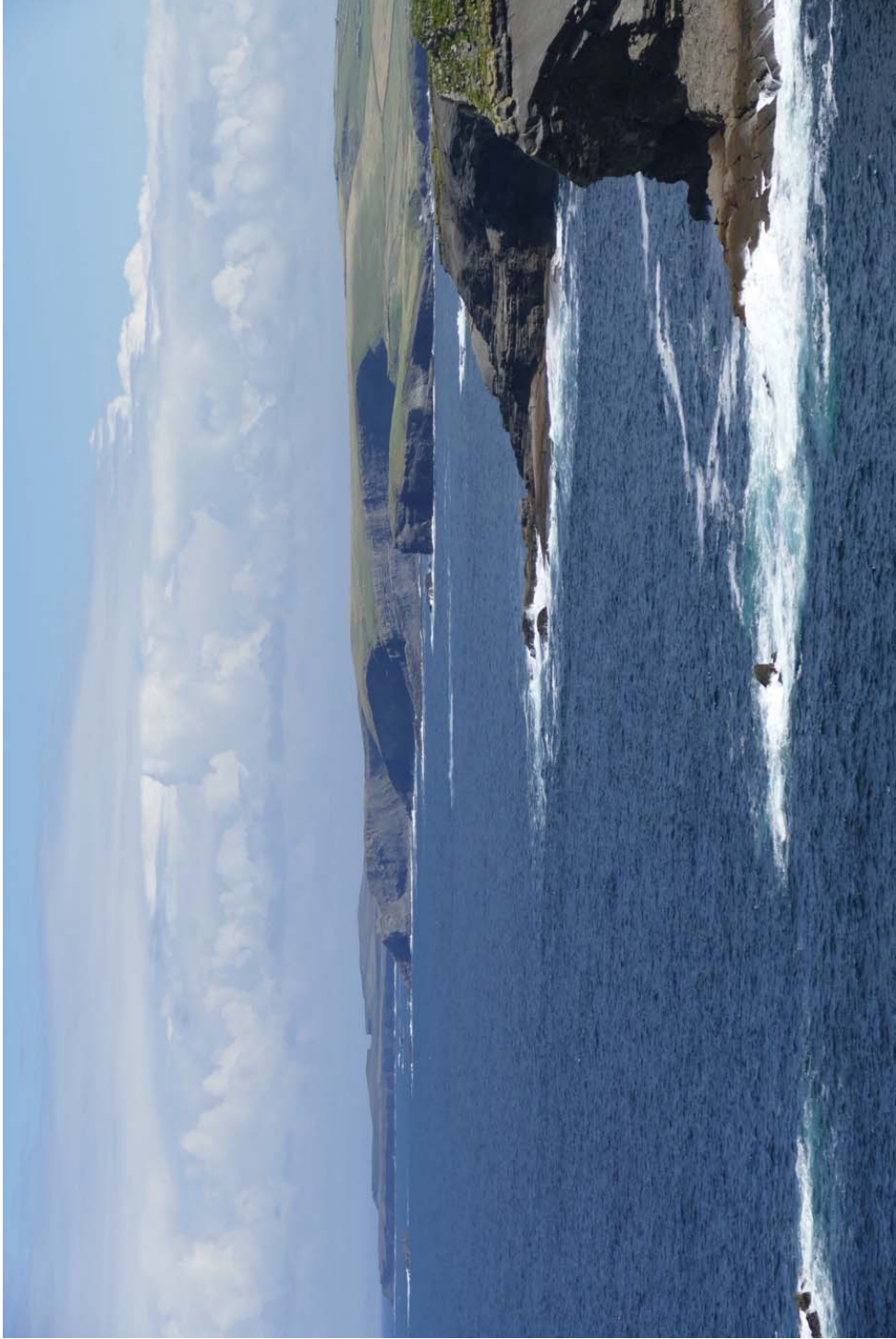
My father, like most people, was no friend of tinkers at close range, and he felt my mother overdid it with her kindness, and he felt a manager's wife should not be so friendly towards tinkers anyway. There were unique situations when tinkers who knew my mother saw her in Ennis or Limerick. They would wave, my mother and I would wave back, and my father, most embarrassed, hoped fervently that there was nobody of importance in his business world who could see us, especially him. I had little sympathy for my father and had to mind myself not to burst out into giggles.

On the way home from Dublin one night this fear of being compromised turned into an almost nightmare for him. We had stopped in Newbridge in the late afternoon to get something to eat. On this main east-coast / west-coast road there was a good and cheap restaurant, serving hot baked beans, mashed potatoes, sausages and a 'decent' cup of tea (strong and hot). It was a cold, crisp November afternoon, and three tinker ladies plus two babies in arms, tightly enveloped in their rugs or shawls against the cold, spied my mother on the other side of the road. There was a loud 'Hello' and happy wave of hands, and the group shot across the road, manoeuvring their route between cars, lorries, buses, car horns blowing. My father looked for that famous hole in the ground into which he could

disappear at short notice, before the circular-visual-stocktaking of all pedestrians and car drivers – anyone – was initiated, fearing to be seen by a manager of Dunnes Stores, or Sunbeam or other important firms. Meanwhile, the tinkers were loudly God-blessing my mother. The old tinker lady in the group had grey hair, which dust and inadequate combs or brushes had felted over the years and no hurricane could move. Her leathery skin also looked hard, having endured years of salty rain and wind and sun and dust, unimpeded by too much soap and water. Her two hands were patting my mother's right hand, beaming her single-tooth smile and she radiated a very special type of beauty at that moment.

She moved on to me, patted my head, while the other two women got a chance of their greeting-ritual-turn also. My father gave a short bow of recognition at their existence and it was returned in a very similar way. Somehow, he had not found that hole in the ground yet, God help him!

My mother took out her purse to give them a few coins, but suddenly the old woman's bony, leathery hand covered the purse. 'No, ma'am,' she said, 'Today we are only here to bless you'. My mother thanked them for the blessing and to me it seemed to be a great moment of mutual respect and admiration without any attempt at comparison on any level from these women, ladies, of such different social backgrounds.



Kilkee [above], along with Lahinch and the Cliffs of Moher, was one of the sights of Clare to which the Leckebusch family was accustomed to bring visitors (see p. 133)

Hellgard Leckebusch, *Singing our Song*, p. 124.

18: Dreams, hopes and other treats

As I can only speculate about Henner's and our parents' hopes and dreams, I should start with my own. It became obvious to me quite soon that the hope of being back in my old world would not be fulfilled in the immediate future, so my attention focused on other dreams. Copying people's behaviour or the way they spoke was one of my skills and I could make family and friends laugh easily. After Grandfather had taken me to see my first film in Ronsdorf, in the Toro, I thought that becoming a film star could be an option. Removed from my first ambiente, I worked on that idea mentally. Fortunately, I didn't tell anyone or they would have pricked this mental balloon! Life pricks its own balloons sooner or later. When I fell through the dining room window, I didn't think about the implications, but when the bandages were removed, I had two scars – blemishes for life! – and as a consequence, this was the end of my film-star career before it had even started. There was sadness and a sense of loss, but neither lingered for long, so it wasn't a tragedy.

Seeing some unexpected Irish dancing out on the road near Spanish Point post office gave me a new idea. After one of our first visits to the White Strand one late afternoon in late spring, we saw a group of eight teenagers dancing to the music of a tin whistle, played by someone sitting on a stone wall. We stopped the car and watched the set dance; the young people's straight bodies being spun around by their sprightly feet and legs. It was a delightful sight. No future as a film star? Dancing could prove to be an even better and more realistic aim. Coincidentally, I picked up information during a grown-up conversation about Margot Fonteyn and her Russian partner, the ballet stars at Covent Garden at the time. On one of our rare and exciting trips to Ennis – or was it even Limerick? – I spotted a photobook about this couple. In the photos they showed ballet steps one could practise. My excitement must have been apparent as the book was purchased and I could take the treasure home. My inner motor was in top gear now and each day I made time to practise these steps, in the privacy of my room, in my bare feet. In Rosleven, my parents signed me on for dancing tuition after the Christmas holiday in January 1957, fitted out with a wonderful pair of dancing slippers! Our sports and gym teacher taught us Irish Dancing, ballroom dancing, folk dances from other countries, starting with the Scottish sword dance, but also introducing us to easy versions of Hungarian and Russian dances. For a school celebration, she rehearsed 'The Rosleven Toyshop', in which all the members of the dancing class were involved. Dorothy was the 'mother' who brought her 'child', Alison, to the toyshop to choose a doll. I was the shop assistant, who showed the 'child' the dolls in their costumes, wound them up and then they performed. It was an excellent idea and it was a 100% success.

'Very good' for dancing on my report always pleased me tremendously. Only twice did I not get this remark; 'excellent' stood there instead, the only remark on any report I was ever really proud of. I never made it to Covent Garden or more modest places. Instead, I became a well-qualified 'inner' dancer, moved by music, giving me great pleasure and lightness – an I-dancer. I was never able to oblige an audience with the visual joy of watching my movement, but I learnt to live with that. There are limits to the abilities with which I can oblige!

What were the dreams of the others? Did Mother yearn to spend a leisurely afternoon shopping, looking for a nice dress? Perhaps she dreamt of an evening at the opera, a singing lesson, singing a solo at a wedding? Perhaps Father wished to have his own looms in a shed beside a nice house with all of us living there – a projection of a dream-world very similar to his youth in the *Sonnenhof*, the pattern of a life he had experienced for a short time, but that had no future, a life that would have ended soon, but the recession in the twenties put an end to so abruptly.

And Henner? Perhaps he wished to be a carefree teenager again, with less responsibility, an easier path into the adult world. No doubt he wished to continue his schooling, to be part of the voluntary work of the Fire Brigade Service, to be with his friends again. Even to find a profession that suited him and offered him a future would have satisfied him.

He loved the freedom his bicycle offered him, exploring his new world. Driving a car at his age was something very special, even if it was only the wreck of a car, and he drove it illegally at 16. Our first year was a course in survival training and our highlights were modest, not frequent and greatly appreciated. Letters from family and friends were always a treat. When Mother and I were in Wuppertal in the autumn of 1954, she ordered the German edition of the Reader's Digest to be posted to the Retreat every month. I was allowed to 'read' it first. I was interested in all the jokes and anecdotes, filling the space at the end of each article. There were lots of them. It did not take me long and then the magazine was available to the other members of the family. Some years later, she ordered 'Madame' and 'Schöner Wohnen'. 'Madame' featured fashion, but there were always reproductions of famous paintings and articles about the painter and his work. 'Schöner Wohnen' dealt with modern home furnishings, interior decoration, new electrical gadgets, china and pottery. A reproduction of a painting by van Gogh in a 'Madame' showing a rustic chair – a detail – is my first memory of becoming interested in art, which continued ever afterwards.

For the people in Clare, traditional music in their homes, in pubs or at Céilís (traditional social gathering) was part of their lives. The art of visiting each other on winter evenings, sitting round the fire and exchanging news and information had not died out. I only remember enjoying an evening's entertainment with a *Seanchaí* (traditional Gaelic storyteller or historian) in Bunratty Folk Park, but there were many evenings visiting friends when one particularly gifted person could entertain the whole group excellently. Our parents who had always been very hospitable people became even more so in Clare. At the beginning, our visitors were mainly German. The German Directors, Herr Selbach and Herr Reinshagen, came regularly. Later, it was Herr Selbach only. As time went on, Herr Selbach's daughter stayed with us for a few days, or the manager, Herr Vogelskamp came, sometimes alone, occasionally also with his wife. There were Germans around while the turf power station was being built; managers from German firms in Ireland visited, of whom I remember the manager of Faber Castell and his family best. We became friendly with the Ludorfs who lived in Dublin, their daughter attending a school in Templeogue. Relatives visited us,

bringing young people like Krista, Bernd and Gaby with them occasionally. There was Mother's good friend, Frau Dr. Ahrens from Remscheid, a highly respected children's doctor who was an extremely welcome visitor with new and interesting topics, very often talking about her favourite author, Dostoyevsky. There were also young students that we had met on a ship/train journey back to Ireland, e.g. Martin Reese from Bielefeld, a student of theology, or a group we met, surviving in poor weather in a tent on one of the beaches nearby.

As time went on the number of Irish guests increased. After our invitations for afternoon tea, about four weeks after we moved into the Retreat, which hadn't been taken seriously, we were careful about offering hospitality to others. This family had driven us to the Retreat from the hotel. More than one journey was necessary and our parents wanted to thank them with this invitation. We had gone to endless trouble cleaning the drawing-room in the tour, had walked several times to the village for extra groceries and Mother had tackled the Baby Belling to do some exquisite baking preparations for a good welcome. It was a great disappointment when they didn't turn up and there was only a shrug of the shoulders in reply to our question if there had been a mistake regarding the time. It didn't encourage us to extend invitations to any of the residents for some time.

While we had less opportunity to visit people and places, we met them at home and the conversations were always very interesting, covering a vast range of topics. Mother had had no extensive education although sent to a school of commerce for two years, it was the sons who were sent to secondary school. She had always been a great reader and took advantage of any opportunity to learn something new. She was quite philosophical and had an instinctive understanding of human psychology. She came out with unexpected questions, one for example that she addressed to Canon Elliott on a short, parishioner's visit over a cup of tea: 'What is your view on world politics at present?' He was a bit taken aback, but then replied with a farsighted assessment: It is China we will have to watch eventually, not Russia. Father had other topics and interests, and he could be a good entertainer.

When a cinema opened in Kilrush we were delighted. It wasn't the Ritz, but they showed films like 'The Benny Goodman Story' and we would have a careful look, hopeful as far as I was concerned, when we bought the weekly *Clare Champion* and could see what films would be shown. Kilrush was 17 miles away, so we didn't go often; but it was a treat sometimes. The new pottery firm in Kilrush, especially the German manager and family were of interest and in Killarney not only had a German firm Liebherr making heavy machinery been built, there was also the shop 'Fossa Stores', for our life a type of online shop in the past. One could order groceries like good rye bread, tins of Sauerkraut and red cabbage, whole salamis, coffee beans, coffee filters and by return of post a parcel would arrive. Their prices were quite reasonable, but a parcel from there was always something special and was seldom ordered.

For our parents' Silver Wedding Anniversary in December 1959, it was decided a record player would be invested in, and one record of international

carols. We had no piano, of course, Henner's violin was still in Wuppertal and this was our greatest treat so far, a door to the world of music.

In 1960 Mother got a modest windfall, wonderful for her and us and our lives became so much easier. She bought a very simple washing-machine, a vacuum cleaner and a sewing-machine, a complete comfort revolution, followed first by a transistor for Henner, and then for my next birthday I got one, too; same type, just different colour.

Still, the greatest 'treat' for Henner and me, and it wasn't really that, it was months of happy youth at the beach for some years round the lifeguard hut, life-saving. It was Henner who was in the middle of it, but I profited greatly, being still a little in the role of 'Henner's little sister', but involved nevertheless and very grateful to be part of this because of my brother.



Enjoying beach life at Spanish Point, Miltown Malbay, date unknown

19: Grandfather's visits 1956 and 1958

Grandfather visited us twice in the Retreat. The first time he came was about a month after our grandmother, aged 75, had died. He arrived with a broad, black band over his coat sleeve. When he took off his coat, he wore it over the sleeve of his jacket. It was a man's sign of grief and mourning, he told me. Grandmother was part of his conversation a lot of the time. He talked about their courtship, how he walked the long distance to her home in Remscheid-Lüttringhausen one New Year's Eve and played his trumpet under her window shortly before midnight and then walked back home. He repeated several times how young she appeared to him on her deathbed.



Grandfather Paul Nüsken in front of the Retreat, March 1956

[Hellgard Leckebusch, *Singing our Song*, p. 129]

He was just as interested in our lives as he had always been, also passed on news about his sister, Great aunt Frieda, Auntie Paula, Uncle Willi and his family who had moved to the south of Germany because of Frank's asthma. They liked living in Bad Buchau am Federsee.



Grandfather Paul Nüsken visiting the beach, March 1956

During the day, I showed him sights nearby. We went down to the beach at low tide and sat on the Black Rock. There, I pointed out Mutton Island, told him that cattle or sheep (or both) were brought there to graze in the summer, related what I knew about the Spanish Armada. I walked with him past the convent and Medina to a tiny Post Office with a very limited shop facility. Grandfather was a charming, polite old gentleman, delighted to be blessed with old age. Age was one of his important topics if the people he met were old, so he immediately asked the post mistress her age. By the face she made I could see she nearly had a fit. I tried to explain to my grandfather that in Ireland one did not question any woman about her age, but he swept that aside. He admired this old lady for still working and being in charge of the Post Office as well as the little shop. She sold tea, sugar and biscuits, sweets, chocolate, minerals, cigarettes, but she also sometimes had a few tins, items that could be convenient for people in a hurry, with no time to walk or cycle to the village. Grandfather's parents had had a small all-round shop, and when they got too old, he unhappily took over the store with grandmother, ran it for many years, after Grandmother's early illness only possible with the help of our mother, very young at the time. With all these images and memories in his head he persevered the about the woman's age. I then tried to explain to the old lady, after wit's end with these questions the ill wind had blown in, that in Germany women talk about their age, and that my grandfather respected people being old, in fact, the older the better. She decided on a compromise and said rather sharply: 'I'm over 65.' and my grandfather's compromise was to accept her answer. I sighed with relief and we could get down to the business of postcards and stamps. After all, Grandfather was a great letter and card writer.

Canon and Mrs. Elliott invited him, and we all met several times, not only at church. Grandfather had some knowledge of English and he made the best possible use of it and they talked about all sorts of topics. In the village he wanted to see the shops we frequented: in short, he wanted to see how we lived. We introduced him to Mr. Curtin, the butcher. We went into Mr. Hurley's shop, the newsagent, who sold postcards of the Retreat, Spanish Point, the small protestant church. We said 'Hello' to Mrs. Hogan, where we got his flight back home booked and who also sold unusual items, e.g. wonderful woollen coats, hanging outside her shop. Father bought a light blue/grey one in the first year, great for bad weather when he walked home from the factory, and it survived till he died in 1984. Mrs. Hogan proudly showed him a large photograph of Éamon de Valera that hung on the way up the stairs. She was keen to tell everyone that he had visited her home.

He spent a lot of time in Mae King's shop and got on well with Mr. King, who was helpful and obliging, brought out the heavy bags of flour, generally wholemeal, to the farmers on their way home from the creamery, and heaved them up onto the carts. It was Mrs. King, though, who was in control of the shop, knew where everything was in a shop where the stock filled even the tiniest cavity. She kept the shopping-record books. People generally paid monthly. While she would ask very meaningful questions, remembering all sorts of family details, Mr. King

came out with wonderful phrase, e.g.: ‘Now, Hellgard, that man is so mean he would skin a flee for its hide.’ If Mr. King was alone in the shop for some reason, I always made it very clear what I wanted, e.g. ‘I’d like a 2lb. jar of strawberry jam. It’s on the middle shelf behind you, at the top on your left!’ He was very nice and always an entertainer. Moe King, on the other hand, was an all-rounder: good, nice, most intelligent, full of kindness and understanding. Grandfather liked going there. He gave Mr. King the nickname ‘Donnerkiel’, no idea why.

He loved looking into the forge at the corner of the Ballard Road, always very busy. Most of the country-people travelled by horse and cart, bike or walked. On the other side of the corner was Flynn’s shop, corner Main Street/Lahinch Road. Mr. Flynn was the man to contact if one had an electrical problem in the house. He also dealt with small electrical gadgets like heaters, electric kettles, electric blankets – very popular in houses that had electricity – light bulbs, simple lamps. Mrs. Flynn was in charge of the grocery side of the shop. She did not compete with Moe King, she concentrated on a different selection of food, her stock was more adventurous. She kept rashers, sausages, bacon, a little later cooked ham. Sometimes there were tomatoes from the Canaries, Hovis bread, and some years later fresh cream, very few packets of frozen fish, blocks of ice cream, small sponge-cakes.

When mother was so ill in the summer of 1962, I sometimes sat at her bed and would take her on mental trips to the Rhine (I had only been there in 1954) or we would go for a mental walk in one of the forests in Ronsdorf, or she would tell me how lovely the Ehrenberg was, a hill in Wuppertal near Schwelm, where I had never been. She said she would love to go there once more. When they returned to Germany in 1972, Henner drove our parents there and she saw it again. I found it difficult to tempt her to eat. One afternoon I asked her what she would love to eat if she had the choice. She answered: ‘A piece of melon.’ As it would have been as easy to find and pick up a raw diamond off the Main Street as getting a melon in the village, I told her to describe the taste to me!

Before Father and Henner came home for their tea I had to go to Flynn’s shop for a few messages. I couldn’t believe my eyes – Mrs. Flynn actually had a few melons in a box! I ran home with my treasure, grabbed a bread knife, a fork, a small plate in the kitchen, even before I took off my coat, ran upstairs with the melon & Co. Mother laughed heartily when she saw me in my coat, melon under my arm, the big bread knife, but she was delighted. As soon as I had cut out a piece and portioned it into small pieces on the plate, she took the fork and enjoyed her melon. It’s a wonderful memory for me.

The factory was of prime interest and Father showed Grandfather how everything was organized. Grandfather was impressed. He was very knowledgeable about the weaving industry. Perhaps the firm ‘Ritter’ in Barmen, where he worked for many years, was a weaving firm? Auntie Frieda’s husband, his brother in-law, was the owner of a weaving firm in Ronsdorf till it went up in flames when a bomb hit it in 1943. In fact, I know nothing about his various abilities. He was a good trumpet player, was a member of a music regiment during

the first world war. He knew a lot of English at his age. He was trained in typing and shorthand, had a teaching talent, and made wine out of the cherries from his garden in his kitchen. He was artistic and must have attended a secondary school in the nineteenth century.

In 1956, there was a tailor in Church Road. Our parents made enquiries about the price of a made-to-measure 3-piece-suit. It wasn't inexpensive, but in Germany we couldn't have contemplated such a purchase, and my parents wanted to take the opportunity to do something for him. Above all, the matching waistcoat was important, he always wore one, even if it wasn't a perfect match, and of course a white shirt and tie. Grandfather was delighted at the prospect, enjoyed choosing the material with great care, regularly going for his fittings. The suit turned out very well and he wore it regularly till he died, except when it occasionally had to be sent to the Dry Cleaner's.

During the visit Henner was helping out at the power station interpreting, but he and Grandfather had the evenings, and at the weekends we all showed him the sights, e.g. the Cliffs of Moher, Lahinch, Kilkee. We took him to Ennis. As we had been told that the Old Ground Hotel was lovely, served a great afternoon tea, we treated him and ourselves to that. It was a lovely, old hotel. Afternoon tea was served in the lounge, round a big fireplace with a huge fire and very comfortable couches and armchairs, small tables all over the large room. There were different sandwiches, hot tea and water in heavy metal pots, fruitcake, biscuits, some fancy cakes and warm, small scones with butter and jam. We never had them before. Two lots of sandwiches and the scones were served on a three-tier-plate set, all on top of each other, something we had not seen before either. It was held together by a metal stick which went through holes in the plates and had a silver ornament at the top; by holding this the equipment could be passed round. Grandfather, observing the silver handle-ornament named this combination a Christmas tree.

Ballroom dancing was starting to become popular at this time, *the* entertainment, especially for young people, and of course there were Céilís regularly. Grandfather wanted to see what entertainment there was for Henner and went along with him. My brother was delighted not to have to go alone and one could be happy to take grandfather anywhere. He never seemed old.

He had not been pleased about our move to Ireland, although he was prepared to admit we had all coped well and Father had done wonders to build up the factory from scratch. On the other hand, he made it clear what he thought about the chances Henner and I were getting and pulled out all the stops to persuade us all to return to Germany. There certainly was no solution in sight to the problems concerning our schooling and for Henner, at 18, there was no possibility of completing his secondary education. Eventually, my parents decided that Henner and I would return with him to Wuppertal. We would live at 'Am Kraftwerk' with him and Auntie Paula, and would return to our old schools. It was a chance, and my parents, who saw no alternative, reluctantly agreed to try this. A most difficult decision that did not work out for any of us.

Grandfather visited us a second time when Henner and I were at boarding schools. This time he came early in October, and my parents brought him to Galway to see the school. They collected Henner every Friday evening, brought him back Sunday evening or very early on Monday morning. One Sunday, they also brought him up to Athlone to see me, they were even in time for church. At Halloween weekend we all had a long weekend together.

Although the weather was good in early October that autumn was particularly cold and wet. He hadn't got any younger either, although I must say he stayed very fit till he fell, aged 87, and died three weeks later. The cold and the damp in the Retreat were not good for him, although my parents bought a large petroleum heater and an electric heater to add to the heat of the range in the kitchen or the open fire in the dining-room. He got very ill and Dr. Hillary strongly advised our parents to send him home as soon as they got a flight, and they did. He never attempted a third visit, but he was great to risk these visits at his age, when flying was not the usual way of travelling yet.

I saw him on one other occasion, our mother on two. She had things to get done in Wuppertal in 1960 and took the opportunity to take three double driving-lessons with a friend of our aunt who had a driving school, and then started driving in Clare. Father was surprised and appalled, forgetting his own early attempts. She needed a bit of practice, but later drove up to Dublin regularly to visit me, up-down on one day.

In 1962, about 4 weeks after her serious heart attack, she wanted to travel to Wuppertal. She had a friend, who like herself was very interested in alternative medicine and she had told her about a new Strath medication for heart attack patients. I was prepared to accompany her, but the risks terrified me. Once there, having got more information about the medicine she stopped taking her tablets, changed to the two bottles. I was even more terrified, especially when I saw a very blue tinge on her lips getting darker, but nothing would stop her. I had to admit later she slowly improved. We were actually able to order it in Dublin and she took it all her life.

Being with her father did her good, me also. When we had to return home, he insisted someone would drive us Düsseldorf and he would come, too. Looking out of the plane I could see him on the lookout platform. His coat was open and he had put his hat on the top of his walking stick and was waving it around wildly. It was the last time I saw him, such a happy and loving farewell.

20: A German surprise in an Irish setting

A turf-fired power station was going to be built in Spanish Point near the Holy Wall. Some Germans were the construction specialists and Mr. Collins was the E.S.B. (the largest Irish energy company) man in charge on the Irish side. They were staying in the Central Hotel in Miltown Malbay and Mrs. Cleary told them about us and where we lived. When a small delegation suddenly arrived on our doorstep, we were most surprised and then delighted. It is amazing what it means to be able to converse in one's language when one is not yet settled in a different country. Cologne is very close to Wuppertal so we had a lot of common topics and they called frequently. Herr Engels was the boss. As more workers arrived, Mrs. Cleary couldn't put them all up. Herr Engels asked if we could help out by offering a room, breakfast and an evening meal for a few men. They would be moving on to Skibbereen and other sites soon. I cannot remember how many stayed with us – may be three men, for perhaps three or four weeks.

Our grandfather was due to visit after his 76th birthday on February 10th in 1956. Grandmother had died in Germany, a few days after Henner returned home. Direct flights from Düsseldorf to Shannon Airport had started not long before that. Herr Bick was the man in charge of Lufthansa and we knew him well. At that age and in 1956 this was a courageous step for Grandfather. All his friends, in the Male Voice Choir, for example, thought he was crazy.

As it happened, a new specialist from Cologne was flying over on the same plane, so we were all able to welcome grandfather. On the way home our father got a lift from Mr. Engels, and Henner drove Grandfather, Mother and me home. Father's driving skills had improved, but now and again there had been a few serious hitches. Coming home from Ennis one day, for example, he didn't slow down before taking the corner at Inagh. This was a quiet place with a pub and a chapel and a few houses. A policeman was viewing the scene on the crossing when father shot round the corner. The garda had to jump for his life! Father got out to apologize of course, but the poor man was still under shock and pretty furious to put it mildly.

This new specialist was to me an old man like my grandfather, much older than Herr Engels, who had a grown-up daughter and wasn't that young either. He was very polite, very pleasant but only replied when spoken to, otherwise he was quiet. Two days later, Herr Engels appeared with the newcomer, imploring our mother to put him up anywhere. The two unoccupied rooms were full of 'junk' and unused furniture that the owners had parked there. In desperation Mother showed him one, the second small room off the dining-room, to explain why she couldn't take him in. The man was desperate and he didn't give up. He just couldn't bear the jollity of the other men, the noise and the drinking. The very small dark room with only a small window looking into the courtyard did not put him off, it actually increased his hopes. He was looking for a simple room in the vicinity, with use of a kitchen and as soon as he got a room, his wife would join him and he would be gone, he said.

He offered to help move all the things out into the 'Maid's' room, after that had been restacked to make room, and he did. Our parents made the little room as nice as possible for him with a rug in front of the bed, a good bedside lamp, a *lot*

of cleaning, a curtain and a few nice pictures on the wall. After the evening meal he liked to retire there and be alone. I overheard our parents make the remark that this man's wife was enabling him to cope with his memories of the war. Another lodger, they added, tried to survive with the help of alcohol. I was puzzled. I did sometimes help to remove empty bottles from 'his' room.

Not much later a room was found in Quilty and as soon as she got a flight, the newcomer's wife came over. She didn't have a word of English, was certainly about sixty years of age herself and had to be admired. Mother told her she could come two or three days a week, so she wasn't on her own all day. When Herr Engels collected the husband for work in the morning, he brought her to the Retreat first. Once I had had my lessons with Canon Elliott, I enjoyed her company. She wanted no fancy treatment and brought a new interest into my life. When she talked about her attempts at English I was mesmerized. Apparently, there was a visitor from London staying in the same house who would put the kettle on the stove and then forget it. She used to shout: 'London boy, de vater cockt!' She liked telling us about their life in Cologne-Parz and their cat, Peter. As they had no children, he was the one they could spoil. For the moment he was in 'cat-care' and she sincerely hoped he would get his daily ration of 125g of Tartar – good, lean beef, minced. (It is eaten by many people – raw – with a raw yolk of an egg, some gherkins and onions, toast or bread for their supper. I goggled for two reasons: we never ate raw beef and our cat certainly did not get 125g of beef steak each day! She talked about enjoying the Karneval in Parz – it was their highlight of the year. Plans and preparations began after Easter and eventually the 11th November was eagerly awaited when the fifth season was officially opened at 11:11 a.m.

She helped to prepare lunch and ate with us, and sometimes, knowing our mother, she took a portion home for her husband for supper. In the evenings she and her husband were sometimes driven to Miltown Malbay to do some shopping before returning to their room in Quilty. At that time Quilty did not have a shopping mall!

Now and again, Herr Engels would implore our mother to have them all (!) for a traditional German meal. German pea soup (made with dried peas) was a favourite with them all and the easiest to prepare. By that time, we had dried 'soup vegetables' sent to us from Germany from time to time in the winter: dried leeks, celeriac and carrots. Mother added fresh onions and carrots as well as potatoes, some lamb or beef (as we could not get fresh pork) and a little bacon. It came pretty close to the flavour of German *Erbsensuppe* (pea soup). Another favourite was a carrot, onion and mutton or beef stew with very little fluid – *Eintopf*. This 'one-pot' type of dish had become popular from the thirties on, as it saved energy, and these recipes have remained very popular since all kinds of vegetables can be used.

One day they begged Mother to make *Reibekuchen* potato cakes made from freshly, finely grated potatoes, mixed with eggs, chopped onions if desired, oatmeal/flour, salt, and then fried. That was a punishment. The huge mahogany

table was full of men sitting around it, hungry and delighted to get the taste of *Reibekuchen*, couldn't wait for the next freshly fried ones to be brought from the kitchen – just room for one pan on the Baby Belling – and Mother didn't repeat this cooking-frying marathon!

Very soon someone hit on the idea that Henner should be asked if he would take on the job of interpreter for a while. He accepted and only stopped when Grandfather took us both back to Germany in April, another attempt to solve the schooling problem. While he was working at the power station, an E.S.B. official was down from Dublin to investigate how things were progressing. He asked: 'Where did that young lad learn such good German?'. We chuckled about that remark for years. Henner picked up a good Clare accent from the beginning and so did I.

Frau Engels came to stay at the Central Hotel quite soon, and with her even more life came into the Retreat. They loved Cologne and had a flat right across the road from the Cathedral. They raved about the Cologne *Karneval*, especially about the well-known floats and bands that make their way through Cologne on the Mardi Gras Monday. The floats would pass their balcony, giving a bird's eye view and each year there was a rivalry amongst friends and relations to get an invitation.

When the daughter got older Frau Engels, being a Catholic, had visions of her daughter having a wonderful wedding in the cathedral. No taxis, no cars – they would only have to cross the road. And what did their beautiful daughter do? She went and got engaged to a Protestant – in Cologne! – who insisted on a protestant marriage – and her daughter agreed. Living across from Cologne Cathedral for the greater part of her life hadn't done the daughter much good. Frau Engels had to clench her teeth and accept the inevitability of her daughter's inconvenient marriage!

On our return to Wuppertal in April Henner re-entered his old school and surprisingly enough his old class. I passed a test, an equivalent to the 11 plus and joined those friends who had opted for secondary education. I was good at writing German essays, but my spelling needed a great deal of attention and I had to do some work to improve my grammar. The rest of the subjects did not prove to be a problem. However, this attempt to give us an education was not a success in other ways. The family in Wuppertal did their best, but when our aunt sent a photo after weeks showing me with my friend Bärbel, Mother was so appalled that she sent Father off on the plane to collect me a day later. I couldn't believe my eyes when I suddenly saw him crossing the street.

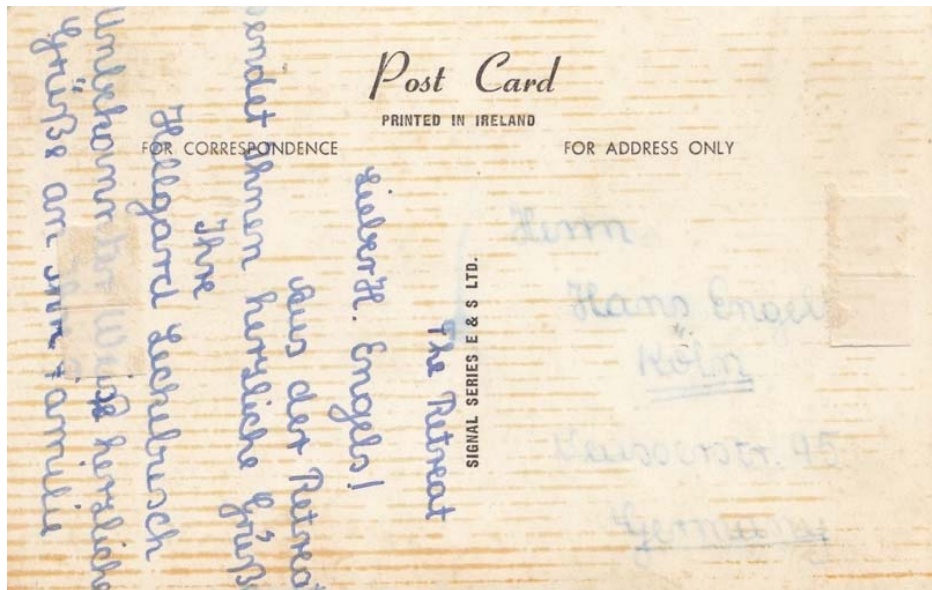
Mother made a pronouncement. Either schooling would be possible for us in Ireland and we would all remain, or we would all go back to Germany. Again, it was Canon Elliott who came to the rescue. He explained that Henner could qualify for university by doing the Trinity Entrance Examination for which a knowledge of Irish was not required. Finding a boarding school for us was the next problem. Most of the Protestant boarding schools, teaching through English, had a waiting

list. Eventually he found Galway Grammar School for Henner, and Rosleven School, Athlone for me.

Mother went to Wuppertal to discuss this possibility with Henner and he agreed to return with her. In September, boarding school life started for us, not ideal, but our parents could visit us and the contact was easier.

Meanwhile, work at the power station continued and was completed. Herr and Frau Engels bought a house in Athlone, lived there, and from there Herr Engels could drive to the various power stations. The three Rosleven standard walks all passed their house and the teachers were great: they always stopped the line for a few minutes to let me say 'Hello' at the door. I always felt they were pleased to see me. I was delighted to see them. They still occasionally visited us in the Retreat.

We were all very upset when Herr Engels became ill, and he told us the doctors hadn't been able to give him any hope of getting better, not even for a short time. I still visited them and generally he opened the door, even about a fortnight before he died. I was quite upset. When my parents visited me the next time, we called on Frau Engels. She was due to return to Cologne, a sad return. Both of them were important for us – and we for them – in our early years in Ireland, and I grew fond of them.



An unsent card to Mr. Engels in Cologne, about 1956

21: Swimming, life-saving, lifeguards, youth summers on Clare's coast

When I talk of treats, I include beautiful, sunny days spent on the beach, or a picnic at Lahinch or Kilkee. What I refer to now is a unit in time, which for Henner was Clare's special summer gift to him; in a lesser sense for me, too, and hopefully for many of the young people at that time. When regular summer visitors started arriving between mid- and late June, Spanish Point came to life, for young people in particular. There was the Kerrisson family from Limerick with their two teenage daughters, a younger son and a dog. They stayed in Spanish Point. The Condra family with their seven children stayed in a cottage at the White Strand. There were the Stapletons and the Morrisseys who stayed in Spanish Point too, but they do not stand out so distinctly in my mind. Slightly older young men from around the area like Dr. Paddy Hillery or the cousin Sean Hillery who was a chemist, were regular swimmers and well-acquainted with the young life guards. There is a photo of the life-saving competition group who won first prize in life-saving for the province, second place in Ireland. I recognize them all, but cannot remember all their names. I see Guy Vaughan, Sean Hillery, then two men whose names I have forgotten, Henner, of course. In the front row there is Irene Kerrisson, Nora Condra, Minnie Casey, a girl from Miltown, Gaby Gast, a visitor from Germany, and Billy Comerford.

Among the young people were Margaret and Geraldine Collins, Geraldine who was to become such an important person in my life. The photograph dates back to 1960, but this swimming time started sooner, maybe in 1957? Perhaps Henner had passed his First-Class life-saving test earlier, after which he was qualified to be a lifeguard, and had this post mainly in Spanish Point, sometimes at the White Strand, once in Lahinch. The lifeguards taught children how to swim and young people how to save someone in danger of drowning when the beach wasn't crowded.

These summers are not my nostalgic review of times that were always happy, of summers that were warm and sunny and when it never rained, when we were whirling around in a kind of Hollywood dreamland that was full of fun, where princesses and princes came straight out of a Hollywood 'Perfect Plant', all ready to be thrust into the 'happy-ever-after' state of life.

On the contrary, these summers were a perfect space for us young people, reaching out towards the adult world. We had great freedom, but there were boundaries that protected us and we were observed by watchful parents. No one was ever left out or made to feel they didn't belong. We hadn't a chance to feel bored or think up too much mischief. There was room for the shy, like myself, and certainly, if I hadn't had Henner, the big brother, my parents wouldn't have allowed me so much freedom.



Henner as lifeguard at Spanish Point, 1960

There were glorious, sunny days, when we sat in the sand dunes overlooking the wide expanse of the sea, chatting about all sorts of topics. When it was cool and the tide left a firm sandy beach, we drew lines in the sand with a stick to indicate a tennis court, and we played tennis. If the surface of our court became too bumpy, we quickly made a new one. Sometimes there were highlights like a bonfire at the edge of the beach. I think Mr. Kerrisson had that idea. Late in the afternoon the wood was stacked and the fire lit. Once it was ablaze, we sat around it while the potatoes were cooking in the ashes or on a stick. We had to train our patience, till after what seemed an endless time the potatoes were tested and thought to be ready. The piping-hot, black potatoes were placed into our hands. We shifted them around with great speed, so we wouldn't get burnt, till eventually they were cold enough to be peeled and eaten; still hot and smelling and tasting of smoke – wonderful. We were dressed in thick woollen pullovers or cardigans, yet the heat of the fire was great and I hated to see it die down.

Nowadays I would call it a 'flat rate' experience. We got it all. There were days that were cold, yet being summer we girls wouldn't consider wearing tights. Instead, we put up with cold, slightly purple, goose-pimple legs. If it really poured, we squashed into the tiny lifeguard hut, no one was left outside. And as could be expected on those occasions, someone might have a packet of cigarettes and passed them around – no pressure, no one was given preference, no one was ignored. One day at the White Strand I was offered one, took it, was given a light. Cigarettes were considered part of the adult world, so sophisticated. At the same time, I do not remember feeling I had to like them to be accepted. The taste was revolting, I thought, and when I had smoked about half of it, I went outside, quenched it in a puddle the rain had left. No way was I going to make myself sick and pay for it! There is one other occasion when I smoked a whole cigarette. We had a lot of visitors in the Retreat one day when I was about 15 years of age. Father passed round cigarettes and offered me one; quite confident I would refuse. His presumption annoyed me, so I took one, said 'thank you very much' and held it out to him to give me a light. He was completely at a loss and didn't know how to get out of this situation. I did my best to smoke with ease and assurance, suppressing the feeling of nausea, smoked it to the bitter end. Father never commented and I never touched another cigarette.

To quote Seamus Heaney when he mentions student pilgrimages to Station Island, 'there was an element of courtship' in the air. Duty came first though – swimming and life-saving. When I was twelve Henner decided that my 'splashing-around-in-the-small-waves' time was over and I would have to learn to swim. Had we stayed in Germany swimming would have been taught at school when I was ten, but I missed that. On one of his visits to Wuppertal Henner had come back with a most beautiful swim-suit for me. The basic colour was white, but it had some tiny pink roses with little green leaves spread over it, and around the legs and the bust it had three rows of tiny frills in the same material. I loved it. Duly attired he brought me to the 'deep corner' towards the end of the Black Rock, carrying the rescue ring with the long rope. He was a strict teacher. I could just

about stand at one end where I was given instructions what movements I was to make with my arms while standing. Then, I had to hold on to the rock and move my legs. Progress was good and a few days later I was told to get into the deep corner and swim. This time I couldn't stand, but the water was very calm and clear. It was delightful and Henner moved up the rock for a minute or two to talk to someone. Suddenly I was in the middle of a swarm of tiny fish – hundreds – no more than an inch long, apparently trying to escape herring and mackerel that fishermen caught very near the shore, standing on the beach with a fishing rod. The tiny fish were swimming past my arms and legs, they tickled me. I closed my mouth fearing I might swallow one. Panic was catching hold of me, but I did stay calm and when Henner came back they were gone. He wasn't impressed. 'What about them?', he said. 'They are more afraid of you, than you of them.' He had a point there.



Henner and Jimmy Darcy as lifeguards at Spanish Point, 1960

The Atlantic doesn't remain as calm as a lake for long. There were more swimming exercises beside the rock, closer to the beach. I was thrown against the rock again and again, and the tiny slate edges of the rock made little cuts everywhere, on the one side of my body, all bleeding slightly. No pity was to be expected. 'What about it?' was Henner's remark.

To get my swimmer's badge for my swimsuit I would also have to dive down to the ground and bring up a bathing cap. When the day came to practise this the sea was exceptionally wild, the tide was far in, covering part of the Black Rock. This exercise had to take place in the small corner of the rock, close to the beach. I couldn't stand of course, and besides coping with the waves, the water was full of sand and bits of seaweed and it was hard to spot the cap, never mind retrieve it. Henner was relentless and so getting the badge eventually was no problem. I could show off with it then!

Once I felt confident in the sea it was hard to keep me out of it – no parents, no cold weather, no downpours, nothing. I would run from the Retreat through the field to the little gate in my swimsuit, towel, cap and an umbrella, barefooted. I'd cross the road, pass the lifeguards' hut, leave the towel and umbrella on the wet sand, enjoy the swim; return with the wet towel and umbrella to the Retreat. On one of those days Henner and the other lifeguard were in the hut, the green flag flapping in the wind, but not a soul in sight. There were just two sets of footprints in the sand to the water – one set going, one set coming. A friend dropped in to pass the time of day. 'What eejit (idiot) has been out swimming today?', he asked. Henner replied, 'That eejit was my sister.'

In Wuppertal he was always interested and involved in the work of the fire brigade and the Red Cross. Along with like-minded people he wanted to help others who were in distress. In a way he was following in the footsteps of a granduncle of mother's that I read about in very old newspaper articles when I sold the family house. He was a communist and a socialist and he died in 1937, very rare in those times. Our grandfather helped elderly people who got welfare money, helped them with official correspondence, for example, and for 25 years he taught shorthand at night. It provided people with a better chance to get work. My grandfather was not paid for this work. In Ireland Henner saw the need to train young people to become lifesavers. When the sea was rough life-saving drill was practiced on land; there were all the different methods of releasing oneself out of the dangerous grasp of a drowning person, and then positions which enabled a life-saver to bring the person safely to the shore. The organized drill was endless, it had to get into the subconscious part of the brain. (I know, because eventually I had my first-class life-saving badge, too!) We young people had a common aim, it was active enjoyment, and we were trained to learn the necessity of seeing something completed. We learned patience and endurance, at the same time enjoying the company of people at our age.

No doubt I'm biased, but I always felt Henner was a 'doer', someone with a vision. While studying Judges (Old Testament Theology course) in Wuppertal in later years, the professor tried to explain what the role of one of the Judges –

German *Richter* – in the Old Testament was. To do so, he concentrated on the meaning of the German word ‘Richter’. A judge naturally passed judgment, but the professor continued to point out that there was also a connection to the word *richten*, doing something correctly or putting it right, making sure that a task is completed. Finally, the professor referred to the word *Richtung* – direction. A ‘judge’ in the O.T. was also the man who showed what direction people had to go – a man to follow. It was not a love of power; it was a love of responsibility. Looking back on Henner’s whole life I think that fits for him in some way. As soon as he could, he became an instructor, finally an examiner for life-saving. In a way he continued to lead the way for others all his life, no matter where he was.

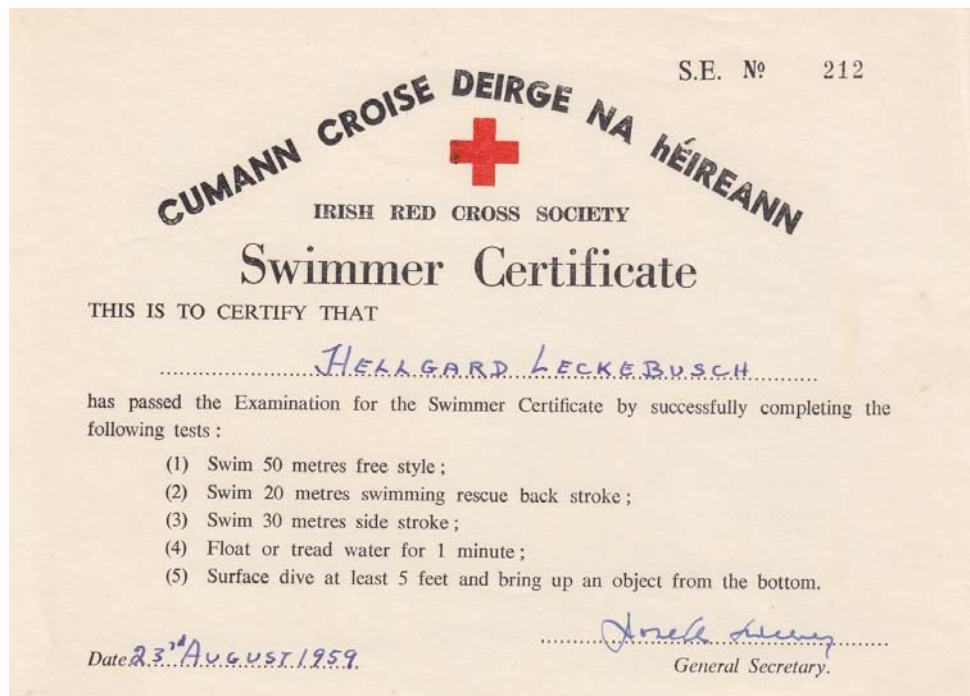
Meanwhile, this period was a good preparation for and entrance into adult life for many of us. For me it was a godsend. As long as we lived in Wuppertal, children to me were children with no distinction between boys and girls. Naturally my best friends were girls, but I got on very well with Ehrhard and Frank, our cousins, as well as Henner’s friends. When lots of children came to our house to do homework and we all sat all the way up the oak staircase because we were so many, there were boys and girls. Once in Ireland, I had little enough contact with children, practically none with boys and once I went to the girls’ boarding school, I found it increasingly difficult to talk to boys. In this protected, non-judgmental group in the summer I learned I got on well with them on a shy, friendly basis, I could watch them at a safe distance and sooner or later started to discern what I found to be pleasant characteristics in the other sex. Looks were not unimportant to begin with, but it always amazed me how quickly looks improved when a wonderful character shone through.

We all wanted to look our best and nice clothes gave confidence. Limitations in resources stopped us from becoming addicted to satisfying our vanity. School uniforms had to be paid for, so there was no shopping mania prevalent, something that young people are subjected to nowadays. We generally got one new item, dress or outfit per season. Geraldine was a good example. She was a really good-looking girl, and has always had, even then, great elegance and style. She had one outfit for one or perhaps even two seasons which never failed to impress. Her cotton skirt was in lovely summer colours, but small colour elements, so that I remember the ‘red impression’. The skirt was wide, held together by a wide band at the waist in the same material. Tucked inside the skirt she wore a white cotton blouse, three-quarter length sleeves, round neck, no collar, with a little thin strip of lace sewn onto each side of the row of buttons, and down the length of the sleeves. Geraldine with her dark wavy hair, tall, looked beautiful in them. Both skirt and blouse were always freshly washed and ironed. We didn’t all look as well as she did, but that was unimportant. We tried to look our best, hoped that would be registered, and then we concentrated on living.



Henner as lifeguard at Spanish Point, 1960

Life wasn't always fun, we weren't always happy, but life was rich, a preview of real life. Metaphorically speaking: with the sunshine and the rain, the storm and the calm, inner growth was possible. Wishes and hopes were not always fulfilled, there were times of sadness, disappointment as well as joy: it was an important time. In later years Henner did not often have the opportunity to recall this period or in fact, life in Ireland as a whole. When he could the occasions were precious. When Dr. Hillery became President of Ireland Henner was so delighted that he specially came to see me, wanting to know if he could send off the letter he had written to congratulate him. I encouraged him to do so, and he did. The letter showed the appreciation for shared times, Henner's respect for him, his sincere congratulations. And the letter showed how much Ireland had remained a part of his life.



Hellgard received her Swimmer Certificate on 23 August 1959

Clare: A mental portrait gallery

22: Introduction

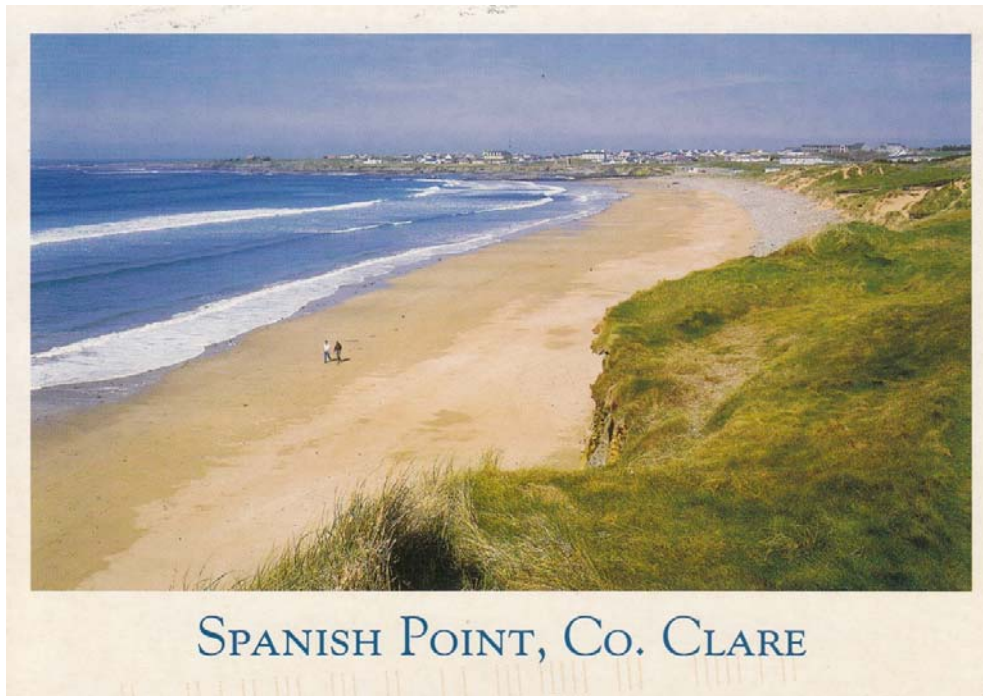
to the nine portraits below (Nos. 23-31)

It seems to me as if we walk through life on a conveyor belt. If we have enough space around us, we can stride ahead, and feel we're in command of where we're going, making any decisions we wish. When we come across a junction we can move onto a different conveyor belt, changing our direction. For many people this is so, but what about those who are enmeshed in a dense crowd and cannot leave in time? Perhaps they take too long to decide and miss the opportunity, or misjudge where the new route will lead them. It is easy to stumble, people can push you, walk over you; we may be unable to find our feet again and just have to let life take its course, without a chance to enjoy moments of beauty and joy along the wayside, free gifts, instead waiting for the painful journey that 'life' is taking us on to be over.

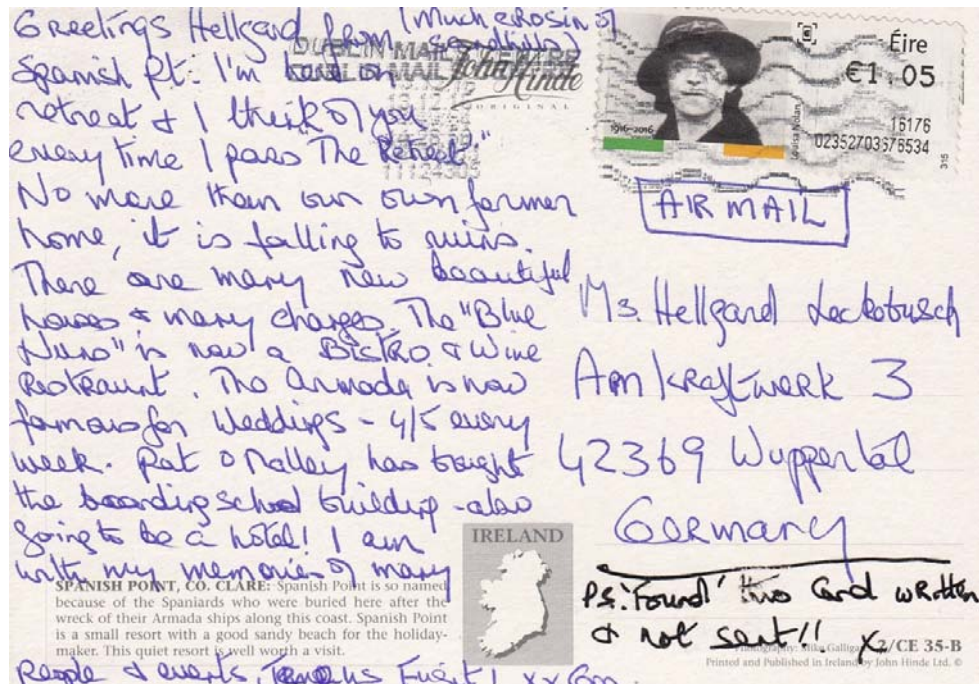
Whatever our journey is like, we always move along with others, in contact or not, pleasant or unpleasant people; men, women and children we hardly notice, not even when they stumble and fall, are hurt and need help. Occasionally our hearts are touched when we see the need to give a helping hand and do so, or are helped ourselves. And there are always fellow wayfarers who are just wonderful, striding happily and courageously with us, making it a wonderful journey.

I have been blessed in my life with family, friends and acquaintances wherever I have lived that have made my life so rich. In my mental portrait gallery of Miltown Malbay, a few from there have their place, but by no means all. The others are unframed so far, in storage so to speak, but remembered and honoured. To name a few: Mrs. Comerford, the hairdresser, such a wonderful woman with a sharp, clear mind. There is Mary Meade, father's competent secretary for many years with a lovely character, very like my friend, Gertrude. She kept in contact with my parents till they died and continued to write to me till she died. I see Mrs. Fitzpatrick, who lived across the road from us in the Main Street. Her husband was the national schoolteacher. I thank her, too, for her loyalty of keeping in touch with us and later on with me for so long, like some others, too. There was Tom Laffan who had the Medical Hall near Flynns and Henner knew him well, or the couple who lived beside us in the Main Street: They had a small pub, a very friendly couple. I think she had been a teacher before she retired and I often had a cup of tea and a chat in their house. There are Willi and Mary Healy who moved into the Hill House after we left. Willi regularly wrote long letters to our father, keeping him in touch with what was happening in the firm, always including Mother. They and others who are not mentioned now like Mrs. Flynn from Canada Cross – such a lovely, cheerful and friendly woman – are not forgotten.

[Hellgard Leckebusch, *Singing our Song*, p. 147]



A postcard from Geraldine Collins to Hellgard from 2016



23: The emigrant

He stood there in the street that spring morning, talking to some friends and neighbours, the small garage that repaired cars and small farm machinery on his left. The constant rapid change from bright sunshine to dark threatening clouds was not a cheerful background. A sharp wind was blowing up from Spanish Point.

I might have been 10 years of age, knew who he was, knew his family, and had been told that he, 17 years old – roughly my brother's age – was due to travel to Cobh the next day. From there he would board an ocean liner, sailing to Australia perhaps not knowing a soul on this long sea journey: a young man who had possibly never travelled much farther away from the village than Ennis. He knew this was his destiny and that of his parents, as it had been his brother's some years previously, and that of many young people he had grown up with. There was little or no future for young people in the villages. They were sent to Britain, or the States, to Australia or New Zealand. This man's parents worked hard, would have done anything for him and his brothers. This was the best future they could offer him now: the sacrifice of the money for the journey – the fare was generally free – and he would have been given a small amount of money for an emergency, too, along with the assuring address of an uncle in Australia; above all, they were letting him go with the hope of a better life – heartbreaking. Dalcash Labels had been built to bring work and more prosperity to the village – I knew that. That was why we were there.

I could see the expression of natural pride in his face, displaying a completely new outfit: trousers and a jacket, matching shoes and socks, a shirt and tie. In these he was happy to present himself to the neighbours. The outfit was nice and good, but to me it did not seem to be a good fit, had probably been bought with him the good, thrifty intention that he would fill it out a bit later. He was already tall, very thin, lanky one would say, and he didn't seem to know exactly what to do with his long arms and legs yet, not helping his confidence but quite normal at his age. Besides the pride, and beneath the sheepish smile, I seemed to detect a sense of fear of the relentless unknown adventure that lay ahead of him, and I still do when I see the mental snapshot of that moment now – it is the significant detail.

He arrived safely in Australia, met his uncle, we heard that, but heard no more. At first we made careful, gentle enquiries, but when the answer was always 'He's grand', we stopped. It wasn't that he was forgotten – even to mention him was too painful, the facade too close to breaking point. A friend tells me she never saw the mother smile. I did, on a few very precious occasions – a wonderful, courageous and strong woman and mother. No doubt the father was just as good a father, and suffered likewise, but I only knew him to see.

More than sixty years have passed since then and life has changed. The village is prosperous now. Spanish Point has been discovered as the jewel that it always was. While the village has received a face-lift in every way – the small and some larger houses are beautifully painted, decorated with baskets of flowers, and a statue to honour Willie Clancy at the end of the Main Street, nice shops. Spanish

Point has been developed, too. There are some exclusive hotels, even the ruins of the Armada Hotel have given way to a beautiful hotel for quite some time, while the ruins of the Retreat are literally sinking back into the sands of time. The Willie Clancy Festival is well-known and it is good that such a gifted musician has a deserved place of honour and respect, because however hard life might have been, there was always Irish music and Willie Clancy was a musical genius.

My 'Mental Portrait Gallery', is filled out with other heroes, deserving to be honoured and at least sometimes remembered. The emigrant's portrait hangs in a good place. I think of him now and again, wonder how he fended for himself, if he was able to live a happier life than his parents. When I look at the portrait it is there for him and his family to be remembered, but he also represents all those young people who for many years had no choice but to emigrate. I admire their courage, their quiet acceptance of the inevitable, and the fact that very many did exceedingly well, making the most of their opportunities.

My thoughts are extended to other times and places. Extensive emigration belongs to the very heart of people's destiny in Ireland, especially for the century after the famine, but not exclusively so. As far as living memory goes back millions of men, women and children have always had to flee from or leave their homes, family, country of birth in varying parts of the world. The reasons vary: war, famine, catastrophes; for political and/or religious reasons, strong in the hope of survival, but with no assurance of success. And even when successful, they had paid a noteworthy price in many ways. I wish to acknowledge what they endured; to respect them; to stand up for their dignity when I can, I, who know nothing of their plight.

This 'young' man's family home still exists, well looked after: a sign of work and life and love and hope. There was and still must be a little garden at the back. I never saw it, but each year for my birthday, whenever I was home for it, I got a huge bunch of magnificent dahlias out of that garden, just beautiful. Even now that I am old there is a family here that knows dahlias are important for me on my birthday and bring me some if they can.

24: The woman with the broom

One day I had just come down the Ballard Road, and was turning the corner into the Main Street on my way to Mae King's. Some messages had to be got before Father and I would drive down to the Retreat for lunch; and that was when an unusual event caught my eye. Nothing much ever happened in the Main Street during the week in those days. Sometimes people stood in the doorways of their houses or shops; the jaunting cars with one, sometimes two, big milk cans would pass early in the morning after their trip to the creamery on the Ennis Road. Perhaps a policeman or even the sergeant would be reviewing the village situation on his way from the Chapel to the bank and back, or the Parish Priest would be passing, stopping on his way to talk to various parishioners. (When Miss Parker-Hutchinson sometimes came to Clare her flashy, light blue Opel Kapitän would attract a lot of attention, parked in front of Mr. Tom Jones's building, that for brief periods served as a so-called cinema. The car was like a highlight.)

On this particular morning I was confronted with a situation that in Miltown Malbay could be termed a tumult. (This was in the front of the Central Hotel and P. J. Hurley's.) Besides a lot of shouting and a bit of physical attacking, a lot, in fact, for the village, I only recognized one woman. I knew her and liked her very much, a very kind-hearted woman. On this occasion she was armed with a big broom, used it to hit one or two people in the crowd, as if she were in control of a tennis racket: forehand, backhand, and in this way, she literally swept them towards the bank till these poor creatures fled up the Ennis Road, out of my sight. I stared.

Then I quickened my step and ran to Mae King's, wanting to know what that was all about. News travels even faster when there is little news: indeed, Mae King could give me details. Apparently, a small group of Jehovah's Witnesses – possibly two or three – had made their way to the west and hit on our village. It is their tradition to stand and hold up their newest edition of the 'Wachturm' (The Watch Tower), try to engage passers-by in a conversation if they respond, or visit people in their homes if they are let in. They do not preach in public. They must originally have stood there on the footpath, where there was a bit of activity, with people buying a paper or going into the hotel for lunch. This proved to be too much for a few of the villagers, who must have felt the Catholic Church and their faith were in danger of being corrupted, and this danger had to be removed, physically if necessary. I could not believe that a woman I liked so much would arm herself with a broom and use it against people who had not attacked anyone, or even broken a law. There was a lesson I had to learn: fear can protect us from potential danger, but irrational fear is a bad companion and a worse adviser.

Quite upset I said to Mae King that I was used to seeing Jehovah's Witnesses in Wuppertal, generally standing near the post office when I had accompanied my grandfather there. Mrs. King replied with a 'Is that so?' I continued to relate that Grandfather always acknowledged their presence by lifting his hat in greeting, but he never stopped to talk to them.

I continued to relate I had met one of their members in Ronsdorf, as Mother knew her, and occasionally she called in to see Mother. She had had a very hard life after the war. Her husband had left her with a very small child, could or would not support them either. She was isolated, working and caring, seemingly getting nowhere, devoid of all hope till Jehovah's Witnesses called one day and changed her life. She had found a kind of family in their congregation, and a belief and trust to support her. Mother said it was a blessing she had come in contact with them. Mother's beliefs were different, she did not need to be influenced, neither would she ever have thought of criticizing her friend's belief. Once I heard her friend make a derogatory remark about the Reformed Church. Mother didn't let that pass. We had a bit of firework whizzing around the sitting room till the boundaries were negotiated!

At home for lunch Mother was informed about the latest village excitement. A few days later we met the broom-lady who was still full of excitement, most pleased that she had saved the village from a religious onslaught. Mother didn't say much, asked what harm these people had done, and finished the conversation a bit briskly by saying she felt we were all human beings, and anyway she was a pacifist. End of story about the broom and its victorious achievement!

A temperamental portrait in my gallery, no doubt.

25: The man in Wellington boots

There were regular cattle fairs¹ on the Main Street during the fifties and early sixties, a spectacular sight for us. The night before all the ground-floor front windows of the shops and houses were barricaded fairly high up with wooden boards. The cattle did not keep to the street, they were all over the footpaths, too. There they pushed or were pushed against the doors and windows, and without these safety precautions the glass would have been broken as a matter of course.

Farmers living a few miles away drove their cattle into the village themselves. On a few occasions I saw Canon Elliott taking his cow the mile up to the fair, in his clerical clothes, the hat with the rosette and black Wellington boots. They sometimes kept a calf and sold the cow. He was well respected by the people around, from time to time, young people asked him for a letter of recommendation and as a bargaining man he was not aggressive, but he wouldn't be fooled. Everyone knew that.

The portrait that I am focusing on in the portrait Gallery is not like any of the other portraits. I see a man in Wellington boots, he is bending down, so I cannot see his face; but he is a strong man with large hands. In the background the scene on the street is visible, crammed with cattle and people bargaining. Beside the man there are two other faces, Mr. Curtin's and my brother's, who is just entering the scene. The man in the Wellingtons was one of the cattle dealers, who drove to the village in their lorries, transporting a number of cattle. They generally parked up the Ennis Road. They hoped to buy and sell well, and to make good money.

Henner on his bicycle had passed the man in front of the butcher's shop and saw him drop a thick role of banknotes as he pulled a handkerchief out of his pocket. Either he did not hear my brother's shout, or perhaps he did not feel he had been addressed and disappeared into the shop. So my brother stopped, got off his bike, leaned it against the shop, lifted the tightly rolled up banknotes and followed the man into Mr. Curtin's, explained the situation and gave the cattle dealer his money. He in turn took the money, flattened out the banknotes and counted them, well over £900, a huge sum of money at the time. He remarked that nothing was missing, rolled the banknotes up again and replaced them in his pocket. With a thrifty 'Thanks very much' toward my brother he turned back to Mr. Curtin and whatever they were discussing.

When Henner came home he was full of the news, still speechless that a man would put so much money into his trouser pocket, no purse, no wallet. My parents remarked that the man had been very fortunate, especially a man showing little gratitude. Our mother was annoyed that he had checked the money to see if my brother had helped himself (!), yet quite unprepared to hand over even 10 shillings or £1 to the honest finder. Our parents praised Henner for doing the correct thing, and told him not to let this man's behaviour discourage him.

¹ For a photograph of a cattle fair in Miltown Malbay *circa* 1956, see p. 167. For the landscape in which the cattle graze see the photographs on pages 168 and 169.

CLARE: A MENTAL PORTRAIT GALLERY

26: Mrs. Walk

Mrs. Walk we always called her, but in the village, she was known as T.C. Walk. The Walk family lived in one of the houses in the Main Street, nearly beside Mrs. Casey's shop. She was one of the first people in the village that caught our interest. She never just walked or rushed anywhere; she had a joyful, sprightly step about her and I used to compare her to a spring lamb when I was quite young. She was surrounded by an air of calm, personal happiness, alongside with a dimension of pride, all supported by trust. It was a joy to watch her.

The hairstyle seemed most unusual in Clare. She had two plaits pinned over her head from ear to ear in both directions. There were only two Irish women I remember with this hairstyle: Mrs. Walk and the wonderful wife of an Anglican Archbishop of Dublin during my time. It reminded me more of German or Austrian women; in Clare it was like a revelation. Her husband was a man from Poland. His English was fine, but limited. I met him occasionally, a very cultured family man, very friendly, but he kept himself to himself, like all the family. We never heard how he had come to settle in Clare or where he worked, and we never asked. They had three very nice children, a little younger than me. They were very clever at school, making the most of their abilities without the need to be over-ambitious. As far as I know they all went to university.

When the old, greatly respected postmistress was due to retire Mrs. Walk applied for the post. She had suitable premises, had great personal qualities, e.g. she was very discreet, and was given the post. I think life was a bit easier for the family after that, but above all she was a great postmistress. As soon as she took over there seemed to be no noticeable change from the post office in Mrs. Hynes's good hands. Mrs. Walk was very conscientious and reliable and took it all in her stride. As before the time when she took over, they seemed to be a very happy family; the parents were doing everything for the welfare, happiness and progress of their children.

We cherish one memory of her above all others. In the early summer of 1969 Mother had her most serious heart attack late one evening. We had a phone in the Hill House, but the doctor could not be called directly, we had to phone the post office. Mrs. Walk immediately tried to contact Dr. O'Connor in Quilty, but there was no answer. Obviously, all the family were out. She stayed up all night, and tried every 20 minutes, till eventually at 5 a.m. Dr. O'Connor answered – they had just come in the door. When I thanked her again a few days later she replied how worried she had been and repeated again and again: 'And I had to think of your mother the whole time, getting no help.'

The last time I was in the village I went to see her in the post office. She was delighted to see me, more so because I hadn't come a day later. She was off to see her husband's sister who was in London. 'When she's so close by, someone must make an effort to go and see her and I'm the only person who can just now.' That was Mrs. Walk – no effort she felt was necessary was a chore for her.

27: Mr. N

Mr. N's portrait is small, but very clear. He was not a local, he wasn't even Irish. The time when our lives crossed was short, but it was special. He can't be placed in the visitors' gallery because he was never that; for a limited time, he was more like a friend or even part of the family

When I started college, my parents were nearly 60 and they had made it clear to the German directors that it was time to look for someone to succeed him. After some time, Mr. N was announced. He would come and work alongside my father in the firm before he was prepared to commit himself. Even ten years after our arrival it was almost impossible to find a suitable place for him to stay, but he rented a room in a family house on the way to Spanish Point. He was fortunate to find it, but in comparison to what he would have been used to not really suitable. As I was at college a lot of the time, I do not know exactly how long he stayed. He was intelligent, cultured, well-mannered, thoughtful – an extremely fine young man. Our Father got on well with him at work and we enjoyed his company and conversation in our home. As far as I know he came for lunch with Father during the week. At the weekend he drove around Ireland, getting to know Kerry or Connemara; he discovered new places each weekend.

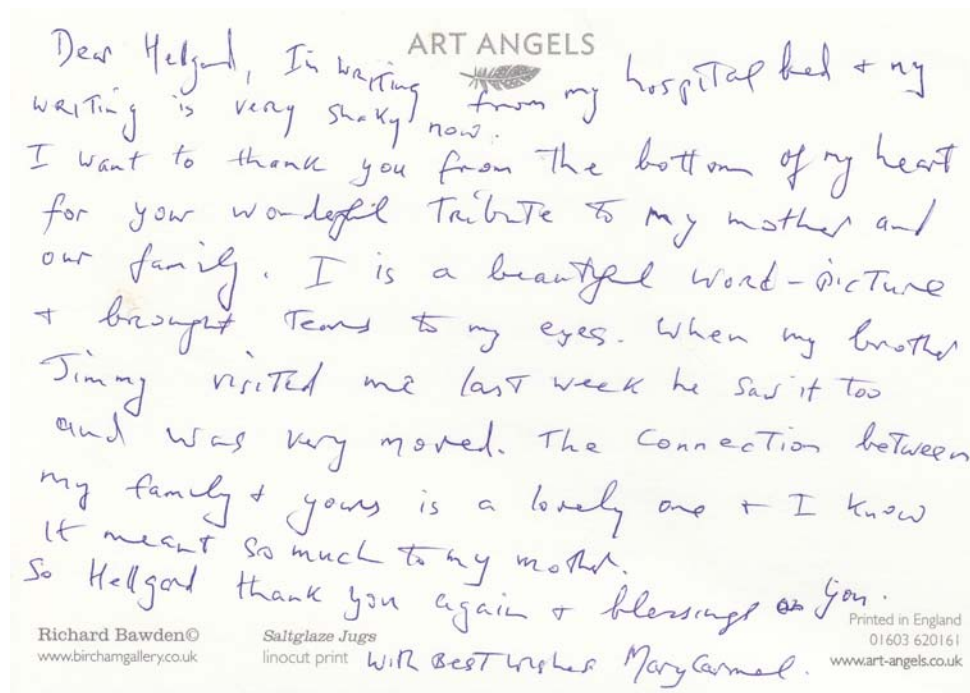
Integration was not easy for a young unmarried man who was not keen on the role of the new beau around the town. And his room which had little more to offer than a bed and a television could not become more than a transitory place to be based.

For us he enriched our lives and almost seemed like a member of the family and he behaved like that sometimes. Shortly before Christmas our parents wanted to do some pre-Christmas shopping in Limerick and Herr N said he would cope well alone. There is no doubt that he was respected by all the workers. I was already home from college, but was going to do some cooking for the Christmas party in Dalcash and did not go to Limerick.

Christmas Shopping sounds most elaborate for the shopping plans in Limerick. Some real coffee beans were on the list, some cheddar and/or Blue Danish cheese as a change from the Galtee processed cheese. A change of bread would be wonderful, a glass of pickles and above all some different vegetables and some fruit, e.g. some white cabbage, celery maybe a cauliflower or beetroot, some oranges, bananas and grapefruit or pears. Getting oranges in Miltown was still not a certainty. When they returned to the car park, they had Mother's lovely leather shopping bag which was heavy, and a plastic bag. Father had the leather bag and said he would put it into the car, Mother put the plastic bag on the back seat. They were keen to get home. The road to Shannon Airport was a good road now, but after that the roads were narrow and full of twists and turns, difficult to overtake a horse and cart or tractor. It would take them the best part of two hours. When they got home there was no leather bag with all the important – and expensive – goodies. Herr N had heard the car and came over at that precise moment and said 'Guten Abend' (Good Evening), when he became aware of the atmosphere and

wanted to know what was wrong. Mother briefly and simply stated the facts. Herr N, still in his coat, checked his coat pocket for the car keys and just said: 'Bin gleich zurück' – I'll be right back. He sometimes drove to Limerick, knew the car park. Well after 9 o'clock we heard his car and the knock on the door, He came in beaming, proudly presenting the lovely leather bag. It was still there where Father had put it down. (During those years many people never locked their houses or cars, even left their key in the front door. Other people's property was generally respected.) He was so pleased and announced very simply: 'Jetzt habe ich aber Hunger!' – I am hungry now. He got something quite special in next to no time and we all had tea – a happy time. That was Herr N. – in a nutshell. He flew home for Christmas and the New Year a week later.

When he decided to return to Germany after some months, we understood his decision. For us personally it was the end of an enriched time we hadn't expected.



A postcard sent to Hellgard on 12 July 2019 by Mary O'Sullivan, the daughter of the subject of the following portrait

28: Mrs. Kathleen O'Sullivan

We will have seen Mrs. O'Sullivan around the village before that, but we only got to know her when she knocked on our door in the Main Street. She was a tall, slim, dignified woman with a lovely smile and manner. She asked us if we had any scraps for her chickens. As there was no garbage collection at all in those days Mother said she would be delighted to keep potato peelings, vegetable bits and pieces, egg-shells for her. Up till then we had dug these into the small garden. She came twice or three times a week, very regularly, and now and again she brought my mother six fresh eggs – a wonderful arrangement and always a short, very pleasant meeting.

When we moved into the Hill House up the Ballard Road, she was our neighbour and we got to know her better. She and her husband and the three children lived in a small house on the road, and I vaguely remember that early on two elderly relatives lived with them. They had a front door, plus a half-door to keep out the chickens or stray dogs or cats, as one entered their main room from the doorstep. Mr. O'Sullivan was a postman. His round started up the Ballard Road, and continued uphill into the countryside. We felt for him, his bicycle heavily laden with parcels, packages and letters, and that in all weathers. My mother commented on his hard job and Mrs. O'Sullivan agreed, but added, that one family on his round always made tea for him in the middle of the day. My saying – it's the people that do more than their duty that keep life for a lot of people 'going'.

They had a small patch of bog somewhere up that hill, and early in the year they spent a day there, cutting the turf. They brought tea and sandwiches and Mrs. O'Sullivan loved these days. She would tell my mother a day or two later what a great day it had been and raved about having a meal outside in the fresh air. In the autumn there was another day out in the bog: the turf had to be brought home.

There was a water pump on the opposite side of the Ballard Road for the cottages up that road who were not connected to the water supply yet. Every bucket of water had to be fetched, for cooking, for cleaning, for washing. They didn't have electricity at the beginning either, but they had a transistor radio which they enjoyed and were well informed about current affairs, and a lot of literature, too, especially Anglo-Irish literature which was becoming famous. Mrs. O'Sullivan often commented on what she had heard.

She loved her family and she was always cheerful, even fulfilled, in spite of what could be considered a life of hard work. When we moved into the Hill House I was in my late teens and she impressed me greatly when she talked of the 'three lovely babies' that had died. She often included them in her conversation, quite naturally, still being part of her life and family. That touched me greatly.

She had two sons and a girl that all did well. When a storm and heavy rain were responsible for part of our stone wall falling down, we thought it would be no problem to put the stones back into place, and we did and it worked fine. We didn't have to wait for a storm till the stones lay scattered beside the house again.

Mrs. O'Sullivan told Mother that her son Jimmy – in his early teens – could do it if we wished. Jimmy came. I must admit we were not too confident, but Jimmy spread out the stones individually on the field. It took him quite a while, looking and musing, before he would decide on a particular stone and put it into position and in this manner, only interrupted by mother's invitation to some tea and refreshments, he finally had all the stones in place. Lacking knowledge in regard to the art of building stone walls we felt it looked no different to the way we had tackled it. Time taught us though! We were to experience lots of rain and heavy winds, storms, but the wall was well built, not a single stone fell, still standing years later when we left for Wuppertal.

They were good years, and Mrs. O'Sullivan was a wonderful neighbour. Her children grew up and all did well; water was connected to the house, electricity too, and her work got a little easier. She was very sad when we left, as we were. She was a regular correspondent and we loved getting her letters and of course we wrote likewise. We were sad to hear when she wrote that her husband had died. She likewise wrote lovely letters when first our father and then Mother died. And she had a mass said for them in the Chapel in the village – one in 1984 and one in 1986. It meant a lot to us that they were honoured.

When I organized a bus tour to Ireland in the nineties, I visited her with three friends. As she knew we were coming she had made any amount of delicious ham sandwiches and tea. We hadn't had anything to eat since breakfast time. I felt a bit ashamed that we were eating so many sandwiches and was a bit relieved when she finally had at least one herself when we had finished. Incredible hospitality! It was important for me that my friends had met her.

We continued to write to each other and the day came when she couldn't cope alone at home and she was in the nursing home in Ennis.

On a visit to friends, I got a chance to visit her, but had not told her, in case I would not be able to call in the end. One of the nurses brought me into the room. She was sitting up in bed, contentedly saying her Rosary. I didn't speak, watched her, a special moment in time. And then she saw me, cried out my name, and after we had hugged each other, she cried and I was close to tears myself. It was so good to see her – for the last time.

Kathleen O'Sullivan, I want to pay a tribute to you, your life, your friendship.

29: Bid Downes

The neighbours in the Ballard Road our mother had most contact with were Kathleen O'Sullivan and Bid Downes. Bid Downes lived in the two-storey house across the road from our short avenue, and diagonally across the road from the two factories, Dalcash Labels and Malbay Manufacturing Co. Beside her house was the vocational school.

During the day the front door was always open and a very short passage led to her kitchen which she also used as a sitting-room. The open fire was always lit and immediately in sight when one opened the door; an armchair on either side and her faithful dog on the rug beside her.

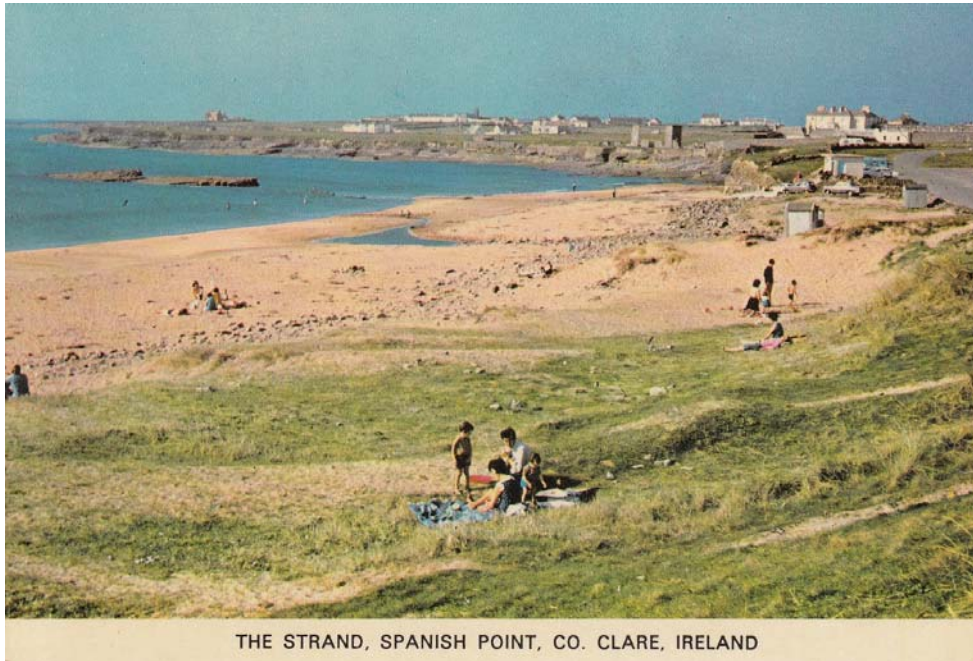
Before one arrived at her kitchen door there was a hatch on one's left and a little tuck shop behind that. She entered the tiny room through a door from her kitchen and opened the hatch at break times in the factories and the school. She sold cigarettes, matches, sweets, biscuits, crisps, chocolate, tea and sugar, minerals, little else, and if anyone came at another time, she would be ready for a little selling session.

She was an elderly lady, a treat to visit her. She was calm, friendly and interested in everyone, but not inquisitive. Mother sent me over from time to time to get some tea maybe, or a packet or two of cigarettes. Father smoked seldom, but it was good to have some in the house for visitors and anyway it was a neighbourly decision. To go to her was a pleasure for me. She always invited me into the kitchen for a fag and a chat. As I have never smoked, she'd make tea and fetch one – sometimes even two – small bars of Cadbury's chocolate, either Turkish Delight or Fruit and Nut, my favourites. She would ask how all the family were and told me about her relatives in the States and their renewed invitations to visit them in the States. She told me how ridiculous the kind idea was, she had hardly ever left the village. Eventually she did fly over the Atlantic, for the first time when she was 80, and loved it, talked about it for months. Not only did she take it in her stride – she repeated the visit a year later, at 81!

She shared other news and helpful tips. The doctor – I think it was Dr. O'Connor – came regularly. When her 'iron' was too low, he advised her to add a good handful of raisins to her brown soda bread which she baked, *not* sultanas!

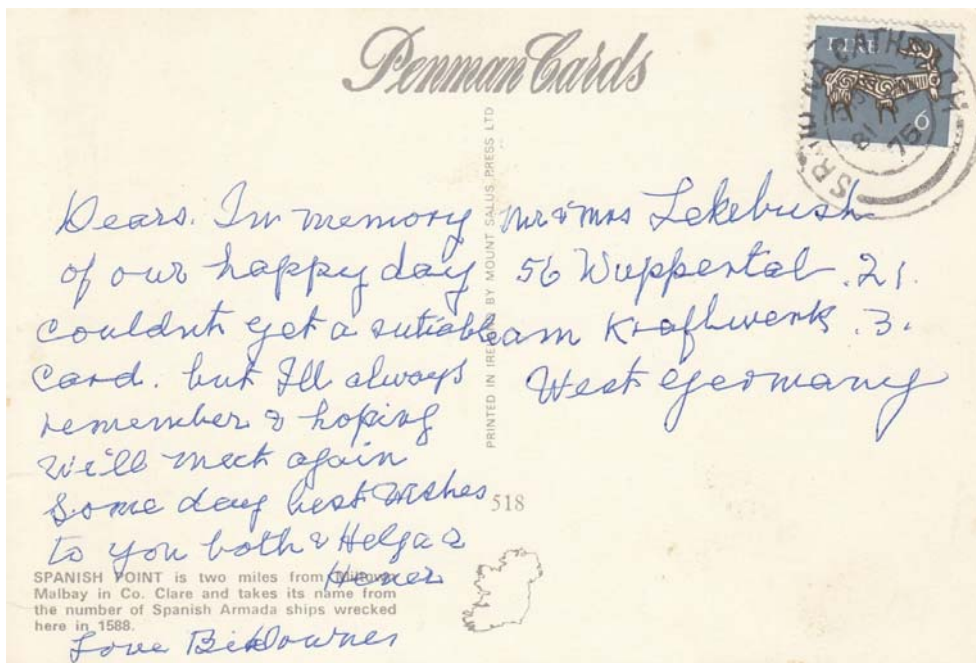
When she heard that we were going back to Germany she was very sad, and so were we to leave her. Instead of a little farewell present my parents decided to take her out for a drive to and afternoon tea in Kilkee. I had already left for Wuppertal from Dublin. They were lucky, it was a beautiful day and it was a great success all round.

As long as she lived, she sent my parents an anniversary card each year when the date came around, in grateful remembrance of the outing. When I was over in Ireland on holiday, a friend from Dublin sometimes took me down to the Miltown Malbay and Spanish Point. I called in to see her of course, always a lovely, happy, but also tearful meeting.



THE STRAND, SPANISH POINT, CO. CLARE, IRELAND

A postcard from Bid Downes to Hans and Helma Leckebusch after they had left Ireland



30: Mary Anne Mac Donagh and her brother

This portrait is one of my favourites in the gallery. I admire the dignity of these two people, a certain serenity, pride devoid of any arrogance, an acceptance of life as it comes, with all its hardships and limitations, accepting life as a gift about which one does not argue. When readers reflect on my words, will they find them difficult to relate to the portrait?

They must have been between 40 and 50 years of age in 1954, perhaps even younger. Mary Anne Mac Donagh was not as tall as her brother, had a brisk step, but walked with a slight stoop. Perhaps the heavy metal bucket she always carried when her brother was not with her, was responsible for this. Her hair was already quite grey, showing signs of white. Her brother, like herself, was slim, but tall, and his hair was still dark. A lot of caring for each other seemed apparent when one saw them together, he with a certain manly protectiveness. She, on the other hand, seemed to be the more courageous of the two, full of energy and purpose to survive and to make the most of their few opportunities. They never strolled through the village, looking for novelties in the shops. They greeted everyone, but seldom stopped to chat.

In the early fifties life wasn't easy for many people along the Atlantic Coast. Poverty was the rule, not the exception. These two people stood out from the rest – for their dignity, and one had to accept their poverty belonged to a different category: they were destitute. They had a sort of roof over their head and no doubt they got some help from the church as far as that was possible, being just two amongst so many needy people. We were told the brother and sister always reared one pig, sold it and started again with a piglet. It seemed to be their only source of income. I never caught sight of a pig or piglet, but the bucket served to transport leftovers they collected daily to feed the pig. As both places were on their daily route, I presumed they got supplies from the hotel, and from a small bakery in the Flag Road, but I do not know.

They were very polite and well-spoken and the way they walked; one knew they were in no doubt that they had the same right to live as everyone else. They accepted their (mis)fortune as it came to them and tried to make the most of it. I never ever saw them on the beaches of Spanish Point or the White Strand. The shame – or maybe painful memories – might not have given them this personal freedom or the walk was too difficult for them already perhaps?

We were aware of them some weeks after our arrival, and they of us. One day Henner passed them and after they had exchanged a normal greeting, possibly a comment about the weather, they said they had seen him and his parents and sister about the town, and could they enquire if we were just visitors, or if we had moved to the village. They introduced themselves, Henner did likewise and explained that our father was in charge of the new weaving factory on the Ballard Road. That was all that was asked and said, but Henner, whom they always called

Henry, impressed them. They told Mae King what an exceedingly fine, polite young man, a German, they had spoken to, not at all arrogant and very good at English. From then on, they greeted anyone of us by name and we in turn did the same. No conversations ever followed. We respected each other. It was 'Henry' who remained for them the 'star' in the family however.

It was Mae King who at some stage told us their story. They had been children in a well-to-do family; their father had been the stationmaster. They received private tuition and she, Mrs. King, remembered seeing the children being brought to the White Strand in a pony and trap. Before either of them had reached adulthood, neither prepared for a difficult life or trained for a particular task, grave misfortune hit the family completely unexpectedly. The father, Mrs. King told us, had not been able to survive the tragedy, and the mother died of a heart attack soon after. All the children could do was to support each other to try and survive.

They must have followed the rules of their upbringing, to remain honest, to work hard, to accept life as it came, not indulging in complaints or accusations towards the people involved in their misfortune. Our lives seldom crossed, but we respected each other. We felt for them, but we tried not to pity them. On our first Christmas there, not an easy Christmas for us either, Mother sent me to them with two blankets and some tea, and we always remembered them with a small gift every Christmas, even after we went back to Germany, then with the help of the good woman, Mae King. She had advised us when Mother asked, to give them a small jar of Bovril; similar in texture but quite different to Marmite, as Bovril was concentrated beef juice that made a very nourishing and tasty hot drink. The gift of a large jar of Bovril, some tea and a tiny treat of a packet of biscuits was to become the traditional gift at Christmas for them.

In Miltown we were thanked personally, in Wuppertal we regularly got a Christmas card from them, but as we knew her writing we realized it came from Mae King! Then one year there was a surprise – Mary Anne Mac Donagh wrote the card herself, Mae King the address. One could see she was out of practice, but it was still obvious she had been trained to write well. Lovely to get such a card! When I think of them, I smile, although I know about their difficult life. Their memory makes me happy!

31: The lady and the Canon, the lobster and the crab, the roses in the case

Canon Elliott's portrait hangs on the wall of honour. Three moments are captured there, all equally important for me, and he is not alone in the portrait.

The lady, Mrs. Elliott, his wife, may not always have a prominent place in my writing, but she is always there, so important, basically the other side of his life. In my childhood small wooden 'weather huts' were popular in many homes showing a woman, often in a *dirndl*, and a man, often in leather trousers. If the weather was due to be sunny one of the figures moved to the front of the hut, while the other retreated to the back, still visible. If rain was expected they changed positions. No matter who was in the foreground – they only worked as a couple. The Canon and Mrs. Elliott always reminded me of these couples.

She was tall and slim, very dignified, walked very upright, but without the faintest trace of arrogance. Canon Elliott often proudly recalled the fact that she was one of the first ladies to drive her own car around Liverpool at the beginning of the twentieth century. Her life in Spanish Point was a long way from that! She was quietly well-dressed, never wore a huge, flashy hat that was the fashion at the time. Still, she knew what was right for her. She often wore a lovely brown tweed coat. Walking to Miltoyn regularly, she had spotted a brown sheep, not dark brown and quite a novelty amongst a flock of white sheep – an unusual sight around Miltoyn. One day she decided she would like to have a coat from the wool of that sheep. It was a long way from sheep, to wool, to tweed, wool to be transformed gradually into a lovely cloth and finally the coat she was wearing, the sheep mentally still grazing in the field beside her.

She lived her important role as the rector's wife quietly. She saw everything, did what she could for the small congregation that was increased considerably by regular visitors in the summer.

Her dinner parties for friends in the summer season were special occasions. At high tide good friends living afar were invited in the spring and summer season to catch lobsters and crabs with the Canon. He was an expert, whisked along the rocks and with his long pole, a hook at one end, he got the lobsters and crabs out of their hideouts in rock cavities, and he loved it. Mrs. Elliott, with Catherine's help, prepared dressed crabs and made lobster salads for the guests' dinner. She sent us a few dressed crabs occasionally and they were a delicacy. Even I had to admit that when I tried some, although I generally kept to my resolution not to eat crabs or lobsters ever after I had heard their squeaks when they were immersed in the boiling water. This was in 1954 when the Canon had taken us and our visitors out on the rocks to catch them and we brought our share home.



Canon Elliott fishing in Quilty, date unknown

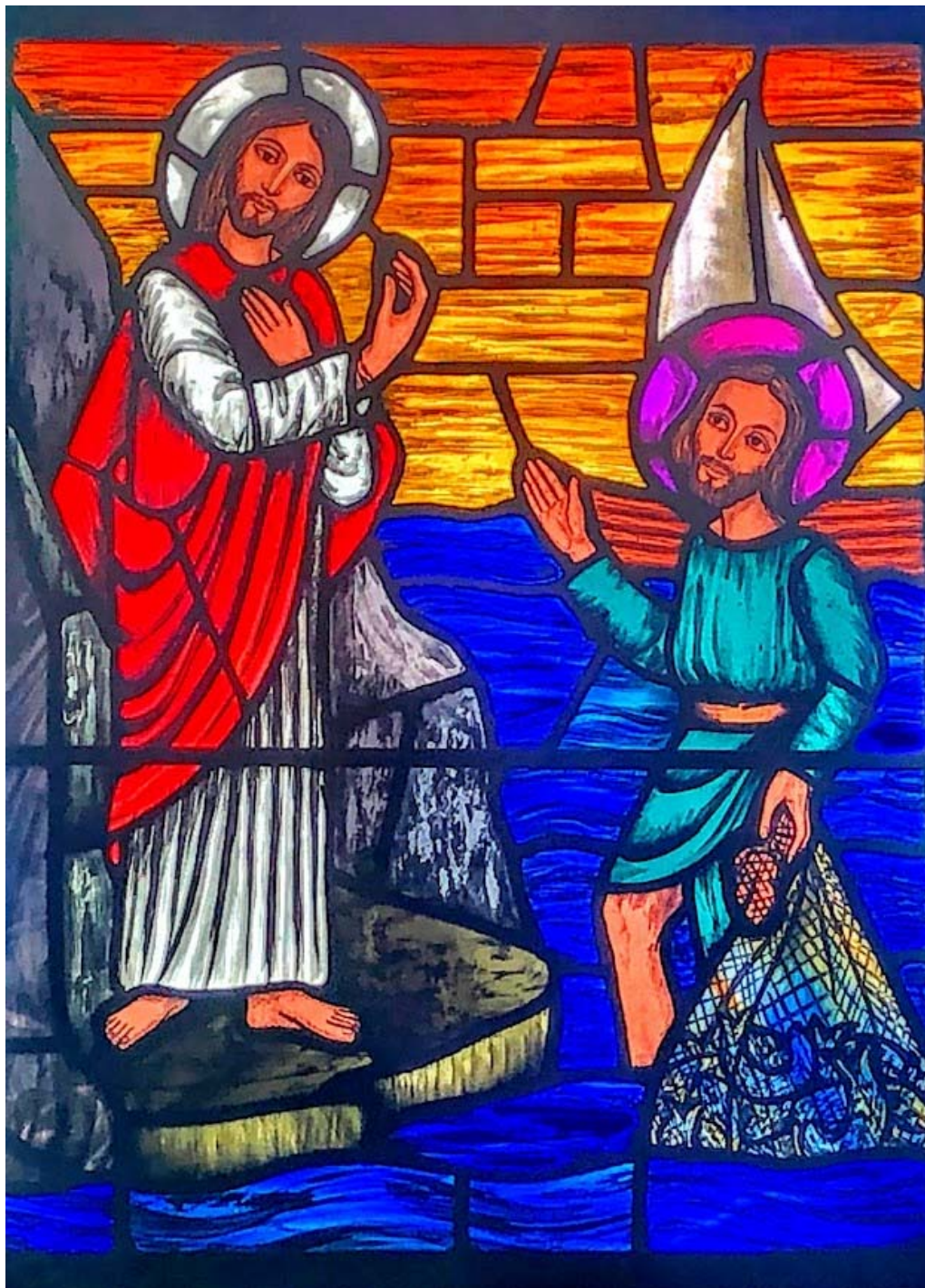
That brings me to the second part of the collage. This shows Canon Elliott standing in front of the new church window being unveiled in the small church. Dear Mrs. Elliott was no longer alive and he had continued his work as the rector till he was nearly or over 80 years of age. His eyesight was failing and he retired and went to live in Ashford, where his sister-in-law lived. It was a lovely bright day when all the beautiful old furniture was out on the grass in front of the house for the auction – a sad day for him and for the people to whom he had given so much and to whom he and his wife meant a great deal.

The stained glass window, designed by the Harry Clarke Studio in 1959, is dedicated to the memory of Canon Elliott's wife, Nellie, who died in that year. In the left- and right-hand bottom corners there is a lobster on the left and a crab on the right. Especially one family had the idea and organized the project – a great credit to them. It was natural for others to support the idea, but this family saw it through.

[photograph opposite]

The Elliott Memorial Window
Christ Church, Spanish Point

Photograph by Patrick Comerford
(<http://www.patrickcomerford.com/2021/07/christ-church-spanish-point.html>)



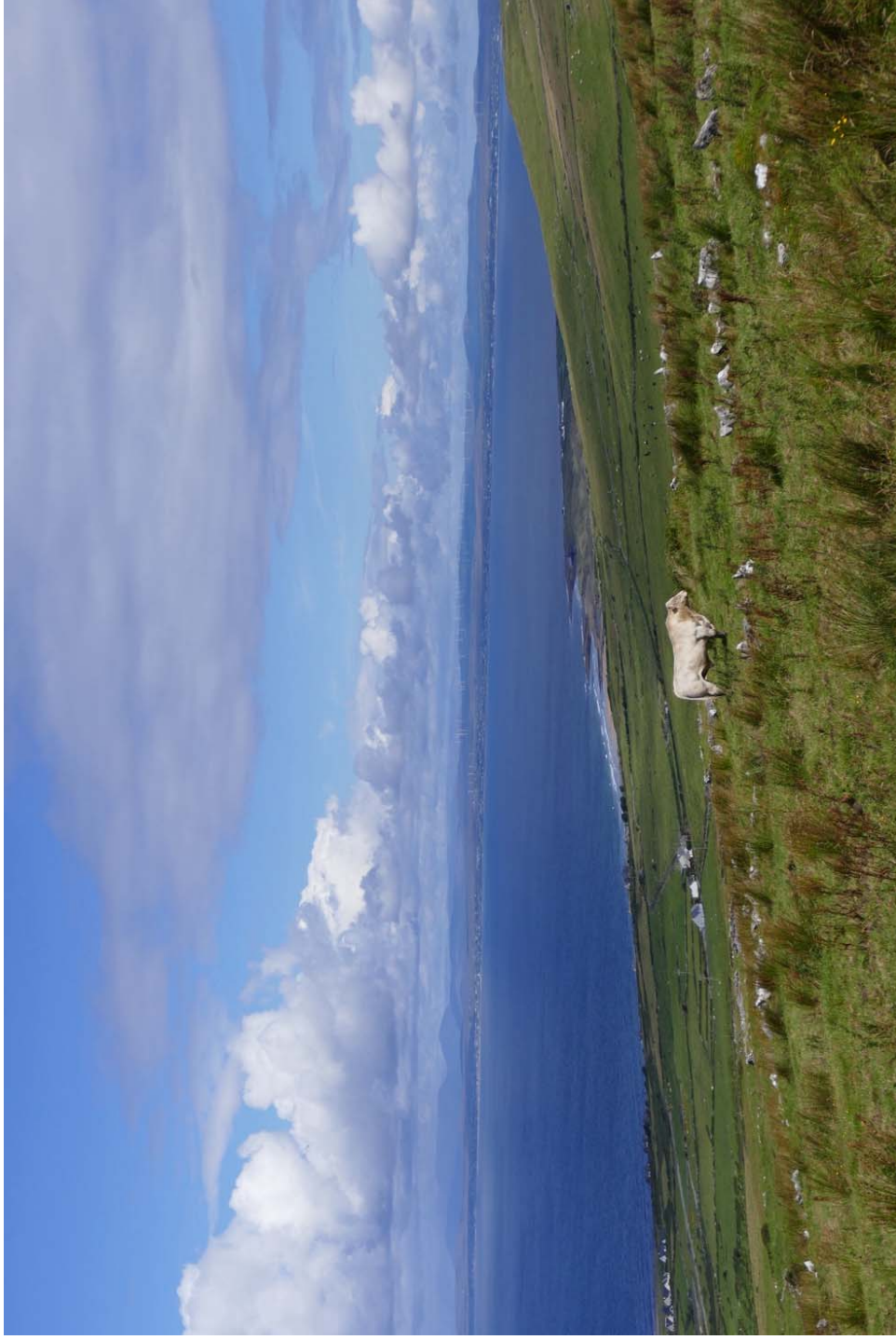
The third portrait: My parents and I had visited the Canon in Ashford and had met his very talented sister-in-law who made beautiful stone and wooden sculptures. I was studying at Trinity at the time. The day of commencements, when my degree was conferred, our parents and I were standing in Front Square after the ceremony. Quite unexpectedly we saw the Canon coming through Front Gate. As always, he was in his clerical dress, squinting hard, so he could see where he was going. He had come up on the bus from Ashford and was carrying a very small brown cardboard case – very common at the time and used for all sorts of things: e.g. as a case for travelling, or by pupils who kept their schoolbooks in a suitably sized version. I ran to meet him and brought him to where we were standing – Lorna and Gertrude were also there. He lifted the secret of the case: it was full of the most beautiful light pink roses out of the Ashford Garden. Some in full bloom, some buds, all with wonderful scent. The Canon, our Canon, with roses for me, brought up on the bus to mark my day, a day towards which he had guided me for a considerable part of the journey. He would take the bus back later, get to Ashford and would have to walk up that short but very steep path to his sister-in-law's house, all with his limited eye-sight. What a tribute!

He had not become a bishop, he was not the rector of a large urban parish, he had not written any highly regarded theological books or essays. But suitably he was Chancellor of the Diocese of Killaloe, and he was greatly respected. Above all he and his wife had mounted the ladder of humanity and had reached a great height. They had become and been peacemakers and were authentic ambassadors of what they believed in. They were quiet heroes.





Miltown Malbay cattle fair, about 1956



Black Head, the Burren, County Clare

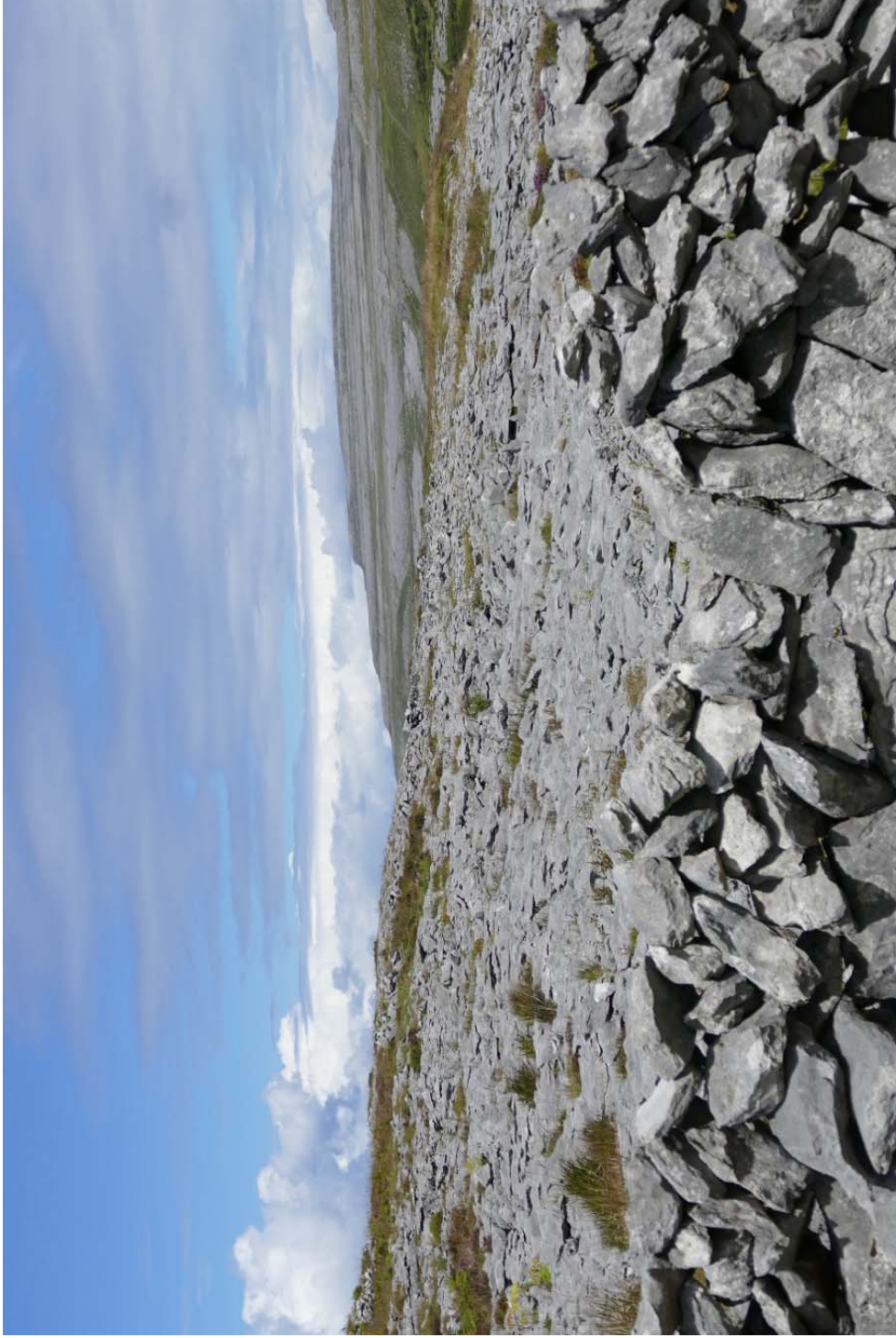
[Silke, 2017]

[Hellgard Leckebusch, *Singing our Song*, p. 168]



Cattle grazing on the hills of Clare near the shore of Galway Bay

[Hellgard Leckebusch, *Singing our Song*, p. 169]



The stony landscape of the Burren where one could travel for miles with no hope of finding a Christmas tree

[Hellgard Leckebusch, *Singing our Song*, p. 170]

[Silke, 2017]

32: Operation Christmas Tree

In the Ronsdorf Church Magazine in autumn 2018 there was an article about Christmases, with photographs during the war and the importance of having some sort of a tree. Alongside there was a photograph of Christmas 2017, taken in South America. The family from Wuppertal had tied green branches to a broomstick, had decorated it with electric candles and other German decorations and it was their symbol of Christmas. No way could they do without a tree and that is how it was with us. In the first year Mr. Tottenham's brother and family came to visit from Co. Wicklow and brought us one on Christmas Day. In the following year and years we had to fend for ourselves.

One of our treats was going for drives around Clare, getting to know our area, and from October on we would take a mental note of cottages with relatively small fir trees growing beside their house or cottage. The cottages might be near Kilfenora, on the road to Mullagh or Ennis, maybe even Kilkee. Two weeks before Christmas we would get down to business. We'd knock on one of the cottage doors, introduce ourselves, state our request. Irish hospitality is wonderful. Tea was then served and the matter discussed in detail. We, naturally, wanted to pay for the tree. It generally took a bit of driving, and lots of hospitality, tea and chat till the saw came out and we could put the tree into the boot of the car and happily drive home. The tree was always put up on Christmas Eve and in the meantime, it was 'in waiting' in the courtyard. I have many memories of Christmas; they were always exciting. In 1955 Henner was in Germany and besides the fact that we missed him, a great helping hand was missing, too. The factory didn't close till 6 p.m. on Christmas Eve, the shops were still open and we could get the last few messages from Mae King's. Sometimes she suddenly had oranges at the last minute, so it was well worth paying a visit after the factory had closed down for Christmas.

By the time we got home and had our tea, lit the fire, it was quite late and we still had jobs to do, no tree up. At 11 years of age, I was dead tired. In the end I promised to go to bed if they promised to leave the tree till Christmas morning. They did!!! I fell asleep as soon as my head hit the pillow. I was woken up by a scraping noise and I knew at once what it was. The passage between the kitchen and the dining room was very long – three bedrooms off one side of the passage – but it was extremely narrow. So I knew: my parents had brought the tree into the kitchen, were pushing it along the narrow passage towards the dining room now. On the one hand I felt bad because they were doing this alone (!) as they were so tired, but I went back to sleep very happily, knowing I would have a decorated Christmas tree when I got up.

My parents also had another surprise in store for me. Beside Mae King there was another small shop, the width of the one display window, about 150cm, plus the width of the narrow door, like Mae King's. They sold china – we bought the first china tea set there – Tara – and in 1959 the workers of the firm bought a huge Waterford Glass salad bowl for our parents' silver wedding anniversary there – a

**BOREENS,**

defined opposite as country lanes, frequently narrow and unpaved. The upper example is to the south of the Cliffs of Moher. Both are bounded by the dry stone walls typical of the Burren



most generous, wonderful and beautiful gift. The shop window was always crammed with lovely quality things. That year – quite out of place – I noticed a white toy dog, about 12 inches long. He was gorgeous. The idea would not have entered my head to say I'd like to have it, but I wanted to share my delight and get my mother to see it when she came out of Mae King's. She agreed – it was sweet. I was quite happy to leave it at that. Our parents tried to fulfil our wishes if they could, but seldom indulged us with transient joys. That Christmas morning, under the decorated tree, with other gifts, sat the white dog, suspiciously eyed by our cat! It was fantastic and a 100% surprise. I was delighted.

When Henner was at Galway Grammar School we took a mental note of a suitable tree *en route*, and we got it before Christmas in 1956. It was the most beautiful tree we ever had, either in Germany or here. It had a duck-egg blue tinge, the tree was a fir, the spiky variety, not a spruce. It was beautifully grown, not a flaw anywhere, not the type when there would be one side best placed out of view against the wall. We put it up away from the wall in the 'drawing-room' in the square tower, the one looking out on the Atlantic. There is a beautiful photograph of it still, with the sunlight coming in through the big east window, sunbeams in the branches.

From our second Christmas on in the Hill House Mother told Father the workers should have a Christmas Party. Besides a Christmas cake she baked a selection of German cakes, made endless sandwiches. I don't remember what else, but it was splendid and lovely and it brought great excitement. When the few lady workers and some of the men collected the Christmas spread, they were full of surprise and delight and praise.

As soon as this tradition started two Christmas trees had to be got. I was home early from college one year and I set off in the car with W. Healy. We started early in the day, but luck was not on our side, and wanting two trees out-stepped any willingness to surrender even one tree. We were foolish to talk about two trees to any farmer.

We'd been driving along the countryside, up endless boreens (a country lane, or narrow, frequently unpaved rural road in Ireland), talking our heads off and it was slowly beginning to get dark. We stopped on the road, where we had spotted a cottage up on a hill with several trees. Mr. Healy made a double pronouncement:-

No. 1: We're not going home without a tree, i.e. two trees.

No. 2: You're going to stay in the car this time. I don't want you to hear the stories I'm going to come out with.

Off he went and it got dark. Several pots of tea later, or perhaps there had been a lot of something stronger, time-wise more than an hour later, he appeared with another man, both pulling a tree behind them, Mr. Healy with a broad victorious grin. They tied one on the roof of the car, the other went in the boot, boot open!

I congratulated Mr. Healy on the success of his stories, and as for the rest, I kept my curiosity under control and said nothing. We shot home, at quite a perilous speed in the dark on these country roads — very narrow, full of bends — feeling triumphant.

By the time I was teaching in Wesley College I was never home early enough for such an event, but I think, by then, one could buy Christmas trees in Ennis, for cash rather than for cash *cum* stories.



The Christmas tree, propped at the back of the newly-built Hill House, Miltown Malbay, ready to be set up on 24 December 1963

Part V: My Boarding School Years



Hellgard at Rosleven School, 1961

[Hellgard Leckebusch, *Singing our Song*, p. 175]

ROSLEVEN SCHOOL

ATHLONE

OUTFIT LIST

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1 BROWN COAT | LAUNDRY-BAG ✓ |
| 1 BROWN MACKINTOSH | 2 PAIRS WALKING SHOES ✓ |
| 1 SUMMER COAT | 1 PAIR STRONG SHOES for games ✓ |
| 1 WINTER SCHOOL HAT | 1 PAIR HOUSE SLIPPERS ✓ |
| 1 SUMMER SCHOOL HAT | 1 PAIR WELLINGTONS (or goloshes) |
| 1 BERET ✓ | 4 PAIR FAWN STOCKINGS ✓ |
| 1 SCHOOL TIE | 2 PAIRS GLOVES ✓ |
| 1 BROWN TUNIC | 1 PAIR DANCING SANDALS |
| 1 BROWN FROCK for best (Winter) | 1 PAIR TENNIS SHOES ✓ |
| 1 CREAM FROCK for best (Summer) | 1 PAIR BROWN DRILL SHOES ✓ |
| 3 CREAM SCHOOL BLOUSES | 1 PAIR BEDROOM SLIPPERS |
| 3 SCHOOL TOBRALCO FROCKS (Summer) | 1 DRESSING GOWN ✓ |
| 1 BLAZER | 1 TENNIS RACQUET |
| COLOURED FROCKS for evening ✓ | 1 HOCKEY STICK |
| 3 SETS UNDERCLOTHING ✓ | 1 SPONGE BAG and contents ✓ |
| 3 PAIRS PYJAMAS AND CASE ✓ | WORKBASKET and mending things. ✓ |
| 1 RUG OR EIDERDOWN ✓ | HOT WATER BOTTLE (optional) |
| 1 SCHOOL SCARF ✓ | HYMN and PRAYER BOOK, BIBLE ✓ |
| 1 BROWN CARDIGAN ✓ | 18 HANDKERCHIEFS ✓ |
| BRUSH AND COMB ✓ | CLOTHES BRUSH ✓ |

HOUSEHOLD

- | | |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| 2 PAIRS SHEETS ✓ | DINNER KNIFE and FORK ✓ |
| 2 PILLOW CASES ✓ | DESSERT SPOON and FORK ✓ |
| 2 BATH TOWELS ✓ | TEA KNIFE and SPOON ✓ |
| 2 FACE TOWELS ✓ | FISH KNIFE and FORK ✓ |
| 2 TABLE NAPKINS and RING ✓ | SOUP SPOON ✓ |

Coats, Blazers, Tunics and Materials may be obtained from
MESSRS. BOYERS & CO., North Earl St., Dublin.

Hats, Blouses, Scarfs, Ties and Berets are kept at the school.

Every article must be clearly marked.

Clothing with Cash's names.

33: Rosleven School, Athlone

After Father had collected me in Wuppertal in June 1956, and Canon Elliott had come up with Galway Grammar School for Henner, and Rosleven school for me – they both had a free place at short notice – my parents brought me to Athlone in August to see the school and meet the Principals, Miss Webster and Miss Richardson. Our first impression was good – lovely, well-kept grounds and except for a new wing for two dormitories and classrooms and a gym downstairs it looked like an old, well-kept country house with extensive grounds. There were lots of trees and bushes on one's right as one drove up the avenue. The lawn in front of the house with lovely bushes and shrubs behind it – I specially remember the laburnum tree in bloom – also served as a tennis court in the summer. The open space between the building and the lawn was covered in gravel, leaving plenty of space for cars to park.

The two ladies had heard our car and were standing in the doorway to welcome us, up a few steps, and accompanied by their two dogs, Patch and Larry. We were brought into the spacious hall. The landing on the first floor was in view, protected by a beautiful long banister. We were brought into the Principals' sitting room on our right and were served tea, Larry and Patch in attendance.

After pleasantries and formalities had been exchanged, we were shown round the school and the grounds. When we came out of the sitting room we were shown into the very large room on the other side of the hall. This was a multifunctional room as it served all the boarders as their rest and prep room, but during the day it was also used as a classroom. The first thing I noticed was a cabinet, with glass doors, which was full of books: the school's 'library'. It was well stocked with children's classics and standard books for children and young people. Later on, I always enjoyed choosing a book for the weekend, and I more or less read my way through the 'cabinet' while I was a pupil there.

A very large mahogany table surrounded by many chairs was the important piece of furniture in the middle of the room and at the end there was a large wooden armchair, the beautiful fireplace behind it. Along one wall there were three desks and there were one or two double-desks beside the fireplace, at an angle to the wall. The huge window looked out on to the tennis court, and if one moved one's eyes to the left, one could see the hockey field beyond. The railway line on a high dam ran high up along one side of the field. Looking towards the right we could see the large walled garden with a gate. It was full of vegetables and potatoes, fruit like gooseberries and loganberries. I think that they also had an apple-tree, but I may be wrong. A gardener was in charge here, as well as for the grounds and tennis court/lawn. Later they brought us outside and led us up a path between the lawn and the walled garden to the children's allotment. Before we turned a corner we had to walk through an arch, covered in magnificent light pink roses that had a beautiful smell.

Two pupils always shared a small patch of garden that we had to look after, we had to plant it, give it a design and it was very easy to see who grew up with a large garden at home. By nature, I was not endowed with green fingers, nor did I



Miss Richardson and Miss Webster, 1960

develop them, but it was an interest and a responsibility for everyone and some of the pupils were great gardeners.

Back in the house we were brought into the dining-room now, divided from the Principals' sitting room by a sliding door. There were three long, narrow tables and chairs, a dumb waiter on one side, and the piano on the other. At the end of the room there was a hatch through which the food was handed into the dining room from the kitchen. During the day this was the music room, for piano or violin lessons, and for choir practices. The kitchen was across a narrow corridor between the kitchen and the hatch of the dining room.

At a right angle this same corridor led to a tiny room and the back door, the room had shelves on one wall where the clean outdoor shoes were kept, every day and Sunday, the hockey shoes. Underneath there were two large wooden boxes for all our dirty shoes. They could dry there, but we had to make sure we cleaned them regularly. Out the backdoor there was a ball alley to practice tennis. This was marvellous and in great demand. A vast number of cats lived here in outhouses, but they did not come into the house.

There were classrooms downstairs in the new extension, also the large room, used for morning assembly, special announcements, gym, dancing, classes, art. There was another piano here that one could play but had had its day. It was one of the three pianos in our rota of piano practice time.

Upstairs in this new wing were two dormitories, but the dormitories pink and blue for the juniors were in the old house, the landing divided the two. The Principals' bedroom was on the other side of the landing, as was the sick-bay where we had to stay and were looked after when we had e.g., chickenpox or a bad dose of flu. The toilets and bathrooms were half way up the stairs in the old part of the building. While children from the age of 5 were taken as day pupils, I don't remember a boarder younger than 11. The number of boarders was approximately 25. Day pupils, boarders, preps and secondary pupils were around 50 pupils altogether.

We were shown examples or photographs of the uniform next. This consisted of a brown tunic, (one) beige blouses (3), a school tie, and an orange *crios* – a length of a thick orange coloured 'ribbon' tied round the waist. We needed a dark brown cardigan, a winter Sunday dress, brown with a cream collar, a summer Sunday dress – cream with a brown collar. A beige woollen Sunday coat was required for the summer, a brown one for every day and Sunday wear: a brown beret (with RSA badge) for weekdays, a brown hat (plus badge) for Sundays in winter, a beige hat for Sundays in the summer, a brown mackintosh for rainy weather. The exact type of shoes was also specified as well as three brown underpants. The list was extensive but I'll leave the rest to the reader's imagination.

My favourite item was the school blazer, brown of course, but with a beautiful embroidered pocket including the motto *Deo Duce*. I loved it and felt I looked smart in it during the summer, too, when worn over a summer dress.

Rules were explained then: One letter would be written home every Sunday – supervised. Tuck and fruit could be brought to school, but it was locked away: one piece of fruit after lunch, four sweets after our tea, be they smarties or big toffee

sweets! Food was to be eaten! If there was anything we didn't eat we could say it there and then and that would be honoured. I mentioned porridge (as I had never eaten it) and black pudding. Had I known about the sweet, hot rice pudding with lots of plump raisins that would have been my No. 1 'no-go'. However, this was a once, and only chance I had missed and the rice pudding remained a challenge till I left. Finally, the question of pocket money came up. This was handed in at the beginning of term and we could put our needs on the weekly shopping list: stamps, soap, shampoo, writing paper were more or less our supervised needs. They meticulously wrote everything down and our parents got the account, very correct.

My parents decided on the school. There was a lot to be said for the school. That was good, as we really had no choice. I was to start late September, just turned 12 then.



Hellgard moving into Rosleven School, Athlone, in September 1956

34: The Legacy of Rosleven School Athlone

It was mid-September when we put my luggage into the Ford car to set off for Athlone. The pupils at the Convent of Mercy had been back at school for more than a fortnight and I watched them playing camogie after school. Miss Webster and Miss Richardson kept more to the holidays of British schools, and we played hockey, no camogie (an Irish stick-and-ball team sport played by women)!

A sense of forthcoming adventure covered any anxiety for the moment. The uniform had been delivered, our father had woven 'H. Leckebusch' labels, red on white, which both my brother and I could use. (He had started in Galway Grammar School two weeks earlier.) In the summer, endless time had been spent sewing the labels on almost anything – from bed-linen to hankies, laundry bag – the lot.

As we had visited the school during the summer the route was familiar. Ennis first, past St. Flannan's College, the Fergus River. The next larger town was Gort and then on to Lough Ree. These were all country roads, so it took a lot of time. When we reached Ballinasloe, we knew it wouldn't take that much longer and then the large Church, St. Peter and Paul, beside the Shannon, came in sight. We crossed the bridge over the Shannon on our left, drove past the Church of Ireland, left the road to Mullingar on our right and were almost in sight of the railway bridge over the road. An immediate sharp turn to the left after the bridge brought us through the gates up to the school.

Everything went very fast then. My luggage was brought in and my parents departed quite quickly. They had a long journey home, I thought, but maybe they tried to make good-byes less painful.

Suddenly there were girls around in uniform, who brought me up to the Blue Dorm (The Pink Dorm was for the youngest ones.) I think there were five beds, a large fireplace, two large windows. Later I went down to the dining-hall for tea with the others. There were three large tables, with one of the principals – or both – and teachers sitting at each end of each table. I was amazed to feel my legs being kicked under the table. It took a while for me to realize we could only help ourselves to food if it was offered and passed and once I knew that, I was quite prepared to do so. Then I wanted something. I was sitting between Miss Webster and a girl, who seemed unaware of my kicks. So, I tried it with Miss Webster ... I had a lot to learn!

Being with girls my own age was wonderful and I was ready for fun. There were just four girls in my class. The class above ours was Form II and a large group of seven or eight. Sometimes a teacher taught both groups together.

Although I spoke English fluently my vocabulary was very limited. Our reader for the term was 'A Christmas Carol'. Dickens' vocabulary seemed to me to belong to a different language. Our homework was besides an essay, grammar etc. always the same: Prepare 20 pages. That meant write all the words you don't understand into the vocabulary notebook, look up the meaning in the dictionary, write it beside the word and then learn the vocabulary. For me this was a huge task and sometimes I should have looked up the meaning of the original word too. So it was with 'pontifical'. The meaning was something connected with episcopal



Hellgard (in the middle) receiving two prizes for Music and Merit, about 1958



Prizegiving at Rosleven School:
Dorothy Richardson, Hellgard Leckebusch, Jean Miles

rites and I didn't know what episcopal or rites meant. My luck – I was asked to hand over my vocabulary notebook that day and we came to pontifical. Then the teacher wanted to know what episcopal rites meant and I answered 'pontifical'. I was standing, my hand trying to get support from the desk when I saw the ruler being lifted and within a second, I had withdrawn my hand and the ruler cracked on to the desk. She was furious and I felt a bit victorious. It was a heavy, wooden ruler!

I don't think I was very bold – but I was a notorious giggler, trying to amuse the others, too, in and out of class. Writing 'lines' was part of the daily routine, e.g. 100 times 'Empty vessels make most noise.' Very soon I had a copy book with the inscription: 'Hellgard Leckebusch, Lines'.

When 100 was increased to 500 it became a bit tedious. I looked round for short pencils; all HB and I taped them together like a pan flute. They were all freshly sharpened and the distance between the pencils corresponded perfectly to the width of the lines in the copy book. I developed it to a fine art – five lines for the energy of one! I think one or two teachers were a bit suspicious but couldn't prove anything. That's when my punishments were extended to learning extra poetry off by heart, short poems at first, progressing to Milton and speeches in Shakespeare plays. What an unexpected extension to my very limited literary horizon!

I liked one English teacher especially. Unfortunately, I made her laugh so much, even when it was unintentional on my side, that we went through this ritual frequently – she entered the room, she saw me and started to giggle. Then came the question: Will I leave the room, or will you? I always replied that I knew the answer and left.

In my first term I found a great pal in a girl from Cavan. There is a photo of the school choir, both of us standing side by side – I still have my long plaits, and my face is distorted by withheld laughter. We were good friends and enjoyed that Christmas term.

That changed after Christmas. On returning to school a huge, blazing fire was burning in the big fireplace – I looked forward to this every year in January as long as I was in the Blue Dorm. The room was lovely and warm that evening and some of it lingered on for a few days afterwards. (The room had no other heating.) A few days afterwards my pal had the idea of hiding my pillow up the chimney, normal mischief. Eventually I found it – quite black. I removed the pillow-case, put it into my laundry bag and at the weekend I would have the new pillowcase. A bit of mischief!

Not much escaped the two headmistresses, so I was confronted with the black pillow-case. I wasn't good at telling white lies, but I did my best, and naturally did not say how the pillow had visited the chimney. They persevered and as all the girls in the dorm were present, I somehow expected my pal to say she had done so, but she didn't, not even when I was severely punished, not because of the dirty pillowcase, but for insinuating someone else was responsible, and I hadn't had the courage to admit I had done it! Somehow trust was damaged and our friendship did not continue. We never quarrelled and we never went out of each other's way but our fun was over.



Miss Webster (right), Miss Richardson (middle) and Mrs. Chapman (left)
at the Junior Prizegiving, 1959

Hellgard Leckebusch, *Singing our Song*, p. 184.

As the number of boarders was small, we got to know each other very well. There was Gertrude from Co. Kildare that I got on with very well, or Valori from Westport who shared my special interest in music. Her father wrote her wonderful long letters every week – as my mother did to me – three or four double foolscap pages sometimes. She read out some parts for me from time to time, sharing these highlights. There were Anne and Betty Payne from Co. Galway, Gail from South Africa, Deirdre from Ennis and many others. Iris Woodhouse was the head-girl, a very good piano player and very nice. She often honoured me by asking me to walk with her to church, or on one of these for me awful, boring Sunday afternoon walks. It meant we were at the front of the line, setting the pace and it was great. Dorothy Richardson was also a few grades ahead but she and her generosity deserve a special mention.

In September and October, the trees around the school turned their green into blazing colours, beautiful and I remember lovely mild days, playing rounders that I enjoyed. Before Hallowe'en weekend hockey began. Not being a good runner, but strong, I had a permanent place in the goal for the length of my Rosleven days. As long as the ball came to my end of the field, I was happy, but the cold waiting-spells do not put me into an enthusiastic reminiscing mood! The only thing – it was better than the boring walks 'in line', but naturally on Sundays there were no games – penitential walks on Sundays.

I had to wait till the summer term for tennis on the grass court in front of the school, and the ball alley at the back, where we could practise alone. I loved tennis and for me it was a great achievement when I won the runner-up prize in the junior competition in my third year. I also remember the prize-giving. Desna went up to receive her cup – very tall, very slim, a real sporty girl and then I went up for my runner-up prize, small, energetic but definitely overweight and more so in comparison to the slim build of Irish girls. Everyone laughed but I didn't care. I was so proud to have achieved that!

The Easter term was a dull term I found. There was no highlight like Christmas ahead, no tennis, and we were living in the shadow of the forthcoming synod examination on the second Friday in March. A great school pride was to achieve an excellent result and at least one or two 'Best place in Ireland' awards. To achieve this, they were very strict and on Sunday mornings we had one hour of Scripture prep before Church, but only in the Easter term.

For my age I was very well acquainted with the stories of the Old and New Testament. The English version of Old Testament names was often a problem and admittedly I didn't give them much attention, I didn't consider them to be a priority. One of these names made me stumble and from January till early March I had the 'privilege' of getting washed and dressed in the dark and appearing at 7.30 in the kitchen to be given my task for the morning – some Bible passage and then reappearing at 7.50 in the kitchen to be questioned before allowing me to join the breakfast table. In that first exam I didn't do as well as most of the others, but I did do well enough to receive a book prize – a book I could choose up to a certain price limit.

After Christmas my parents allowed me to take piano and art lessons, both extras. I loved them. This helped me cope with the dreary term. Rosleven school



Afternoon tea on the lawn at Rosleven

Anne Payne, Brigid Ogle, Anne Butler, Jean Miles, Gertrude Sandall, Kirstin Hannevig, Dorothy Richardson, Deirdre Walker,
Heather Parker Reeves, Valori Walker, Gail Price, Mabel Noble, Helligard Leckebsuch, Kari Hannevig, June Simmons
Helligard Leckebusch, *Singing our Song*, p. 186.

days were a great challenge to me in unexpected ways. Here I was being prepared for life in a different culture. My prime example – position of hands at the meal table. At home I was brought up in the tradition of wrists on the table at mealtimes – German good manners. In school it was – ‘What is that hand doing on the table? Hands are only to be seen if in use.’ When I finally had that organized the problem was the changeover. When I got home and hadn’t fully got my head round ‘Wrist on table’ I was asked what my hand was doing under the table and vice versa. At home I was taught to be outspoken, at school I was being taught to watch what I said and to say the right thing at the right time. I profited from this too, but for years I wasn’t open enough for my family and at school I was too outspoken. It took me decades to lose the feeling that wherever I was or whatever I did, it was never right!

But I am most grateful for these years at school and I learnt a lot, made wonderful friends and learnt to behave confidently in any society, almost a paradox to my feelings of never being ‘right’. The staff were strict but well-meaning and could be very kind and we were given treats if they were available, like swimming and a picnic on the shores of Lough Rea during a fine summer spell, a Sunday picnic on the lawn, a chance to see a film.

It certainly wasn’t what I would call an academic school, but I learnt a lot from the teachers about all sorts of things, and some were an example to me when I became a teacher much later on. First on the list is the Domestic Economy teacher, Mrs Donnelly. Even though the turquoise, handmade underpants with flowers in the material, and lace, sewn on by hand, landed in the school waste paper basket before I went on my summer holidays, and my slip – white background this time, was to experience the same destiny, she was a great teacher. (The slip could have been wearable, but Mrs Donnelly only had one pattern and it didn’t fit me. I did take a lot of measurements, added bits here and there, but it never fitted. Each time I was to try it on I had created a situation in which this wasn’t feasible.) One day an inspector arrived for D.E. Mrs. Donnelly asked ‘Does it fit?’ and I answered ‘No.’ Her reply was ‘Get lost for the lesson’ and I did! To her honour I must add that I made an apron in her class which I gave a special design and had lovely material. It made a great present eventually, and I got any amount of praise for it. The cooking tuition was basic, but very good. Gertrude and I, both of us over 70 now, have used ‘All in the Cooking Part 1’ for years. When we had our cooking lesson, we always had to make enough to feed everyone in the school, for a meal or just a dish. ‘Shepherd’s Pie’ was on the menu for the school when an inspector came. We were all supposed to have learnt the recipe...! I had looked at it, had a vague idea and remembered one quart of sauce instead of $\frac{1}{4}$ pint. Multiplying the original recipe for 4 people by 10 (pupils, staff and helpers) we had organized all available saucepans to make the amount of gravy. When Mrs. Donnelly came in without the inspector she saw ‘gallons’ of sauce in the making. She never delayed long in her decisions – ‘Get big plastic buckets to pour the sauce into. Can be used for soup tomorrow.’ She told us which small saucepan of sauce was to remain on the Aga (oven). Even today I can judge amounts and numbers of people well, provided the recipe in my head is correct!



Hellgard (second row, first from the left) and some Rosleven friends
enjoying a Sunday, date unknown

In sewing classes, she talked to us, telling me for example, I would make a good judge and gave her reasons for it. The thought had never entered my head, but she was right about this ability she recognized in me. I later developed it and used it often in different situations.

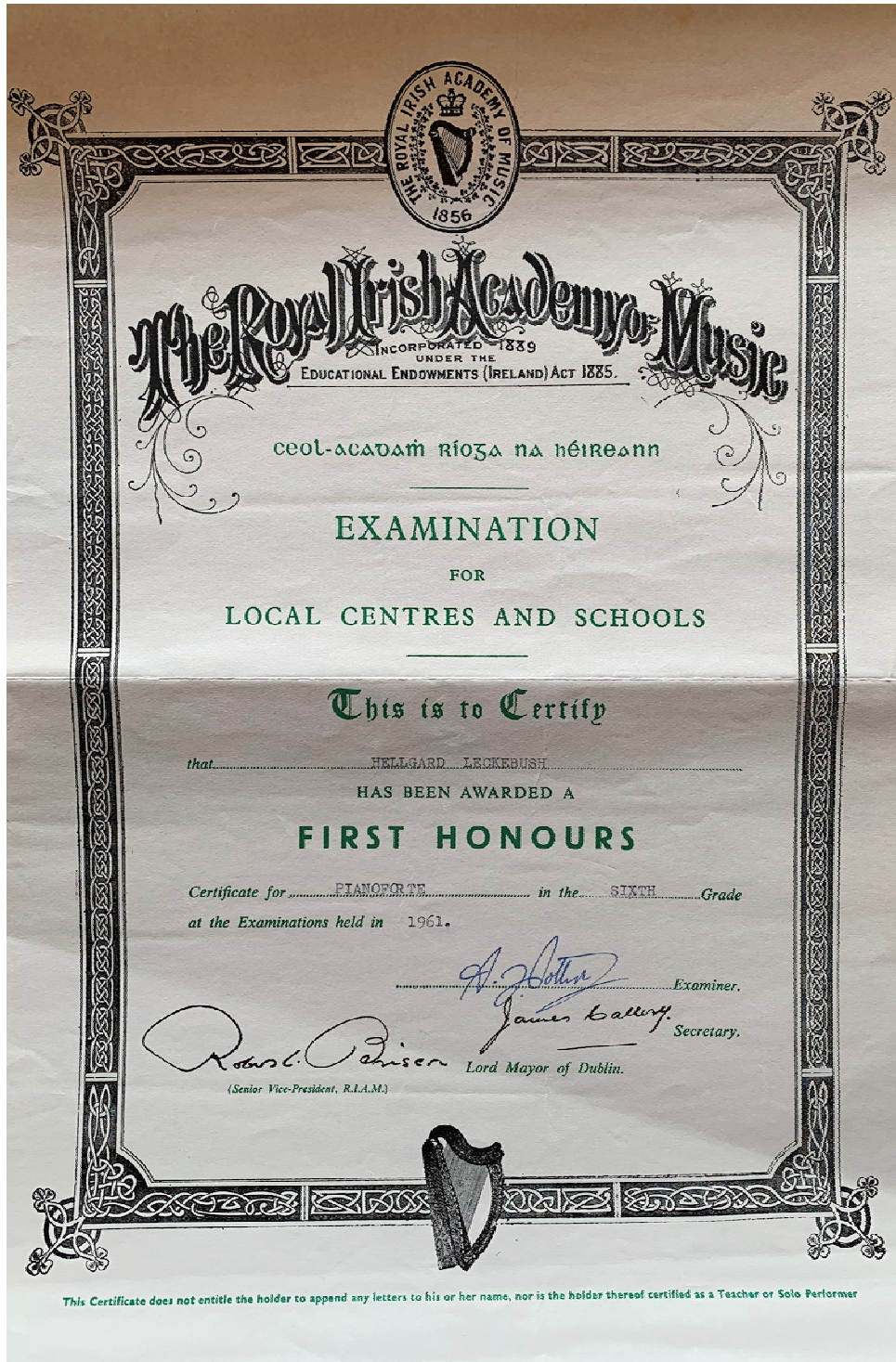
As my Maths teacher was very good but not qualified to teach Hons. Maths, I couldn't have studied Maths at university. I couldn't study music in Cork as I only played one instrument so my only chance was Fine Arts I and II at Trinity. Fine Arts I (two years) was a basic study in music with Professor Boydell, Fine Arts II was the History of Art with Miss Crookshank. I decided on that, and English and German would be my other choice of subjects. An English teacher advised me strongly against taking English. I passed every English year exam at college and the finals, did quite well, too, but she was right. I was forever trying to catch up on knowledge I had missed and I only got better while I was teaching – learning by doing; not ideal.

After the end of the summer term, they had the Old Girls' invitation. I remember being able to go to two after I had left and am glad that I have photographs to help me remember who was there and who is who. They prepared an excellent meal – poached salmon with a very varied salad, home-made brown bread all sorts of trimmings, white wine, home-made lemonade and wonderful desserts. It was in keeping with lovely letters that both Miss Richardson and Miss Webster wrote to me after I had left school. The school and its pupils were their life.

Parents are wonderful in what they do for their children. For my parents it was more difficult as the ordinary schools around us with Irish as the spoken language in all or most subjects they just had no option but to pay heavy fees for boarding school. Both my brother and I appreciated their great efforts and tried to make the most of our opportunities. 'Work is love made visible' – D. H. Lawrence. We saw a lot of work and love in our parents!



Mr. Bolton's choir with Hellgard and Gertrude (back row, 6th and 7th from the left)
Hellgard Leckebusch, *Singing our Song*, p. 190.





Hellgard (front row, 4th from the left) attending the Old Girls' Reunion in July 1963
Hellgard Leckebusch, *Singing our Song*, p. 192.

35: Lamplighters and Co. and consequences

Our world in Rosleven was the school world which we seldom left, but the doors were opened to people from the world outside. Starting with Ireland there was the Reverend Neill telling us about the work of the Scripture Union. A member of the Gideon Society came twice while I was at school there, explaining how and why they were founded, and what their work and aims entailed.

They distributed small New Testaments with the Psalms to children who wished to have one. Not only did they go to schools, they also distributed these Testaments amongst the armed forces, the police, in prisons, in hospitals, in hotels.

These New Testaments were financed mainly by the members themselves, but also by generous donations from people who had experienced a great crisis in unfamiliar surroundings, and had found a Gideon New Testament – some editions in three languages, e.g. in hotels – and were greatly comforted by some passage they happened to read and / or were so moved, that it helped them to give their life a new direction.

The men who came to Rosleven were Gideon members, mainly retired, as they had more time. They impressed me because they were not success-orientated. They had no hope of reaping any reward or gratitude or getting any feedback. There was no urgency in their presentation or a sense of appeal. I thought highly of these humble men who had been very successful in the world of business.

Years later I found a Gideon New Testament in a drawer beside a hospital bed, occasionally in hotels, even in a hotel in Rwanda, and as a Religious Education teacher in Germany I was contacted by the German Gideon Society. One of the members came to my first-year class, and all other first year classes after that. The first time he came I brought my own little red copy, presented to me in Ireland so many years ago. I thought the pupils might be interested. These copies were very similar: the same colour and size. Only the covering was of a different material.

On other occasions we heard about the mission to seamen, learnt a great deal about these men – very few women – working away from home for the greatest part of their lives to support their families. The wives and children did not lead an easy life either. When the ships docked the mission to seamen offered companionship, meals, above all facilities to phone their families and to post and receive letters. If they were fortunate enough, they might meet another seaman who spoke their own language and sometimes wives could arrange to travel there and spend a few days with their husbands.

Up till then I knew about ferries, had travelled on some myself. My parents told me about the *Orinoco* in which Mother had sailed across the Atlantic to Mexico and our parents had eventually returned on the same ship. I knew the journey took three weeks in the Thirties, but I had never thought about the captains and staff being at sea for so long.

Nowadays the era of mobile phones has made contact with the families easy. Today's problem is rather that the time a ship is at a particular port is so short that the seamen have little time to take advantage of the amenities a seamen's home offers. They are still very important as it is a home – be it an area with a welcome,

Erzbischof aus Afrika zu Besuch



Hohen Besuch aus Afrika hatte die Evangelisch-Reformierte Gemeinde Ronsdorf: Der Erzbischof von Burundi, Ruanda und Zaire, Justin Ndandali, weilte zwei Tage im Gemeindekreis, wo sein besonderes Interesse der „Ruanda-Gruppe“ galt, die jetzt zehn Jahre mit diesem zentralafrikanischen Staat eine Partnerschaft unterhält, die durch viele Leben gekennzeichnet ist. Die Jugendlichen in Rosndorf veranstalteten Theateraufführungen und Basare und nahmen auch bei anderen Aktivitäten Geld ein, das den Kauf von Fahrrädern für die dortigen Pfarrer ermöglicht. Außerdem konnte mehreren Studenten das Theologiestudium in Butare (Ruanda) finanziert werden. Dabei wurden auch viele Briefkontakte zwischen jungen Gemeindeangehörigen und Studenten aus dem anderen Erdteil geknüpft, die heute noch bestehen.

Article from the WZ (*Westdeutsche Zeitung*) of 18 October 1988

a short break from the small group of people working under hard and dangerous conditions in a micro-cosmos. For many it is the important alternative to clubs or bars.

The missionaries who worked in Nepal left a lasting impression. Nepal, Tibet, Mount Everest were names, little more. I remember seeing slides of gigantic

mountains, smiling people, rugged, rough paths the missionary walked along with her backpack, from A to B. No cars, no trains, no buses, we asked? The subject of food caught our interest. I will never forget the lady saying she was grateful to have regained her respect for food as nutrition, had stopped concentrating on her likes and dislikes all the time. I thought of the warm, very sweet rice pudding with the plump raisins which I hated!

Her family when they wrote always enclosed a packet, sometimes two, of soup. These were wonderful.

If she was far away from people she knew or a shop-like room where she could hopefully get some very limited food supplies, she could make soup. People would often help her out with a small amount of water and she always carried an emergency ration with her. Equipped with a tiny gas camp-cooker and a small saucepan she could make herself a warm meal, because in the mountains it was often cold. Even in an isolated place she would soon be surrounded by children and grown-ups interested in this female novelty and her gadgets. Her cutlery was admired and passed around for all to see and touch, to be returned either late or not at all. So she had learned to keep a spoon in her trouser pocket and she plunged it straight into her soup to stir it, never let go of it till and while she had the soup and then it went straight into her trouser pocket again. Amazing what details children remember!

We were introduced to many people working in the missions in Asia and Africa, but it was the Mission to Lepers that moved me most. I had read about leprosy in Lambarene in a book that Mother had got for her fiftieth birthday about Albert Schweitzer, the Man and Thinker (*Mann und Denker*). Not only were these people very ill, but, as the illness progressed, they became increasingly handicapped: they were completely isolated from the everyday life they knew. The children were normally very healthy at first, but sooner or later they would develop the disease through living with their mothers or parents or other lepers. But where could they go? A dilemma, and the illness, untreated, always took its course.

Children are at heart generous and want to know what they can do. Yes, we could do something: we could ask family, friends and neighbours for scraps of wool and knit colourful scarves – ten inches by fifty-four inches – and most of us in Rosleven were always ‘working’ on a scarf, even Miss Richardson and Miss Webster. Once I became better at knitting – I crocheted the first two scarves – I enjoyed sitting up in bed at night, happily knitting in the dark. I couldn’t change the colour of the wool without seeing what I was doing – a real problem.

That was solved by bringing up a bicycle lamp from home, a torch-light one could clip on to the front of the bike. It was a strong battery light and with it – well-hidden under the bedclothes – I changed the ball of wool quickly without dropping a stitch. Then I emerged from under the bedclothes to continue knitting in the dark. Above the bedroom door there was a small window that couldn’t be opened. The staff could see the faintest ray of light and that would have caused ‘bedlam’!

Once a year the scarves were collected by someone from the Missionary Society. They were not used as scarves. They were sewn together to make blankets. The nights in Africa could be very cold, we were told.

In 1980 I visited Rwanda with Frau Zippmann, invited by the Bishop of Butare. I had started a small Rwanda group – pupils of different denominations to support humble projects. I had several adult co-workers, very capable women. The reformed church in Wuppertal-Ronsdorf gave us a ‘home’. We could meet in the parochial hall and the children were insured. We were connected with the V.E.M. (Vereinigte Evangelische Mission; United Evangelical Mission), a missionary society in Wuppertal. The invitation to Rwanda was to give us the opportunity to meet people in the diocese, enable the beginning partnership to flourish. It was a very important experience.

During our visit I developed a bowel infection. The medicine I had brought from Germany was useless, so I was taken to the hospital at Kigeme and got help in the form of necessary medication. The Bishop of Butare then sent us to Shyogwe where two British missionaries ran a small Anglican Centre and were generally very active, helping people in need all the time, e.g. while we were there, aiding a woman in the process of giving birth to a child outside their house on the roadside. (The couple – on foot – was walking – miles! – to the medical centre still about a mile off now. But they just couldn’t make it. Mabel raced through the house shouting: ‘Where is the razor blade?’ Finally armed with plastic, a razor blade, towels, a blanket, and a small plastic bath for the baby, she managed to drive the woman and her husband to the medical centre before the baby was actually born, just after their arrival there.

These women, Mabel and Jackey, were wonderful and they would put me back on my feet, I was told. They cooked a kind of porridge from an African grain. It did me good. I still shivered a lot due to the infection. And the first night Mabel brought me an extra blanket, made of scarves like ‘our’ leper scarves! They had been made by a supportive group of women in Britain who had had the same idea. The blanket was wonderfully warm and comforting.

Ideas lead on to new ideas. Our first project was to get enough money together for bicycles needed by fourteen clergy in the diocese who still had to walk miles to visit people in their parishes. We wanted to help people in Rwanda of course, but my first aim as a teacher was to help my pupils to realize that all the people all over the world are basically very like ourselves. They have been born into different circumstances and traditions to which they have had to adapt, have developed rules and standards to enable them to survive. My hope was that with this contact the children’s focus could be extended outwards away from only concentrating on themselves, gradually maybe. We may not like the way other people live; we may not agree with a certain behaviour, but it is necessary to accept these differences at the beginning without being judgmental. Then we are open enough to learn about them and their lives and then we learn a lot about ourselves too. I thought and think so still.

Getting the money together for our project was challenging, not easy, but not impossible either. We had to be creative and active. At the same time a frequent exchange of letters between Butare and Wuppertal, occasional visits and a lot of

information, also from the V.E.M. and the White Fathers in Cologne, basic news hither and thither, the partnership became more alive. After our visit to Rwanda, having managed to get enough money together for these fourteen bicycles for the clergy, we took on a small but more challenging project. We undertook to be responsible for the fees of one student at the Theological College of the Episcopal Church of Rwanda for the length of his studies. 'Our' first student was not just a student – he had a face and a name and we were responsible for this man's education. He shared a lot of his life with the group in letters and we with him.

Getting the necessary fees together each month was a commitment. One of my fundraising ideas must have originated in the leper scarves idea. We collected scraps of wool. One of the lady helpers made contact with a knitting firm in Wuppertal. They offered us unfinished woollen garment parts. We collected them and then unravelled them. I had decided on a particular crochet square pattern, any colour or colours, but the final crochet row in the same colour. When we had all the squares together it was my job to make a blanket out of them. These blankets sold well. We even got an order for a bed-spread-blanket for a double bed for which the wool was supplied and the way the different colours would be used was clear. It was quite an undertaking.

A rehearsal weekend in a youth hotel for the choir and orchestra at school was coming up. A Mozart Mass was being rehearsed for the school concert. There were well over a hundred pupils. My good friend and colleague, Angelika, and I were responsible for the girls. We had a number of male colleagues, as they played in the orchestra, but they looked after a much smaller group of male pupils. Angelika and I, both of us in the choir, weren't seriously worried about this: it was always a tiring but happy weekend. I impulsively decided to pack the wool, all the crochet needles I had. The pattern was familiar to those both in the choir and in the Rwanda group. Before the first rehearsal I briefly announced that I had wool and crochet needles, held up a made-up square, no more. The wool and crochet needles were snatched out of my hand.

Later, others wanted to learn how to do the pattern and the crochet needles had to be shared around – as fairly as possible! Enthusiastically, they sang and crocheted the squares. The conductor, Herr Fleischer, didn't object, in fact he was quite pleased, and it kept the choir members concentrated on the Mozart Mass, the conductor and the squares: other distractions were not so important somehow. By the end of the weekend, they had finished all the squares.

A few years after I had started the group, my life circumstances changed and I could no longer play a very active role in the group. A very capable lady helper took over, greatly supported by her own, very active mother, and her three girls, all enthusiastic members too. She developed new, very good ideas and new students were sponsored. 'Our' first student did well, and received further education in Britain. When he was married and their first son was born, he asked the oldest girl to be the godmother. Good contact has continued between these families, and visits have taken place, also from later students. A tiny but important bridge between two continents.

All this seems to be far away from Rosleven School, Lamplighters and Co., but I do not think so at all. Being far older now myself than Miss Webster and Miss

Richardson were at the time, I look back on my own teaching life:— I only had the responsibility of a teacher, I can say I made different mistakes, some of which I recognize, most of which I don't. I came from a completely different background of family, lifestyles, influences, code of behaviour. I might often be critical of my schooling, but I do not compare or evaluate their decisions in general. What I consider they did very successfully – and I can only say this from my own personal point of view – was that they were an example for me in the way they interpreted their ideas of how a Christian life should be lived. They tried to present moral standards and Christian principles which they had tested and proved to be good guidelines in their lives. They were convinced of what they upheld, but never intentionally influenced us. Their influence and pressure in regard to the Synod Examination was different. That was rather an understandable matter of pride and ambition. I didn't then, and would certainly not now, agree with certain religious or other teaching I received, or the decisions they made, but strangely enough their reaction to my criticism and contradictions was always very low-key.

One example: The lesson was about the Ascension of our Lord. The teacher was genuinely convinced of what she said and I can hear her still! 'A cloud appeared and our Lord stepped on to it and it went up, up, up' – and as she said so I saw her raising her head, arms and eyes to the ceiling. I must have been about thirteen, but I just couldn't take it. I whispered to my neighbour: 'Sounds like a blooming lift!' (I am glad to report that I developed better manners as I got older.) She did hear it and didn't let it pass, but her reaction was surprisingly mild.

We had morning prayer before school started each day, as was usual in religiously-run schools then. There were three prayers and a hymn. I vaguely remember, but have no definitive recollection, that there might have been a short reading or a thought for the day too. One of the prayers has stayed with me: 'Give me peace in my heart which will make peace in my home, which will help peace in the world'. I would doubt that peace in my heart would always lead on to make peace in my home, but it is what could certainly become a move towards peace in my home. To me as a child that was irrelevant. The idea that I took out of this prayer was rather: what I do contributes to peace, or not, in my home, in the world. This peace is not of my doing alone: it is something for which I need help; it is not in my control entirely. I still believe this to be so.

The school psalm was sung on special occasions – a signal for hope and comfort: 'I to the hills will lift mine eyes, from whence doth come mine aid'.

36: Letters

Letters played an important part in our lives as far back as I remember. Father's brothers and sisters had all settled in England before the second world war. The correspondence was frequent between the families and I certainly remember our parents' shock and sorrow when a letter arrived from Uncle Kurt to say that their much loved and only daughter had died of pneumonia at the age of 9. I remember seeing photos of a cheerful blonde girl sitting in a deckchair in a garden. Uncle Kurt and Auntie Mona were shattered.

Like Uncle Kurt, Uncle Ernest, both living in the Manchester area, had returned safely after his years in the British Army during the war. Uncle Alex who had married Martha, Father's sister, came home safely, too. They lived in Bristol and they kept us informed about their lives and how the children were growing up. Tante Grete who lived in Esher was a frequent letter writer, too.

In Mexico, my parents were very friendly with three families in particular. The contact by post remained and when a letter came, it was a special day. The Dahms had returned to Germany, too, and were living in Freiburg. I remember their son, Hans, as he visited us in Wuppertal in the late Forties. He became a doctor and later he worked as a professor at a clinic in Tübingen at a very early age, concentrating on the treatment of cancer. He died, far too young, of that very disease. Correspondence with his parents continued until the Eighties when first our father died and then our mother followed two years later. I wrote to them and we received wonderful letters back on both occasions.

The Stauders stayed in Mexico and wrote regularly for two decades. When both my parents had died, I found quite a few letters and cards, the last dating back to 1959.

The third family moved to the States. I recognize their photos in the family album. I found an old Christmas card of 1959 also – a short while ago. Andreysens is the name. A few letters kept these friendships alive and fruitful between these families, one for a lifetime.

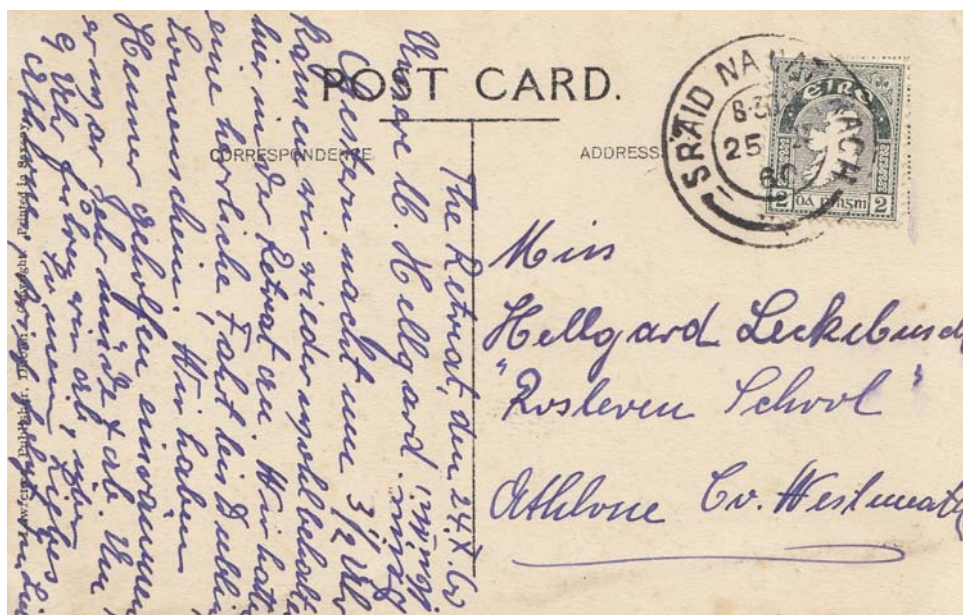
Before I went to kindergarten, my grandfather took me to the post office each morning, and later he postponed our visit until I got home. He had a post box there with his personal number and a key that only fitted into his post box. There was always a sense of anticipation before he opened the door and, generally, there were letters inside.

What letters can really mean only dawned on me when we lived in the Retreat. Our grandfather wrote wonderful letters about twice a week, cards of special interest, and once a week he sent interesting cuttings from the weekly local paper and the daily Wuppertal paper as *Drucksache* / Printed Matter. These post items were like lifelines in times that were difficult and lonely. We also received post from aunts and uncles, a few from our grandmother, who found it difficult to write then, some from great-aunt Frieda. Mother's friend, Frau Schäfer, corresponded regularly with our mother, and my National School teacher, Frau Schuster, wrote lovely letters to me. Seeing the postman arrive on his bicycle in his blue uniform, heavily laden, was always a joy. If we saw him coming down the avenue, we ran out to open the gate for him. When the weather was fine, his job must have been relatively bearable, but it was often wet and very stormy and the homes, cottages

and houses were spread over the countryside. Most people received letters from relatives and friends living in Britain, in the States, in Australia – all lifelines! Official post was less frequent.

Mother was the lifeline keeper at our end. She always had her writing pad, envelopes, some stamps and her Pelikan pen in a prominent position, and in the early afternoon we would put on our coats, go up the avenue, out through the large gate, across the road and walk a small length along the convent wall. There, cemented into the stones was the small, green letter box. If it had the date of the day on it, we knew that we were in time. I wrote to 'Am Kraftwerk 3' quite often, too, and thanks to Aunt Paula, who did not destroy all the letters after Grandfather died, I still have a few, also from Mother and Henner, few from Father. Father was not an enthusiastic letter writer. One of my earliest letters is cute, I think. It is written in pencil and illustrated with little drawings, coloured with colouring pencils: Mount Callan, Peter, our cat, the Church of Ireland – little everyday realities like that to illustrate our lives. I was nine years old when I wrote it.

When Henner and I were away from home at boarding school, Mother's letters were something we could depend on, and it certainly helped me through many unhappy patches.



A postcard from home, 1960

In Rosleven we all had to write a letter home every Sunday. We could write other letters, too, but we were not allowed to seal any of them. On Sunday afternoons, they were read, sealed, or not accepted! I was very fortunate to be able to write in German, but I was not beyond criticism! My parents always did what they could for us and Henner's pocket money was naturally more than mine, he needed more. This was never an issue. We both knew how difficult it was for our parents to pay the fees and we were grateful. During our first term at boarding

school Henner obviously had some he wanted to share and sent me coins, two-shilling pieces and half-crowns – about 15 shilling in all, a lot of money then, in an envelope with a letter. The Postal Service was not pleased and put a severe fine on it – more than 10 shillings and I was lectured by Miss Webster and Miss Richardson to write to my brother and tell him not to do such a silly thing again – he should get a postal order. I smiled, thanked them for the advice and promised to do so at once and went straight into the study to write and thank him for this impulsive, warm-hearted act of sharing and needless to say didn't even mention the fine. One could and should pay any price for such a brother, such a gift, such a memory.

When I was about 10, I had been sent a chain letter; i.e.: If you send four letters to four different friends and one postcard to the top address, you will receive, let's say, 1539 cards after a certain number of weeks! My number of incoming cards was one, from Jupp (Joseph) in Wissen on the Sieg and we became pen friends for some years, exchanging about six letters yearly. One Sunday morning I had written to my parents, my grandfather, as I did regularly, and to Jupp. I had written a long letter to Jupp as I had quite a lot of news.

I was summoned to the sitting room. Who was Jupp? And did my mother know I was writing to a boy? Boys were not accepted on our mailing list. I persevered and said it would not be very kind to suddenly stop writing for no reason; after all we had been pen-friends for years. My parents were phoned. Yes, they did know about Jupp and they had no objection to our exchange of letters (we had never even met). However, the headmistresses did not give up yet. They told me that by the length of the two letters it was obvious where my interest lay. My choice: I could either add some pages to the letter to my grandfather or shorten the one to Jupp. No problem!! Without mentioning Jupp's name, I described the sitting-room scene with loads of letters to Grandfather: the armchairs, the open fire, cups of tea, my problem with my letter to Jupp, I spread it out over several pages. I hoped my grandfather would laugh. (When his next letter came, I knew he did!) I went to the sitting room with my extended letter to Wuppertal and was told that this was the proper balance now. They hoped I had learned something. I had indeed: Take life as it comes and never give in easily.

When I review this post supervision critically, I do not forget decisions I later made as a teacher that make me blush today! Besides, this idea of writing a proper letter home each Sunday, the regularity of writing to keep in touch, was good training. It has stayed with me; and friendships with the most wonderful people have survived over decades, and my parents always thanked me for my regular correspondence.

Today I am an antediluvian specimen. People tell me I could organize my correspondence much better, besides the time I would save, by sending e-mails or text messages etc., but I do not want to. These short messages are fabulous for quick information, and the thought of needing to send telegrams or spending fortunes on overseas phone calls years ago shows that this innovation is a gift to mankind. For me, however, a personal letter is more than updates on information. When I write a letter to a good friend, it is premium time. As I write, I am strongly bonded with them, have their latest letter in front of me and I wish to share some

of my life, my thoughts, the development of my person. When one of their letters arrives, I wait until I have a little time, maybe take a break, make myself a cup of coffee or a mug of tea to celebrate this contact. I am then ready for a letter-visit!

When I moved back to Germany in 1972, this was a sharp change and I knew it would be. I had moved back to the country of my origin, but I found it hard to discover roots that I could connect with. The new challenge set energies free and many experiences were good and interesting. Still, I was sad and lonely, played only the record of Brahms 'A German Requiem' for a year and was grateful that the owners of the house did not complain. Many friends were just fantastic. Hardly a day passed without one or two letters and/or cards lying on the stairs to my flat. That kept my flow of energy going for the new life and work I was contending with.

My Christmas post is still very extensive, but in those days more so and I loved sending a few little gifts, too. At the main railway station in Wuppertal-Elberfeld, there used to be a small post office. Three times in Advent I drove there with a well-filled shopping bag full of post. Here I could avoid the long Christmas queues and the post official knew me well. One year he said he wanted to ask me a personal question. I told him to go ahead, but I would not promise that he would get an answer. He wanted to know what kind of company I owned or worked for, as he knew no private person with such an amount of correspondence! He got his answer and he was amazed. He just listened, no criticism. I simply smile when people tell me with an instructive motive how expensive this hobby is, because their hobbies are far more expensive: cars for speed and prestige, gadgets of all sorts, a private boat, their own horse, expensive holidays! You name it! But I say nothing; I just smile because I have no reason to criticize other people's lifestyles. Letters or waiting for one of them can also put one into a state of fearful apprehension. Early on as a class teacher in one of my 'first year' secondary school classes I had a lovely, intelligent, sensible and sensitive boy. He had inherited his parents' best qualities, both having very different personalities. His father, very genuine, rough, emotional, the owner of a large, very successful company, felt that his son had not inherited enough of the qualities he would need in life. The caring love for his son was obvious. Every day during the week at 2.45 p.m. on the dot, he would phone me and throw his worries at my feet and he always started with: 'The problem with my son is ...!' At this time, I had just returned home from school. Still, I tried to persuade him what a wonderful son he had, but without success. One day in May, about eight months after the phone calls had started, he rang again and for some reason, my patience suddenly ended. He just got the introduction 'The problem with my son is ...' and I finished the sentence for him by saying '... his father!' The tempest at the other end of the line was dramatic. While he ranted and raved, he shouted that I would have to explain and justify this statement. I do not remember any details about our confrontation, but I know I replied something in the line of that he was so keen on doing the best for his son that he was forever trying to make him into the son he wanted and so had no time to see how his son was developing, and, consequently, he could not help him on the route the son needed to take to develop his own qualities. The conversation ended abruptly. When the father slammed the phone down, I did not

regret telling him my view of the truth, but I should not have worded it like that. Talk of diplomacy!

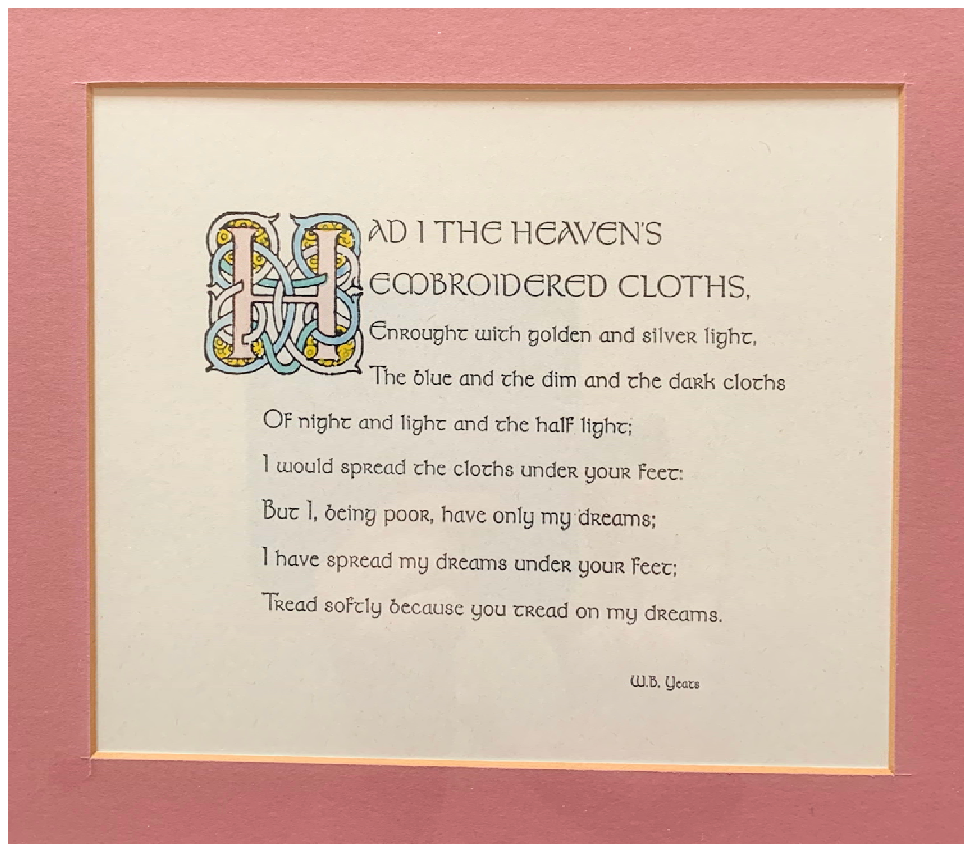
For three weeks I approached my school pigeon hole waiting to see a blue/grey envelope that the Board of Education in Düsseldorf used! Nothing. Not even an invitation to a private ‘talk’ with the headmaster in his office came. About four weeks later, I had a phone call at 2:45 p.m.: no name, no greeting, no introduction, only: ‘Sie haben mir ja mächtig den Kopf gewaschen!’ This is hard to translate and I think one possibility is ‘You really cut me down to size!’ We almost became friends after that and whenever and wherever I met him and his charming wife then – even a few years ago still – he came and gave me a big hug and said: ‘Wissen Sie noch, wie Sie mir den Kopf gewaschen haben?’ (literally: ‘Do you remember how you washed my head?’). They can be and are indeed very proud of their son! He is a credit to both of them!

I do not want to neglect very special, very private letters – love letters. But life has changed. When I see happy wedding photos in the newspaper these days, I sometimes read the comments. Nowadays, not only details of the wedding are printed, but also when, how and where the spectacular proposal took place: on a summit in the Alps after a climbing marathon, on a cruise, in a wonderful resort when suddenly a small plane appears with a huge floating banner: ‘Will you marry me, ...?’ I admire these men, putting so much thought and effort into their proposal and ignoring the cost, because they want to show their loved one how much she means to them. Doing it in public also means that they would lose face if they opted out. Unforgettable moments, deeply moving for the future couples. Yet, I do think, at least sometimes wonder, if this proposal tradition would have evolved if love letters had not become obsolete. There is no doubt that for the present generation, a message on a smartphone is as eagerly awaited as my letters from boyfriends were, but I have outlived this development. I do think that the speed, convenience of this communication will prove to have grave disadvantages as well as advantages. It is wonderful for families living thousands of miles apart being able to talk and see each other. They can send photos *ad hoc* of the grandchildren showing how they develop and what their interests are. A friend of mine complains that her daughter only sends her photos, but no other communication whatsoever. I tell her it shows that the door is still open. She is in contact with her mother and the mother can still react. However, when I hear from some young friends that a long-standing relationship was suddenly ended by sending a short text message, my hair stands on end – emotions all in the deep-freeze!

I am glad that I lived at a time when I received some wonderful love letters – emotional, romantic, honest – revealing my boyfriend’s most personal feelings, trusting I would not tread on his dreams [see p. 204, Yeats’s ‘He wishes for the Cloths of Heaven’]. The love letters were a promise in hope for all time, not knowing the outcome like anyone else and they could be re-read at any time.

I went out with a student at Trinity College Dublin for about two years. They were good years and I have many memories of happy, carefree times and interesting conversations and discussions. At some stage we realized that we were too different to risk a lifelong relationship. There was great sadness, but no

bitterness. We met for a final coffee in Bewleys, respect on both sides, careful not to be hurtful. Then, he asked me to give him back all his letters! To me, it was like the blow of a hatchet. Did he not know me well enough to realize I would honour them and treat them responsibly? I refused, saying I had received them as a gift. I felt like adding: 'Not as a loan', but I am glad that I could stop myself in time. He did not repeat the request. It took me a while to forgive him for that! It had left a sting.



William Butler Yeats, 'He wishes for the Cloths of Heaven'

Life goes on and with it changes come. Still, I would like to think that the art of writing personal letters will survive somehow because of the joy and warmth letters can transmit. Perhaps some people will keep the tradition alive, like others who try to keep the traditions of the Middle Ages alive, knitting steel vests and cooking old recipes on open fires at large festivals near old castles!

37: Sundays

Sunday mornings were wonderful. We had an extra hour in bed and when that extra time came, we could switch on our bedside lights if this was necessary and read – luxury. Then we got up and got ready, put on our Sunday uniform dress, brought down the Sunday hat, well-brushed – all ready for church – and had our breakfast. The outdoor shoes were shining – most of the time – awaiting our walk to church. Quite a problem if they weren't shining!

The Church of Ireland was in the centre of the town. We sat in the seats allocated to the school and didn't budge till the service started. (During Grandfather's second visit to Clare he came up to Athlone with my parents and was at one Sunday morning service. He remarked that seeing us sitting there reminded him of his time in the army during World War I). The organist was good and sometimes Valori recognized what he played, e.g. The Trumpet Voluntary. The Reverend Ernest Herdman Langton May¹ was the rector. He had been a chaplain in the army and I used to say this was obvious as he was so disciplined. But I always liked him. Later his wife became our art teacher. She was really good and I loved her as a teacher and as a person. We got to know a number of the parishioners by sight and some of us sometimes helped out in the choir for special occasions like the carol service.

Sundays were structured. After lunch we were either invited out or 'enjoyed' the penitential Sunday walk, more so on really wet days! Then we had afternoon tea, another thrill!

Around 5 p.m. tea was served in the study. The chairs stood in a half circle around three walls, not near the large table in the middle. The teacher sat in the big chair at the top of the table, in charge of the hot tea. The table was set with stacks of plates, cups, saucers, spoons, napkins, and sandwiches, cake, scones, biscuits. The food varied, but there was always an afternoon tea selection. The teacher poured the tea and we took our cups, plates etc. and sat down. The older girls, especially if they were tall, were blessed: they had their feet on the ground and their thighs were fairly straight, great for balancing the tea cup, saucer and plate – quite a fine art.

The Head Girl and some of the older pupils started passing around the sandwiches, beginning with the teacher, of course. This was training for afternoon tea in 'real life'.

In the here and now it was a bad time for the young and the short-legged members of the community like myself. To keep my thighs straight for stability I had to hold my knees up – in mid-air, so to speak – and it wasn't long before a cramp in one leg set in, or even in both! At the same time a sensible, pleasant conversation had to be kept going with the teacher, and we also had to keep an eye on our neighbours right and left if they needed anything. If so, we took our plate to the neighbour(s) in need of refreshments, and didn't sit down till we were sure the teacher didn't need anything or possibly someone else who was trying to catch our

¹ Canon Ernest Herdman Langton May, B.A., T.C.D. (1935), was rector of Athlone from 1958 to 1981. His wife, the art-teacher at Rosleven, was Lesley Ryland, whom he married in 1945. The Canon served as a chaplain in the 2nd World War. His father, Major F.W. May, had died in the 1st World War.

eye. At the same time, we hoped that a neighbour would later pass us what we required! It must also have been an hour of unsurpassed joy for the teacher on duty: trying to keep a relaxed conversation at nearly shouting level going and looking benevolently happy!

I had grown up with the German tradition of Kaffeetrinken (having coffee), always seated around the table. After a year or two in Rosleven I was well-trained and prepared for any afternoon tea invitation in any house. At home we soon adopted the afternoon tea ritual, but adapted it slightly. Besides, we always had enough little tables for visitors who were sitting on a chair rather than in an armchair. We always had large numbers of guests.

The Saturday and Sunday evenings could seem a bit endless in school, but I generally enjoyed them as I enjoyed reading my book, making birthday or Christmas cards, browsing through one of the Encyclopaedia Britannica where some article had caught my attention, or chatting with friends. Occasionally the principals brought us photo books of the Royal Family, mainly featuring Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip, Prince Charles and Princess Anne. That was a diversion. I remember them bringing in a transistor radio – their own – once or twice, a rare treat. A newspaper never appeared.

From time to time, we had the choice of attending the Sunday evening service in the Methodist Church and I remember one occasion when I took advantage of the offer. There were eight of us and we were accompanied by possibly the youngest teacher, the eight pupils walking in line, naturally. We were offered the two pews in the front on the right, four of us right under the pulpit, the other four in the pew behind, the teacher in the pew behind that.

A visiting Minister was preaching that evening. He seemed a nice man and good preacher, elderly, but children notice differences at once. He was charismatic and dramatic, thumping the pulpit sometimes to emphasize a point. We were wide awake watching every move. Suddenly there came a quiet interval when he talked about ‘the quiet after the storm’. His arms spread out and connected again, while his fingers were restlessly active. I whispered: ‘He’s starting to play the piano now’, and that was passed along the line in the pew. At the same time our eyes were focused on his mouth and upper dentures. They did not look very safe, seemed to live a life of their own. I was sorry for him. (My father had the same problem till he found a new dentist in Shannon Airport.) This minister was so intent on his dramatic rendering of the sermon that he had tossed all caution aside and the inevitable happened – his top dentures took flight and for a second I was terrified they would land in my lap. However, with great presence of mind and an energetic, athletic launch he caught and retrieved them, inserted them and finished his sermon instantly. The poor man!

We were in a poor way, too. None of us laughed. We even stopped our bodies from showing signs of laughter, but I bit into the sides of my cheeks so hard that they bled and they were sore for days. After the blessing, we all rose to our feet, took a quarter turn. The first four girls came out of the pew, got into line, then a second row of girls and the teacher finally. With perfect discipline, no word spoken, we left the church. At the corner we turned left and walked past the Church of Ireland, and further on past the hotel. A little further on, the teacher

stopped us. I couldn't believe she had such a heart for us when she said: 'Now laugh girls, laugh'. We did – we roared. I remember clutching a lamppost during my outburst. She only gave us a few minutes before we heard 'Back into line, girls'. In perfect order we returned to school, 'sober, steadfast and demure' (John Milton).

On some evenings there was a lot of room for entertainment. I remember one Sunday when I started to talk like the Reverend May (imitating a teacher or one of the Principals would have meant cutting too near the bone.) Obviously, I was a source of enjoyment for the others, so that the act had to be improved. Outside the study door there was another door. Behind it hung the two M.A. gowns the Principals wore during school time. I ran out, grabbed one, put it on back to front, and at the neck placed a folded, white handkerchief to indicate a dog collar, got a chair and did my best to give a good presentation: 'Let us pray' ('lettuce pray'). I thought my intonation was pretty good. Soon I had them all bursting with laughter. Suddenly I saw a movement on the door handle. I scrambled down under the table in a flash, gown and all. Miss Webster decided to join the happy group and sat down and chatted – for at least half an hour! I moved away from her legs and hoped fervently that she would not notice my absence. She didn't, amazingly enough. At least she didn't ask where I was. When she left, I realized it had been a close shave, hung the gown back on its hook, and stuffed my white handkerchief in my pocket. No more fooling around for me that day.

And then Sundays passed, week after week, some more sober than others. The summers can't all have been mild and sunny, but for me these Sundays are spent out on the lawn and having a picnic afternoon tea there – beautiful. I think the wet, cold summer Sundays I filed as winter Sundays.



The girls (Hellgard 2nd from the left) with Bishop Pike and the Reverend May
Hellgard Leckebusch, *Singing our Song*, p. 208.

38: Confirmations

When I was fourteen, several pupils as Rosleven were between 14-16 years of age. One day in September the principals addressed this group and told us to ask our parents if they wanted us to be confirmed in 1959. The Reverend May would take us for confirmation classes once a week in the school.

My parents specially came up from Clare to discuss it with me. They had mentioned it to Canon Elliott who was so keen for me to be confirmed in Spanish Point: such a very special occasion for the church, the small parish, a very special day for him. He was extremely proud to see me doing well at school, and I would honour him and his two years of teaching me. Above all he was very fond of me, as I was of him and of his wife. Mother felt I owed it to him, and no doubt she was right. I felt selfish and I felt petty. The years without children of my own age around me had left their mark. I was 'starving' for wanting to live like a child at my age and I had always been a gregarious type of child anyway! – All in all, I wasn't generous enough to fulfil his wish and although Mother was very clear about what she was advising me to do, she let me make my own decision.

My confirmation was a great, significant day, but I often felt sad about my decision. Now, so many years later, I realize that the Canon's wishes and needs and mine were so far apart that no matter what happened one of us was bound to be hurt.

Confirmation classes started soon after my parents' visit and preparations for the outfit began. In the Anglican tradition girls wore white dresses, a veil and white shoes. As it was too difficult for my parents to take me shopping – we would have had to go to Dublin – the Principals suggested their dressmaker could make my dress and we could decide on the material and style. We would look for shoes in Ennis, my parents decided, and we got a nice pair with a low heel, white slingbacks.

The date of confirmation was 28th June, 1959. The diocese had a new bishop and we were the first to be confirmed by him. Soon after breakfast we were all in our outfits outside the school, with the morning sun shining through our veils, having our first photographs taken. My mother often referred to seeing us standing there. Just then my family arrived, but they weren't in our car. A very nice hackney driver from the village that I knew well had driven them up. What had happened, I wanted to know. Apparently, my father had been at Hillery's garage the evening before to check tyres, petrol, oil etc. when he crashed the car. Thank goodness nothing had happened to him, but in the family photo the shock is still visible.

We drove to church then and it was a lovely service. The Reverend May brought us individually up the aisle to the bishop to be confirmed. In the aisle there were several wrought iron plates let into the flooring. One of my new heels got stuck in one of the cavities. Mr. May was wonderful. He took my hand and hissed 'Pull, girl, pull', and I did, eventually successfully. When he slipped Bishop Pike the card with my name on it, he was so taken aback by the unusual name that he stopped half-way – such an unexpected one. This time it was me who hissed – my name slowly, clearly – and the bishop's second attempt was perfect, loud and

clear. He addressed us all kindly then and preached well. It was a memorable service.



Hans, Hellgard, Henner and Helma, 28 June 1959

Afterwards we all gathered in the spacious grounds of the rectory with lawns and old trees. The group was small enough so that all the visitors got acquainted with everyone else. The weather was lovely, photographs were taken and this was a festive part of our confirmation. Miss Webster and Miss Richardson and other Rosleven pupils were happily mingling with everyone else. We as a family set off for the Shamrock Lodge Hotel, where my parents had booked a table for five. It was a well-known, old hotel which we loved because it was so homely and comfortable. We sometimes went there when my parents visited me, but normally for tea and sandwiches only. The hackney driver did not want to join us for lunch, but the question wasn't debatable. He was such a pleasant man and belonged to us as a family that day and we were glad of his company. In a way he represented the family in Germany as well as my godmothers.

After lunch we sat outside in the deck-chairs on the lawn and enjoyed our tea or coffee in the sun. My parents and Henner had brought post from the family and my godmothers and there were greetings and good wishes from many people in Miltown-Malbay.

After a while we drove to the shores of Lough Rea and enjoyed sitting in the sand beside the lake. We met Gail Price and her family there who had the same idea! We remembered and talked about Henner's confirmation in Ronsdorf in the spring of 1952. It was the tradition in the Lutheran and Reformed Churches to have the official question time – so called examination – the Sunday before the confirmation during the normal Sunday morning service. This was to show the congregation what these young people had learnt and that they were ready to take on the responsibility of being godfathers and godmothers and to start

apprenticeships a month later – at 14! –which most of them did. Henner was asked questions several times and he answered not only confidently but also without showing any pride that he was good. In retrospect he was dignified even then, as he always was.

Both the examination and the confirmation took place in the parochial hall, as the church hadn't been restored after the war yet. At his confirmation one of the vergers brought us to seats in the front row, so I could follow the service and saw Henner right in front of me the whole time. I have some very clear memories of the service. He looked so grown up in his trousers and jacket!

Then we went home. Mother had completed miracles. In the small sitting-room our normal table was gone, and I couldn't decide what tables were hidden under the festive-occasion damask cloth, very light green, that Mother had brought as a bride to Mexico and I still use now, more than eighty years later. It is a very long cloth and somehow all the family, grandparents, Auntie Paula, Great-Aunt Frieda, Uncle Willi (godfather) and family could all sit down. The old white dinner service with beautiful dishes, all gold-rimmed was on the table, the silver-plated cutlery, the best glasses and a beautiful arrangement of flowers from the florist's. Mother served a gorgeous, festive meal, clear soup, main course and dessert. I still don't know how she did it. The kitchen was so small. It was a memorable day for Henner, for us all, and he looked wonderful in his first suit, white shirt and tie – both confirmations were memorable days for us all.

These days were important milestones in our lives.



The Confirmation party in the Rectory Garden

Hellgard Leckebusch, *Singing our Song*, p. 212.



Bishop Pike and the Reverend E.H.L. May



Hans, Helma and Hellgard Leckebusch in the Rectory garden, 28 June 1959

Diocese of Meath



PARISH OF St Mary, Athlone.

NAME Hellgard Margarete Beckelrosch.

EXAMINED AND APPROVED BY ME,
Ed Houghton May
Rector of Athlone

CONFIRMED by me,
Robert Meath.

28th day of June 1959.

ADMITTED to the Holy Communion on

13 day of September 1959, by me,
David Allen Elmsley (Chancellor)
Rector of Kilfarboy
(Melbourn, Leaboy, Co Clare)



Hellgard on an outing with Gertrude Sandall in the 1950s

39: Rosleven gifts

My years as a child in the Retreat from 1954 to 1956 were years in which I took in many new impressions, and people were very kind to me, many experiences were good, but it didn't alter the fact that I really missed being a child amongst children, instead of being a child amongst grown-ups. The month of August 1954 when my aunts came over on holiday with Krista and Bernd from Remscheid was an exception – it was wonderful, as was the visit back to Germany that autumn when I was amongst my old school friends again. Mother did her best to bridge the gap e.g. by taking me to P. P. Flynn at the corner of the Main Street, buying two tray cloths at first (with embroidery thread!) and she taught me how to do it. It happily passed the time for me and bridged the loneliness. She taught me how to iron clothes, even shirts and a lot of other skills. I used to beg Canon Elliott to give me homework, but he never did, so I didn't have that either. This was at the age of nine even!

I loved the Canon and his wife and Mrs. Buckley and the lovely shopkeeper, Mrs. King, but it was in Rosleven that I was amongst girls my age, and around my age and was very lucky that I got on well with everyone in general. Some became friends for life. There were often invitations to homes on Sunday afternoon. One of the girls in my class invited me to her home at Athlone station. Her father was the stationmaster there. Once or twice did I visit a friend whose father was a photographer. They had a motor-boat on the Shannon and on one visit she took me out to the lake where there were weeds. The motor got entangled in them. She was great, however, got it fixed and brought me safely back (When I returned to school there was a letter for me from my mother, saying I was never to go out in a boat on the lake. That was eerie! My mother often had a premonition of things, but the chance of being out on a boat away from Rosleven was a chance in a million.) When I wrote home that Sunday I promised not to go out on the lake in a boat, but did not say I had already been! Basically, my friend was on sick-leave, but already feeling better. I had got the treat of visiting her as I had received a very good mark in a piano exam (over 90%) while all the other results were extremely disappointing in comparison to other years, the rest of the pupils did not get a day off school.

Another family lived a bit outside Athlone, right on the shores of the lake. I think the father built boats. I certainly remember seeing a large wooden boat in the making, right beside the house. There were three sisters, beautiful-looking girls and I admired them greatly because they cycled to school most of the year, even the youngest one.

The mother had arranged a really lovely children's party with games inside and outside the house and a real children's picnic. The father wasn't involved in the activities, but he was very kind and happily and benevolently watched us as he ate his chicken meal.

Our parents were allowed to visit once a month on Sunday afternoons, so invitations to other girls' homes and their families were very important in the winter, even more so during the Easter term.

Dorothy was about three years older than I was and after I had been a boarder for about a term or two, we started to get on really well. Whatever she might have

felt about me, to me we were always on eye-level, no attempted mothering element in the relationship, nor did I feel like the German-background novelty, which I often did. This was understandable, but when one is growing up there is a great need not to feel different.

She often asked me to walk with her at the front of the line – the older pupils in school always had the privilege of leading – and I loved this. We walked to church and back, and of course on the ‘charming’ Sunday walks. At the front of the line, I had the view, we set the pace and I didn’t find the enterprise so wearisome. In the middle of the line, I had to watch not to get too close to the person in front, and not to have someone walking on my heels from the back. Dorothy was down to earth, very good at math like myself, past the giggly stage and we had many interesting conversations about all sorts of topics.

Like my family, her family visited her regularly. She had elderly family friends living in a nice bungalow, just on the outskirts of Athlone. Perhaps they were far-off relatives, but this is of no consequence. They had no children themselves, but great empathy for children. Especially in the winter terms they invited Dorothy for one Sunday afternoon, often two, and she was allowed to bring three friends. Very soon she always asked me and I was thrilled. It was like a wellness-Sunday, recharging my mental battery.

The husband collected us in the early afternoon, very pleasant and jolly, and we hadn’t left the school for more than a few minutes when he parked the car and got out. He came back with four ice cream cones, generally the ones with a longish stick of chocolate inside. This wellness treatment ritual no. 1 was never missed and I even remember enjoying an ice cream in a light snowfall.

It wasn’t far to their bungalow and sometimes we finished the ice cream outside before entering their welcoming home. His wife was really warm-hearted, more reserved than her husband but she gave us a great welcome as she brought us into the sitting-room. There was always a blazing fire in the grate, turf and pieces of wood at the side magazines and a bag of sweets on the small table and then they gave us space. He explained that preparing the tea for us was a great chore and his wife couldn’t do without his help – Ha! Ha!

Then they left us alone and spoilt us, with privacy beside the fire, reading-material and sweets, such a rarity in our lives. And there we sat, either in an armchair, on the couch or sat on the rug in front of the fire, eventually sucking a sweet, reading or perhaps just staring into the fire. It was wonderful.

Around six o’clock we were asked to come to the dining room and the table was laden with good things they thought we would like. They always had one particular hot pie – a dish lined with pastry and filled with sausage meat. She had made spaces in the sausage meat into which she dropped raw eggs and she covered the pie with slices of tomatoes before she put it into the oven. There was always a lemon meringue pie or a flan with jelly and whipped cream on top. There were certainly cakes and other goodies, but we generally had a piece of savoury pie and a piece of flan or lemon meringue and several cups of good tea. The lavishness of the tea table did not provoke us to overeat – it showed their wish to be good to us and make us feel happy and they achieved that fully. I think they had to bring us back before 8 p.m.

Dorothy did a lot for me by letting me be part of many of her Sunday invitations and I could never forget this wonderful couple. They seemed to enjoy doing this for Dorothy, and for her friends, too. But I don't think they realized fully what they were doing for us, at least for me. Sometimes gestures of undeserved loving kindness are like island in a fast-flowing river one has to cross. Boarders sometimes invited me to stay with them for a short while during the holidays too.

Anne was one year ahead of me in Rosleven, but she became a good friend. She seemed mature for her age, had needed to show a lot of courage in her illness a part of her childhood and was what I would call 'real' – no show or pretences. She was the second youngest of six children. Betty, a little older, was at Rosleven with me, too, but left to help her mother at home when the second eldest daughter got married. Betty was quiet, sensitive, kind and gentle and I always liked her very much, too, but Anne was my friend.

I must have been about 13, certainly no more than 14 when Anne invited me to her home for the first time. They had a large farm with a few hundred sheep if I remember correctly. Maybe they had crops, too – I have a faint recollection of a conversation about a combine harvester. The father had died some years previously and the elder of the two sons had taken over the running of the farm when he was very young. To me he seemed quiet and gentle like Betty, but very strong mentally and physically and very hard-working. It was a big house for the mother to run even when Betty was at home. Two daughters were married and the youngest boy as well as Anne at boarding-school. She was a very dignified lady, was well in command, had an eye on everything and there was great routine and order. I got on very well with her.

I was greatly taken by a small, marble-top table standing in the corner of the kitchen and it was only used for baking, mainly the whole meal soda bread that was baked every day. They wouldn't have dreamt about of buying a kg packet of flour – they bought brown and white flour in large linen bags which were kept under the table. The table was most convenient for making soda bread.

The family was well-aware of its tradition, a tradition that W. B. Yeats wishes for his daughter in 'A Prayer for my Daughter' (reproduced overleaf). There was no set time for breakfast as this wouldn't have been possible. During lambing time especially there was work to be done with the sheep for a greater part of the night, so for some a very early breakfast was necessary. Otherwise, there was a set routine – Betty or Anne vacuum cleaned the whole house every morning, the bread was baked, lunch prepared – changing chores with the changing seasons. I enjoyed helping.

Lunch was at the same time every day, always in the dining-room for all the family. There were lots of delicious, flowery potatoes, which I wasn't used to – with a little meat and vegetables and beside the jug of water there was always milk on the table as well. Sunday lunch after church was a special lunch, and I seem to remember many visitors. The first Sunday I was there – a young teenager – I naturally helped to clear the table. When that was done, I went back to the table and sat down again – waiting for the others to come back – waiting for Godot! Once I realized that I was the only girl in a group of men, I felt helpless and very

WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS – A PRAYER FOR MY DAUGHTER

Once more the storm is howling, and half hid
Under this cradle-hood and coverlid
My child sleeps on. There is no obstacle
But Gregory's wood and one bare hill

Whereby the haystack- and roof-levelling wind,
Bred on the Atlantic, can be stayed;
And for an hour I have walked and prayed
Because of the great gloom that is in my mind.

I have walked and prayed for this young child an hour
And heard the sea-wind scream upon the tower,
And under the arches of the bridge, and scream
In the elms above the flooded stream;

Imagining in excited reverie
That the future years had come,
Dancing to a frenzied drum,
Out of the murderous innocence of the sea.

May she be granted beauty and yet not
Beauty to make a stranger's eye distraught,
Or hers before a looking-glass, for such,
Being made beautiful overmuch,

Consider beauty a sufficient end,
Lose natural kindness and maybe
The heart-revealing intimacy
That chooses right, and never find a friend.

Helen being chosen found life flat and dull
And later had much trouble from a fool,
While that great Queen, that rose out of the spray,
Being fatherless could have her way

Yet chose a bandy-legged smith for man.
It's certain that fine women eat
A crazy salad with their meat
Whereby the Horn of Plenty is undone.

In courtesy I'd have her chiefly learned;
Hearts are not had as a gift but hearts are earned
By those that are not entirely beautiful;
Yet many, that have played the fool

For beauty's very self, has charm made wise,
And many a poor man that has roved,
Loved and thought himself beloved,
From a glad kindness cannot take his eyes.

May she become a flourishing hidden tree
That all her thoughts may like the linnet be,
And have no business but dispensing round
Their magnanimities of sound,

Nor but in merriment begin a chase,
Nor but in merriment a quarrel.
O may she live like some green laurel
Rooted in one dear perpetual place.

My mind, because the minds that I have loved,
The sort of beauty that I have approved,
Prosper but little, has dired up of late,
Yet knows that to be choked with hate

May well be of all evil chances chief.
If there's no hatred in a mind
Assault and battery of the wind
Can never tear the linnet from the leaf.

An intellectual hatred is the worst,
So let her think opinions are accursed.
Have I not seen the loveliest woman born
Out of the mouth of Plenty's horn,

Because of her opinionated mind
Barter that horn and every good
By quiet natures understood
For an old bellows full of angry wind?

Considering that, all hatred driven hence,
The soul recovers radical innocence
And learns at last that it is self-delighting,
Self-appeasing, self-affrighting,

And that its own sweet will is Heaven's will;
She can, though every face should scowl
And every windy quarter howl
Or every bellows burst, be happy still.

And may her bridegroom bring her to a house
Where all's accustomed, ceremonious;
For arrogance and hatred are the wares
Peddled in the thoroughfares.

How but in custom and in ceremony
Are innocence and beauty born?
Ceremony's a name for the rich horn,
And custom for the spreading laurel tree.

much out of place. Eventually Anne stormed in to ask what I was doing, sitting with all the men and beckoned me out. The ladies had withdrawn to the drawing-room for a cup of tea. I was mortified. Differences in cultures can be a problem!

The fire was lit in the evenings daily after tea, much earlier when the weather was cold. I loved the time after tea when one by one the family settled around the fire after the day's work and important matters were discussed, plans for the next day presented. That was the time of day when Roy's sheep dog was allowed to sit beside him at the fire. I was told not to pet him as he was a working dog. He put his head on my lap one evening and I couldn't resist. Suddenly I was sitting in the dark. He had hopped on to my lap and he was a big dog. Everyone laughed; I had been caught out. There was always supper around 9 p.m. tea, some sandwiches, a little cake or maybe biscuits and then it was bedtime.

When the weather was good in the summer, they were all busy making hay, no time even to come in for tea. I remember walking with Anne through the fields carrying heavy baskets of sandwiches, cans of tea, cups and napkins. They continued to work when it got dark, running several tractors with their lights on. Good weather was precious.

When the second-eldest daughter married she told Anne she could invite a friend and Anne chose me. It was a splendid summer wedding and the weather was beautiful. For the reception they had put up a large marquee in front of the house and it was the first big Irish wedding I was at.

The whole family was always very kind to me and I visited them several times, also with my parents. On one occasion they visited us in Miltown Malbay, too. I think that visit was probably in the Retreat.

When Betty married, she kindly invited me personally. It was another wonderful day. This time the wedding was in Athlone and the reception in the new hotel that had been built beside the church – lovely and very modern, and also convenient because it was during the colder season and we could all walk over from the church.

I loved staying in their home and loved the daily life on the farm. Perhaps it also brought back happy memories of the family visit on a farm in Altenaffeln when I was only 4 years old.

In 1972 when I moved to Germany the contact continued by post, and eventually I received the sad news that the mother had passed away. In the meantime, I was in contact with the eldest daughter and one summer I arranged an exchange with her daughter – a lovely girl – and one of my pupils in Wuppertal. It was a good time and later that summer I visited them in their home and became very fond of Anne's sister Dora and still am.

Shortly after the mother's death I was staying with Ida during the Easter holidays. Betty was good to invite me for the Easter weekend and we would visit the two brothers living in the family home and running the farm. They were expecting us for Sunday lunch. Ida brought me down to Betty's home and it was lovely to see her and she and her husband gave me a great welcome. On the Sunday when we arrived for Easter lunch the two brothers were in full control. The table was beautifully set and we sat down to a perfect, delicious lamb lunch

they had cooked, with a dessert to follow. They had picked a huge bunch of daffodils which spread a bright Easter welcome in the room – a day to remember.

I still hear from several members of the family which is amazing. Anne has always been my friend and I love hearing from her, about all she does, how loyal she is to friends, news, how Betty is. Dora's contact is precious and so is the Christmas news from Alice and Roy. I've never met Alice but she must be a special person and I appreciate it that she makes the effort for someone she does not know. Thank you, Alice.

The whole family has a special place in my treasury of memories, the friendship for a lifetime and has been extended to her family also.

I got on well with another girl called Patricia but we were not what I would call friends, but I gratefully remember their hospitality. I got a look into a strange world. One year her parents invited me to join them for Hogmanay (the Scots word for the last day of the old year, and synonymous with the celebration of the New Year in the Scottish manner) after Christmas, their great family celebration, as they were Scottish people. They wanted to thank me for helping their daughter during the summer when we had been attending an Irish summer school in Carna, Connemara.

One day Patricia hurt her ankle badly. It was very swollen and she could not walk on it. As it happened Patricia's Aunt and Uncle were on Eyre Square, Galway, with their fun fair. But how could we get there? I suggested to Patricia we would hitch a lift. One of the teachers said we could try to get a lift to Galway if a third girl would come with us. She did and Patricia hopped on one leg, leaning on our shoulders. Carna to Galway was about 40 miles. In this day and age, the road to Carna is busy, full of tourists, e.g. buses taking tourists to the boat going to the Aran Islands. In the late fifties one could have happily gone roller-skating on the road, no vehicle in sight. And during the holidays there were no school buses either. But we were lucky. Eventually a car came and stopped, room for us all, as far as Spiddal. Driving along the sea on that fine day was beautiful. In Spiddal we thanked the man for the lift, and this time it wasn't long till a car stopped, on its way to Galway. The man brought us right to Eyre Square. A kind man yet again.

The aunt and uncle were very worried about Patricia. One of the family drove her to a doctor and the aunt gave us tea, sandwiches and a mineral. Soon Patricia was back, but her Carna days had ended. The ankle had to be seen to and she was now in the care of her relatives. Lovely people. The two of us hitched back to Carna, eventually lucky to get a lift.

Patricia's parents were grateful that I had taken the initiative to get their daughter to Galway. (We didn't even have the money for a taxi to take us anywhere for a few miles, and she wasn't so badly hurt that an ambulance would have come from Galway for her.) Patricia's family also had a fun fair, and their caravan winter quarters were in Co. Wexford. There was a lot of family discussion at home about a visit there. I was keen to go, also curious to see how they lived. The car journey from Miltown Malbay to Co. Wexford was an obstacle, especially in winter. I have forgotten the details: for example, where Henner was that year. His birthday, on January 1st, would always have been a priority. And how and

when did I get home or to school? Eventually my parents promised to drive me there on December 30th, but not with a light heart.

It had got dark when my parents and I arrived, the caravans in a row, behind a wall, and beyond the wall the sea. There was a bit of a difficult moment when I thought they wouldn't leave me there, but they did. What a terrible journey for them home! Perhaps they stayed in the B&B in Dún Laoghaire, where they stayed on various occasions. One of the ladies was called Miss Brewster. I can't remember.

The caravans were beautifully furnished and quite large and one led to the next caravan, like a different room in a house but an elongated house. Patricia and I shared a bedroom, and the bathroom was in the next caravan. They had a lot of visitors there, probably staying in a hotel at night.

Patricia had told me to bring some tea and a piece of coal for her mother, symbols to wish her prosperity in the coming year. There was no coal to be got, only turf, so I got more tea instead and her mother seemed pleased. It was an experience for me, because I got a glance at a very warm-hearted, happy family. They had to work hard, but their family was of foremost importance to them. Their life was so different to ours, but only superficially.

On another occasion years later, Patricia met me in Dublin and said she wanted me to meet her cousin and family, living near St. Patrick's Cathedral. We walked up Dame Street, and at Christ Church turned towards St. Patrick's Cathedral. Suddenly Patricia moved towards a high wooden fence, a solid fence. I noticed a door in the fence. Patricia had a key and we were in a different world, full of large caravans and partly packed roundabout elements! Tea was served in beautiful china cups, but much larger. Apparently, they were breakfast cups.

The cousin's wedding was coming up shortly. There was a new hair stylist shop near the top of Grafton St. – Cesar, I think it was called. I had heard about it. The cousin had tried him out and her hairstyle was very elegant. He took a guinea for a wash and set; she told us. My sip of tea nearly went down the wrong way! The price of my hairdresser was about 25% of this.

I had a pleasant, very interesting afternoon, again sharing tea with very kind and pleasant people, people whose work made them travel – travelling people, about whose lives I wouldn't have known or thought about except for Patricia and her parents' gratitude and my parents' effort!

Last but not least, there was Deirdre who lived in Ennis. I visited there sometimes and liked her parents, especially her mother. She was friendly and cheerful, not as stern as her sister, Mrs. Wester in Rosleven. Deirdre also came to stay with us in the Retreat a few times. She was a little older than me, but I enjoyed the contacts.

And then there was Gertrude ...



Hellgard Leckebusch, *Singing our Song*, p. 224.



The Sandalls in the fifties

40: Gertrude from Woodville in Brannockstown

I love the poem 'Dead friends are like jewels in my hand' by Sasha Moorsom, although when the lines go through my mind, I exchange 'friends' with 'loved ones'.

Jewels in my hand

I hold dead friends like jewels in my hand
Watching their brilliance gleam against my palm
Turquoise and emerald, jade, a golden band

All ravages of time they can withstand
Like talismans their grace keeps me from harm
I hold dead friends like jewels in my hand

I see them standing in some borderland
Their heads half-turned, waiting for my arm
Turquoise and emerald, jade, a golden band

I'm not afraid they will misunderstand
My turning to them like a magic charm
I hold dead friends like jewels in my hand
Turquoise and emerald, jade, a golden band

By Sasha Moorsom (1931-1993)

As for the living, my friends are like jewels round my neck, a precious necklace that I live with and Gertrude is a special jewel, accompanying me through life. We shared three school years and we never lost sight of each other. Her home was Woodville in Brannockstown. What a ring that name has and it conjures up outstanding, happy memories with dearly loved people. I cannot remember when she invited me to her home for the first time or her first visit to the Retreat, but it doesn't matter.

She left Rosleven after passing her Intermediate Certificate. Her plan was to train as a secretary, but she was too young then and the secretarial college didn't take her. She took the opportunity to take on a job as a mother's help in a Norwegian family until she was old enough to start her course. That mother had found a crock of gold at the end of a rainbow and she knew it. Gertrude knew the family, too, the two eldest girls went to Rosleven. Gertrude worked enthusiastically and thoroughly, delighted to learn anything new. At 15 she was a good cook already and she learned a lot about the care of babies and small children. She was good in any situation in life. I could have imagined her being very successful doing a university degree, but she did well, very well, of what she did. The secretarial college course was soon completed and at a very young age she became a typist in a typing pool at the B&I, but not for long. A very wise person discovered the young gem they had working there and she got a post which was to the best advantage for the B&I and for herself before she was 20 and she only left the post when she married.

Woodville was a farm in Co. Kildare, surrounded by farmland and beautiful trees. The father looked after a number of beef cattle, one or two cows for

[Hellgard Leckebusch, *Singing our Song*, p. 225]

household use, the milking, the land and the work outside. The mother was in charge of the house, the yard, the young folk, the chickens and the small vegetable garden. I think they had bushes of berries and apple trees, too. They certainly had wonderful home-grown tomatoes. The help of the two sons and Gertrude was part of the family teamwork. The older of the two brothers would and did take over the farm and he was growing into this responsibility by degrees.

None of the family ever considered work to be a chore. It was treated naturally with the same vigour and respect as celebrations and times of fun were. They knew what they were aiming at with great enthusiasm and energy, but achievement for itself had no fans in the house. It sounds like a very traditional family, and to some extent it was, but this perfect balance of taking responsibility and being able to be part of the decision-making process seemed very extraordinary at the time.

The kitchen was the heart of the home, the place where we all met, where we had our meals (except on Sundays), when visitors always would be there too. The table was a large wooden, scrubbed table, no paint. I loved sitting behind it on a long bench, no back to it. The Aga, a wonderful invention, always had a kettle on it with almost boiling water. When the occasion arose for a quick cup of tea, the kettle was shifted to the hot plate. If the lunch wasn't in one of the ovens, a stew might simmer gently on top for hours. In winter, the kitchen was cosy, in the summer months never hot, because the back doors were always open. They had an underground well in the yard with a pump. The water was pumped up to the tap in the scullery.

When I was staying there, the family were up and about their jobs already, while Gertrude and I had a lie in. When we were officially beckoned for breakfast, the family had had breakfast and the cows had been milked. The chickens had been fed, lunch prepared, bread baked, sometimes there was washing on the line. One summer in particular I remember, Gertrude had a gorgeous summer dress, sleeveless, white based with large apricot flowers, lime green at the bottom and some round the edges with a sort of apricot sash at the back. With her blonde/red hair, tall and slim, she looked stunning in it. She had changes of summer clothes, but this was her dress of the season. Uniform was expensive and it was normal that one got one new outfit for the season, one for the summer, one for the winter. My season dress was white with red stripes and of course I felt best in it. We never asked, but each night, the mother came up to our room when we were in bed, collected the two dresses, washed them and hung them to dry over the Aga. As soon as she could, she ironed them in the morning and then brought them up to us and that was the sign that we could/should get up and start the day. I still bless you for this, too, Mrs. Sandall. Thank you for all the fun and the laughter and for making me feel so much at home.

Mr. Sandall was an admirable man. He was quiet, saw everything, checked just a little. As long as I knew him, he suffered from a severe illness which was diagnosed early on in their marriage. He had decided, in trust, to continue doing his duty, hoping to be able to support his wife and children. Anyone who heard his frightful coughing attacks at night found it difficult to understand his attitude of courageous trust, his sense of duty and acceptance. He died when he was over 70!

The family belonged to a small Baptist church with a considerable congregation in this country area. On Sundays, the morning and evening worship was attended by all the family. There was never any pressure on me to go, too, I was happy to share the day in their way and heard a number of excellent sermons. As a teenager I was greatly impressed to be spoken to from the front of the church each time: 'I see Hellgard is down from Dublin (or up from Clare) staying with the Sandalls. We are glad to see you and welcome you in our midst.'

Their Christian belief gave this family a structure in their lives, but it was never restrictive in the family or towards others. The Sundays were special days in the Christian sense. The cows were milked in the morning and at night and we drove to church as it was too far to walk. But on Saturday, the table in the dining-room was laid, setting several extra places. The roast, potatoes, vegetables, dessert were all prepared and there would be nice home-made biscuits or some cake for tea in the afternoon. Before we went to church, the roast went into the Aga. Potatoes and vegetables were brought to the boil when we returned. If there was a single person at church, or visitors, they were invited to join them for Sunday lunch, whether they knew them or not. Mr. Sandall's phrase: 'You don't notice a slice of bread off a cut loaf.' It seldom happened, but occasionally, the number of guests was not quite in keeping with the amount of lunch and Mrs. Sandall whipped out, had some idea, even if it was big bowl of very large tomatoes as an extra. No-one ever left the table hungry.

After lunch they sometimes had visitors – perhaps a number of young people for a game of rounders, other games or a picnic. On wet days, especially in the winter, we could read or go for a nap. Mrs. Sandall always left stacks of 'Woman's Weekly' in our room for a relaxed read. Sometimes we moved to the sitting-room and someone played the pianola. Sundays were happy family days. When I was at college or teaching, Gertrude regularly asked me down for the weekend. I would take the bus to Blessington or another bus to a terminus in the middle of nowhere. There was always someone there to collect me, generally Mr. Sandall. I never brought chocolates or flowers for Mrs. Sandall – she was so practical. I would bring a melon or a cherry brack from Bewley's and even once I brought down two gorgeous cucumbers, rare at the time, and whatever she thought, she used to say she loved these useful gifts.

One summer, Gaby stayed with us in the Retreat for her holidays. During that time, we were invited to stay with Gertrude and her family. Gertrude and Gaby were pen friends and now had a chance to meet. The Sandalls gave us a good time. We were taken to the zoo, we tried to help with the haymaking. We walked to the river nearby and Gaby went swimming, and we saw the Japanese gardens.

Another summer when I stayed in Woodville on my own, Mrs. Sandall decided to bring us to the Sally Gap and we would have a picnic, she said. She very seldom drove, but she got us safely there, the boys giving driving advice, whether it was needed or not. She parked high up overlooking the gap and there we sat on rugs, a beautiful day, a magnificent view, fun and a meal in the open air.

When I lived in Dublin, I often knitted a woollen garment for someone in my family, sometimes even two. Getting closer to Christmas, I would bring it down and got some knitting done on the Saturday. They would never knit or embroider

on a Sunday, so I left mine aside for the day too, in respect for the way they lived. One day Mrs. Sandall asked me if I knitted on Sundays, and I said I did. She answered: 'If you do, you can do it here, too.' And I did.

Gertrude visited us in the Retreat, and in the Hill House on Ballard Road too, but I don't have the same detailed memories as of my visits to Brannockstown. I know she was a very welcome guest in our house and that my family was very fond of her. She got on especially well with our mother. My parents always did their best to make our visitors enjoy the visit. There will have been trips to the Cliffs of Moher and the Burren, Kilkee, Lahinch, swims at Spanish Point and the White Strand.

And one visit was no doubt in the summer because she still talks about the gourmet shock she got when my mother made Gulasch with a green salad. The Gulasch was a festive dish and Mr. Curtin's beef really good. But the green salad was a specialty, only if lettuce was available from Miss White Junior in the summer, or if we happened to get to Limerick (over 40 miles each way so that was once in a blue moon) and got one there in the summer. Gulasch, green salad and potatoes or pasta is a very German Sunday dish. For Gertrude, this was a salad with a stew! Still, she was never whingy and never batted an eyelid. Over the many years, her cooking had improved, constantly open for new and foreign ideas. In her free time, she caters for the wedding of friends – up to 40 - 50 guests – a sit-down meal, 3-4 courses. She does have help, but only to lay and decorate the tables and serve the food. One of her gorgeous ice cream recipes is doing the rounds among my German friends, but Gulasch and green salad never got on to her mental cookery book!

When I went to Trinity College Dublin, I moved into the Y.W.C.A. (Young Women's Christian Association). Gertrude had a small bed-sitter just around the corner. This was great. She was a very good friend, making sure I could visit a family she knew on my first Sunday afternoon in Dublin. Gertrude and I often met for a quick coffee before I went back to T.C.D. in the evening to the library or one of my different choir practices.

In 1966, I had passed my A.L.C.M. diploma so that the fees for the Royal Irish Academy of Music (piano, theory of music) did not have to be paid anymore. I had also got a moderate, but very helpful, scholarship from the Church of Ireland towards my college fees. So my parents decided I could share a flat with Gertrude for a year and take singing lessons with Violet Byrne at the Academy. Hurrah!

From the beginning of October 1966, we shared a very simple flat in No. 12 Charleville Road, but it had everything we needed. When one walked through the door of the flat, one would have been confronted with the two single beds and a very small wardrobe if there hadn't been a curtain. If one took one step to the right, one was in the sitting-room. There was a small couch, a small fireplace, two small armchairs and a small round table in front of it. There was a tiny gas heater, the meter in the hall was fed with shillings. In front of the window, looking right down on to the playing fields and trees of the St. Louis Convent, there were a small kitchen table and two chairs. At the wall, there was a sink and a tap for cold water. There was a small boiler so we had hot water, too, the kitchen sink served as our washing facility too! Beside the sink there was a breakfast cooker – two

plates and a grill, and we had an electric kettle. A bath was available in the cellar, but one had to book a date. The toilet was down the stairs and there was also a telephone with a shilling meter in the hall. Just around the corner towards Rathmines there was a launderette. It may not have been comfort living, but we coped well with all the limitations and loved it. For me this was certainly one of the happiest and most relaxed years of my life and I even had time to play tennis with friends at Trinity College.

We had a household purse which we filled with the same amount each Monday and paid our food from Monday to Friday, breakfast and evening meal (Gertrude was home at the weekends). We lived well but simply. Our V.I.P. shopping was tea, milk, oat meal, potatoes. Gertrude made gorgeous porridge. In the evenings we took cooking in turns – some meat or fish, potatoes, vegetables. We tried to save a bit each week for a night at the cinema or a simple meal out. We enjoyed the occasional winter's evening by the fire if we were both in. Above all, we had great and interesting chats before going to sleep.

Gertrude was and has always been very fast and organized, ignoring non-essentials, but one February evening I felt she was over-active. Our meal was a bit rushed, she cleared out the grate and lit a fire, ignoring my remark that we didn't really need a fire as we had a fine gas fire. I was sitting down to enjoy my after-the-meal cup of tea. But there was little comfort in it, as she rushed to do the dishes, whisked my tea cup away. Well, of course I dried the dishes, but I was mesmerized. We had just finished when the doorbell rang and Gertrude shot down the stairs to the front door. We weren't expecting visitors – at least I wasn't. Suddenly the room was full of people. I remember Lorna and Ida from Wesley, Ruth Harper, too, whom I knew from Trinity C.U. They had brought a cake displaying a sugar-icing message 'Welcome to Wesley, Hellgard'. I had just unexpectedly got the post at Wesley College that I wanted. I was really moved – moved to tears with his unexpected welcome. I knew about Ida, but I had never met her before. She was in charge of Tullamaine, the boarding house for the junior girls, where I would assist her. Gertrude made tea and coffee, we cut the cake, and we had a lovely celebration. Lorna and I had become good friends in the Y.W.C.A., but she was two years ahead of me and was already teaching in Wesley College.

One evening in spring, I was invited out to see 'The Sound of Music'. I was friendly with a lot of students, male also, and was invited out to concerts, films, a meal, parties, but not to what I would call dating. So with her sense of fun Gertrude decided to prepare a banana split bed for me. When you get under the sheet, the blankets fall to each side and you've only got the sheet. I came home, wasn't terribly talkative because this evening, I realized, might be the beginning of a different relationship, as it turned out to be. I got into the bed, the blankets fell and I never noticed it. I said good night, fell asleep and Gertrude's 'mischief balloon' had burst, and started her thinking! After Commencements in July, I was looking forward to teaching, to moving on in life, but I was sad to leave Gertrude and Charleville Road.

Now we are both well into our seventies and when she comes to visit me once a year, we feel as we always felt when we met – as if we'd only said 'good night'

the previous evening. My move to Wuppertal didn't change this. Letters were wonderful and the frequent visits to Ireland and Germany bridged any gap. When she married Eric and had three boys, time got a bit scarce, but it made no difference in our relationship.



12 Charleville Road, where Hellgard resided with Gertrude, 1966-1967



Gertrude and Eric Dillon on their wedding day – late Seventies

What is it? I think we shared a lot, our faith and trust, our sense of responsibility, the fact that we were open and honest and never played ‘games’. We were both proud, but not arrogant, hard-working but not ambitious, grateful but not spoilt satisfied, and therefore happy.

On the other hand, we were complementary. I was really courageous, confidently so, but I lacked self-confidence generally. She never lacked this and that steadied me. Whereas she was more sensible and serious, my ‘Jack-in-the-box’ nature helped to preserve her positive child-like attitude perhaps? I don’t know.

Good friends are such a blessing in one’s life.

41: Looking back

Six years of my life were spent at boarding school. It was an important stage in my life and during these years away from home Miss Webster and Miss Richardson did their best to make our time there as much like a home as possible. I would go further – I have no doubt they ‘brought us up’ during these years as they would have brought up their own children.

Were they born in Ireland or in Britain, perhaps in Ulster?¹ When I was sent there in 1956 my parents were 51. I would guess that they were a little older. Where did they go to school; where did they get their education? They were among the few women, who were allowed to take a degree in Trinity, like Mrs. Barcroft, Janet’s mother. One thing is certain to me, they grew up in a British or Anglo-Irish tradition with a great interest in the Royal Family, loyal to traditions of good behaviour, self-control, decency and integrity, honesty, Christian principles, obedience with great pride in their families. They must have been young women of high ideals to risk starting a private school and educating girls in the way they thought it would help them to lead a happy life, and prepare them to be good wives and mothers which so many became, they felt the necessity to do something for girls’ education which I admire. I expect that they got some teaching experience before they founded the school around 1935 (I took part in the 25th anniversary celebrations as a pupil, perhaps in 1960 or 1959.).

The first premises, I was told, were near the Methodist Church in Athlone. It was a severe blow when these premises were destroyed by a fire. I never knew exactly what year,² but they had the courage and determination to start again in the buildings and grounds I knew. The school was their work, their life, their fulfilment, their home, and the pupils, past and present, were to some extent their ‘family’.

What I recall are my own personal recollections and my own selection of what made up life at the school for me. I am often critical, but not in the sense that I criticize their lives or their aims, their achievements. I have great respect for them and appreciate much of what they did. I was a teacher, too, and the aims in education, the ever-changing needs of children growing up is still of great interest to me. Looking back, I am keen to decide what I think is important in education.

¹ Elsie Hilda Richardson (1905-1962), a Trinity graduate of 1927, was born in Killeshandra, Co. Cavan, the daughter of John Richardson, a watchmaker, and his wife Stella Frances, *née* Cooney. Elise Webster (1907-1967), a Trinity graduate of 1930, was born in Ennis, Co. Clare, the daughter of Henry Webster, a grocer, and his wife Emma *née* Rice. According to the records of the T.C.D. Association and Trust, Miss Richardson died in November 1962 (aged 57), and Miss Webster in September 1967 (aged 60).

The couple founded Rosleven School in 1938. Janet Barcroft’s mother, whom Helgard mentions as an early woman student at Trinity, was Vida Geraldine (*née* Ashworth), who graduated with Miss Richardson in 1927. Janet also had an aunt, who was an educational entrepreneur like the Rosleven ladies. She was Rhona Ashworth, not a Trinity graduate, but the holder of a Froebel qualification, who, until her death in 1969, owned and conducted Mount Temple School, Palmerston Park, Dublin.

² The fire, which completely destroyed the school premises at Northgate Street, broke out on 11 November 1940. A lawsuit that ensued, Richardson and Webster v. Athlone Woollen Mills, went to the Supreme Court. The Woollen Mills company was both the lessor of the school premises and the owner of the adjoining factory in which the fire started. The ladies, who ultimately succeeded on appeal, 3 to 2, were claiming £2,400 in damages. The judgment is reported in the *Irish Reports* for 1942, at pp 581-95, but not the amount of the compensation, which remained to be assessed.

While I was teaching, I just had to get on with it. Now looking back, I want to consider what was good and will always be good, and what was good and expedient at a certain time only, and what has outlived its time completely. I came across a remark of Cicero's lately: 'Not to be aware of the past is to remain forever a child'.

I am my mother's daughter certainly in her conviction that it is essential to state what one considers to be wrong, evil, or what one considers might be better, so that reflection can occur, because otherwise, that was my mother's opinion, traditions and habits are automatically passed on to the next generation. She never criticized a person, but could object to a certain behaviour or action strongly.

Miss Webster and Miss Richardson did their best to make sure we got enough exercise. We were given a balanced diet, even if we didn't always appreciate it. In the winter when vegetables were scarce, we sometimes got steamed onions as a vegetable, and oranges at breaktime, for example. Just before breakfast we could wait outside their room, wait for them to appear, and state our complaint. It would then be dealt with. They expected us not to be over fussy, but looked after us well if we had a serious complaint.

The twentieth century was a century of great changes. The 2nd World War was to change society completely. Obedience until then was regarded as a prime virtue: an army without obedience doesn't function, and most families lived accordingly and schools likewise. Strict and enforced discipline has a lot of advantages, but the freedom of a person is at risk if the personal will is not respected, and personal responsibility for one's own behaviour and decision is neglected. That was a problem of the times, not of the school I went to alone. I found it difficult to find my place in the midst of so many traditions. As a teacher I occasionally used disciplinary actions automatically, especially when I was tired, punishments that I had grown up with and that I was continuing. The few occasions this happened I quickly came to my senses, regretted it, and tried to make amends. And needless to say, I made different mistakes, equally serious, but mistakes I wasn't aware of, perhaps am unaware of even now.

A small school has not the scope to develop the best qualities of a school in many areas. My boarding school had a particular part of society in view, and a special, traditional role for women was never questioned. This role they taught to perfection. Academic achievements were important but excellence was not a priority. If achievement went along with excellent behaviour, it was perfect. In such a small school competition was lacking amongst the pupils, as well as impulses. Coming from a completely different background I got any number of impulses, but they weren't academic.

What I really owe to the school is training how to behave in different groups of society. Like every pupil at a boarding school, I learnt to be more considerate, to get on with people – I had no chance to get away from other pupils or teachers. I learnt how to complete something, even if I didn't feel like it, or was almost too exhausted to complete a task. I had a wonderful home and was well prepared for this strict life but I never lost my inner freedom. In fact, the training I got was a perfect supplement for my upbringing to enable me to find my roots in Ireland. And the friends I made were a special gift for life.

The school closed a year after I left. Miss Richardson became ill the last year I was at Rosleven, but she went on teaching as before and it wasn't generally known. She continued for another year, but the principals decided they would close the school at the end of the school year 1962/63. As usual they invited the Old Girls after the end of the school year. Very many came that year and so did I.

Miss Richardson died while our parents and I were still in Ireland, and Miss Webster did not reach very old age either. They lived a life of service and with them and their aims an era ended.

42: An important transition 1962/1963 – The start of a deep and growing friendship

We got to know each other when we shared beach life in Spanish Point. I liked her from the very beginning and we both specifically remember one Christmas time when she visited us in the Retreat. She was very surprised to see real candles burning in our tree. I was still at Rosleven. We had moved to the Main Street then and in 1962/1963 I attended the Convent of Mercy in Spanish Point.

The Collins family lived not far from the Retreat, that is, ‘as the crow flies’. From our doorway their house across two or three fields seemed very close; we could clearly see the washing out on the line. Henner had got to know Mr. Collins at the power station. I knew the older sister Margaret, too, and had met Mrs. Collins and the three younger boys.

When Trinity College was prepared to let my application rest for a year due to Mother’s illness, Geraldine and I had the chance to get to know each other better. Mother had advised me not to neglect my studies and the Mercy nuns were prepared to let me repeat the Leaving Certificate in five subjects only in 1963, and I would have piano tuition and could do my A.R.I.A.M. (Associate of the Royal Irish Academy of Music; qualifies the successful candidate to teach up to Grade 8) examination at the same time. With just the minimum number of subjects and the greater part being repetition, I would be able to manage school and help at home. It turned out to be a really good year for me in many ways. I had my wine-coloured school tunic, blouse and tie, possibly a blazer. The school was not too fussy about coat, shoes, etc.

A girl called Patricia who lived outside Miltown called for me each morning and then we cycled to Spanish Point together. She, Geraldine, Mary Meskell, and Anne Maloney were all in the class I joined. I found the standard of teaching very good. As it was a school with a great emphasis on the Irish language, an honours Irish course was not debatable, a real challenge for me. Sr. Mercy, who taught us Irish, did not waste a minute of teaching time. Coming down the corridor, with a resolute step, she was already in top gear, starting her prayer well before she reached the door. We jumped to our feet, joined in the prayer and she timed it so perfectly that she was standing at her desk to say the ‘In ainm an Athar’ – ‘In the name of the father ...’ When we sat down the lesson had basically begun.

I had my work cut out for me, especially when we started reading texts relating to the legends of Fionn mac Cumhaill. One morning it was my turn to relate what I had learnt. My Irish was very limited. I was doing fairly well till I got to one sentence: Dainigh Fionn Miocad Mac Colgān’. I hadn’t got my head or tongue around ‘Miocad’ and said, ‘Micky MacColgan’. Even Sr. Mercy joined in the hearty laughter – briefly. Her face just cracked. It was lovely laughter; they weren’t in any way making fun of me. There was just a bit of Micky Mouse in the air!

Sr. Baptist was a really good Maths teacher, but also a genius at making use of her knowledge of psychology, besides her instinctive understanding of human nature. Mathematics on the whole was my best subject, if we can ignore geometry. These marks had always been well below average, compared to my other marks in

mathematics. I understood the idea behind the theorems, generally got full marks for the transfer questions, but I found learning the exact wording of the theorems a bore and couldn't be bothered. I had decided that understanding the theorem was more than enough for me. I wasn't prepared for Sr. Baptist! She made us all write out the new theorem for the day in a very limited time, collected the pages and the next day we got them back marked – always! I tried to flirt a bit, using my charm a lot, hoping for sympathy and understanding, which would leave me free to remain stubborn and lazy. It didn't work. There was never any comment about my poor effort. She would patiently say: 'Don't worry, Hellgard. You will improve. Just keep on going.' That game wasn't much fun and I started to learn the theorems. She took this change in her stride as well. No smug remark ever, like, 'Didn't I tell you ...?'. At the end of the year and in the Leaving Certificate, my mark in geometry was not way up in the nineties like the rest, but well up in the eighties, for me a peak-mark!

Sr. Ambrose taught English and R.E. (Religious Education). She was very special in many ways. Geraldine always looked forward to Fridays when we were given the title for the English essay for the weekend. Her titles were most unusual. I remember writing essays on titles like 'Wheels' or 'Telegraph Poles'. Unlike Geraldine, I was daunted by these titles at first, but once I got over the shock of not getting what I would expect, the ideas that suddenly came to me were amazing. I couldn't say which lessons I found more exciting, English or R.E. Some of her ideas I have never forgotten, e.g., her dealing with 'relationships'. First of all, she clarified that all kinds of relationships were included: friendship, love relationships, family, work relationships, in fact any. She contradicted the idea that each side of a relationship was responsible for 50% of its success, because this was seldom enough. Each side needed to invest about 75%, because we all had our shortcomings and with a 50% investment we could easily fall through the fragile gap. In later life I found this statement to be very true.

Sr. Mercedes taught me music, was really good and so full of love of music that I enjoyed the lessons. The fact that I didn't pass the A.R.I.A.M. exam was simply due to the fact that my basic practical and theoretical knowledge didn't suffice.

The nuns suggested that I should sit for Hons. German in the Leaving Certificate although they did not officially teach German at the Convent then. I received individual tuition and a good mode was found for our lessons, which proved to be very pleasant and successful. In fact, I did so well that I was awarded the German Ambassador's prize for the best result in Ireland that year. Besides a book-prize signed by the Ambassador, there was a cheque of £20 – a lot of money in 1963!

WON PRIZE

Miss Hellgard M. Leckebusch, Main Street, Miltown, and a pupil of St. Joseph's Convent, Spanish Point, was the winner of a £20 prize as the result of the Leaving Certificate examination. She secured the prize for German.

Who taught me Art I have forgotten, but that was good, too. In one section of the exam, I had to do a watercolour of a geranium, not the easiest flower for me. Still, it turned out well and I got a good mark.

These nuns taught me a great deal about teachers, that I found very useful in my future life as a teacher, and I was very fortunate they and the pupils gave me a great welcome. Many things impressed me. One of the pupils lived about ten miles away along the coast road to Kilkee. They owned a small farm cottage with no electricity yet. Her job in the morning was to bring in and milk the cows, and looking after the cows was her job when she came home from school in the evening too. Above all there were her two long bicycle rides to school, and then home, in rain, wind and storm. The arrangement was that she could change into her uniform at school, and her wet clothes would be dry or partly dry before she cycled home. Every day she was asked, 'Did you have time to do your homework?' 'Would you like to tell us what you prepared?' There was no pressure whatsoever, and it is my firm belief that that is the reason she did well in her Leaving Certificate Examination and this opened a way for further training and a good job.

The whole year was a time of academic growth for me, but it was also a time of great inner growth on account of all the good conversations, especially, though not exclusively, with Geraldine. I know we didn't push our bikes along the Strand Road to her house after school every day – to cycle would not have given us enough time at all – but we did so frequently, discussing the problems of the world, life and all it involves. These conversations laid a solid foundation to our gift of friendship.

Other parts of a web were woven, too. Mother was improving and regaining her strength. She was asked by the nuns to come and introduce them one evening per week to the German language. Mother explained that she was not a teacher, but they insisted nevertheless. Mother loved those evenings in the winter of 1962/1963 and was well enough to do that.

We got to know the Collins family better, especially Mrs. Collins who was a wonderful lady I grew very fond of. One reason for this was a very sensible arrangement between Mrs. Collins and my mother. By now Mother was a confident driver and she regularly came up to Dublin for the day, either to bring me or collect me or visit me, and to do all sorts of other things 'in town'. Mrs. Collins had relatives in Dublin, enjoyed a day 'in town' and asked Mother if she could get a lift if she was due to visit. Mother was delighted as it would make the long drive so much easier and more pleasant with company and Mrs. Collins was a very good co-traveller, as they had pleasant conversations, but she did not chat continuously. She was great in other ways, too. The start was generally around 5 a.m. and Mother used to drive up to Dublin non-stop, on a bare cup of tea or coffee. Mrs. Collins insisted on more civil arrangements. She always brought a flask of hot tea and sandwiches, and they would stop near Nenagh or Roscrea. Before setting back home to Clare she invited Mother to a meal in the Mount Clare Hotel. She knew the hotel well as it belonged to a member of her family. As I was often with them, either travelling to Dublin or home, I benefited from Mrs. Collins's treats and pleasant company occasionally.

In the summer of 1963, great changes in our life were due. Geraldine had decided to enter the Mercy Order, Mary Meskell the Poor Clares, both having houses in Ennis. There were great preparations for both of them and the Leckebusch family were due to move into the Hill house, little more than a building site, and then off to Trinity at the very beginning of October for me.

The Collins had a lovely farewell party at home for Geraldine with friends. I felt very honoured to be invited, and have very clear ‘snapshots’ in my mind of the occasion. Geraldine had made her dress of light *báinín* (a woven woollen cloth) material. It had $\frac{3}{4}$ length sleeves, a round neck with no collar. It was buttoned down the front, the two sides overlapping generously. There were just three, large, beautiful but not fussy buttons in the exact colour of the *báinín* material, but made of wood, a natural material: one at the top, one at the waist, into which a belt of *báinín* material was also attached, and one towards the hem. She always had such great, non-pretentious, elegance. A few days later came the great occasion of her entry, with the moving religious ceremony. I was greatly moved to be there with her, and her family, and afterwards being part of a lovely reception in the convent gardens.

I may be mistaken, but I felt she had hoped to be trained as a teacher, but she wasn’t, and she did not have a choice. Whoever made the decision for her was very far-sighted. She was trained as a speech therapist and later had a clinic centre in different towns – five in all, as the week had days and there, she trained children to overcome severe speech problems. They will have loved her and she loved her work. We never lost touch, but I do not know what her training entailed. She certainly spent quite some time in LA during which time her father died so suddenly at a young age.

When the time to leave Ireland – 27 June 1972 – came closer, my wonderful friend Ida organized a ‘Farewell Hellgard’ party on June 25. I knew about it, witnessed some of the preparations, but no more. (A moment never to be forgotten: Ida and I had shared a flat in Sydenham Road for the year. The day of the party, Ida was off to the fish market more or less in the middle of the night, and came home with two fresh, magnificent salmon (!) which she steamed at once. They were cooling on the kitchen table, flat door open. Two neighbouring cats had got the whiff and had already come through the door when Ida spied them. We had just had some breakfast, a half a grapefruit each and the ‘skins’ were still sitting on the side plates. Ida was up like a panther, grabbed a grapefruit skin in each hand, roared, running after the cats, flinging the skins at them. She was a real protector of her salmon, and she was most successful and so funny.)

The party was incredible. A friend had offered the use of her flat for the occasion and had cleared all the furniture from the sitting room to the bedroom, just leaving very few chairs. They had invited 65 guests, and some stood in the corridor outside the flat. Not only Wesley College friends had been invited, for there were others too, like Albert Bradshaw, who had been the conductor of Singers, and Geraldine! It meant so much to me that she had been invited and came, to share this important day in my life.

We continued to correspond and I paid visits to Dublin when I could. In the Eighties, she studied Psychology in Trinity College and we had the chance to

meet. We had decided on a restaurant near Trinity College, probably Bewley's, and it was so wonderful to see her sitting there after so much had changed in both our lives, and before she would be working in University College, Limerick, helping to organize a new department / courses in family therapy.

While great changes were taking place in our lives, I visited Ireland in the autumn of 2004. My health was not good, but a very dear friend asked me to come and see her and I wished to do so, too, although it was an inconvenient time for my Irish friends. It was their half term which coincided with my visit and they all had plans. Still, everyone helped and Dodie and I had the gift of this lovely meeting – and indeed she died not that long afterwards.¹ Geraldine collected me at the Reeds' flat and treated me to a weekend in the West. We stopped at Naas, her Mercy home for the time when she was part of the Mercy leadership group, and she made a lovely meal. Then she drove us to Clare *via* Killaloe and Lough Derg, the trees around the lake arrayed in beautiful autumn colours, and all this against a bright blue sky. When we reached Spanish Point, it was dark. Geraldine parked, facing the beach, we opened the windows. I smelt the salty air and listened to the waves lapping on the shore. Geraldine unpacked a delicious picnic including a flask of hot tea. 'For oft when on my couch I lie, in vacant or in pensive mood,' (Wordsworth) I relive those moments frequently.

Geraldine had booked B&B (bed & breakfast) in a new house overlooking the beach, more or less beside the Golf course. The owner was a lady I had seen growing up from babyhood to a toddler, as I used to go for milk at her parents' house when I was around 10 years old. It was like a life circle closing. Geraldine and I were both happy to go to bed early. I kept the window open, listening to the waves, and with that sound I fell fast asleep.

Breakfast the next day, overlooking a rough sea, even out as far as Mutton Island, felt as if I were sitting in the Square Tower drawing room in the Retreat. It was also good to hear that the owner's mother was still alive and that a brother had built a beautiful hotel on the site of the cottage, with a caravan site across the road in one of their fields.

After we had left, we drove on to Lahinch, where we stopped to walk around the village and seafront. I loved the drive to Galway, going down the Corkscrew Hill and past Galway, then to Salthill to her mother's house, Geraldine's second home, overlooking Galway Bay. There was a lovely meal waiting for us, delicious, including one of her mother's renowned apple pies. Mrs. Collins had an appointment, and we would see her in the evening.

We set off for Barna then, not far, on the way to Spiddal, but with a lot of new estates we had at first great trouble finding the right address. Eventually we were at the house and were delighted to meet a young couple. They had been so kind to invite me to their wedding, but it was a bad time for me, so I couldn't attend. This was a chance to see them. He is the son of a former Wesley colleague and his wife. He was the youngest Maths lecturer at Liverpool University ever, and was now a lecturer at U.C.G. (University College, Galway). His charming wife, originally from the Netherlands, and most intelligent too, had just completed her

¹ Dodie died on 5 November 2006.

Ph.D. Over a cup of tea, she gave us a brief introduction to the fascinating subject of her thesis, although I could only understand a little of what it was about: the chemical changes that take place in pigs, depending on the methods employed in killing them, and to what extent these changes influence the quality of pork meat. It was an eye-opener for me, and I made further progress in my development to do more careful shopping and have deeper life awareness. She was employed by an American firm, working online.

When we came back to Salthill, I was very happy to see her mother again and spend an evening with her. We sat in the cosy sitting room, chatting about the past and the present. One of her sons called, too, I think it was Cecil, a chef in the Great Southern Hotel. Eventually it was definitely bedtime. I slept well and had to leave after breakfast.

Geraldine did so much for me that weekend. As I was never able to travel to Ireland again after 2004, it was my last chance to visit Clare and Mrs. Collins, a more than precious time. We occasionally had a brief chat on the phone, and there were cards and messages and there are memories.

‘For all the saints, who from their labours rest, ...’

It wasn’t the last time I saw Geraldine, and there were two occasions in the Nineties when I organized some bus tours to Ireland and we could meet in Clare.

Then there was 2013, which I will come to later.¹ She is in many ways an *Anam Cara* (soul friend).

¹ There is no further reference to 2013. It is believed that Hellgard’s intention was to write more about Geraldine in a piece to be entitled ‘My Anam Charas [‘Meine Seelenfreunde’].



[above] The Hill House in Miltown Malbay, to which the Leckebusch family moved in September 1963 when it was still under construction.

[below] The factory premises of Dalcash Labels Ltd. seen from the Hill House.



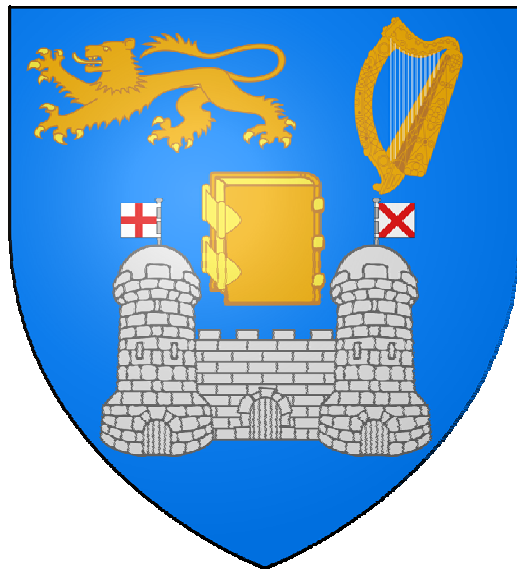


The completed Hill House
seen [above] from the front, and [below] from the side of the garage



Part VI:
Happy Years Ahead

[The Trinity College Years, 1963-1967]





The former Mountpleasant Square Y.W.C.A. Hostel,
where Hellgard resided between 1963 and 1966.

The Hostel occupied two adjoining houses: No. 31 Mountpleasant Square (the tall house which incorporates the route under the arch) and No. 32 (the three-storey house on the left). The window at which Hellgard and friends were photographed (below) is the one just above the door of No. 32, next to where a burglar alarm is affixed



43: Getting ready for a new phase

I was looking forward to my first term in Trinity, although there were obstacles to be overcome first. Would I get a place in the Y.W.C.A. in Rathmines? There was little time to worry about this as we moved into the Hill House beside the factory in the Ballard Road, at the beginning of September 1963. We had to move out of Mrs. Casey's house in the Main Street, but the Hill House was still in the process of being born!

My parents moved in to the smaller bedroom for the time being as it was the only bedroom with a pane of glass in the window: in fact, the only room in the house besides the kitchen. All the other rooms, even the bathroom, had no end of fresh Atlantic sea breeze. In my bedroom there were two large window spaces, one facing the Ballard Road, the other the factory. I covered both spaces with large sheets of dark plastic: a protection from the elements and the bird's eye view the factory workers would have had. The factory worked 24 hours of the day except at weekends. The three bedrooms had doors that locked, as did the door leading to the bedroom/bathroom area, so we didn't in fact sleep in an open house. The bedrooms, the bathroom and the kitchen had solid flooring, the rest of the house had planks of wood. There was no front door as yet. The steps led into a would-be hall, over a wooden plank to the kitchen. The sitting room was a building site. We had running (cold) water, electricity, a cooker, an electric kettle, a fridge. In the kitchen there was a small table and three camping chairs.

It was good that I could be at home to help Mother before Trinity term started. By the time I left to go to Dublin all the windows had panes of glass, and the house had a front door. Hallelujah!

In the Hill House our belongings were partly in the built-in cupboards, but most of the boxes and some furniture were in the garage. Workmen of different trades were endlessly active all over the house: painting, hammering, putting in flooring, using the natural stones from Liscannor to make a lovely fireplace. In between the variety of work going on Mother and I tried to keep the normal household chores going, also trying to find permanent homes for our belongings where possible! Like a leitmotiv we served endless cups of coffee and tea to keep the workmen in relatively good spirits. It wasn't easy for them either, or for Father who had to concentrate on the work in the factory, and at 1 o'clock he was ready for his lunch. Miracles took place daily.

When I came home for the Christmas holidays, I could see a lot of progress. Yet it wasn't till the 24th December that the carpet was put down in the sitting-room and the curtains were delivered from a shop in Limerick and put up, too and we actually were able to sit round a blazing fire in the grate on Christmas Day.

Well before this, the first week in October, my parents drove me to Dublin, with some hastily packed belongings in the case and the Raleigh on top of the car. They drove up to Dublin and home the same day – a marathon. (At the time we had to reckon that one journey took approx. 4½ to 5 hours.) The day was beautiful and mild, and after Limerick the density of trees increased, all beginning to show the autumn shades. In Dublin we found our way to Rathmines quickly. The dome of Rathmines church, copper turned green, was prominent, and then we met Miss

Brookes who was in charge of the Y.W.C.A. (Young Women Christian Association) and very pleasant. She served tea and biscuits in the dining-room and then showed us the kitchen, and the rest of the house. The sitting-room was furnished like the sitting-room of a large country or city house. There were big windows looking out on Mountpleasant Square, a large fireplace, a spacious table, chairs, a piano and the room was heated. I shared a bedroom with four other girls. It had five beds, a rail for hanging clothes, five chairs and the space under the bed for our case with clothes and personal belongings but no heating. There were toilets, baths, hand wash basins in a communal bathroom. The house offered protected living, very inexpensive full board quite near the university: cycling no problem.

The excitement and the anticipation for the new phase in my life was so overwhelming that I was sad to see my parents setting off on the long journey home, but not for long. Mother was very upset, leaving me in the large city, completely unprepared for this new freedom, but she only told me much later. In a way she had a point. I had led a very protected life up till then. On the other hand, six years of boarding school life had taught me independence and responsibility for myself and others. My parents were both good examples to follow, showing me what values were important and giving me an idea how to place my priorities. I had also inherited our mother's courage. All in all, I was well prepared for any life anywhere.

At teatime I met a lot of girls, many studying at T.C.D. (Trinity College, Dublin). There was Lorna, starting her third year at Trinity. She came from Castlepollard and her bed was beside mine. Elma came from the North, doing French and German, full of fun and in the Choral Society. (I pricked my ears.) There was Mary from Belfast, who seemed and was special. They had come a week earlier to prepare for the term, others followed during the week. The evening passed pleasantly and once in bed I fell asleep at once.

On that Sunday after breakfast, I had decided to go to the German Lutheran Church in Adelaide Road. Henner had told me how to get there. Schwester Marga Reibert remembered him well and hoped she would see me at Church regularly, too. It was good walking through Dublin, beginning to get my bearings: U.C.D. (University College Dublin) in Earlsfort Terrace, the hospital across the road from the Lutheran Church, the Synagogue, the large Presbyterian Church in Adelaide Road. And I loved the trees. They were what I always missed in the West, however much I loved the sea, the wind, the rocks, the beaches, the cry of the gulls. The trees brought back remnants of the past, and whenever I came across lovely trees an indescribable never-ending longing seemed to be answered.

After lunch in the Y.W.C.A. Gertrude had arranged for me to spend the afternoon with a family she knew well in Leinster Road in Rathmines. I got an impression of this part of the city, heard the clock that chimed every fifteen minutes and found the house easily. There were many people there for the afternoon and I couldn't have felt lonely in this group. They were all friendly, the topics were interesting, the age-group was mixed and the couple that Gertrude knew were very kind and hospitable, making me feel welcome.

When I returned to Mountpleasant Square the others had had their tea. Some were still happily chatting at the tables and I joined them.



St. Finian's, the Lutheran church in Adelaide Road, where Hellgard went on her first Sunday in Dublin. To its left is the Church House where Schwester Marga Reibert resided and held her Sunday evening get-togethers for young people (see p. 260)



[left] photograph of Schwester Marga taken in her rooms in the Church House.

Schwester Marga had served in Belfast before coming to St. Finian's. Before Belfast she had been in Paderborn.

She came from Breckerfeld (not far from Wuppertal or Hagen), where Hellgard visited her in her retirement.

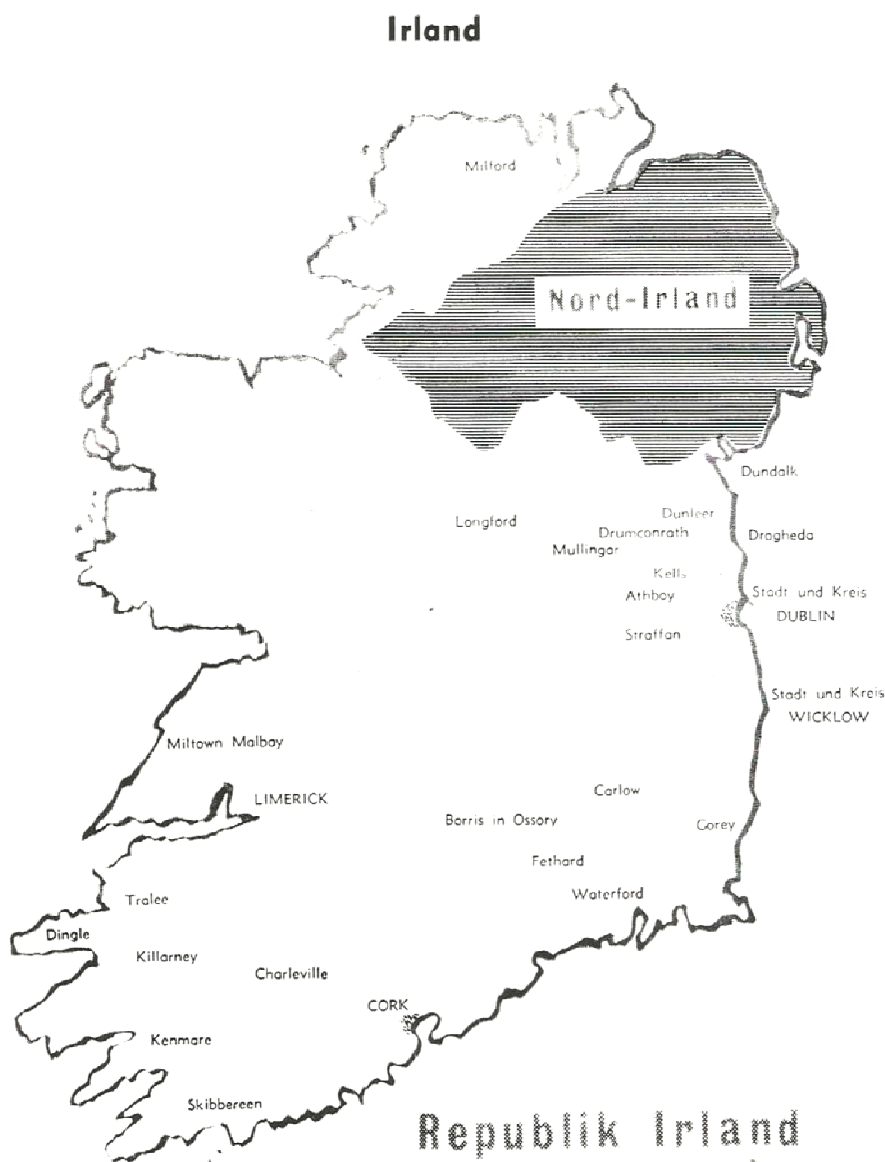


The interior of St. Finian's showing the organ

It was Sister Marga who recruited Hellgard to play the organ at St. Finian's, a role for which she was thanked in print in the 1965 publication *10 Jahre Lutherische Kirche in Irland* (the source of the accompanying photographs). Hellgard was modest about her proficiency as an organist, and said she found it mortifying to be mentioned in a list that began with the name of Dr. Hans Waldemar Rosen (1904-94), conductor of the R.T.E. Singers. In her copy of the 1965 publication she inserted a Post-it which read: 'Hel[l]gard Leckebusch, organ, in the same line with Dr Waldemar Rosen, such a musical expert, God help us all'!

Zu grossem und bleibendem Dank sind wir unseren Organisten verpflichtet, die in ehrenamtlicher Bereitschaft abwechselnd den Dienst an der Orgel tun. Ihre Namen seien hier aufgezeichnet Dr. Waldemar Rosen, Herbert Pöche, Heinz Langheld, Friedemann Lembens und Helgard Leckebusch.

Sister Marga had known Henner Leckebusch, and it was on Henner's recommendation that Hellgard sought out St. Finian's on her first Sunday in Dublin. The sketch-map of Ireland below, which appeared in the 1965 publication *10 Jahre Lutherische Kirche in Irland*, shows the places in which Lutherans lived. That Miltown Malbay is marked on the map can only be attributable to the Leckebusch family.



In den auf der Karte eingezeichneten Orten wohnen Lutheraner



The Front Square of Trinity College seen through the Campanile

44: Finding my way around

All junior freshmen (and women) had to be on the campus one week before the first term started. Canon Elliott was very kind to treat me to my undergraduate gown; and this was especially wonderful as he did it with such joy and some pride. I collected it from Bryson's, near St. Andrew's Church, on Monday morning, first thing!

At college there were lectures with information how and when the library could be used; rules relating to the college; facilities such as sport; where we could eat; the University doctor – all the information that could and did make our start easier. From Front Gate to the Campanile the various societies had their stands, offering flyers and verbal information in the hope of attracting new members. Most of them were very tempting, but I decided on just three: I really hoped to be able to join the choral society – Bach's *Christmas Oratorio* was being performed that term – so I applied for the audition. I joined the C.U. (Christian Union) because their topics, lectures, discussions, etc. for the term really interested me – apartheid problems in the U.S.A. and South Africa, world hunger, just to give two examples. My interest in the world as a whole, and the various needs of millions, had been awakened at home and in Rosleven. Finally, I joined the Elizabethan Society. I never got round to really knowing what their aims were but the facilities they offered in Nr. 6 were wonderful: toilets, a warm place to sit down briefly, a place to leave a coat, a pigeonhole for letters and messages. That was all I needed, a really useful society.

Somehow, I had managed to overlook the fact that all students reading General Studies had to sit for a test – three hours in which we had to write an essay on one of a huge list of topics. The choice was widespread, and the list took ages to read. For someone who had so far lived without access to a radio or newspaper, except during the holidays, the choice was lethal: current affairs, or international sport themes. Eventually I chose the best of a bad lot: about the advantages and disadvantages of the E.C. (European Community). I came from a business household, so the discussions on the E.C. were part of family life. When I was at home I learnt about some aspects, as our mother offered hospitality to the numerous visitors to the firm: the directors from Germany, the managers of large firms in Ireland choosing new designs for their labels and making contracts. The conversation over many lunches was informative and interesting. I hoped my knowledge would suffice for the essay, and it did, so there was no need to resit the test. One couldn't start at university doing General Studies if one did not pass this test.

My introductory appointment with my tutor was encouraging. It was Dr. Lösel. His academic reputation was extremely good. I also found him to be a very wise, and a very kind man, so I was lucky. He always spoke to me in German and was quite upset that I hadn't decided on Modern Languages and did his best to persuade me to change. He told me I should attend his lectures on Walther von der Vogelweide, expecting me to know who he was! His lectures fitted in with my timetable that term so I got my introduction to the *Minnesänger* (minstrel).

Parts of his lectures were in English, which was flawless, but spoken with a very attractive but pronounced German accent. There was no question of my changing my course. Music was the first love in my life, and besides my course at the R.I.A.M. (Royal Irish Academy of Music) in pianoforte and theory for the diploma, my only chance of doing music was the limited two year-music course with Professor Boydell in Fine Arts I, shared with Fine Arts II, the History of Art.

That first week I found my way around. Cycling to college wasn't a problem. At the Y.W.C.A. I had a safe place where I could leave my bike, and in T.C.D. (Trinity College Dublin) I always locked it to one of the iron-railings outside No. 6. Traffic was busy, especially along the Green and in Grafton Street, but I never thought about it till I had a puncture one day, took a bus, and then saw others cycling in and out between the cars and buses, just like myself! It didn't worry me for long, however.

I walked into the Green, which I loved, got to know Bewley's restaurant in Grafton Street, with a delicious smell of coffee which was being roasted in the shop behind large windows, so one could see it being done, as the smell wafted out on to the street. Just a coffee there was a treat, a bun was not essential.

The bookshops were of great interest: Fred Hanna's in Nassau Street, one part full of second-hand books – very convenient, and Hodges Figgis in Dawson Street. The other good bookshop Easons was that bit farther away, so I favoured the quick walk from T.C.D side gate into Nassau Street.

I liked the Buttery. They served coffee, tea, water, snacks; and I enjoyed reading many books there while having a coffee. I made notes, wrote letters, using it as a kind of sub-office when they weren't busy.

Cycling back to the Y.W.C.A. for lunch made no sense, so I generally made do with a coffee or an apple. They served a good, reasonable meal in the dining hall at lunch time, and on very cold and wet days I sometimes went there. Miss Brookes was kind. If a lunch had been left over at lunchtime, she kept the plate for me. It was cold but it was good food and served me well.

I loved the library and got my introduction to the book orders. At that time, one handed in the name, author, and register number of a book at the desk, and could collect the book(s) about twenty minutes later, by which time one had found a convenient place to work. In my first year this was the place where all of my study was done except just reading.

From 1964, there were lovely double rooms available in the Y.W.C.A. with a small desk and a wash-hand basin, two chairs, a small built-in cupboard, carpeted floor and heating. It was more expensive, but still extremely reasonable and my parents told me to apply. I shared one of these rooms with Lorna and we could study there too. It was just wonderful and there was heating!

Attendance at lectures and tutorials was carefully checked. If we were really ill, we had to go to the T.C.D. doctor who was tough. At lectures with a large number of students one could sometimes chance missing a lecture. The list of names went round and it had to be signed, and if the necessity arose a friend did wonders in practicing one's signature!

As soon as I had a chance I walked through Trinity, past the cricket field out Back Gate into Westland Row to meet A.J. Potter and Miss Copeman at the Royal



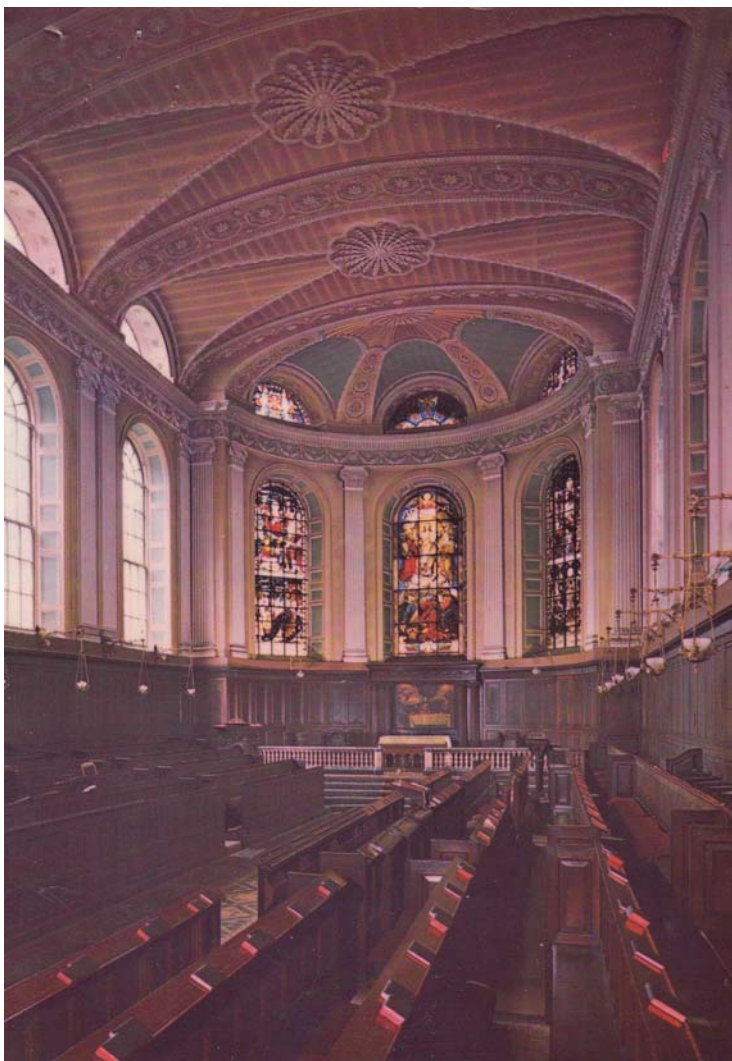
[above]
The rear of No. 31 Mountpleasant Square, with part of No. 32 visible to the right. The red door into the lane is where Hellgard was photographed returning at night with her bicycle. She rightly judged this to be a 'safe place' (p. 252) for the bike

[left] Hellgard and Lorna coming back to the Y.W.C.A. on their bicycles, 1964 or 1965. Hellgard is wearing the T.C.D. undergraduate scarf.

Irish Academy of Music and arrange suitable times. I also had to try to arrange practising time at pianos there, or elsewhere. Miss Copeman expected me to practise the piano for three hours per day, but that was seldom possible. Sometimes I had some free time, but no piano or *vice versa*. But I was so happy that I made little of these difficulties, and did my best, cycling round Dublin, trying to get practising time daily, always 30-minute slots.

By the end of the week the results of the essay test were posted outside the Examination Hall. That obstacle had been taken. I had heard about the small *a capella* choir, 'Singers', but certainly did not have the confidence to put my name down for an audition. I attended the choral evensong in T.C.D. Chapel on Wednesday evening – beautiful singing – and decided the chapel choir was a possibility too; and indeed I sang in that choir for years.

The week had been exciting and I was ready for the beginning of term!



Trinity College Chapel, showing the choir stalls in the centre to left and right
[old postcard]

45: Starting university life

Fitted out in my new gown that first Monday morning of term I was eager to start. Front Square was busy with students delighted to meet their friends again, lecturers and professors in the different gowns, freshmen like myself trying to look efficient and confident.

English: Besides the Professor for English whose name I cannot recall,¹ Mr. Kennelly and Mr. Thurley made a lasting impression. The professor introduced us to the writers of the sixteenth century leading up to and mainly dealing with Shakespeare and his time: the development of the English language, the development of drama and its religious and non-religious roots – all fascinating.

Mr. Thurley's main themes were the two contemporary writers, D. H. Lawrence and James Joyce, but not exclusively. The reading list was overwhelming especially as my literary background was basically non-existent. I borrowed books from the library where possible, bought a number of second-hand ones from students or at the Fred Hanna second hand department. I did not manage to get a cheap copy of *Ulysses* or *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, so I went to Hodges Figgis to invest in these two books. I decided that the assistant's reaction to my request for *Ulysses* was not neutral! This was 1963 and maybe I did not look very intellectual, but he produced a copy. My next request was *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, to which I got a short and sharp reply, that it was banned. How was I to know? I couldn't have felt worse if my dress had suddenly fallen off and I was standing in the shop in my underwear. It was good to know that other students had the same problem and our solution was to ask students from the North for help. Some went home for the weekend regularly and supplied us with copies. The book was not banned in the U.K. Mr. Thurley was very good – a serious, academic man, enthusiastic about literature. I enjoyed D. H. Lawrence's novels, also his poetry which is not as well known.

James Joyce was an unknown 'world' to me. I loved the *Dubliners* and even today a confrontation between a workman, who is late for work, and his boss still gets me into the state of shocked hilarity. Boss, enraged: 'Do you take me for a fool?' Workman: 'I don't think that is a fair question to put to me, sir'! *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* I found very interesting, but *Ulysses*? My education and my head were not ready for it yet. I made myself read a certain number of pages each day, but the genius in the work seemed to escape through my ears during the process. When I made another attempt a few years later it was easier, and I was at least aware that this was / is great literature. I have never lost interest, have read a great deal about him, his life, his wife, and look forward to reading *Ulysses* again soon, in the hope that I will have this opportunity.

Mr. Kennelly was equally learned, academically excellent, and an equally good 'teacher', but his sharp wit and creative use of language fascinated me. His

¹ The name of the Professor of English that Hellgard did not recall was J[ames].K[irkwood] Walton (1919-1988), known to his students as 'J.K.'. The editor of *The Quarto Copy of the First Folio of Shakespeare* (Dublin University Press, 1971), 'J.K.' was the half-brother of the physicist and Nobel prize winner Ernest T.S. Walton (1903-1995).

remarks could echo the shot of a gun, or could appear like the unexpected treble Rittberger of a skater – breathtaking and beautiful. Endless instances come to my mind. A wonderful moment: the largest lecture theatre was packed. Mr. Kennelly was way down below my seat. He was standing, holding a huge pointer for the board and the map. There was no microphone. The pointer was larger than he was. Suddenly he faced us, and he looked as if he was holding a bishop's staff. He was grinning broadly, then put the pointer down on his desk and started to clap at length. You could hear a pin drop. Loudly and clearly, we heard him: 'Congratulations, sir. That was the longest yawn I ever saw'. Together with a few hundred other students I looked round and we saw a poor young man blushed to perfection. No one was ever unseen in Mr. Kennelly's lectures or tutorials!

On another occasion he invited us to his bedsitter in the Rubrics for a tutorial. We were about twenty in number and the room we were allocated to was so large it swallowed us. We agreed and only had to walk across Front Square. We could sit where we found a place, he said. Most of us had sat down on the carpeted floor when he was about to start. Suddenly a solitary, very beautiful girl, still standing, asked in a whinging, pseudo-helpless voice: 'Mr. Kennelly, and where should I sit?' He did not look up. He said 'Sit on the bed. It's the only place for you', adding 'luv'; then immediately started 'business for the day.' She sat on the bed! Obviously, she hadn't been at school in Rosleven! I blushed for her! She didn't.

Anglo-Irish literature was his theme, specializing on short stories, I seem to remember. I loved them and the long reading list did not daunt me.

Dr. Thomas was in charge of German. As I had expected, my fluency was a great advantage. My knowledge of German grammar was non-existent, as I had learnt German orally only, but fortunately the spoken German I heard was grammatically correct, and university was not the place for basic tuition! German literature was my challenge there, and I really looked forward to this and I enjoyed new worlds opening for me.

The Department of Music was in No. 5, and I was full of anticipation. The lecture room was small, but large enough for about 25 of us. It resembled a class room except for the good piano at the side. I had managed to sign on for 30 minutes piano practice earlier in the day, and the sound was beautiful. I had met Professor Boydell at the Bower Convent, Athlone, while a pupil at Rosleven. The Reverend Mother had invited all from Rosleven School for an important celebration at which Professor Boydell was the guest of honour. Being German I was introduced to him. He had studied music in Tübingen for several years and was a fluent German speaker.

When he arrived in No. 5, he wasted no time, and after a short introduction he started his lecture. From the first sentence I was aware that I was completely out of my depth, understood nothing; there was nothing I could make a note of. I was shocked, terrified and disappointed.

I didn't cycle back to the Y.W.C.A. for my tea, as I had my audition for the choral society shortly afterwards. If I was successful, I could join the evening rehearsal straight away. The music lecture had ruined my confidence, but I needn't have worried. I got the O.K. quickly and was sent to the rehearsal. As I flew up the stairs, I heard the choir singing the beautiful, stirring appeal: 'Christians, be

joyful'. Elma had promised to keep a place for me, hoping I would be taken. Outside the door I met the secretary of the society preparing a cup of tea and a biscuit for everyone in the interval. On a single ring of a gas cooker a huge kettle with an extra handle over the spout was being brought to the boil. Cups and saucers with a biscuit were stacked, starting with six by four at the bottom. It was a large choir. I went into the rehearsal and saw Elma almost at once. She was near the end of a row, with the spare seat for me – perfect. I got a friendly nod from Mr. Grocock, and I joined the singing, sharing Elma's score.

At the interval we went out for our tea. It went so smoothly! Everyone took their cup and saucer and moved away to make way for those behind us. I was amazed to see so many students I had already met! I borrowed my own score, paid a deposit there and then. It was a good, short break and then back to work. This time I noticed the tall, thin man at the piano – 100% concentration on a piano stool. His posture, also of arms and hands, was perfect, and he had one eye on the score, one on Mr. Grocock. Whatever impulse he got from the conductor in regard to speed or volume, his reaction was instant. When Mr. Grocock asked him to transpose the chorale a minor third down this was immediately put into action. He was just incredible. Elma whispered 'That man reads a score like we read a book, only faster!' He did. And he was even a bit younger than I was.

After the rehearsal Elma took the bus back to Mountpleasant. I cycled back, up Dawson Street, on to Rathmines, the music still ringing in my ears, some of my hopeful confidence restored.

46: First experiences as a student

I just loved being in Dublin, at Trinity, amongst young people, a world of learning at my disposal, but sometimes I had to learn more than I had bargained for.

The problem of the music lectures led from worry to panic and I saw no way out. Then Professor Boydell opened the cage for me. About two weeks after the beginning of term he wanted to know if we could all follow his lectures, and, if not, to say so. I closed my eyes and put up my hand and in that order. When he asked me what I found difficult I didn't mince my words. I replied that I had no idea what he was talking about. He looked perturbed and asked again if anyone else had the same problem. Very slowly, one by one, all the hands went up except for three.

From then on, his lectures changed. He made us work exceedingly hard, but it was manageable, exciting, and I never looked back, never had a problem with a term essay, did fairly well in the two end-of-the-year exams. I didn't expect to become an expert and I didn't, but it was a great experience.

My first English term essay was sobering. The title was 'Wit in *The Way of the World*' (*The Way of the World* is a play written by the playwright William Congreve). I enjoyed writing it, discovering details in the play, getting background information, and developing my own ideas. Then we all got our essays back. Mine had been corrected, but instead of a mark at the end I had a remark – to go to see my tutor about the essay that very day: I felt sick!

Dr. Lösel gave me an appointment for the afternoon, and received me as graciously as ever. He was careful with his wording, started off on the positive side: The professor had been quite impressed by my background information, the way I quoted, but above all by the individual and unusual ideas I had produced, relating them well to the play. By now I was getting impatient. I wanted to know what he was getting at.

Dr. Lösel continued in his extremely mild way to explain that the professor hadn't been able to decide if I had no idea how to compose a term essay, or if I had the impudence to hand in work – quite organized and neat – which could have become a term essay. He, Dr. Lösel, had assured him I was a diligent student, so I was to get a second chance. He took my essay and showed me how a term essay should be written. It was quite logical. As most of the term was over, I had a very limited time to give it the proper form and hand it in. I did so and within two days of handing it in I got it back with a P II.

I continued my studies with even more enthusiasm, motivation and pleasure. They were strict, had their standards, but, besides being learned, they were also helpful, not merely judgmental. I tried to remember their example all through my teaching life.

Except for these hurdles at the beginning, I was fortunate that studying came easily to me – Life had opened its door for me, and I was in my element. Singing was my greatest joy, but I was invited to parties also, went to the Abbey Theatre regularly, sitting for half a crown 'up in the gods' with many other students and parents who brought their children to see a play on a Saturday night. I looked out for plays by O'Casey, Synge, J.B. Keane (Mr. Kennelly's recommendation), also

saw others like 'The Cherry Orchard', or enjoyed an evening with Marcel Marceau. There were no chairs or seats up in the gods: we all sat close together on wooden steps leading up to the door where we came in. The legs of the people behind us supported our backs.

I loved chamber concerts or piano recitals – very reasonable admission for students – or visits to the National Gallery that I had discovered. Off and on Schwester Marga asked me to play the organ at the Sunday Morning Service. I had no idea how to play an organ, and was not particularly good at playing it like a piano – it was a favour I did for Schwester Marga when the alternative was no singing. She knew I had no time to prepare myself for these favours really, except that I came early before the service to go through the hymns once. The 'Mr. 100% Concentration on a piano stool', who was also an excellent organist (even in his early teens, he had played at big weddings), lent me some easy but lovely music I could play before or after the service.

I was always out on a Saturday evening, but less often to a party. I enjoyed them too, but I wasn't a party-mouse and generally preferred other activities. From time to time, I was asked to sing a solo at a church service. Word had got round that I spent a lot of time singing, so I was invited, e.g., to sing at one of the early 'Women's Solidarity Services' which led to the 'Women's World Day of Prayer' in 1968. This was in Adelaide Road Presbyterian Church, a church I only knew to see. I was asked to do it as a favour by someone I didn't know. I fitted it into my timetable, no time to practise with the organist. The only preparation was that I put on a suit that day, and brought a hat on my bike in a large plastic bag that I was able to leave in No. 6 for most of the day. That service did give me a bit of a shock, as the church was almost full, but otherwise it wasn't a big deal. I enjoyed it – using a gift I had at my disposal, if it was required; no more, no less.

Even the happiest times in life have moments that keep us firmly on the ground. With me it was my piano lesson with Miss Copeman on a Wednesday. Dr. Potter had offered his help if I ever came to the Academy. (We had met for the R.I.A.M. [Royal Irish Academy of Music] yearly grade exams in Rosleven.) When I enrolled, he put in a good word for me with Miss Copeman who was excellent and I really liked her. Still, for me these lessons were most distressing. To tell the truth, I just wasn't good enough for her, and as I didn't have a piano at my disposal to practise for more than thirty minutes at a stretch, she thought I should spend more time each day practicing; also that I was not interested enough besides being lazy. Due to my Rosleven training of self-control I never showed any emotion and she couldn't realize that I was far harder on myself than she could ever be, and that I only blossomed when I got encouragement and praise. So we were both trapped in our different and individual roles and had to endure this situation. My lessons gave the week a tidal structure. During the three days leading up to Wednesday my underlying panic arose and it progressed to high tide on that day. Once the lesson was over, my panic tide turned and lessened for three days till the tide turned again.

Reason could tell me now that I could have saved my parents a lot of money and myself a lot of hardship, but that solution would have been too easy. Those years at the R.I.A.M. were precious too. Miss Copeman, a teacher to whom a few

young concert pianists from Britain travelled over on the mailboat once a fortnight, did not give up hope for me in spite of everything.

I learned to stick it out, got my diploma from the L.C.M. [London College of Music] in the end, and learnt to accept that I might have been good enough if I had had better opportunities; and yet knowing that my parents had done more than their best, I had learned the lesson early that some dreams cannot be fulfilled, and that life is still good. I could understand Moses a bit, I thought, who saw the promised land, but he himself would never live there!

Before the emotional tide of the week turned on Sundays I was in Adelaide Road where Schwester Marga invited the young Germans in the congregation for a get-together on Sunday evenings. There were about six of us. She always baked one or two cakes with more good intention than expertise, but she created a homely atmosphere and we had great fun playing cards and we showed our appreciation of her baking by eating more than one polite piece.

A man from Berchtesgaden who had been asked to come over to Ireland for some months to work on the planning and design of new roads was regularly there, as was a young man who had been at Trinity with Henner. His father had played in the Irish Symphony Orchestra. The family had come to Ireland around the time we came. The younger brother was my age. For him the change was so difficult that, after some years, the parents had to return to Germany, leaving the older brother who was more settled in Dublin now; distressing consequences. Along with me we were the three regulars, but others always joined, some more often than others.

Life must have passed quickly, but it doesn't appear to have done so. Each week had its special times and unexpected turn of events. In November we were shocked by President Kennedy's assassination. Lorna and I had become friends already. That day she had received bad personal news when news came through about President Kennedy. That was a day I have never forgotten, sitting on a bed in our room, sharing sadness, shock and a feeling of insecurity.

Then it was Advent time: What an enjoyable spell. In the Choral Society we were looking forward to Bach's *Christmas Oratorio* concert at the end of the term. In Chapel Choir, besides the normal rehearsals for the services, there were rehearsals for the Carol Service, including some modern carols. Grafton Street was even busier than usual, beautifully decorated; and Brown Thomas' and Switzers were full of glitter and beautiful things. Schwester Marga had managed to get some German Advent biscuits for the weekly Sunday evening youth gathering. She had an Advent wreath with four red candles and vases of pine branches decorated with straw stars. I hadn't experienced advent like this since we had left Wuppertal. What was new, and what I loved too, were the groups of carol singers out and about, collecting funds for worthy causes, and I went out singing with a group as often as I could. Naturally I had a ticket for the T.C.D. Singers' Christmas Concert!

A topic amongst my female student friends was the question who would be invited to the 'Christmas Dinner' by male students who shared rooms in T.C.D. I knew nothing about this, and it was obvious this was outside my pale. I wondered – just theoretically – how these young men could organize even a slender turkey

meal: very few of us were not short of cash. I put it out of my mind. I was friendly with a lot of students, both male and female, but there was no one special. There was certainly no one who would consider me as special.

It was my first Trinity term, and out of the blue I got an invitation! The two young men sharing a room were both in the C.U. (Christian Union) like myself, both in their final year, exceedingly nice and interesting, academically conscientious and successful, but good fun at the same time. Mary knew them well and no doubt her invitation was stretched to include me.

The last Sunday of term came, and at 1 o'clock Mary and I steered towards the flat in T.C.D. bringing little useful gifts. The rooms were adequate – lots of shelves for books, simple desks with a good lamp to work at, a kitchen table and four chairs. The kitchenette had a breakfast cooker – two hot plates and a grill. There was cold water, a sink, an electric kettle – full stop. (Toilets and showers were in the corridor.) We were asked to sit down and formally the menu was read out: beans on toast with mashed potato and a mug of instant coffee and a biscuit for dessert. Mary didn't seem at all surprised. I was, although I don't really know what I might have expected. I think the mashed potato with the beans on toast killed me! However, I didn't blink an eyelid, said I loved beans on toast, which I did, and said the menu was just fine. It was. Once again, I realized, when eating in a group, it is the sharing, the conversation, feeling at ease, feeling accepted, that counts. They told us about their plans after college; we talked about the Cuba crisis, Kennedy's assassination the previous month. They were interested in our lives, our plans after college, and surprised us with their plans. They wanted to know the connection between my German name and Irish accent. They spared me the thoughtless question I was forever confronted with: how I liked living in Ireland? I knew little else! Every so often the conversation turned to lighter topics which were just pure fun. It was late in the afternoon when we left.

The rest of the year I met them as I had done before, frequently but briefly, sometimes going for a coffee in the buttery when we had time, with or without Mary. Before going home in June, I wished them well. They were working hard for their exams in the autumn and these would be over before I returned. Such wonderful young men and great hosts! Their Christmas hospitality was superb in its purest sense. They lived according to the last lines of Rose Ausländer's poem 'Noch bist du da', although it hadn't been written yet in the 1960s. 'Be what you are. Give what you have'.

The last days of the term flew on the wings of song: Singers Concert, the Carol Service, Christmas Oratorio! Then it was time for me to go home for my first T.C.D. holidays, and our first Christmas in the Hill House. Would we be able to use the sitting room at Christmas? No idea!



The Library Square of Trinity College looking northwest towards the Chapel
and the Graduates Memorial Building

The Chapel, on the steps of which this photograph of the chapel choir was taken, is the building with the columns and pediment on the left. Rosemary, the subject of the following piece, is second from the right in the front row. Hellgard is third from the right in the second row. The Revd E.C.D. Perdue, Dean of Residence, is furthest to the left.



47: Rosemary and Singers

Rosemary, so she wrote to me some time ago, is the herb of remembrance, and I thought: what a suitable name for my friend. She honours my memories as she honours her own. She is more in the mainstream of life, but we both live in the present, looking ahead, yet aware of our past.

She must have started her university studies a year after I did. She was from a small town in Co. Antrim, lived in Trinity Hall. She was lovely: full of life, with a sharp academic mind, a most pleasant personality and a glorious voice. I was extremely happy and content with my life, but if a fairy had approached me with a selection of wishes I would have gone for her slight figure, her natural, pretty looks and her good school education. Living in the Y.W.C.A. was perfect for me in many ways, but living in Trinity Hall in such a beautiful setting seemed much more sophisticated and Hall Ball a big occasion at the end of April!!

Singers was where we bonded, because we shared the love of and enthusiasm for singing and music in general. Her musical background was sound — her mother taught pianoforte, and was an excellent organist —yet she was so modest that it was decades later that I realized how good she was at the piano. From the age of fourteen she had shared with her mother the organ-playing responsibility at Armoyle and Loughguile, churches with different types of organ.

The choral society gave me the chance to sing choral works I was familiar with, but actually singing the works enabled a much more intimate approach and understanding: Händel's *Messiah*, Brahms' *A German Requiem*, Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*, Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana* to name just a few. Singers' repertoire was a new experience, introducing me to music more or less unknown to me and the singing was mainly a capella, with some exceptions like Brahms' *Liebeslieder* that were accompanied by two pianos. Being a lover of Bach, cantatas like 'Jesu meine Freude' were a highlight, but works by Orlando di Lasso, e.g. *The Cries of London* fascinated me like my introduction to Allegri, and that large range of madrigals from 'Sing we and chant it' to those e.g., by Gesualdo, are still ringing in my ear. More modern compositions by Bela Bartok and Benjamin Britten kindled my love for more modern music. Singers opened an emotional door for me, music that has been an integral part in my life. I would never have come in contact with it otherwise.

One summer I stayed with Rosemary and her family at the rectory in County Antrim and my memory is very clear. Her father was the rector of the small parish, a very learned and academic man – later to be appointed bishop of a diocese in Ulster – but also full of creative ideas. Like many rectories some land was part of the church grounds, often leased out to neighbouring farmers. When the seating in his Church had to be replaced and the funds were most limited – it was not an affluent parish – he suggested to his parishioners that they could grow potatoes in the church fields, if they were prepared to organize the planting, weeding, watering, till the potatoes were ready to be sold, and this money would go towards the funds. This idea was taken up with a lot of good will and energy, and the side-effect, that it created a happy feeling of working for a common cause was not unimportant. When I was there, I was warned that the forthcoming

Saturday was a 'potato day' for weeding. Rosemary's mother was busy making endless preparations for tea and sandwiches. It was going to be a beautiful day and parishioners started to arrive very early; some would spend the whole day there, some just a few hours they had to spare. Rosemary and I and the older children started straight after breakfast and there was a contagious spirit amongst us all.

The mother made endless pots of tea, more sandwiches and seemed to be washing up cups, saucers and plates endlessly. I thought she was lovely, had a lot in common with our mother: she was loving, intelligent, capable, hard-working and could be depended on to perform little miracles. Rosemary was the eldest of six. Giving all the children a good education was a financial challenge, but she often had little surprise treats too. During my visit she brought home strawberries one day and they were shared. Each individual strawberry was a taste of luxurious summertime, every mouthful treasured.

Rosemary's father was a most intelligent person, but also a man with a creative mind that he put into action. It was wonderful to hear that he and a parishioner set off in the car with a trailer in the late fifties to travel to Co. Mayo, a long way from Armoy. Their errand was to collect three stained glass windows (Faith, Hope and Charity) from a redundant church, and bring them safely to Armoy on the back of the trailer. When I visited a few years later these windows were part of the small parish church in Armoy; and they still are!

When the Church needed new seating, it wasn't only that he organized essential finances: he designed the seating himself. And as he had managed a team spirit to be developed among the parishioners, he, the rector, and the men of the parish actually made the seating in the same way they all worked together to replace gravel paths around the church and rectory with concrete paths.



Armoy Parish Church in the Seventies
[photograph given to Hellgard by Rosemary]

But the fund-raising idea I enjoyed most was that he organized donkey races at the annual garden fête. I just loved the newspaper cutting showing a photograph. All this reveals the particular character of a man who was so gifted, as well as conscientious and hard-working, both intellectually and academically.

I had a really good holiday and felt at home with all the members of the family. When the youngest brother, aged five, suddenly at the tea-table asked me if I would marry him when he grew up, I knew they liked me too. I replied that I would wait for him and that seemed to satisfy him. I was quite chuffed.

Going back to college days, Singers was a very happy part of our lives. Besides the singing we all shared there are many incidents that I clearly recall – even enjoy them today, just thinking about them.

My A.L.C.M. (Associate of the London College of Music) exams were in April 1966 – the theory part was on April 13th, a bright day, but a bitterly cold wind came up the Liffey as I crossed O’Connell Bridge to get to Liberty Hall and I had my warm winter coat on. The piano part of the exam was on April 19th, a warm, sunny day when I walked from T.C.D. to Suffolk Street in a short-sleeved summer dress. It took some time till I got my results, but a weight was taken off my shoulders and I had more time to enjoy the social part of university life. It must have been April still when a group of us – mainly from the music and singing T.C.D. world – set off on a bus with the intention of visiting Ireland’s Eye, a bird sanctuary island not far off the Dublin coast. Nobody had detailed knowledge how and where one could get a boat to take us over, but eventually somebody had got in contact with a man who knew a man who owned a larger rowing boat and he was located. After a bit of ‘chatting-up’ he was persuaded to row us over. A price was fixed – one of the students helped to row too, I think. We were certainly ten in number or even more. It was agreed at what time he would collect us. ‘Fools rush in where angels fear to tread’, so the saying goes, and you could certainly apply the saying to us that day.

We stumbled out of the boat and looked around rather like Alice(s) in Wonderland while the boatman rowed home. We hadn’t walked far when we realized that the island was covered in gulls’ nests in the grass all close together, gulls hatching out the eggs or looking after the recently hatched. We walked very carefully, because we hadn’t expected this, certainly hadn’t intended to disturb or frighten them – we just hadn’t thought, although it was the time of year. The gulls showed us what they thought about the intrusion – they were furious and set out to attack us, flying at great speed, aiming at our heads in numbers and making such a noise. The ‘100% concentration on a piano stool’ was by far the tallest and so target No. 1. He tried as best he could to protect his face and head. Although it was frightening for us all, we were all targets, we couldn’t help laughing at the sight. With his long, thin legs, slightly bent at the knees, trying to reduce his height, he was moving at top speed in a sort of hop-run, carefully avoiding any nest, hoping to avoid the beaks. He looked like a heron practicing for a bird marathon on the ground. We followed in a lower gear, and eventually all found a small area without nests where we sat down, afraid to move. We quietly sang a few madrigals and enjoyed the view and the sea breeze. It was quite chilly. In this way we passed the time before we had to tackle the gulls again to get to the boat.

very good to see the boatman! We had an eye-full of Ireland's Eye, and the gulls of us! But I didn't forget it. (Decades later I visited the bird sanctuary Scharhörn, a very tiny island off the tiny island of Neuwerk, near Cuxhaven, belonging to Hamburg. This time we were met by the biologist, stationed there for the spring and summer months. He guided us past gulls breeding in the grass too, but on a short path not too close to the nests and with definite instructions how to behave. Most of our bird watching was done from the balcony which was built right round the hut, accompanied by excellent information. At the same time, we saw huge ships – passenger and container ships – sailing to or from Hamburg in the narrow stretch of deep water very close by. I thought of us stampeding round the nests in 1966 in Dublin Bay!)

On another occasion we spent a rehearsal-weekend in Co. Sligo. Professor Boydell had promised to take another member of the choir and myself down in the car. I seem to remember his younger son sitting in the front. I sat in the back and after a while Professor Boydell collected the other girl on the way.

It was in the afternoon, there had been no time to have lunch, so he said we could bring a snack and eat it in the car. We had already done so. M. unpacked her little picnic box as soon as she was in the car – she was really hungry, peeled her boiled egg, had the sandwich. When she was finished, she gathered the egg shells and crumbs in her paper napkin, thoughtlessly opened the window and threw everything out. Professor Boydell's Alfa Romeo was flying along the road when he saw this. He braked sharply, stopped the car, we were thrown forward, he sprinted back along the road, picked up the litter, brought it back and put it in a bag he had in the car. He made no comment whatsoever, just drove off again. An African saying goes: 'I can't hear you; your actions are too loud'. I would change it slightly: 'No words needed; action is screaming!' There was complete silence in the car from all of us for quite a while.

Tanja had invited us to her grandparents' house in Co. Sligo, right at the bottom of Ben Bulbin – an unforgettable weekend. It was a huge, old country house – lots of rooms for all of us to sleep – I even had a tiny single room with a close view of Ben Bulbin. Only when I put my head right out of the window could I see the summit. There was a very large room where we had our rehearsals. Cooking had been well planned; we took it in turns, no big event. There wasn't an Aga (oven), but a very large, well-functioning range in the kitchen with interesting equipment. I was fascinated by a large, round iron gadget on two long straight handles. When you spread out the apparatus on the table with the two handles at opposite ends, you could insert four pieces of toast in the wide middle section – a big sliced pan loaf! When it was closed, the toast was well sealed and when one had taken out all the rings on the range – there were several – it fitted perfectly on top of the open flames. One had to turn the gadget once and there were four pieces of toast, ready in a flash.

Most of the days and the evenings were spent singing and it was just fantastic. Albert Bradshaw was not only a great musician and conductor; he also had a way of keeping the atmosphere in the group good. Everyone felt needed and important, though naturally some were more gifted than others. We got little breaks to go outside, stretch our legs, have a 'fag' or grab a cup of tea or coffee in the kitchen,

which was always available, kettle never off the boil. On Saturday afternoon we were to climb Ben Bulbin. I said I wouldn't go because I was terrified. I would be a brake for the others. I had short legs, as always, I was strong but not fast. Tanja asked if I would try it with her and we'd go as far as I could manage in the time we had. She added she regularly climbed Ben Bulbin, so it wouldn't be a sacrifice for her. What an angel! I was delighted to accept. I remember the joy of scrambling over stone walls up through gorse. There is a particular feeling of joy one only gets with exertion in the fresh air — exertion to one's limits without a sense of fear. I didn't make it to the top in the time, but it was wonderful.

We had a practice on Sunday morning, of course, but set back off to Dublin in the early afternoon. We were to visit Lady Gregory's home, Coole Park. I knew about its significance, her life, her work. After her husband's death she dedicated her life to the cultural scene in Ireland, especially the literary people at the time, by opening up her home to them, and all the writers of her day were often there. Although not much of the buildings remain, the park is there. I could imagine the old country house that would have been there, steps leading up to it outside from what would have been a lawn. The trees were magnificent still and the Wild Swans at Coole were visible to my inner eye.

Professor Boydell's sons were both very musical and played in the T.C.D. orchestra, I remember, but I always felt the younger son was the one in whom the artistic strain was more obvious, even in the way he dressed. He wasn't in Singers, but he was definitely there for the weekend. At Coole Park, near the entrance, I seem to remember a building and beside it the remnant of a stone wall, quite high. He had long dark hair, not that usual at the time, and he wore a large purple woollen cloak he had sewn himself with a lot of help from his mother, he said. It was open at the front, quite wide, and held together at the top with a large silver Celtic brooch. Suddenly he appeared at the top of the wall, one side of his cloak thrown over his other shoulder and he recited — beautifully — 'The Wild Swans at Coole'! I hadn't got a camera, but the short film strip is on my head computer! The performance was brilliant.

Then we drove back to Dublin. By this time, it was late and we were tired and none of us looked as if we were ready to go somewhere special. Tanja was a very beautiful girl with blonde, curly hair, very modest but with great dignity and pride, she stood out in a crowd wherever she went. I distinctly remember her wearing tartan trousers green and yellow, and on it was a large patch of red material, approximately 6 x 6 inches, covering a hole; perhaps she ripped the trousers on the gorse? The red patch was coarsely sewn over the problem. It was decided we needed tea and sandwiches; we all suggested a casual place to stop. Not with Tanja. She knew of a lovely hotel nearby; we'd stop there and she'd organize tea and sandwiches. It was a top hotel — we girls could have sparkled diamond jewellery there; gorgeous armchairs, sofas in the lounge, open fire. With all of us at her tail she walked in like a modest Queen of Sheba with the red darn-patch on her bottom, with a tired group, made the arrangements and there we all sat round a gorgeous fire in beautiful, comfortable armchairs, enjoying the best of tea and sandwiches, perfectly served, looking the worse for the wear but not treated or

feeling like that. It was a great weekend, last but not least, with wonderful *a capella* singing.

Professor Boydell invited all the students connected with music to garden parties at his home on Howth Head from time to time. I was there once. He and his wife had gone to a lot of trouble that summer with tables outside and some chairs, good food and drinks. The weather was kind: sunshine and quite mild. The view over Dublin Bay was exquisite, and right down, way down on Howth Head we could see the Baily Lighthouse. Professor Boydell went out of his way to make life and music good for his students.

One year, a different occasion was the Choral Festival in Cork in late spring. We were looking forward to it, to hearing choirs from around Europe and Ireland. We knew the Glasgow Orpheus Choir/Phoenix Choir were coming too – what they called themselves at the time I forget. We Singers girls were all wearing evening dresses as usual, the men were wearing black suits and white shirts and a tie. Our accommodation was in a B&B fairly high up on the hill. The Concert Hall was way down in the centre of Cork. Somehow there didn't seem to be enough space for us all in the available cars, being in evening dresses, because we didn't want our style to be crumpled! The arrangement proved difficult and everyone's nerves were a bit tight. I had suddenly had enough, and Ros and I announced we would set out at once to walk down – we were ready – and would meet them at the Concert Hall. It was a fine day, so that wasn't a problem.

Ros had a very good, clear and slim voice, perfect for *a capella* choir, but she was able to turn up no end of volume if she wished. She was very tall; she was slim but had enough weight to look well at her height. She had a royal blue dress on – not too dark – quite spectacular. I was in a gold dress, not red/gold, more cream gold, and I loved it. I had made it myself and was delighted. Ros and I could have represented Sweden! In the early afternoon we didn't walk unnoticed. Ros suddenly decided to give a rendering of the famous aria sung by the Queen of the Night in Mozart's 'Magic Flute'. She was good, but I felt they could hear us in Cobh and couldn't wait for her to finish. When she did, she felt an encore was forthcoming and it came. By the time we got down to the Concert Hall we had had our limelight! I could have done without it.

Needless to say, we hoped to win one of the prizes to stock up our finances, but the competition was really hard. Our hopes sank with each choir, then it was our turn. We did our very best and got a lot of applause. Then the results: The choir from Glasgow got a well-deserved first place. We got second place, not even a whole percent behind them, so we were thrilled, and the money helped our finances. The way back up the hill was quieter for the Cork residents than the afternoon had been. We didn't have to worry about creased dresses now and we all squashed into the cars, the Queen of the Night taking a break.

Rosemary cannot remember the competition in Cork, perhaps she could not go for some reason. She went on the trip to Oxford, which I couldn't attend, however, and I remember her sending me a card, raving about it.

Another event we shared was in a recording studio near O'Connell Street. Someone had approached Singers, looking for some female voices, who were willing to earn a little cash on a Saturday, singing the background music to three

songs, part of a recording for an LP¹ to be launched soon. The Irish singer² was very popular at the time. I decided to apply with a few others, and so did Rosemary. The room was fairly small, basic, the walls full of empty egg boxes to keep out any noise. I remember two of the songs: ‘So Long, Marianne’, and ‘Bus 22 to Bethlehem’. I forget the title of the third one.

No doubt he was a good singer. He was very well known and accompanied himself, but he certainly found it a bit difficult to keep his pitch that day. Once we had gone through our background entries a few times, we seemed to be okay, but again and again the recording-technicians were not satisfied, and we had to go through the individual songs till he kept his pitch. We were well into the afternoon when we still had to get two of the three songs ‘right’.

Suddenly Ros (not Rosemary!) got impatient and made a very direct comment about having expected it would be a Saturday session only, and could he, the singer, get it right before midnight? Frozen silence can be very loud, but her remark did the trick. It proved to be an interesting day, showing what hard work is needed to produce a good record: a little extra cash for us, but hard-earned money.

There are lots of memory flashes, not important for others to recall, yet there is one which I love. On a Sunday, also in summer, a group of us had taken the bus out to Ticknock. We probably went for a long walk, and had tea or a drink later. We got the last bus home, and we immediately started to sing madrigals. There were enough of us, to be able to take over the four parts. As soon as one madrigal ended, someone started the next one. The people on the bus were very quiet and moved to seats closer to us. We sang all the way, non-stop. I was sad when Rosemary had to get out in Rathgar, and I shortly afterwards in Rathmines. To me this is still the essence of summer, carefree youth, living the moment to the full.

I must mention that we both sang in Chapel Choir too. We certainly could not get enough of singing. For choral evensong the music was especially beautiful, but we enjoyed the Sunday services likewise.

The contact between Rosemary and me has never stopped. The good friends who have shared important times in my life are treasures which I value; they are my blessings. She visited me several times in Wuppertal. The first time she came, *Carmina Burana* was on the program in the town hall of Wuppertal; and this time we were not singers, but in the audience, loving it too. On the second occasion we had spent a good time together when she was already in bed, on the couch in the sitting room, ready for an early start home the next day. She suddenly remembered she hadn’t read my newest written ‘episode’ – ‘Farewells’,³ an account of my last day at school, farewells from our grandparents: Henner was 16, I was aged nine at the time. So, I sat down in an armchair beside the bed couch, and read it out to her. Her remark afterwards was most important for me: ‘I have known you for so long and I knew you were German, but till now I hadn’t realized this to be so.’

¹ The record appeared in 1968 as a 12” L.P. under the title ‘With An Eye To Your Ear’ (Target [IE], NPL 18264).

² The popular singer was Johnny McEvoy (b. 1945). When he sings ‘So, Long, Marianne’, the backing group is distinctly audible: cf. <https://youtu.be/e3AUWz-YJac?so=ZOcEKD0uwTjHZe27>.

³ No. 4, *supra*, pp 35-38. ‘Episode’ was Hellgard’s word for a section of her work.

On another occasion she came and visited me with her lovely daughter, so we could meet too; and I saw lovely photos of her husband and her son's family. On her last visit she and her husband came for the day. I felt I had known him from her letters, but meeting him was even better. In my episode 'Letters' I talk of letters being lifelines. Her letters are just that, sharing her life and the life of her family with me, bringing impulses, information, interest and joy into my days. For me it seems to be important to review my life by writing about it. Rosemary's letters could be sent to the publishers without further editing! She, like Gertrude, is another beautiful jewel round my neck, a reminder of a poem she sent me on a special occasion: '(Dead) friends are like jewels in my hand'. Her family are like beautiful connecting pearls, because the living friends are like adorning jewels round my neck. The beloved dead are the jewels in my hand.

48: Trinity Ball

Trinity College Dublin offered a most exquisite setting for their dress dance in Trinity week in May. In the sixties one entered the university grounds through Front Gate and was immediately captured by the familiar and loved setting – old majestic trees, paths, the Campanile, the Examination Hall, the Chapel, the Library, the Rubrics, the G.M.B. (Graduates Memorial Building). In the sixties during this event there were about seven bands in different venues, and I still hear Acker Bilk in my mind – he was in the Examination Hall with his band. There was a steel band; or music like the popular ‘In the Mood’; Frank Sinatra and Bing Crosby favourites; jazz and more – something for everyone, for the students and the staff.

The meal was served in one of the marquees in front of the Rubrics. Each ticket showed the time when one was specified to appear for the meal. I was delighted to be invited to Trinity Ball twice, both times by extremely pleasant and interesting men. Both nights were mild, dry, in moonlight and just pure magic.

The first time, I was painfully shy, had had no idea even that the young man was looking for tickets. We were at the Garden Party on the Tuesday of Trinity Week and afterwards he came out with the invitation – he had managed to get tickets that very day. I was over the moon, tried to appear happy but cool. My mother came up on the Thursday – I had got her a ticket for the Singers’ Concert. She had arrived at the Y.W.C.A. before me and had been warned that I was walking on air! I sang like a lark that night, at least it felt like that.

Friday passed quickly till I was collected in the evening. We were in a nice group of three pairs, students I knew well. I was incredibly happy, but at the same time extremely self-conscious and shy, almost painfully so. I loved the atmosphere, the bands, the movement to the music, ambling along the paths to the different halls. Having attended Dancing Classes in Rosleven I was good at all the standard dances, loved them. I was not vastly overweight at that time, but plump and felt huge in comparison to Irish girls at my age. My partner was an intelligent, interesting, but also very kind young man and for some reason we were on the floor most of the night moving to the music in a form of expressive dance! It was a pity he could not dance, I thought, but his company was so good and we had such a good time that it did not really matter. By chance we found out much later that we were both good dancers, and the two of us looked quite sheepish then.

The ball was over at 5 a.m. – far too soon. It could have gone on forever. The morning was beautiful as the sun rose and the gentlemen had plans. All six of us scrambled into the car in our evening clothes and drove to the sea, maybe Clontarf? There were beautiful houses, we parked in front of one and followed the man who obviously knew where he was going. He walked along a small path between two houses and there it was – a beautiful beach, a completely unexpected revelation to me. At the end of May the temperature of the water was more than refreshing esp. so early in the morning, but we were beyond noticing or paying attention to such details, and some of us went swimming – it was great. After two hours on the beach, we were very keen to get a cup of tea, even a small breakfast? At 7 a.m. this was a problem, but not for us. The airport was the bright idea. So

back we scrambled into the car and off we went. We appeared in the main restaurant as if it was quite normal to be attired as we were in evening dress early in the morning, and ordered a full cooked breakfast and tea. Astonished gazes from regular travellers, mainly business men, we decided. We felt like purring cats enjoying cooked and carved mice.

It was 9 o'clock in the morning when I was escorted back to the Y.W.C.A. in Mountpleasant Square and like the gentleman he was he brought me inside before setting off to his rooms in T.C.D. himself. Breakfast was still being served. I had to return the key to Miss Brookes who was grinning and remarked rather pointedly that I certainly hadn't had any need for it. There was good moral supervision! We could ask for two keys a week as the hall door was locked at 10 p.m.

The second Trinity Week occasion was some years later – I was already teaching. This time the evening was even more wonderful in many ways. I had been going out with my partner for some time and so had lost my painful shyness and found some new self-confidence. He had never learnt standard dancing, and wasn't interested in dancing really, but it didn't stop us from enjoying ourselves on the dance floor all night either. Another night of a lifetime. Around one o'clock we were energetically exercising our extremities to the sounds of a steel band. The only light in the hall was the limited light from small lamps over the musicians. We had eaten very early on and had been on our feet ever since. We decided to look for a free chair along the walls. I was delighted with my evening dress that I had made myself – flowing off-white material, sleeveless, a small stand-up collar with a pretty golden braid sewn on to it, and the same braid going down from the collar to the hem of the dress. It had a good fit and I felt I looked well and moved confidently towards the chairs.

We found two empty ones, normally used in this dining-hall daily. The fold-up chairs were sturdy, wooden with a slightly lower part in the middle of the seat to please the human anatomy, offering more comfort. The anticipation of being able to rest our legs was delightful.

But indeed, there was another cooling element in store for me, too. As I sat down, I realized I was sitting in fluid, resting in the comfort cavity of the chair. A speedy spring-effect was sensible and accomplished instantly, but the damage had been done. By the smell of it somebody had spilled Guinness there; and even in the dim light my partner said quite unemotionally he could distinguish a dark full-moon on the dress and a few drop-enhanced lines from there to the hem. I didn't need this unintentional modern art on my white dress! I was close to tears, full of apologies for ruining his evening, for not having checked before sitting down: full of self-reproach, disappointment and shame.

His reaction was amazing: no annoyance, no disappointment, no sympathy, just logical assessment. In his normal way of speaking, he said I could choose: I could be so upset and ashamed that my evening was ruined and he would naturally bring me home if I so wished. On the other hand, he said, it was a fact that I could not have avoided the situation, so I had no reason or need to feel ashamed. The dress would dry quickly, he continued, and we could enjoy the evening as planned. He was quite serious, authentic and unemotional. It took me far less than a minute to decide. I threw my arms around him, presented my brown moon bottom to the

world and gave him a W.B.H.E. (world's biggest hug ever). I was well aware at once that his behaviour towards me was the greatest possible respect and gift for me. It was the most beautiful gem that would stay with me always.

It was a fantastic night. At 5 a.m. we walked out of T.C.D. into the bright day, into the city, his arms around me, we both of us, escorting 'our' Guinness moon for all to see. I felt and walked as if I were the Queen of Sheba – a very rare feeling for me – and that with a Guinness moon! But what a man!

49: The Y.W.C.A. and Lorna

When I think of my Dublin days, I feel young, energetic, full of fun and laughter, hungry for knowledge. I feel I could be coming out of Front Gate and see the 48A coming round the corner and I feel myself getting ready to jump on to the moving bus. At that time there was a part at the back of the bus, a kind of platform which was open. The stairs led up to the upper part of the bus and there was a pole to support the upper deck. So the idea was to jump towards the pole, get a hold of it and the rest of me seemed to follow. The feeling of success was great as soon as I was steady on my feet and could move inside the bus to get a seat – maybe. The College was my area and I extended my movements up Grafton St. as far as Stephen's Green, along Nassau St. and the two streets leading up to the Green. Very occasionally I would be in Suffolk St. at the post office or very seldom in the Indian restaurant. Outside the Back Gate I went left into Westland Row to the Academy, and not that seldom I went right for a quick visit to the Art Gallery which I loved.

I never really spent time or money going out for a drink with friends. I neither had the time nor the money. The restaurant where students from college often went was the Paradiso, with its portrait gallery of famous people – writers, film stars, musicians, politicians, celebrities who had been there. One could see and meet quite a few students in the Paradiso, as there were debatable low-price small dishes on the menu like mushrooms on toast that we could afford and it was different. Sometimes we ordered a second coffee, individually, and one after the other, to stop us being asked to pay the bill and leave!

During the day, if I had a little spare time between lectures and piano practice times, it was the Buttery I loved and, if it wasn't too full, I sometimes used it to do some work I could have done in the library, but not with a coffee! My years in Rosleven had taught me how to concentrate so intensely on a book or some homework in the midst of about 25-30 loud children, that I could mentally shut off other distractions. That ability has remained with me all my life and in the large staff room in Germany, with a lot going on, I could do some marking at a table and wouldn't hear anyone who was trying to get my attention till they tapped me on the shoulder! I can work – theoretically – on the platform of a frequented railway station.

Being able to stay in the Y.W.C.A. Hostel in Rathmines proved to be a great advantage for me, especially at the beginning. There were girls not only from Ireland. I was the only German there at the time, but, besides some girls from the 'North', there were students from abroad staying there like the girl, originally of Irish origin, whose family had lived in the Lebanon for most of their lives. After she got her degree, she returned to live there. I remember two girls from India, one of whom introduced me to the work of the Anti-Apartheid Movement to support changes in South Africa and the U.S.A. This introduced me to the life and aims of Gandhi. The great focus in the sixties was on the work of Martin Luther King and, of course, Nelson Mandela and Bishop Tutu in South Africa. I am still grateful to them for making me aware of these situations. I had no time to be involved in the movement as all my spare time was taken up with my diploma work at the

Academy or singing, but I did join a few of the protest marches and they kept me informed.

Ching Chang was a girl from China studying medicine at the College of Surgeons. Although we had such different temperaments, I was very fond of her, and have often wondered how her life developed. She was very friendly, but had little spare time to enjoy with the rest of the girls as she worked so extremely hard and had no time for girlish nonsense. I don't think she ever had. She got her degree while I was there, and, one day, she did massive shopping in Switzers' sale. We were surprised at what she bought and why. They had a sale of linen bed wear e.g. – cotton was beginning to take over – and she bought about ten sets of sheets and pillow cases, also towels. She told us she was taking all this back to China for her trousseau, for she would be getting married as soon as she got home. We were excited and wanted to know what her fiancé was like. She stated the fact quite unemotionally and naturally that she had never met him, but that she was sure her parents had made a good choice. We were appalled, but her quiet, assured reaction made us think, even though we couldn't be persuaded that she was very lucky because her parents had always made good decisions for her, as she saw it, at least not in regard to their choosing her husband. She pitied us, at our still slightly silly, giggly and perhaps partly immature stage, to have to choose a husband ourselves and hope he would be willing. (We didn't tell her that women at that time were expected to wait till they were asked!) She was very sensible in her mid/late twenties. One very noticeable characteristic – she seemed to have no sense of humour, certainly not our type of humour. Once the boyfriend of one of the girls from Ulster was down for the weekend and they invited her out for a meal, but she refused. Her argument was: I don't want to be a strawberry. We roared laughing and explained that the saying should be. 'I don't want to be a gooseberry'. She looked up amazed and wondered why that was important. They were both types of fruit. That was of course true, so we left it at that!

Yet amongst all the wonderful people I met who (at least, it seemed to me) accepted me as I was, without mentally filing me as a German, or being overweight, or being a bit unsophisticated, or having a very pronounced Irish accent which didn't seem to fit in with my name at all, it was Lorna from Castlepollard, who was to become a really good friend and made me feel I was accepted and was important for her. We were very different. We were both conscientious and reliable, but whereas I was like a lamb that was let out on a green pasture for the first time, she had been out on the field long enough to know how to avoid the electric wiring in the fence and had stopped taking high jumps into the air and fooling about. Her father had died very suddenly one day when she was at boarding school, and that was a wound that left a scar. It had made her very thoughtful for her age, very careful not to judge or hurt people, and gratefully to make the best of her opportunities. She was a lovely young woman who was great fun, but she was never silly or childish. She often asked me to join her at home for the weekend and I loved that and got on very well with her mother. Sometimes she had a friend (or was it a relative?) to stay at the same time and that was lovely too, except for the fact that she thought she was always very clever at avoiding the washing-up time. The need to retire to the WC became urgent, punctually, when

we were ready to start with the dishes. The bathroom was quite spacious and Lorna's mother left old but interesting magazines, ready to be discarded later, conveniently on a stool. It was a comfortable escape room, and as soon as Lorna and I realized that there was method in her madness, we sat down one day and waited till she reappeared. We told her we had specially waited for her, knowing how embarrassed she must be feeling, unable to give us a hand. She got the message, and as she was a lovely person, it didn't do our relationship any harm.

The weekends were short as we generally couldn't take the train till Saturday afternoon, and had to take the last train back on Sunday evening. Lorna's mother did everything to let us have a happy weekend. The Saturday after Trinity Ball we set off for Castlepollard to spend the weekend too. I had come back on the Saturday morning around breakfast time but did not get a chance to get any sleep, as different girls kept coming in, wanting to know what the night had been like. As I was still in my seventh heaven the adrenalin kept me fully awake and active. During Trinity Week there was a lot going on: the Garden Party on the Tuesday, Singers' Concert on the Thursday (Mother came up for that), Trinity Ball on Friday – and of course – lectures! Lorna was already teaching in Wesley College. We had looked out for a suitable time for us to get the train to Mullingar (Castlepollard wasn't on a railway line); we had got the tickets, and written to Lorna's mother when we were due to arrive at the station. We had made all the necessary arrangements, we thought, met at the station, got on the train, and happily settled in our seats as the train set off for Mullingar, as we thought.

Fellow travellers sitting in the opposite seats were commenting on the convenience of this train to *Sligo* (not Galway) as it stopped only twice on the way, so certainly *not* in Mullingar. We were in a real state now, first of all because we couldn't contact Lorna's mother. (Mobiles would not be invented for decades.)

We went in search of the C.I.E. (Córas Iompair Éireann, the public transport provider) official who would have started checking the tickets. When we reached him, we told our story; and there was no need to explain how worried and upset we were – that he could see!

His reaction deserves to be recorded. 'Now girls, don't you worry. Ah, sure Moses stopped the ark in Mullingar, and so will we.' He told us to stand at the door of the carriage as soon as the train was approaching the station.

Meanwhile Lorna's mother was standing on the platform as the train came in sight. Simultaneously there was an announcement that the train from Dublin to Sligo was passing through and to keep away from the platform. The shock that Lorna's mother got was only beginning to sink in when the train started to slow down. Out hopped Lorna and Hellgard; the door was closed, and the train was moving on the rails, off to Sligo again after a very short interlude.

That was a C.I.E. Moses! In 1966 the days of the West Clare Railway, well-remembered in Percy French's song, when C.P. Michael forgot a parcel for Mrs. White, due to be delivered between two stations, were over. Here we experienced a remnant, at a time when more people were beginning to travel by train, and efficiency had to take over, and was taking over. For us it was an experience. Lorna had to remind me of the incident recently, but then I remembered at once.

Perhaps my tiredness after the ball and lost sleep was beginning to work on my senses a bit and it had sunk to deeper levels of my memory!

On Sunday morning, after a good night's sleep, the tiredness hit me. At church the clergyman recognized me and asked if I would play the organ, as the organist was ill. It was a matter of Hellgard's doing a very amateur job or of no music at all. I felt I couldn't refuse. I managed to play the hymns, not well, but without any major hitches, but this leaden tiredness kept me from remembering which verse I was playing, and my lack of concentration didn't allow me to coordinate the text with the music. In one hymn I continued playing, when there was no verse left to sing. In another hymn I stopped too soon and suddenly heard the clergyman announcing loudly and clearly: 'And we shall now sing verse No. 5'. After the service I didn't mingle with the congregation for a chat, hoping that this kind of event might perhaps develop humility in me? I could do without signs of sympathy from the friendly parishioners.

The year Lorna and I shared a 'new room' in the Y.W.C.A. was most pleasant. We discussed the problems of life and the world and were happy. When there was a little free time many of the other girls would come in for a quick chat. Very occasionally on a Saturday morning we would not have to work in the library, and then we treated ourselves to a baguette, milk, and a little Brie or Camembert cheese from a small shop in a side street at the back of the Y.W.C.A., and then we would celebrate a morning coffee break. The small electric fire we owned was multi-functional. Lying on its side, with a thick book on one side, it was great for making coffee in a small saucepan. We filled this with a 1/3 mug-full of milk and 2/3 water, and while it was balancing on the electric fire we watched the saucepan like a hawk, so that the milk wouldn't boil over. With a spoonful of instant coffee, the first mug of coffee was made. The others would follow, one by one, till everyone had a mug of hot coffee, a slice of crisp baguette, and a tiny portion of cheese. This was the height of luxury.

Henner, who all his teenage and adult life was interested in the work of the voluntary fire-brigade, and personally involved, at intervals when he was in Germany, and permanently after he had finally left Ireland, would have presented me with several duplicate copies, as well as the original certificate, testifying my stupidity and irresponsibility! When I did once confess to Mr. Mooney our inventive way of organizing an occasional coffee morning, I did notice a twitch in his face. (He never raised a moral finger or made judgmental remarks.) He asked me then if I always made sure that I knew what I was doing...

The girls in the Y.W.C.A. in our time were lovely, far too many to mention them all. Mary from Belfast had a room just around the corner and she often called in for brief visits. She was wonderful, young, fun. Her boyfriend, whom she married in 1966 was doing V.S.O. (Voluntary Service Overseas) in Africa at the time. Mary and I had a lot in common, but while I was like a young hen running around with part of the egg-shell out of which I had been hatched still clinging to my rear end, Mary had a quiet, mature assurance. It wasn't that I wasn't mature in some ways, very much so actually. Perhaps I was living part of a carefree childhood now for which there had been no space at a certain time. Anyway, she had all the characteristics of a young woman, indeed a woman of any age, who is a

gift to all around her. At the same time she was confident and independent, also assertive in a non-aggressive way. She did a lot for me in regard to finding my place in the world as a woman.

The years Lorna and I shared, first at college and later in Wesley, were very special, and this has never changed. Having her as a friend made me feel very secure. Great sadness had come into her life when she was a young teenager, but she never looked back or complained. This scar of sadness gave her character an unusual beauty. She was young and full of fun, like all of us. We were both conscientious, kind and sincere, enjoyed parties and got many invitations, but we were no party-mouse types. Our characters had already a certain depth. While I was more temperamental, critical though not judgmental, ready to call a spade a spade if I felt it was called for, and no upbringing or Rosleven training could stop me, Lorna was more prepared to make allowances, always ready to comfort and understand. Above all she was calm. She was a great teacher, very much respected. She did her work and duty in a quiet way that no one ever questioned. She lived in Epworth, where Madeleine was in charge of the house for the older girl boarders, while I lived in Tullamaine with Ida in charge of the juniors – such happy years.

When I look back on our friendship, I cannot recall incidents and activities as much as I recall feelings and atmosphere. It is not the visit to a party, to a concert, an outing with friends, that have left their mark; it is more what happens afterwards, a coming home, like after a long journey, or doing something together, enjoying the peace and harmony of being at home, perhaps sitting beside a fire, reviewing an event, exchanging views, ideas, assessments, a time when events can ripen into experience. There has always been a deep calm in the appreciation of our friendship.

When Lorna fell in love with the man that was to become the man of her life, I was very happy for her. In the summer of 1969 two major historic events took place – man landed on the moon – and Lorna and Tom were married! The wedding with family and very many friends was a beautiful and really happy occasion with many personal touches. Margaret, the domestic science teacher at school, made the dream of a wedding dress, so perfect for Lorna, and the four apple green dresses for the bridesmaids. The dresses were very elegant. Susan, a friend at Wesley College, was also one of the four, and I felt greatly honoured that she asked me to be her chief bridesmaid. It turned out to be a special day in my life too! The reception was in a beautiful hotel with a lovely garden; but the mother was also very busy preparing food for guests calling at the house the day before, as some travelled a long distance and brought wedding presents. I remember Tom's mother also calling, offering and giving a hand. I was staying overnight with at least one other bridesmaid, and I remember the night before well. In the midst of everything Lorna wrote a thank-you letter for every present that had been left: just like her, so correct; and she didn't go to bed till she had finished.

The day was warm and sunny as the bride's car arrived with Lorna and her father's brother. He was to give her away, walked her up the red carpet to enter the church with her, then up the aisle for this special moment in Tom's and Lorna's

life. Lorna had invited my parents too, and though Mother hadn't fully recovered after her massive heart attack about six weeks earlier they made every effort to come to Castlepollard, quite a long way there, and a long way back that evening, as they wanted to share the day with me and Lorna and Tom. As it turned out it was a special day in my life too.

Tom's work was based in Britain, so Lorna started teaching there. Our chances of meeting became few and far between, but we met occasionally as long as I still lived in Ireland. We never lost touch. When the three of us were all retired and my health had deteriorated, they visited me once in Wuppertal with friends. The four of them stayed in a hotel for the night, so we had two days. That was very, very special. In the last ten years or so Lorna and I have shared the joy and opportunity of close contact by phone and letters and in this way share much of our lives, interested in the present and its concerns, sometimes recalling the past. May she and Tom and I be granted many more years of this sharing.

Like Gertrude and Rosemary, Lorna is a jewel in the necklace of my friends.



Lorna's and Tom's wedding, July 1969
[left] Best man Derek and chief bridesmaid Hellgard

[Hellgard Leckebusch, *Singing our Song*, p. 280]



Lorna's and Tom's wedding, July 1969
[right] Hans and Helma Leckebusch in the background



Hellgard the chief bridesmaid (3rd from the left) and Derek the best man (2nd from the left), Tom and Lorna in the middle, and Susan Latta on the left July 1969



50: Recalling faces and encounters on and around the campus

The most outstanding face I remember is that of the Junior Dean. He was a renowned professor of history besides his status as Junior Dean, an eloquent speaker that didn't remain unnoticed wherever and whenever he appeared. One could describe him as 'a real character'. His outward appearance did not fit in with that of the other lecturers and professors: it was not the typical style of fashion in the middle of the twentieth century. The colour-scheme was black, with a white shirt, even the glasses were black, as was his hat, which he wore with a coat (black) on days when he just carried his gown under his arm. His historic and academic mind did not appear to have come in contact with even a glimpse of a very modest fashion world. He had such presence that this never challenged people's respect, and once he opened his mouth he was in a different space. I watched him on television in an interview twice, and I soaked up every word he uttered.

A selection of O'Connor's short stories was introduced to me in Rosleven, and my appreciation of his work has continued ever since. I read as many of his texts and as much information about his life as I could. *First Confession* has always been a favourite of mine. The contrasting portraits of the grandmother and the priest show excellent perception and understanding, from the point of view of the child; but the reflecting author's comments are just as fitting. The grandmother seems to come to life, drinking porter and having a bath once a year if she needs it or not. The priest shows great insight into the boy's state of mind and I can physically feel myself relaxing with the boy when the priest handles him so carefully.

I still reread his autobiographical books frequently. His family and his life come across so vividly that I begin to feel I'm right there as an onlooker. The account of his going home one night from the pub where he is supposed to look after his father and bring him home is most touching. When, as a very small child, he eventually goes home alone in the dark, he buys himself a toy dog with the pennies some men gave him while he was waiting outside the pub. With his 'protector' he walks home and at dark lanes he puts him down and sharply says 'At'em boy!'

One summer term I saw Frank O'Connor around the campus several times. He was a tall man, slim, with a thick head of white, slightly wavy hair. Besides black trousers, a white shirt and tie, he was wearing a wine-red blazer with an elaborately embroidered pocket. I was delighted to see a man for whose life and work I had so much admiration. It was the year he was there to translate Irish texts with Brendan Kennelly, and in the same year the College conferred on him an honorary doctor's degree.

In my third year I started Fine Art II with Miss Crookshank. Although I had no preparation for this, my interest had been nourished sufficiently, and, along with a limited gift for art, inherited from both grandfathers, I was enthusiastic when I did come into contact with it, e.g. I was delighted when I received a framed Paul

Henry print at school as a prize. From early college days I frequently visited the National Gallery nearby whenever I got a chance, and almost daily ran up to the T.C.D. Library Long Room to admire the new page of the Book of Kells, displayed in a glass case there. In those days no entrance fee was charged, and only in the summer were there queues of visitors in front of the glass case; so I was very lucky.

Archbishop Simms was an authority on the Book of Kells. I had the opportunity to attend one of his public lectures on the topic, and I seem to remember going to a second lecture of his on Early Irish Christian Art. Miss Crookshank may possibly have opened her course with Ancient Irish Art, which was certainly on the curriculum. The Archbishop had an elder brother, the historian Dr. Gerald Simms, who was on the staff in Trinity and lectured about the seventeenth century.

A lot of students were attending lectures in Fine Arts II, especially students reading medicine. They needed a non-medical subject to obtain a B.A. degree at the end of their fourth year, before they finished their medical degree. Miss Crookshank was an excellent professor, most enthusiastic and a lovely lady. She was always well-dressed, in a stylish way that did not give away her age. Her hairstyle was similar – a French pleat. I believe she came from Co. Donegal or Derry, but spoke in a clearly pronounced English accent. Her clear speech was important as most of her lectures were held in the dark, and she lectured, pointing out characteristic details in the slides projected on a large screen. I enjoyed lovingly copying her accent when, for example, a small group of us were having a coffee in the Buttery. This provoked laughter in those who attended her lectures.

The time of famous cathedrals, especially belonging to the Rococo period, with endless putti, was a time when our attention slackened. We were presented with endless slides of little putti, plump cheeks, curly hair, many bare-bottomed, some vaguely draped in a light length of material, a few playing an instrument. The array was endless and to some of us it was a matter of: 'If you've seen one, you've seen them all.' We were morons on the subject so far! Miss Crookshank carried on regardless about 'the beautiful little putti'. Rumour had it that a few of the medical students had planned a practical joke for a bit of fun, but that was all I knew. I was sitting quite near the front one day, second or third row, when I heard some hysterical shrieks from a selection of female students, followed by suppressed male laughter at the back. Then I saw why. About five white mice, clearly visible in the light of the slides were crawling up Miss Crookshank's legs and under her skirt – upwards and onwards! Dozens of white mice had been released to explore the lecture theatre and its inmates. Miss Crookshank briefly paused, looked down at her legs and the climbing mice and her reaction was marvellous. 'The poor little things', great emphasis on the word 'poor' after which she continued with the beautiful putti in these magnificent cathedrals. She pulled that through till she came to the end of the double lecture. Some of the female students were out of their mind. In the dark one had no idea where the mice were, except when they tried to crawl up our legs. When Miss Crookshank put on the light she just said: 'And make sure these poor little things get back to where they belong.' That was the only attempt to play a practical joke on Miss Crookshank by any student.

As I write about Miss Crookshank, Mr. Kennelly comes into my mind, as he often does. He was supervising one of the year exams (not alone) in the huge Examination Hall. One student must have decided that his ideas had no right to spoil the virgin T.C.D. paper and after about twenty minutes went up to the supervisor with his exam sheets and paper and asked: 'What shall I do with this?' Brendan Kennelly was never stuck for an answer and replied, grinning widely: 'I could give you a classical answer', and left no one in doubt what he meant!

Canon Elliott told us I could apply for a bursary that the Church of Ireland granted if they thought it was fitting. I was the grateful recipient of a bursary twice: one for one year studying for the B.A., the second for the H. Dip. Ed. year. I applied for the first grant in my first or second year. The condition was that I had to teach for a certain number of years at one of the protestant (boarding) schools down the country, e.g. Raphoe or Sligo Grammar School. The alternative was to repay the grant.

For the second grant I was invited for an interview. The headmaster of High School was there as it took place at his school. The Archbishop of Dublin was the chairman. There were two lady teachers from Alexandra College, and Dr. Kenneth Milne, secretary of the Church of Ireland Board of Education. I was introduced. When it came to Dr. Milne, the archbishop added – 'You are practically pen friends.' I was young, desperately wanted the scholarship, and felt I had nothing to lose. Dr. Simms was not only a very learned man, greatly respected: he also had a great sense of humour and was charming. That helped me to feel more confident, courageously wearing one Fergus O'Farrell copper earring! After several questions that I had expected, Dr. Simms spotted in my curriculum vitae that I was a member of Trinity Chapel Choir. He made the remark that he had preached there the previous Sunday, asking me if he had seen me there. I was at a loss, but then replied, 'I have no idea if you saw me, Sir, but I certainly saw you, and heard you preach.' He laughed loudly: 'That was a stupid question to ask you, wasn't it?' I repeat, he was extraordinary, so academic yet so humble too, and with that great sense of humour. Suddenly he added: 'You are German, so was my mother. Please call me Otto.' I thanked him, but kept to 'Sir'!

They were sceptical about my hope and plans to find a post at a Dublin School, teaching for more than the required four hours. I was also looking for a school that offered free board in exchange for boarding duties. Did I not think my chances were very slim, as these posts were rare? Of course, I did, but I also knew what I needed, so I felt it my duty at least to try. Before we parted the headmaster told me to be sure to contact him if I was not successful. It was a very unusual interview, doing wonders for my confidence. And I was given the grant.

Another interview connected with my application to do my Higher Diploma in Education course in Trinity was quite different. There were about 120 available places, we were told, but almost four times that number had applied, apparently. When I opened the door I recognized Dr. Rice, the chairman, professor of philosophy. I also recognized the professor of psychology, and the lady who was mainly responsible for teaching-methods. The fourth (man) I did not know, and he didn't ask any questions, just took notes, and looked at my application. Somehow, I knew he would finally put the decisive question to me, and he did. What did I

think of the political situation in Communist China? For a moment I was lost for words. All those years at Rosleven I never saw a daily paper, nor could I have listened to the news on a radio. Some teachers occasionally mentioned an important national or international event, and in General Knowledge class I learned the names of the American President, British P.M. – isolated pieces of information. At home, during the holidays, we got the weekly *Clare Champion*, not a well of international news. Politics were discussed at home, but I was never part of the discussion – I picked up unconnected information, no more. I had no information that would help me to attempt an opinion on the political situation in communist China!

I had been caught out, my Achilles heel had been hit, so I replied, ‘I am sorry, Sir, but I have no knowledge or opinion on that matter whatsoever’. He smiled, and said he hadn’t thought I would. If children confronted teachers with questions they could not answer, they would always understand if the teachers said they didn’t know but would look for information and come back to the question at a later stage. Passing on half-knowledge to children was, on the other hand, unforgivable, he said. I would get a place, he added. I did!

I want to refer to the young T.C.D. chaplain too who took over towards the end of my studies. I have forgotten his name.¹ He was an extraordinary, but very good and helpful young chaplain. Another student and I had been going out for some time, when he unexpectedly asked us both for dinner and told us ‘to work up an appetite’. I knew him quite well, but he knew my partner better. We were delighted to accept and I made no comment, although I had a slight suspicion that he was curious to find out why we weren’t engaged yet! Perhaps he thought a little push might be needed for the important question to be asked. (I may be quite wrong.) Indeed, no push was needed, and I wouldn’t have been interested in a man who needed ‘a push’! So, I was out for a lovely evening and it was just that.

The meal was delicious and it was a perfect invitation. Our first course was avocado. I had seen them in that exclusive fruit shop off Grafton Street, but I had never tasted them before. Then he served a dish of liver, done in red wine and some ground almonds and very few raisins. This was served with a green salad, tossed in a fairly tart dressing – perfect with the slightly sweet liver dish – and French bread. The dessert will have been good, but I have no recollection. To finish off we got freshly brewed, very strong, black Turkish Coffee, quite sweet. I have often tried to make that liver dish – I didn’t get a recipe. It was always good, but nothing like his dish.

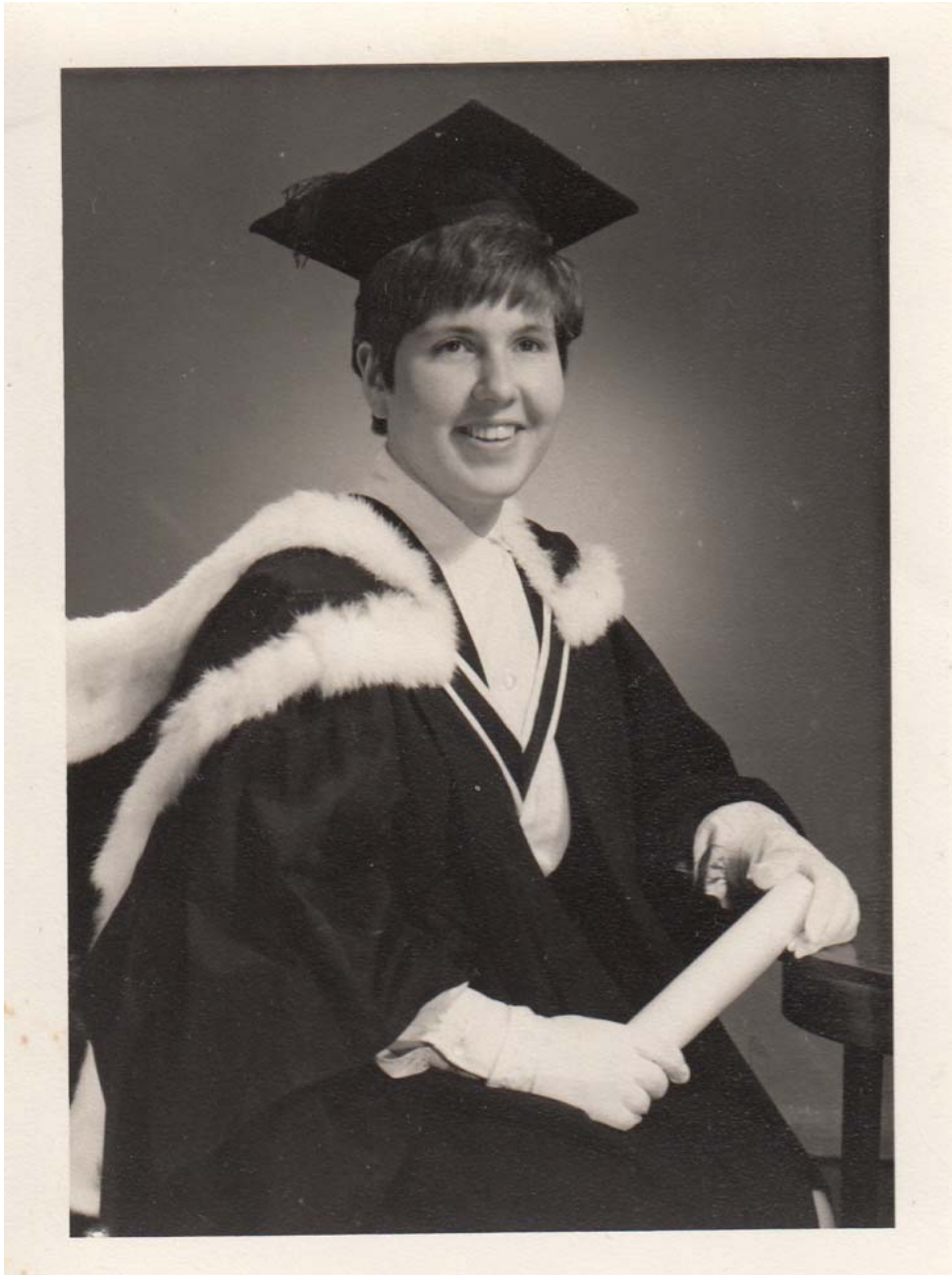
I remarked on his great cooking expertise. Then he told us that their parents found it extremely difficult to finance both his and his sister’s university studies. They had shared a flat, and worked extremely hard, but there was little money for treats like dancing, visits to the cinema, a drink with friends. So, they decided to use these years to learn to cook really well with good but cheap ingredients.

¹ This was the Revd Dr Peter Hiscock, an Oxford graduate and priest of the Church of England, whose appointment as Assistant Dean of Residence was reported in the *Church of Ireland Gazette*, 28 October 1966, p. 7. He succeeded the Revd Ernest Perdue as Dean of Residence in 1968 and retained the appointment until 1973. He served afterwards in India and at Durham and Newcastle. He died in 2012.

(Liver, for example, cost next to nothing at that time.) He told us about several recipes they had come across, or developed themselves, and in this way they often entertained friends. As the years went on, I entertained a lot myself, but like him chose good, fresh, but not necessarily expensive, ingredients to make tasty meals.

When I had completed the Higher Diploma course, we all had the chance to apply for the Irish Oral Examination every teacher had to pass before they would be paid by the government. Most took the chance to postpone it till the following summer, so they could prepare themselves for a year. I had survived that strenuous Higher Diploma in Education year and enjoyed the teaching and studying and the school so I must have been reckless, beside myself, also because I had got an honours diploma, a fact that would mean a higher salary as a teacher. Of the four staff at Wesley who had done the course I was the only one to put down my name for the Irish exam. I must have been mad!

The day came. The staff meeting was over. I had walked from the Green to Bewley's with my basket, gown on top, to buy three pounds of coffee beans to take home. I had decided *not* to take the oral examination which would have been that afternoon. As I walked in the door, the secretary lifted the phone and said: 'Professor Rice, Miss Leckebusch is just here and I am sending her in'. Obviously, someone else had cancelled; and, with my mouth open, I was sitting in the examination and felt sick. Somehow the conversation flowed on. I was still profiting from Irish I had learnt the year I was at the Convent of Mercy. Someone made a remark about the wonderful smell of coffee coming from my basket. The topics were light. At one stage someone commented that I would enjoy listening to the birds when the school moved out to Ludford. I had to laugh and made some comment that I would need to make an appointment to hear the birds when I was teaching or doing duty there. To my great amazement I passed. I gave the secretary a hug to thank her afterwards, took the late train to Limerick, where my parents would collect me, and had a more carefree year ahead without the worry about my limited knowledge of Irish. I still have that lovely letter the Principal, Mr. Myles, wrote to congratulate me. He commented (very kindly) on the fact that, of the four Wesley teachers who had successfully completed the Higher Diploma in Education Course, I was the only one who had not put off the Irish test for a year, and had passed. Of the four of us, he added, I was the only one who was not Irish! I was really happy, but knew I would miss the 'Campus' and did.



Hellgard on her graduation day



Canon Elliott, Hans Leckebusch, Hellgard, and Helma Leckebusch, photographed near Front Gate

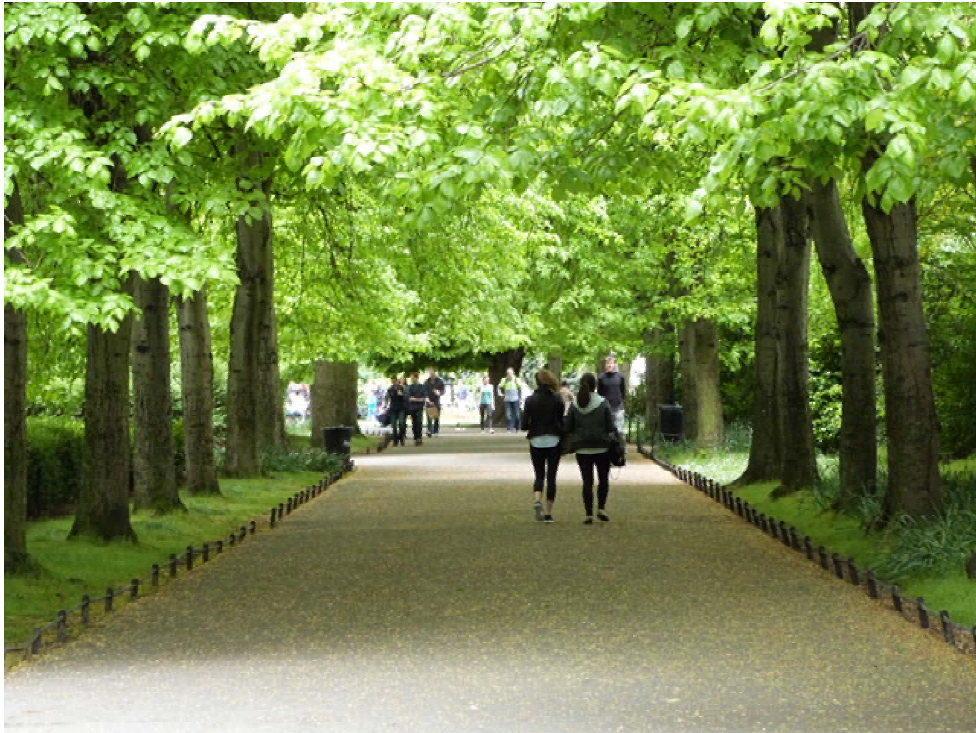


Gertrude Sandall and Hellgard, photographed with the Public Theatre (Examination Hall) and Old Library in the background

Part VII:
Even Happier Days

Dublin and the
Wesley College years
1967-1972





St. Stephen's Green, Dublin

[Silke, 2014]

'For Dublin can be heaven / With coffee at eleven / And a stroll in Stephen's Green'



[Silke, 2023]

James Joyce [see p. 299] waiting for his invitation for a cup of Bewley's coffee
in a 'strictly tea only' German editorial household
... Waiting for Godot?

51: My Dublin

This never was my town,
I was not born or bred
Nor schooled here and she will not
Have me alive or dead
But yet she holds my mind
With her seedy elegance,
With her gentle veils of rain
And all her ghosts that walk
And all that hide behind
Her Georgian facades –
The catcalls and the pain,
The glamour of her squalor,
The bravado of her talk.

From 'Dublin' by Louis MacNeice (Stanza 2)

The words of many poets and writers have knocked on the doors of my emotions, giving some of them a chance to peep out at the world. My inner life has heard words in a language it can bond with. In this stanza, Louis MacNeice gives voice to the importance this city has for me.

Although I didn't think about it at the time, Dublin seemed to welcome me as a paying guest, a guest that was accepted with open arms and loved. In Germany, some psychologists and counsellors offer clients what they call 'Freundschaft auf Zeit' – a limited time in which friendship is offered, the time till counselling ends. I do not feel like a Dubliner, but it is the city in which I spent the happiest days of my life. When I have revisited the city, it has still always felt like being that adopted daughter.

In contrast to MacNeice's poem, 'my' Dublin centres around certain areas only: places where I stayed as a student — in the Y.W.C.A. in Mountpleasant Square, and, in my final year, in Charleville Road, where I shared a flat with Gertrude Sandall; and — as a teacher in Wesley College — in Tullamaine, the junior girls' boarding house (now the site of the Burlington Hotel). When the College moved to Ballinteer, so did I. Only in my final year did I share a flat in Sydenham Road.

My active life centred around Trinity College; Rathmines; the R.I.A.M. (Royal Irish Academy of Music) in Westland Row; Wesley College on the Green, and later at Ballinteer; and around Dundrum, where I shared a flat with Ida. In the first few years at Trinity, the Lutheran Church in Adelaide Road offered a spiritual home as well as a sort of meeting place for young Germans.

A great part of my time was spent singing, so there were few opportunities to get to know the city. Outings, generally at the weekends, were limited to places that were on a direct bus route. Dún Laoghaire was my favourite, but other destinations were Howth, the Phoenix Park, Enniskerry, or services in St. Patrick's Cathedral.

As time passed, I was taken to a concert in Castletown House, or for a drive in the Wicklow Mountains. When I was invited to visit friends in their homes, I got to know Templeogue, where the Ludorf family lived, as well as other parts of the city: Clonskeagh, Ballsbridge, and the area around Sandymount Green. Besides, I never failed to pay a visit each year to Ailesbury Road when the Japanese Cherry trees were in bloom. On return visits to the city, I got to know more and more places: for example, a beautiful private Georgian house stands out clearly. It was not far from O'Connell Street, and belonged to an uncle of a Rosleven friend.¹ My knowledge of the city has nevertheless remained fragmentary.

As my emotional awareness always comes before rational assessment sets in, my reaction to Dublin, as I walked along Rathmines and into Leinster Road that first Sunday was instant. I could compare it to a feeling of arriving, coming home almost: a feeling of being accepted, a feeling of freedom. From the time when I was very small our mother used to sing the song 'Mondnacht', and the melody and text [by J.Eichendorff] are still most familiar:

'Und meine Seele spannte weit ihre Flügel aus ... als fliege sie nach Haus'.

My soul seemed to spread its wings to its limits that day too ... as if it were flying home. This text perhaps expresses the experience best.

The family and my schooling and contacts had sown the seeds of many interests that I could now develop. The immensely joyful, hopeful energy of youth did not waste time. I was entitled to make my own choices, learn from my own mistakes. Knowing what sacrifices my parents were gladly accepting to give me this opportunity, I put myself under great pressure from time to time. As long as I acted according to my intuition, everything went well. At times, however, I worried if my wide range of interests, which I loved, would diminish the success in my studies. A few friends in the Y.W.C.A. stoically spent the time from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. between lectures, tutorials and the library, snatching a coffee and a quick meal in between. In contrast, I was whizzing around between lectures, the R.I.A.M. (Royal Irish Academy of Music), piano practice, singing – all competing with normal university work. I was fortunate enough that I never had to worry seriously about passing exams, or whatever else was expected of me. These wonderful years have acted like my life-long energy supply, so I have never regretted my decision regarding my priorities.

The years in Wesley College were demanding years, too, naturally, but they were very special. I was earning my own money. I was responsible for my teaching, for the pupils. I never forgot my loyalty to the staff and above all to the school. This was a freedom I had never experienced before, not even at university. The fact that I was able to work in an excellent school with great staff, of which quite a few became friends for life, and lovely pupils, is a fact that I have always acknowledged as a gift. As one friend has commented: 'During your Dublin years you burst into flower.' She said it!

I could not call them years of fun: they were nine years of real happiness, and happiness is always balanced by momentary sadness, worries, disappointment –

¹ The house was 19 North Great George's Street, the home of Harold Clarke (1933-2022), Chairman of Easons, and a notable figure in conservation and the arts.

and ‘growing pains’, as I call painful experiences when maturity doesn’t accompany me like a soft refreshing rain that I hardly notice, but hits me unawares like a deluge with thunder and lightning. All in all, these years, as a unit in time, amount to fulfilment. This kind of happiness cannot last forever, and the times will not return. However, they are part of me. In the beautiful poem written by Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin for the occasion of her son’s and daughter-in-law’s wedding in 2009, she tells them: ‘Leave behind the places that you know; All that you leave behind you will find once more, you will find it in the stories.’

This truth applies to my life also, in the context of the tapestry of my memories. For the ‘My Dublin’ part of the tapestry there is a large Lecky House approximately where St. Stephen’s Green is. With this house I can share with others some special parts of my life, if they are interested, and if I choose to do so. The house is in no one’s way, it does not destroy any of the park’s beauty, does not disturb the ducks, or the flowers and plants, or the people in need of peace or new energy. It is a house that is accessible only to me, or, if I bring a friend who can share the scene. When I open the shutters from outside – not even I can enter – a video clip of the past appears and it seems as if the element of time has been removed and I’m transported into a former time.

I am about to open a few selected shutters for readers. What appears are precious times, precious people, precious occasions, precious sadness – all deserving respect. I have no wish to live in the past, but all this life belongs to me, and what I am and what I will yet become. I can have moments when I relive times that have passed, fully aware of all the changes that have taken place. All is well.



The staircase in St. Patrick’s Deanery

[Silke, 2014]



St. Patrick's Cathedral

[Silke, 2014]



[above] Merrion Square, and [below] the Grand Canal

[Silke, 2003]





View from Howth Head [see p. 268] over the Baily Lighthouse and Dublin Bay
Bray Head, Dalkey Island, and the Sugar Loaf in the distance.



Ireland's Eye [see p. 265], seen from Howth

[Silke, 2017]

MAGIC WINDOWS IN THE DUBLIN LECKY HOUSE

52: Bewley's Oriental Cafés

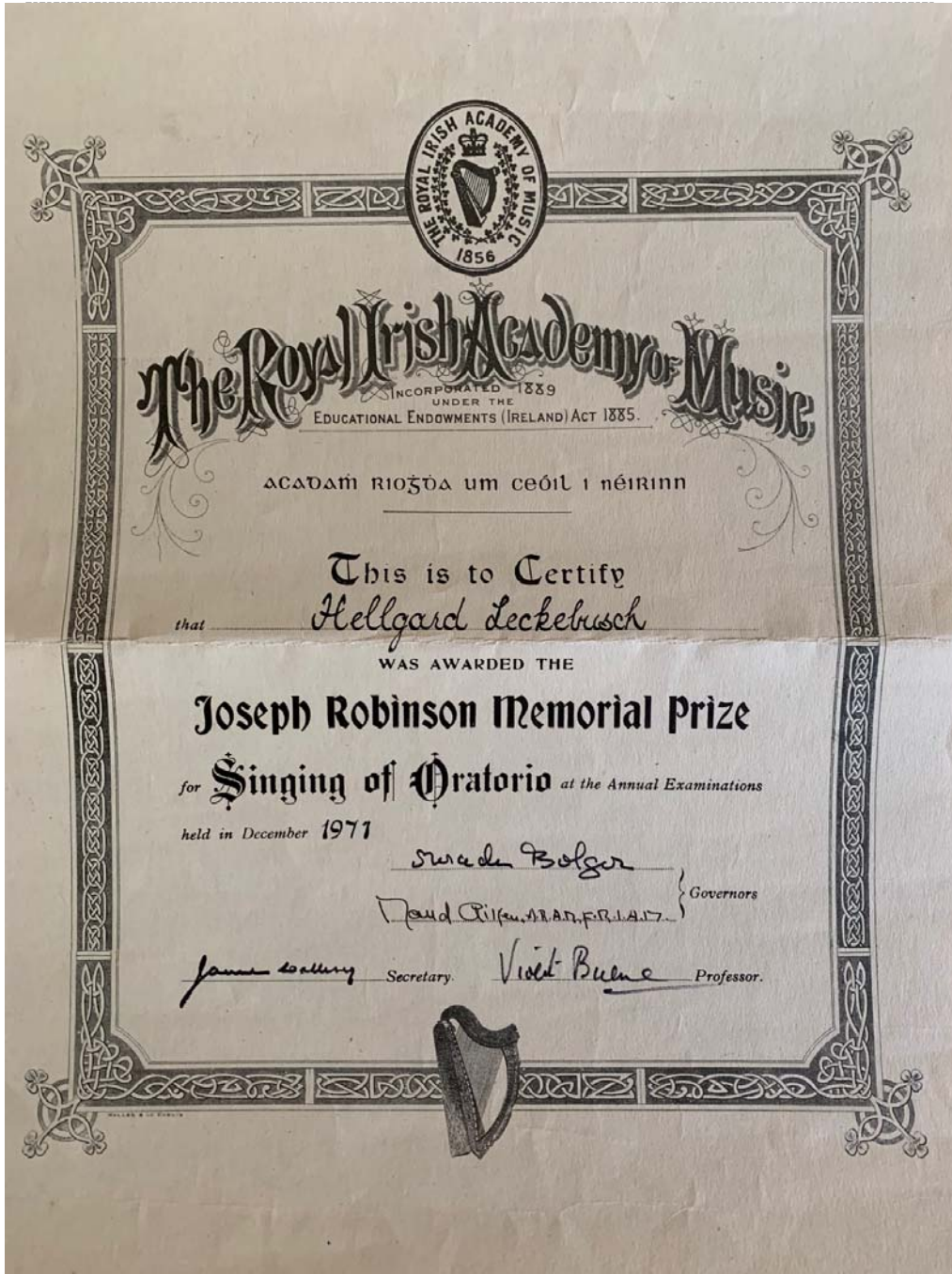
As Mr. Mooney and I approach the Lecky House, floating around the Green, I see that Mr. Mooney has removed his grey cap. A sign of respect? I do not enquire. We are too busy sniffing the smell of coffee being freshly roasted. Yes, as we open the shutters, there are the two machines roasting in the window, the coffee-roasting specialist keeping a watchful eye. The place is buzzing with life. I can see the beautiful windows at the far end of the café while pleasant waitresses are taking orders, bringing coffee or tea, scones, cherry buns, cream cakes – whatever customers wish to enjoy. They do not seem to rush anyone, yet they are moving around at top speed.



The shop in the front of the café is full of customers, buying their favourite blend of Bewley's tea or coffee. Beans or ground? Cakes, bracks, cherry loaves or buns, scones, fudge: they have a huge selection.

I tell Mr. Mooney that my relationship with Bewley's goes back to the Fifties – as if Mr. Mooney didn't know! He is also well aware that we are looking at the shop in Grafton Street, my favourite café. When Henner started his science course in Trinity, he got to know that real coffee beans could be bought there. From then on, Henner brought some home, or we bought some while in Dublin for a day. Bewley's also sent us coffee beans to Clare when we needed a supply. (Times change. When we moved to Germany, they sent us tea for years, in fact till they gave up this service for customers.) With Magill's just around the corner, we became acquainted with this shop too. We never did extensive shopping there, but, when we were in Dublin, a rye bread was always bought, a tin of Sauerkraut or red cabbage, or both, and maybe half a pound of sliced salami. The smells alone were familiar and had something reassuring about them.

As a place to meet, Bewley's was an institution for Dubliners and visitors, and it was renowned as it had style. When we sometimes served instant coffee in the Y.W.C.A., made with a mixture of milk and water which we boiled on our electric heater, lying on its side, it was what would become a 'coffee to go' on toddler's feet? A coffee in the buttery was good, like having coffee at home with many friends sitting around the kitchen table. A coffee in Bewley's was an occasion,



like having coffee with friends in the sitting room, with a box of chocolates doing the rounds ...

Whom do I see now? It is Derek and his friends going downstairs for their Saturday morning ritual. When not on duty, I often enjoyed joining them for coffee. Then I see myself sitting with Ida. We didn't go there frequently, but I associate these visits with a cherry bun. Ida introduced me to cherry buns. When visiting Gertrude's family for the weekend, I often arrived with the unorthodox gift of a cherry loaf. Gertrude's mother was a practical woman. On Sundays she always had many visitors, so the cherry loaf came in handy.

In another part of the room, in a corner, I see myself with student friends from college. It is lunchtime and we are having one of their light savoury dishes – do I see a fried egg with chips? Now I know what we are doing there. Having been offered £5 for filling the seats in the Gaiety for one day, we had accepted. They were making a film with Ray Charles. However, we had first to pay one pound to become a member of Equity. Then, when we paid for our Bewley's lunch treat, the five Irish pounds had slimmed down a bit; but it was an experience and fun.

There is someone else I recognize, sitting at a table with me, right in the middle – the windows on one side, the shop on the other. It is Violet Burne from the R.I.A.M., my former singing teacher. We stayed in contact for some years after I had returned to Germany. We had decided to meet in Bewley's on one of my return visits to Dublin, in Grafton Street, of course. She was as full of music as ever, remembering songs I had sung during her lessons, telling me about songs or duets we had never got round to. Then she mentioned one song I was not familiar with. Without any warning, she burst into song. Her voice was still strong and good. You could hear a pin drop while everyone in the café listened. She sang it to the end. It was an unforgettable moment. Thank you, Violet Burne, for your lessons, and for that song.

This is what I see in the video clip, but even I have far more memories associated with Bewley's in the few years I lived there or when I visited. Generations of people have lasting memories. I think it is so delightful that Brendan Kennelly quite naturally assumes and refers to the detail that the Holy Family serves Bewley's coffee in Nazareth after a meal to which they have invited James Joyce. ('The Dinner' by Brendan Kennelly) No-one could invite James Joyce to dinner without serving a cup of Bewley's coffee, now, could they?

I close the shutters again and Mr. Mooney replaces his grey cap. We move away, slowly, silently, respectfully.

53: Antonia's cocktail party and a castle in Tipperary

The shutters of this particular window stand out, as the shutters seem to be made of very special wood – expensive, exclusive, perhaps even mahogany? Perhaps I should mind my P's and Q's as I approach?

When I can look inside, there are two 'rooms' – one is the Russell Hotel on the Green, beside Wesley College and the Centenary Church. People are enjoying a cocktail party and my Trinity friend Antonia is the hostess. She is also visible in the larger room, a Trinity setting.

We both studied Fine Arts and I knew her well. We never became friends in the sense that we visited each other's families, nor did we keep in contact after we left college, but we met frequently, had a lot in common, and enjoyed interesting conversations. Her father was a British ambassador, perhaps even in Ireland at the time. She didn't stay in Trinity Hall, and certainly not in the Y.W.C.A., and she never talked about her digs or where she stayed and I didn't ask. Her background was clearly British and wealthy, but she was modest. She had coffee with us in the Buttery, and I knew she had lunch in the dining-hall – good and very reasonable.

When we were dealing with Bach, and the Brandenburg Concertos were discussed, most of us were looking for ways of listening to them outside lectures. When I asked her if and how she had solved the problem, she mentioned in passing that she had just bought a record player and the records of all the concertos. No doubt that was one solution!

In my third year we had both finished Fine Arts I, and I had moved on to Fine Arts II with Miss Crookshank. Possibly so had Antonia, but I don't remember that. However, we were always friends while we were studying for our degrees.

I suddenly started to lose weight without being aware of it. It was always important for me to look as well as possible, but I wasn't vain enough to make it my top priority. That had the disadvantage that I forgot about it at times and didn't take it seriously enough. The advantage was that I lived with the problem fairly happily too, sometimes at least.

Although there wasn't much money we could spend on clothes, my mother always made sure I had a few, but very nice, outfits and clothes from a shop we found in Ennis. One of these was a coat I could wear all the year round, except on very cold days. It was a bouclé material, mainly grey but with threads of beige and orange and black, a mixture of linen and wool. As it was a very good coat it wore extremely well, and, except when I brought it to the dry cleaners, I lived in it. One day in the Buttery Antonia said 'I know that coat is lovely and you can't just go out and buy a new one, but look at yourself in the mirror because that coat is falling off you'. She was right. The look in the mirror and the subsequent inspection of my outfits showed me that a few clothes fitted me better, some had to be taken in and others I just had to stop wearing. Antonia's remark had been very helpful, not in the slightest way offensive, and I had to do something about it, and did.

Once she invited friends to this big cocktail party in the Russell Hotel on the Green. She invited two of us from the Y.W.C.A., the only two friends of hers at the party that spoke English with an Irish accent! Her other friends were either British or came from what people in Miltown called 'gentry houses', all with a British accent. It was a posh affair, a lot of the girls in stunning cocktail dresses. I wore my silk dress in autumn colours and felt good in it too. I had stayed on holidays with friends who lived in huge protestant houses and I was just as much at home there as in a cottage in Clare, without electricity and running water, sitting with lovely people beside the open fire, the only source of heat in the house. Both Henner and I were always proud of our Irish accents, and I still am!

Anyway, the two of us from the Y.W.C.A. took the bus to Stephen's Green and found the room in the hotel where the party was already in full swing. Antonia immediately came to greet us, a perfect, sophisticated hostess. She introduced us individually to two very pleasant groups of people. The waiters came to offer different cocktails and, not being used to a lot of alcohol, I chose a light cocktail. It was good. When the waiter came the next time, I asked him to bring me a large glass of plain water with ice cubes, slices of lemon, and whatever other additions he could think of. He came back with a highly decorated, big, wide glass of water and I sipped it. A few people came and asked what I was drinking and I simply replied that I liked my alcohol 'straight'. They could have had no idea what was meant and some went off, perhaps wondering – gin or vodka?! The waiters came round and offered very tasty and exquisite titbits, but it wasn't food that would balance high percentage alcohol if one wasn't used to it.

It must have been more than an hour that I happily chatted with Antonia's friends and mingled with people I did not know and enjoyed myself. I had not come across the girl from the Y.W.C.A. during that time. Suddenly I heard her, talking far too loudly and in a very pseudo-English accent. There was no doubt – she was stone drunk. I could see that she was talking to no one in particular. She was addressing the guests, so to speak, moving her head sometimes to talk in a different direction. I would have to get her back to the Y.W.C.A. immediately and didn't take long to find a good moment to move away from the group I was talking to. At that precise moment came the remark, loud and clear for everyone to hear, 'Oh Charles, do visit me in my castle in Tipperary.' She must have got her tongue right down, opened her mouth partially and produced the name 'Charles' magnificently. Timothy wouldn't have had the same effect! The choice of Tipperary was unsurpassed with the T and pp and four syllables. Counties like Clare or Laois wouldn't have been up to the standard of the show. I took her arm and quickly steered in the direction of Antonia whom I thanked for a lovely evening and explained that our friend wasn't feeling well so I would take her back to the Y.W.C.A. Antonia was such a perfect hostess that I didn't even get a quick, grateful glance. She was concerned and hoped our friend would feel better soon. I got our coats, and went outside before we put them on. Our friend was really in her element now and was first class entertainment on the bus as she loudly, in her pseudo-English accent, talked about horses, Lord and Lady So and So, gardeners and chauffeurs. She didn't run out of ideas or breath.

It was not easy to get her to keep quiet as we walked into the Y.W.C.A. and up to my room. I armed myself with the saucepan, put in some water, got the electric fire on its side and made a mug of strong, black, very sweet, instant coffee and made her drink it. I then took her to her room, helped her to get into bed and stayed till she fell asleep. Her room-mate came back shortly afterwards. The next morning, she remembered little and I didn't fill in the gaps. The events of the evening had to be sent to that castle in Tipperary – student days!!



Powerscourt: ornamental gate

[Silke, 2017]

54: Bloody Germans

In 1987, two colleagues and I from the Gymnasium (secondary school) in Wuppertal brought three different honours courses on their final school trip to Dublin. They all had to do an essay on one aspect of the tour and everyone got a copy which they were to study. As I was officially in charge, I planned the tour with the staff and the pupils, but I did try to persuade them that we would book seats for an Irish play at the Gaiety Theatre (not in the Abbey Theatre, as we needed a date that suited us). Slightly reluctantly, they agreed, and the male members of the tour even promised to bring a jacket or what I called 'a decent shirt'. In return, I offered them the chance of a drink in small groups in a pub between the Green and Suffolk Street afterwards, and, while the two male teachers chose a pub down Grafton Street, I chose a pub in Suffolk Street, and everybody knew where I could be contacted. They couldn't believe Lecky's generosity, but the gratitude dwindled somewhat when they heard when the pubs closed and that we would meet at the bus on the Green at 11:30 p.m. Well, they did have time for a (one!) drink...

As I approach the Lecky House and open the window, I see that it is dark as I leave the pub at 11:20 p.m., enough time to walk up Grafton Street to arrive punctually. It is a lovely, mild night.

About half way up Grafton Street, I see the bus and that some pupils are already standing there. One male student is standing very close to a local man, too close, and I do not like their body language. The voices are raised and I clearly hear a Dublin accent, shouting: 'Bloody Germans, Nazis, concentration camps!' I try to gather speed and would appreciate it if I was sportier. I realize that fists could start to fly about at any minute. When I reach them, I squash myself between the two men, nod at the Dubliner and then face the pupil, ask him what has caused this escalation.

It appears that the Dubliner, admittedly drunk, had politely asked for a light for his cigarette. I could imagine he wanted to start a conversation, wanted to know where the group was from. He got an answer he did not expect: This 18-year-old visitor in a foreign country said 'Only if you say please first'. It was not a convenient moment for me to give him a lecture, so I merely said that it was not surprising that we had this unpleasant situation now. As he was about to argue, I told him not to say another single word – and to be honest I have to admit that I added – and if he did, my foot might accidentally land on his foot and he might have a weighty problem.

With that, I squashed myself round to face the Dubliner (neither had moved an inch). I apologized sincerely for what had happened, a situation I could not clear now. We would be boarding the bus in a few minutes and I had no choice. I hoped he would accept my apology for the pupil's behaviour. I would ask him to do me a personal favour, to go and stand on the other side of the street.

With that – amazingly – he lifted his cap, gave a little bow and said: 'Yes, Ma'am.' I thanked him and he crossed the street. We continued to be confronted with more abuse of a similar nature, but a physical confrontation had been avoided.

Although this pupil got a very clear and unfiltered bit of my mind, I don't think he understood what I meant. He felt quite justified to expect and insist on a 'please' with any request anywhere. He was not in my English course, so I informed my colleague and it was out of my hands. Just as well for the young man, I was so furious!

It was the only unpleasant moment on a very interesting, pleasant and exciting trip.



Scenes at Wesley College, Ballinteer [Silke, 2003]



55: 'Think thin!'

This time I'm approaching shutters that give me no clue what I will see. The shutters give the slight appearance of a very clear-cut, almost clinical design. Again, there are two settings: Trinity College and Charleville Road. I see Gertrude and a man I immediately recognize. It is the Trinity medical officer, the university doctor in his tiny surgery, and the flat in Charleville Road.

Attendance at lectures and tutorials, work-shops, etc., was extremely carefully checked. Only he was authorized to sign a form which stated that students were ill and unable to attend lectures, etc., for a certain number of days. He was good, reliable, very competent, and extremely helpful in an emergency. He had been a doctor in the army and had no time for people who felt little sneezes and other discomforts should grant them a few days of comfort and rest in bed.

I had to contact him twice during my years at college. The first time I had a severe attack of tonsillitis. I knew from experience that if this wasn't treated at the beginning, I would become seriously ill. I felt terrible, very weak, but had no obvious signs of a cold yet. Before I could even mention my complaint, he commented on my weight. At the best of times there was a sharp contrast between me and the slim build of Irish and British students at college, and this wasn't one of the 'best of times'. I wasn't given the usual lecture on diet and sport. He only said 'Think thin.' As there are so many people who love to comment constantly on people's surplus weight, advise and instruct and pity them, even people one hardly knows, it is extremely hard to imagine how one could 'think thin'. He explained: 'Don't ever think I can't do this or that as I'm overweight. Go swimming, dancing, scramble over walls, flirt (yes, he mentioned that too). Just go ahead. There is no reason why you shouldn't.' It wasn't always easy to follow his advice, but when I could, it made a difference.

It was time to get back to the reason of my visit. He wasn't impressed, told me to forget about it, it would pass. At that moment I knew I was about to faint, but he grabbed me in time, got me seated, and shouted at the nurse to bring him a thermometer. The nurse appeared instantly. My temperature was over 103. When he had put out his hand to stop me from falling, he had felt that I was very hot. The nurse now got the lecture he was giving himself: 'When a patient comes with a complaint that doesn't seem serious, never fail to touch them. You may need to take their temperature'. He sent me home with a prescription for antibiotics, with the instruction to go to bed and stay there. I should eat very little, but drink enough water, lucozade, and the odd cup of tea if I felt like it. If my condition didn't deteriorate, I was to ring him on day 4 – he gave me a specified time. I was over it after a week.

The year I shared a flat with Gertrude in Charleville Road I was so ill one night that I asked Gertrude to phone the Trinity doctor very early in the morning. The whole room seemed to circulate around me and I couldn't leave the bed. I had been out for a meal with friends the night before and I suspected food poisoning.

Fortunately, the doctor remembered my strange name and said he would come at once, so that Gertrude could let him in before she got the bus to go to work. He came at about 7.30 a.m.

He examined me carefully and decided that everything pointed at food poisoning. He had brought some tablets and gave Gertrude a prescription to get more. His instructions were clear and helpful. Gertrude was to phone if I didn't feel a slight improvement when she returned from work, otherwise he wanted to be informed every second day. The time was specified as it always was. In the meantime I was to drink lots – sweet, black tea, lucozade, water with slices of lemon, no milk, no food, whatsoever, *NO* soup.

I kept to his instructions and felt very well looked after. After a week – yet again – I was on the mend and almost ready to 'think thin' again. A great doctor, I mutter, as I close the shutters, and a man with a kind heart.



Wesley College, Ballinteer, entrance [Silke, 2003]



[above] Tullamaine (demolished c. 1970), where Hellgard was Assistant Resident Mistress, under Ida, 1967-1969

[below] Wesley College, St. Stephen's Green (also demolished c. 1970) where Hellgard taught from September 1967 to June 1969.

The room to the left of the entrance was Mr Myles's Study, where Hellgard was offered her teaching job.

The pupils are walking in line to the chapel.



Source: R. Lee Cole, *Wesley College Dublin 1845-1962: An Historical Summary* (Dublin: APCK, 1963)



The Girls' Residential Block at the new Wesley College, Ballinteer.
Hellgard resided here in the years 1969-1971.

[Silke, 2003]

56: Wesley's late night barber chop

There is one shutter I really enjoy opening, although the video clip appears in a haze. My memory of what happened is clear, but what I see doesn't all seem to fit together as I only see fragments.

When Wesley moved out to Ballinteer, it was the beginning of my third year. It felt good to be in the middle of all the boarding school life, including the varied sports activities on the grounds. After the school day I got to know the 5th and the 6th Year boys and girls whom I did not teach. Duty for me so far had been with the junior girls in Tullamaine.

It is early autumn prep time, homework supervision in the classroom block. What is new to me on this particular evening is the monthly visit of the school barber. In turn, all the boys have to be sent out of prep to have their hair cut. The staff on duty are expected to see to it that the boys get a 'proper' haircut. (This was the age when girls wanted their skirts to be as short as possible while the boys wanted their hair to be as long as possible.)

It is not clear to me why I have to send three older boys to the barber. No doubt I am on senior duty, but are the prep groups mixed? Still, I have a vivid memory of three boys going off to get their hair cut and returning. I decide that their hair has hardly been touched and I send them in again. This time, I do notice a change, but this seems to be due to the work of a generous amount of Brylcreem rather than a pair of scissors. I am not satisfied, so I go over to the other prep room where Mr. McDowell is supervising, to get a second opinion.

This is my second problem. I remember Mr. McDowell as a member of staff well, but not doing duty in Ludford, but I see him clearly in the video clip that night. I explain my concern and he inspects the boys' hairstyle. He tells them that Miss Leckebusch is concerned that the barber hasn't given them their money's worth, and he is going to have a word with him.

There can be no doubt that he did just that. The three boys look a bit sheepish as they go in to see the barber for the third time, while Mr. McDowell and I wait outside. After a while, three shorn sheep appear. They are trying not to show it, but they are disgusted. Mr. McDowell welcomes them with the following words: 'Now that is what I would call a haircut. Tell your parents that Miss Leckebusch made sure that their money was well spent.'

And with that 'chop' we all returned to our respective duties for the evening: homework or supervision, satisfied or furious.

MAGIC WINDOWS IN THE DUBLIN LECKY HOUSE

57: 'For your own personal comfort and convenience'

The Aer Lingus hostesses impressed me from the very beginning with their efficiency and very pleasant manners and their fresh-looking green uniforms. The announcements on the plane, starting with the order to fasten our seatbelts, always followed the introductory phrase: 'For your own personal comfort and convenience.' In other words: you are doing yourself a favour if you take our advice. A most elegant way of getting people to do something willingly!

It was not surprising that an article in the daily paper caught my eye. A certain lady called Mrs. Begley¹ was offering coaching courses to all groups of people, young people in particular, however, to give them further self-assurance by certain guidelines in regard to their behaviour and appearance. The four different sessions would, e.g., deal with the problem of going for a first interview, using make-up to the best advantage, taking a special girl out on a very special first date with self-confidence. The maximum number of a group was twenty, the fee for the course was reasonable, especially if there were twenty taking part to share the price for the course. Her recommendation: she was the official coach for all Aer Lingus staff.

The idea hit me that it could be a great advantage for me if Wesley girls availed of this service. My new post as Mistress in Charge of Girls included the responsibility that the school rules regarding uniforms were respected. The model Twiggy in her mini skirts and dresses had a great influence on the fashion of the day, and this didn't halt at the gates of a school. The rule for the length of uniform skirts was clear: the skirt length had to be long enough so that the space between the back of the knee to the hem of the skirt did not exceed four inches. Whereas the definite guideline was important, rigidly imposing the same rule on all the girls seldom proved to be a good decision. Tall girls with slim legs could even look perfectly well if the space was five inches. Girls whose figures even vaguely resembled mine were ill-advised to insist on their rights to the allowed length. Perhaps Mrs. Begley would be a support in my daily battle with the girls, the skirts and the inch tape? I contacted her, was impressed, and Mr. Myles gave me permission to offer courses to all the day and boarding pupils, provided that I was in charge of the complete organisation and payments, and that the courses did not interfere with regular school activities.

Mrs. Begley's offer to advise them on how to make the best of their looks, including make-up, appealed to the girls, but some training on how to give the best impression in an interview seemed important too. As she refused to train mixed groups, I soon had 80 girl applicants, which meant arranging four courses. I asked both Mrs. Begley and the girls of the first group if I could stay for one or two sessions to watch and they agreed. Perhaps I could learn something too?

Mrs. Begley opened the first session of the first group by telling them how lovely they all looked, that that they were all at an age when they would look their best with very little extra help, that they could however make unfortunate mistakes if they wanted to look like somebody else.

¹ Jean Begley soon afterwards published a 63-page pamphlet entitled *Etiquette and Social Ease* (Dublin: Educational Company of Ireland, 1972).

She started by talking about hairstyles. A few girls had started wearing very long fringes. The reason was simple: they did not want me to see their eye make-up which was against the school rules. She stopped in front of a girl with an XXL fringe. She was on the top of my priority list. 'My dear girl,' Mrs. Begley said, 'Would you lift your fringe for a minute? I would love to see your eyes.' She immediately commented on the colour of the girl's eyes and asked her why she hid her particularly beautiful ones. The answer was honest: Her wish was to use eye make-up, and with the fringe she hoped that I wouldn't notice. Mrs. Begley's answer was plausible: 'My dear girl, it is a waste to wear eye make-up when nobody can see your eyes anyway, with or without eye make-up'. With that, Mrs. Begley had solved the fringe problem for me almost instantly. She went on to advise them on using make-up in such a way that it would improve their looks but I wouldn't notice. That went down very well with the girls!

To tackle the issue of the length of the skirts, she had brought quite a long mirror which she placed against one of the walls. She had a second smaller mirror too. 'Now girls,' she said, 'If you wish you can have a look at yourself in the mirror, and then it would be perfect if you ask a friend you really trust to hold the mirror behind you, so you can decide more easily what the right length of skirt is for you, keeping within the four-inch limit the school rule allows. Very slowly and one by one, some girls risked a look at the second mirror, revealing a more or less pleasant view, and eventually all the girls had decided to go for this revelation. I felt sure that some new decisions 'were in the air'.

I stayed on while Mrs. Begley showed them how to sit with decorum in their mini skirts – very helpful – and then retired, leaving Mrs. Begley to continue her superb coaching. Word got round that the courses were worthwhile, and, in the end, more than 400 pupils had taken advantage of the offer, boys included.

One group of 5th Year boys caused me a slight headache. They were pleasant, well-brought up young men, but not prepared to leave out any opportunity to get a good laugh, even if it were at the expense of someone else. They felt Mrs. Begley was a perfect target. I had decided it might be necessary to stay with her. When we arrived, the door was open and twenty smug young men were slouching in their chairs, sitting round a set of desks pushed together to look like a large table. They were just about controlling their wish to laugh in expectation of the fun they were about to enjoy. Mrs. Begley, slightly ahead of me, a beautifully turned out 'lady of about 50 plus', stopped dead at the threshold. 'Good afternoon, gentlemen', she said, which was answered politely by a chorus of 'Good afternoon, Mrs. Begley', but Mrs. Begley didn't move. She continued 'Gentlemen, I have a problem and I need your advice and help to solve it'. Being addressed yet again as 'Gentlemen', and being asked for assistance, the good basic upbringing and schooling triumphed and one of the boys inquired 'How can we help you, Mrs. Begley?' 'Well,' she said, 'I cannot enter a room if the gentlemen remain seated, and it seems to me to be an inconvenient position to start the course, standing in a doorway'. With that they all shot to their feet simultaneously and Mrs. Begley swept in.

I closed the door; absolutely certain she needed no help. So, 'for my own personal comfort and convenience', I went about my own business.

MAGIC WINDOWS IN THE DUBLIN LECKY HOUSE

58: A noble car and a nobler driver

On a day when I least expected it there was a phone call from Mr. Mooney asking me if I would be willing to take him on another visit to the Lecky House. He would like to take me out for coffee in Bewley's first. A delightful request. We enjoyed our conversation over coffee in this café as always. One might see Lord and Lady so-and-so, up from the country, alongside a poor student or Dubliner who had had to count his/her coins first, hoping they could afford a coffee. The staff seemed to work with pride for their employers.

The walk to the Green is short and as soon as we approached the entrance gate near Grafton Street, the Lecky House appeared out of the mist. I decided to go for the window on the ground floor with the really huge shutters which were so heavy that Mr. Mooney had to help me open them. The first object that I recognized was an old car, a Jaguar; then I knew what we would see. The main setting was Wesley College in Ballinteer, but in a corner, I got a glimpse of the college on the Green. The car door opens slowly and a very tall man appears. There is nothing rushed about his movements. He is quite relaxed and he seems to spread an atmosphere of assurance. His actions show that what he is doing has a purpose, but he is going about his business quietly. What a joy! Without a doubt this is Jimmy A.

When I started as a young teacher, he introduced himself, was welcoming and assuring, always very pleasant, but he left it at that. We didn't teach the same subject, so there was little contact. I knew he was responsible for the boys during teaching hours and he offered help should I need it. I registered how he and Margaret A., responsible for the girls, ushered over 600 pupils into the hall for assembly, no noise, no pushing, all achieved in a matter of minutes and followed by complete silence, ready for the entry of the person about to take assembly. There was no apparent sign of discipline. I was reminded of a Higher Diploma Education lecturer at Trinity College who had just given an excellent lecture on the difference between order and discipline.

When Margaret A. left at the beginning of 1969 for family reasons, Mr. Myles offered me the post that had become vacant. Mr. Myles's trust in my ability was reassuring. When I accepted, I felt honoured, but I felt nervous too. Jimmy A. did not come and spread his vast experience like a carpet under my feet, nor did he frighten me with too many details about our responsibilities. He covered essential guidelines and added a very important help for me: 'You'll be grand, Hellgard'.

I was to benefit greatly from his wisdom and life experience. During the first half of 1969, the school was making final preparations for the move to Ballinteer and the official opening of the new school in the early autumn. Mr. Myles was an excellent organizer. Jimmy A. and I were to decide on a list of rules and decisions about the purpose of certain staircases. Only up or down, girls and boys separately, where the places for the different forms were to be allocated in the Assembly Hall, what areas would be out of bounds for the pupils, when and for what purpose, locker distribution, etc. During each staff meeting that was held Mr. Myles asked: 'Miss Leckebusch, Mr. A., how is your work progressing?' Jimmy always answered: 'Mr. Myles, we are getting on very well. No problems.' He was

correct in saying that we had no problems. We hadn't even started! I couldn't get him to put his mind to it. By May I was in a frenzy, so he then agreed that we could get going one Saturday morning. He would collect me in Tullamaine, take me out to a nice lunch in Ranelagh, and then head for Ballinteer. He produced a large copybook and a biro. Things seemed to look hopeful.

It was a pleasant, very relaxed, light lunch, which was not to be disturbed by worrying about 'movement rules'. After lunch, on this beautiful May day, we gently sailed in the Jaguar towards the Dublin Mountains. Jimmy parked the car outside the future boys' boarding house and we sat on a low wall overlooking the beautiful premises, including the classroom block right in front of us. 'Well now, Hellgard', he started, 'it's like this. What our task is can be compared to people having to teach someone to swim in the sitting room. Till we see the pupils on the premises and the routes they naturally decide on we can't find suitable solutions that can last. Once they are there, I can decide on sensible rules in half an hour. There is no point in preparing work for a waste-paper basket.' When I asked him why he had come, he replied he had hoped to calm me here. He hadn't been successful in that so far. There was no denying it, I had lost. Yet I insisted we could sort out the coat hanger numbers to go with the lockers, decide on questions like – would the lockers be allocated to classes, girls, boys separately, etc. He agreed, and I was relieved, but the relief was premature. The first day at the beginning of September when the school was filled with life, he surveyed the scene and it took him about half an hour to write down a few but very sensible rules that were excellent and did not have to be adjusted. The rules regarding lockers / coat hangers, etc. which had taken hours, turned out to be a disaster really and had to be changed: a great deal of extra work for the caretaker. Hellgard had learnt a lesson! And she got no 'I told you so' from Jimmy either.

The video clip suddenly changes to the scene when all the pupils have just entered the Myles Hall, have found their seats, and sat down. Mr. Myles is about to take morning prayers and assembly. I have gone down the steps to where the pupils are sitting and have taken up a position where the senior boys are standing. Jimmy is on the higher area around the walls and in front of the stage. The staff are standing near the door to the library. Jimmy briefly walks along, surveys the scene, lifts his right hand, and just clicks his fingers. What follows is instant and complete silence. I remember a visitor to the school, who was also at Assembly one morning. The click of the fingers and the instant silence left him speechless. He said to me: 'That was like a bit of pure magic'. Perhaps it was, but it was also a combination of quiet authority and tradition.

The scene changes and one of the senior girls appears. She has come to complain to me about Mr. A's behaviour towards her. She feels she has been unfairly treated and she is not going to let it pass. I listen to her side of the story, promise to contact Mr. A., and that I will come back to her later. I make no comment. During the tea break I meet Jimmy and briefly give him an outline of the girl's complaint and suggest we three should meet and clear the situation. Jimmy agrees. As it is a nice day and other pupils and staff are in class, we decide to meet at the boulder near the classroom block.

The girl has a strong character, not always easy to handle, but one can see that she will grow up to be a woman with all the potentials of leadership. After civil greetings the girl immediately sits down on the grass, Jimmy does likewise. I choose to sit on the boulder, conscious as ever that I might not be able to get up from the grass gracefully ... Jimmy says, 'Miss Leckebusch tells me that you were dissatisfied with my reprimand the other day. Perhaps you could start by stating your complaint. She did; she was not rude, but very outspoken. Not only were they both on eye level sitting on the grass, she was also on eye level in the way she stated her complaint.

Jimmy said nothing for a while and then addressed her by her name. He continued to say that he now understood why she would not accept his reprimand. He explained why he had reacted harshly. He had meant what he had said, but he could have worded it differently. He apologized sincerely and hoped that she would be able to accept his apology.

With that she was on her feet and held out her hand. Jimmy could hardly keep up with her speed but soon stood there and shook her hand. 'For goodness's sake, Mr. A., that's quite all right now. We've cleared the air. And – thank you.' and off she went. I was on my feet too, aware that I had witnessed a great teacher / pupil moment.

The official opening of the new school took place in June 1969. It would have to take place outside and we were all hoping for a lovely day, which it was. The pupils, teaching and other staff of the school were present, the board of governors with their wives, dignitaries from the churches. The Minister for Education officially opened the school in the presence of President Eamon de Valera.

The day was a historic occasion and I was part of a community that day that felt it was a privilege to be there. Mr. Myles, in charge of all the planning and organisation, as always, had been very thorough, and everything worked perfectly and quietly, and yet it had the atmosphere of a family day. Everyone knew what they had to do and were determined to do their best. Jimmy told me that we were responsible for bringing the pupils to their numbered seats in an orderly way, to watch in case anyone seemed to feel sick or faint throughout the ceremony. It was taken for granted that their behaviour would honour the aims of the school. I was to start bringing them to their seats in classes because he had 'a little job' to do first. I would be grand (!!!) and he would come as soon as possible, well before the ceremony. Well, if getting into a panic was another way of saying 'doing grand', he was right. Admittedly, all had gone well, no hitches, no problems at all, but Jimmy didn't turn up after doing his 'little job'. Just before the ceremony was due to start, I was in such a panic that I sent a prefect to ask Mr. A. when he was coming.

It was the only time I ever saw Jimmy running, though he was an athletic man. He panted: 'But Hellgard, I'm responsible for the parking. You're doing grand on your own', and sprinted back! Miraculously I was. Anyway, the pupils were so proud to belong to this school, particularly on that day, that they were a credit to it.

Jimmy was a helpful man, often doing 'a little job' for someone. One of the funniest, happiest, amusing hours I ever spent in my life was during a drive with

Jimmy and his wife, Iris. She was giving me a run-down of a few driving lessons Jimmy had given a 'mature' lady teacher in Wesley (before my time) who had decided to buy a brand-new car and drive herself around the city and down the country in comfort. There were no driving schools yet. One needed a driving license, but that just had to be bought for one Irish pound and renewed each year for the same price. These 'lessons' had always been trio outings: Miss X at the wheel, Jimmy beside her, Iris on the back seat: so, Iris's comments were first class experiences, and could have been filmed. 'Well', she said, 'Miss X might be going straight for another car, quite fast, more or less on the wrong side of the road, and Jimmy would quietly tell her she was 'doing grand', but could she just steer a little to the left, could she take her foot a bit off the accelerator? Iris gave endless accounts of hair-raising examples of Miss X 'doing well' only just avoiding a catastrophe, and it was perfect entertainment.

Miss X was a courageous woman (and reportedly a great teacher) and 'did grand' all over the streets of Dublin and on roads down the country. Her driving style attracted the attention of numerous police officers doing their duty wherever she and her car appeared. She would be stopped and given a serious, well-meaning and firm lecture throughout which she smiled generously. As soon as the Garda stopped, she would change the subject. 'By your accent I would say you must come from Kerry'. She was generally right, so the surprised Garda would admit it and unwittingly answer the next question where he came from with 'Dunquin', for example. She recognized accents from all over the country and knew somebody in the remotest places. 'Oh, you're from Dunquin', she'd reply, 'Now do you know ...? I taught him years ago.' According to Iris, Miss X got away without a fine using this strategy, most of the time at least.

Iris's best story was about Miss X parking in a one-way street near the Abbey Theatre. When she parked, there was enough space for a plane to land. When she returned, the cars behind and in front of her had left so little space that she had immense difficulties getting out of it. She ended up, almost squashed between a car on the one side of the road, and another parked on the other side: a perfect T junction. She was helpless at this stage, turned off the engine and stayed at the wheel. In no time a bus came and flew the horn – but no reaction. The driver got out and told her to move the car. She replied that she couldn't, so with a sigh he told her to get out of the car and give him the key so he could shift it.

I don't think that even an efficient driver could have managed to park their car in a more precarious position. It must have taken the bus driver ages to get it moved, during which time his humour and language deteriorated and his temper soared. After the ordeal he roughly handed her back the keys and said: 'Drive off now, I'm late enough – and sell that car, buy yourself a bike'.

Mr. Mooney and I really enjoyed that video clip and laughed heartily as we listened to Iris's rundown of Jimmy trying to teach Miss X to get control over the car. 'Wonderful people', was Mr. Mooney's comment, to which I added, 'This wonderful couple 'did grand' in life and in the lives of all who were lucky to know them'. 'That's why we're going to celebrate their life now by having a second cup of Bewley's coffee', was Mr. Mooney's suggestion, and we did. Cheers to you, Jimmy and Iris.



5 Sydenham Road, with the Tower of Taney Church in the background.
Here Hellgard resided with Ida in the basement flat, 1971-1972

59: Sydenham Road

Somehow, I'm at the side of my Lecky House where the huge bay window is. I know immediately what life is taking place behind the shutters and I can't wait to open them. There is Sydenham Road where Ida and I had a flat. Coming up from Dundrum, I see the Overend estate on my right, the beginning of Sydenham Road on my left. I was never in the estate then or in the park as it is today, nor do I know very much about the old ladies who lived there at the time, but through the window I can see the wonderful Oldtimer driven by one of the very old ladies. It is as if I see a museum piece, but in motion. It is a museum video clip. The internet reveals an interesting piece of information. Both daughters were given an expensive car when they came 'of age': the older daughter the Rolls Royce. She always kept a First Aid kit in her car, should there be an accident, and she received good nursing training. At the 1916 Rising, she actively helped all the injured people: I.R.A., Army, and other injured people.

Opposite No. 5, where we rented the basement flat, I see the house owned by an artist and his family. He was a respected artist and the family were warm-hearted and pleasantly different. One evening, I can see it is winter, Ida is on her way home quite late – after 11 p.m. Before she reaches the house, she can see that the area in front of the house is brightly lit up. As she gets nearer, a very bright spotlight is revealed, obviously plugged in somewhere in the house. Something seems to be wrong with the car, i.e. the engine, and the artist is half hidden under the bonnet of the car. There is no ice or snow, but it is winter, so the temperature is not tropical. Nevertheless, moral support, solidarity and companionship ignore discomfort. The artist's wife is sitting on a kitchen chair beside the car, reading the newspaper and keeping her husband company.

That year a teacher from France was on an exchange with Maureen. Odette was her name: she was taking over Maureen's classes, while Maureen was teaching her classes in Meaux. Odette was lovely: young, beautiful and very different, and she brought excitement into the very orderly and low key, undramatic school day in Ballinteer. She had long, blonde hair with a slightly reddish tinge and a fringe. She wore trousers only and had to borrow a skirt for the first morning teaching before she bought two skirts to see her through the year! She looked fabulous in her maxi-pony skin coat that she wore over her chic clothes, and this was underlined by her beautiful Lancia car in which she had travelled from France.

The artist and his wife rented out one or two rooms on the first floor to her and a bathroom. There was a sink and an electric kettle, and that was the closest she got to a kitchenette. As she had school lunch during the week she coped. She kept a very limited supply of food, e.g., bread, jam, butter, milk, in one of her cupboards. Like Ida and myself she was young and flexible.

One night around 4 a.m., Ida and I are woken by someone frantically ringing our doorbell. We both jump out of bed, run to the door, and there is Odette, her beautiful hair flying, the pony skin coat over her pyjamas, a most extravagant and exquisite small leather wash and makeup container in her hand and she is beside herself. We get her into the flat and an armchair, in which she dramatically

unfolds her problem. Meanwhile Ida and I listen, but at the same time get out the very simple spare bed, make room for it in the sitting room, get out spare sheets, blankets, pillows, and make up the bed. The long bank strike in Ireland – *incroyable!* – as well as the problems with her bank in Meaux fade in comparison with this nightly disturbance. She has become personally acquainted with an intruder – a *mouse!* – who has been sharing her food without permission. In *no way* would she spend another minute in the company of this mouse.

We advise her to get some sleep, do likewise till the alarm clock wakes us. We make and have breakfast, then take our turn at getting washed, dressed, doing the washing up. As she has brought no clothes, she has to go back to her room to get dressed – mouse or no mouse. The artist's wife promises to set up traps and deal with the problem, and for the moment Odette will stay with us.

Three days later the artist's wife arrives in the evening when we are home from school. She proudly tells Odette that the intruder has been caught in a trap, the problem has been dealt with, they have left her tins for the food, and she can now return. When Odette isn't looking for a moment, she gives Ida and me a big wink! Odette returns, but keeps telling us she can still hear noises. We tell her it couldn't be the mouse, as that problem has been solved. It can possibly be a relative, but he/she wouldn't stay long as she keeps all the good things in tins now. After a while, things calm down and the mouse drama is over.

This gives me the chance to concentrate on other neighbours. A nice, elderly widower lives close by. Ida comes from a family that has always been good to neighbours. She brings him a warm meal from time to time which is greatly appreciated. Nothing better for a good neighbourly relationship, though Ida's wish to help needs no other reason.

Not in Sydenham Road, but in Taney Lawns close by, live Mr. and Mrs. O'Brien. He is the bursar in Wesley at the time and I would include them in what I would call our neighbours. They are a very pleasant couple. He is very correct, gets on with things, makes sharp remarks. I love his metaphors and always associate him with one particular one: 'Believe you me, I got that thought percolating in his head'. Ground coffee was beginning to be more readily available just then, and young married couples generally got at least one electric percolator as a wedding present – along with pyrex dishes in all shapes and sizes!! Moving up the road that comes up from Dundrum, Taney Parish Church is on the right-hand side. This is the church where all the Wesley boarders were taken for the Sunday morning service. When not on duty I often went there too. The Reverend Burrows was the rector, and I had a very high regard for him and his wife. He was a very spiritual man, very academic, very humble and very much in touch with the world, its people, its problems. He spoke with authority, but in a quiet way. I always compared him to the unsurpassed strength and endurance of a blade of grass, that quietly, and in time, will even crack concrete and break through.

His wife was equally wonderful and what I admired most about her was that she was an excellent rector's wife, but she never stopped being Mrs. Burrows in her own right. They live not very far from the church and I have good memories of when Ida and I received great hospitality in their home. They have a very nice

son who started at Wesley College the autumn after I had left. It is so good to see them in the video clip.

The Reverend Horace McKinley was the curate in the parish at the time. He sometimes visited us after he had seen the two elderly ladies who lived next door. He was a good curate and I see one occasion when he showed that yet again in the video clip. I also remember one remark which I found so good that I adopted it. When we offered him some refreshments the first time he came, he had a clear and straight answer. 'I don't eat or drink between meals'. This did not make anyone feel he was turning down a kind offer. When visiting Miltown Malbay, I tried to see as many friends and acquaintances as possible and I didn't know how to deal with so much kindness at the time. I had the right answer for the future after this.

Now I see Horace taking one of the ladies' arms as he slowly walks with her to the ambulance that is going to bring her to hospital. The other lady is there with her, and so are Ida and I. She is very ill and most people would wish to help and support a person in such a situation. Yet, there is something about Horace's behaviour that stands out. His concentration is fully focused on this lady and her needs at this particular time. He has fully withdrawn into the background and he is not concerned about doing the right thing or keeping to guidelines he has been taught. I consider this to be an example of empathy at its purest. Now that I am old myself and often in need of support, I am even more aware what Horace's behaviour meant and means. The time in hospital was very successful and the lady was able to return and take up all her duties again that life had still lined up for her.

In the centre of the window, I see a middle-aged couple who lives in the beautiful flat above us. She is Italian and from time to time, Ida and I are invited for an evening with them in their home and the wife's superb Italian cooking. There is always an aperitif and a starter. Secondly, we are served a very tasty pasta dish and lovely wine. What could be a good evening meal for Ida and me is the overture to the main meat dish, served with vegetables or a salad and bread. At this stage we have to become a bit heroic as the dessert is about to be served – zabaione made to perfection (I found it far too sweet after a good meal). The strong, sweet, black coffee is good and it helps. This is exquisite hospitality and we leave around midnight, go down the steps leading up to their flat, turn round to the door to our flat, enter and shut the door firmly.

We wait for a few moments before we leave the flat again, as quiet as two little mice, get on to Sydenham Road and then go for a brisk digestive walk around the block before we go to bed and sleep wonderfully well.

The shutters are closed again. What a happy video clip! The fact that these are scenes in a year of difficult decisions and changes for me does not take away from the extremely happy side of the year in which I shared a flat with Ida in Sydenham Road.

MAGIC WINDOWS IN THE DUBLIN LECKY HOUSE

60: Willie

Willie was a well-established teacher in Wesley when I started in 1967. He was the housemaster in Burlington, the house for the younger boy boarders. (The present Burlington Hotel is built on the site where Tullamaine and Burlington used to be.) He prepared the boys for life with a mixture of loving care and strict discipline. At the time one couldn't have imagined the school without him. He was one of Ida's friends, and in her generous way she introduced me to and let me share several of her friends, giving both parties the chance and freedom to become friends or not. That was a gift forever.

Ida and Willie, both being in charge of the junior boarders, worked well together, but he would often come to Tullamaine for a quick chat, a good conversation, or some fun. An occasional outing to Grafton Street on a Wednesday afternoon – Ida and I, Willie and George – was great. The prelude to the outing was always a visit to the wimpy bar at the top of Grafton Street; convenient, good coffee, no wimpy, after which we generally went our own ways. They were good friends to me, wonderful company, and even today after almost fifty years the flashback of incidents makes me happy, makes me smile; especially incidents with Willie make me laugh. Like all of us he wasn't perfect. However, I was not fond of him in spite of his small, unimportant shortcomings. I was fond of him especially because of these slight blemishes. They made him special, very human, real, and helped me to be as real as possible too.

The good are real as the sun,
Are best perceived through clouds
of casual corruption.'

from 'The Good' by Brendan Kennelly

My greater inner freedom must have been hard on him sometimes. While I was in Tullamaine we had two major confrontations, each time about a dress: one on which dress I was due to wear, and the other one on the dress I was wearing. I was earning now, but money was still a bit scarce, and crochet dresses were the rage. I got a lovely pattern and navy-blue wool and got going, a shell pattern. It needed a dark blue slip, in the shape of the dress, which I made too. It had short sleeves. I wore it for years, a great success.

Willie was quite outspoken when he commented on the would-be dress. He thoughtlessly made the remark that he would wear a pink shirt the day I would wear it to school. A pink shirt was the height of a courageous male fashion outbreak then, and needless to say Willie did not have one.

I was quick at needlework and it didn't take long before I was ready to embark on the school day at the Green as the lady in blue. That morning I rang Burlington just before breakfast and one of the two nice students doing duty in return for board and lodging lifted the phone. I asked him to leave a message to say that this was the morning for Mr. Devers's pink shirt. There was quite a pause while the student was trying not to choke on his own saliva, so great was the shock. Having

composed himself he said: 'I beg your pardon. Could you repeat the message, please?' I certainly did, slowly and clearly, and rang off.

Willie nearly had a fit, phoned back after breakfast, enraged that I had humiliated him in front of one of his staff. He was so furious that it took quite a while till he stopped avoiding me. He lingered in a huff, but at some stage our relationship was back on a steady course again. But worse was to come with dress No. 2!

I didn't realize it at the time, but I must have had an identification crisis. All I knew was – I needed a Dirndl – desperately and instantly. Although a Dirndl can be bought in most larger cities throughout Germany and they are worn by some women occasionally, they are traditional dress really only in Austria and Bavaria and southern Germany. Strangely enough I remember quite a lot of girls and women in Wuppertal wearing a Dirndl straight after the war, but our family didn't. It may have been an expression of a need for identification too. Who knows. Perhaps I wore one at a very early age? I certainly don't remember.

I pestered my aunt to get and send me a Dirndl pattern and eventually she did. In a shop at the top of Grafton Street which I loved they sold beautiful material and I found very suitable cotton – pink for the dress, light blue for the apron. My aunt had chosen a simple and plain pattern and the dress turned out well. One early May morning I was standing with my line of girls waiting for Willie and the boys, wearing the new outfit. It was our ritual to walk down Leeson Street with the children, trained to walk in perfect line, the boys, line ahead, then the girls' line, and Willie and I behind. Willie would always pick out one of the bigger boys and say: 'Boy! Carry Miss Leckebusch's bag, please', and with a 'Yes, Sir', the boy would take my bag as if it were a sign of honour to be chosen to carry it. At the traffic lights or zebra crossing the line stopped till we were at the front to stop the traffic, so they could safely cross the road. Willie had made it clear to the boys that the cars would stop when the lights went red or we stopped them, but it meant a delay for the motorists and generally they let the very long line walk across the road without showing impatience by blowing the horn. He added that this should be honoured and suggested that the boys at the front of the line could lift their caps as a sign of greeting, demonstrating grateful acknowledgement. Once he explained that, they were eager to do so, lifting the caps first to the right, then to the left, each boy in his own time and without any subsequent reminder. There was nothing military about this and it was lovely to watch. Maureen reminded me lately that there had been letters in the *Irish Times* from time to time in praise of the wonderful behaviour of these schoolchildren walking in the centre of a capital city, and I remembered reading these letters myself. It was a pleasant walk to the Green, with good conversations; and sometimes Schwester Marga from the Lutheran Church, already out to visit a 'Lutheran' patient, would shoot across the street, shake my hand, then Willie's hand (very German), and would send us on our way with blessings for the day. She was always a little highlight in her black dress and veil. On this particular morning our communication had a problem. Maybe I got a greeting, I don't remember. I definitely heard the command: 'Take that apron off. You look like a fishwife.' I explained that it was part of the dress, but he answered that he wouldn't walk down Leeson Street with someone looking

like a fishwife. I said: 'That's fine, Willie', and set off with my line of girls. Then Willie followed behind with his boys at a reasonable distance, not in a good humour.

In school all the staff wore a gown, so the apron wasn't so noticeable. A few children asked interested questions, the other staff made no comment. It was a Wednesday, the half-day when school finished at 1:30 p.m. Sometimes Willie would like to walk across the Green and into Grafton Street if he wasn't on duty, and I would take both lines back – no problem. This particular Wednesday he felt like an afternoon in town and asked me to take the line back. 'Oh', I said, 'anytime, Willie, you know that, but it's impossible today. I wouldn't even consider being responsible for your wonderful and precious boys, being a mere fishwife. You'll have to bring them back yourself today'. With that the fishwife set off, only the line of girls in front of her. Talk of a coming ice age! But it melted too.

When we moved to Ludford the friendship continued, including the occasional recurrences of a disturbed atmosphere. He was a great friend and I must have been trying for him. One day he came to visit me in the Girls' House as I was very sick, in bed with a high temperature. I had tossed and turned so much that the bed clothes were in a real mess.

He had been in town and very kindly came to enquire how I was, and if he could do anything. He kept his coat on and didn't sit down. I put on my dressing gown and sat on the bed, hoping I'd look a bit more presentable. The situation could not have been more innocent. Just then there was a knock on the door and the window cleaner came in to tell me he would be in to clean my window in ten minutes and left! Poor Willie was mortified and said: 'I wonder what he is thinking now!' My love of fun couldn't leave it at that, not even when I felt so ill, so I replied; 'No idea, Willie. Do tell me what you thought he might be thinking'. I got a look of despair and mortification, and I had great difficulty to remain serious!

There are so many funny incidents that I recall and one more must be mentioned. When George married, and he and his wife moved away from Dublin, Willie became senior housemaster, and so of course he lived in the housemaster's flat. During his first term there, we both had a free period at the same time and he generously gave me the standing invitation to have a cup of coffee in his flat each week at that time. The arrangement was that whoever got to the flat first would make the coffee. (He never locked the door.) On this particular day I had previously upset him over something I considered as minor, and as he didn't feel like discussing it, I completely ignored the situation and went to the flat as usual. No sign of Willie when I arrived, so I made two coffees, pretty certain that he had banished himself to his bedroom as soon as he heard me! –I retired to one of his comfortable chairs, first with my cup of coffee, later with his – waste not, want not – and the *Irish Times*. After a wonderful break I washed and dried the two mugs, folded the *Irish Times* neatly, plumped up the cushion in the armchair, and left the flat.

There was – maybe still is? – a house phone in the corridor just outside the flat, so I lifted the phone and rang the number of the flat. The poor man unwittingly

lifted the phone and answered. He could have known me better! I said I just wanted to thank him for the two lovely cups of coffee before going back to class and was so sorry he hadn't been able to make it. I finished off with a cheerful 'Bye Willie. See you', leaving poor Willie at quite a loss. When we met in the school building shortly afterwards there was a whiff of coolness in the greeting, but the huff had passed and we were soon back to normal as if nothing had happened.

I enjoy these reflections greatly. They are true, but show less than the dot on an 'i' who Willie was, and do not do him justice at all. He was a great man who put wonderful work and energy into his career as a teacher, his boys, and I'm sure they have never forgotten what he did for them. His achievements must be and are honoured by many, yet for me it is the man, the human being that stands out, who was like no one else and precious. He could be very generous, he was very vulnerable, he was kind, he did more than his duty. He was a good man, a product of the times he lived in, the circumstances he was born into, he lived with the fulfilment and non-fulfilment of his hopes, and I know more or less nothing about all this. I treasure the few years of school life and companionship with him, amongst several wonderful staff, the times of fun, huffs, good conversations. I remember many things I learnt from him and unexpected moments when I got a glimpse of the Willie. When the school had moved to Ballinteer, I still took singing lessons at the R.I.A.M. and had Violet Burne as a teacher. Occasionally I won a small prize at the Feis Ceoil (an Irish music organization), but one year I won the prize for oratorio at the academy and with other prizewinners I was in a photograph in the *Irish Times*. I was delighted to have won, but was quite aware it was all considerably average. George and Willie came over to the girls' house to congratulate me, bringing lovely flowers and a card. It was completely unexpected and so touching and I have never forgotten it. I still have the card!

While still working in Burlington Willie bought his first car, a brand-new Opel, duck egg blue. He treated it like a raw egg too! It was a necessity for him sometimes, but he used it seldom. Driving was not the love of his life. Yet when my mother had a massive heart attack, and I had no chance of getting to Clare for that weekend, as the last Friday train had left, he told me to borrow his car and go. We both knew that although I had had a driving license (for one Irish pound per year) for some years, I had only had fifteen of the seventeen driving lessons in the offer at one of the first driving schools in Dublin, and almost no other driving experience, so I felt I couldn't accept. At that time the journey to Clare by car took about five hours, and I had to drive through Dublin and all its traffic first. He persisted so generously that he made it possible for me to accept. It was immensely important for me to be able to help at home that weekend. Mother, for the moment, was confined to her bed. Father had missed a day at the factory, taking Mother to the Regional Hospital in Limerick and trying to cope with his work, Mother so ill, the housework, shopping – it was far too much. And to the consternation of the good heart specialist in Limerick, she couldn't be treated there, as we had not been accepted by any health insurance when we arrived in 1954. This situation had not changed since her heart attack in 1962. Willie's generosity was a moment of friendship at its best.

Willie did not leave it at one offer. The following weekend he told me to take the car and drive to Clare again and I did. I had a chance to be with my parents, so glad to see my mother; and she was relieved to see me and the house being cleaned, the washing and ironing seen to, and shopping and preparing meals for the following week done. I wrote short letters to the immediate family, giving them the news. (Phone calls were still wildly expensive.) On the Wednesday after the second weekend Henner and a friend of his suddenly and unexpectedly arrived on the doorstep of the Hill House in his car from Germany and they stayed there for three weeks. Henner could put his hand to anything and he took over the household, no doubt made lovely meals too, as he was a good cook. When they had to leave to return to work, I was home on holidays to take over, just in time to see them before they left.

It was difficult for me to know in what way I could show my gratitude to Willie, till one day I spotted a large table lamp in town; white china base, a plain light-green silk lampshade, and a little chrome. It was really elegant. I knew it would give Willie's room a more homely touch, and it was also a lamp that a man could like. Willie was thrilled with it, and as soon as the days got shorter, I could see the light of the lamp shining through the curtains of Willie's room in the boys' house. I could see his room from mine in the girls' house.

For the second time he lent me the car I decided to knit him a jumper, a green wool, plain pattern, with a crew neck, so it could be worn with a shirt and tie. It went down very well with him too, and he sometimes wore it after school when he was doing his rounds on the large premises – rugby and hockey fields, cricket pitch, swimming-pool, library, classroom block, etc.

One day in the late autumn Willie went down with flu and had to take to his bed. We staff always visited each other when anyone was sick, but this time I was given a clear message – he did not want to see me! I was quite upset, worried what I had done this time, especially as it went on for days. Eventually I heard it on the grape vine from a very considerate friend – he couldn't bear to see me as the lamp was smashed. An unexpected draught had sent it flying and he didn't know how to tell me. After about four days I was told he would be up for a little while and I could call after school. Suitably equipped with a few nice grapes I went over, and though I made a point of not looking in the direction of the lamp I saw the corpse with the corner of my eye. The bottom of the base was still undamaged so the lamp could stand, but the electric bowels were fully exposed. The lampshade had got a real bashing and a large bit of silk was actually missing. A kind but not very successful hand had got a length of lace, a fringe, light *green*, had attached it to the end of the lampshade, hoping it would cover a multitude of sins. I spotted at least one bit of Sellotape, attaching the 'fringe' to the silk, and fringe and Sellotape were the final straw.

I concentrated on Willie, ignored the lamp, didn't sit down, and remarked how pleased I was to see him on the mend, obviously in better shape but not good yet. He was wearing 'my' green jumper, though no shirt and tie, and the bare neck made him look especially vulnerable. It was obvious how uncomfortable he felt, afraid how I might react. He didn't want to hurt me, and he seemed to try to get as far into the safety of the back of his armchair as possible. I passed a few more

cheery comments, handed over the grapes, and didn't linger. I could call again, he said. I did the next day, and this time the *corpus delicti* had been removed and neither of us ever mentioned its disappearance. I would have given a lot to have been able to buy him a new lamp, but I realized that would have been heaping fiery coals on his head, so I didn't.

Of all the encounters with Willie this memory is my favourite. A man who was so strict, so much in control of many things, so intent on wanting to be perfect, showed this sensitive, generous and empathic side of his personality.

That 2nd of January remains burnt into all our memories. The boarding staff were due to return to school the next day, all looking forward to seeing our friends and being back at school, when my parents' phone rang in Clare. It was Ida's sister, trying to tell me that Willie had been a passenger in a car that had skidded on an unexpected patch of ice that morning. The car hit a tree and Willie was killed instantly. I asked several times where he was in the I.C.U. (Intensive Care Unit) so I could visit him till the news sank in eventually.

Even though this all happened nearly fifty years ago, it is a fact when I say 'Willie, I remember you well.'



Sunlight on the Classroom Block



WESLEY COLLEGE STAFF, 1969–1970

identifying those who are mentioned in the text

In the front row, left to right:

T. A. McDowell (the oldest member of the staff, teacher of Mathematics since 1932, the person with whom Hellgard had a conversation about haircuts [see p. 309]); Hellgard (seated prominently as the member of staff responsible for the 'General Welfare' of girls); W.G. Kirkpatrick (Vice-Principal since 1947); Revd. Gerald Myles (Principal, 1947-72) [see pp 327-31]; Madeleine Cooke ('Madeleine', who, as the senior resident mistress, had the title of 'Lady Warden'); W. J. Agnew ('Jimmy A.', the teacher responsible for the general welfare of boys, and owner of the Jaguar in Hellgard's tale [see pp 312-5]); and David Wilson (Head of the Departments of Classics and Modern Languages, a member of the staff since 1937), whom Hellgard describes [p. 332] as 'a great teacher and an admirable person'.

In the 2nd row

1st from left, 'Dick' [Richard Giltrap] of the Debating Society [see p. 330]; 2nd from left, Maureen [Sheehan]; 5th from left, Ida [Bunbury; later Reed]; 6th from left, George [Magee]; 7th from left, 'Dodie' [Valerie Barrett]; 10th from left, 'Arnie' [Arnold Edge].

In the 3rd row:

2nd from left, Stephen [Austen], the English teacher who excelled in staging the school play. On a return visit to Ireland with a German group, Hellgard encountered him assisting his wife in her catering business [p. 412]; 4th from left, Susan [Latta]; 5th from left, Willie [Devers] [see pp 320-5]; 11th from left (i.e., furthest to the right), Roy [Ritchie].

In the 4th (or back) row:

2nd from left, Jim Ryan; 6th from left, 'Dick' [O'Connor]; 8th from left, 'Ernie' [Armitage].

61: The Reverend Gerald Myles

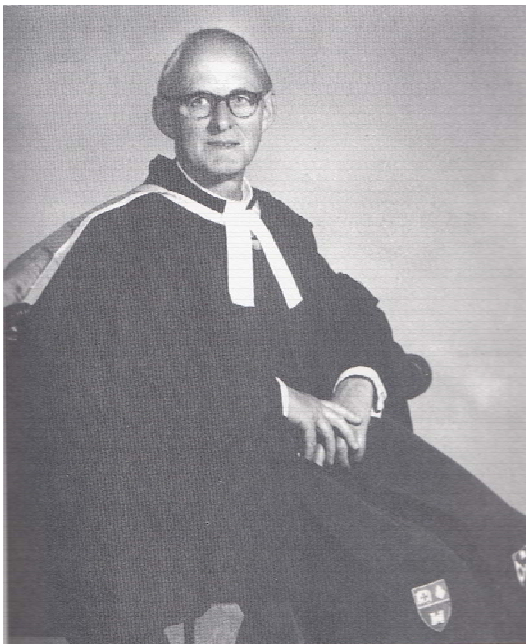
Headmaster of Wesley College, Dublin (1947-72)

When Lorna started teaching in Wesley it was obvious that she was very happy there with its aims, the standard of education, the pupils and the staff. She was delighted to have been offered a post and greatly admired and respected the headmaster. Lorna was a kind of person and teacher that any school anywhere could consider a valuable addition to their staff. She seldom referred to her teaching life there, a sign that it was all good.

When I started to look out for a possible post for myself in my final year at Trinity, Lorna did her best to persuade me to apply for a post in Wesley. The prospect sounded wonderful, but there was one real snag. They were looking for a female teacher, prepared to live in the junior boarding house Tullamaine, and share in the boarding duty. This meant: free board and lodging.

So far that sounded perfect, except for the little ‘snag’ – they were looking for a mathematics teacher! Lorna kept insisting I should apply. We both agreed it would be fantastic if by any bit of good fortune, I was taken. And if my application was refused, I should be able to live with that. That sounded very logical, so an application was sent off.

I was invited for an interview that week almost by return of post. That



February day was very wet as I was standing under my umbrella beside the Centenary Church, waiting, as I wanted to be punctual. Unfortunately, I was wearing suede shoes to match my suit. They had got so wet that they squelched when I walked – not ideal when one wants to make a good impression, and it didn't help my confidence. I entered the school and saw the headmaster's office on my left. There was a doorbell, but also a miniature set of traffic lights: red, orange, green. When I rang the bell the orange light went on – so presumably I had to wait till the green light went on shortly afterwards. With my shoes squelching I opened the door and went in.

Mr. Myles rose to greet me and pointed to the chair on the other side of his desk. He wasn't a tall man, but his natural, dignified authority filled the room. There was no need for him to assert it. He checked on a few details in my application, after which he came straight to the point. I had applied for a teaching

post without any qualification in the required subject, he said. As this was most unusual, he had wanted to meet the applicant and find out the reason for the application. It was a sharp enough query, but he seemed to be quite open to consider the reason. He didn't seem to expect me to justify my action.

My answer was as open as his query had been, and before I left his office, he stated two conditions under which he would be prepared to offer me a post as a teacher of English. One condition was that I would be prepared to repay the Church of Ireland the money I had received for my bursaries so that I did not have to accept a post at one of a number of protestant schools outside Dublin after two years. He was of the opinion that a school invested in a teacher during the first two years, and only after that the teacher really benefited a school fully. I accepted his two conditions and a few days later I received the formal contract for me to sign.

The five years I taught in Wesley College were a lasting gift that life had in store for me, and that in many ways. Of all the headmasters I had during my teaching life, Mr. Myles stood out as an example as a teacher, as a man in a position of authority, as a human being, and though I have several friends who were also excellent principals, he stands out amongst them all.

He invited the new staff to meet him at the beginning of the year after the staff meeting. We were given certain guidelines which made it very clear what was expected of us, of all his staff. He introduced us to the secretary who would go to each class with the roll book every morning as the teachers had to check who was present and who was absent. He mentioned a number of teachers we could go to if we had any questions or problems at the beginning. (They were not our tutors.) Furthermore, he explained who held special posts of responsibility. It was a short address, but very helpful to anyone who was new. Mr. Myles was always brief and to the point: he said everything that was necessary, but he never wasted time with additional explanations, and he certainly did not repeat himself ever.

I was starting school life there with Susan Latta, a young sports teacher, Dick O'Connor, and Ross Hinds. Roy Ritchie, who had been in Nigeria with his wife Cherrie and taught there for many years, returned to Wesley in 1967, as did Ernie Armitage who had also taught in Nigeria for some years. Dick, Ross, Roy and I were the four from Wesley who did the Higher Diploma in Education that year. (Ernie had done his H. Dip. Ed. before he went to Nigeria, Roy hadn't.)

The memories I have concerning Mr. Myles are numerous, far too many even to mention only a few. Memories I wish to recall here are personal ones only. Assembly in the morning started each school day: a short reading from the Bible, a hymn, a prayer. The Wesley College hymnbooks during my years there were small, light blue. The College Hymn was the last hymn in the book. Mr. Myles generally took Assembly, but not always. Canon Burrows came regularly and when Graham Hamilton was appointed as chaplain he took the small service regularly too, but there were others also. Mr. Myles made a great impression on me, because in prayers of thanksgiving he sometimes mentioned the cleaning staff and the staff in the kitchen who made it possible for the rest of the school to concentrate on schoolwork, in pleasant surroundings and providing us with nourishing meals. After the short ceremony, the Jewish Community were part of

Assembly when important information was given or general announcements were made.

Till I was reminded by a past pupil of Wesley not long ago I had forgotten that Mr. Myles at the beginning of every school year repeated the appeal from Joshua, chapter 1, verse 7: 'Be strong and very courageous'. Then he added: 'I and all the staff will try to help you to become that, as far as we are able'. There was no reminder to work hard, or to behave in a way that would honour their home or the school. How wise that was I only learnt after years of being a teacher. Doing their best and aiming towards excellence was automatically expected of all the pupils, but whereas everyone could learn to become stronger and more courageous, not everyone can achieve academic excellence. Strength and courage help us to get through life more happily. Intelligence alone need not always suffice to help us to live well.

Being on duty for Assembly could be very interesting if Mr. Myles had the time to come and mingle with the pupils. He tried to get to know each child personally, made every effort to learn their names, connecting them mentally with pupils he had taught many years previously, often parents or other relatives. If any litter was lying around, which was seldom the case, he would ask the nearest pupil – boy or girl – to help him clear it, and then both bent down to pick up whatever was lying around. That made a far greater impression than just talking about keeping the school clean and tidy!

Shortly before building began on the German school in Dublin officials from the ministry of education in Germany were visiting Dublin school buildings, and I was asked to show them around the premises when they came to Ludford. They were amazed that the whole school area was so clean, that the toilets were so spotless, no Edding marker messages on doors or walls, and that all the wood, especially in the Assembly Block, had been left untouched. When asked how we managed that, I was at a loss – I was used to nothing else! – and eventually replied: 'We are all proud of our school and we all feel responsible for it'. The remark put it in a nutshell really.

I was only ever late for class once. Ida and I shared a flat in Sydenham Road that year and we always set off in Ida's car. Taking the bus or walking was also an option. That particular morning Ida had left very early and my only explanation is that she may have had to take Irish Orals at another school. Anyway, I must have fallen asleep again, wasn't in time for the bus, and subsequently arrived late at Ludford. Assembly was about five minutes over, but there was no noise from an unattended class as I rushed up the stairs in the classroom block. My classroom door was closed, so I wisely knocked before I entered. Mr. Myles was sitting quite relaxed on my chair and smiled at me when he wished me a good morning. He went on: 'Miss Leckebusch, I realized that some urgent reason must have kept you from being here in time, so I started the lesson for you.' He thanked the class for their interest and attention. 'I'll hand you over to your teacher now.' I thanked him, brought him to the door, and we both behaved as if it were the most normal thing in the world that a headmaster would fill in for you when you were late for class. Talk of heaping fiery coals on my head!

Mr. Myles taught me a few lessons. The teaching staff who had a university degree were expected to wear their graduate gown during school hours. I wasn't very vain, but I loved my new, yellow-striped tweed poncho suit and wanted to wear it in class, but the gown couldn't be worn over it. I chanced a day in school without a gown and all seemed to go well. During the second day I was called to the Principal's Office. He said that he had noticed I wasn't wearing my gown and wanted to enquire about the reason. There was an excuse sitting up my sleeve which I produced, explained that I had torn my gown when it had got caught somewhere – that was true – and I hadn't managed to mend it yet. He could have argued about my second remark, but Mr. Myles didn't – he was most sympathetic, led me out to a large built-in cupboard outside his study, opened two doors to reveal an array of graduate gowns. 'I'm not very tall, so you should be able to find a suitable one to wear, and then you won't be under such pressure to mend your gown!' What could I do but thank him for his generosity. I chose a gown speedily, took off the poncho and put the gown on. That put me in my box!

His intelligence was extraordinary, and besides that he was a very good judge of people.

He appreciated what I was good at, but was also aware that, whereas my academic background was very solid partially, it still had big cavities, like a Swiss Emmentaler cheese. Some of my academic training had to be implemented. I was aware of this, and also that he knew this, but it did not make me feel uncomfortable, nor did I feel the slightest need to show him assertively what I was good at. While he saw what had to be learnt or improved, he made me feel his trust in my ability and wish to learn, my courage and my resilience. When he appointed me as Mistress in Charge of Girls when I was 24 years of age, and the school hadn't moved out to Ludford yet, he decided and acknowledged that I had already developed qualities which he thought important for this post of responsibility.

In one particular situation I disappointed him, but there was nothing I could do about it, as he had not discovered one unfilled cavity in that mental Swiss cheese of mine. He asked me to assist Dick Giltrap in the current affairs society; but I refused. I got on well with Dick Giltrap, although I didn't know him particularly well, admired his work, and the success of the debating society. I also felt that I had a balanced way of arguing a point. My problem was that I was still quite ignorant on topics relating to current affairs. It was to take me years to learn things that other children and young people grow up with quite naturally. I would not have been a help for Dick Giltrap, in fact I would probably have driven him wild! As for the pupils, they would have seen my weakness within two sessions. You can't hide much from the natural instinct of intelligent young people. Mr. Myles was quite taken aback at my refusal and couldn't understand it.

There are two incidents that I still want to mention as they reveal a different side to his personality. Between Embury House and Ludford House, where Mr. and Mrs. Myles lived, there was a small path which led through shrubs and small trees. Quite close to the boys' house I had discovered a beautiful, firm swing. I had always loved swings and regretted not having had a swing as a child. So sometimes I took the opportunity, during a free period, gown and all, to have a

good 'go' on this swing. After all, staff and pupils were all safely in class, there was no-one around, and I couldn't be seen by anyone unless they were close by. One May morning I was enjoying myself whole-heartedly when suddenly Mr. Myles appeared on the path. He must have gone to their house for some reason. He stopped, smiled and said: 'There is nothing like the joy one gets out of a moment of freedom. We seldom have these moments once we grow up' – and he was gone.

Official photographers came to the school every few years. This could be nerve-racking when normal school life was continuing. Time was short, yet everything had to be 'right'. Mr. Myles was in one group photograph that I was also in. I suddenly realized that a very important member of staff was missing who should certainly have been there. Just before the photographer was about to take the photo I said: 'Mr. Myles, Mr. X isn't here.' Mr. Myles immediately sent for him. Then he said: 'Hellgard, what would I have done if you hadn't noticed.' It is only a great man who does not feel he is great at every single moment of his life.

Examples showing Mr. Myles, as the great headmaster he was, are generally known; and who am I to mention, refer to and / or comment on them? I am grateful for the years I worked at the school when he was the headmaster, for all I learnt from him, at a school where I spent such happy years. He has my greatest respect and admiration.

MAGIC WINDOWS IN THE DUBLIN LECKY HOUSE

62: Anna

I started off teaching 24 periods a week, about 25% less than the other teachers. This was to enable me to attend all the essential lectures for the H. Dip. Ed. (Higher Diploma of Education) course. One of the two prep classes was on my timetable, for English, French and R.E. (Religious Education). Dodie was a perfect teacher for the prep classes, getting them gently but firmly, and solidly prepared for secondary school. Other teachers took on subjects like French and Irish, or whatever other subjects had to be taken over so that the timetable would work. The thought of teaching them French terrified me, but it was the condition on which I was given the post. Mr. Myles said I was to do my best, that I had a record for all the texts, a very good text book, and I could ask any of the French teachers to help me. He added, to give me some reassurance, that if it turned out to be a catastrophe it wouldn't ruin for life their chances of learning French: in Form I, with all the new pupils starting secondary school, they would be starting French again. I was to make them interested in the language, give them a feeling of some enjoyment, and teach them as much as I could. 'God between us and all harm', as they would say in Miltown, came into my head!

This prep class was pure joy for me. I just loved them and they were the ones who got me through that year teaching French without my ending up with a trauma. Mr. Wilson had them in the new Form I the following year, a great teacher and an admirable person. One day he came over to say 'Hello' to me, while we were having our 15 min 'cup-of-tea break' in the staff room, and then added that 'my' preps were a problem. My heart sank. 'What you taught them has stayed with them so well, that I have a problem not to bore them, while the newcomers need the time to learn all that yet.' It was such an unexpected and undeserved remark that I burst out laughing, but I still bless you for that remark, Mr. Wilson.

The Old Testament was on the R.E. syllabus for the preps that Christmas term, specializing in the stories of Abraham up to Solomon, if I remember correctly, and just a few psalms. I wasn't good, but I was creative, and the class and I seemed to enjoy the lessons. The children were just lovely, the boys and the girls. There were eleven girls, and – what was special about them – they were like a unit, always played together. Probably individual friendships existed, but in school this wasn't noticeable to me. One girl stood out among the lovely group. I never saw any blemish or shortcoming about which one could kindly say 'she'd have to work at it' – it was quite amazing. While she behaved like any child of her age, she was more: honest, confident, polite, most intelligent, interested in everything, but taking no information for granted. Often, she had several questions that needed an answer before she was satisfied. She had long, wavy black hair, and was a beauty as well. It was not her name, but I shall call her Anna. I have to admit that her family name sounded more German than Irish, but I never thought about it. She was a Wesley day pupil and that was that.

After about four weeks, not long after my 23rd birthday, she was standing at my desk before class and passed on her mother's regards. Anna was to tell me that her

mother was watching what we were doing in R.E. with great interest and was very pleased with my teaching, but she did want me to inform her in good time before I would start the New Testament, because Anna would not be doing that. I thanked Anna and returned the greetings to her mother, and promised to let her mother know in good time before I would start the New Testament syllabus.

I was well aware that in all my life I would never again be so kindly, so politely and yet so firmly told that I had made a *faux pas*. Anna was Jewish, and I, as a German, had been so insensitive as to teach this girl R.E., little more than twenty years after the Holocaust! I should have checked the list, knowing that there were many Jewish children at the school,¹ but I had never thought about it. I felt terrible. As soon as I had the opportunity that day, I knocked on the headmaster's door and explained my mistake and distress. Mr. Myles was friendly, just made a note without any comment to me. He would see to it, he said, and with a smile wished me a good day. In the next R.E. lesson, Anna was not present, and had obviously been taken to the room where there was supervision, without any comment ever.

Thank goodness I still had her in my English and French class. One Monday morning, not long before Christmas, one of the girls, near to tears, took me aside and asked when all the girls without Anna could speak to me, but Anna was not to know. The boys must certainly not know either. It was serious, she said, but wouldn't take very long. I wondered what that could be about. We managed to fix a certain time and place after lunch, where we wouldn't be conspicuous and Anna and the boys wouldn't notice.

When I had shut the door of the little room the spokes-girl, now crying, told me that she had been at Morning Prayer with her family the day before, instead of Sunday School, and the clergyman had stated that no one would enter the kingdom of heaven if he/she didn't believe in Jesus Christ. 'What are we going to do with Anna?', she said.

Instantly there was a huge lump in my throat and I came out in a cold sweat. I felt completely unqualified to answer such a deep theological question. The girls couldn't be left in their worry either, so I couldn't say: Leave it with me, I'll think about it, and will tell you later! My belief and my convictions were all I could give them, no chance of looking for a good or even right answer, so I said: What the clergyman said is a quotation from the Bible, and I do believe that the words in the Bible are words of truth, and the clergyman is a good and learned man. Perhaps what he meant to say didn't come across to you, or maybe he does take this quotation literally, I can't say. As for my opinion: We all know Anna, and I am absolutely convinced God wouldn't want to do without Anna at all. Anyway, God is God, and what may be a problem for the clergyman is certainly not one for God. And I also tell you – should there be no place for Anna in heaven, then it wouldn't be the place for me either.

¹ While Hellgard knew that the school had a long tradition of very good relations with the Jewish community in Dublin, she, in common with most others, discovered only later, in the 1980s, that Chaim Herzog (1918-1997), the son of a Chief Rabbi, had been a pupil in the 1930s. Chaim Herzog was by then President of Israel (1983-88), in which capacity he made a State Visit to Ireland in 1985, during which he was brought to see the new Wesley College.

The girls said: 'Miss Leckebusch, are you really sure?' And I genuinely replied: 'Yes, 100% sure.' With that they smiled again and happily ran off. I had to sit down to 'reassemble' myself briefly.

It is one of the most beautiful, moving and outstanding memories of wonderful experiences I had with children as a teacher. Although we never actually met, Anna's mother often comes to my mind. I have the greatest respect and admiration for her. Anna had an older brother, and though I did not know him well, I can still see this distinguished young person as a Prefect, who had such presence, and already at about 16 or 17, was showing great leadership. He never raised his voice, and I felt the pupils followed rather than obeyed him. The word comes to my mind when I think of the girls in that prep class, Anna, and her brother too: 'And a little child shall lead them'.

When I open that particular window into the living past it is like a breath of fresh air. Occasionally when the storms in my life are whirling around me the window is blown open and the flashback reinforces my trust in the future, a future that is threatened. I must accept I have no influence over it. I'm a woman of my time, am only part of the present and in the way I have lived and made decisions I have sown seed for better or worse, quite unaware often what I was doing; and I must live with that.

63: Farewell, Hellgard

When I open this window a comforting breeze of affection meets me. The scenes show the farewell party Ida organized for me, with the help of friends, on 25th June, 1972. It also reveals the decisions and weeks that led up to it. Considering the number of guests that were there it must be called a party, but it had the quality of table fellowship.

What led up to this? When I realized that a move had to be made if the family, especially our parents, were to find a way out of a deadlock situation, I had to take it in hand, and I did. I applied for a post in four different schools; one in Wuppertal, two in Essen and one in Meinerzhagen. A positive reply came from all four schools. That was very encouraging, but I did not realize that a school in Germany could need an English teacher, the headmaster might be interested in the appointment of a particular applicant, but it was the school authorities of the state, e.g. Bavaria or Niedersachsen – for me it was the department of education in Düsseldorf – that actually employed and paid the teachers, and therefore made the decision to which school they would be allocated. As all this had to be learnt gradually through correspondence, it took time till I found my way through a jungle of regulations and bureaucracy.

In the meantime, Father had given in his notice and the date of departure for him and our mother would be August. The best opportunity for the container to come for our belongings was during my Easter holidays. Mother did great packing for weeks and decided very few essentials would stay in the Hill House; and she had arranged who could and would like to take over these belongings when they left. It was admirable, the way our parents, coming up to 70, accepted quite incredible conditions for several months without a complaint. The day when the ‘Bell’ container came up the Ballard Road catapulted us into the reality of the times – our belongings went into it, and Mother and I flew to Düsseldorf that evening. The date of the arrival of the container in Wuppertal was the Friday of the following week and we had to be there to receive it. I had endless interviews and appointments lined up in the meantime, including a medical check-up with the board of health in Wuppertal, and we just had the week. It was a nightmare. Miraculously, the container arrived very early in the morning on the Friday, and my aunt had got in contact with four additional helpers to transport everything up two flights of stairs to our parents’ new flat, including the piano. Mother had rented the flat from January 1st, 1972.

After the interviews I for myself decided on the school in Wuppertal. It was not my first choice, but the only sensible decision. If I wanted to be in Wuppertal to support my parents when they needed help, it wasn’t logical to work in a town an hour’s drive away. The Department of Education in Düsseldorf had indicated that I would probably get the desired post – nothing in writing, a most shaky affair. It was good that the headmaster was keen for me to start.

The day after the container arrived, Mother and I flew to Dublin, and Father collected Mother there. For me, the summer term would start after the weekend and anyway there was no bed for me in the Hill House anymore. I wouldn’t see



Tom Cullen – The Merchants' Arch (Hellgard's painting)

Miltown Malbay again till July 1973 when friends took me down and I had a visit of a few hours.

The summer term in Wesley was always short. The school term in Wuppertal would start very early that year, August 7th, so I would have to leave for Wuppertal immediately after the staff meeting at the end of June. It was very busy, but not a sad term. On the one hand I was constantly concerned and busy with arrangements and decisions and correspondence dealing with the move. On the other hand, it was quite a normal term, teaching, duty, taking hockey teams to matches. I only survived because I concentrated on each individual day. The kindness of more and more people arriving with beautiful gifts for my new life, and, above all, showing great affection, was overwhelming. Somehow that carried me through these difficult weeks. The staff and pupils had collected money for a present for me, and Madeleine was to choose the gift. As it was a considerable amount of money, she asked me what I would like. My choice was six Waterford wine glasses, with the Lismore Cut. It was not always possible to get a particular cut at a particular time and Lismore was not available just then. Madeleine was a practical woman, so was I, and it was decided that I would actually buy the glasses and no one needed to know. I could decide more easily what glasses I would like when I knew what was available. It was an investment, after all.

Mother came up for a weekend in May, as some decisions still had to be taken, arrangements made. Quite early on the Saturday morning we drove to Dún Laoghaire to a top-quality gift shop that always stocked a large selection of Waterford Glass. On our way downstairs to the showrooms, I spotted large oil paintings of Irish places and scenes, many in Dublin. One just hit my eye and it was love at first sight. The artist Tom Cullen was unknown to me. We were told that he was a very talented young artist, who owned or worked in a butcher's shop not far from Ailesbury Gardens where Dodie and her mother lived. 'My' painting showed the Archway on the quays, looking from Ha'penny Bridge up towards Christ Church Cathedral, now Temple Bar, a very modern up-beat part of Dublin, and the painting belonged to a group of Dublin scenes that would be changed in the immediate future, a historical set, so to speak. I loved everything about it, also the fact that it depicted a rainy day. What absolutely fascinated me was that when I went close up to it, the stonework was just brown. As soon as I stood back, the individual stone blocks were as clear as in a photograph and I could have placed my fingers in the crevices. Nothing could hold me back. I couldn't have left it there. I added a very few pounds and bought it, a bit nervous how Madeleine would react!

In the meantime, Mother spotted another painting, very unusual, as it was very realistic in its style: in the foreground, a row of cottages, a pier, some small boats, a cobbled path which looked wet. The background is painted in a very modern style, the hills only indicated without any colour or shapes, just outline filled in with a light beige. The sun is special. It seems to be shining through a slight mist. It is surrounded by several very thin black lines, forming an irregular circle. Mother decided this was a perfect present for Henner from his parents and bought it.



Tom Cullen – The Dingle painting (Henner's painting)

My parents took back a watercolour of Rossnowlagh Beach in Donegal, so we all had a painting. I had a chance to buy it from someone very soon afterwards and my parents were delighted. The sea, the beach, the sand hills were beautifully painted, but what pleased my parents most was that it resembled Spanish Point so much. These paintings shared our lives now and were important companions.

Mr. Myles retired in 1972 and the arts teacher I liked very much was also leaving for family reasons. The speeches and presentations took place just before the school closed for the summer holidays. Only the pupils doing the Intermediate and Leaving Certificate examinations were on the premises, the boarders doing exams still in the Houses.

That event was a most emotional presentation for me. I was so overcome that I was literally speechless. Although well aware that Mr. Myles – and others – were disappointed with my speech, there was nothing I could do about it. It seemed as if my life stood still for a moment while life around me continued. In a frozen state I did say a few words, thanked everyone, kept within the limits of good manners, but I wasn't able to say what I would like to have said or what I would have considered as appropriate. Rosleven training in self-control proved to be a real bonus.

The painting was greatly admired, except by Mr. Myles. He had reservations about Madeleine's choice of a gift. 'One never chooses a painting for another person. It has to be a personal decision'. I replied: 'Mr. Myles, the person who bought that painting knew exactly what I wanted'!

As mistress in charge of girls I worked closely with the girl prefects and Head Boy or Head Girl and sometimes this overlapped with the boy Prefects too. Arnie worked likewise. For the school year of 1972, Wesley had a Head Boy. He and one of the boy Prefects completely unexpectedly invited me to a play in the Abbey Theatre. They had chosen a day when they had finished their exams, but exams in

other subjects were still going on. With their invitation they wanted to thank me and wish me well, they said.

They may both have been 17, but anyway one of them had a driving license and I was collected in the family car. The Irish play was lovely and the whole evening a real treat. They weren't only perfect gentlemen there, they also insisted on taking me out to a small meal afterwards – quite an unforgettable invitation!

They both made their way in the adult world as highly qualified, accomplished and influential men in their careers. Although I saw one of them only once or twice after that evening, I know and hear that both have retained and developed the wonderful elements of their characters as well. I feel very honoured to have been taken on such an outing by them. The 'portraits' of these two young men hang in my personal gallery of prime people and prime memories.

The final day was getting very close. On June 24th the staff meetings took place. All the weeks and days of the summer term I was very receptive emotionally but I had no time to look beyond each single day. The demands on me time wise and emotionally were immense. Ida had told me some weeks earlier that she was having a few people round on Saturday evening, 25th June, so I should keep that evening free. I didn't really have time to think about it too much, as getting all my belongings into some sort of transportable luggage on a plane was an undertaking. Besides, I had insisted on taking the two Tom Cullen paintings, so my parents would only have to take the smaller watercolour on board their plane. My booking for the flight to Düsseldorf was Monday morning, 27th June 1972.

The party was taking place in Janet's flat. She had kindly offered the hospitality as that weekend No. 5 Sydenham Road was a place of packing in progress. I hadn't been involved in the preparations of the party at all, as I had no time, and I was a guest anyway, I was told. Normally Ida and I were a good team preparing for a party; this time I had no idea what few people were coming. When asked by Ida if there was anyone special that she could invite, I suggested Albert Bradshaw, with whom we all had spent such wonderful years in Singers. After college I seldom had a chance to see him and he didn't even know I was leaving Dublin.

On Saturday 25th Ida got up very early in the morning: the middle of the night would be more correct! She rushed off to the fish market and came back to Sydenham Road before the crack of dawn with two large magnificent fresh salmon which she steamed immediately. I got up and we had an early breakfast after which the fish was ready and it was then placed on the kitchen table to cool off. (The *few* people being asked around were not going to get a glass of wine, some chips and a few peanuts, I gathered.) Ida had opened the front door (and entrance to the flat) to let the smell of the steaming fish out. This smell attracted and brought in two large cats that suddenly appeared at the kitchen table, about to jump up and feast on the salmon. Ida turned into a roaring tornado, grabbed the two halves of grapefruit skins still lying there from our breakfast. The cats ran but were overtaken by the two flying grapefruit skins that Ida had thrown after them before she shut the door. What a fantastic scene: A roaring defender of salmon, two hungry cats, and flying grapefruit skins!

We didn't see much of each other that day as both of us had to try to work our way through the individual lists of things that had to be done. When I arrived at Janet's flat, I couldn't believe my eyes. The main room, quite large, was completely empty except for just very few chairs round the edge for people who might want to rest their legs. How they managed to get all the furniture into her bedroom and shut the door was a miracle. (Perfect planning – Janet was going to sleep in her parents' house that night)

The buffet set out in the kitchen was exquisite. Ida and I had always gone to a lot of trouble preparing food for a party but this was different. Besides the two salmon and other delicacies, salads, desserts, Ida had also boiled a cured tongue which she always skinned immediately once it was cooked and pressed it into a Christmas pudding bowl. When it was cold it had set into a solid round, perfect for slicing, very professional. This buffet honoured a really special occasion. No doubt many friends helped but it was Ida who had taken on the responsibility and accomplished it.

When I arrived, many guests were already there, but more and more came: all the close friends, especially from school, were there, even Jimmy Agnew and Jim Ryan and their wives came, neither teaching in Wesley any more in 1972. Gertrude was there, of course, but Ida had remembered others too, and had even thought of inviting Geraldine Collins, a young Mercy nun from Ennis. We both grew up in Spanish Point and we spent one year together at the Convent of Mercy school. Her surprise visit was just lovely and completely unexpected.

I was overwhelmed by the occasion. Ida, supported by a friend, gave all those present a chance to show their affection for me, which I had not been aware of to that extent. (And there were over sixty guests! Janet's flat was on the first floor and I remember standing on the stairs leading down to the front door talking to a larger group.) Considering the number of people there it was a 'party', but it had all the qualities of table fellowship as it was so personal. That evening was a milestone in my life. Affection makes people strong, and on this occasion, it was support that made me strong for a change in life I was prepared for. Yet I couldn't have imagined its implications or dimensions. A foundation was also laid that day on which a bridge would develop for me between two different worlds. And for my friends too, in a lesser sense?

My parents were up for the weekend and on Sunday my father carefully and professionally packed the paintings: one I call the 'Dingle' painting for Henner, and the 'Archway' one for me. Meanwhile Mother and I were trying to find reasonable solutions for all my belongings, with an allowance of 20kg. Besides the normal things like my clothes there were so many beautiful presents: the Revelry coffee-pot to go with my mocca cup set, Irish linen, a Belleek china vase, Waterford glass vases, another small dish, a sketch of T.C.D. Front Gate, just to name a few. Meanwhile, more friends dropped in for a quick visit, e.g. Gypsy, Ida's cousin, who was very taken by the way Father was packing the paintings. He was an expert. Later she often referred to this.

A friend from college days was taking the same flight to Düsseldorf that day which helped in many ways: in fact I wouldn't have coped without him. He was due to start at the Irish Embassy in Bonn. When he asked me what he could do I

asked him to reconsider his offer, as he might be ashamed of my getting on to the plane with so many bits and pieces, especially as he had a diplomat's passport. I warned him it might turn into a happening. (I was thinking of the paintings.) He said he was ready for anything and set off to the check-in that day with nothing but his case, and his boarding card, till he was loaded with my belongings!



Hellgard at the airport, 27 June 1972: (above) with her parents and 'the diplomat' (3rd from left), who was Maurice Reid, on his way to Bonn to be 3rd Secretary; and (below) in animated conversation with Dodie.



Very close friends brought me to the airport. I can't remember if my parents were there.¹ Probably they drove home on Sunday evening because Father had to be in the factory on the Monday. In 1972 I had a very slight chance of getting away with what was in store for one very unfortunate member of the Aer Lingus crew. Nowadays they wouldn't even let me get within walking distance of the terminal building with this menagerie. Four friends armed themselves with one of my carrier bags each and dispersed a bit in the area of the check-in desks. My experience was that women were generally stricter, keeping to the rules, so I took a good look at the male selection beside the conveyor belts and chose one man who didn't look to me particularly ambitious, and the helpful diplomat just let me get on with it, merely following behind with his one case. My case was a few kilos over the 20kg mark, but not too many, and the official kindly let it pass. In regard to the paintings he stated they would not go with the luggage. My only chance to take them to Germany was on board the plane but he could make no promises they would be accepted on board. (That has changed since then.) Well, Hellgard, keep up the pressure, I decided!

Once we had our boarding cards it was time to say goodbye. The worry of getting my belongings on to the plane was like an anaesthetic, obliterating most of my emotional awareness, which was good. The four bag carriers handed over two bags to the diplomat, I took the other two. I handed him 'Dingle' while I carried my 'Archway' leading the way up the gangway. The Aer Lingus stewardess greeted us with a very welcoming 'Céad Míle Fáilte' while I had a very quick look round the door and luckily spotted a place for the first painting. Her smile evaporated instantly when she became aware of the painting, but relaxed slightly when I suggested a suitable place for it and had to admit it wouldn't be in the way. At this point I reached back to take the larger 'Dingle' painting from the diplomat and posed the question: 'Now, where could this go?'

The air hostess remained civil but only just. 'In no way is that second painting coming on board'. This would be the final battle and it would decide if I would win the war! 'I am extremely sorry to put you to so much trouble and inconvenience. I understand your predicament and sincerely wish to apologize. My side of the story is also difficult. With a one-way ticket I'm leaving Ireland for good. I can't post the paintings. At check-in they refused to accept them with the

¹ While Hellgard's recall of people and events has impressed the Editors as strong, vivid, and generally reliable, it falls here to mention the exception that proves the rule. Hellgard writes that she does not remember whether her parents were at the airport to see her off. That they were in fact there is vouched by a photograph (reproduced on the previous page) showing her conversing with them at the airport in the company of the 'Diplomat'. She discovered the photograph only after she had written this section, so the matter is of small consequence. Her concern that her father might have had to be home to open the factory ranks as an authentic memory of a train of thought.

A greater curiosity is that Hellgard's very precise dating of her return to Germany is not supported by the calendar. She wrote that her flight to Düsseldorf was on Monday 27th June, that the going-away party organised by Ida took place on Saturday 25th, and that the final staff meeting at Wesley was held on the 24th. The problem with this dating is that in 1972 the 24th June was a Saturday, the 25th a Sunday, and the 27th a Tuesday. 1972 was a leap year, and it is posited that Hellgard might have constructed her chronology by reference to unsafe inferences from a diary or calendar for the preceding year. Were the 27th a date that stuck in her memory, it was the date not of her departure from Ireland, but of the day she woke up in Germany.

luggage. I can't attach them to the bottom of the plane and I can't throw them across, so they will both have to come. I'll hold this painting on my lap for the course of the flight.' She instructed me that my suggestion would not comply with safety regulations. That statement helped me to get 'a foot in the door' in the argument. It wasn't a comfortable conversation after that but I admit she was obliging and finally found a solution where the blessed picture could be placed. She had an iron expression on her face! Who could blame her!

The diplomat and I found places for the four carrier bags and took to our seats with a sigh of relief, and soon we were flying over the beaches nearby and over the Irish Sea on our way to Düsseldorf. I would never have coped without the diplomat's help. It felt good not to be alone on this flight, a perfect gentleman sitting beside me, bless him.

In Düsseldorf we left the plane as we had boarded it, again sharing the load, but with a sense of relief. Near the conveyor-belt a customs official approached me unasked with a trolley, took the paintings and the four bags, and placed them inside, waited till my case came, and took it too. There was no room for the diplomat's case, but he, having a diplomat's passport, didn't need to approach the customs for any reason. I was being brought with my two paintings to another customs official ready for inspection. He took down details in turn: artist, approximate date of production, scenes, type of painting, e.g. oil or watercolour, etc. He didn't unpack them then. The fact that I had the bills was of great importance. It was obvious they weren't old masterpieces! The duty wasn't extreme, but not trivial either. He didn't ask me to open the case or unpack the four bags! With all the expensive gifts, lots of tea, that would have been a catastrophe.

When we came into the visitors' area a friend was waiting for the diplomat, and Henner was waiting for me. We introduced each other, and then he and his friend set off for Bonn, and Henner and I started for Wuppertal. It was a very hot day and I was quite unsuitably dressed in a light tweed suit! There was so much to be learnt.

Henner was always very considerate, but he had also gone through this himself. He didn't drive on to the Autobahn which would have meant reaching Wuppertal in less than an hour. Instead, he drove me through Ratingen, and from there on a lovely country road, along vegetable and fruit farms, lots of trees on either side and huge, yellow rape fields, all in full bloom. He stopped at a typical inn on the way, a slated house, with a rustic character inside. He was giving my soul a little more time to catch up: therefore he invited me for lunch and I was very grateful. (I think the only other time we ever stopped for a meal on this short journey was when we collected our parents when they arrived on August 16th, and for the same reason.) On the 27th of June he collected me during his rest period, as he was on night duty, so I appreciated everything all the more.

In Ronsdorf, my aunt and uncle were waiting with coffee. My aunt had bought a really lovely bunch of roses which were to welcome me – *Lachsrosen* – i.e., roses the colour of salmon. They did me good and have not been forgotten. In the evening we briefly phoned the Hill House to tell our parents that I had landed safely in Wuppertal, and that Henner had collected me, paintings and all. Henner

was able to tell them how thrilled he was with his 'Dingle' painting! He had made up a bed for me on the couch in his flat, and shortly afterwards he drove off to Essen for night duty. I went to bed and fell into an exhausted sleep.

The 28th June started early. My aunt had to be off to work at 7 a.m. and shortly afterwards Henner arrived back from his night duty in Essen. We had breakfast, then Henner went to bed, and I started my new life. First of all, I had to make an appointment with the school secretary, as I didn't yet have a contract! Then I had to start looking for a flat, so newspapers had to be bought. I was looked after in regard to meals by my aunt, so I concentrated on my chores, went to the post office to get stamps, wrote letters home, to Ida and the closest friends, also to the diplomat who had given me his address in Bonn-Mehlem. They were sincere letters of thanks and gratitude. With a small selection of local newspapers, I informed myself about available flats, sizes and prices and made the first enquiries.

Somehow, I was starting to look for a new way in (for me) a strange world, getting through a jungle of problems with endless trust and energy, still embraced by all the kindness and affection shown to me by real friends and this incredible send-off.





Hellgard in April 1972

[Photo: Lorna]

APPENDIX:

Report of the stone laying ceremony at the new Wesley College
on Founders' Day, 1967,

and the Programme for the Official Opening on 7 June 1969

Irish Independent, Tuesday, October 3, 1967 3

Memorial unveiled

A MEMORIAL STONE to mark the beginning of work on the £750,000 Wesley College at Ludford Park, Dundrum, which will have accommodation for 640 pupils, was unveiled by the chairman of the Board of Governors, Rev. Dr. Albert Holland.

The new school, which will be opened in June 1969, will include an assembly building, consisting of an assembly hall, a small hall for minor concerts, musical groups and dramatics; a dining hall to seat 300, administration offices, library, music rooms; a classroom block with 19 rooms; cloakrooms and toilets; a science block of four laboratories; a lecture and demonstration theatre; arts and crafts rooms; a geography room; separate woodwork and metalwork shops; a gymnasium and site for a future swimming pool; and dormitory blocks for boys and girls.

The school was founded on October 1, 1845, with an enrolment of three boarders and nine day boys in 79 St. Stephen's Green, and became co-educational in 1911. It now has 150 boarders. There are more than 500 pupils in the existing school at St. Stephen's Green.

The cost of the new buildings which will centralise activities, will be met by the sale of the older properties in the city, a substantial capital grant from the Minister for Education—70 per cent of the parts of the scheme devoted to teaching—and from voluntary subscription.

The architects are Michael Scott and Partners, Dublin, and the builders are Messrs. G. and T. Crampton, Ltd.



Rev. Dr. Albert Holland, chairman of the Board of Governors of Wesley College, unveiling a memorial stone to mark the beginning of work on the new college buildings at Ludford Park, Dundrum. Also pictured are: Rev. Gerald Myles, principal, and Rev. W. Johnstone Hunter, vice-chairman, Board of Governors.

From *The Irish Independent*, 3 October 1967



WESLEY COLLEGE, DUBLIN

Opening and Dedication of New Campus

at

LUDFORD PARK, DUNDRUM

at 3.00 p.m. on Saturday, 7th June, 1969

in the presence of

The President of Ireland, Mr. Eamonn de Valera

Chairman

REV. ALBERT HOLLAND, D.D.
Chairman of the Board of Governors

THE MINISTER FOR EDUCATION, MR. BRIAN LENIHAN, T.D.
will open the Buildings.

THE PRESIDENT OF THE METHODIST CHURCH IN IRELAND,
THE REVEREND GERALD MYLES, M.A., PRINCIPAL OF THE
COLLEGE, ACCOMPANIED BY :—HIS GRACE THE ARCHBISHOP
OF DUBLIN, THE MOST REVEREND G. O. SIMMS, PH.D., D.D.
AND THE MODERATOR OF THE PRESBYTERY OF DUBLIN AND
MUNSTER, THE REVEREND WILLIAM A. MORAN, B.A. will
dedicate the Buildings.

OPENING CEREMONY

The Platform Party will assemble at the Main Door.

The Chairman will welcome the President of Ireland and the Minister for Education and invite the Minister to open the buildings.

The Party will proceed to the Platform.

THE MINISTER.

THE CHAIRMAN.

ORDER OF SERVICE OF DEDICATION

THE FOUNDERS' HYMN

Come, Father, Son and Holy Ghost,
To whom we for our children cry;
The good desired and wanted most,
Out of Thy richest grace supply;
The sacred discipline be given,
To train and bring them up for heaven.

Error and ignorance remove,
Their blindness both of heart and mind;
Give them the wisdom from above,
Spotless, and peaceable, and kind;
In knowledge pure their minds renew,
And store with thoughts divinely true.

Learning's redundant part and vain
Be here cut off, and cast aside;
But let them, Lord, the substance gain,
In every solid truth abide;
Swiftly acquire, and ne'er forgo,
The knowledge fit for man to know.

Unite the pair so long disjoin'd,
Knowledge and vital Piety;
Learning and Holiness combined,
And Truth and Love let all men see
In those whom up to thee we give,
Thine, wholly thine, to die and live.

Father, accept them through thy Son,
And ever by thy Spirit guide!
Thy wisdom in their lives be shown,
Thy name confess'd and glorified;
Thy power and love diffused abroad,
Till all the earth is fill'd with God.

Charles Wesley, 1707-88.

The Chairman shall say:

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.

The People: Amen.

The Chairman: Let us pray.

Chairman and people: General Thanksgiving.

Almighty God, Father of all mercies, We Thine unworthy servants Do give Thee most humble and hearty thanks For all Thy goodness and loving-kindness to us, and to all men: We bless Thee for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life: But above all, for Thine inestimable love In the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ: For the means of grace, and for the hope of glory.

And, we beseech Thee, give us that due sense of all Thy mercies, That our hearts may be unfeignedly thankful, And that we shew forth Thy praise, Not only with our lips, but in our lives: By giving up ourselves to Thy service, And by walking before Thee in holiness and righteousness all our days; through Jesus Christ our Lord, To Whom with Thee and the Holy Ghost Be all honour and glory, World without end. Amen.

THE DEDICATION.

President: Believing that God through the Holy Spirit has guided our fathers in the founding of our school, and ourselves in the renewal of it we joyfully dedicate it to His service.

To the Glory of God and in the service of our city and nation.

People: We dedicate this school.

President: For the staff and children who live and learn in these buildings and fields, that they may know Christ in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

People: We dedicate this school.

President: For the advancement of the promise that we should have dominion over the earth and subdue it.

People: We dedicate this school.

President: For the mastery of the Spirit over the flesh, for the overcoming of evil with good.

People: We dedicate this school.

President: For the promotion of the arts: that we may learn that beauty is truth and truth beauty.

People: We dedicate this school.

President: For admonishing the disorderly, encouraging the fainthearted, supporting the weak, and patience towards all.

People: We dedicate this school.

President: For the growth of justice and equity in peace, in our homes, our city, country and among the nations.

People: We dedicate this school.

President: That in all things Jesus Christ our Lord may have the pre-eminence.

People: We dedicate this school.

President: Accept, O Lord, this service at our hands, and bless it with such success as may most tend to Thy glory and the salvation of Thy People; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

People: Amen.

THE SCRIPTURE: Romans 12, 1-12—The Moderator.

THE PRAYERS—The Archbishop of Dublin.

Archbishop: Almighty God, of Whose only gift cometh wisdom and understanding: we beseech Thee with Thy gracious favour to behold the universities, colleges and schools of our country, that knowledge may be increased among us, and all good learning flourish and abound. Bless all who teach and all who learn; and grant that in humility of heart they may ever look unto Thee, Who art the fountain of all wisdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Almighty and merciful God, Who in days of old didst give to this land the benediction of Thy holy Church; withdraw not, we pray Thee, Thy favour from us, but so correct what is amiss and supply what is lacking that we may more and more bring forth fruit to Thy glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

We give Thee thanks, Almighty and most merciful Father, for all those who have served this College faithfully in the years that are gone. We thank Thee for all friends and benefactors, for the generosity of those who have given freely of their substance, for the wisdom of those who have led by their counsel, and we further praise Thee for all those who have gone forth from this School and by their lives and works have given glory to Thee and service to mankind; humbly beseeching Thee that we and those who shall come after us may have such grace that in our turn we may prove worthy of so great a heritage: and this we ask in the Name of Thy Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Archbishop and People together:

I bind unto myself to-day
 The Power of God to hold and lead,
 His Eye to watch, His Might to stay,
 His Ear to hearken to my need.
 The Wisdom of my God to teach,
 His Hand to guide, His Shield to ward;
 The Word of God to give me speech,
 His Heavenly Host to be my guard.

ADDRESS: The President.

THE COLLEGE HYMN

Lord of Light! look down upon us,
Hearken as we cry to Thee;
Lighten thou our minds and lead us,
Thine now to be.

Lord of Life, the Bounteous Giver!
Evermore our portion be;
Guide our feet thro' all life's pathway
Nearer to Thee.

Lord of Love! who only knowest
All the years that are to be;
Keep us pure amid temptation
Looking to Thee.

When from "Wesley" far we scatter,
Servants true for Thee to be,
Home at last, oh safely bring us
Father to Thee.

James Grubb, 1866-1937

BENEDICTION—The President.

THE NATIONAL ANTHEM.

THE BUILDINGS

1. **THE ASSEMBLY BLOCK.** Ground floor : Administrative Offices, Kitchen, Dining Hall, Assembly Hall, Minor Hall, Library, Study Rooms, Board Room (The Irwin Room), Home Economics Kitchen, Music Rooms, Staff Room, Prefect's Room, Ladies' Sitting Room.
Basement. Kitchen stores and preparation, Boiler Room, Workshop, Kitchen-staff Room, Staff Cloaks and Toilets, oil and water storage.
2. **THE CLASSROOM BLOCK.** Ground floor: Cloaks and Toilets, Medical Centre, Book stores, Tuck shop.
First Floor. 19 classrooms.
3. **SCIENCE BLOCK.** Ground Floor: Four science laboratories, two preparation rooms, Lecture/Demonstration Theatre, Science Library, Dark Room, Plant Room, Two Art Rooms, Geography Room.
4. **SPORTS CENTRE.** Gymnasium, Changing Rooms, Showers and Toilets, Open-air heated swimming pool.
5. & 6. **EMBURY HOUSE AND WESLEY HOUSE:** Boys' and Girls' Residences. Ground Floor: Flat for Head of House, Six Staff Bedsitters, Four Prefects' Bedsitters for two, Three Senior House Rooms, Junior House Room, Reception Room, Boot and Cloakroom. First Floor: Junior Dormitory for 24, Three Senior Dormitories for 88, Toilets and Bathrooms.
7. **LUDFORD HOUSE:** The Principal's Residence, Sick Quarters, Staff Bedsitters.

Architects - - - Michael Scott and Partners
Structural Consultants - Ove Arup and Partners
Mechanical Consultants Robert Jacob and Partners
Quantity Surveyors - Patterson and Kempster
Builders - - - G. and T. Crampton, Ltd.

Part VIII:
No Return Home

Germany post-1972
and
Touring in the West of Ireland
before and after 1972



Christ Church, Spanish Point
Hellgard's spiritual home

(Photograph: Patrick Comerford, 2021)



Hellgard at school in Wuppertal, date unknown.
The big wickerwork basket features in the tale below.

64: Guten Morgen, Frau Leckebusch

July 1972 was one of the peaks in my often very varied and busy life. In the midst of it all was the oasis of peace and happiness when Ida asked me to join her, Maureen, Ernie and a group of Wesley pupils who were visiting the Rhineland and staying in a hotel on the way up to the Drachenfels. That highlight must be given a special mention at a later stage.

Henner was still living in the flat that our parents had rented, although he had already rented a flat on the first floor, a flat that had become vacant. The reason was that Henner had designed and built a bathroom for my parents. He had to choose the room nearest to the water pipes and the drains and yet leave enough space for a small bedroom, and a tiny hall from which doors led into the bedroom and one to the bathroom. He did it all himself and had made a wonderful success of it. Our great-great-grandfather had been quite ahead of his time when he had a toilet built on every storey; but bathrooms were dreams of the future for ordinary, middle-class people.

When I arrived, he started to strip off the wallpaper of this new small bedroom, and I helped with that as well as I could.

Meanwhile I had contacted a family about a flat. They were offering two lovely, large rooms on the first floor of their family house. There was an old, large garden with fruit trees and flowers and benches to sit outside in the summer. The house, like most of the houses in the street, was from the early twentieth century and had survived the war. All the houses were very well kept. A 93-year-old man lived there with two of his three daughters: one a teacher, due to retire soon, the other, a few years younger, an accountant in the Evangelische Kirche (Evangelical Church). As she occasionally worked in Düsseldorf, but normally in Darmstadt near Frankfurt, it was obvious what an important and responsible post she held. The eldest sister, a widow with two grown-up daughters, lived in Solingen. (She came every Tuesday, filled the house with the smell of freshly baked cake and lovely meals that were being prepared. In the summer she bottled fruit out of the garden, and made jam. In the afternoon Herr Zippmann's two friends came to play scrabble and enjoy Kaffee and the freshly baked cake. These friends were slightly younger than Herr Zippmann, but they were a great Tuesday trio!)

The house was situated in a quiet street in Elberfeld, a wide street with beautiful trees growing on either side. I immediately took to the flat, the area, and the old man and his daughters, and I was really thrilled to see the little balcony, big enough for a small table and chairs. The rooms got sunlight all day, but in summer the trees gave the necessary shade.

There was a small bathroom, but the kitchenette was a tiny space part separated from the bathroom by a very narrow wall and a door. This 'kitchen' would not have been suitable for anyone who wasn't particularly flexible, and not used to making the best of limited circumstances, but I knew I would cope. The rent was reasonable, the price for heating far too little really. I loved the place, yet I turned it down.

My furniture consisted of a bed, one chair, two very small, neat armchairs and a coffee table, very few bits and pieces. I would be earning 1,000 DM

(deutschmarks) a month which wasn't a lavish income and my savings from Ireland that were due to arrive were limited. After all, I had repaid two bursaries too. I was sure I wouldn't be able to furnish two large rooms at the beginning.

Being a great believer in my intuition which just said: 'Wait', I ceased to look for a flat for the moment. My aunt and uncle felt I was silly and irresponsible, kept prompting me to look for another flat, but I didn't. (Remember that stubborn streak?) Very early, one beautiful summer's morning, my aunt's phone rang. She had just left for work before 7 a.m., and I had opened all the windows and was preparing breakfast for my uncle, and my brother who was due to arrive back from night duty in Essen, and myself. Only faintly apologizing for phoning so early – Frau Zippmann was due to leave for Darmstadt – she wanted to know if I would reconsider my decision and take the flat. They would really like me to move in and would not expect me to furnish the second room. They would only expect me to put up curtains, so that no one from the road would see there was an empty room in their house. I agreed at once and we decided I would come on the following Saturday morning at 9 a.m. – they were always early birds! – and we would sign the contract, starting August 1st. I would move in on Saturday the 5th and school would start on Monday the 7th of August.

My mind worked fast now. I would need a wardrobe and a large, solid table to do my schoolwork, do my ironing, eat. The rest could wait. The next day I took an early bus to Barmen to find my way round the furniture stores, an eagle eye out for a table. I worked my way through the stores in Barmen leading on to Elberfeld, about five miles, and finally landed at a huge store that had just opened – Westmöbel – and went in to look around. Almost immediately I landed in front of their special opening offer, just for that week; a dining room consisting of an oversized table, which could be extended twice, four chairs, a good-sized sideboard with four doors, and a 2-piece china cabinet: that is, a small, closed cupboard that could stand alone, and the china cabinet that could be placed on top of the small closed cupboard, but it could also be placed on the sideboard. The wood was oak, and but not the 'cold' variety. The total price was 840 DM. (The price for wooden tables just on their own that I had seen did not cost much less.) Sideboards were not yet popular in Germany at that time, and it was definitely what I liked. The special offer would only continue till the Saturday and I didn't have 840 DM just then.

I had spotted in passing a lovely cafe opposite Westmöbel, and decided to think it over while I had a coffee. It was 2 p.m. and a break would be good. I ordered a 'Kännchen' – two cups – and treated myself to a piece of German baked cheese cake and that worked wonders. Having enjoyed the delicious break, I returned to the shop, paid a deposit of 100 DM, signed the contract and said I would return on Saturday with the remaining 740 DM. No problem. I got on the bus to Ronsdorf and I had the problem! Where would I get 740 DM by Saturday?

The bus arrived in Ronsdorf and I started to walk back to 'Am Kraftwerk 3'. On my way I saw a 'Deutsche Bank' and decided this bank would be as good as any; went in, stopped at a counter where an elderly assistant asked if he could help me; and I said what I really needed was a loan of 1,000 DM and I could explain why. The efficient man took it in his stride, listened to my story, asked some

questions. I produced my passport, gave my aunt's name and address. (She had lived there all her life.) I named the school where I was due to start on August 7th, had to admit I had no contract yet, no salary proof. However, I had been worked into the timetable – he could phone the school. I had little else to offer than my person and my story about the special offer of furniture that I needed for my new flat as from August 1st. He said he would risk giving me the loan of 1,000 DM, trusting my story and his intuition. I signed a form promising to repay the sum in six instalments as from September 1st. My first salary would be due on August 15th. I walked out with 1,000 DM and he had a new customer for his bank!

When Henner came home from duty the next morning (I kept it to myself before he went off to work) I told him about the furniture and that I had walked into a strange bank and had come out with 1,000 DM. He said this was ridiculous and why hadn't I asked him? Furthermore, he didn't expect the furniture to be a good investment for a mere 840 DM. At least he did remark that only I would go into a strange bank with such a request and come out with the 1,000 DM! He insisted he would want to inspect the furniture that Saturday before I spent the other 740 DM. I decided a morning in Wuppertal with him would be very pleasant and ignored his lack of confidence in my decision. We would meet in town as I had that early appointment with the Zippmann family to finalize the flat arrangements.

The Zippmanns had sent me off to Elberfeld with a huge bunch of flowers from their garden – large white daisies and simple but beautiful red garden roses – I was equipped for an occasion! Henner admitted that the furniture was lovely and an incredible offer. With that I asked the man I was dealing with if I could buy two extra chairs – the table definitely needed six chairs. Yes, I could, but they were not part of the special offer. One would cost 170 DM – two 340, naturally. I knew I would need them and had priced good chairs on my furniture run-around. I bought them too, and have congratulated myself on that wise decision on numerous occasions. Henner felt 340 DM in relation to 840 DM for the whole dining-room furniture outrageous and I think he decided I would need a lot of looking after! To calm his worries, I invited him to Kaffee and cheesecake in that same café and he started to relax. It was a most pleasant, mutual outing in Germany for the two of us – and I had a date for the delivery of my new furniture – August 4th.

Meanwhile we were making progress with the situation of the flats in Ronsdorf. We redecorated the future kitchens for our parents, and Henner tiled parts of the walls too. At best I was training to become a better handywoman, but Henner said I was making progress! All the furniture and boxes out of the container were stored almost to the ceiling in what was to be our parents' sitting room. Getting at the kitchen furniture was a challenge but eventually that worked and the kitchen upstairs was beginning to look quite well. There was no cooker, as our parents had kept that in the Hill House and it was passed on to neighbours later. Mother was to choose the cooker herself, and she would be able to use the breakfast cooker for a few days.



[above] Hanni and Elizabetha Zippmann with Ida in the Worringerstrasse, probably in 1973
[below] Ida, Maureen Hellgard, and Janet in the Worringerstrasse, Easter 1973



In August we tackled the bedroom for our parents, i.e. redecorated it, put down a carpet, and once we had laid our hands on the bedroom furniture, that room was more or less ready for them; and then the last room downstairs was tackled before August 19th. When our parents arrived, there was food in the fridge, also a cooked meal for the next day, and a bunch of flowers on their kitchen table, and made-up beds – no sitting room though. Henner was installed in his flat.

I had ordered a small van for my belongings to be brought to the Worringerstrasse. There wasn't much, and the storage sitting-room was less crammed now which helped when we got the bits and pieces. My new dining-room furniture came very punctually on August 4th and the sitting room with balcony, the two small armchairs and coffee table in one corner, the beautiful Tom Cullen painting on the wall, looked quite homely already. The Zippmanns were impressed! I had a table to work at and was as ready for my new school life as I could be in the circumstances. I arrived at the Ronsdorf department of the school on Monday morning at 7:30, ready to meet my new class and some of my colleagues. I had a double period with my class. They had to be given all their school books, we had to get to know each other, they got their timetable, and hopefully we would get down to some English. Someone would give me a lift down to Barmen for the staff-meeting at 10:30, the school secretary had told me on the phone.

The class seemed nice. I had been appointed as class teacher for a 2nd year class, age about 11 years in Germany. They were a lively bunch. In the middle desk, front row, sat two boys in traditional short leather trousers and matching, elaborate braces. They were sizing me up, working out how far they could stretch their boundaries with me, but friendly. I had been told that the children in Ronsdorf generally came from middle class families. Their fathers were doctors, solicitors, bank managers, teachers, owners of firms, accountants or insurance people. They had, I was told, above average intelligence and a family focus on achievement. They were pleasant classes to teach, I was told. They also had a bloated self-esteem not always matched by their manners, I found out, but I wasn't their class teacher, and once we got to know each other, quite a bit of that arrogance went straight out the window! And they were indeed very intelligent and a joy to teach.

The children in my class came from a more mixed background. One of the boys in the front, wearing the leather trousers, told me very soon that they had a butcher's shop, very proud to tell me. One day in the first few weeks I was offering some details of *Landeskunde* each lesson, i.e. information about Britain and Ireland. They could choose what they wanted to know, and that day I was asked what sweets I had liked. I thought 'bull's eyes' would interest them. They understood peppermint, I drew the shape of the sweets, black and white stripes on the board. I put the two fingers on my forehead, indicating horns, and for a moment paraded in front of the board, then pointed to my eyes and wrote 'bull's eyes' on the board. They understood.

A few days later the butcher's son appeared with a big plastic bowl with a lid – Tupperware – and beckoned me to open it. (He had remembered not to speak German if he could avoid it.) I did. I stared into five full-sized real bulls' eyes and at that moment thanked Miss Webster and Miss Richardson at Rosleven for my training in self-control! I closed the bowl quickly, thanked him greatly, giving him as much praise as he could understand and he was most satisfied. He had contributed to further information. I bet the eyes were passed round during the break – very interesting specimens!

The boy beside him was the son of the caretaker at the Lutheran Church. As I taught them a lot of English by teaching them English songs or made-up songs with new vocabulary each day, I realized he had an angelic voice and sang heartily.

The headmaster had asked a young teacher, mid-thirties, to assist me a little and keep an eye on me. The headmaster amazed me with his decision. I was well aware what his impression of me was – friendly, conservative, conventional, a bit Victorian, too polite, too meek, unable to assert myself, and, indeed, that is the way most of the new colleagues saw me. This teacher had been very active in the student rebel movement in Frankfurt, known as the ‘68’s, and was still very active he told me! His way of dressing, his hair style, great personal freedom, set him completely apart from all the other, not only male teachers. He was a great teacher (German) and the children worked very hard for him because they loved his classes. One day I passed my class when the door was open and obviously the theme for the day was parsing. There was just one sentence on the board, handwritten but very large: ‘Der Hund hat den Lehrer in den Arsch gebissen’. The dog has bitten the teacher’s a ...’ This was quite avant-garde in 1972! We got on very well and he was a great help to me, like a breath of fresh air too, especially during the short period till headmaster and staff realized their assessment of me as a person was not 100% perfect.

That first day I got a lift down to the staff meeting in his old Renault R4 car. Although I was the second-youngest member of staff, and he also gave two other teachers a lift, he told me to sit in the front. He would take the road to Barmen that passed a look-out spot with a fantastic view of Wuppertal and he wanted me to see as much of Wuppertal as possible. He actually parked the car, and on that beautiful August morning the view was stunning – the narrow, very long Wupper Valley below, the Schwebebahn (suspension railway), steep hills on the other side too, and so many famous buildings clearly identifiable – buildings I had only heard about so far. It was a wonderful start into my new world of German education and the start to a new leaf in my own book of education as well!

Staff meetings show similarities all over the world, no doubt, and I recognized some which reminded me of staff meetings in Wesley College, but not that many. The number of staff was far greater, as it was a school with a larger number of pupils. After the formal preliminaries of cheery good-will greetings, wishing us all a successful and good school year, hopefully well-rested after a good holiday (!), the next important part of the agenda began: the new regulations from Düsseldorf had arrived, were introduced and explained – on all sorts of topics – and when that was over, we were told we were responsible for getting acquainted with them. Endless pages were put in a big red file that was left on an information shelf area. It took me a while fully to realize that a headmaster was in charge, had authority, and was responsible for everything that happened at the school, but that the cradle of authority was in Düsseldorf and that that institution was our ‘boss’. The *Oberschulrat* (Superintendent of Schools), responsible for *Gymnasien* (High Schools) would occasionally appear, or could be contacted in an emergency, but he was really a representative of the *Schulkollegium* (staff).

There were few young teachers, even fewer women staff. Helga, one year younger than me, started teaching there too, but not in Ronsdorf. Herr Fleischer was one year older than me and had started teaching the previous year. Then came the teacher who was to 'keep his eye' on me: he was about 34, I would say. Ditha was there, definitely 34, my brother's age. She also taught English, and was to become such a wonderful friend. Christel was 42, but she was young in her mind and work, and stayed that till she died, and in our friendship, age was never an issue. There was another teacher in Ronsdorf, nearly 50, a neighbour in the Worringerstrasse, and she was lovely. I got on perfectly with about three or four other lady teachers, but I think they felt I had come from another planet.

The majority of the teachers were men. After all, the present headmaster had introduced co-education when he came, and there were still many classes that were boys only classes. These male staff were friendly and pleasant but so different to the male staff in Wesley. Except for Herr Fleischer and my colleague of the '68 group they were all over forty. I don't know if there was even one who hadn't experienced the war. Some had been called to service at 16, and ended up as prisoners of war, fortunate enough to have survived. It was later that I realized that this experience probably followed them like a shadow they couldn't shake off, a shadow that seemed to have swallowed up their youthful spirit. That does not mean they were not dedicated and good teachers, concerned to do their best for young people. It was an experience they had to learn to live with, by whatever method or inherited gift they had at their disposal.

That week went quickly too. My first Sunday in the Worringerstrasse I set off for Bonn early. The diplomat had invited me for the day. Before I left, I congratulated Herr Zippmann on his 93rd birthday. He was all set for the day in his best suit, prepared for the arrival of the Church brass band that was going to play in the garden in his honour that morning. The daughters had made good preparations of food and drink for them, all in the garden with seating for everyone. The day was beautiful. The extended family were invited for Kaffee and Kuchen, served in the lovely garden in the afternoon. It was ideal that I had an invitation for the day, so they were amongst themselves.

The diplomat and I visited the centre of Bonn with the Beethovenhaus and the Rathaus (Town Hall) and then we had lunch near the Markt (market). After that we took the ferry to Königswinter on the other side of the Rhine and walked up to the Drachenfels. It's a beautiful walk and the view from the top of the Rhine and the Siebengebirge is unsurpassed, as so was the weather that day. Later as we walked along the Rhine the footpaths were full of fallen leaves, making a rustling noise as we walked through them. It had been an exceptionally hot and dry summer. Before he brought me to Bonn Main Station, we had a coffee in his flat in Mehlem. It was on the first floor and had a huge glass window with a first-class view of the Rhine, the Drachenfels, and part of the Siebengebirge. I never saw a better view of the area.

It was a lovely day. We shared, among other topics, our first *faux-pas* in Germany. When I had gone to Elberfeld for the first time there were lots of people at the bus stop when I wanted to return to Ronsdorf, and somehow, I was the only one who didn't manage to get on the bus. It didn't worry me as there was so much

to see around me. Twenty minutes later – on the dot – the next 620 bus came. I waited politely for people to get off first and then expected to be the first to get in. Surprise, surprise! They all rushed and shoved past me at such a rate that I was standing there, incredulous, staring with my mouth open and wasn't let on that bus either. Twenty minutes later the next 620 arrived and I rushed in, ignoring everyone else – well, almost.

The diplomat shared his first day when he had had lunch out alone. He decided on the restaurant in the Kaufhof (department store chain). You ordered, you waited at the serving counter with a tray, till the meal was brought, you paid and then looked for a table, carrying your tray. He had yet to learn German and felt more confident in the Kaufhof restaurant.

He was clearly thinking of a three-course lunch: starter, main meal, dessert. He saw 'Erbsensuppe' (pea soup), recognized soup and ordered that. Next, he saw 'Gulasch' and ordered that with Rotkohl (red cabbage) and Klöße (dumplings), obviously potato and veg. Finally, he ordered a small dessert he could see. He was waiting with one tray, but he realized very quickly when the food came that he needed two, for pea soup in Germany is a meal and a large portion – at least in 1972 – it was served in a Terrine – a large dish with a lid. He lifted the lid and two quite large sausages were smiling at him. There were two slices of bread, a soup spoon, soup plate of course, and a knife and fork – and mustard – for the sausages – and of course a napkin.

Gulasch, two Klöße – a kind of cooked potato ball – and Rotkohl, red cabbage, boiled, were served in three separate dishes plus plate, cutlery, napkin, and he decided he definitely needed a glass of water! The dessert looked a bit lost, but was taken on board. He decided to grin and bear it, and pay, took two walks to a larger table (!), and had more than enough to feed a family of four or five. He had a small helping of soup (no bread or sausage), took one Kloß, some Gulasch and red cabbage, nibbled at the dessert, needed that glass of water and got rid of his trays on stands like the other people did, and left, feeling very undiplomatic!

We arrived at Bonn station in good time, sat and chatted. The platform was crowded with people who had been on an outing to the Rhine and for the 'Wein' and were now eager to get home. Quite near us we noticed a fairly large number of people, twenty or more, who obviously didn't often meet, or hadn't done so for years. The emotional farewell rituals started soon and were extended all the time and / or repeated. While they were absorbed in embracing each other heartily a train came – and left. As it was leaving, they realized that at least eight of them should have been on that train. It was sad for them, but watching the situation had a funny side for us. They were still trying to sort out the problem when the train for Wuppertal came and I got on swiftly!

In the Worringerstrasse the sisters and helpers were still clearing up. The father was in bed, happy but exhausted, they said. It had been a special day and the following Saturday Henner and I would collect our parents at Düsseldorf Airport. Special times!



[above] Ida and Hellgard in the Worringerstrasse in the Seventies
and [below]
Hellgard, Helma Leckebusch, Madeleine Cooke (Wesley College) and Hans Leckebusch
standing outside





Photographs from the Seventies

[above] Ida and Hellgard on the pavement in the Worringerstrasse
[below] Gertrude Sandall in the Worringerstrasse garden



65: Kinder und Jugendliche – die größte Kostbarkeit unserer Gesellschaft – ein Potpourri an Erinnerungen als Dank

Children and young persons – the biggest asset of our
society – a potpourri of memories as a thank you

Our parents and the grandparents whose lives we were fortunate to share for many years never remarked on this, but in the way they behaved and treated us we knew that we, along with our cousins Erhard and Frank, were the important part of their lives – and their greatest joy. The natural consequence was that respect and responsibility and joy when in contact with children was part of my life too, and this never changed, even when the age gap between me and my pupils increased noticeably the older I got. Looking back, I am aware of what a privilege it was to be automatically surrounded by young ideas, new views in a changing world, often unspoilt, unmanipulated honesty.

When taking a leap into the unknown, one must find a platform from which one can explore the new territory in order to build a new life. I had no expectations, was prepared to work hard at making a new life for myself, and had some hopes of where I could start. I came from a school where the staff all had their different abilities, their wonderful qualities, their limitations, but there was an underlying supportive respect, so we worked as a team. Hoping to find this in Wuppertal gave me the courage to think I could develop strategies to cope with facing the unknown: teaching English as a foreign language, dealing with children whose lives and background I was not familiar with. This hope was not fulfilled. It was the children who helped me to find my feet and I wish to honour them – all of them – with a small potpourri of experiences that I wish to recall.

Life is full of surprises! I had no personal experience of being taught a foreign language in a school situation (French in Rosleven was a different experience, and no help.) At the age of nine I had learnt within a month to communicate at some level with Canon Elliott. We fought our way through the jungle of unfamiliar languages. Trying to find good ways of teaching a foreign language now I gathered my resources of cheerful fun, singing, acting, flexibility. As class-teacher for my first class it was not too difficult because they had had one year of English. With my first-year group it was a bit different. I took the large doll I had got for Christmas, at the age of 2, to school. She was dressed in a black pleated skirt, a bordeaux and white little blouse and a little apron in the same colours, but with white little flowers.

Her body was made of a flesh-coloured material, filled with sand. Her head, showing a nice hairstyle around a very kind face, was a plastic Schildkröten head, still a collector's item. I sat her in my big wicker basket on the other side of the books, called her Betty, and for two years she became my assistant teacher. I would let her clap for a good answer, made her point towards mistakes in an exercise when going around the class, made her lift a reprimanding little arm if things were not to my liking.

Starting my second year's teaching I was determined to start my first lesson with a 1st Year English group without a single word of German. Again, I was accompanied by my assistant teacher Betty, who beckoned them to stand up. I greeted the class, gave my name and wrote it on the board, introduced Betty. They were amazingly quiet, wondering what was coming next. With Betty's help, endless body language, signs and drawings on the board I had made myself understood that I needed six strong children to bring up the 40 Cornelsen, Velhagen and Klasing English books. I explained where the staff room was, drew a door on the board, and knocked on it.

Amazingly enough, six children volunteered and slowly came to the front. I brought them to the landing, showed them the way down to the staff-room, made three knocks in the air again, and off they went, a bit nervous. I waited on the landing till they disappeared in the staff room.

They returned, with a heavy load; each child in the class got one book and then all were seated. Meanwhile, I had placed a large piece of covering paper on each child's place, so they could cover the English book. It was cut to the right size, the cuts at the back to turn back to turn back the extra paper and then, greatly aided by Betty, showed them how to cover the book properly and then write their name in the book. When that was finished, the book was immersed in the school bag, and we got on with elementary vocabulary like 'please' and 'thank you'. We sang a simple English song I taught them: 'Good morning, good morning, good morning to you. Good morning, Miss Leckebusch and how do you do?' With that it was time for our break and off we went.

The teacher who had handed over the correct pile of books was quite amused when I arrived in the staff room. Apparently one of the six pupils, a little girl, had turned round at the staff room door and wanted to know if this Miss Leckebusch at least knew a few German words. After all, there could be an emergency. The teacher was cute. He didn't answer the question directly, but assured her that I was well able to look after them in any emergency and had smiled at her reassuringly.

Betty assisted me for about two years, after which I decided it was time for a new idea. Still, off and on, there were enquiries about Betty's health, and good wishes were passed on.

Strange and all as I must have been for many of the children – and their parents! – it was generally with a great sense of relief that I would close the classroom door and be alone with whatever English class I had. (For the first two years I taught only in Ronsdorf with its eight classes – two parallel classes for the first four years for pupils who lived in that part of Wuppertal. After that, I taught at the Siegesstraße too. By 1973, I had a car and could commute.) Having said how good I felt when alone with the children, it must be added that teaching was not always a joy, and that it was not always easy. There was no complete absence of problems, nor did they all love this strange Lecky that an Irish breeze had blown in. I made many mistakes, and I had my limitations. But there was a kind of solidarity between us. I tried to approach them on eye level, but there was no question ever who was the teacher. The communication when I was angry with them proved to be faulty at first. Although I called a spade a spade, my manner of approach was obviously too polite and too controlled for them to judge how

serious I was. On one of the first occasions, I realized that my degree of annoyance wasn't getting through, so I changed over to English to give them a bit of my mind. Although I didn't raise my voice more and changed nothing but the language, it worked. My too polite German no longer distracted them, and they concentrated on my face, tone of voice and body language, and no more had to be said. Not long afterwards I told one of the boys I wanted to see his mother, as I was not happy with his behaviour. She came, a lovely woman and loving mother, stubborn like I was, and determined to protect and make excuses for her son. It was a tough meeting and went on for quite some time till I had at last convinced her that I was not criticizing or dissatisfied with her son, but with a certain behaviour of his, and that I wanted and needed her support to help him to change that. In the end, I had her support. Before she left, she remarked that her son had sent her off to the appointment with a warning. 'Sei vorsichtig bei Frau Leckebusch. Sie ist nicht so nett wie sie scheint' (Be careful with Miss Leckebusch, she is not as nice as she seems.)

I made many mistakes. Just an example on 10th November. Children went Mäten singing. (Translation : singing on St. Martin's Day). For the younger pupils, there were and are parades through the towns, led by St. Martin on horseback, with cloak and sword, accompanied by the 'beggar', and all the children, with their (often handmade) lanterns with a candle, accompanied by teachers, parents, grandparents and quite a lot of police. At the end of the parade, 'St. Martin' symbolically divides his cloak with his sword, and shares it with the freezing beggar. Then (sometimes on the parade also) St. Martin songs are sung. At the end of the parade, the children are presented with a bag of sweets and fruit or are served hot chocolate and a 'Weckmann' – slightly sweet, soft yeast type of roll, baked in the shape of a man.

Children not part of a parade went and still go out with lanterns in groups, going from door to door, singing and receiving goodies. I had done so also as a child; it was a special occasion. One class asked me not to give them any homework. As school closed at 13:15 p.m. and it got dark after 17:00 p.m., I felt they had enough time for both, and said no. There was no doubt that they were annoyed and disappointed.

At break time, I talked about their request in the staff room. The staff were appalled – how *could* I even consider giving them homework! (Perhaps I would have been told if I had been a new teacher from Jamaica or New Zealand? Who knows.) I returned to the class and said I had enquired if they generally got homework and had been told they didn't, so, of course, no need to do homework for me either. They were very relieved and grateful. One girl added: 'Frau Leckebusch, you see this is our last year; next year we'll be too old.' They never held these mistakes against me. When I didn't allow them to come to school disguised on Mardi Gras Monday, my class (and I) were the only sober-looking individuals in the school. They were angry and I was upset. I made a statement 'Karneval isn't over till Wednesday, so we'll come to school dressed up tomorrow and have a little party.' We looked silly again, but it was the best I could do. I apologized for my mistake. Their reaction was lovely. They told me not to worry. I hadn't known, and they were enjoying the novelty of being the only class

dressed up now, and having a little party, while everyone else had to be 'sober' and work.

Right from the beginning I went to school with my big wicker basket. The 'Aktentasche' was the normal conveyance for books and exercises among the staff. In 1972, they were generally of leather, very good quality, but pre-war specimens. One could buy them, but they were very expensive, if really nice, and I was not going to invest in a cheap plastic variety that I disliked. The wicker basket did me fine. While the staff filed this as 'typical for someone from another planet', for most pupils it wasn't important, till in my own class the wicker basket made history one day.

It was February and there was a lot of snow. We had not moved out of the old school in Ronsdorf yet. There were 40 in my class again that year, lovely but a bit wild. (In their first week at secondary school we had one broken arm, one broken leg, and one boy had bitten into one of the girl's legs till blood came. I had had my hands full!) Having come from the top of the building on the opposite side, I was now at the bottom of the stairs leading to my class. I could hear the noise, they were in 'full swing'. Only complete silence could have worried me more.

The stairs were wide and each step deep, covered in linoleum, as was the landing at the top of the stairs from which the door on the sharp left led to the music room, and the one beside that was our classroom.

I had my wicker basket tucked tightly under my left arm, held tightly on to the banisters on my right, and as far as I was able, 'flew' up the stairs. The snow from shoes had melted on the stairs and the landing leaving about ¼ to ½ inch of water. When I reached the last step – I had just let go of the banisters and taken a slight turn towards 'my door' – when I fell up the last step on to the landing on to my knees and off I went at a fantastic rate and slid into my class on my knees with the wicker basket, was stopped at and by my desk. Still on my knees, I lifted my banister-free hand and said '5 DM for anyone and everyone who can manage to do this after me'. I got off my knees, my legs were soaked and bruised, but the tights had survived and no blood in sight. Aquaplaning is not a myth!

In the mood of this hilarity, my prepared lesson had to be ignored. We did English, of course, but I played games with them at great speed, giving them no time for breath, except with a short rest at charades. Then the energetic 'Macavity says, do this' was played, and then we sang English songs. It was a memorable and happy lesson that went down in the annals with some of them. A few days later, a father came to see me about a matter. Before he left, he didn't comment on the arrival of Miss Wicker-Basket in any way, but when he left, he said he would like to come to an agreement with me. What was coming? He said: 'If you promise not to believe everything my son tells you about what happens in our house, I promise we won't believe everything he says that happens in your class'. I laughed, said 'That's a bargain' and shook his hand, as I would have done if I had bought a goat from him. We both laughed now. It was a lovely moment.

One other occasion refers to one of numerous school outings. Each individual class went on several outings per year. There was even one outing per year for the staff, when the pupils had a day off, and for first- and second-year classes the

annual day at the zoo, with instructions in view of the animals, was a permanent fixture too.

In 1972 I decided it would be good to take the class on an outing soon, so we could get to know each other better. A suitable date seemed to be November; the parents signed the form; they had paid the fee; the total cost was limited; the destination Duisburg and its harbour. Volker, the '68 man, would accompany us. *No one said anything.*

November came and with it the yearly fog intermezzo. I hadn't realized that this was inevitable, and that it could occasionally last for most of the month. The day came, the bus arrived, and you couldn't see more than two yards ahead. Parents were worried about letting the children get on to the bus, teachers wondered why I could think of an outing in November, my situation was less than pleasant. Yet I made a clear decision: Parents could send their children into the parallel class for the day. I would personally refund their money, but the bus and I and Volker were going to Duisburg. In the end, all the children came. We hadn't driven for more than 10 minutes outside Wuppertal when we were out of the fog. Duisburg and the tours, the boat trip round the harbour, all were great and we had a lovely day. We didn't have a blue sky, but the day was bright, no rain, the trip was very interesting and informative. Reaching the outskirts of Wuppertal on the way back, we were welcomed by thick fog again. Many parents were mentally prepared with their 'I told you so': but no, the children hopped off the bus, full of excitement and experiences and chat. Lecky was greatly relieved!

A school outing to a skating hall in Solingen or Wuppertal was another annual event. This always meant that all eight classes and all the teachers in Ronsdorf went in hired busses to Wuppertal-Vohwinkel, or we all took the train from Ronsdorf to Solingen – great excitement. A teacher I was friendly with often went skating with her family, so she had her own skater's shoes. For a laugh, I asked her if she could lend them to me till the bus came. I slung the skates over my shoulder as if nothing could be more normal. One couldn't easily imagine my figure whizzing elegantly over the ice, so children started to enquire: 'Are you going to skate too?' I pointed to the shoes, smiled and said: 'What do you think these shoes are for?' More and more children came to enquire and I was beginning to get into deep water. I wondered how I would get out of the situation without losing face. With that, a little first year girl came up with big eyes and asked 'Are you really going to skate?' Bless her! I pretended to get into a huff. 'I'm quite upset that none of you expect me to skate today, so now I won't. I'll ask Frau Schauf if she'd like to borrow my skates', and with that I handed them back. I admitted my lack of skating skills in the course of the morning!

Besides outings we had 'open days'. These required good ideas from each class. One year, I suggested we could learn an Irish set dance, the Siege of Ennis, which I had learnt at Rosleven, and I was still fit enough to teach them the steps with the proper, controlled posture, and later, they learnt the formation. Armed with a record player and a suitable LP with Irish music, we met in school in the afternoons. They learnt well, enjoyed the novelty and then eight pupils who were especially good at it were willing to perform on Open Day. But what would they wear?

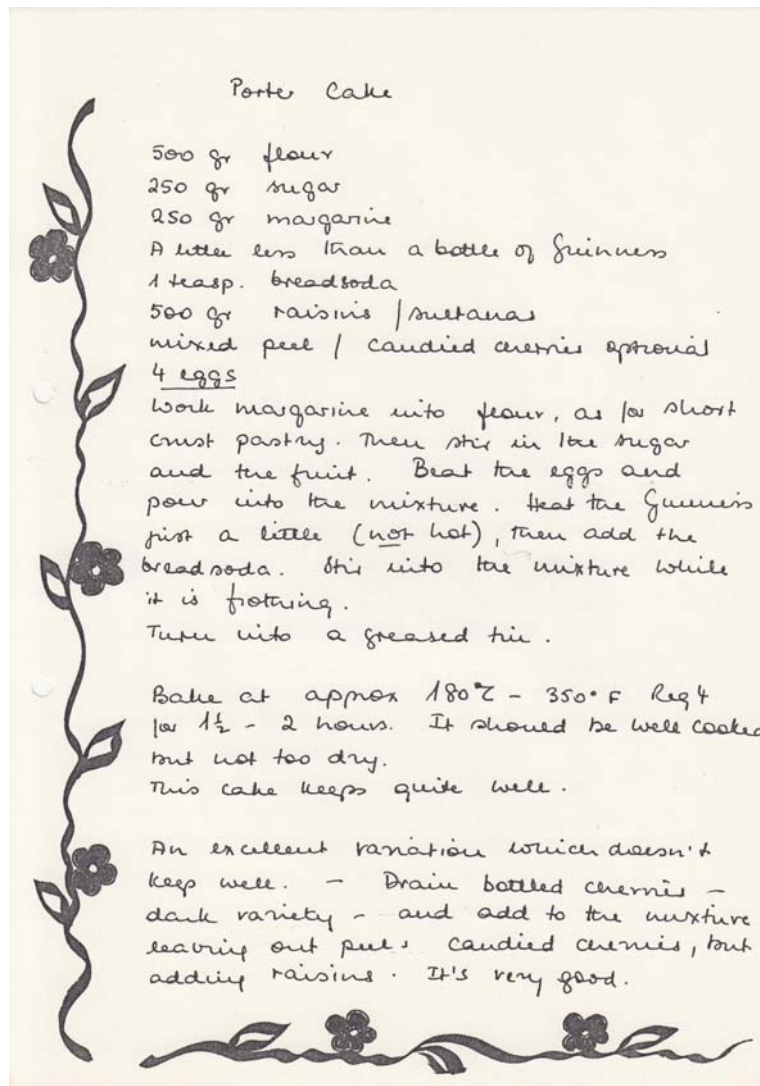
Kilts were quite popular and I managed to borrow eight kilts in what I would call pseudo-Campbell tartan. The pattern in each kilt was identical. White polo neck jumpers could look well with the kilts. With such good luck there had to be a flaw. One of the Kilts was for someone with a very small waist, so it was also very short. It only fitted one of the boys with a very thin build, but quite tall. The kilt looked well on the perfect little figure and very proper legs, but he refused to wear that garment, fervently explaining he felt it was bad enough looking ‘like a sizzly’ in a skirt, without having to show so much leg. (At 12 he was at a sensitive age. Although I insisted, I would never have asked him to wear it if he didn’t look well, I didn’t push the point. I saw my idea and preparation melting out of existence.) One should never underestimate children. They kept telling him how well he danced and that he looked fine in the kilt. Two of the girls kept saying they would give a lot to have such nice legs, and above all the dancing was great fun. Finally, he caved in. After the successful siege of the male dancer, they gave an excellent performance of the Siege of Ennis – a great novelty and success.

Irish life kept flowing into my English classes. The English book our school used in the Eighties introduced recipes with the adequate vocabulary for recipes and ingredients and methods: age groups 13–14-year-olds. This lesson coincided with the early autumn, with the recipe for an apple tart. Soon pupils knew for years from older brothers, sisters, friends that this recipe would come, so I presented them with a new recipe each year, one easy enough for them to understand and to make at home, and I didn’t run out of ideas. My 1984 was a very special year which I just about survived. Our father had died during the summer holidays; I was supposed to find time to write my university thesis, to be handed in by October 13th (12 o’clock postmark); I was trying to cope with a backlog of marking; and my final English university exam was due in November; and there was a lot of help needed at home, though Mother, as always, coped remarkably well.

I have to admit that school preparation was often reduced to threshold preparation – not good. One Friday, I was on my way to school when I realized it was the day for the recipe. The only suitable recipe I could think of at such short notice was a porter cake. A pub in Ronsdorf had started to serve Guinness draught beer to its customers – I had seen a huge advertisement outside the Kneipe. So, can you imagine what is coming?



The recipe was no problem, a cake a good idea as Sunday cakes were still usual in the homes; and having dictated the recipe, I told them they could go to the Kneipe in the centre of Ronsdorf with a jug or Tupperware bowl and get their 200 ml Guinness for the cake. They were 13-14! I must have been out of my mind!



Being overtired can serve as an anaesthetic at certain times. I had obviously had a suitable idea for the recipe for them at the last minute and they all seemed pleased and eager to bake this cake for the family that weekend. I taught till 1.15 p.m., jumped into the car, as I had a lecture and a tutorial between 2 p.m. and 6 p.m., had a bite of a sandwich on the way, and tried to get my head round the preparation for the tutorial. Afterwards I drove home, had tea with Mother, spent a little time talking about what her day had been like, planned our weekend, and by 8.30 p.m., I was involved in marking, university work, (finishing off the thesis -

hopefully) mini-preparation, when reality hit me. I suddenly had a vision of forty children queuing up outside the Kneipe, armed with kitchen utensils, hoping to get their 200 ml of Guinness. There was little I could do now, but it was difficult to keep my mind focused on my work. I had all the visions of the school, the board of education, the parents all rightfully punishing me for my irresponsible action, which was clearly against the law. The phone, strangely enough, did not ring, but it was a terrible weekend for me and I slept little and badly both nights. I did my best to appear calm and normal for the time I spent with Mother.

At least my English lesson with them was 8 a.m. on Monday morning. I was all prepared with my 'Mea Culpa, maxima culpa' as I walked into the class, but I wasn't given a chance, there was too much excitement about their successful baking experiences. I was brought quite a few cake samples, carefully wrapped in foil with their names on them and disappointed pupils who said they had such a greedy family they hadn't been able to rescue a piece for me. One girl said she loved sour cherries, had drained a large jar and just 'thrown the fruit in'. It had been such a success that her family had gobbled the cake up before she could even try to rescue a piece for me. (I tried that recipe out later, and it is superb, but naturally doesn't keep well.)

The excitement died down gradually and at last I had the chance to say that I should never ever have sent them to the Kneipe to get the beer. One of the girls started to say that they had had a bit of a problem at first. Apparently all 40 pupils had turned up at 3 p.m., as arranged, and had lined up in twos on the footpath as they were trained to do. The first two went in and asked for 200 ml of Guinness as naturally as if they had asked for a pound of carrots at the market. The woman was apparently speechless at first, even more so when they told her that their English teacher, Frau Leckebusch, had ordered them to get the beer, so they could bake the cake as part of their homework. That woman must have rolled her eyes to heaven at the thought of a teacher doing such a thing. She firmly said she was certainly giving children who shouldn't even be in the pub no Guinness. 'Well,' said the girl, 'If you look out the door, you'll see that there are 38 more pupils waiting to be served.' That woman must have decided – if you can't beat them, join them. She will have been in a cold sweat trying to get rid of the children serving them 200ml of Guinness each as fast as she could, and without trouble from the *Ordnungsamt* (office of public order).

When asked what the parents had said they laughed. Some were a bit surprised, they told me, but had said they knew how strict I was about alcohol and they were surprised Guinness could be used for a cake.

It took me a very long time to live that down. I brought it up at the next P.T.A. meeting (Elternabend) and apologized. They were very kind, just remarked that they still baked the cake from time to time, but went for the Guinness themselves!

Sometimes one is very fortunate to be treated so fairly that one gets away with a thoughtless and unlawful action, quite undeservedly.

As for all those pupils I taught for many years, in times that for me personally were most demanding, I mentally thank them repeatedly for their kind hearts and honesty and the happy atmosphere in our classes. We worked pretty hard all the same.

66: Schönste Blüten auf frierenden Ästen

The most beautiful blossoms on freezing branches

A friend of mine who lives in Donegal quoted a saying to me some time ago, a saying I was not acquainted with: ‘There is no ill wind, but it blows in some good’. For a good saying about difficult times, you can hardly do any better than that! In 1972, the ill wind blew heartily and generously into my face. Yet I felt, although I was sitting on frosty branches, that I was surrounded by glorious blossoms that opened unexpectedly, bringing the joy of beauty and scent, both of which made me forget the cold.

To begin with, there was the invitation to join the Wesley tour of the Rhineland,¹ based in Königswinter, not long after I had arrived on June 27th. This was mainly Ida’s plan and she made it possible. They were staying at a hotel on the way up to the Drachenfels, a most beautiful setting. Being the Drachenfels it had for me the complete déjà-vu effect. When Mother and I travelled to Wuppertal in the early autumn of 1954, Frau Schuster, my former teacher at the primary school, invited us to join the day trip to the Drachenfels, and we did. That day I was re-immersed into my former life: Mother was there, Frau Schuster, all my school friends, many mothers and some fathers that I knew well and in whose homes I had always been welcomed; my grandparents would be in Ronsdorf, waiting for our return, and ready to listen to everything that I had experienced on my outing. (I didn’t reappear out of this bubble of my old life till Father lifted me out of the train at Limerick Junction in November.)

Eighteen years later, again at the Drachenfels, I was whisked back for several days into my life in Wesley, for a farewell treat! My friends, the three staff accompanying the pupils, were all delighted to see me, and so were the pupils. For these few days I seemed to be removed from reality as if I had woken up after a dream. Although I had and was given no responsibility, I felt part of a team, the way I had always been. We visited interesting places I knew nothing about. Ernie professionally informed us about the geographical and geological details and quite a few historical ones as well. He was an expert, responsible for many geographical books he wrote for schools for years. Ida was in charge, with her unsurpassed personality that automatically commanded respect. But it wasn’t the respect you can evoke with a hammer or a gun, metaphorically speaking. With her it was evoked as if by a beautiful, strong scent. The children always felt secure but never unfree; with great experience and expertise she saw to it that everything ran smoothly, that all the children were well-looked after, that the hotel kept to the arrangement that no pork, in any shape, size or form would come near our meals, honouring the food rules that some of the pupils respected and took seriously. She had a huge handbag, slung over her shoulder, firmly grasped, in which all the money necessary for the trip was being cradled, including the pocket money for

¹ A report entitled ‘A School trip to London and the Rhine Valley’ was printed on page 30 of the 1972 *Wesley College Annual*. The writers were Lynne Bennett, James Haslam, and Donald Keogh, three pupils who had been on the trip. They record that ‘Miss H. Leckebusch, a former member of the staff, joined us in Germany and kindly acted as interpreter’. The hotel in which the party stayed is identified as the Burghof overlooking Königswinter.

the children, all 'bank exchanges' meticulously registered in the notebook. She carried the bag with the same ease as if it merely contained a supply (large supply!) of paper hankies, and perhaps a small selection of peppermint sweets or fruit gums? How were we to know?

Maureen was perfect as the third member of the staff in the trio. She carried a little less of the seemingly obvious responsibility, but her role was not less important. Her well-rooted, wide-ranging knowledge, and her brilliant brain never failed when called upon, and she gave the trip a feeling of lightness due to her highly intellectual humour with which she always hit the nail on the head. I used to think that a new dimension of Maureen's wonderful character and personality blossomed vigorously when she was on holiday.

The days were perfect. During the day we went on bus trips, or went by boat to Rudesheim and back. When we visited the Drosselgasse we staff sat on the roof terrace of a wine restaurant, drinking exquisite, ice-cold grape juice, served in elegant half-litre bottles, frightfully expensive. There we had a bird's eye view of the Drosselgasse, and the pupils in groups, who were looking for little souvenirs to bring home. The weather was hot and perfect.

In the evenings, after we had had our dinner at the hotel, we often walked up to the top of the Drachenfels. The temperature was at its best then, really pleasantly warm. The trees housed a few nightingales whose song we enjoyed till we got to the top of the hill with its unsurpassed view of the Rhine.

One minute we were all there together, realizing that these were moments of bliss. The next minute my friends and the children were gone, and I was facing a bit of that ill wind!

When our parents arrived on August 19th, it was wonderful to see them. They settled so fast with no complaints! Most days I generally called briefly after school and could take the bus from outside their house to bring me very close to the Worringerstrasse. Each day they had settled in more and one could see the changes. One day at the end of September they were quite excited to show me the sitting room which was now complete with the carpet that had been part of the sitting room in the Hill House, the couch and armchairs which our parents had bought from Burke's on the Ennis Road, curtains that had been made in Limerick, etc. They had made a wonderful room.

Henner was doing a three-month-course in Lübeck at the time, so for the moment he got a rundown by post till he came home for a weekend. That was in the middle of October, round Mother's birthday. In November, Father returned to work in his old firm, mornings only. He finally retired when he was 70.

At school we had one week off in the second week of October, so-called 'potato holidays', and Henner had suggested that I could come to Lübeck for the week. At the gate of the police centre where he was doing his boat licenses and whatever else they were being trained in, there was a small, pleasant, reasonable guest house and I booked in for breakfast and evening meal for the week. There was a bus stop there too, so after breakfast I took the bus into Lübeck each day and spent the days looking at this old harbour city with its old traditions and buildings.



This was all very new to me, very exciting and, as it was a mild, sunny October, I enjoyed reading up information in brochures on benches outside between visits to different sites. Henner and I had a meal together in the Gasthaus in the evenings, and after that he showed me around certain places outside



Lübeck. The first day he took me to the border to East Germany, with its extensive fencing, watch towers, soldiers ready with their guns, prepared to shoot at anyone attempting to flee. I knew about all this but it was quite different to see it. Henner felt it was time I became acquainted with German realities! One evening we drove into Lübeck and had a meal in the Guild Hall for captains and seamen. It has been a renowned fish restaurant for years. The seating can be compared to pews in a church, but facing each other. The ledge was not slanted, it was also bigger than in churches, so it would have been possible to use it to write down information at a guild meeting. Now this ledge was used to 'set the table' with a mat, plate, dishes, glasses, etc. It was an exquisite meal and an experience, fish served only.

On the Saturday we were ready to drive to Wuppertal. Henner was driving me home and he was going home for the weekend. Near the border, and close to Ratzeburg that first day, I had seen farmers offering ripe pears and apples. Having a squirrel characteristic of getting ready for the winter I persuaded Henner to drive me there – a very short run – and eventually he agreed (wondering if they didn't grow apples and pears around Wuppertal) and I bought one box each – very good value – and off we went to Wuppertal, for the weekend for Henner, and back to school for me.

Earlier that week I had had another treat too. I was (and am!) still in contact with Margaret whom I had known in Trinity. She had married a German, was living in Hamburg now. Getting a train to Hamburg wasn't a problem and she had given me good directions to find her home. It was just wonderful to spend the day with her and their young child, just one year old at the time. The importance of being able to speak to a person in a language in which not only the words but also the shared life experience makes communication so easy cannot be over-estimated.

And then back home, mother's 67th birthday. When routine set in again, it was a return to fresh, exhilarating and blustery wind: an ill wind more often than not, but beautiful blossoms appearing regularly!



Lübeck, The Cathedral [2022]

67: A weaver's daughter reflects on the tapestry of her life

I used to refer to 1972 – and many of my friends understandably still do – as the year ‘when I returned to Germany ...’. In the meantime, I have come across a most fascinating and enlightening book on the subject of immigration, migration, exile: *Praying in Exile* (2005) by Gordon Mursell. And reading it, I realized that this statement is incorrect. I could not have gone back to the Germany of my childhood in the post war years, as it no longer existed, and neither was I the same person that I had been as a child. I went forward to a future in a country that was strange and new to me, in the seventies still greatly influenced by the war, but moving on towards a new Germany, a road I was not on.

I had good reasons to make a sharp decision, and I did not look back, but I was landed in exile for a second time in my life. I was still surrounded by immediate family, but grown-up, responsible for my own decisions and struggling to find my identity, a home, a life. It was a time of losses and challenges, but also new opportunities and unexpected new gifts which all made me the person I now am. I have been blessed with many friends I do not only meet in the ‘stories’, but that have stayed with me on my road through life, or have joined me on that adventure.

On one occasion, just after Mother's death in 1986, I briefly considered returning to Ireland, but I am grateful that I was wise enough not to give in to this unrealistic temptation. All my decisions will always present me with the bill called ‘consequences’. I cannot ignore that by just turning back the clock. Reality kills false hopes instantly! It's a lesson I learned early in life and I have not forgotten.

Sometimes friends and acquaintances feel sorry for me because I left Dublin, and they decided it was a bad decision and that I grieve as a result. Of course, I miss Ireland, Dublin, Clare, my friends, and a visit to Ireland has always been a highlight; and realizing 17 years ago that due to health problems a visit to Ireland would never be possible again was harsh, but I do not lead an unhappy life. The happy years that cannot return are a part of me. My decision was made for good reasons and I knew what I was doing.

When I had to retire for health reasons in 2005, after 38 years of teaching, my short speech to the school summarizes my view of life. I felt it was a suitable metaphor at the time. Looking back, I think it is an important statement and so I wish to recall it.

After addressing the headmaster and the staff, the school speaker and a past pupil who had turned up unexpectedly, I continued:

‘My father was a weaver, a brilliant expert in his profession, because he had still been trained in all the aspects of the trade. He had learned to set up the huge looms and deal with a mechanical problem. He was able to cut the cards which were responsible for the patterns that were being woven. He worked out all the artistic designs himself, just to name a few of the aspects that were part of the weaving work, and he was a respected manager.

I had always been convinced that I had not inherited any aspects of these gifts, but life had taught me that this was wrong. I have woven my own ‘life carpet’, a task that will only be complete when my life thread is cut and I can weave no more. The basic threads, strong and neutral in colour, are the

elements in my life with which I have been equipped: gifts to which I can add personal choices. It was part of my responsibility to what extent I could and wanted to avail of these gifts. The size and stability of the carpet depended on these decisions. The colourful threads responsible for the pattern are the people with whom I have shared my life – for shorter periods or for many years. The colours they introduce are dictated by their life: bright or dark, happy or sad, rough or elegant. They all belong. In this sense, every member of the staff has been woven in forever and each individual pupil is represented, even those whose names I cannot remember. Each thread is indispensable, even the shortest one, for it can become the vital detail which completes a section of the design.

In this frame of mind, I leave you and take you with me. All I can add is this: the times I shared with you were good. Thank you.'

Hellgard Leckebusch, *Gymnasium Siegesstraße*,¹ Wuppertal, 2005

As I was addressing the school community, I referred to them only; but it applies to all my family, friends, and fellow wayfarers, people who were for me, or against me, as well as angels in disguise.

The carpet reveals all the details of my years, even the moments when life was teaching me difficult lessons – even a few times of which I am not particularly proud! I can wander over the carpet alone or with a friend and ponder the different patterns and colours, stories and times, which are so varied and manifold.²

¹ Since Hellgard's time as a teacher at the *Gymnasium Siegesstraße*, the school has been renamed the *Johannes Rau Gymnasium*, in honour of a distinguished past pupil. Johannes Rau (1931-2006), whom Hellgard described as 'very much a man of the people', was successively mayor of Wuppertal, Ministerpräsident of North Rhine Westphalia, and President of Germany (1999-2004). Hellgard thought it worthy of notice that the school was also one of the first 'Gymnasien gegen Rassismus', a cause of which the dancer, Pina Bausch (1940-2009), a parent who sent her own son to the school, was patron.

² As explained in the introduction (p. xiv), this text was extracted from the piece No. 51, 'My Dublin', at line 9 on p. 293, after the phrase, 'This truth applies to my life also'. At that point the words 'in the context of the tapestry of my memories' were supplied to make a bridge to the theme of the Dublin Lecky House.

68: My reflections on 'For here we have no continuing city' – Hebrews 13:14

Migration has always been an integral part of human life.¹ Worldwide, people have been forced or some will have wished to settle in other countries or continents. The problems as well as the positive influences of migration have both been part of the process. The archaic truth that strangers need support was respected even a few thousand years ago. That law does not provide equal rights to newcomers only: they are given special rights.

While immigration was a major issue in the twentieth century it will continue to be an issue and influence people's lives in the twenty-first century all the more, on an extensive scale especially in Europe. The motives why people leave the country of their origin are as varied as the people. Survival comes first for most of the people who make the decision to risk changes of which they do not know the outcome, and fears of dangers cannot deter them. The absolute uncertainty of the outcome does not stop people from taking this faint chance when it is the only chance they have.

War is the most obvious reason for people trying to flee that is ever present in people's minds and starvation follows closely behind. Recurring droughts in Somalia is an example or the Famine in Ireland in the middle of the nineteenth century when the potato crop failed in three consecutive years and hundreds of thousands left for America (if they had a chance) because they were unwilling to surrender to the circumstances. Many did not survive the attempt.

Religious reasons: The situation of Jewish people fleeing from Germany in the thirties e.g. is the most drastic example ever and their plight cannot be given an adequate and respectful enough space in my reflections here. Muslims fleeing from India to Pakistan and Bangladesh must be remembered. The examples are endless, going back even to the seventeenth century when the Pilgrim Fathers left Plymouth on the Mayflower for America. All they wanted was a place where they could practice their religion in safety and in peace.

Immigration, purely in the hope of increasing personal prosperity, takes place too. People always try to improve their circumstances by making the most of their opportunities. That is a laudable procedure, also if it includes immigration, as long

¹ For the title of her reflections on migration Hellgard chose a phrase from the letter of St. Paul to the Hebrews. It is a coincidence worth mentioning that Hellgard was not the first German who sojourned in Ireland to draw inspiration from this passage. *Die bleibende Stadt* is the title of John Hennig's autobiography, which his family produced as a typescript book in the year after his death. Hennig (1911-86) came to Ireland as a refugee in 1939, and stayed until 1956. In his memoir there is much about Ireland, where he spent his time to good scholarly purpose. He is acknowledged as the father of Irish German Studies, and is credited with having coined the term 'Irlandkunde'. The continuing city of his title hints at the influence on his life of Roman Catholicism, to which he – the son of a protestant theologian in Leipzig – became a convert.

Hellgard would have been intrigued to discover that Hennig, in the preface to his memoir, quoted Goethe on the subject of writing autobiography:

Die Frage, ob einer seine eigene Biographie schreiben dürfe, ist höchst ungeschickt. Ich halte den, der es thut, für den höflichsten aller Menschen.

[Hellgard Leckebusch, *Singing our Song*, p. 381]

as both sides can profit from this interchange of ideas, knowledge, learning, and provided it does not destroy opportunities for those who are living there.

I would call them cosmopolitans. People who always have the freedom of choice to leave or stay wherever they are, are like cosmopolitans. Their influence on the life and people they meet can be important. Their wealth and/or knowledge is generally welcomed and this goodwill can remain as long as they abide by the laws that exist and they adapt and accept a certain code of behaviour. Integration is not necessarily an issue. The needs of both parties are served. Their identification is likely to remain with the country of their origin, or with their work. Perhaps the influence their wealth provides them with makes identification less urgent. They may continue to feel firmly rooted in the country of their origin, but sometimes they and their families settle so happily in a new circle of real friends, together with their new lifestyle, that they integrate into the community. Even assimilation can be a natural consequence after one or two generations.

They may not be loved when they come or even liked, but they are received with respect, goodwill, maybe gratitude, as they benefit the community. This can develop into a mutually enriching relationship with learning and growth on both sides. If hopes are not fulfilled this group of 'cosmopolitans', for whatever reasons, has the means to leave. They are not trapped.

Discoverers and explorers have always wished to reach out to new frontiers, countries, people; life beyond their horizon. They make their knowledge available to people in their own country, they bring wealth, new ideas, new food and plants, riches to their nation and pass on their knowledge to mankind in general. This group can naturally not be termed 'refugees', but they have always opened the door for others who have emigrated (and often intruded) this new territory, not only for a peaceful accumulation of new knowledge. Colonial immigration with questions of racism that is part and parcel of it can then not be ignored.

Having named the different groups of people I now wish to return to the situation the majority of immigrants find themselves in when they arrive in new surroundings, providing them with their first elementary safety. These early times are similar to a host/guest situation. We human beings are generally moved when we see people in need of help, the examples of people risking their lives is endless be they people who rescue someone in fear of drowning, helping when a fire is an imminent danger for life and property, we are all aware of them. There is no need to continue listing the heroic deeds human beings are capable of. When destitute people arrive, they are met with goodwill and help by the authorities and by individuals. Great kindness is shown to the newcomers by voluntary groups and by helpers from the public and community, and the 'guests' are grateful. This situation cannot last forever. It often changes rapidly, almost unexpectedly. What causes this?

The newcomers when they arrive appreciate shelter, food, first signs of safety, kindness, empathy and some of their fear and pressure eases, but they also have hopes, visions, expectations. I would think that many expect, certainly hope, that this hardship and loss of home is not permanent, but an interim time in which they need help. Once their momentary needs are met, they can and will return to their

normal life and their home country, they hope. For a very limited number this is possible, but for most this hope is shattered.

The hosts are prepared to do almost more than they can, but their expectations do not include the changes that are likely to confront them, at least this is not understood by the general public, nor that this is the beginning of something new, not a time that will pass. The fact that the input of new ideas and ideals into a community can be most beneficial cannot be seen at first. The fear that this beginning of changes, commitments, confrontations, certainly upheaval is something they do not want, and a helpless feeling of loss of control in their lives takes the upper hand. As long as they can concentrate on the joy that goes along with helping others, being useful, receiving gratitude – we are all acquainted with this feeling, they are motivated to do more than their best – as long as those at the receiving end continue to be and behave like guests. Yet people cannot stay in their role as guests or hosts indefinitely and the 'guests' start to settle and behave accordingly.

Eventually most refugees, immigrants of all kinds, have generally settled in their new 'homes', happily or unhappily, temporarily or permanently. Their own survival, but above all the survival of their children, hoping that their life will be a better one, remains the top priority. For this they risked everything and left the life they knew, their status of respect and importance, possibly their wealth, their health, the support and love of their family at close hand. Many people could only flee because they were financially supported by their whole family. Despair and fragile routes whipped them onwards, following any tiny shadow of hope, recklessly accepting a helping hand from anyone, even if this helping hand could turn out to be out for their own gain only; a help for better maybe, but often enough for worse. They cannot give up their fight to gain the best possible future now after all they have been through.

Life is not a fairy tale and people are not saints, neither hither nor thither, and as the ways and standards of upbringing, or what is considered as morally or socially acceptable vary i.e. again between different people and in all societies, so boundaries and rules must be found that can be accepted by all sides in these new circumstances and it must be possible to enforce them. The integration of small groups of newcomers is not the problem, but politicians, the churches, the police, supportive groups, numbers of individuals need to try to find a consensus of rules and regulations that can be accepted and will safeguard the whole new community by those who have always lived there and whose who have come to stay especially if the number of strangers is influential. Otherwise, animosities can smoulder and increase the problems, not only during the lifetime of the first generation if new acceptable rules are not developed, accepted and enforced.

What can each side contribute? What reasonable expectations do the hosts have, or the newcomers? What routes towards a peaceful mingling of lives and cultures are feasible? What realistic possibilities exist?

To start with the host countries:

They provide essential help, e.g. food and shelter, clothes and they are in a position to invest in this help by making financial cuts in other areas. It is a grave mistake if the newcomers take this completely for granted. Most people will

accept cuts in times of emergencies and are happy to live in a country in which the government considers this help to be a non-negotiable act, and individuals applaud when help is sent to places hit by catastrophes, e.g. earthquakes, and personally donate money also. Should the need prove to be so great that an end to the need cannot be visualized and the emergency situation seems to be the new 'normality' the tide of goodwill can turn swiftly. The realization that this time of help is the beginning of a commitment brings out feelings of fear, dissatisfaction. Comparisons are made especially by groups who feel their needs are now being neglected, they make a division between 'them' and 'us', 'they who get everything for nothing' is the accusation – jealousy arises and the help that is given is begrudged. The expectation now is that gratitude for everything and at all times is the least 'they' can do. Their presence in everyday life is not welcomed more so if they are in any way conspicuous and too much show of their identity is considered a threat. Is it easier to accept uprooted people if they resort to the role of 'beggars' with no rights whatsoever? Perhaps they are not seen as a threat then?

Politicians in democracies have been elected by voters who expect, at least hope, that their issues are taken seriously. Politicians in turn reflect the different views and expectations of their voters, and if they do not want to lose their office, they try to fulfil at least some of the promises they made before they were elected. Their first responsibility is to abide by the statutes of their country, and after that to fulfil at least some of the promises they made in their election campaign. At the same time, they have to seek compromises with politicians of different parties whose views do not coincide. That some politicians see and seize the opportunity to increase their personal power is an additional issue in the background.

Merely hoping for a liberal and helpful approach to immigrants, or the 'hard hand' that will guard existing affluence, will not deal with the dilemma. The question has to be tackled – where is the limit of help, possibly even of certain sacrifices that a nation can endure. When we consider the fate of native Americans, we see what immigration can lead to. Immigrants finally arrived on the North American continent in such numbers that they easily bonded with each other in their fight for survival till they were superior in strength and power. Their knowledge of how to live in their new surroundings was not necessarily superior to the first Americans, but their different knowledge and experience, their numbers and their weapons enable them to exercise their power ultimately, and misused their superiority in their treatment of the 'hosts' who from the Europeans' point of view were a danger, and certainly an inconvenience. The first Americans had their culture, lived according to their rules and traditions in harmony with nature till the Europeans arrived.

Many were helpful at first, but by degrees their rights were neither honoured nor respected till they were finally destined to live in reservations, remote from a life that was natural to them. Their plight is documented and only now, many generations later, they are beginning to regain certain rights which they are asserting, and subsequently regaining their dignity.

The situation of the aborigines in Australia and Maori in New Zealand shows similarities but is not identical. I also believe we are dealing with many of the consequences even up to the present time, of thoughtless and/or irresponsible

intervention with 'host' countries in the colonies. Knowing about the historic problems and results the efforts of present European countries not to lose sight of the safety of their own territory and people is understandable responsibility.

On the other hand, what responsibility do we owe people from areas that have become so poor, and/or are so difficult to govern? Can some of the roots in the dilemma be traced back to decisions our ancestors made in the colonies, or the ancestors of other European countries? They were not our decisions, but we can and will decide by our actions now if we wish to make different, hopefully better decisions than our ancestors. Like them we have a choice and whatever we do will have consequences in the future and our descendants will have to live with them.

Being German and living in Germany I must say that Germany has made a substantial effort in trying to relieve the situation of refugees even if the decisions may not all have been good. When I look back on all the help German people were given at the end of World War II and afterwards – Care Parcels, the *Rosinenbomber* (raisin bombers) helping the people in Berlin to survive the Soviet blockade in 1948/49, signs of help at an individual or on wider level, even up to as late as the restoration of the Frauenkirche (Our Lady's Church) in Dresden, I am glad that this help has been given. Signs of peace, like that of the son of one of the pilots who flew one of the planes bombing Dresden, who made a new cross for the Church, are ways that open hearts and eyes and they can help to build a new future with fewer prejudices.

While I am shocked and ashamed of racist voices, atrocities, attacks on the Jewish and Muslim community, the voices and acts of goodwill help me to still walk upright as a German, and keep trusting in the deeply rooted goodness in every human being, may it be damaged, hidden or not developed yet.

What are the responsibilities of immigrants, and what possibilities do they have?

Two vital demands that immigrants face, both from the political side as from the general public are learning the language and integration. These are essential targets to be reached and most of them try to learn the new language as well as they can. This is far more difficult for women, especially when traditionally their place is centred in the home with the children, so opportunities might be limited. The more immigrants are isolated, the more difficult it is to learn the language.

In regard to integration I often wonder if people really have assimilation in mind, even politicians? Assimilation is far more one-sided. To me it means that changes of life-styles, the development of ideas and opinions, tastes, are expected to take place mainly on one side of the community only. Can it be expected of them not to honour their past life, their culture, their religion and live accordingly?

My personal conviction is that personal identification is the helpful bridge towards integration. The natural pride of a person is first of all firmly rooted in the family, the language, the music, the religion and culture, the code of behaviour, the special abilities, the countryside. Perhaps they have not become aware of this fact so far or have had no reason for this identification to be questioned. If their personal pride is threatened or destroyed it leaves people without their roots. How can they respect the new culture, different ways of living then? Is that why people in wartime try to make people submissive by destroying examples of their

heritage, and interfere with religion and language? (As far as I understand it, extensive rape belongs to this category.)

It seems logical to me that in order to keep this pride alive, and not only for that reason, people of a similar background try to settle close to each other, possibly with shops around them that serve their needs. Places of worship or social and cultural centres can become areas that give them greater emotional stability. Sometimes opportunities to teach children their own language are provided. Even places where they can bury those who have died are a need. (I welcome the fact that the city I live in is now offering part of an existing, communal graveyard that is reserved for the Muslim community.) It makes me very angry when a need to be with people who understand them is considered as a sign of segregation, although I realize that larger numbers of strangers cause fear. With the best will in the world, no government can offer alternatives to provide a feeling of belonging, and it is good when this fragile plant has taken root somewhere, is growing and developing. The danger that these areas can turn into no-go areas for the police and authorities cannot be ruled out, but these areas also exist in cities where Germans live, Germans that share an ideology that does not respect the state and blockades are built to keep others out. These areas have to be dealt with. Nationality is not the only aspect that is important. A respectful regard for law and order must be observed by everyone living in a country.

The ideal is when people settle where it is convenient for them to do so, and get on well with their neighbours. When their motives for wanting to live where they do, is no longer questioned, then integration will take place.

John O'Donohue writes in his book *Landschaft der Seele* (Landscape of the Soul) (page 39) 'Unser Hunger nach Zugehörigkeit ist die Sehnsucht die Distanz zwischen Isolation und Intimität zu überbrücken'. (Our hunger to belong is a yearning to bridge the gap between isolation and intimacy.) This is a need in all human beings. How much greater must this need be for people who are uprooted, with scars on their souls, for people who are even traumatized? In our time many psychologists warn us that loneliness and isolation and the consequences to which they can lead (e.g. the great increase in cases of depression) are becoming a major issue in our society. They refer to people who have not necessarily had to leave house and home, or take the rugged route to an unknown future. How much greater must the threat be for refugees!

The problem of immigrants will hold our attention for years to come. Wise men have found no solution so far, and perhaps we must accept that we may have to live with the problem permanently. For the greater or smaller span of our life we have to learn intellectually; we have to learn to be prepared to accept new ideas, and to accept that our particular views of a problem, or the world, have to be readjusted, changed, again and again.

All I can consider is what stepping stones there might be to help us to move along on this difficult path. What stepping stones can we offer I must ask myself: What questions are important?

1. Do I think that the whole human race has equal rights to live as happily as possible? What privileges am I prepared to surrender in order to help others to live

in slightly better conditions? Am I concerned enough to look for necessary information and then to act more responsibly?

2. Can I exist alone for any length of time without the support and responsibility of others? Or can I only have the best possible life for myself and future generations if I work with others and not against them? Am I so privileged at the moment that I do not feel the need for human solidarity? Can I remember that the way I live, e.g., in the way we treat our environment, does not only affect me, but people everywhere round the globe? May I think my decisions are my personal right and that I have no responsibility in regard to the consequences of my decisions? Yet do we know how our actions will change the life of our children and future generations?

That leads on to the inevitable question: Where does the responsibility of the individual end? At the limits of our own person, at our front door, at the boundaries of our extended families, our village, or our nation, even continent? At this point our attitude towards the question of our ethics is challenged. Do we feel generous when we exchange a certain amount of help with people to whom we owe gratitude, like an equation? Or do we consider giving and taking to be like a stream or river that flows on towards new territory eternally, and to new people, to whom we do not owe anything, like running water that is forever fed by gratitude?

Immigrants also have choices when they arrive, difficult choices. Need does not release anybody of personal responsibility for their own lives. It is not easy to concentrate on, or endure, all that they have left behind and miss. The pain they have endured on their route may never leave them. But I wish them helping hands and stepping stones, so that they can find their balance more easily when they arrive. I wish them the ability to see new possibilities they can grasp, through tears of sorrow for all they have lost. I wish them contentment with small steps of progress, increasing moments of happiness. I wish them that they remember the times when life was the only important thing, as that never really changes. I wish them all that because this may help them to accept that they have had to move into a new room in their 'home of life', and maybe the way back to the 'old room' is forever locked. But they are, and always will be, in their home which is inside them, deep down.



[above] A pub the name and decoration of which characterise the reputation of Lisdoonvarna

[below] A view that typifies the landscape of the lovely Burren



69: Lisdoonvarna: The lovely Burren and a dismal interlude

The first glimpse Mother and I got of the Connemara Mountains had been in May 1954 when the Whites took us to the Burren. We were overwhelmed by the magnificent view of the calm dark blue sea – the Atlantic and Galway Bay, the Aran Islands very clearly visible that day, and then the Connemara Mountains in the background. Connemara was a place we definitely wanted to visit. It took some time till we got there. Our approach was gradual. but when we lived in Lisdoonvarna we came close to the area once or twice.

Later when we had the Austin we revisited the Burren area, noticed a small hotel we could see up on a hill, a hotel we never visited. That is where the botanists generally stayed. We ventured to Black Head at a later stage, loving the masses of wild flowers in late spring at the side of the road, having no idea what rare specimens grew there and, in my ignorance and childish joy I picked bunches of different kinds of flowers, many a variety of wild orchids and brought them home! (I always brought a jam jar filled with water, put the flowers in the open jam jar and held it carefully all the way home.)

Later we heard about the Corkscrew Hill and explored that route. It had to be approached from the other side of Lisdoonvarna. As we turned a corner at the top of the hill, a marvellous bird's eye view of the road leading down the steep hill, the lush green of the fields below, the sea and the Connemara Mountains on the horizon opened out. It took our breath away. We drove on to Ballyvaughan, then to Black Head, driving a complete circle.



Helma, Hellgard and Hans Leckebusch in Ballyvaughan, 1970

When exactly Gregan's Hotel opened at the bottom of the Corkscrew Hill I don't remember, but it was certainly there in the sixties, and a drive round the

[Hellgard Leckebusch, *Singing our Song*, p. 389]

Burren and Black Head with tea and sandwiches there was among the top priorities of our limited treats. We loved the simplicity of the building, as it seemed to fit in with the scenery and was not in competition with it, shouting for attention! Inside it was very comfortable but reduced – no fussiness. The bricks were painted white (hopefully my memory is correct) and hanging on the wall were beautiful water colours of all the wild flowers that grew in the area. The frames were elegant, but helped the viewer to focus on the flowers. There was extensive information about the area and its botanic specialties.

In the sixties Ireland became a popular attraction in Germany, especially for younger people e.g. students or academics. Böll's *Irishes Tagebuch* (Irish Journal) was the rage amongst a changing generation. The director of a firm of world-wide renown in Wuppertal-Ronsdorf (son of the owner too) had come across Gregan's Hotel and loved to stay there for a number of weeks, for quite a number of years. My parents vaguely knew the family, but more the older generation – a lovely family, hardworking, running a very successful firm – it still is just that – but they were a rooted family. Sometimes this man just loved being around the hotel in the fresh air and asked if he could do a bit of work in the garden, a man well-used to swinging a spade. He got the loan of a pair of trousers, a jumper, and pair of Wellington boots, put on his new tweed cap, and, got going, he was delighted. It was a change from desk work and decisions. One day a busload of tourists arrived and asked him if he was the gardener. He agreed, and also gave a positive answer to the questions whether he had a pleasant boss and if his pay was adequate. Then they all gave him a tip! Like all German gentlemen of his day, but especially older men, he lifted his newly bought tweed cap each time as a sign of humble gratitude! He didn't want to embarrass these well-meaning tourists, he said, who had made a bit of a *faux pas*. We loved that gardener story.

My first visit to Galway I can't recollect. Certainly, my parents at first, and later with Henner, will have visited his school. Once he started there, he very soon became a weekly boarder. From Lisdoonvarna the journey was a bit shorter. In spite of good support from the headmaster the situation became quite difficult with the other boarders, so that for some time he was given a small room for himself where he could study, perhaps even sleep? So, on Friday evenings after work my parents set out to collect him, and at an unreasonable hour on Monday morning, sometimes on Sunday evening they brought him back. Excursions into Connemara weren't part of our programme yet, for we had other problems. We had to get out of the Retreat after the Hallowe'en break, the beginning of November. Miss Parker-Hutchinson couldn't even be persuaded to let us stay there till the spring – they wanted to be able to use the house themselves again, she said, understandable – but in the summer, I would guess! This was a major problem for us. Where could one rent a furnished flat or house? Or even unfurnished?

Just outside Lisdoonvarna two old ladies – sisters – lived in a large house, Rouska, what I would define as a big protestant home. They had a middle-aged, unmarried niece who worked and lived in Lisdoonvarna itself. Or was it Mrs. Maston's daughter? That was their small family – lots of room in the house. Probably through Canon Elliott's negotiations we were offered bedrooms for us all, a small sitting-room, our own bathroom, but a shared kitchen. (Needless to

say, the rent was correct but not a special offer!) Lisdoonvarna was about seventeen miles from the factory. One lady was pleasant and no problem. The sister wasn't unpleasant, but her boundaries were all over the place, and the idea that people who rented premises had certain rights too, hadn't occurred to her. I spent basically only the Christmas holidays there, but I even remember her coming into the sitting-room one afternoon without knocking, telling Mother it was time she got a meal going for our father. A man, working hard for the whole family all day had a right to have a hot meal sitting in front of him when he came home! Mother was well able for her but the constant combats took her time and energy and she was tied to the place. She often walked to the town for a few messages but it wasn't round the corner. Having cleaned up the Retreat living quarters, she was back on this basic job in Rouska, and she had enough to do without combats. It was so appalling that Mother developed a sceptic jaw and couldn't even be brought to see Dr. Paddy – but finally her temperature was far too high. He immediately came – seventeen miles each way – and as all the antibiotics were not helping, he could only offer her a new drug on the market. He had no personal experience of how patients reacted and he wasn't happy prescribing it. It was wildly expensive, whatever it was. Mother had no choice, took it, and very slowly did get better. Perhaps it was Cortisone? Waiting in Rosleven to be brought home before Christmas was strange. Even at 6 p.m. I hadn't been collected yet, no phone call. At 7 p.m. Father arrived alone – a shock for me – but he evaded all questions. We would have a cup of tea first, he said.

We parked outside the Church of Ireland, crossed the road and went down the three steps to a nice, reasonable restaurant, serving tea and all kinds of fries. There sat Mother in front of a glass of water, neck and part of her jaw and cheek very swollen, as well-wrapped up as she could manage it. But, of course, we were delighted and relieved to see each other.

That New Year's Eve, going on into Henner's birthday, we decided we couldn't be in that house to start the New Year. We all got into the car and just drove off into the night. We stopped where we could see some of the candles still burning in the windows of houses round the countryside. Then we drove off again. Around 0:30 we headed back, and Henner's birthday was the focus. It was a dismal New Year's night in the car, but we had our privacy and that counted.

Lisdoonvarna was nearer to Galway, but there was no opportunity to venture out into Connemara yet. When I came home for Easter, we were back in the Retreat for another five years. For some reason the owner had changed her mind! And our firm's house wouldn't be built for another six years yet.

I associate places and times with memories of people and what I experienced there. Although I spent very little time there, and Lisdoonvarna is a nice small town of interest, any mention of it upsets me still, except the mention of Mrs Maston who was lovely. She was kind, she was proud but not arrogant. She tried to make life easier for us as she included Mother and me those Christmas holidays in as much of her life as possible. She treated us all as her equals, took Mother and me to visit a friend in the Stella Maris Nursing Home, and I'll never forget her bringing me into their sitting-room once. She sat down at the piano, played and

sang wholehearted and joyfully and still had a good voice. As I watched her, I saw an old woman who was still young and happy.

I didn't develop an ordinary interest even in the spa, which was an unusual novelty in Ireland, and even in the Sixties Lisdoonvarna in September and October was considered as the venue to find a partner when the farmers had some free time! Today it is a well-organized festival. People come from many parts of the world, many leave as couples.

The Sixties were the decade when dance halls found their way into Irish life, at least that is what I remember. Up till then special dancing occasions – balls in beautiful hotels – did take place. Good bands provided the music. What was needed were venues for more casual, less expensive dances, especially for young people. Dancehalls were sometimes built even in sparsely populated areas and attracted young people, who would often travel for miles, many even on bikes. The music was always live. These dances were an additional interest beside the Céilís and small dance sessions in the parochial halls in Miltown and Quilty. Ennis, Kilkee and Lisdoonvarna attracted the crowds later to large dance halls.

I must have just turned 17 when I was allowed to accompany Henner to a Red Cross Dance in Lisdoonvarna, just before I had to go back to school in late September. Henner enjoyed dancing, but it was the bands that really interested him. At one dance he actually persuaded the bandleader to let him 'have a go' at the drums. In Germany he had learnt to play the piano and violin well, had a lovely voice, and played in the school orchestra from the age of 13 or 14. He had a natural musical talent and his first 'go' on the drums perplexed the bandleader. Word got round that there was a young German in Clare who was good at the drums. As soon as he entered a dancehall and was spotted, the bandleader gave the drummer a break and Henner took over. I must say he was great and he generally played for the rest of the evening. This procedure took place at my first big dance in Lisdoonvarna too. So I sat down and hoped someone would ask me to dance. I had been well trained in different standard dances in Rosleven, but that didn't do me much good, and wouldn't have done me any good even if I had worn a banner with the information! Although I had little confidence as a young girl, I was lucky and 'got' quite a few dances while Henner whirled the drumsticks. After a short while one young farmer asked me for the next dance. He told me all about his small farm, the good harvest he had brought in, and it was pleasant: he was genuine and good company, a good dancer. Suddenly he asked me, 'What's your name?' Hellgard Leckebusch, I answered honestly, in my distinct Clare accent. With that he became furious, dropped his arms and said: 'Is it coddin' me ye are?' and stalked away leaving me standing in the middle of dancing couples, unaware of what I must have done wrong. Later I thought: 'Why didn't you say Fidelma Clancy, for example?!' All I could do was work my way through the dancing couples to my chair – feeling like a wallflower that was wilting before I ever reached a chair at the wall.

Lisdoonvarna – we should have got a second chance!

70: My Connemara

My memories of incidents are often so vivid that they can include smells, temperatures, emotions, colours. Trying to slot these incidents into the right year is difficult. If they deal with the same person(s) or place(s) they all seem to mingle into one. My first view of Salthill could have been in the summer of 1956 after Henner's return from Wuppertal in August, and after he had been introduced to his new school – a boarding school. It was definitely summer, sunny and warm. The beach is huge, lovely sand, a promenade, and this time the view is of the hills of Clare and Black Head across Galway Bay.

We were most impressed and just had to keep on driving along the road in view of the sea. We decided it had been enough for the day when we got to Spiddal, so we turned, and had the view this time towards Galway city.

Our next venture on another occasion was to Oughterard. We had heard a lot about this lovely place, visited by hobby fishermen and we hit upon a green, very pretty oasis of trees, small river and of course Lough Corrib. It had homely looking hotels, referring in their names to fish and anglers. We saw an old country house hotel, nice grounds in front of it, not very large, the house overgrown by ivy. It looked most inviting. We sat down in an equally homely looking 'sitting-room' with comfortable and older furniture, that had a historic aura. We loved it.

Connemara was a 'must' when we had visitors and so we finally got to know Clifden, Kylemore Abbey, Killary Harbour and the lovely route back to Galway through the mountains. It was always a highlight for us and them.

After a while we felt almost at home in Galway. Before one reached the city, we always passed a well-known restaurant, of such repute that famous people from all over the world, e.g. Princess Margaret, flew over to Shannon and specially travelled there by car to eat these oysters. Around 1960 we decided we should pay that restaurant a visit, after all we were almost living on its doorstep, a mere 60 miles one way! We were saved the inconvenience of a flight. We had never tasted oysters. The restaurant was full of atmosphere, a large pub with wooden tables and chairs, a lovely country restaurant and we sat down. The waiters were very pleasant, definitely well trained. We got a drink and the menu. I was a greenhorn and asked if the oysters were still alive. He was shocked – of course they are, he said. The four of us were busy with the menu and said nothing. When the waiter came, we all ordered, one by one, smoked salmon with brown bread! It was a gorgeous salmon and we enjoyed the meal – good-bye to oysters for me forever!

The year before I was due to sit for the Intermediate Certificate, my parents were wonderful to send me to an Irish College in Carna for a fortnight. Patricia from Rosleven had booked, already. I was very keen to improve my Irish and my parents wanted me to have every chance to pass the Intermediate Certificate, and that involved passing in Irish too. Carna, you could say, was on the map due to the large day and boarding school. It had a chapel and Parochial Hall, no doubt a pub, a small shop offering everyday necessities for people in the area. The mountains were in full view in front of us and we could take lovely walks on a large unfenced area leading to one of the hills; and as the area was in full view of the

school, we could walk around there at lunch time. We could also borrow bicycles, and I remember cycling to Carraroe with a group one afternoon.

The teaching was good, from 9-12 a.m. and from 3-5 p.m. The young people were nice, many from Salthill and Galway, but from other parts of Ireland too. During the lessons only Irish was spoken, and soon my ear seemed to get more accustomed to it; and in the afternoon we either had grammar lessons or we were taught Irish songs. During the free time we were supposed to speak Irish, but many of us didn't come up to that, so we made sure to get out of ear-shot of the teachers before we chatted the way teenagers do, in English.

In the evenings there were Céilís (traditional dances) in the school every night, and on Saturdays we could go to the Céilí in the Parochial Hall (open to everyone). With me it was my straight hair – eskimo hair one hairdresser called it, two insults for the Inuit in one. If I had curly hair all would be well, I thought! Having arrived on the Friday – my parents had gone – I went straight to the little shop for a bottle of beer so I could set my hair the next morning. That was an undertaking! Needless to say, the shopkeeper wanted to know what I needed it for. I told him. I got a sermon about under age, danger of alcohol – the all-inclusive talk. He added the question, ironically, if there was nothing else I wanted and I said the loan of a bottle opener would be really great and he would get it back. To my amazement I was handed both! Of course, he did get the empty bottle and the bottle opener back.

On Saturday I washed my hair after breakfast, rubbed half the bottle of beer into it, set my hair in rollers, sealed the bottle with the rest of the beer in it and hid it for the second Saturday Céilí. As there was no hairdryer around, I spent most of the day lying on the bed, reading, waiting for the development of beauty. At lunchtime I took the rollers carefully out to be replaced later. The hair wasn't dry. I went down for my lunch looking ridiculous.

Before the Céilí the hair was dry and some movement had found its way into my Inuit hair. When I arrived at the Parochial Hall with a group from the college the priest was inspecting us at the door. I greeted him in Irish, got no response, but as I was about to move on, I felt his nose in my hair. Before I could react – I was furious – he said, 'Well, you've certainly used the beer for your hair. I can smell it.' (He said this in English.) Obviously, there was a well-functioning news line between the shopkeeper and the priest!

Carna is a happy part of 'my' teenage Connemara and I was so proud and thrilled when I was presented with the silver Fáinne (a badge that indicates that the speaker has a basic knowledge of Irish) at the end of the fortnight and wore it for years with great pride on the lapel of my Rosleven school blazer. And I passed the Intermediate Certificate!

Before we returned to Germany, I persuaded my parents to take a day trip to Achill. My parents were still marathon car travelling people and I had become a confident driver. B&B was out – we were only going to Achill! Heinrich Böll was of great interest to us, as he came to Ireland at approximately the same time as we did, and we realized that our impressions coincided with his in most things when we read his *Irishes Tagebuch* ('Irish Journal').



The day was overcast and quite wet. It was very windy and the sea was showing off its force. We saw a lot of the coast road, at Keel, and incredible scenery everywhere; so we got a good impression of the whole island. My parents were delighted to be there. I personally found the force of the elements overwhelming and terrifying for some strange reason. Storms and furious seas in Clare put me in awe of the forces of nature. I didn't underestimate their unpredictable power ever. But except as a child crossing the Irish Sea in a storm, I was never really frightened by hurricanes that sometimes swept over the west coast in the autumn, but in Achill I didn't feel comfortable. Perhaps it was just because one day wasn't enough? No idea.

When I returned to Germany it was my friends who kept my bridge to Ireland operating, and because of them Ireland stayed my partial home and I was not completely disorientated a second time in my life. Their hospitality, kindness and friendship cannot be described or sufficiently acknowledged, and all the efforts, both great and small, were important and appreciated. My friend Ida almost had a standing invitation for me for years. When she, Maureen and Janet visited me in the Worringerstrasse 52 in Wuppertal that first Easter in 1973, Maureen came out with one of those statements that I would consider having an instant quotation status. 'The journey is nothing, it is only the 'lolly'!' Flights were still most expensive at that time. There was a lot of truth in her saying. Yet it is the loyal friends who kept the lifeline active, with or without lolly!

One summer in the late Seventies Ida decided that instead of travelling around to visit friends when I was over, we should spend a fortnight in a bungalow together and we would all enjoy a holiday there. She rented a bungalow right on the shores of Lough Mask – the lake only a few yards down from the house. There was even a rowing boat tied to a tiny, private jetty. The whole bungalow was beautiful. There were five of us: Ida, Dodie, Maureen, Susan and I. I was to have the bedroom overlooking the lake and mountain rising up behind it. When I woke up, I could see the scene from my bed – I never pulled the curtains. I raved so much about it that they actually drove me to Galway to buy water colours, brushes and paper, and I couldn't wait to paint the scene. I blush now when I realize that I accepted all these wonderful gifts, like time and driving, and I wasn't even permitted to pay for my share for the rent of the house. Not even being a hobby painter, the 'painting' turned out quite well, however, well enough in fact for my parents to have it framed and it hung over the piano till our mother died two years after our father and the flat had to be cleared. They said it brought Connemara back to them.

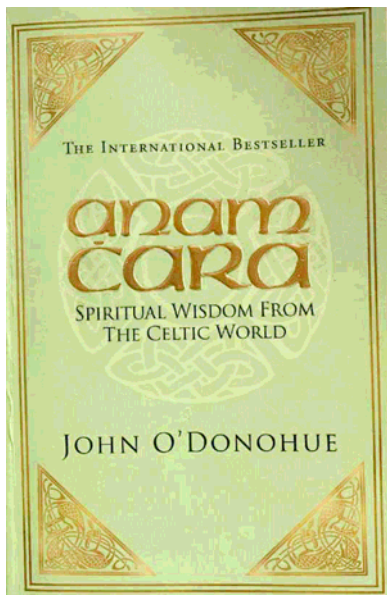
The five of us spent some time on the lovely grounds during that holiday, but besides going on errands to do a little shopping for our meals, and having me 'artistically' fitted out in Galway, we went on some trips. One day we visited a Wesley College teacher, Bob, whose sister had come over from the U.S.A. to stay

for the holiday. They had rented a cottage on Achill Island. Old photos captured and reveal these happy times. None of them is posed, just a reminder of the ease and joy for all of us. Maureen is wearing one of Bob's wonderful summer hats in one of the photos and we are all laughing. She looks fantastic.

Another day we visited Ashford Castle. When we arrived at the gate the attendant, very official-looking in his navy outfit, resembling a Garda uniform just a little, told us the price of available tickets and what we had to pay. Ida always had a thing about money being taken by private individuals for just looking at a part of Ireland that should be open to the public. We five mature women were sitting in the car, one with a head of white curls, the driver's seat window down, Ida at the wheel. She said without the trace of smile, and in an official tone: 'Five half-price, please.' The man bent down to have a good look inside the car and then remarked, 'By God, ye must all be Glaxo babies'. We laughed as Ida handed him the right amount that she was already holding in her hand; and in we sailed, admired the beautiful grounds, looked at the top-class hotel, but we didn't linger.

Due to the generosity of friends, I saw wonderful sites where I had never been before. When I organized groups on bus trips to Ireland, I also saw many places I had always wanted to see, but never got the opportunity, e.g. Clonmacnoise, the Boyne Valley, Monasterboice, the Giant's Causeway, to name just a few. Connemara was part of a tour twice, but the tours were not identical. We stayed in hotels in Eyre Square, Galway, on both occasions, and a visit to the Aran Islands was the priority on the second trip.

A small literary interest was part of all the trips. On the first visit to Connemara, it was an introduction to *Anam Cara* ('Soul Friend'; published 1996) by John O'Donohue. A German curate with whom I had once organized and planned a school church service lent me a German copy, signed by John O'Donohue himself, given to him when they were both students in Tübingen. John O'Donohue was doing his Ph.D. on the German philosopher Hegel at the time. I had found out after a lot of enquiries that the author was now living in Maam Cross in Connemara. As the saying goes, 'fools rush in where angels fear to tread'. With a fair amount of work, I eventually traced his telephone number. He remembered Olaf Schaper and then I carefully explained about the tour, my introducing the group to his writing and as we were in the area, I couldn't resist enquiring if he might be prepared to give the group a short address. He was very kind, but as he was due to leave for the States to present his new book, he wouldn't be in the country.



Beannacht – Blessing [John O'Donohoe]

<p>On the day when the weight deadens on your shoulders and you stumble, may the clay dance to balance you. And when your eyes freeze behind the grey window and the ghost of loss gets in to you, may a flock of colours, indigo, red, green and azure blue come to awaken in you a meadow of delight.</p>	<p>When the canvas frays in the curach of thought and a stain of ocean blackens beneath you, may there come across the waters a path of yellow moonlight to bring you safely home. May the nourishment of the earth be yours, may the clarity of light be yours, may the fluency of the ocean be yours, may the protection of the ancestors be yours. And so may a slow wind work these words of love around you, an invisible cloak to mind your life.</p>
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On the day for Connemara, we woke up to find Galway wrapped in fog. So, we drove along that beautiful coast road, just about able to see a stone wall beside us – sometimes. The bus driver was a character who wanted us to call him ‘Captain’. He was very well-read and to keep the group happy he started to talk about ‘the little people’, about traditions with keening women, banshees. He was full of traditions and folklore without indulging in ‘touristic leprechaunism’ (‘leprechaun’ = a diminutive supernatural being in Irish folklore, classed by some as a type of solitary fairy. They are usually depicted as little bearded men, wearing a coat and hat, who partake in mischief. In later times, they have been too much depicted as shoe-makers who have a hidden pot of gold at the end of the rainbow.) When we started off in the morning, we were all so disappointed, but it turned out to be a trip with a special atmosphere. I had booked a stop on and in a small Connemara farm and cottage, including a morning tea break. The cottage seemed to me to be quite authentic and the lady of the house was most friendly and welcoming, the tea good. The man turned out to be a bit of a *seanchaí* (a traditional Gaelic storyteller or historian). When he started telling some of the group how a huge boulder we were looking at had been placed there by four of the little people, carrying it on their fingers from a field a way off – he pointed towards the west(!), and some very studious people in the group, well prepared by the Captain, were beginning to take notes, asking serious questions, I decided I wasn’t well enough up on this and went to get a second cup of tea from the lovely lady of the house who was very firmly grounded!

When we drove up the coast road leading to Clifden the fog started to lift somewhat and the stop at Kylemore Abbey gave everyone a chance to take in the view and they all loved the stop, chance to walk around, do some shopping, have something to eat. As we started off on the road leading to Maam Cross, the fog lifted completely in the shortest of time, revealing a most magnificent view of the mountains. The colours were wonderful. It was magic, this complete and unexpected change and we were all overcome by the scene. When we had a

chance to stop and people had had time to take photographs and we set off again I introduced them to 'Beannacht' (blessing) by John O'Donohue. I left it at that. The impressions had been manifold, and I referred to small passages and notes I had prepared on *Anam Cara* (the 'Soul Friend' book by John O'Donohue) on longer road stretches on other days, not forgetting to point out Maam Cross, and explaining its importance as a cross road too, when we came to it.

On the second trip to Galway, Connemara was on the programme, but a visit to the Aran Islands was the highlight. We also spent more time in Galway itself which everybody enjoyed. Some went to greyhound races. The city was full of young people, lots of students. As we had not come in the top season there were lots of other visitors as well, but the city wasn't too crowded, and the music pubs pleasantly frequented. We found a wonderful fish restaurant with excellent food and friendly service. As we had breakfast in the hotel, most of us had our meal there in the evening, more or less filling the restaurant. On this particular visit a young couple chose their Claddagh wedding rings in Galway, very exciting.

On the day of our trip to the Aran Islands the weather was beautiful. We had most of the day on the island, but everyone made their way first to the fort. Some really sporty ones walked there and back, and fell fast asleep as soon as they sat down in the boat afterwards! A few were lucky to be taken in a jaunting cart, but most were brought to the bottom of the hill in small buses. Some when they had reached the fort, lay in the grass to look over the edge. I'm glad I wasn't there to see that! The visit to the Aran Islands was certainly unforgettable! The literary introduction on this tour was some of W. B. Yeats's poetry, as we visited Thoor Ballylee from Galway, as well as Coole Park and Lissadell House, where the Gore-Booth sisters (one of them the Countess Markiewicz) had lived. As in Sligo, where later on the trip he recited 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree' on a boat on the lake, Hans Hochreuter gave a moving rendering of one of Yeats's poems in front of Thoor Ballylee in English, later translating it and giving some background information. A moving experience.

The Lake Isle of Innisfree

I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,
 And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made:
 Nine bean-rows will I have there, a hive for the honey-bee;
 And live alone in the bee-loud glade.
 And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes dropping slow,
 Dropping from the veils of the morning to where the cricket sings;
 There midnight's all a glimmer, and noon a purple glow,
 And evening full of the linnet's wings.
 I will arise and go now, for always night and day
 I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore;
 While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements grey,
 I hear it in the deep heart's core.

In the Eighties, Ida's husband Bob, taking Sunday services in a small protestant church near Roundstone during a few summer weeks, was offered the chance to stay in a lovely house; it was for the time when he took over the services there, down a lane from Roundstone, right at the rocky edge of the sea. They invited me to join them, and, if my memory doesn't fail me, twice in fact. The time there was probably the most restful and, at the same time, happiest holiday of all the wonderful holidays I spent with different friends ever. We went on a few outings, did some essential shopping for groceries, when necessary, collected water in large containers from a public pump, as the summer was so warm and dry, that the water tank for the house was nearly empty. On the whole, we were just perfectly happy reading, or talking about all sorts of topics while sitting outside in the mild sun or shade, seeing and hearing the sea gently lapping on the rocks, just a few yards away. Sometimes we took a stroll up the avenue, and Ida, so knowledgeable about plants and a great gardener, pointed out wild geraniums growing at the side of the small road. I must repeat that the times spent there with these wonderful people are among the happiest times of my life.

What do I consider to be so special about Connemara, besides the obvious scenic beauty? What was so important to me at the time was the stillness, the frequently changing colours, but always a quiet harmony of shades: beiges and greys, blues, light blues except for the sea which could sometimes be a brilliant blue or almost darkish grey with green patches and always green fields somewhere. It was an area where the constant 'cinema' charging round my brain stopped, just turned off, and ideas started to emerge, thoughts started to mature and connect. There are so many beautiful places in Ireland, in Germany, in the world, and even I, who has not travelled widely, have a treasury of memories of astonishingly beautiful places, and I would never think of comparing them. But when I am at peace, when I want to think, need to solve problems, or want to write or remember people who have gone on the road of life before me, my mind and I are in Connemara.

71: Experiences in Kerry – Part 1 (August 1971)

At the beginning of our life in Ireland, travelling around was neither a priority nor a possibility. When the necessity arose, Father took the risk of driving the old Ford Prefect to firms even in Cork or Dublin to get label orders, and Mother generally accompanied him, all marathon one day (plus night) trips! Our first mobile friend simply needed careful, caring handling. If we had to travel for more than a few miles from home, the decision could only be made if necessity was the decisive factor. So, if our ‘friend’ decided on a major breakdown we bore it patiently and calmly, looked for help; we hadn’t foolishly set out on the trip for a bit of distraction, so there was no need to feel guilty. As far as we could, we tried to attend to the Ford’s needs too. At one stage we just had to go to Limerick, Henner driving. The vehicle was literally addicted to oil, so we had about eight cans in the boot of the car. Henner checked the oil level twice on the way there, each time giving a refill of one can, and we had the same procedure on the way home. Detectives could have easily traced our movements by investigating a loss of oil on the roads of West Clare!



Addicted to ... oil! [Photo about 1955]

Thanks to the two German Directors, the Ford was replaced after about eighteen months by a second-hand Austin car. It was still relatively ‘young, fit and dynamic’, so that took a load off our minds. After a while we decided to visit Killarney. Everyone we met and talked to was surprised we hadn’t been there yet and told us it was a ‘must’. Eventually we planned to go there one Sunday.

We had a road map, and chose what seemed to be the most direct way via Limerick. (The Killimer Ferry wasn’t in action yet.) I can’t remember what route we took, but it wasn’t ideal. The scenery was so rugged that for us, the journey consisted of mere mileage. Henner remarked that he could now have a faint idea what the surface of the moon might look like!

[Hellgard Leckebusch, *Singing our Song*, p. 400]



Killarney, 2017

When we reached Killarney, we did appreciate its beauty, the setting, the lakes, the vegetation and those lovely trees. Our parents had seen a bit of the world, but Henner and I had been conditioned to appreciate creation in its green attire, a gentle sight. We needed more mental adjustment to appreciate the scenery in its reduced form, like someone whose taste is fixed on paintings of the impressionists and needs time to appreciate paintings in basic lines and colours, or modern art. Here in Killarney, we were almost ‘at home’.

To have tea and sandwiches out somewhere, or even a drink, was a rare treat we could seldom afford. We had brought a picnic, wonderful on a dry day, but it poured, so it was a car picnic, awkwardly pouring and passing hot tea and sandwiches backwards and forwards: the Austin was great, but not spacious. We had umbrellas in the car, so we walked around the town for a while, admired the jaunting cars with very slack business that day. We had no time to attempt the Ring of Kerry, and our knowledge did not yet extend to Muckross House, or Ladies’ View. Our trip had been an introduction. It took several years till we revisited Killarney and Co. Kerry, and, this time we loved both the town and the country, and could do its beauty justice.

Father and holidays did not really go together. While in our mother’s family everyone worked hard and long hours during the week, a Sunday was a holiday, a Sunday was different. The day was celebrated, generally begun by attending a church service. That was the day when there was meat for lunch, visitors came, or friends and relatives were visited or they went for long walks or Mother went to the Opera House. On Saturdays, a cake – often a very simple cake – was baked, so that Kaffee & Kuchen was an option instead of the evening meal: a celebration shared alone in the family or with others.

In Father’s family the tradition was different. They had wonderful, happy occasions, celebrations when the opportunity arose, but there wasn’t the accepted

regularity of a free and leisurely day, or even a holiday. In contrast, Mother's father took the children on a short trip to see Helgoland. Holidays were rare and brief, but took place as a part of life and education, if possible. I gather the looms in the 'Sonnenhof' were in action on Sundays, certainly on Sunday mornings attended by the sons, while the women were preparing the food in the kitchen, as visitors often arrived in the afternoon in numbers. This is what I have filtered from conversations about Sundays there. So, our father's way of giving his best for his family was to work himself 'sick'. He did take his times of leisure, off and on, but as they weren't predictable, they could seldom be shared by his family.



Killarney, 2017

Although I appreciated his effort and motive, I started to oppose this arrangement when I got older. During his four-week holiday he worked (and got double pay, which was a great help) and this meant the firm did not have to close down for a month. When we lived in the Retreat, Henner and I had our summers on the beach, or I was able to visit friends like Gertrude or Anne for a week or two. Once we moved to the village, this changed, except when we had visitors. Even during my T.C.D. days, holiday time at the sea was more or less reduced to what I called 'the daily medical bath'. Even on an exceptionally beautiful and gloriously warm day I couldn't get Mother to spend an hour or two in Spanish Point or at the White Strand, as she felt she couldn't spend time there while Father was working, an act of solidarity that I could admire, but didn't share, and I didn't like to let her do the work alone. When Father came home after 6 p.m. we drove off to the White Strand – daily almost – had a swim, got dressed, drove home. After all, swimming in the sea was so *healthy*! As long as I was at T.C.D. I didn't really complain, but once I started teaching, I insisted a bit more on some rare treats. Eventually, after lots of arguments, even till just before our departure (this trip took place in August 1971), I persuaded my parents to go to Kerry for a long

weekend, spending two or three nights in a B&B. I would do the driving and treat them.

It was great. Once we were on the Killimer Ferry we were on holiday and even Father was delighted. I took a lovely photo of him looking out to the Shannon estuary over the railing in the woollen cardigan I had knitted him for Christmas, a garment he loved and wore till he died. He's beaming. In the photo of Mother she is beaming too, but of course she was delighted about the trip. She felt some breaks or short holidays were important in life if it could be arranged.



I had addresses of B&B places in Dingle, our first stop, and I tried to organize accommodation as soon as we arrived. It was August, so this proved to be difficult. Eventually we were offered a double and single room in a farmhouse and we set out to find it. The place looked fine, we had a place to stay. I paid for our accommodation and didn't bother to look at the rooms.

We loved Dingle, the view of the Blaskets, even the Skelligs, Dunquin and the Beehive Huts, Gallarus Oratory, the overwhelming coastline.



It was late afternoon now and we decided to freshen up at the B&B, then have something to eat in Dingle. and have a look around the town. The double-room was a surprise. It had a good bed and everything was fresh, clean and bright. It had, as we had been told, running hot and cold water. It had: a tiny, triangular washhand basin in the corner of the room opposite the door, large enough so that Mother or I could immerse both hands in the water. Father couldn't, and the space around the bed enabled one way traffic only, although just one person could choose the direction. We were all in the room, as we wanted to make plans. Mother and I were lying on the bed, while Father was washing his hands and face. Suddenly Mother said: 'I have an idea, Hans'. He turned round, ready to hear her idea. 'I have just thought, Hans, our bedroom in the Hill House is far too big for us. We'll turn it into four double-rooms, one for us, three for B&B guests'. Father wasn't always quick enough for Mother's fun, and one could literally see him sizing up the room mentally, about to tell Mother this was foolish and that it wouldn't work, but I burst out laughing before he got his chance. Mother and I shared a similar sense of humour. This was Mother's way of saying what she thought of the size of the room and the washing arrangement, no bath or shower available outside, just a W.C. A couple would have had to make do with a cat's lick. We were fine. My room had a normal-sized wash hand basin, so we took turns to have a good wash.

We all had a go at the 'running hot and cold water', and had a lovely evening in Dingle. The beds were good, we slept well, the breakfast was tasty, home-made brown bread too, and the people were nice. Then we headed for the Ring of Kerry, loved the spectacular scenery, drove to 'Ladies View', revisited Killarney, did it justice this time.

I forget where we hoped to get B&B for the next night but it was Bantry where we stopped. It was late afternoon and our chances were slim. Eventually, the lady in the Bord Fáilte (Tourist Information) office came up with an unofficial address. Apparently, the people were fussy about the guests they had, but she felt they might like us – wouldn't we be lucky? – and we were to give it a try! They were able and willing to take us and I immediately booked and paid for two nights without asking my parents. The people were incredibly pleasant and the house gorgeous. It was almost like staying with friends who had a beautiful home and it was prime time. We enjoyed the peninsula too, including Garnish Island. And I remember the incredible view, garden and building of the Great Southern Hotel in Parknasilla too. My memory otherwise is not as vivid about our time there. Perhaps I had seen so much already, but it was the stay in the lovely B&B that made a great impression.

The trip was a success for us all in every way and I was delighted my parents had seen and enjoyed this lovely part of Ireland before they returned to Germany.

It wasn't the end of my relationship with Kerry though. While still teaching, my wonderful friend and colleague, Dodie, decided to visit Dingle with me and we would spend the weekend there. I don't know what prompted us that weekend, or why we went in Maureen's, and not in Dodie's car, which we did and without Maureen! It was the end of term. I seem to remember that I was staying in Dublin for a colleague's wedding on July 2nd. Another colleague had just got married and

had gone off on his honeymoon, destiny unknown. When we drove up the lane to our B&B, which was not an official B&B either, we spotted his Morris Minor. What a coincidence!

Dodie was the loveliest, gentlest, and in such an inconspicuous way, ablest person, but quiet. At the wheel you wouldn't recognize her: she was a fantastic driver, most concentrated, fearless, taking no risks but missing no chances either. When we had left our things in the room we set out for the coast. A sea mist was coming down, not blotting everything out. It was rather like sheets of white and grey silk floating through the air – magnificent. The coast road wasn't that wide, but Dodie knew what she was doing. We came to the place where a small stream flows across the road on to the sea. It was only a few inches deep, so not a problem but not a place to drive through at top speed. Suddenly in the mist a white apparition approached us and for a second took our breath away. The fog lifted for a minute and we knew what it was. It was the large white statue at the side of the road near the stream, but it had looked so different in the mist.

We were not too late back to our room after our meal out and it was comfortable enough to enjoy sitting there for a while. Dodie wanted to go to the toilet which was in the corridor, but each time she made an attempt I started to copy the honeymoon teacher's accent, saying what I expected he would say if he suddenly ran across Dodie. We laughed so much that Dodie couldn't go, so I eventually had to stop to let her go on this urgent errand. We were glad we didn't meet them, but the possibility added to the fun and joy of our weekend. Dodie drove back with her normal expertise. I've never met a driver like her. Unforgettable when once she drove me from Ballinteer to the station to get the last train that day to Limerick. No one gave us a chance, but Dodie made it, 'taking no risks but missing no chance', and neither of us spoke a word. Dodie was a lovely friend, and though she died some years ago, I laugh with her still.

I was over on a holiday from Germany when Ida drove me and Janet for a few days to Dingle on another occasion. We decided we'd rather save on the room, and treat ourselves to a really nice meal every evening. Driving into Dingle we hit on a perfect solution. Before we drove into the town there was a B&B on our right, and down the lane on our left a beautiful new hotel with a most marvellous view. We enquired at the hotel about coming for dinner in the evening and that was possible for non-staying guests too. The B&B was not fancy but good and convenient. We spent wonderful days out and about and the time spent on Inch Strand was exhilarating, as was the whole trip. In the evenings we took a leisurely walk down to this gorgeous hotel, sat in comfortable armchairs in front of a blazing fire, looking out at an arm of the sea and the big white B&B building on the other side, Milltown House. We treated ourselves to a drink or a coffee till dinner was served. I don't need gourmet food, but these three dinners were of the best, the lobster and the crab soup '*incroyable*'! After the meal we sat for another while in front of the fire, night settling in over the sea, having a coffee, reading and I generally wrote some cards. Then we took a leisurely walk back to our B&B, superbly happy after a perfect day and ready for a good night's sleep.

72: Experiences in Kerry – Part 2 (2000)

The last time I visited Dingle was also the last time I was in Ireland with a tour, in the year 2000 and that tour was an ‘all-inclusive’ adventure. The journey from Wuppertal to Hull, and from there to Chester, where we made a longer stop, was lovely and a normal procedure. It was early autumn, mild, warm and beautiful and we started by visiting the cathedral. The group had guidelines where they could go, or have lunch if they wished and we would meet at the bus before 3 p.m. and leave on the dot. The bus driver and I took turns to be at the bus in case of an emergency

By three o’clock we were all there except for one lady! That’s what I used to love on school trips – one person missing! We set out in groups in different directions hoping to find her, the husband very worried and distressed. By 4 p.m. she was located at the police station. With practically no English, she had got there. Overwhelmed by the cathedral and its sanctity she trustingly left her huge handbag with all the bank, insurance, identity cards, driving licenses and keys, all the cash, *everything* for her and her husband in a church pew while she was spellbound by the beauty of the place, taking endless photographs. Somebody with a heart for and good eyes to spot lonely unattended handbags had released the bag out of its unattended solitude! Although this thoughtless action of a mature woman with grown up children, both university graduates like both their parents, brought great inconvenience, there is a great deal to be admired. She hadn’t lost her childlike ability to be so moved by beauty and tradition that she forgot everything else.

By the time she was located and I could contact her, the German Embassy had closed down for the weekend. I know there is always an emergency number, but I hadn’t got it and the recorded message did not give the number either. It was about 5 p.m. when we left for Caernarvon and were just in time for dinner. The bus driver remarked that there was something wrong with the bus – bus garage service in the next centre closed for the weekend. At least we were able to contact a man with a garage who came to see what could be done. When I had interpreted enough for the bus driver and mechanic to deal with the problem – a new battery was needed! – I had to make some arrangement with the unfortunate couple.

There were only two alternatives: they would travel with us to Ireland and would either be spared passport control, or I’d have to think of something. They would have to consider that they might not be allowed to enter Ireland and then the Irish authorities would make the decisions.

Or I could offer them a very limited amount of money; they would have to stay in Wales till the German Embassy in London opened on Monday morning. The daughter had been contacted and she had stopped bank cards, etc. I had managed to get a ref. number for the theft at the police station before we left Chester, and that turned out to be immensely important later. The couple decided to stay with us in the bus and take the risk.

We set off for Holyhead to get the early Catamaran – breakfast at 4:30 a.m., the bus running smoothly, meanwhile with a tractor battery that had been located somewhere during the night! But we didn’t seem to have a good Karma. We had gale force 12 winds, so the catamaran would not travel. We drove back to a small

town with a huge shopping centre, restaurant, sitting room. Obviously, they were prepared for travel hindrances, were open when we arrived so early and offered a warm shelter. Most of the group decided on a good, leisurely breakfast. They offered a wide choice. Some just had tea or coffee.

There was spare time before we would head off for Holyhead to get a crossing on the normal mail boat – hopefully. The storm raged but the rain had stopped, and there were sites to visit nearby. Anyway, we had a warm dry place where we were relatively comfortable.

When we reached Holyhead, the storm had calmed down to gale force 10-11! Anyway, we would be sailing and we all had to deal with the circumstances. Some trusting individuals had a good meal of fish and fries, baked beans, sausages and mash, on the boat, but soon realized it was a pure waste of money – a short, limited and unsuccessful visit for the nourishment, mission unaccomplished.

I offered group games in the lounge to pass the time and had about 20 sitting round me till Dún Laoghaire was in sight – the time of decision. As soon as I got on the bus I made a sharp announcement, that should a passport control get on to the coach not to interfere with what I was doing, and above all to offer *no advice!* There were a few very nice people who were solution experts! And there was to be no reaction till we were out on the road, no matter what the outcome was.

As could be expected, a friendly Irish official did want to meet us. My only chance was to talk him into the ground till he was so worn out that he would let us off. So I brought out my best Clare accent and made a comment that here I was wanting to introduce friends to a wonderful country and all Ireland had to offer on this particular day – gale force winds and rain. He hadn't expected the accent and enquired, poor man, wanting to see my identity card! I took great pains to leave no gaps in my vitae. Eventually he got a break and said he was sure there were no problem cases and they were to pass their passports down to him. Well, I said, there is a problem, a lady from Serbia, married to a German but with a passport from Serbia and she's travelling with her younger child. She has of course got a visa. Like the British official the day before he smelt a problem and it would take time. I asked Milla to come to the front of the bus with her daughter, passport and visa. He was due for the next of my oral attacks – husband's profession: I had taught the son for years, now at the Max Planck Institute with a scholarship. The daughter was equally nice and clever. The official's patience was getting thin, God help him. The row of buses behind us couldn't move, other passport officials were making signs, and he leant backwards out of the bus several times, making signs with one arm, holding on to the bus with the other. Then he said: 'Off you go. Good night'. I wasn't fair to him, but my loyalty that night was with the couple in distress, and we could all now travel to Dingle. Holy Hour, they would say in Clare, as a full stop; not an irreverent remark. Many people's spiritual life was so closely connected to everyday procedures, that sometimes only a spiritual reference could step in for an emotion they couldn't verbalize. So I say 'Holy Hour!' too.

I had phoned Benner's Hotel from Wales to explain we wouldn't be there for dinner, that we had had a really tough day, and could they prepare some sandwiches or soup for our arrival.

The bus swayed in the storm. Just outside Dublin, the bus driver stopped at a large filling station with a shop and toilets. He needed petrol. I was back at pronouncements – everyone was to go to the loo, ‘if they needed it or not’. The very hungry could buy some chocolate, biscuits or sweets if they wished, but to ignore drinks. We would get refreshments in Dingle – as if Dingle was down the road! I was trying to bypass the problem of toilets *en route*! The bus had an emergency ration of drinks one could buy.

It was dark and stormy, the roads got narrower, by-passes outside towns, so no restaurants in sight, they saw not even a place to park the bus. The request for a stop for refreshments came frequently at first but died down gradually. We would, of course, stop if the opportunity arose, I repeated again and again. One lady kept tapping me on my shoulder. It was her husband’s birthday and they had Sekt for everyone. We only needed a good place to park so we could all stand outside. She said she wanted to honour her husband’s birthday. (It was dark, a gale blowing and pouring rain) Eventually the husband said we should postpone the Sekt Stop!) Once we were in Kerry the questions stopped – the driver could hardly get his bus round some of the corners. Thank goodness he was a great driver and we reached Benner’s Hotel around 2 a.m. When I knocked on the door the manager said roughly: ‘Why are you knocking in the middle of the night?’. He hadn’t expected us for another two hours!

They had prepared a great welcome in the lounge – different sandwiches, tea, coffee, drinks and a blazing fire. It was good, as we had a chance to recover to some degree, and it was 3 a.m. when the first guests took their keys to find their rooms. The hotel had about ten or more honeymoon suites for our group – no upgrading price – and they were beautiful, and in the best of taste. Strangely enough they didn’t go down well with everyone and I had to arrange a lot of swapping. One elderly couple had patiently waited for their turn, but by then there was no couple I could ask to swap with them. They were quite old and both very tall and the double bed wasn’t comfortable for them. But they realized I couldn’t do anything till the next morning: they would get a twin bedroom then, I promised, and they said it was a short night now anyway. It was nearly 4 a.m. They realized we couldn’t produce a suitable room like a magician would pull a rabbit out of a tall hat!

I moved over to the last couple still enjoying the fire, another Guinness, to give them the key of their room – also a honeymoon suite. They returned instantly – this was a ‘no-go’ situation, they said. This otherwise very pleasant couple obviously had a real problem – the one partner emotional, panicky, assertive, demanding. The other partner speechless in this humiliating exposure of obviously a basic intimate problem. The manager, overtired, only showed a sprinkling of goodwill at this stage, which soon disappeared. The rest of his professional politeness was also worn out when he told me to tell them he was not prepared and certainly not at this hour of the night or morning to get a saw and end up with twin beds!! That shows how most people can react in a panic after a horrifying day. It only needs one more problem and their self-control vanishes as the nerves snap. Just then this had happened to the couple and the manager. I translated! At this stage I was almost ready to offer my room to them as a second room, and I would

sit in the lounge till day routine started – lethal for my legs – when I heard the bus driver coming down the stairs in his bare feet. He was in his pyjamas. He was in the room above and had heard the raised voices. He told me it was time I got some rest and he at least would bring my case to my room. He asked what the problem was. I briefly stated ‘The honeymoon suite’. A few minutes later I heard him flying down the stairs with my case again, grinning. ‘Hellgard’, he said, ‘you will have that beautiful honeymoon suite now. (He had swapped rooms and had one too!) The couple can have your twin bedroom.’ He was lucky that I didn’t give him a hug! He had a close shave as I was almost too tired to control my grateful emotions.

A few hours later, breakfast at 8 a.m., I was almost ‘young, fit and dynamic’. The manager was back in his professional, ‘good-humour and good-will’ state. I had a honeymoon suite on offer and immediately three hands went up, the first raised hand got it and the patient couple from the night before was relieved to be able to move to the twin bedroom. Mr. Mooney, an old friend, contacted me, but didn’t make any comment. He felt I should get on with it. He wouldn’t interfere. In some way news had got round to him that the trip had hit on a difficult patch and he never let me down. The breakfast was great, a full Irish breakfast available, but lighter variations on offer; home-made brown bread, fruit, jam on offer for Europeans as well as marmalade. The hotel, the food, the efficiency – excellent!

At 9 o’clock, a phone call came from the guide I had booked for a longer guided walk around certain sites in Dingle. The storm had uprooted trees which were blocking several major roads and a Garda had said it would be 12 o’clock probably before he would reach Dingle. He added he would come and offer a shorter route. As it turned out, people were quite glad of some free time to have a look around Dingle and the shops – just to take it easy after the short night. By 12 o’clock everyone including the guide was at the hotel and about twenty people wanted to go on the tour with him; the rest, like myself, were quite happy to get the chance of a little snooze and gentle walk before dinner.

The meal and service were extremely good and then we all set off for an evening in one pub or another with Irish music. I hit on a great place, and thanks to the forty plus winks in the afternoon I could enjoy it.

Unfortunately, the trip to Skellig Michael had been cancelled that day, very disappointing. The storm calmed more and more and the weather forecast was good, but the sea was still rough: a calm sea was a condition for the trip, clearly stated in the booking.

From now on there were no hitches. Dingle was just as wonderful as ever and everyone loved the whole programme, from beehive huts near Dunquin, followed by a film about the Blaskets, Inch Strand, Gallarus Oratory, etc., and they also wanted and got more time in Dingle, loved the little harbour, a type of Ocean Experience I didn’t know; and they saw and bought really nice Irish Crafts of different materials. And we were all able to accept the lady’s offer of some Sekt, to toast her husband on his birthday a day later.

The organizing Touring group never took in Dingle on their trips. My choice seemed to astonish them and eventually they persuaded me to book half our time in a hotel in Kenmare. It was more convenient when visiting Killarney, the Ring

of Kerry, the boat trip to see the seals, and it was a nice town: but the far more expensive hotel, admittedly set in a pretty garden, couldn't compare with Benner's Hotel at all, and I regretted having given in. But the days and the sites were wonderful, the weather magnificent, and we had a bit more time really to appreciate beautiful views, and the sheep dog presentation I had half-heartedly booked proved to be great. Killarney was an appreciated highlight and we spent most of the day there with a guided tour of Muckross House. Everyone loved Killarney.

From Dingle I had contacted the German Embassy on the Monday morning and the husband made the arrangements with them. They were able to get provisional identity cards, valid for a limited time, and the couple was able to collect them in Dublin on our way to the ferry sailing to Holyhead so that was a great relief. Once back in Germany, they both got their new driving licenses very quickly, due to the theft registration number, and the rest was inconvenient, but not a problem. They were able to organize enough cash for the trip. The loss of their cash and some personal items was bitter, but due to bank cards they didn't have cash for the whole trip in that big handbag.

This time the journey to Wales was lovely and calm. We stayed in university student flats in Bangor that night, simple but good and most convenient. I booked tables for us all in a wonderful fish restaurant I had come across by chance on another tour, the dining room overlooking the sea. After a splendid but very reasonable meal it was dark, but it was a lovely, mild night with a full moon and the 30-minute walk to the university a delight.

The drive to Hull, the trip to Rotterdam, all were wonderful and calm; after a nerve-wracking start it was, all in all, an unforgettable trip for us in every way. To quote Shakespeare: 'We shall live and laugh at this hereafter.'

73: The salt of the earth

Starting teaching in Wuppertal I was full of hope and enthusiasm to start a school partnership between Wesley College in Dublin and my new school in Wuppertal. Wesley College was interested and my friend Ida very involved, but I could not transmit my enthusiasm here at the beginning. When it did spark off, Wesley College was already looking at other projects. A few isolated private exchanges during the summer holidays did take place between pupils of both schools, or amongst children of my friends, of Ida's, and my pupils. It was often possible for pupils from Ireland to visit school here for two or three weeks. Much was learned and gained. As each teenager taking part in an exchange spent time with the partner family, the cost for this educational experience was reduced to the cost of the flight and some pocket money, not a huge financial undertaking.

This died a natural death as not only did I get older – so did my friends' children! Then, at the beginning of the nineties, Ida was approached by the parents of a Wesley pupil who at 16 had just passed the Leaving Certificate, obtaining splendid results. A place at Trinity College was secure, but the parents felt a year's experience in Europe first would be a good opportunity. Knowing of Ida's German contacts, they hoped she could help them to find a suitable German family, with a child / children around his age; so he could spend one year with the family as a paying guest, attend school for a year and get to know Germany and Europe with some support in the background.

I went through my mental list of suitable families and quickly hit on a family who had a daughter and two sons still at school, the youngest son also 16. Both families were delighted, formalities quickly organized and the exchange turned out to be a great success for all concerned. He benefited not only from the new experience, he also became a fluent German speaker, and after obtaining an excellent Trinity degree, he had offers to pursue postgraduate studies in Great Britain or Karlsruhe. He chose the German university as the studies there more suited the career he had in mind.

Mr. Mooney always refers to the importance of people building bridges, or even just organizing stepping stones for others, to overcome isolation or fear or prejudices. Tiny bridges will have been begun even with the short exchanges, but in this young man's life, as well as in the life of the host family, the connection developed well, has lasted, resulting e.g., in an invitation to the wedding in Ireland, special birthday celebrations here etc. When the host father died many years later, this young man had a business appointment in Russia the day of the funeral. He managed to postpone the business trip for a day. As he had to change flights in Amsterdam he booked a night in a hotel at the airport, rented a car, drove to Wuppertal, attended the funeral. On the way back to Amsterdam he paid me a short visit and caught the late flight to Russia that evening. Friendship, mutual respect, hospitality, shared joy and gratitude and the willingness to make an effort can lead to such actions of peace.

While he was a student at Trinity College, I took my first German group on a tour of Ireland. They were friends from the parish, from the Samaritans in Wuppertal, a few colleagues from school. His family had heard about my project and his mother wrote to tell me we were all invited for a meal in their beautiful

home at the foot of the Dublin mountains. I felt I couldn't accept such a generous invitation; after all my contribution was merely a good idea that I put into action. However, they wanted to show their gratitude and the group was thrilled not only to see Irish sites, but to meet Irish people in their home too. They probably thought of tea and sandwiches, maybe a bun? They hadn't experienced Irish hospitality yet and certainly not the generosity of this family.

We arrived in Dún Laoghaire in the early afternoon, the bus brought us to the hotel in Bray and we just had time to freshen up before we departed for the early evening invitation. There was room for the driver to park the bus at the gateway and we saw the lovely grounds, beautifully kept, sloping up towards the house and beyond. As we started to walk up the avenue the owner and his wife and three sons – all five side by side – came down the hill to greet and welcome us, and then to escort us to their home. The group was overwhelmed by the reception.

They had prepared adequate seating in the large sitting room downstairs and a large room upstairs. Except for some tables all other furniture seemed to have been removed. They had booked exquisite caterers who had prepared the food, and the main course was cooking in the kitchen. I was so amazed and most pleased to see Louise and Stephen. We had been at Trinity at the same time. Louise left teaching after a short while. Bringing up four small boys and teaching was too difficult to coordinate I would think. Being an excellent cook, she worked her way into the catering services most successfully. Stephen was an excellent teacher of English for many years in Wesley College, especially renowned for his excellent play and musical productions. They were a highly regarded annual event before Christmas. Sometime in the later eighties or early nineties he decided to join his wife in the top-class catering business. That day they served a salmon mousse with a small salad, followed by a choice of two main courses. The excellent meal was rounded off with their own specialty whiskey ice cream and then coffee or tea. A delicious meal.

No one who was there has ever forgotten the evening. The communication was no problem. For those only firm in one language there were enough of us relatively fluent in both. We translated where and when it was necessary and the young student moved around because like the rest of the family, he wanted to meet everybody. One of the ladies from Wuppertal had gone to the trouble to bring her accordion for the occasion and distributed photocopied song texts of English and German songs she had prepared. She sat on the stairs between the two rooms, the young people on the trip beside her, all doors open. We experienced again that music knows few boundaries and we sang for more than an hour – quite indescribable.

It was late when the family asked us all to assemble downstairs in the sitting room. It was quite crowded, but the family showed us how to join hands, our right hand holding the person's hand on our left, and vice versa, and sang with us in 'Auld Lang Syne', a Scottish tradition most of us were not familiar with and we joined in the singing as best we could. Then the family escorted us back to the gate and bus.

A link had been established, like a bridge, a link that would grow and become stronger. German and Irish people were no longer merely that to anyone who had

experienced the meeting. We were all people with a name, a face and a personality, and for all the Germans there 'Irish' would forever be associated with hospitality and gratitude, and hours of shared joy.

I think of other, smaller examples of networks on this tour. The first person to become my good friend in Wuppertal when I was emotionally stranded there in 1972 became very ill a year before the trip to Ireland. When I visited her the previous Christmas in hospital, the news was devastating, but she was very courageous, making it as easy as possible for her distressed family and friends. It had always been her wish to visit Ireland with me, and suddenly the chances had become slim. Lying there in the bed she asked if I would be prepared – and of course with her husband if he wished – to take her on the trip to Ireland.

Would I be prepared ...? We both knew it would be her/our only chance and I was so moved. They should fly to Dublin was my suggestion. The long coach trips and four sea crossings were ordeals that could be avoided. I asked my friend, Máire, if she would collect them from the airport, and Dodie if she would bring them back to the airport? Máire promised to collect them – she knew them as they had met in my flat and she showed them their Dublin home – and Dodie brought them back at the end of the trip. She also offered to be on stand-by to collect Ditha and her husband from any venue that would prove to be difficult for her. One social pub evening in a dense smoky atmosphere and far too much noise turned out to be completely unbearable for her. When I phoned Dodie, she immediately jumped into her car, collected them and brought them to our hotel. This is what life is about. People like Máire and Dodie who often do more than their duty are the pillars of society, reaching out among and beyond the boundaries of family and friends and strangers.

For Ditha and me the visit was most important and meaningful, and my memories of those days are as vivid as if they took place only a few days ago. They have comforted me often when I feel her presence strongly and miss her most.

Another wonderful, elderly couple in their late seventies was on the trip too, not a word of English. They had friends living and working in Drogheda and they were determined to visit them. I had arranged a tour of Dublin on one particular day and then they asked me to help them to get to Drogheda by train that day. I wasn't very happy about this, but helped them as well as I could with details of station, times and ordered a taxi from Guinness' Brewery to Westland Row. I had written out the English requests for tickets, destination, etc. but was anxious to let them set off on their own and could not relax till they arrived back at the hotel in Bray, completely exhausted but as happy as people who have won a marathon. They had even managed to take the Dart from Dublin to Bray instead of a taxi.

They had something to eat with us, but retired to their room immediately. They had shown that friendship, loyalty and gratitude deserve special efforts and that these efforts are generally rewarded with success. Mr. Mooney was most impressed by their courage and determination!

On another day the group had the opportunity to spend a day on their own in Dublin, shopping, and the opportunity to spend more time in one of the places we had visited, or to visit sites that had not been part of the organized day in Dublin.

A small group was more interested in a short historic trip around the south-east. One of the stops was at the Moone Cross, a great experience. Daniel in the Lion's Den impressed me most, his eyes full of fear and faith, such a strange combination. Suddenly I spotted a pub nearby – the Moone Cross Pub. I went in to enquire what they might have to offer twenty people for lunch. The old lady, eighty years of age, as she told me, was wonderful, but a bit overcome by the number. She had fresh vegetable soup on offer, home-made brown bread and apple pies, both freshly baked that morning, but that was all, she said and wondered if it would do. *Would that do?* It was perfect; but then she panicked and said she couldn't serve so many people, her legs not being the best, and her son was in charge of the soup and serving out in the kitchen. If she could put up with my interference, I interrupted her, I would bring the food from the kitchen to the tables and one or two of my friends would and could help. Well, she said, aren't you a great girl? Being pretty middle-aged I enjoyed the remark I hadn't heard for years and we were a team. It was a delicious home-made meal in a most friendly atmosphere, with a good cup of tea or Bewley's Coffee to go with the apple pie – a pub experience at its best. It is a woman one cannot forget – serving her best food in her home so to speak, in a room full of real, old furniture, a blazing open fire and some of the small tables we sat at were old sewing-machine tables! People like her are the salt of the earth and the best ambassadors for any nation.



In a letter to her friend Rosemary, Hellgard's original subtitle for this photograph is: This is the lady in the Moone Cross pub, 'her legs not being the best', but a great cook and a pontifex maximus. In the mirror, where just a profile is vaguely visible, is the lady who went to Drogheda with her husband. (photograph taken in the Easter week of 1993)

74: But who is Mr. Mooney

No reflection of mine on Clare or on life in general would exist without Mr. Mooney. It may sound strange that I formally address him as Mr. Mooney instead of using his Christian name as would be the more general way of addressing a person that one knows so well in Ireland. The distance this implies is misleading, it is rather a way to set him apart, to honour him for his unassuming intimacy, to respect him for knowing me so well, and yet always giving me the space to be myself. He has never tried to change me. He has echoed my thoughts, providing a mirror in which I can see myself. I have known him for most of my life, but the awareness that he is there, watching over me in a way, caring for the inner child in me, came much later.

In the Nineties, elusive as he always is, he almost unexpectedly joined me when I was taking a bus full of friends and some acquaintances around different parts of Ireland. Although I had no experience of guiding a tour anywhere except children on school trips, I decided to try it. Over a cup of coffee after a Sunday morning church service someone made the suggestion, we should all visit Ireland and in no time, there were enough requests to fill a bus – over 40 travellers – and my joy of showing Ireland to people I knew was great enough to be able to ignore any fear. One morning on one of several trips, waiting for the latecomers, it was a fellow traveller that pointed Mr. Mooney out to me before I saw him myself. Like several Irish friends, having heard about the trip and knowing the itinerary, he turned up to say ‘Hello’. The group were quite accustomed to friends of mine suddenly appearing and sometimes remarked in admiration: ‘Anyone could turn up to see you anytime.’

Mr. Mooney as always looked impeccable in his grey outfit, yet unspectacular and he simply slipped into the scene quietly. He was willing to accept my invitation to join us if no one objected, and he got on the bus with the latecomers and stepped into a free double seat near the entrance at the back of the bus.

As soon as everyone was seated and I had made the essential announcements I introduced my friend on the microphone, added that he was willing to join us for a few days if everyone agreed. The driver had settled the question of insurance with CTS Tours Lemgo, the bus company Ochsenbrücher, and as it was a bus for 51 passengers, there were spare seats, as all the travellers knew. No one objected.

I pointed out that he was very kind and polite, but shy, and would appreciate it if he was left alone. (I lifted my arm, pointing very vaguely to show where he was sitting.) He had asked me to thank them all for having the chance of spending some time with me, I said.

The group was lovely, but a few friends felt so relaxed and ‘at home’ that departure times did not seem to be relevant or necessary, a real snag. Having to keep to a schedule proved to be difficult and unnerving for me. In Wesley College, at quite an early age of 24, I had been entrusted with the post of ‘mistress in charge of girls’. That had been fine and I had enjoyed those years, but in no way was I due to slip into this role now, in charge of a bus-load of travelling adults!

Mr. Mooney was like a gift from heaven. At the next meeting time the vast majority of the group was being trained in patience yet again. Eventually the last person staggered in, doors closed, the driver set off. I made myself comfortable in

the seat, lifted the microphone. After some announcements I referred to Mr. Mooney. He had remarked to me – in a very quiet and polite way, I said – that he was a little shocked. His idea of Germans was that they were punctual, very correct, keeping to the rules. He had heard that people in Germany would never cross the road at traffic lights till the little green man was visible. Just a little reminder, I added: not only were they seeing the beautiful Irish countryside, historic sites, becoming acquainted with Irish people and Irish life, they were also in a way ‘ambassadors’ of Germany and the German people.

I used Mr. Mooney’s remarks to make my own pronouncements on the bus during the subsequent days and this was most successful, even long after this elusive man had left the coach and vanished out of their lives. It even worked on tours in other years, just by referring to what Mr. Mooney might have thought about a particular situation, right up to my last tour to Kerry in 2000.

Lives can take different routes. Some people are very successful in their career, others do very well financially, or live a happy and contented life with their partners, children and grandchildren. Other people’s lives are unspectacular but good and fulfilling. There are so many who belong to none of these groups and life passes for them too, relentlessly. My life is spectacular in that it was crammed with so many facets of life, all so different and my great treasure is and always has been the gift of coming in contact with such interesting and wonderful people, and many of them became and have stayed good friends all my life, both in Ireland and in Germany. Mother’s sister died in March of 2000, and Henner was to follow so soon afterwards in June, aged 62. For his wife and son his death was a great shock and an even greater loss. For me it was hard too. Besides missing him – we had always been a close family – he was the only person who knew and understood what it is like to live with one’s soul divided between two cultures and people, having roots in their old life and being integrated in the new. His experience was not identical to mine, but basically not very different. All my wonderful friends were sure I was either Irish, and happened to be of German origin, or they thought I was German with very ‘Irish’ ways!

In this situation, writing about different family experiences seemed to become a necessity and I wrote my first text ‘Christmas Eve’, Christmas 2004, fifty years later. The years after 2004 were tough years, full of hard work, illness and problems that had to be solved. Occasionally, a new text would be written, but very seldom, and I had absolutely no idea if what I was writing vaguely corresponded with my feelings and memories, so that others could even partially understand. A few friends were helpful, some did not get the idea of what was brewing up in my brain and kindly accepted my hobby, benevolently, as a safe and inexpensive hobby for an old woman, also non-fattening, thank-goodness!

When medically quite ill, but mentally in top form during the good periods, several friends, some of whom supported me in ways and to such an extent that it raced past any normal standards of friendship, made it possible for me to move to a smaller flat, but far more suitable for my handicaps, where I have been very happy. Here my ‘paperwork’ started to grow. This is where Mr. Mooney comes in. In his quiet, evasive, non-judgmental way he encouraged me to continue, to trust my inner voice, to do it for myself and this is what I do and it is wonderful.

When I celebrated my 60th birthday with family, some friends and colleagues, he and his wife came over for the occasion. We had breakfast in the lovely restaurant of an organic cheese farm, spacious grounds outside, the cows grazing, goats and unusual sheep around the premises. We ended with a small tour around the cheese farm. I didn't want any speeches with people feeling pushed to say the right things! So the arrangement was that I would welcome everyone and then Mrs. Mooney would give a short account of our life in Ireland as she knew it, and that was all. She asked me to lend her my huge Avoca tweed hat and shawl, blue and heather colour, so there would be no mistake where she came from! She looked quite like me, almost. Mr. Mooney, shy and elusive as ever, dressed in grey, dissolved in the group of guests.

Who is Mr. Mooney and where is he from, you will ask. I don't know the date of his birth, or even his approximate age. His characteristics? I can only reply metaphorically as he is so unique – as young as a fresh May morning, as fit as a spring lamb, full of wisdom and years like an old oak tree. There is the serenity about him that can come with old age and he is flexible in body and in mind.

He and Mrs. Mooney belong to the West of Ireland, emerging from the mists in Connemara, or standing firmly on Skellig Michael in a storm. I could imagine them mingling with others in Dingle, part of the Irish music scene. Most of all I would like to think of them at the coast of Clare 'in September or October, when the wind and the light are working off each other,' (Seamus Heaney, 'Postscript') amidst the strong changes between wind and rain and unpredictable, glorious sunshine. Both he and his wife are truly Irish, in the best sense of the word, full of warmth and understanding; Mr. Mooney, as if he were a part of me, has been especially empathetic towards me: a delicate, sensitive, insecure but strong soul; suspended between two worlds; forever dancing.



Hellgard, at Am Kraftwerk 3, with visitors from
Ireland on separate occasions in 2015:
above, with Ida and Emma; below with Ken and Traudi (who is behind the lens).

In both images Yeats's 'Heaven's Embroidered Cloths' (see p. 204) is seen through the glass door.
Henner's Dingle painting (see p. 338) is prominent on the wall in the lower photograph.



SUPPLEMENTARY IMAGES

HELLGARD'S IRELAND

IN

SILKE'S PHOTOGRAPHS

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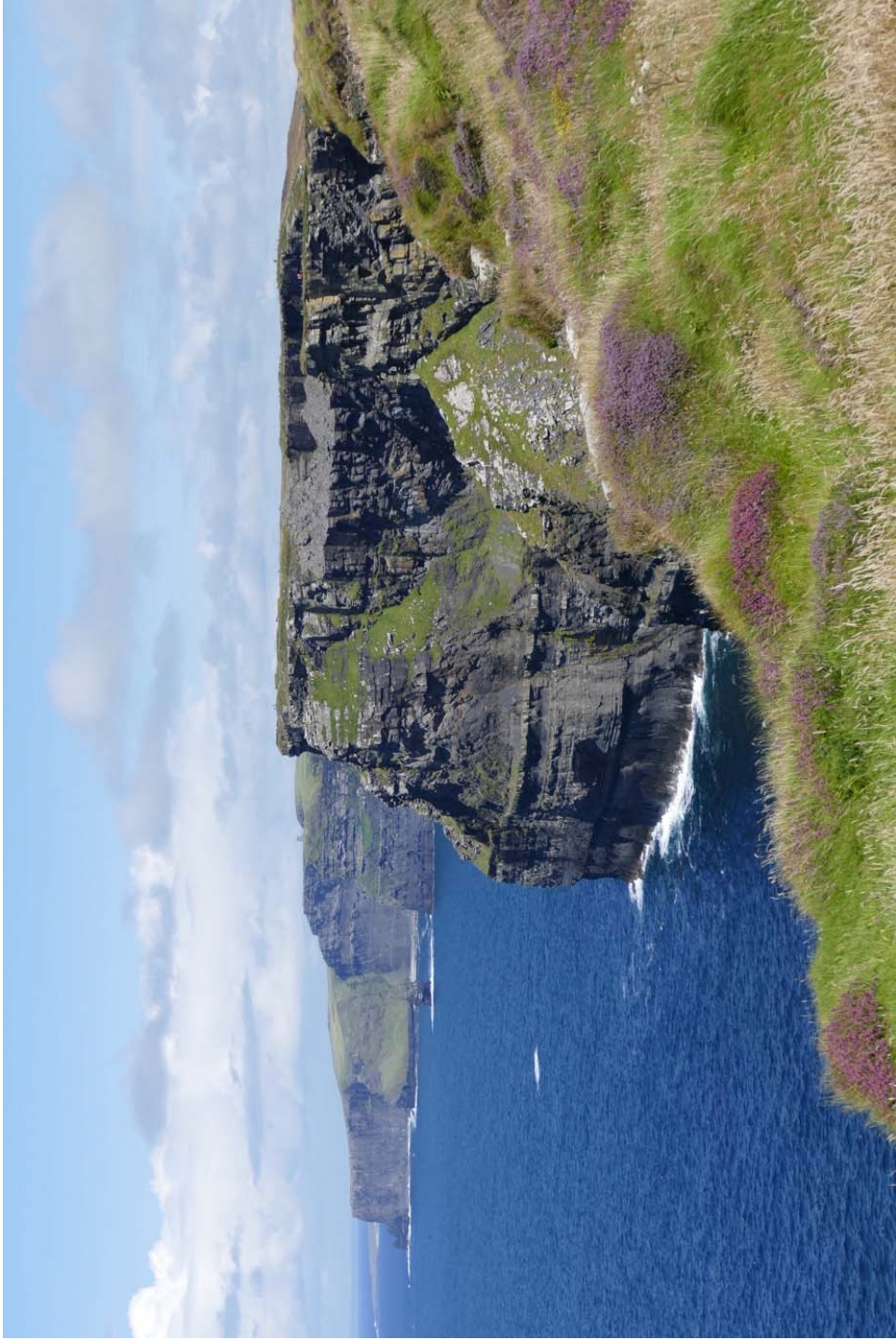












The Cliffs of Moher, County Clare

[Silke, 2017]

[Helgard Leckebusch, *Singing our Song*, p. 426]



[above] Galway Bay seen from Black Head

THE BURREN

[below] Area south of the Cliffs of Moher





on the borders of Counties Galway and Mayo
KILLARY HARBOUR
[four views, here and opposite]





KILLARY HARBOUR

'Connemara was a 'must' when we had visitors and so we finally got to know Clifden, Kylemore Abbey, Killary Harbour and the lovely route back to Galway through the mountains.' [p. 393]





[above], with seaweed and gentle rippling waves, Ventry Beach

THE COASTLINE NEAR DINGLE IN COUNTY KERRY
'Dingle was just as wonderful as ever' [p. 410]

[below], with people, Inch Beach





[above] Muckross House

KILLARNEY

'Everyone loved Killarney' [p. 410]

[below] Trees in Killarney National Park





County Galway

KYLEMORE ABBEY

One of the stops on Hellgard's touring route
between Galway and Killary Harbour (see p. 393)



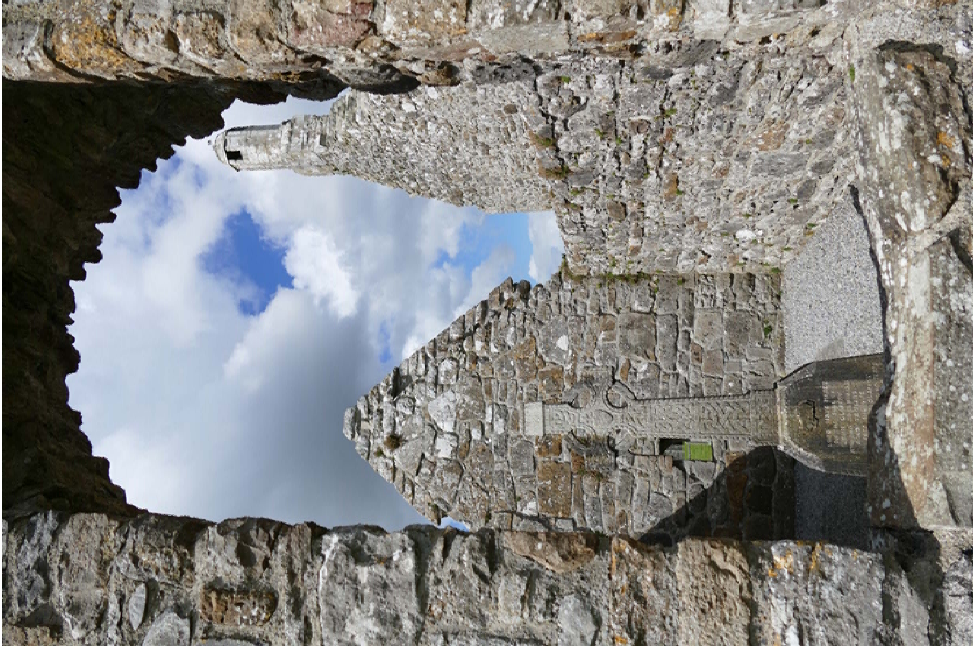


[above] Lough Coolin

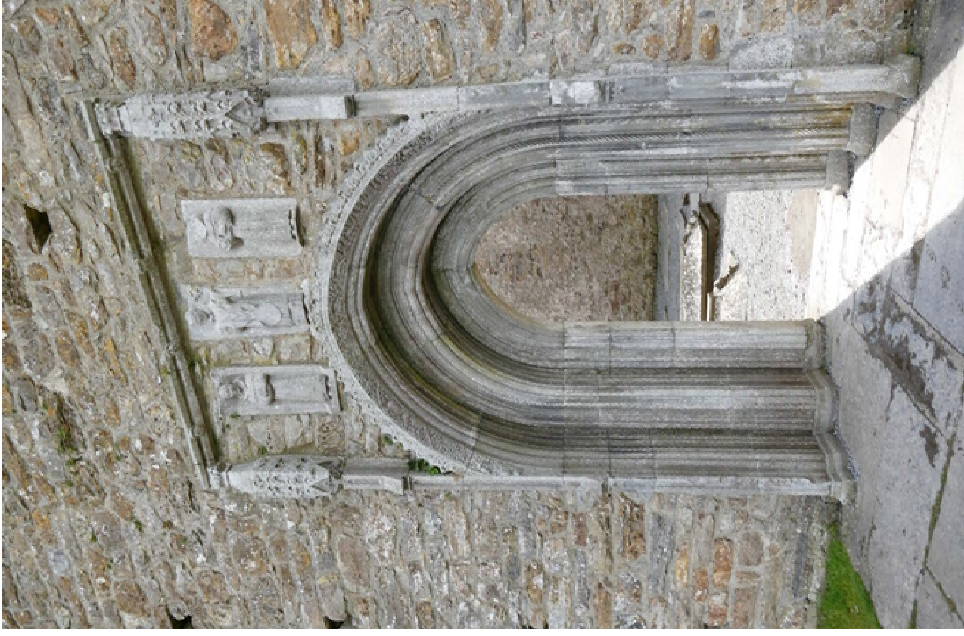
SCENES IN CONNEMARA

[below] near Lough Mask





[Hellard Leckebusch, *Singing Our Song*, p. 434]



Clonmacnoise, Co. Offaly.
One of the sites to which Hellgard came with a German touring party (see p. 396).



[above] Powerscourt House, seen from the Gardens

COUNTY WICKLOW

[below] a thicket of young trees at Glendalough





THE QUINTESSENTIAL BURREN

[above] Stone walls, as field boundaries, stretching into the distance

[below] Botany in the crevices of the rocks

‘in my ignorance and childish joy I picked bunches of different kinds of flowers,
many a variety of wild orchids, and brought them home’ [p. 389]

