



Vera Lynn memories by Anne Harding, IC Seniors volunteer

In Vera's own words - "It's moving for me to relive those days, and humbling to know that people still think of me - after all, it was simply my duty to keep singing". Many of us grew up listening to Vera Lynn's haunting songs, followed by a story or two about a relative or neighbour in the war. She, herself made her stage debut at the age of seven and now, in 2014 Dame Vera Lynn's ninth decade in the business - a feat that will be difficult to match and one unique in the 100th anniversary of the start of the First World War.

Vera Lynn is well known to us as the "Forces Sweetheart" and most popular female entertainer in World War Two. She was born in March 1917 in East Ham, London and at the age of seven was singing in working men's clubs and part of a dancing troupe which

she enjoyed until the age of fifteen. Vera made her first broadcast in 1935 when she sang with the famous Joe Loss Orchestra among others, but it was during the war that Vera found fame. By 1940, she had her own BBC radio show 'Sincerely Yours' when she read out messages from men fighting abroad to their wives, girlfriends, etc. back home. She also released such songs as "We'll Meet Again" and "White Cliffs of Dover" both of which made her a superstar. At this time she travelled overseas to entertain troops - and made the long and difficult journey to Burma.

Vera married her manager, Harry Lewis in 1940 and they had a daughter, Virginia. She made 3 films: *We'll Meet Again* (1942), *Rhythm Serenade* (1943) and *One Exciting Night* (1944). When the war ended in 1945, Vera returned to the variety circuit. She was one of the most popular female singers of her time, easily filling halls and theatres. She is the first British artist to get to Number 1 in the American charts - with the song "Auf Wiederseh'n Sweetheart" - also a huge hit over here.

Throughout the 1950's and 1960's, Vera was a regular on both radio and television. She was awarded the OBE in 1969, and in 1975, in recognition of all that she had done in entertainment, Vera Lynn was made a Dame of the British Empire. She has devoted much of her life since to doing work for many worthy causes.

In recent years, at the age of 92, Vera had a Number 1 top selling album with the collection *We'll Meet Again: The Very Best of Vera Lynn*. Her book, **Some Sunny Day** was published at the same time. These days Vera lives in Sussex with daughter Virginia as her neighbour. She paints with watercolours. "My subjects are usually from my lovely garden and the field beyond," she says. Her beloved husband, Harry Lewis, died in 1999. Always interested in helping others, Vera serves as President of the Dame Vera Lynn Trust for Children with Cerebral Palsy, a charity she founded in 2001.

Her album *Vera Lynn: National Treasure - The Ultimate Collection* was released this year in her 97th year, to mark the 70th anniversary of the D-Day landings. It reached 13 in the Charts and features more than forty of her wartime songs. The album includes some previously unreleased tracks discovered by her daughter.

Dame Vera Lynn has given so much pleasure to so many people over the years, and for that, we thank her.

Irish Chaplaincy Seniors Project: A Decade of Service to Our Elders

2015 marks the tenth anniversary of our Seniors Project. In the early part of the year we will be carrying out a short survey with you all about your views on our services and your ideas on how you would like to see the project develop. We are also planning a focus group to discuss ideas in depth and there will be an opportunity for you to be part of this.

More details to follow, but until then, **HAPPY NEW YEAR!**

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Irish Chaplaincy SENIORS

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Christmas on the Farm

by Paul Raymond, Project Manager, IC Seniors

Bridget Meehan grew up on a farm a few miles outside Cashel in Tipperary. The family kept cows, chickens, pigs and a horse! Now 86 and living in west London, she remembers well the good and bad times of family life in rural Ireland in the 1930s and particularly of the Christmases she enjoyed.

"We were told to go to bed and make sure we slept on Christmas Eve", she recalls, or Santa wouldn't come. "We had the chimney especially cleaned before Christmas, so Santa could get down", she laughs - at least that's what her parents told her!

The family farm was at the bottom of a hill called Sampsons Hill. At the top was the village of Rosegreen. Bridget's parents, Joanna and William Nash, travelled to Cashel in their horse and trap to buy provisions and presents for Christmas when the children were at school. Shopping included a turkey! "We didn't keep turkeys on our own farm", says Bridget. "They were difficult to look after and would chase you". However the turkey needed plucking which Bridget says she "always tried to avoid!"

The potatoes and vegetables for Christmas dinner came from the farm and there was always a good spread. Bridget had one brother, Martin, and a sister, Jo. "I remember getting the doll I wanted one year", she says, "and Martin getting a clockwork train, which seemed to run all through the house!"

Bridget and her brother and sister went to the local village school up the hill in Rosegreen. "Before Christmas we would always sing lots of Christmas hymns and songs at school", she says.

Shortly after the end of the Second World War she came to London where she met her husband, Pat, a chef. Bridget has been in London ever since. But she still talks vividly and with a twinkle in her eye remembering the Christmases on Nash's Farm eighty years ago!



photo of Bridget Meehan courtesy of Pauline Murphy

Holly and ivy hanging up, and something wet in every cup



NOLLAIG SHONA DUIT

Waterford Christmas Memories

by Stafford Cunningham, Assistant Project Manager, ICSEniors

Every Christmas I look back in fond memory of my godparents, Uncle Bob and Aunt Louise. I smile as I remember the happy visits and days we spent together when I was growing up in Waterford. There is one day that comes back to me every Christmas and that is our shopping day.

This memory has lasted my life time and I still talk and meet each year with my godfather's family at Christmas time. Most of the places we visited are changed now and some of the people have passed away but their memory and traditions have lived on with me.

I look back on our relationship and think how different my niece and nephew's lives are now than when I was young!!

My godfather Bob always wore a shirt and tie, with turn up trousers, a pair of polished brogue shoes and a brown trilby hat for special occasions with a cap on ordinary days. He always tipped his cap to greet the ladies as he passed.

He was softly spoken but on occasion as required his voice could be heard!

Uncle Bob was a man of faith and attended daily Mass and was my sponsor for Confirmation. Family were very important to him and he always remembered life's important occasions by sending a card. He had a great love of sport, boxing and the horses! He never drank or smoked. If any of the family were sick at home or in hospital, he would be the first to visit them to offer support. His sister used to visit often and since there were no cars or public transport in those days, he would walk her home at night after his hard day's work. There was always a smell of home cooking and baking in Bob and Louise's home and a smile on their faces when they opened the door to visitors.

Bob was a gentleman to his finger tips. I never heard him speak a bad word about anybody. My godparents journeyed with me through life's ups and downs and his goodness and kindness was never spoken about. I hope that I can follow in his footsteps by supporting my godchildren and their parents.

Two day before Christmas his daughter would come to collect me and my sister to bring us down town to Shaws Department Store where we would pick out and be fitted for new outfits. This was a special treat as it was one of the few pieces of clothes that was not a hand me down. After that we would go to the Wimpy for a Knickerbocker Glory ice cream and the trimmings!!

Then my cousin would have her shopping list and go to O'Sullivan the bottler in the high street to hand in the drink order. There we would meet the town and county and cousins we never knew we had!!

We saw the Christmas lights and visited the crib. We took away a piece of straw with us for old customs sake so that we would never be short of a few bob!

Then we collected the Holly Wreath which would be placed on their parents' grave before Midnight Mass. As children we watched from the window everybody going into Mass. On Christmas night there was open house between the two families and we would recall stories of previous Christmases and brothers and sisters coming home from England.

Now after all these years we still meet Uncle Bob's and Louise's family and grandchildren at Christmas. We recall with fond memories my parents' and godparents' great spirit of faith and generosity.

Thank God for my parents' wisdom in choosing Bob and Louise as my godparents. May their gentle souls rest in peace.



We welcome creative contributions from our readers.

Footing the Turf

by Brigid McIntyre, ICSEniors Volunteer

In the past, Irish people heated their homes and cooked their food using turf as fuel. Turf was cut from the bog by hand, using a two-sided spade called a sleán. Whole families would go to the bog together to save the turf. Saving the turf involved turning each sod of turf to ensure the sun and wind could help the drying process. Then the turf was placed upright or "footed" for further drying.

When I was going to school back in Ireland I used to hear my cousins and school friends saying that they were going to the bog to foot the turf. Some of them weren't very enthusiastic about it as it was "work" but to me it was something that I really wanted to do, especially when I had heard them talking about making a fire in the bog to boil the kettle and make the tea. They're having a picnic, I thought! Well because I was reared in a town and we did not have a "bank" of turf I never had the pleasure of footing the turf until this year, 2014. They say better late than never!!

I was at home in June when the weather was really good over there. My daughter had bought some turf which had to be footed. Believe it or not, the village where the turf was cut is called Fuel! (in Co Sligo). The very first day we arrived we went down to the bog to see the turf.

Some of the others around her had started footing their turf, and some had actually finished, so we got stuck in and started helping. We went down to the bog for the next few days until it was all footed. I finally had my tea in the bog, but sadly it came out of a flask, but I must say I never tasted tea as good! My back was sore as you have to bend down and place the sods upright, leaning against each other, so that the air can circulate. When the turf is dry it is brought home and stored in ricks or sheds. Years ago the turf was brought home by donkey and cart, but nowadays it is brought home by tractor and trailer, which was how my son and grandson brought it home for her.

Nowadays the turf is cut by machine but it still involves a lot of back-breaking work and, of course, good dry weather, which we have had plenty of this year. I am sure that this will bring back memories to many of you reading this article of going to the bog and helping to save the turf in the "good ole days".

I read a lovely story in the paper recently of a bus load of young footballers who were on their way to Comortos Peil na Gaeltachta (Irish Speaking Areas Football Competition) in Moycullen, Co Galway. They spotted an elderly man out footing a big bank of turf on his own. As they had enough time, they stopped the bus and all got out and started footing the turf for the man. They had it fished before they left. It's lovely to know that the good nature of Irish people lives on in the younger generation. May God keep them that way.



Collecting Turf from the Bog, Connemara, Co. Galway, Ireland.

Colour Photo by John Hinde, F.R.P.S.

Early 1960s postcard by photographer John Hinde whose work has been exhibited at the Irish Museum of Modern Art.

Share your stories of interesting connections to Ireland or Irish people.