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**Name:** Celia Hughes

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**Interviewers:** Tony Murphy & Pauline Connolly

**Transcription by:** Pauline Connolly

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**Celia:** I was born in Portumna, County Galway.....Ya, on the verge of Tipperary, the River Shannon.....just divides the counties.....outside the town. It was called Gortaha, a village outside the town.....And, went to the Mercy nuns in the school with the big ruler. It was tough. I believe in correction when they're very young, understand yes and no. Now if you want this tomorrow, now you'll have to wait a little while, train.....because when you go out in the world, it's not all yes, am I right?.....and really I don't know, they delivered instructions (laughs). They had the big ruler there, you'd get a slap of it if you didn't know your answer.....put out your hand, and they'd (slap).....Jeez it was awful.

Well, I remember when you'd be going for confirmation, twas very tough. You'd have to go back again in the evening for instructions but there was one, she lived across the Shannon now that you know it, bit beyond there, she had a good bit to come to school and she used to get chill blains and her hands would be swollen and the nun couldn't beat her on the hands. I never forgot this. And her legs were kind of swollen from the chill blains, as well, you'd get them on the feet but she walloped her and walloped her and walloped the hell out of her on the legs.....That girl I can still hear her roaring.....That was the punishment.

**Tony:** After school, what did you do?

**Celia:** Well, you'd have your lessons and a few lessons to do, get someone else to help you out (laughs). ....Well, in my grandparents, my mother's homeplace, there was land attached. I understand the farm side of it as well, the cows and the calves. I've seen it both sides. I did and then I went in on it here. I never could milk, never....The women did all the milking, you know.....Twas the women that used to milk.....Well, you'd see what was going on that time. They were ploughing with the horses, as ye know, no machinery. The donkey and the cart brought home turf.....And you'd love a day in the bog, ramping around.....We seen how the turf, did you see the turf coming up with the slain? .....Oh, I did.....I seen it below in Cloondroon.....Throwing up the turf.....Oh, I did, now that was hard work, they used to call it the spit, am I right? The length of the sod was the spit.....And then there was a man had to fill it on a wheelbarrow and wheel it out.....And young lads loved to get that job for a bit of pocket money.....I'd seen it done, we loved to see it being done but I heard around here now of women that did wheel out turf. I think they worked on a different system down this side of the country. Women worked much harder I'd say. You see, they had very big families to rear.....ya.

We left school at 14 or 15.....There was, you see, I remember when the law came in. There was a lot of people had no education at all that time because the law came in that you had to go to school at 14 or 15, well, before that, you see, they didn't go. There were a lot people I knew that couldn't read or write.....They couldn't keep them going to school, I suppose. They had to maybe work for farmers out in a country place like this, help out on farms and get a few shillings, you don't know. There were awful times.

And there was no.....children's allowance, when did that come in? Well before that there was nothing and, there was no dole, you either sown what you eat or provided you firing. Now, there's free this and there's free that and there's free the other. They have a great time, if they have, I don't know.....There's the fuel allowance, and there's rent allowance and there's unmarried mother's allowance.

I didn't go out working too early and then I was very lucky, you remember, you often hear tell it, when the grove was a private residence.

**Tony:** Yes, Smallwood's.

**Celia:** Oh ya, that was a lovely place.

**Tony:** How did you get in there?

**Celia:** I got in there.....

**Tony:** That was a long way from home.

**Celia:** She was very particular who she'd take.

**Tony:** Ya.

**Celia:** There were nuns that time be in contact with these people....They'd get you a reference from your convent school, do you see? I got in there until Mr Smallwood died. I came in '40. He died in '44. She sold that then after a year or something and we moved onto Galway, out Newcastle....I went with her.....She got rid of the rest of the staff.

**Tony:** What was her name before she got married?

**Celia:** Who was she? She was one of the Kirwan's.

**Tony:** That's right.

**Celia:** One of the Kirwan's that we were talking about here the last day. He was an English man but lord, he was a gentleman.....Aww and very well off, she met him late in life and he had to have the best of a house and he could afford everything, that's why.....do you understand what a fee simple is?

**Tony:** Whatever land or house he had, he was the owner of them. If he had them in fee simple it means he was paying no rent.

**Celia:** Oh, is that it. I often heard of fee simple mentioned. Some lord, I think, owned that place one time and then there was a Henry Concannon a solicitor that lived in it. She entertained a lot, high entertainment in there.....in Tuam and Galway. She was fond of entertaining. The government, all the priests and bishops (laughs).....We didn't mix with anyone, we kept closed mouths.

**Tony:** Ya, they had these house parties.

**Celia:** More or less lunches and high teas. She'd have a lot of friends out from Galway. I've seen Dev there. I did, entertain there, a gang of them. She sold out in Galway and went up to live in the Aras because they wanted her, Sean T, he was, what president was he now? Douglas Hyde was the first....Well, when the O'Kelly's went in then, you see, they were very raw. They had to entertain all the nationalities.....And she was the entertainer, do you see? and they got her to go up. She loved that, you see, she was there, training them in, we'll say, for them.

**Tony:** She brought you with her.

**Celia:** Yes (laughs).....I wouldn't stay there, no.....Complete different life to me. You see, you were kind of your own boss when you're in a private house. But when you get in with a staff and a raw young staff and Seán T and his wife was very raw. It was a complete change.....You weren't master of what you'd like to eat either. You were master, what'll I have going to bed but you see in those big places, you just had to eat what you get.....You weren't in control around nice bits and as I said, it was very rough and raw until they got going but finally do you see, you often heard the old saying stick to your own corner, did you?.....Eventually, she came out and got another little residence for herself in Dublin, it didn't last...I suppose, you don't know.....The point I'm coming to, when the house in Galway was sold then, she came from Dalgin, her brother was married there. It was the home place, we were always up and down, in and out, the girls below would come into us and we'd go down to them. I took a chance down there. Twas the fact I knew them. Twas a family.

**Tony:** When she left Aras an Uachtarain.

**Celia:** had to get....

**Tony:** her own house in Dublin, you came down here.

**Celia:** She never drove, she was driven, chauffeured driven everywhere. He had two cars, one big splash, one with coloured glass, a uniformed chauffeur. Life experience is wonderful. When we were in Tuam, that uniformed chauffeur would drive her to mass, these ladies always sat in the back of a car, do you know that etiquette? Tis not today, you see. I sat in the front with the chauffeur, we'd go to early mass. You'd have to wait outside that car until the lady would get in the back. You'd have to have great manners. He'd open the door for her, let her in, close the door. Well then I would sit in, in the front. You're laughing at this now.....The point I'm coming to, life changed in Galway, it was only herself and myself, no big car, no chauffeur. We had a man down the road, he was a native of Milltown here, parish of Milltown and she and I would sit in the back together to go to mass.

**Tony:** In Galway.

**Celia:** Ya.....She never drove herself and she had no car from once he died. The cars were sold but she had a man down the road that chauffeured her to mass or wherever she wanted to go. The difference I'd seen in that family, coming down, down down.....They're all gone. There is no one alive today now of that family.

**Tony:** So, she bought a house in Dublin then. How many years did you stay in the Aras?

**Celia:** Wait now and she sold the following summer....oh, I didn't stay long. We had to come back again. I seen the auction in Tuam, I went through it. I went through the auction in Galway and finally I seen the auction below in Dalgin, all gone. That's life....How long was I in Dublin?.....Only some months. You see, the O'Kelly's were out in Wicklow somewhere. They were used to land and it was very tough to take that job on. All the nationalities had be entertained there and do you see she did a good bit of it for them, do you see?.....She loved that, great life, height of luxury, height of luxury there. I think it's not like that up in the Aras now. I don't think they're occupying the big big house. Do you know anything about it? Because when that Ballina woman was there.

**Tony:** Mary Robinson.

**Celia:** Did they move out to another residence? They had more a family life, am I right? I think she made that change, (**Tony:** Have you ever been back there?) Mary Robinson, she wanted over the other place, god almighty. Twas run by the board of works, the army, there was all these guards there, there was a corporal and there was a commandant, one be off, the other be on. There was a man all night in the boiler room. There were guards in peter boxes everywhere you looked when you went out and there were two guards with a key like that at the gate letting you in and out, I said 'this is jail, no freedom.....Awful regimental but (the board of works). It's not like that now.

**Tony:** Douglas Hyde was gone, twas Sean T O'Kelly in all your time, was it?

**Pauline:** Was Douglas Hyde gone when you were there?

**Tony:** The 1<sup>st</sup> President.

**Celia:** Oh, he was dead, he lived there, he was in a wheelchair, all he had was a butler. This is what I was told. They took it over, that's why she was so useful do you see, he couldn't entertain, the poor man was in a wheelchair and the butler looked after him.

**Tony:** The O'Kellys were there in your time.

**Celia:** Ya, Sean T. She was a sister to the minister for agriculture at the time.....Do you see it was all a government thing. Sean T married his sister-in-law. She was the 2<sup>nd</sup> wife. He was in the family all the time. But it's very different today.....I went back to have a look because there was one very nice girl there but you'd never see her all day. The levels were huge. She was upstairs doing something and I was down in the dining room knocking around. She was a lovely girl. She worked in her young days in Westport house. She was very well trained under a butler and all that thing but the only thing is I hadn't her. She didn't stay in at night. She had a sister married that had a job under the government as well and she went out at night and came in, in the day time and until the day she died, we kept in contact.....She was a lovely girl, a great girl, Anna Ryan.

**Tony:** So you moved back down to Kirwins?

**Celia:** And that's how I ended here.

**Tony:** You married Tom Hughes?

**Celia:** Ya....., you wouldn't meet anyone under Mrs. Smallwood because jeez we weren't let out to dances even but it wasn't everyone that could get a key to her. Oh I'd stand up to her, if I wanted to....She knew you suited, she was different below now. Mrs. Kirwin hated entertainment. I said that suits me, I've enough of it. No, couldn't take it at all.....They moved off then to live in Dublin.....They had one son, and the poor fella, it was very tragic. I was saying to ya about yes and no, an odd little slap was no harm but he was thoroughly spoilt, with a result, he was a fella that wouldn't want to stay in hospital, he had to get special diet, he was in hospital in Dublin after an accident, I don't know what it was. Of course, he didn't want to be there either. He wanted home comforts and he left the hospital and he got hit with a car and I suppose he went to hospital again, he went home, he was on his own, parents were dead. He had this lady in Dublin that was kind of looking after him and whatever else was in it, I don't know and she went in and she found him dead. Isn't that sad, that was the last of them.....I suppose he would be between 40 and 50, youngish man.....I'd say this woman got it, he probably had a will made, she got the lot, whoever she was.

**Celia:** Wasn't that sad?.....He wouldn't stay in the hospital. He always wanted home comforts. It's marvellous the different people you meet in those circles. And you think they have everything but they haven't.....The simple life is nicer in one sense. There's pressure on them, I don't know what it is.

**Tony:** Were they arrogant?

**Celia:** They could be, they were, you wouldn't make too free on them, sometimes, more times you could and they'd talk to you and they'd tell you anything, they would now, stick to the same family, they will, they will depend on you or talk to you.

**Tony:** Would they look down on the common people though?

**Celia:** Oh definitely, oh they would, all that's gone, oh yes. You'd hear awful stories around here, oh yes, they were a class in themselves, very much so.

**Pauline:** What used you have to do in the house?

**Celia:** I came to Tuam be in the dining room and upstairs. She (clicks her fingers) was like that, quick, hot tempered. I mean one or two bad meals and she'd shift the girl, Now, I was always, had a go for making things and I'm still at it. I love nice food that I do myself. So when I came onto Tuam, this girl that was in it, she was a long time over the world, other places here and there, and she could cook but she couldn't concentrate. Now you have to concentrate on food to the minute. So, she would never give a month's notice, you'd go very quick. They let her go, she got another one then, and she couldn't cook either and finally I never intended on taking it over but she got at me to do it. I could do it alright but I didn't want to do it..... So, that was it and then they thought they'd work me into the Aras, no.... it was time to go then.

**Tony:** But you were obviously good though.

**Celia:** Ya. (laughs) Awful work there. Sean T was nice though but she wasn't, no. He was only a small little man. He was nice. She was big and haughty. Ryan, he was minister for agriculture, now well he was a brother to her. They were all in the government. You see it's a different place up there now. You asked me did I go back? This girl Anna Ryan....we were in contact. I used to go visiting Mrs Smallwood in Dublin when I'd get holidays and I arranged with Anna that we'd meet in Dublin. We did go out for a visit but they were gone. I had another a look around. You see, there's a lot of presidents gone there through since, whatever in the name of hell was going on, I'd love to know. It's a tough job.....That woman from down there, do you know her? The president woman in the park, down there in Ballindine?

**Tony:** Oh I do ya, Sabina.

**Celia:** Now it's tough on her.

**Tony:** I knew him. I knew Michael D.

**Celia:** He's one man I admire.....But do you know how hard he got it growing up and he made his way and not one bit ashamed to tell it. His Dad drunk them out. He came up the tough way. He did everything on the land. He went to school. He takes a teacher's place. I read all that, he put on a collar and tie. He made his way into Galway, a job in the ESB office. He went to school, probably a nice school in the university and he's the top job in Ireland now. He's one great little man. He didn't get it easy. He was not spoon fed.....Two lads went to the uncles, they had to rough it out on the land. There were two girls as well but they didn't come into it, maybe they went on the mother's side. The father drank them to poverty. I heard him telling it on telly. He didn't deny it. He was trying to say he drank himself into the poor house. That man deserves a lot of....he's a great little man. He got nothing easy.

**Celia:** Is she Galway or Mayo?

**Tony:** She's Galway.

**Celia:** Now, there was a Father Bloke here, I used to hear them talking about a Father Bloke here at the fire. Was he her Uncle? Did you ever hear that? Was she baptised in Milltown Church?.....Well, that was it, it must be on account of the priests....She claims Mayo sometimes I think does she? .....Oh she was, this Father Bloke, he was a relation. I don't know whether that's right or wrong, that's only hearsay.....And she so tall (laughs). He was a wild boy in his day.....He was fond of the dances. He's a great talker.

**Pauline:** What's the biggest change you've seen over the years?

**Celia:** The changes. They're frightening. You just wonder what's going to be the end. I mean life means nothing now. Switch on that news, the way they're killing one another and you see, the way the church has gone too.....We were shivering, there's no fear today now.....No and worse it's getting.

**Tony:** You've enjoyed great health.

**Celia:** I have to be very careful of myself, I couldn't rough it like another. I'd get cold very quick and that. I'll tell you what suited me is the outdoor life. There's nothing like in and out and exercise. If you housed in enclosure, it doesn't suit everyone. I loved the out and cycling, I loved cycling, best exercise going.....Oh no, I had to give it up and I missed it awful. Go in on your bike, you'd make nothing of Tuam, in and out, Claremorris, but now it's run me here and drive me there. The minister for Health is advising people to go out and walk and I heard it on the radio this morning. He'd be better off clear them off the trollies in the hospitals, never mind tell them, telling people what to do, walk, get out and walk, well this man said 'Why don't he get them out of the trollies in the hospitals (laughs)'. Today, to me is very hard to fight corruption. It's everywhere. It's everywhere. Greed. They'll never have enough.....Oh they got very greedy. One time you shared everything in the country. But they got so greedy, that you can't trust anyone. Something has gripped the world.

**Tony:** Have you any relatives around here?

**Celia:** I have a grandnephew below in Cloonfad, that's only 9 or 10 miles from here and I have a nephew, his father has lived in Portumna and he has a son over in England, he's a male nurse. Then he has two more married at home. One of them has a very good job with the GAA. You know the McManus fella down there, he's implicated with the GAA as well, Tom is his name. They often meet below in Ballyhaunis. They have something to do with the GAA the 2 of them.....Damien Coleman, a tall fella.....Tell him, you know me. He's married now in Portumna and his wife is teaching in the National School. He's after building a house. He was in an estate. They moved out and built a house, way out, a couple of miles outside the town. They wanted to get out. She was greatly involved in the GAA as well, his wife, she was with the camogie.....Veronica. She was photographed a few times on the herald. She won something three years running, I've nothing to do with sport, I don't understand. Now, he and Tom McManus, they're involved in the coaching.....Whatever way this Damien Coleman is in on it, they fly him out to America now and again, he's been in Boston and he was in New York on the GAA business.....That's right. So now, he's into kind of thing. It's a good screw I think. It's a good job, a steady job. They were involved in it up there in the hurling. Then, he has another brother and this was awful that happened. They got in on cycling, himself and the wife. He was just two years married now when this happened. She went out one day on a bike, they were going to do a charity run for some child that had a brain tumour and I suppose she went out practising and a car in the middle of the day, I believe on a straight road, she was knocked down and from that day on, the poor thing will be in a wheelchair. She was six months in hospital in Dublin but she came through it, wasn't that tough?

**Tony:** There's a lady called Gertie Tighe, is she related to you?

**Celia:** Now, they are my in-laws. They are very good to me too.

**Tony:** She married to Micky Tighe.

**Celia:** Right. He used to go through Milltown here with bread years ago. He went over to America you see. She was in America. They all emigrated there at one stage. They decided Micky would go over for a while. They worked way beyond the two of them. Then Micky didn't like America. She didn't either I think. But eventually they came home and built at home in his place and he kept working and got work all the time.

**Tony:** Celia, out of all the places you were, in the Aras an Uachtarain and Smallwoods, have you any photographs of all that time?

**Celia:** Well, I have, you have to give me time. Pauline, I just show you, do you see that picture on the left, the dark little picture over on that wall there. That's myself and Mrs Smallwood, walking in Dublin, that's back in around '52 or '53. (laughs). As I was saying, she always asked me to spend a few days with her in Dublin. I always got on with her. You see, I got with her alright, I liked her.

**Tony:** Who's the fella?

**Celia:** That's taking in O'Connell Street, some fella walking about his business, but you know that time the lads in Dublin would stamp you, they'd give you a number, an address and go and pick..... but I have other ones in the grove.....

**Celia:** Pauline, would you go over there under that paper and I have albums there and I'll see would I get one.....that's taken here. I'd have yanks coming here looking for relations and I'd bring them in. There's the Concannon's now. They were coming, then they got married. They were bringing boys. I might have it in the other one.....These are all relatives of the Hughes.....Now, I have Damien here and his wife and meself. One time, they came visiting me, passing through. That's him....Now, you can tell him you were looking at his picture.....So, I think I'll have to get you to hand me another one. These are not going back to The Grove..... Now, that was a Tipperary girl. That was taken in The Grove. She was a nice girl. Give me a minute now.....yes, this is one: This was the boss's car when he'd want to go out shooting when he was able before my time. This is the man, the gardener. This man worked in the garden and that's the girl that was with me at the time and this is me here. That was a lovely girl there and she couldn't cook at all so she got the door, ya. I got stuck (laughs).....Now this is me with the dogs below in Dalgin (laughs).

**Tony:** Dalgin house is gone altogether.

**Celia:** Gone altogether. It was a shame. But you see, do you know what happened there? Government made a law one time with these places. Now the same thing happened above in the big place as you're going to Gort cos I was there as well. I used to go with friends from Galway out to the woods, what do you call it?

**Tony:** Coole Park.

**Celia:** Right.....Now, all that's there is a photograph and you know Millbrook? You see the government put a rent on these houses. It was Carty's owned it at the time, Pat Carty down here. Once you took off the roof, you see, and that's all these places were knocked down. How they saved Kilclooney, I don't know. what happened beyond there.

**Tony:** Quarrymount House

**Celia:** Oh is that's what preserved. And they're living there in that hall of luxury.....And then if you didn't take off the roof, you were nailed, sure that was wrong. That's what happened over there now. And then all the showings? .....below in Dalgin went on the road up to Tuam or somewhere they tell me, I don't know. You see the Kirwins, all these landlords were all related. There were Bodkins up there before Gordons. They owned all up round Kilconly and Kilbannon. They had thousands of acres. They were awful tyrants you know to the tenants, throw them out if they weren't able to pay the rent.....

**Pauline:** Sadly, Celia passed away on the 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2018. May she rest in peace.



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