

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

My earliest memory is of playing with a hurley at home, before the local school introduced hurling. My father played hurling and my mother played camogie, so I was natural that we had sticks and sliothars at home.

Around 1961 or 1962 a Patrician Brother started hurling with a group of boys from the local national school and we soon had an underage team to play against neighbouring clubs/schools. My two brothers and myself played a lot of hurling and my older brother also played football for the club.

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

Both of my parents were active in the GAA. My father was from Mountmellick, Co. Laois and, apart from playing hurling with Carrickmacross (Carrick Emmets) and Monaghan, was also involved in the club administration, and for years was treasurer of the hurling section of the club.

My mother played club (Celtic) and county camogie in Dublin, where she worked until her marriage in 1949. She started a number of camogie clubs in the Co.

Monaghan, including locally at Donaghmoyne and Carrickmacross, and also was involved in administration at club, county, provincial and national level. She was a trustee and also served a term as president of the Camogie Association.

My sister also played camogie at school, club and county level.

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

Very few of my relations (apart from family) were directly involved in the GAA at the time. However, both hurling and camogie (fixtures, results, etc.) were discussed regularly at home. My mother's friends and camogie acquaintances often met at our house and I travelled with my mother to many camogie matches, where I would practise my hurling before matches and at half time.

Q4: Tell me how GAA affected your family life?

Apart from the usual after-school sessions for the boys, my mother would sometimes have camogie training sessions. Sunday afternoons, especially in the springtime and summertime, were regularly organised around fixtures. My father would go to some football matches or might have been playing a hurling match occasionally, but mostly it was camogie that featured.

As the family grew up, it was the boys who were regularly involved in club and county hurling. My older brother also played club football matches

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).

For club fixtures, there were only a few other hurling clubs so there were not many matches. I went to boarding school for second level and so would not have been as much involved in my home club for quite a few years, apart from the summer time. There was not a lot of interest in county football, and only an occasional county hurling match gave us any interest outside of the club.

As my brothers and I got older, we played quite a bit of club and county hurling. After inter-county matches, it was traditional for the host team to provide a meal for the visitors, although we sometimes travelled back to Monaghan before having the meal (particularly when the security situation was an issue).

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

As a player, I'd say it was the chance to play in Croke Park against Derry in a Division 3 hurling final in July 1982. I had injured my back earlier that summer, but was determined to play in the final. Our game preceded another fixture, but I can't even recall what that was. Just to be there and play and the sense of space (and ground to be covered!) was great. It was the first time that a Monaghan hurling team had played in Croke Park.

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

From my earliest years I have been interested and involved in GAA, especially hurling, and I still follow club and county fixtures. I enjoy going to the All-Ireland Final each year as it is such a great occasion. Even when I was still playing, I got involved with coaching at the schools I taught in, although mostly the U-14 football teams.

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

I am no longer involved in my home club. The GAA still has an influence, but perhaps not as vibrant or as strong as it was in the past. I think this is mainly due to the time commitment it takes to run a successful club.

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

I played both football and hurling at school (Carrickmacross and Tullow) and also hurling while I was at college (Galway and Maynooth). I played in intervarsity competitions over the four years I attended college and played on the UCG ('73, '74, '75) and the Maynooth ('76) Fitzgibbon Cup teams.

I also played quite a lot of handball at schools, but there were no competitions either at school level or at club level.

As a teacher, I have been involved with under-age teams (football and hurling) in the schools where I taught before I transferred into the civil service.

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

The main reason I admired GAA people is because of their dedication, skill, and the enjoyment they brought me in their various roles.

The people I most admire in the GAA are predominantly from the hurling side. Players like Eddie Keher, Ollie Walsh, DJ Carey, Henry Shefflin (Kilkenny), Jimmy Doyle and Nicky English (Tipp), Brian Whelehan (Offaly) and Joe McDonagh (Galway). I had great admiration for footballers like Mick O'Connell (Kerry), Sean Doherty (Down), Jimmy-Barry Murphy and Enda Colleran (Galway). Managers like Sean Boylan (Meath) and Mickey Harte (Tyrone) also come to mind.

Others in the GAA whom I admired included Seán Ó Siocháin (Administrator), Pat McEaney (Referee) and Michael O'Hehir (Broadcaster).

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

There has been a move to more structured/professional approaches to the inter-county games, and to greater levels of fitness and skill on the part of players. The appointment and movement of coaches between counties and the changes to the playing rules have all contributed to refinements and improvement in standards which have enhanced the game for both players and spectators.

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

Over the years, perhaps influenced by increased availability of televised games (including soccer and rugby), there has been less of the traditional involvement of the younger generation in GAA activities. This applies also at the school and parish level, where in the past parish identity was very much associated also with GAA affiliation.

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

There has been an increased interest in games for girls and women, camogie and women's football have both benefited from greater publicity. On the other hand, there seems to be less involvement by mothers in the games played by their children (especially boys), whether as supporters (and some of them were almost fanatical in the past!) or through backroom or administration involvement. With more 'working mothers' there is probably less time for them to devote.

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

In my own case, there was great involvement by the Patrician Brothers in both football and hurling in Carrickmacross. Many of the Brothers also played for the local Emmets club (hurling and football), even at a time when there was a so-called 'ban' on such involvement. I can recall some of the Brothers using the names of local young men when playing for the club (and some also for the county, in hurling). A few of the neighbouring parishes, where there were no Brothers, often had one of the priests as the trainer/manager, though I can't recall ever seeing a local priest on a football team. There was one priest I knew who played hurling for the county team, although not very skilful but with great enthusiasm and commitment.

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

My family had no particular political affiliation, and I was not aware of any links between politics and the local GAA scene.

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

In my earlier years, the lack of fairness in the way games were refereed. Although it was a cliché, there were occasions when I felt 'We were robbed!'.

In more recent times, there seems to be a culture of winning at all costs and I particularly dislike the unfair tactics some players employ to get frees and/or hoodwink the referees.

Finally, the more militant approach being adopted by some players (and not just the Cork sagas) is very disappointing.

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

I have always considered myself a GAA man and appreciate the opportunities I had as a player to become involved and to develop an outlook towards fitness and general health that has stood to me over the years. Involvement in team games is an important aspect of the individual's development and healthy rivalry keeps alive the spirit of competitiveness without it becoming too it and take an interest in games where the children of friends and relatives are involved.

Over the years, I have met many former team-mates and opponents and it is good to make these connections.

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

I would say that the Irish language and culture have not had a significant role in my home club, although the Brothers did involve themselves in other activities such as Féile na nGael, Scór, etc.

The only association I can recall with Irish language was when objections had to be lodged 'as Gaeilge' and one or tow of the Brothers would draft these with my mother's help!!

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

As I said above, there have always been healthy rivalries between clubs, though sometimes these boiled over into unhealthy incidents. It seems to me that there were greater and closer parish affiliations in the past, and this was reflected in rivalry on the pitch.

At inter-county level, there was always great rivalry between neighbouring counties and also between particular 'auld enemies' such as Cork & Tipp and Kilkenny & Wexford.

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

These are the often unsung heroes of the association. No club or county could have managed to survive, let alone thrive, if it were not the volunteers who ran the club, provided transport to games, raised funds, etc. Likewise, the referees and match officials at club level and the 'backroom' team who looked after the gear, etc.

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

I enjoyed all aspects of my involvement and was fortunate to have played an active role as a player for a long number of years. While I was teaching, I retained my involvement through coaching and managing under-age schools teams, and occasionally as a referee.

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

The only experience I had outside of Ireland was when I played for an Irish Club in the Netherlands in a friendly match against an Aer Lingus selection (I think about 1985). My brother was involved in the Irish Club over there and on one visit he asked me to bring over hurleys and sliothars. We had a practice session the day before the match. The club also played a football match against an Aer Lingus selection on the same day.

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

Initially, it was mainly in the papers or the radio broadcast of matches on a Sunday. I got used to listening to Michael O'Hehir on Sunday afternoons and also to the detailed round-up of results every Sunday evening. For a few years as a teenager (in boarding school) I kept a scrapbook of paper cuttings about inter-county matches (mainly hurling, involving the leading hurling counties), and liked to collect match programmes. Sadly, none of these have survived.

When an uncle of mine got a television, it was often the case that we went to his house for highlights of games when they were shown in the evenings.

Nowadays, there is live coverage of the big games and TG4 also broadcasts regular matches as well as archive footage of games from times past.

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

Probably the biggest challenge is to maintain the interest of young people in the various games and to continue to gather voluntary support that is so necessary. The big-name counties will always get that support, but in the lesser-known ones it will be extremely difficult.

The falling away of the traditional parish identity will also present a challenge and maybe the time has come to consider more widespread club amalgamations into county districts or something of that nature.

Q25: What does the GAA mean to you?

The GAA is one of the few, true grass-roots organisations nationwide. It is steeped in history and tradition and acted as a focal point for the parish/local community over many generations. It provided me, as a youngster, with a level of activity in team games that I will forever cherish. In later years, it gives me great pleasure to attend matches or to watch them on television.

The fact that it was predominantly non-political was a big plus as far as I was concerned. Although very much 'local', it transcended politics.

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?

I know that I have some photographs from the '70s and '80s of club teams, and probably some newspaper clippings of match reports. I came across some photos and cuttings from my mother's involvement in camogie, which we used for a slide show on her 80th birthday.

The only recordings I have are extracts from past All-Ireland finals which were shown as part of the 'Reeling in the Years' series on RTE.

My father compiled a hand-written 'log' of club activities (Carrick Emmets, with some county hurling references also) for a number of years and this has some photocopied newspaper clippings attached. This included a brief synopsis of the foundation of the GAA in Co. Monaghan (but I don't know what the source of this information was).

If you want to follow upon this, I'd be happy to pass on copies.

Although she is not in the best of health, my mother I'm sure can recall a lot of her camogie involvement over a number of decades, although much of that is probably well-documented by the Camogie Association.

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

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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: Bill Lynch _____ Date: 04/01/09

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

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.