

The Basket

Rita Taylor Brennan (In memory of my grandparents, John & Katie)

IT WAS THAT time of year again, to decorate the house for Christmas. My husband is the decorator in the family and goes all out, both inside and out. Feeling the need to contribute some creativity to the decorating, I carefully removed "the basket" from the glass cabinet where I have it safely stored away.

As I slowly began to place some scented pine cones and colored bells into the basket, my mind wandered back to that warm summer when I made the basket with my grandfather. My grandparents, John and Katie Early lived in the town land of Annaghbradican, near Effernagh. It was approximately five miles from the village of Drumsna where I grew up. We would often visit them on a Sunday afternoon; it was on one of those visits my grandfather invited me to spend a week there during my summer holidays. I was very excited and could not wait to get there. My grandfather had prepared the room upstairs for me. I walked up the narrow stairs to the hot room with

the slanted ceiling and began unpacking. He had given very precise instructions on what I should bring; the outfit for Sunday Mass was of the utmost importance. It was unpacked first and inspected by my grandfather as appropriate to wear.

My grandmother was a quiet, placid woman who enjoyed just watching and listening to me and grandfather. He loved to talk about his experiences in America. He would tell me stories about the cities he lived in during the fourteen years he spent there and about his work on the railroad. It was during one of our conversations he talked about making the turf creels and baskets that I asked him if he could make a basket for me. That was all the motivation he needed. The next morning we walked down to the big field behind the house to pick the sally rods. The rods were carefully selected and cut one by one. We gathered them up and took them back to the house to dry. Once they were ready we started the project. I chose

each rod and handed it to him, I watched as he slowly weaved them together with his long, nimble fingers. Gradually the body of the basket began to take shape, then the curved handle, and within a few hours it was complete. The following day we varnished the basket together and set it aside to dry.

I was so excited about the basket that I checked on it several times a day, when Sunday evening rolled around it was time to leave and go back "in to town" with my Uncle Mike, however, this time was different. I now had a handmade basket to take with me as a keepsake of my holiday and the wonderful memories of time spent with my grandparents.

Sadly, I never learned the art of basket weaving, my grandfather made it look so simple and easy. He was truly gifted with his hands and my grandmother was his most avid supporter, silently watching and wondering what was he going to create next.

