

Q1: Describe your earliest GAA memory and how you became involved in the GAA?

- ~ Introduced to playing football at primary school
- ~ Encouraged by my uncles who were all GAA players
- ~ Listening to GAA radio commentaries by Michael O'Hehir
- ~ Watching and supporting my local club Castlewellan GAC
- ~ My grandmother knitted my very first pair of football socks in 1955

Q2: Did your family have a tradition or history of GAA involvement?

- ~ My mother's family (brothers & sisters) all played football and camogie
- ~ My father was a sportsman and excelled at cricket

Q3: Did your relatives discuss their GAA experiences with you? What were they?

- ~ Sport was always the topic of conversation especially from my mother's family
- ~ My mother's family all played Gaelic games for Loughinisland GFC Co. Down
- ~ They often referred to a man called Dan Lavery who played for them and indeed played for Down who later played soccer for the famed Glasgow Celtic.
- ~ Emigration of players was always a major problem and the difficult times during World War II

Q4: Tell me how GAA affected your family life?

- ~ I was an absolute fanatic and devoted hours upon hours playing gaelic football, little did I know then that this would be referred to today as the practising of the skills of the game.
- ~ Footwear was always a major problem due to the time spent kicking football – unlike today where most people can pick and choose – I would have had one pair of shoes, used for all occasions.
- ~ I got my first pair of football boots, which by the way were second hand in 1958 when I was 10yrs of age and I was one of the lucky ones in those days.

Q5: Tell me what it was like to support your club/county when you were young and down through the years (travelling to games, prices of tickets, food, grounds visited, clothes worn, match-day traditions, local celebrations and traditions).

- ~ My club Castlewellan were the first GAA club in Ireland to own a club bus in 1954 and it was garaged beside where I used to live – thus from when I was 6yrs old I was travelling all the clubs away fixtures, sometimes unknown to my parents.
- ~ My first memory of championship success for the club was in 1958 at the final in Newcastle between Castlewellan and Clonduff with Castlewellan winning 0-8 to 0-4 with my child-hood hero Pat Rice collecting the cup as capt.
- ~ I was lucky enough to be in Clones in 1959 when Down won their first Ulster senior championship title against Cavan with a vivid memory of a Down supporter scaling the goal-post to hoist the Down flag.
- ~ My first experience of Croke Park was the same year for the All-Ireland semi-final v Galway with my father lifting me over the turn-style to gain entry, the price of a Hogan Stand ticket was 5/=
- ~ I travelled to the All-Ireland final in 1960 with my father and uncle and 3 other men in a small volkswagon beetle car, leaving Castlewellan after 6.30am mass with the journey taking almost 5 hours.
- ~ The journey home took a lot longer – I'm proud to say that I have attended every All-Ireland football final since 1960(51 yrs unbroken)

Q6: If you had to choose just one game from all you've experienced, which would you choose? Why?

- ~ I would probably choose the 1961 All-Ireland final between Down and Offaly in Croke Park(50yrs ago)
- ~ Down were reigning All-Ireland champions and their training base was my school St.Malachy's High Castlewellan, with my school principal Danny Flynn the team Trainer
- ~ I attended every training session, acting as ball-boy, message boy or any chore the principal requested.
- ~ The build-up to the game was unbelievable for a 13yr old boy to experience
- ~ I traveled to the game with my uncle Danny and his friend and family, with bumper-to-bumper traffic all the way from Newry to Dublin
- ~ It was a truly historic occasion which may never ever be equalled with 90,556 spectators in attendance and tickets on this occasion costing 7/=6p
- ~ I still have vivid memories of Offaly scoring 2 goals in 4 mins to lead by 6pts – how Down so courageously fought their way back – witnessing my hero Castlewellan's Pat Rice going off injured, having his finger stitched along the line and returning to complete the game.
- ~ Not forgetting the slow and long journey home, the bonfires and the unforgettable scenes in Castlewellan on the Mon. night when 'Sam' arrived for the second time.

Q7: What impact has the GAA had on your life?

- ~ Without fear of contradiction I can safely say that the GAA is my life
- ~ I have been so lucky to have played on so many successful club teams down through the years – winning U.16/U.18/Senior championship medals – 3 All-Ireland 7's titles – along with numerous leagues & tournaments.
- ~ I was elected as club secretary in 1969, a position I held for 25yrs – I have also served as club chairman for 3yrs – Trustee for 19yrs – currently I am a member of the club executive committee and this is my 43rd consecutive year as a member of this body (1968-2011)
- ~ As a coach/manager I have taken charge of club teams from U.12-senior level – at county level I have managed/coached Down U.18 and U.21 teams, winning the All-Ireland minor title in 1999 – I have also managed/coached the Ulster Club San Francisco to 4 Western SFC titles and 1 North American senior title in 2005.
- ~ For my club centenary celebrations in 2005 I was co-author/researcher of the club's official written history book 'The Town'

Q8: What place and role does your club have in your community?

- ~ St.Malachy's GAC Castlewellan was officially affiliated to the GAA in 1905(106yrs), celebrating its centenary in 2005 with the publication of a written history 'The Town', which was awarded the prestigious national 'McNamee' award
- ~ During the early turbulent years the club was always the hub of the community and retains that affinity to this very day.
- ~ The club has built from its humble beginnings of a senior hurling team to today, where they promote 26 different teams in Football – Ladies Football – Hurling – Camogie

Q9: What role did the GAA play as part of your school and/or college life?

- ~ St.Malachy's High School Castlewellan is steeped in GAA history
- ~ The school campus acted as the Down 1960/61/68 training camps.
- ~ Principal Danny Flynn was the 1960/61 Dow team trainer
- ~ V.Principal Dan Rooney was a Down selector for the successful Down 1968 All-Ireland champions team. – playing on this team were George Glynn a member of the teaching staff, along with past pupils Colm McAlarney & Willie Doyle – past pupil Eamon Burns was a player on the Down All-Ireland champions teams in 1991/94
- ~ Gerry Dougherty(man.), Barry Breen & Eamon O'Hare(selectors) all teaching staff members were in charge of the Down minor team All-Ireland champions in 1999.
- ~ School teams have captured 4 All-Ireland vocational schools titles, 2 at U.16 and 2 at U.18 levels – I was co-manager of the successful 1982 U.16 team.

Q10: Who do you admire most in the GAA and why?

- ~ Within my own club I would have to single out Dan Rooney who was club secretary for 23yrs and club chairman for a further 10yrs, for his loyalty, commitment and professionalism towards the organising and development of gaelic games in Castlewellan.
- ~ At county level my plaudits go to former Co.Sec. Maurice Hayes for his vision and foresight to realise a dream to put Downs name firmly on the GAA map not only nationally but inter-nationally.

Q11: In your experience what have been the biggest changes in the GAA?

- ~ The removal of Rule 27 the ban rule on 'Foreign Games'
- ~ The re-development of Croke Park as a world class stadium.
- ~ The ability of clubs to continue to develop and improve facilities for players/ members
- ~ The introduction of All-Ireland competitions at club levels.
- ~ The provision of floodlighting systems for our games at all levels
- ~ A more professional approach taken by referees and administrators towards the control of games at all levels

Q12: Have changes in your community affected your club and how?

- ~ Additional population has necessitated the need for more and more teams within the area to cater for increased demands to play gaelic games.
- ~ Because of the enhanced areas of population the personal knowledge or parochialism known in the early days is gradually being diminished.

Q13: Do you think the role of women in the GAA has changed over the years and how?

- ~ Yes, with the establishment of ladies football the opportunity for young girls to participate at playing level have greatly increased.
- ~ More women are becoming qualified as coaches on an equal status with men.
- ~ The days when women were seen as the tea makers and jersey washers are long gone.
- ~ Women are now going forward and getting elected as top officers at both club and county levels.

Q14: Describe the role of the churches and clergy in your club and how it has changed over the years?

- ~ In the early days the church was the main body in any parish and when GAA Clubs were established the priests were expected to play leading roles.
- ~ In the 1920's the PP a Fr Eardley secured a long term lease on the ground which is now Castlewellan's main pitch St.Malachy's Park – the same Fr Eardley is also credited with the building of a handball alley and the introduction of the game to the area.
- ~ In the 1930's a curate Fr McAlea was responsible for uniting all teams in the parish to form one club named St.Malachy's Castlewellan.
- ~ Up until the early 1980's it was always the usual thing that the Parish Priest would be elected as the club's honorary President.
- ~ Nowadays most clergy just play a supportive role if and when required.

Q15: Was there a connection between politics and the GAA for you, if so what?

- ~ There has always been a connection between politics and the GAA dating back to the foundation in 1884.
- ~ With the upsurge in tension and the arrival of the so called 'Troubles' in the late 1960's all GAA clubs in the North were greatly effected.
- ~ Internment without trial – harassment and searchings going to and from games and training sessions – incarcerated in jails without convictions placed on numerous GAA players in our community had an adverse effect on the progression and spirit within the club.

Q16: What have been the main disappointments you have had with the GAA?

- ~ On the playing field, missing the opportunity in 1979 to win the clubs 1st Ulster Club football championship.
- ~ Being mis-guided in 1966, resulting in my withdrawal from the Down minor panel that were beaten in the All-Ireland final that year.
- ~ At national level the establishment of the group known as the Gaelic Players Association which caters basically for eliteism within our association.

Q17: Did the GAA shape your own identity in any way?

- ~ The GAA is the bedrock of every Irish community and has dedicated voluntary officials at club level committed to the promotion and development of our games.
- ~ These values are at the heart of the GAA family, old and young, male and female, players, officials and supporters all equal.
- ~ Witout its clubs and energetic volunteers the GAA is nothing.
- ~ I would like to think I play some role in this!

Q18: What role has Irish language and culture had in your club and on your personal involvement with the GAA?

- ~ Part of the remit for our Social & Cultural sub committee states:
‘This sub committee should actively promote Irish culture, Irish Language and Scor to all members within the club’
‘ They should also aim to include other community organisations in the club, enhancing the club as the hub of the community’
- ~ My personal grasp of the Irish language is very limited, something I have always regretted.

Q19: How important are rivalries within the GAA and what are yours?

- ~ Rivalries within the GAA are often used as the main motivational factors.
- ~ Championship bragging rights are so important to neighbouring parishes, especially when rival players attend same schools, workplaces and socialising venues together, with life-long friendships often forgotten when the ball is thrown- in in the heat of battle.
- ~ The development and provision of facilities etc. can also be influenced by envious eyes from neighbouring clubs.

Q20: Comment on the role of volunteers within the GAA?

- ~ Legions of voluntary workers day-in, day-out willingly make sacrifices to promote the ideals of the association and carry out its daily burdens.
- ~ The GAA as an organisation is built around volunteerism, not just as a core value but as a way it gets its work done.
- ~ But volunteerism just doesn't happen by accident, and there are proven ways to recruit volunteers.
- ~ Because our volunteers are the most precious asset we have, we need to look after them and value their contributions.
- ~ It is-all-too easy to take volunteers for granted – It is so important to keep everyone enthusiastic and refreshed – we need to constantly acknowledge our volunteers formally and informally.

Q21: Describe your experience with teams as a player, manager, committee member or supporter.

- ~ As a player I was lucky enough to play on club championship winning teams at U.16/U.18/ and senior levels as well as numerous league and 7's winning teams.
- ~ As a manager I have coached:- club teams from U.12 – senior levels, County U.18 and U.21 teams, Schools teams U.12 – U.18 levels, Senior/ Intermediate/ Junior teams in USA.
- ~ As a committee member I have been involved with the appointment and support of team mentors from U.10 – Senior levels in male football/ladies football /hurling/ camogie
- ~ As a supporter I take great joy from achievements at club-county-provincial and national levels.

Q22: Describe your experiences, if any, with the GAA outside Ireland.

- ~ From 2005 – 2010 I have travelled to San Francisco each summer to coach the Ulster Club senior/intermediate/junior football teams which include home based players(exiles), summer students(J1's), and other invited players from Ireland.
- ~ The effort and commitment by the long term exiles out there towards the promotion of gaelic games is absolutely tremendous, given the limited resources at their disposal.
- ~ I have been lucky enough to have helped win 4 SFC titles and 2 JFC titles in the Western division and also capture that ultimate dream of a North American SF championship title when beating St.Brendans Chicago in the 2005 final played in Philadelphia

Q23: Describe how media coverage of GAA in your lifetime has changed.

- ~ Recognition of gaelic games by newspapers has increased dramatically since the mid-1960's especially in the North of Ireland, when small column reporting were the norm and the present day when pages of reporting on GAA matters are common.
- ~ In the 40's/50's/60's/70's the radio commentary by Michael O'Hehir was the closest most people witnessed in relation to high profile gaelic matches – now-a-days all the high profile club, county, provincial and national games can be viewed live in the comfort of most homes.
- ~ My most vivid memory was that of family and neighbours all gathered around the wireless(radio) to listen to commentary on the 1957 All-Ireland final when Louth beat Cork by 2pts.

Q24: What in your opinion are the biggest challenges facing the GAA in the future?

- ~ Retaining and recruiting for the highly successful volunteer system.
- ~ Avoid going down the professionalism route in relation to players and coaches.
- ~ In the current economic climate be mindful re-admission rates etc. in order to maximise spectator attendances.
- ~ Continuing to attract juveniles to play gaelic games when there are so many rival field sorts competing for their allegiance.

Q25: What does the GAA mean to you?

- ~ As a national organisation the GAA basic aim is the strengtheninh of the national identity in a 32 county Ireland through the preservation and promotion og gaelic games and pastimes.
- ~ The GAA continitues to proper from the enormous voluntary efforts of its members, the amateur status of its players and its mentors and the dedication of its employees.
- ~ The GAA continues to promote sportsmanship, discipline, pride, passion and personal development among its members.
- ~ All these values are at the heart of the GAA family, old and young, male and female, players, officials and supporters equal.
- ~ The games of Hurling, Gaelic Football, Camogie, Ladies Football, Handball and Rounders set us apart in the sporting world.

Q26: Do you have any pictures, documents, video etc. that you could share with us? Please provide a brief description.

Do you know any songs or poems about the GAA in your local area that you can send us or write in here?

Can you think of anyone else in your locality or in your family circle who we should contact for this project? Who are they and why?

- ~ PICTURES: I have lots of pictures which were published in the Clubs history book 'The Town' which I can share with you.
- ~ VIDEO: We have a 90min DVD 'Ag Amharc Thar Na Blianta' produced for our centenary year in 2005, I can provide you with a copy.
- ~ SONGS: I have copied below a new club song 'Castlewellan Heroes' again for our centenary in 2005 specially written and composed by former players Terry and Jimmy Cowan and recorded by local folkgroup 'Granite'
- ~ POEMS: I have copied below a poem written by local man Patsy Mullen 'The Castlewellan Man' which was also published in our written history book 'The Town'

Q27: Is there anything else you would like to say about the GAA?

- ~ Gaelic Games are the best field sports in the world.
- ~ Once a GAA person you always have GAA in your blood.

Q28: How did you hear about this project?

- ~ Notification by the Down Co.Committee

I hereby assign the copyright of the answers above to the GAA Oral History Project on the understanding that the content will not be used in a derogatory manner. I understand that I am giving the GAA Oral History Project the right to use and make available to the public the content of this questionnaire.

Signed: *Gerry Dougherty*

Date: **23-11-11**

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