



Interviewee: John F Deane, Poet And Founder of Poetry Ireland

Interviewer: Dr Angela Maye-Banbury

Location: Poetry Ireland Dublin

Date: 6th Jan 2020

Total running time: 43 mins 07 seconds.

PART 1: Early childhood in Bunnacurry, Achill 4 mins 6 seconds

Angela: My name is Angela Maye-Banbury. I'm an oral historian. I have the pleasure of being here with John F Deane, the celebrated poet, at Poetry Ireland. It's Monday 6th January (2020). It's exactly 2 p.m., John, so we're with the atomic clock. Thanks so much for agreeing to, you know, meet with me. I'm really, really honoured.

John: Pleasure.

Angela: Can I just begin by asking you what your first memory is of life in Achill, John?

John: My first memory is probably a false memory. I'm sure it's looking back at a photograph of something. But it is of being in the front of our home in Bunnacurry. It's there situated at the crossroads. I don't know if you know it.

Angela: Oh, I do. I'm familiar with it yeah.

John: There's a big frontage, with a big hedge in front. So the front part of it is actually a sun trap in so far as anywhere in the west of Ireland can be. And my memory seems to be of being in a pram and of being outside and sitting up in the pram and taking in something or other. Now that's probably just looking back. Then I have a definitive one which is maybe three years, four years (old). And that is again, that was in the same place. Me playing on the grass among the daisies and my mother lying on a deck chair - the old fashioned deck chairs that they used to have. And suddenly jumping up in fright and saying "Somebody has walked over my grave." And I looked at her and she looked at me. And then she kind of laughed and laid back down. But that has stayed in my consciousness forever.

Angela: So how old would you have been then?

John: Three or four or five.

Memories Of Bunnacurry Boys National School; sense of freedom in Achill.

Angela: And this was in Bunnacurry, of course, which is where, of course, you were born. Can you tell me a little bit about those early years in Achill, you know, before you went to school and then a little bit about what life was like when you were at school?

John: Are you talking about primary school?

Angela: Primary school, yeah, initially and then we can move on to secondary.

John: Well, I presume I went at the usual age which would have been four. So my memories are all good, very happy at Bunnacurry Boys National School. Used to walk to school which was half a mile and walk back and playtime and so on. And it was run by the Franciscan monks, third order of monks. And I was lucky to have very gentle ones. In those years, there was a reputation for cruelty in schools. Kids used to get bashed around a lot. And I witnessed some of that. But very, very little. And nothing disastrous. So I just drifted through that. My joy always was to get out and to be out in the open air. Climbing among the hedgerows of rhododendrons. Where we lived in Bunacurry, there was a grove of very fine trees that my grandfather had planted to shelter the house. And when I was growing up, these were Scots pines and they were in great shape and great size. So the joy was to have a house up in the trees and to climb and spend ages up there sitting, listening to the wind moving with the wind and looking out over the island. It was just beautiful. I loved it.

Angela: So very tranquil. Very quiet amongst nature. And obviously that's a big theme in your poetry that relationship that you had with Achill.

John: Yes.

Musical interlude: 'Carolan's Ramble To Cashel' Performed by Patrick Ball. On 'Celtic Harp' Vinyl (September 26, 1995) Label: Fortuna ASIN: B0000007SC