



Growing Up in Dublin: Reflections from the 1950s

John E. Mullee

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(Black & white version of same title.) The author takes you with him as he reflects on his childhood and adolescence in Dublin, glimpsing occasionally into his many places of exile. He does this through twenty-six unconnected stories, illustrated with photos or his own cartoons. A year before World War II ends, his mother dies, leaving his dad with four young children. The postwar years are tough on Dubliners: socks are darned until heels become more mend than sock; clothes are worn so thin that any critical seam may rip at any critical moment. His dad gives bowl haircuts like The Three Stooges. But every Christmas morning there is a big box of Woolworths toys under his bed. He and his pals get up at dawn and walk out on the sand flats in Dublin Bay to check their fishing lines. They taste the raw smell of the sea and feel gritty sand stuffed between their toes. He finds boyhood ecstasy turned loose on a small farm in County Mayo: raking hay, footing turf, delighting in the colorful local characters, but gets into trouble with his catapult. A favorite cousin takes him hunting rabbits at dawn, smearing their footsteps through the drenching dew. Proustian flashbacks evoke the lost country kitchen: the signature smell of turf smoke; praties boiling in the fat-bellied pot; a dinged-up black kettle “singing peace” on the hob. His eternally busy uncle teaches him lasting lessons in work ethics. School leaves mixed sentiments: indiscipline, indifference, animosity, mediocrity; biffs to the hand with the strap, lashes to the psyche with the tongue, the teacher openly calling one an eejit. Glimmers of literary joy discovering Yeats’s “terrible beauty,” in the very classrooms where Pearse sat, before he was shot for his part in creating it. But one Christian Brother emerges as a prince who inspires the author in time to slip across the stile guarding the fields of higher education. Rock ’n Roll upsets parents, grips teenagers; James Dean rebels, Buddy Holly thrills; their impossibly young deaths bewilder the young. Things must change; some find no satisfaction. Pirate radio ships force staid national programs to embrace pop. The lovable Beatles win all sides over in the tumultuous revolution of the 1960s. The author gets hooked on the suave contours and savage crags in the nearby Wicklow Wilderness. At twenty-two, wanderlust compels him to take the emigrant boat. He returns to Dublin, gets through University, resumes his exile, pays tribute now to the city that mothered him.

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