

BO'R: I was born in Sixmilebridge in 1916 there was seven in the family.... I was number four I think on the arrival time. My father was for most of the period of my early years, he was very active in Clare Co Council and was the chairman of it during the vital years before the Rising. He was a very ambitious man for Ireland, and brought me as a very young man to the Continent. Sixmilebridge was a very fine village, very good teacher in the national school. I remember writing to him after I had spent the first year in Blackrock to say how much I appreciated his teaching. He wrote me and said you are the first letter I ever had from a student. Jimmy Donnellan was his name. When I went to Blackrock, I found I was ahead of the average age of the Dublin income, new person coming in. Now I mightn't be going the right way for you now at this stage"

JH: That's a very interesting remark and we will come back to it that you made about writing back to your teacher. Can I just bring you back to your father again his political involvements what would his politics have been in the day?

BO'R: He was a supporter of Cosgrave ...not of DeValera, although when he died DeValera paid a compliment to him to me when he came to Shannon on one occasion. He was very much in favour of the Co Councils developing a strategy that would get us independence or as much as we wanted from the British and travelled quite a lot in England and I travelled with him too, looking at the developments at local level in England. He admired the British system of administration but he was nationalist never the less, but in a Parnellish kind of way, if you know?

JH: He also had a famous involvement with the Clare hurling team in 1914?

BO'R: Yes, he was the chairman of the committee that ran it, he wasn't a trainer but he took them to Lisdoonvarna and had them stay in Lisdoonvarna before the matches and things like that. One of the accounts I heard, I could hardly believe it, they walked between Lisdoonvarna and Lahinch and back again that same day.... That seems an incredible exercise I remember being told that.

JH: This would have been for training?

BO'R: For training, yes

JH: Could I just ask you about his own background, did he come from a farming background?

BO'R: He came from farming background and a pub and grocery and before that I think he used to claim that my great-grandfather owned the forge in Sixmilebridge I know Joe Fennessy, who ran it during my time, paid some minimum rental for it and so...he used to say we were related, that O'Regans were related to Brian Ború and that we made pikes and other weapons

JH: Prime candidates of course, prime suspects

BO'R: Yes

JH: By the 1920s then his business would have been, what would his business have been?

BO'R: He had gone to the Italy, he had gone to Turin in Italy and he had come back with the agency for the FIAT car in Sixmilebridge and when the Turin discovered that he was living in a small place like Sixmilebridge they told him that he would have to move to the capital if he wanted to retain the agency so he moved to Ennis to buy a garage and he bought what he called were the bones of the Old Ground Hotel for £1200 and built a garage onto it within the grounds and eventually.. he made the garage strong enough with great girders on it .. so I built two storeys on to the top of the garage to extend the old ones they came looking for accommodation for crews, they asked me..anyway it's not worth going on onto that now.

JH: So he was forward looking ... he could see things developing.. He saw the motor car, "the age of the motor car" had arrived

BO'R:He did, when I got a draft of an agreement from John Leydons department he looked at it with me and put in a few extra things which made it more possible for me to have freedom to act against civil service interference

JH: Could we turn to your mother then?

BO'R: My mother came from Kilrush. He met her in Lisdoonvarna and her family, the Ryans of Kilrush, were the major supplier of goods to West Clare, and I supposed my father liked her. She was beautiful and he also saw that he was making a link with a very prosperous people in Kilrush, the Ryans of Kilrush. My mother when saying the Rosary would always, at the end of it, she would sprinkle holy water on us all and to the Ryans of Kilrush.

Of course these merchant families at the time were very important these were bringing in new products into the area, West Clare and other parts of the country?

JH: Oh that's right he had about four different stores throughout West Clare and he had a boat that flied up and down the Shannon to Limerick bringing supplies from Limerick to West Clare and out to these local centres.

JH: So that family would have had openness to the wider world as well?

BOR: Oh they were. He came to see me in Shannon and was delighted with what I was doing? He asked me to book him on a trip to SF where he would meet his brother... he died out there. He was held...I think he was held up. Well I did the booking in Chicago and he had a waterworks problem and he died in Loma Linda and we missed him a lot

JH: Just to clarify that was your grandfather?

BO'R: That was my uncle, my mothers' brother, Uncle Dan. He had a big influence on all of us. So that from the Ryan side and the O'Regan side we seem to have got commercial values

JH: And also that sense of being open to the world as well, your father went to FIAT, he went to Italy at the time when next to no travel

BO'R: People wouldn't do it, my grandfather on the Ryan side was an Irish speaker, although not a native Irish speaker but a very good maybe he was partly native. Andrew Ryan, he would have moved in from farming to set up the business in Kilrush, which was very prosperous.

JH: Could you talk a little about your siblings then? Your older sisters, maybe you'll take us through the family?

BO'R: The oldest member of the family was Moira and she helped to run The Old Ground, in fact she was the leader of the family when my father brought us all for a holiday, seven of us and himself my mother and aunt he brought us all to Northern France to look at Northern hotels. We stayed in luxe d h Cote I remember. At Moira, the oldest that you ask about, was the translator into French for all of us.

JH: What year was that?

BO'R: 1927, I was ten.

JH: Would you have travelled through England?

BO'R: We would have travelled to England because he had brought us also on a holiday to Northern England the year before that. In other words, he didn't have a lot of money but he had a lot of kind of anxiety for us to see the world outside of Ireland.

JH: *And that you stayed in several hotels in Northern France?*

BO'R: Yes, we stayed in Chartres, luxe sa mer I can remember the embarrassment on the first Friday we were there. My father took a menu and he saw enough French that he felt he knew to order fish for all of us but he actually ordered cockles and mussels and we were all disgusted!

JH: Are there any other memories of that visit to France, I mean were you how were you, it was very different atmosphere to Clare?

BO'R: Well I remember at ten years of age being chased by a group of French fellas who were throwing sand at me and it was when I made a rush back at them two of them fell into a pond.

JH: So that would have been your second holiday abroad, say you would have been abroad in the North of England as you said?

BO'R: In Scarborough, and I had measles and they had to hide me to get me into the hotel I can remember. I got measles en route I also remember changing from one train to another at Crewe & it was a

terrible rush altogether because some of us were half undressed and we had to be pulled together to get from one train to the other...We just made it a lot of memories.

JH: Transport wasn't as easy in those days

BO'R: Sixmilebridge....No it was not

JH: Could I just bring you back to some of your earlier memories in other places you recalled the fact that you had the very early memories of The Troubles could I just ask you to recall some?

BO'R: Well I can remember banging at the hall door and my mother said don't go down James they'll shoot you. These were Black & Tans actually after the ambush at Glenwood. He went down what they wanted was a drink, we had a pub. We were all nervous as to whether he was going to come back upstairs again. The following, well maybe the following few days afterwards, he walked across the square to stop them from shooting three of the supposedly IRA, who they had put out into the river. They didn't shoot them anyway. He was a friend of Michael Collins and at the time I was sleeping with him, my father, in the room that we called the sanatorium (sic) because he had big windows built on it looking out onto hills behind Kilrush, (CORRECTION) behind Sixmilebridge, and he used to get messages. There was bay windows at nighttime. Up, I think it was Collins who was getting them, but I don't know. He was, he wasn't in favour of war or anything like that, I would have got that from him anyway.

JH: He was a constitutionalist?

BO'R: He was, he felt that like O'Connell we could win it by intelligence and so on from the British.

JH: That time must have been built with anxiety for the family, because it was a time of reprisal with the reprisal approach, with the black and tans were using at the time. Would you have an awareness of that anxiety at the time even as a four-year-old?

BO'R: Yes, well the photograph that you saw in there was taken in 1917 show shows a whole group of workmen who were working with my father in those days. By a strange coincidence one of them at some stage began the airport manager at Shannon, Colonel Maher, so he was. My father was a great friend of his and my father used to come over in the early days to the airport and we had no separate lounge for the public, it hadn't been built. The passengers sometimes wouldn't have seats because the local fellows from Cratloe or Sixmilebridge would be over to see what was happening. So my father used to come over at weekends and stand at the door and say: "No Michael you are not to go in now". "Alright Sir" So he had a bit of authority, one particular newspaperman came up to the door, and I was coming down the lounge and said my father must not stop him now or there'll be trouble, I heard my father say to him "No, you are not going in and you can do what you like with your poison pen". He didn't as far as I know do anything about it. It showed you his character because he was felt it's wrong anyway that passengers

going through, some of them were very important in those days should be accosted by newspapers.

JH: If I were to ask you to take us back to Sixmilebridge in the 1920s and to ask you describe just what it looked like, what it sounded like and even what it smelt like? Could you do that for us like a time traveller could you take us back almost seventy years now, more than seventy years now

BOR: Well my memories of course would mainly at that stage would be related in going to the national school under James Donnellan. Some of the boys would be barefooted and the school was in a pretty bad repair. The girls were up above us. Frequently the mortar would fall down if they were making noise or moving around too much. We had Jimmy Donnellan and Patsy McInerney. Patsy McInerney was, unfortunately for me, he was staying as a boarder in our house because my father even in those early days had put the name 'hotel', to my mother's distress, over the hall door. He wanted people to talk to and so Patsy was staying there. His Irish was bad, "Féach ar na pracháin amach ar an bháid". Look at crows out on the boat. When something was happening between a cock and a hen. He would say "Don't look now, Don't look now"
Anyway, these are the kind of memories that a young fella will have

JH: The economy, showed there was a creamery there

BO'R: There was no creamery there, the creamery was in Bunratty but it became a very important village of course when the airport got

going. I think those who would have known me as a young fella had great doubts about my ability to do what I was supposed to be doing.

JH: If we could just turn back to the family again, the atmosphere in your family. Would you describe it as being a religious atmosphere was your family religious in that sense?

BO'R: Yes it was, my memory of course would be related to my mother who was the religious one. My father would be slightly agnostic as I was for a bit of my life until I got some sense. My mother got us all up to say the rosary in the nursery including all those who were working in the shop. One of them had to come at least "To all the Ryans of Kilrush" was in the trimmings.

JH: This was a period long before radio, well not long before radio but before radio and television, but was reading important in your family?

BO'R: Reading yes, we had a lot of books some of which were from an encyclopedia. I remember funny aul things that are in an encyclopedia that I didn't know anything about until I looked through it. My father had ambitions to be a doctor at one stage and gone to Limerick after national school until his father found he was getting off at Longpavement to play cards, and travelled in with him and the fellas that he used to play cards with were "Are you getting out or not getting out James"? He father immediately, that finished his studies in Limerick and probably put him into politics. I don't know.

JH: So Limerick would have been accessible for the family because the family would have had a car?

BO'R: We would have had a lorry and a fiat of course, and he had built a garage which is still there and of course it was that that got us into the hotel business and the hotel over the door in Sixmilebridge which might also have got him into the timber business where I think he made enough through a sawmill during the war to be able to buy the bones of The Old Ground as he called it.

JH: I believe in the country there was a great load of tree felling in the First World War that a lot of the old estates they cut down trees because of lack of fuel

BO'R: That's right well of course they cut them down also for the British who needed to make support for the trenches

JH: Yes

BO'R: A lot of it came out of that

JH: Am to take you back to your school days again, your primary school the national school in Sixmilebridge, what subjects would have appealed to you as a child at school?

BO'R: Well history of course and geography I liked those. I can't remember anymore except by the time I left and went at about fourteen years of age and I went to Blackrock I was ahead of those of

my age who were being educated in Dublin That wasn't just that I was clever or anything like that it was just that the teaching was better in the National School in Sixmilebridge under Jimmy Donnellan than it was in Blackrock College where they were fewer coming in at that age. I remember a laugh in the school when my name was read out an abnormal number of times when, I think they put in to 2B when they should have put me into 3A. I wasn't particularly smart or anything like that it was just an example of being transferred to a National school to a secondary school.

JH: Before we move from the national school, how would you describe the regime in the school at the time? Was it a tough regime? Was it very strict?

BO'R: Oh I'd say we were pretty afraid of the... we behaved ourselves generally speaking. Yes.

JH: Of course, corporal punishment wouldn't have been unknown in those days

BO'R: Oh no no.... the rod, the bamboo and of course it existed at the parent level too. I remember my aunt who is my fathers' sister, having a rattan and it was slightly blackened where we had tried to burn it apparently at one stage. That's all I can remember now mind you I'm not much good at this interview because my memory...

JH: No, it's interesting that recalling of those things there. They I suppose they symbolize the period. We will move on so say to Blackrock if that's ok or would like to have a little break?

BO'R: No, we will finish we'll do a bit more.

JH: If we just move onto Blackrock, going to Blackrock was influenced I believe largely by your mother she was very keen?

BO'R: Yes and Blackrock was then under the command of really a number of great priest, Fr. Finn who was the rugby who also helped us in the setting up of hurling I was one of those that went to see Dr. McQuaid to see if we could have a hurling team. We got a hurling team and we won the senior and the junior cups. We were accused of rugby tactics by the others schools (Laughing) I was on the Junior team and I played against on the wing on one occasion with Rory DeValera on the other wing and apparently I had learned a trick of standing on the ring, the surround you're not going to go in any closer to the referee than that. I learned that if you stood on the corner you would inevitably score. I remember being told at half time by one of the priests" Why don't you let the other wing score?" He was Rory DeValera (laughing)

JH: Again in Blackrock...

BO'R: That was Colaiste Caomhinn I think we were playing against.

JH: Just that even if it was a long way from home, was leaving home a big break for you?

BO'R: Well coming back to the house even though our house was a good house and big enough, I remember thinking it got very small coming from the bigger college of Blackrock. I was saying to Mama and she was very disappointed she thought we had a lovely house. "has got very small Mama"

JH: They were not only Dublin boys at Blackrock there were boys from all over the country I'm sure

BOR: Oh, they were yes. I looked after, you were to look after anyone coming from the same area who was a new one and I looked after Séamus Casey who was the son of the Chief Superintendent in Ennis. I remember on one occasion being with him in an old banger that I had and the guards said and what's your name? "Casey" he said. Where are you from, Ennis. Go off; Drive off the two of you (laughing)

JH: Do you think that was important later on contacts you had made in school and lads from all over the country you had met? Would that have been a factor later on that there was always a network of people you would have known throughout the country

BO'R: Oh, I think so, I think so

JH: Before we wind up and we wouldn't be far from it I can bring you back to Blackrock and I can just explore some of the influences that made you decide to choose a particular career path than another...Say if I brought you back to you fourth or fifth year and you were beginning to think What am I going to do? What is the next step to be? Can you bring us back to that time of your life?

BO'R: Yes, I don't think at that stage I had made up what I was going to do but for some reason I had thought about Law. Thank god I didn't go on for it anyway I was apprenticed to a man called Hunt in Ennis on my last year in Blackrock to do but of course my father was afraid that I was going to do that and he needed somebody to take over The Old Grand and he brought me on a trip to Germany. I learned in Germany about Austosch -exchange - and that was the first I did while I was trying to make up my mind what I was going to do and I was in Germany for eight months during Hitler's time, and I was serving behind the counter passing food from the kitchen to the dining room. To give you an idea of the atmosphere of the situation, Hitler would come on and not all the people would listen to him either serving Germany. One night five or six brown shirts came in and said: "Heil Hitler" Six of them said it together it was like a command and I said "Heil DeValera" (laughing) and they said: "What??" (Something in German) They were nearly coming across the counter at me until they said (German) I said "nicht Englisch Irland". They kind of backed away then. It was a very dangerous thing for me to have done.

JH: So from your experience in your first trip to Germany, was a relevant short trip to Germany?

BO'R: It was

JH: And would that have been towards the end of your school, your time in Blackrock or after it?

BO'R: Yes, it would have been the holidays the last holiday. I wasn't going to be kept on for another year. My father was persuaded to give me another year in Blackrock and then during that time I changed my view as what to do. But my having gone abroad to Germany to England and Switzerland has had a big effect on my thinking now because I think that Germany and other areas Japan, I'm for instance interviewing a Japanese once week now to find out what way they are thinking about Hiroshima and Nagasaki so I am thinking on the one thing that there is an opportunity now for Ireland to stop the greatest tragedy of humanity, which is the tendency to go to war. There might not be another chance of my and so I am going to be meeting you and Cian again I am and diverting onto that situation but I think that that might be important for me to do it because I am doing it at the request of the Chairman of the group that you work so well with.

So I don't mind meeting with you again but I'll have to use part of it to try and verbalise.

NOTES:

1. Speakers on disk:

BO'R: Brendan O'Regan

JH: John Heuston

CO'C: Cian O'Carroll

2. ***** indicates breaks between tracks on the disk

3. This manuscript may contain errors in transcribing from the disk and in the interpretation of the spoken word. For external quotation the text above should be checked against the original recording.