Tony Killeen

Male

0:00:00 – 0:08:03
CHILDHOOD/FARMING –

Tony was born in the shadow of Rath church in Corofin. 'I was the first child and I was born at home. Some of the others were born in hospital and a midwife from Corofin and a GP were present. We lived about two miles from Corofin and there was three quarters of a mile avenue up to the house, and it was the only house on the avenue. There were other houses-the Corbett family and the Moroney family in particular who were equally far in and parallel. The reason for that was that the old road from Corofin to Ennistymon actually ran beside the houses initially, and then a new road was constructed which put them three quarters of a mile off it. I do not know the historical background to that. The priests used to get blamed even though we were very close to Corofin. The old church ruin for Rath was very near our gate beside the Beakey's house and that was for the convenience of the priest than the parishioners. The location of Rath church as it currently stands is very inconvenient for the distant parishioners because Corofin parish is very long and narrow. It runs into Ennistymon almost. That was sited there for the convenience of the priest as well which says something about an era before my time.

The two biggest influences in my early childhood would have been agriculture, as my dad was a farmer and perhaps the West Clare railway because it ran immediately in front of the house, between the houses on the road. So when I was a young fella, if you were going to Corofin you would have to open and close 5 gates including the two railway gates. I think the West Clare railway closed about 1960 or 61 so I would have been 8 or 9 and I travelled on it many times to Ennis with my mother shopping or whatever, and occasionally to Lahinch or to Kilkee

where my father had an aunt. I would have travelled on it quite a bit. My father was delighted when it closed because it divided the farm two thirds and one third and was a terrible nuisance. The road got you through two sets of gates but there were other sets of gates along the length of the farm. So he was delighted when it closed as it made farming life a lot easier. I remember going to Ennis and would look forward to crossing a bridge somewhere near Our Lady's where you could look down and see the water. There must have been timber floors on the train as there was a way you could see the water through the track or the sleepers. I used to be terrified as I felt we could fall into the water but I used to love it as well in equal measure, the thrill of going over it. I remember my father used to do the market shopping/the hardware shopping in Ennistymon, and on his way back the train would pass the house and went onto Corofin station which was half a mile further on. He would throw horseshoes and bags of nails out of the train when he would pass the house and we would be there and gather them up and take them in and the perishable or breakable goods he would bring back on the bike. Very few people had cars in the area then. They were known as hackney cars. Maybe the doctor and two teachers and the priest. There were three priests in Corofin parish around then. The West Clare Railway was the artery for communications or for travel up to when I was 8 or 9 whenever it closed. I remember the men who used to maintain the line had a little bogie which was a little cart that they pushed along with a handle and they would be cutting bushes along the line and doing general maintenance. They would frequently come into our house for lunch and I remember them very well. I remember an elderly man who lived further back just a bit off the line who liked a drink and there was a pub beside the station. It was Moynihan's The Station Bar and that was open until fairly recently say 10 or 12 years ago and this man may over indulge a little. On his way back home he would occasionally fall asleep on the railway track between the rails. My mother used to have us on vigil, on I think a Thursday when this man would be perhaps be on the rampage and we would be sent out to wake him if he fell asleep somewhere along the tracks. So now they are unusual childhood memories. Obviously the farming ones are working with animals and I think at that stage all the work being done

was with person powers or horse machinery. My father used to keep two horses and tended to have good ones as he trained horses for farmers when he was younger. We would have had at least two horses and milking cows, and we also had goats. I think we had either 14 or 16 goats. I was able to milk a goat when I was a young fella. My mother set a lovely orchard and in springtime or perhaps May when food was scarce the goats broke into the orchard and strip the bark off the trees and then they were eternally banished and that was the end of goats in our territory'.

0:08:04 – 0:09:16
CHORES –

Spoke about chores – All the next members of my family were sisters so I spent almost all of my time working with my father when I was at home. My poor mother would try to make me do Irish dancing but she failed after one go. However she was really determined to get me to play some musical instrument. On a Saturday I would be up at 6.30 in the morning and have the cows in and be off doing something so she could not find me to go off and learn a musical instrument. I am afraid my own lads are much the same. Milking the cows and bringing in the cows on an early summer morning was a lovely peaceful time. It was a difficult farm to work on. Some was wet land and prone to flooding and during that time my father bought this place which is where my house is now in Kilnaboy. We would be cycling up here to see cattle and we used to work really hard'.

0:09:17 – 0:14:56
NATIONAL SCHOOL –

Spoke about the national school in Corofin – 'The late great Macey Cleary was the principal and I think I only had two teachers for all of primary education. The late Norah Moynihan from infants to second class and then Macey Cleary in the senior classes. Macey was a great man for preparing people for scholarship exams and I

was one of the successful ones. You had a whole stream of firsts in Clare; I think three of four which is extraordinary for a small enough country school and I got a scholarship to the County Council one because the land valuation was very high that was not worth very much. I also got the entrance to Flannan's school as a boarder. In primary school the subjects were not all in Irish even though Macey was a great gaelgoir and I am fluent in Irish and have been since I was in 5th or 6th class and even though I don't practice as much as I used to. I go around the country and to the Gaeltacht where I can converse in Irish which is fantastic. Macey was old school in terms of the kind of curriculum, although after lunch he would often digress and reminisce of his travels around the country, or he had been to Rome for Eucharistic congress and he would talk about traveling around Europe in a car. When you're a child and you have no tv you try to visualize these places. He used to go to Dingle quite a bit and he died on the peer in Clifden strolling the peer he just dropped dead. I think he was in his late 70s at that stage. Macey was a very determined educationalist and teacher and he drove us pretty hard and I did not have much difficulty with school so I did not take much notice of it really. I did not hate national school the way lots of people did because I did not have a huge level of difficulty. When I was in the lower classes he would be hurling with the lads and I think an accident may have happened because hurling became virtually banned and it was mostly football. We then had rounders in Spring which I think is making a comeback since the success of the Irish cricket team. We would all walk to school and the creamery was in Corofin so sometimes we would go on the milk cart with my father. However when I was much younger the creamery was the traveling creamery which was only a few hundred yards away which was not much good to us for getting to school. So we would either cycle or walk and there were a huge number of us on that road, and on a summers evening we would come as far as what we call the pound cross. We would sit on the side of the road there on an old ruin and take out various homework and do them communally and head on then after 20 minutes or whatever. Dermot Hehir was in my class who is now a Consultant Surgeon in Tullamore hospital and he was born the same day as myself as well. Gerry Corbett

was a Garda who is actually retired now in Cork and the Williams brothers and a whole lot of others. There were a whole pile of girls but they were in a different school even though they were in the same building because it was boys and girls separate. It was the same building but a wall dividing with two rooms and play yard for the girls at one side and two rooms and a play yard for the boys on the other side. The amalgamation happened much later. It did happen during Macey's time so he did get to teach girls for the last few years of his career. There used to be a school garden and my father would bring up farm yard manure on a horse and cart and maybe do some of the rough digging with a few of the other fathers. We used to sow potatoes and carrots and all kinds of things and have that eternal battle with scutch grass that you never win. By and large the curriculum was fairly narrow. There was huge emphasis on the three Rs of old. Macey was hugely interested in history and very anti English leanings which we all managed to pick up I am sure. So that was the Primary Education, very confined apart from the few adventures we had because the West Clare Railway enabled us to get to places such as Kilkee and Ennis fairly frequently'.

0:14:57 – 0:16:19
HIS MOTHER –

'My mother trained as a confectioner in Ennis and Dublin, so several times a week she would make all kinds of interesting things, so it was a popular house for my friends to visit because of all the confectionary she would make. Our house was one of the least accessible houses in terms of where people would come from, and I remember as a young fella sometimes awaking in the middle of the night, like 2 or 3 in the morning to hear shouting and cheering in the kitchen, and it was mostly playing cards. There could be as many as 8 or 10 people usually the same ones who would come and play cards until god knows what time. It was one of the houses that people went to. There were other houses that my father went to but an awful lot of them came to our house. They used to have great fun mostly with cards and sometimes just chatting'.

0:16:20 – 0:18:46
STORYTELLERS – There was an elderly man called Tommy Fitzgerald who is dead a long time now and who lived across the valley. On the rare occasions that my parents would go to the show dance, maybe three events in the year he would be left minding us and he was a great teller of ghost stories. It is only in subsequent years that I have begun to realize that he actually frightened himself with his own ghost stories. My older sister and myself used to be kept up until we would hear the car bringing my parents back and he would run us off to bed. I am sure that would have been 2 or 3 in the morning. There was another neighbour called Jack Moroney and he was an absolutely wonderful storyteller entirely made up by himself. We used to go there over the railway track which was in disuse when I was in my mid teens and we would go there at night quite a bit. My two sisters that were younger than me and Jack would tell the stories and on the way back a goods van that had fallen off at some point 50 years previously was in the field and Jack would centre a lot of his stories around that. Fellas being murdered and dying in it and all kind of things. My two sisters would nearly have me choked coming back hanging on so grimly to me that I could hardly take a step. His wife would say â€œthat's right Jack,â€ as she had heard them all a million times. Our next door neighbour married a lady a generation younger than my parents and slightly older than me and she tried to teach us how to dance a waltz. We used to be there at night with a tape recorder playing music and she would be there trying to make us do the steps and make us dance with girls before we were prepared to even acknowledge them. It used to be really good fun and that was Corbett's house'.

0:18:47 – 0:19:44
TELEVISION –

Corbett's were the first ones to get a television and I remember going to see the All Ireland final in the first years of television. The first time I saw a television was at my uncles house who was reared by my fathers aunt in Kilkee who was a Court

Clerk in Ennis, Michael Killeen and then moved to Bray in Wicklow and in the summertime we used to go there for a week or two and the east coast areas were able to receive television from the BBC from a transmitter in Wales. So quite a long time before RTE came we saw television there and we thought it was amazing and wonderful. We would come back to others who had not seen television and describe it to them and tell them how great it was'.

0:19:45 – 0:22:00
SHANNON –

Tony spoke of spending time in Shannon with Tony's father's uncle and aunt – In my early teens we stayed in O'Gorman's cottage in Shannon for a few weeks which used to be the artist's place. They were much older and we thought it was the quaintest little place with a horse and a donkey. My grandaunt used to make butter in a churn which we hated. The interesting thing about being there is that the cottage had a long avenue leading up to it and we used to go to the top of the avenue and get the bus to Limerick or you could cycle into the airport which was a fantastic place. On a Sunday morning we would go to mass in the little oratory in at the airport and up to that time we would have never seen banks of a river. The river is all banked along there and my grand uncle would tell us stories about when the banks were breached in the 1930s and 1940s. Hundreds of acres of land were flooded and the water used to come right up to the door of the cottage but never in so the house site was chosen before the banks were put in place. We would go to sleep at night thinking the banks would burst and the place be flooded and we would be trapped there for months'.

0:19:45 – 0:22:00
RUAN HURLING TEAM –

'Ruan were a really strong hurling team at the time and Jimmy Smith was an outstanding hurler not just in Clare but nationally as well. Pat Hinchy another great hurler was on the Ruan team as well as the Clare team and a local family

were related to him with one son and they used to take me to a lot of matches. I think I saw every Clare championship match from 1959 and most years there was only one. I would have also seen almost every home league game that Clare played right through that period and very few did as there were hardly any cars. I saw Ruan winning two county titles'.

0:22:55 – 0:26.36
MASS –

We used to go to Rath mass across the railway and Mr McInerney used to come along on his white horse. There would have been several families going to mass in pony and trap or pony and sidecar. There were two elderly ladies that used to come on an ass and cart with rubber wheels and the ass was very fast and they called him 'The Diesel' because up until the 1940s, 1950s the train had been the steam train and then CIE bought Diesel engines and diesel engines were more reliable and fast and this donkey was really reliable and really fast. Most of us would be walking to Mass about 30 or 40 people walking. At some point I started serving mass at Corofin as I was in school in Corofin so then I would cycle in and out to mass in Corofin, more frequently than going to Rath. There were three priests so there must have been an awful lot of masses and we used to serve quite a bit. The parish priest when I was a young fella was Fr Dan Conheedy. He was an extraordinary guy and he used to have so many sayings that are still in the folklore of people of my age group but some were not repeatable'.

0:28:57- 0:30:21
EXAMS –

'The end of term exams I did not consider a big deal. My parents were not pushy about education in my case although they were with my sisters and brother. I was fairly diligent and was a good judge of how much study I needed to complete. I was also a very good judge of what I did not need to do as well. By the time I was doing the Leaving Certificate which was 1970 there was an exam which was an

entry to University called the Matriculation, however you could Matriculate on the basis of your Leaving Certificate and that is what I did as I knew I would get enough points. Initially I thought about doing Engineering in University College Galway as I got the points for that and I also got Teaching and I opted for Teaching. I have to say I really enjoyed the 20 years I did teaching but I often think if I had gone off and done Engineering it would have taken me away from this neighbourhood as it would be unlikely that you could come back after completing engineering'.

0:30:22 – 0:39:18
WORKING ON THE FARM –

'I was the oldest of the family and the farm was a difficult farm to work and next to me would have been my sister so my father was hugely reliant on me and I came back after two years studying to be a teacher in Galway and it was like a new lease of life for my father to have me around again. I used to tell the children when I was teaching about working on the farm in Kilnaboy and about the thrashing. A lot of the farms in Corofin grew beet and it was left in huge piles by the roadside and then taken by truck to a factory in Tuam which I would say is closed about 30 years. A lot of potatoes were grown and a lot of crops for feeding animals, fodder beet, mangles. Mangles are similar to turnips but their roughage content and feeding value for animals is higher. You would sow them on drills and weed them several times and you had to thin them which was an appalling job because there were loads of little nettles grew around them and there was no such thing as gardening gloves and your hands would be all burnt. We used to have three fields of corn-one of oats and two of barley which in total were six or seven acres which seemed very big to me at the time. I remember when I was 6 my father cut the barley one day in September and it was really hot and he had his shirt off and got badly sunburnt on his back which badly blistered on his lower back. He did not go to the doctor but made up some concoction that my mother rubbed on his back and the blisters burst eventually, it was terrible. A great day

on the farm would have been the thrashing day when John O'Brien would come with a tractor and a thrashing machine. The machine seemed enormous to me then and the tractor operated the thrashing machine by a belt and pulley system. The belt that was on a big spool on the tractor drove the thrashing machine. You needed about six and most probably about ten men for the operation so all the neighbours went around for three or four days to each others houses with the thrashing machine. The corn would have then be cut, put in sheaves tied in the middle with a piece of corn and four or five pieces stalks wrapped around the middle and then knotted. It was a horrible job because there were tall thistles through it and by that time in September the thistles would be starting to rot and the thorns would penetrate your hands and you would be full of thistle thorns. It was then taken into the yard and put into a tram which was a circular construction with all the seats faced inwards and gradually built up to 10-12ft tall and we used to have five or six in the yard so a tractor or thrashing wheel could be fit between them. One fella would fork each sheaf up to the guy who was on top of the thrashing wheel and he would have a knife that would cut the binding and feed it in a way and then the thrashing wheel would remove the corn which fell into sacks which was hanging on at one end. The straw came out at the back end and the fellas would wreak of straw. Other fellas would be running with the bags of meal storing them wherever you stored them. As you came down near the bottom there would be rats and mice that would have taken up residence in the corn, and they would not come out until the very end, and we used to be there with hurleys trying to get them. Sometimes we used to be very successful and that was one of the great things about the thrashing in addition to all the neighbours getting together. There could be a dozen people in the house. Mind you it was enormous pressure on the women to feed all those men.
It was called the meitheal. My father would say â€œwe will have the meitheal now for the thrashing for the next three or four daysâ€
And he in turn would go round to the other five or six neighbours.

The sheep had to be shorn with a hand shears completely manual and there was a

better price for washed wool. We used to take the sheep to a place which we called the Mill, The Mill Bridge in Corofin and there was a little roadway on the left as you would go up towards the wood road. We used to take them in that roadway and corral them there and wash them in the river. Four or five farmers used to all go together and we used to have to keep the flock separate. That was a huge job as the sheep loved breaking through to one another and then we would wash them all there and then we would go home. The first lot would be washed and then they would be let out on the road but you could not let them go until the next lot were ready and there would be a person in between each of the flock. That was a great day as it would be a lovely summer's day. You would wash the sheep and then they would be shorn over the next couple of days and it was really laborious workâ€¦terrible work with a hand shears. I was very young when I was shearing and you needed to get off all of the coat and it was a very valuable income and the sheep could be quite docile in the beginning but by the end they could be very cross. The wool was then taken to Keane's of Gort. I think they used to come around and collect it in a lorry. There was a substantial element of the income from the sheep. Nowadays the farmer shears the sheep for its comfort otherwise they will be devoured by the insects. The cost of shearing exceeds the value of the wool or at least equals it at the moment. I think the washed wool would then be exported to Scotland'.

0:39:19 – 0:43:32
HOME GARDEN –
'I never really like gardening as it was really hard work but my father would make the drills with the horse and plough. There was an object called a scuffler which was great for exterminating weeds but it could not do the middle of the drill but it did kill most of them so it made the weeding and thinning some bit easier. Then there was a man called Kevin Randler who would come with a horse and a sprayer with a 40 gallon drum and he would spray the crop, the potato crop. My father would do it with a knap sack sprayer but we had quite a lot of potatoes as did everybody then. Kevin would come and spray the big garden of potatoes. My

father would spray the kitchen garden. We had fruit as well, gooseberries, strawberries, blackcurrants. My mother would make gooseberry and blackcurrant jam. We would eat the strawberries quicker than they could be put aside. We also had geese and turkeys and hens hatching. I think we used to sell about two dozen geese at Christmas and we used to keep very few turkeys and there would always be a few hens that would go off and hatch a clutch of chickens. Later on there were poultry instructors that were employed by the Department of Agriculture and they introduced a product called day old chicks and they were chickens of rhode island red and white leghorn were the two commonest breeds and they were very good laying hens. They had much better output than your traditional Irish hen which I think laid about 50 eggs in a year and these would lay 150-200 eggs and they were introduced because everybody who had poultry sold eggs and we used to sell eggs to Barron's shop on O'Connell Street in Ennis. We had a lot of hens and they had to be fed. There was a machine called a pulper. You wound a wheel and you would throw the turnips into it and they were broken into fairly small pieces and then you would put meal with that to feed the cows, cattle, sheep etc. There was fodder beet and mangles that you would chop up. When I was a young lad there was an outside fire which my father used to light once a week and there used to be a big huge round pot hanging over this fire and small potatoes and other things were boiled for the pigs in the pot. Pigs would not get raw food it would be cooked and they used to get skimmed milk when it came back from the creamery and the calves got that as well. The farm was self sufficient and every farm I knew was exactly the same. Some of the pigs would be sold and some would be killed for home consumption'.