

The Telegram

Fádo, fádo, I lived in rural Ireland where a telephone was not even the luxury of the upper ten. All we had was a Sub Post office which closed on Friday evening and as a result the only phone in the area was shut down too. Then the telegrams were delivered from the bigger post office which was two miles away by the telegraph boy on his bicycle. This is almost impossible to comprehend in 2007, when there is a mobile phone stuck to almost everyone's ear 24/7. It was October 1954 - the Sunday of the all Ireland Football Final. My Dad was glued to the radio, and Mammy, my brother and I had spent a great evening picking mushrooms. When we came back home a neighbour asked me to go to the local shop with her. I jumped at the chance of getting a lollipop. I never got that lollipop. Half way there we were met by the Telegraph Boy. He gave me a telegraph which read "Come immediately – brother James dead" Short on detail but with information that upset the happiness of our family. Mammy was crying and wondering what happened to him. He was only forty four years old. The match was forgotten. Daddy went to check the car. That was a time when you checked cars thoroughly for oil and water before starting a long journey. Today they are roadworthy between services and no need for the extra checks. Next morning the four of us took off for Donegal – three hundred miles from Cork. This trip we had done almost annually because Mammy loved to go home. Normally my brother and I played games, fought over who saw the most cars; who saw the car coming first, and stopped a couple of times for sweets and ice cream. A happy memorable journey for us children. This trip was different – we sensed the seriousness of this journey. It would have been our first brush with death and we were not too sure what to expect, so we were quiet in the back seat – a first I would say.

When we arrived near Killybegs town there was a train passing at a distance. Mammy insisted she recognised Auntie Rose through a carriage window. She lived in Scotland. So Daddy went to the station and sure enough there she was coming off the train. Rather a co-incidence by any standard. By now we had only about thirty miles of the journey to go. We arrived in Carrick and booked into a B&B called the Red House – we had often stayed there.

Then we proceeded to Uncle Jimmy's house. His sons who were about our age were playing around with other visitors and we joined in. They were too young to conceive the gravity of what was going on. Our only problem was we spoke English and they spoke Irish. I cannot remember anything about the adults that were there or the rest of the services – except a very large hole in the ground, and Mammy crying. This was new to us because she was always happy before this.

Next day it was time to go back to Cork. Mammy decided to stay in Donegal for three weeks more, and the three of us returned home where our Granny and Aunties were available to baby sit us. We got plenty of attention but it was no good. It was the longest

three weeks of my life - because Mammy was missing - the school days were not too awful but I will never forget how sad I was on Saturdays, when Mammy was not there.

At an early age I was to learn the importance of the presence of my mother to me, so much so, if I was not home when my children came home from Primary School, I would always leave the radio on and a special treat for them to eat. In that day - Daddy worked six days – he was there on the Sundays and I have lovely memories of Sundays with him. It is the loneliness of the Saturdays that sticks in my mind, never to be forgotten. That was fifty years ago.

Etta B.