

Interviewee: Mary Jo O' Keefe

Interviewer: Angela Maye-Banbury

Location:, Ashleam School, Achill Island Co Mayo Ireland

Date: 23rd April 2019

PART ONE

Angela: This is Angela Maye-Banbury, oral historian and I'm here in Ashleam School with Mary Jo O' Keefe. It's 23rd April (2019) 11.05 a.m. So Mary Jo, thanks a million finding time to talk to me. I know you're very busy with lots of family things going on. Can I just ask you first about what your first memory was of Achill life?

Mary Jo: Well if I really give you, Angela, the farthest back vivid memory I have, I would probably be maybe three years of age going back. And I was born... - well, I am from the village of Cloughmore, born in 1943. And, as was the custom at the time, my mother...I wasn't actually born in Cloughmore. My mother went to her mother's house where I was born. 'Twas in March, and...you know. Anyway, and I was brought back in when I was, well I don't know what, a toddler, well a baby and she returned home with me. But my earliest memory I can think of was when I was about three or four years of age, I was always with

my grandfather. Preschool now. And he spoke all Irish, Gaeilge. I can safely say I didn't have an awful lot of English maybe at this stage. But I was with him, he was digging away. And we had a photograph taken at the time. He was sowing potatoes or doing some farm work - and being with him. And then going on the donkey cart with him to my aunt's house in Ashleam with an exchange of seed potatoes as was custom as well. One would change from one soil to another in order to maybe have a better crop the following year - autumn. And I remember going on the donkey cart with him and it was his treat to go from...

Angela: Oh lovely. So how far was that, for people who aren't familiar with the geography of Achill, from Cloughore to Ashleam?

Mary-Jo: From Cloughmore to Ashleam, I'm not great on long distances but it was on the sand road. No tarred road on the Atlantic Drive. And hairpin bends then were really hairpins coming down to 'cava runta' (sp) as we called it. And I suppose it was maybe two, three miles.

Angela: On the donkey. So it would have taken a while to have got across, like.

Mary Jo: It was lovely.

Angela: Very slow pace.

Mary-Jo: Slow pace. You know, got along alright. I thought it was a great treat to be taken on the donkey cart. But, as I say, I grew up in Cloughmore in our house. My grandparents were there. All Irish. They had never gone to school. My mother and father and my elder brother and two siblings. My dad spent most of his time away in England and he would seasonally come and help with the..

Angela: What did he do in England, Mary-Jo?

Mary-Jo: He's be in Scotland first with the tattie hoking. And then he'd move up to round Preston.

Angela: In Lancashire.

Mary-Jo: In Lancashire. With the farmers - market gardening. Then the war years – construction and he ended up with Taylor Woodrow construction for years and years. On buildings all over England, Scotland and Wales which he knew far,

far better than he knew Ireland. In fact, he...we in Cloughmore on the southern tip of Achill and I would safely say he hadn't been down in Dooagh very many times in his life until he retired nearly.

Angela: So his knowledge of the geography of England was much better than even it would have been of Achill.

Mary Jo: A thousand times. He loved the summer. He loved summertime when he retired and he would be sitting. And English cars would come along and he was sort of a traffic hazard in a way because he would be crossing the road, himself and his dog, and they would pull up, of course, to give him right of way and he would chat with them and he'd come in then and he'd regale us "Well, I met people from such a place in England, Scotland or Wales. And I worked there in 19 in whatever whatever in whatever job. And of course, whatever pubs were in the area and he'd have a tale to tell.

Angela: So the people, the English visitors to Achill, would have connected him with his past.

Mary-Jo: Oh, yes. And he loved it.

Angela: You said he lived until he was 105. That's extraordinary. One of the oldest men in Ireland and a great storyteller.

Mary-Jo: Oh, fantastic if I may say so. He was...my mother passed away and he was at that stage. I gave him the option would he come to live with us or...? And he was "No, no, if I want you now." I was just over the road from him. But he had all the neighbours calling in. He had a wonderful time. And he'd have more information than I would have of all that was happening in the locality.

Angela: All the local comings and going and who was doing what.

Mary Jo: And if there weren't there, he'd be visiting them. What he did, he was able to tell stories and he was blessed with a great memory. He was blessed with a great memory. And he got a stroke when he was almost a hundred. And we thought he wouldn't...you see, we thought he wouldn't...he went away to the hospital and he was comatosed for a week. And he came back. And then it would have required full time care and he was at the Sacred Heart Nursing Home in Castlebar. And he lived five years there and was very, very well looked after. And celebrated his 100th and 105th birthday - all the birthdays.

Angela: He sounds like an extraordinary person.

Mary-Jo: And he sang on Radio na Gaeltachta on his 104th birthday - live.

Angela: Oh my goodness.

Mary Jo. Live.

PART TWO

Angela: So he had this remarkable vibrancy for someone of that age which is very...it's extraordinary.

Mary Jo: He was blessed. He wasn't a big man. He was a small man but he was active. And as I say, he was blessed with a mind which was clear and lucid and remembering things. Mind you, he could colour his story very well too. But he would sing, took part in television programmes - not a bother on him. Loved it.

Growing Up In Achill

Angela: So when you were a girl growing up, tell me a little but what that was like. Was he very much part of.., when we would come back, it must have been a bit of an event and there you were at home here obviously with your mother and your family.

Mary Jo: It was hard times, especially on them all. Hard on my dad going away when he was going away with men and his neighbours. They went in the one car away on the bus to England. They work was shocking hard...the digs, the accommodation was awful but now looking back on it, his separation from family and his wife and children must have been horrendous. It was. And the letters coming home. And it was my mother too. It was awful. We were sad for days and days when he went away. Look forward to him coming. Now, my birthday was in March. And my dad was a great... when children started getting birthday cards...my brothers and sisters all got birthday cards. But he was always home for my birthday and I wasn't a bit pleased. Because I didn't get a birthday card.

Angela: Ah. He was your birthday card (laughs).

Mary Jo: That didn't matter (laughs).

Angela: You didn't get the physical card from him.

Mary Jo: I didn't get the physical card coming in the post.

Angela: And you felt a bit...difficult to come to terms with because everyone else had one. Understandably.

Mary Jo: I felt a bit put out - yes (laughs). Came in March to, as they say, do the spring work. Sewing the potatoes, cut the seaweed on the shore, brought it in. I remember on the shore on Cloughmore on the (Carrickgee sp?) cutting - everyone had their own plot of seaweed. And they brought it to cut it on the big strands and rain, hail or storm, it had to be done in February.

Angela: Would you have been involved in that work?

Mary Jo: I would be involved in the sense that we'd go when they were cutting and when they cut away the seaweed, you'd have wrinkles and barnachs (sp) on the rocks and you would gather them and maybe eeiscon (sp) a sort of fish they were delicate and very sweet. And we'd have the crusach (sp) at home with us. And that would be our job. We might bring it down quay from the cut, the loaders of the seaweed, from the people who would be emptying it on the shoreline.

Angela: Right. So this was in Cloughmore.

Mary Jo: In Cloughmore. We were on the beach. Achillbeag was across from us. Achillbeag was straight across. Tralong (sp?) was where we cut our and Carrighhura (sp?) and that was where the Clonmore (sp) people got their seaweed. But we did those jobs...we...children and even girls and boys, they had work on the farms. We were always busy. There was no such a thing as boredom as we hear now. No such a thing, Angela.

Angela: There was always things to do.

Mary Jo: There were always jobs.

Angela: And they were very productive things, things that needed to be done.

Mary Jo: We had to do them. We had to do them. We had to help. But as they say, my mother, it was hard on my mother. Looking after us, all the ailments, you know, the problems with children and getting the work done when he was gone. The potatoes but the hay had to be cut.

Angela: It was hard work come rain or shine, you know.

Electrification In Achill

Mary Jo: It had to be done. And to see everywhere was cultivated, everywhere was neat. Then in the home, remember our facilities until we got the electricity, we had the oil lamps and we had the open fire.

Angela: And the electricity..when was that..I think.

Mary Jo: I'm not great with dates.

Angela: Was it 1952? Was it, I think It rings a bell.

Mary Jo: In the context of the electricity, we got the whole bit. I remember the houses getting wired. It was great excitement.

Angela: What was that like when the electricity was turned on?

Mary Jo: It was great excitement in the place. But my own grandmother, my father's mother, she was still alive. We got the electric into the house. And I mean, it was amazing. But no-one was allowed to turn on the light but my mother. Because it was dangerous.

Angela: Ah, so that it was a privilege but it was because it was dangerous...

Mary Jo: We thought. We wouldn't be trusted. And the switch was half way up the wall.

Angela: So difficult to get at. Oh my goodness. I'm just trying to picture it.

Mary Jo: It would be well up the wall out of children's reach.

Angela: Right. OK.

Mary Jo: That was what was. My own granny, she wasn't a bit pleased with this new light and she says "oh, mo lampa bhreá ola." Her great oil lamp. And that was on the wall, you know, and it only threw a shadow across. And she be giving out about the lampa bhreá ola which wasn't being lit. But at the first time that there was a power cut, the lampa bhreá ola was brought out and lit. And she never said a word after. She saw the light.

Angela: (Laughs).

Mary Jo: She saw the light as I said. These were things - a wonderful thing, the light to come.

Angela: It must have felt magical, just so special after all the years of having to carry the paraffin lamps.

PART THREE

Women In Achill

Mary Jo: Oh yes. And at the same time, when I was growing up now, I'm rambling back again, the times my dad was in England and the industry that went on, the houses at night, you know, by the women.

Angela: What did the women do, Mary Jo?

Mary Jo: The knitting, they would be knitting at night the woollen socks. They would be spinning, carding and spinning the wool from their sheep. And that was big. Now my own granny, she couldn't walk. I suppose she had vertigo - we don't know. But she sat in the chair, she got up but I remember doing the carding she would be able to do that. The carding, making wool. We used to call them 'rulloos' (sp) - they were like large sausages of wool and my mother then would spin that into thread. And that would be done, the spinning, would be done at night. But a great...I always have fond memories of the women making quilts.

Angela: Quilt making. Oh, fantastic. Yeah.

Mary-Jo: Quilt making in the wintertime. And you'd have a meitheal (sp?) of women, a group of women My mother would be getting the things ready for a while. She would have every but would be utilised. There was no such things as going to the refuse in those days. Everything was recycled. And she would have flannel dyed red. That was her own wool that was going to the weaver and was now in a flannel.

Angela: And nothing was wasted and everything was recycled.

Mary Jo: And then, to augment that, to stretch it, she would have maybe, you know men wear, wore shirt jackets, you know navy maybe. You wouldn't remember that maybe.

Angela: My daddy use to wear one.

Mary Jo: And that would be, she would have done that with say panels, maybe ten inches wide, there would have to be even and sewn together the full length. And then you'd have red and navy, you know, it was to stretch the...it was lovely. The women then, she'd have everything read for this quilting, that would be the

outside of the quilt. Then underneath there would be attached a sheet which would be a flannelette

Angela; Flannelette- your brush cotton sort of style.

Mary Jo: Exactly. There was a frame came into the house and they're be...I remember four three women on one side of the frame and three on the other. And they would have needles and they had about a yard or two and they would be doing stitching across until halfway and they'd meet the other, take the needle from opposite and bring it right over to the end likewise. And this would go on. And my mother would have made a currant cake.

Angela: A currant cake. Oh, how lovely.

Mary Jo: For their tea. You know, lovely currant cake. We'd be sent to bed maybe - we'd try to listen. They'd have great fun and storytelling.

Angela: Would they be talking about local things and who was doing what and just catching up? And these were days way beyond the internet and even before the telephone was in common use.

Mary Jo: The adventures they'd had and their adventures they'd had in Scotland.

Angela: So how old would you have been then, Mary Jo?

Mary Jo: I have a good enough memory. I'd have been 9 or 10.

Angela: You not quite in your teens at this point.

Mary Jo: No, I hadn't reached my teens at that stage. Like I say, my mother didn't seem to be sitting at the quilting because she was busy getting tea and she was busy supplying the threads.

Angela: It sounds like a very sociable thing too.

Mary Jo: It was a sociable thing. And then the frame would go maybe to the ...over to the next village, the next woman's house.

Angela: Have any of the frames survived or maybe any of the jackets or any of the quilts? I mean, it's exquisite work, so skilled, so meticulous.

Mary Jo: I have actually some of the quilts they made. But they're packed away now, continental quilts. The women had those jobs to do in that house. And that was work, remember. I know there was a great social aspect to the ladies having the fun and all of that.

Angela: But it was industry. Producing things beautiful as they were. So were these for their own consumption or to be sharing round?

Churning The Milk

Mary Jo: Oh, no, no no it was for your own...for our own beds. We didn't, it wasn't on a commercial basis for personal use in the home. And the group would go, you know, around to the houses. Of course, they shared (inaudible). We started knitting Aran bairnes (sp?) as that was Gaeltacht Eireann. That was a different thing in the '60s. That was different. And the women would do that. But women had lots and lots of jobs, the day of making the churn, making butter. Yeah. I don't know if you're familiar with that. I hated that. I hated...

Angela: Yeah, yeah, we used to . Very time consuming.

Mary Jo: Hours and hours - your arms up and down. And you'd be delighted for someone to come into the house because it was making Gaeilge lámhYou'd have to put your hand on the churn when you were churning, you'd have to put your hand on the desh (sp?). Because you might, the butter would never come on the milk, the cream maybe, the fairies would take it or you'd take it with you. You would take it away with you. That was one of pishrogs (sp?) was attached it. But the churning was a big thing. And of course, we all helped with that. And as I say, the girls and boys would work out with their mothers in the fields and with the turf.

Angela: So everyone would pitch in.

Mary Jo: You had to.

PART FOUR

Early Memories Of School

Angela: So what was your early life at school when you were at school, when you first went to school?

Mary Jo: My first excursion to school was ...(table creaks). I remember vividly we were working down in the bay. My mother and father. My father wasn't there. No, he wasn't. My grandfather was there or sewing the potatoes or digging the potatoes. Must have been. It was something to do with down in the field. And anyway, the neighbour's boy came and he said "There's school in the morning in Tommy Gallagher's." Now to explain that Dereen's old school was being knocked down and a new school being built in situ. And I hadn't gone to the old school. Being a girl, it was though, they'd give me another while. And the school was in a big house in the village in Cloughmore.

Angela: OK. So very handy for you.

Mary Jo: Very handy. Just over the road. So I went to school in Tommy Gallagher's. And you know, the weather seemed to be glorious all the time.

Angela: (laughs) So how old were you when you went to school?

Mary Jo: I was five, I think. I must have been.

Angela: You were so very young.

Mary Jo: I was five. I'd gone over to the school and it was...the three rooms were packed. Two bedrooms and a room in the middle. The kitchen. That was our school. The owner was away in England. And we were sitting on the little (inaudible). And Mrs Lineen our teacher.

Angela: Mrs who?

Mary Jo: Mrs Lineen, our teacher. She would take...I remember she would take us outside with our slates and our chalks. And outside sitting and whatever lesson we were writing. It was lovely. It was lovely. Beautiful.

Angela: And you had Achillbeg just across, just over...idyllic.

Mary Jo: Now I must have coming on six because my sister Pam is three years younger than me. Patrick, my brother is three years older. And Ellen, the youngest, is three years younger than Pam. But one day, a beautiful day, it must be about May, Pam decided she's follow us over to school. There was no traffic on the road. But nobody worried about children walking on the road.

Angela: It was a really safe environment.

Mary Jo: It was a really safe environment for children. Hard life, safe life. But anyway, we were sitting waiting. The teachers came. We had a teacher...he was in the middle classes. He was from Donegal. Now Donegal Gaeilge...Gaeltacht.

Angela: It's a bit different to Achill Gaeilge.

Mary Jo: So we were sitting outside the door and Mr McGonnel - he began to converse with us as Gaeilge. And Pam, my sister, she was doing - he wanted to talk to her. She was only three remember. And she was able to answer him. And I was quite annoyed because he wasn't talking to me. And it was the Gaeilge. All Gaeilge. I knew what you were saying. Pam knew what you were saying. Wasn't it amazing? You see, (Gaeilge). And anyway, she wasn't going into school. She went back playing with the neighbours children then. And he gave her whatever change he had in his pocket.

Angela: Oh, that was nice of him.

Mary Jo: And I was looking at it and I saw this lovely coin. I still remind her of it.
It was a farthing.

Angela: Oh.

Mary Jo: And it had the woodcock on it. The farthing. Anyway. And I thought 'I want to get that from Pam now when I go.' So she went home and she went home and when I went back, my mother and my aunt Kathy, they were working with the potatoes, you know, working with something and she was playing making sandcastles down by the shore. And she put her money in the sandcastles. And of course, the sea came in and I never got my farthing.

Angela: The mighty Atlantic Ocean took it away (laughs). The treasure. It's out there somewhere. It might turn up sure on Keem Beach.

Mary Jo: I was out there the other day with my grandchildren - we were picking (Gaeilge).

Angela: They do say that there's treasure in Achill, don't they? You've maybe just added to it a little bit.

Mary Jo: But those were memories I had of school. And then we moved over to the new school for children which we thought was fabulous, you know?

Angela: So where was the...which school did you move to?

Mary Jo: It was Dereens School. In Dereens over the road from us. And there were children galore in it. You know, even in the roads, one class was sitting down with the writing and the other class were standing around reading our spellings.

Angela: How many children would have been at that school?

Mary Jo: There were, there was a hundred, there were three rooms. Oh yes. It was. And there were three teachers. Mrs Lineen was there - did infants. And then you had in the middle room. And I loved her and the school. And we had Miss McGuinness and then Padraig Saoithe was the master. Now sometimes the teachers were away and there were different teachers, you know.

Angela: Was he the man who use to teach on Achillbeag? I've come across his name somewhere.

Mary Jo: Oh, Padraig. He had great Gaeilge. He's written books.

Angela: That's maybe where I've come across him.

Mary Jo: Yeah. Oh, you would. He was. Now at that time in our locality, Dereens School had Cloghmore, Dereens and (Andreanus sp?) children going school. And you had this school here in Ashleam was chockablock with children - some from Bleanaskill and some from Ashleam. And you had a school in Achillbeag. And you had a school in Dooeaga. Now...

Angela: So that's a lot of schools in Achill at that time.

Mary Jo: Now a lot of schools. But we went to Dereen's school. It was an all Irish School. I never found that a problem whatsoever. Because I always say 'I never learnt Irish - I always had it. '

PART 5

Angela: Yes. Right.

Visiting Houses

Mary Jo: I always had it. Because, going back to my childhood again, we were talking about what we did at night and that. Our houses seemed to have been a bit of a house for - a visiting house - where the neighbours came in apart from the women quilting. But then they would come in and on other nights visiting. Men would come in. My granny smoked a pipe. Well, she had learnt. The reason...how she got in on that was as I say, our house had ..a visiting house.

Angela: So it was a real magnet for local people.

Mary Jo: And the pipe was passed around. The men had the pipes and then my granny, she took the pipe and she was able to do it. And then, she was 93 when she died.

Angela' Even though she smoked a pipe. That's amazing. Your family must have a brilliant constitution, Mary Jo. 'Cos they have these lovely long lives, don't they? Fantastic. It's astonishing.

Mary-Jo: And her cousins, they lived long lives, they'd longevity in their family. But in our hsue, as I say, I remember then this man over the road from us - he was a lovely man. Oh, lovely man. And we would have to - you know, the plug tobacco. There was an art in filling it. But someone was, you'd be putting firelighters to light it.

Angela: I can smell the tobacco. I can see the pipe being passed round. So you were in Cloghmore. So you were quite close to where Tom is.

Mary Jo: Actually, where I am now...I lived in Caiseal for a while. My home was between Caiseal and Tom's house.

Angela: How were old you when you finished school here?

Mary Jo: In Dereens...Oh, I went to secondary school at the Sounds. I was thirteen.

Angela: Do you have any favourite subjects at school?

Mary Jo: I loved history. Always. And I have to say, my love of history came from my time at the National School at (sp?). Because...maybe it was because I was attuned to it and I liked it, the stories of the (Fionniocht - sp?), the stories of mythology and all that. You know, it was wonderful. It was. That's where I got my favourite subject.

Angela: So you always had a love for it.

Mary Jo: Oh I had a love for it.

Angela: Tell me a little bit about your teenage years coming up to kind of 17 and what you were doing then.

Entertainment

Mary Jo: Our first sort of entertainment away from the home was...we use to go to the pictures. I don't know if anyone else has covered this. But there was a man, a local man, called Peadar McHugh who lived in Bunnacurry. And Peadar was ahead of his time in an awful lot of ways. Peadar would come round to places. And there was this place just over the road from here - Sands Cove (sp?) , it was called. . And it also had a nickname - The Hillocks.

Angela: There's a story behind that.

Mary Jo: In my father's time, they had dances in it, you know. It showed films. And we saw the finest of films. Finest of films. That was our sort of first thing into social aspect out from the home. And going to céilís at the Sound in the Sound Hall. Oh, that was great.

Angela: Would most of the young people congregate there to see films?

They sounded like good fun.

Mary Jo: They were. But they were supervised. it wasn't your great break out into the big world at the time when you were casting your eyes around.

Angela: So you were chaperoned around. Were you driven round? (closes door to keep room warm). So it wasn't that big break from home that you would maybe think it would be.

Mary Jo: Not really. I was allowed to go to the céilí with my next door neighbour. He had a car. Lord have mercy, he's dead now and he taught in this school.

Dennis Gallagher. They were neighbours of ours. And Dennis and Hannah - they were going and my mother allowed me to go. And Dennis was playing in the band, you know, in the Sound Hall So that was my first break out. So then, the next big thing was going to the dances. The ordinary dances in Dookinella. In Mulligan's, it was called. And that was the big adventure. We went down in the car. Health and safety when I think of it. There were no accidents. Packed tight in the car.

Angela: (laughs) Four or five of you maybe.

Mary Jo: That was a small load! You'd have three of the lads maybe sitting in the back. You know the seats were...Or maybe four. And sitting on their knees were maybe three or four girls.

Angela: I forgot about the knees! Yes. Crammed. (laughs).

Mary: Packed in. In the front. The driver had his seat. But you know, they weren't single seats. They were strange across seats at the back. And you might have two more boys and two more girls.

Angela: (Laughs) So ...oh my goodness, it's amongst into double figures.

Mary Jo: You were into double figures. You know. They must have had two rows doing that up and down. We thought it was fabulous and all the bands and all the showbands.

Angela: What kind of bands did you have? Were there showbands?

Mary Jo: You had local sort of...coming from Westport and local bands. You had the swing bands (check name (sp?) inaudible) which was a local band with John Mc Namara, where John Twin played. And, as I say, you know we thought there were we thought they were brilliant. And at Mulligan's, the same bands coming in. No, the same Peadar McHugh who had the cinema as I call it, movies going round all the different villages. He had a carnival one August. You know, a big tent on the sandybanks in Keel. And he had a clipper cart come over - the biggest showbands in the country were in it.

Angela: How did he manage to recruit them? Did he have contacts with the showbands?

Mary Jo: He had. And outside you had a playground with swings with roundabouts and all that.

Angela: Wow - my goodness.

Mary Jo: And he had the huge artists in when I think of him. I cannot think of them. I remember the clipper cart. And I have a feeling the Miami was there.

Angela: The Miami Showband?

Mary Jo: I think so. And what do you call the one from Waterford...Brendan Boy (sp?) They were with Peadar. They were fabulous.

Angela: Some of those bands were even bigger. I remember hearing a story in Las Vegas. One of the ones that did a tribute to Frank Sinatra and they sold tickets in Las Vegas than Frank Sinatra himself who was performing on the same night (laughs). They were so popular.

Mary Jo: Yeah. It was amazing. That was an amazing summer with Peadar now a storm came. And I'd say poor Peadar...now the last night the tent had to come down.

Angela: Don't worry if you can't remember. What year did Peadar have his carnival?

Mary Jo: I did. It must have been was it 1960? I did leaving cert in '61 and I think it the previous summer.

Angela: That sounds like a lovely summer. You know, quite a few people have summers - these memorable summers. And that sounds like a memorable summer. So then you did your leaving cert.

Mary Jo: I went to Scoil (spelling) for the five years. Cycled from Cloghmore which was a distance of 5- 6 miles.

Angela: And very undulating landscape as well.

Mary Jo: Well, it was. Now the last two years, a man from the village, Paddy O'Malley, Lord have mercy on him, he got a minibus and we got transported down, you know. There was no...the free education didn't come in until 1967.

Angela: I'm just very struck by what you're saying. Public transport wasn't widespread obviously but people - there was the mini bus and the improvised personal taxis with everyone on each other's laps. So people...where there's a will, there's a way.

Mary Jo: In Achill at the time - this is my theory about a lot of thinking - our parents always had a vision that the way to better our life was through education that they hadn't got. And I suppose my father and the rest of the local people with their experience in England and the attitudes of the people towards them and the Irish at the time wasn't always as it should. And they would do anything to have their children educated. And the local secondary school was set up. And Padraig Sweeny, Lord have mercy on him, you know as it was. Otherwise, I wouldn't have got any second level. And my family wouldn't have got any second level.

Angela: So it took people like Pdraig Sweeney to really give education a profile and the real importance you and many other people benefited from that, Mary Jo.

Mary Jo: We wouldn't have. Not all at all. They could not afford it. We could not have afforded it. And I forget now what the fee was for the year. And we had to get a bike. And we cycled. And we'd be glad of a bad day too when we couldn't go.

Angela: A day off is a good thing for everyone from time to time.

Mary Jo: Now it was rough and ready. Some great - people from all over the world appreciate it.

Angela: We have so many people in Ireland who go on to higher level or secondary level education. We have one of the best education systems in the world, I think. We've invested in it, you know?

Mary Jo: Even now, as I say, my time at Scoil Damhnait - it as hard, it was rough. But the last two years Paddy had the van. It was a godsend.

Angela: And you were drawn into doing teaching yourself as well in a role. So tell me a little bit about that.

Mary Jo: Maybe when I was in secondary, the second years, there was a scholarship to go to McKeady Colaiste (Gáinne?) Galway from the Gaeltacht areas. And you'd automatically could then go on to maybe to teaching. There was one criteria for teaching particularly for girls. You had to be able to sing.

Angela: Was that right?

Mary Jo: Oh yes.

Angela: Just for the girls? The boys didn't have to...?

Mary Jo: Well, the boys did as well but there was more emphasis on the girls. Because, as far as I know, a boy might get away with it. And I hadn't a note. Sadly, I hadn't a note. Anyway, they tried at secondary school - there were three of us. You know, we were able enough at the subjects, I'd say that now. But God

help us between us, we had no voice between us. We tried and we tried and we were put in for the exam.

Ends 43.21