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

Attending Roscommon matches and Cashel (my fathers club) matches in late 70s early 80s

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

Grandfather was a founding member of St Brigids Roscommon and my father won an All-Ireland minor medal with Roscommon in 1951, he was also involved with Longford minor board and Ballymahon (Leo Casey) minor club. My parents were also very involved with scór many years ago, but our club isn't involved in scór any more.

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

My parents would often talk about going to Croke Park when they were young and all-Ireland finals past. All nostalgic but positive recollections. We would often recall a particular story from scór which was quite serious at the time but quite funny now where we lost a competition on technicalities.

Q4: Tell me how GAA affected your family life?

We would spend many summer sundays going to matches, usually connacht matches or big games, often All-Ireland finals in Croke Park. It also meant my father would often be away at meetings, GAA and other organisations like the community games

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).

Not too many memories of big Ballymahon games when I was very young, but the big memory would be stopping outside what is now Carlton House for sandwiches on the way to Croke Park. I also remember big excitement when Cashel were dominant in Longford football in the early 80s and travelling to those games.

Q6: If you had to choose just one game from all you've experienced, which would you choose? Why? 2002 county senior final, I was playing in

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Ballymahon's first and only senior championship win
Q7: What impact has the GAA had on your life?
Huge impact in that I've lived in the greater Dublin region since 1994 but still play in Longford and now also referee in Longford, so my social life tends to revolve around GAA in Longford
Q8: What place and role does your club have in your community?
Truth be told, I would envy a lot of other clubs where the GAA has a much bigger impact on their communities. But there are still a lot of people in the region who come to see our league and championship matches and use it as a social outing
Q9: What role did the GAA play as part of your school and/or college life?
Football was the main sport in our school and we were reasonably successful. I feel it was the basis for some of the success in our club as well as we got used to winning competitions. I would still go to watch finals that the school would be in if they are on at the weekend. In college I was lucky enough to be on the Sigerson panel and got to play with some high profile players
Q10: Who do you admire most in the GAA and why?
There are a couple of categories here. Really the thousands of unsung volunteers who do the many thankless jobs without which the whole thing would fall apart. But you also have to admire the likes of Liam Mulvihill, Peter Quinn, Sean Kelly who developed the organisation into the modern giant it is, easy to look back now and say we'd all have developed Croke Park, but it took foresight. Also the opening of Croke Park was a marvellous step forward as we can be confident in our own games to not have that sort of negative mentality of keeping ourselves closed off.

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Q11: In your experience what have been the biggest changes in the GAA?
As I touched on, the opening up of Croke Park and the way teams now approach games and championships. The dedication involved at all levels from junior championship to inter county is staggering, particularly the many that live from 50 to over 100 miles from their home clubs but still make the journey every weekend and often midweek as well.
Q12: Have changes in your community affected your club and how?
There are alot more immigrants playing our games, but there should be more. The GAA is a place for Irish people abroad to meet and gather, I would love to see it as a place where the “new irish” can get involved in our culture.
Q13: Do you think the role of women in the GAA has changed over the years and how?
They are alot more involved behind the scenes and ladies football is probably one of the fastest growing sports world wide, but they would often still seem to be playing second fiddle in some aspects to men, but it is changing slowly but surely.

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Q14: Describe the role of the churches and clergy in your club and how it has changed over the years?
I never remember any huge involvement in our club apart from saying a prayer at a dinner dance. There was always encouragement from the nuns in charge of our secondary school but not a major involvement.
Q15: Was there a connection between politics and the GAA for you, if so what?
No real connection. You would know the people who had party affiliations, but it never affected things that I could see.
Q16: What have been the main disappointments you have had with the GAA?
Plenty of on field disappointments, 2009 senior semi and 97 intermediate final the most disappointing. I was disappointed the first time the opening up of Croke Park was rejected and by some decisions made at congress over the years, but it is fair to say, the conservatism in general has probably served the GAA well.
Q17: Did the GAA shape your own identity in any way?
It would very much shape how others view me, particularly friends and work friends who wouldn't be involved in the GAA, but I would see it as a part of my life and something that has created many great friendships.
Q18: What role has Irish language and culture had in your club and on your personal involvement with the GAA?
For me, it would be very important, but more because my parents would be fluent Irish speakers and I would have a reasonable command of the language. But it wouldn't have a huge impact on our club. We haven't had scór in many years, but again when it was my parents were quite involved and
Q19: How important are rivalries within the GAA and what are yours?
They are probably it's biggest strength and weakness all in one! Carrickedmond as a senior would have been the biggest when I was in my early 20s and Kenagh as an

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underage player, but it would no longer be the most important thing for me anymore. But it would often be these games where a player might show his full potential and could use this to develop his skill.

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

As simple as this, the better run clubs are the ones with the most volunteers and often the most successful on the field of play. To me GAA clubs should be about more than just football and hurling, but if you don't have the people to help, you can't do the many other projects

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

As a player I've experienced the highs and lows of championship games and similar experiences as a referee and umpire. As a committee member I often find it quite frustrating because we don't have enough people involved. As a supporter in recent years I've been lucky enough to see Longford win a few Leinster minor championships and they were super days.

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

I've recently refereed games in Dubai and Doha and these tournaments are the liveblood of the GAA in the middle east. They are the ideal example of what the GAA should be. Competitive action on the field and a great social occasion afterwards and all the players are involved in the workload off the field.

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

Obviously with the internet things have changed greatly, but the wall to wall media coverage can sometimes go over the top and be very unfair on players and their private lives, but by and large it is a great thing when you can't go to the game, it's easy to see highlights. TG4 are one of the best things that has happened for the GAA in my opinion.

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

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future?
That Ireland is becoming a largely urban community rather than a rural one is a major challenge as there isn't necessarily an obviously identifiable club or if there is it might struggle to have enough teams for the numbers involved. There is no easy answer to this. The other is the willingness of people to give of their spare time to help with teams, selling lotto tickets etc. Obviously emigration is a worry as well, but this is something we've had to deal with before and hopefully we can survive it this time as well.
Q25: What does the GAA mean to you?
For me it's something that I'm proud to be a part of. I enjoy going into the clubhouse in Kiltoom and seeing pictures of my uncles and grandfather or Cashel and seeing a picture of my father. It's something that has been handed down through tradition and hopefully that will continue.
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?
There are some pictures on www.ballymahongaa.com from big days in the past and some from teams in the past. We produced a terrific book in 1989 detailing the history of the club, but Pearse Park has a wonderful collection of histories produced by all the clubs in Longford
Q27: Is there anything else you would like to say about the GAA?
Q28: How did you hear about this project?
From longford county board

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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: _____Fergal Kelly_____ Date: _____29/11/2011

Please Note: If you are aged 18 years or younger this must be signed by your parent / guardian. Failure to do so will mean that we are unable to include your responses in the Archive

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Data Protection Information

The GAA Oral History Project aims to record the fullest possible picture of what the GAA has meant to the Irish people, in their own words. The project will record face-to-face interviews with thousands of people in Ireland and internationally, including GAA members and supporters, current and former players, managers, officials and administrators; anyone who has ever had any contact or involvement with the GAA. In addition, in order to reach the largest number of people possible, the GAA Oral History Project is also requesting that people fill out one of the questionnaires or send the project a letter or email about the place of the GAA in their life.

At the start of each questionnaire are a number of biographical questions, which we hope will be completed by each respondent. By including this section we aim to build up a profile of the socio-economic, religious and political composition of the people involved in the GAA. As this project aspires to be the largest public history project carried out in the state to date, the material collected will provide possibly the richest source of material to the sociologists of the present and the historians of the future. By including biographical information such as religion, political affiliation, education and occupation this project will allow academics, family or local historians and interested individuals to build up a picture of the composition of the GAA in a locality, a county and in the country. The interviews that are conducted and the questionnaires that are collected will allow current and future family members of participants to hear and see their ancestors, to view their handwriting, to learn about how they lived and the place of the GAA in their lives.

The interviews, questionnaires, letters, documents, recordings and photographs gathered will be preserved as the GAA Oral History Project Archive – a permanent resource on the history of the GAA in particular and Irish society in general. Samples of the collected material will be made available to the public on our website www.gaahistory.com and may be used in: public performances, lectures or talks; publications, including print, audio or video cassettes or CD ROM; public reference purposes in libraries, museums and archives; on radio or television; in educational establishments, including use in a thesis, dissertation or similar research; publication worldwide on the internet.

The entire GAA Oral History Project Collection, i.e. the full length interviews, questionnaires, letters, photographs, documents and recordings, will be made available to the public through the GAA Museum and Archive.

It should be noted that all contact details provided will be kept entirely confidential and will be accessible only by the staff of the GAA Oral History Project Team. Your contact details will only be retained so that we can contact you to clarify factual information, to send out a thank you note for your contribution, or to request clarification on items that you may have donated. Under no circumstances will your details be passed on to a third party, without your prior consent.