# Fascinating Experiences of Drumany

*Gerry Adley*

Although I was born in London in 1944 and now live in the USA, I claim to be half Irish and half British. My mother, Catherine Adley nee Melia, was born at Drumany, Foxfield near Fenagh in 1915 and was one of a family of nine children.

All the family are now deceased, apart from my mother, who lives in Essex, England near my sister Maureen, and Rose who lives in Dublin.. When I was four years old, Maureen and I were sent to live with the Melia family in Drumany as my father was very ill in hospital and my mother found it difficult to cope with three children and a sick husband. The Melia homestead was up a boreen, off Drumany lane by the canal bridge. The Doherty family lived at the bottom of the boreen and the Moran family lived at the other end beyond Melia's. At the present time all these properties have the appearance of being empty and derelict. Back in 1948, things were very different. The Melia household was a hive of activity. Living there were my grand parents, Michael and Anne and three of their children, Paddy, John and Lizzie.

To all intents and purposes Lizzie became a mother to me and my sister. She was amazingly kind to us as were all the other members of the Melia family and I will be forever grateful for the love they gave us. Although they were quite poor like everybody else in Leitrim, we never went hungry and I felt, even as a four year old child, that a great contentment reigned over the townland.

We went to Drumany school in our bare feet. The teacher was Master Reynolds. I particularly remember the school toilets as they were really smelly. I rarely ever used the Drumany school toilet after my first experience. We went to mass on Sunday to Foxfield chapel and were well turned out on these occasions. Transport consisted of Bob, the Irish draught horse pulling the side car. Mattie Dolan of Corragoly was a frequent visitor to the Melia home. He was highly regarded by all as a very wise person. He spent some time in the USA before returning to Ireland.

***All dressed up for Mass in 1955***
*Back: Catherine Adley, Lizzie Doran & Jim Early Front: Gerry & Maureen Adley.*

Maureen and I moved back to England in 1950 but returned again to Leitrim in 1955, the year my father died. On this occasion my mother also brought over my older brother Michael. I clearly remember travelling on the narrow gauge train from Dromod to Fenagh. It was a slow but truly fascinating experience. We were met at Fenagh station by Lizzie and her neighbour, Jim Early, who was acting as chauffeur. Jim had a maroon Austin 7. This car was the forerunner of the Austin Mini. By now the only people living in the Melia household was my grandmother and John. Paddy had married and moved to nearby Leamonish. Lizzie had also married and was living with her husband Jack Doran in Rossy about 3 miles away but I recall her staying with us in the Melia abode for most of the two weeks that we were there. The highlight of our stay was a day trip to Bundoran.

We spent up to six weeks of every summer holidays from 1956 to 1959 in Leitrim, either staying with John and my grandmother, until she died or in Leamonish with Paddy and his wife Ciss. During my time in Leitrim I passed the days by assisting John or Paddy at saving the hay, working on the bog or fishing. I usually arrived in early July by which time the hay would have been mowed, using a horse and mowing machine. My job was to assist in shaking and turning the hay until it was properly dry. It was then put into cocks. Paddy had an invention that could drag the haycocks from the fields rather than carting the hay. The contraption consisted of a piece of metal about twelve feet long by six inches wide which would be pushed under the hay cock. Ropes were attached to each end and tied securely. The horse with appropriate collar and chains would be attached to one end of the metal and the hay cock would be dragged to the hay shed. There was very little waste and I am sure a lot of time was saved. The hay was then pitch forked into the hayshed.

John and Paddy were incredibly kind to me. They let me run wild, which I invariably did. On one occasion I remember assisting Paddy by walking a white heifer, from Leamonish to Drumshanbo fair, a distance of about six miles. I couldn't have been more than fourteen years old at the time. It rained the whole way but the beast was well behaved. You might ask where Paddy was.

***Bringing in the hay***
*Jimmy Moran, Gerry Adley & John Melia*

The answer is I don't know. All I know is that he met me at the fair and the animal was sold by him, so I didn't have to walk her home. Part of the journey was along the tramway and the passing steam train caused no problem for the heifer, probably because it was travelling so slow, On another occasion I cycling with Paddy to Drumsna, via Keshcarrigan and Kilnagross, to collect a pet goldfish off the evening Dublin- Sligo train. That was about an eighteen mile round trip. We got home to Leamonish without lights on our bikes and without spilling any water. The goldfish survived for several years. The bikes used were the old fashioned lady's, black, sit up and beg type Raleigh bikes with no gears. Those bikes were really heavy.

By now I was a keen fisherman and regularly fished Drumany Lake (Lough Nacarriga) from the side of the road with varying amounts of success. But I felt my chances of catching a 'whopper' would be enhanced if I had the services of a boat. Obviously at this time in Leitrim there were few if any boats. I put my proposition to Paddy and without further adieu he set out and built a wooden rowing boat from scratch. It took him about seven days to complete the task and during this period all the farmwork came to a standstill. Paddy was a very talented, unselfish man who would do a good turn for anybody.

He built the boat in the old thatched cottage just below his bungalow. Upon completion the boat was launched on Drumlaheen lake. The horse and cart were pressed into service to bring the boat to the lake. I had limited success fishing there as my pike lure was always getting caught up in the trees that abound on the floor of that lake. Within two weeks the boat was moved to Drumany Lake where many large pike were caught and consumed by the Melia's. I also fished the canal near the present Rossy Bridge. Jack Doran fed the canal beforehand with a huge amount of cooked potatoes. We fished that part of the canal the following evening and ended up with a big catch of bream.

County Leitrim was a very sociable place in the 1950's. I recall many callers to John Melia's home. During the day Jimmy Moran and his father, old James Moran (the retired RIC officer) would be constant callers for a chat and a cup of tea. Mattie Dolan called most nights. Certainly the most sociable place was Rossy where Lizzie and Jack lived. We'd be up half the night chatting with Michael and Rita Healy. Lizzie would fry potatoes and cabbage, which was delicious. She also made apple pies with apples from her own garden and this fare would often be consumed at about midnight with copious cups of tea. When the evening finally came to an end, it was a scary walk or ride home without lights to Drumany, especially after Jack Doran had been telling ghost stories all night and frightening everybody to death. At least once during our annual visit to Leitrim we would visit our cousins, the Melia's at Drumkillian near Gorvagh and spend time with Margaret (now a retired school teacher) and Sean (now a Garda Inspector in Kilkenny). There were two other children there. Kathleen (now a nun in the Philippines) and Thomas, who still lives in Drumkillan, is an awesome gardener and local history researcher. Tea was always served by their mother, Bridget, on a white table cloth. Their father Tom was my mother's brother. An event that always stands out in my memory was the death of old James Moran. I think he was nearly 90 when he died but I was saddened by his passing. His son Jimmy came to the house to tell us of his passing. John Melia cycled to Foxfield chapel to get the priest and Lizzie went to the house to help out. I did not go as I was sort of frightened by it all. The priest turned up later in his black VW Beetle and administered the last rites. I looked over the priest's car with awe as he had parked it outside our house.

Although Lizzie, John and Paddy are gone, I am eternally grateful to them for the kindness they showed me when I was with them as a child. Lizzie's son Christopher Doran still lives in Rossy albeit in a different house to the one I knew. Paidh Melia, the son of Paddy still lives in the same house in Leamonish. There is another brother Michael who lives in Carrick-on-Shannon.

My wife, Michelle and I now have a house in Leitrim between Keshcarrigan and Fenagh and we try to spend as much time there as we can. I am just as fond of the county now as I was fifty years ago.

***At the M J McManus Writer's Day in Carrick-on-Shannon.***
*Lorraine Currid, Patrick Anderson McQuaid, Peter Finlay &Peggy Clarke-Frost.*

*Photo: Sean Gill*