

GAA Oral History Project

Interview Report Form

Name of Interviewer	Regina Fitzpatrick
Date of Interview	13 th June 2013
Location	Croke Park Stadium
Name of Interviewee (Maiden name / Nickname)	Liam O'Neill
<u>Biographical Summary of Interviewee</u>	
Gender	Male
Born	Year Born: 1955 Home County: Laois
Education	Primary: Trumera National School, Co. Laois. Secondary: Knockbeg College, Co. Carlow Third Level: UCD, St Patrick's College Drumcondra, Dublin.
Family	Siblings: 4 brothers & 7 sisters Current Family if Different: His wife Áine, 2 daughters & 1 son.
Club(s)	Trumera GAA [Laois]; Sliabh Blooms GAA [Laois]; UCD GAA [Dublin]; Erin's Hope [Dublin]
Occupation	Principal of Gaelscoil Thromaire
Parents' Occupation	Primary School Teacher [Father]; Housewife [Mother]
Religion	Roman Catholic
Political Affiliation / Membership	N/A
Other Club/Society Membership(s)	N/A

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Date of Report	6 th July 2013
Period Covered	1910 - 2013
Counties/Countries Covered	Laois, Dublin, Carlow, Kilkenny, Kerry, Roscommon, Wexford
Key Themes Covered	Facilities, Playing, Administration, Celebrations, Religion, Role of Clergy, Role of Teachers, Role of Women, Role of the Club in the Community, Identity, Culture, All-Ireland, Club History, County History, Earliest Memories, Family Involvement, Impact on Life, Career, Challenges, Sacrifices, Politics, Professionalism, Purchase of Grounds, Relationships
Interview Summary	<p>In this interview, Liam reflects on a lifelong love of Gaelic games, first instilled by his father as a child growing up in Trumera Co. Laois. He talks about his childhood in Trumera and being a member of a large family. He describes his father's GAA involvement and their family involvement with Trumera National School. He outlines his playing and administrative careers taking him from Trumera, to Knockbeg, to Laois, to UCD, to St Patrick's Drumcondra, to being president of the GAA. He provides a narratives of the many administrative positions he has held within the GAA and his approach to each of these roles. Finally he reflects on life as president of the GAA so far, the place of GAA in Irish society and what he hopes his presidency will achieve.</p> <p>00:00:00 Introduction</p> <p>00:00:30 Liam describes Trumera where he was born and raised. Mentions Gaelscoil, GAA Club and community hall. Reflects on the changes of the area from a predominantly agricultural area to a more mixed community.</p> <p>00:02:10 Describes his family and his position in the family. His father was a teacher in the Trumera NS. Talks about his family history and the school. 101 years of teaching service in Trumera in his family. Description of school and his time there as a pupil and as a teacher. Decision to leave the school in 2012. Reference to the place of the Irish language in the school and in Liam's family.</p> <p>00:05:28 Description of his father and his background in Dublin and Mountrath. His father's family were gardeners for big houses. Mentions Coolock House and Coláiste Caoimhín preparatory college where his father attended as a student. Father won Leinster Senior Hurling Colleges Final with the Coláiste. His father's nationalistic views and commitment to the Irish language and Irish history. Influence of this on Liam</p>

	<p>and his family.</p> <p>00:08:40 Importance of Gaelic games to his father. Taking Liam and his siblings to games and going to see them play. Attending Knockbeg College. Place of the games in the college. Also mentions athletics, basketball and football.</p> <p>00:10:09 His father playing minor hurling for Laois. Reference to 1934 All-Ireland Minor Hurling Final against Tipperary, the 'long All-Ireland'. Mention of newspaper strike at the time. His father finishing playing hurling in 1948. Also played senior for Laois.</p> <p>00:12:01 His father's involvement in the administrative side of the GAA. Involvement in Laois juvenile GAA and the Laois hurling board. Being defeated in an election for the position of Vice-Chairman of Leinster.</p> <p>00:13:21 Description of his mother and family life growing up. Life in such a large family, his mother's hard work and sacrifice. Growing their own vegetables at home.</p> <p>00:18:20 Place of sport in the household when he was growing up. First generation who grew up with Gaelic games on television. Getting their first television – mentions RTV rentals. Seeing first televised game, Kerry v Roscommon. Mentions Mickey Maloney, an electrician in Mountrath.</p> <p>00:19:49 Going to Croke Park for the first time in 1963 - League Final between Tipperary and Waterford, preceded by a Colleges A All-Ireland final between Ballyfin and St Finbarr's Farranferris. Mentions Ned Power in goals. Description of the day and who was with him. Impact of that day on him.</p> <p>00:21:50 Going to Mr Holland's (neighbour) house to watch the 1963 Hurling All-Ireland. Description of the event and the hospitality of his neighbour that day.</p> <p>00:24:35 Pre-dominance of hurling in the area. Playing underage with Mountrath, no club in Trumera at the time. Hurling in Trumera NS. Cycling in to Mountrath to train. Playing hurling at home, mainly with his sisters. Getting his first hurl. Reference to Camán Teoranta – hurling factory co-operative in Mountrath.</p> <p>00:27:34 Other interests as a child – exploring railway line, picking strawberries, going for walks. Doing jobs around the house, bringing in fuel, helping in the garden, collecting the can of milk and the water.</p>
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	<p>00:29:01 Gaelic games in Knockbeg. Class leagues and internal leagues. Fr. Moling and Fr Michael Noonan training teams in the college. Being a member of the college team, level of success during his time there. Getting out of school of play teams like St Peter's, Wexford. Walking into Carlow to play in Dr Cullen Park. Mentions other South Leinster venues including Geraldine Park, Athy.</p> <p>00:32:24 Playing U16 hurling for Laois. Winning Under 16 B competition in 1971 in Tullamore. Level of success and organisation in Laois GAA in the 1970s and 1980s.</p> <p>00:33:44 Working for the summer at PMPA in Dublin. Playing in Dublin Insurance football competition. Subsequently attending UCD. Working part time as a night security man to fund his way through college. Playing hurling in UCD, older students running teams. Mentions Martin Quirk and Timmy Williams. Becoming secretary of UCD hurling club. Description of that role. Mentions Jimmy Smith who was involved in the organisation of higher education games in Croke Park. Learned the ropes of administration there.</p> <p>00:37:40 Transferring to St Pat's Drumcondra to do the diploma in Education. Winning U21 title playing with UCD, mentions Tom Killeen, Tommy Lanigan and Mark Kirwin who were also from Laois and on that team. Playing with St Pat's (Erin's Hopes) subsequently. Mention of O'Toole's club in Dublin.</p> <p>00:39:30 Meeting his wife Áine in first Arts in UCD. Mentions his friend John Butler of Myshall. Áine's Honda 50 and getting lifts from her to games etc.</p> <p>00:41:00 Chairperson of UCD GAA when he had transferred to St Pats. Teaching in Haddington Road. Playing with Clan na nGael Fontenoy's. Returning to UCD to do the HDip and playing with them again.</p> <p>00:42:44 Returning to Laois and taking over from his father as principal of Trumera NS. Starting a school hurling team, winning competitions and how this helped him to get acceptance in the area. Involvement in juvenile parish teams also. Importance of games in the school, of the sense of belonging and community, of the joy of playing with your friends, of that expression of being from Trumera.</p> <p>00:47:45 The impact of involvement in the games on life inside the classroom. Playing hurling for Trumera himself at the same time as teaching. Relationship with students.</p>
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	<p>00:48:12 Trumera hurling club during Liam's years of involvement as a player. Buying grounds in the 1980s. Administration of the club. Becoming secretary of the club in 1984. Fundraising for the purchase of the grounds and building of hall. Opening of new dressing rooms on his first official day as president of the GAA.</p> <p>00:51:30 Narrative of administrative roles in the GAA. Mentions Paddy Bates and Jim Sayers. Organising U14s festival in Laois; becoming Oifigeach na Gaeilge for Laois; Development Officer; Hurling Board Secretary; Secretary of Laois County Board. Involvement at national level in Leinster games development.</p> <p>00:53:20 Description of how Laois GAA worked when he became involved. Organisation quite poor at the time. Discusses frequency of meetings, numbers of people at meetings; officers; financial difficulties. Challenges of being a young person becoming involved and trying to create change. Learning from the things that don't work out – defeat in elections etc. Eventually he had proven himself at provincial, national and international level and was made Laois secretary.</p> <p>00:55:56 Achievements as Secretary of Laois County Board. Level of debt of Laois GAA at the time, poor state of grounds, low morale when he became secretary. Success of fundraising measures introduced. Building new stand in O'Moore Park.</p> <p>00:57:35 Challenges of the role of Laois County Secretary. Discusses organisational level of clubs in Laois, lack of ambition. Mentions Bill McEvoy and Oldtown Construction building new stand in O'Moore Park. Challenge of getting people to think bigger and to look outside their own benefit for the greater good.</p> <p>00:59:40 How Laois teams fared when Liam was county secretary. Need to put the ground work in to develop organisationally in order to be successful. Mentions Mick O'Dwyer and success in 2003.</p> <p>1:01:30 Maintaining a pride in Laois despite the shortage of victories on the field of play. Size of county a factor. Talks about high points of being a Laois supporter in his life time.</p> <p>1:04:05 Quotes Tommy Moran from Leitrim on the weaker counties celebrations.</p> <p>1:05:01 Setting up of Cumann na mBunscoil in Laois in 1987-</p>
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	<p>88. Discontent with juvenile board in Laois. Laois hosting Féile, approach to Féile. Mentions Des Sutton.</p> <p>1:07:13 Contribution of teachers to Gaelic games in Ireland. Huge awareness of games among young people.</p> <p>1:18:14 Involvement with the GAA at national level. Meetings of the National Games Development Committee. Mentions Joe McDonagh. First time he heard a president of the GAA address a meeting – Con Murphy visiting UCD in the 1970s. How that event influenced his own approach to the presidency and higher administration.</p> <p>1:10:30 Situation in the GAA when he started to become involved at national level – Peter Quinn president at the time; plans for the re-development of Croke Park starting; Description of Peter Quinn and his vision for Croke Park. Style of subsequent presidents. Mentions Jack Boothman, Seán McCague, Seán Kelly, Nickey Brennan and Christy Cooney.</p> <p>1:12:35 His own ambitions in the GAA. When he set his sights on the presidency. Remembers seeing Hugh Byrne and Alf Murray presenting the cup on All-Ireland Sunday. Awareness of importance of presidency as a child.</p> <p>1:14:54 Not a particularly political person, defeats in elections. Walkover for presidency.</p> <p>1:15:50 Mentions Dick Miller of Laois. Talks about leadership and his own motivation and approach to getting a job done. Why he wanted to become president.</p> <p>1:18:01 His ambitions for the role of president when he got it – mentions hurling plan, bringing five strands of Gaelic games together to include the ladies games and make the system more efficient for everyone. His own affinity to the ladies' games. Mentions Black cards, decision to allow county boards to appoint rather than elect committees; launch of feachtas na Gaeilge; forming Irish language and youth committees; forming Scór committee; increasing the number of women on GAA committees. Needing to be at the front to facilitate change at times.</p> <p>1:23:12 Starting the 'job' of president. The experience of being úachtaráin tofa. Mentions walk on the roof of Croke Park with the Olympic torch. Seeing out the school year before taking up the role of president. Approach to presidency – inclusivity, informality, awareness of transience of the role. Changing the date of congress. Routine work – strategic</p>
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	<p>plans, international rules, all-stars etc.</p> <p>1:27:23 Impressions of the role so far – workload, lack of privacy – very public role. Respect for the office of president within the association and in Ireland generally – can be daunting at times. Talks about visiting clubs and schools, behaving in a manner that's deemed appropriated to the office. Privilege of being president – a life changing event – intense schedule of the role. Adapting to the amount of energy required for the role, creating a good impression of the association.</p> <p>1:32:12 What Liam would like the legacy of his presidency to be – reflects on the GAA as an association and the presidency as an office. How he has developed as a person through the GAA. Impressions people may have of him – how he would like to be remembered. How much he has enjoyed being involved in the GAA. Reflects on the support of his family.</p>
<p>Involvement in GAA</p>	<p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Supporter <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Player <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Manager <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Coach <input type="checkbox"/> Steward</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Chairperson <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Committee Member <input type="checkbox"/> Grounds-person</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Caterer <input type="checkbox"/> Jersey Washer <input type="checkbox"/> Referee <input type="checkbox"/> None</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify): Uachtaráin CLG 2012-2015</p>
<p>Record as a Player (Titles won; Length of time played)</p>	<p>1964-2004: Trumera-Mountrath GAA. Junior B Championship (1991); Junior C Championship (1998).</p> <p>Laois: All-Ireland B Championship, 1971 (hurling); Lenister Junior B Championship, 1971.</p> <p>UCD: 2 Roinn A university titles; Under 21 hurling title.</p> <p>Erin's Hope: Under 21 Dublin hurling championship.</p>
<p>Record as an Administrator (Positions held; how long for)</p>	<p>UCD Hurling Club: Secretary and Chairperson (1975-76)</p> <p>Clan na Gael Fontenoy GAA: Helped with underage training</p> <p>Trumera GAA: Secretary, treasurer and chairperson (1980s)</p> <p>Laois GA: Secretary of Cumann na mBunscoil; Irish Language Officer (1980s); Development Officer (1990s); Secretary of the Hurling Committee (c.1995/6); County Secretary (1999-2002); Chairperson of Games Development Committee (1993-99).</p> <p>National: Chairperson of the Leadership and Administration</p>

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	Committee; Member of the Urban Development Committee; Vice-Chairperson of Leinster GAA (2002); Chairperson of Leinster GAA (2005-2008); Chairperson of National Games Development Committee (2009); President Elect of the GAA (2011); President of the GAA (2012-2015).
Format	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Audio <input type="checkbox"/> Audio-Visual
Duration	Length of Interview: 1:37:48
Language	English

To be filled in by Interviewer:

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Signed: Regina Fitzpatrick

Date: 6th July 2013