A Summer of Hope & Pride

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'And when the summer and the fine weather like this comes it takes from us the memory and the gloom of winter'

The words of Peig Sayers of the Blasket Islands, are also true of the people of Leitrim 2000.

'I hope it lasts' they said when the fine days came. And it did. With sunshine came hope. Hope for harvest weather to take the panic out of haymaking. The rain stayed away, as convoys of tractors travelled the roads, attacking the dry fields, and leaving in their wake random scatterings of round bales or black bales. Farmers drove their jeeps and cars into clean shaven fields and the mud and potholes were forgotten. We were growing accustomed to summer, we were almost taking it for granted. We were going to have time time to look around and relish the work that was done, time to smell the honey suckle in the trimmed hedges. Sunshine brought a feeling of prosperity and pride. And most of all hope.

Hope had been an earlier visitor,and somewhat a stranger in Leitrim.We sensed it first in the building boom.Suddenly we had sought after sites, ideal locations. Housing developments, unheard of before in villages, made the locals look on in wonder; estates of houses, houses bought before they were built.

People were coming to Leitrim, some maybe as week-enders to their second homes, but they were coming back too, coaxed back from Sydney or San Francisco or even suburbia. Young people settling in their home towns and villages,bringing the

The epitomy of pride in their clubs and in Leitrim – Frank Holohan (Drumreilly) and Jerome Quinn (Aughawillan)

vibrancy of youth. Commuting became the new word, giving us something new to talk about – building sites, whole fields for sale, promises of hotels, thousands became hundreds of thousands. We listened in wonder and soon began to wonder at nothing. Progress was bringing change and that change is good.

And so hope made way for pride and in the early summer sunshine the county bedecked itself in green and gold. Football fever took over. It became the topic of conversation on street corners and supermarket queues. Elderly men leaned on mart railings and pondered the possibilities, remembering past heroes. Young boys wore replica jerseys and rattled off the names of their new found heroes. A rash of flags, fluttered from upstair windows, into towns and out of towns. Otherwise half hearted followers, and even the hardened cynics became caught up, resurrected their pride and the involvement made them young again. They talked of 94, they hoped, they dared to believe, and as the rain drizzled down on Hyde Park the hope faded but the pride was renewed and remains.

And that same pride was there in the gatherings for the summer festivals and school re-unions. Those who left Leitrim came back to reminisce, they marvelled at the string of new houses from Bornacoola to Ballinamore to Ballinaglera. They sensed the change, saw the changes. They were proud of us and proud for us. We have come a long way in Leitrim.