

*“The Story”*



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## *"THE STORY"*



This story is for Downeys and O'Connors. Of course anyone touched by either clan may also enjoy it. I'm not a writer, more of a reader, but for years I thought there was a story waiting to be told, and my family is that story.

I know of no explorers, generals, financiers or for that matter any fame whatsoever associated with either clan. I can tell you that we did have some genuine saints and a couple of world class sinners. While we had no explorers we did have some brave enough to cross an ocean with only dreams in their pockets. I think it's important for Irish descendants to remember that their ancestors were forced to leave their homeland. Of course many people wanted to come to America, but in the case of the Irish, the British made it almost impossible to stay. Some believe that American slaves had it better than the Irish. I will give a list of some good Irish history books at the end. Feel free to read them and draw your own conclusions.

First, I'll introduce you to the Downeys. My grandfather, James Vincent Downey, was the youngest of 10 children, he was born July 22, 1890. His brothers were Michael, Hugh William, Edward Patrick and John, sisters Mary, Helen, and Susan. All were born between 1874 and 1890 with Michael being the oldest boy and Mary the oldest girl. My great-grandparents were Edward Downey and Ellen Dever, they married in Derry City Ireland at Long Tower Roman Catholic chapel on January 26<sup>th</sup> 1874. Edward Downey was a blacksmith and Ellen was listed as a housekeeper in the 1901 census. To the best of my knowledge they were separated by prison walls. Edward was in the Irish Republican Brotherhood and ran afoul of the British, who decided to offer him room and board for quite a few years. The 1901 census shows greatgrandmom Ellen living at 20 Elmwood Terrace with

6 children ,Mary, Hugh, Edward, Patrick, John, and James. Michael would have been 25 and William 22, so they were probably out on their own. The mystery is Helena and Susan, Helena was said to have died in a fire in 1901: she would have been 19. The presumption is that she was already deceased . Susan, so far, is a mystery for me. It's possible that she died young but as of yet I don't know her story. She would have been 17 in 1901, so she probably should have been living at home. The Downeys came to America circa 1909, Ellen brought with her Mary, Edward , Patrick, Hughie, William and James. I wish I could fill in the blanks; what kind of life was it for a blacksmith in Derry in the late 1800s? Could you feed 10 kids? What was it like for my great-grandmother when her man was taken away, did they have an inner strength that we can only guess at? In any event Michael didn't come with them to the states. John was also said to have perished in a fire ; we know Helena did and that still leaves the mystery of Susan. Could there have been any foul play because of the political climate? It certainly lends itself to speculation. Mary was said to have gone back to Ireland to care for her father.

Now let's drive a few hours south to County Galway and in a town called Athynry we'll find my maternal grandmothers family, the Fahy's. My grandmother was born on April 20, 1886, and named Honoria after her mother. She was one of eight children born between 1881 and 1893. Her siblings in order of their birth John, Margaret, Laurence, Sarah, Honoria, Martin, Bridget, and Murty.. My great-grandparents were Marty or Murty Fahy and Honoria [Nora] Haniffey, who were married in Loughrea parish on February 5' 1880. There is information available on their parents and siblings but I don't have it yet.

I don't know if the Fahy's were political or not but you can bet, as rural farmers, the famine and the troubles must have had a terrible effect on them. Some of the British were known to say that the

famine will kill off the weak ones, well the Fahy's must be strong, because thank God they are still on the land in Athynry. I don't know what year they came to the states, probably about the same time as the Downey's. Grandmom Fahy came over with all her sisters and one brother Martin, so John Laurence and Murty stayed in Ireland. One of the descendants of Murty Fahy, was Paddy Fahy, He married Nina and they raised four children, Seamus, Jerry, Maeve and Martina. Sadly, Paddy passed away in May '98 and Nina joined him in July '99. Seamus and Jerry still live in the Fahy homestead and their house is a short distance from the land my grandmother was raised on, which is now just a heap of stones. Sisters, Maeve and Martina also still reside in County Galway. Maeve Fahy Killkelly has two beautiful daughters and a handsome son. Martina is now Martina Malone and her husband Frank is a super dude, as we say in the states. Both girls are beautiful and couldn't be nicer. Seamus seems to be a real character and I would guess popular with the ladies, Jerry is quiet, but, in the brief time I spent with him, I could tell he has a good heart. I don't know anything about the Haniffy's yet but I'm still at it.

In general you can probably imagine the different obstacles both the Downey's and Fahy's faced, and like most good Irish Catholics, whether they came over or stayed, they honored their God, their family and their country.

Back to my grandpop, James Vincent Downey. I can't tell you much more about his life in Ireland, but I was born in his house in America and later shared a bedroom with him for 12 years. I am very grateful to be able to pass on some firsthand stories about his life in America. He arrived in North Jersey in 1909 with his mother, four brothers and his sister Mary. They were from Derry in Northern Ireland, and they were Catholic. There was some talk of conflict with the English, I don't know if that or poverty was "the" motivator.

James Vincent Downey settled in north Jersey , got a job with the Pennsylvania Rail Road. He relocated to Philadelphia, which brought him in contact with Nora Fahy [grandmom] around 1911. She was from County Galway in Southern Ireland, a town called Athynry,. There's a beautiful song called the fields of Athynry, it's about a father that was sent off on a prison ship for stealing corn to feed his children. Grandmom was (Surprise! Surprise!) a house cleaner when they met. They were married in Phila. at St. Francis De Sales Church on August 23, 1916. A beautiful woman, she gave birth to 8 children, 7 of which lived. I'm told she was both a great wife and mother, you could eat off the floors etc. I'm also told that when she died at age 54 she looked 10 years older. What beautiful faith without a pot to piss in. These old world Catholics brought new life into this new world. One of her offspring was my mother Margaret [Sis] Downey. Something to be said about genes, you could eat off her floors too. She was the fourth of seven survivors that you will meet along the way.

In the dictionary next to " Irish Catholic Gentleman" should be a picture Grandpop Downey. I most remember him in a three piece suit, probably because he was not often seen in anything else, but that alone didn't make him a gentleman. Maybe it was his devotion to his family, the fact that he didn't curse or drink, or maybe because he tolerated no malice or hate towards others .It could have been his faultless social manners, or the inner strength you just felt, or maybe it was all of the above. Remember, this part is not hearsay. I was lucky to have him as an integral part in my life since I shared a bedroom with him until I was 18 years old. This was a man that did physical work until his death in 1965, every morning he would rise before dawn and walk three miles to the Clifton Heights train station. He unloaded freight often by hand and did a young mans work into his seventies, I never heard a complaint. Most Saturday nights, dressed to the nines, he would again walk the three miles to take a train into Philadelphia for ballroom dancing at the Wagner ballroom. Cant' you feel the gaiety?! He was said to have been a great soccer player, and he was sponsored by Bethlehem Steel.

I also have to tell you that he believed in the wee people, the night my father died I lay awake all night, because Grandpop had me convinced that his spirit would enter our room at any moment.

O'Connors and McCallums. If anyone knows anything about Grandpop O'Connors parents, or where great grandpop O'Connor went off to please help out.

Grandpop O'Connor was born in the U.S.A. No one seems to know when his forefathers arrived, and I don't even know the names of my great-grandparents on the O'Connor side. I was told that my Greatgrandmom O'Connor died when Grandpop was young, and he was raised by the Seville family. His father headed south after all the kids were placed in neighborhood homes. I know very little of Grandmom's background but I was told recently that her father was Charles McCollum from Donegal, we finally got a Mick.

They probably married about the same time as the Downeys, around 1916 give or take. They produced 3 boys 3 girls, one of whom Edwin Charles O'Connor was to fall hopelessly in love with Sis Downey. I heard so many stories about Corktown and family life, I have this romantic notion that it was wonderful. I was told that monsignor Melon came around one night a week for tea, and that he really gave a damn about his parishioners. I was told that the boys would go to the train yards and steal some coal so everyone would have a little heat. I was also told that the men who worked during the depression would make sure their neighbors had some food. I was also told many stories about all my aunts and uncles, but tis better if you hear it from themselves. Now I will zoom into the forties where I can be an eyewitness.

My name is Michael C O'Connor I was born in 1947 in a working class neighborhood of Phila. at the

home of Jim Downey. I came about because both Grandpops worked for the railroad, lived within walking distance and produced babies on a regular basis. It also helped that Japan surrendered in 1945. I followed a sister Noreen who was born in 43. She made it by the slightest of margins, shortly after conception my dad was told to go sail around the pacific ocean for close to three years. The neighborhood was mostly Irish Catholic, now it's 100% Afro American. The war brought prosperity even to Corktown. They called that section of West Phila. Corktown, it seems no one knows why. My first conscious memory goes back to 1949, I was 2 years old I can still remember the bus ride to the suburbs. I can remember the smell of the new house the newspapers spread out over the new hardwood floors. Like many others we were abandoning our slice of Corktown to the blacks. I must have sensed a need to move on because only a toddler I remember an enthusiasm for the new adventure. We landed in Westbrook Park a huge subdivision of row homes, which is essentially what we just left except these were new and everyone was white. That fact seemed to mean absolutely nothing to my dad but was very important to mom. Dad was so utterly at peace with himself that he didn't have time to hate anyone, but he sure found the time to love them. Ed O'Connor was a fervent catholic that never had money or even good health, but every morning he would open the door and say what a wonderful world God gave us. Mom on the other hand could be pissed off at the world most easily. In her defense, her mom died when she was a teenager, she left school and basically took over all the duties of raising a large family. She longed for gratitude, she never got it, she never stopped expecting it. Sis Downey O'Connor had her good side she would do what she could for anyone, our house was always open to any stray cat, the Irish welcome was her trademark and her devotion to family was unequaled. If you were sick or hurting Sis would be there for you, she liked a drink, loved to sing, dance and tell a good joke, so I guess I had a typical Irish mom. So here we were a family of four in a brave new world, only 10 miles from Corktown, but it seemed like a hundred.

My first memories are quite pleasant, being cuddled in my mother's lap, being sung to, being held. It seemed to change in an instant, she seemed to think I was on my way to being a "sissy", so I was booted out the door. It maybe okay to boot a kid out the door, they need peers, but it was more than that, it happened fast, I was cut off, it was like one way of life ended, so my new world was outside my home, and I began to like it. I THINK I WAS WEIRD, MAYBE MOST OF US THINK THAT BUT WE'LL NEVER KNOW. I was big, I wanted to be leader of the gang, the best in football, everything, funny thing was I was insecure and I knew it at age eight. It was post war, it was prosperity and mobility and world dominance, everywhere but our house. Well our house and maybe everyone in our extended family. I remember as a child thinking the whole world is making money except the O'Connors and Downeys. Was I the only 8 year old conscious of ugly drapes, nasty carpets, oldest car. You know from the beginning I thought poor meant you were inferior. Drove me crazy because I knew then as now my Dad was as close to ultimate good as I've ever found. Always hoped I could tell the world who Ed O'Connor was, know I can't. Fell in love with Sis Downey, went to war, pissed himself on a destroyer escort when kamikazes came to visit. Always wondered if he met and fell in love with Jesus in the pacific, I'll never know, at least not in this dimension. He had a bad heart, he sold a catholic magazine door to door, made a pittance, but in hindsight he was the richest man I ever knew. He usually carted old people off to daily mass, worked all day, at 6 on a summer evening you would find 20 kids on our lawn, he ad-libbed stories that carried us off to wonderful places. I didn't need to be hit in the head to know I had something special in Ed O'Connor. I also knew I got pretty lucky having Noreen for a big sister. You see she seemed to get the same heart at birth as Dad, not many people get the agape brand and we had two in the same family.

Kindergarten and "farashaka do mey vous," are like a blur but I do have very clear memories of Holy



Cross from grade one on. I ran home from school on day one, it seemed like 8 million kids were there that day, very intimidating. I should have been more secure, the last time my big sister took shit from someone was never, and she always looked out for her younger brother. I settled in ,it was much like home you get some nurturing nuns early on and then pow right in the kisser. All in all I grew to love those years, so many baby boomers, you walked out the door and there were always 10 or 20 kids playing hide the bacon or whatever. My maternal Grandpop James Downey became my permanent roomie and uncle Jim was always there although he often didn't know it. He was often delivered unconscious by a cabbie, there was always an empty whiskey bottle and presents for me and Noreen. Noreen and I loved it, Mom was less than thrilled. For years Jim was the family Alchie but to Noreen and I he was number one. Uncle Jim was a binge drinker so he could be sober for long periods of time. He was the one that took us to Phillies and Eagles games, City championships at Franklin field. He was the one that took us to Riverview Beach on a huge ship that left from pier 89. It was an understatement to say he was our favorite uncle, God we loved him dearly. Some of our favorite times were sitting around the kitchen table listening to uncle Jim's stories. He almost froze to death as a teenager in New York, also was on a Georgia chain gang at the ripe age of 14. He did jump off the steel pier naked, and via freight trains he visited 48 states, sometimes unintentionally. When I tell you he had stories, he had stories. Noreen ah you couldn't ask God for a better sister and if you did God would slap you for your greed, she had a heart of gold and she would step in front of a tidal wave for her family and she would stop it in it's tracks. The poor thing had diabetes, she was willful and wild , she couldn't be tamed, she spit in the eye of her disease but diabetes had the last laugh. I long to see that little wildcat we called Noni, I just hope she's been easy on the poor souls in heaven and letting them get a little rest at night.

As adults my brothers and I have become our in-laws, I'm a MacDonald, Kevin is a Tracy, Shaun a

Brown. It's understandable our parents and our big sister have gone to their reward and men aren't the family glue that women are. Also in our own way we were all traumatized by the pain and it was probably good that we had our in laws there for us, but it's also important that we remember who we are. When I was a kid we got an equal dose of both sides. Every summer was spent at Grandpop O'Connors in Westmont New Jersey, to me it was better than Disneyland. If you wanted to draw a picture of grandparents they would be it. Grandmom was chubby and jolly, but grandpop was so easy to piss off, it was our greatest sport. If we didn't piss off grumps 10 times a day, it was a bad day. The we consisted of myself, cousins Jim, Bobby, and Tom. Noreen and Georjanne were constant companions, but driving Gramps crazy was more of a guy thing. The setting was perfect, they lived across from a concrete yard, behind the houses across the street huge steam locomotives hit full stride as they left the Cuthbert road station. Within walking distance was Crystal lake, Westmont movies, Carvel ice cream, and best of all the beautiful Holvick girls lived next door. If you knew the Holvick girls you would understand, lumped with all the above facts they made our summer paradise complete. What was a typical day, there wasn't one we did different things all the time. Upon waking Grandmom would have breakfast for us, and Gramps would try to get us doing some chore or other, usually unsuccessful. Our days were varied but a constant with me was hitting the train tracks. I would crouch behind a boulder not 10' off the tracks the huge steam locomotives were just getting speed as they left the station 2 blocks away. They were horribly wonderful, you knew they wouldn't kill you but you really didn't believe it. We had so many adventures along those tracks details are vague after all these years but I doubt if Tom Sawyer & Huck Finn had more fun. We idled away many afternoons at crystal lake, we discovered girls, we learned to laugh till it hurt.

Like millions before me I miss those days of early youth, my cousins Jim & Bobby & Tom have never been as funny as they were in 57. Georgeanne I had a cousin crush on and my sister Noreen gave me

entre to the older crowd, damn life was good then. One night cousin jimmy dared me to moon the Holvick girls, our bathroom window faced their bedroom window, I was balls ass naked, we called them to the window and threw the light switch. It was such a laugh that the exercise was repeated till it played out. In September back to school my life was probably more influenced by the Downey's. Since Grandpop Downey was a strong patriarch, our family was the Downey center. The best way to describe Jim Downey, Irish catholic gentleman, didn't drink, got up at 5 am and walked 3 miles to the train station, every workday until he became terminally ill. He would take that walk every Saturday night so he could dance at Wagners Ballroom, always impeccable in a three piece suit. I'm trying to remember the sleeping arrangement in our 3 bedroom row, Grandpop and I in one room Mom & Dad in one Noreen in another, where the hell did that put Kevin? As small as our house was Mom & Dad always seemed to have room for one more.

My life probably parallel my cousins, but at the time I felt like I was the only one that had bullies to contend with and nobody ever loved a girl like I loved Alvina Murphy. I guess in 1958 I started to pull away somewhat from family life, and get more involved with the outside world. That summer I became a caddy, no more summers with my grandparents, now I was a wage earner. One day my Dad took me to White Manor Country Club, told me to sit around and wait for the caddy master to call me for a loop. What a metamorphous, I was scared to death that day, I cried and called home begging for a ride. Two weeks later I was playing poker and cussing up a storm, another altar boy gone bad. My uncle Mike managed White manor C.C. and Dad, uncle Bill Hoffman, Leo and Jim often worked there but they weren't around during the day, I was on my own and after correcting the older boys about their cursing and getting beat up and humiliated a few times I got with the program. It's hard to tell in retrospect if it was good or bad, probably a little of either, but one thing is certain I took to making money like a fish to water. I don't think I missed a day in 3 years, at 11 I was by far the

youngest, but I was a big 11 and bullshitted people adding a few years. I learned quickly how to lie about a lot of things, of course I was also honing my skills at home, Sis would knock the shit out of you in the blink of an eye, so there wasn't a whole lot of George Washington at our house.

I had to hitchhike home at the end of each day, what freedom, if you could hitchhike to work why not the seashore etc. it opened up new horizons. I tried to interest my buddies in caddying with little success, they weren't ready to worship at the money altar and had better things to do. So I was usually a solitary hiker, There was a penned up bull at the top of the road out, I often climbed in teased him and ran for my life, I discovered bugs, special were the beetle and the prey mantis, so the solitude also had the good side. Good or bad nothing would deter me from chasing the dollar, I was convinced by now, if you didn't have a jingle in your pocket, well you were nobody. Often Dad would ask me to turn over my earnings, it bothered him, but not me, as much as I loved money I loved him so much more he could have asked for my right arm and I would have went looking for a saw. Nothing special about that, I believe a lot of people felt that way about him.

Although as we cousins started entering puberty we saw a little less of each other, I can assure you most O'Connors and Downeys weren't slackers when it came to family affairs. There was no way to squeeze out of going to weddings, funerals, baptisms etc. At 13 you hate most of that stuff [I want to be with my friends wah wah wah]. With Sis you were drug to everything, and these scenes were probably repeated by most of the clan. It was great, I think we hung pretty tight as a family and I cherish everyone of those memories today. Who were all those people, it's time to introduce them, before I do I admit up-front that I won't tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth, because I want you all to think highly of me. If you have skeletons in your closet I'm going to leave them there. The oldest O'Connor boy was Jim, he was blessed with a wonderful saint I mean wife {after all she did put

up with him all these years] Ok so I will take an occasional shot. Her name is Dot, and just like his brothers he was blessed with a good woman. He also had the good fortune of bringing Jimmy and Georjanne into the world, my good fortune too. They were so close to me and Noreen growing up, and my mind still relives so many of our times together. They were followed by John and Greg, I have to admit that I was an age snob, if you weren't within two years of my age you weren't worthy of recognition. So as a kid I really didn't interact with most of my younger cousins, outside of a pat on the head. My communist uncle Jim was close to my Dad and spent a lot of time with us at grandmom's, I remember a good sense of humor that is nonexistent when he's talking about republicans. In all honesty I can only give a thumb nail sketch, I only have glimpses of real life in my extended family, but maybe some of my cousins will pick up on this and do their own.

After Jim, you have Ed, and then uncle Bob, he did real well in the marriage dept. too. Aunt Nora gave him five great kids, I told you how I loved growing up with Bob and Tom, well as an adult I've gotten to know them all, and either Nora and Bob did a great job or they got real lucky. My strongest memories of Bob and Nora was their romance, even in their forties they were slipping off to a motel in Jersey, they knew how to keep the fires burning. Every one of the kids Bob, Tom, Roey, Don has a strong marriage and Pat has been with Marcie for years they just haven't made it official yet. You know you guys could be the Cleavers for God's sake.

Next is Aunt Margie, I think everyone should have an Aunt Margie, but hey hardly anyone gets one because Aunt Margies don't grow on trees. She's a cross between Mother Theresa and Santa Clause, in her golden years she more closely resembles St. Nick. Of course I've filled out too and I don't want to hear about the pot calling the kettle black. She is hard to put into words, try imagining pure love

and you'll picture Margie. When you are alone with Marge, well you're the only one in the universe, and the next time she puts someone down will be the first time. Truly no one would ever leave the church if all Nuns and priest had the spirit of our Marge. Need a song, a good joke or two look up Marge, need someone to really understand the crap you're going thru, well look up Marge.

Next we have Aunt Rosemary, she was still living at home when we were very young, and we would invade Westmont. I remember her being so beautiful, even the Holvick girls couldn't compare with her. I remember a nice young man named Austin, everyone thought he was the one, and then out of nowhere came Tom Vogleman, the rest is history. Uncle Tom was not on Sis's top ten list, so I didn't really get to know him until I was an adult. He had a great sense of humor, he called a spade a spade, I admired his work ethic and his family values. Roey and Tom have two beautiful daughters Rosemary and Kathleen and like all my cousins they are good people working hard and trying their best to raise their children right. So I am glad that Roey passed on Austin. Rosemary stayed in the house a little longer than her sisters that ran off to marry Jesus, she seems to know a little more of the O'Connor side and is helping me to fill in the gaps.

That brings me to the baby of the family my godmother Doris. You never read in any magazines that the best place to find a husband is in a ghetto parish in North Philadelphia, but it is just ask Doris. Chuck Hall swung into Most Precious Blood parish and stole her away from the good nuns of Saint Josephs, but ask Paige Blake Marcie or Mike and they will say he did the right thing. Here we have another family that gave me cousins to be proud of, what a coincidence. Doris and Chuck are those rare bighearted individuals that really care about others and actually do something about it. So I have to say when they handed out Godmothers I did pretty well.

Before I do a thumbnail sketch of the Downeys I want to emphasize that I really would love for at least one cousin in each family to write a story about their own parents and siblings we could weave it in and really have a great history / story.

Well the first Downey offspring is my uncle Ed, I didn't have a lot of contact with Ed, but here's what I've got. Ed was supposed to have been a great baseball player growing up, and I know his brothers and sisters really looked up to him. I believe he was a marine in world war two, I expect to hear from many of you with corrections, but remember I'm doing this from memory and I was a product of the 60's. Anyway Ed married aunt Mabel and there wasn't a lot of interaction between our families but Ed always came over to our house to see his father and I always thought he was a good son. He and Mabel had 3 beautiful daughters, Eileen, Janet, and Susan, unfortunately I saw very little of them growing up, I hope so much that our family reunion will bring them to us and we can make up for lost time.

Next

is uncle Jim, as I mentioned Jim or Seamus as my Mom would often call him, did have a drinking problem for many years, which was weird because he certainly wasn't exposed to the drink growing up. He did get sober in AA and he enjoyed many years of sobriety before he passed on. Don't think for a minute that he wasn't a good son, brother or uncle because of the drink, he was all of the above and then some. Noreen and I adored him, if I ever had to vote for uncle of the year, he was it. I can't remember how many times I pissed myself laughing at him, with him, even just recalling him. He took me to more sporting events in my first 18 years than I've been to on my own in the next 34. The world is a better place for anyone that was touched by Jim [Seamus] Downey.

Now we come to crazy uncle Jack, he's not really crazy, but if you were someone who's ass he was

ripping on 60 years ago you might think different. My mom said that Jack had a white temper and if the color drained out of him you better run for cover. She told of a time that she pissed him off and rather than hit his sister he put his fist thru the fridge. I believe there were more than a few darkies that were glad to see Jack vacate the neighborhood, than again the same could probably be said about all the Downey boys. Jack was fortunate to meet aunt Lil, they have been married 50 + years and produced Jackie, Donna, and Cathy, along with raising Lil's boys Tommy, Bobby and Ronnie. I hate to sound repetitive, but surprise, surprise, they all turned out good too. I was the same age as Jackie so we have some good memories and Donna wasn't far behind so we've had a few laughs along the way also. All in all they are the kind of family that makes Philly what it is and help to keep it humming.

After Mom came uncle Mike, after uncle Jim, Mike was the uncle that we saw the most, also Mike follows Jim closely in the amount of stories he can recall from all those years in Corktown. Mike was a marine in the Pacific, and worked a lot of different jobs before and after, so he knows a lot about a lot of different things. We grew up knowing him as the manager of White Manor Country Club, where I got my first real job. They would lock you lock you up if you worked a kid like that today, { 20 hour work days were not uncommon}, but it was good for me after White Manor everything else seemed easy. Mike like the rest of the Downey's loved and respected his dad and was always the guy that would ride to the rescue when there was a family crisis. Someone died Mike would make the arrangements, whatever the event Mike would take care of the food, and when my dad had problems in the catering business, Mike was their to pick up the slack . Mike also did good in the marriage department, Betty was a kind and gentle woman, she was great in the garden and in the home, which was perfect for Mike since she was a country club widow, Mike was dedicated to his work and 20 hour days were no stranger to him either. They were blessed with two lovely children Bernadette and Patrick, Bernie was another one that I had a crush on, luckily these cousin crushes took place before



I was old enough to go to confession, as I said I was an age snob so I patted Patrick on the head as a child and that was that, luckily we can all get closer as we get older.

Next came the only other girl in the family aunt Lil, needless to say she was our favorite aunt, [ on the Downey side ha ha ] even though she didn't always agree with her strong willed sister they remained best of friends until God called Sis to the next life. I was born before Lil was married and I actually remember her as my beautiful single aunt. She was part of our life from the beginning . She married a very funny German by the name of Bill Hoffman, I thought he was brilliant since he programmed computers long before I knew what they were. Like Mike, Lil and Bill were always there for us in our times of need which were many and myself and my brothers will always remember. They struggled through numerous miscarriages and were finally blessed with my cousin Genie, followed by Billie, Barbie and the twins Tracey and Kelly, Well they made up for lost time with a vengeance, Lil didn't make the Guinness book of records to be the oldest woman to have twins but she tried. They have all turned out so nice and married well themselves, I count them not only as cousins but also as friends. Tragically Barbie was lost to us in an automobile accident and to make it worse she was in her 9<sup>th</sup> month of pregnancy, it seems we all get some sorrow mixed in with our joy. Joy is exactly what Barbie was, so vivacious so full of life, so missed.

Last but not least we come to rubber legs, otherwise known as uncle Leo, the baby of the family, what a break he's still young enough to dance. Uncle Leo was only 17 when I was born so we lived under the same roof for a while. I don't remember what Leo did as a young man I seem to think he was off chopping down a forest some where, but I do remember him bartending a few places, one of which was White Manor CC back in the 60's. You could try to interview some of his patrons but they would probably be laughing to hard to give a proper interview. Yeah Leo kept them laughing just like he has

his family for all these years. More repetition, he married very well also, as a matter of fact I think the men in our clan all marry well and it extends through the generations. Aunt Marie is another beautiful woman and for that reason alone they made beautiful children. Aunt Marie was always into family, interested in family history and photos and you can count on both of them when your back is against the wall. They were blessed with four children Patty, Jimmy, and the twins Franny and Michael. I remember more of Patty growing up but lately I've gotten to know Franny from working on the reunion, she's great, we all love her over here. Yes like all those before him Leo ended up with a great wife and kids, does anyone really believe it's a coincidence.

There was another son stillborn between Mike and Lil, my uncle Joseph, hopefully we can all meet Joseph in the next life. Well I've said very little about my own family, that's because I intend to keep writing this story for the rest of my life, I want my great-grandchildren to read this, so I will tell them all about my wife and kid's and my brothers. Wouldn't it have been great if our forefathers had written about life in Ireland, about the horrible crossing, what life was like in Philly in 1910 etc, etc. Well it's not too late we are all forefathers and 100 years from now our offspring can learn all about the knuckleheads that went before them, in the meantime here's a thumbnail sketch of my immediate family. My brothers Kevin and Shaun, Kevin has a son Ryan and a daughter Jen, Shaun has two boys Shaun and Eddie and my Goddaughter Erin. Nothing special about these two, just like all my cousins they have great wives, they have great kids, they work hard and they get A's in husbanding and fathering and brothering and I love them dearly. I didn't go on about my own family I also married up and my wife should be canonized in the near future. Diane has been all one could hope for and then some. We have a yours, mine and ours family and we survived. Laura is the oldest, she's beautiful and wonderful and a great teacher to boot. Jimmy is the proud father of five year old Tyler and a good father he is, Michael graduates from the University of Pennsylvania 5-2000, he's captained the soccer

team for the last two years and he hopes to play professional soccer . The most important thing is they are good people and they are not just our kids they are also our best friends.

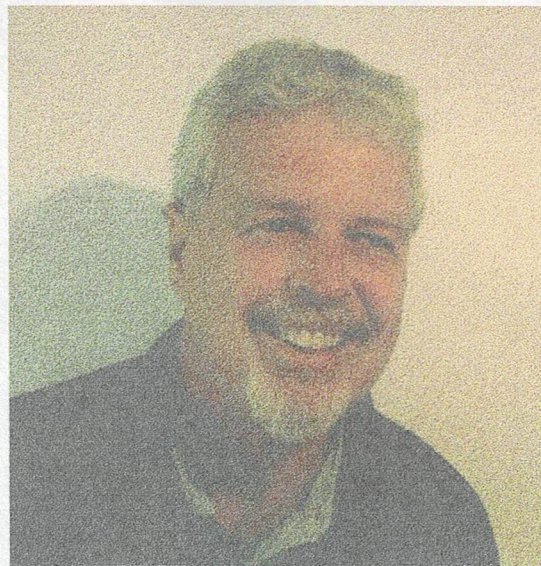
I hate to see this part of THE STORY come to an end, it was so enjoyable to do some research about the Downeys and Fahys, I move very slow but I will continue to try to find some history about the O'Connors and McCollums.

Our grandparents can be proud, they came to give their children a better chance, they hoped their offspring would be educated and flourish in this new home away from home. I'm sure they hoped that future generations would have strong values , that they be loyal to their God, their families and their friends. Well tip your hats and tip your glass because you made their dreams come true, yes we are all of us an Irish success story. God bless, all the best - Michael C O'Connor.

The following is a short list of books on Irish history.

- #1 The Story of The Irish Race Author Seumas MacManus Random House isbn0-517-06408-1  
This is a must read, it starts in Ireland about 1000 BC and proceeds through the Easter Rising into the 1930's, a great book to start with, it's both very informative and an easy enjoyable read.
- #2 Michael Collins; Author Ulick O'Connor WW Norton & CO. Isbn 0-393-31645-9
- #3 The Irish Famine Author Helen Litton Wolfhound Press isbn 0-937702-14-5
- #4 How The Irish Saved Civilization Author Thomas Cahill Doubleday isbn 0-385-41849-3
- #5 Hope Against History Author Jack Holland Henry Holt & Co. Isbn 0-8050-6087-1
- #6 A New Ireland Author John Hume { Nobel Peace Prize} Roberts Rinehart isbn 1-57098-141-8

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