LARRY'S STORY

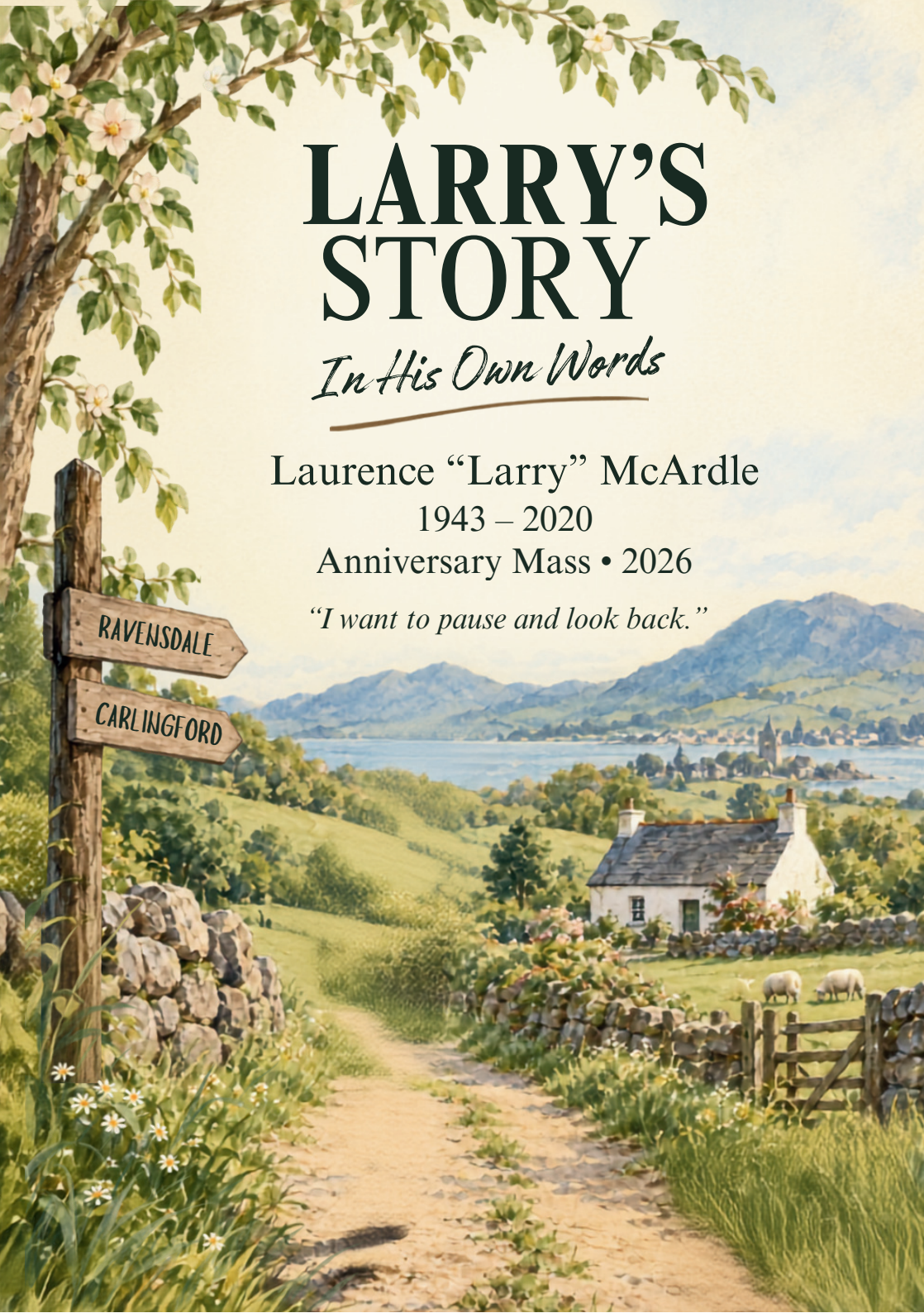
In His Own Words

Laurence "Larry" McArdle

1943 – 2020

Anniversary Mass • 2026

"I want to pause and look back."



Larry's Story

A family keepsake for Larry's anniversary Mass.

This booklet preserves Larry's short memoir in his own words, including his original turns of phrase, spelling and punctuation.

For His Family

Six years after Larry's death, these pages allow his family to hear him again in the way only his own words can manage: observant, funny, curious, candid and full of memory.

The memoir was unfinished. That feels fitting. A life continues in the people who remember it, repeat its stories and pass them on.

LARRY'S CHILDREN

From Ravensdale and Carlingford to Tokyo and Brussels

Aoife McArdle
20 February 1972 • Tokyo, Japan

Aisling McArdle
15 August 1973 • Tokyo, Japan

Aonghus McArdle
11 November 1979 • Brussels, Belgium

Oisín McArdle
11 January 1990 • Brussels, Belgium

Larry's Story

Story of a nobody or Don't know much about Carlingford

The following pages are Larry's own memoir, transcribed from his surviving manuscript.

Larry's Story 1

The past, my past, is a confusion of many things. Can I trust myself to remember what happened during the past seventy years? Certainly not everything. Dismissing dreams, and fantasies I want to explore memory, my memory.

Although Sigmund Freud says that dreams are events that happen inside our minds and help to explain who we are? No use trying to remember days and dates. People inflicted with super memory can do that. Who said 'Events, dear boy, events?' Feelings associated with events can remain quite vivid, even if the details are not clear. Memories of pain or sadness can continue forever, as can sadness or loss. The negative memories seem stronger than the positive like joy or even euphoria in some people's lives. Are these emotions truly connected to happenings in the past or mere distractions of the present? Can emotions bring me back to the real experience or just an unclear echo from the past?

Larry's Story - 1

I imagine this doubt is the same for most people. Hundreds of actions can clutter just one day. As time passes and the years advance, as activity is replaced by long periods of inactivity and reflection, we live more and more inside our heads, inside the mind? If I think small, I see brothers and sisters and friends, a house, a home, my home, the garden, food, one or two fields, the road near our house. When I think big I see almost nothing, no wars, no famine or no great inventions or policy decisions that changed the world.

As I come round the last bend, and head up the home straight of life I feel the urge to look back and try to remember my story, in case the destructive force of time sweeps all away into oblivion. Will lady memory play tricks and mix things up? I feel sure she will, but I've decided it's a risk worth taking. For instance, in recent years I can effortlessly confuse the title of last night's movie with something else I saw in the distant past, or forget who sat at the table with me having coffee a week ago.

Larry's Story
1

Even my son will complain 'For God's sake dad, I am not Aonghus, I'm Oisín!' I would like to retrieve from the millions of words, from the multitude of physical movements, noises, smells, hurts and pleasures; play, duties and efforts, neglect, idleness, lost opportunities, of conversations, disagreements, jokes and fights, the essence of a life, a life likely to be insignificant and up to now invisible. In the hope that there is more to come and that this story can continue, I want to pause and look back.

Larry's Story 1

Born in 1943 most of mainland Europe was resigned to listening and trying to speak German. Belfast had taken some serious hits from the Luftwaffe and I was born during the blackout. A year before that, on the upper deck of a trolley bus my father proposed to a young lady who worked as a secretary in the Stormont government.

A few weeks later they celebrated their wedding under an air raid shelter with chocolate cake, no icing, as sugar was in short supply. A few years later one of our favorite dressing up games was putting on a gas mask which somehow found its way south. This was part of the war equipment in every house in Northern Ireland during the war years. My father's voice and attitude on the upper deck of that trolley bus must have sounded too loud and passionate because he was shushed into silence by other anxious passengers. The blackout was taken seriously so people tended to travel around in silence apprehensive that the Germans might hear their secrets. The blackout meant that German fighter pilots struggled to target one of Britain's most important ports, Harland and Wolf.

Larry's Story 2

After four days, and my mother had recovered from the birth of her first born it was time for this young lady, no longer a secretary, but a new proud mother to head south and show me to the neighbors, her greatest achievement in life, so far. It is said that the first born comes in the heat an thunder of the blood. Subsequent babies seem to take on a more routine pattern, especially if they make their appearance at the end of every year. And that is why at the end of my fourth year, just as I was preparing to start school I had two other siblings.

I'm not sure how long after our return south of the border, when family life began to take shape, that my mother's anxious face appeared above me while I lay back in my pram outside the front door of our small cottage. I was pulled inside urgently. The huge noise above our house was of a RAF fighter plane in trouble.

Larry's Story 2

Trapped inside a lethal metal box with little hope of escape or getting back safely to base, his fuel and his luck had run out. He had been defending Belfast during the Blitz and wandered off course into southern air space and got hopelessly disoriented. Unfortunately his luck had run out. No threat here of crashing into a high rise building and killing thousands of people. However, my mother alone with her babies was terrified and neighbors flew inside and locked their doors. Apparently the crash was deafening and the plane exploded in a ball of fire which was merely two hundred yards from the door of our house. Whatever problem existed in the plane the pilot was lost in the flames.

The front field in a matter of a few seconds was now part of the second World War story.

Larry's Story 2

Officials and military arrived to examine and cordon off the scene, the only time the Irish state took any interest in my father's field. The next day a funnel of some sorts took place as a hand, the only part left of the unfortunate pilot, was placed in a coffin, and taken away to be handed over to British Authorities. All of this I do not remember. Much later, when I learned to speak, my mother told me the story. The sights and sounds of this adventure came to me second hand, together with stories of wonder and imagination that mothers tell their children all over the world. However, I do remember her anxious face looking down at me.

Before going to school, I think, my uncle and his bride arrived to spend their honeymoon in our house. I didn't see much of them as they spent nearly all their time in the bedroom laughing and talking. Visits from friends or family was rare in those times, so it was a disappointment for me, that we saw so little of our visitors.

Larry's Story 2

Anyway I thought people went to bed at nighttime only.

Before my first day at school, it seems that a little more than four years had passed. Yet, even that momentous day has been erased from the hard disk of memory! Those pre-school years were full of oil lamps lit before going to bed, turf drying before the black iron stove, sometimes with clothes drying near them, of seeing home made bread emerging from the oven, of porridge and stew in pots cooking above the stove. A stove which could be stubborn when the rain came down and the turf was wet. Of a house with few material comforts, no central heating or indoor bathroom. And no electricity.

I don't remember the lack of any of these facilities which are now common place in modern life. Looking back it seems that our parents surrounded us with love while they too struggled to survive in those harsh times. Good parenting and love blanked out difficult times.

Larry's Story 3

My father, the only son of a widow, seemed mystified and eventually delighted at the novelty of his house filling up with children. The rakish young man, out of control most of the time while growing up, was now a settled and responsible parent. Without television or radio his smiling face and immature good humor ensured a happy household. From this distance looking back ,I remember only a continuous state of peace and contentment.

During this time I vaguely became aware that my world was added to every year by a new brother. Outside I remember a rectangular tank usually full of rain water. There was a barn with potatoes, lots of them. In the roof, swallows nested and were noisy and busy with their own families.

Larry's Story 3

Then there was the cow shed. Most of the time the floor was covered in manure which I used to help sweep clean. When the cows stood up and were tied for milking I was warned not to stand behind them. I didn't always obey, and was lucky to escape a back leg kick on occasions. The buckets were now full of foamy milk, at times with fragments of straw floating around.

We drank a cup of this warm milk and also learned to appreciate a taste of butter milk. This was milk from the churn which the city girl made butter, salted butter, from the excess milk which the family didn't use. She also learned how to rear day old chicks in battery heated units. These products were sold to neighbours to supplement the family income.

Larry's Story 3

My mother delighted in the garden full of apple and pear trees. Gooseberries, raspberries and several other berries were scattered around. During the early months she picked and ate these fruits, a novelty for her, in vast quantities. As a result her skin broke out in a rash, but it was some time before she figured out the cause of the problem. Later, much of this fresh fruit was transformed into delicious apple pies and fruit cakes. Home made griddle bread was a favorite and the only challenger was the bread man who arrived once a week with batch loaves.

With a long wooden spoon he reached into the back of his covered cart and produced gleaming white loaves with a round black crust on top and another flat one on the bottom. Strangely it was this black crust that we desired most of all. In a growing family we had to learn the principle of proportionality. Any effort to take more than our share met with severe resistance.

Larry's Story 3

My father was the latest to eat at night and the food on his plate looked more delicious. As the eldest I was allowed to linger on longer and sit with him at table. No question of a second meal but I did manage to poach a morsel from his plate. If I overreached and procured a disproportionate amount my mother intervened with a scolding. She understood who was taking home the wage packet and needed to be nourished.

In this household there was another adult, my grandmother. She was my father's mother. Her son's new wife had moved in to take over running the house. She adjusted successfully to the changed power structure but for one or two exceptions. She taught my mother many things about how to survive country living, as well as helping out with the children.

Larry's Story 4

I have warm feelings for her and as a child found her very interesting. She was a great story teller. In her youth she worked as a companion to a rich American lady. This American millionaires was not easy to please. Before my grandmother presented herself for the job, new employees were sacked at the rate of one a week. The core of the work demanded obedience at all times, anticipate and take care of her mistress's needs, and always look presentable on social occasions. Rather simple rules but only my grandmother managed them with any success for more than six years. This involved many trips across the Atlantic to visit some of the wealthy parts of Europe.

Madame was very careful with her money and supervised every penny of expenditure. Her companion was forbidden to allow train station porters to carry her bags, she had to do that herself.

Larry's Story 4

Otherwise she would have to pay them a tip. In Italy a rather persistent porter tried to wrestle the bags from my grandmother asking her 'Where you go, mam?' All she could think of replying was 'I don't know, I don't know', and ran off down the platform. Later when she looked back she noticed the porter scratching his head and muttering 'So you don't know where you go?' My grandmother always exploded into a hearty laugh at the end of this story.

I was unsure about the punch line but after hearing the story many times I figured out exactly when to join in the laughter! Before going to school I knew about trains travelling through the Alps in Switzerland, about staying in comfortable hotels, and about sitting up in first class restaurants envious of the steerage passages freedom to run around and 'joi de vivre'. Finally, the great escape came when a giant Irish deck hand, six and a half feet tall asked her to marry him and return home together to Ravensdale, settle down and try their luck at farming. She obliged and said goodbye to her difficult American boss.

Larry's Story 4

My father was four when my grandfather dropped dead in a field trying to be a farmer. Life on land in those days was very challenging especially having spent most of his adult life at sea. After his death my grandfather was left to fend for herself and bring up two small children. No welfare payments in those days. Life was now a long way from travelling first class.

But I do remember enjoying the three mile walk to school. A young lady, three years older than me, used to come over to collect me each morning and take me by the hand. I remember her cheerful arrival each morning but I don't remember her name or what she looked like, indeed even the sound of her voice. Neither do I remember being bullied. One day she grabbed the culprit by his hair and swung him round, his feet flying off the ground, and threw him into a ditch. As she took my hand and we headed for home she exclaimed 'that will teach him'! I can still remember him screaming, but not his face or his name.

Larry's Story 4

I have no recollection of weather, not even the cold winters without central heating? Not even the winter of 1947,which according to reports, was extremely cold. Seemingly the snow was still on the ground right up until April and thousands died. Yet I don't remember the cold. Surrounded by warm and loving parents probably obliterated cold and hardship is a possible explanation.

We lived in a small country cottage with few comforts, not that we as children noticed. Oil lamps were lit for a short time before retiring before nightfall on winter evenings. No television or radio.
I believe a FordT car and a battery cell wireless made their appearance before the end of the forties. I remember the adults sitting around on a Sunday afternoon listening to drama and wonder being reported from Croke Park. The car refused to do anything until the starting handle, a heavy iron bar, was thrust deep under the radiator into the engine.

Larry's Story

On a bad day, the cantankerous engine back fired, chasing those of us who didn't understand back into the house. Even when the engine obliged we still had to promptly jump in before it stalled, or sputtered out again. Car drivers in those days spent a lot of time under the bonnet or under the car.

The sun was warm in summer and the tar melted on the road. I can't remember sunshine. We used to take off our shoes on the way home from school, and enjoy the heat of the road's surface on our bare and hardy feet. This I know because this led to a showdown with my mother when I got back home. What would the neighbors think? My proud mother was further dismayed as she tried to remove the melted tar with industrial carbolic soap and loud scolding. Not loud enough it would seem, because it happened more than once.

Larry's Story

My next door neighbor, my guardian angel, didn't protect me when I was attacked one day by a goat. He knocked me over on my back and with his wirey beard looked threateningly down into my face.

I have no memory of him knocking me down on my back but I do remember being pinned down on the flat of my back on the grass verge on the side of the road. I hate to think what would have happened if the proprietor of the Lumper's had not run out and pulled off me. Later that day telling my story at home my mother did not appreciate the remark of a neighbor that this male goat with his goatee fantasized that he had met the love of his life.

Larry's Story 5

My grandmother was great fun. She was especially nice to me whenever I was in trouble with my mom. After an incident of stealing a piece of cake or apple pie while it was still warm and without permission I had to make a run for it.

Granny would invite me to duck under her white apron which stretched like her multiple petty coats down to her ankles. Granny usually sat outdoors weather permitting. By the time my mother emerged with her wooden spoon which she never actually used I was well hidden somewhere inside the pettycoats. This was when I learned the nature of truth and untruth. In an unusual tone of voice granny would exclaim that I has escaped down the fields. Mom would answer that she was to tell her when I came back.

I was amazed that mom never noticed that granny was standing on four legs. As I felt safe and warm among the petticoats, and as there was true and cerain danger outside, it took some time to emerge into the light of day.

Larry's Story 5

So often, it seemed that granny was there to help me out when I fell out of favor with my mom.

The loo was outside and I felt grown up when it was time to use it. It was granny's job, and eventually mine, to cut up those Sunday newspapers that my dad spent so much time reading. A mettle wire was threaded through one corner of the torn up squares and it was my job to hang them on a nail just inside the front door. When it was time to visit the small house outside these cut up newspaper squares were taken by the client and used accordingly. This facility was illuminated during the day but not at night. The dominant odor which I remember was of disinfectant, a job which was my father's responsibility.

Something resembling a bucket was emptied daily. This happened at a time when similar outdoor toilets were used in cities all over the western world. Unfortunately, for city people, two or three families used the same toilet, very often with a line of anxious neighbors waiting outside.

Larry's Story 6

In cases where no system of cleaning or emptying had been agreed hygiene was a problem. We were privileged having our own private facility. When mother nature called during the night various vessels had to be slopped out the next morning, just like happens in Victorian prisons which continues even in modern rich western countries to the present day.

When my mother arrived to take control of the household one of her first reforms was to get rid of the open fire and replace it with a black stove. There were various hot plates on top which could be opened to allow turf or coal to be put on the fire down below. On one side there was an oven which worked only when the fire burned hot, almost like a furnace. A normal fire meant that the oven was used for boiling water, a frying pan or indeed drying turf which was then used to boost the declining fire, when extra heat was needed. During the years of an open fire, and even with the modern black cooker, a lot of smoke escaped inside the house and blackened the walls.

Larry's Story 6

Evening entertainment on occasions was when the whole family worked as a team and applied new fresh wallpaper to the kitchen and other rooms. The rolls of wallpaper were spread out on the table and a colorless paste was applied liberally to the blank side. We all took great pride in the results and enjoyed the admiring comments of neighbors.

For a few years there was another adult in the house. Chris was a young girl from the work house. This institution existed in most towns in Ireland. Young girls who had been abandoned by their families, or had got into 'trouble' had to live in workhouses if they had no means to live independently. Chris's job was to work on the farm and help in the house. She was very kind and I loved her.

Larry's Story 6

My mother treated her kindly and they both got on well together. However, Granny was a different story. Whenever Chris had to rise in the morning before the family, light the fire and prepare the breakfast my grandmother used to throw her boot across the room. Usually it was not necessary to throw a second one and hit her on the backside, head or shoulder.

Chris got the message. I often wondered why granny didn't use the same method to wake the rest of the family? In later years I learned that granny was ashamed to have a workhouse girl in the house. Perhaps she imagined that Chris was some kind of threat to her role in the family.

Larry's Story 6

Because of granny's continued opposition and frequent conflict with Chris she had to go back to the workhouse. The day of her departure she and my mother cried bitterly. She begged not to be sent back, a fate she considered was a disaster for her. This was one of the few occasions when granny, normally rather relaxed and placid, asserted her view with success.

Larry's Story 6

Our nearest neighbors were either spinsters or bachelors, and growing old gracefully. We as children enjoyed a warm welcome whenever we called in. No appointments were necessary in those days. After some minutes of light hearted and friendly banter a treat was produced. A slice of homemade bread with lots of homemade jam, or a slice of pink turnip.

Somehow the neighbor's food tasted delicious. Frequently, whenever the bread landed face down on the earthen floor a whisk of an apron by the hostess was enough to restore it's suitability for consumption. Slightly further away, my dad's first cousin from Liverpool was married with her young family.

Larry's Story

She is still alive today. Her children were smarter than us and already could read and write before going to school. Sometimes during visits one of them might be asked to stand on a chair and read something aloud. Confronted with such intelligence and the fact that they were girls did nothing to boost my academic confidence. Years later, during which time life took us in separate directions, we met again at university. By then, we had made up intellectually for lost time and life was more on a more even playing field.

As far as intellectual development is concerned I have no recollection of learning to read. However, I do remember a slate board and chalk. Each individual pupil had a small black board which could be whipped clean with the sleeve of a sweater or coat. I vaguely remember spitting was involved.

Larry's Story 7

I can't say exactly when an inkwell with a wooden pen and a mettle nib was introduced. This was a messy business with great quantities of ink landing on the desk, on the floor, on our clothes and all over our fingers and hands. Apart from blots, I can't remember anything intelligible getting onto the page. That's as much as I can remember about learning to write.

Strong black boots with studs were the order of the day. Such footwear was made to last for months or years. If your foot grew longer this was an insubstantial reason to upgrade. In those days, footwear was renewed only after it had utterly disintegrated. In case the foot grew too fast boots were bought a few sizes too big with the result that disintegration took place as the foot reached the proper size.

Larry's Story 7

A hole in the sole of an otherwise healthy boot was mended by the cobbler and went on to function for many months afterwards. The studs on the soles could fulfill several purposes. Apart from making a splendid noise on the road, knocking sparks or scraping a gritty surface, the metal studs prolonged and protected the sole. We had a last for repairing a shoe or boot, especially when a nail came through the insole. I suppose we wore socks, but I don't remember. Hairstyle conformed to the local fashion.

The method was similar to what the sheep had to endure. The hair clippers were powered by hand and not sharp as they are today. Yes, getting a haircut was often painful as the shears frequently caught and pulled the hair much like a blunt lawn mower tears at the grass. 'Hold up!' was often the only instruction. For days, if not weeks afterwards, irritating hairs could be found in vests and shirts, indicating that washing clothes was not an everyday priority. As I surveyed the other students in school their hairstyle was not noticeably different. My father's hair looked much more stylish. I suspect he went to the barber's.

Larry's Story

The house was built on a rock. I know that because a large boulder dominated the parlor, that is , when it wasn't used as a bedroom, which was most of the time. This rock was either painted over or sheathed off with plywood when my mother took up management of the household.

This was the room where my brother Des burst through on Christmas morning screaming that he was going to die. He had just swallowed his bubble gum by accident. My parents had warned him not to swallow chewing gum or he would die. And here he was in hysteria waiting for the end. Now the challenge was to reverse the psychology and try to convince him that he was not going to die after all.

Larry's Story

Salvation came when it was announced that Santa had come down the chimney during the night leaving lots of toys and other goodies, and when that chaos was over, it was time to head off to the Christmas Mass.

I remember whooping cough and measles. The measles passed quickly to every member of the family and after a week or two disappeared off to some other family. However, the whooping cough was another matter, and it was the one time in my childhood when I felt I could die. The breathlessness and choking lasted more than three weeks and seemed to stress out my parents. In 1940's Ireland there was no vaccination scheme against childhood diseases and many children died, the strong only surviving.

Larry's Story

I guess that included me! I don't remember a doctor ever coming to the house although I do remember being brought to a hospital in Belfast where I was surrounded by medics who put a cover over my face. It looked like a bag. I learned later that it was a gas appliance which put me to sleep. I had the dubious pleasure of staying for a week or so afterwards in my favorite uncle's house on a strict diet of ice cream and water only. This was because my tonsils had been removed and my throat was now very sore. I remember the ice cream more vividly than the sore throat.

Staying with my uncle and aunt, in Belfast, as I have stated, was a joyous experience. Spoiling was the order of the day. As they had no children they lavished me with all kinds of luxuries. The most spectacular was the variety of serials for breakfast. The favorite was shredded wheat which tasted great whether the milk was warm or cold.

Larry's Story

Happy time was the order of the day until disaster struck. My uncle suffered a heart attack and following a serious operation was confined to bed for almost a year. My favorite location for play was in his bedroom where he was convalescing and although weak he enjoyed the company.

Beside his pillow hung a cable with an emergency red button. This was an object of curiosity and one day I gave in to the temptation to push on it. The alarm sounded and all hell broke loose. My aunt came tearing in at top speed thinking that her patient had just suffered a new heart attack.

When she discovered that it was a false alarm and that I was the source she read me the riot act. I had never been scolded by my normally kind and rather even tempered aunt. Despite my uncle intervening to protect me, her fury was unmistakable.

Larry's Story

This was a side to my aunt I had never seen before and the outburst has stayed with me to the present day. My subsequent visits up north were never the same again and were later on eclipsed by the arrival of their own baby who miraculously arrived a year or two later.

Walking about Belfast in those days was a fun experience. Public parks and play grounds were full of young children and happy adults. To my eyes, as a child, life seemed carefree, interesting and exciting. The silent electric trolley buses swishing along the streets was a far cry from the under populated and silent world of Ravensdale.

No sign then of the violence and ethnic conflict that exploded a mere twenty years later. Visiting the north as a young adult in the early seventies my childhood memories of happy families and peaceful co-existence had changed utterly.

Larry's Story

Looking back now with hindsight, perhaps my childhood visits were limited to one half of society, the Catholic half. What I would not have appreciated as a child that feeling safe and secure within their own kind and not straying or interacting with the Protestant side my relations were unconsciously playing a game of self preservation which only they knew and understood.

I can't remember when the radio arrived or indeed whether it always existed. A lot of attention was given to a large battery which looked like a modern car battery. On occasions a fist landed on top of the radio to stop the whistling and scraping static noise. On weekdays music from America in the form of Bing Crosby, Dean Martin and Mario Lanza. All had to go silent while granny took in the news. On Sunday afternoon all gathered round to hear football commentary from Croke Park. The excitement as full time approached was often nuclear, especially if the wee county was playing.

Larry's Story

It was well into the next decade before. One evening we all arrived home late which was unusual. It would not have been normal to drive home in the dark. Imagine the problem if the car had broken down. On entering the front door I noticed my father put his hand on the wall of the kitchen. A flash of light, the likes of which, I had never seen before, filled the house.

A ball of fire hanging from the ceiling. The dark world where we had lived for years during and after World War Two was now gone and a bright future opened up.The McArdle family now had electricity, or at least an electric light, and had become part of Irish rural electrification.

Meetings were held in local parish halls to explain about electricity and to take the names of all who wanted to sign up. Many people at that time signed up to be connected to the grid purely to get the illuminated statue of the Virgin mother. It was years later before they agreed to install electric lights.

Larry's Story

It took me some time to make a connection with the workmen who, for some months now, had been digging holes in the fields and erecting tall black poles connected to great shining grey cables.

Of course we had an electric bulb in the living room only. This was the norm in most families .A second or third light would have been unaffordable so the life routine continued as usual. I don't remember any electrical appliance or device or machine operating on electricity in those days, however, I do remember a cable between the radio and the electric light giving a much improved sound and which didn't fade away or screech with static interference.

Every evening time an illuminated statue of the Virgin Mary was switched on, or was it the or was it the Sacred Heart?

Larry's Story

A cousin of my father's arrived from Liverpool and settled down with her new Irish husband and their first baby.

From what I understand her family had to leave Ireland following a dispute over property. Left penniless and without a roof over their head they emigrated to Liverpool. It seems my grandfather who had just returned from a life time working at sea was the son who inherited property ordered his sisters off his house and land. My grandmother, was that 'American one' his new bride, who forced the issue by 'putting the gun to his head'. Either they go, or I go! A short few years later having given birth to two children my grandfather collapsed from a heart attack. Because he was big and strong he liked to show off. One of his feats of valor was to throw a hundred weight bag of potatoes clean across a horse and cart.

Larry's Story 10

By the way, this had nothing to do with agriculture at which he was very inefficient and catastrophically unsuccessful. He pub hadn't rushed out and pulled him off me. 'He thinks you are his soul mate', jibed one the neighbors. My mother didn't appreciate this kind of reference to her son's miss-adventure.

Further along the road it was a ritual to stop at the spring well, stretch our hands down deep and drink cupped handfuls of delicious sweet water. Nobody seemed to worry about falling in. One of my evening chores was to take two white enamel buckets to the neighbors well, force the bucket down deep into the precious drinking water and carry that evening's supply home. Our farm had no drinking water.

Larry's Story 10

However, we had a lively stream with lots of eels in it. With a piece of bread, we as children found it quite easy to catch a slippery and tasty meal with our bare hands.

My mother's first adventure with this stream was to throw a basin of freshly picked potatoes into the water to wash for dinner. Before she had time to bend down and retrieve them the current swept them away. A girl from the city, she was anxious that miss-hap would not impress her new mother in law. One of my fun evening jobs was to go down to the lower field and direct the cattle home to the stables, ready for milking as soon as the working man, my father returned from his long day in the factory.

The cows were in no hurry to return home and neither was I.

Larry's Story 10

I spent a generous time jumping back and forth across the river or talking to the neighbors, receiving thick slices of home made bread garnished with freshly made salted butter or home made gooseberry jam. Time moved slowly. No dead lines or appointments. Plenty of time to dream and dilly dally. My father's return from work, a darkening sky, the cows impatience with full udders and my mother's irritated impatience signaled the approaching end of another day.

The man of the house had finished his evening meal and was now ready for milking.

One day the cow was ready to calf and a man arrived to help. Mother tried to gather us inside and let the men get on with the job. She saw that the neighbor had a rope. This was tied around the feet of the emerging calf.

Larry's Story 10

The belief was that the cow was failing to give birth and this man was here to force the issue. Mother was perplexed and anxious. I can still see the two strong men, my father and this stranger pulling the calf with brute force while the mother roared in pain. The calf shot out of the mother. The cow collapsed and died instantly in a pool of blood and the baby calf never moved. My mother, knowing that this drama was unfolding scolded us back into the house.

The scolding my father and his friend received later was far more blistering, and the aftermath, the rights and wrongs were never resolved between my parents. He defended the old ways as passed down to him by local practice, and tradition.

Larry's Story
1

She originated in the city and therefore condemned such barbarism. Veterinary services may have existed in 1940's rural Ireland, but it was outside my parent's sphere of experience, and certainly outside their budget. Two bodies, mother and calf were removed by horse and cart, the next day.

Do I imagine or do I remember my mother's worried face looking down at me? I am outdoors in the pram. There is panic. She quickly pulls the pram indoors. I didn't hear the loud mechanical noise above our house or the huge explosion in the field less than a hundred meters from our front door. In later years, I understood that an RAF pilot protecting Belfast during the Blitz, wandered off course and entered southern air space. Now out of fuel and hopelessly disoriented he was trapped in a metal box falling from the sky. In this sleepy part of beautiful countryside there was no fear of planes crashing into high rise buildings killing thousands.

Larry's Story 10

However, the neighbors were terrified when the plane crashed with a very loud bang and exploded into flames. Like many other young pilots in that terrible war, and unlike modern jihadists he had no wish to die but little chance of escape.

When all the important people, army, guards and government officials had done their investigations and made their reports, a funeral of sorts was carried out. A small box with just a hand remaining inside was handed over to British authorities. Our damaged little field was now part of world history. Meanwhile, Adolf Hitler was deep in his bunker waiting for the Russians to smash their way into Berlin and finish off the Third Reich.

Because of my mother, going north was a frequent event, even in those days. Unlike many of our neighbors in those times, we had a car. My uncle took a special interest in me and we became great friends. He was manager of a large men's wear shop in Belfast and often took me with him to work.

Larry's Story
11

This sometimes resulted in my being measured for a new suit. At lunchtime or after work we took the electric trolley bus around the city. Belfast took a number of hits from the German Luft Waffe during a short concentrated bombing raid. Seemingly the target was Harland and Wolfe and the dockland areas. As we toured around and picked out bombed out areas, still black and scorched for some years after the war, it became clear that quite a number of residential areas took a battering.

During the black out, when all lights were turned off on government orders, German pilots had their work cut out for them trying to find their targets. It was on the upper deck of one these crowded blacked out trolley buses, during a winter's night of 1942 that my father noisily proposed to my mother. One of those early cross border agreements, long before, such a concept became part of our vernacular. It didn't go smoothly however, because his loud proposal was shushed up by other nervous passengers. It was the order of the day to maintain silence on public transport in case the Germans might hear.

Larry's Story
11

Travelling to Belfast in those days with two adults and three children, especially in winter, in a ford T was quite an adventure. The journey was usually uneventful until Hillsborough, providing a fog didn't descend in the Newry area along the canal. The steep climb up the hill, especially with snow on the ground was too much for a fordT.

A decade of the rosary had already started in the back of the car in anticipation of the difficulties lying ahead. Luckily a number of men standing idle outside pubs were gripped by a rush of civic duty or so it seemed to us.Seeing the plight of this southern registered car full of terrified passengers they rushed across the road to our rescue. With great whoops of laughter and merriment they put their shoulders to the task and pushed our car up and over Hillsborough and exuding much good will, wished us a merry Christmas and lots of good luck on our merry way towards Andersonstown on the suburbs of Belfast, as it was at that time.

Larry's Story
12

The decade of the rosary was dutifully concluded just in case. Later, in 1954, I think, we all got out and stood for a long time outside Hillsborough Castle to wave to the new Queen of England high up on her balcony. Hidden in the car and sometimes in our clothes were many presents, taken across the border, for the northern cousins, suffering many shortages because of post war rationing. Many basic products were unavailable as the industrial military economy of Great Britain now had to be transformed, and serve the needs of peace time.

More than once, on the return journey south, my job was to walk in front of the car as guide, to prevent the family and car falling into the Newry canal during dense fog. The temperature outside wasn't much different from inside.

Larry's Story
12

However, blankets, heavy winter coats and a generous supply of sandwiches donated by the Belfast cousins kept our spirits high. On board heating systems, de-icing equipment or fog lights did not exist on private cars in forties Ireland. Or if the engine cut out it had to be coaxed back into life with an iron bar, called a starting handle.

My favorite uncle wanted to adopt me because they had no children and we had plenty, so he used to spoil me. After mountains of cake and sweets I was taken to the cinema, a novelty unthinkable in the rural south. I remember a huge red curtain with lots of lights.

Larry's Story
12

Then a blast of sound as both musician and organ were hydraulically elevated from a sunken chamber in the body of the cinema.

A dramatic, and earth shattering one man recital was the warm up before the curtains opened and the beginning of the main event. Eventually, when the audience was thoroughly deafened the lights were dimmed, the curtains opened and an unbelievably huge picture of cowboys and Indians appeared. More loud and dramatic noise.

Larry's Story 13

The cowboys were brave, and with loud gun shot moved down, hundreds, if not thousands of bad Indians. Nevertheless, with the wagons in a circle, the bad Indians had an endless supply of brave warriors well equipped with terrifying bows and arrows. Just as the cowboys and brave settlers were running out of ammunition, and mothers clung to their babies waiting for the end, with flaming arrows setting fire to the wagons and the settlers journey westward coming to a bloody end, help appeared over the horizon.

A distant bugle sounded. The cavalry had arrived. The Indians looked really scared. They regrouped and disappeared in the opposite direction with much whooping and defiant gestures. With my uncle and the rest of the audience, I cheered and stamped my feet in celebration of a great victory.

The cow boys had won and western civilization was saved!

Larry's Story 13

A little older now my new job every morning was to rake out the open fire, keep the cinders still smoldering, add fresh coals and with a skillful combination of sticks and newspapers create a cheerful open fire to warm the room and family during breakfast. Great porridge and fresh milk menu du jour. Dad having come back inside, his milking and feeding of farmyard animals complete, devoured a huge meal before setting out on his bike and heading out for Dundalk to make it into the factory before the eight o'clock siren blasted out.

His job was was as a clipper in Rawson's shoe factory. I never understood this kind of work whenever he mentioned it. Seeing Charlie Chaplin on a conveyor belt system, I imagine him doing something to a piece of shoe leather and passing it on to the next person, one part of the chain in a conveyer belt system.

Larry's Story 13

His remarks about his job indicated dissatisfaction, although he spoke warmly of his many friends. Some of these pals would meet up early on Sunday, their only free day, shot guns in hand to go off hunting for rabbits in Tippon's wood. When my mother skinned and gutted the rabbit stew was enjoyed by all. However, as father deserted the family on his only free day mother took a stand and insisted that he gave up his hunting Sunday and by his presence contribute to family life. When the government introduced mixymatosis to eliminate the rabbit pest my mother's position on this dispute was consolidated. When I was discovered playing with the loaded shot gun one day, the gun had to go as well following a fit of hysterics.

It was the end of an era and in one stroke eliminated the only remaining role of granny who prepared a huge mound of sandwiches and flask of tea for the hunter gatherer son of hers. Our Sunday mornings were overshadowed by the redundant hunter reading the Sunday newspapers from cover to cover and back again paying special attention to the death column and sports results.

Larry's Story 13

The new battery cell radio was introduced and Sunday afternoon entertainment was listening to Michael O'Hare reporting blood pressure reports from Croke Park, dominated by goals scored by Kerry. Except one summer when the wee county, Louth toppled the champions. The Stephen Whites and Brendan O'Briens and their exploits are still talked about in some quarters even to the present day.

Our cousins used to come from Navan proudly showing off their new car, which was bigger than ours. All cars were black in those days. They brought home made bread, apple pie and a generous donation of vegetables and fruit from their garden. We were boys and the cousins were girls. Full of good cheer and mischief and lots of food for everybody.

Larry's Story
14

Then there was the arrival home from school ritual. Our front door was permanently open during the day. Inside the porch was another door usually closed. The upper half of the inside door was glass.

So I used to duck down and shout 'Cuckoo'. This was repeated until eventually the door opened and my mother discovered that her eldest son had finally arrived home from school. It was when this ritual was disturbed that I remember it best.

After a number of increasingly louder cuckoos and no reaction that I eventually went inside. Yes my mother was there but no cheerful welcome. Something was wrong. Having been sent off to bed early that night before father came home mother explained. Earlier in the day they had called into school and chatted with my teacher.

Larry's Story
14

Praise was politely heaped on me from both sides. This was a nineteen forties version of a parent teacher meeting. Meeting over, it was time to leave and I was given a dispensation from the rest of the day so I could travel home with my parents in the family car.I refused, held on tightly to my desk. I would not be moved. Not at all pleased my parents left in disgust. Embarrassed in front of teachers, students, and especially Miss King.

She was the lady who was Dad's girl friend before they got married. Mother especially didn't like her. And then there was the day our aging bachelor neighbor called in, as usual, without knocking. My mother, a city girl found this open door tradition, most irritating. What he saw froze him in three dimensional terror. In the days before bathrooms and running water my youthful mother had her bath in front of a warm blazing fire in the kitchen. Water was heated on a cast iron stove in large pots and poured into this grey galvanized portable bath. Quite a long labor intensive process.

Larry's Story 14

This Victorian gentleman, on seeing my mother in the nude, was struck dumb and immobile. Failing to utter, neither a sound nor an apology, he turned on his heel and ran. In the following years he averted his eyes and never looked directly at my mom, ever again. The hidden rules and social proprieties of Catholic rural Ireland condemned him to avert his gaze whenever he met my mother. She, on the other hand, stared him into submission with a deeply suspicious and menacing accusation.

My father, his life long neighbor felt less condemnatory and more a touch of sympathy for Paddy, our neighbor, seeing him more as a victim rather than an intruder. After all, isn't there always a welcome on the mat? My mother thought differently. He never darkened our door again! missed his carefree life at sea and couldn't find fulfillment working on land. It was the bag of spuds that did it for him. A day or two later he was dead. His widow, for some strange reason, did not inform his sisters, his immediate family in Liverpool.

Larry's Story
15

When they eventually found out years later, the hurt and anguish they felt caused a serious rift between the 'widow' and the Liverpool contingent. Why did she not inform them? Was she afraid they would come back and reclaim their property which they were forced to leave so many years before? Nobody knows and only she who is long gone can explain. This was not the only mystery involving 'the widow', my grandmother, my father's mother.

A year before my grandmother got married she had lived in the Ravinsdale area for a year. She was caring for two small infants. Apparently they belonged to her sister who was dying of consumption in the United States. My grandmother, being single at the time, volunteered to take them home while her married sister battled with her illness. When the year was up she took the children back to America.

Larry's Story 15

The mother eventually died and the children were returned to the care of their father. That was that! This was not good enough for the neighbors. 'The widow McArdle' lived for the rest of her life under the shadow of a different version of this story. The neighbors version insisted that she had given birth to twins and had somehow managed to make them disappear. In secret corners a sinister and much darker slant was given to this story so that the widow endured a 'femme fatale' existence for the rest of her days.

Now a member of her second generation in laws had arrived and was perched with her new Irish husband just a stone's throw away.

Larry's Story 15

By now, her son was married with a new wife from the city. One year later, the widow permitted her son to sell the property and move to Carlingford. Was it because she felt the threat of attempted repossession? During that year, the young mother from Liverpool and my mother became great friends and enjoyed each other's company. They had much in common. Both were from the city and had enjoyed life as carefree young girls with lots of other options.

Both had decided to marry into country life facing all its consequences. What both noticed on arrival was the darkness. No electricity or street lighting. No running water or flush toilet. No shops and very few neighbors. No public transport or family car. So they found each other and during one year they bonded for life. Interestingly, during that year1949 the widow and the returned emigrant despite living practically next door, managed to avoid or talk to each other.

Larry's Story
15

Tom, my father, liked women and as is so often the case, women liked him in return. My mother on arriving in Ravensdale to take up her positions as wife, mother and daughter in law, discovered that a number of ladies in the neighborhood were now ex-girlfriends of my father.

Miss King, it seems, was the biggest threat to my mother imagined. Tensions rose when my younger brother was punished for misbehavior in Miss king's class.He returned home from school, one day, with his lunch still uneaten, as a punishment for some trivial misdemeanor. Miss King did not allow him to eat with the other pupils during the lunch break. Mother was apoplectic with rage. The next day she marched up to the school and on seeking out Miss king issued a scolding with all guns blazing. No doubt, she released a great deal of resentment and pent up jealousy at this other woman's former and perhaps present sentimental interest in my father.

Larry's Story 16

It would appear, that my father brought into their relationship a damaging amount of baggage from his carefree and single Don Juan career, an attractive only son without the supervision or discipline of a father. My father attracted women until his dying day.

Not only women found his extrovert and warm personality attractive, his funny and interesting banter made him the joker and welcome linchpin of many a social gathering. His verbal social skills were inherited from his mother who told wonderful stories of her travels with her rich boss. In some circles locally, my grandmother was referred to somewhat unkindly as 'that American'!
One example of my father's feckless behavior as a young lad was when he was sent off to the fair to sell a calf. His job was to use the proceeds of this transaction to buy food bring home other domestic items.

Larry's Story
16

Much later that same evening, his mother entered the stables to find her son in the process of assembling a new bicycle which he had purchased with the money instead. The sudden shock and element of surprise, resulted in a scattering of nuts and bolts and other essential parts of the bicycle into the straw and manure. Bedlem broke out as his angry and frustrated mother released a volley of blows and curses so fierce that he was never to forget it till his dying day.

However, the bicycle survived and was used later to both impress and transport his new lover, and perhaps other previous girlfriends, around country lanes sitting on the handlebars. When I arrived I sat on a cushion on the same handlebars and my mother by this time had her own bicycle.

Larry's Story 16

In those days boys met girls at dances in the Bellurgan parish hall. Admission was four pence on a week night and six pence on a Sunday when closing time was extended until midnight. Brothers and sisters, cousins and neighbors all gathered in with the boys on one side and the girls along the opposite wall. Segregation was similar as for Mass on Sunday morning.

Anybody from 'out of town' stood out like a sore thumb and if attractive was the source of immense curiosity. My mother suffered this fate when she spent a holiday by the seaside in Blackrock. The Liverpool cousin who had perhaps more than a family interest in my father was asked what did she think of 'your one' from Belfast. The penny dropped as she realized with a sinking heart that the lady from Belfast was going to be the special one. Other local suitors had made their advances in the same direction but it seems my father piped them at the post, thanks to his winning and carefree persuasive personality.

Larry's Story
16

As the news spread other local female hearts in the hall felt the blow of being shut out of the local romantic bond market. During the following weeks and months these groups of boys and girls, in their early twenties, organized picnic outings and bicycle rides during free time, which was usually on Sunday. My mother, quite miraculously survived these testing and competitive rural mating opportunities and triumphantly became my mother.

It's not clear who persuaded my father to stand for local elections. As he stood on an election platform, usually on a stationary horse and cart, outside the church on Sunday morning as the congregation streamed out of the church his challenge was to get their attention and their votes. While a skilled joker and story teller in intimate circles of friends and neighbors, public oratory was a different matter. My mother suffered acute embarrassment from these antics.

Larry's Story
17

She used to sit low inside the car and whisper to us as we stared out in amazement at this curious spectacle, 'is he finished yet?' Whatever he thought about it, my mother greeted his failure to get elected with relief. Stand by your man, which my mother did bravely in many other aspects of their married life, did not extend to politics. Afterwards the whole matter was never talked about again and eventually forgotten. In my mother's view, later on, it was a close call and could almost have been a deal breaker. This wasn't the only crisis in my parent's life together.

The low income of my father's job, the poor yield from the family farm, a family growing rapidly, was putting pressure on the relationship.

Larry's Story
17

Even my mother's efforts to supplement selling salted butter made in the churn where I liked to turn the handle, fresh eggs from our hen shed which I found fascinating, and jars of home made jam made from the abundant fruit in the garden was disappointing. Besides my mother was beginning to find life in the country, at first full of charm and delight, now a grinding and tough existence.

As children, when we heard that the farm had been sold and that we would soon be moving out, lock stock and barrel, we were a fever of excitement. When the Liverpool aunt, now only one year living close by, heard the news she was at first alarmed and eventually devastated. My mother, her new best friend and her favorite cousin, my father, were both moving away. It was a disaster for her personally. Tearfully she explained that having the McArdles next was the biggest factor in making her new married life in Ravensdale bearable and meaningful. All through her life and to the present day, she still remembers with deep pain and regret the wrench of separation.

Larry's Story
17

In the years that followed we returned to visit on many occasions but things were never the same after that. The decision was irreversible and we had started a new life elsewhere. Many years later, relief from that tough way of life ended for my Liverpool aunt when she turned up in Carlingford as the district nurse. Friendship was renewed somewhat but by this time life had moved on as my parents struggled hard to create a business.

To Be Continued...

LARRY'S STORY.

P 18.. (13) - TO BE CONTINUED.

.. IN SPANISH .. BY LARRY.

CHECK WITH NIKIA!

Mary Carlingford
13/1/23

And Continue
It Did...

Larry's manuscript stopped, but his story did not. It continued through his family, through the places he lived, the stories he told, the journeys he made and the four children whose lives began in Tokyo and Brussels.

Larry died peacefully in Tenerife in 2020, during the Covid-19 pandemic. He was on his balcony, smoking his cigar, drinking his whiskey, listening to the radio and looking out at the world.
There is something wonderfully Larry about that final picture: the radio playing, a drink in hand, a cigar, a view, and time enough to look out and think.

"In the hope that there is more to come and that this story can continue, I want to pause and look back."

Laurence "Larry" McArdle
1943–2020

His story continues through his family.

For

AOIFE, AISLING, AONGHUS AND OISÍN

Your father left the story unfinished.
The rest lives with you.

Keep the stories
Going.

LARRY'S STORY

1943 – 2020

"I want to pause and look back."

