Any Boiled Frogs in Leitrim?

Thomas Clancy

MEMORIES TEND to oscillate between the rose-tinted and the horrific and can be almost exclusively centred on the formative years of our upbringing. This can be shown to be true by the tragic accounts children of state or religious run institutions give of their time in these places, while the succeeding years of their existence could have been even harsher or more problematic they tend not to remember them.

On the other side of the coin children who spent some time in the homes of relatives in the country during school holidays, remember only the good times. It is the memory of the time between the age of four and fourteen that the majority of us remember most.

For us who grew up in Leitrim and had to move elsewhere to secure a living, our subconscious can be caught on the memory treadmill of recurring dreams of chasing hens and ducks around the farmyard or swish swashing through clobber and mud or endless weeding of potato plots. The fact that we may have graduated to a more affluent way of life from that which we experienced in our youth does nothing for our nocturnal rambling dreams.

No boiled frogs here as these young Leitrim people prepare to fly the nest!

This latter point was brought home to me recently by a former son of our county who now has the luxury of visiting his native town land by either helicopter or silver shadow Rolls. He put it simply when he stated that his present forms of transport are but dust in comparison to the second hand bike he couldn't buy when he was at primary school. 'I longingly looked at that bike in a local garage for weeks before it disappeared, and its memory still haunts me' was his sad comment.

Another facet of such dreams is the recurring incidents of people of authority which pervade them and still hold sway over the dreamer recreating the same feeling of fear and dread which they once brought to the child. People like parents, teachers and priests become superimposed on otherwise benign characters. This may be a locked in fear in the memory which has no validity either in fact or fiction but which the now adult child still has not dealt with in an adult fashion. Is there part of the inner subconscious which develops from conception to adolescence and there after remains in a state of limbo only to resurrect itself in times of stressful sleep? Is it the individuals own longing for childhood acceptance which when not met at that stage of their development becomes their Hamster wheel of torment.

There are as many theories as there are stories of recurring nightmares, but consider for a minute what today's children might face in forty years time. Their dreams may bring nightmares of having to eat proper food instead of the variety eaten from polystyrene wrappers or the flashing lights on their branded runners becoming extinguished or maybe the trauma of having to take public transport to school instead of being allowed to use their skateboards. Perhaps they will see themselves in court prosecuting their parents for having the audacity to refuse them permission to go on sun holidays on their own at the age of twelve. Perhaps their dreams may see them using their laser card to buy the dreaded leaving cert points in academic qualification vending machines.

Today's children are facing such a vastly different world that we adults cannot even begin to imagine. The rate of change that they are facing may turn them into the dreaded boiled frog. Or could the rate of change be either reversed or worse still opposed and turn them into reactionaries or revolutionaries. Perhaps they will long for the progress, which their parents witnessed and achieved in their own lifetime. Their dreams are unlikely to encompass the spatial awareness of their ancestor's rural settings, but may be replaced by urban conurbations. Authoritarian figures might be a module in their sociological studies, rather than something, which they actually experienced. Want and longing might be replaced by a deluge of cabbages and play stations, while the pursuit of achievement may be replaced by apathy and boredom. Health farms might be the only rural connection they will experience. Creature comforts may be a given, rather than an attainable goal.

Abraham Maslow (1908-1970) the American works psychologist of the of the last century spoke of a pyramid of needs which human beings go through during their life cycle, from physiological to self actualisation. Most of our basic needs are being met in the western world since the second half of the last century but what about the higher needs in the pyramid. Some of them like self-actualisation have been curtailed by our society and in particular our enslavement to money. Can one spend their time writing poetry of travelling the world while the mortgage has to be paid and cards have to be kept in credit?

Another change that has occurred in a short period of time is the tendency to stay at home as adult children rather than to fly the nest. We left home and Leitrim to better ourselves, while our children have no wish to leave to worsen their conditions. Why leave a home with its built-in maid, butler, taxi driver ATM machine, surround-sound entertainment and carvery restaurant, to go to a one room apartment and have to pay rent and keep themselves.

What will be the driving force behind the future dreams of our children? Will the rate of change be so constant and so dramatic that they will not notice or care what takes place? If our rural background of the last century provided us with such a rich source of material for our dreams, then imagine what a stockpile of experiences they will have to pick from. Their world is vastly different from ours. The most positive thing about the future of our children and us is the fact that they possess good genes, the genes of their parents and grandparents and if they achieved so much coming from a more limited time then the future for Leitrim people is secure and in the gifted hands of our youth.

To return to Maslow's pyramid of needs, before his death he recanted somewhat and said that there might be even a higher need in the human psychic and that is the need for a God or a higher being in our lives. Perhaps in today's reality of closed churches and lack of priests in Leitrim, things might change and maybe some of yesterday's values might return in the life of our children.

PROCESSION Mary Guckian

On the night before the annual procession we ironed our pale blue Child of Mary cloaks and carefully folded the delicate lacy veils, placing them in a neat parcel. Next morning we awoke excited and looked forward to taking part in the annual Corpus Christi procession. Wearing out Child of Mary medals we attended last Mass at St Mary's Church in Carrick. Before we qualified to be called Children of Mary we attended a monthly meeting over a period of four years. These took place usually on Sunday afternoons where we said prayers and one of the nuns spoke about how we should live our lives. At the end of each year we were given a medal with a ribbon that was hung around our necks in a different colour, starting with red, then green and later purple, the final ribbon a delicate pale blue shade with a large medal confirming us fully fledged Children of Mary. On our bicycles, with parcels on the carrier we pedalled over the pot holed roads praying that the tyres would survive the rough stones. On the footpaths people gathered and waited to be placed in lines while we donned cloaks and veils, male helpers wearing right hand arm bands arranged us in bunches behind a row of priests who were dressed in long cloaks covered in heavy embroidery that glistened in the sun. Four pall bearers carried a cloth attached to four poles held high over the priest that was covered in braid ringlets sheltering the golden monstrance. If showers came down, large umbrellas were carried by the tallest men and the choir sang hymns that got us marching in slow motion down the main street as we prayed out loud, our veils blowing in the breeze. Feeling part of this religious celebration we admired altars with large vases full of lavender lilac, red peony roses and pale pink thorny stemmed flowers. Honeycombs of lupins in purple and yellow shades filled shop windows placed around Infant of Prague statues and Our Lady wore a blue veil, other pictures of St Joseph and the pierced heart of the Sacred Heart filled shiny doorways. Saying our prayers with enthusiasm, we circled the town before arriving back at the Church. We bought ice-cream in wafers and struggled back to reality facing the journey back to the farm, where many jobs waited to be completed.