

Green and Blue Project

Myra McCarthy Interview Transcript

It was tough being the wife of a Guard we had four small children and... there was four and a half years between the four of them, and the baby was only eight weeks when he went away... and... no mobile phones, had to wait until he got to the other end to say he got there safe... and it was tough because... when he got home then... it would be late, very late in the evening by the time he got home, and we would try to keep the children up... see their daddy, and then we will be gone, whatever day or two later, he'll be gone before they get out of bed in the morning, and they'll be looking for their daddy... and... it *was*, you know, because I'd no family near me,

We were in Kanturk, North Cork, and... I had no family near me, nobody to call, nobody to come at all, so... if any adult that I knew in Kanturk, they'd visit me... some people were very good, and kept in touch and came to, you know, came to visit me... I'd know now and then, open the door, I'd say 'oh thank God for an adult conversation'! because I only had baby talk all day long, and... but... I suppose the good side of it, and it made it a bit easy for me is the kids were all healthy, you know, and that... so...

Communication, he'd ring when he'd get up to say he arrived safe, and... that'd be it, and he might ring then, do you know, during the... maybe... during the week, there'd be no regular phone calls because... he wouldn't be near a phone, and you know everything like that, and... yeah communication was very sparse, yeah.

We had a phone at home, so it would have been that little bit easier, but you'd still wait for that call, and as I say, when he say he got up safe, and... I remember one time and that's a piseog [superstition], and I know it's, it came from his mother's side, robins, robin in the house for a... he left one morning, and the kids obviously were up, he must have left a bit later or something, and the next thing he came running in, he said 'mammy, mammy there is a... a robin in the house', or there's a bird inside... a robin, and I put him out, and I came back in, there was another one there... and I tell you, I nearly died between that and when he got up to say he'd arrived safe, and I don't believe in piseogs, but... I thought this is *awful* strange, you know?

We would have had a television all right like, so it was sitting in front of the television, get the kids to bed, but yeah this girl had started school then I suppose, I'm not sure he started, or she started when he was there, and... I'd have to walk down in the morning, until I got the car, we were about half a mile from the town,

was a matter of put... two kids into the double push chair, and... strap the other two children... in their cots, really and said our Hail Marys on the way up the road,

He might get down maybe... maybe every three weeks or something, sometimes... he'd come down, it would scare me... be on duty all day, and he'd arrive down like at whatever hour, late at night, without any sleep, you know which was very, extremely dangerous, then we kind of went through two winters where we'd frosts only, we'd a lot of frost as well, because in Kanturk you would get snow and frost, where in West Cork we don't anyway, and... I remember him coming home one evening with the other Guard, Sergeant at the time, and they were all wrapped up with coats, the windscreen was after breaking on the way down! They were frozen, you know and... and that and...

He, maybe one or two days, I can't quite remember now, depending on his roster, on the roster, you know?

Oh the kids were hyper, hyper... now once or twice he came on the train, and we were kind of lucky enough there was a train station about... three miles, four miles, Banteer Train Station, outside Kanturk, and... we went... went to Mallow actually I think, went to Mallow to meet... one time! And everybody got off the train, and all the kids were excited about their daddy coming, and even the small little fellah, and... no sign of him... and I thought, 'oh my God, no mobile phones, what do you do?' so I went to the office and he says 'he's after getting off, he fell asleep on the way down and got off'... there was two fellahs asleep and once he woke up, he was 'get up, grab this, wake up, wake up, it's Mallow!' the two of them out there and the train off!

So that was okay too, but you know these kind of little disappointments for the children, that's understandable you know, and that, but... it was mostly he drove now, the odd time as I say he... came down in the train and that...

Well we got another car then we got... and it was a *banger* of a car, it got me from A to B, which was great really it gave me freedom then, I had a bit of freedom then, because I could visit one or two friends of mine, do you know that I had, friends I had made in Kanturk, and right, I plagued them, probably, I probably ended up at their door one particular... maybe ten o'clock in the morning, I'd be outside their door, do you know, and I stayed there for most of the day with the kids playing with the other kids, just for an adult conversation.

But we did went up then... oh some time in that summer...

I took the four of them up with me, yeah up in the train, and he was to pick me up in Dublin, and that we'd drive the rest... and... I went up and I said 'now we'll be leaving, my own children won't be leaving me now, because when they come to visit me the kitchen sink comes, the bags... I went with four children, one on my arm, and two big bags, cloth nappies and clothes, and that's how I went travelling with the two, or four kids, I said if anyone saw me! But lucky enough the other sergeant above and his wife were very good, we stayed with them in Lifford, and... we are still friends today.

We stayed a week. Now they were very good, but I mean in, in turn Con and the other sergeants would have been good, there was six of them went up at the time, they were promoted, and there was only one house available... and that lady was pregnant, she was the only one was pregnant, so everybody said that... they could have the house, so nobody else moved up, the other sergeant moved up, only that sergeant, and we are great friends today... we visited there recently, but to arrive into anyone's house with four children!

Yes, you see I knew that I could wash the clothes there for the kids, so I didn't have to take the kitchen sink with me, you know? Back down I think, I'm not sure if he drove, I can't remember that now, we drove down, did Con bring us all the way, did he come home that time with us, or not, but yeah.

The loneliness, yeah... the loneliness of everything at that time, like you know, and what would be on television like you had to... do you know, the loneliness and then... even if you were sick, you had, or felt unwell, you had no-one to help you, do you know I remember one time... the youngest girl, we had three girls first and then Niall is the only boy, is the youngest, and the youngest girl, she got croup, I was told, and there was a shortage of petrol as well, right, so that was being rationed, and we had *frost*... so we had to get the doctor to come up, I couldn't go down, and I was extremely sick myself, I never... remembered pain I had in my face, I never understood, sinus, was the first attack of sinus I ever got, got three in my life, but that was the first one... and I, he had to come up to the two of us... he had petrol, I had no petrol, and then... he told me like the croup, so... well she had croup and I had sinus, so he had given me some kind of medication, that you dissolve them in water, like Alka Seltzers, they were the old... tablet long ago, I don't know what these were, but they were similar to that, and oh... was... I... sick... couldn't keep it down, I had Clare sick in the other room, and the other three running around, so... I felt like... if I could get sick when I had help I would be delighted! That you could stay in bed yourself, you know? And I had to ring him again the following day and he'd come up and inject me to stop me from vomiting... and you know, I still had to get up and do the things with the children, and... with the other three lively ones.

The children missed him ... and so much now where, the youngest nine could never understand his daddy going away, he could never never understand daddy going

away, and... the others were just that little bit two, three, four... so but when we came... to Skibbereen, that's jumping a bit now, we going to Skibbereen, we had rented a house, kind of the street below the Garda station... you could see, and Con's office actually was facing the house we had rented and we had to rent a house with a railing because Niall was a divil, that would keep him in off the street, and he spent the first... week I'd say... standing at the front window looking at his daddy had gone, and he couldn't understand, and daddy'd come down maybe, see, he came down, we were trying to settle in, and... he'd come down a few times out of the office, you know, probably shouldn't be down, but I mean he'd call down to know was everything all right, and Niall couldn't understand his daddy coming in uniform, and he was gone to work again, and he could be back in two hours, when he was gone to work before he could be gone for a week, you know, for a child of two and a half to you know, take that in, was...

Like Niall he developed an impediment then as a result of all the coming and the going, and that yeah, and I was putting him to bed one night and he said to me, I said 'come on, say your prayers', two and a half, two and a half, and he said 'I don't like Holy God'... and I said 'why don't you like Holy God?', 'because he makes me say Kay, Kay, Kay' – that's the eldest girl, and he's you know, he was trying to explain that while God was making him repeat the word,

It was in kind of a quiet way for them I suppose, and... they weren't the experts there, never the inspectors then, he'd only call for daddy and I'd say he'll be back in a few days, and you try to keep him occupied, and you know...

Madness when he came home. But the morning he left, was extremely sad, they were up that morning, and I have pictures of that, and he crying, and they crying.

He was going to the unknown, we didn't know what it was going to entail, but I suppose what that was through it really is... we didn't know where it was going to end, and it was kind of a journey for us, maybe a rough journey, but... you know, we didn't know when it was going to end, so you're hoping it's going to end and I think that's what kind of what kept us going, do you know?

He was up there from... oh was it two, eighteen months or something, and he had to dig in two winters yeah I think.

And he came down I think in October and we did move to Skibbereen, we had to sell our house then as well, and the eldest there was making her Holy Communion, so she would have been seven... before we came down to Skibbereen, so yeah.

It cause adjustment really, because I had him in the house one day, you could kill him!

I had a routine, yeah exactly, and you know like he's bringing, have three quarters of an hour for their lunch, that time, and we'd have our dinner in the middle of the day, so... dinner had to be on the table when he came in, no matter what, how... what the children were doing, or how sick, or whatever they'd be, you know you had to have whereas, when he was away then I could be that little bit... relaxed 'cause I wasn't set to a... time clock like, yeah. It's still raw! You know we used to think about it, yeah, I didn't think now it would be but it is.

The kids don't talk about it at all now, yeah... the move then I think, the move was another thing in, in the Guards like, the move didn't go too well at all from Kanturk to Skibbereen with them, no, no no... yeah.

I mean the eldest one of them was gone to school and the second one was in school there and the third one just had a day or two for you know, they... take them to school a day or two, they used to do that a day or two before the summer holidays and they would be starting then in September, so she had started there as well, and... he was talking, he was... talking about going back to Kerry, because of his parents, go back nearer, because we moved from Kanturk, I moved a little bit nearer to home, but say not very much,

I am from Kinsale, but he lived, he moved twice as far from home, from Listowel, to Skibbereen, that made that journey twice as far, I didn't gain much... road at all like, but... you know he wanted to go back maybe to Kerry, and... one time he got a transfer to... Macroom, and... when I mentioned, when the eldest girl came in and she, I said we're moving to Macroom, now he had turned it down at that stage, he wasn't going to, and... didn't take it, and... she just ran up the stairs crying, and I said 'come down, I'm only joking, daddy's not going to take it', she was so upset... the other two... didn't take any notice, the little small fella, then when he came in I said it to him as well, and he said 'well we're not going until we can take Skibbereen in the trailer!' so Skibbereen to Macroom, that's innocence, you know. Everything's good at that stage.

We're in Skibbereen since '79, oh '79.

You know, my father died, yeah we'd just were moved... I was staying in Kanturk, yeah he died in February, yeah we moved here in August.

Con found it as tough as the children really, tougher probably, because... he couldn't say goodbye to them in the morning, he'd be leaving, he might be gone at six o'clock in the morning, you know, and he wasn't able to say goodbye to them then, either when he was going back, you know, and...

Then you'd have to keep them up until he got home,

Yes, daddy's coming home, yes, now in fairness he brought down clothes to them, and that, that kept him going, and shopping across the border, you know, washing powder and things now were much cheaper, so he'd come down with the boot full, and he always got, you know, they always got something, but 'twasn't sweets or things they got, they got... clothes, dresses, or... you know things like that, and there was always a kind of a little, well not every time, now he didn't bring it every time, he would have brought the household stuff maybe all right, but... that kept him sane as well above. Doing that little bit of shopping and achieving and getting... something for them,

Yes, in that way was kicking out the brushes for the kids, you know, when they've... photographs, they're always saying... 'Jaysus'!

Oh he was losing out time, with them growing up, and the things they were doing, and going to school, and they doing the homework with them, like at that stage, and with your first child, you need to be around for things like that, because that's all the new experiences, God help the second and third they're just told 'do your homework'!

But there's always something with the first child, you know, it's all new experience for parents, but then... yeah, I don't think, I don't think there's anything else now in fairness, yeah, you know,

[End of Recording Part One / Start of Recording Part Two]

He was in good digs, and they were in Lifford, down... and... they were excellent people, then we went up and stayed with them, and... we've been friends today, her husband is dead now, and... she's still alive, she's eighty five, we talk every year for her birthday, and if I don't ring, she said is something, if I don't ring early in the morning, sometimes I may go late on the day, but I'd always ring her on the day, and... she'll say 'oh that Myra, is Myra all right? I didn't hear from Myra today', you know so, but that made it easy, being in with a good digs made it much much easier for Con, because the first place he was in... I think 'twas kind of... you roll out of

bed, and I roll into bed, and you roll out of bed... but, when he got into that digs like it made so, so homely, and they, yeah.

He was able to ring, he was able to ring more often then, from them, yeah.

They'd the phone at home as well, yeah so... that definitely made it easier for both of us, yeah.

Yes, and being up there and staying there, and knowing where he was staying, and... you know, *seeing* where it was, and... what kind of people were... and that, yeah.