

2.01 Memories of my father.

Seán og Reid

I asked Seán og Reid for some memoirs of his father and both he, and other members of the family, came up with the following. There are of course countless stories of Seán's exploits but these few gems will give a taste for the type of person he was. Ed.

Most locals who remember Seán Reid, after remarking on all he did for music and athletics, go on to tell of the funniest of stories which, without exception, tell of how absent-minded he was.

As you would have known, he was given to working tirelessly for weeks on end, with very little time given to sleep, in trying to make the best possible use of his time. This could mean that he wasn't one hundred percent alert on the 'day' job of chief assistant county engineer. I have been told of a time when he was to attend a function of some sort connected with the job. The county engineer drove him to our house where he was to change into a dress suit for the occasion. He went to his bedroom and changed out of his clothes and, being a 'little' forgetful, got into his pyjamas and into bed. About a half an hour later a slightly puzzled (and probably angry) county engineer knocked on the front door to tell my mother that he had been waiting in his car for Seán for some time and "would he be ready to go soon."

I can personally remember, as a five or six year old, going to Spanish Point, Miltown Malbay, for the music, when there were twelve children with him in the car. One of these would have to sit on his lap while two others would be carried in the boot. He would play the tin whistle while my eight-year-old sister would steer the car. He would leave us kids to play at the beach with the eldest in charge while he would go off to attend to what was supposed to be County Council business. We now know that this was Willie Clancy business. On one of these occasions, all of the children, after waiting for too many hours, walked back to Miltown, to discover that he had forgotten all about his charges.

I can remember countless occasions when he would play the tin whistle as he steered the car with his elbows or his knees. When he was younger he owned a 500cc Rudge motorcycle, which he bought new in 1932 and on which he traveled the country with his musical instruments on his back. He also took the time to compete in motorcycle hill-climbs and grass-track events on the same motorcycle. In all his years and miles he never had an accident when driving the car although he had some nasty falls from the Rudge.

I don't know if you are aware of the circumstances of how Peter O'Loughlin got the Gildas/Egan pipes as a wedding present. You probably knew that my father would frequently visit Brother Gildas at the de la Salle retirement home or college (I don't remember which) and eventually persuaded him to come for a holiday to our house. This had been cleared with my mother in advance, as she would have to make the old man feel that he wasn't any trouble to the family. He had all his meals in our house and slept in a local hotel. My mother, who was an expert cook, found him to be unreasonably particular about the way she cooked his food. He even went so far as to tell her how many minutes his egg should be boiled to be to his liking and this interference in my mother's area of expertise was not appreciated. Gildas came on at least one other holiday to Ennis and

both he and my father would talk and play as usual for hours on end but my mother had very little to do with him as the musicians stayed to themselves in the 'book room' all day. The 'book-room' was the front room of our house in which my father kept his collections.

One night she chatted as usual with a next-door neighbour over a sherry while she waited for the pipe music to stop because there was no point going to bed while the pipes were still being played downstairs. She had listened to the pipes until about 3am when she finally went home only to find my father asleep in bed and Gildas gone back to his digs. In the morning my father told her that he had taken Gildas back to his hotel at around 11.30pm. Both my mother and our neighbour were adamant that they could hear the pipes up to the time that she started to leave the neighbour's house. This mysterious late-night music happened on a few other occasions while Gildas was in Ennis on holiday. Needless to say, my mother, who had somewhat of a name for reading the cards to tell peoples fortunes, believed that the Gildas pipes were somehow haunted. (Once when I asked her, in later years, she refused to tell my fortune, but had no problem about telling the fortunes of others. One of her sisters, who is still living, said that my mother could tell her future in very exact detail. My grandmother had a similar reputation and was well known for what was probably a psychic ability of some sort or other.)

There was no more ghostly late night piping until one day my father returned from Brother Gildas' funeral with the beautiful Egan set of B Flat pipes that Gildas had left to him in his will. My mother said that the 'Mysterious Pipe Music' started all over again and she immediately started to put pressure on my father to get rid of the pipes in the firm belief that she was in Gildas' bad books. Not too long after that the O'Loughlin wedding provided my father with the perfect solution to his problem: (a) my mother's demands were met; (b) the Gildas set would be nearby and accessible; and (c) another potentially very good piper now had a set to play on.

Garret Barry was a grand uncle to Michael Barry who in turn was a grandfather to John Reid who now plays the 16 ½" Seán Reid / Coyne pipes. My nephew John Reid would dearly love to hear from someone who could tell him something of the previous owners of these pipes.