

One morning in late May of 1974 my mother walked myself and my then three siblings (there's been another one of us around for a good 27 years now) up to the office of Balrothery National School. We had just moved from a busy Dublin estate to the village and this was our first day at our new school. The four of us (great band in their time) were subsequently ushered into our respective new classes. Deirdre to Mrs. Murray, Jack (or Thomas as my mother still calls him) to Mr. Daly and Patricia to Miss Larkin, a lovely young blonde lady with a kind smile, and me to the old wooden prefab off to the right of the original building. My teacher was Miss Hikcey and I was not the only 'newy' in my class as Des Cox (my current husband) had arrived but a few weeks before. Alas where he was handsome and gave off an air of quiet confidence I was a bit of an ugly duckling who spent the first few weeks crying tears and snot (and possibly freckles I had that many of them) onto my wooden desk. But things got better. My first real friend was a girl called Frances Devine, a lovely fair haired girl from Balbriggan. I was both in awe of and petrified of Michelle Cannon (the petrification has long since gone Michelle) and then I was off to Africa for the month of July with the rest of my family to visit my dad who was working in Lagos with Nigerian Airlines on a six month contract for Aer Lingus. The only downside to the trip, apart of course from being absolutely petrified of vultures, snakes and killer mosquitos, was that my mother fell in love with the African attire and sent us back to school in September donning embroidered African dresses (my brother had to wear a short one over his trousers) and beaded necklaces making the four of us look like the offspring of a couple of peace loving hippies from the sixties, which alas we were not.

September 1975 and suddenly I was in fifth class being taught by Mr. Griffin (or 'the benjy' as he was more affectionately known) standing at the top of the class sucking on his pipe or sitting at his desk telling us stories about little green men from Mars and petrifying the life out of me even more. I remember the 'comhra' on the black felt board and being terrified of the principal Mr. Madden and visits from the inspectors with which we were regularly threatened. I remember Mr. Griffin who subsequently went on to successfully court the current Mrs. Griffin (then Miss Keneally.... I think) who back then taught a few of us pupils, Kieran Allen, David Fitzgerald, Fergal O'Connor and myself to name but a few, to play the guitar. Country Roads, The Streets of London, Una Paloma Blanca and many many more.... Great unless of course you happen to have an incredibly proud (and quite possibly stone deaf) father who wanted the world to hear his family sing (yes I know I was the one who played the guitar but the others had to sing along and attempt to harmonise) and for that reason subjected everyone from friend to family to the insurance man, bread man, milk man, post man (I tell not a lie) to our rendition of his favourite songs..... country roads, the streets of London, una paloma blanca..... Thanks Mrs. Griffin! I remember a lovely English girl called Tracy Hamilton and doing a play where Colm McKenna had one of the lead roles. I remember making my confirmation wearing a cream and navy lacy dress perfect if you were Laura Ingles in 'Little House on the Prairie'; white socks, black patent shoes and an 'ABBA' hat, yes you read right, an 'ABBA' hat complete with little flower on the side and crocheted by my late aunty Margaret White.

And then came Mr. Keary! Poor Mr.Keary! We were his first class out of teacher training college and God love him but I'd say we gave him hell, not me personally I might add as even though I had managed to curb the copious crying on my arrival, I existed nevertheless in a state of permanent petrification. The best student by far in Mr. Keary's first ever sixth class was a guy called Paul Nolan from the village. I remember Ursula Rooney and Miriam Marry, Nancy Richardson and Deirdre Flynn, Maria Downes, Bernadette Brogan, Valerie Gilligan, Brenda Maguire and Anna Kirwan and lots of boys; Peter White and Gerard McNamee, Patrick Hickey, Paul Rooney, Paul Murray, Philip Tracey, Jim Cunningham, Kieran Allen, David Fitzgerald, Paul Gallagher and Bernard Fitzgerald and of course Des Cox (my current husband). Mr. Keary was big on maths and Irish and English and he was nice to us girls. And then there were the Friday afternoon quizzes! God but we loved those quizzes!

I remember being sent home from school because of frozen pipes and lunchtimes playing chasing out front in the muck and around the trees. I remember Paula Campbell breaking her arm during some crazy game and the boys losing footballs forever in the depths of Mrs. Despard's back garden. And I remember being so happy when Mrs. O'Connor was made principal. She was and still is a lovely lady.

I have wonderful memories of Balrothery National School and will always look back on them with great fondness, apart of course from the time I got nits and my mother poured this oily greasy lotion onto my head which in order to work had to stay on said head for a whole 24 hours meaning I had to go into school the following morning looking like someone had poured oil on my head which of course they had.....