

Nan Aherne

Female

File 1 0:00:00 – 0:05:03

EARLY LIFE AND FAMILY BACKGROUND –

Nan she says that she was born on 9th August 1921 in the same house where she now resides. The house is located on New Road which is also known as BÃ³thar na hAbhann. The river runs along the back of the houses.

Nan was baptised Ann and she was known as Nan because her grandmother was Nancy Healy and this would allow some distinction between them.

Nan's mother, Molly Healy, was an only child. Her father was Jack Aherne from down the street. There were three in Nan's family. Her brother Tom was born in 1915 and her sister Nell was born in 1917.

Nan's grandfather's brother Patneen Healy was a blacksmith. He was building the house but he died during its construction. Later, her grandfather Thomas Healy, who was also a blacksmith, returned from America and continued the construction. Patneen had the forge completed before he died. When her grandfather finished the house he opened the forge for business and hired three other men to help him. One of their customers was the Landlord H.V. Macnamara. At that time if anyone wanted something from their landlord, they would generally go through their blacksmith. This is because blacksmiths were normally friendly with the landlords for whom they provided a highly valued service. All of the work that Nan's grandfather did for the MacNamara's is recorded in his ledger.

Nan's grandfather, Tomás Healy, took over the house when his brother died. Her grandmother was a Healy from Kilcornan and her grandfather was a Healy from

The Black Mountain. She continues to explain that her father's family were the Aherne's from the bakery in town. Her father married into the house.

0:05:03 - 0:08:43

THE HOUSE -

Nan describes her house as a fairly big one. They kept buyers in the house the night before a fair. There are four levels in the house which includes a basement, the ground floor and two more levels upstairs. The name over the door is 'A. Healy'. Her grandfather and his two year old son died of diphtheria three weeks apart. He was only 37 years of age. Her grandmother continued to employ men in the forge. Her nephew Jack Leyden came in from Moher and took over the forge.

There was a bar and a grocery in the building. There were two counters in the bar. At one time they had their own cows and a bucket of milk was left on the counter for sale. Later, when society became more conscious of hygiene this was brought to an end. They believed it was safer to keep all dairy products in a separate room. The snug was then used as the dairy.

0:08:43 - 0:10:44

THE FORGE -

They had a lot of outbuildings which included a cow house, a hay house and a few horse boxes and the forge. Later, a section of the forge was converted into a garage for Nan's car.

Most of the tools that were used in the forge are gone today and the bellows that was used in this forge fell apart. Nan states that a forge had to be dark because you were able to judge the heat of the fire better in a darker surrounding.

0:10:44 - 0:13:23

SCHOOL -

Nan mentions that her mother's uncle Patsy Healy from Kilcornan attended the fairs and markets on their behalf. He was one of the oldest people she remembers.

Nan doesn't have much recollection of her first days in school. She attended the Convent in Ennistymon. Her sister, who was two years older, would bring her to and from school. She remembers her mother bringing her up hot milk at lunch hour in a lovely brown enamel can with a cover on it. All of the teachers were nuns. Sr. Stanislaus was in charge of Baby Class. There was a Mother Aloysius Wall in the school. They had very small little desks. Each classroom had a fire with a fire guard around it.

0:13:23 - 0:14:13

FIRST HOLY COMMUNION AND CONFIRMATION -

Nan says she had a beautiful First Communion dress. It was hand made by her mother's aunt, a John of God nun. Her sister wore the same dress. It was linen with an insertion of lovely lace in the front. Nan says that Bishop O' Doherty confirmed her.

0:14:13 - 0:15:31

MUSIC AND SINGING -

Nan talks about Sr. Frances Berchmans who had a trained voice and taught her singing and music. Music was Nan's favourite subject while at school. She was playing the piano when she was six or seven years old, getting lessons from Sr. Frances. The school took part in Liturgical Festivals and different Feiseanna in town. She remembers photos of the different groups taken at the Convent steps.

0:15:31 - 0:16:58

HOBBIES AND PASTIMES -

Her sister had a bicycle. She loved to get spins on it. Nan always enjoyed played

hurling, normally playing in goals. At that time, not many girls would play hurling. She hid the hurley behind her back when a guard would be coming. They were not allowed to play hurling on the street. There was only one other girl, Lil Maloney living on her street. She became a Mercy nun in Belfast.

0:16:58 - 0:19:20

SCHOOL -

Nan attended the Secondary School in the Convent. There were three rooms for Secondary pupils. She continued on to take the Leaving Cert with three other girls, Mary Crawford, Mary Sweeney from Liscannor and Molly Egan who later married Paddy Harvey.

Subjects that were studied at that time included English, Irish, Latin, French, History, Geography and Maths. Students were awarded a bonus of 25% if they took any subject in Irish. Everything was done through Irish while Nan was attending school. In regards to Latin, everything was translated from Latin into Irish.

0:19:20 - 0:22:24

MUSIC -

Nan was the church organist and she talks about how she learned to play this instrument. Mrs. Comber was the organist before Nan. During the war, her family moved to Lahinch and since she only had a bicycle, she was no longer able to undertake these duties. The senior curate at the time, Fr. O'Reilly visited the school and asked if any girl would like to play for the benediction in the evenings. Nan volunteered and she was then taught what to do. She was the church organist for the next 70 years. She misses it very much. She got lessons from Mr De Regge in Ennis. Nan talks about some of the different events she was involved in while she was an organist. Her career as the church organist was so successful that she was awarded the Papal Benemerenti Medal in 1984. Canon Lee

organised the presentation. Nan describes it as a gold medal of Christ with an unpolished finish. It hangs on a pendant of yellow and white – the papal colours. She brought it to the special mass that was held after Pope John Paul II died and showed it to her choir.

0:29:13 – 0:32:23

MUSICALS AND OPERAS –

Nan was also involved in musicals. She remembers when two new churches were needed in Ennistymon and Lahinch. There was very little money in the country at that time as it was just after World War II. In order to raise funds they held concerts, whist drives and later on musicals and operas. Nan remembers Br. Carberry, one of the Christian Brothers who was involved in the operas. She describes him as a wonderful conductor. They had a four part choir. There were 80 participants who were all male. Mrs. Comber taught the young boys and Nan trained the tenors and basses. They practised at the Monastery. She names some of the boy sopranos – Frank Benson, Eamonn O'Dwyer, Michael Fitzgibbon and Georgie O'Brien. Nan herself was the first woman to take part in the operas.

0:32:23 – 0:34:27

FAIRS –

Fairs were held in the streets which had no lighting. All the pubs got an exemption to open from 6 am to 10 on fair mornings. The lights from the pubs would shine out onto the streets. People would bring their cattle opposite the window to look their best. These days were always very busy in the pubs and generally straw was put down to protect the floors of the pubs. It was warm for the men to stand on.