

## ***Casting Memories***

Reliving my great grandfather's days on the River Blackwater

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At low tide, hidden within the heart of County Waterford, a place of tranquility and opportunity begins to reveal itself. The blackened waters shrink revealing the shells of the salmon boats that once navigated the river, reminding me of generations past when these murky waters were home to local salmon fishermen in a constant battle with 'time and tide' – an excerpt from a longer phrase my grandfather often used. Many of these men were breadwinners who worked the land, turning to the river in times of great difficulty much like during the famine times. My great grandfather Patrick was no exception.

From an early age, my great-grandfather Patrick learned the importance of hard work instilled in him by his own father. At just seven years old, he was already being reeled along to help untangle the freshly caught salmon nets from the wooden boat tied along the banks of Ardsallagh. From the peaceful calmness of dawn to the fiery hues of sunset, each moment spent on the banks was a testament to the beauty of the natural world. While casting nets alongside his father, he would lean over the side of the boat, gazing past his own reflection, asking himself what the future might entail.

Long summer evenings were spent looking across the glassy surface of the water at the great Ballynatray House, a testament of the pleasures wealth can buy, while hoping for a better future. The river's flowing rhythm and purity consumed much of great grandad's childhood as he whiled away his early life playing and weaving tales of the mysteries captured beneath the

depths. These are the tales, and the stories that are woven into my family's long history, 'trailed by loose threads of tradition' as my grandmother used to say.

As a child, Patrick spent many days in the peaceful surroundings of his small cottage, shared with six others. Often, he could be found wandering the fields, hidden by the tall grass or joining his brothers by skipping stones across the tranquil surface of the water. Despite the belief shared by his family none of the stones ever reached the distant shores of the grand, historic riverside mansion of Ballynatray. They hoped that one day, if a stone did manage to touch the prosperous grounds of Ballynatray, it would bring fortune to the struggling families of Ardsallagh.

In a time of limited opportunities, breaking from tradition was impossible. Nevertheless, Patrick turned the river into his livelihood, apprenticing under his father, after marrying Catherine, my great-grandmother. In the short time our lives crossed paths, there's one thing my great-grandfather passed on of relevance that I'll always remember: "patience, experience and tide are the keys to salmon fishing'. That's exactly the advice his own father passed down before. My grandfather, following in Patrick's footsteps, also turned to salmon fishing. He would fish the river in UD280, a wooden salmon boat, echoing history one last time.

Standing on the riverbanks today and hearing the birds sing and watching the trees sway brings such peace to my mind, knowing that I've grown in a generation where the struggles that my ancestors endured in the past are unheard of among my siblings and me. Hearing the water trickle past me almost to the end of its long journey washes a sense of sadness over me, reminding me that all life's journeys come to an end. This brings to mind the saying from my own grandfather: "Time and tide wait for no man."