

WHEN I WAS YOUR AGE

By Mike Farragher

There's a great date night venue that my wife and I frequent called the Silver Ball Museum in Asbury Park, New Jersey. \$10 buys you 1/2 hour of unlimited games on vintage pinball and video game machines.

I found myself standing in front of the Corgar pinball game and on a trip down Memory Lane on our last date night. Corgar was a red muscular demon with scantily clad women worshiping at his feet in the artwork on the machine. It was built in 1979, the year I was 13. I remember it being a big deal at the time the first one was shipped to my mall because this was the first talking pinball machine. Because microchips were so primitive at the time, Corgar only said a only a few unintelligible words.

Before the 1/2 hour ended, I challenged my wife to a game of Asteroids. Some of you may recall this early video game--a rudimentary triangle of a spaceship that flies around a black and white screen and you must break up the rocks in space with round bullets that shoot out of the top of the triangle before the rocks break you!

We got home and found our kids down in the basement, as usual, playing "Dance Dance Revolution" on their Wii console. The dancers are in vivid color and their moves are perfectly synched to those of my daughters, thanks to this nifty wireless wand technology in their hands.

You know what comes next.

"Wow," says I. "You know, when I was your age, we played video games on a black and white television---heck, we had to practically have our noses to the screen because the joystick was connected to the consult with this short little wire. We didn't have wireless wands in our day!"

Yup. You guessed it. I became my father at that moment. Except I sounded like a whiny little douche delivering my video game tale of woe compared to the stories of his rough childhood in rural Galway during the Forties.

I would remember my father shaking his head at the doorway in disgust while my brother and I played Atari video games after school. "When I came home from school there were no video games," he said. We would go straight to the bog and cut turf." I would lose that game at that moment because I would roll my eyes and take focus off the screen as he went on and on about it.

Dad would tell us how we would have to dig by hand the first twelve inches to clean the bog before throwing it into the bog hole. They would then cut the turf, throwing it up on the bank sod by sod and then pitchfork it and wheel it out to the plains for drying. Cutting and footing the turf and then loading it onto the cart where the horse or ass would pull it was even more backbreaking then the pitchforking process.

"We weren't up half the night talking to our friends on the phone," he'd say. "By jaysis, your head hit the pillow nice and early after that kind of afternoon. Even before I was old enough to cut turf, I would have had to go to the well to get the water to make the tea and then walk a mile to take the tea and the mugs and the bread and the jam over to my father and the workers."

Yeah, yeah. Whatever, dad. You just screwed up my high score on Pong! Thanks a lot!

On the rare occasions when the turf story got old or my father got tired, my mother might enter the boxing ring with stories about digging potatoes each October after school in Ballylanders, a hayseed outpost on the Limerick outskirts. The good news about picking potatoes is that you may have gotten some time off from school. The bad news was that you would spend hours at a time digging in the dirt and kneeling on canvas sacks to keep the moisture from your knees after the threshing mill (a luxury) had its way with the rich soil.

Most parents of a certain age love to spin that yarn of walking to school "uphill, both ways," as the comedian Bill Cosby once said. My parents are no exception. When I moan to them about taking out a home equity line of credit to

fund the insatiable American Eagle appetite of two teenaged girls, I am rewarded with a story of how lucky my parents were to have a pair of cheap green plastic Wellington boots that kept the dampness at bay during those mile-long walks to school in the rain.

Many of the same stories were corroborated by this book written by the Abbeyknockmoy Social Club for Retired People called "Shared Memories: Memories of Life in Rural Ireland." To prove their point, even the book itself is primitive, printed in black and white and held together at the binding with staples. I'm just after taking a Jimmy Dean lowfat ham and egg breakfast sandwich out of the microwave as I flip through the section in this book about killing the pig. It says here that the best female "crayture" weighing eighteen stone would be fed oatmeal for a month, singled out, tied with a rope at the mouth, pierced in the main artery of the neck as blood drained into buckets, all before boiling water was poured over the pig to make the shaving process easier. After reading about how the pig's stomach would be cut to get the intestines for the black pudding, I'll be thinking twice before buying a frozen brick of that stuff for my St. Patrick's Day breakfast!

The stories about farm work, traveling carts, and calving, were all pointless stories that annoyed me to no end and got in the way of my video game addiction. I wouldn't give a Canadian quarter (the pinball machine only took American quarters, you see) for these yarns as a teenager. Now, as my parents and I face the reality of having many more yesterdays than tomorrows, those slices of oral history about the past become as precious as gold bricks. Though my stories of hardship pale in comparison to those of my parents, I suppose I try to impart a sense of historical perspective to my kids to confirm just how good they've got it in the same way that my parents did for me.

As they said in the olden days: "black cats have black kittens!"

Check out Mike Farragher's book of humorous essays www.thisisyourbrainonshamrocks.com



My father's elementary school in Co. Galway