

Oral History Project	Achill Oral Histories
Oral Historian	Celine Lavelle
Interviewee	Michael O' Donnell
Track no	1 combined (final)
Date and time	10th August 2023 15.00 hrs
Location of interview	Celine's home, Cashel Achill Island
Running time	2 hours 30 mins 30 secs (edited)

1 Celine: My name is Celine Lavelle. I am one of the community of Achill Oral Historians. Today is
2 Thursday the 10th of August 2023. And the time is 3:00 (15.00 hrs). I'm here today with Michael
3 O'Donnell from Pollagh. And Michael, thank you very much for coming to share your memories of life
4 in Achill and your connections with Achill.

5 Michael: Yeah, no problem. Thank you.

6 Celine: It's great that you're. Yeah, because this is what Achill Oral Histories is all about. Gathering the
7 stories of the people who live locally. Yeah. So thanks for that.

8 Michael: The local information.

9 Celine: Yeah. So thanks for that. So what are your first memories or your early memories of o being in
10 Achill?

11 Michael: Yeah. My earliest memories were where we left Glasgow, the city that I played out on the
12 street at the age of three and a half or four years. And I came to a place like Achill. Thought it was in
13 my youth that in was another city, was surprised to see that it was all green fields and oceans and
14 mountains, that that's that was a real surprise. I knew that I'd be able to play on the beaches and things
15 like that as a child. That's that was that was the very first. I don't know how soon after I arrived that
16 that came in, but it was one of the initial things of my memory from Achill. And then, you know, my
17 mother would take us to the beach on the good days and my grandfather bringing me around the farm

18 and, you know, showing me a horse and the donkey and the cows and how to milk them and all that.
19 I've seen all that. That was lovely. Another memory that sticks is when the plane crashed up on
20 Croaghaun. There was a couple of British, seven or eight, British soldiers killed. They were really done
21 weather reconnaissance and they crashed into the mountain of Croaghaun and they were all killed.
22 But what I remember is not the disaster, that that didn't mean anything to me if there was. If three
23 hundred people killed and that as a child... this is what I was thinking. But it didn't mean anything.
24 What did mean to me was when we were told when the cortege was going by with all the coffins , that
25 we were to go inside and not be not be out. And I thought something disastrous was going to happen
26 if we went out so inside. And it was a kind of a fear that that was in me as a child. That's what I
27 remember from the very early stages.

28 Celine: And that was to show respect for the dead.

29 Michael: That was to show respect. And I suppose I think maybe now looking back, it was that the
30 people who were organising this thought it wasn't good for a child to be watching all these things, you
31 know. Yeah, but it was more fierce looking to me by saying you have to be inside than to be watching
32 them all going by in coffins.

33 Celine. Your imagination must have gone wandering.

34 Michael: And so I don't know. Yeah. Yeah. I don't know. That's the. That's what I remember about that.
35 That very early memories and of course, the smell of the grass. You know, when they cut the hay. I
36 have never noticed it much since, but there was a certain scent that just sticks in my mind, you know.
37 Lovely.

38 Celine: Yes, that you wouldn't get in in Glasgow.

39 Michael: No. Glasgow was a city and across the road. Now we lived on a quiet street. But that was
40 what I thought was the place where everybody lived, you know? And when we came to open place
41 like Achill, that that was a real delight for me, I can tell you as child. Growing up all the time with this

42 great feeling and learning everything about the way life was at the time. You know, I learned how to
43 milk the cows. I could milk the cow by the age of five or six years. Well, not five or six, but I was only
44 five when I came here, so maybe six or seven, I was allowed to milk the cows. I used to drive them out
45 the hill gone over to Slievemore with the cows, you know. And they nearly be back as soon as you. But
46 you brought them over. You know it. It was great. And then you were learning. You know, my
47 grandmother had said "Drive them out the railway", you know. And we'd go out the railway. And then
48 you went to learn and there was a railway here once. And then you discovered that there were trains
49 on it, you know, and that they used ferried white stone or quartz from the quarry to the harbour. And
50 you learned all those things as you were going. And then there was names all along, you know. The
51 names given by the engineers and the workers that built the railroad, you know. Yeah, so the 'passing
52 point' is one - that's still there. All the locals know the passing point where the two trains on the one
53 line would have to pass each other. Then there was another place called the 'Toolbox' - that's near
54 Achillhenge now there and you know, different things as you go along, you learn them and you learn
55 the names, all the places.

56 Celine: OK.

57 Michael: The old people, I'd say there wasn't 100 square yards of area that didn't have a specific name.
58 And you knew exactly where your cattle was, you know, or the sheep. So that was that was... these
59 were all learning things. And then you while you had the names then later on you started to discover
60 what the names meant and if you didn't know, you'd ask somebody and there'd be a good story about
61 it or, you know.

62 Celine: So everything was connected.

63 Michael: All connected, all connected. Yeah.

64 Celine: Yeah, it was relevant to the people.

65 Michael: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

66 Celine: They named it themselves. It's like...

67 Michael: Yeah, well, all the Irish names mainly are descriptive and so are the Scotch, the Scotch, Gaelic
68 and the Welsh. Their meanings. And the names are not just things. But, you know, the English is the
69 same. You know, if you analyse their names that they too have, you know, meanings to the names.
70 They're not just names made-up, you know, for those reasons for the news, yeah.

71 Celine: Yes, yes, it's connected to some, yes.

72 Michael: So but being Irish, I suppose, that made me more in true the meanings of the Irish and the
73 translations and how they came about, you know.

74 Celine: Yes, yes. And then, yeah, what was important because there weren't many maps that time for
75 people to say, you know, to measure, a certain field. It could be identified that way.

76 Michael: Yeah. Every field, every field had a name. Every family knew their fields. And in Pollagh, the
77 houses were originally along the shoreline - 8 or 10 houses. And maybe a little more than that. Some
78 of them are gone now. Coastal erosion has taken away quite a number and those that had their houses
79 on the shoreline fenced land immediately to the rear, going north up to what's now known as the Main
80 Road. Yeah. The land was divided up because when the families like in them times, families were in my
81 grand great grandmother's family, there was 10 or 11 of the family, you know. And they those that
82 went off to Scotland, America, Canada, Australia, wherever, they got nothing. And then the ones that
83 remain behind, usually one or two, usually a man and maybe a woman that would get married a
84 daughter. And they'd share the sites between them, and then they change hands and you know. So
85 everybody had a name then on whose site it. As you know, 'Biddie's Big Field', or you know 'Brid's
86 Garden', you know, 'Germo's (sp) piece.' You know, they had names for each field, you know, and you
87 knew exactly which one it was, you know, and that would be the same for every family in Pollagh. And
88 Dooagh and I'm sure throughout the island

89 Celine: Yes. Yeah.

90 Michael: And a I'm sure throughout the island, the fields were named. And the commonage, then, like
91 thousands acres of common age here. And like the shepherds are really the best and they know the
92 areas really well and they have the names. And Tommy Boley McNamara. He came up with an idea of
93 making a CD with the names and maps showing all the name places. And that was really, really good
94 because... he got. I'd say 95% of all the names, a lot of names would be gone too, because old people
95 died off and they didn't pass on the information that they had you know, so...

96 Celine: Yes, yes.

97 Michael: But for those that have information, great, you know it should be recorded, and Achill Oral
98 Histories obviously are in a position now to collect stuff that wasn't collected before, you know.

99 Celine: And from, let's say from the horse's mouth, so to speak. You know, from people who have lived
100 through this. Yeah, who know for a fact what they're talking about. It's not coming out of anyone's
101 book. It's lived. It's a lived experience.

102 Michael: Yes, experience. Yes. Well, you're interviewing me here now. And you see, before you
103 interviewed me, I didn't know you would know stuff that you'd want to know. You know, you think you
104 know nothing, you know. And then when you go to tell it, it brings you off in different lines here and
105 there, and it expands. And the next thing you're looking at rays of information, you know, coming from
106 the one single spot.

107 Celine: That's right.

108 Michael: So yeah, you realise that as you're talking, you know.

109 Celine: I agree with you. Yeah. Yeah, because if you have an interest in the subject as well and you
110 don't realise how much you have stored.

111 Michael: Yeah, and that's why I love myself talking to old people. If they think you're interviewing them
112 for something, they came to clam up for some reason. And they say: "God, I better not say anything in
113 case I'm wrong", that kind of thing. And I love talking to them, chatting and they'll tell you stories and

114 some of it might be made-up as well. You wouldn't know, you know. But when you hear the same thing
115 from different people, you realise that yeah, that was the way it was, you know.

116 Celine: Yeah. Yes.

117 Michael: Yeah, like one of the things now that I say may or may not be true. There's people say it's true
118 and others will say it's not true. And that is the location of the 'chofree hollach' (ph). You've heard the
119 chofree hollach (sp). Yeah. Well. Everybody in Dooagh and Pollagh and Keel knows the part of the
120 mountain that has been called Gerrin Ban (sp) up by the way down to Annagh. But the last person that
121 was supposed to have discovered the entrance was about 70 years ago. And they felt that they
122 shouldn't tell it to anybody else in case something bad had come from it, you know. And the stories
123 that they told was and from past histories is that there was four steps going down into it with grey
124 sandstone slabs of stone. And then you went down into a cave and when you went into the cave and
125 when you went so far in you could stand up and then you could come back again across the top of the
126 cave that you just went out. And there were spaces in the floor that you were just going through. And
127 people said that that's where if anyone were being chased in and enemies come in, that they should
128 follow you in there, then you'd get in on the top and you'd kill them, stabbing them down through the
129 openings on the top. No, that's the story. I don't know whether it's true or not. But it's what was going
130 around. I believe that someone else told me that the slabs were taken out for the steps to build the
131 tower in 1702. You know, the lookout towers where they can see from Clare Island to Achill and the
132 one down to Bellmullet. And that it was taken out to put in cornerstones or lintels for the tower. And
133 the tower is built with stone. But it's not local stone, it's Corraun. So they had to bring the stone from
134 Corraun to build this tower, you know. And the long slabs might have been, you know, a different colour
135 and it might look nice. That that, that's the reason why the entrance to the Choffrey Hollagh (sp) is not
136 easily discovered because the slabs were taken out, the front caved in and now to find it is the problem.

137 Celine: Right. I'd have to go back there after some rainy day.

138 Michael: Well, our teacher Seamus Gallagher used to send out the 6th class on the good days, just
139 before the summer holidays. Every year we'd have a day out, looking up on the hill and if we found it,
140 we'd probably never tell him, because then we wouldn't be able to get out the next year so. But we
141 never found it. But we never found it.

142 Celine: It was a continuous quest looking for it. Well, that's a bit of mystery. It's nice to have these
143 stories and legends passed on. Yeah, it sounds a lot like these tombs. Ancient. Like megalithic.

144 Michael: But it's probably from several thousand years ago, like some kind of sous terrain. And the
145 people that knew what they were used for are no longer with us and they took their information with
146 them to their grave.

147 Celine: Yes, it seems, yeah. And probably out of respect too for whatever the purpose of it was, not to
148 have it destroyed. It's interesting though, it's interesting that these exist. There could be more of them
149 within - in the mountain.

150 Michael: Yeah, it's quite hard to tell. There's quite a few megalithic tombs around that area down in
151 Keem Bay. And there's old beehive huts that's still there on the west side of Annagh and, you know,
152 Yeah, there's history there. I know, Theresa MacDonald, the archaeologist, she's doing quite a lot of
153 research in the area in Slievemore and things like that I hope she gets enough time to examine it all,
154 you know.

155 Celine: Yes, it's. It's huge. I think we haven't unearthed much of it. We're only scratching the surface
156 of it yet.

157 Michael: Yeah. And, you know, people have a fear of interfering with old things,

158 Celine: For fear of desecrating them.

159 Michael: You know, for fear that the fairies would put bad luck on them or something, you know. And
160 I think leave it, you know. Leave the fairy tree. Leave the fairy mound. Leave gróigín mór. (sp). At the
161 front to Doctor King's house, halfway to the sea and that'll be there forever more. There was a song

162 written about it about 70 - 80 years ago called the house around gróigín mor. (sp).. And they name all
163 the villages and the people, they name all the people that was in the village, you know. Yeah. So that's
164 in the in the Achill song book, yeah.

165 Celine: Great, great. Yeah, that tells, that's another way of telling the stories and songs.

166 Michael: Yeah, and songs is probably the original way of letting people know of historical events. And
167 the other way - and this is my opinion now - paintings, you know drawings. And they say these are
168 this is the way history has passed on. You know, if people couldn't read or write how did you get the
169 information across? Well, you know, in pictures and in and in songs and poetry and the history then
170 was passed on, you know.

171 Celine: That's right. Even when you think of the old caves that they still find drawings in them.

172 Michael: They're still trying drawings inside in them. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

173 Celine: It's it's, it's true that it's.

174 Michael: So that would be like in them times, you know. Then when people got to learn how to read
175 and write, whether it was Latin or Irish or English it, it was much easier to get the information across,
176 you know.

177 Celine: Yes, yes.

178 Michael: Look like the annals, the old annals that the monks wrote. You know, it's hard to say whether
179 it's true or false. But like, you can expect that it might be fairly true, you know. But some of them have
180 been rewritten, you know, and what was rewritten the exact truth, or is it fictitious?

181 Celine: Yeah, it's somebody's interpretation. Yeah. Yeah.

182 Michael: Interpretation of what's it is. Yeah. So that's the way it is. Yeah. But we have to believe what
183 what's around. The stories True or false. If there's fairies or no fairies or, you know, it doesn't matter
184 with the stories with the place. And it's a nice thing.

185 Celine: Yes, it's part of, yeah, how people live and the fears that they had about disrespecting. And are
186 you aware of anyone that did disrespect the fairies and got punished for it? Or is there any story like
187 that that caused people to be so fearful?

188 Michael: No, because nobody would break the rule. They all believed that something bad would
189 happen to them.

190 Celine: Yeah, you, yeah. Yeah. So there. Must be some history for that belief to be as strong as it was.

191 Michael: Yeah, they believed that if they did, something can destroyed something that something bad
192 would happen to them or to their relations, and they would not, under any circumstances, break those
193 rules. And I know of nobody that would have broken the rules.

194 Celine: There was definitely. I've heard of people having connections with the fairies. You know, where
195 they would be thrown out the water from the teapot or something out the door. Oh yeah and warned
196 them. They'd say they'd say it in Irish. You know what? To warn the fairies. This is coming, you know.
197 Get out of the way.

198 Michael: Thomás Mac Seáin has the saying. I'm not good at Irish.

199 Celine: Yeah and different things. They'd leave a patch of the garden or they wouldn't take all the food
200 from the garden. They'd leave a bit for the fairies.

201 Michael: They wouldn't change a gate and a fence because if that was a fairy track that they'd never
202 alter that gateway. It was always left. They might build a new gateway. But the old one was always left.
203 And the saying I think was like, you know, "leave the way I'm going to throw out the water." Or the dish
204 or the dirty water or whatever they were throwing out.

205 Celine: Yeah, yeah. So not to hit them in the face.

206 Michael: And then of course, there was the thing about leaving food and things like that for the fairies.
207 And I think November's night might have been one of those. You know, it started off by, say, taking
208 vegetables and leaving them for the. Fairies and then...

209 Celine: It got it changed into something else. A different sport (laughs).

210 Michael: Changed into something else. For pure devilment, you know, pulling cabbage and firing it at
211 people's doors. But really, what you were doing was you were giving them the cabbage. It was mainly
212 cabbage, you know, for some reason.

213 Celine: it was probably plentiful at that time of year.

214 Michael: It was, yeah. You'd fire it at the door and wait for them to come out. And some would say "Go
215 raibh míle maith agat" and some would say "I'll catch ye." And you know, it was a little bit of fear
216 attached to being caught as well because you didn't want to let on I t was you that was throwing them
217 in, you know, so you took off and you did the same at the next house. You'll be going around for hours.
218 And if you knew what field the cabbage was in, you'd be down. You wouldn't take it all now. You'd just
219 take the ones that you wanted to, you know, enough heads to do what you wanted to do. But the
220 farmers always planted enough cabbage for November's night. They knew their crops were going to
221 be raided.

222 Celine: They allowed for it.

223 Michael: Yeah, yeah, they allowed for it because if they didn't, they'd been lying down in the ridges.
224 And the first time someone had come around, they'd be up and catch them, but they knew. Because
225 it was part of an old tradition and they weren't going to break it.

226 Celine: It's lovely. Really. Yeah. How it just changed. It evolved into something else for the young boys,
227 mostly boys, probably.

228 Michael: Yeah. But there were girls too. My mother often said that she went out and, you know, got
229 heads of cabbage herself and her friends and yeah, yeah.

230 Celine: They made it fun anyway.

231 Joined join the former. But they had they made it fun anyway, yeah.

232 Michael: That was that was November's night. Since Stephen's night, then was a different kind of night.

233 I don't ever remember my mother talking about Saint Stephen's night. And you know. But they spoke

234 about Saint Stephens Day. Going around at the wren. Yeah, or the 'wran' as they called it, you know

235 the 'wran' the 'wran' the king of all birds and Stephen's Day. He was caught in the woods. up with the

236 kettle down with the pan. Give us a penny to bury the wran. If you haven't a penny, a ha'penny will do.

237 If you haven't a ha'penny, God bless you.

238 Celine: (laughs) Good on you. So yeah, that was the wren.

239 Michael: You finished it off with: I worried the round 3 miles or more, round and round and round the

240 shore. From bush to bush and from tree to tree, and broke his knee going down the lee. So yeah.

241 Celine: Poor wren - that was the end of him.

242 It at the door. Poor wren. That was the end of him, yeah.

243 Michael: That was the wren. We never caught a wren. We never.. But we'd see them. Although I've

244 seen them now this this year, I've seen two wrens this year. Yeah, they're coming back. Yeah, I've seen

245 two this year. Yeah.

246 Celine Right. So they're coming back is. That's a good sign. That's a good sign.

247 Michael: But what we did was peel a potato and shape it up like a bird. We became little artists and

248 put eyes in them in a beak and legs and feathers even, you know. And yeah, we, we dickey up a right

249 bird.

250 Celine: Great. Yeah. So that was that you weren't harming any of the wrens, whatever they were. So

251 that was great.

252 Michael: No, no, no, no, no. And plant them in a in a nice ush and you sit them in in the bush like a
253 nest you make.

254 Celine: Yes, yes, very real. Yeah, that was creative.

255 Michael: A nest for them and yeah. And the fun making it, you know, we, we'd be preparing for Saint
256 Stephen's Day for over the Christmas, yeah.

257 Celine: Yeah, getting ready. What you needed.

258 Michael: Yeah, there was more. There was more out of Christmas on Saint Stephen's Day than there
259 was from Santa Claus in them times, you know.

260 Celine: Yeah. So people are giving.

261 Michael: And not toys like they have today. You know, you might get some people might get one toy
262 or an orange and apple or, you know, some things. Yeah. In my early youth and then as we got a bit
263 older and Santa Claus wasn't for us, the younger ones got so much more and now you go into a house
264 and the floor is full of toys. The kids don't know what to do with them.

265 Celine: Yeah, it has very much changed in that way.

266 Michael: But the memories are there, yeah.

267 Celine: That's right, yes. And so you go round the village, then showing the wrens...

268 Michael: Oh yeah. Every house you did, every house and you know, into Dooagh school that I
269 remember there was 78 lads and 125 girls. The girls were in half of the school that it wasn't like mixed.
270 You know, the boys were in the other part. But it was the boys mainly that went around with the wren,
271 not the girls.

272 Celine: Yeah.

273 Michael: It was the boys. But sometimes a girl would go like maybe a brother or a sister, something
274 like that, but it was more the boys and.

275 Celine: Together.

276 Michael: And then and they'd have a great day getting a penny or a ha'penny. and some of some houses
277 that give you shilling or two shillings. Do you know what they are. You remember them. I say two
278 shillings now to my granddaughter, she says "What's that, Grandad?" in the English accent, you know.
279 Already, knowledge of shillings. No, no knowledge of the money.

280 Celine: They don't have any knowledge of shillings. And then what happened to the money?

281 Michael: No knowledge of the money. Yeah, if one went around on the own, they mightn't have got
282 an awful lot. But if two or three went together, they usually get usually get a bit more.

283 Michael: If one went round on their own, they might have got an awful lot. But if two or three went
284 round together, they'd usually get a bit more.

285 Celine: So you'd have pocket money then?

286 Michael: Yes, we'd have our pocket money. It was a shilling to get into the cinema at Achill Head. There
287 was an hotelier called John Mac Gonnigle who built a cinema with a cinemascope screen and a
288 fabulous stage and fabulous curtains with diamonds here and there on the curtains and lights up on
289 the walls in the form of shells, clam shells and it was beautiful. And a balcony and what we called the
290 pit, the lower part. Now, it was sixpence to get into that, and I remember he showed some great films,
291 new out ,you know. One of them I remember in particular was 'The Robe,' It was a three or four part
292 film, or a five part film, I can't remember exactly. And 'Quo Vardis' and the 'Winchester Rifles,' in colour.
293 We thought we were cowboys on our way home, you know. So, it was great, you know.

294 Celine: So alive on a big screen and this was long before television.

295 Michael: Yes, this was starting in 1956 or 57. Maybe even before that a bit. Can't remember the years.
296 But I was going to the National School and every Monday morning, the teacher was insisting that we
297 only go to the cinema on the Friday night. But it was open Monday night, Tuesday night, Wednesday
298 night, usually (Celine laughs) and on Sunday night. And, on Monday morning, we'd be asked what film
299 did we go to see, who were the actors. He made us look. And to this day, I still look at the titles, who's
300 who, who did what, and things like that. Was it MGM or was it Warner? We liked the one with the
301 heart shaped thing that came up with the big 'W' on the front and we knew that was going to be a
302 cowboy. If we could see the lion roaring then that could be anything else, you know. (Celine laughs)
303 Yes, but he made us be aware of who the actors were. One of things he asked was, "Tell me how many
304 Irish names you see, on the subtitles." So we'd be...that made us look then, we'd look at all the names.

305 Celine: Very good. It was clever of him to get you to observe that.

306 Michael: It was. Oh, he was a great teacher. He was a bold teacher. But when he was cross...well cross
307 was allowed at that time, corporal punishment was allowed, you know.

308 Celine: Yes, that era.

309 Michael: Yes.

310 Celine: So, some people wouldn't have good experiences of it.

311 Michael: Oh, there'd be some people who would hate him. But then sometimes it doesn't take much
312 for you to hate somebody.

313 CelineE: When you're young.

314 MICHAEL: Yes.

315 CELINE: They leave an impression.

316 Michael: I lived next door to him, you know. I was never afraid of him, but I was always wanting to be
317 as good as I possibly could, you know. And he was always complaining about the condition of my books.
318 A bundle of rags, it what he used to call them. And the reason they were a bundle of rags was because
319 I never stopped looking at them, getting it off, learning them. It was out of fear that I learned, not out
320 of love. Later on, when you'd be learning something, you loved it and you wanted it, you know. But
321 then it was that you had to know it, and that was different. You see things differently when you leave
322 school, you know. (3.58).

323 Celine: Looking back now yes, that's right. And you're more inclined to follow what's of interest to
324 yourself afterwards.

325 Michael: Everything with Seamus was education. The first time I ever seen a test tube was with
326 Seamus. And that was strange and rare really because now I know that, but at the time on bad days at
327 lunchtime he'd take you in and sometimes he'd show us about litmus paper and the way it would
328 change colours and, you know. He'd tell you a little bit about chemistry and physics and he was great
329 like that, you know.

330 Celine: Yes.

331 Michael: He'd really hook you.

332 Celine: Great, because at that time education only went to about fourteen years or something, so that
333 all the education people had was at National School.

334 MICHAEL: Yes, school to me was a nightmare because I was always afraid that I get hammered in the
335 school, you know.

336 CELINE: By the teacher?

337 MICHAEL: Yes, by the teacher, of course. But like, he was great as a teacher, you know, You'd be playing
338 out in the yard, something like that, you know, and he'd say, 'There's six pence for the man that'll do
339 the best map of Ireland in the sand, the fastest. So you'd try and do this map of Ireland.

340 CELINE: My goodness.

341 MICHAEL: Yes.

342 CELINE: So he was creative too.

343 MICHAEL: Yes, you'd put in the counties and places like that. He was making you learn and yet you
344 were having fun doing it, you know/

345 CELINE: Yes, yes and you'd remember what you'd do in the sand better than you'd do...

346 MICHAEL: Maybe in the school. Yes, because if you made a mistake in the sand, you just brushed it out
347 and do it again. If you did it on the copy, you'd get a slap for making a mistake. You might even get two,
348 one on each hand, and then you might get your hands turned over and hit on the back as well, you
349 know.

350 CELINE: Oh!

351 MICHAEL: He'd have a leather strap, called 'Black Jack.' It was about a foot long. It was about a half
352 inch thick and it was two inches wide, with a shaped leather handle, and when he's swing it up and
353 down, it would creak, you'd hear the leather creak. So that put the fear of God into us. So we were all
354 good.

355 CELINE: Young boys, yes.

356 MICHAEL: Yes, seventy-eight lads. So if there was a fight, it was kept very quiet, you know, because
357 we'd get hammered in the school. And then of course, if the teacher slapped you and you went home

358 and said that the teacher had slapped you, you'd get slapped at home because, if you were doing
359 wrong. So you'd make sure that you weren't going to be punished twice.

360 CELINE: Yes, yes.

361 MICHAEL: But they were the times.

362 C; It was a different time, yes. A lot has changed since then.

363 MICHAEL: Yes. And second level education in my time was not too many. A few people went for second
364 level, and any of those that did, really did well, became teachers or engineers, or architects or
365 whatever. You know, it was great. But most people hadn't the money to afford to send their children
366 to college or university.

367 CELINE: And where was the second level education?

368 MICHAEL: Well, at the Sound. Padraig Sweeney raised funds throughout the world really to build the
369 first second level school, and then after that it was University if you went far enough, you know. And
370 some did, you know, quite a lot of Achill people did.

371 CELINE: Yes,

372 MICHAEL: So it was great, and some of those very same people today are foremost in the development
373 of Achill because, they saw what they did with their education.

374 CELINE: With their education.

375 MICHAEL: And they'd say that's what was needed here, you know. So, they're foremost in the
376 development of Achill at the moment.

377 CELINE: That's interesting, yes. And it's a process, it's a gradual progression.

378 MICHAEL: It is, yes. And then of course it is. If you couldn't make a living in Achill, you went to England
379 or America. Usually England first, or Scotland. In my case, because of the connection with the farms,
380 my grandfather was a gaffer in a farm in Scotland, and he lived on it with his family, my mother and
381 her brother, and her sisters went to school from the farm, you know. Well, they lived in Scotland, you
382 know.

383 CELINE: Yes,

384 MICHAEL: Then there was the other type of gaffers that gathered the squads here. A squad is where
385 you get anything between 15 and 30 people in a group Usually family members or family connected,
386 or friends of the gaffer or something, they were all friends. And then they'd go to Scotland and the
387 farmers while they planted the spuds, they sold the fields to potato merchants, and the potato
388 merchants were the people who hired the gaffers and the squads,

389 CELINE: Right, I've never heard it explained like that before.

390 MICHAEL: Yes, they'd pick the fields for each gaffer. Like one potato merchant might have four, five, six
391 gaffers working throughout Scotland, with 30 people in each group, and then they'd pick...you do these
392 farms, you do them, you do them, and then these and then on the west coast of Scotland was the early
393 potatoes, first early, second early, then you went to the eastern side of Scotland, Edinburgh. Kelsoe,
394 towards the English border and Dundee and Perth and all them areas. They'd be later with spuds, you
395 know. And by the first week in November, the crops were in, the spuds were in, you know. But the
396 squads were interesting for me because, I had heard about my three neighbours who had been burnt
397 in the Kirkintilloch disaster. Incidentally, my wife's uncle was also burned in it, but I didn't know her
398 until recently. This was 1937, before we were even born, you know.

399 CELINE: Yes, yes.

400 MICHAEL: And that got me because I thought, what conditions was it that they were there, you know.
401 Like, there's so much information on the internet. Some true, some you could say, may be true, you
402 know. But there's a lot of information and people looking at that. There was a report that a Scotch man
403 who didn't like the Irish locked the boys in and took off with the key. And when the fire started they
404 weren't able to get them out in time. His wife, fifty something years after that incident, said that he
405 had confessed to her that he done it.

406 CELINE: That he had locked the door.

407 MICHAEL: That he had locked the door, but they could never prove it. It was never proven but there
408 is, I believe, a Scotch law, I'm not sure a hundred per cent, that after fifty years there's no crime. But I
409 wouldn't...that's what you read, it might be not true. But the local people were really good and from
410 what I gather reading it all. I would suggest, if anybody is interested, look at the internet, just put in
411 Kirkintollock disaster, and there's pages and pages of information.

412 CELINE: That was a very sad event for Achill.

413 MICHAEL: So, I wanted to see what to see what the conditions were, and I believe they were exactly
414 the same in 1960 when I was over as they were in 1920, 1930, 1940.

415 CELINE: Really?

416 MICHAEL: Yes.

417 CELINE: They hadn't changed, even after that disaster?

418 MICHAEL: Yes, and the children were allowed to work on the farms. It was nothing to have a child
419 working on the farm with their mothers and fathers, maybe. And Scotch people. There was as many
420 Scotch squads as there was Irish squads. But, you see, you didn't mix and so you only...in our time
421 you'd get Scotch people mixing with the Irish, you know.

422 CELINE: Yes,

423 MICHAEL: But, the Scottish authorities in 1930...I'm not a hundred per cent certain of it, but I believe
424 it was 1939, when the Second World War started, that they made a rule saying that the schools could
425 close so that children could go out and help with the harvests. So the parents and the children went
426 out and they picked and there's photographs to show that, that the children were on the farms. They
427 weren't always made to work. But they did bits to keep them busy and made to pick potatoes and put
428 them in a basket. It was that they felt they were like an adult and they were quite happy.

429 CELINE: Yes.

430 MICHAEL: And then the farmers would say, 'Whatever you can carry home is yours,' you know. So, they
431 got potatoes and during the food shortages during the war, they had plenty of potatoes. So, that law
432 was repealed in 1964.

433 CELINE: Okay, yes.

434 MICHAEL: So, it was kept going a long while, you know. The squads ended roughly around that time
435 too, '64 to '67. But, I only spent six months there in 1960. In 1959 actually, getting up to 1960, and I
436 just wanted to see it and learn all about it and see what they did and the stories I heard, were they
437 true and when you'd see it happening, you had heard the story before. It was like you were re-enacting
438 it. The Bothy dances were great then, you know, I liked the dancing, I was learning how to waltz that
439 time, you know. I was fourteen and I was learning how to waltz.

440 CELINE: Great. So, you were getting dancing lessons in as well.

441 MICHAEL: I was getting dancing lessons and everything, yes.

442 CELINE: Great.

443 MICHAEL: It was good fun, and then going into town and you know...

444 CELINE: It was all a new adventure for some fourteen year old boy coming from Dooagh..

445 MICHAEL: Yes, everything was new to me, except that I knew what cities looked like from being a child
446 in Glasgow. But, you know, the experience of being free on your own going in your own way without
447 catching your mother's hand, you know, was an open freedom, you know.

448 CELINE: That's right.

449 MICHAEL: You grew up quickly then.

450 MICHAEL: Yes,

451 CELINE: You were responsible for yourself.

452 MICHAEL: Yes, and people were very good, you know.

453 CELINE: Yes.

454 MICHAEL: So, that's Scotland, I spent six months, and after that I went to England and worked for my
455 father and he was a scaffolder and he worked on power stations and it was industrial scaffolding, you
456 know, big. You'd work high, awkward corners and things like that. I didn't like it. I had to stay with him
457 because I didn't know the ropes and I felt safe when I knew that I was being looked after, put it that
458 way. But I fancied doing other jobs and things like that, you know.

459 CELINE: yes. He was the bridge for you to get to England

460 MICHAEL: He was the safety barrier there and he kept you on the straight and narrow and the kind of
461 people that you would mix with and things like that, you know. You were advised about all the different
462 aspects.

463 CELINE: It was a very different culture too from home.

464 MICHAEL: It was, from us. Here, we knew everybody. Over there, they might know most of the people
465 on their street, you know, and maybe odd ones from other things that they were involved in, other
466 industries, but they were all Mr and Mrs. They were never called by their Christian name like here, and
467 if you went into a house, they'd stand at the door, 'What do you want?' you know. "Oh, I just wanted
468 to say hello to you, Mrs so and so, have you a cup of sugar?" you know (laughter)

469 CELINE: Yes.

470 MICHAEL: Here it would be a totally different ball game, you walked in, you were almost like part of
471 the family even though you were living several doors away, you know.

472 CELINE: Yes.

473 MICHAEL: It was a different thing.

474 CELINE: The open door.

475 MICHAEL: They expected the neighbours to be coming in and out, yes. If they didn't, they'd be saying,
476 'why?' what's wrong - did we do something on them? you know. So your neighbour...

477 CELINE: ...You kept each other going it seems.

478 MICHAEL: Oh, they did, yes. And the visiting was great, you know. The men were all, the men would
479 all go to the pub. Sometimes they had gables that they'd stand at, they'd meet at the gable during the
480 day and they'd be chatting and having the crack. The women then, in the evening, would pick a house
481 and maybe five or six of them would go and visit a house and have the chat and, you know. They'd do
482 the circle and it might be a fortnight or a month before they'd go back again to the same house. But,

483 that's the way it was, and they kept information going about who was who and who was getting
484 married and who was having a child and who wasn't, you know. So, that's the way it was.

485 CELINE: Yes. They were interested.

486 MICHAEL: They were interested in their neighbours.

487 CELINE: It's like one big family really. They were, speaking about it like that.

488 MICHAEL: That's the way I see Achill, although not everybody is friendly, you know, and they have little
489 bouts of unfriendliness, put it that way. But they'd still, you know, be thinking that we're a unit, you
490 know, in a sense.

491 CELINE: Yes, because, even in small families, they don't always agree.

492 MICHAEL: No, not at all. No one agrees a hundred per cent of the time, yes.

493 CELINE: That's what makes life interesting.

494 MICHAEL: You won't get total agreements all the time, yes and there was always plenty of arguments
495 and that. But , you knew that was very immaterial, in a sense because if somebody died and you'd see
496 how that the neighbours who you were thinking were not your good friends would ride in helping you,
497 bringing in chairs for the wake, and making tea and helping you in every way they could, and when
498 that was over, maybe you'd be back again to square one.

499 CELINE: But their heart was in the right place.

500 MICHAEL: Their heart was in the right place, yes.

501 CELINE: When it mattered.

502 MICHAEL: It wasn't badness. It was just, you don't agree with me so I'm not agreeing with you and
503 that's it.

504 CELINE: Yes.

505 MICHAEL: Not a badness, yes. Mostly it would be very simple stuff, you know. Or maybe they didn't
506 like the way you did things, you know, 'Oh, that one she never does anything right!' (laughter) you
507 know. And you're not shunned, but...

508 CELINE: They don't exactly approve of your ways.

509 MICHAEL: Yes, It was not their way. So, that's the kind of thing, you know. That's the way I saw it.

510 CELINE: It's harmless kind of differences.

511 MICHAEL: That's the way I saw it, yes.

512 CELINE: It was innocent enough and harmless, there was nobody would want any harm on anyone
513 else.

514 MICHAEL: Yes. One of the other things in Achill that I remember, is the tinkers. Now, they're not
515 supposed to be called tinkers now, they're called travellers. But, that was politically correct at that time
516 to be called a tinker, and it's in the song, 'tinker, tailor, soldier, sailor', you know. And the tinkers would
517 go around and they'd say, 'will you buy this, or buy that,' maybe a mug or a can, and then the husband
518 might make a gallon can for you, or a five gallon can, a bucket. And he'd sit there on the doorstep or
519 wherever, or a stool that might be supplied to him and he'd get his shears and he'd cut his roll of tin
520 and the next thing he'd have had a bucket made or a can made and fill it with water to prove that it
521 wasn't leaking and charge you a half crown or something for it, you know. It was marvellous to watch
522 them doing it, absolutely wonderful. That all stopped, the tin smithing all stopped. But I remember
523 that, and there's a few more my age would remember it, you know,

524 CELINE: Yes, and there was interaction between them, you know.

525 MICHAEL: Oh yes, and they were very good, like, if you did anything for them. Sometimes they would
526 just ask for food, you know, and they were very holy. The tinkers were holy and they'd say a prayer for
527 you, you know. But, then again, if you didn't do anything for them there's a thing called the 'tinkers
528 curse,' (laughter)

529 CELINE: If you didn't offer them anything.

530 MICHAEL: You'd look after the tinker just not to get the curse, you know. Maybe not for the prayer, but
531 not to get the curse, you know. (laughter)

532 CELINE: To be on the safe side, like and insurance policy.

533 MICHAEL: Yes, yes. So...

534 CELINE: It was an easier way of life.

535 MICHAEL: Yes. They'd often have stories from other parts of the county, and they'd be telling what was
536 happening in Louisburgh, or maybe Connemara or North Mayo.

537 CELINE: So they carried the stories.

538 MICHAEL: Yes, and often people in Achill would know people, say, in North Mayo, or Connemara from
539 the squads in Scotland, you know. They'd say, how was so and so, and if you see them say I was asking
540 after them, you know. So, they kind of kept in touch that way, you know. So I was just little things like
541 that that you could pass, you know, it wouldn't mean anything but that was how they connected, you
542 know.

543 CELINE: That's right, yeah and those memories. They stay with you. Yeah, I'm remembering something
544 they said earlier about the smell of the grass and the hay.

545 Michael: Oh yeah, the new mown hay. Oh, yeah, that. That is a special smell. I think maybe when you
546 get older, your senses aren't as good as when you're a child, you know, so you're just barely taller than
547 the than the grass that they're cutting, you know?

548 Celine: Yeah. That's right, you're close to the ground.

549 Michael: Yeah, and all the sounds, you know, the, the sharpening the scythe. I remember my
550 grandfather standing up, you know, and sharpening the scythe and you'd here this 'shush,shush,'
551 (imitates sound of scythe) you know and then , the cut of the grass and the hay.

552 Celine: Your motioning there. It's like you're cutting the grass there yourself.

553 Michael: And in them times, bees made nests in the ground, and you, you'd come across a bees nest
554 with the little honeycomb in it. And oh sure, if you found that that was, that was the delight, you know
555 Yeah. And you'd get the honey. And I have never seen a bee in the ground since, do you know. I'm sure
556 there are, but I haven't seen them, you know.

557 Celine: Maybe the scythe was a kinder way of cutting ...

558 Michael: Well, no, I'd say it's it was the hay. The fact that there was hay and that it was cut. You know,
559 that gave the bees tome to make their nests.

560 Celine: Right.

561 Michael: . Nowadays there's hardly a field with hay because the sheep have it ate or the cattle have it
562 ate or they've cut silage or something and there's nothing. There's nothing there, so there's no chance.

563 Celine: Right. For the older way of the hay. It was more gentle and the bees could prosper.

564 Michael: Yeah, the bees. And not only the bees, but the butterflies and the corncrake.

565 Celine: The whole lot.

566 Michael: Yeah, a machine now gone in, you know, when the when the tractor started cutting the hay.
567 you know, you had the farmers organisations telling the farmers look at start in the middle and start
568 cutting from the middle out so that the corn crakes could run with their chicks to the edge and escape
569 now. They go around the, you know, the around the outside of the field and work their way to the
570 middle. And you know, the corn crakes and being getting trapped and killed, I suppose , that way, it
571 would have, it would have happened, you know. But now there's hardly any corn crakes, although I
572 believe they're on their way back.

573 Celine: Yeah. Yeah. So in the beginning, there were more conscious not to hurt the corn crakes if they
574 started in the middle

575 Michael: I'd say it wasn't that there were more conscious, Celine. I think it was that the method of
576 farming allowed for this to happen naturally.

577 Celine: Yes, yeah, yeah.

578 Michael: You know, there was nothing fast if you if you were mowing hay you know, the scythe came
579 back and knocked the grass away from you. And then as you were coming towards it, it cut it from the
580 bottom. It was easy to cut if there was a frog or anything in the way it...

581 Celine: It had got a chance if you were taking it back

582 Michael: Yeah whereas if you had a tractor or anything like that

583 Celine: Yeah.

584 Michaael: So I think it was just the method that's good.

585 Celine: Yes, it makes sense as you describe it. It's like having your head, waving your hand over
586 something and saying "Get out of the way."

587 Michael:: Get out of the way.

588 Celine: Something's coming.. Yeah. Yeah, that's lovely.

589 Michael. So it wasn't that they intended to be ecofriendly. It was that the method that they used made
590 them ecofriendly naturally.

591 Celine: Yes.

592 Michael: And then the sequence the grass would be let grow for ages and ages. That meant then
593 insects could develop and the birds would come and you'd hear if you were in the, you'd hear the lark
594 whistling up in there and you could be looking up. I'd only once or twice I ever spotted a lark but you'd
595 hear him whistling up high. And you'd never hear that now never hears. I haven't even seen a lark. And
596 I feed the birds around my house now and everything. And there's lots of little birds coming around
597 now, like house sparrows and tree sparrows and dunnocks. I haven't seen a yellow hammer now,
598 although I did when I was a child, you know, the wagtail and you know, yeah, all the different... Pigeons
599 now are a new thing in Achill, you know, we have pigeons flying around all the time and of course, a
600 fierce amount of crows and magpies and yeah.

601 Celine: Yeah. They'd be very common. Yeah. And the cuckoo.

602 Michael: And the cuckoo. Yeah. Here. The cuckoo I heard him this year early, but he took off again.
603 About the third week in April, and I know it's the same cuckoo because he lands on the same fencing
604 post. That's how I know. Yeah. So every year for the past 5-6 years, he's come on the same fencing post
605 but other years, he he'd be hanging around for a couple of weeks. You know, this year I only seen him
606 for two days, I don't know why.

607 Celine: Yeah. Something has shifted.

608 Michael: One of the things elusive things is, I never see any young cuckoo. In all my watching and
609 everything. I never, I never. Well, I don't look for birds' nests, but if I did, I'd hope to find one that would
610 have a young cuckoo in it.

611 Celine: Hard to find, yeah.

612 Michael: And I never found a young cuckoo. I never seen a young cuckoo. Seemingly they fledge quickly
613 and off they go.

614 Celine: So this is a great place like far that wildlife with sea birds and in Achill.

615 Michael: Yeah. And everything here, there's the shady areas. And then there's the trees and the bushes
616 and the boglands and everything. Yeah, I saw a lizard the other day. Yeah. Yeah, there's one around my
617 house or my wife has seen them several times as well. You know, little lizard and a vole. I've seen a
618 little vole.

619 Celine: Right. OK.

620 Michael: You know they're like a little mouse - they have a pointy beak. Yeah, so they're, they're
621 around. Yeah. But then again, I don't disturb that part to the ground where they are, you know, and.

622 Celine: Yeah, yeah.

623 Michael: My wife would be giving off, you know, "Mow the lawn" and all that I leave... I have a wild
624 part of the garden now that I leave everything grow and I'll be cutting it now in September.

625 Celine: Yeah, that's great. That's great. Yeah. At least you're giving them a space for themselves. Yeah,
626 it's lovely. There's more awareness about that in recent times. We're being educated on these things
627 more and more.

628 Michael: There is, yeah.

629 Celine: Yeah.

630 Michael: Let's hope that you know things will develop and you know all the corn crakes will come back,
631 yeah.

632 Celine: Yeah, it would be lovely. It would be lovely. Because the pleasure we get from these things..

633 Michael: Yeah, in the in the 70s now the corn crake would have been, I'd say early 70s. And the 60s all
634 through the 60s. If you walked by any anywhere, you'd hear this (makes cracking sound) there would
635 be this crack in the middle of the night, 'tis crack, they'd be going all night all night long you know?
636 And you never knew was it the same bird or was it, you know, different ones, you know?

637 Celine: Yeah. They were very plentiful. That coincides with you talking about the tractor. Michael: The
638 system of saving hay. Yeah, and now there's no saving here because there's no cows. Now hardly
639 anyone has a cow. Sheep...they let them up the mountains, some people cut silage, some people bale
640 hay, you know. It's not doing it like they used to do it, you know. It's a pity the state wouldn't pay the
641 farmers to go back to the old way, start cutting with the scythe, shaking the hay, rolling it...

642 Celine: Well, that might come back.

643 Michael: It would be great if they did that. They'd have to pay the farmers because...unless you have a
644 lot of sheep, there's no money in it. A few sheep is more of a pastime and they cost you more than
645 you'd make on them, you know.

646 Celine: Yeah.

647 Michael: But some people, like, because they have a bit of land, they're retired or they're not doing
648 anything else, they'll say "Well, a few sheep would be alright," you know. And they keep them busy
649 busy.

650 Celine: Well, that's right. And it is a hobby for those people.

651 Michael: It is a hobby. Well, that's life.

652 Celine: And that might come. There are a lot of young people now with that kind of thinking as well.

653 Michael: Well, it might. I am sure if young people were here, if there was industry, if there was work
654 for them, whatever kind of work it would be that, you know, a sideline might be a bit of farming. There
655 might be in the form of the '40s and '50s where they learnt to use a scythe and they'd get the
656 enjoyment out of making hay and doing things the way it was done years ago.

657 Michael: Some people cut silage and some people bail hay, you know. It's not doing it like they used to
658 do it, you know. So yeah. It's a pity the state wouldn't pay the farmers to go back to the old way and
659 start cutting with the scythe and shaking the hay and rolling it and make...

660 Celine: But that might come back.

661 Michael: Well, it would be great if they if they did that. But they'd have to pay the farmers because
662 yeah, there's not much people think there's unless you have a lot of sheep, there's no money in it.

663 Celine: Yeah, that they just they deserve to be paid. Yeah, yeah.

664 Michael: A few sheep is more like a pastime, and they're the cost you more than you'd make in them,
665 you know. But some people just like because they have a bit of land, they're retired or they're not
666 doing anything else. And they said, "Well, a few sheep would be all right", you know, and keep them
667 busy. But that's life.

668 Celine: Yeah. That's right, that's right. And it is a hobby for those people. Yeah.

669 Michael: Yeah. And it is about the... But yeah, that's that's life, yeah.

670 Celine: But that may come, you know, because it's like. That there's there are a lot of young people
671 now with that kind of thinking as well.

672 Michael: It may. Yeah. Well, I'm sure you know, if young people were here, if there was industry, if
673 there was work for them, whatever kind of work it would be, you know, a sideline might be a bit of
674 farming and there might be in the form that was done in the '40s and '50s where they learn to use the
675 scythe and get the enjoyment out of making hay and doing things the way it was done years ago, you
676 know.

677 Celine: And today it probably wouldn't... it can be more flexible. They could have the job, whatever,
678 and it wouldn't be coming from survival like it was years ago.

679 Michael: It could be an evening pastime. It was survival then, in them days. You're dead right, Celine.
680 It was survival.

681 Celine: Yeah but for today, it'll be more because they want to do it and they're interested. And they're,
682 like, getting their hands into the soil and growing their own vegetables. Or there's an interest, a
683 growing interest, in that, I think.

684 Michael: Hmm. Yeah. Yeah, yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

685 Celine: Because people feel a little bit disempowered with this. You know, so much been that's gone
686 from them. And many of them would like to return to that, I think. Just a little bit.

687 Michael: Yeah.. Well, it's so easy to pick up vegetables in the supermarkets and they're so cheap, you'd
688 wonder how they could afford to sell them. And I, but I suppose massive quantities by big farmers
689 makes things cheap, you know? But people get great enjoyment how to grow on their own, you know.

690 Celine: Even if it's only a few heads of lettuce or something coming in from your own garden. That's
691 great, yeah. And the connection you have with us.

692 Michael: Yeah, they love to see you grow up on the tasting is so much different and and yeah, so the
693 Valley people were great, you know the village. Yes, they were horticulturalists, really. You know, they
694 were into vegetable handling and vegetables.

695 Celine: You know, putting in. Seeds that have been. Yeah. She's so very much. Yeah.

696 Michael: Fruits and all kinds of things. Yeah. My grandfather came from there. That's how I know about
697 it. And then came.

698 Celine: That's right. Would they have spent time in the gardens in England, I wonder? A lot of people..

699 Michael: No, he spent time in Scotland. Scotland was his place. But most of the Valley people went to
700 market gardens in England and they would have that from grown tomatoes to everything. And that
701 would be, I think, people maybe up to my age now that would be having gone there, you know.

702 Celine: Yes, yeah, yeah, that was great education as well.

703 Michael: Yeah, and. And they learned all about it. They'd be great people, you know. And I know in my
704 grandfather's case, he grew gooseberries, raspberries, strawberries, black ones. And blackcurrants.
705 Now blackcurrants, I've been threatening to grow them for years, but I haven't got around to it. But he
706 dug a hole about. 3 foottdeep and the clay that he took out of the hole he made to a high wall and
707 the gateway in and he planted all his black currants inside. In this what he called a 'haggart'. And it
708 would be about 30 foot by 30 foot. Or maybe a bit bigger and he had all these bushes in there and,
709 backcurrants bushes and a beautiful big black juicy blackcurrants, you know, and my grandmother
710 made jam and she was good. She was, she was... She was great. She used to make wine and blackberry
711 wine and dandelion wine...

712 Celine: Wow. They were ahead of their time.

713 Michael: Well, I don't think they were the only ones doing it. But they were the ones I knew doing it.
714 Yeah. And my grandfather grow melons and...

715 Celine: In Ireland? In Achill?

716 Michael: Yeah. Here in Pollagh. Yeah.. When I was a child. Yeah. Yeah. So yeah, it was. It was an
717 experience, you know, all the all the vegetables. He grew all kinds of vegetables that you wouldn't think
718 could be. Cucumbers. Yeah....

719 Celine: So they created the environment first, where they would flourish.

720 Michael: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And he, well, he knew about it. And that was it. And it was easy to. It was
721 easy for him to deal with it. One of the things that didn't work for him though was. He tried to make
722 purple daffodils. But it didn't work. And how we tried to make the was that he put the bulb into, uh, a
723 beetroot thinking that the dye might. Yeah, but it didn't work.

724 Celine: So he was doing his own little bit if research.

725 Michael: Yeah, he was. He was a gas character like that. Grafting. And different bushes or different
726 bushes to see what would take and his apple tree and an apple tree – he had two apple trees.

727 Celine: Right.

728 Michael: So I don't know what the names of the apples were, but yeah, yeah, yeah.

729 Celine: Oh yeah, there's so many species of them. that Well, that's interesting. And he definitely had
730 the flair for that.

731 Michael: Well, he came from the Valley and they were great for that. That was it. Whether that came
732 because of Lord Cavan owning the Valley House and later Mrs MacDonnell, who they used to call Lady
733 MacDonnell, so no lady, but...

734 Celine: She got the title anyway.

735 Michael: Yeah, she had the title. She got it here locally because of course, Lord Cavan was the Lord
736 that owned it. He was a good man, yeah, to my grandfather. Yeah. Yeah. The stories from him were
737 great, you know. Yeah. Even though he would be gone, maybe before my grandfather would be an
738 adult. You know, I don't know what year. Yeah. But he the stories he heard. Yeah.

739 Celine: More humane.

740 Michael: He heard he also said Nangle was a good man and he said it wasn't, you know, the bad stories
741 that came from Nangle and you know the poor house conditions that they kept orphaned children.
742 And even though they educated them, they weren't treated that well, you know. It wasn't Nangle that
743 mistreated them. It was the people he had working for him. Because Nangle was away most of the
744 time trying to raise funds. Ans when he was around, everything seemed to be great. But when he left,
745 everything seemed to go pear shaped.

746 Celine: Yes. Yes. The power. The people left in authority.

747 Michael: Yeah. Yeah. And it was the people left behind that that now this is my grandfather's version
748 of it. And I believe him 100 per cent.

749 Celine: Yes. Because Nangle had a vision for improving the place, you know. It was his idea. Some much
750 of it good, much of it good, you know.

751 Michael: Yeah, he had, he had. I was reading up on Nangle Yeah. Yeah, I was researching the history of
752 the white stone quarry recently, and I came across a piece about Nangle. And when Nangle came in
753 1838 or 1828 or something like that, I can't remember the date, I'm bad for days. But the gist. I
754 remember he said. The Achill people in Dooagh people in the area were idolaters, because every time
755 they passed the white stone, that they'd bless themselves. Now I then realised why my granny used to
756 call the white stone 'clochán na croise'... I'm not good at Irish now, but 'clochán na croise'.

757 Celine: Right. Was it to say mass maybe, was it?

758 Michael: They're clubbing a crush or something. No. What it was was that in the white stone there was
759 such amount of white stone. You could see it nearly from Achill Sound. with a woman. This huge lump
760 of a white stone. And there was a crack in the rock and the shape of a cross. And any time they seen
761 a cross, they'd bless themselves. And I knew that before I had read this about Nangle because my
762 granny died in 1979. I didn't start researching this white stone quarry until four or five years ago. And
763 I realised then what Nangle was...why they blessed themselves, why he thought they were idolaters.
764 Yes.

765 Michael: So he needed to get in religion into them, you know? And there was no church. They did build
766 a church. Sometime later in Dookinella. But the church that time was in Dooega. And they crossed
767 over the hill in Dooega, you know, there was a path over there. And walked there on Sundays. Those
768 that were fit to go, yeah.

769 Michael: And that was a that was that was deep religion, you know? And then Nangle built the church.
770 And of course, I don't know, 100 per cent... and I saw no documents yet that said Nangle said "If you

771 don't change your religion, you don't get any food." I have never seen that. But I have heard with his
772 servants, "If you don't come to the services and change your religion, you get nothing." So now is the
773 story about Nangle, is that real? That he was a good man and didn't care what religion you were, you
774 got your food? Or was it that he intended solely, or was it just his servants, that were making that rule?
775 I didn't... I can't. I have seen nothing to confirm that. Yes.

776 Celine: Yeah. So it's an open question still.

777 Michael: That's an open question, yeah, yeah.

778 Celine: Yeah, that's a good point because whoever is on the ground. Yeah.

779 Michael: Do you remember the white stone before 1975? That that big mound of white stone at the
780 end of Slievemore?

781 Celine: Just in the distance?

782 Michael: In the distance you would see it. There was no reason to go near it but you'll see it coming
783 down Gubalennaun in the car.

784 Celine: Yeah. Yeah. No, that's right. Yes.

785 Michael: A great big white mound.

786 Celine: It was part of the landscape. Yeah.

787 Michael: A company came in and started taking it away in 1975 and they shipped it off to different
788 parts of the world and the first shipment went to Trondheim in Norway and it was rejected because
789 they had brought it to a crushing mill in Westport or Castlebar. And it got mixed with limestone and it
790 couldn't be used. And then they got their own crusher in and they started taking it away and what they
791 have left now. would fit in this room here. But there was hundreds of lorry loads and lorry loads of
792 white stone being blasted and taken it away. And my father was one of the people that worked on that
793 quarry, drilling holes into the quartz, which was really hard work because quartz is very hard and

794 blasting it out and breaking it up into smaller pieces and shipping it off for crushing. And then it went
795 off to the different parts of the world. It would be used for the silicon hardening of steel and for glazing
796 of pottery and maybe for decorative works and concrete and things like. But in 1909, there was a fellow
797 came in called **Carter**. And he came in to set up the business in the quarry. And the quarry at that time,
798 I understand, was owned by the Achill Mission estate. And I believe he made a deal with the Achill
799 mission estate to buy out the quarry eventually, after working on it a couple of years. So I'm still
800 researching that part to see where they are. But in 1909. he had the best part of 100 men with picks
801 and shovels and wheelbarrows and things like that, digging the track in the railway up by the Pollagh
802 Church and over to Slievemore. They built that railway with tracks fitted in one year. And then they
803 brought in a train called the King George and another one called the Derwent, And they had two trains
804 that pulled 6 bogeys and they ferried away quartz down to Porteen harbour And there's a big wall
805 down at Porteen harbour. You might know the big wide, thick wide wall as you're going in that that
806 had a flat top about 10-12 foot wide and there was a bridge going up to it. And the trains would go
807 right on to that. And then they'd tip the bogey sideways, where they would come down on the big
808 white pier that's at the bottom. And then they'd fill it into the small boats and then they bring it out
809 to the big boats. And that then was shipped to Westport. There was a crushing mill set up in Westport
810 and then it was brought over to Liverpool and) (Staffordshire) were cheering places like that for the
811 glazing of pottery.

812 Celine: And that was...?

813 Michael: 1910 – 1916. The amount of stone that they had to take out was said to be 500 tonnes a week.

814 Celine: Wow.

815 Michael: And 500 tonnes. Well, one tonne is approximately 1 cubic yard. So in a week there was 500
816 cubic yards. But in four years there was an awful lot of stone gone and still, Celine, there was that big
817 lump of quartz that you could see from halfway up Achill left. That was taken away and used, and now
818 there wouldn't be enough to fill this room here.

819 Celine: Yeah. It's been taken out.

820 Michael: So I'm researching that at the moment.

821 Celine: Well, there's a lot of history there with the railway track.

822 Michael: Yeah. And the same, the same company had the quarry Cloghore. They had a rail line up there
823 as well and they had six bogeys on that, but there was no engines. They brought the bogies uphill to
824 the quarry, pulled by horses and they just shunted them down to the pier. And the boats would take
825 the quartz away from the pier. Yeah. So that ended in 1914, kind of more or less ended it. And because
826 the war and submarines were sinking ships off the West Coast of Ireland that time, and they'd have to
827 go either around the south or the north in both places where dangerous. Up off Donegal or down off
828 Cork and Kerry.. They were dangerous spots so it's it stopped the the quarry from being very active at
829 that time.

830 Celine; Right. Very industrious, weren't there?

831 Michael: So the quarry was sold. It was sold in 1921 to an English company. Thomas Ward and
832 Company. And I sent...they're still there. I checked out that Thomas Ward was still there. So I checked
833 out with Thomas Ward to see because they bought the engines. And I know where one engine went.
834 It went to Finchley in London after the war. They were building a housing estate that was so large that
835 needed a train to ferry the stuff around the housing estate. But the other one, the Derwent, I never
836 knew where that one went to. So I wrote Thomas Ward and asked, an e-mail, and I asked them if they
837 had any information at all of anything. I didn't suspect that they had, but I thought maybe they might.
838 You know. I got a letter back from Rio Tinto. An e-mail from the managing director for Rio Tinto, the
839 biggest mining company in the world. And he had said that they had no information on it and if there
840 was information, it was probably in the archives in London.

841 Celine: Right.

842 Michael: Yeah, they bought Thomas C Ward and company. Rio Tinto did. So that's how I got the answer
843 back from them. Yeah, yeah. So I thought it was nice of them to even answer a small person inquiring
844 about this single little old engine on a 2 foot track, you know? Yeah.

845 Celine: Yes Good on them.. And to point you give you a pointer where to go look like to.

846 Michael: Yeah. So I'm getting help from the Irish Railway Society at the moment. They're researching
847 stuff for me. And I go to the archives in Dublin and that's like a magnet for me because once you go in
848 there, it can take you anywhere. You know, you're reading this piece of information and it leads you
849 off into something else. So it's really interesting, but it closed for COVID and I haven't gone back. But
850 this year, I'll be going back after the summer holidays, I'll be getting in there again and going back and
851 finishing my research on the quarry.

852 Celine: Yes. Lovely. Well done. Well done. Yeah, your, your interest is in it enough to follow it up like
853 that which is great.

854 Michael: Well, there was a lot of men working on it and it kept them kept them going. I have a figure
855 where I discovered that a man was paid 10 and six a week. That's ten shillings and sixpence for his
856 week's work.

857 Celine: And I wonder how did that relate to what it cost to live?

858 Michael: Today it would be classed as a fairly good wage at the time, especially for around here, and
859 especially that there was so many men. So when the blast the quartz, the men had boxes. There were
860 there were measuring boxes. There were cubic yard which was a cubic tonne. And they had no bottom
861 in this box. It was just sides and handles. And men could club together that got paid by piece work. So
862 there was some of them would have made quite a bit of money and some would have made a week's
863 wage depending on what they were doing. So they broke the stone up, they put it into these boxes
864 until it was levelled to the top. Then the foreman would come along and he'd write that in that they
865 had done their cubic metre and then they just lift the box out and all the stones will stay on the ground

866 and they just move it a couple of feet and start again. And that way then it was ready then to get
867 loaded up onto the bogeys and get to porteen, then taken to Westport for to the crushing and then
868 shipped off, yeah.

869 Celine: Yes. Right. So they had their own methods, yeah. Inventive weren't. they?

870 Michael: They are, yeah. And then up in upper Achill, they were doing the same thing in, but there was
871 one thing up in Cloghmore that wasn't anywhere else and that was soap stone. Now soapstone is used
872 for talcum powder I had a sample of that tested through my uncle in America back in 1963 and he said
873 there was asbestos in it and in asbestos in talcum powder would be deadly, you know. And so we never
874 thought again about it. But it was used at that time by the Irish Mineral Company that owned the
875 quarries. And they were shipping it off. And only a couple of weeks ago, I was reading up and I
876 discovered that soap stone allowed the furnaces to be burned at a lower temperature to get the same
877 effect. So they were saving money by burning soapstone. And the furnaces were... it was causing it to
878 be... everything to work at a lower temperature, which saved on fuel. Now, I believe that it wasn't used
879 for talcum powder at all, but it was used for the furnaces. So that I have to research.

880 Celine: God, there's no end to what you could discover.

881 Michael: Yeah, yeah. It's very hard to research it because the man called Carter that set up this business
882 was known by 'Lawrence Carter', 'William Carter', Wilfred Carter and. He had a load of names and it
883 was discovered that in 1908 he was declared a bankrupt in England. I discovered that. And here he
884 was borrowing money and building and business and he was going to buy the business, I believe off
885 the Achill Mission Commission estate. I think they were the shareholders.

886 Celine: Oh.

887 Michael: But at the same time, there was an English MP who was a doctor born in Limerick. Went to
888 Queens University, went to Cork. Went to London with his business but then came back to here and
889 was an MP for here. And he owned the quarry in Dooega.

890 Celine: OK.

891 Michael: And Carter and himself clubbed together. And that's how Carter got to be up there. Yeah, I'm
892 still researching that. It's still in its infancy. Yeah. Yeah.

893 Celine: It's wonderful. Yeah. Like, this is news to me. A lot of it That detail of it. I had heard about the
894 railway and I knew it existed. But you have a lot more details about it which is due to your research,
895 no doubt. And your patience with that.

896 Michael: Yeah, yeah, yeah. But you know, people were delighted with it and, you know, it must have
897 been some sight to see a steam engine coming down the hill in Pollagh and crossing over in front of
898 the Achill Head Hotel, puffing up smoke and you know, And the engine drivers, turned out to be local
899 in the end they initially the engine driver that brought in was a man called Curly who got the sack from
900 Great Western railroads for causing too many accidents on the railroads. But Carter thought that he
901 would be a good man for his railroads. And sure, there was nothing but accidents. He was derailing
902 trains and they had an awful problem with him. So the more or less paid him off and...

903 Celine: Where there any casualties with men or...?

904 Michael: My granny's brother got killed on the railway. My grandfather said 'no', he Castlebar. He died
905 as a result of an accident and he died on his way to Castlebar.

906 Celine: The accident occurred on the way to the railway.

907 Michael: Yeah, there was. There was another accident where a young lad from Dooagh got his legs
908 cut off playing on the bogies and the bogies ran together and chopped his legs off. That went to court
909 in Dublin High Court. And the judge said that the children had no right to be there, that they were
910 there for no good and the case was thrown out. So that was the way it was, you know. Safety was not
911 a thing, not even when I went to England first. White helmets weren't... You didn't have them. The
912 only one you see going wrong with white helmet was the boss, you know. And then the rules came in
913 that everyone had to have a helmet. So the boss wore the white helmet and everyone else wore a

914 different colour helmet. Yeah. Now that bosses wear black helmets on some jobs, and because there's
915 so many white helmets. Things change. Even the helmets. Yeah, it's gas.

916 Celine: So yeah. So I've heard about your book that you brought out yourself, a book of poetry.

917 Michael: Oh, yeah, yeah. "Taking Stock". I wrote that book because it was a request by my daughter
918 before she died. She died as a result of very serious cancer called triple negative that the same one in
919 eight people has. One in eight cancers is triple . negative. Not everybody dies from it, because if they
920 find a cell of the triple negative cancer somewhere, or a tumour that's in a place that can be operated
921 on, they can. remove it safely. And as long as there's no other rogue cells here and there throughout
922 the body in places that they can't get at, then you have a great chance of survival- if it's got in time.
923 of course, too. That's the other thing and in my daughter's case, it was obviously too late. It had spread
924 to her lungs. It went to her brain,, her spinal column, her liver. And she just had no chance. And during
925 the time that she was her in dying days, we'll say, she kept her mind right up to within hours of her
926 death. She was able to look at her laptop and everything, even though she didn't have the strength
927 often to just press a button.. She was there. The mind was alert. She said to me "Look, Dad, there's
928 this girl Naoise Sennett Nice, research student with a PhD student in Dublin University Bellfield
929 Working through Saint Vincent's hospital had discovered a method of killing the cancer - the triple
930 negative cancer. And they were talking about going to clinical trials. And when I said to her "Catherine,
931 we'll get you on the clinical trials." And she said "You won't." And I said "We will, Catherine". And she
932 says "No, you won't." And I said "Why are you saying that? And she said "Because I won't be around
933 by the time clinical trials come up. We were kind of in denial. We knew that that was possible, but we
934 had hope, right? So I said, yeah, she said, "You know what you'll do?" She says "Why don't you write
935 a book of poetry? You're not bad at writing bits. Why don't you write a book of poetry and donate the
936 proceeds to Naoise Sennet's research?" I said I would. And shortly after that then she died. And I never
937 thought more about it for about a year. And then I remembered that I had promised her this. I called
938 up Naoise Sennet. She said she'd have to talk to her boss, which is Professor John Crown. He's still

939 there in charge. And Professor Joe Duffy and they're still doing the research for Cancer Clinical Research
940 Trust, CCRT. It's not cancer research. It's specifically for triple negative, right, But they are finding things
941 that are beneficial to all other t cancers and other ailments as they're going on and they're associated
942 with other universities and hospitals around the world. So they said no problem. You can write the
943 book of poetry. And I started writing. I had six pieces written from years and years ago. The one about
944 the tattie hokers that I wrote was the year after I came back from Scotland. I was 15 when when I
945 wrote it.

946 Celine: Really? Yeah.

947 Michael: And I had won about Sean Kilbane's tractor and that was 1961. A year later and the road that
948 leads to Keem, another one I had that done. And a few more and. then I started writing in February
949 2018 and I had the book launched in Achill head Hotel And the end of July 2018 and there was more
950 than 500 people came in. It was the worst night you could imagine -storm, heavy rain, wind. They
951 couldn't get in. That hotel was full - bar foyer. The room we were in choco bloc. If they got to the door
952 they buy a book and away they went. And the book is still selling to this day still selling not as fast
953 because Achill people you know have their house full of the books. But the strangers coming in are
954 buying books when they see something. Maybe they want to have a look at it.. So all in all, up to now
955 I have to get this confirmed with CCRT, but I believe I have sent or donated to them from the book, the
956 best part of 20,000 and from donations the best part of 21,000. So all in all, I have managed to secure
957 that. I t's a small amount of money when you see what other people can raise in a function doing
958 something else but...

959 Celine: Because it's a huge amount of money for one person.

960 Michael: But it's a huge amount of money for me, for the book. And I enjoyed reading them myself. I
961 go back and I say, "Do I really write that now?" do you know. You go back. Because I don't learn my
962 own stuff, you know? I mean, I don't. But I'll read it out occasionally if I'm asked to, I'll do it, you know.

963 Celine

964 Yes. Yes, yes. Yes. And because you're a native, you feel into what's happening, the events that you're
965 describing and the poetry.

966 Michael: Yeah. Well, the name of the book is called taking stock. And it's all about taking stock of what
967 happens here, what happens there, cutting the grass, the road to Keem, explaining about people, Jamo
968 (?) the Weaver, I was explaining about. He was my granny's brother, do you know? Things like that.

969 Celine: What you passed on the way, on the road.

970 Michael: What you passed. It's all about what I see and people you know - the Routey e (sp?). I fished
971 for a couple of years with his son, deep sea fishing on a trawler and the kind they were was their house
972 was open day and night. It didn't matter if they came up from the pier at six in the morning or six o'
973 clock at night, you could go in. If there weren't there, you could make your own tea. Maggie was there
974 to help you out. rO there was a bed for you if you were caught if there was people going to Clare Island
975 and there were couldn't get out because of bad weather. Maggie put them up. And in the poem with
976 tells you they're the way they were. And it just the truth of the life that they were.

977 Celine: Yeah. Yes, yes, wonderful. Well done on that. That's a great accomplishment.

978 Michael: Maggie used to knit fisherman's knit. I don't know whether she was telling me a little fib or
979 not when she was saying... But if a splash of a wave comes up on the fisherman's knit, it doesn't wet
980 through, it flows off again. It's like a waterproof iron knit sweater, that kind of thing. So she knitted one
981 of those for me. I didn't appreciate it. I don't know where it is, you know.

982 Celine: Yes. Yeah. And it, I think, I think that is true like all the island men used to wear those kind of
983 sweaters before oil skins came into fashion.

984 Michael: Yeah. Yeah. And she knitted for the big socks for the waders, you know, and big, thick woollen
985 socks. They were lovely. Your feet hardly ever sweated them. And they were brilliant. And she knitted

986 them for every fisherman that was up in Cloghmore pier. Talk about a brilliant family. . I just couldn't
987 say enough about them.

988 Celine: That's wonderful. Yeah. So you have a lot of good memories of your life in Achill and no regrets
989 for returning back from England.

990 Michael:. None. None. It's those memories that brought me back from England. And I was like,quite
991 happy in England. You know, I I worked mainly in country areas, although I did work in London. It wasn't
992 my scene.

993 Celine: Yeah.

994 Michael: But in country areas, yeah, especially around the power stations, you met the local people,
995 you know. And then there was the local dances that they had all the sets and form dancing and you
996 know that was interesting and I got to know an awful lot of people in different villages and around.
997 Yorkshire and Derbyshire in England, you know. Yeah. Yeah. And that was a big area for power stations
998 and Achill people as well. So yeah, so I spent the best part of 10 years in England and then I came back
999 to Dublin and I got a job in Dublin with John Sisk (sp) in their office and I wasn't long in that until my
1000 uncle wanted to set up an industry here in this island - producing quartz crystals for the telephone
1001 and communications equipment and things like that. So we're one of twelve companies in the world.
1002 We had the raw material here in Achill, the white stone at the time in 1972-73 before it was taken
1003 away. And then he died before it actually opened. But the orders that we had when he died were
1004 £760,000 worth of orders, a colossal amount of money back in 1973 and 74. Yeah, pounds, pounds we
1005 had then - punts

1006 Celine: Pounds. Yes, yes.

1007 Michael: So that was a shame. But the company did keep going. A German company came in and took
1008 over, not took over our business in a sense with a new company. They took our equipment and set up
1009 in Bunacurry and they kept going for 10 years. And what they did was the same work as what we did.

1010 They didn't grow the quartz. We grew it from start to finish. We had the technique for growing it from
1011 Western Electric in the United States. We did it under licence from them and they had common patent
1012 rights with General Electric in England so they granted us the licence and we grew the quartz and then
1013 we cut it into little crystals like shirt buttons, but way thinner. You're talking about thousandth of an
1014 inch. Yeah, two or three thousandths of an inch thick. We'd gold plate it, put cables on it and then ship
1015 it off. Sometimes we didn't need to gold plate them that the company would sell to would put the gold
1016 plate on. The Germans then took over that part of the business worked for 10 years in Bunacurry and
1017 they sold everything to their own company in Germany - at cost where there was no profit for here
1018 and the German company called KVG - still in existence. Sold it on the open market for the market
1019 prices and they made a lot of money. I don't want to talk anymore about it because it's very sore the
1020 way things transpired between the transition between Achill Quartz and the German operation.
1021 There's a book on that that I may or may not write (laughs). It might be best, might be best leave
1022 sleeping dogs lie well.

1023 Celine: Well, the truth is that you know, when you look back from years later, you know whatever is
1024 going on there...

1025 Michael: It's as fresh in my mind now as it was then.

1026 Celine: Yeah, I'd be encouraging you to, with your ability to research

1027 Michael: Yeah, a lot. People say that to me, but there was things transpired that, I think, should be let
1028 lie.

1029 Celine: Because it's upsetting.

1030 Michael: Very upsetting:

1031 Celine: And it's still there. So my recommendation is in the writing or in the research. It moves it on,
1032 you know it's something different will emerge afterwards. It's like because it's still there, it needs to be
1033 written. Perhaps I'd invite you to explore it anyway.

1034 Michael: Maybe when maybe when all concerned are no longer alive. The only thing about that is that.
1035 To say, "Oh, you made it up." Because of the circumstances, Celine, I have to tell you this, it's not a
1036 good thing to put out.

1037 Celine: That's your choice.

1038 Michael: It would be bad of me to say the things that I know happened. Because it would not benefit
1039 me, but they would blacken in the name of other people and I am not going to black in anybody's
1040 name. Not Achill people now I have to say that no Achill people were involved in this and any help that
1041 did come from Achill people was absolutely 100% genuine..

1042 Celine: I'm sorry that you had that experience in your life because. The other stories that you had to
1043 share are, you know, and that's the cruelty of that, that world of economics and how things get
1044 handled, you know, get taken out of people's hands and it gets out of balance, and that's unfortunate
1045 when these things do happen. So yeah, it's your call and you're at the at the front line of that
1046 experience.

1047 Michael: Yeah and you become cynical when you see what the people that are supposed to help you
1048 do behind your back.

1049 Celine: They have two faces.

1050 Michael: Oh, absolutely. And other things I won't say. So if you don't mind, Celine, on this one, we'll
1051 park it up.

1052 Celine: Yeah, we can park it up. That that's for another discussion. Different time maybe. But that's
1053 part of...

1054 Michael: Maybe a different time, yeah. I probably need quite a lot of legal advice about what I'd say
1055 and what I could say. But none of it would be a lie, I can tell you. if I were to tell the truth, none of it
1056 would be a lie. Not one piece.

1057 Celine: Well, you were there. Yeah.

1058 Michael: And to this day I have quite a bit of evidence. But I'm not... that's it. End of story now on that
1059 one. So when the factory ended and closed, my uncle died before it actually opened. And that put kind
1060 of more or less pay to the major development and he had plans for several factories coming in, the
1061 Bunacurry units being one of them., In fact, when we were bringing in the machinery from America, I
1062 had identified because there was a member of the co-op that was there, I had identified that area as
1063 a storage point for machinery that was coming in and we couldn't because the building was dilapidated
1064 a bit.

1065 We had to go to Connemara to put it in a place called Beana burntha churnta (ph), a company that was
1066 not in existence but had a name and had a big warehouse. And we brought in six 40 foot containers
1067 full of equipment for several factories of all kinds. Because my uncle had this idea that to plant one
1068 factory was like planting on one tree. It was doomed to failure. But if you plan to a forest, you're
1069 guaranteed success. And he had this idea and the powers that be at that time when he was alive
1070 agreed. And they agreed that they'd look at developing the industrial estate in Bunnacurry. And when
1071 the factory closed in Dooega, that's when the German went with his business – into that. So it
1072 benefited Achill people for 10 years. I can't knock that. There was 10 years wages there, including my
1073 brother-in-law. He worked in it there. He was a key man because he knew the business. Yeah.

1074 Celine: Yes. Yes.

1075 Michael: In fact, he had the secrets from Western Electric and those key of things were so gaurded
1076 because there was only 12 companies in the world. We were one of them. There's now only 11. Yes.
1077 So that's that kept people going and industry, but it brought me here from Dublin,

1078 Celine: Right. Yes. It was a unique situation.

1079 Michael: And I said. What could I do here? And I was thinking about all the people that wanted
1080 extensions and or saying if I had known that nobody here we, there's the few people that were

1081 available, you know, to do the work. There was so much work. And so I thought well. You know, I'll set
1082 up a business and I did and I used to do the drawings for the houses and they'd get the planning
1083 permission. And they might build the house and paint it if necessary turnkey it they wanted but. I'd do
1084 whatever part they wanted and that was it, but that kept me going for years. Dookinella was the
1085 farthest I worked. I was 3 miles from me. Dooagh was one mile. Dookinella and I never needed to go
1086 any further than that ever, and I never looked for a job. Never asked anyone to give me a job. Never.
1087 They came to me and said "Will you do this or that?" I always felt that the other tradesmen and another
1088 but were better than me, you know? And I never thought that I was better than anyone else, put it
1089 that way. But there are mighty tradesmen in Achill. They're brilliant. Yes. And even the ones that just
1090 pick it up, that never served their time doing anything. They're absolutely the certified tradesmen
1091 behind.

1092 Celin: Yeah, there's a lot of talents. Yeah, there's the naturals. Yes.

1093 Michael: That really class, yeah. Yeah. So yeah, and I enjoyed that work really well, but I had one thing
1094 all the time. I thought I'd love to be a teacher, you see? So I had... I don't know if you say the misfortune
1095 or the fortune to tell, uh, a fellow from Castlebar who was a teacher. He used to do videos of the bands
1096 and when we set up at Pollagh pipe bands, he came down to do the video and I said to him: "I said
1097 "What do you do?" "I'm a teacher". I said "I'd love to have been a teacher. You know, I don't work now.
1098 I said "I like what I'm doing",. I said, but I don't love it, you know? And he said "Well, he said "We have
1099 a vacancy," he says "In Saint Gerard's College in Castlebar and it's for an assistant supervisor teacher.
1100 If you know when a teacher is out and you might look after the class, you're not expected to teach
1101 them anything or anything. So I was 15 years there.

1102 Celine: Were you? Really? Oh, that's wonderful. You had a taste of it.

1103 Michael: Yeah. So that's so one day a local teacher came in. He was just starting with St Gerard's. And
1104 I came in into the canteen and made the tea and everything I said.

1105 Oh, I said hello and he says hello, he says. What are you doing here? I said I like him. I said "I'm teaching
1106 here" and he said, you know, I said I am. Yeah. He said, what are you teaching? I said "I'm teaching.
1107 Maths, physics, chemistry." And he said he asked the fellow beside him a teacher "Is that right?"and
1108 he answers. "Yeah, it is." But it wasn't. I was lying, but yeah, I I pulled a fast one. But yeah, I was there.
1109 It was great.

1110 Celine

1111 Yeah, yeah. Just being in the environment of education probably did something for you,
1112 Michael: I'm not sure now that that was the job for me. I think the building was the one in the end
1113 because you know, it's hard to control students and things like that, you know, and especially at that
1114 age second level, you know, they're coming in ten, twelve years of age, up to fifteen, sixteen, game for
1115 anything. But I got on really well with them. They had a great system and Saint Gerard's College for
1116 control and there was a sanction system if they if they did something wrong, they were sanctioned. In
1117 other words, the teacher had to write out a sheet of paper. Bring it into the office. If there was two,
1118 that was a heavier sanction. And if they got the third one, they were brought in on Saturday for
1119 detention. And their parents had to be brought in and everything. So there was no messing and I was
1120 there for many years, seven hundred and forty kids, , mainly on average for the years that I was
1121 there. And never, never a problem I've never seen.

1122 Celine: Yeah. That's wonderful. Yeah. So you had that experience as well. You haven't had a great
1123 variety of experiences. in all your, you know, different work.

1124 Michael: Yeah, that was, yeah. Fair play to Saint Gerard's College that. Yeah, it was just to look after
1125 kids. Yeah, it was great. Yeah. Sometimes it would be given their papers to do for, you know, their
1126 homework or something. I'd more or less just supervised and we all so I was wrong one day and I had
1127 a look and I could see. One of the boys had written besides this question "I cannot answer this

1128 question.” And I went over to the other fella and the other fella has written beside it and “I can't answer
1129 it either. “ So there was definitely no copying going on, you know.

1130 Celine: Laughs. Oh that's a good one.

1131 Michael: That's it. That kept me going. The building kept me going and that until I retired.

1132 Celine: Lovely, yeah. So now you're enjoying the life of Riley and do what you want to do or. Whatever.

1133 Michael: Yeah, except I'm an awful lot older and I'm not as supple as I was. And the wife don't want
1134 me to be climbing ladders anymore, and I'd have to do it quietly and secretly. But yeah, I'd. I'd be. I'd
1135 keep myself busy all the time, yeah.

1136 Celine: The secret worker.

1137 Michael: I do a bit of gardening now that I've planted potatoes this year. The old tatties.
1138 Some vegetables. And cutting the turf. Yeah, those things. Mind you, it's not very eco friendly now to
1139 be cutting turf, you know. But that's what people did. You know, I wrote a poem that's not in the book
1140 called “The Old Bog Rd.”

1141 Celine: That's right. Yeah, this little job. You won't run of little jobs, yeah. No, no. I'm not.

1142 Michael: And the Dooagh day group, the people that does all the benefit, work around Dooagh putting
1143 up the seats and things like that. They have a walk called “the loop.” The walk loop. Have you? Did you
1144 see the poem?

1145 Celine That's right. I have walked with myself. Yeah, yeah.

1146 Michael: Have you? There's a lot of people look at the sign and they say “Oh, that's about when we
1147 know all that already” do you know “That's for visitors.” But if you look down the bottom, you'll see
1148 the poem called “The Bog Road”. And it's written in there about the bog road. So they thought it was
1149 very good. Yeah. And then they have pieces of, you know, “I come from hands of Coach and her and I

1150 make it something. Sally wander out and in and out and one Becker down the valley” and all that from
1151 that. The Tennyson I think it is. Yeah, he's there. They have little bits of that poem around the world.

1152 Celine: Right. Just interesting. Yeah. Yeah, it adds to the walk to have a little stop here and there and
1153 take a moment and look around.

1154 Michael: So I'm very proud of that, that the locals, my neighbours would think it worthy to put up the
1155 sign and put up my poem on it. Yeah, it's not one that's in the book.

1156 Celine: Not yet anyway, For the next book.

1157 Michael: It's not in the book. Yeah. Well, the next book. Yeah. Yeah. I have about 30 written, right.
1158 Yeah. So half thinking of getting published. But then there's other poems that I'd like to write as well
1159 and I think if I wrote them, I might think I had enough done. But writing in poems. When did I write
1160 the last one? Well, at Christmas. I wrote one for the pipers for the do that they had in Achill Sound And
1161 I was asked.

1162 Celine: Right. OK.

1163 Michael: And I wrote that that would be the last one and. I'm not sure you know.

1164 Celine: When it comes, it comes.

1165 Michael: Yeah, it's a kind of a thing that you could, I could write a poem in a couple hours. Or
1166 sometimes over a few days change in lines here and there and yeah. But generally the poem would be
1167 finished by me in a week. That's why they're not that great. I think they're not great, but a lot of people
1168 love them.

1169 Celine: Yeah, but it it's brewing all your life probably - it could be brewing. You know, in the back of
1170 your head somewhere that you don't realise words are going to come and then eventually it happens
1171 in a couple of days or in a week.

1172 Michael: But then you know that that introduced me, you know, as 'Michael O'Donnell local poet.' I
1173 was a local builder until three or four years ago. I don't consider myself a poet, even though I write this
1174 stuff.

1175 Celine: It's one of your one of your many...

1176 Michael: It's just one thing that I can do, you know. And I don't see myself as a poet, although I have
1177 written the best part to 50 or 60 poems that people love. People tell me it's really the older ones. They
1178 love them and the younger ones keep asking me to read them. So maybe there is something in them
1179 that I personally think is not good. But you know...

1180 Celine: You know, see if. Yeah but I think that's a common thing among poets this It comes through
1181 them. And then it's done and it it's not meant to be the same thing for them as it is for the reader. But
1182 you reach the reader because your heart was in whatever you said at the time and that's what you
1183 touch. hen somebody reads it, that's what sparks off for them.

1184 Michael: Maybe yeah. Yeah. I have put so much on the fire. It's almost like recording history. Yeah, the
1185 stories about people you know and what they do and what they did and things that were done from
1186 cutting the turf to, you know, shore arranging (sp) and things like that, you know?

1187 Celine: And you stir up memories for them. for them. And then they remember their time with their
1188 family doing something similar.

1189 Michael: That's the 'taking stock'. So yeah, so that's a new title that I just acquired and I get a great
1190 kick out of it because I still don't consider myself a poet. (laughs).That's the nice thing about it.

1191 Celine: Well, to be honest, when I put your name into my phone recently I put 'poet' after it.

1192 Michael: Well, there you are now. Yeah. Well, that's what most people are doing now because they
1193 know me more now for the poems than my building. They wouldn't say he was a Michael O'Donnell
1194 great builder. But 'Michael O' Donnell, great poet sounds an awful lot better.

1195 Celine: Yes, it is very good. I think that's a good note to end on Michael. The poet is thriving now and
1196 the poet has always been there, but is getting an outlet now and you're putting good use to it.

1197 Michael: Yeah. I love collecting old stories too, you know. Yeah.

1198 Celine: Yes.

1199 Michael: Yeah, they're really interesting. There may be a small amount of truth in them, But, you know,
1200 they get legs longer and oftener they're told by different people passing on through the generations,
1201 they get more legs and more interesting and that's the kind of thing. Yeah.

1202 Celine: And there's enough truth in it just to hold your interest. Yeah. So I think there are a lot of stories
1203 like that everywhere. And that's what keeps the fun in it, figuring it out, how much is true. And not
1204 getting too bogged down about it and just enjoying the entertainment of it and.

1205 Michael: And I get a I get a bit of enjoyment too when I finish a poem. And I feel that I have captured
1206 what the essence of the story that I'm trying to put across. And I have that. I feel happy about that.
1207 But I never think they're great and if I didn't think they were great, the first thing is put them in the
1208 fire in case I'm influenced, in case I go back say 'That was a great line.' And I've often thought why did
1209 I burn it? And then I thought 'No'. think something new.

1210 Celine: But, you know, when you say that you don't think they're great, but that's a judgement from
1211 you like. Like like every poem is an expression of something and one person, what's great to one is not
1212 great to somebody else and so it changes depending on the humour of them.

1213 Michael: I have to admit, though that I'm a lover of poetry that rhymes.

1214 Celine: Right. Because I lyrical musical.

1215 Michael: This this prose poetry. While it's easy, I feel it easy to write. It doesn't challenge me like.
1216 Finding words that rhyme with words that you're trying to put out in a poem and anything that rhymes

1217 is easier to remember, and you leave nothing out. You leave no line out, because if you do, you miss
1218 the poem. So I love rhyme poetry. I just love it.

1219 Celine: It's more like a song than as well because it rolls into one another and it's balanced and there's
1220 a rhythm, a rhythm to it. Yeah. This. Yeah. . That comes with it, which makes it enjoyable to listen to as
1221 well.

1222 Michael: Did you know Roddy Gallagher? Valley House?

1223 Celine: Roddy, is that Roger's brother or

1224 Michael: Pat's brother. He was good. He was a musician, you know. Yes, he said to me. He said. 'When
1225 I build my house ' he said...he started building the house along the lake, there beside the Valley House,
1226 you know. He says 'When I built my house' he said, 'I want you to come down' and he said 'I'm going
1227 to put ears to some of the tunes and some of the poems that you have written.' He said, 'I want to do
1228 that. Some of them just itching for music and I said I do that 'No problem at all, Roddy.' Yeah. The poor
1229 man never got around to finishing his house. Sadly, he died. But there's other people who have come
1230 to me since saying then they intend to do it. So let's see. Yeah, that's it.

1231 Celine: Lovely. So that's wonderful. Yeah. So they continue to get more life...

1232 Michael: Yeah, get a new, get a new lease of life. Yeah, yeah.

1233 Celine: Yeah. Yeah, it's like the writing of the words is one stage and then when the music and that is
1234 joined. It's lovely.

1235 Michael: Yeah. And what I didn't tell you though, was that the the poem about the Tattie hokers, TG
1236 Cathar and Crescendo Television from Channel 4 in England came together and made a documentary.

1237 Celine: Right.

1238 Michael: Based on that poem - the tattie hokers. But they didn't call it the tattie hokers. They called it
1239 'Ar Dover féin', and it starts off with Michael Murphy, who used to read the RTE News, saying that a

1240 container had come in in Dover with 21 Chinese dead people. You might remember that yes. And said
1241 this was our own Dover, our Dover féin..

1242 Celine: Right.

1243 Michael: And then it goes on to take a verse and explain all about it and they had a lady. I believe she
1244 came from 'Cross Maline' (sp) as she was an actress and she sang a verse of the song and then they
1245 explained all about it and they had the likes of Thomas Johnson and different people talk about it. And
1246 then then they take the next verse and explain all about that. Now that was a documentary and it was
1247 shown in our on TG Cathar for at least 20 years. It could be shown two or three times a year or more.
1248 Yeah, especially in the summer. Yeah. So I got a copy of that from a person that worked inside in TG
1249 Cathar., I was doing a first aid course. I was a first aid instructor and I was instructing a course for them.
1250 And I heard that they were working in Radio Na Gaeltachta and I said 'Could you could get a copy for
1251 me?

1252 Celine: Lovely. Lovely. Yeah. So that was a great. Yeah. So you never know, like, once you write it and
1253 let it off. Yeah, you never know where it might land.

1254 Michael: Yeah, but it didn't...it was entered for a competition, but it didn't get anywhere so.

1255 Celine: But it's probably reaching the ones it's meant to reach. You know, it's like those kind of
1256 programmes are powerful, yeah. And they.

1257 Michael: Well, they're always there, you know. And yeah, they come out. Yeah.

1258 Celine: Yeah, yeah. And recently I've noticed that they're showing a lot of the older. programmes again
1259 from you and people are interested, you know, even 'Reeling back the years' and 'The way we were'
1260 and programmes ourselves like in the 60s and 70s and it's of interest, it's like we're looking at a different
1261 species of people. Things have changed quite a lot in some areas.

1262 Michael: Yeah. Yeah, absolutely, yeah. Yeah, I was watching a a programme the other night on
1263 television. Ah, a couple of weeks ago. And there was a car like the car. I had an Austin A40 my first car,

1264 and how we started it, it was with the starting handle. So you had this crank handle and you went
1265 around the front when you wound the handle up and...

1266 Celine: Yeah, yeah. So that was. That was then, yeah. There would be people that definitely their
1267 grandchildren would be laughing at that now.

1268 Michael: Talking about the starting handle in 1963 , we'll end on this one, when they were up looking
1269 at the soapstone, yes, we didn't know whether it was of value or not value. But my uncle, being an
1270 industrialist, thought 'If it's valuable, we'll set up an industry making talcum powder. If it's not valuable,
1271 we'll forget about it.' So I said to him, 'Well, what if somebody comes along in the meantime? If they
1272 hear we're doing this, they might stake a claim and all that.' So what did we decide but to stake a claim
1273 there and then. So there was five of us in the car. My aunts and my uncle in laws and my uncle and
1274 me. And we signed the names, right? And my name was the first name. and then my aunt and then
1275 and we were staking the claim. And then he's seen where it goes. We had a small whiskey bottle in the
1276 back of the car and we put the thought into the whiskey bottle. Screwed the cork back in it. I got the
1277 starting handle. This is what reminds me of the starting handle. I dug a hole into the soap stone on top
1278 of the the cove, you know where at the Atlantic Drive where the crane is the metal crane. Where the
1279 ship came in over that cove. Dug a hole into the bank and pushed in the bottle and bagged up the
1280 soapstone. You see, soapstone is so soft that you could rub it and make it hard and yeah, yeah and
1281 Tom Johnson calls it 'cnóch tarbh' 'or something 'bulls rock. 'Because if you rub it, you could make the
1282 nose rounder like a bull's nose and that's why he called it. But it's actually soapstone. So I put it in,
1283 banked it in. I went away three weeks later or a month later, I got the message back from the United
1284 States full of asbestos. Can't be used for talcum powder and I was thinking that the quarry when it was
1285 being used and there were taking it away during the quartz time, that it was used for talcom powder.
1286 And I discovered since that it wasn't, but anyway and never thought a thing about it ever again until
1287 last January, the phone rang. And it was this fellow called Brian MacDonnell. Do you know him? He's
1288 a builder. He may have even built this house because he's a really good friend of Joe.

1289 Celine: Joe, is it? Yeah, right.

1290 Michael: So he was passing by the bottle and he thought was a funny place Someone must have been
1291 drinking here, you know. And then he looked at the bottle again and he saw what he thought was a
1292 note in it. So he took it out and opened it up and read the note and he saw my name on it and he
1293 thought. 'Well, my wife knows Michael O' Donnell. She's in charge of the Mayo Childcare Association
1294 for Mayo County Council and I know her for about 15 - 20 years or close on that anyway, I think. And
1295 she said maybe it is. I have she, he said he asked Joe Faidi and then his friend if he knew me and Joe
1296 said he did. And so. The wife said to him 'Well, he might be Michael O'Donnell. That was the first aid
1297 so he called me up. And he said 'Are you Michael O' Donnell?' I said I am, he said, 'Do you do first aid?
1298 I said 'I do.' He said, 'Do you know anything about her note in a bottle? I said 'I do'. I said, 'Where did
1299 it come in?' I thought that erosion had taken it away and that it had fell down into the cove. And I was
1300 amazed that it hadn't broken and I was saying 'Oh, where did it come in?' I said . 'In Cloghmore.' And I
1301 said 'Ah, very good. So he said. 'I want to meet you and I said fine. And we met in Ted Lavelle's and we
1302 had lunch and he brought his dad with him. He was an old man. I said, 'Where did you find it? He said.'
1303 I found it on the bank up at the top.' And I told him the story about it and he said he might. He said
1304 'Michael, give me that beer mat there and a pen. And I said take that note away there and I sign my
1305 signature and it's the same one that was on the thing to prove that it was me, you know.' And he said
1306 'He said he's going to frame it and he's going to put it up in his sitting room. Because I was, we were
1307 staking our claim for the soapstone. That's the daft thing, you know.

1308 Celine: Yeah. And wonderful like to.

1309 Michael: But everybody else except me on that list is dead. They're all dead. So sitting over in the
1310 corner was my brother-in-law, my sister, their sisters and brother-in-law, there was about five or six of
1311 them around the table and I said, I says to Brian McDonnell, I said, 'Brian, I want to take that letter
1312 over here to show my family, you know, and my friends.', So I goes over and Tommy Cafferky says, you

1313 know, Tommy. Tommy knew they were all dead except me. He said. Oh, God, he said. They're all dead.
1314 I'm the last living person. And that's the last of the story I'm going to tell you very good.

1315 Celine: Well, thanks very much, Michael. That has been a joy to hear. The way the stories from you
1316 And the way you tell them, you know, and they're just your clarity and your memory is great.

1317 Michael: I'm sure there are lots more from somewhere. But don't ask me to remember them – unless
1318 I am reminded.

1319 So that's wonderful. I'm very appreciative of you giving your time for this. And it's been a lovely, a
1320 lovely time. I've thoroughly enjoyed it.

1321 Michael: Yeah, well, thank you.

1322 Celine: Thanks, Michael very much.

1323 **Ends 2 hours 30 mins 30 secs**