

Elizabeth Gorman: From Armagh County, Ireland to Queens, New York

Based on an interview by Christa Kadletz

I was born in Armagh County Northern Ireland, August 2, 1925. I had two older sisters Bridget Clare and Mary Francis. Margaret, who we called Peggy, came years later after we moved to the United States. Our father Daniel Gormill [Gorman] was born on January 28, 1894 in Drumgreenah, County Armagh. He inherited a farm from his father where he grew up and worked and where we lived. Mom, Bridget Hannaway, was born on April 29, 1894 in Madden Kaedy, County Armagh. Her father was also a farmer and married to Elizabeth Toal. Mom and dad were married in 1918.

While we lived in Ireland times were tough, but I don't think my parents had any intention of leaving. My father had problems with the British, the Orange as Mom called them. I remember men tearing apart our haystacks. They were looking for something, guns maybe. Mom didn't speak of this much and my two older sisters followed her lead as good catholic girls, who knew their place. I remember the day they came and took him. It was early in the morning, we were in out pajamas, there were loud knocks at the door calling "Daniel Gormill, Michael Gormill - Sinn Feiners to be arrested!" Michael was our uncle but he didn't live there. My mother got us up and sent us out to play. Bridget was dragging my hand I looked back for mother and saw as they pushed her to the ground. Our father was gone for three months.

Prison Ship

My father Daniel Gormill was held prisoner on the internment ship *Argenta*. There is a book about the ship, *Republican Internment and the Prison Ship Argenta* by Denise Kleinrichert (2001) where dad's name is mentioned in the prisoner manifests, but the actual records are sealed until 2020. The ship was originally a U.S. ship deemed "unseaworthy" in May 1922 and sold to the British to use as a prison ship.

The prisoners were being charged as Sinn Feiners, what we know as the I.R.A. today and held without trial. The I.R.A. was committed to political and economic independence for all of Ireland and preservation of Irish culture.

After his release my father went to the United States where he changed our name to Gorman. We came to the US almost 3 years after my father. I remember when we finally met my father again asking,

"Who is this man and why is he hugging my mother?" He was a big man, slightly intimidating, and hardened.

It must have been hard for my mother to come here and leave her homeland. She didn't ask for these "problems with the British." She cried leaving her hometown, but most of all leaving her mother, our grandmother, who we never saw her again. Like I said, I just don't think they ever planned to leave.

Arriving in New York

When we arrived here in New York in 1928 we stayed with Aunt Alice and Uncle Jack, mom's sister and her husband who owned a house in Woodhaven, Queens. That stay was brief until dad found us an apartment of our own on in Woodhaven. A few years later we moved to Richmond Hill, right next to the Kadletz residence where your grandfather Frank lived.

Your grandfather was in his early teens when we met him. He had no mother and mom had no sons. He was a good boy and quickly became close with our family. He was particularly a big brother to Peggy and myself. We were the youngest ones and troublemakers.

It was just before Valentine's Day in 1939 when your grandmother, Bridget Clare, came home from work in the city at the American Sugar Refining Company. She said "You'll never guess what happened." I remember hoping she'd got a raise because she helped support the family. Then she told us "Frank Kadletz asked me for a Valentine's date." She was the first one of the sisters to move out when he came back from World War II.

My father died in August 1953, just before your father was born. He never knew any of his eight grandchildren. My mother died in 1983. Mother never spoke about the "Orange" or the troubles that dad had with the British. At the end of her life she had Alzheimer's. Your Uncle Vinny came to see her the day he returned from four years of service in the navy. He brought her beautiful orange roses in the nursing home. She knocked the vase off the table and said "Who are you with, your with the British aren't you?"

I don't know if it was combination of the color and his being in uniform, but for the next three or four minutes of her banter and rant we were able to gather more insight into what happened than we had ever heard before.