

Oral history Interview with Sean Gallagher, son of John Michael Gallagher Achillbeg, Co Mayo

Monday 4th September 2023 14.20 hrs

Interviewer: Celine Lavelle

Total running time: 1 hour 32 mins 50 seconds.

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2 **00.05 Sean explains his relationship to Achill and Achillbeg**

3 Celine Lavelle: It is 2.20 pm and today is Monday, and the date is the 4th of September 2023. I am here
4 in Achill with Sean Gallagher, who's here from Cleveland, Ohio, visiting Achill. And my name is Celine
5 Lavelle and Sean and I will have a conversation now. And here is Sean. I'm very happy to invite you to
6 be here and to talk with me for an hour or so. And it's great to have you, you know, with all your stories
7 of your experiences. And thanks for coming to do this.

8 Sean Gallagher: It's a great honour to be asked. It's a great honour to be asked. And this is a beautiful
9 community. This is my first time in Achill, not my first time in Achill but I didn't know this little
10 community existed over here. I suppose I did see it on the maps but I never really understood its
11 separate distinctive communal aspect to it but...

12 Celine Lavelle: (laughs) Yeah.

13 Sean Gallagher: But no, it's great. So my name is Sean Christopher Gallagher. And I was born in
14 Cleveland in 1955. That makes me 67 years old today.

15 Celine Lavelle: Today? Oh yeah. Oh yeah. Yeah, OK. It's not your birthday. OK. OK.

16 Sean Gallagher: And no, not today. But I mean, you know today, November. I am the son of John Francis
17 Gallagher who was born on Achillbeg Island in January of 1913, a long time ago, more than 100 years
18 ago. And I have a little something to say about that in a moment about the time distance between
19 generations. But my father was one of 10 and his father was a man named Patrick Gallagher who was

20 born and raised on Achillbeg Island. Their home is still there on the north side of the island, facing
21 Cloghmore, the very southern tip of Achill Island. And my grandfather Patrick Gallagher, my father's
22 father was married to a woman named Mary Gallagher and Mary Gallagher was a Gallagher who
23 married a Gallagher. Now Mary Gallagher, this would be my maternal grandmother, her family
24 originated from around where Nevins is, the restaurant and pub outside of Mulranny. And her mother
25 was a Gibbons and her name was Winifred Gibbons. They called her Winnie Gibbons many generations
26 ago. So Mary Gallagher eventually met Patrick Gallagher and the two of them ended up living on the
27 island. And for Achill people where they lived on that island on that north side, many of the Achill
28 people would remember a family called the Butchers – Kilbanes. We say Kilbane('bane') in America
29 but over here Kilbane (ban).; a Paddy Butcher and...

30 Celine Lavelle: That's right.

31 Sean Gallagher: That Achill clan of people were my family's neighbours on the island of Achillbeg. So
32 in 19.... Well, I'll go through the children of the family first. So my grandfather was Patrick Gallagher,
33 originally from Achillbeg. His wife was Mary Gallagher, originally a Gallagher from outside in Nevins.
34 who was really the product of the Gibbons family. I don't think there are many Gallaghers over there
35 by Nevins but Winnie Gibbons apparently found one and married him (laughs). So that produced Mary
36 Gallagher, who then married Patrick Gallagher and ended up on the island of Achillbeg. So they had
37 ten children. The oldest was Patrick. The next one was Peter.

38 Celine Lavelle: Right.

39 Sean Gallagher: The third was John - he was my father. Owen was the fourth, Michael was the fifth.
40 And there's an interesting twist here. Seamus was the sixth and James was the seventh and I'll explain
41 that in a minute. And Willie was the eighth, Beatrice was the ninth and Sarah was the tenth. Now, what
42 happened with the Seamus and James connection was this. When Seamus was a young boy, he got
43 sick and died on the island. And he's buried in the church floor of the cemetery at Kildownet cemetery.
44 So he would have died prior to 1930 sometime - I don't know the date of his death. But when Mary

45 Gallagher got pregnant again, almost in some faith-based world, she was pregnant with twins and twin
46 boys emerged at her next birth. So after Seamus died, they named the next boy the first boy, the next
47 boy, James because they considered him to be a gift from heaven, that their son was given back to
48 them. And so James was born and his twin is Willie. So James and Willie were always considered the
49 twins in the family.

50 **04 mins 59 secs Sean's father, aged 17, emigrates from Achillbeg to America: getting a sponsor**

51 So the nine surviving children left Ireland in 1930. On July 30th 1930 was their last day in Ireland. Now
52 I have vivid memories of my father telling me the stories about this. He was 17 at the time when he
53 first left as a young man. And he said that they, you know, had worked in Scotland. Some of the older
54 boys had gone to Scotland to earn money and the father, the father had gone to Scotland to earn
55 money. And when they had enough money, Winifred Gibbons's family from outside where Nevins is,
56 had written to an uncle in America and his name was Red Gibbons. They called him 'Red.' I believe his
57 name was Thomas Gibbons but I'm not sure. But everybody referred to him as 'Red Gibbons' and he
58 was what they would call back in those days a sponsor. He was an American sponsor for the Irish family
59 which would make it much easier to get through Ellis Island for these people. Rather than just showing
60 up at the gates of Ellis Island and taking your chances, you at least had a sponsor which mean you
61 would have assured them that you had a place to go and you had some type of a job and possibilities.
62 But my father said that they got on the railway at Achill Sound - it was still operational in those days in
63 1930 and they took the train all the way to Queenstown which was, I believe... it's called Cobh now or
64 called...

65 Celine Lavelle: Cobh (ph Cove), it's spelt. It was all English.

66 **06 mins and 24 secs Sean researches his family history**

67 Sean Gallagher: But it was Queenstown on those days. I was fortunate to be able to research this
68 myself in America. I was in one of the federal courthouses one day, and I had a friend that was a federal
69 judge and he said "Sean, you should go down the basement. We've just gotten a collection of

70 immigration records that are going to be shipped to some place and they eventually are scanned but
71 they are destroyed. You should go down there and see if you can find anything that might be..." And
72 lo and behold didn't I get fortunate enough. And these were hard copy documents to find a container
73 that said 1920 to 1940 and these were just Cleveland records so they weren't scattered all over. And
74 when I opened the container, much to my satisfaction, they were alphabetized.

75 Celine Lavelle: Right. Easy to...

76 Sean Gallagher: Now, there were a fortune full of Gallaghers but I was at least able to go through...
77 And sure enough, I found my grandfather and grandmother's photographs, two of probably only,
78 maybe two or three that I have of anyone like that, you know, that that age group. But I was... and they
79 let me keep the record. They made a copy of it and they said you can you could take it cause it's going
80 to be copied anyway and so I still kept that. I saved that.

81 **07 mins 53 secs Sean's father and his family leave Achillbeg. Patrick Gallagher, Sean's**
82 **grandfather, does not want to leave**

83 But they travelled by train to Queenstown and then they boarded a ship called the SS Carmania -
84 steerage passengers, of course. And then off they went to America. And my father told a... now I should
85 back up a little bit because Patrick Gallagher, my grandfather, the Achillbeg man there, there was a
86 story that went around and I believe his name is Irvine Moran has heard this story too, that when
87 Patrick Gallagher left the island of Achill and this could be a little bit of drama but they say he reached
88 back and pulled on the grass at the base of the boat thing to hold on because he didn't want to leave.
89 But Mary Gallagher said "We have to go. We have the kids, they have to eat and survive." And there
90 was no work for these kids, these poor kids. And, you know, getting my dad would talk about you only
91 got shoes when it was a special... you know. Unbelievable.

92 **08 mins 45 secs School in Achillbeg**

93 So when they were on that island, they went to school on the island school that was, that was in the
94 centre of the island. It's still there. The school is still there to this day. And John Kilbane's mother, I

95 believe, was one of the last school teachers at that school. Now, that's long after my father left. But
96 they would walk along that that bank and come down almost towards the sandy beach and then cut
97 up between the two mounds the two big hill hills and in the centre, they make it to school every day.
98 And to think that they lived on this kind of an island. And their reading and writing skills were next to
99 perfect. All of them had perfect penmanship, could spell, write, do, you know... so to think that this
100 foregone island, this tiny island in the middle, you know, at the very edge of Atlantic Ocean could
101 produce, you know, highly... You know, they didn't have degrees or long, you know, years of education.
102 But what they got there served them all for life. They were, you know, incredibly proficient at...

103 Celine Lavelle: I wonder what they have been told by the Paorach. There's a teacher in there Paorach
104 who was remarkable. He taught the children music, Latin. Every subject was taught, better than a lot
105 of secondary schools now.

106 Sean Gallagher: I was amazed that their skill level later on. It was very, very surprising. The knowledge
107 they had and I'll share as I move along, I'll share a story that of how that that even surprised.

108 **10 mins 17 secs Sean's father and his family arrive in New York, Ellis Island**

109 But so the story went that Patrick certainly didn't want to leave. And believe me, as I would learn later
110 in life, my father was very... I don't want to say bitter, but very... it was as if a lot of his life had been
111 taken away from him by having to leave. He didn't want to leave, you know, he just did not want to
112 leave. So they got on the SS Carmania and they went to Ellis Island and I just can't imagine travelling
113 with nine kids, all different ages, you know. The oldest Patrick had went out ahead of them to kind of
114 set up shop. So there were really only eight of them at the time that were travelling but still eight kids
115 of all ages on a train. They get to New York City and my father tells a story about he got off the boat.
116 And now this is seeing things, some things for the first time. Like a building taller than one story or two
117 stories or three, you know, seeing it, seeing a skyscraper for the first time in your life, seeing
118 automobiles. I mean, we're talking about 1930, 1930 Ireland. There were not a whole lot of cars. I'm

119 sure there were some and I'm sure he saw them. But here's the first time he's seen big trucks, lorries,
120 you know, rail centres. You know, giant bridges, everything.

121 Celine Lavelle: We're talking what year again?

122 Sean Gallagher: 1930. Now there's the other significance of this is this is an Irish family coming to
123 America at the height of the depression - 1929 is the crash only 6-7 months earlier, the stock market
124 crashed in October of 1929. And here they are in July of 1930 in New York City and, you know, the
125 thinking that the Americans are having it bad enough and here are these Irish that show up. So my dad
126 said someone gave him a Lucky Strike cigarette and a can of Coca-Cola and that was one of his first
127 introductions to America. Of course, the Lucky Strikes in the end probably killed him. But he always
128 marvelled at that how somebody gave him a... he was 17 years old. He got a Lucky Strike cigarette and
129 a can of Coca-Cola and he thought he was on top of the world.

130 Celine Lavelle: Even the name was good. 'Lucky Strike.'

131 **12 mins 18 secs Sean's father and his family arrive make their way to Cleveland.**

132 Sean Gallagher: So he they boarded the train and they headed to Cleveland and my father's brothers
133 used to tell a funny story about that too. In those days in America, the African Americans were kind of
134 relegated as they still are today, let's be honest, to many of the poorer jobs and poor areas. And it was
135 very common during the age of the railroads in America for Blacks, African Americans, to serve as
136 porters on trains. They handled all the service. They would handle the luggage, the meals, the, the
137 bathrooms, toilets, all that stuff. They would handle anything service related. And my dad and his
138 brothers were talking one day. I remember, and they were talking about how it was the first time they
139 ever saw a black person in their lives in the world. They had never seen a person of colour before and
140 they did not know how to react or what to... And, of course, their parents had no insight to give them
141 either. You know, so, so they would hide from them and look and it was it was a very... and that I'm
142 sure the porters found them to be quite the interesting rabble that they were, the young the young
143 kids because they didn't have an appreciation of them. So they get on the train and they come to

144 Cleveland.

145 **13 minutes 34 secs Sean's father, grandfather and family arrive in Cleveland**

146 Lived on a street called Fir Ave, which is on the near west side of Cleveland, and it's in a parish which
147 thankfully has a name that's symbolic with Achill, which is Saint Colman's. And it was run then in those
148 days by an Irish priest, I believe his name was Sweeney, and it was a very, very traditional Irish church
149 on the west side of Cleveland where many Irish immigrants congregated. And of course, that's where
150 my parents ended up at, in that church immediately got involved there and were, you know, good to
151 go with that. And they lived on Fir Ave and Gibbons had arranged for my grandfather, Patrick Gallagher,
152 to get a job. And I mentioned this to you tale yesterday and but it shows the somewhat, I guess,
153 tenacity of the Irish but also their willingness to kind of go in the middle of the depression with nine
154 children.

155 **14 mins 40 secs Sean's grandfather finds work in Cleveland**

156 My grandfather goes to work in some type of a plant, a chemical plant in Cleveland and he was a pipe
157 smoker. An endless pipe smoker whenever I saw him in my youth, he would always have his pipe. That
158 was where you know.. And my dad said his pipe in the old house on Achillbeg ...there would be there
159 was a little notch out by the by the mantle where he would put the pipe and then even in the home in
160 Cleveland they had a gas stove that he still managed to put the pipe on. He, in other words, he adapted
161 his behaviour despite the difference. But he's smoking in this chemical plant and finally the foreman
162 comes and says "You can't smoke here, you're going to blow us all up with that pipe if you don't put it
163 away and put it out." And of course. What does my grandfather doing instead of putting it out? He
164 quits the job with, with kids at home and of course he comes home and Mrs Gallagher was not too
165 happy with him for quitting the job. But you know, being the way the Irish were in Cleveland, especially
166 in those days, this very close community, you know where word travelled fast. All right, there may be
167 a job over here. And sure enough, even though it's the Depression, he manages to get another job
168 working outside so he can keep his pipe and smoke it when he wanted and all.

169 **16 mins 02 secs Achill people in Cleveland: sense of Irish community, writing back to family in Achill**

170 That, and it was fine but... those boys all were raised on the West side of Cleveland and the one of the
171 most prominent things about them was they showed up in that county. They were not American
172 citizens but in the time they were there... and I and I have two very interesting letters that I probably
173 should send back here for somebody to keep. One was by my uncle Michael and the other was my
174 grandmother writing back to this community talking about their experiences in America. And the first
175 letter is within the first two years of their departure and arrival in America, and the next letter is
176 Michael writing seven years later back to this community describing what it's like and what it is. And
177 of course, both letters have references to money that is enclosed in the... they're sending money. And
178 then the other is an acknowledgement of the receipt of shamrocks from Ireland. I don't know what
179 the tradition of that was to those people. But getting a shamrock for them was a big deal, that they
180 got a shamrock from Ireland. So you know, you see that. But Michael's letter is somewhat humorous
181 in that he talks about, he's longing to see the old place again and he goes on and on about that. But at
182 the very end he says "I'm saving money. But in America there's a beer parlour on every corner. And
183 you have to stay home if you want to save money." And of course, my grandmother is gossiping in her
184 letter endlessly about... and she uses references like and I don't know what this reference means to
185 the Irish and I hope it's not an offensive reference, but "chewing the rag." Does that mean talking or...?
186 Celine Lavelle: Oh yeah, yeah. And it's not offensive necessarily. It's more or less it's, you know, like,
187 having a chin rag, you know, it's more or less, you know, the way women get together and it's...

188 Sean Gallagher: Well, maybe she was saying something was chewing there. Yeah.

189 Celine Lavelle: It's good for them. It's not necessarily gossiping, but it can be gossiping. It can be, yeah,
190 but it's the joy of just be chatting to one another as well it. It encompasses all of that, I think, in my
191 reading of it anyway.

192 **18 mins and 22 secs Seans's grandfather and family buy their first home in Achill: family life**

193 Sean Gallagher: Yeah, this sounded gossipy to me, but... And they were hard working enough that
194 didn't they get a chance to buy a home for themselves? And it was at 6110 Ellen Ave on the west side

195 of Cleveland, just two streets away from where they had come on Fir Ave and still right in the Saint
196 Coleman Parish and...All the boys were raised there and the youngest two were two girls, Beatrice and
197 Sarah. So they lived there and they grew up there and they ended up finding their way and they were
198 very successful.

199 **19 mins 31 secs Sean's mother and father marry**

200 My father ended up marrying my mother who is Margaret Theresa Casey, and she's from a little village
201 called to Touasist outside of Kenmare in County Kerry. And the way I'll just briefly divert from Achill for
202 a moment and just touch on her briefly. She was one of six and four girls and two boys. The girls were
203 the oldest. And on a small farm in Kerry. And her father was a stone mason who went around and
204 travelled in that region and built a lot of things and stonework and things like that.

205 **19 mins 15 secs Sean talks about his mother, Marget Mary nee Casey's time in London then New**
206 **York**

207 But as you, as anybody knows from that era, my mother was a little younger than my father. She was
208 born in 1917 but by the '30s, you had to go. You know, there was nothing for these women. The men
209 were leaving. So you weren't going to necessarily find a husband that that you know and...the odds
210 weren't good with four Casey girls in. A small village competing for the likes of some suitors. So the
211 three oldest girls...they went to London. And my mother was only 17 when she first went to London.
212 And a couple of years later, doesn't the war break out? And so it's my mother, Margaret. Margaret
213 Mary. But her nickname was always Casey, her maiden name. They just called her, her maiden named
214 Casey and Bridget and Nora were the other two daughters.

215 Celine Lavelle:OK.

216 Sean Gallagher: And they lived at 123 Ebury Buildings in London and Westminster during the war. And
217 they were bombed, you know, during the blitz and all that. And their apartment was hit by one of
218 those V2 rockets. And so they stayed there. And my mother loved London. It was a very expansive city.
219 It was a very cosmopolitan city. My mother would tell me stories about how they would eat Chinese

220 and Indian food when nobody knew what Chinese and Indian food was, because there were little
221 Chinese and Indian foods everywhere in London, even in the 1940s. But Westminster was a place at
222 those days where the domestic Irish were pushed into to live and work. You either were a waiter or
223 waitress, a domestic servant, whatever. And it was, she said there was a lot of anti-Irish prejudice
224 against them at that time. But she got a job at a place called Lions Corner House in Piccadilly Circus as
225 a waitress. It was a Jewish run company that hired particularly hired Irish women, young Irish women,
226 because they had a strong work ethic and showed up, didn't complain and got things done. If you were
227 an Irish girl from somewhere, you were likely to be hired by that operation. And they had several
228 restaurants. But my mother happened to get the one at Piccadilly Circus. So she's, you know, during
229 the war, she's walking by Buckingham Palace, Saint James Gate.

230 **22 mins 05 secs How Sean's mother moved to Cleveland**

231 But she realised that, you know, it was probably time to move on. So she had an aunt in New York City
232 and her aunt's name was Margaret. Dismal, dirty, noisy, you know, high rise, absolutely hated it. So my
233 mother decides one weekend and but and her she did tell me that her aunt was very overbearing and
234 my mother said "You know, I survived the war on my own. I didn't need my aunt to tell me when to
235 come in and when to go. And now I'm in New York and I'm under her roof. So I have to listen to her.
236 But I don't want to put up with this." So off the three go to Niagara Falls. Just for a weekend because
237 they were...they said you have to go see if you're, you know, you're in this country, go see Niagara Falls.
238 So the three of them go up there and they're standing there talking and a gentleman comes over and
239 says "You three are from Ireland and they said we are we're from Ireland but. We live in New York. And
240 but we want to get out of there. We can't stand it." And the guy says "You should go to Cleveland.
241 There's a lot of Irish in Cleveland. That's the place to go. If you're Irish, go to Cleveland." So my mother
242 and her two sisters, you know, they were hard working. They had a little money. But this is the... what
243 I say, the incredible spirit of these people. From this island, from those generations, that would think
244 nothing of picking up... And let's be honest, many times it was forced, they had to do it. Now my mother
245 could have stayed in New York and just dealt with it, you know. But no, her sense of adventure was

246 "Alright. Let's go. We'll go there." They went to Cleveland and I don't know what they what skill they
247 had about getting jobs but these people could get a job faster than anybody could, you know. It's just
248 like they would go into some place and my Aunt Bridie, I remember my mother told me later, the first
249 day she was there, she got. a job with a telephone company and I said "How in the world did she get
250 a job with a telephone company? She didn't even have an address yet." She didn't even have a
251 telephone or an address let alone. She's working at the telephone company and my mom said they
252 wanted her. She went in there and they hired her. And my mom got a job as a waitress because she
253 had experience. Doing that and Nora got a job, and the three of them were living, and they discovered
254 this thing called the West Side Irish American Club in Cleveland.

255 **24 mins 019 secs Sean talks about the importance of Clan na Gael in Cleveland and Patrick Lynch**

256 Now the West Side Irish American club in Cleveland really existed....and I don't know that how much...
257 But in America, we had these things called Clan na Gael. Are you are familiar with that term? They
258 were kind of Republican brotherhood clubs that sprung up after the Irish Civil War or during the Easter
259 Uprising. And they were kind of support groups where Irish immigrants would try to support causes
260 back in. Ireland. They could be missions a lot of times, they were missions, you know, Irish missionaries.
261 I remember, my father and his brothers always seem. To be active in these missions, I never understood
262 it, a bit of me. What is the Irish priest doing in West Africa? This is what I would say. But they there you
263 know. And they were doing something and they felt this compelled need to give money to these
264 causes. You know, they would always take a few dollars aside and that was going to the mission, this
265 Irish mission or this Father so and so. And this father moved Mulranny or father whatever. You know,
266 whoever he was, you know, some Irish priests that they would hear about. But when they when they
267 did that, these Clan na Gael groups, out of them emerged this entity called the West Side Irish
268 American Club and the very first - he wasn't the very first president but he was the leading president
269 for the group's formation and his-a name was Patrick Lynchehaun. And he was from up here around
270 Tondragee or Polaranny or somewhere in there that branch of Corrigans but where those Corrigans
271 are out there too by Tondragee. And he's buried today in the upper part of Polranny cemetery on the

272 far left. You go up there and you see the name Patrick Lynch him now. He was never known as Patrick
273 Lynchehaun in America. He was Patrick Lynch and he was the club president for 36 years, I believe. So
274 the importance of Pat Lynch was this. If you were an Irish kid from this island and you showed up on
275 the shores of Cleveland, you would find your way to the West side IA.. And Pat Lynch would be at that
276 club. He was never married, he had no children. That club was his life. So when immigrants showed up
277 there, if you didn't have a sponsor or you didn't have somebody that you were going to be staying
278 with, you'd be staying with Pat Lynch or one of his clan. And Pat knew every Labour leader, every
279 construction person, every tradesman, every steel worker, boilermaker. Anybody working any plant,
280 the Ford plant, the auto plants, he had his fingers into everything. So when these Irish people would
281 show up, Pat Lynch would say "All right, you go here and talk to Joe so and so and they'll talk to you
282 about getting on there on that job." And he was an amazing, an amazing interface to get these people
283 into the community and get them hired and on and it's kind of sad the way because I knew him. He
284 was a tall guy for this area, about 6 ft 4 or 5" very tall. And that there's an old there's a funny story
285 about Pat Lynch. He served in the American Army in World War One and I don't know how much truth
286 there is in the story, but it was a great story and the Americans love to relate. That when he went over
287 there in the American Army, he realised what the English army were the English were the Irish allies
288 but there were no allies of Pat Lynch. So when he wasn't doing his duty with the American army on
289 the front or marching around, whatever he was prone to go looking for Irish soldiers to bait him into a
290 little bit of a fight himself. And that was Pat Lynch was he was described to me once as a 'tough man
291 for a tough time.' That's what he was. But he lived into the into the late 1970s and he got sick. And
292 when he died, they brought him back here and he's buried there. And then he reverted to the name
293 Lynchehaun on his gravestone, which I thought was very telling, you know.

294 Celine Lavelle: It must have been on his birth cert or something or whatever.

295 Sean Gallagher: So that's the club where my parents met, where my father met the Kerry woman.

296 And my mother described it, as she goes “We thought we were told there were a lot of Irish. In
297 Cleveland. They're Mayo Irish, which is like I may, she said. I may as well have gone to Yugoslavia
298 because...”

299 Celine Lavelle: Yeah, yeah. The rest of Cleveland, yeah.

300 **28 minutes 40 seconds The Cleveland Achill community**

301 Sean Gallagher: My mom said, “They were very nice, but they were very clannish.” You know, you were
302 an outsider, even if you were from Ireland. You weren't. You weren't Achill. You weren't Achill Mayo.
303 You know, they could be distant to even somebody from what's the town? Charlestown - just because
304 you're from over there.

305 Celine Lavelle: That's right, yeah. So circles within circles. Yeah.

306 Sean Gallagher: Right. And it's amazing breakdown of these people in this community. And today if
307 you went through the, I live in a little community called West Park which is a part of Cleveland. But if
308 you went through the phone book there and just saw the names Chambers, Corrigan, O'Malley,
309 Sweeney, Gallagher, it just goes on and on and on. It's amazing to see these names. And as an American
310 of Irish ancestry, that's probably some of this draw, this connection

311 But I wanted to say one more thing about age and generations. My father was born now, today it would
312 be almost 110 years ago. And to think I'm still alive and my father was born 110 years ago. How can
313 this be? Well, he was 40 when he had me. I'm sad to say, I have a son, Fergus. I was 40 when I had him.
314 So that's 80 years between his grandson is born 80 years after, you know. I mean, he had his. When
315 you think about it, that's a crazy dynamic. But the experience of those people coming over and my
316 father just a few more things about him. He was never really Americanized. You know, he wanted, he
317 worked and he wanted to be like a good father and a provider and all that. And he was, he was good.
318 But he was never really Americanized. Most Irish guys, they would retain their Irish culture identity I'm
319 talking about people now that came over in the 30s, 40s 50s and 60s. They very much stayed Irish.

320 But the vast majority of them easily integrated into the American community because it was easier to
321 be acceptable as Irish in America at that time. Now maybe not in the 1800s, but by the 20th century
322 the American Irish were running many things. The Police Department, the fire department, the courts,
323 you know, everywhere in Cleveland was politicians were Irish. So it was very easy to immerse yourself
324 in the American culture. But my father had a hard time doing it. I remember he took me to a
325 professional American football game, the Cleveland Browns against the Philadelphia Eagles This would
326 have been like 1963. I was probably 7 or 8 years old. He had no idea what was going on in this game.
327 Not one idea and he had been in the country for 30 years. But he had no idea because he never... for
328 him it was., you know, what happened in the GAA match, you know. So that's another part of the story
329 that I think people here, especially young people, should know. When my father would come back
330 here and it was often.

331 Celine Lavelle: What's your first memory of coming with?

332 **31 mins 39 secs Sean talks about his first memory of coming to Achill as a boy and what his**
333 **father would do in Achill: collecting Irish newspapers to bring back to Cleveland.**

334 Sean Gallagher: I was a little boy. I was a little boy and.

335 Celine Lavelle: Roughly what age?

336 Sean Gallagher: I would have been 8 or 9. In the early 1960s, early to mid 1960s. And we would have
337 come over on a big 4 engine jet, you know, out of New York. Out of New York. And we would have
338 landed in Shannon in those days. I think we did land in Dublin once or twice early on. But my memories
339 of Shannon and someone came down to get us. I don't think we got a car, somebody came and got us
340 and took us back up to Mayo. But the sad part about these visits was I would find my father going
341 around. We would go somewhere. Maybe we would stop at a pub to see meet somebody and talk to
342 them. And we, my brother and I would be given to like two pops with no ice which was the funny thing
343 for the Americans because we're looking for the ice. Americans are always looking for the. "Where's
344 the ice machine?" Of course. There's no ice machine, so we were happy with that. But we were happy

345 with the pops. But my father would be going around and collecting these newspapers from, you know,
346 like people would people in a pub that you know, by 4 o'clock, the newspapers been read three or four
347 times over and it's cast aside on the...And my father would go "Is this anybody's? No? OK." And he's
348 collecting these newspapers and I would be going, "What are you doing, collecting newspaper are you
349 going to start a fire somewhere or something? What are you doing?" "No, never mind. Never mind.
350 Never mind." And he would collect these newspapers and they would go into a suitcase somewhere
351 and back home they would go. And then these fellows would show up at our house, back in the states,
352 and they would read the newspapers and it didn't matter if they were 4, 6 or 8 months old, by the time
353 they saw them. They would sit there and read and say things like "Did you see? This Wexford beat
354 somebody or Mayo beat somebody." And I and I'd look, as an American kid, and I'd go "Dad, that was
355 seven months ago." "Yeah, but they won." And here's the story of the game, you know. And there was
356 no television, there was no, no mobile phone to call. There was no Internet to check anything.

357 Celine Lavelle: No phones in houses either.

358 Sean Gallagher: Right. The only the only time they would they would you would call if there was a
359 death. You would call if there was a birth. Maybe if there was a major event of some type. And it just
360 was a very, I think for that generation, a very sad, you know, it's hard enough that you have to leave,
361 but then you can't have that. Like today, we can get on the phone and call anybody and Zoom anything
362 and look at videos and we can recapture almost any interaction we want.

363 Celine Lavelle: Yeah, it's gone to the other side.

364 Sean Gallagher: Yeah. Now it's, it's almost too easy to get things. But for them, it was a stark emptiness.
365 My father never got over that. So he would work, work, work, work, work and when he got enough
366 money, he would load us all together and off he went. And even when my brother and I got older and
367 were, you know, were independent and on our own, my father did not stop. He continued to come
368 back and he would compromise with my mother and say "We'll go to Kerry for a couple days. But we're

369 coming here then, you know.”

370 **35 minutes 19 secs Relationship with Kerry, Sean’s mother’s place of birth**

371 Sean: And eventually my mother didn't really want to go back to Kerry because there was nobody
372 there for her anymore. Her family had gone, whereas my dad still knew people here in this community
373 and tried to stay active. My mother was much more Americanized than my father was, and I attribute
374 that to her experiences in London and her experiences in New York. She was more cosmopolitan, much
375 more worldly, if you would say. She had a sense of fashion, a sense of, you know... whereas he was
376 much more rooted in...

377 **35 minutes 52 secs Sean’s father and Irish foods in Cleveland**

378 So I want to share this story of my father too. We have a place in Cleveland called the West Side Irish.
379 Not. I'm sorry. The West Side Market. And the West side market is this. Like an old style European
380 market where you can get meats and fish, but it's got not just one vendor I'm talking about like 50
381 vendors, all different kinds of vendors in there, you know, and it was very common for these Irish
382 immigrants to go down there and shop because they could get foods in their more natural
383 unprocessed...So my father would go to the fish guy. And normally the fish guy wouldn't have this. But
384 he managed to get it for my father. And my father would buy a buck load of it every chance he got, and
385 it was salted mackerel and it came in this.. boxed case or something. And, you know, it seemed to be
386 loaded with salt, you know, to preserve it. But my father would take that and boil the mackerel and
387 boil potatoes. And then he would put it on the plate and salt it more. And then he would eat that - he
388 was in heaven. If he could have his salted mackerel and his potatoes... And my mom said “Look, that's
389 likely what they ate on that island many a time. That's what they would have eaten and that's what he
390 wants. So don't you know...we're not going to make you eat it. But we're going to let him have his.”
391 But, but then that's the experience of them. And it's kind of sad. And then as they passed away.

392 **36 mins 58 secs Jonathan Beaumont, the writer: Achilbeg book featuring Sean’s father and**

393 **Achill railway.** But another interesting story about these fellas, there's an author named Jonathan
394 Beaumont. He's from Northern Ireland but he vacationed in Achill for many years. He wrote a couple

395 of books. One was on the railway. I don't know if you've seen it. It's a fascinating book on the Achill
396 rails. He's got every detail in there. But the other book he wrote, that's great is called 'Achillbeg, the
397 Life Of An Island.' And my father and his brothers are prominently featured in there in one section
398 because in 1943, at the height of World War Two, these seven boys, six of them were in the United
399 States Army at the same time in all theatres, the Pacific in Europe, all over the globe, North Africa
400 fighting. And they weren't even American citizens yet. They were Irish. And they had joined the
401 American Army. And they were featured in a prominent front page story about these six boys on Saint
402 Patrick's Day. Can you imagine? Fighting for a country that they're not even from. And so my
403 grandmother was interviewed in that.

404 **38 minutes 5 secs Education on Achillbeg**

405 When I talk about the education system that I think she got, she is
406 writing about the Irish and their support for American causes going back to the American Revolution.
407 And doesn't she know all about in the article? She's quoting about Yorktown, the American
408 independence battle at Yorktown, where the Irish fought for the colonialists and she's able to. I said
409 "Where the hell did she learn that?" I said to my father one time. "Where did she ever learn about
410 that in Ireland?" He said "She was very well read." They read and they learned in Ireland many things
411 that you would be surprised they knew. And so it was a very prominent thing to see that that here you
412 are. And then of course, they all became citizens, you know, and then, you know, they went on to raise
413 families. And many of them went on to be successful and all that they pushed education, education,
414 education at every turn. Like I was young and I could do no wrong as long as I was in school. Yeah, and
415 that was the way my father did.

416 **39 mins 08 secs Sean's father discusses careers with him; Sean becomes lawyer and judge**

417 But I will say this. My father was very one time I remember as an immigrant, he got mad at me. Because
418 I was in high school and the Vietnam War had ended and I was kind of indifferent about what I wanted
419 to do. And I said "Yeah, you know, Dad, I don't know what I'm going to do yet, but maybe I'll just join
420 the army for a couple of years and then I'll figure out what I want to do. "And he exploded at me. He

421 said "There's nothing wrong with the army. I have nothing bad to say about the army. But you're not
422 going in the army. I didn't come across that ocean to land here. And I served in the army. You're going
423 to have to do better than the army. The army was for me. You're better." And I was - he put the fear
424 of God into me because I thought he was going to kill me if I joined the army. And you know, he didn't
425 mean anything bad about the army. He just, it was this spirit that they wanted their children to do
426 better than what they had done because they gave up so much to come here. Why would I have come
427 here to see you do no better than I would have done if I stayed there. So in many ways, I have him to
428 thank. I went on to school and became a lawyer and all that and a judge now and all that. But you
429 know, I'm no bigger than anybody else. But I mean you, you get that in you because of this Irish culture.
430 So when you say, why do you come back here?

431 **40 minutes 50 seconds Sean talks about his and his family's Irish American identity**

432 First of all, I was raised in a very Irish family, you know. We were Irish, you know, I mean so there was
433 this affinity for it. But when you're young, you kind of rebel against some of that and I certainly did.
434 You know, I remember I was an American named Sean Gallagher at a time when most Americans
435 couldn't even pronounce the word 'Sean.' I was called 'Seen', 'Sign' 'Soon' (phonetic). And it wasn't
436 until Sean Connery, the actor came along, that they figured out "Oh that's how you say that name
437 'Sean.'" "Yeah, but I mean, that's just the way that that's the way it was that then so. When I remember
438 being in school in college and professors would single me out because of my name. American
439 professors, you know, and especially like with things involving the Troubles or anything like that at all,
440 any kind of thing about Ireland. Let's hear from Sean Gallagher. And I would say "Look, I'm an American.
441 I was raised here. I'm not, you know." But that that they would not accept that because your name is
442 Sean Gallagher. But you know, so you come back here because this is your ancestry. You know it's in
443 you. It's in your blood.

444 Celine Lavelle: Like you have the choice, you're living in Cleveland. You have the choice to go anywhere
445 in the world.

446 Sean Gallagher: Yeah, well, my wife likes the Bahamas, I will say. She does like it here but she likes it
447 here on days like today. And if you bring my wife here, you bring my wife here, you're going to bring a
448 storm cloud. I brought her here on our honeymoon and it rained 17 consecutive days.

449 Celine Lavelle: Oh dear me. Oh no.

450 Sean Gallagher: She's got... she's about sixty five per cent Irish. We did this on a on a on a whim one
451 day - we did. This 'my DNA' or 'DNA' or 'Ancestry DNA.' And we thought it was a big scam. We said,
452 "Oh, it's probably a big scam. They'll just they just tell you what, you know. I can't believe how accurate
453 it was and how they pinpoint you right down to this community and that they identified other people
454 that have taken the test that. Our have your DNA, they will right away tell you "Your second cousins
455 with this person and third cousins." Now it's kind of scary. Some people say that's scary giving your
456 DNA away. I figure I'm old now.

457 His name is John Fergus Gallagher. We call him Fergus though. But he's 27 now and I did not prod him
458 to be Irish. You know, I did not prod him. But growing up in West Park, this neighbourhood in Cleveland,
459 where all these names are synonymous with Achill, these kids grow up in that environment and they
460 form an identity for it, you know. And it's and it's not something that is pushed on them, it's organic
461 and they get it because of the commonality of the names. His best friends are Chambers. Ginnelley,
462 Corrigan, you know, these kids that he's grown up with. And they're the children of these immigrants.
463 And so there's this natural affinity that they form and they seem to take to it more than even my
464 generation did. Are you familiar with these terms 'narrow back' and 'greenhorn' in America?

465 Celine Lavelle: Yes, yes, yes. Yeah, of course. Still, yeah.

466 Sean Gallagher: Like you're greenhorn, you were from Ireland and narrow back or. I'm not sure if I have
467 it right. Narrow back is you're from Ireland and greenhorn is your first generation. I can't remember
468 which one is which, but there, there, there were these phrasing terms that were used often used,
469 sometimes derogatorily but nevertheless used.

470 Celine Lavelle: Yeah, it is a good explanation as well because they're just didn't know, you know, they
471 just didn't know what to expect. And their first time seeing things.

472 Sean Gallagher: But these younger generation, now they join GAA teams in America. Now I will tell you
473 they're the worst players on the planet. But they have this in them that they want to do it. So when I
474 said I was coming back over here, my son did everything in his power to finagle his schedule. So now
475 he can fly in here on Thursday. Just going to get to spend four days here, but for him that will be
476 priceless. It's almost like he's reverting to his grandfather. John. He wants to come back here, you
477 know? So he comes back when he gets a chance and he too could go to the...what do they call it? The
478 South Beach Miami for the, you know, for the what do they call it? Spring break in America, you know.
479 Nope. He'll come back here. He'd prefer to come here, you know. I think the spirit of this community
480 is very strongly embedded. We probably don't have the tourism from Cleveland that we had previously
481 and and hopefully. That connection will erode over time, the next century, the connection between
482 Cleveland and Achill will probably not be as prominent as it was 50 years ago, where it was a lifeblood.
483 It was a lifeblood 50 years ago.

484 Celine Lavelle: Yeah. Sending the money.

485 Sean Gallagher: But I think that with these younger people and their affinity of the names they
486 recognise where they're from and they have an affinity for it and you see it on different days. The Saint
487 Patrick's Day parade in Cleveland is unbelievable. It's like 400,000 people. Can you imagine 400,000
488 people you know ? And a parade.

489 Celine Lavelle:. Celebration of Irishness.

490 Sean Gallagher: And they're all basically coming from this community is the core of it. There are other
491 Irish in Cleveland, but not to the extent that there are Achill Irish, the parish of is...you know. And even
492 the average Clevelander will know like the distinction between saying someone from Ballycroy and
493 someone from Dooagh, or, you know, they would, they would be able to identify that. The other funny

494 thing about Cleveland being a big city, a melting pot city of Europeans and African American cultures,
495 even the blacks, the African Americans, figure out male Irish. They get it, they understand, you know
496 Celine Lavelle: That they're different.

497 Sean Gallagher: This is where they came from. Just like they will tell you this group of blacks just from
498 Alabama or that group of blacks is from Georgia, you know, that came north for their own great
499 migration as they came for work. But yeah, it's an amazing experience to be for me as an American to
500 come back here and see this is like unbelievable. It's like, you know, and I kinda feel, I almost wish my
501 dad could, you know, he could be just reborn for a day. Come back here and see it, you know, and see
502 the...what's been achieved. Because when he came back.I mean, he died before the Celtic tiger, you
503 know? So he never saw necessarily a successful Ireland. But I don't think he wasn't coming back for
504 the success of Ireland. He was coming back for the culture, you know, singing songs.

505 Celine Lavelle: And the people, the connections.

506 **47 minutes 54 secs Sean describes how his father would connect with his Irish culture in Cleveland:**
507 **music and language**

508 Sean Gallagher: He would go up to a bar in Cleveland and sit there. And they might have, like somebody
509 playing a usually, like a maybe a guy with a guitar playing a country and western song. And my father
510 would go up there and he would not be pushy at all. But he would quietly get to know... And my brother
511 and I were appalled by it. We said "Oh no, he's not going to go up there and sing." He would go up to
512 the bar and sit there and eventually convince the guitar player to let him sing a song while the guitar
513 player took a break. And he would sing some Irish song. Often an Irish, and he's probably singing to
514 himself, you know.

515 Celine Lavelle: Beautiful. Oh, how beautiful was that. Well, he would be. But you know the way music
516 travels. It's a universal language. And when Irish is spoken, it's a heart language for one. You know, it's
517 a subjective language. The English language is objective.

518 Sean Gallagher: OK, I see what you mean. Yeah.

519 Celine Lavelle: A different way of speaking and of singing. So when you're singing in Irish, you're
520 connecting with people's hearts. And to sing...

521 Sean Gallagher: He would... the few times when phone calls did come in from here, he would speaking
522 in Gaelic. He would speaking Irish back. And then when he would go to the club and there was
523 somebody there that was there, of course there were much more Irish speakers in those days in
524 America. Now it's... we do have Irish speaking lessons in Cleveland still to this day, but I think it's a
525 different form of. Irish it's more structured Irish speaking. You know, maybe like Scottish, Scottish Gaelic
526 or something, you know or...

527 Celine Lavelle: Yes, yes. And it and it, it all evolves, you know, the decades anyhow.

528 Sean Gallagher : We used to tell a joke, my brother and I. We only remember one word from our youth
529 in Irish. And that was 'amadan' because we were two 'amadans' at times and he would say 'You
530 amadans, get over here.

531 Celin Lavelle: (Laughs). My own grandchild is going to. School. She just started a couple of days ago.
532 And. Yesterday evening she was going round the house "Déan deifir! Déan deifir." Like "hurry up."

533 Interference on recording

534 Sean Gallagher: Now, why is it that? Why is it that like Orla's generation, they all can speak it? But
535 when my cousin and my cousin Ashling can speak it. But her daughter cannot speak Irish.

536 Celine Lavelle: And what age is her daughter.?

537 Sean Gallagher: She'd be in her young... or early 20s.

538 Celine Lavelle: Yeah, a lot of is, I think, you know, it depends on the people themselves, whether...what
539 experiences they have. Sometimes a teacher, a school, can give you the love of it. They put a lot of
540 focus on language and, you know, the academic side if it.

541 Sean Gallagher : Yeah, the younger one. She was not taught Gaelic and Irish in school.

542 Celine Lavelle: Oh Irish. Oh yeah, it depends. Every school isn't taught through Irish, yeah. Some of
543 them are half and half but...

544 Sean Gallagher: Now her mother can speak it fluently.

545 Celine Lavelle: Yeah, it depends on where her mother was.

546 Sean Gallagher: And her two grandparents could speak it fluently. But she's not an Irish speaker.

547 Celine Lavelle: But she'll have a fair bit from them. It depends on her own willingness too and her own
548 fondness of it. Yeah, yeah.

549 Sean Gallagher: Oh, I'm sure she would. Yeah. Yeah, I would when I see the signs, I can kind of
550 phonetically think them out, but it's only because I know like if I'm in Dooega and I see Dooega in
551 Gaelic, I can figure that out. But if I didn't have that knowledge... it would be very hard for somebody
552 like me.

553 Celine Lavelle: Yes. It's surprising how much we have in stored without even realising it, people like
554 yourself.

555 Sean Gallagher : Oh, it's amazing. But so really that was the story of my family, that's it really.

556 Celine Lavelle: Yeah, and your own experiences then coming to Achillbeg can you tell me more about
557 your memory of the first trip into Achillbeg?

558 **51 mins 54 secs Sean's first trip to Achillbeg as a boy. Sean's father revisits his family home.**

559 Sean Gallagher : Sure, we went over on a rowing boat.

560 Celine:Lavelle That would be similarly a culture shock like their father going to States. It would be
561 similar for ye coming on this way.

562 Sean Gallagher: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. Well. My mother thought we were all gonna drown. She said
563 you're all gonna drown out there. Yeah. But no, it was fine. It was great. And I remember my dad would
564 go out there when we were there. My brother and I would go and we would run around. We thought
565 it was. This is a big... My dad would go. And sit in the house, he would. No roof. The roof caved in.

566 Celine Lavelle: Oh yeah, you know, the house that was left

567 Sean Gallagher : And he would sit in the house. He would just sit there. And then you know, and one
568 day he went out there and was digging around, and there was a well where they used to get their
569 water. And he found that and he was able to, you know, and there is a holy well out on that island too.
570 And he knew he knew where that was and he took us, you know, over there and then, you know, it
571 just those were great times, I mean, for him.

572 Celine Lavelle: That's beautiful.

573 Sean Gallagher: It was, it was the... You know he did. He would want to sit out there and stay out there
574 and I'm sure what was going through his head was all the times he played with the kids next door, the
575 Kilbanes, and where they went up on the hill, the top of the hill and the stupid games they probably
576 played or going out catching fish.

577 Celine Lavelle: And they had names on every field, every garden, you know, had name.

578 Sean Gallagher: And here's the other story he told me about that that island that a lot of people, I
579 think, even maybe even Irish people, aren't really aware of. There's no turf on that island. They had to
580 go on... and my dad told me they would take the boat and then of course, they had... These people
581 were a lot smarter than people realise. They had to know all the tides and the times and when you
582 travelled and how you... what time you had to leave to get back and blah blah. I remember my dad
583 telling me "Don't tie the boat up there because when we come back, that the water is going to be out
584 there and the boat will be in here. Go put the boat out there, you know, way out at the end of the pier
585 and tie it out there and then walk in."

586 Celine Lavelle: Yeah, yeah.

587 Sean Gallagher :Because by the time we get done, I didn't know anything about tides, you know? But
588 he knew that from living on that island, he knew when you would go. But he told me they would go
589 and they would cut their turf. And then I don't know how they dried it or whatever they did. They did.
590 I didn't know that. But then they would go back and they would get it. They would pick it up and they
591 would have to haul every piece back to that island and to think they lived on it in a thatched house.
592 You know, talk about a hardy people. Yes, I mean unbelievable. I'm one generation removed from that
593 and I couldn't survive a weekend in that condition. You know what I mean? We're too spoiled. And
594 then my son is even more spoiled obviously, you know, with the creature comforts.

595 Celine Lavelle: That's right. Yeah, yeah.

596 Sean Gallagher : I'm glad we have those comforts, but it's something to be said for those people. And
597 then, you know, having to go to a foreign country and make your way, you know, but they did, they all
598 did. They were they were great.

599 Celine Lavelle: Amazing. Yeah, pioneers, really.

600 Sean Gallagher: Yeah. So my experience of coming back here is every time I come back I have a richer
601 experience. I meet somebody else. I have a connection to somebody. You know, you feel an energy
602 from them that their life experience and you think to yourself.m" You know but for the fate of a few
603 things, that person could be me over here." Or they could be over in America had had their ancestor
604 had to leave or decide to leave or whatever you know. You would have you would have had to go, you
605 know. But for like my mom and them, there was no choice for them. My. My dad's... Really they had
606 to leave Achillbeg. You couldn't survive on Achillbeg with all these kids on Achillbeg. So now could they
607 have come to the mainland maybe and tried to resettle? I suppose. But they still you have 10 mouths
608 to feed and you know you can't keep you can try to keep going to Scotland and working and that but
609 that's not bringing...that's not making it. So they eventually got to a breaking point and that's.

610 **55 mins 53 secs Seans visits his grandfather in hospital**

611 But I remember when my father, my grandfather died, he died in 1970 and my dad took me to see him.

612 Of course ,I didn't. I was 15. And you're 15 years old. You're like "Do I have to go see Grandpa?" You

613 know?" "Yes, you do."

614 Celine Lavelle: Was this before he died? Or after he...?

615 Sean Gallagher: This is before he died. He was in the hospital and he had his pipe in the hospital. Can

616 you imagine? (laughs). But I remember seeing him and he was very reflective about life, you know, and

617 very...He kind of got my attention a little bit. I was fidgety because I wanted to go. You know, I just. All

618 right. Hi, grandpa. Can we go? You know, you're 15. You know you're...But my dad kind of put his foot

619 down and "Now you need to spend a little time here." Because my dad knew he was going downhill

620 and downhill fast. But you know, it was a very sad thing for my dad to see his dad go. But they all

621 carried on. And when my dad died, I was with my father when he died, I was with both my parents

622 when they died. A great sense of solace. Losing your parent, you know I mean to be with them and

623 you know.

624 Celine Lavelle: It's a period of grace. It's like a special time.

625 Sean Gallagher: And all your personal experience of just the life and all that. So for me, that was very

626 reflective of him. And I knew he liked to come back here. So maybe in some strange way, that's why I

627 come back here too. Because he came back here. So I feel this sense that I should be coming back here.

628 I shouldn't let this go you know. And I'm blessed that my son has got that disease.

629 Celine Lavelle: Yeah (laughs).

630 **57 secs 27 mins Sean reflects on coming back to Achill and what would mean to his father.**

631 Sean Gallagher: And he would be thrilled if he thought that after 110 years after his birth, one of his

632 ancestors thinks enough to take time, spend the money and travel all the way over even for a long

633 weekend. So he was successful in two ways, I think. One – he provided a life where we all got

634 educations and we were able to elevate ourselves. But somehow, through hook and crook, he got us
635 assimilated to this culture back here in a way that didn't get out of us. So we come back and we keep
636 coming back. And it's great. I mean, every time I come here, I meet somebody new, I have a new
637 different little twist on an experience. A little bit of a different angle on something. Meeting you. The
638 first time I met you was on a video, watching your video for poor Finbar, you know. And of course, we
639 knew your daughter, I knew her, we'd see her and talk to her all the time. And it's great, we're good
640 friends, we're good pals. And now sitting here today talking to you in your house and I'm thinking
641 "Geez, oh man, I should pinch myself. How did this happen? "

642 Celine Lavelle : It's wonderful. This is where my interest is. You know, people like your father and your
643 grandfather have emigrated from Achill. And, for me, as someone from Achill, watching Americans
644 coming and going particularly the Clevelanders with Achill connections over the years in the business,
645 it was always of interest to me. Somehow, they were set apart. Years ago now when they went away
646 first and they came home, they seemed to be wealthier. If they were coming home, the other side of
647 it was people would be whitewashing their houses, getting ready for them. The Yanks were coming. It
648 was a big deal to have them come back. And they knew conditions were better in Cleveland and that
649 they hadn't been doing maybe as well as they would have liked. There was some part of them here
650 thinking "Maybe we should have gone." There was always that "Where am I placed best?" You know,
651 not fully settled where you are.

652 **59 minutes 47 secs Sean talks about his father's decision to emigrate from Achill**

653 Sean Gallagher: Sure. You know, I had this conversation last night even a little bit indirectly with Noreen
654 Gallagher from Corraun. And I said " Noreen, did you ever have an inkling to go?" And she said," Well,
655 I probably did. But I didn't go and I'm too old to go now. So, you know, leave it at that." I'm sure a lot
656 of Irish had to think about "Should I go or should I stay?"

657 Celine: And some people go and make a good go of it. It worked out well for them.

658 Sean: I think if my father had been older when push came to shove, he wouldn't have left. But because
659 he was in this family and they had the young ones – and it was really my grandmother that said “We
660 have to go.” She kind of put her foot down. “These kids have got to have a better life. They're not going
661 to survive here. If we stay here, it's not going to be a good ending.” And eventually, I think a lot of
662 those families on Achillbeg, they probably survived and did OK but I remember in the '60s...

663 Celine Lavelle: They probably got scattered in a lot of different places.

664 Sean Gallagher: There was the western electrification project and that was what moved them off the
665 family. Now I was told this – and I don't know if it was accurate or not, my father used to say this often,
666 that originally, at the height of that community and this might of been the 1911 census, the Irish
667 census, that there were 26 families on that island and they were Gallaghers, Kilbanes and Corrigan's.
668 And what per centage of what. I don't know. But that was...(Recording interference).

669 Of those twenty six families, how many people were there? A couple of hundred people maybe and
670 that would have been it. But to live on an island of 200, no electricity, no running water, no turf and
671 really, they could plant gardens and that but I don't think that you could really grow a whole lot more
672 than...there wasn't ... It's a pretty rough environment over there. And if you go over there today and
673 spend just a few hours over there, unless it's a day like today, you talk about the wind. What a hardy
674 bunch those people were to... Unbelievable. I just can't imagine. Where did they get their clothes?
675 Where did they get their...? You know, it's unbelievable when you think about it. Ten kids on an island.
676 You can't go to Sweeneys at the Sound to get a pack of pork chops. Just unbelievable.

677 Celine: Nothing was convenient like that. It had to be well managed.

678 Sean: He was a hard worker and all that but he smoked endlessly and he got emphysema and he was
679 as strong as a bull when he died but his lungs gave up. He eventually got pneumonia and that's what
680 kills you when you have emphysema. Now my mother, faired much better. She lived into her early 90s
681 and she really just died from old age – nothing else. But they had a great run. They raised kids. Of

682 course, they only had two, they were smart, they only had two kids. They had come from families that
683 were big. So two is better than 10. So, yeah, that's my story.

684 Celine Lavelle: Very good. So when you come back to Achill now, you've seen a lot of changes from the
685 first time you came till now. What would you like to see Achill retaining? What matters to you
686 connected the way that you are?

687 **1 hours 3 mins 20 secs Sean reflects on an Achill of the future**

688 Sean Gallagher: This is a selfish observation by an American. We don't want to see the Achill people
689 have too many creature comforts. Now that sounds horrible, doesn't it, for me to say that. But I don't
690 mean it that way.

691 Celine Lavelle: It's a romantic view sort of, is it?

692 Sean Gallagher: Yeah. We want to see the turf fire in the chimney not the electric gas range, if you
693 know what I mean. (laughs).

694 Sean Gallagher: But we don't mean that negatively.

695 Celine Lavelle: There's a part of you that wants to see the nostalgic.

696 Sean Gallagher: We don't mean that negatively and I hope that no-one on this tape thinks that I don't
697 want them to have creature comforts.

698 Celine Lavelle: But that's the memory.

699 Sean Gallagher: It's that connection, But yet, it's all still here. You just have to scratch the surface back
700 just a little bit. You know, it's all still here. I walked around the Sound, that little neighbourhood behind
701 the Church, down there behind the House Of Prayer. And as I walked around there, the turf fires were
702 going it took me right back in time – it really hasn't changed even with the gas ranges (laughs).

703 Celine Lavelle: But you see smoke coming out of the chimney.

704 Sean Gallagher: So it's very...so those are the things that we (recording interference). This is what I call
705 'The Quiet Man' syndrome. Americans have this 'Quite Man' syndrome and see that movie and they
706 think "Oh, we have to go to Killarney and ride on a cart" And of course, the Irish are probably laughing
707 and saying "That's not Ireland."

708 Celine Lavelle: Not now, not quite – except if it's a tourist promotion.

709 Sean Gallagher: So I mean I get that. But I think the Americans are starting to get a bit more
710 sophisticated about it too because of some of your films and some of your...the Irish entertainment
711 has a huge effect on Irish America. America in general but Irish America especially and, you know, we
712 tend to break through these things by seeing some of these films and documentaries that put things
713 in a little ... the John Wayne movies with Maureen O' Hara are the romantic tale. But now we're getting
714 these more cutting edge, Irish produced films and documentaries and things like that which put a
715 different...which is a good thing and I hope they continue with that, you know.

716 Celine Lavelle: And I see people like yourself, you've just said, each time you've come, it's a different
717 experience. It's like you're educating yourself into what Achill is now. That's an evolution as well.
718 Moving through what your father came back for and what brought you back initially. But each time it's
719 going to change with every experience you have.

720 Sean Gallagher: I went to the bike opening and it was a different. I would never have thought, my first
721 time here, that there would be a bicycle path through. For what reason? But now, there is a reason –
722 (Recording interference) a pulse into the community and it gives it a sense of purpose and vibrancy.
723 You keep reinventing yourself in a way. Yet you retain the core of who you are.

724 Celine Lavelle: Very well said. Very well said. I think that's brilliant and I just see. I'm grateful for this
725 opportunity.

726 Sean Gallagher: I'm grateful.

727 Celine Lavelle: Because it bridges a gap between the separation - between the Irish Clevelanders or
728 whatever or the Cleveland Irish people and Achill. Because it needs to be bridged to bring us into an
729 equal reality with each other where there isn't better or worse or higher or lower.

730 Sean Gallagher : We always liked the thing too with the Irish, one of the things we love when we do
731 come back, I'm talking about now the first and second generation American Irish that come especially
732 this community, is having to Irish trying to explain to the other Irish what their relationship is "He's
733 Michael Tony's brother's cousin's..." That for an American, that is priceless. I would film these
734 descriptive analyses, it's as complicated as a physics problem in a math class having the Irish person
735 describe genealogical connections between this Yank and somebody's cousin something and it's just
736 fascinating to go through it. I laughed at...Noreen did it last night with someone and in about forty five
737 seconds, she had somebody covered I just started laughing to myself 'cos I thought "How do you know
738 all that?" And all the nicknames and everything.

739 Celine Lavelle: You see, the people were the connection. And because there were so many with a
740 similar surname. Micheal, Johnny, his father, Tony. That was their way of identifying somebody. Sean
741 Gallagher: So last night, I'm in Alice's and Noreen Gallagher says "I want you to meet this gentleman."
742 And I go over to meet him and his wife. And his name is Michael Tony Gallagher and he's from Corraun
743 and he lives near the Compass, right near the Compass. And it turns out he's talking to me and his wife
744 says "Do you know who his father was?" And said "I don't." This guy is in his eighties, this guy I'm
745 talking too Michael Tony Gallagher.

746 Celine Lavelle: Michael Tommy was it?

747 Sean Gallagher: Micheal Tommy Gallagher. I think he's in his eighties or close to it, you know. And his
748 wife said "Do you know who his father was?" And said "I don't know." "He was Thomas Gallagher."
749 And I said "OK, who's Thomas Gallagher?" And she said "Thomas Gallagher was your father's
750 godfather." How about that.

751 Celine Lavelle: Wow. So that's another link you've made.

752 Sean Gallagher: I found that out last night. Thomas Gallagher was my father's godfather. And here I am
753 talking to his son. Talk about a connection there. And Noreen put all that together. She knew that
754 history – she figured that out. And then she said "Get over here." She's good at bossing me around.

755 Celine Lavelle: She's wonderful. She's good anyway at connecting people, I think.

756 Sean Gallagher : This is a great little local experience for Achill people, anyone who would ever hear
757 this. Noreen took me on the GAA ticket selling tour yesterday. I went to pub to pub with Noreen. I was
758 like the wing man having her go round GAA tickets. We'd say in America "I was the wing man." And
759 she'd showed up with about 900 of them. And I said "What are you going to do with all of those?" I'm
760 going to sell them." And sure, she did go around and they don't even bother to say no to her. She just
761 puts the tickets down and they're reaching for their wallets. And she managed to see me a season
762 ticket pass and I won't be here for any of the games. That's as good as sales person she is. So I'll leave
763 it at that. Thank you very much for doing it. One thing I'm going to try to dig out, these tapes... I think it
764 would be very nice to have a record of something. People should have that kind of stuff. I'm going to
765 send you something else too. I wrote a history of the west side American club which is a really
766 interesting story of how these Irish came and developed this club. I'll send it to you.

767 Celine Lavelle: Fantastic. Wonderful. Thank you so much, Sean It has been an honour, you know. You
768 have a wonderful memory and recall and names.

769 Sean Gallagher : Well, I did do some research before I came out here to remind myself. I had to get the
770 names straight. I knew all the names but I couldn't remember the order. Did Michael come before...?
771 But I got it straight, I got it straightened out.

772 Celine: We'll stop there. Thank you. I'm very appreciative.

773 **Ends 1 hour 13 mins 50 secs.**