The 1937 Irish Constitution defined the role of Irish women as mothers and housewives. The Constitution thus relegated women to a primary role in the domestic sphere. Article 41 of the Constitution states: “The State recognizes that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved. The State shall therefore endeavor to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labor to the neglect of their duties in the home.”

I will argue here that after Irish men and women had successfully removed their English colonizers from their homeland, Irish men, in turn, colonized Irish women. Irish women, through self-awareness mostly by becoming aware of themselves as citizens, sought freedom from the confines of the State and the Catholic Church and the restraints of the 1937 Irish Constitution.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

For over 800 years Ireland had been one of Britain’s colonies. The Irish people did not prosper under British rule. Not only did they lose their language since the British forced the English language upon the Irish, but they were denied education, denied their religion, and denied land ownership. The Irish were treated as strangers in their own country. Britain renamed all Irish towns and cities of Ireland from the Gaelic to the nearest-sounding form of English name, enforcing the colonization of Ireland by Britain.

In 1980 Brian Friel, a well-known Irish Playwright, first performed his play about the British re-naming Ireland. The play was first performed in the Guildhall, Derry, on 23rd September 1980. Known now for his movie roles, a famous movie star, performed one of the leading roles.

While I visited Ireland last year, I saw this play performed in the Abbey Theatre in Dublin. Last year while I was on a visit to Ireland, the British re-naming took place. The play depicted how the British re-naming took place. Irish place names were changed to the local names in Irish and renamed them to the
nearest English sound. Some of this renaming reflected, simply and completely, towns and cities they just renamed completely after British kings and queens. Dun Laoire, Dublin’s main port, for example, became Queenstown; Cobh, the second largest port, was named Kingstown. This renaming reflected the British dominion of Ireland. The play’s depiction of this renaming seemed unreal to me, what had happened in my homeland. Unreal as it reflected that this play was actually showing what had happened in my country, in a very the very contrivance and control of the British, who felt fully entitled to do so as colonizers, contrived and controlled way by the British, who felt fully entitled to do so, as colonizers.

Edward W. Said writes in “Culture and Imperialism,” that it is necessary for colonizers to change the local habitat.” In Ireland, especially in its capital city, Dublin, the colonizers built large imposing buildings, very much in the English style, e.g., the Law Courts, the General Post Office, and the Customs House. The British hung their flags on these stately buildings, imposing their emblems and icons throughout Ireland.

In the center of Dublin, the English erected a statue of Admiral Lord Nelson, one of their Naval heroes, that became known to locals as Nelson’s Pillar. The statue depicted Nelson standing on his obelisk, rather pointedly looking down upon the Irish, in the middle of Dublin. Because the Pillar was conspicuous and centrally located, it became a very popular meeting place; as it was so central and conspicuous, The Pillar became a colorful place as well. It was also very colorful since traders sold flowers, selling and merchants used the space around the Pillar to exhibited and sold their wares, all their wares. That was until traders did so until the I.R.A. destroyed the Pillar with a bomb blew it up in in 1966 to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Easter Rising. Nelson’s head, the only remaining remnant of that bombing piece left, is now on display at the Civic Museum in Kildare Street, in Dublin. In a way, the Pillar’s...
destruction symbolizes in this way, one of the last obvious symbols of the end of British colonization in Ireland had been removed.

The monument was finally replaced some about 10 years ago, by Dublin Corporation. The statue with a statue of a women lying in a fountain of water, is named. The name of the statue is "Anna Livia," better known to Irish wits, as "The floozy in the Jacuzzi," or "The Hoor in the Soor." The statue was designed to personify the river Liffey, which runs through the center of Dublin, gives life to the city, much as women do, like a woman giving life to the city. As a woman, I think I prefer Nelson over Anna. Anna, to me, reflects a negative image of a woman—rather than the negative imagery of wom, degrading and disrespectful. to include some put upon this statue, by calling it such a shameful naming. It is degrading to women and shows an attitude that is not respectful. Irish authorities also commissioned a statue to a street trader in Dublin, famed in myth and the following song:

“In Dublin’s fair city where the girls are so pretty, I first set my eyes on sweet Molly Malone, where she wheeled her wheel barrow thru streets broad and narrow, calling cockles and muscles, alive alive o”.

This bronze statue, situated at the bottom of Grafton opposite the gates of Trinity College, depicts a rather buxom young woman pushing a wheel barrow. The statue is commonly known as “The Tart with the Cart.”

Ireland erects There are very few statues erected to honor women in Ireland, and the few that have been erected, are often become denigrated by absurd name calling. The Irish erect many statues to honor men. There are plenty of monuments to men, but I know of none that are denigrated by absurd name calling. Only monuments to honor women seem so affected. It appears it is only monuments to women in Ireland that are not respected. I have also noticed also a
reluctance on the part of authorities to commemorate flesh and blood women, such as Countess Markievicz, who was one of the main participants in the Easter Rising. She was condemned to death, but her sentence was commuted to life imprisonment. Countess Markievicz was a well-known figure throughout Ireland’s fight for freedom. She was jailed many times for her nationalist convictions. A monument to her would be a fitting tribute. There exists a small bust of her hidden somewhere in St. Stephen’s Green, but it is just of her head and not very conspicuous. 

Dr. Kathleen Lynn, who opened the first hospital for sick children in Ireland, could beis another ideal candidate for a monument. Fanny and Anna Parnell, whose brother Charles Stewart Parnell had a statue erected got a statue and a downtown Dublin street (Parnell Square) named after him in his honor, received no honors, despite having run better than his two sisters who ran a much better political campaigns against evictions than he ever did, got nothing. Numerous other women deserved to be immortalized instead, Dublin reflects only “the Floozy and the Tart.” 

Almost all of the leading men in the 1916 rebellion, arc were, honored in some conspicuous way. Streets, avenues, army barracks, train stations, all bear names, were all given names, to commemorate individual male leaders of the rebellion. Not one woman was honored in this way. Countess Markievicz remains was sentenced to death along with the other leaders in 1916. The sentence was later commuted to life in prison, however, she is the only 1916 leader not publicly so honored by having something obvious named after her in the Capital city. 

Irish men and women had fought long and hard to free Ireland from British rule. Both sexes devoted their lives to the “cause” and it took the combined efforts of both, to free Ireland and gain her independence. Both sexes deserve equal recognition to be recognized equally for their efforts and sacrifices. Ireland’s road to home rule was consistent and tragic but ultimately successful.
HOME RULE:

On St. Patrick’s Day 1858, James Stephens, a veteran of the last aborted rebellion in Ireland (1848), started an organization known as the Irish Republican Brotherhood. Stephens and his friends swore an oath to create an independent Irish republic. The Irish Republican Brotherhood was the forerunner of the Irish Republican Army. An Irish immigrant in New York, John O’Mahoney, established the American counterpart to the IRB, naming it the Fenian Brotherhood. Terry Golway, in his book “Irish Rebel,” called the Stephens-O’Mahoney alliance a “redefining moment in the long history of Irish national struggle.” Ireland now had a link with the United States; this assured money and support for the Irish cause.

The beginning of the 20th century saw Ireland agitating for home rule, continuing what it had begun 40 years ago. Several Irish groups established themselves to end British rule. The Gaelic League, a literary movement, was among them, as were the Gaelic League, the G.A.A. (Gaelic Athletic Association) and Irish Ireland. In his book “The Course of Irish History,” Donal McCartney writes in his article From Parnell to Pearse (1891 – 1921) states that “it was the combination of literary, social, cultural and political ideals that...” effecting the change in the mental climate of Ireland between 1891 and 1921.

In January of 1913, the third Home Rule Bill passed in the House of Commons in England, but the bill was defeated in the House of Lords by a vote of 326 to 29. Again in July of the same year, the Home Rule Bill was passed in the House of Commons and again defeated in the House of Lords. The chances of getting home rule...
by political means seemed remote to Irish nationalists who wanted an independent Ireland, free from British rule. Irish Nationalists became impatient.

The Unionists (Protestants), who sought to stay in Ireland under British rule, were perturbed by the possibility of home rule. They wanted to stay in Ireland and be ruled by Britain. Britain had given them the land originally, and the Protestants wanted to keep it. Protestants long enjoyed all the benefits of good land, good jobs and status, and they did not want to let it all go. They wanted to hold onto that too.

Edward Carson, a Dublin Lawyer, led the opposition to home rule. In January 1913 the Ulster Volunteers (UVF) were formed, 218,000 pledged themselves to employ all means necessary to defeat home rule. The Unionists, who had plans in place, would form a provisional government the day home rule was established. The Unionists, who had the support of the British Conservative Party, were prepared to thwart any progress towards home rule for Ireland. The Protestants were fearful that if home rule was granted, they would find themselves in the minority and might not be treated too kindly in the new Ireland. It was in their best interest to remain with Britain.

For centuries, the Irish had several unsuccessful uprisings by the Irish against British rule. Many of the Irish leaders and martyrs remain famed in song and spoken about with reverence and pride. However, April 1916 saw the most powerful uprising of all and changed the course of Ireland forever. It became known as the Easter Rising.

THE EASTER RISING

James Stephens, an Irish writer, wrote of the Easter Rising, “The day before the rising was Easter Sunday and they were crying joyfully in the churches ‘Christ has risen.’ On the following day they were saying in the streets: ‘Ireland has risen.’”
On Easter Sunday 23rd April 1916 the printer Christopher Brady carried out his commission of printing the document that would proclaim the Irish Republic. The next day Patrick Pearse read the proclamation, which he had written, on the steps of the General Post Office in the center of Dublin. It was a small force that carried out the rebellion: 1,558 volunteers led by Pearse, plus 219 of the Irish Citizen Army led by James Connolly. Pearse was a schoolmaster and minor poet, and Connolly a well-known labor leader and socialist.

There was very little sympathy given to the rebellion by either the common Irish citizenry or the Irish press. For example, the headline (Tuesday 25th April) of the most prestigious paper in Ireland, The Irish Times, on Tuesday 25th April, was "Three Ladies Shot in Stephens Green" – with no mention of the armed rebellion. The Irish people in the street thought it all a bit of a novelty, and then, when the firing started, it was viewed as a major inconvenience to everyday life.

Another leader of the movement was Michael Collins, a leader in the Irish independence movement, played. He was to play a major role in the Rebellion, and subsequently becoming a political opponent of de Valera over whether or not to accept the Home Rule Bill. Collins favored accepting a limited victory (letting the 6 counties of Northern Ireland remain under British rule) but de Valera wanted to continue the fight to gain all of Ireland. Collins, together with de Valera, were to play a major roles in Irish history over the next few years.

Pearse was leading in charge of the Rebellion, commanded the forces at the General Post Office. Michael Collins was with Pearse, as was also in the Post Office with Pearse. De Valera was in charge of Bolands Mills. Countess Markiewicz was second in command to Michael Mallin – who was Chief of Staff of the Irish Citizens Army. They both took over Guinness’s brewery. An Irish tri-color flying over the G.P.O. proclaimed to all in the center of Dublin, that a Republic had been declared. Ireland proclaimed her freedom from Britain and was prepared to fight for it.
Despite the involvement of the British, in World War I, Britain responded quickly, with 20,000 of its troops marshaled to put down the rebellion. Fighting ensued throughout strategic places (mostly in Dublin) all Easter week. It was over soon - what chance had 2,000 Irish men and women, against the might of the British Empire?

Patrick Pearse accepted defeat on Saturday 29th April at 3.30 P.M., formally handing over his sword to a British captain, and the tri-color was immediately hauled down from the GPO roof. The casualties were as follows: 62 Volunteers and 103 British soldiers dead; 256 civilians (men, women and children) dead; and some 2,000 wounded. Alas, it remains not so much the rebellion of Easter week that was important, but rather it was the manner in which the British handled the aftermath, that did the most harm to Britain and helped the Irish win sympathy and eventually their independence from their colonizers.

The Catholic Church condemned the rebellion before executions began. The Bishop of Kerry, for example, claimed the rebellion was fought by “evil minded men affected by Socialistic and Revolutionary doctrine.” Such opinions would change soon after the executions began.

The executions began on 3rd May and ended 12th May. Donal McCarthy writes in the book, “The Course of Irish History,” that: “the officials appeared to panic, martial law was imposed and more people were arrested than had actually taken part in the rising.”

Tom Clarke, Patrick Pearse and the poet Thomas McDonagh were the first to die. A few days later, strapped to a chair, too ill to stand, wounded and with a broken leg, James...
Connolly was shot strapped to a chair, he was too ill to stand. He faced a firing squad and was shot. He had been wounded and also had a broken leg. The British sought all the signatories of the Proclamation dead, and to put down any further rebellions they wanted to put down any further rebellions. Instead, Britain and her executions made heroes and martyrs of them all, and made all the Irish people of Ireland into supporters of the Rebellion.

Then the British judgment lapsed in another act when they made another error in judgment: they executed Patrick Pearse’s brother, who had played a very small part in the rebellion. The British executed him simply, but he was shot simply because he was Patrick’s brother. Frank Sheehy Skeffington, the well known Dublin pacifist/feminist (he took his wife’s name upon marriage), was arrested and shot while in custody, without trial and with authority [AU: sense unclear, “with authority” – do you mean malice?]. Skeffington had been out on the streets of Dublin to maintain order and prevent looting, trying to keep order and stop looting. His murder, which led to a public outcry, forced the authorities and the British were forced to arrest and try the man responsible, and try him for murder. Sadly, a badge inscribed “votes for women,” was found on his corpse. It was rather sad that on the corpse of the murdered man, was a badge saying ‘votes for women’. Remains tragic that two great supporters of women, James Connolly and Frank Sheehy Skeffington, lost their lives in the Rising. Their support in ensuing years would have been invaluable, especially Connolly’s, who was well respected by all the leaders and was an ardent supporter of all human rights, especially those of women.

As Sheehy Skeffington’s murder created a public outcry, the about Sheehy Skeffington’s murder and the British quickly tried to cover up what had happened. The military offered his widow of Frank Sheehy Skeffington, money and a pension - if she would drop charges and not pursue nor prosecute her husband’s sng and charging the killers. She refused both money and a pension, despite being quite destitute.
The British eventually staged a court martial and Captain Bowen-Colthurst was found guilty of murder (though, but insane). He spent 18 months in Broadmoor, the prison/hospital for the criminally insane in England. Captain Bowen lived the remainder of life-finished his life out, in the south of England, as a bank manager. The outcry about the murder of Frank Sheehy Skeffington, the ensuing outcry, and the executions of Irish leaders (all those who signed the Proclamation were executed) were heard in America as far away as America.

The people of Ireland now supported the rebellion and were incensed about the treatment meted out to the rebels by the British. The Irish mood of the people had shifted and the rebels could now depend upon the support of the man and woman in the street.

Because he was American, many believe that de Valera’s life was spared, was saved from execution because he was born in America. Given a life imprisonment, de Valera but was set free out of prison, some months later on a general amnesty.

During the rising, de Valera had been in charge of Bolands Mills, and, although very light short of manpower, he refused to have, accept or let any women assist in the fighting, whatever in his group or accept any assistance from women during the fighting. Viewed as anti-feminist or paternal. Some view this decision as not wanting women around, viewing them as inadequate, others viewed this as being somewhat paternal. Either way, de Valera did not provide the fighting women of Ireland an opportunity to join in his group and render it support. Margaret Ward writes in her book, "Unmanageable Revolutionaries," p. 110 states, that de Valera refused to have any woman under his command in Bolands Mill, stating, “however there still remained one commandant who steadfastly refused to have any woman under his command—deValara in Boland’s Mills.”

During the 50th Anniversary celebration of the Rising, Joseph O’Connor, a member of de Valera’s staff, addressed this
issue found it necessary to mention this fact in his speech, apologizing, more or less, for the fact that de Valera did not allow the women to participate, let alone fight alongside him. De Valera in debate concerning his 1937 Constitution admitted that he had told women who had come to the Mill that he did not want them. According to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, de Valera later admitted to her that he had come to regret that decision because "some of his best men had had to spend time cooking."

Ireland’s freedom has always been considered a man’s war, although women have fought alongside the men, nursing the wounded, spying and communicating messages, cooking and capturing, but their participation has been downplayed considerably in Irish history books. However, some contemporary historians, mostly women, do research and publish the important history and contributions of women throughout the movement to free Ireland. Margaret McCurtain, for example, has played a crucial role in Ireland in this field with her research and writing.

Popular opinion and support of the people was now with the rebels. Over the next few years following Boland’s Mills, there was murder and mayhem ensued throughout Ireland as the rebels killed and bombed their way towards a free Ireland, or home rule. Finally, de Valera negotiated a peace treaty between Ireland and Britain. Michael Collins was in charge of the group and it was thought a little odd at the time, that de Valera did not go with them. The British offered to keep 6 counties of Ireland, i.e. Northern Ireland, and return 26 counties back to Ireland. The British placed a deadline and consequence on the offer: at a time limit on the deal, either sign now or resume war; or there will be all out war. Michael Collins signed. Upon signing the treaty, When he had finished signing the Treaty, Collins turned to one of his colleagues at the table and said: "I think I have just signed my death warrant."

He was right
Collins’ signing of the terms divided the country about whether or not to accept the treaty. The Irish Government acceptance of the treaty voted and the Treaty was passed by a narrow margin. Most Irish People in general were tired of fighting and wanted peace, sought an end with the treaty. Yet Ireland still held but a large voice that disfavored the treaty section of the people were not in favor of the treaty and wanted to fight on to get back all of Ireland. De Valera was one of those voices.

De Valera was against the signing of the treaty, he sought to hold out for a united Ireland. Civil War thus ensued. The country was splitting Ireland between two divisions, Treaty and Anti-Treaty. Michael Collins was the pro-Treaty leader against and de Valera, the leader of the anti-Treaty division. It is ironic that Irish women, the women of Ireland, were mostly anti-treaty and supported De Valera. Ironic, as many of the wives and relatives of the men executed believed the Treaty to be a betrayal of what their men had indeed died for, and supported Dev in his opposition. Irish women actually supported de Valera when he needed support most. History would show that de Valera did not return the favor, as he would write but not the Constitution that actually took women out of public life and relegated them into private houses as mothers and homemakers.

The Dublin Parliament had accepted, by a narrow majority, the British conditions that Britain had set down for the transference of the 26 counties of Ireland. On 7th January, the voting of the Dail was 60 votes for Griffith (representing the Government) and 57 votes against for de Valera. After hearing the vote, Against, The anti-Treaty Deputies boycotted the Dail after hearing the vote. Both Collins and de Valera worked hard at a compromise to avoid civil war by various means but collision was inevitable between two such strong and ambitious personalities. Northern Ireland’s six counties housed most of the Protestants of Ireland. Northern Ireland was also the most commercial/industrious part of Ireland (linen mills and shipbuilding capacity) with lush, green farm land and the large port of Belfast. This was, and still is,
part of Great Britain. Thus, a bloody civil war raged throughout Ireland until May of 1923.

On the 22nd August 1922 Michael Collins was killed. He was assassinated by the irregulars or the anti-treaties. In October of the same year, Dail Eireann approved the Constitution of the Irish Free State Bill. Seventy-seven anti-Treaty prisoners were executed between November 22nd 1922 and May 23rd 1923. The end of the Civil War's end finally came in May of 1923. De Valera had survived, and was now the most prominent man in Irish politics.

W.B. Yeats the Nobel Prize winning Irish poet wrote *Easter 1916* as moved to writing a poem a few weeks after the rebellion. He named the poem ‘Easter 1916.’ Though shocked Yeats was shocked at the executions, he but wrote that the abortive rebellion had a transforming effect upon the Irish people. The last line remarks: and the last line notes ‘a terrible beauty is born.’

FAMILY BACKGROUND

My mother was born in 1916 in Lurgan, a small town outside Belfast. The family was living in a ‘mixed’ area at the time – a common term in Northern Ireland for Catholics and Protestants who live alongside each other. Because Catholic families were often targeted for violence, living in a ‘mixed’ area was always considered unsafe and hazardous for your health during times of tension since Catholic families were targeted for violence. My mother’s family was burned out of their house, not once but twice. Catholics living in ‘mixed’ areas were especially vulnerable around the 12th of July, a time of celebration for Protestants. It is known locally as the glorious 12th, commemorating when, at the Battle of the Boyne in 1788, the Protestant King William of Orange, defeated the Catholics at the Battle of the Boyne in 1788. Protestant celebrate their This celebration reinforces the idea that Protestants have a right to be in Ireland.
After having been burnt out of their house the first time, when my grandparents were burnt out of their house the first time they went to live in Belfast. My grandfather was at that time a stage manager in the Alhambra Theater, an old music hall theater in the center of town, and the family lived nearby in downtown Belfast. After having been burnt out of their house a second time, however, after being burned out for a second time, the family sought the safety of the Catholic community. My grandfather, in fact, had a large collection of letters from well-known music hall stars (Vaudeville is the American term) such as Lily Langtry. These, unfortunately, and these were lost in the fires because the family did not have time to secure a lot of their belongings out of their home, before the house was torched.

My mother’s parents took their 8 children, and went to live in the predominantly Catholic Falls Road area, in an area named Beechmount. Beechmount consisted of rows of small, red-brick row houses, commonly known as two-up and two-down (two rooms upstairs, and two rooms downstairs) built upon the style of British Victorian laboring cottages found in industrial parts of England. However, Beechmount was, and remains, relatively safe from Protestant invasion by mobs of Protestants seeking to torment Catholics of Catholics. An aunt of mine still lives in the same house in Beechmount to-day.

My father’s family also lived in Beechmount. My paternal grandfather and his father were both men in the merchant navy, and so had his father. One of the grandfathers had been harbor master in Cork and had been transferred to Belfast to be harbor master. The Broderick family had arrived in the north.

My father’s family consisted of five boys and two girls. The boys were all well-known swimmers, water polo players, rugby players and excelled at most other sports. They were also fine singers and musicians. One uncle sang professionally. I gained a certain amount of respect from the children at school, when it was known my uncle had
swam with Johnny Weissmueller at the 1928 Olympic Games. (J. Weissmueller was later to play Tarzan in Hollywood). Tarzan was a firm favorite at our local cinema at the children’s matinees.

My parents met at the local cinema, The Broadway on the Falls Road. Like most Irish couples of their generation, they courted for quite a long time before marriage. As money and jobs were scarce, Irish couples tended to marry later in life compared to their European and American counterparts, who married considerably younger. My parents married in Dublin in December 1940 and remained wed for over 50 years.

My father and his brother joined the Free State Irish Army and set up the first swimming school in the Irish Army in the Curragh Camp in Kildare, in Southern Ireland. My mother continued to live with her family in Belfast. This arrangement was fairly typical of the time. Housing was scarce and expensive, and extended families stayed together. WWII was also during the Second World War which made housing even more scarce. My mother continued to live with her parents for a number of years. I think she was reluctant to leave all her family and friends and go to the South.

IMAGES OF MEN IN THE NORTH

Even though my grandfather was not very old, he was in ill health because of his war injuries. He had been gassed during the First World War and this damaged his lungs. However, he still managed to rule the household. He had his own special chair, which no-one dared sit in while he was in the house. The chair was adjacent to the radio, and he decided when the radio was put on and what programs the family would be listened to by all the family.

He managed to convey to all and sundry that this was his house and he ruled it. His was a very Catholic home, and the Church advocated and preached that men were the head of the family, that and women and children. Despite my
mother being a married woman, my mother even though she was a married woman
was still subject to her father. I remember when I was about 7, my mother gave to a repair
man an old clock that was not working and asked him to fix it. When my grandfather
noticed the clock was missing, he sent her to ask for the clock back, as my mother had
not asked his permission to get the clock repaired. I can still remember my mother’s
humiliation as she asked for the clock back. I was with her when she returned the clock to
its rightful place, where my grandfather had originally placed it. My grandfather left
her with no uncertainty as to who ruled the household.

Most of the men in the neighborhood carried similar authority. All paperwork (e.g.
census, forms, insurance, credit application and legal forms, forms, application forms for
credit, any legal form whatsoever, all had to have a man’s signature). Very few
unmarried women applied for any credit or even had bank accounts. This was as this was
thought to be a man’s world, a world and women seldom entered into that independent
arena. If my mother wanted anything, she had to have my father’s authority and signature.

There were few, if any, women in senior positions within Irish society. Men
bore all the authority figures, as doctors, lawyers, bankers, and the ultimate
authority, priests. I never saw a woman in a position of authority save when I went to the local hospital, where I found the nurses all to be women, but I knew the male doctors carried all authority, were really the people in charge. There were
few, if any, female doctors in any of our hospitals.

Women cooked, cleaned were the cooks, and cleaners and minded the children,
working silent and in the back-ground, almost invisible in a way. The men, were highly
visible and were taught from their youngest day that they were special. An old Irish
saying, There is an old saying in Ireland, when asking about the gender of a new baby,
reflects this: “Is it a boy or a child?”. That is, only a male is worth mentioning!

SCHOOL DAYS - NORTH AND SOUTH
North: Catholic Schools in Belfast

School also enforced the Catholic view of how women should behave in society. Our teachers, all women, were employed by the Parish priest. Our teachers did a very good job in defining our roles as women within the dictates of the Catholic Church. Girls were constantly reminded to be like Our Blessed Lady: obedient, subservient and, above all, ladylike and silent. Useful to be the mother of Christ “Behold the handmaid of the Lord – be it done unto me according to thy word” Bible. get quote! See exact quote……….but seen and not heard

Girls were taught different subjects than boys. My brother, who was two years younger than me, was taught Algebra; and I was not, I was taught cookery instead. My brother did science subjects. I learned how to knit knitting and sewing. Women were being trained in the tradition of wife and mother, certainly not mathematicians. Women would have no use for science and mathematics for their place in society and in the confines of the social teachings of the Catholic Church. And my brother lorded it over me: he knew I was better than him at arithmetic. I was not being taught the more complicated math, and he now looked down on me because of it. He was learning fast in school who was the superior animal.

In my first school play, at school was 'Dick Wittington,' I was chosen to be the narrator. I was about 8 years of age. For this role, I had to borrow my brother’s suit – only a boy/man could have a public role. Girls/women were simply not acceptable as authority figures, even in school plays, within the confines of school or society. I was learning very early in my life that women did not have any authority or power, and it was not acceptable to be seen as such.

Although some girls went onto second level education, if they passed the II+exam, boys within those same families were given preferential treatment and encouraged to go on to further studies. Although the actual schooling was free, books and uniforms had to be
purchased. The child had to be given money for such school expenses such as trips, lunches and bus fares. As further education did involve concern a certain amount of money, so decisions on who went to second level education were based on opportunity.

had to be made within families who actually got an opportunity for second level education.

Educating girls was considered a bit of a waste of time as they would eventually get married, leave work, and bear have children, and education was not considered essential preparation in any way for women. Why bother to educate girls? Such was the attitude of most teachers and parents. Girls were not to say that girls were not as clever as boys, and, after all, it was men, who ruled, and got into the history books; it was men who became priests, bank managers, lawyers and doctors, etc. What recognition or acknowledgement did women receive? Spouse and motherhood, only as wives and mothers. There were few role models for girls existed, as all to gain any inspiration from, all we reflected were surrounded by was women working at menial jobs and raising children at home.

It is ironic that the irony of that situation was that girls achieved higher scores than did the boys in the 11+ examination. Unfortunately, but were not awarded places on the system did not give that gave 27% of boys place and 27% of girls place. Some boys were gaining places with less scores than girls. On Tuesday 20th December 1988, as a result of a case being taken against The Department of Education for Northern Ireland and the Education and Library Boards with respect of the 1987/8 Eleven Plus Transfer Procedure, the marking of the 11+ examination was found discriminatory towards girls.

The decision, found, in part, that: “A total of 860 girls who were not awarded non-fee-paying places in February 1988 are now eligible for such places as a result of these two applications to the High Court. These decisions clearly confirm the obligation placed on the Education and Library Boards and the Department of Education for Northern Ireland...
by the Order, to ensure that girls and boys are guaranteed equality of opportunity in the field of education irrespective of sex”. The truth was out at last.

I attended the local Catholic girl’s school, St. Mary’s Public Elementary on Beechmount Avenue. My brother went to St.Paul's School, for boys. Girls and boys were educated separately. Women taught girls, and men taught boys. Even at the 10 AM children’s Mass on Sundays, boys sat on the right side of the church and girls on the left. We were kept very much apart once we began school.

The Catholic schools in Northern Ireland were under the auspices of the Roman Catholic Church. It was not the head teacher who ruled the schools, it was the Parish priest. Even as children, we knew this to be true. Religion was the most taught subject and we spent a great deal of time learning how to be good Catholic subjects. Girls were groomed to be in the image of the Virgin Mary, Mother of God. She was obedient, docile, subservient, even to her Son—a full-time mother and appeared to have no life of her own. We were also taught to be still, speak only when spoken to, and not raise our voices or question anything. Men were the doers. Women did not participate, were just not in the name of life, we only made the doing possible for men, by being their servants.

To make certain that we knew our religious duties, twice a year priests came into the school andquestioned us on our religious knowledge. The preparations for this test seemed endless and were taken very seriously by our teacher, who, in turn, passed on her anxiety to us. We learned to say the Mass in Latin, to know the names of all the vestments and garments the priest wore while saying Mass. We learned all the responses and prayers. It seemed, even then, totally ironic to me, as a young girl, to know all of these details and yet never get a chance to practice any of this part of religion. Only boys could be priests and altar boys. A fact my younger brother often kept reminding me of.
When I was about seven I was the narrator in the school play. For the part, I had to dress as a boy, wearing my brother’s trousers and jacket. Even then at that young age, it would be unthinkable for a girl to be a narrator. Men were the public voice of authority and Master of Ceremonies, women just were not seen, nor accepted, in that public role.

School in the South:

Schools in the south of Ireland were run along the same traditional lines as those in the north. Boys and girls had their own separate schools - in the same Catholic tradition, and the girls had female teachers while the boys had male teachers.

The first day I attended school in the South they put me down two classes to 4th standard. The Head Teacher, Mrs. Smith, decided, for my age, that I should be in 4th standard, not 6th. Two days later, she put me into 6th. [AU: Any particular reason for this change? Your aptitude? Sense unclear]

I found the Southern educational system to be much further behind the Northern system as far as academic achievement was concerned. The big drawback in the South was the Irish language. Teaching Irish took a long time out of each day. and there existed plus there was the same enthusiasm for teaching religious knowledge in the South as there had been in the North. This left and that left little time for the remainder of academic subjects. Still, however, I was taught knitting, sewing and cooking, while my younger brother in the adjacent school was being taught algebra, calculus and technical drawing.

I found the educational system in Southern Ireland to be much more authoritarian. In Northern Ireland, we had been allowed to speak more to our teachers within a lesson, without being viewed as being at all disruptive, however, in the South, it was definitely “chalk and talk” by the teacher and we children just sat and listened. Pupil participation was limited. There was limited participation by the pupils. I always felt that the teachers were just one page ahead of us in our school books. Homework, it was determined, was the key to finding out if one was learning or not. My father looked at my arithmetic
homework one night, and told me adamantly that my teacher was wrong in her theory of how to multiply by large numbers. I had the uneasy job of telling Mrs. Smith, the head teacher, that her arithmetic was incorrect according to my father. I was terrified, but she took it well and went on to teach us the correct way of multiplying by large numbers, saying she was so busy that it was a wonder she could remember anything.

At the time, I thought that if the head teacher was getting my arithmetic wrong, what hope was there for me to learn the correct way of doing anything? However, she did try to secure for me a scholarship into St. Louis's Convent in Rathmines, where she had gone to school. However, I knew even then, that if this attempt was not supported by family — it was doomed to fail.

My mother needed a baby minder and preferably one out in the workforce earning money. Under this circumstance, I would be doomed to failure even if the scholarship was available. When I do my homework and concentrate on my studies? I would be called for home duties, first and foremost. Again girl's education was limited and not considered worthwhile; the teachers substandard and the focus remained on religion and making us little Catholic mothers without and no talk of us girls going to University, choosing careers or having a life separate from hearth and home.

Even after school hours I noticed the boys did not mix much with girls. In Belfast, we had played races with the boys and swapped comics and talked. We even ran races with the boys in our street. In Dublin, boys and girls were even more separate. It was considered unladylike and unhealthy to be friendly with boys and discouraged even at our young age. It was also considered a bit sissy for boys to be playing with girls; somehow unmanly. As girls were not worthy of being playing companions and not equal. Boys kept their superior distance.

IMAGES OF WOMEN IN NORTHERN IRELAND
The women of Beechmount organized our lives. This was pretty typical for the era and the area. Mothers took children to school, did all the cleaning, washing, cooking and ironing. Women walked their babies out in prams, as no self-respecting man ever wheeled a pram. He would be laughed out of the street. Women held a full-time job confronted with dealing with the poverty of the times, low wages, high unemployment and prejudice at every level of society against Catholics.

The man of the house had his own special fireside, comfortable chair. He read the newspaper first and decided what was to be listened to on the radio. The chair was situated adjacent to the fire and the radio, so he could have full control of both. Most men gave some of their earnings each week to the woman of the house. With this money they ran the household buying food, clothing etc. However, with few exceptions, men held onto some money for themselves. This could be used for alcohol, cigarettes and, if they were betting men, the odd wager on the horses or dogs. I took this kind of deference for granted, as did most of the families, that I visited had the same higher archival system.

Women did not have special chairs, or any special time to rest or go out anywhere, except to Church. Most mothers in our district, in fact, seemed to spend all of their time performing domestic chores and tending to children. If they did sit down, they usually had sewing on their laps, clothes to repair or knitting sweaters to knit—always busy fingers.

Women were expected to spend all money left to them on the household, but never on themselves or have any money to call their own. Even unemployed men were still expected to have some money for pleasures no matter where it came from. It was acceptable for men to go to see the dogs race in Windsor Park, (just off the Falls) but no self-respecting women could attend. Men also had their sports: they had clubs for football, cycling, swimming, and tennis. Keeping pigeons and dogs was also a popular hobby for men. Men also played pitch and toss in the streets, which is illegal in Northern Ireland.
One Sunday morning when I was about 8 years of age, I saw a police car arrive at the top of our street. This was a first for me, as I had never seen even one policeman in our area before, never mind the four jumping out of a car. Men and money scattered everywhere. The police did not stay long; they made a pretense of chasing the men, then threw the money to us children and sped away in their car. The Falls is not a safe place for Police. The police knew well that would know that an I.R.A. gunman could be around, and they could be sitting targets – and nobody would have seen anything. There would be no sympathy and no witnesses if they were shot.

There were very limited sports for women/girls and very little time to indulge in them even if they did have some. Girls were mostly kept busy minding children, running messages for the neighbors and being "little women". I never saw any 'big girls' or mothers playing any sports. I had no role models in that respect either. I could outrun every boy in our neighborhood but this became unladylike after a certain age, and there was no place or venue to channel such activities for older girls, except maybe running after children.

The clergy also did not encourage women placing themselves in any kind of public display, not even for playing sports. Several Bishops wrote about this subject. Muslim women today, had many seemed to have a lot of social laws to conform to; men, whereas men on the other hand, could drink, smoke, gamble, beat their wives, lead their own freedom-filled lives, fill the prisons, and have very few lectures regarding their behavior from the Clergy, comparatively speaking, than the women. Women or girls were always restricted by Church and School; boys, on the other hand, were encouraged and promoted to do anything they wanted to do.

Unlike girls, boys were encouraged to play sports and there were plenty of clubs around for them to join. There were footballs clubs, bicycle clubs, camping clubs, hurling, tennis and rugby clubs. Plenty of sports for boys to choose from and display themselves on the football pitches, etc. This gave boys a sense of adventure, plus they needed time to play
these sports and time to practice. The only girls clubs I knew was the Catholic Girls Scouts. Girls were needed at home to be an assistant to their mothers and other women. Girls were to mind children and to learn the household skills necessary for their future as wives and mothers.

JOBS FOR THE BOYS

Unemployment ranwas high in Northern Ireland in the 1940’s and 50’s, and Catholics in particular had a hard time finding work. At In Harland and Wolf, the shipbuilders, (builders of the infamous Titanice), out of a workforce of 4,000 men, employed less than 5%. 5 per cent were Catholics.

Discrimination was rife against Catholics in housing, too, and employment. Protestant men held had most of the jobs and were determined to hold onto that privileged security position. All positions of power and authority were held by Protestant men. The civil service and the post office, were all run by Protestants. Catholics seldom got into any positions of power, as they were considered untrustworthy and thought to would undermine the State of Northern Ireland if given any kind of chance.

Protestant women had much in common with Catholic women. They, too, were dominated under the bye domination of the church with the various rules and regulations in being good wives and mothers. Like Catholic women, they too, did not want to rock the boat by being too critical of their Church. Protestant women found themselves in much the same position as did Catholic women, wherein they did not want to show any display of discontent or disrupt the image of a united front against Catholicism. Much the same could be said of these Catholic women. Both groups of women found themselves were on opposing sides and wanted to evince a sense of show solidarity with their men. To this day, Even to this day, Protestant women in Northern Ireland remain are much under-represented in political, social and economic arenas.
Because of the high unemployment amongst men, it was not unusual for women to go out and secure some kind of work; in fact, it was necessary to keep the family together. As children growing up in Belfast, we were accustomed to seeing women going out to work. Both married and single women were in the workforce. Most women found employment in the sewing industry. The linen mills employed mostly women, and their nimble fingers guided the large looms. Women were also found employed in such the private service industries as cafes, shops and offices. The jobs were low-paying and not part of any career path. Before my mother married, she worked as an overlocker, someone who does the hems of garments in the sewing trade. Her sister, also in the sewing industry, sorted out different types of cloth and distributed to the stitchers—whose job was to make clothes for children. The work was boring, highly repetitive and going nowhere. In the linen mills, the women stood in about 12 inches of water—and the smell from the flax and the water was awful. The smell clung to their clothes. And you could always tell a mill doffer by her smell.

Then came World War II. Eire was neutral during the second world war and de Valera fought long and hard to retain that neutrality. Even though it was a world war, any enemy of Britain could only be a friend to Ireland. Many southern Irishmen fought alongside their old enemy and were happy to do so. I remember my father proudly telling me that the first George medal for bravery was awarded to a northern Irishman.

However, Belfast was an allied port used by the Allies to ship servicemen overseas. All nationalities of servicemen came through Belfast. Romance was in the air—Irish and American men were particularly popular with Irish women. They had nylons, chewing gum and plenty of money and charm. The women got a new lease on life, discovering and meeting a whole new breed of men. My aunt Charlotte, my mother’s sister, met a Swedish man who had been sent to Belfast to...
entertain the troops. He was part of an acrobatic group and my aunt brought him home for dinner. They are now living in Sweden and have been married for almost 50 years.

My mother remembers meeting one black sailor (we have few people of color in Ireland), who remarked to my mother: “It’s bad enough being black in America, but I am sure glad, I ain’t no Catholic in Belfast.” He could see the similarities between the black struggle for civil rights and the Catholic struggle in Northern Ireland, and just how racist our society was at that time.

As often happens in wartime, Irish women became more essential to the work force as men were away at war. Women found an opportunity to do jobs men typically did, such as driving ambulances, buses and cars. Women worked as mechanics in factories and other jobs that helped the war effort; jobs which had been typically carried out by men. Jobs became demystified. Because of these opportunities brought on by war, northern Irish women gained a sense of importance and value that the women of the South or the Eire did not have an opportunity to experience.

Northern Irish women also found an opportunity to live alone with their children while their men were away. They could manage money, feed the children, look after the house, and have money left for themselves. They experienced a taste of freedom and confirmation that they could do a man’s jobs if required, and do them well. During war time, women were used by the Government as a standing army. They were standing by if and when the government needed them. When the servicemen returned home, the women could be returned to their original positions - or so the Government thought. Irving Berlin had written a song just after the first World War about the returning American troops, coming back home:

How are you gonna keep ’em down on the farm
After they’ve see Paree…
No doubt Mr. Berlin may have been referring to the troops who tasted getting a taste of the high life and not wanting to settle back into the boredom of their pre-war lives. So, it was with the women of Northern Ireland. Many northern Irish women became dis-contented with their lot in life and made major changes in their lives. Most women who went through the war experience in Northern Ireland would never be the same again. Change is painful but life expanding. Women who had become accustomed to the cultural mores saw that these could change as and when needed, and many looked at their lives with fresh eyes. Performing work during the war time gave women a sense of achievement and a sense of being needed on a national level - working for the good of their country and being paid to do it. Performing the work typically performed by men normally carried out by men, and doing it well, and being financially rewarded for it – was all a new, rewarding and life-changing experience for these women.

During the war, while my mother sewed parachutes and her mother looked after us children. Although the Government wanted and needed women working – the Government made limited provision for looking after the children of working mothers. By now, even the Government took women for granted, as most. Most women had to make those arrangements themselves and, in nearly all cases, it was the grandmothers, or other women relatives, who did the job of child minding. In this way, these women worked full time for the war effort, then came home and were mothers to their children. Women also looked after their homes, paid the bills, did any repairs necessary to the house, as nearly all the men were away at war. These responsibilities gave women much more lot of confidence in knowing how to perform a men’s role in addition to all of the to know they could do all their motherly responsibilities things, and a ‘man’s role’ as well. My mother enjoyed being at home and she was used to my father being away from home so the war did not changed her little much. She was in no rush to go back to sewing handkerchiefs eight hours a day for very little money.
However, generally speaking, women left work at marriage or when they became pregnant. But due to the high unemployment rate for men in Northern Ireland, it was not unusual for women to return to the workforce out of economic necessity. Phil Colter wrote a very famous song about Derry (The Town I Loved So Well) his hometown in Northern Ireland and where the Civil Rights movement played a prominent role. One of the lines of the song reflects changes from the unemployment experience: “While the men on the dole (unemployment assistance) played a mother’s role – in the Town I loved so well.” He, too, must have experienced, in Derry, the fathers at home without jobs while the mothers working outside the home. Married women who worked at paid employment was still considered a stop-gap measure until the primary breadwinner, the man, secured work. It was considered demeaning in society for the husband to have a working wife. It was a slur on his financial ability to provide for a wife and children, and on his masculinity. Husbands needed to be agreeable for a wife to have a job outside the home, and most men did not want their wives working for this reason. Society viewed married women as an affront to their husbands’ ability to keep them in the manner to which they had become accustomed to – working class poverty? When my uncle Malachy married a Protestant woman, the family went into crisis. My aunt Kate, the eldest, remonstrated with my uncle and said to him “all she wanted was a man to keep her”; in reply, he said “Well at least I can do that, unlike your husband – after all, you are still working”.

The truth hurt. My aunt was furious. She was the exception around the Falls. She married very late and had no children. Her husband was work-shy and alcoholic. She worked all of her life and this was most unusual in our neighborhood. However, she had to take the insults that were sometimes directed towards her. In her case, it was more acceptable as she was not a mother, but she was still a married woman and really should have been at home waiting on her husband. She was still waiting on her husband.
but onlyjust until the public houses closed and when he came home to her. When he did, he was mostly under the influence and talked to us children about fighting and dying for Ireland. To be fair to him, he did play a part in Ireland’s war by providing a “safe” house for men on the run. My mother tells a story of the house being searched and of hiding a “fugitive” under my cot while I stood up in the cot crying, and the police would not go near me. I, at eight months, and was already doing my bit, however, unintentional, for Ireland’s freedom.

THE INFLUENCE OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

The Catholic Church had a huge influence on all our lives in Northern Ireland. Church attendance in Northern Ireland was almost like an act of defiance against the Protestant state, and viewed by us Catholics as a show of solidarity with the Free State and the nationalist cause. To question the authority of the Church was akin to questioning our national identity. It was an act of treason, and seen by Catholics as treason.

For the Catholic Church, men were its leaders, and women subservient to them very much second class within the Church. Men, then and now, are still seen as the central figures within the Church. The Catholic Church has made it abundantly clear that men, as chosen by Christ to be the gender of His twelve apostles, were the chosen sex and women are “subject to men”; as Christ is head of the Church, so too are women subject to men. Man was made in the image of God, women were an afterthought, to be a companion to man, a helpmate. So the Church decrees. Women will never be priests; this was, then, and still is, decreed within the Catholic Church, right up until the present day.

Catholics in Northern Ireland deeply resented the Protestant State and felt their second class status most acutely. Every Catholic rushed out of the cinema before the authorities played “God Save our Queen,” the British National Anthem. Even the red post boxes and red buses were an affront to our tradition of green and an
obvious reminder of who ruled whom in Northern Ireland. As children, when we were at
the cinema, we applauded any time a Catholic scene appeared on the screen, such as a
priest saying mass or someone blessing themselves. It was the only time (apart from
being in a Catholic Church) we saw any public evidence of our religion being
acknowledged and honored.

Catholics wanted to stand together against the British State of Northern Ireland. The
women stood alongside the men in their feelings of solidarity with each other. Us
against Them. Them – being the protestant rulers who represented the British government
in Northern Ireland knew what it was like to be a British subject and a second-class citizen in their own country. Both genders had a
common bond and a common aim; to be free of British oppression and see a united
Ireland in their lifetime. They wished to be treated with dignity and respect in their own
country. Catholic men and women wore Catholicism with pride as a mark of being truly
Irish, and not a "planter" (one who was planted from England into Ireland and
therefore, not Irish but English.)

Much as with the nationalist women in the early part of the 20th century, the choice
to fight for a United Ireland or fight for women’s rights – was always a dilemma. Men
did not have to make these choices. Fighting for Irish freedom was clear and
straightforward for them. When they achieved freedom, they knew they would gain
power and a new lifestyle. As the British would be gone, leaving it free and clear for men
to take over, men knew they would be running the new Ireland and have a choice of
jobs and authority, as the British would be gone, leaving it free and clear for men to take
over. Nationalist women, who subjugated their desire for women’s rights, in favor
of fighting for Irish freedom, must have felt assured that when Ireland was free, they
would be free too and have the same rights as men in work and in the public arena. They
would learn differently.

Every Catholic went to Mass on Sunday morning. It was unthinkable not to. We, and we were questioned the following day in school if, indeed, we had
attended when we went to school the next day if we had in fact attended Mass. Men, women, and children went to confession regularly and, during certain months, such as October, many Catholics went to devotions each night from 7 p.m. until 8 p.m. The six weeks of Lent were also a very religious time for Catholics. Fasting and prayer were required and extra time spent in Church. Daily Mass was encouraged during Lent and we children were required to give up candies and make other little sacrifices. Adults gave up alcohol, — well, mostly men, did this as a penance, — and both men and women tried to give up smoking cigarettes.

The women certainly did more obvious praying than men. Women were expected to prepare the children for Confirmation and Communion. Getting the children physically ready with new clothes, and preparing them spiritually ready was part of a woman’s duties. Women went to the church more often than men to pray and do devotions, with the children. Such activity was considered a woman’s duty, not a man’s by issue and not a male one. Somehow, it was, and still is, more acceptable for men not to be religious. Men appear to have been more independent from and not a part of religious duties. Yet, men, in nearly all religions, hold the most positions of power. It more of less reflects society in general. Women do most of the menial work and men hold the positions of power within the workforce.

The nationalist solidarity gave the Catholic church a great deal of power and the Church used this power to control the people and the schools, which in turn, controlled the future fathers and mothers of the future. The Church also controlled the adult population from the pulpit. Each Sunday at Mass, the Catholic population was advised as to what movies were not acceptable, what dance halls were taboo, for whom to vote, and who to vote for and whom to marry, or rather who not to marry. The Church strongly disapproved of ‘mixed marriages’ (i.e. Catholics and Protestants marrying). If a Catholic married a Protestant, then the Protestant must have agreed, in writing, prior to marriage, that any children of the union must be reared brought up as Catholic. The marriage must take place in a Catholic church married in a Catholic church but only at a side altar, as the center altar was reserved only
for those without need for he did not have to have special dispensations. It would be a long time before such rules were relaxed.

**Editing stopped at 10,335 original word count.**

When my uncle married a protestant girl, my grandfather threw him out of the house and told him never to come back. He eventually did come back but he came more often after my grandfather died. He had to change his name to Joe, as Malachy was too obviously catholic. He went to live in disguise in a protestant neighborhood and nobody knew he was catholic for about 25 years. In 1978 a friend of his in the Royal Ulster Constabulary, advised him that his name was on a ‘protestant hit list’ as his secret had been found out i.e. he was once catholic and had served time on the Floating Ship as a Republican prisoner. After one attempt on his life, he left the country and is now living in rural England. He dare not go back to Northern Ireland. He brought up his three sons as protestants, and they are all in the British army. These facts did not save him from the hit-list. Once a catholic always a catholic. There is deep racial hatred between protestant and catholic. Protestants fear the catholic ambition for a united Ireland, and want to keep their superior position within Northern Ireland as part of the ruling elite.

In the early 1950′s - I can still remember being in the congregation, when a Priest in St. Paul’s Church (Fr.Close) gave a Sunday morning sermon at Mass, advising us not to go and see two movies presently being played in a Cinema in downtown Belfast. This was just after he had preached one frightening sermon on Hell and damnation. How we would all burn forever for committing a mortal sin and dying with this sin on our souls. I can still remember my fear. This fear meant control. These people had power over me, not only in this life, but for all eternity. Naturally then, when the clergy spoke the population listened.

Remind the reader of what year this was. It was (date) and the two movies the priest was commenting on were, the ‘Rose Tattoo’ and a biblical movie named “Salome”. In school
the next day our Teacher also advised us not to go and see ‘Salome’, because in the movie ‘Salome’ was somehow shown as being victimized and this would not be tolerated, she was an evil woman and that was final. The Rose Tattoo, was not explained, as I suspect, there was some sexual context that we, as schoolgirls, could not be advised upon. We were just told not to go and see that particular film under pain of mortal sin. School also enforced the Catholic view of how women should behave in society. We schoolgirls were indoctrinated with the dogma of the Church. We knew, in Latin, all the prayers the priest said at Mass. We also knew the names of his priestly garments, all the responses required by the congregation and all the hymns. During the school year priests came into the school to test us on our knowledge of Catholicism and we had to know our Catechisms off by heart. However, as girls, we would never get a chance to put this knowledge to any practical use. My brother was an altar-boy, and in those days, there was never any mention of altar-girls. It was a great status for a young boy to serve at Mass and be on public display in front of the whole community at Mass. Altar girls were not even dreamed of let alone considered. Men, and only men could be on public display within the Catholic Church. Men were Christian Brother, priests, bishops, cardinals, ushers, and altar-boys. Men would take up the collection at masses, add up the money and submit it to the local parish priest. The parish priest employed a sexton, or administrative assistant for the parish, who was also always a man. In turn, women were allowed to clean the churches, organize the various social functions e.g. making the teas, baking the cakes and cookies, preparing the sandwiches and serving all this, to all and sundry. Women could also be housekeepers to the local clergy – cooking, cleaning and secretary within the home of the parish priest. These housekeepers were always unmarried, and typically stayed with the parish all their lives. These women devoted their lives to looking after the clergy. It was lowly paid, but there was a certain social recognition and respect given to the job, it was the highest achievement of power a lay-women could have within the catholic church – housekeeper to the parish priest. Men then, and still are, the central figures within the Church. The Catholic Church has made it abundantly clear that men, as chosen by Christ to be his twelve apostles, were the chosen ones and women are ‘subject to men” as Christ is head of the Church, so too women are subject to men. Man was made in the image of God, women were an
afterthought, to be a companion to man. Women will never be priests, this was, and still is, reinforced within the Catholic Church, right up until the present day.

CULTURAL LIMITATIONS IMPOSED UPON GIRLS/WOMEN.

Women in Northern Ireland, did not go into public houses (bars); my mother and aunts never did. It was not that public houses banned women or they were forbidden by law, it was just culturally unacceptable and it never occurred to men to ask women to the bars for drinks. This was another area that men controlled and asking women into their world as just unthinkable. However, my uncles and most men who lived in our neighborhood, were frequent attendees of these establishments.

Robin Livingstoke, in his 1998 “The Road’ Memories of the Falls” – 1998, quotes on page 13 of the introduction – ‘But kicking back over a bottle of ice-cold imported beer in a Falls Road Bar to-day, its well to remember that old women have no heartwarming stories to tell about pubs because there were never part of the picture.” Very true indeed. Livingstoke goes on to explain in his book that no matter how desperately a woman wanted to see her husband, she dare not enter the public house, “the cracker must have sounded distant hollow indeed to the woman with the pram in the street waiting for her husband to send out part of his wages”. The Road: Memories of the Falls’ – 1998 page 15

It was also considered very unladylike to smoke in public places; this would be perceived as most improper and not done by women. However, women did smoke indoors. My mother and my aunts all smoked indoors, but never in public. Women did not whistle, this too was considered most unladylike. My second grade teacher, Miss Heaney, informed us girls that “Our Lady in Heaven is offended by a woman whistling – and it makes Her weep to hear any woman whistle.” Men on the other hand whistled a lot, especially after women in the streets. This kind of male behavior was certainly deemed acceptable by males until well into the 1970’s, until women rebelled and this form of address became offensive and politically incorrect.
Women did not go into betting offices to gamble. Again this rule was not forbidden by law but culturally imposed. My aunt liked to bet money on the horses each Saturday. She would write out her betting slip, give it to her older brother and he would go into the betting shop for her and place her bet. This reliance upon the good nature of men to accommodate women’s needs was demeaning to any sensitive women but it was so ingrained, that few women ever questioned these restraints.

Women were discouraged from wearing make-up, especially lipstick and were also given constant lectures by Church and school, on having any association with the opposite sex unless properly supervised. The Catholic Truth Society published an article in the “The Irish Independent” 13th October 1926

“The woman of Ireland, heretofore, renowned for their virtue and honor, go about furnished with the pain pot, the lip-stick…and many of them have acquired the habit of intemperance, perhaps one of the sequels to their lately adopted vogue of smoking. A so called dress performance or dance today showed some of our Irish girls in such scanty drapery as could only be exceeded in the slave markets of pagan countries.’

This attitude still prevailed with the church right up until the 60’s – almost requiring women to go around dressed like our Muslim sisters, covered up, invisible, in shad……. The Catholic Church ran dances for teenagers within the Parish and this was supervised by a priest on duty to ensure no slow or close dancing took place. I was at a dance when I was about 16, in the Church Hall in Fruithill, on the Falls Road, in Belfast. The priest of the parish came into the hall and insisted the lights were too dim and must be raised a watt or two, as some couples were dancing too closely for catholic church comfort. Sex outside of marriage was taboo and girls were expected to be virgins when they got married. Boys being virgin was not discussed; only girls had to remain virgin. The Church, as well as nearly all bridegrooms, expected this and the term ‘second hand goods’ was bandied about if a women was even suspected of having sexual relations before marriage. St.Paul’s letter to the Romans was read aloud at most marriage ceremonies. “Wives be subject to your husband in all things, just as Christ is head of the
Church, so too is your husband head of you………..” In the marriage ceremony the woman also had to promise to ‘love honor and obey’ her husband. There could be no mistaking who was going to be subject to whom. Lest women forget their rightful place in society the Church was there to ensure they remembered.

Around the Falls, the women always took care of preparing the bodies of the deceased. There were certain women in the neighborhood who washed the body and laid out the dead. These women were sent for as soon as someone in the neighborhood died. For this service they received some money but not much. It was as much a service to the community as it was for remuneration. However, in Belfast, women did not follow the coffin along the main road, that was reserved for men. Men carried the coffins, men walked behind the coffin, and men were at the graveside when the body was lowered into the ground. Men then proceeded to the pub to drink to the deceased. The men came back to the house of the deceased wherein the women had cleaned the house, prepared a feast and served the mourners with food and drink. The women did all the private work and the men did all the public posing.

The first time I saw women at a graveside, was on Television in the seventies, in the same graveyard where my family plot is located, Milltown Cemetery on the Falls Road. It was an IRA funeral and women carried the coffin and stood alongside the grave in military formation while they buried the deceased. The women wore military style uniforms, black sun glasses and like the women of the 1916 rebellion, stood alongside their men in times of struggle. It was once again akin to when the whole of Ireland was struggling for independence, and women took their place alongside men in the time of armed rebellion. It is in times of war that women are allowed to come to the forefront of danger and be seen in public roles. It is permissible they come into the melee and stand by their men. Women are now culturally permitted to stand alongside the graves of their loved ones as a form of reward for participating in the struggle for independence? It will be interesting to see if the women of this rebellion fare as badly as the women of the 1916 rebellion. I will watch with interest.
Women were expected to uphold moral values within Irish society, in a society in which they had no power: they were to be the bastions of moral purity, the mainstay of the family upholding the Catholic ideology and yet get the least reward for doing so e.g. no say in how society is administered.
It would appear that women did all the menial work and men took all the glory and that was the norm.

THE NUNS

The other group of women who were not wives and mothers and who were very much respected within our neighborhood, were nuns. The local school beside St.Paul's, St.Dominic's, was staffed by teaching nuns. Somehow I did not view (as a child growing up) nuns as women. They appeared to be gender neutral nullified and not of this world, neither male or female. They were just nuns.

My mother had been taught by nuns and for that reason she always said she would never send her children to be taught by nuns. I have actually no experience of being taught by nuns but thousands of Irish girls did have that experience. My mothers’ reason for not sending her children to be taught by nuns, ( well the girls anyway, as the boys went to the Christian Brothers) in her experience, she had found the nuns to be very class conscious and money conscious, and cruel. She said she was aware of who the rich girls were in her class as the nuns treated them differently. The poorer children were punished more, both verbally and physically and generally were treated with contempt. My mother said she remembered how horrible the nuns treated her at school, and she swore she would never send any of her children to be taught by them. She was true to her word.

The nuns I remember were dressed all in black with black and white head-dresses. They wore their skirts to the ground and carried clanking brown rosary beads around their waists. They collected money each Wednesday for the poor of the Parish. The nuns would just knock on the door, then stand there, always in pairs, not saying anything, and
you just gave them money. They usually nodded, left and went onto the next house. I
never knew them to have a conversation with anyone. This was my only contact with
nuns growing up.

Nuns had to take a vow of obedience to the church. They did not question authority and
as educators this message was passed along to the children under their supervision. The
girls especially. They taught the girls to be chaste, pure, obedient, and to follow all the
church’s rulings. The highest calling for a girl was to be a wife and mother, the next to be
a nun.

The nuns did a dis-service to women by carrying on the teachings of their male superiors
within the Church. Nuns also did not contribute much in the way of education on a higher
level. They did not write original papers, or attempt to change the way children were
being taught, looking for new and more modern ways to educated. They were not being
innovative and that made, education very stagnant. However, to be fair – they did much
good work in hospitals tending the sick, and were for a long time used as the social
services department of the Irish Republic. They provided a source of unpaid labor, and a
plentiful supply of help whereas in a secular environment the Government would have
had to set up a social services unit to minister to the people. The Church was again used,
but at the same time, the Church wanted to continue to have control over the people’s
health and education, and this provided another opportunity to do so.

Girls thought it was a great honor to be called to be a nun. It was called having a
vocation. If you had money to give the convent a dowry, then this would be an advantage
and the convent would welcome you to a high social position within the fabric of convent
life. However, if you did not have money, you remained in the lower orders and were
relegated to cooking, cleaning, washing and gardening. It was said to be the ambition of
many Irish mothers to have a son a priest and a daughter a nun. Nuns, like priests were
shown great respect within our society. It was also a way for women to opt out of
difficult situations e.g. if you had a very unhappy home life and were being mistreated
you could always enter a convent. Another example was in rural areas farmers were
anxious to consolidate land and they wanted their daughters to marry older and richer farmers – a way out of that situation was to say you had a vocation and wanted to be a nun. In later years, it also became a way for women to get a good education.

“Women and the Church since famine” shows that in 1840 there was one Catholic priest for every 3,500 lay people, and there was one nun for every 7,000 Catholic’s. However, by 1960 there was 1 priest for every 600 – and 1 nun for every 400, quite a considerable increase, especially as far as nuns were concerned.

However, around 1950 Pope Pious XI1 concerned that many of the nuns were falling behind educationally :- compared to their lay counterparts. He permitted and indeed encouraged nuns into third level education. In 1954 the Pope offered three year religious courses for both nuns and lay women. The nuns who took these courses could then go back into the convents and take on more responsible roles. However, what really happened was an opening up within the religious life and a questioning of the rules, especially by the nuns who were receiving additional further education. A few nuns stayed within the Church and tried to change things, however, women left the convent in droves. Jenny Beale in Women in Ireland writes that after the Second Vatican Council 1962 (which called for change and renewal within the church) gave nuns an opportunity to change their dress, their rules and regulations and “most important, nuns have begun to reclaim their full identity as women” p. 165xxxxxxxnote

Many nuns who stayed within the Church have done great work by having greater freedom to express themselves within that work. My daughter did her thesis while attending Trinity College, Dublin, (same college as Mary Robinson attended) with Sister Stran. who is revered in Ireland for her work helping the homeless, the drug abusers, and young teenage runaways.

Jenny Beale interviewed one nun, Sister Margaret, who was particularly offended by the male exclusiveness of language within the Church’s liturgy. “The question of language is a serious one. The consistent use of the terms ‘brother’ ‘men’ and ‘he’ in hymns, prayers
and scripture have a definite effect on women by reinforcing feelings of exclusion and inferiority”. P. 169

In 1967 the proportion of nuns was at its peak, at 19,000 Irish nuns. This is now reduced to a very small proportion so much so that convents are closing for lack of vocations. My friend Maria Macanna whose Aunt Brenda at aged 55,( a nun for most of her life) was complaining that there were no longer any younger nuns to look after the aging population of nuns. She was the second youngest in her convent. There were just no replacements coming into the convents. Between 1966 and 1975 in the U.S.A. the number of nuns fell by 28% in Ireland the number was 9% for the same period. Cite source for this in a footnote. Excellent statistics. A significant drop by any standards and as nuns grow older and retire there are very few younger nuns to take over.

Over half of the nuns entering religious life in 1978 had honors Leaving Certificates or better, and over a quarter had University degrees. As a result, Jenny Beale points out “nuns sometimes find themselves more up-to-date in theology than their local priest and more highly qualified than him as well.” P. 179 This must surely cause conflict within religious life, since nuns are obliged to be subservient to someone who you perhaps know to be less talented and less educated.

As women have more choices in life, less and less of them, are choosing the restrictive life of the convent.

COMING OUT SLOWLY

Ironically, it was the Catholic Church that first gave women the opportunity of going out on their own within the community. To raise money for their churches in the 1950’s the catholic clergy started to run bingo at the local catholic halls. Women loved it. They went to bingo by the thousands. As far as their men were concerned, the priest was there to supervise their women as very few if any men went to bingo. There was also the possibility that the women might win some money and the men would encourage this. Money from anywhere in those harsh economic times was always welcome. Possibly, it
was the first time women had an opportunity to obtain a fairly large sum of money in her own right. It must have given women who won money a great sense of power and giving, to walk home and say, ‘this is my money and I want to contribute financially’ a feeling of strength and autonomy that may have stayed with many women and made them hungry for their own money and that sense of power.

The women of the Falls - put on their best finery and went to the local church hall every Wednesday night and got a taste of freedom. Women started talking to each other - laughing and enjoying themselves away from their home duties. It was their first taste of freedom, even if it was supervised in part by the local clergy. As a child it was the first time I had seen women go out en masse together (except for church, even then it was mostly families with children) This was a time for women to be together, to talk, to share their experiences, to walk out of the house, like men did, without children to enjoy themselves. It was an exhilarating experience for women and certainly consciousness raising.

GOING TO LIVE IN THE “FREE STATE”
- a woman’s place is in the home.

My father had obtained a house for his family in Dublin, and when I was eleven years of age we went to live in the Free State. Unknowingly to me at that time, my fate had already been sealed within the 1937 Constitution seven years before I was born. As a girl/woman my limitations within the new Irish society were already defined as a mother and homemaker.

article 41 states: ‘The State recognizes that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved.’ ‘The State shall therefore endeavor to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labor to the neglect of their duties in the home.’ [is this the quote in the first paragraph? If so, summarize it one place or another, don’t quote it twice.]
If the church were dominating women in the north the south had enshrined their position on women within the 1937 Constitution – so church and state in the south had decided the place of women within the new Irish society i.e. within the home.

Women who had taken part in the 1916 Rebellion must have been very disappointed with the way the new state was emerging. Women were not being treated equally. De Valera had a very idealistic view of Irish life. He envisioned Ireland as some sort of cultural oasis in Europe. Ireland may not have much material wealth, but culturally we were blessed He saw the women tending the hearth and home, and the men out making decisions and men only in public life. This is very much in keeping with the Catholic Church’s teachings and he went about making Ireland true to this vision and women suffered for it. On a more astute political level, if he wanted to continue in power, he would have to please the church. If he failed to do that, then the church would preach against him, and he would not be elected. He was clever enough to know that. So what if it was women who suffered, and did not have full citizen rights, the men would certainly elect him. The old boys network was in full force and the men had the money and the power. He needed to humor men more than he needed to placate women. Men would win him elections, and priests would help him do that - provided he gave the clergy what they wanted - a Catholic Ireland. He did just that.

As early as 1927, in Dail Debates about women in the new Irish society, Kevin O’Higgins, was setting the groundwork for the position of women in the new society. He stated “that the ‘normal’ role for women was to be the bearers of children and keepers of the home, and only ‘abnormal’ women thought otherwise.”. Dail Debate Paper Vol.18 – 1927.

The Cosgrave Government in 1924 and again in 1927 brought in restrictions on the right of women to serve on Juries.
In 1925 the civil service placed restrictions upon certain examinations being open to both single and married women, thus limiting their promotional prospects, whether they married or not.

In 1932 compulsory retirement was introduced for married women teachers and eventually this rule was applied to the whole of the civil service. (This was later to be rescinded when there was a shortage of teachers and married women could keep their jobs, at least in the teaching profession.)

Little by little, women were being excluded officially from public life. Divorce was banned following the Catholic doctrine of marriage for life, without exception. With no divorce and no job and no money, women had no choice but to stay with men they hated. The sale of contraceptives was also banned. This is also in keeping with Catholic ideology: to use any form of contraception was a mortal sin. Choices were being taken away from all women. They had no control whatsoever over their reproductive system, and with the censorship laws, really no way of knowing how to control anything about their own bodies. Any book with any sexual slant, or any information about sex or reproduction was banned.

Women without paid work had no means of support, and could not purchase items on hire purchase or have any sort of credit. The husband and breadwinner had to co-sign all legal agreements and guarantee payment. These restrictions put women, whether married or single, in very difficult situations. If women did not marry how could they support and improve their financial life? If they were employed in the Civil Service, promotional prospects were limited. Managers were reluctant to promote women, as most women would get married and almost immediately leave work – it was the expected social norm. Why train a woman to do all this specialized work and then as soon as she marries she had to leave.

Articles 41.2 in the Constitution envisaged a married couple with children, and the wife working inside the home and the husband working outside earning a living to support the
family. This was the traditional allocation of gender roles. It saw the man as the means of support in the public arena – earning a living, while the woman was given, because of her gender, the role of child-rearing. It made women totally dependent on their husbands, since in most cases only the public role is remunerated and labor in the home is not.

The 1916 Proclamation had stated ‘The Republic guarantees religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities to all its Citizens.’ According to Professor Mary Hayden in a 1937 article - ‘What is proposed by the new Constitution is not a return to the Middle Ages. It is something much worse.” Independent…….put in notes

Louie Bennett, the much respected secretary of the Irish Women Workers’ Union with other members of the Irish Women’s Workers Union executive, formed one of the many deputation’s to de Valera, seeking amendments to the Constitution. Louie Bennet wrote to de Valera outlining many of her objections and in fairness to de Valera he did make some small adjustments to Article 16 and 45 to, “change to the latter eliminating what the IWWU referred to as ‘the obnoxious phrase ‘inadequate strength of women”, and substitution of the word ‘citizen’ in place of ‘women and children’). IWWU, Annual report 1937–38, po.5: also Ward , Unmanageable Revolutionaries, p.241. rewrite this piece……………

Another objection came from one of deValera’s most ardent supporters, Dorothy Maccardle. Maccardle was a keen supporter of de Valera and as Tim Pat Coogan pointed out in his book “De Valera Long Fellow, Long Shadow” for Maccardle to object to something by de Valera, ‘it was akin to one of the four Gospel authors falling out with Christ’. P497. In a letter dated 21st May 1937 Maccardle stated “As the Constitution stands, I do not see how anyone holding advanced views on the rights of women can support it, and that it is a tragic dilemma for those who have been loyal and ardent workers in the national cause’. page 497

De Valera refused to accept the objections of either Bennet or Maccardle, but rather took the advice of his constitutional adviser on the subject John Charles McQuaid, CSSp,
President of Blackrock College and later Archbishop of Dublin. McQuaid advised de Valera that ‘the feminists are very confused’ McQuaid also advised de Valera that it was ‘incorrect’ to state that ‘men and women have equal right to work of the same kind. Men and women have equal right to appropriate work.” His assessment was that …..the law of Nature lays diverse functions on men and women. The completeness of life requires this diversity of function and of work. Coogan goes on to say “This diversity argument was one which was to hold sway, not only in the Constitution, but in Irish life generally for many years after de Valera had retired from politics.” P. 497 Tim Pat Coogan,

De Valera did not change the Constitution, it went through the Dail and was passed by a small majority. Women were put in their place in the South of Ireland enshrined within the Constitution - within the home and out of public life.

WOMEN IN THE FREE STATE

The year was 1955. I liked Dublin, it felt less tense than Belfast. The air seemed fresher, people were more relaxed and the green buses and post boxes looked good to me. Policemen were not wearing guns. For the first time I saw cows on the road. We lived near the Cattle Market and the Abbotoir on the North Circular Road. Farmers drove their cows along the main road every Wednesday to be sold for profit and then killed for our consumption. Manure fell all over the main road but this seemed to be tolerated by the city folks as part of life. After the regimentation of Belfast, this was quite refreshing for me.

I noticed very few women worked in Dublin. Working was part of a man’s life. The women who did work, were mostly single and they worked in shops, - minding children for payment, cleaning, hairdressing, sewing and all of the menial low paid jobs typically allocated to women. Some of the better educated women were in nursing and teaching, the caring professions, but as yet there were few women in the more public and lucrative professions.
Very few married women worked outside the home. Most women had large numbers of children (contraceptives were illegal) and this was a more then a full time job for them. In the housing estate of nearly 200 houses: - where I lived in Dublin, only one woman worked outside the home: - Mrs. Colbert. She ran a money club from her house. She had two children, rare by Irish standards, and a very easy going husband who supported her efforts. She was also the first woman in later years to own and drive a car.

Mrs. Colbert acted as an agent for clothing shops. She exchanged vouchers for goods, and collected money weekly from the local housewives, who purchased items in advance and paid for them on a weekly basis. This was a woman’s way of getting credit to buy clothes and goods, for themselves and their children. I also noticed in the south there were fewer factories and much less industry. There were no linen mills, brick mills, or large or factories. I missed the sound of the factory horns that would sing out at lunch time in Belfast. The horns would again hoot at evening time, as all the employees left the factories and the Belfast women would scramble to get the food ready for their men arriving home.

The main industry in Dublin was Guinness’s Brewery and mostly men worked there. On one hand this seemed appropriate as men were their best and most diligent customers. They mostly drank their own product. There were a few women cleaners, and some office workers, but mostly it was a place where men worked.

My husband’s grandmother was employed in Guinness’s as a cleaner. Her husband had worked for Arthur Guinness. He had died very young (he was about 33) and left her a widow with 3 young children. With no means of support - the company gave her a job as a cleaner. Cleaners worked early in the mornings so that a mother with young children, could do her cleaning job and be back home in time to take her children to school. She worked from 4 a.m. until 8 a.m. Monday through Friday. Guinness’s rather kindly made these jobs available for widows of deceased employees. She told my husband that most of the women who were employed in the offices were from old Protestant stock and very ladylike. Guinness’s was a well-known Protestant family with high social connections.
The Guinness family are still pictured at the Hunt Ball, and high social and artistic occasions as part of the social elite.

I also noticed the same social restrictions applied to women in the South as had applied in the North of Ireland. Few women in role of authority, the usual nurses and teachers, the caring professions were the only places I saw women in any positions of limited authority.

The Catholic Church’s view of women as secondary to men was very much evident throughout society in Southern Ireland. The Church had a much more controlling hand in the South as there was a special place for them enshrined in de Valera’s 1937 Irish Constitution. The Church had a secular role as well as a religious hold on the society. The Church also had such a hold on the people of Ireland that Politicians knew they needed the support of the Church if they wanted to get votes and be voted back into office.

It did not inconvenience men too much to be subject to the rules of the Church. They were not deemed second class citizens, they could get jobs anywhere. As men, they could seek an apprenticeship, expect to earn more money, expect to remain in their job whether they married or not. They could also expect to be given financial credit, and to do any job they choose, e.g. doctor, lawyer, civil servant or member of the police and armed forces. Women, however, could not expect the same treatment. Men, did not have to bear the children and suffer and sometimes die in doing so. Therefore, the church’s social rules and religious laws, did not impact men to the same extent as they did women. Women’s health suffered from having and raising so many children. When my mother was having her third baby, she had the advantage of getting free medical treatment in Northern Ireland. She had a resident doctor, Dr. McGarry who took very good care of her and her unborn child. When she asked him once “ I feel so special, what happens women who do not have the luxury of a good doctor,” He looked sad and then said to her “Nan, Milltown Cemetery is full of them”.(Milltown is the main Catholic cemetery on the Falls Road). A sobering moment. The concept of women dying for their faith seems implicit
in that statement, but women have not been canonized by the Church, for dying in childbirth. No glory there either.

As a teenage girl growing up in Dublin, in the 1960’s I had the sense that boys in the South had much less respect for girls, than the boys in the North. I felt the shared experience of being under a colonizing force in the north did much to bring together the community and each had a bond with one another and a mutual desire to be free of the oppressors. I did not feel that bond existed in the south and men and women were very separate from each other throughout society.

However, in the south the men had seen the women stripped of dignity and becoming less of a citizen in their eyes, by not serving on juries, by not being recognized for their role in the freeing of Ireland, and by being enshrined in the Constitution as a homebody/mother without any power. Women were relying on the kindness of strangers, i.e. the men in their own land, as the British had taught them well.

The men had all the power. No divorce, no contraception, no laws to say you had to give your wife part ownership of the family home. No laws to oblige you to pay maintenance, as there was no divorce, no alimony. Some say power corrupts and total power corrupts even more. Well the men of Ireland had been under the heel of their colonizers for so long, they in turn choose to colonize the women of Ireland. They learned how to dominate and control from the best, that is, from the British, and it was all they knew. They grew up being colonized and they did not know any other way. It was their day in the sun now, and women were available to be controlled, there was nobody else around.

EMIGRATION

Women responded to this treatment in the only way they knew how, they emigrated. The image I had grown up with in Ireland was of men leaving the country. However, women were invisible in our society and I was surprised to learn that more single women left Ireland and came to America, than to any other country in the world. The emigration of
women to England and America was so prevalent that at one point it was discussed in the
government. The discussion centered around how they could stop women from leaving
the country. Parts of the rural areas, were left almost without women, and this naturally
was a cause for concern by the government. They needed women to increase the
population and keep the farmers – farming, and in Ireland. Ireland’s population is the
only population in Europe not to increase at the same rate as other countries. [can you
answer this: as which other countries? provide the source for this data] It is way behind.
Ireland needed more people, especially in the rural areas.

The government did not consider why the women were leaving and maybe this did not
occur or matter to them. Again the attitude of control was prevalent. Keep them here by
fair means or foul. Women were not represented in government, men only in control.
Who could speak for them? Women were not represented in any positions of power, so
who did they ask - if any women, why the women were leaving? The government did
disider a ban on women leaving the country, but in the 1950’s this was considered a bit
too much like Communism and that idea was not followed through.

Most of the women were going to the U.S.A.; especially those from rural Ireland. The
chain of women leaving - started after the Great Hunger, commonly known as The
Famine (1847/54) . The women worked mostly as hired help in America, sent money
home for fares, got jobs for women relatives in the large homes in America, and their
relatives, mostly women, followed them out of Ireland. Links had already been formed
with the emigrants in the U.S.A. and this made it easier for women to leave in the 1950’s
and 60’s . It was their response to the controlling legislation against women as codified in
the 1937 Constitution and to the efforts of men to colonize them.

A good quota of women went across the Irish sea to Britain. However, it has always been
my opinion that the “Bridget” or Irish women in the U.S.A. was very visible but there
was no equivalent to the “Bridget” in the United Kingdom. There was the Irish Paddy but
no Irish Mary or Bridget. Irish women until recently have been somewhat invisible in the
U.K. Partly this could be due to the animosity between the Irish and the English, and
women just kept their heads down, melted into society and worked. The drunken Paddy has always been the English image of the Irish emigration to their country. The songs and images of Ireland were of men leaving and their mothers lamenting, but few if any songs lament about the fact that women were leaving – a more realistic image of what was happening in Ireland. The Irish woman in England was well respected. They mostly worked as nurses, teachers and in the offices as secretaries. When I first went to England and was looking for work, it was an advantage to be an Irish women, as the employers wanted good industrious workers and they found Irish women to be just that. The English liked to keep the mythology of the drunken Irish and Irish women did not fit into that image.

**OUT IN THE WORKFORCE**

In 1959, I left commercial college, where I had studied shorthand and typing. I got my first summer job while I was visiting Belfast. It was with a wholesale shoe distributors; and although it was a summer job, they offered me a full time position. The company employed an all catholic female staff in the office, and an all male protestant staff outside in the warehouse. The owner and his two sons were protestants. It was there I experienced the unacknowledged feminine plague,(at that time) sexual harassment. Of course, it was not named and I had never heard of this but I do believe it is the reaction of men who put available women in a sexual context always, and do not see them as people who are trying to do a job of work.

I was chased by the foreman, a big burly protestant man, in a position of power. I did not even have the sense to tell anyone. Genteel catholic ladylike women did not discuss such things. I learned to avoid him at all costs. I knew I would be leaving at the end of the summer. I refused their position. I fled back to Dublin.

My second job was in Dublin, right in the center of the city also in a wholesale shoe distributors. I worked for just one man. He seemed elderly to my 17 years, - though he was probably in his early 50’s. He had five sons, all older than me and a very nice wife.
However, the harassment started almost immediately and I did not have the same way of avoiding him since we both worked together. I felt embarrassed and hurt on behalf of his wife. His wife would occasionally visit the office and I would feel so sorry for her. How could he be so disrespectful to her and to me? He obviously felt that because he was my boss, in a position of power and paying me (well the company was but I feel male bosses think the money is coming out of their pocket) that I was some sort of bought woman. There is another more blunt word for this - prostitution, but I would have to be in agreement to that, and obviously I was not. I soon was forced to leave and look for a job that had more people around and less of him….

There were few if any female bosses and the next job I took also had a male boss, but it also had an office that was completely surrounded by glass. I made sure of this before accepting the position.

Society in general was run along strict gender lines. Males very much in control and in charge. Women in more subservient roles as mothers and minders. It is hardly surprising then, men tended to want to be looked after and turned to women to supply that nurturing role in work as well as at home. That was the way women were seen in society. I resented this attitude very much and felt humiliated by being asked to provide tea and sympathy in the controlled environment of the work force. I could protest at home and refuse this role, but in work I was being paid to do a job and as part of that job, was seen by men in authority as part of their dominion. The risk of losing my job and not having work, made me suppress my instinct to rebel and eat humble pie on more than one occasion. I am sure I was not the only women in this position but we did not have any protection e.g. a trade union or any laws to guarantee women freedom from such oppression.

Mostly I got by on humor. If I was asked by a man to get him coffee, my typical reply was “What did you last servant die of and when did he die?. I hoped this rebuff would provide food for thought and usually it did. I could not get away with this attitude with all and sundry but those of an almost equal level to myself but there were few if any male short-hand typists. However, I observed some of the younger men were beginning to
learn to be more self reliant at work, but the older men, would not give up their position of control over women quite so easily. I had gone to school, I was clever, I was doing a job, why did I also have to perform a servant’s role in the workforce? It was the way I was seen by the majority of men, as the ‘work mammy” – not a person in my own right and this role was enshrined in the Constitution, therefore, it must be alright! No, in my opinion, it was not.

There were still subtle forms of harassment’s I observed all around me in the work force. Male colleagues who felt they could mark remarks to you withy overt sexual overtones. Objects from male staff members with sexual overtones, calendars of nude women, pictures of women in sexual poses were all around me. There were few if any women supervisors and men supervisors who thought they could pinch or touch you at will. I was getting a little older and wiser and the very next man who pinched me while I was at work, I turned around and I slapped his face. I did suffer for this and he made my life very uncomfortable with this rejection but he did not have total power over me, so maybe he learned a lesson. I hope so.

I loved to dance and went to many dances. Irish men were very inhibited around women. Most needed the false courage of alcohol to ask a girl to dance. Many a time I danced with a man, who was under the influence of alcohol, and was virtually sexually assaulting me on the dance floor. Holding me too tight and in all the inappropriate places. Alternatively, if one did not agree to their offers of a drink or a drive home, then many a time I suffered the verbal abuse of daring to turn down their offers. However, I got very good at replying and many a man left with the idea that it was my choice whom I choose to go home with and not a right, just because he asked.

It was also a mark of a man’s authority to have a secretary which would enhance his position in work. When he had visitors he would ask his secretary to bring in the coffee and serve it. This promoted his sense of authority and his position of power. Women were still playing supporting roles. There were no leading roles as yet for women.
The choice of language around women was also interesting. We were always the ‘girls’ even if the ‘girl’ was 55 years of age. She was never a woman always a girl; especially if she was unmarried. Typically, we did not have any married women anyway so it was mostly single ‘girls’ who were working at that age. Men thought it was flattering for a woman to be called a girl. However, there were never any boys anywhere, they were all the ‘men’ in the office, we were the ‘girls’ in the office. It was insulting if men were referred to as ‘boys’ but somehow women were supposed to be flattered by the term ‘girl’.

In offices, both north and south of Ireland, first names were seldom used. Staff addressed each other by either Miss Brown or Mr. Brown. I resented the fact that this form of address always pointed out if a women was married but did not point out if a man was married. I quickly clung to the form of Ms. as soon as this term was available, which was in the mid or late 60’s. However, it was a struggle to make the point that women like me, wanted to have the title Ms. I can remember the national airline, Aer Lingus, telling me when I was booking a flight to London, they needed to know if it was Miss or Mrs. on my airline ticket. I pointed out that when my husband traveled he was never questioned on his martial status and I certainly did not intend to be questioned on mine.[can you do this from my last round of comments: you might point out that all of this was the argument for the failed Equal Rights Amendment in the U.S. in the 1970s and 80s]]

Women had to fight the conditioning of women on many levels. Women had been taught not to respect women in authority roles. If women were taught from an early age, that they were inferior, how could they now trust other women. They did not trust themselves. They had been conditioned not to We were taught not to trust each other and our colonizers certainly did a good job on that, with the help of the church, and society in general. Women were taught to feel inferior, therefore, why would you support another ‘inferior’ women. I also believe some women felt resentful, at some deep level if they saw a women in a powerful position. They too wished to be important and felt their inferior status even more when they saw another women had achieved success. This
however, was an initial reaction. Later, women would look at themselves again, and
argue, if one woman can achieve a certain status, then why not some more women?

After the nationalist struggles of 1916 and the aftermath of civil war, the women in
Ireland needed a chance to be at peace and learn to stand together. All the struggles had
been attached to men. Men were seen as the main components of war, and women
appendages to that struggle. Now the women of Ireland stood alone. Their foreign
colonizers had been replaced by a more familiar colonizer and it took some time for
women to realize that fact and then to act upon the knowledge. There was going to be no
help from men, if women wanted something they had to fight for it themselves. There
would be no groups of men standing alongside our struggle for independence and
freedom, like the 1916 Rebellion. Did women want to do things the way men did them?
Did we just need a chance to see whether we, as women, do things differently when
organizing ourselves.

The one male feminist in the 1916 group that would have been a help to women, James
Connolly, had been executed. We did not have a male friend in power to help. Thus, we
were going to have to get our civil rights on our own, in our way and on our own terms.

CIVIL RIGHTS

The Civil Rights movement in America in the 1960’s made a big impression on the Irish
people, particularly those in Northern Ireland. For years the boundaries in Derry had been
adjusted by Protestants to give them the majority in politics. This is known as
Gerrymandering. In Derry (or Londonderry) as its known if you are Protestant) , the
districts were Gerrymandered to give Protestant Councils control and power. Even if the
majority in a certain district was Catholic, the district borders were adjusted to give
Protestants authority and power.
Bernadette Devlin states in her book “The Price of My Soul” that the Civil Rights Association was founded in 1966 and it consisted of “representatives of every political party in Northern Ireland, including Unionists”. P. 154.

I remember it’s slogan ‘one man one vote’. Not quite feminist times yet. However, one of the leaders a young university student from Queens University in Belfast, Bernadette Devlin was to play a major role in Northern Ireland politics.

Devlin was tiny in stature, 5’2” tall, but mighty enough to take on the leading radical Protestant preacher of the day, the Rev. Ian Paisley. Dr. Paisley as he is now known, (he received an honorary doctorate from the Bob Jones University in the U.S.A.) is still the most prominent advocate of anti-Catholicism and pro-unionism in the north of Ireland. He has a big booming harsh voice to match his tall and powerful physique. The diminutive Devlin took on this Goliath style opponent and the country watched, especially the women, and saw just how powerful she was and how with her quiet voice she could outtalk the blustery Paisley. I was so proud of her.

In 1964 the Irish Civil Rights movement, following the style of Dr. Martin King Jr., took to marching peacefully requesting their civil rights. The infamous Royal Ulster Constabulary baton charge at Derry, gained world attention for the sheer brutality of the northern Ireland police force against unarmed Catholics. The world watched. Paisley was the chief agitator against the Civil Rights Marches, and his mob was responsible for most of the attacks on the civil rights movement. The world watched as the R.U.C. stood by and let the thugs attack the peaceful demonstrators. Devlin was in the thick of it.

Bloody Sunday.

claimed that they had been fired on as they moved in to make arrests. The people of the Bogside believed the army had summarily executed 13 unarmed civilians. The killings provoked outrage and were denounced as "another Sharpeville". The British Embassy in Dublin was burned down and Bernadette Devlin MP physically attacked the Home Secretary Reginald Maudling in the House of Commons.
Roger Sawyer in his book ‘We are but Women – Women in Ireland’s History” remarks about Devlin, that she used her ‘feminism and her femininity to her advantage’P.132 so even when women gain positions of power they are underplayed by these remarks.

I have yet to read a piece about a man being elected to office for his ‘masculinity’. Roger Sawyer also goes on to point out in his book that ‘feminism was a mainstay of Northern Ireland’s civil rights movement,” but with the slogan ‘One man one vote” I find it hard to agree with that statement.

Bernadette Devlin was the first women I had seen in public life to be so openly supported, admired and respected by both men and women. For me she became a symbol of what a young women could achieve and an inspiration to most women. If one woman can do this, then others could follow. Men and women listened to her debate her politics and marveled at such knowledge fortitude and grit. The Catholic Church was not too keen on her as she was a self confessed Marxist and such politics did not have a place in Irish catholic life.

She was also the first women since Countess Markiovicz to play such an open role in fighting oppression in an Irish context. Many more women were to follow but she was the first in a long time to gain such respect and popularity.

Apparently Devlin is still considered a threat but now by the United States. In February of this year, 2003, the Immigration Authorities would not let her enter the United States. Whereas, Jerry Adams, self confessed spokesperson for the I.R.A. (Irish Republican Army – who have bombed and wrecked havoc in Ireland since 1969) can freely come and go into the States, but apparently Devlin a 56 years old, ailing grand-mother, who long since left active politics, is considered too much of a threat by the current United States government. Women are still held to different standards than men, and memories are long where women are involved.

February 22, 2003
SECURITY THREAT?
Bernadette Devlin McAliskey Barred Entry to the United States
By LAURA FLANDERS

Irish activist and former Member of Parliament, Bernadette Devlin McAliskey was detained by immigration officials in Chicago, February 21, and denied entry into the United States allegedly on "national security" grounds.

A tireless advocate for the Irish nationalist cause, at the age of 21, McAliskey was the youngest person ever to be elected to the British parliament. A witness to the deaths of 13 civilians shot dead by British paratroopers during a civil rights march in Derry, Northern Ireland in 1972, McAliskey narrowly avoided death a second time when she and her husband were shot in their home by a loyalist death-squad in 1981. Deirdre, who was present, was five years old at the time.

Famously articulate, McAliskey has been frequent visitor to the US for the past thirty years, although this was her first visit in over eighteen months. She has been awarded the symbolic "keys" to several US cities, including New York and San Francisco. On her first trip, in 1971, the young McAliskey made civil rights history when she refused to be met by Chicago's Mayor Richard J. Daly on account of his treatment of opponents of the Vietnam War.

Does the US government consider Bernadette Devlin McAliskey a security risk? "I can't imagine what threat they could think she poses to US security," says Deirdre, "Unless the threat is knowing too much and saying it too well. [footnote, or put in the source]

The British television images of Devlin and the R.U.C. had done much for the Irish cause and television would have a huge impact on Irish society in general when Irelands’ new television station opened in the early 60’s.

ENTER GAYBO – IRISH TELEVISION
One of the most powerful forces for social change within Irish society was the introduction of Television. Television brought the outside world into countless homes. In 1961 Radio Telefís Eireann (Irish Television) aired its first program, and became a transforming force in Irish society. Irish Television was born. In 1962 a 6 week filler-in The Late Late Show came on the air and the host was Gay Byrne. The show ran on Friday nights and became the longest running talk show ever. This show was to have an enormous impact on Irish society as it brought debate to the Irish public in a way never experienced before.

As host of the show Gay Byrne is almost 90 per cent responsible for the success of this long running show. He is a conservative man. Educated by the Christian Brother in Dublin he married a well known Dublin harp player, Kathleen Watkins. He lives the quiet life of a typically middle class Irish catholic. He lives in the same house that he purchased when he got married. He suited Irish T.V. as he was conservative in his views, and politics, but always willing to hear the other side – he held a mirror up to Irish society and we all looked into it and wondered. This had to change society in one way or another. We were talking at last.

The show was a mixture of Byrne interviewing guests from all walks of life some debate - with audience participation and as a light relief - musical guests. Actors, politicians, people in the news for whatever reason, singers, historians, art lovers etc. were all introduced to Ireland via the Late, Late Show. Subjects were discussed before all of Ireland that had never been even mentioned in private. Sex, contraception, marriage, divorce, adultery, religion, the north of Ireland, no topic was spared. The audience participation was an integral part of the show. Special people were invited to take part in the debate, as part of the audience. Gay was always careful to have people on both sides of the fence talk about whatever issue was being raised. It was opening up subjects for discussion that were controversial but I would consider were necessary for the growth of the Irish public. The Late, Late Show was the topic of the week over coffee in most offices every Monday morning, and beyond.
Very many famous quotes happened on the ‘Late Late Show. A politician, Oliver J Flanagan, (now deceased) remarked on the show “There was no sex in Ireland before Gay Byrne”.

There was also a story that became notorious when a young bride admitted on the show that she had not worn anything on her wedding night. The Catholic Church was furious about such a topic and the Irish bishops were loud in their condemnation. It became known as “the Bishops and the nighty story,” - Headlining the Sunday morning newspapers. These became part of Irish folklore.

I can remember the show in the 1960’s when Gay introduced ‘feminists’ as a panel and so the debates raged. I also remember Erin Pizzy on the show. She discussed how she started a home for battered women in England. Erin had suffered at the hands of a violent husband and found she had no where to go, so she opened up a home as a refuge for women suffering from violence. Nuala Fennell who later became a Fine Gael Politician, was watching that show, and she decided to start a home for Irish battered women. It opened in Harcourt Street in the 70’s – under the auspices of a women’s group known as AIM and I volunteered there for some years - minding children, listening to women’s stories, painting walls, cooking meals, whatever was necessary. Women supported other women. There was no money, help or support from the government, the Church or the police. Sisters were doing it for themselves. This became a trend. – women helping each other.

I can also remember some magical musical moments on the Late, Late Show. It was a live show and the songwriter/singer Don McLean picked up his guitar and sang “Starry Starry Night” there was magic in the air, even though it was on T.V., I felt it and I know everyone else did too.

The early years of the show, were the most interesting for me. I saw Mariead Corrigan being interviewed. Betty Williams and Mariad Corrigan started a movement for Peace in
Northern Ireland and in 1977, they ended up sharing the Nobel Peace Prize, an example of ordinary women doing extraordinary things.

I saw Brian Keenan’s (he was a hostage situation with Terry Waite) two sisters on the show. They came to appeal to the Irish Government to help gain the release of their brother who was being held hostage in Beirut. He was being held with another journalist named Brian McCarthy. Brian’s girl friend also came on the show, to appeal for support.

They were both later released and Brian Keenan wrote a very interesting book wherein he thanked his sisters for helping get his release and for their unfailing support of him. Keenan is a protestant from northern Ireland, who considers himself Irish and did not take sides in the North versus South attitudes. For this reason – Northern Ireland politicians were reluctant to help him. His sisters were forced to appeal to the Irish government for assistance in getting their brother released from captivity. He was held in Beirut for nearly five yethars. He was released and is now living in Connemara in the west of Ireland. He appeared on “The Late, Late, Show” and thanked the people of Ireland for their support.

Such were the people and subjects that were discussed and revealed and most people would agree this show informed, reformed and challenged Irish mores, culture, religion and ideas in general. Clergy, church, and politicians were all demystified and certainly my eyes were opened. Byrne also had a one hour morning radio show. The radio show was a little more light hearted and because it aired at 10 a.m. each week day, mostly women at home listened to the show and were big supporters of both shows. Byrne took telephone calls from viewers who could call in anonymously to the show and discuss any sensitive topic they wished. It was sometimes as a result of these calls, that Byrne took up the item under discussion and did a TV show on the topic. People were encouraged to write into the show and discuss their problems, or annoyances, give tips or just generally air their dis-satisfaction with life.
I had the pleasure and distinction of having a letter read out Byrne. It was in the mid-70’s and I had come back to live in Ireland after having lived in England for almost 10 years. I noticed it was still only women who discussed childbirth, contraception and the church’s attitude on having children. Irish men never discussed or seemed involved in the process of having children. Men did not appear to be resentful or annoyed that their wives were suffering and unhappy, forced to have so many children. My letter asked the question: where are all the Irish fathers? Don’t they want to look after their wives, the mother’s of their children? Don’t they want to change this non-contraceptive attitude, that was literally killing their wives? – the silence was deafening. There was not one reply, not even from a woman. I can only presume it had not occurred to women that men were still not in the game, but wait, the times they were a ‘changing.

When Gay retired from the Late Late show it was a sad night for Ireland, he was entertaining, he was interesting, and he was one of us. He had brought the world to Irish Television and we as a people were hungry for that knowledge. Most of all Gay does not consider himself in any way an agent for social change, that is not his mandate, he is first and foremost, as he says himself, an entertainer.

Author Salman Rushdie, comedian Billy Connolly, and pop band The Corrs were among those to appear on his final program. Irish President Mary McAleese, one of several surprise guests told Byrne: "You're bearing up well, but people out there are crying tonight, they're very sad." "You've entertained us, you've educated us, you've exasperated us. What more could anyone ask over 37 years?"

Thank you Gay, where would we be without you?

WELCOME TO OUR CLUBS

As television had brought awareness to Irish society in general and women in particular it was now time to do something. To form associations, to bring about social change. Irish women were now ready and willing to do just that.
Most people believe that from the 40’s to the 70’s were a stagnant time in the Irish feminist movement. I don’t feel that way. I feel that women were waiting and watching and remembering. They shook off the shackles of nationalism, certainly in the south anyway, and saw the results of the freedom from Britain: how it had not brought them greater freedom. When the collective consciousness of women was ready, we started making changes in our own way - quietly but steadily. Maybe we women don’t need to do things in the previous ‘man’s’ way of leadership and power struggles and making careers for ourselves in politics as our goal. We actually wanted to help other women and help ourselves at the same time. I do believe that women do things differently from men, and want the freedom to choose the way they want to behave in a political sense.

Several women started organizations to help other women. The refuge for women in Harcourt Street in Dublin was a start. The Rape Crisis Center, badly needed for Irish women, also got off the ground. There was a chipping away at the status quo to get laws changed on behalf of women. To get ownership of property, mainly the family home., and to get the right to be on juries, to repeal the laws on married women in employment and obtain their civil rights, also to get the rape laws changed.

Finally, a group of women challenged the government and the legal system on the sale and import of contraceptives. They took a train up to the North of Ireland, and bought contraceptives. They waved these out of the window of the train as it arrived in Connolly Station. (Jimmy would have been proud of them). They challenged the law to arrest them. This piece of history was known as the Contraceptive Train. The point was made. The law was ridiculous. Women were on the move.

The first bean gardai, or women police officer, was permitted to join the Irish Police in 1959. Women are now free to join the Irish army to have careers, to apply for and obtain apprenticeships. Women now have choices.
Most importantly several Irish women’s book publication houses were formed and brought to women, books by women for women. Arlene House was opened in 1975, Irish Feminist Information Publications in 1978, Women’s Community Press 1983 and Women’s Education Bureau 1984 and finally Attic Press, also in 1984. The style and quality of books presented was superb and much needed. It took courage and determination to provide books and information to women in what sometimes could be called a hostile environment. The Essential Guild for Women in Ireland, published by Arlene House, written by journalist Janet Martin - the publication of this book left both the author and the publisher liable for ‘the then statuary fine and imprisonment for the publication of material which could be seen to advise the use of contraception and abortion’

Two of the longest running women’s organizations that stayed together and helped other women, were the Irish Countrywomen’s Association and The Irish Housewives’ Association. The IHA was formed in 1941 and consisted mainly of protestant women who were concerned with the poor and the distribution of food. They linked up with other women’s groups who had similar interests e.g. price control, proper rationing, school meals and salvaging waste. The clubs also attracted a number of veterans of the suffrage movement. The Irish Countrywomen’s Association also played a similar role for the women based in rural Ireland.

Many of my friends who lived in the country were members of the ICA but we city people thought that organization much too staid for our tastes. However, the ICA did much to help the isolation of the rural Irishwomen and were a good pressure group to get the government to provide, piped water, and the widespread use of electricity to the home. But Carol Coulter in her book The Hidden Tradition states ‘the main contribution the ICA made to the lives of thousands of women was the opportunity it gave for them to leave their homes and engage in social activity with other women”. P.33

In the early 1980’s I joined the Federation of Ladies Clubs. This is an organization that meets twice a month, a get together where women can meet other women, new to the
area. The club invites various visiting guests to talk on their books, cooking, antiques, health matters etc.. The women also have singing and drama competitions, cooking and painting competitions, they visit other clubs and meet other women from various parts of the city of Dublin or the country. It is a good way of meeting other women and finding a way of getting women to speak in public by becoming officers of the club and stretching their talents by performing in public in shows and contests.

In Galway in the 1970 our club organized an open meeting on Birth Control and it was a very meaningful night and much enjoyed by those for and against. My main concern was that I had a sore throat and could not speak but I did listen well as did other women. Galway was and still is, a very rural area, and the women of Galway had not experienced such openness by women for women. I hope it did some good and changed some lives, I would like to think it made a difference.

Women were learning once again how to organize themselves, how to deal with committees and how to appeal for change. Although these clubs were without any real political teeth, they did act as consumer associations on behalf of Irish society in general.

THE PILL

What do women want from a contraceptive?
Mary Short
Rock Court Medical Centre, Blackrock, Dublin, Ireland
Forty years ago when the combined oral contraceptive pill was first introduced, women were happy to take it in the knowledge that for the first time they were able to take control of their fertility regulation and hence their destiny.

Medical Forum,
gynological News, 5/15/2003
The contraceptive pill made its entrance into the world in 1961 and this was, in my opinion, the single most important change in women’s lives in this century. In Ireland contraceptives were still illegal, however, resourceful women and understanding doctors, prescribed the pill, under the guise of regulating women’s’ menstrual cycles. There were jokes going around in England, that Ireland had the largest population of women with poor and irregular menstrual cycles in the world. So many Irish women were taking the pill ostensibly for regulating their periods but it was an Irish solution to the non availability of any contraceptive devices.

The pill was a God-send for many women who could not obtain any form of contraceptive. For the first time it also gave women control over their own bodies. It was women who took it and women who decided to control her fertility. In most cases it was user friendly, just one pill a day and you were done. Simple but effective. Another plus was the fact that working class or poor women, via a means test, had free medical benefits. Therefore, the women who needed contraceptives the most, the women with the least money, could obtain this form of contraceptive free, as a medication “cycle regulator” via their medical benefits. The major disadvantage of the pill was that for many women with health issues, no doctor in good faith could recommend or prescribe the pill, as it could be life threatening, if they had hypertension or some other ailment unsuitable for the pill. So while it could be used by most women, for those who needed to control their fertility the most for health reasons, contraceptives were still unavailable. There was still work to be done to obtain free and easy access to contraceptives for all women who wanted and needed them.

Pope Paul VI had appointed a commission in 1965 to review the Catholic Churches’ stance on birth control and many Catholic people were expecting a relaxation of the laws. When the Pope rejected the advice of the commission and reiterated the traditional policy of birth control – there was consternation. However, the problem would not and did not go away. Expectations had been raised and dashed but the expectations had given cause for thought and change.
In that very entertaining movie “Educating Rita” starring Michael Kane as a Trinity professor, educating a very working class, eager for knowledge Rita, played by Julie Walters. Rita is a hairdresser and wants to change her life. She is married and is expected to leave work as quickly as possible because she is pregnant. However, Rita goes to the Open University and wants to learn.

Rita hides the contraceptive pill under her floor boards and takes the pill unbeknownst to her husband. He is furious when he finds out he has been deceived. He had been under the impression they wanted to start a family. Rita and her husband part company. Rita is hungry for knowledge and continues with her University Course under the tutorage of Michael Caine and the end of the movie shows Rita with choices.

The movie was filmed in Dublin in a working class area known as Ringsend, tiny red brick houses similar to those in Belfast that I grew up in, only these houses were down by the docks. One scene in the movie depicts Rita’s sister, already pregnant, getting married and there are some great shots of the Church. It is the Church of the Holy Family in Aughrim Street, on the North Circular Road and I got married there about 30 years ago – so I identify with Rita a lot. Hungry for knowledge and looking for an education, however, I did marry a man who was indifferent to having children, he did not see children as a sign of his masculinity so I did not have that pressure.

However, the contraceptive pill made it possible for women to take decisions to control their own lives. To have children or not to have children, to go out to work or not to go out to work, and all under their own power and control. The social fabric of society had to change with so many women awakening for the first time to the possibility of controlling their own fertility.

Naturally, the Catholic Church was not pleased with the emergence of available contraceptives controlled by women and judging by the media etc., being readily used by thousands of women. The 1971 Irish version of This Week magazine, shows on the cover “Women in Revolt” and is the cover story of the week which is about Irish women in a
state of change. The first line of the lead article on page 9, states “Article 40 of the Irish Constitution promises equal rights to all its citizens” – One million, four hundred and thirty four thousand nine hundred and seventy Irish Citizens (at the last census) are not accorded such equal rights. These are the women of Ireland.”

The article goes into great detail on how unfairly women are treated especially married women within the law. A very lively placard is depicted on page 10 says:-
“A woman’s place is in the Wrong” and how Irish women are paid on average 26pence per hr and men paid 47 pence per hr. Irish women earn 54.9% of men’s wages, whereas it goes on to say inl938 it was fractionally more – 55.6%. Nothing had changed for women in the next state except things had got worse.

In the same News Week there was an article “Politics and the Pill”. Senator Mary Robinson had notified the Senate that she had prepared a bill to change the l935 Criminal Law Act ( banning the sale and importation of contraceptives). The bill would contest the legality of such an act and Robinson would be remembered for this courageous act in years to come and the women of Ireland, would thank her by voting for her to be President of Ireland. Nma na Eireann have long memories and thanked her for her civic action on their behalf.’

The article on “News Week” on” Politics and the Pill” writes about the Church’s objection to any releasing of birth control laws but goes onto say how the then Prime Minister, might use this opportunity to show that Eire could South. Women were not the main consideration here of the Fianna Fail party it was woo Northern Ireland that was the main concern.

IRELAND AND THE EEC

Ireland applied to join the European Common Market in l971 - primarily for financial gain. However, Britain had also applied to join around the same time, and that made it very important for Ireland not to be left in trading isolation. Ireland relied upon Britain
for economic trading reasons and it would be essential to have other trading partners. Especially if Britain would be forced to trade with other European countries, then Ireland could not be the primary trading partner. The financial gains would be great especially for the farming community.

The farming grants were much eagerly anticipated and indeed the farming community benefited greatly from the Irelands’ entry into the European community.

“Ireland received 14.3 billion pounds in various funding programs between 1973 and 1991. Of this, £10.3 billion went to the agricultural sector. One of the primary reasons for Irish eagerness to become a member of the European Community was the potential benefit to the Irish agricultural sector. A great deal of the EC budget went towards agriculture price support. This optimism was well justified. EC entry removed reliance on the low price British market, pushing prices up to the higher continental levels. More importantly, Irish farmers reaped the benefits.” J.Burke in his essay page 3.

To be part of the European community, Ireland had to obey the directives if they wanted to obtain the financial rewards.

The following are some of the gains obtained and ratified under the direction of Irelands’ membership of the EEC:-

Can you weave this into a paragraph?

1975   Equal pay between men and women
1976   Equal access to employment, training, promotion and working conditions
1979   Equal treatment for men and women in social security (I received reimbursement from the government as they had discriminated against me (under EC laws) whilst I was unemployed)
1992   The right to maternity leave and pay
1992   Guarantee of adequate health and safety at work for pregnant women
1992   Pregnancy cannot be used as a reason for dismissal of a female employee
1992   A minimum of 14 week period of maternity leave
1996 Parental and Adoptive leave

Over a period of time these laws brought about a feeling of entitlement to the women of Ireland. Irish women realized what exactly they had been missing. It had taken strangers to make sure the women of Ireland were cared for adequately and fairly.

Action on sexual harassment was also investigated. In 1996 Padraig Flynn, the then Commissioner for Social Affairs, stated that one third of women in the EU workforce have been subjected to sexual harassment in the workplace. The Minister for Equality and Law Reform requested the Employment Equality Agency to draw up a code of practice to be implement in Ireland, in accordance with the rules of the European Commission. The 1996 Employment Equality Bill includes a specific provision on sexual harassment.

Thus, it took the money that the E.U. could provide to the Irish farmer to gain recognition, equal pay and equal status for the women of Ireland. If it had been left to Irish politicians, it is not clear how long these changes would have taken. It has always been a priority with the European Union to ensure that there is equality amongst men and women. To further ensure this would always be the case a referendum was held in 1999 namely the Amsterdam Treaty. Top priority in the Treaty was the elimination of inequality between men and women.

The Amsterdam Treaty was ratified by the EU in 1999 points directly at discrimination between the sexes within the EU: -
Portion of the Amsterdam Treaty: regarding men and women:
Is there anything in the Treaty which specifically combats inequality and discrimination between people in Europe, in particular between men and women?
The Treaty is quite clear: it contains a new article devoted to the general principle of non-discrimination.

In other words, the Union itself can lead the fight against any form of discrimination, whether it is based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or
sexual orientation. Any appropriate action may be taken by the Council of Ministers (without prejudice to the other provisions of the Treaty, and within the limits of the powers conferred on it), deciding by unanimity on the basis of a proposal from the European Commission, and after consulting the European Parliament.

The provisions relating to police and judicial cooperation apply mainly to preventing and combating racism and xenophobia.

Sexual equality is mentioned in several places:

- first, as one of the main objectives promoted by the Community (added to Article 2 of the EC Treaty);
- secondly, the following sentence is added to Article 3 of the EC Treaty: "In all the activities referred to in this Article, the Community shall aim to eliminate inequalities, and to promote equality, between men and women." The activities concerned are work and professional activity;
- finally, under social policy, specific provisions promoting equality are also adopted (see question 3).

There can be little doubt that the European Union is still making progress with enforcing the idea of equal opportunity and the women of Ireland have much to thank them for in this regard.

Francis Gardiner, in her article "The Unfinished Revolution" states that much of Irish women's successes has been through pressure groups, not political parties, and of course EC influence. However, she would like to see pressure from within the Parliamentary system, pressure from the inside. Women will have to obtain more visibility in Parliament for there to be further significant change.

THE CHURCH LOSES FACE AND REPUTATION

While all this change was going on in Europe the Catholic Church in Ireland was having a very dark period. In the 1980's and 90's the church was hit by a serious of scandals that
shook the Catholic Church to its foundations. Several priests were found to have abused hundreds of children in their care. Even more shocking, their superiors had covered up for them. Nuns too were called into question for the physical abuse of children under their care and for an even more scandalous outrage – for giving or selling Irish babies to the United States of America during the late 1940’s and early 50’s.

The first scandal to hit the public was the fact that Bishop Eamonn Casey had an affair with an American women named Annie Murphy. Eamonn Casey was Bishop of Galway and was very popular with his parishioners. He was ordained a priest in 1951 and appointed a Bishop in 1969. He was often seen on Television, especially on the Late Late Show, where he was a frequent guest. He was very jovial, known to like a drink and much given to singing at the drop of a hat on television or anywhere else.

He admitted that he had fathered the child and the church authorities banished him from Ireland. They sent him to Africa to be away from all the scandal. He resigned as Bishop in 1992. The country was devastated and I remember watching the Late Late Show on Television when Annie Murphy, the mother of his child, came out of the closet and told all. It was a blow to every Catholic who had listened to the preachings of these hypocrites. It was not the idea that the Bishop had sinned sexually, but the idea that he had evaded his responsibilities in helping raise the child. He had suggested to the mother that she put the baby up for adoption. He had not provided moral or financial support of any significant level. He had never shown affection or interest in his son and continued to live the life of a do-gooder type priest.

The next big scandal to follow quickly on the heels of Bishop Casey, was the arrest of the pedophile priest Fr. Brendan Smith. Smith caused the fall of the coalition Irish Government in 1994. It was revealed that not only had the clergy covered the trail of Smith’s abuses, but the Irish Government had also delayed and hindered his extradition to answer to the British authorities on abuse charges. The country was horrified at the very thought of this priest in a position of power – and that he had been consistently allowed
to abuse children over a series of years with the clergy being fully aware of his wrongdoings but covering them up.

The Catholic bishops tried to downplay the various scandals and this only added fuel to the fire. Scandal upon scandal of abuse was revealed and the country was shocked and disillusioned.

The nuns then came under scrutiny for their part in allowing foreign adoptions of Irish babies. The nuns had always been the guardians of the ‘unmarried mothers’ homes in Ireland. These were the places unmarried girls/women went to have their babies. The nuns ran these homes. It was revealed that the export of ‘illegitimate’ children to America had been organized by nuns, with full official sanction. The approval had been given by that well known guardian of public morality and helpmate of Eamonn de Valera – the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin, John Charles McQuaid. The department of external affairs also came under pressure as they had provided passports to the children ‘exported’ to the United States.

Senior RTE (Radio Telefis Eireann) Reporter, Mike Milotte wrote a book named “Banished Babies” in which he outlines how the nuns took the children from unmarried mothers and gave they away to adopters in America. Milotte explains how unmarried mothers in Ireland did not have any choice about keeping their babies, in the 1940’s and 1950’s that was totally unheard of. Mothers gave up their babies for adoption and did not know that these babies were being handed over to American citizens to be taken out of the country and never seen again.

Milott’s book begins by naming Eamonn de Valera ‘self–styled father-figure of the Irish nation, who opened Ireland up to America’s child-seekers”. P. 25 Milotte goes onto state “there is no record of de Valera’s thinking on the matter and no record either of how many passports were authorized in his name”. De Valera at the beginning of the baby exodus was both Minister for External Affairs and Taoiseach so he must have been fully aware of the situation.
Milotte’s book is a sad indictment of church and state and their authoritarian attitude towards women and their offspring. American citizens desperate for white children came to Ireland and were able to obtain passports for the babies. The babies were issued passport giving the names of the adoptive parents as the ‘parents’. The nuns arranged all the documentation and for this service they received expenses and ‘donations’. Several cases are cited in his book and tell a story of children being taken out of the country without proper supervision as to where they were going and what kind of families they were going to. No follow up supervision was given to the babies and they just disappeared into the families of their adoptive parents. Milotte does state that the records of passports issued for babies is not definitive but he does give a record of how many ‘illegitimate’ birth occurred between 1951 until 1974 and shows the corresponding passports issued. He does state that the vast majority of the babies went to America. Out of 1,962 passports issued to babies, 1,911 went to America.

This scandal on top of the other priestly scandals was devastating to the people of Ireland who had always held the religious in such high regard. They were firmly pushed off their pedestals and many Irish people would never look with respect upon the clergy again.

This weakening of the clergy made other social change possible. Up until 1995 Ireland was the only country in Europe not to have divorce. This law was enshrined in the 1937 Constitution and this situation could only be changed by a majority vote in a referendum.

The government had tried to introduce divorce in 1986 but had been defeated. The defeat had been attributed to two major factors, the influence of the catholic church and property rights and how they would be affected by divorce. Farmers were especially worried about the break up of their land and if divorce happened, would the farm have to be split? This time around it was different. The church was losing credibility and several pieces of legislation to do with property rights had been issued. The 1989 Judicial Separation and Family Law Reform Act, had been implement giving wives and husbands more of a sense of security. The unthinkable happened in catholic Ireland, divorce was introduced.
By a very slim majority the vote was carried to have divorce. This was indeed changing
times for Ireland. It was also a clear signal to the Church that people were no longer
going to be dominated by their religious dogma.

Mna na Eireann (Woman of Ireland)

Irish women were coming of age. In 1972 a young junior counsel brought a case before
the Irish High Court, on behalf of a Mrs. Mary McGee. Mrs. McGee challenged the
constitutionality of the 1935 Criminal Law Act after a package of contraceptive jelly, was
purchased by her in Britain via mail. This package was intercepted by Irish customs
officials and impounded. The name of the young barrister who took the McGee case was
Mary Robinson. The McGee case judgment, delivered by Mr. Justice Brian Walsh in
December 1973, accepted that article 41.1 of the 1937 Constitution, gave the family “as
the natural primary and fundamental unit group of society, and as a moral unit possessing
inalienable and imprescriptible right, antecedent and superior to all positive law”, implied
the right of privacy and the court upheld the right of Mrs. McGee of the necessary means
to plan her family. This was a bench mark in Irish society and in the career of Mary
Robinson.

In 1990 the women of Ireland (Mhna na Eireann) thanked Mary Robinson the best way
they knew how, by helping to elect her as the first women Irish President. It was a great
victory for women and marked their coming of age.

Mary Robinson had consistently worked throughout her career to bring changes to the
lives of women. She had contested the rule applying to women appearing on juries (1975)
and had been successful, the plaintiff in this case was Mairin de Burca. In 1976 Robinson
had acted for Josey Airey, an Irish women separated from her husband, and got legal aid
from Strasbourg to pursue her case in the Irish courts. Airey, three years later, wins her
case in Europe. She is awarded damages. In 1986 Robinson was also the person who
introduced the Bill to change the Constitution on divorce.
Mary Robinson through her life at the Bar and in the Senate had challenged the laws of Ireland. I remember listening to her on television saying it is through the constitution that the women of Ireland must seek change. She was so right.

John Horgan has written a biography: Mary Robinson: A Woman of Ireland and the World, it is dedicated to the women of Ireland: Do Mhna na hEireann. It is the women of Ireland who thank her.

Just in case anyone was of the opinion that it was just a fluke that Ireland elected an woman President, in 1994 directly after the end of Mary Robinson’s term, the Irish people elected Mary McAleese and she is president of Ireland as I write.

In a statement this evening, the Cardinal said the victims of sexual abuse by the clergy had suffered a terrible betrayal.
He said that in many instances, the Archdiocese did not act with the necessary speed and decisiveness.

Cardinal Connell said in his statement that he fully accepted that at the time of Fr Noel Reynold's appointment to the National Rehabilitation Hospital in Dun Laoghaire, he should have informed the hospital authorities about concerns raised relating to his inappropriate behavior with children.

CONCLUSION

When my father left the north of Ireland and went to the Free State in 1940, he did so with a happy heart. He left behind him oppression, hatred and colonization. He went into the Irish Army and was happy to be part of the new Ireland. However, when I went to the Free State, I quickly realized that it was not so free for me because I am a woman. I could not get an apprenticeship, these were reserved exclusively for boys. I could not enter certain professions, e.g. the Army (like my father had), or any of the armed services, including the Police Force (Garda Síochána) I could not purchase or order contraceptives from anywhere else in the world. I could not divorce my husband. I had been colonized once and I looked around and saw it was happening to me and women like me all over again. This time however, it was more painful, as this was my own kind who were the colonizers.

Growing up in Belfast, I knew there were certain areas that were dangerous for me to enter as a Catholic. I grew up parallel to the Shankill Road, which is all protestant, just as the Falls Road is all catholic. I knew never to go there, it was not for me. However, in the South, the Free State, there were physical and mental areas I could not enter.

I would be physically not allowed to stay in the Civil Service when I married, and for a while in the south, married female teachers were banned, until there was a shortage, and this law was repealed. I could learn shorthand and typing and take a menial office job and be dictated to and harassed at all levels, but still I was not free. Even as late as the 90’s
still could not be a full member of a golf club. The local golf club had a room reserved for men only and women could not enter. Like South Africa the women could drink in the lounge – apartheid?

Hindsight is 20:20, and even though I was becoming more and more disenchanted with the politicians and the men of Eire in general, and I was aware of the influences of the church all around me, I still was subtly unaware of some aspects of Irish life that were closed to me. It did not occur to me to seek an apprenticeship. It did not occur to me that girls should seek apprenticeships. I just could not see that this should be an option for us girls. I had been mentally groomed to see myself as a girl/women in certain limited roles. I never saw myself challenging the system that allowed altar boy but not girls. I did not see myself in any male job. I was so conditioned I just did not challenge my way of thinking, I was too conditioned by society.

There was a prevailing attitude in Southern Ireland, at that time, (early 60’s) that men needed money for recreation and to mix socially amongst themselves, but that girls/women did not need money, as the man would pay. When the man paid he expected a return on his investment, and would get rather angry that after spending his money on an evening out on a date, there was not a sexual return on his investment, and things could get a little nasty at times. Most of the men I met felt a sense of entitlement when they have paid all night for goods and services and the reward was rather limited – in their minds. I was insulted by the attitude of Irish men in this capacity and made up my mind that I would never marry an Irishman. I was going to stop dating them entirely. There were four girls in our office, including myself, all around the same age. The other three laughed at me being so adamant about Irish men and their insensitivity. They all said they would definitely marry Irish men, it was the patriotic thing to do. However, two of the girls married Englishmen, one married a Scotsman and me, yes, I married an Irishman. When we meet or talk even now, we laugh about how ironic that situation turned out to be. I still remember saying to one of the girls, ‘funny there are no unmarried father homes in Ireland” its as if girls/women got pregnant all by themselves. There was also no legal way to make a man pay for having a baby. The shame girls felt at being
pregnant so intense that it was hidden by everyone with the result men got off Scott free. Why should they worry about contraception, they did not pay in any way, if a girl got pregnant. She was the person to have the baby, go into a home and live in the convent until the baby was adopted. That could take up to two years sometimes. It was all so hidden.

When I challenged male friends and members of the local golf club I was told to go and start my own golf club with my friends. I reminded these men that my husband as a mark of respect to me, would never join a club where I was not admitted. The same way I would never join a club or condone in any way a place, that would not allow certain persons because of their race, color or creed to be a member. I reminded these patriotic Irish men that I thought we had fought for that freedom, but obvious some were more equal than others.

I knew what it was to be colonized from an early age and I quickly recognized the signs however nicely disguised by a paternalistic attitude, and I did what most thinking women of Ireland did, I emigrated. I was not going to be trapped on an Island with invisible and physical barriers holding me back from a productive, creative and fulfilling life. I did not see myself as a breeding machine to enable the Catholic Church to gain new members.

Women in the Nationalist movement had suffered long and hard and with very little recognition. They thought when the fight was over, Ireland free, they would be free too along with the men. I also surmise the women thought the men of Ireland, had the same ideas of freedom and would include men and women alike - women would naturally be included in all aspects of life in a free Ireland. This was not to be. Under a paternalist, conservative de Valera, who was going to narrow the competition of jobs for the boys, women were to be excluded from the marketplace and kept firmly within the confines of the home. Margaret Ward in her book “Unmanageable Revolutionaries” notes de Valera in his opening remarks on his 1937 Constitution “ I do not care what women’s organization there are...I am going, as long as I live, to try and work for that” (women
within the home and man as the breadwinner “as the normally and naturally the father of
the family”). Further he goes onto say “I do not care a threepenny who says I am
reactionary if I work for that”. He was adamant. Margaret Ward goes onto say that “This
was almost indistinguishable from the Nazi decrees” p.240.

The Constitution of Cuman no mBán, the group of women who had bravely and proudly
fought for a Irish Republic, had these words contained within:-

“regain for the women of Ireland the rights that belonged to them under the old Gaelic
civilization, where sex was no bar to citizenship, and where women were free to devote
to the service of their country every talent and capacity with which they were endowed:
which rights were stolen from them under English rule, but were guaranteed to them in
the Republican Proclamation of Easter Week.”

I believe that Nationalistic women who fought for a united Ireland and sublimated their
allegiance to feminism, in order to put all their energies into their nationalist ideals, were
let down by the new Eire. Women were quickly written out of history, by not being
acknowledged as fighters for freedom. All of their sacrifices, gun running, hunger strikes,
spying, carrying concealed weapons, terms of imprisonment, were all ignored by de
Valera.

I too looked at the new Ireland, and taking my term of colonization into account in the
north of Ireland, I asked myself what is the difference between the north and south.? For
me, there were several no-go areas in Belfast, and here in Eire the same applied in a
slightly different way. There were no go areas in jobs, in pubs, in apprenticeships, in not
being visible, not being able to control my own fertility, and not being acknowledged as
an equal with men. There were also openly ‘men only’ areas. The 40ft. in Sandymount, is
a portion of the beach reserved for male swimming. No women were allowed near the
spot, as it was surmised men swam there in the nude. This was male territory they had
claimed with no right other than might, and the firm belief that it was their right to claim
this as a ‘Men only Beach - and no women went near it. That is until the 70’s wherein , it
was invaded by several groups of women, publicly crying out, “this is our land too.” The men got the messages.

Certain public houses would not allow women in the bars. There was one bar in Donaghamede that simply would not let women into the bar. There was a notice outside the door “no women here” The owner and patrons were proud of their stand against women. However, several demonstrations were held outside the bar by women and it is now a thing of the past. Needless to say, very little support was given by the men. They liked their feeling of power and wanted to hang onto it. Most public houses in Dublin would not serve women beer in pint glasses, as the men were served. This was considered a man’s drink and most unladylike for a women to drink out of a pint glass. A lot of women took to drinking pints even if they did not want to, just to make a point. Now its quite common to see women drinking out of pint glasses. It does not offend the sensibilities of those delicate male souls drinking pints at the bar and especially not those taking the money behind the bar for the pints.

Women were ready for the changes in Ireland and changes did come slowly but surely. Women brought about those changes by challenging the Constitution and gaining their rights. Mary Robinson was more than helpful in this regard. Her legal mind and expertise bringing about constitutional change and the women of Ireland, less educated and qualified to make those changes, are grateful to her and always will be.

I will give the last word to Eamon de Valera, who in conversation with W.H.Van Voris, Dublin, 6th June 1976 remarked

“Women are at once the boldest and most unmanageable revolutionaries”

I feel flattered.

Caitlin Ni Broadair - Mna Na Eireann
Labour, Emigration Type: News clipping Published in: Irish Times Author: Louie Bennett Description: News clipping from the 'Irish Times', 6 September 1951, being a letter to the editor entitled 'Emigration' by Louie Bennett, Secretary, Women Workers' Union. She states that in his recent speech the Taoiseach deplored emigration and discussed the miseries of the Irish worker in England but made no attempt to analyze why people were forced to leave the country and 'offered use of the Irish language as a remedy for the national evil'. She writes that the Irish Women Workers' Union is 'chiefly concerned with the emigration of women … Many causes for it are suggested, but only one remedy, now reiterated by the Taoiseach - increased emphasis on education in domestic science in all the schools, primary, secondary, technical. All our male politicians, philosophers, councilors, social experts, prescribe domestic science as the be-all and end-all of a girl's life. They fail to perceive that science and mechanization have revolutionized the life of woman as well as of man, of life in the home as well as in the factory … But as far as girls are concerned, the curriculum of schools has not been changed to meet this changing outlook upon life'. She writes of the need to develop industry in the provincial regions.

Keyword: emigration; employment Date : 6/9/1951

FOOTNOTES