An Irish Way of Life

An Honors Thesis by

Mary Cunningham

Thesis Director
Dr. Paul Ranieri

Ball State University
Muncie, Indiana
May, 1991

Graduated May 4, 1991
An Irish Way of Life

"Mother has always been able to find good in everyone. People others would look down on, Mom would state their good qualities," Mary Cunningham McClelland lovingly proclaims about her mother Bridget. Such a positive outlook is a rarity today. One can expect to receive benefits from such an attitude.

Bridget Cunningham has received the blessings of a good full life. She has devoted children who see that she has been taken care of in her retirement years as she had faithfully provided for them as youngsters. Bridget has life-long friendships that grow stronger with each passing year. Bridget also has had a successful business with a relaxed atmosphere that kept her customers loyal. Bridget has had these rewards and many others in her positive life.

Her life has seen unbelievable changes in the world. Born in the year that the Wright brothers first flew their airplane at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, Bridget has gone from living in a small cottage heated by a fireplace to a modern home with the comforts of electricity. She has witnessed the invention of the automobile, television, and indoor plumbing. Just as the world has changed drastically, her life too has changed.

My earliest impression of my grandmother was not just one experience, but rather a collage of experiences that took place throughout my childhood. I remember on many different occasions...
to her house for dinner after church. We would go to mass together to St. Catherine of Sienna, the parish church of my parents' youth, on that day. I squirmed during mass, thinking about going to grandma's house to play. We would go to her house, only a few blocks away, after mass. Getting out of the car was always the ticket to freedom my sisters and I had been waiting to cash in since 11:00. It meant play time. Mom, Dad, and Grandma would go into the kitchen and sit and talk for a few minutes before peeling potatoes, fixing vegetables, and preparing the roast. I could not understand why Grandma needed help. After all, she had raised ten kids and worked in the family owned bar, the M&B, during the day when she was younger. I figured anyone who knew how to cook for ten kids would not have a problem cooking for five other people.

Meanwhile, my sisters and I would begin to play the games that were reserved for Grandma's house. We had a couple of favorite games we always played. One involved the three of us putting together a mini play or skit performed on the screened-in porch. When we felt we were ready for our debut, we would go into the kitchen and perform for the three of them. Grandma would always have a proud smile on her face while we engaged in our version of Masterpiece Theater. She never failed to laugh at our child-like attempts at humor. When it was over, she would applaud. One successful attempt to create a new Broadway play would lead to several more attempts. Long after Mom and Dad could barely stand to watch another, Grandma would welcome them
with the same smile that said she was delighted we were having fun.

After a while, we would run out of ideas. The number of themes from the Bugs Bunny/Road Runner Show and SuperFriends cartoons that we could use without repeating ourselves was limited. By that time, dinner was well on the way to being prepared. We all wanted to help the adults with dinner when it was close to being finished. Grandma, of course, was always happy to have her grandchildren help. Under her watchful eye, we would mash potatoes and butter the rolls to be baked. My favorite part, though, was getting to go to the china cabinet in the dining room to get the good table settings she used on special occasions. I would try to set the table as neatly as possible by making sure everything was placed just right since I wanted it to look as pleasing as the food smelled. In a typical grandma fashion, Grandma would seat us three in honored positions at the table. She would not sit to eat until she was satisfied that we had enough milk, potatoes, or rolls. She always seemed happy going out of her way for us.

Dinner ended. We would all help clean up the table and dishes. I would try and put things away, but was not always sure where they went. Grandma took on the role of supervisor by telling us where plates, silverware, and glasses went and helping us with the chores we were too little to do. After watching her in the kitchen, I could not help but think she must have the ability of a master chef.
Once dinner was over and the dishes were done, my older and younger sisters and I would continue with our play. By this time, the adults would be chatting in the living room while we frolicked. They would sit and talk about the subjects adults talk about after a Sunday dinner--politics, the church, and family. I would catch snatches of comments my grandma said, but sometimes her thick Irish Brogue would get in the way. If I were participating in the conversation, I would have to ask her to repeat herself, but she never minded doing so.

While they would talk, my sisters and I engaged in another of our favorite games. It involved using the stairs next to her Lazyboy chair. One of us would climb three or four stairs, while another would be standing at the bottom. The one on the stairs would begin by flinging her hand to her forehead, looking around, and saying "Romeo, Romeo where art thou Romeo?" The other would come bounding around the corner that served as a make believe bush and say, "Here for art thou Juliet. The sun is the east and Juliet is the west." Although the scene never changed, it never failed to evoke some laughter from my parents. Grandma, however, never laughed at our muddled attempts to perform our favorite Shakespearean work. As long as we were careful on the stairs, she did not care if the words were correct or not. Later, my parents would tell us it was time to go home. I would kiss Grandma goodbye and go home a happy, but very full little girl.

I remember a second, more specific impression I developed when I was nine or ten years old. On her seventy-fifth
birthday, all her children got together and planned a surprise party in her honor. Before the party, they planned on having a mass said in her honor, which they tried to make extra special by having the children and grandchildren participate. One of her children brought her to St. Catherine's, the church she normally attended, once all the other guests had arrived.

Although I do not remember how many people were there, I know it was well over three hundred people. Since she had been in the habit of going to church every day for many years, she did not think it strange that she was going to church on a day other than Sunday. I do not think she realized that everyone was there for her birthday until, the priest, upon giving his opening remarks, congratulated her. All during mass she just could not understand what all the fuss was about.

The service ended with "Happy Birthday" and "When Irish Eyes are Smiling". All the people in the church then went to the cafeteria at Roncalli High School where a big reception was awaiting her. Rows and rows of tables were aligned across the cafeteria. As we entered the door, a table on the right held a guest book and a picture of her and her husband on their wedding day. Of course, the walls and tables were decorated with green and white streamers and green shamrocks. In keeping with other family gatherings, there was plenty of food, soft drinks, and beer. Throughout the evening, spirits were high. The music of Grandma's youth filled the air. People were laughing, talking, and having a great time. The party lasted well into the evening.
hours, long after Grandma's many young grandchildren grew sleepy.

My most vivid memory of that day is of my grandma dancing the Irish Jig. It took her nephew Mike McHugh as well as her children quite awhile to convince her to dance with him. She eventually made it out to the dance floor. Even at seventy-five she danced with the vigor of a woman half her age and the experience of a true Irishman. I always remember her as being physically active, but not in this way. Although she probably would not have admitted it, she had a great time dancing too. It was like a walk down the memory lane of her youth in Ireland when she attended dances in the town hall.

What amazed me the most was not her dancing, but that one person, as easy going and laid back as she, could gather such a crowd in her honor. She was happy not because she had a big party thrown in her honor, but because all her family and friends were gathered together and having a great time. It was then that I had the first inklings that my grandma was an extraordinary person with a special ability to make others happy with her selfless attitude and wonderful sense of humor.

Actually, my relationship with my grandma when I was younger was remote because I did not see her often. Although I admired and thought the world of her, oddly enough I felt somewhat intimidated by her. I attribute this to: (1) her thick brogue that made it difficult for me as a child to understand her, and (2) that I had never spent much time with her. Although I remember having good times at her house, I do not associate these
memories with her specifically. Grandma's house was a haven away from the evils of a child's world.

The question in my mind became over the years, "How could she create such a pleasant serene environment?" A year ago, I realized that the only way I could find the answers I desired was by learning and sharing in her past in Ireland and America. Grandma and I then embarked on a trip down memory lane. We discussed every aspect of her past possible. By tape recording our interviews, I was able to preserve the details in Grandma's own words. Then, I began to document her life. By sharing in her life experiences, I have begun to better understand who Bridget Cunningham was, is, and will be.

A WAY OF LIFE

The setting is a small farm, in a small town, in County Donegal on March 13, 1903. The rolling green hills, quiet countryside, and sandy beaches of the coasts, characterize Ireland. One can see small towns scattered sporadically throughout Donegal. For most people, this typical day in Meenaneary, Ireland begins around 7:30 a.m. The women begin by making breakfast for their husbands and children and by getting the children ready for another day of school. Aside from making two more meals for the family and taking care of the little children, the women do normal household cleaning as well as tend the animals. They also milk the cows, feed the chickens, collect the eggs, and churn the butter. Later in the afternoon, because they handle the money, they go to the market
to sell eggs and butter (O'Neill 34-43).

While the women's work varies little from season to season, the men's work is somewhat affected by the changing seasons. During the winter months their work is confined to inside the house or barn, which serves as a workshop. The Irish male in the small farm economy begins his winter days, November to April, tending the cattle. He sees to it that the livestock are all right and are fed. After breakfast, the men begin to prepare for spring by repairing farm implements and the animals' cages. During the winter, they continue with such household and farm maintenance work until supper time around five or six o'clock, with their only break being a few minutes for lunch (O'Neill 34-43).

When the spring time draws near, the excitement over a new year's planting arises. The male farmer decides what and how many different crops to plant. During this time, he also buys the seeds with money he has put aside for this specific purpose. Then, at the end of spring and beginning of summer, the actual breaking of ground and planting takes place. The rest of the summer, the men's work revolves around producing a successful year's crops. Upon the arrival of autumn, they have hopefully reaped the rewards of a plentiful harvest, a rare achievement (O'Neill 34-43).

The small farm economy in Ireland, as anywhere, is dependant upon a prosperous harvest. A poor year's crops can make for a lean year until the next year's harvest. The massive devastation
that can come from several years poor harvest is illustrated by the Potato Famine years in Ireland. During the late 1840's and early 1850's, the potato crops suffered from a destructive bacteria. The result caused extensive suffering throughout all of Ireland. Millions, either died from hunger or were forced to emigrate in order to remain alive.

Michael and Mary McGinley's mid March day in 1903, however, did not follow the usual pattern. In the early afternoon, Mary began having pains that signaled the birth of her baby. Later that evening, Mary had a little girl named Bridget. Bridget was not the first child Michael and Mary had. She had two older brothers, John and Mike as well as two older sisters, Mary and Ann. A younger sister Margaret would soon follow (see appendix A). Before John was born, Mary had two other sons, Patrick and Francis, who died during early childhood. Although Bridget was born long after they had died, she still remembers hearing about how "whooping cough had taken them while they were still young."

Grandmother thinks back, "Francis, who was four at the time of his death, was the first one to go. Patrick was six. In those days it was customary that the mother would not be allowed to attend the funeral of a child who died that young, but the father went, of course. The mother would stand at the window watching as the husband and family took the casket away. My mom and Patrick, who was still sick, were watching at the window. Patrick asked my mom, 'Where did Francis go?' Mom told him that 'Francis had gone to heaven to be with God.' Patrick told mom,
'I want to go to heaven too.'

She said, 'ya wouldn't want to leave me too would ya.?' Patrick said, 'God will send you two more boys and I'll go to heaven to be with god and my brother.' By the end of the week Patrick died of whopping cough too. My mom always said that God was offering her comforting words through Patrick to help her through that time."

Bridget describes her father as being "tall and never having a strand of hair on his head as long as I knew him." Her mother was "...about my height, maybe a little taller. She might have been 5'2' tall." She describes both of her parents as "hard working, easy-going, and very religious."

Bridget never remembers her parents' arguing except over her father's drinking. Bridget reminisces,

Sometimes when he went to the market, he would stop at Swedonnell's for a beer. I never saw a thing in the world wrong with it, but my mother never did like drinking. She would get after him for it when he came home. When she was through yelling at him and he wasn't around no more, I would say something to her. I's tell her that there wasn't a thing wrong with him having a few drinks. Oh, she didn't like it when I said that. She thought I was telling her what to do. I never let my dad know I said that or she would get after him again ya know.
GRANDMOTHER'S PARENTS

When Michael was in his late teens to early twenties, he left Killyschonse, a few miles east of Meenaneary to go to America to work. He spent several years on the East Coast doing factory work. When Michael was twenty-five and felt as if he had saved enough money to be able to support a wife, he returned to Ireland to get married to his nineteen year old fiancee Mary O'Donnell from a nearby town called Meenaneary. Shortly, before they married, Michael bought a plot of land in Meenaneary from Mary's father with the money that he had earned while in America. Bridget says, "My grandfather had two pots of land that he did not use. Although they were both about seven acres, only one of them had a house on it. My father bought the one with the house on it."

It was on this land that Mary and Michael began their new life together. During this time period in Ireland, the typical home on the small farm was a cottage. It generally was a single story stone building with a thatch roof, and three or four rooms. The main room for family activity was the kitchen, which also served as the place for meals and for gathering to talk and play in the evenings before bedtime. The rest of the rooms were used for sleeping purposes (Wallace 91).

Bridget's childhood home was no different. It had two bedrooms and a kitchen. She relates, "My parent's slept in the bigger room. The rest of us slept either in the other bedroom or on the bed in the kitchen." Furthermore, the fireplace in the
kitchen was the center of activity in the house. According to Bridget the fireplace served two purposes. By burning turf it could be used for heating as well as cooking purposes. She said, "My mom never had a stove. It was mainly the upper class that had those when I was over there, unless someone who had emigrated sent over money for the family left in Ireland. Since I had always wanted one while I was in Ireland, once I was working over here in the U.S. I saved money so my mom could buy one. I then sent it over to her. I knew it would make her life a little easier."

Like the cottage, their farm was typical for an Irish farmer. Michael turned the land into the family farm. The crops of potatoes, carrots, cabbage, the fifteen chickens, and three cows provided them with almost all of the food they needed. Any excess crops or eggs were taken to the market place to be sold. The money that they received was used to buy bread from the town bakery. Like all other Irish farms at the time, they also had two dogs. Bridget recollects, "All farms had two dogs. The sheep would come down from the mountain. If the dogs weren't there to chase them off, they would stay there and eat your crops."

As with their house and farm, the meals that the McGinley family had were quite similar to the typical Irish family. Breakfast consisted of tea, cornbread, and oatmeal or cornmeal. Lunch usually was toast or a sandwich and potatoes. Dinner was usually cornmeal, mush, oatmeal, or potatoes. If the crops were
in, they might have a vegetable of some kind. The diet in Ireland was quite poor, which caused many to die young. The poor diet and lack of good doctors took many people young.

Over the centuries that the Irish people had farmed the land, the summer months had always been rough. June, July and August were commonly referred to as the blue months. During the summer months, the past August's stored crops were dwindling down. The present August's were not in yet. Thus for a time each summer farming families had little to eat. The highest death rates were often in these few months. This caused food to be a high priority to the Irish (Suppe class lecture).

AN IRISH EDUCATION

The Irish system of education during the time period from 1900 to 1920 was similar to the American system. The main difference lay not in the education itself, but the philosophy behind the education of the people. According to Martin Wallace, "the Irish constitution, article forty-two, acknowledges that the primary and natural educator child is the family. The state guarantees to respect the inalienable right and duty of the parents to provide for the religious and moral, intellectual, physical and social education of their children" (127).

He further goes on to say that, according to article 42 of the Irish Constitution, the state is "required to provide a free primary education and aid anyone wanting to attain a higher education" (Wallace 127). Children in Ireland are required to attend school from the ages of six to fifteen. Most children,
however, begin at the age of four. The primary difference between the Irish education system and the American system is in the control of the schools. While the U.S. public schools are separated from the church, the Irish national schools are church-owned, with the support coming from the government (Wallace 127-129).

Bridget received her formal education in the Catholic church school in Meenaneary. She attended school from the ages of about five until sixteen in a one room school house with two teachers for all the students. One was a man and the other was a woman. The younger children went with the woman while the older children went with the man. They studied Gaelic, reading, math, and because it was a church school, religion. Bridget recalls, "I stayed in school until I was sixteen. Ed, my future husband, stayed in school until they practically kicked him out. He was nineteen when he quit going to school. He really liked to learn. His sister wanted him to become a teacher as she was. She even offered to pay for the rest of his schooling. He would have been a good teacher, but he wanted no part of it. He told her he was going to America and that was all there was to it."

GROWING UP IRISH

The strong family ties can be attributed to the Irish notion of family. The Irish always seem to feel a moral obligation to help their family members. In this society, everyone worked toward the same objective, whether it be putting on a town fair or repairing the local church. Furthermore, the
goals and property of one were the goals and property of the whole family unit. This was especially true in the early 1900's when for the Irish Catholics, still under British rule, sustenance was the main objective. Bridget, as well as her brothers and sisters, spent much of her young life helping around the farm: in the spring, they helped with the planting; during the summer, they helped nourish the crops.

She recollects, "Everyone helped Grandma with the harvesting in the fall though. She was too old to be out doing anything like that by her self. The one thing I remember most about the times I helped her is that she always worked us until we were dead tired. She sure was a worker."

The rest of the summer, she spent helping her mother in the house with cooking, cleaning, and sewing. The young Irish girl's role in the family for centuries had been to help the mother Bridget remembers how she spent a lot of time embroidering:

I'd do things like handkerchiefs, pillow cases, and stuff like that. My mom wove cloth. There was a big demand for the things she and I did in those days. We'd get a certain price per item that we made. The money I made wasn't bad, but my mom made really good money. She made a lot more than I ever made. I never usually kept the money that I made, although I could if I had wanted to keep it. I always gave the money to my mom to help support the family. It was the only right thing to do ya know. Of course I got to keep it if I needed a new jacket or shoes or
something.

Bridget recalls with delight, "There was always one chore that all her brothers and sisters loved to get a chance at doing, churning the butter. The whole process took about an hour. Grandma fondly remembers, "Mom would let ya do it for awhile. If you weren't doing so good, she'd let someone else do it for awhile. Since it took along time, everyone got a chance at doing it. Mom was always the one in charge of it though."

During the months from September to May when Bridget spent from 8:00 to 2:00 in school, she would come home and help around the house after finishing her studies. She says, "I mostly helped with the cooking and cleaning. On Saturdays I would do embroidery work. There wasn't as much time to help though because I was in school all week."

GROWING UP CATHOLIC

The most noticeable similarity between the McGinley family and Irish society is the importance that religion, Catholicism, played in their life. Bridget received some of her religious training at school. However, most of her religious background stemmed from her home environment. In her family, everyone went to church on Sunday. Bridget reflects, "In our house you had better go or mom would have thrown you out of the house. Since she was active in the church, you had to be too."

Sundays in the McGinley family were always devoted to going to church. They would get up early in the morning, put on their best clothes and walk to church in Carrick, a close town
which served as a church for both Meenaneary and Carrick. Bridget recalls, "We had to walk three miles to church to attend mass. We would have to leave an hour ahead of time because it took about forty-five minutes to get there. We didn't want to walk in late either. It was a long three miles. I don't know why, but I think it was longer over there than over here. Probably because of the hills and bends."

Although they did not attend mass the rest of the week, in the evenings the whole family devoted two hours to prayer. Bridget reminisces, "My dad would start the prayer in Gaelic and the rest of the family would finish in English. I spoke Gaelic, but never cared much to speak it. Anyone planning to leave Ireland wouldn't have any use for it. Some people way back in the mountains thought Gaelic was the only language that should be spoken since they thought English was the language of the enemy."

Catholicism in Ireland and America are very similar, though Bridget says, however, there is one key difference. When she was growing up in Ireland, Confirmation was the most important day in a Catholic youth's life because it signifies the day when you become a full member in the Roman Catholic Church. Here in America First Communion is the most important day. She describes Confirmation, which occurred every three years when the Bishop came to town, as

an exciting day since it was the only time the Bishop would be in the town. Most children made their Confirmation
a few months after their First Communion when they were seven or eight. I was supposed to make mine then too. The day before Confirmation I had an earache and couldn't hear a thing in either ear. Since I was too sick, I had to wait until I was eleven.

In preparation for the big day the youngsters would take special classes for six months with the school teachers. On the day of the Confirmation, the priest would ask the children questions to make sure they were all ready. According to Bridget, "When I finally did make my Confirmation, there wasn't anyone else that knew the Christian Doctrine better than I did. I had my hand raised for everything. Of course, they were all three and four years younger than I was though. The Irish loyalty to the Catholic Church would parallel modern Poland's. The church was the only effective way to resist the British. During the centuries of British control, Catholicism was the one part of their tradition that the Irish refused to compromise to the British, which was also the source of their trouble.

**ADOLESCENCE IN IRELAND**

Bridget's young life in Ireland was not all school and work. When she would finish with the chores, she would often play with her friends. She remembers one time when she was twelve she was out playing after it had rained. Bridget recaps, "A boy about three years older than we were joined us. A few minutes later I fell into a puddle and ran home crying. I did not see that boy again until I was at a town dance two years later when he
reminded me of the day I fell into the water. I said, 'Was that you that day?' He said, 'yeah'. I told him that I didn't want to hear a thing about it. He just laughed at me. Later that evening he wanted to walk me home, but I told him no because I had to be sixteen before I had a boyfriend." Although she continued to attend town dances, she did not see him again until two more years had passed. Bridget thinks back, "The next dance we were both at he asked me if he could walk me home. I said yes this time because I was old enough and I liked him too. Ed and I were married thirteen years later." Bridget and Ed dated for a while, but because as she says, "I was in no hurry to get married, we started dating other people." After she saw and met other people, she knew Ed was the best one for her and that they would eventually marry. She laughs, "I was hoping he would come back and he did. He never really wanted to stay away see."

After a couple more years dating, Bridget and Ed decided in 1925-1926 to emigrate to the U.S. All those wishing to do so would go to Dublin a month or so before they were going to leave to talk to the American Immigration officers who would ask them questions. Bridget says, "if you did not pass the questions, you weren't allowed to go. This process saved a lot of people money. If you came to America and were turned down, you had a lot of problems getting back. You had to find the money to go back home to Ireland. This way you didn't have to waste any money or time travelling."

Their plans, however, were delayed by a year because of her
sister Ann's death. Bridget did not think she should leave her mother at such a difficult time. Although Bridget told Ed he could go without her, he waited for her. She says, "I never understood why he wanted to wait really."

The custom in Ireland at the time was for the most recent person who had emigrated to the United States to send the money for the next person who wanted to go to America. Once he was settled and working, he would pay the person back or assist the next family member to come to the U.S. Because of this custom, brothers and sisters who had emigrated before her, Bridget found the most difficult part of leaving Ireland was not finding the money to go, but saying goodbye to friends and loved ones. Leaving her parents was especially hard since they did not really want her to go. She kept the date of her departure from her parents until the evening before since she did not want them worrying or trying to talk her out of leaving. Ed came over the evening before, and they said goodbye to their families and friends. Bridget confides, "My mom was real upset and crying. She told Ed if it weren't for him she wouldn't let me go. Of course I would have gone anyway."

On the day of her departure, Bridget never imagined that she would spend the rest of her life in America. The parish priest told her that he expected to see her back in five years. She laughs, "I told him that I wasn't staying no five years. He told me I'd stay at least that long. I look back and laugh now because I never did return. I figured that I'd only stay three
years or so. I thought I'd be making so much money that I'd have nothing to worry about. Once ya got here, ya found out the truth about life in America and had to like it then. Life in America wasn't as easy as I expected it to be."

It was with big hopes, dreams, and more than a little apprehension that Bridget and Ed boarded the boat that would land them in New York two weeks later. Although the trip was only two weeks long, she thinks it was probably the worst two weeks of her life. Bridget confesses, "I've never been so sick in my whole life. Everyday I'd get sick to my stomach." Ed, who had a cabin a few floors above Bridget, was not sick at all. She is adamant that "Ed didn't understand why I wouldn't leave the cabin and walk around on the deck." One amusing event did happen on the trip. Before they left, her dad gave them each a bottle of whiskey. Ed drank his, but Bridget was too sick to drink hers. Ed asked her why she hadn't opened hers yet. When she told him she was too sick, he told her he would get rid of it for her. She relates, "He gave it to the steward who was in the cabin at the time. He finished it all while he was in the room with us. The two girls I was sharing the room with came back when he had finished it. The steward was just crazy over them. They didn't know why he was acting so funny. I wasn't about to tell them either." When the two weeks were finally over and they were entering New York Harbor, she made her way to the deck to witness the end of an old way of life and the beginning of a new one.
A NEW WAY OF LIFE

It was customary and logical that when one immigrated, one would settle in the same place that family and friends from the old country had previously settled. Many friends and family of Bridget and Ed had settled in Indianapolis. Bridget's sisters, Mary and Margaret and her brothers John and Michael had all settled in Indianapolis before she came. After they arrived in New York, not knowing any other place to go, they immediately left for Indianapolis and arrived on December 7, 1927, but parting shortly thereafter because they found work in different cities. The typical job that a recent Irish immigrant had involved hard labor. A great majority of the Irish men in the worked either on the railroad or for Kingan's, a meat packing company. Ed worked on the Big Four Railroad in Chicago as a car check. He was responsible for checking to make sure everything was in all of the cars before the train left. Bridget, on the other hand, worked at a hosiery factory in Indianapolis, Real Silk. She worked as a part of an assembly line doing what she calls "piece work." It was her job to sew hose and other lingerie items together. Bridget reflects,

Catherine Carroll, who also came from Donegal, was able to get me a job there. It was real good money in those days. I made about $50.00 every week. I usually worked from 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. on the busy days and 7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. on lighter days. A normal work week was 56-60 hours,
making the hourly wage about $.90. Some people pushed themselves too hard. They would work through their half hour lunch and without any break all day. They could end up making as much as $70.00 a week. No matter how hard a person worked on the busy days, when you worked until eight you had to wonder how you were going to get up the next morning because you were so tired. Of course you had to because you had no choice.

While she was working at Real Silk, Ed returned from Chicago and found a full time job in Indianapolis. After a few years, they were finally married on May 12, 1932 at St. Philip Neri Catholic Church at 7:00 a.m. so that everyone they knew would be able to come. Bridget fondly recalls,

the church was packed on that day. We had the reception at our first home on Kelly Street since at that time we didn't own the big house next door too. Ed had purchased the home a while before the wedding. We had a couple people we knew watch the house while we were at the church. Even though the house was still vacant because the people before us had just moved out, we didn't want anyone coming in and vandalizing our home. After the wedding mass, we went to the reception. Everyone had a great time: Irish dancing, eating cake, and drinking whiskey and beer. Of course, we had to have moonshine because alcohol was illegal.

Bridget worked at Real Silk until her marriage to Ed. She also worked as a maid for a successful Jewish family on the north
side for a brief time. She did not stay there long because, as she says, "They had a couple of the meanest kids I had ever seen." Bridget laughingly remembers that working as a maid was often a sought-after job by Irish women in those days. She says, "During the summertime the Jewish families would go to the lake for the weekend. While the families were gone, the maids would have parties in their mansions. These fun-fests were held early in the day see. By the time they got back, everything was clean and back to normal. These families never did know a thing about those parties either. The ones that I went to were a lot of fun."

RAISING A FAMILY

Once Bridget found out that her first child, Michael, was on the way, she stopped working outside the home. While all her children were still babies, she stayed at home and worked as a housewife. Bridget and Ed would have ten children: Michael, Cathline, John, Patrick, Francis, Daniel, Charles, Mary, Edward, and James (see appendix A). Bridget emphasizes, "Extreme patience is a necessity when raising that many children. They were all pretty good, but they liked to cause mischief too." Bridget feels that although raising children was hard when she was doing it, she thinks it is probably harder today because teenagers are more defiant today. While the children were still babies, she stayed at home and worked as a housewife and mother. Bridget's son Dan tells of a time when his youngest brother tried to skip school. Dan confides, "Jimmy always did hate school. He
decided one day when he was six that he just was not going to go to school that day. He ran out of the house from Mom. He figured he could out run a lady in her fifties. Just about the time that Mom came out of the house, a friend of hers was driving by the house. She stopped him and had him drive so she could get ahead of him. She got out of the car and hid behind a bush. When Jimmy ran by, Mom grabbed him and took him to school screaming. She says the look on his face was one of amazement. He could not figure out how she had passed him up."

Once the children were a little older and they were on their feet financially, Ed, Bridget, Bridget's sister Mary, and her husband James opened a neighborhood bar called the M&B. They did the normal tasks that barkeeps would do during the course of a day. They served as bartenders, waiters, and clean-up crew.

The M&B was a neighborhood bar. It was not extremely large as it had a bar area, sitting area, and a kitchen. It was a place where friends could gather during the afternoons and evenings to have a few drinks, get together with friends, and just talk. There was always a relaxed atmosphere present. One could always count on finding several friendly faces among the crowd.

While most of the days of waitressing and bartending were uneventful in the M&B, she remembers on one occasion when things were not so peaceful in the bar. She says, "One day I was serving drinks when I saw two people sitting at a table. I could tell that one of them wasn't old enough to be in a bar. So I
went over and told him that he had best be leaving. The next thing I knew he pulled a knife out of his back pocket. I have never been so afraid in my whole life. I ran behind the bar as quick as I could. I tell you I really thought that I would end up with that knife in my back before I made it to the bar. He didn't do anything though. He just left."

TRAGEDY

Life for the Cunninghams was full of the normal ups and downs one would expect to have when raising a large family. Then, in March, 1955, Ed was diagnosed as having colon cancer. After nine months of suffering, Ed passed away on December 13. One would expect such a trauma would have thrown Bridget into a deep state of depression. However, Bridget quietly says, "I couldn't go around feeling sorry for myself because I had ten children to raise and one was sick."

A little more than a year and a half after Ed's death her son Chad died. He had been diagnosed with cancer of the bone in 1956. Bridget sadly remembers the time when he was sick. She says, "By the time he died, it was all over his system. It was hard on the whole family seeing Chad, only thirteen years old, so sick. He really was a saint. He prayed every morning while he was sick. He even went to church every day until the priest at St. Catherine's, Father Knueven, said he had no business going to church as sick as he was. The priest told Chad he would come out every day and give him communion. It really meant a lot to Chad. By the time he died in November 1957, he couldn't see or walk
anymore. He was so frail at the end you were afraid of hurting him when you picked Chad up."

His brother Dan clearly recalls the day that Chad died. At the time he and his brother Francis were both in class at Cathedral High School. Dan says, "An announcement came over the intercom to have Frank and me down to the office. Intuitively, I knew before they called our names that Chad had died. Ironically, Mom, Hannah Brady, and Patrick were the only ones in the house on the day he died. They were also the only three that were in the house when he was born. He even died in the same room in which he was born."

This, however, was not the end of the trials for Bridget and her family. On February 26, 1965, her son Eddie died of kidney failure. Dan reflects, "A strep infection from a summer cold went down into his kidneys and heart caused damage. Eddie who had been athletic was restricted in his activities and his blood count was monitored. His life was comparable to and AIDS victim since his immunity level was low. Eventually, the damaged kidneys caused his death. A short time after Eddie's death, dialysis began to lengthen the lives of individuals like Eddie."

Despite the trials and heartaches of the 1950's and 60's, Bridget realized with eight children to raise, life had to continue. Five of her children enrolled full time in college. Along with their own efforts, Bridget assisted them with their expenses as best she could. Francis says of his mother's help, "Mom could always find that extra five or ten dollars that I
needed for a book or other expense when my money was tight. She would sacrifice everything to help us get our degrees."

During this time, she continued to work at the M&B in the afternoons and evenings. In the mid 1960's the State of Indiana began construction of I-65. Bridget's bar was bought by the Indiana Highway Department since it was on Raymond Street, a major access street to I-65 that needed to be widened due to the increased traffic that would result.

Bridget thought about moving her business to another location. In the end, she decided to retire at the age of sixty-six. Although all of her children had helped out in the bar in one way or another, none were interested in going into the tavern business for themselves. Since she herself was growing weary from a lifetime of work, she decided to retire.

Ironically, the month of my birth, July 1969 was the last month of Bridget's love affair with the M&B. In the last week of business, many old customers returned to say thanks, have one last drink, and relive old time. The last day of the M&B had the traits of an Irish wake: tears, joy, camaraderie, hugs and prayers for the future. Before the bar had opened that day, Bridget hung a copy of an Irish Blessing over the door for customers to see as they left.

May the road rise to meet you

May the wind always be at your back

May the sun shine warm upon your face

And until we meet again
May God hold you in the Palm of His Hand.

Since her retirement, Bridget has spent her days as an old world Catholic woman would. She prays for two hours in the morning, as well as attending mass every day. For many years, she continued to walk the six blocks to the parish church. As the neighborhood underwent sociological changes, related to the increase in the number of rental properties after I-65 was built, her sons took on the responsibility of taking her to church in the evenings. For thirty-seven years, Bridget has attended daily mass or communion service.

A trauma in the lives of many of Bridget's old country friends and family was the changes wrought in the Catholic church as an aftermath of Vatican II. This was the first major effort of the Catholic church since the Council of Trent to modernize and face the realities of modern life. Pope John XXIII was responsible for bringing about the changes.

Some of the changes involved Catholic rites. The tradition of abstinence of meat on Friday's was changed to Fridays during Lent only (Flannery 31). The use of Latin in the mass was replaced by the use of one's native language (Flannery 13). The non-participatory involvement of the parishioner in the service was also abolished. The most significant change was that Vatican II placed responsibility on the individual and stressed personal conscience (Flannery 801).

Although some of Bridget's friends were frustrated at the changes that were occurring in the church, Bridget claims
otherwise for herself. Bridget indicates, "I liked the changes from the start. I could finally understand what the priest was saying. For years I prayed the rosary throughout the mass because I didn't know what he was saying." Bridget does find one change that resulted from Vatican II disturbing, the departure of long time priests and sisters from their vocations. She recalls, "one of my nephews left the priesthood so that he could pursue another career. These were dedicated men and women."

A SUMMARY--FOR NOW

During the year I have been working on this project, I have come to see Grandma in a different light. As I have gained insight into Grandma, I have come to discover more about who I am. Some of Grandma's traits are evident in Grandma, my father, and me. No matter how serious a situation is, the three of us will seek to lighten the mood with a comic word or expression. Another shared trait is our love of people. We all love to be around people to share in discussions or just to listen to what someone has to say. A final trait common to all three of us is our caring attitude. We always seek to help those in need around us.

I wrote a letter to Father Harold Knueven, a former Priest at St. Catherine's Church, a few weeks ago requesting that he answer a few questions about Bridget. I asked him to describe who he thought Bridget Cunningham is and describe her personality. He put in words, the feeling and thoughts I have developed about Grandma over the last year. He described her as
being "a woman of great faith and compassion." A person of weaker faith would have fallen away from God when forced to deal with such difficulties. Instead, she put her trust in the Lord and gave her family the care that they needed. This faith that she has stems from her childhood. Bridget grew up during a time when the British still had a tight reign over Ireland. The undying faith that the Catholics demonstrated for centuries served as a guide for Bridget in her own religious life. Her mother was another influence in the development of her religious beliefs. Bridget's mom, as well as her dad, was clearly a devout Catholic, praying for two hours every evening and never doubting the church. Father Knueven says, "Bridget is thoroughly Catholic from head to toe. She trusts the authority of the church unquestioningly."

Father Knueven further went on to say, "she has a patient attitude and was always there for her children." Despite unfavorable circumstances, she never lost her faith. She always did what was best for those around her. She is still always ready to lend a helping hand even now that her children are all grown and have families of their own.

I admire Grandma for the qualities that she has: (1) compassion for others; (2) strong faith in God; and (3) patient attitude. Although I admire her, I have come to realize that there are many differences between my grandma and me. The first difference is the courage she had when she left Ireland not knowing if she would ever see her family again. She came on the
hope that she would build a better life for herself and future family. Grandma, however, did not know what life would bring for her in America. I'm sure that she was fearful of the unknown. Somehow she overcame that fear to follow her dreams. I, on the other hand, doubt that I could ever leave my family behind to go to another country and face an unknown life.

Grandma and I also have a different perspective as to a woman's role in society. Grandma believes that a woman's primary role is to take care of her family and home. Throughout her child rearing years, she was always doing something for the family. They were always her first concern. Her wants and needs came second. She worked to earn money so that her family had what they desired, and she took care of sick family without thought that she needed a break herself.

My view of a woman's role in society is much different than Grandma's. Although a family and home are important to me, I think that women are capable of much more. A career outside of the home and family is something I hold to be a key part of my life. This belief stems from the fact that my mother and many other female relatives have and enjoy careers of their own.

Grandma is also very trusting. She is more likely to believe what people tell her automatically than I am. I question what others tell me. Before I will believe something to be true, I have to ask myself if it seems reasonable, is the source reliable, and where can I find this information out for myself.

Still, as one gets older, there is a tendency to look back on
one's life and judge whether it has been successful or not. Many people equate a large bank account and material objects with success. By these standards, Grandma has had an average life. However, the true measure of a success can never be in dollars and cents. One must look at the manner in which they treat others, their love of life, and the people that care about them. For Grandma, with her tremendous love of life and selfless attitude, her life becomes one which people look at and envy. As her granddaughter, I can say that over the past year Grandma has become more than a relative, she is my role model. I hope to be the kind of caring and giving person that she has always been to others. Maybe one day I can be to one of my granddaughters what Grandma has become to me, a trusted friend and confidante.
Family Tree of
Michael and Mary McGinley

Michael  ---  Mary

Patrick  Francis  John  Mike  Mary  Ann  Bridget  Margaret
            (b. 1903)

Edward
(m. 1932)

Michael  John  Francis  Charles  Edward

Cathline  Patrick  Daniel  Mary  James

Appendix A
Personal description of holder as of date of naturalization:

Date of birth: March 13, 1903
Sex: Female
Complexion: Medium
Color of eyes: Green
Color of hair: Brown
Height: 5 feet 2 inches
Weight: 155 pounds
Visible distinctive marks: None
Marital status: Married (Husband Deceased)
Former nationality: Irish

I certify that the description above given is true and that the photograph affixed hereof is a likeness of me.

Bridget Cunningham

(Complete and true signature of holder)

United States of America

So. District of Indiana

May it be known that at a term of the United States Court of the United States held pursuant to law at Indianapolis, Indiana on November 29, 1956 the Court having found that Bridget Cunningham then residing at Indianapolis, Indiana intends to reside permanently in the United States (when so required by the Naturalization Laws of the United States), had, in all other respects complied with the applicable provisions of such Naturalization Laws, and was entitled to be admitted to citizenship therefor, ordered that such person be, and she was admitted as a citizen of the United States of America.

In testimony whereof the seal of the Court is hereto affixed this 29th day of November in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and fifty-six, and of our Independence the one hundred and eighty-first

Robert G. Newbold

Clerk of the U.S. District Court.

By: Jane Upton

Deputy Clerk.
THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

No. 5814589

Petition No. 5221

Personal description of holder as of date of naturalization: Age 43 years, sex: male; color: white; complexion: medium; color of eyes: gray; color of hair: brown; height: 5 feet 11 inches; weight: 165 pounds; visible distinctive marks: Scar on right temple; marital status: Married; former nationality: British.

I certify that the description above given is true, and that the photograph affixed here is a likeness of me.

Edward Cunningham
(Complete and true signature of holder)

United States of America
So. District of Indiana

Be it known that at a term of the United States Court of the United States District Court for the Southern District of Indiana, held pursuant to law at Indianapolis, Indiana on November 12, 1943, the said

Edward Cunningham

then residing at Indianapolis, Indiana

pledges to reside permanently in the United States (when so required by the naturalization laws of the United States), and to comply with all applicable provisions of such naturalization laws, and was admitted to be a citizen of the United States by the Court having found that

Edward Cunningham

was admitted as a citizen of the United States of America.

In testimony whereof the seal of the Court is heretofore affixed this 12th day of November, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and forty-three, and of our Independence the one hundred and sixty-eight.

Albert C. Logeman
Clerk of the U.S. District Court

By Marine Field, Deputy Clerk

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
In Loving Memory of

Charles W. Cunningham

BORN: SEPTEMBER 25, 1943
DIED: NOVEMBER 7, 1957

O GENTLEST Heart of Jesus,
ever present in the Blessed Sacrament ever consumed with
burning love for the poor captive souls in Purgatory have
mercy on the soul of Thy departed servant. Be not severe in
Thy judgment but let some drops of Thy precious blood
fall upon the devouring flames, and do Thou O merciful Saviour
send Thy Angels to conduct Thy departed servant to a place of
refreshment, light and peace. Amen.
May the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy
of God, rest in peace. Amen.

CECIL B. HURT MORTUARY
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Barker, Ernest. *Ireland in the Last 50 Years (1866-1918).* London: Oxford Press. 1919


1. What have you learned from this project?

I have learned about my family's roots during the time I have been working on this project. The family is the first and most influential group affecting an individual. In order for me to understand myself, I have to understand the key figures in my family. Now that I have gained an insight into my grandma, an influential person in my life, I can better know who I am and who I want to be.

2. What do you value most from the project now that you are finished?

Most importantly, this project has provided me with an invaluable legacy of Grandma. She has allowed me to share in her innermost thoughts and feelings. By doing so she has given me a precious gift--herself.

3. What could be better with the project if you had more time?

If I had more time to work on this project, I could have researched the history of Donegal and Ireland during the time period more thoroughly. This would have given me a further insight into why my grandma is the kind of person she is today.