



cross the road from Tom O'Sullivan's Kiosk in Boherbuoy is a large green space, bounded by Carey's Road, Hyde Road and the railway station. Up to thirty years ago, this area was a warren of lanes, made up mainly of one-storey houses in long terraces. Straight opposite the kiosk, was the entrance to Picquet's* (better known as Piggott's) Lane, one of the last of the lanes to be demolished.

The lane was narrow at the top and widened out into a triangular, open space at the lower half; its houses ran into Dixon's Lane at right and left angles, thus forming an enclosed playing area.

My family lived at No. 14, and next door at 13 lived Mrs. Whelan, the mother of Bishop Whelan of Owerri, Nigeria. Halfway down the lane there was a little recess containing two houses, McMahon's and Lynch's. There were two more recesses, each with two houses on opposite sides, at the end of the lane. Tiny Lynch, well known for his horse-and-car, lived in the right inlet, across from Jordan's house. At the extreme left, running into Dixon's Lane, were two more little houses, Considine's and O'Connell's. Johnny Considine later married Joan O'Connell in London and they still live there, in the East End.

My family lived in the lane during the Second World War years and we were all very poor but, as we knew no better, we were happy enough. Our parents had to put up with great hardship caused by the harsh environment. Poverty was the one common feature we all shared.

We had moved to the lane from St. Mary's Parish, when the original householders had moved to Prospect. How we envied them their new houses with electric light, gas cookers, toilets and front and back gardens! We had a cold water tap but no toilet. Buckets were used by all the families and had to be emptied each night at the top of the lane. Each house had three rooms: a kitchen, bedroom and attic. There was also a little yard behind.

Cooking was done in an open grate, and often the chimneys would go on fire. The neighbours were generous with what little they had and everyone seemed to help everyone else. If a man was out of work, a pot of boiled potatoes would be often sent up to his house, with a pinch of tea and sugar.

When babies were born — and that was often, because big families were then the rule — the women would assist each other. The babies were usually born at home in those days. I remember the day the women got their first children's allowance. They hired a long car and went off for a few sherris and a sing-song and came home late to

Memories of Picquet's Lane

by Paul Malone

their amazed husbands and children.

If a husband and wife had a row, the neighbours would intervene. The weeping wife would be brought up to a neighbour's house and all the women would console her. The angry husband would usually be brought up to the pub and, after a couple of hours of neighbourly consolation, the couple would be restored to each other.

I cannot remember any conscious brutality, wife-beating or child-battering. Rows and fights there were but, after a few blows had been struck, that seemed to end it all. People pulled together and did their best to help one another. We would seek almost any occasion for a sing-song together.

I can well remember the War ending in 1945, and we heard a new word "demob". The men who had been in the British Army came home with lots of money and we all had a great time. People got new suits and more bought radios and everyone seemed to be happy. But after a few weeks, the suits and the radios were pawned and that ended that.

T.B. was rampant in a lot of families were bereaved. When babies died, they were buried quietly in tiny timber boxes. Few people could afford medicine or even a decent funeral.

I remember our first bath; it was down in the City Dispensary and all the children had to go. We were dipped in a bath and then washed with whitewash brushes because there had been an outbreak of scabies. Another time we all had our heads shaved because of fleas.

In the Summer, we could not afford to go to Lahinch or Kilkee. The children and a few adults went out to the Creek for a swim. There were several other swimming places at Rosbrien and Ballinacurra: "Sandy" was for girls and babies, "Poul" for boys from about eight to twelve years, the "Cat's Lick" for boys from 12-14 years and the "Eagle" for big fellows. On my first visit to the "Cat's Lick", I nearly drowned and was hauled out of the water by a big fellow who ran up from the Eagle.

All the boys went to Leamy's School in Hartstonge Street and the girls usually attended the Henry Street School.

Though the masters were good and kind, we hated school. Usually, we were lucky to get the primary certificate. "Mooching" from school was a popular pastime; the clever thing was to have a good excuse or to pretend to be sick and have to go to Barrington's Hospital. How we learned anything at all was a miracle.

The People's Park was our playground; it was a wonderland all its own. We played at sports or just enjoyed ourselves. Vandalism was unheard of. Our biggest crime was "skinning" orchards; the best one was at the Christian Brothers School. The Brothers grew the biggest apples which we called "turnips". The Gardai we feared and avoided because they could send us to Glin — though we did not know where it was.

When we finally went to Ballinacurra Weston we could hardly believe the luxury. But we all retained one common goal in life and that was to leave school at fourteen years, get into long pants, find a job as a messenger-boy on a bike and have a few bob to spend - after we had given the wages to our mothers. Looking back now with nostalgia, I can only remember happiness and courage, along with grinding honesty.

After the terrible winter of 1947, a man from the Town Hall called to the lane and gave our mothers the keys of the new houses in Ballinacurra Weston. We got a day off from school, and Tiny Lynch and his horse-and-car were hired to move our furniture up Hyde Road and into the new estate. We had bigger and better houses but the same old neighbours.

Forty years later, I often look back on our lives in the lanes and on the haunting memories of those times.

*(It is not known how the lane got its unusual name but the word "picquet" crops up frequently in the pages of the *Limerick Chronicle* in the late eighteenth century. The term was used to describe a small, detached body of troops. A dictionary definition of "picquet" is "a camp-guard, sent out to bring in men who had exceeded their leave". The word "picket" — as in strike — picket — is also derived from "picquet").