THE CLADDAGH ASSOCIATION INC.

FROM HOME TO HOME

Oral Histories of Irish Seniors in Western Australia

Edited by Anne Wayne and Michelle Crowther

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Foreword

A mhuintir an iarthair, cairde mo chroí,

Tá an-áthas orm mo dhea-ghuí agus mo bheannacht a chur siar ag muintir Perth is Iarthar na hAstráile fré chéile. Tá súil agam go bhfuil gach duine agaibh ag coinneáil slán is ag baint taitneamh as an Earrach thiar. Bliain chrua a bhí sa bhliain seo, bimís ag súil go mbeidh crut níos fearr ar 2021 agus rath níos fearr orainn dá bharr.

Dear Friends in Perth and Western Australia (WA),

I sincerely welcome having this opportunity to send my best wishes to all in the Irish community in Perth and Western Australia. My particular thanks and appreciation go to all of you who have supported and assisted our community in so many invaluable ways over recent months. I most especially want to thank the staff, management and supporters of the Claddagh Association for the tremendous work you have done in these particularly challenging and difficult times.

Whenever either I or my colleagues at the Embassy or Honorary Consulate have reached out to Claddagh to seek your assistance and support for an Irish person who needed help, it was given generously and professionally.

This year 2020, was a very tough year for so many people in our community and many needed the help of the wider Irish community. You gave generously and unselfishly – thank you so much. Sadly the need is not abated and your continued commitment is crucial to the ongoing welfare of our community and the more vulnerable members in particular.

One of the most inspiring and rewarding elements of my role as Ambassador of Ireland to Australia is to stand alongside the great women and men who so selflessly serve our community across a myriad of organisations and activities. The Irish community in WA is one of the most active Irish communities in Australia, indeed anywhere I have had the privilege to serve. The Irish community in Perth and WA are strong supporters and promoters of every aspect of our culture. This includes Gaelic games, Irish dancing, Irish theatre, Irish literature, Irish language and other aspects of our unique contribution to the rich and diverse tapestry of cultures, including the indigenous cultures, that make Australia such a unique and inclusive society.

I am delighted that we have been able to secure additional funding from the Government of Ireland's Emigrant Support Programme of the Department of Foreign Affairs to help respond to the additional demands being made on the services of the Claddagh Association from COVID-19 and related pressures. Equally appreciated is the financial and in-kind support that the community has also contributed to the work of Claddagh, your support was never more needed nor more appreciated – keep up the good work, tosach maith leath na hoibre.

These have been challenging times for our families and friends back in Ireland and the support and solidarity you have shown to them has been both noted and deeply appreciated. Of course, you do not have to go

as far as Ireland to find someone who needs your active assistance and support. So I would also ask you to consider how you can play a more active role in assisting your friend, neighbour or even a stranger who may be going through a tough time and in need of your support be that material, moral or psychological.

By nature and through the experience of our history, I believe we Irish are an optimistic and forward looking people. We look forward to the bright new day not in some naïve sense of unwarranted optimism but in the realisation that by hard work and commitment to one another and to our community, we can overcome and defeat adversity. Never have these Irish traits been more challenged, evident or successful than in 2020.

Ní neart go cur le chéile! (Our unity is our strength).

HE Breandán Ó Caollaí
Ambasadóir na hÉireann
Ambassador of Ireland to Australia

Preface

The Claddagh Association Inc has a long, proud history of supporting the Irish community in Western Australia (WA) and has done so for almost 25 years. Our mission is: to provide help and support to members of the Irish community in difficult circumstances; to support senior members of the Irish community and those who may be lonely and isolated; and to promote the well-being and development of the Irish community and to engage with other organisations to celebrate and preserve Irish heritage.

We continued to carry out the work of our mission though the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020, pivoting all our energy and resources towards support work with those in the Irish community who were most badly affected. The high level of need stretched us to our limits and we are very grateful to the Irish Embassy of Australia who secured additional funding from the Government of Ireland's Emigrant Support Programme of the Department of Foreign Affairs to distribute grants for projects responding to COVID-19.

Claddagh's oral history project was one of three Claddagh initiatives which received such a grant. Further funding for the oral history project was contributed by Claddagh members and donors who, during COVID-19 as always, gave generously to support their fellow citizens. We are also grateful to the Australian Irish Heritage Association (AIHA) for part funding the publication of the oral histories which you are reading now. The AIHA encourage and promote an awareness of Australia's Irish heritage and we are so pleased to partner with them to make these interviews available to a wide audience.

The Claddagh oral history project progresses our mission in many ways. It fulfils our goal of fostering a strong and resilient Irish community in WA by preserving our heritage and helping us understand our identity. These interviews allow our history to be preserved for the benefit of the whole community. Recording the history of our elders in this way - orally - is one of the most potent methods of bringing history to life.

The project also delivered incredible benefits on an individual level. One of the central tenets of our mission is to support senior members of the Irish community and all those who may be experiencing loneliness and isolation. This year has seen a particularly challenging set of circumstances with COVID-19 measures requiring us to socially distance. The oral history project brought people together safely, at a time when people were at risk of more isolation and loneliness than ever before, so that we could build connection between members of the Irish community in WA.

Our gratitude goes to Anne Wayne, Claddagh Coordinator, who conceived and led the oral history project. We were also very lucky to have Michelle Crowther working with Claddagh during COVID-19 and she contributed her skills and co-edited this publication with Anne.

Claddagh is a volunteer-run organisation and I want to thank to all the volunteers who gave their time to listen to and record these important stories, and put in the effort to develop new areas of expertise in interviewing and recording.

I would also like to thank the people who shared their stories. Irish migrants of the 20th century undertook a very different journey to those arriving now. Often travelling by sea, many of them conquered hardships of which younger generations have only heard or read.

This book is one small window into the world of Irish immigrants to Western Australia. I hope these stories are the first of many that we gather, cherish, and pass on to future generations.

Heather McKeegan
Chairperson
The Claddagh Association Inc

Introduction

Anne Wayne, Claddagh Coordinator

We begin the introduction to this book with a message of gratitude. Claddagh is so appreciative of the seniors and volunteers who committed to this oral history project and carried it out so well. We wish to thank our seniors who opened their homes and lives to us and shared details about their migration journey. And we wish to thank our volunteers who committed significant time attending training, conducting interviews and helping with the extremely time consuming transcription. Without our seniors and volunteers we could not have completed this project.

The ten chapters that follow this introduction contain edited excerpts from oral history interviews conducted with eleven Claddagh seniors (nine individuals and one couple). Each interviewee was interviewed a number of times and this yielded very long transcripts. The reality of multiple interviews means that the seniors ranged over diverse topics and looped back on important themes as the interviews unfolded. For the sake of ease of reading, these edited excerpts shine a spotlight on specific themes or experiences from each interviewee.

Nine of the interviewees came from counties across the island of Ireland and two were part of the wider Irish diaspora. The interviewees ranged in age from 69 to 90 years old. The interviews provide insight into the wide variety of migration journeys undertaken by the Irish community in Western Australia (WA). While each of the Claddagh seniors had a unique and fascinating story about migrating from Ireland to Australia in the 20th century, many common themes emerged. These shed light on the impetus for migration, the way it plays out and the identity of Irish migrants in WA.

Themes

Emigration from Ireland is commonly understood as an economic choice and a response to the fluctuating fortunes of the Irish economy (Fitzpatrick 1984). Many of our interviewees underscored this reality: Tom O'Hanlon was unable to get work in rural Ireland of the 1950s to pay off the debt on his family's farm; John Flood made the decision to leave as a result of a feeling of uncertainty and precarity in the 1980s when cutbacks and redundancies were talked about everywhere. However, as other researchers have found, our interviewees also highlighted alternative factors which alone, or combined with other circumstances, provided the impetus for migration (Delaney 2002). The stories of Denis Bratton and Richard Moloney showed the impact of religious discrimination as well as the Troubles on the decision to migrate. Gerry McGough spoke of the strictures of Irish society and the attraction of openness and freedom in Australia. Sr Regina O'Neill spoke about the desire to live out a vocation, contributing to a cause larger than herself and Richard Moloney's story shows a love of adventure and a desire to embrace new ideas and experiences.

Before the late 1980s Irish migrants had little prospect of return to Ireland but since then many of those who left have returned home (Fitzgerald 2020). Our interviewees showed the complex reality of migration and return. Some did not intend to migrate permanently to Australia. Bridie Higgins said, 'I never even planned to come to Australia and here we are nearly 50 years later!' Many of the interviewees demonstrated the ebb and flow of the migration journey, returning to Ireland for a year or more at various times in their

life. Some made regular trips to Ireland of long duration. This was particularly common after retirement. Tom and Kathleen Kearns spoke of returning to Ireland for three months every Irish summer for the last 20 years, each time attending the All-Ireland Fleadh.

We know that Irish migrants have always contributed significantly to their adopted countries. Engels famously opined that England's industrial revolution could not have happened so rapidly were it not for Irish workers (Engels 1993, 101). The range and breadth of contributions our interviewees have made to Australian society were also significant. Many brought special skills which were in short supply. A number of the men worked in northern Australia - Tom O'Hanlon constructing railway lines, Richard Moloney in telecommunications and Gerry McGough in the mining industry. Of particular note is the number of teachers amongst the group. Denis Bratton, John Flood, Bridie Higgins, Sr Regina O'Neill, Ann Benton and Patrick Whalen all worked in education or training inspiring the next generation of West Australians. Bridie Higgins even learnt Japanese and re-trained as a teacher in order to meet the needs of West Australian schools. Many of our interviewees also gave enormous amounts of time volunteering with local organisations supporting the West Australian community.

Perth, the capital of WA, is a small, isolated city, so far from Ireland and yet many of our interviewees were quick to point out that they are able to participate in a vibrant Irish cultural life here in Western Australia. A common refrain throughout the interviews was a description of the number and variety of Irish community groups in Perth. So many of those we interviewed were integral to the foundation and development of the Irish community groups which sustained their connection to Ireland. As Tom Kearns said, 'we have a little Ireland here of our own'. This made the migration journey less stressful; it eased homesickness and helped the interviewees build social networks and find employment. Those with children spoke of the importance of the Irish community in healing them to pass on Irish identity and culture to the next generation. The strong Irish community in Perth was also appreciated by Ann Benton, a second generation Irish migrant from the UK and Patrick Whalen, a third generation Irish migrant from New York. It helps them to maintain their links with Ireland and allows them to express their pride in their Irish heritage.

Migration could be seen as a loss or dilution of identity. Migrants are often asked where they are from and prompted to choose one or other place as home, to designate one culture as most formative or essential (Maalouf 2000). When asked if they were Irish or Australian our interviewees rejected this perception focusing instead on the richness and diversity migration can add to our identity and describing the feeling of truly belonging in two places. Richard Maloney summed it up saying, 'I'm proud to be Irish, I'm glad I'm Australian as well. I feel both. It's not a dichotomy'.

These oral histories, collected here in Perth are, of course, the stories of successful migrants. Throughout their interviews they implicitly and explicitly showed the importance of embracing change, approaching the new culture with curiosity and positivity, getting involved in your community wherever you find yourself and responding to the need around you with action – a good recipe for a rewarding life in whatever country you find yourself.

Connection and community building

The oral histories we gathered are a valuable resource in understanding Irish migration to Australia and preserving the history of the Irish community in WA. Oral history allows us to see the hidden story that does not always enter the historical record. And this collection brings together the stories of a diverse range of Irish migrants whose experiences may never have been shared otherwise. But the process of collecting oral

history is also intrinsically valuable, uniquely suited to building relationship and community (Thomson 2000).

It is no coincidence that these oral histories were collected in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Claddagh undertook this project as a direct response to the isolation felt by members of the Irish community of WA in the first half of 2020 as we observed COVID-19 restrictions. By the time the interviews were under way restrictions had relaxed here and interviews were able to take place in the homes of the Claddagh seniors who volunteered for the project. The multi interview process was designed to allow time for relationships to develop between the each interviewee and the volunteer who interviewed them.

It was evident from early on that the oral history process was working its magic when I rang volunteers to hear about their progress. Each one would tell me how lucky they were to have been assigned to their particular Claddagh senior who was so welcoming, so friendly and had such an interesting life story. The seniors too gave feedback about their experience of the interviews commenting that the volunteers were 'very professional 'and 'showed that they cared'.

After the project, one interviewer, who has continued to volunteer with Claddagh, told me she was looking forward to sharing the interview transcripts with her Irish friends in Perth. She thought they would be interested in hearing the stories of the previous generation and commented that it would help them to know how other Irish people have not only coped but also flourished as migrants in Australia. We agree and hope that these histories will be widely read so that they can contribute to an understanding of the Irish community in WA. Many stories remain to be told and we look forward to the opportunity to gather more oral histories from the Irish community in WA in the future.

Dissemination

These oral history excerpts are available as a softback book or in a digital version of the book which we have made available on the Claddagh website so that these histories can be disseminated as widely as possible. If you would like to know more and are interested in reading the full transcripts or listening to the full audio of any or all of the oral history interviews you may do so through the State Library of Western Australia (SLWA). The full collection of oral histories from this project has been lodged in the SLWA Migration Voices archive which is part of the UNESCO Australian Memory of the World Program. This archive is freely available to anyone via the SLWA catalogue on their website.

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Denis Bratton

Denis Bratton was born in 1936. He is from Armagh City.

Well, I was born in Northern Ireland [in] 1936. I lived there up until I was 17 years of age. I lived a normal life in Northern Ireland. We were a big family, four boys and a girl. And my father was in the British Army in the First World War and the Second World War, and then my mother was in Cumann Na mBann too, at the same time as him.

I went to a Christian Brothers school, and got that Northern Ireland Senior Leaving Certificate. When I left grammar school, the only tertiary education you could get into was, say, teaching. And there was a Catholic teaching college, Trench House in Belfast, and the Protestant one, a state one. And you need to be a Rhodes Scholar to get into those.

I don't know, if I'd stayed in Ireland, I don't know what I would have done. Couldn't get much of a job in Northern Ireland. I applied for jobs when I left school, no good. What, 27%, 28% unemployment, you know. And that was only the Catholics, couldn't think of any Protestants unemployed.

My two brothers went into the British Army. And my sister, she actually went to Belfast to work in the civil service. She was lucky. But you saw your friends and neighbours, and their sons and daughters going to England for work.

I fancied being an architect, because I was good at art and drawing maps and that sort of thing. But couldn't get a job because even then, you heard about the old tale of, 'No cats, no dogs, no Irish need apply'. Well, in the Belfast papers some of the adverts for jobs were, 'No Irish need apply'.

And the problem was that if you went for a job, in a small city like Armagh, everybody knew who you were anyway. And then in Belfast, if you went for a job in Belfast, my name was Bratton. And that's a Protestant name, because my father was a Presbyterian. He changed his religion to marry my mother. My father was a Plantation person, my mother wasn't. [Her name was] Tomney.

So anyway, when I went for jobs in Belfast, got interviews for architect's office and showed them my drawings and artwork, and they loved that. They thought I was a Protestant. So, my name being Bratton, I got past the first five or six interviews okay. And of course, the crunch came, when they turn around and say, 'What school did you go to?' I went to a Christian Brothers school.

'My father was in the British Army and my mother was in Cumann Na mBann'

So I just left. I had an uncle, my father's brother. He was a master mariner and I hadn't seen him very much because he lived in India. He came over on holiday one time and said, 'Why don't you join the Merchant Navy? You're a bit old for a cadet, and too well educated, I can get you in as a cadet.' So I went into the Merchant Navy as a cadet. Stuck it out for about two years. They offered to let me sit early for my second officer's ticket, which they don't normally do. But I said no, I just wanted to leave. So they let me go.

When I left sea, I went back to Ireland and I was on the dole for about

‘I think if we’d been able to afford to buy a car, we wouldn’t have maybe come out to Australia’

six weeks. You went down to the dole and they would offer you a job, what, in a mushroom planting factory in Birmingham. I was fed up with it so I applied for the Ordnance Survey in England. I had to go over there for the interview. They paid my fare. They were just about to do a whole, complete re-survey and they were wanting people.

When I was fed up with moving around in the field, I left the Ordnance Survey in England and joined [a survey company] in Coleraine, where you do survey work, and mapping. You couldn’t call it a factory, but it was a factory, churning out maps. The thing was when we were living in Coleraine, we couldn’t afford a car. We put all our money into building a bungalow. We hadn’t much money, we had a £1200 deposit on the house, you see. And we hadn’t the money to buy a car. And we were stuck up in Port Stewart, 60 miles from Armagh, but it took us seven or eight hours to get there from Belfast, we hadn’t a car.

[I had a friend, Mike] who came to Australia, and I kept correspondence with him. Then Mike went into the Lands Department [in Perth]. ‘Won’t you come out here?’ he says, ‘I can get you a job out here’. So anyway, we decided. I think if we’d been able to afford to buy a car, we wouldn’t have maybe come out to Australia. Because I was enjoying my Gaelic football, and everything.

The bloke from the Australian Immigration Department flew over from London to Belfast, and then came through interviewing people. We were interviewed in Limavady, and I hadn’t a car to get from, Coleraine to Limavady is about 12, 13 mile so I got one of the young lads from the office to drive. Before we went in, Patricia said to the kids, ‘You behave yourselves in here, or they won’t take us to Australia’.

We were £10 Poms. It didn’t cost us the money. I think it was paid for by the government in Northern Ireland, because there were so many unemployed. It was a beautiful day, when we get into Fremantle. First of January, in 1967. The temperature was 105. We said, ‘Christ, for what have we come here?’ The water looked like glass coming down the channel. So, we were coming down and she [Patricia] came up and looked at me, looking over the port side of the ship, towards the sea. And she sees Rottnest Island. She says, ‘Oh, Jesus, Australia’s very small’. I said, ‘Look over there. 20 miles, that direction’.

And Mike and his wife were waiting for us with their two kids, because we were going to stay with them. Luckily, he was one of the first cars in WA with air conditioning. The place looked different. The houses, all the verandas and that sort of thing. And even going into town, the fact that all the shops had awnings, and all that sort of thing. And I said, ‘Well, what they all they have awnings for?’ He says, ‘If you come in here in the rainy weather, you would know’.

We settled in pretty well. And we went to Mass there [at St Lawrence’s], and we met people. Scots people and Irish people. That was a big thing, a comfort. There weren’t any hard times. No, never had any hard times, because we were bringing up the kids here. We were involved with them and their education. And the kids played a lot of sport. Our two daughters, our little daughters, they were very good swimmers. They swam for the state. Brought us three medals, too. I never felt unwelcome. We were caught up with the church, and the Catholic schools. We knew all the nuns and the priests and all that sort of thing. And then there was the GAA.

So I went back full time to Claremont Teachers college when I was about 36. I was doing mapping as well, at the same time, and got a three-year Diploma of Teaching degree. With both of us working, we were doing quite well, because we could afford to go home nearly every two years.

Although, you go back and you find your family's different. My sister, she was injured in a bomb blast in Bloody Friday in Belfast. She drove down to the local shops, the kids wanted lollies or something. Suddenly, the shop that she'd been at, the bloody car just blew up.

And she had part of her hand blown off, and her face, and the kids had shrapnel damage. She said, 'We used to sit in at night and when there was nothing on the television, you could watch the explosions going off in Belfast, and the helicopters'. So, [she] told Noel [her husband], 'I want to get out of Northern Ireland'.

'Patricia said to me, "What would you do if I died?" I said, "I'd sell this place up, and I'd go back to Ireland". That's just the way I felt'

Our first two kids are still sort of Irish. Both of them went back there. The only hard part was my mother and father died when I was out here. I couldn't go to their funerals, at the time. Patricia's the same. Patricia, she said to me, 'What would you do if I died?' I said, 'I'd sell this place up, and I'd go back to Ireland'. That's just the way I felt.

Denis was interviewed by Claddagh volunteer, Kieran Aherne. Kieran is from Limerick City and migrated to Australia in 1971.

Bridie Higgins

Bridie Higgins was born in 1950. She is from Camlough, Co. Armagh.

I have two sisters, and five brothers. I was the fourth one. We lived in a council house. My father worked for the local council. Driving a bin lorry is what he did. And my mother was a housewife. She was at home all the time looking after us. And we had a great childhood because you knew everybody in the housing estate, and further afield. And there were lots of fields where we could run around, and trees that we could climb up. And we lived beside the graveyard as well, so we were always over there around the headstones, and playing about the place. Our life was pretty good in those days. Those were the early days in Northern Ireland.

'I never even planned to come to Australia and here we are nearly 50 years later!'

When I finished school at 18 I didn't want to go on to university. I didn't want to be a teacher or a nurse, which is what everybody seemed to be doing. And I loved languages. And I never liked school, anyway. So the thought of being three years somewhere in a university? No, thank you! There was a really good course over in Wolverhampton for a diploma in languages from secretarial work that was only two years. So I went and did that. I was a bilingual secretary, French and English. Then I worked in London for a while and then I got a job with UNESCO in Paris.

In fact, I never even planned to come to Australia and here we are nearly 50 years later! We were the backpackers in the early times. I was always keen on going to New Zealand. But at that time, there weren't very many people who wanted to go anywhere, to tell you the truth. And this girl - I knew her from home, but we were in London together -she was going to go to Australia. So I said, 'I'll come to Australia with you, if you'll come on to New Zealand with me!' [That was] 1973. But little did we know, that we were only here a few months when she met her future husband. So that was the end of traveling on to New Zealand. But we had paid our own fares anyway, because we had no plans to stay.

We flew Alitalia from London. Shows you how naïve you can be at the time. I thought, 'Where are all these Italians going?' I thought that people over here [in Australia] was all English-speaking. You know? English or Irish. It was only later I found out! [The fare] was something like £140, I have that in my head. One-way, because we couldn't afford two-way at the time. And I remember we had 10 hours to spend rambling around Rome.

The girl that I came out to Australia with, her sister lived in Canberra [so] I was in Canberra. I remember looking at the types of houses that were different. Some of those old timber houses and places being spread out and highways, too. I noticed the heat more than anything and, of course, the colours. Not being green, but the yellows, and browns. There was no greenery like we had left in Ireland. It takes time to even just realize the beauty in Australia, and in those colours, those yellows, and browns, and bits of red. After a while, I could recognize that.

Then [I went to] Sydney. I got married in Sydney. We went to New Zealand for my honeymoon. And then I went to see about getting a re-entry visa on my passport. The man said to me, 'You only had a 30-day [stay]

‘There was no greenery like we had left in Ireland. It takes time to even just realize the beauty in Australia’

on here, and you should have come to have chest X-rays, and all those things that you’re supposed to do’. But sure, either they didn’t tell me, or I didn’t pay any heed. And they didn’t worry about it in those days, not like now.

After we were married in December ‘75, we were going over to Ireland, because none of my family had come out for the wedding as people couldn’t afford it in those days. So I was bringing Steve over there to meet the family, and we were going to be away for 12 months. We were doing that ship-jet, which you could do in those days from Perth to London. But on our way I thought, ‘Well, I haven’t really seen anything of Australia’. So we decided to do the trip through Australia on a coach camping trip which was brilliant. We travelled from Sydney, through Victoria, South Australia, up through the centre, down through the Kimberley and to Perth. We drove down to Albany and everything was beautiful. It was all so green, and the mountains! Because where I’m from, there are mountains. We just loved Albany. So we said, ‘Right. When we come back after 12 months away, we’re actually going to go to Albany to live’. That was the plan.

[We] went by ship to Singapore. It was a Russian ship, there were sheep and everything on it, and it stank to high heaven as we were getting up to the Equator. And then from Singapore you flew to London. We were in London for 12 months working and going backwards and forwards to Ireland all the time. When we came back there was no work in Albany. They had closed the whaling station, so that’s how we ended up, then, in Perth.

If I’d stayed in Ireland or in the UK, as everything was going into the Common Market [European Union], then there would have been plenty of work for linguists. But there wasn’t anything in Canberra or Sydney, so I worked in the Department of Science as a secretary. When we came over to Perth, I worked at Kelvinator as a secretary, I did interpreting for the telephone interpreter service in French, and some translation work. I thought, ‘Oh, French isn’t that useful here’.

So, I went and learned Japanese at Curtin. There was social studies involved in it as well, units on Aboriginal studies, and anthropology. So I was actually learning a lot about Aboriginal culture as well. The fact of being Irish, and having gone through a lot of the same types of things that Aboriginal people have gone [through like] having your land taken from you. And I’ve always felt empathy for the Aboriginal people, and I didn’t like it when people were being racist towards them at all. I would stand up for them as much as I could.

When I’d finished that course at Curtin, there was a shortage of Japanese teachers. That would have been the early ‘90s. So I did my degree then to become a teacher, which I’d never wanted to do. I taught Japanese [and] I was helping Aboriginal children with all their English and maths until I retired in 2013. That was good. I enjoyed doing that with the Aboriginal kids, too.

Well, we took 1992 to ‘94, to live in Ireland because I wanted the children to get to know their grandparents, and their aunts, and uncles, and their cousins, and all of that. You know? We’d been on holidays before, but you only have a few weeks, and so it’s not the same thing. So we went over, and the children went to school there, which they didn’t really like and they couldn’t wait to get back to Perth. But it was actually good for them, because they built up that connection with cousins and everything.

When the children were young, they used to always be teasing me about my accent. I said, ‘You have accents, too, you know’. ‘No, we don’t! No, we don’t!’ And then when we went to Ireland in ‘92 , that was the first

thing people would say: 'Oh, say that again! We love your accent'. You know? They were wanting to hear how different they sounded.

'We live, in a way, an Irish life here, too'

I always feel connected to Ireland! I mean, I suppose we live, in a way, an Irish life here, too. With all these Irish connections, like Australian Irish Heritage [Association], Claddagh - all their outings and excursions. No problem at all connecting with Irish people. We've been members of the Irish Club on and off for lots of years. Through Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann, the music and I love Irish language too. I just learned that at school for seven years like I'd learned French and didn't have any connection within the family to Irish. When I left Ireland, I could keep my French up. But I had no way of keeping my Irish up.

[In] Perth we organized a little conversation group. We used to go to different houses to do it back in the late '90s. And then started teaching up at the club through Comhaltas, helping out there. We used to have three different classes. There were about 25 people all studying up there. And so Maura Ducey had one class. Dick Moloney had the other. And I had one. That's helped me to build up my language as well.

I definitely do feel Irish. I'll always say I'm Irish. I'm not Australian, even though I've had Australian citizenship for years. I don't regret it. No. Although, my father used to say, 'Bridie, if you'd been transported, you would only have had seven years,' he said, 'instead of a life sentence'. Ah, no. I don't regret it. No. You don't know what's ahead of you, do you?

Bridie was interviewed by Claddagh volunteer, Paul Callery. Paul is from Cabinteely, Co. Dublin and migrated to Australia in 1997.

Richard Moloney

Richard Moloney was born in 1930. He is from Mitchelstown, Co. Cork

I was living in the North of Ireland, in County Down. And it was from there that I decided to come to Australia. Well, what happened was that, let me think now. I got a chance when I was working there in the North of Ireland to go to Ascension Island and do some work there for a period of two and a half years. That was in the '60s. Ascension Island is a very small speck of dust in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, just below the equator between South Africa and South America. Interesting island altogether, it's a volcanic island, extinct volcano in the middle of the island and very green at the top of the mountain but quite dry on the coast. The climate was perfect. You could swim all year round. There were interesting people there. It was a closed island, no tourists was allowed.

'The troubles were starting in the North and they were very, very close to where we were living'

I was working for the British Broadcasting Corporation. They were building a transmitting station to transmit programs to South America and South Africa. The other people who were there were the American Air Force and NASA, the space people. The workforce, the manual workorce, they were mostly from the West Indies and they were a very lively lot. They had their steel drum bands and they used to play for us in the evenings.

We had a great time on Ascension Island, there was a school there for the kids. The kids all enjoyed it. They're all champion swimmers because they learned there. Unfortunately it was only a primary school so two of my eldest children, a boy and a girl, had to stay back in Ireland in boarding school. We had to make our own entertainment there. There was no television of course. There was only one little local radio station. So we used to have all different kinds of parties and cabarets and amateur dramatics in which I acted. We had a great time. Unfortunately booze was very cheap. So cheap in fact that women used to use gin to clean the windows because it was cheaper than Windolene.

We got to Ascension Island by sea. There was no commercial airstrip there at all. On one occasion I had to take one of my boys back home to get his tonsils out because they wouldn't do it on the island in case there were any difficulties. The only way to go was via Brazil. How to get to Brazil? Well, I got a lift on an American Air Force plane. We went to Recife and then we went to Rio de Janeiro and we got a flight then from Rio de Janeiro to London and the boy had his operation there, and we flew back to Ascension Island the same way.

Anyway when my tour of duty finished on Ascension Island, we went back to Ireland. Couldn't really settle because of the climate being so different from Ascension Island. Not only that, the troubles were starting in the North, continuing in the North shall we say, and they were very, very close to where we were living. So the Australia House in London had an exhibition in Belfast. Every state was represented, each had its little booth in this hall. We decided to have a look anyway because we didn't know anything about Australia at all. I mean personally I'd never heard of Perth, I'd heard of Sydney and that was about all.

‘I cried leaving Ireland. I was leaving behind brothers, sisters, cousins’

We talked to all the people there and when we got to the one from Western Australia. The man there said, ‘Well, you know Perth has got the most sunshine of any capital city in Australia’. ‘And how much is petrol?’ says I. He told me it was half of what it was in Ireland. I thought, ‘I’m going to go to Australia’.

It cost us £20 altogether. That was subsidized by the British government because I was working for a British Government organization at the time. Kids were all free. I was excited but I was sad leaving Ireland. Actually I cried leaving Ireland. I was leaving behind brothers, sisters, cousins. The whole lot of them. We didn’t know anybody in Australia, not one person. We knew nothing about Australia.

We came over by sea, on a ship called the *Fairstar*. We had a great time on the ship. We got to Australia and we landed in Fremantle. Myself, my wife and six children. I came at the wrong time actually. The wrong time to be here anyhow. 1971 it was, end of November. Nobody wanted to know, because they’re all partying, all pre-Christmas parties.

We had arranged accommodation from Ireland, not far from here actually. It was in Linwood, just across the road was the Catholic church. We got into the house and found that the gas had been turned off because the previous tenants had not paid their rates so we had no way of cooking. In desperation I went across the road to the priest and it was no church as such, it was a little hut he was living in. It wasn’t even a house, you know. So he said, ‘Ah come with me’. And we all went up with him, the whole family. Just on the road to an Italian woman who cooked us up spaghetti bolognese, the whole lot of us. They fed the eight of us.

Well of course it was summertime and it was warm, it was hot. I thought this is great. Yeah. I can settle down here all right. Then the people I met were very friendly and they were very much like the Irish, the people that I met. You know, enjoying life and having a laugh, that sort of thing. Taking the mickey out of people. That suited me down to the ground. Well somebody said, I forget who it was now, but they said it’s the most Irish country outside of Ireland. You’ve only got to look at all the names on television, the Australian programs. Half of them would be Irish names. Have a look.

Now I had no job. I had written to all the radio stations and television stations here in Perth asking if there were any chance of a job when I got there. Everyone said we’re going to have to see you when you come, so give us a call when you come. But when I arrived nobody wanted to know because they were all partying because it was almost Christmas time.

The only time I found Australia a bit hard was when I first came and I couldn’t get a job, but that didn’t last, only a week or so. Yeah. I thought, ‘What have I done’. I suppose in retrospect now it was a bit foolhardy, coming over with six children not having a job.

So anyway, to cut a long story short, there was an advert in the local papers asking for people to go for an interview for a new set up called Overseas Telecommunications Commission which was satellite communication which was just coming into vogue at the time. So I went for the interview and I got the job and it was in Carnarvon.

I had never heard of Carnarvon, Carnarvon was a thousand kilometres north of Perth. So in the interview I said you know, 'I've six children. Is there a high school in Carnarvon?' I was assured there was. But when I got there I found that there wasn't. So I had to leave two of the children behind while myself and my wife and the other four children went over to Carnarvon. The children didn't like it at all. It was highly different to Perth, very brown. Nothing to do. There again you had to make your own entertainment in a lot of ways. Well we used to do a lot of fishing, a lot of fishing and a lot of going to the pub. Of course.

'I'm proud to be Irish, I'm glad I'm Australian. It's not a dichotomy'

An interesting story now, how did I get there? Why did I get there? When I was on Ascension Island NASA had an open day. All the family went there to have a look round the NASA site. One of the Americans said to my children, 'Would you like to speak to somebody in Australia?' My children said, 'Oh yes'. So they were speaking to somebody in Australia. Where were they speaking to? Carnarvon. So I didn't think I'd be ending up living in Carnarvon and working the same field.

There was a lot of Aboriginal people there. In fact my children were very friendly with a lot of Aboriginal people. Then when we came back down to Perth every holiday we'd go back up to Carnarvon to connect with those Aboriginal people. Carnarvon was quite interesting because a lot of Italians up there as well. A lot of them were owners of banana plantations.

I enjoyed the job because it was new and it sent me on a course to Sydney for three months about satellite communication which was just coming in. But then they wanted to transfer me, after two years they wanted to transfer me to South Australia. I thought oh I can't do that because the two children in Perth. So I decided to come back down to Perth.

When I first came here I missed Ireland obviously, I missed Ireland. The culture, especially the music. I was also a great céili dancer. I missed that sort of thing. But then I discovered there was a club just up the road from where we were living called the Shamrock Club run by a Cork man. They used to have dances and concerts. Then the Irish club opened up. We joined in the Irish Theatre. Then there was a radio program every week in Irish from SBS, [I taught the] Irish language for a few years, the Irish Australian Heritage Society of which we are members, then there's Claddagh, of course who are doing great things for the seniors. So all in all, it's like living in Ireland really. A lot of Irish people here, a lot of Irish tradition here. A lot of Irish names here.

Well I suppose I've always loved [living in Australia]. It's more an open society, freer in a way. [I've] lived most of my life here, the best part of my life here anyway. I'm proud to be Irish, I'm glad I'm Australian as well. I feel both. I feel both. It's not a dichotomy.

Richard was interviewed by Claddagh volunteer Denise Keohane. Denise is from Midleton, Co. Cork and migrated to Australia in 2011.

Regina O’Neill

Sr Regina O'Neill was born in 1934. She is from Rush, Co. Dublin.

My name that I was given when I was born was Anna. But in religion, I'm known as Sister Regina. That was the name I was given when I was professed. It was supposed to be that you were giving yourself to God and you forgot your other name. I was happy with Regina. Some of them got names that were dreadful. One sister got Benvenuta, I'd never heard of Benvenuta. I liked the name [Regina] because it was Our Lady's name. When I was a child at home, I was never called Anna, I was always called Nancy. So when I go to Ireland, they don't call me Anna, or Regina. It's always Nancy.

'They inspired us to come to Australia, because it was considered a missionary country at the time'

[My] place of birth was a very tiny place, no one's ever heard of it - Newcastle, County Tipperary. I was only there until I was about four or five. My father was a Guard and he was transferred to Rush, in County Dublin. That was my home really. It was a small seaside place. Market gardens of vegetables and potatoes. We had a great time in Rush. There was a big park, Kenure Park, and we had a great time playing there. I don't think we were supposed to be in there but we climbed trees and there was a river and there was a huge house in the middle of it. It was owned by the Palmers and we filled our days with that and then down on the strand, we'd go on the rocks and see what we could find on the rocks. And so we had great freedom.

My mother was very religious and my two older brothers. Well, we were all very much involved in the church, and Sean [my younger brother] was an altar boy. I went to school to the Dominicans in Eccles Street in Dublin. [In 1950] the Dominicans from here [Australia], went to Ireland, looking for young people to come out here. You see, they couldn't get young Australians to enter and that's why they were looking for young Irish people to come, because they weren't getting any postulants. They came to the school, and they inspired us to come to Australia, because it was considered a missionary country at the time. We put our hands up if we wanted to go. So about three of us from the same class, actually, decided we'd come to Australia. But the parents, I think all said, 'No' to begin with.

[My family] thought I shouldn't go, of course. My older brothers, they told my mother that they shouldn't let me go. I can remember eventually, one of them [my parents] went into the convent to see the nuns, and coming back to say, they've given permission. And my mother's response was, 'Well, God gave her to me for 16 years, and now he wants her back'. That was her response. And that was how they looked at it.

I can remember one of my aunts saying not to let me go because I wouldn't stay, that I'd come back. One of the priests in Rush spoke to me and said, 'Now, if you ever want to come home, let me know, and I'll fix it up with your parents'. Because at that time, if anyone left the convent, it was a disgrace, and people looked down on them. I remember that. He was a lovely man.

It didn't take long, only a couple of months, and then we were off. I had to go from Rush into Dún Laoghaire. Some great friend of ours drove us to the boat in Dún Laoghaire. Oh, they were devastated, especially my father, because I was an only girl. And because we came with the understanding that we'd never go home so they'd never see us again, of course. Everyone remembers my father's voice above everybody

'They met me at the port and their greeting was, "What on earth brought you to this godforsaken country?"

else saying, 'Goodbye, Nance. Goodbye, Nance'. And they could all hear his voice as the boat pulled out from Dun Laoghaire. It was heart-breaking.

We travelled all night on the train to Tilbury Docks and then we got the ship. We had good fun on the boat. There were 12 of us and we were young, we were only 16 and we all knew each other. We wandered around the boat, those of us who didn't get sick. And then this priest decided that we were having too good a time, and he went to Mother Laurence and said that didn't look good. We're supposed to be entering the convent. And he told Mother Laurence we should do some study. We were wild, of course. We weren't very happy with this priest. And so we had to knuckle down

When I arrived at Fremantle Harbour, two men had come out from Rush earlier and their family had given me a cake and some whiskey to give to them. They met me at the port and their greeting was, 'What on earth brought you to this godforsaken country?' I just wondered what was ahead of us after that.

We got on a bus up to Dongara [to the convent]. Dreadful shock. Imagine coming from beautiful Ireland, up to Dongara, there was nothing there really. The land looked so flat after coming from Ireland where it was all hills, and it was so lovely and green. And of course we were going up in the summer, and it was so hot. Luckily, we had each other, and that was the saving grace really. If we'd only just been one or two of us, I don't think we'd have survived. But with 12 of us, it made such a difference.

Oh, we looked forward to our mail because we lived in silence most of the time so you only had recreation at night time and we shared all our news together. So everybody knew everybody's family. My mother was just so wonderful. She kept sending me parcels all the time, such practical things. She'd think that I might need safety pins or all kinds of odd things like that. And everybody loved my mother's parcels and I'd always open them up and share them all around to everybody.

We stayed in Dongara until we were professed, which was for three years. And then we came down to Scarborough, and I went to uni from there. 1955, I think it was, I studied for my BA [with] Sister Assumpta. She and I were dressed in the full habit, we still had the headdress because Vatican II hadn't happened. As Dominicans, we wear cream habits. But we had a cloak on us as well, the black cloak you had to wear when you were out. And here were the two of us, dressed in these long habits, with these young people, and we'd have to go to the psychology lectures and experiments. I mean, it must've been so funny, really, to see us.

And then I did a teacher certificate externally. [After that] I taught secondary school all the time, except I went on the motor mission. On the motor mission we travelled about a thousand miles every week, going from place to place. One of the first places I was sent to was North Beach, a very, very poor place at the time. We had to charge fees, so they paid very little. And if they couldn't pay, they paid in kind. They brought vegetables in. We had to do everything in the school and clean the school and we had to cook. And to make ends meet, we had to give music lessons. When we had a break at, say at lunchtime, we'd have to give music lessons. And then, we gave music lessons after school, as well. So, life was very, very tough in the very beginning.

One of the places where I had to teach was St. John's, in Scarborough. It was growing and we had no places for a year eight class. And so, they hired a hall in Doubleview and I was the teacher. Then the parents

decided that we were paying money out for this hiring of the hall and a parent had a sort of shed in Scarborough and said, 'Why don't we use this place and bring the students down there?' So I taught a year eight class in this kind of shed and the desks were all squashed in together. The first day, I had turned my back to the class and I remember looking up at the crucifix on the wall and saying, 'How am I going to teach this class in this room?' and I was nearly in tears. There were oily things all around the walls, all kinds of animals in the next field and the horse came along one day and put its head in the door while I was teaching. And the pig had piglets outside. I was teaching biology and I was thinking to myself, 'Well, they're learning everything there'. That was my hardest year. I'll never ever forget it, but not one family ever took their children away.

'You can't long to go back, you have to become part of Australia'

I was prioress at Bedford Park in the '60s. It was very hard when my mother was dying in '69. She had a stroke and my brother sent me a telegram. Each time something happened, I'd get a telegram to say what happened. And then he rang to say she had died. The parish priest at the time at Bedford Park was an Irishman. He was a lovely man. I went over and I was sitting in the back of the church by myself, and the priest came along and he said, 'What's happened?' I said, 'I just got word that my mother has died'. And he was so lovely, and he said, 'Now, if you want to make a phone call'. Because it would have, then, cost a lot of money to ring Ireland. So, he said, 'You come over to the presbytery and you make a phone call from here, in case that it's going to cost a lot of money from the convent'. And I thought that was so lovely. That was one of the hardest times, coping with that.

But I wouldn't go back to Ireland to live, I would never do that. I'm Australian enough to want to live in Australia. I feel Irish but my roots are here in Australia. And I think that's what you have to do. You can't long to go back, you have to become part of Australia.

Sr Regina was interviewed by Claddagh Coordinator, Anne Wayne. Anne is from Fremantle but lived near New Ross, Co. Wexford for many years.

Tom O’Hanlon

Tom O'Hanlon was born in 1936. He is from Benagh, Co. Louth

We had a little farm in Benagh. I wasn't very long at school. We had three teachers and 60 students. Our headmaster, he was a devil. He had a sally rod. I was about ten when my father died, that was it [for school]. I worked at home on the farm 'til I was 23. We'd all horses then. You see, when my father died in 1946 horses were the thing. I ploughed with a horse.

'Now we owe £350 pound on the house at home. I had to clear this in three months'

Now, our farm at the time, we owed £350. I can't get a job. Because if I could get a job in the forestry I would. But they had said, 'Oh, well you've got land. You'll need time off to gather the spuds and then after that, this and that'. Then Bord Na Móna wants men, so I go up there. Now, when I worked there, and we're cutting ... we were on this collector. It's like a harvester. It's only a basic wage. Dusty as hell, and you could imagine a conveyor belt on tracks coming up through the bog. We're getting two and eight pence an hour. And we paid two pound a week to the camp.

I went to England in '59 to work. On the boat I met this Paul Kerrigan from Kildare. He was going back after he'd been on holidays. I met him, and he said he'd buy me a drink. And I said, 'I'm short of money'. He said, 'Out where I'm working,' - he was working in Dartford Tunnel - and he said, 'I can get you a job there, no worries'.

You see when I leave Bord na Móna, I'm getting two and eightpence an hour. Now, I go to Dartford Tunnel, where we're paid cash. My first pay was £37. Honestly and there was half crown notes, and I couldn't believe. Now we owe £350 on the house at home. I had to clear this in three months. Paid it off, the whole thing. When I finish there, I just seen Ford is in Essex. Right. I go over there, and I get a job. And I was there for five years in Dagenham. I worked for Ford factory.

I came to Australia when I left there. They were advertising. It was £10. If I applied from Ireland, I would have never got it. The Australian Immigration said that the Republic of Ireland is not in the Commonwealth. You can't apply from Dublin. I went up to London, to Australia House. The top man there then was Downer, Alexander Downer. The quiz was easy. And then you had to have a medical, no worries. Aye, they sent me a letter. And then there was bad reports about Australia, in the paper, this come from the Poms coming back. So, right. I put it back for about two years.

We left on Friday the 16th of March [1963]. On the P&O *Oronsay,* took four and a half weeks. And we went through the Suez Canal and Port Said. When we started into the canal, it was just late in the evening. And I'm saying, oh I was going to miss the scenery. When we woke up in the morning, we thought we were on the ocean. But we're in this big lake, and the ships were waiting. We went through mostly in daylight, just one ship at a time.

'So we head off across the Nullarbor the week President Kennedy was assassinated'

We called into Fremantle. We went on a tour in Perth, you see, on the coach. It was a beautiful day, and you know Perth looks very nice in the sunshine. Can you imagine the Swan River? And I said 'What a lovely place'. The boat went on to Woolloomooloo, right under the bridge. Sydney Harbour.

When I come to Sydney, because I had my reference from Ford in Dagenham, General Motors Holden, they were looking for people. So I got a job there because I had a driver's license. And they wanted forklift drivers. And because I had my license, they put me on training, a test, I got this certificate for operating a forklift. And they give me a truck driver's license like that. That was a good job. And I worked there, staying in Bondi. It was a holiday apartment. In the summer time you rented it out by the week. But in the winter time, you could get a six months lease.

I met a friend, John Conlan, on the boat. We decided we're going to have to stay two years in Australia. We might as well get an old car, and we'll drive around, and see as much as we can. So we head off the week President Kennedy was assassinated. Remember that time? We drove across the Nullarbor. It was miles of dirt. We camped out every night. We got to Perth and we camped outside in Midland so we didn't have to pay. We had a job before we came into Perth. Then we stayed in the Portree Guest House. It's number one on George's Terrace. It was like a boarding house. At that time, the T&G building was the highest building in Perth. And you paid a shilling to go up.

The woman at the guest house, her husband worked on Cockatoo Island. And she always used to go down to the BHP office. They had an office in George's Terrace. I went to work for BHP at Cockatoo Island. We flew up on a DC3. To get from here to Derby, was 16 hours flying. And they took, it was £33 then. So then if you stayed six months, you would get it back. I stayed the whole year.

I worked on the iron ore mines, their railway lines. I was in charge of the rock excavation, the drill and blasting. Every one of them railway lines I done, Pannawonica, Wickham, Paraburdoo, Tom Price and Mount Newman. Each one of them was a different contract because when we finished everyone was paid off and we'd get 10% bonus. That was tax free because it was classed as the end of employment.

When I finished the Hamersley railway line, I flew up to Darwin. Instead of flying back to Perth, I just go around Australia. So I headed up to Darwin. I bought a Volkswagen Beetle. It was a '55 or something. I worked with Darwin City Council. I was the leading hand. I drove trucks, about a year.

When we left Darwin we had a car. So we went to head off around Australia. Just, down, about 50 miles down the road is Rum Jungle. When we get to Batchelor, Batchelor was a little town, the policeman he was half our age. And he said, 'Barney Bannon ... He's an Irishman. Barney works here. And if Barney finds out that there's three Irishmen in town and I let yous go, he's going to kill me'. So we had to stay to meet Barney. So we all did jobs in the uranium mine.

My job was the store truck. I drove from Rum Jungle to Darwin every day. A big seven tonne truck, big flat top truck and I had the trailer. I went to Darwin five days a week. And then Saturday, I collected all the yellow cake on my truck in 40 gallon drums.

I was stuck in Mount Isa for three months. I went and worked in the lead mine. When you start at Mount Isa you get a five pound lead bonus every week. That's while you learn the thing. After a couple of weeks, then earn your pass there, how to do the blast and the drill and everything. And you're classed as a contract miner.

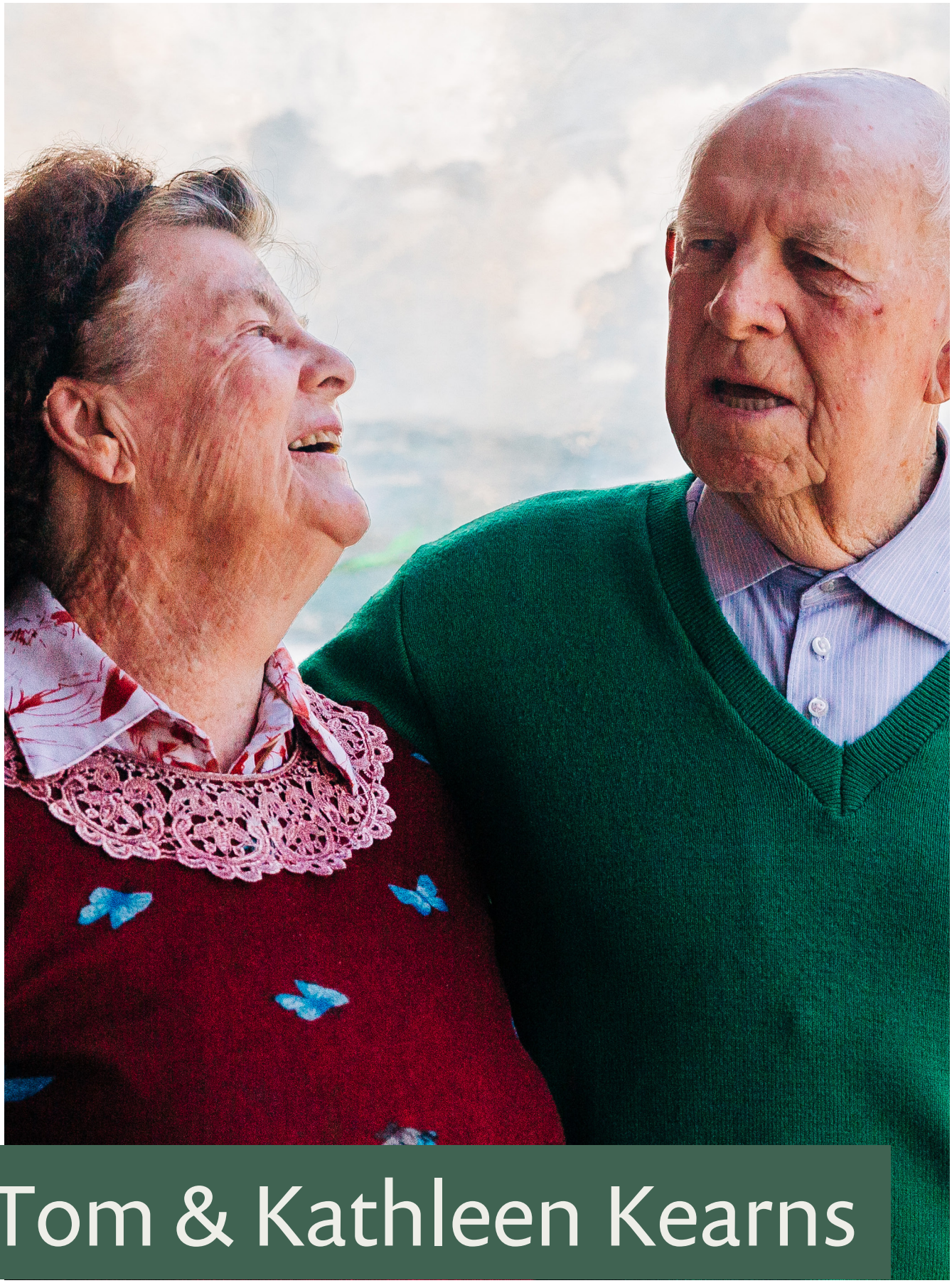
'I drove from Rum Jungle to Darwin every day'

I went to Townsville. I'm going around Australia, so I drive all the way up Cooktown. The very top. I'm coming back down and then in Innisfail there was a sign 'Cane cutters wanted'. I went into the employment office. It give instruction how to go, 16 miles down the Bruce Highway and you turn right into Silkwood. And there was two cane farms there. At that time cane farms were only like 40 acres. It was all small. All the cane farms, the main line comes out along the farm. You have to lay your own track. Four men can do it easy. They're light rails. I'm there, I suppose three or four months.

I had to go back to Sydney because I left me case in Sydney. I knew Blowering Dam on the Snowy, so I went down there and got a job, just a year. They had a camp. Snowy had a camp. Then we came back to the Pilbara. Telfer, I was at five years, Telfer was the last job before we came down. We built the Wickham Pannawonica railway line. That took about more than a year.

I'm proud of being Irish. I settled ok, [in Australia]. I kept on saying 'This is the best country in the world'. Western Australia especially. I mean, even our temperature. When I went back home [to Ireland], after 10 years, it wasn't much different than when I left. They didn't have a Celtic Tiger.

Tom was interviewed by Claddagh volunteer Thelma Blackford. Thelma is from Loughrea, Co. Galway and migrated to Australia in 1970.



Tom & Kathleen Kearns

Tom Kearns was born in 1932. Kathleen Kearns was born in 1942. They are both from Ballymote, Co. Sligo.

Tom: I was born in a townland called Carrigans outside Ballymote in Sligo. When I was about 12 years old I was sent down to an uncle in a townland called Coolskeagh. That was in the parish of Ballyrush, still in Sligo. It was a good life until I was sent down to my uncle and his wife but after that it was slavery. I spent 18 years slaving I suppose to get the farm. My mother thought I'd get the farm. She was responsible, really for sending me down there. And dad was totally against it. And, of course, I didn't know what I was in for. When I was working with my uncle it was 13 and a half hours a day, seven days a week at no pay.

'If I went to England maybe I might have fallen into bad company, become a drunkard'

I was about eight years there when a mate of mine was going to England and he begged me to go with him. But I didn't have any money. You couldn't go to England without a few quid. And he went off to England and I stayed with my uncle. Ah it was slavery really, but then I often think back, if I went to England that time maybe I might have fallen into bad company, become a drunkard or whatever, as happened many a young fellow. So I never regretted it and I had met Kathleen, early on. I look back at it all - I might never have met her if I went to England that time. We've had a great life together.

Kathleen: I was born in a place called Threen, Ballymote, [a] farm in Threen. When you're on a farm, it's from early morning to late at night but that was normal. I was at school all the time I was in Ireland, I quite enjoyed it. For my secondary school I cycled six miles to Ballymote every day and home. That was for about three years. And then I done a year in Sligo where I used to stay in town and only come home weekends. It was 20 miles to cycle down on a Sunday and stay for the week and then cycle back on Friday and that went on for a year. Then I went to London and at 16 years it was freedom.

I went to London for my brother's wedding. It was school holidays so I got myself a job. And then nothing to do from five in the evening. And so I got myself a second job in a cinema. So I worked in an office from nine till five and in a cinema from six till about 11. And I done that for six years. There was a whole gang of youngsters about 16, 17 year olds and we had a great time. It was like going out every night. When I went to England first it was just to get away from school but then when I got a couple of jobs I really enjoyed it, and you know, I fell into the life there and it was really good.

Tom: Well, I began to sense that there was no future for me with my uncle. I did talk to him about giving me the place. He had no notion of giving me the place. His wife had the same claim on his place as he had so she was totally against me. It was a very quick decision. I made up my mind very quickly. Kathleen was home on holidays and I went back there [to England]. But we wanted to get out of the big city of London. We were continually watching television about the great life in Australia and the sunshine. A friend of ours he was home on holidays and he'd tell us all about Australia. He says, 'You'll get tired looking at the sun'. It was a quick decision in the finish to emigrate to Australia because we wanted to get the kids into a Catholic school.

Kathleen: And in London it was practically impossible.

Kathleen: We went to Australia House in London and there were quite rigorous questions and we had to do medicals.

Tom: But that time they were crying out for families to Australia. We had no trouble in getting in, no problem at all. Four months, we were accepted. We could have flown out straight away and we said we'd like to go by boat. We thought it'd be a great holiday. With three little kids under four it was no holiday!

Tom: My boss at work, when I told him I was going for Australia, he says 'What part are you going?' I says, 'Western Australia'. 'Oh there's nothing in Western Australia. Go to Sydney where the work is'. So I said, 'No, we want to go keep away from big cities'. That was it. Never changed our mind.

Kathleen: [We came on] the *Fairstar*. £10 pound and the kids were free. Las Palmas was the first place [we stopped] and Cape Town and that was it. Just the two stops. There was plenty of activity if you could go to it. Now, we could never go together to anything but we could go separately, you see, because one of us always had to be with the children. But there was lots of things on. There was concerts, bingos and different things.

Tom: We never found it a tough run. We never got sick. There was a virus on the boat after about two weeks.

Kathleen: They closed the swimming pool.

Tom: Yeah. That meant all the kids then were inside in a huge big room. There were 600 kids on that trip, 2000 adults and 600 kids.

Kathleen: When we arrived at Fremantle we thought it was the cleanest city we had been through. Everything was spic and span. We were met by bus and taken to our accommodation. Everything was laid on for us. It was really excellent.

Tom: It was coming up to winter in the month of May.

Kathleen: Once we arrived here it rained for weeks and weeks.

Tom: We were taken up to a

Kathleen: Hostel, Noalimba. It was only opened at the time. Everything was provided. They gave us a couple of rooms and done our meals and it was great facilities now.

Tom: We spent two weeks there and then they offered us a house in Beaconsfield. So that was a great start for us.

'We were continually watching television about the great life in Australia and the sunshine'

Tom: The great difference was after three weeks I got steady work. Now I could get steady work in London as well but in Ireland there was no work. So we were very happy, as of three weeks, the way our work life went.

Kathleen: Then we had to buy a car but this man didn't have a license. I had a license so I used to have to drop him to work every day. Get the four kids in the car and drop him to work. He always got a lift home but always had to drop him down.

Tom: I suppose about six months in when I went to the test and failed it. I went for it again, failed again. Third time lucky.

Tom: There was about four or five families in the parish

Kathleen: Irish families like

Tom: They made us all welcome and there was three Irish priests there and they became our great friends and there was the priest that started the GAA. All the great friends that we met here, mostly Irish friends now but they were great to us.

'It never dawned on us to think about going back'

Kathleen: Yeah, we used to have a lot of people visiting. It was really nice. People that had come out here years before but had never gone back. They were delighted to meet somebody who came recently.

Tom: I worked with a lot of Italians who had come out here before and they were great to work with. They were all great workers. Poles and not much English people, quite a few Scots people, but we had no problem mixing with them.

Kathleen: What we enjoyed most about them, they told you exactly what they thought. Whatever it was, straight up.

Tom: We really loved the Aboriginal people. I have great sympathy for the way they were treated here. We still have a great time for Aboriginal people. Our neighbours here for 60 years, you could not beat them. It was a joy to live beside them. We were lucky with the neighbours we had, Aboriginal people.

Tom: We really had a great time, a great start on Australia

Kathleen: Everything seemed to fall into place.

Tom: I think the voluntary work helps a lot. We weren't really thinking about ourselves.

Kathleen: We've done a lot of working with St. Vincent de Paul through the church. We were doing it for, what, 35 years I think?

Tom: We got involved in everything that was good for our life. Gaelic football.

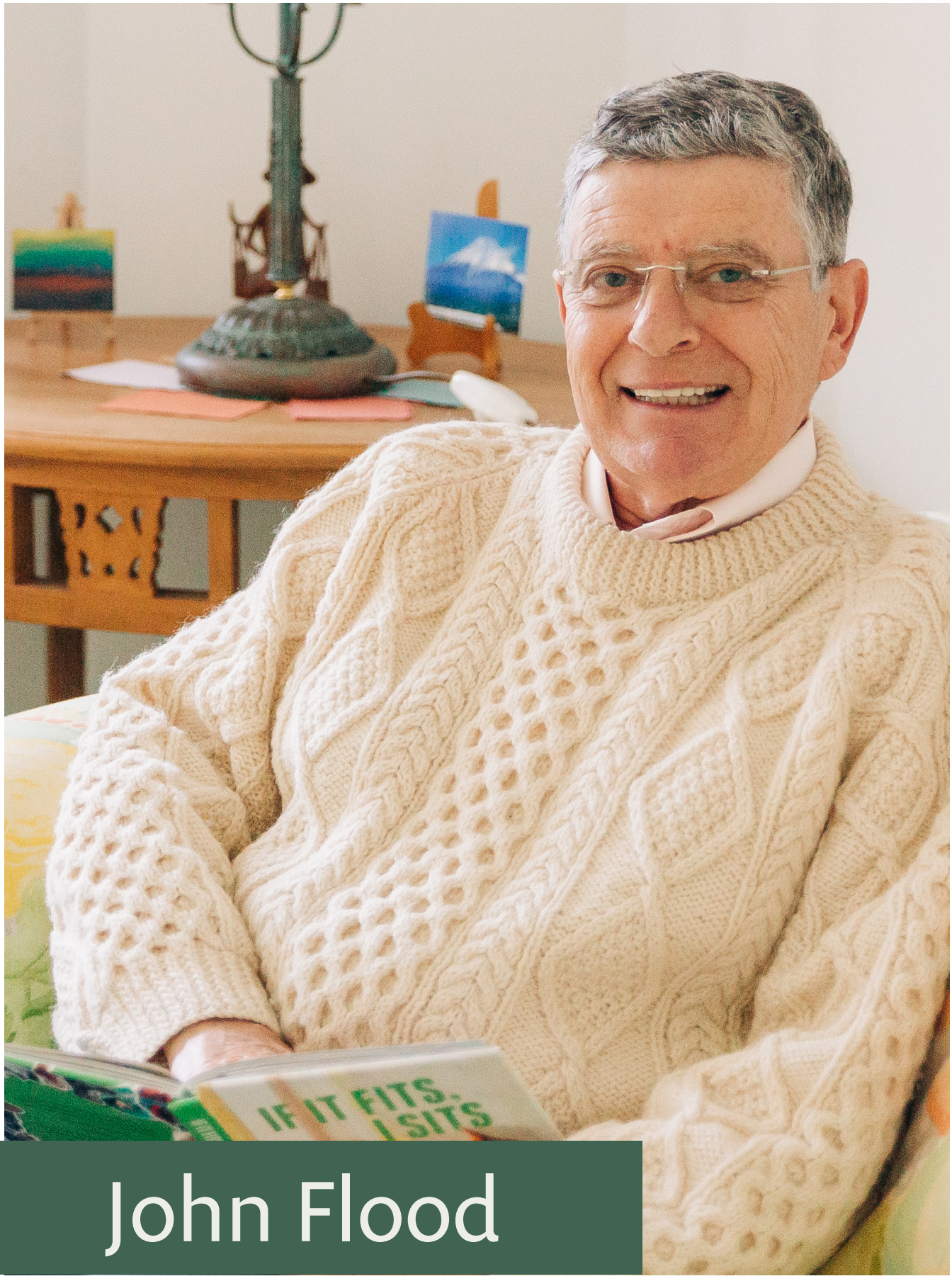
Kathleen: Every Sunday we were out at the Gaelic football. And Irish dancing. The girls done Irish dancing. We spent a lot of time outdoors, which we couldn't have done over at home because of the weather.

Tom: We have a Comhaltas branch here in Perth and we're members of that for years. And I got an award called the Brendan Award for our activities. 'Twas a great honour to get that.

Kathleen: I think we'll always feel Irish.

Tom: But it never dawned on us to think about going back. It was, four years before we had a discussion of, 'Is this our country?' Of course, the obvious answer was we're not going back, this is it. Well, I suppose people would ask us do you miss Ireland? And we say no, we have a little Ireland here of our own. And we have! All the music, the céili bands, we have it all here. We can put it on any time we like. So that stood to us.

Tom and Kathleen were interviewed by Claddagh volunteer, Paul Callery. Paul is from Cabinteely, Co. Dublin and migrated to Australia in 1997.



John Flood

John Flood was born in 1947. He is from Athlone, Co. Westmeath.

Well, I was born in Athlone, which is the dead centre of Ireland. I've three sisters fairly close in age to me, basically, all within five years. I was the oldest. I wasn't wild because I listened to my mother. She had me earmarked for the priesthood and my sisters for the nunneries. My mother was very religious and dad as well. He used to go to Mass quite a bit. The Franciscan friars in Athlone were very good to our family when I was younger.

We were very involved with promoting Blessed Martin de Porres from Peru. He became Saint Martin de Porres. My mother and I used to sell about 60 to 70 Blessed Martin magazines, to families around Athlone every month. We'd have to go around to people's houses to do that.

'We all had to go to the Royal Albert Hall and be presented to the Queen Mother'

I came to Dublin when I was 17. I got a job with the College of Technology in Kevin Street as a trainee laboratory technician, because I had a group certificate instead of a Leaving Cert as my parents hadn't got much money. So I was very lucky to get into the College of Technology as a trainee lab technician.

I was [still] involved as a Scout in Athlone and also as a Cub Master. I had about 50 Cubs who dressed to the nines every Saturday morning. I used to come down from Dublin to Athlone. Looking back on it, I mean, it was fabulous. I managed full houses every week, organised games for them and [held] their attention. They would have been in the eight to twelve age group. Afterwards they would have moved on to the Scouts.

Then I started to do my O levels, which is what I needed to get my junior technician status and then I went on to get one A level from the University of London to get my technicianship. Then I found out that you could go a bit further. If you got two A levels you were entitled to go on for the Bachelor of Science degree. I was attending the lectures in the college I worked in, and then for some of the chemistry and biochemistry practicals I had to fly to London. Eventually I qualified in 1976 with an Honours Bachelor of Science as an external student from the University of London. When I did get my degree, we all had to go to the Royal Albert Hall [and be] presented to the Queen Mother. I had two sisters in London at the time and they came and they were dressed up.

When we got married we lived down in Ashbourne, Co. Meath. I was involved in the Mater Hospital radio, the internal radio station at the Mater Hospital. And I organised a couple of interviews there. We had Daniel O'Donnell and Dickie Rock. People wouldn't know nowadays, who they are, but they came into the hospital.

We've been here [Perth] now for close on 30 years, which is just amazing. Oh, where the time has gone. We came out prior [to moving]. We had an offer of the flight where you could go to five or six cities, open to anybody, and we took that offer up and we came out. We went to all the cities except Darwin. We felt Perth's a nice place. It's a lovely atmosphere there and we were thinking of emigrating. There was talk of cutbacks and redundancies [in Ireland] and there was a possibility that we might have been affected. The Irish television had been out here, as well, doing a programme on Perth, a lot of promotion of Australia as a possible immigration place, a lot of people here already.

‘We were going hell for leather, you know, hey, whatever happens’

And then we said, ‘Yeah, we’ll go back [to Ireland] and we’ll put in for a visa [for Australia]’. That was it. We put our house up for sale. We were going hell for leather, you know, hey, whatever happens. The recession in Ireland, the cutbacks and houses weren’t selling that much so our house in Ashbourne didn’t sell before we came. The price was reduced eventually. We were here maybe about a year and it was sold.

It was the 26th January, 1989 [we arrived in Perth]. Of course, January is the hottest [month]. I can still remember running for shelter across St. George’s Terrace, going from one side of the street to the other side, and looking for shade in whatever alleyway we could find. We were registering for work with employment agencies. We just hadn’t realised what it was like at 40 plus, and especially in a city, no rain!

The shock was probably the fact that we weren’t going to sail into a job as easily as we thought we were going to. We thought it would be very easy to get a job because I had a degree. We [were] well qualified. And that was the thing we found, certainly for the first year, it was very difficult. It just seemed there were no avenues open to us. So you could be fearful you know. We didn’t really [feel like going back]. That wasn’t an option. Phyllis [my wife], I think she’s a quite a persistent person. Resilient, I suppose that’s a good word.

I ended up selling French wine. I mean, I wasn’t a wine drinker. I did become a wine drinker afterwards and I had to give it up again. It was just too dangerous! Phyllis got into the university fairly early on. It took me about a year for me to sort of get a feel for what I want to do. And then a job came up in the education field similar to what I was working in Ireland as I was involved with FÁS, AnCO, in the training business.

Once I got the job and I was involved in running courses for businesspeople I began to feel [settled]. I felt like I’ve got a handle now, on what’s going on here. And also, it means I can network for other opportunities should I wish. And the people who lectured there were very interesting.

We sort of made a bit of a decision not to get too attached to the Irish community for fear of submerging or maybe not getting out and networking. I joined a couple of volunteer organisations, a couple of theatre groups, the homeless men’s, St. Barts, hostel. I was involved with Radio Lollipop at Princess Margaret Hospital when I came out here first, as a presenter and as a public relations person. We had Fawlty Towers, Mrs. Fawlty come in to visit the hospital and we had Darth Vader come in. Little did I know at the time how famous he was!

I was involved at one stage with the Irish programme on 6NR, at Curtin University. We did an Irish programme, two hour programme on every Saturday morning. So I was involved with others intermittently doing that programme. My speciality became entertainment and theatre. And that was later to lead me to getting a little slot on the ABC Radio presenting reviews on community theatre productions in Perth. I’m on tomorrow morning with the Kalamunda Radio covering interviews with theatre people in Perth.

I do feel Irish. Ireland’s a lot to be proud of, a lot of goodness and a lot of kindness in Irish and Irish people. I miss the music. I love the old characters and the stories from Ireland. But in terms of modern Ireland, things have changed a lot. I’m a little bit more hanker on to the old traditional, and the memories are of that. But when you go back the reality is probably not exactly as you remember. Things have moved on. People have changed.

We’ve been lucky enough to be able to get over to Ireland every three, four years and of course now with the Skyping, we Skype with the whole family. There is a very good group that meet on the internet

called 'Athlone Down Memory Lane', and people post on stories about Athlone. I post on some photographs and go back over those memories. People can remember my home. People remember my sisters. Only the other day a lady got onto me and said, 'Are you related to the Anne Flood? Anne Flood used to be my best friend at school'. It's amazing. Even though you're on the other end of the world, you're not really. You're very connected.

When I hear the young choir singing 'I still call Australia home' it brings back the feelings to me that it is a lovely country, the weather is fantastic in Perth, there's lots to do. I'm still involved. I feel Australian. I'd say a nice mixture [Irish and Australian], a foot in both camps.

'Even though you're on the other end of the world, you're not really. You're very connected'

John was interviewed by Claddagh volunteer Dee O'Callaghan. Dee is from Blackrock, Cork City and migrated to Australia in 2017.

Gerry McGough

Gerry McGough was born in 1951. He is from Ballinaclash (Clash), Co. Wicklow.

I actually come from Annagassan, County Louth. That's where my mother came from [but] I started off in an orphanage in Dublin, in Stillorgan. I always remember there was a nun there. And we'd be out kicking football. I'd be the last one coming in. I just wanted to kick a football. That was it. So she'd often stay back for another five or ten minutes.

'I actually played in an All Ireland hurling final for Wicklow'

I was lucky because I was only there until I was five. I remember three ladies arrived and there was three of us picked for these ladies to have a look at to adopt or foster. Next thing I knew, I was on a train heading for Wicklow. [I was chosen because] the colour of my hair was something similar to Mrs. Carey's [my prospective foster mother]. I come on this train and arrive in Clash in Ballymoney and we stayed in Byrne's that night. Of course, word got around that there's this kid from Dublin that was going to stay at Mrs. Carey's. I got up and all these faces were looking into the window. It was the local kids. And so now I know what it's like to be in the zoo!

[Mrs Carey] was an angel really. She would have put up a lot now with me to be honest. Because I wouldn't be a quiet child, let's put it that way. It was like walking into a palace, and as far as freedom went I was very lucky. I enjoyed living there because you had your own room and then she had a few cattle and she used to have sheep and you had your hens and chicks and all that. Her brother, Jim Kenny, used to come visit and I'd be always running around with a ball. My first pair of football boots, he brought them down from Dublin. So he must have said, 'Ah, this lad needs a pair of football boots'. They were Blackthorn football boots. I put them on and I think I walked in the shit and still went to bed with them.

[The GAA] was a big thing for me, especially coming from the orphanage and then coming to Clash and the school. I wasn't a very happy chappy at school, to be honest with you. Had a teacher there by the name of Baker. His idea of teaching was roaring and shouting. Kids got beaten for no reason at all. I loved running and playing football and soccer and hurling. I actually played in an All Ireland hurling final for Wicklow. It would have been, 1967, it was a B All Ireland, and we played Down in the finals and we lost by a goal. I played all grades in Wicklow. With the club at home, Ballinacor, we won two championships, the junior and intermediate [camogie]. I was coach. I always had that great affinity with Ballinacor and it sort of gave me an identity and it meant a lot to me. And the GAA, it's a brilliant way of getting people together and bringing groups together. I am glad to say, I have played football, I have played hurling as well, I have coached football and camogie [in Australia and Ireland].

When I left school, I worked in a bar in Rathdrum, Barry's hotel. And that was bar and grocery. We used to bottle our own beer in it, our own Guinness. [I] left Barry's, and went to a pub in Tinahely, Walsh's in Tinahely. Then I joined the army, September '69. The army was very good for me. It gave me independence. I remember I was in the army at Bray, County Wicklow. Down along the sea front they were having some sort of a carnival. They had this fortune teller. She says, 'The letter A is going to be a very, very important letter in your life'. There's three things, army, my mother's name was Annie, and Australia. So she must have had some insight.

‘I never heard as many curses on a doctor in my life’

Then I went to England, I was working in England. I really enjoyed England. There was a very strong sort of anti-Irish feeling about it. You know what I mean? It was like you were sort of embarrassed to be associated with Irish. And a very good friend of mine, Declan Burke, from Wicklow as well, came over to England. The two of us used to meet up and one day we made the decision, we’d move further on and the next step, really, was Australia. We looked at New Zealand and we said, ‘No, there’s too many sheep in New Zealand, seen enough of them in Wicklow’. We looked at Canada and we went, ‘No, too cold in Canada’. We decided we were going to go to Australia. But we needed more money. So we came back to Ireland [and I] work[ed] for a company called Gouldings.

I used to go to dances in Dublin. You had the Ierne, you had the National Ballroom, you had the Television Club. And I was in the Television Club one night, and there was a guy sitting at a table and there was a couple of spare chairs so we sat down and started chatting. And he was home from Australia on holidays. I said, ‘What do you need to go to Australia?’ He says, ‘Basically, an airfare’. I said to my mate, ‘Let’s look into this’. So we went down to Club Travel in Dublin, in Abbey Street. I said, ‘How much is it going to cost to go to Australia?’ She says, ‘Where do you want to go? Perth is the first stop’. I said, ‘That’ll do, grand’. I think it was four hundred quid for the two of us.

We came in September ‘74. They brought the visa to get into Australia in, in 1975. So we just got in before the doors closed. Only for that we possibly wouldn’t have went through the paperwork and wouldn’t have bothered. Because we looked at Canada and they gave a wheelbarrow load of papers and needn’t tell you I didn’t go through them all. I looked at one, I went, ‘No, bugger that, I’m not doing this’.

We flew out on the second of September 1974. We were in transit to Singapore. So of course, we had to get the hair cut because they wouldn’t allow us into Singapore unless you had the hair above the collar line and we got all dressed up, shirt and ties and all. This ship was going to bring us from Singapore to Fremantle and the name of the ship was the *Fedor Shalyapin*, Russian ship. We had to queue to get on this and we’re standing in the heat for maybe two and a half hours and we weren’t in good humour. I walked in and they looked at my book, and they said, ‘Yeah, no problems. Step in, thank you’. Next thing, my mate come up behind me, Declan, ‘No sorry, you can’t board’. So they’re looking at his paper, said ‘This not signed, this not signed’. You had to get injections you see, but his doctor in Avoca didn’t tick [the box]. I never heard as many curses on a doctor in my life. So I said to the guy, ‘Well what can we do?’ He says, ‘Oh you need to get a doctor’. I said, ‘Haven’t you got a doctor on the ship?’ ‘No, no, you must go see other doctor’. So we had to get a taxi and run around Singapore looking for a doctor. So eventually he got another jab. We eventually got on the ship and we were on our way to Australia.

Then we arrived in Fremantle. It was dark, actually, when we disembarked. And I looked around, and I saw a taxi. And I went over to them, and I said, ‘Can you drop us off in Perth?’ And with a Scottish accent, he says, ‘Hop in’. He says to me, ‘Whereabouts in Perth are you going?’ I said, ‘Haven’t a clue. Just bring us to the cheapest hotel you can find’. So, he dropped us off there in William Street, the Britannia Hotel. It was nine dollars a week rent. We shared a room. We could lease this black and white television for a dollar. We walked around Perth and it was lovely.

We had no pre-plan. You just get on and move on and survive. We went to the employment office. And no, you were wasting your time going there. So, I went down to the train station and booked a ticket [for Sydney]. The train left at one or two o’clock in the afternoon, East Perth. This train tuttled along, tuttled along. Looking at my watch, looking at Declan, saying, ‘Fecking hell, what’s going on here?’ So, she pulled up

eventually, and I got up, and 'Jees, thank God this is over'.

'We had no pre-plan. You just get on and move on and survive'

One Aussie lad says, 'Hey mate, I thought you said you were going to Sydney?' I says, 'Yeah, we must be there by now, we've been on this fecking thing for seven hours'. He goes, 'No mate, she doesn't get there until Thursday'. I turned around and says to Dec, 'Jesus, Christ', I said, 'we're on this train for two days,' I said, 'The longest train journey you ever had'.

[In Sydney we] went into the employment office. Next thing this guy comes out and he says to me, 'I've heard your accent, that's why I come down'. [He was from] West Wicklow, Baltinglass. And I said, 'What do you have to do to get a job here?' He says, 'Don't come in here'. He says, 'People only come in here', he says, 'That are not looking for work'. He says, 'You're wasting your time coming in here'. And he was actually working there! And I says, 'Where in the name of Jesus do you get a job in this country?' He says, 'BHP. Go down there and you might get the start'. So we went in and bingo. So, next thing we're back in the train again and we're heading for South Australia, Whyalla. So the first six months in Australia was nearly spent on the train!

It would have taken us a long time to settle. We always wanted to go back to Ireland. But I'm glad I didn't [go back]. You think about Ireland. You'd think, 'What am I doing here in the bush and there's flies and there's 40 degrees and there could be snow and the rain'. Then you go back there [to Ireland] and you think, 'What the feck am I doing here? It's freezing!'

The lovely thing in Australia, it was the open spaces and there was just that freedom. It was like you could go anywhere. You weren't restricted. If you're prepared to give it a go, you're accepted. Perth is big enough and it's small enough. We have the Irish community here and if you want an Irish day, you can go to the Irish Club. I'm Irish. But don't get me wrong, I'm proud of the Aussies, proud to be here.

Gerry was interviewed by Claddagh Coordinator, Anne Wayne. Anne is from Fremantle but lived near New Ross, Co. Wexford for many years.

Ann Benton

Ann Benton was born in 1942. She is from Oxfordshire and her father emigrated to the UK from Co. Wicklow.

My father's the Irish one. He was born in 1917 and lived in Kilpedder, in County Wicklow. My dad was one of 11 - and not Catholic either - but two died, and so only nine grew to maturity. He lived there until he left when he was 17 or 18 to go to England. He was in the RAF. Then he met my mum in England. She was from Kent, one of nine.

'I remember the snow around the cottage that my dad grew up in'

I know the first time I went [to Ireland], I was five. So it was 1947. We went in the winter, because I remember the snow around the cottage that my dad grew up in. It was awful. It was a farm. I remember it was really cold and my mum was miserable all the time because this was a very primitive cottage that my dad and his eight siblings had grown up in. I think that was a bit of a shock [and] not particularly interesting for a little girl of five, going to an isolated cottage in the middle of fields when I had come from suburbia in Warwickshire.

Then the next time I would have gone would probably have been a couple or three years later. I was probably about eight. That was in the summer for holidays. I remember them getting the hay in, which was of course, something completely new to me being a suburban child and staying out because it was long summer evenings. Dad was helping his brother, who by the time was running the farm they had all grown up in. We went into Greystones and Bray on that occasion. My grandma's still alive and she was getting pretty elderly, of course, by that time.

The next time I went would have been with my dad on our own when my grandma died. And I think the next time I would have gone with just dad again, because my mother worked. I guess she found things pretty primitive in dad's home. I guess that was partly why she stayed at home. And I know we went into Dublin on that occasion, I guess I was about 12 or 13. And it's an occasion I remember, the first time I remember him holding my hand. Strange. Crossing the road, which was quite busy and holding my hand. He was a fairly quiet person.

[My husband] Alan trained in Birmingham in England, he's a jeweller. And he was living in Guernsey working when I met him when I was on the holiday. We married in 1970. And in April 1971 we move to the Bahamas, where he had secured a job, before we got married. So we moved there, April '71. I did teach there and he, he got a bit cheesed off with the place, they're a bit laid back. We stayed there until June 73. In the end it got on his nerves when he was having to get work ready and done by a set time, 'Tomorrow, man, will do'.

So then we went to Bermuda and that didn't work out terribly well. So from there, we decided we wouldn't keep shifting around trying places. We didn't want to go back to the UK to live. I guess we'd enjoyed the better weather in the two places we lived. We wanted an English speaking country somewhere where there was opportunity. [We] didn't exactly get the atlas out but both of us decide[d] on Australia fairly readily.

When we were still in Bermuda and had applied [to go to Australia] from there, the application went through Trinidad. We had to give a sort of CV, of what we did for a living, where we had been born, where we'd

‘I thought, “Great Scott, where have we come to?”’

grown up, what we’d been doing the last few years. And put in a photograph to prove that we were white, basically.

We came to Perth rather than Sydney, because my husband thought there would be more opportunities than going to Sydney. [And we] didn’t really want a big city. And so before we left Bermuda, he’d applied for jobs here. We went back to the UK for three months before we got on a ship to come here.

It was an Italian line, and it was pretty awful. We picked up the ship in Italy. So we drove to Turin, in a car that we were bringing, and got on this Italian ship, which I think took four or five weeks. But we stopped off at South Africa, Cape Town.

Because we were late booking, we were sharing cabins. Al was sharing a cabin with five other blokes and I was sharing a cabin with five other young women. I was relatively young too, because we were still only in our late 20s. Sharing a cabin with these girls that would come in at night, all hours of the night, from partying on the ship.

The food was okay to start with. But then as the trip went on, and you pulled into various ports, the food seemed to get worse because they would pick up stores, I guess from wherever we landed. I think there probably was a small swimming pool. And there were two or three restaurants but not big deal like they are today. We got quite friendly with [a woman who] had got a brother who was a jeweller. We contacted her, visited her in Shenton Park.. And so she put Al on to him. He was quite a nice chap and helped Al out at the beginning.

[We docked on] September the 27th in 1974. We had a huge trunk with a lot of belongings in, two or three suitcases. They were brought off, lunchtime-ish on the Saturday. And Al put me down sort of on the wharf not far from the ship, sitting with these belongings, while he walked down into Fremantle to find a hotel. So there I was sitting in a strange country with these cases and sitting on a big trunk. And it was memorable because it was September, and it was the WAFL footy final and so there was nobody about, they were all watching it or watching it on tv. So I thought, ‘Great Scott, where have we come to? You have this deserted place and wonder if I’ll ever see him again!’ But he came back within a couple of hours and he had found the Oddfellows Hotel in Fremantle. And [we] transferred our belongings to the hotel where we stayed for a week.

[Alan] was working for people here until he opened up his own business, where he did make and sell his own jewellery that people came in to have designed. He would design and then make up, mostly engagement rings, wedding rings, matching the two. Quite often people bringing in older jewellery to be broken up and re-styled so he would design new styles.

We got here in September and we bought [our house] by December. It was $24,500. We’d always lived in other people’s places. So yes, this was the first place that we’d owned and it does make you feel more settled. We’re still here since 1974.

For the first two or three years when you’re saving and buying things, but maybe after five years, for the next ten years we did travel a fair bit to countries around here, Asia, Hong Kong, China, Bali. So those were good years. Because we haven’t had children I have had the availability and opportunity to be able to afford to go back many times.

I feel quite well connected to Australians. There was ribbing of us being Poms. The Aussies would, bring out the fact of £10 Poms, to which we would say, ‘We’re not’. Because we weren’t, we had applied and paid our

own fare. We actually got here under our own steam and money.

My mother was very upset, annoyed, never got over the fact that I left England to come and live here. Never, ever, never accepted it. Never. If she would make not very pleasant comments about Australians, I would then stick up for them. My dad did, my dad accepted it and he quite enjoyed visiting here, My mum hated it. And of course the hotter it got because they came in September. My mum didn't like the heat in England even, so by the time it got to December here, I knew what was going to happen. They left in February. I had just gone back to work. and then [my dad] died in October of that year. He died when he was 67. But he enjoyed it here.

'My dad accepted it and he quite enjoyed visiting Australia'

When I went back after my father died in '84, I went over to help my mum as I'm an only child. And I then went over, the next year because I had six months long service leave by which time mum was a little bit recovered from dad's death, because he was only 67. Every time I went back, 'Well when you're coming back here to live in England', even in 2012 when I went back, and by which time she was 92.

I've never felt homesick. Never thought, 'Oh, we shouldn't have come', never felt, someday maybe we'll go back to live. No, never, never, never ever. I'm not Australian. I'm still English. I'm an Australian citizen and I've lived in Australia longer than I ever lived in England. But I'm still inherently English.

And although I'm half and half, I consider my Irish half [stronger] and I guess it's because of my dad. [I] got on better with my dad than I did my mum. I didn't realise that for many years. I got on better with my father and so would connect more with the Irish bit than the English bit.

Ann was interviewed by Deirdre O'Neill. Deirdre is from Kilcock, Co. Kildare and migrated to Australia in 2011.

Patrick Whalen

Patrick Whalen was born in 1945. He is from New York and his grandparents emigrated to the US from Tipperary and Cork.

I'm Patrick Francis Whalen the third, because my dad was Patrick Francis, and his dad was Patrick Francis. I was born during a snowstorm in New York, which I don't remember, but my mom told me about it. And I grew up on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, right on the outskirts of Harlem at a place called 180 Claremont Avenue. On my dad's side, his parents are born in the States, but his grandparents were born in Ireland. My grandparents from Ireland had my mom. Martin Ryan and Mary - Molly that's what everybody called her- Kelly. My grandmother was from County Cork. And my grandfather [Papa] was from Tipperary.

'I was born during a snowstorm in New York'

A family in New York City sent a ticket [to Ireland] for a passage for Papa's sister Maggie, who's about four years younger. She was to be their nanny, so she was going to New York to be a nanny. However, Maggie had been procrastinating and the ticket had been sitting on the dresser for a while. Papa returned home one evening after a particularly long and gruelling day working in the peat moss fields. He went to the drawer and said that he had enough of this and took it and then left for New York City. I don't know if Papa had to work for them as a nanny for a while. I can't see him doing that job!

He [Papa] migrated on the *Cedric* which is owned by the same line that had the *Titanic*. The *Cedric* left from Liverpool and stopped in County Cork and that's where my grandfather got on at Queenstown and then went on to New York. He was a labourer in Ireland. And then in the States, he became a bus driver on the Fifth Avenue bus line. He faithfully bought Irish sweepstakes tickets all the time. I remember that.

[Papa] and his friend went on a double date with two women. And at the end of the date, they switched partners. So my grandfather got my Nana. I believe my grandmother was actually older than my grandfather. We used to tease her about robbing the cradle. They got married on 96th Street in Manhattan at the Church of the Holy Name on the 6th of June 1915.

They had three girls and one boy, Mike Ryan. They all stayed in the New York area. Michael Ryan was the only one of them that didn't live in an apartment building. When he got married, he moved to Bergenfield, New Jersey and actually had a house and we were just amazed. He was the only one we knew that lived in a house, not an apartment building. All my cousins and I grew up in apartment buildings [in the] '50s and '60s. My mom was living in the Bronx at the time she came to visit [me in King Island, Tasmania]. Now funny thing about King Island is there are more people living in my mom's apartment building than lived on King Island at the time. She just couldn't believe, it's the most remote she's ever been. But she backed a winner on the King Island Cup, so that made her happy.

[My grandmother] used to make the best Irish soda bread I've ever had. The other thing I remember her for - and I never could eat it - was her black pudding. Oh, my grandfather used to hoe into the black pudding! I couldn't take it. I lived with them for quite a while. My parents split up. I lived with my grandparents and my mom and my brother at 180 Claremont Avenue in Manhattan. [It was near] Riverside Church, which has a big bell tower. Some of the nicest memories I have as a kid is listening to the bells on Christmas morning playing Christmas carols. It was amazing. They had the largest tuned bell in the world there.

‘My grandmother used to make the best Irish soda bread I’ve ever had’

My grandfather used to fly back to Ireland every other year. I said to him once, when I was visiting from Australia, ‘When are you going to come down and visit us in Australia?’ And he said, ‘Oh, glory be to God, you want me to fly halfway around the world?’ He had an Irish brogue right up to the day he died. It’s as if he got off the boat yesterday.

I [attended] Corpus Christi primary school, on 121st Street between Broadway and Amsterdam Avenue. At lunchtime, for us to play, we didn’t have a playground. The school was built on top of the church. The police would come 10 minutes before our lunchtime and put barricades up on the street. And so we were able to play on the street except if it was raining we didn’t or snowing.

My three best friends when I was in primary school, by the time I had finished high school two of them were dead from drug overdoses. That’s a sort of neighbourhood I grew up in. My dad never went to college, neither did my mom, in fact none of my aunts or uncles ever went, the only one is my dad’s brother. He went through and he ended up being a school principal.

We spent every summer, first at Rockaway Beach. And then when they destroyed Rockaway Beach by putting up projects, we moved to Long Beach. But I was very lucky insofar as I never had to spend a summer in New York City. We always went to the beach for the summer. Rockaway was predominantly Irish, very, very Irish. Rockaway Beach was called the Irish Riviera because of the volume of Irish people. Rockaway Beach is amazing, growing up there. We leave the house in the morning, my cousins and I, and we wouldn’t come back to lunchtime. We’re just out playing all the time. We played baseball, stickball, playing games on the beach. My cousins and I grew up together almost as one.

I left New York in 1959 to go to a junior seminary. That’s when I graduated from Corpus Christi primary school. From there I went to Don Bosco College and got a Bachelor of Arts with a major in philosophy. But always loving mathematics as much as I did, I went back and did some summer courses to upgrade myself to be a mathematics teacher, which I have done since 1968. I began teaching in a Salesian High School, Dominic Savio High School in East Boston, Massachusetts, or as the people there used to say, ‘Easta’ Boston. It’s a predominantly Italian neighbourhood. Then when I left the Salesian Congregation I did some relief teaching in New York.

In 1972, my cousin Ken Grant, very well-known basketball player, he just came back from a tour in Australia. I think they were sponsored by Levi’s, they travelled around, they’d give coaching clinics and then play games. And he said to me, ‘Pat, you know, I really think you would enjoy Australia’. He said, ‘For one thing, they have a shortage of experienced math/science teachers, for another thing, they really need basketball people with basketball ability’. And I was a reasonable player and I was the assistant varsity coach in a state championship team. He gave me the address of someone in Melbourne and I wrote and expressed my interest in coming to Australia and they said, ‘Yes, we’ll take you, we’ll fly you over for one year, we’ll find you a teaching job and you coach us. If you stay with us for two years, we’ll fly you back to the States’.

It took me a couple of months to get my visa straight. I have to have a chest X ray to prove I [don’t have] tuberculosis. And I had to be fingerprinted. And then I got a good conduct certificate. I came by plane on a Qantas flight. April 21 1972. I flew from New York. This is before they came out with the 747SP, special performance. So the plane had to land in Hawaii to refuel and then continue from Hawaii to Melbourne over 24 hours.

Well, during [my first year in Australia], I played with a touring team. We gave coaching clinics in the afternoon,

and we played exhibition games against the state team at night. And part of the tour was a ten day tour of Tasmania. I just fell in love with the place, the opposite, diametrically opposed to New York City. New York's very intense, you know, it's packed. And so when my one year contract was up with the team rather than stay for a second year, I moved to Tasmania and I stayed in Tasmania for 19 years. I moved to WA because my-ex wife brought the kids over here. I started teaching in Lesmurdie Senior High School, then Trinity, then I taught at Broome Senor High School for five years, and then took a position at Prendiville Catholic College.

'I do feel a strong attachment to Ireland'

I do feel a strong attachment to Ireland. I tend to hang out [in] Irish pubs, I've been to the Irish Club, the Claddagh Association. I keep in mind Blooms Day. St. Patty's Day is always a special day for me. Believe it or not, [the parade is] bigger in New York than in Dublin. One year, the Lord Mayor of Dublin actually attended St. Patty's Day in New York as the guest of honour. The dividing line on Fifth Avenue is painted green. And the parade goes right up along Fifth Avenue. And it terminates near St. Patrick's Cathedral.

[I have] a sense of pride about my Irish heritage but [feel] more Australian than American. One year on Thanksgiving Day, my cousins and [I] we're all on email saying, 'How's Thanksgiving Day?' I said 'One of the things I'm most thankful for in my life was Ken giving me the idea about moving to Australia'. And Ken emailed back and says, 'Yeah, but your mom wouldn't speak to me for four months after that'.

Patrick was interviewed by Claddagh volunteer Tina O'Connor. Tina is from High Wycombe, UK and has spent time in Cloneygowan, Co. Offaly, the homeplace of her late husband, Emmet.

The Claddagh Association was incorporated in 1997 to support Irish people in Western Australia. Our mission is to provide help and support to members of the Irish community who find themselves in difficult circumstances. The Association supports senior members of the Irish community and those who may be lonely and isolated. In addition to its support services, the Association promotes the well-being and development of the Irish community and seeks opportunities to engage and work with other organisations to celebrate and preserve Irish heritage.

The Claddagh Oral History project was initiated during the COVID-19 pandemic. It brought people together safely, at a time when they were at risk of more isolation and loneliness than ever before, to build connection between members of the Irish community in WA and celebrate and preserve our shared heritage.

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