



Just Like The Mayfly

The life and times of Mary Callanan

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Published by Mary Callanan
Edited, Designed, Typeset and Printed by Everyday Biographies Ltd
(www.everydaybiographies.com)

Third Edition

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For my grandchildren

*In time to come you, and perhaps your own children, might want to
know about the "old days."*

Love always

Grandmom

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Chapter One

Ancestors

The great-grandparents that I know of were my mother's grandmother and grandfather. Their surname was Corcoran. They lived at Ardmoniel in Killorglin, Co. Kerry, on the way to Caragh Lake. They were big cattle dealers, selling their cattle to factories. This was from the 1850s to 1910. They died around the turn of the century.

I don't know how big the farm was but it was a mile outside town, on the road to Caragh Lake. The farmhouse was joined to a neighbour's. A long time ago you would have two houses joined together, two farms sharing one yard. It was a long low house, a typical farmhouse.

They were very comfortable. They probably led the high life, but my great-grandfather was very strict on the girls. There were lots of girls. Molly, my grandmother, would have

been one of the daughters. They were all gorgeous looking, it seems. Everybody used to watch them going to Mass because their hats were amazing. This was around the 1860s.

There were at least four girls in the family, and a few boys, but I don't know enough about the boys. My great-grandfather was so strict he didn't allow the girls out at all. My great-grandmother used to feel very sorry for them. When there was a dance on she would help them all steal out the window at night after they had gone to bed. She would pass their clothes out the window and they would get dressed in the outhouses and then go to the dance. My mother told me that, and Molly, her mother, told her.

My grandfather's name was Jim Tangney. He was a carpenter, and serving his apprenticeship for somebody in Killorglin. This would have been in the late 1800s. He came from Castleisland, about 20 miles away.

They really didn't approve of my grandfather at all. He wasn't good enough. But my grandmother loved him anyway, so she left home and married. He was just a carpenter. He wouldn't have been in their league at all.

I don't know the story about their wedding, but she probably eloped with him to Castleisland. Eventually the family probably reconciled with her. He started up his own little carpentry trade and he was a brilliant craftsman. It seems he was a perfectionist and very hard to work for because he demanded perfection. He had a few men working for him and I still have people who come in and tell me about him, older men from Castleisland who would have been very young boys at the time they worked for him. He used to make carts for

donkeys and horses. He always signed his name JM – Jim M. Tangney on the shaft of the cart because he was proud of his work. If you were proud of your work in those times you always signed your name on the piece of furniture. He had a fine workshop at the back and when we were children we used to get into the coffins and cover ourselves with shavings, because he used to make coffins as well.

He was successful but he had a lot of mouths to feed. He built his own house, a three-story house in Castleisland, in the town just opposite the fountain.

There were 14 children in the family. My mother would have been the fourth youngest. She was born in 1918. They wouldn't have been very well off – put it this way, they had enough to eat. Molly died at 48 from an overdose. She used to get terrible migraines and one night the doctor was sent for. He was drunk and he gave her an overdose of morphine and she died.

My grandfather went to kill the doctor lots of times and had to be held back. In those days doctors weren't prosecuted because there was no such thing as proof. My mother remembered passing the bedroom and seeing her mother lying dead in the bed just after she had died. She was only 11. My grandfather was heartbroken.

He used to make all the coffins and people would come in and book their coffin. They were always beautifully carved. The coffins wouldn't be lined until they were needed, they would be plain wood. He would shave them, making sure they were smooth on the outside. We used to have great fun lying down inside them. I can still smell the shavings. That's

why I love wood so much, because of that and working with wood, and feeling wood. It stems from there, my love of carpentry, from Grandad.



Grandad & Grandmum: Molly and Jim Tangney circa 1905

He was about 70 when he died, but to me he was always an old man because I suppose he worked hard and he wasn't a very tall man. He was a lovely man. We used to sit on his knee. He was a carpenter until he died.

Mam would tell me about Small Christmas Night when they would all sit around the fire and have a hot lemonade, but it was hard, she was always working. I suppose when her mother died some of her sisters were very hard on the young ones. Some of the sisters had gone to America but the ones who stayed home resented having to stay. She would have to clean the stairs and one of the sisters would be cranky and she would say she hadn't done it right. She would have to do it all over again.

When her mother died she became close to Auntie Katie - she would have been an aunt-in-law. Her husband would have been a brother to my grandad. They lived at the top of the town. Auntie Kate was a kind of a surrogate mother, and my mother spent most of her time up there after school in the evenings. But Grandad was great. He made them have piano lessons. There was always somebody calling in. They had a piano in the parlour upstairs and there was always somebody teaching them piano. There was always music in the house.

The house was renowned for singsongs. There were lots of girls in the family so there were always parties and all sorts of games, lemonade, singing, and music playing, and piano. Of course nobody went to bars in those times. A lot of guys in Killorglin would be looking to go out with the girls in Castleisland.

I suppose there wouldn't be any party announced but if

people called in they would be asked to have a cup of tea, and then there might be a gathering and soon there would be a singsong. It would always be upstairs in this lovely room they had. I hear it was a lot of fun, that's what Mam said.

The house is still there in Castleisland and still in the family. It's about ten years now since I have been there. It hadn't changed really. It was like going back in time. The workshop is still there.

My Dad's side were from Abbey, Loughrea in Co. Galway. All I know about my grandparents is that they had five boys and four girls. That's my father's brothers and sisters. My grandmother died in her forties, either of T.B. or cancer. They didn't know what cancer was in those days. My father would have been young when she died – only two years old.

His parents had a plot of land on an English Lord's estate. They were evicted off the land because they couldn't afford to pay the rent. For quite a while they didn't have any land. And then there was a land commission set up in Ireland and they were allocated some land in Abbey, Loughrea, Co. Galway. I think there was quite a stigma about being given the land for free. It was like a handout. So his father was a small farmer and that's the farm they grew up on then. There was a beautiful long road going up into it, a beautiful long road that went on forever before you came to the house. The school was at the corner of the entrance to that road.

I never heard anything about how my grandparents met. You're sorry when you're older that you didn't ask all those questions when you were young.