

She towards Finland, myself towards Spain.

Well I didn't know I was going to Spain, just going south.

I was furious with Leone and furious with myself and I put her out of my mind in a rage.

And I lapsed right back into the bad old ways I'd been in after Julia.

In Copenhagen I met a girl called Margareta.

And she was going to Spain.

So I was going to Spain.

I told her there was a biscuit in Dublin by the name of Margareta and she asked me what it was like. And I told her it was sort of hard and dry and she smiled. Like I'd issued a challenge. And we had sex on a train a few hours after we met. Those were the sort of days that were in it. Twenty years later we exchanged correspondence, but were very discreet about the past. She wrote that she remembered sharing our drink and our food and ....just like that, dot dot dot dot.

I think I like Swedish women.

Promiscuous and dark and gloomy surely, but shy at the same time.

I suppose in their culture they've been promiscuous for so long, and the inner woman has had time to re-emerge. Whereas Irish women are only recently promiscuous and haven't re-found and re-released the shy bit yet.

OK, I got certain theories.

Margareta and myself made our way to Spain.

I was pretty broke and she sort of subsidised me.

But we drifted apart and I ended up with others.

Actually ended up with a bunch of dropouts living in a cave on a beach.

I was there for months.

How we survived I've no idea. But there always seemed to be funds for wine and cigarettes. And we sold blood, that I recall and have mentioned already.

All good things come to an end.

I'd now taken up with a girl called Sheri from Canada, and we made our way to Paris. And there we shared a flat with two Moroccan guys.

Word of advice.

Do not share a flat with two Moroccan guys.

Particularly if you have a white girl friend.

But I suppose I was rough enough and tough enough in those days, and not likely to be crossed. They probably thought I carried a knife, much as no doubt they did. I didn't. And my gun was back in Africa where it belonged with all the other guns. But I suppose my eyes told a different story.

Sheri soon was tired of me and I of her. But she did see me off to the Gare du Nord, I remember that, and she walked along the platform and saw me on the train for Londres. Our parting was picturesque and *film noir*, and she walked slowly back down the platform without looking back and I never saw nor heard from her again. In Canada years later I gave her a shout. But it either wasn't loud enough or it was a sound she didn't want to hear, and answer came there none.

Back in London I got a job and worked quietly and thought of Leone.

I knew a South African girl who was playing piano in a bar.

I'd met her on a ship on one of my trips back and forth to Africa.

And the first night I met her I said play *Lara's Theme* for me.

I reckon the film *Dr Zhivago* was popular then.

So she played *Lara's Theme* for me on the ship. Every night when I walked into the lounge she'd spot me from afar and change whatever tune she played. And in London then it was the same. She'd see me in the place and play the tune for me.

It was a little thing we had between us.

All we had between us really, she was never a girlfriend.

But a man and woman can know each other without a single touch. Good, that kind of knowing.

So, apart from working and hanging round bars I didn't do much.

There was no woman in my life.

I was thinking of Leone and, I suppose, I was waiting to be not thinking of her.

I went back and forth to Ireland a few times, mostly to make a change of bars to drink in. And once to Carol's wedding in Portaferry. This the same Carol my mother had mentioned in her letter ([page 62 here](#)). "Carol has been in hospital with stomach pains, but I think she is alright now." And so she



obviously was. And yes we did have a fleeting brief encounter once, way back, but I've no idea why she asked me to her wedding. Women have their reasons I suppose. The same Carol and the same brief encounter and this same wedding invite all feature strongly in my (unpublished!) novel *Eye of The Salmon*. But we'll all have to wait for that.

And about the wedding?

Well, the wedding was...

Let me put it this way.

Carol was a Presbyterian.

Do not go to Presbyterian weddings.

There's useful advice for any young man reading here, so I'll add it to my earlier.

Do not share a Paris flat with Moroccans, and do not go to Presbyterian weddings in Northern Ireland.

Can't go far wrong if you stick to that.

Back in London Leone faded from my thoughts. But I still had no girlfriend, and lived in a bedsit in Earls Court by myself. It was dreary. Siobhán whom I hadn't seen since the *Carney Arms* days in Dún Laoghaire visited me there and looked around and said but this is not you.

And I said how do you know who I am?

And she raised her eyes to heaven, which irritated me.

So I said do you remember that night years ago, you left the *Carney Arms* with my friend Paul, and went down the East Pier for a shag?

And she said you seem to remember it better than me.

Then we went out to a pub and the girl at the piano played *Lara's Theme*.

And after a night's drinking I went home to my bedsit alone.

Those were those days.

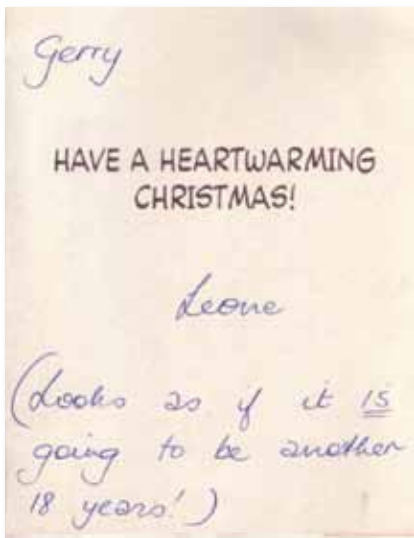
But the future was coming down time's tracks like a train.

So let's remember again what certain physicists say. That there really is no now, no then, no future. That time is a mere construct of man's mind. That it's all the one, the future and the past. Handy enough. We can step through time's curtains here and have a look around.

It is eighteen years later...eighteen years after that row in Scandinavia and... eighteen years after parting from Leone that she and I exchanged a certain correspondence. Back in South Africa, she



had breast cancer. And when I read this in her letter I remembered, and in my mind saw a picture of her as a younger woman in Amsterdam. We were staying in one of those tall narrow houses that remind you of Anna Franck or a song by Jacques Brel. And it was early morning and she was dressing happily because we had borrowed bicycles and we were going to cycle out into the countryside, see windmills, old Dutch ladies in clogs, tulips, all that. We had a swirl of it all in our plans, confused enough but colourful, like a painting by Van Gogh.



And I watched Leone there dressing because she was so enthusiastic. And I was a grumpy bastard and she took the edge off that mood, nearly made me happy. And I watched her as she put her breasts into a black bra. And I thought to myself well that's the only black thing that'll ever get near Leone's white afrikaaner tits. I suppose I think stuff like that because as well as being grumpy I'm sardonic with it.

Fast forward eighteen years now and one of those same beautiful breasts had cancer.

It didn't bear thinking about.

But then nothing about life bears thinking about. And unfortunately if you decide to be in this writing biz then you've got to think about the lot.

There's no running.

The dead will haunt, and a writer's words will fall where they will.

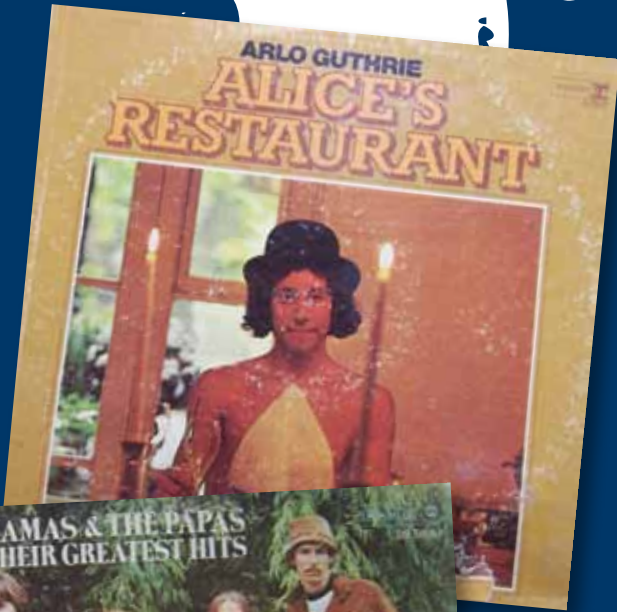
You better believe.

Read on.

The best is yet to come.



ATTIC. STUFF. WRITE.



# 1970s





**A**ROUND 1968 I WENT back to Ireland and met a schoolgirl. Well I like to think of her as a schoolgirl, the word has a certain *frisson* for the more imaginative older writer. But in honesty H was already doing her Leaving. And looked slightly older than she does in this photo here. But not that much. So let it to be said she was a maturish schoolgirl. Eighteen almost. I've written all about that elsewhere, in my book *A Walk on The South Side*.



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One look at H and I realised she was not another Great Love of my life. She was *The* Great Love of my life. I convinced her of this fact. It wasn't easy. She had her doubts. But not many months after meeting we got married and almost immediately emigrated to the USA. Neither H nor I had a tosser, and H's mother was a widow and poor enough and they were living in a dampish basement flat in Monkstown. And so the wedding reception was held right there and my mother came and I see now that she wrote formally to that effect. My parents considered themselves upper middle class, or lower upper class, somewhere around there. And H's family were only bog standard provincial middleclass. But nonetheless it all went well. And that's us there getting married. And after the wedding H and I drove off in a VW beetle car to Virginia for our first married night.



A virgin in Virginia?

Don't even ask.

Next day we headed for Donegal. The plan was to drive around Ireland and end up a week later in Cobh and get on the ship.

Something like that. And it went something like that. But it was all pretty shambolic. And I'm not sure if we knew what the hell we were at anyway.

We hadn't really thought it out.

Most of the months between meeting her and getting married seem now in retrospect to have been taken up with organising paperwork. Fingerprints. And certificates from various police forces in countries where I'd lived. But I did get the



Green Card and we did set off on the QE2 to a new life. This was H's first new life, but I'd started several others already so knew what to expect.

It'd be much the same as the old one.

The QE2 was brand new, so new that we actually sailed from Cobh to New York on its second transatlantic crossing. Sobering, or more likely worth getting drunk for, is the fact that as these words were written the QE2 was being scrapped or converted into something horrible in Dubai. Whatever, other photo happier. Because in the time between meeting the schoolgirl and marriage it shows that three things had happened. H had grown her hair, developed thighs, and colour photography had been invented. Though the other photo (overleaf) of H newly arrived in Connecticut is still in black and white, that of myself at the same time in New York is colour. Transition times.





This pile-of-boxes graphic here has many uses. It denotes a pause, a change, the opening of a new box, the opening of a new memory in the mind. Designed by my mate Cliff Hayes, my book designer mate Cliff Hayes in Sussex, it is worth its weight in many words. The amount of hard writing work it saves is enormous. And also the amount of hard reading work, so let's all be grateful.

However in the particular instance above it represents more than just a change of thinking tack or the opening of another box. Right here it signifies the passage of many months between the starting of the book and its continuation. Just after reaching these US social security cards something else came up. Trouble with novel sort of thing. And oh to hell with it I think I'll go to Italy. That sort of thing. Months passed. Then something else came up. A health thing, which reminded me, as if I needed



reminding, that despite my possession of a United States social security number, there was little security in this life. Either social, or personal. We know not the hour, and that. Though in this particular instance I was actually given an important hour, in four or five weeks time, when I would have to be in Dublin listening to a medical consultant telling me things. Very little of which I wanted to hear, believe you me.

So I said to myself...self, I said, I better finish my *attic stuff write* book. Because it would be a pity not to. So I vanished into the attic again and after careful consideration once again gave myself four weeks to finish up. That way it'd be done before the important medical consultation. And I could sleep easy. On death row so to speak.

I tell H the plan.

She says you can't write a book in four weeks.

"Sure I can" I say, "I've written lots of books in four weeks."

"I know," she says, ominously, "I've read them."

"Watch this space."

She looked at me, silently. Though I did note a slight flicker of her eyes towards the ceiling. She knows that ceiling well, but what the hell. Everyone needs a heaven. And a marriage gets to a stage where it's too late for many things. In our case it was far too late for literary criticism.

I got right down to it.

I have a particular style of approaching a writing project.

Get up very early in the morning, and lash in.

I got up very early the very next morning, five o'clockish.

We have two houses, adjacent. One for living and one for working. The working one is actually the ruin that I mentioned earlier in these pages, but it does have one room converted into an office. And once inside the door of that room one would think one was in, well, an office. Impressions are everything in architecture. Anyway, to get from one house to the other one can either take the garden route or the internal route. I took the garden route. It was a beautiful morning. And it was a mistake to take the garden route because I had recently built a large pond and filled it with goldfish. Well, five goldfish. And I paused beside the pond and looked down into the waters and counted them. And there were only four to be seen. A fucking heron, I said to myself, looking up at the sky. Its emptiness mocked me. Very annoying. And even more annoying was the knowledge

that H would say I told you so. I told you a heron would get those fish. And I had said nonsense woman, how will the herons know I've built a pond?

"They will know," she had said, nodding, mother earth style, knowing stuff. Or, in this instance, mother sky, knowing stuff.

"Don't be bloody ridiculous."

Silence of womanly wisdom from H, nod, nod, nod.

And now it had come to pass.

But maybe not, I hoped, calculated, examining the pond in detail. The fish were darting in and out of rocks and under plants and, though I could only see four at any one time, there was no way of knowing if they were the same four. That was it! Yes. There could very well have been five, I consoled myself, goldfish tend to look pretty much the same.

I stared into the pond.

Counting.

That took half an hour or so and then, no particular conclusion reached, I went to my office. And read the death notices in *The Irish Times*. And saw that old Paddy Finucane was dead, and remembered working for him in my architectural days. He owned a lot of quasi derelict buildings full of grungey bedsitters. A very nice man, albeit a slum landlord. Which I suppose made me a slum landlord's architect. But what can one do? Needs must. After that I read Kevin Myers in the *Irish Independent*. And after that, to counteract his right wing opinionated rantings, I read some left wing opinionated rantings in the *Guardian*. I like a nicely balanced media intake. The actual newspaper I do buy is the *Daily Telegraph*.

But that's a tory paper, my sister said to me once, appalled.

And your problem, I asked her?

She shook her head.

After my online media session I suddenly remembered hearing a few days back that the Irish Census for 1901 had come online. That would be well worth looking at, I thought, harbouring as I do an inner genealogist and, indeed, having written many newspaper articles and books on genealogy.

So I got into that. And was interested to discover that one of my neighbours was descended from a blacksmith, and another from a member of the Royal Irish Constabulary. Yes it was unclear what use this information was, but one never knows.

I then looked up my own ancestors. And, though of course I had looked

at the paper records in the *National Archives* years before, it was somehow more interesting to see them there on the screen. More immediate, more real, digital age sort of thing, medium is message, etcetera. I noted that my great aunt Monimia's name was misspelled on the transcription. Not entirely surprising, Monimia being an obscure enough name in Ireland let alone in Kyrgystan or wherever the illiterate-in-english transcribers had been recruited. So I corrected that on the online function available for the purpose.

Telling you, this was all much more fun than writing a book.

After a few hours I went back to my house, by the garden route, counted the fish again. And now there were five, definitely five. Good news, the morning was shaping up. I went to the kitchen, made coffee and toast for H, and brought it to her in bed.

"I've started to finish the book," I told her, an absolute lie.

"How's it going?"

"Very well, very well indeed."

"Good," she said, in a neutral fashion. Neither belief nor non-belief present in the word.

I sat beside her on the bed.

"Do you know what happened earlier?" I said.

"What happened earlier?"

I noticed that she had been reading a book, and her eyes kept glancing back towards it.

"I counted the goldfish."

"Uh huh?"

"And there was only four."

"A heron got one, I told you."

"Ah hah...but coming back I counted them again. And there was five. One was just hiding. So, a heron didn't get one."

"It will," she said, "it will." And sipped at her coffee like it was a potion, a potion wherein lay infinite knowledge of the ways of the earth and ways of the sky, the movement of birds and the fate of fishes.





Attic. Stuff. Write.

Why I went to America I have no idea. I never had any real interest in going to the place. And kind of thought of Africa as my spiritual home. Or, indeed, Bognor Regis. But America? I'd never thought about it much. But I'd seen an ad and followed it up and had gotten myself a job in Hartford Connecticut. A job's a job's a job so that's where we went. And went about being Americans. Or, rather, immigrants to America. That is, we worked hard. Myself in an architectural firm, and H in a department store selling ladies' coats. And around Christmas time I too worked in a department store to make a few extra bob, but a different one. *Lord and Taylors*. I sold apparel, to men. And felt at home because both my grandfather and great grandfather and going way back into the mists we were all tailors in Dublin.

It's in the blood.

Though looking at this photo which emerges now I'm none too sure about the sartorial cut of us. Nothing wrong essentially. It's the his and hers matching bit that worries. Slightly.



H's hair is moving towards the hippie look, and I suppose those were hippie times. Not particularly in New England, but out in California where we planned to go. Eventually. We had a car because this was America and I needed it for work but we had bugger all else. We lived in an apartment in an old house in a small town outside Hartford and it had basic furniture which was lucky because we were broke. And H made those red curtains out of a length of fabric she found some place. And she wore miniskirts or long flowey dresses and looked very pretty but I already knew that. But I knew nothing much else about her, and I reckon she the same of me.

But we learned.

They were learning curve times. But also dangerous times. Because barely had my feet landed in the land of the free when the local draft board came knocking on my door, discussing Vietnam and suchlike. Friendly stuff like come down the armory and try on a uniform, that sort of thing. And we've very nice guns. But I didn't want anything more to do with guns and was not very happy at all. Luckily my particular classification turned out to mean that a good few



thousand more US troops would have to die before things got serious. Well, serious for me. Before I got called on to die likewise.

I never got drafted.

But nonetheless I do have an intimate understanding of the movie *Apocalypse Now*. Just sort of picked it up on the ether of the times I reckon.

What I would have done if drafted I have no idea. I suspect I'd have realised that the Canadian border wasn't that far from New England, but one never can tell. I might have said to H that this was our country now, and I'd better do my bit.

Yeah right, I might.

And I've got this bridge in Brooklyn, wanna buy?

No, I am not a noble sort of person, and Africa had not been good to me, life-threatening-experience-wise. So I reckon that self interest not to mention preservation would surely have sent me north. One thing I wouldn't have done though, I sure wouldn't have fled trailing peacenik excuses behind me like shit from a dog with the runs. I've lots of qualities that do not inspire admiration, but I don't do hypocrisy.

I'd have put it simple.

I don't want to be killed, I'm off.

The combination of cold Connecticut winters and those warm thighs in that photo had their effect, and H was pregnant pretty soon. It did not go well. The baby died. We called her Siobhán. She is buried in Hartford. The card here came attached to a bunch of commiserating flowers from the women about the place. Barbara was my boss's wife, Barbara Cox. Her son is an architect in Glastonbury now. Helen was an architect working in my office. And Sandi was the secretary of the business. Sandi and her husband Dick Handel were friends of ours. Barbecues in back yards, cans of beer in hands. The American way.

But the death of Siobhán woke us from that dream. And I reckon we got unsettled. We left Connecticut and went to Canada, my sister Liz was



living up there. Hung around with her family for awhile. And H had relatives in Toronto. And we hung around with them for awhile.



We went up around the lakes north of Toronto, and stayed there awhile. And I took H out in rowboats, for the fun. But it wasn't that much fun. Yes it reminded me of those days years back in Dublin Bay and sailing with pretty girls with salty thighs on sunny Saturday afternoons, all that. But it wasn't fun. Because all the pretty girls had grown into this young woman that I loved. From tip of toe to top of head. And she was sad in her soul for our dead daughter. H took this photo. And I remember she laughed some as she did. Then put the camera down and didn't laugh anymore. And trailed her fingers in the water, thinking.



And so that was Canada for then. Because in the end we decided to go back to Ireland. Yes sure we've been back in Canada a few times since, and lived there for awhile in more recent years. It's a quiet thoughtful country, and the people are nice. But for me it always has that sorrow, when H trailed her fingers in the water thinking.

We went to Montreal. And crossed the Atlantic again by ship. An old ship this time, an old ship at the end of its own time. *The Empress of Canada* to Liverpool. And then another ship to Dublin.



I like ships.

But it's highways and planes traverse America.

So we never did get to California.

If Siobhán had lived we would have gone there, and I'd be writing a different book now. And I would've most likely written different stuff throughout my life. Movie scripts perhaps. Dialogue is my thing, I've a good ear for how that works.

In later years I wrote scripts for RTÉ, and throw in this letter here. Yes they paid me money, and I spent it. Though my involvement with Irish TV was short. Gobshite RTÉ apparatchiks like Eoghan Harris and Louis Lentin wore me down. They have their reward. No urrameen?

So, more important things.

Yes I would've liked to have gone to California. And shaken off Ireland and Irishness. It's a drag. Being born Irish is like being born with a spiritual version of cystic fibrosis. Makes it hard to breathe.

But I didn't fucking go to fucking California.

And I sometimes talk to the spirit of Siobhán that lives in a corner of my own soul. And I blame her and say hey you little brat, you changed my life.

And she says I'm a grown woman now.

So I say ok, grown woman now, you changed my life.

And she says I didn't want to die.

And it's not a complaint, just five words soft in the place in my mind where she lives.

A place which I imagine to be like one of those shuttered rooms in Italian villages. Closed against the heat of the day, they open at night to let the breeze flow through.

I often open Siobhán's shuttered room at night, and hear the cool breeze of her whispering.

I didn't want to die.

And I hold her in my arms and say I know. And she shakes in my arms as if she's cold with the cold of a grave, or shakes as if she's giggling, and laughing. And I never really know which it is. So I reckon sometimes it's one, and sometimes the other. As if her moods drift, and change. And when she's giggling and laughing I sometimes think she's giggling with me. Because we are both the same. And we both know the way of life and the way of God. And I sometimes think she's laughing at me, because she knows far more than me.

Of life, and death, and that.

Like she naturally would, from where she's at.

Bottom line, we're thick as thieves, my daughter Siobhán and I.

It's just a pity, a pity.

That sometimes in my arms she's cold with the cold of her grave.



Attic. Stuff. Write.

Yes it's all very well to dig around in boxes, unearth stuff forgotten. And feel feelings forgotten, and know things again that you forgot you once knew. All very well, all that.

But boxes have a way with them, they know their own mind.



And on a certain day in twenty eleven I'm working on a certain box, and digging around for stuff about America. And I find this invite here and I say the hell, that's not America. H was only fifteen or sixteen and I was in Africa then and the sort of guy her mother wouldn't let through the door. And it's a damn nuisance finding this invite now because I've finished that part of the book anyway and I'm a lazy bastard of a writer, too damn lazy to be farting around with editing and rewriting.

So I put it aside and go to a party in Dún Laoghaire.

It's a long planned party of an old friend and H and I have booked into the *Royal Marine Hotel* to stay the night, because our Dublin apartment is in Sutton and that's too far away to be getting back to. Particularly after a drink.

We check into the hotel and change into our party clothes and H wears the new stockings I bought her at Christmas and the new shoes she bought specially for the party. Because they have wedge heels and she usually wears high spikey heels because I'm a foot fetishist. But she can't wear them to this particular party because the hostess has just put down new expensive wooden floors and says she doesn't want them mucked about.

All that.

Then we hop into the hotel bar which is called *Hardys* after Laurel and Hardy who visited there in nineteen stone age whenever and we have a few drinks. Because god knows what the party's going to be like and it'd be best to get a bit tanked up just in case.

All that.

Then we walk through the streets which we know so well and the shops and they all have a history. Past McManus the jewellers which once was a pawnshop too but used be on the other side of the street. H and I would pawn things there to buy food when we were poor. And later I bought a little silver chain there and a little silver lock to go along with

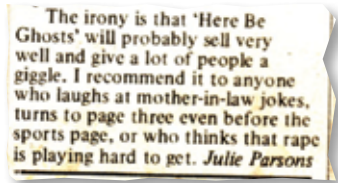


it and clicked it around her waist beneath her clothes to decorate. And I kept the key to her chain on the ring of my car keys so's she'd have to ask me to release her. And that chain became a game between us, a game on a slippery slope. Chess on a ski jump, something like that.

Yes the streets we knew had stories and the shops in them too. But there is no time to write. Particularly when late for a party. So we hurry along the street I know so well and I hold her hand which I don't know at all because it's always new and strange and exciting to feel there in mine.

All that.

Then at the party the first person I see there is a Julie who wrote a review about a book of mine once. And because I'm going through cuttings and stuff back home it's fresh in my mind, and here it is fresh on the page. Well the page is not big enough for the entire diatribe, this here is merely the last paragraph. And that last line got to me and I never talk to Julie since. Or read her books. And the last line got to H too because she knows I'm a lover of women and father of daughters and a great believer in bringing back the rope. For certain things including rape.



The irony is that 'Here Be Ghosts' will probably sell very well and give a lot of people a giggle. I recommend it to anyone who laughs at mother-in-law jokes, turns to page three even before the sports page, or who thinks that rape is playing hard to get. *Julie Parsons*

And Julie's eyes and my eyes meet briefly across a crowded room like we're in an old song and then I look away. And later she drifts over to my chatting group as if she wants to talk to me but I do not talk to her and she drifts away again. And I realise we're having some kind of love affair and we're lovers in some psychic dimension which we sense but cannot enter. Because they don't let bitter writers in there. Neither those who won't forgive, nor those who won't say sorry for a silly hurtful line.

So I watch her drifting away and I hear in my mind that song *Julie Julie Do You Love Me* by Bobby Sherman which I used hear when living in America. And in America the song would remind me of my own Julia and I'd wonder where she was. And other things about her too. And in Dún Laoghaire at the party now the memory of the song reminded me again of my Julia. And I wondered of the connections between her and Julie the writer here who shares her name. And I knew there was something woven there, in the warp of time and the weft of who we are.

And then I put all that aside and enjoy the party.

It was pretty much OK and I get into a conversation with a guy who works for *The Irish Times* just like I did and we denounce our betters in

there happily. Then I talk to another guy who is a musician and says he once long years ago played in a band called the *Greenbeats* around Dún Laoghaire. In rugby and tennis club dances and Longford Terrace and places like that. And I remember that beside my laptop at home there's that invitation to a dance in *Longford Terrace Tennis Club*. Waiting there beside the laptop to annoy me because I can't think where to fit it in. It comes from a time before I even knew H, and is really nothing to do with me at all. But it got integrated into my stuff somehow and that's the way of it.

Existing. And irritating.

So I stand there listening to the musician and imagine him up there with the *Greenbeats* bashing away at a guitar and H who is fifteen or sixteen dancing to his music. Shaking her little arse the way I'm sure she shook her little arse and generally doing her teenage thing. And then she drifts over beside me in case I am bored and need rescuing. She doesn't want me bored because I'll be moaning for days about being dragged to her friends' bloody parties. And giving her a hard time generally.

But I'm not bored.

She gets chatting to the *Greenbeats* guy and I watch them.

Him bashing away at his guitar and she shaking her little teenage arse.

And I think of that invite sitting there by my laptop waiting for me to find someplace to fit it in. And watching the musician bashing away at his guitar and H shaking her little teenage arse I realise it fits in anywhere.

It doesn't matter, it makes no difference.

The invite lives in its own time.

Beyond time.

Timeless.

All that.

So we partyed the party and got a lift back to the hotel from a reformed alcoholic friend who drove so badly I wished she was back on the drink. Then we went to bed and watched CNN because we don't have CNN at home in the West of Ireland. Just TG4 and things like that which I don't really understand, even when they're in English. And in Italy where we spend a lot of time now we don't understand anything that's going on at all except there's a lot of flashy women involved.

CNN sent us to sleep and in the morning I went to Mass in the town.  
It was not intended.

But yes I do go to Mass, in my Roman Catholic manifestation. And to Anglican services when I'm feeling Protestant. Us children of mixed marriages have this conflict, it keeps us on our toes. Or, rather, keeps us on our knees.

I'm always happy on my knees.

On my knees I'm an aristocrat, about to face the guillotine of God. Good place to be, particularly because when the chop finally does come I won't have to listen to the baying of the mob.

But enough of serious theology.

It is the year twenty eleven and I go to Mass in Dún Laoghaire.

And no it was not intended, not this morning.

The intention had been to walk down the pier, but the weather seemed rather inclement. So I walked around the back streets of Dún Laoghaire instead. There once were shops in some of these little streets and on particular corners here, and I remember them, but they're all empty and shuttered and abandoned now. Air of decay and the end of times.

Or so I mused.

And then I noted other people walking through the early streets. In dribs and drabs and ones and twos. And I wondered where they were going and then I knew. Because the bells were ringing at St Michael's Church, and these folks were heading down to Mass. And the bells bonged a poem by John Betjeman into my head. *Bells are booming down the bohreens, White the mist along the grass. Now the Julias, Maeves and Maureens, Move between the fields to Mass.*

And I said to myself yes I'll do that too. And I'll pray for my Julia.

So I did.

I said here goes the mob and I am its mystic and I will follow them.

So I went to the church and I knelt right down there and prayed for my Julia. And yes of course she needed the prayers less than I needed the praying, but that is always the way.

And after Mass I went over to the shrine of St Anthony and lit a candle for my Granny Mollie who was married in this church long ago. Well, not precisely in this church, in the old one that burnt down. But churches do burn down, just as candles do. But folks build them right

back up again, anew. And light new candles.

I put Mollie's candle up on the top rack, because she was a grand lady and lived high over Dalkey looking down over the small houses of the ordinary people. Up there she lived in an old house full of the things of the past, and she talked of the past. Her place was an island of the past in the ocean of the present. And in her garden around her old ruin of a house she grew geraniums. And so the island she lived on was scented like Madeira.

I watched Mollie's candle up on the top rack.

And Madeira in my mind I thought of the girl in the green dress. And the chain of my thoughts churned on like the wake of the *Capetown Castle* heading south. And the mind moved on. And then with Africa in my mind I thought of Leone. And I watched the candles and I thought of women drifting, in and out of my life. And what each brought to me, and what I gave to them. And how their bodies mock a man, as if God knows he needs that mockery. How they mock him first when they're young and beautiful. And mock him more when they've gotten breast cancer.

And when they die.

And then I thought of candles, being lit, and burning out, being lit anew.

And the church doors opening and closing around the corner sent a little breeze into the shrine and I thought in afrikaans then. Those *Winternag* lines by Eugene Marais. *O koud is die windjie en skraal. En blink in die dofliig en kaal.*

*Oh cold is the little wind and cutting...*

And like that.

And then I sighed, melancholy. Because I am a poet and an intellectual and a mystic, and I am pretty damn clever if I think so myself. But still my thoughts end up like a song by Elton John.

Candle in the wind.

Time for breakfast.



Attic. Stuff. Write.

Back in Ireland I had gotten a job in Stephenson Gibney, a large Dublin architectural practice. And that is me with another employee there, Brendan Ryan from the Albert Road in Glenageary. We worked as a team. A good relationship. He was an older man than I, but not quite so qualified. I was under the impression that he was my assistant, and he felt that it was the other way around. It was never precisely resolved which was which, but it didn't seem to matter.



We were too busy.

Those were the glory days of knocking down old Georgian Dublin and building the new. And Stephenson Gibney was very busy. Up to its eyeballs in corruption and chicanery. There was a Swiss bank account for bungs and bribes and under the counter deals. I remember the secretaries laughing, sorting the cheques, which ones would go to Switzerland, and which go through the Irish accounts.

Good place to work though.

Marion Finnucane sat at the next drawing board to me.

No that wasn't exactly the good bit, just threw it in as gossip.

I first farted around with office blocks and the demolition of fine Georgian and Victorian architecture and that end of the business. Then I was plucked from this obscurity and placed in The Special Unit. This was the architectural equivalent of the special units in the SS. The blokes who eliminated Jews in overrun Polish villages.

I had special clients.

Politicians. Friends of politicians. Businessmen. And solicitors. They were all egregious crooks. With very little taste. And lots of money but no fees were ever charged. My services were supplied by the firm gratis. My role was back scratcher. Someone had scratched the firm's back. And I scratched back.

For Pat O Connor Charlie Haughey's corrupt solicitor I designed a swimming pool.

It was vulgar.

For John Finnegan the corrupt auctioneer I designed a sauna room beside his swimming pool out in Monkstown.

It was in the Ionic Order.

For Des Traynor Charlie Haughey's corrupt bag man I designed a loggia around his house in Howth.

Perhaps that was Doric, or Corinthian, can't exactly recall.

For Mr I've-forgotten-his-first-name McGonagle another corrupt solicitor I designed an extension to his ugly bungalow. An ugly extension, be it said. But it is important to make things blend in.

For a lady in Sandymount who was the mistress of the principal of a household name building company...my lips are sealed, professional ethics...well no, libel laws, they're both still alive. But for this lady anyway I designed a fireplace. Both it and she were very nice and we got on well. I think I have a natural affinity for the mistresses of rich men. Very admirable quality, that courtesan quality. They're smooth and cool. Smooth and cool and slender like the wire between the barbs on barbed wire. If chromosomes had fallen differently I might very well have gone down the courtesan career path myself. Though I may not have been born with the looks.

Cross that bridge when I come to it next time around I suppose.

And so it went on, the crooks and shysters and chancers and their illicit squeezes in their fancy little pads. I was their man.

But I was also the man for other more salubrious clients of The Special Unit. Clients who actually did pay fees, or their employer the government did so on their behalf. And for this beautiful woman here I designed a security system for her garden, new secure windows for her house, and various internal alterations. The Department of Justice picked up the tab. Because this beautiful woman was married to Cearbhall Ó Dálaigh, then Chief Justice. My role to make their house in Wicklow safe from marauders and assassins. And I spent many afternoons there, the point man for the State, about my business.

The house was in what is known as *The Russian Village*, in Kilquade, a strange little enclave vaguely reminiscent of the set for the film *The Fiddler on The Roof*. Though without the marauding Cossacks and singing Jews and chirping chickens. My afternoons there were spent taking tea and discussing the topics of the day with the Chief Justice's wife, her name was Mairín. Sometimes the topic of architecture did arise, but rarely. Instead we wandered widely on life's rich tapestry.

I liked her lots.

But once when the topic of construction did arise, the replacement of the house's original leaded pane windows with clear sheets of glass, bullet proof glass, something good happened. Mairín knew I was building my own house in Mayo at the time, and gave me the old windows.

And that, was that.

The Ó Dálaighs moved on, to Áras an Uachtarain. I did not see them again. But I often think of her as I look through the windows she had given me. I think of the nature of windows, and all the eyes that look through them. I remember our conversations and her quiet intensity. Much older than me, I'd never seen her young. But she was that sort of woman whom one can meet at any age, and see the whole picture through the window of that time.

And now this photo of her as the young woman whom I never knew emerges from my boxes. I have no idea as to why it's there, or who gave it to me or where I found it. It's a cutting from a magazine obviously, and comes complete with caption. No, it is not the President's wife, nor the wife of the Chief Justice. Nor is it the middleaged woman who gave me tea so many times, and listened to my young man's waffle, amused and wise. It's all of them, and lots of other people too.



"Mairín Ní Dhiarmada, of Dartmouth Square, Dublin," the caption tells me, "on the 16<sup>th</sup> May 1934 she married Cearbhall Ó Dálaigh."

It seems a long time ago.

But that is the way of time, subjective.

While it seems a long time since Mairín Ní Dhiarmada married Cearbhall Ó Dálaigh it doesn't seem at all long since I went around Dublin photographing buildings that I'd been associated with. Well, actually in the latter case it wasn't, not very long at all. Not more than a year. So much for the chronology of this book. But it *seemed* long. Because it had been a disappointing photographic trip and the bundle of pictures had rapidly vanished into my attic stores. And their very presence there said *long ago*.



But now for this book the photographs emerge. Disappointing, a disappointing trip? Yes. Memory tricks me into believing that I spent a goodly portion of God's hours at an architect's drawing board but, when it came to going out and tracking the results of the endeavours it seems the results were few. Well, few to see. Because many were houses, hidden now behind private walls. And of course some buildings were in deepest Africa. And though Springfield Massachusetts is a pleasant enough town I wasn't going to hie all that way to photograph the shopping mall I designed there.

So I'd wandered round Dublin that Sunday morning.

The curtain wall of the onetime EBS head office in Westmoreland Street, now some kind of educational establishment?

I take a bow.

But strangely the photo here on the page does not remind me of the hours spent getting those Miesian proportions right (rather successfully, I feel), rather I'm reminded of visits to the central part of the building. I had no part in that Victorian construction, my role merely to wander up the stairs of the *Paradiso Restaurant*. Stairs lined with signed photographs of movie stars who had dined there. Signed black and white photos. Yes, they'd dined there in black and white days. With the advent of colour and scruffs like myself and my mots the stars had abandoned the place.

But I suppose the glory, albeit faded, lived on.

And now the *Paradiso* is gone. Just as the EBS itself is gone. Sad, kinda. All the building societies are gone. Well do I remember sailing in Dublin Bay with a pretty girl called Jacqueline. Daughter of Edmund Farrell, the sort-of-founder of Permanent. An earlier Fingleton of Irish Nationwide I suppose. Smartass mover shaker who takes over a



slumbering organisation run by senile nincompoops. Modernises it. Introduces computers and corruption, that sort of guy. Farrell did so well that a grateful Permanent named its earlier headquarters *Edmund Farrell House* and gave his son of the same name the job when he'd shuffled off the coil. Then of course the shit hit the fan as shit inevitably does. The younger Farrell retired and the brass letters announcing *Edmund Farrell House* were removed without fanfare. Probably in dead of night. For a while you could see the ghostly outlines of the letters on the brick and then even they vanished.

And, as always, all that remained was architecture.

With a sigh I took the photo of the Paradiso/EBS, got back into my car and decided to drive to Ranelagh via Molesworth Street. Ranelagh because the breakfast club there does a good 'recession breakfast' (of which for this mention a free one I expect next time), and via Molesworth Street because another of my gifts to the city stands there. This, a hairdresser's now, was built as the boutique and atelier of the onetime fashion designer Pat Crowley. Well, not 'built', it's a Georgian building, but I got my pencil on to it and converted the structure. I'm particularly fond of that bay window shopfront I decided on. Elegant. As indeed was Pat Crowley. A member of the eponymous accounting and big business family, she was nice. If somewhat severe. With one of those ballet dancers' severe hair styles. That is really all I remember. Whilst she herself ended up remembering nothing, having fallen to Alzheimers.

A nod to her memory.

I drove on to my recession busting breakfast, but stopped again on the Appian Way.

That there is the Fitzwilliam Tennis Club.

Whilst working for Stephenson Gibney I did have a hand in the design of those indoor courts. Just a hand, an input. But the exterior boundary wall is all my work.

All my own work. Put that in your pipe and smoke it, Liebskind.

Onward. Ranelagh recession busting breakfast safely consumed, I drove to Dublin's suburbs and arrived in London's Earls Court. I stepped out of my Tardis/Passat, and it was suddenly many years ago, decades before these times. I was working in architecture and I met an Irish bloke called Yaman. Yes. He said what're you up to and I said architecture. He

said that seems a good idea and off he went and studied and became one. An architect. And I've never seen him again nor since. Then decades swirled about my ears and I was back from America working running my building business in Dublin. And a psychoanalyst came up to me and said I've married a new bride and I need a house, build me a house. And he whipped out some drawings and I saw in the corner the name *Yaman, Architect, Brighton*. And I said ah, it all hangs together. And the shrink then brought me to his site in Monkstown's Trafalgar Lane and I built him this house.



And now I stand there with my camera listening to the sounds of the sea and time's winged chariot. The marriage hadn't lasted and the young bride was long dead and the house was vacant and up for sale. I stood there and took this photo. And I remembered the young bride beautiful and drove on. She died of the heroin. And had ended up working in prostitution.

Free love usually ends up expensive.

I drove on. The miles were as many years, decades even. And the last building I visited was quite recent, up in Killiney Village. And there I took a photo of my gift to the Celtic Tiger, put up in the last ten years, the apartment block on page 94 here. A relative had dragged me out of architectural retirement. Read on, below, there's more anon. Enough to mention here that this once was *Rita's Shop*, I had bought ice creams there as a child. And bars of chocolate. It was sort of a mini heaven on top of the hill. But I'm not sentimental and as an adult I got planning permission to knock it all down except for the fascia and to build these apartments in its place. I did it for the money. Judge. It wasn't easy, but nothing worthwhile comes easy. Bord Pleanála finally agreed with me, the place was knocked and the flats were built. Not precisely to my design, there was a falling out of some kind with the developer, but essentially my ugly apartment block.

A man needs that.

A sense of achievement.

A job well done.



In those architectural times the architect's wife still wore her hippie hair, and was herself working. At things many and various. She demonstrated electrical appliances in electrical stores. And somehow she mogrified this into becoming a store detective in large Dublin department stores.

She's a tiny five foot high. Her bra size is considerably more than half her height. So how all this worked out I'm none too sure. But she must have been reasonably efficient because betimes I would have to collect her after work. Security reasons. The shoplifters were waiting for her outside. And in that context, as they say in Dublin City Council, the name of a modern Dublin City Councillor makes me smile. Oh but I know things and things know me so I'll move along. As indeed did H, taking up tempy secretarial work.

The office work eventually led her to become secretary to *Veritas*, a religious publishers. And this led to her involvement in publishing. And this led to me following her pretty footsteps. But all that was to be in the future. Back in these times she was still demonstrating electrical appliances. And I was working in Stephenson Gibney. And we lived in a basement flat in Monkstown.

Damp?

No comment.

We made a virtue out of a necessity and converted one of the rooms into a mushroom growing factory. The mushrooms being grown in fish boxes liberated from the West Pier. And it must be admitted that, though I had this booklet here, it didn't work out that well. Particularly when the landlady found out.

But we had other strings to our money making bow.

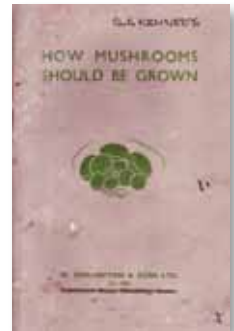
But that's perhaps well covered in my *Walk on The Southside* book.

Amazon dot com... please have your credit card details ready...

OK I won't make that joke again, it grates.

Those other strings?

For complex reasons we now owned several mobile homes in Arklow. And with these we started a caravan hire business. I unearth these documents from the boxes now. And read the names of our customers, and wonder where they are. And presume a lot are dead. And with these old papers also... I must have sorted stuff a few years



back... with them I see this picture of H at the caravan park. She's resting on the grass beside our second child, a tiny boy. And if you look closely at her thighs you will see the fingers of a tiny hand, spread out as if to block the view of his mother's flesh. Appropriately I suppose, that tiny hand belonging to a man who now lives in an Arab country.

I can identify the photo precisely. It's a weekend, a Saturday morning, and we've been changing over the holidaymakers. Old ones out, new ones in. And she has spent the morning cleaning the caravans. As I have spent the morning putting them back together again.



Please Book by 7.00... North Caravan  
 for 7.00... Week/s

Commencement 10 a.m. Saturday 22nd July  
 Ending 11 a.m. Saturday 29th July  
 Weekend

I enclose a Booking Deposit of €5.00 and agree to pay the balance at the commencement of Hire. I understand the total cost of Hire to be € 55.00

This includes Gas, and Hire of all necessary Cookery, Cutlery, Kitchenware, Blankets and Pillows. Sheets and Towels NOT supplied.

I agree that the €5.00 Booking Deposit be held as a Refundable Insurance Deposit against damages until 1200 end of Hire Period.

Name ANNE CASSIDY  
 Address 2 BENEVENUE GOS. NEW TOWN ABBEY Co. Dublin  
 Signature Thomas Cassidy  
 Date 11.5.77 Phone No 412268

Kennedy Charter.  
 Eglington Lodge,  
 Seafield Avenue,  
 Monkstown,  
 County Dublin.

22/7/77  
 22nd JULY 1977

Mrs. Eileen Turner  
 24 Danesbury Road, Shankhill Country Dublin.

Mrs. Thompson  
 73 Daltrybridge Avenue, Inchicore Dublin 8

Mrs. Smooty  
 2nd Fairfield Grove, Raheny Dublin 5

Mrs. Leverage  
 4 Irvine Cottages West Wall West Dublin

Mrs. Leach  
 11 St. Columba's Road, Wallinstown Dublin.

Mrs. Aetsonagh  
 45 St. Columba's Road, Wallinstown Dublin 12

Mrs. Quinn  
 17 O'Connell Ave, Ballypaul Dublin 11

Mrs. Maxwell  
 25 Westmore Square, Rathmore Dublin 6

Mrs. Penaghan  
 15 Wexford Road, Rathmore Dublin 6

Mrs. Fitzpatrick  
 24 Wexford Street Dublin 2

Mrs. Connaught  
 20 Wexford Street Dublin 2

Mrs. Clarke  
 15 St. Anne's Terrace, Raheny Dublin.

Travis O'Shears. 307120

It was tough work. Made tougher by the fact that Saturdays was not the only working day. Sometimes something would go wrong during the week and I'd be phoned up to come to Arklow to fix the lights or fix the water or whatever. And a few times yes it was whatever. Because I had some kind of deal with girl guides' groups and was friendly with

one of the leaders. *Adult* leaders. Thought I'd better throw that word in. What with readers already having gained a dodgy impression from the fact that I married a schoolgirl. No, this was an *adult* woman, well in her twenties. And we seemed to have what French businessmen call an arrangement. Pronounced *arrangement*. And she would phone me up at particular junctures and I'd put down the phone with a sigh and say to H it's the bloody caravans I have to go to Arklow.

I'm sure she knew.

But if not I reckon I'll find out soon enough when she reads these pages.

It's all a long time ago, and Arklow is a distant country and besides, the wench became a politician.

Attic. Stuff. Write.

Back to the boxes.

Oh look.

This may seem to be just an old wedding invite, and of course it is. But like all such wedding invites, it is shorthand for a complex story.

Meaningless by itself, it is hieroglyphics before the finding of the Rosetta Stone.

But I can translate.



Maureen Murray was Maureen Cox and H's aunt. Her husband Tom Murray was Chairman of the ESB. And his son was to be Donal Murray, that Bishop of Limerick who resigned. And who should have ignored the crawthumpers of the abuse industry and stuck it out. In my opinion. Which I'm probably not entitled to. Well not in the

eyes of the crawthumpers of the abuse industry anyway. The invite out of the boxes here is for his Bishop of Limerick job. And the earlier little booklet is from Donal's consecration as auxiliary bishop of Dublin in 1982. H and I sat, if not quite in the front row, but near enough to go for tea with Archbishop Ryan. A very tall man, austere, aloof, and though he was looking down on me when he shook my hand, I couldn't see into his eyes.

H's cousin Una was secretary to Brendan Corish, leader of the Labour Party. And when she married David Quaid from Kerry they set themselves up in a shop in Killiney Village. It had once been *Rita's Shop*, back when in my childhood. As youngsters we'd traipse back up the hill from Killiney Beach and buy ice creams there. Groups of kids from Killiney Road and Saval Park and Ballinclea. And we'd lick at the ice creams on the way down the other side of the hill towards home. And try and make them last as long as possible. A sort of competition I suppose.

Later the Quaid shop became a Post Office, and later David died quite young. And then Una was the postmistress in Killiney for many years. Then she sold up, the place was demolished and reborn as an apartment block overlooking Killiney Bay. And, as I mentioned above, but will mention again, I did the drawings for the development, planning permission and so on. But wasn't involved in their construction, having moved on. I tend to have moved on a lot. And so I've never been in the apartments, but they must be nice, with that great view, and nice to sit there watching, looking out. A glass of something amusing in the hand after a hard day's work, all that. You'd envy the occupants, sort of. Though there again, as much as they sit and as much as they watch, they're never going to know the stories of the place.

They have no Rosetta Stone.

I do, and I write on with my stories. But do I write just because I can read the runes? Nope. But because I am a storyteller. And a storyteller is one half of an organism made up of teller and told. And so I wonder now for a moment about my readers...and hello out there...I wonder about you folks.

How's it going so far, readershipwise?

Personally, around this stage of reading a book, I frequently throw it across the room. And have all sorts of theories about whether it's best to throw it closed, like a brick, or throw it open so that it flutters to the