

## GAA Oral History Project

## Interview Report Form

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| <b>Name of Interviewer</b>                             | Seán Kearns   |
| <b>Date of Interview</b>                               | 2 <sup>nd</sup> Sept 2009   |
| <b>Location</b>  | Riverdale Steakhouse, The Bronx, New York   |
| <b>Name of Interviewee</b><br>(Maiden name / Nickname) | Rosie O'Reilly  |
| <b><u>Biographical Summary of Interviewee</u></b>      |   |
| <b>Gender</b>  | Female  |
| <b>Born</b>  | <b>Year Born:</b> 1969<br><b>Home County:</b> Cavan   |
| <b>Education</b>                                       | <b>Primary:</b> Killyconnan NS<br><b>Secondary:</b> Cavan Vocational  |
| <b>Family</b>  | <b>Siblings:</b> 2 <sup>nd</sup> Oldest. 2 sisters and 3 brothers<br><b>Current Family if Different:</b> Married with one child |
| <b>Club(s)</b>   | Lavey [Cavan] ; Breiffne Blues Camogie and Cavan Ladies Football in New York [America]  |
| <b>Occupation</b>                                      | Personal Trainer, Bartender   |
| <b>Parents' Occupation</b>                             | Farmers   |
| <b>Religion</b>  | Roman Catholic  |
| <b>Political Affiliation / Membership</b>              | Fine Gael   |

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| <b>Date of Report</b>             | 6 <sup>th</sup> Dec 2009   |
| <b>Period Covered</b>             | 1970s - 2009   |
| <b>Counties/Countries Covered</b> | Cavan, New York, Americas  |
| <b>Key Themes Covered</b>         | Travel, Supporting, Grounds, Facilities, Playing, Training, , Refereeing, Officials, Administration, Celebrations, Fundraising, Sponsorship, Material Culture, Media, Emigration, Involvement in GAA abroad, Role of Women, Role of the Club in the Community, Volunteers, GAA Abroad, Identity, Rivalries, Earliest Memories, Family Involvement, Childhood, Impact on Life, Food and Drink, Socialising  |
| <b>Interview Summary</b>          | <p>Rosie O'Reilly is among the most successful players in New York GAA history, having won 13 New York ladies football championships with Cavan ladies, as well as camogie titles with Breiffne Blues. She has represented New York in both codes.</p> <p>The interview covers her early interest in Camogie and the challenges this interest created and lack of equipment and structure. The emphasis on men within GAA and lack of attention for women, in Cavan and NY and changes to this are also discussed. The growth of ladies Football and decline of Camogie are also mentioned.</p> <p>The GAA in NY from the mid 1980s onwards and social life attached to it are also discussed. The high standard of Camogie in North American in 1980s and the decline from that are discussed. The bringing of players from Ireland, underage development and difficulties in bringing teams to play in Irish championship are also addressed. The role and difficulties of GAA in NY in recent years are also addressed.</p> <p>00.20 Her earliest GAA memory would be playing Camogie in National school, when you won your first game you couldn't wait to get home to tell your parents. They didn't have any jerseys though so they all had to agree to wear a similar coloured shirt of their own. The hurleys they had were all taped and fixed up. "I'd say we were the oddest looking bunch."</p> <p>1.20 Her own club, Lavey, didn't have a camogie team so a lot of them went to surrounding clubs to play. Later on her</p> |

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|  | <p>club did start a camogie team.</p> <p>1.50 There was a teacher, Annette Rice, in her school who encouraged them to play. The teachers didn't play themselves but at the time camogie was the only sport for girls so they encouraged it.</p> <p>"It was encouraged because it was our national sport and it was just a regular on the curriculum."</p> <p>2.20 Even though there was no ladies football then – some girls – tomboys - still did play football with the boys.</p> <p>"A lot of the girls if there wasn't a team, played with the boys and then joined a ladies team later on."</p> <p>3.00 Her father was very interested in the GAA and had won a few Cavan championships with the local club, Lavey. Her two brothers played senior for Lavey and her two sisters played camogie for them.</p> <p>3.30</p> <p>"Daddy only went to watch the boys play. For some reason or another he just didn't think girls should be playing sport. But in the end, as things went along, I ended up winning more than the boys and he started coming round to the idea, when he started seeing the trophy cabinet with more girls' trophies than boys' trophies he said there must be something in this ladies' sport. And it was only then that he started taking an interest."</p> <p>4.10 The attitude to women in the game has changed so much during her lifetime. When she started she went to the parish priest about getting a camogie arm to the local club, he brushed them off and told them the men weren't interested.</p> <p>"More or less telling us it wasn't our place to be out playing sport."</p> <p>** 4.40 Good extended quote: Even when she came to the USA and they started the ladies football a lot of the older GAA guys didn't want to know about it. The first ladies final they had in Gaelic Park, the then President of the NY GAA walked out of the park and went across to the local pub until the ladies games was over. He said ladies football had no place in Gaelic Park and a lot of his old crew felt the same, but now</p> |
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|  | <p>they realise that it's one of the biggest days in Gaelic Park – its brings such a crowd and they've all come around to it.</p> <p>5.30 There were no women really involved with the running of her local club when she was young but now there are.</p> <p>6.00 She's sad to say that Camogie hasn't got the same recognition as ladies football has got in recent years.</p> <p>"To me that's the greatest game in the world. It's our oldest sport and I just feel that it took a back seat...the ladies All-Ireland gets showcased a lot more than the camogie All-Ireland. There's a lot more hype about the football and camogie just takes a back seat."</p> <p>6.50 Ladies football was in a position to be more popular.</p> <p>"Football is such an easy sport to pick up. Anybody can pick up a ball and kick it. I know you need hand-eye coordination but camogie, it has to be taught in primary schools and you have to pick it up at that level."</p> <p>Ladies football was able to put coaching into every school in Ireland but Camogie never got near that, not in Cavan anyway.</p> <p>8.00 She never had a lot of training on how to play Camogie – just played it and learned from the more skillful girls when she went to secondary school. It wasn't until she got too county level that they had really good coaching.</p> <p>8.45 She had an unusual journey to playing inter-county camogie for Cavan.</p> <p>"I found this [hurley] stick in the ditch, in the ditch outside my house, and I had a tennis ball and I just started whacking the thing over and back against the wall at home. And I thought I like this, I'd really love to y'know, and then when we started playing in school I thought I'd really like to play on a team but ...the nearest team to me was probably four or five miles walk."</p> <p>So she just thought she'd have to wait to secondary school to find a team.</p> <p>"In the meantime, just before secondary school, I saw this ad in the paper. 'Attention all under 14 girls – Training for the</p> |
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County Cavan Camogie team will start this Saturday. Anybody who wants to try out should be at...That day actually i walked 5 miles to the training session, anything just to get to it.”

But it was for people who were already on a team and she wasn't but she turned up anyway. When they saw her train, the coach said she could play with his club and she ended up captain of the County Camogie team.

10.20 But the coach for the county took her ditch stick away from her and told her it would be classed as a weapon – half of the boss of the hurley had been missing and she didn't realise.

10.50 Once she joined a club she could get equipment. They raised money by having cake sales and raffle tickets and little things like that. There was no sponsorship of jerseys then. You started out by paying for your first stick, but if it was broken the club would give you a new one. And you had probably the same jerseys for 6 years.

12.00 Once she and some other girls from her area became successful with the neighbouring club and the county, their own club tried to persuade them to set up a camogie club at home but they weren't keen because the club hadn't been interested when they'd asked them the first time, but she still supported the Lavey club.

13.00 Her father was very proud to have two sons playing senior for the club he'd won a championship with himself.

14.00 “Anybody I know in sport, your biggest rivals are your next door neighbour club.”

14.30 They often went to see Cavan play football. It was a big part of family life. Cavan supporters take the championship and the league seriously even if other counties don't take the league too seriously. Cavan is one of the best supported counties even though they haven't had much success recently.

15.00 The biggest county game she ever went to was in 1997 when 25 of them from New York went home to see Cavan play Kerry in the 1997 All-Ireland semi-final. Being back on a big stage like that was so big for Cavan – did a lot for the

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|  | <p>county.</p> <p>16.00 Going to see Cavan play when she was a child was a big day out. Dad would drive and you'd get a packet of Tayto and a Club Orange or a bar of chocolate for half-time.</p> <p>17.00 She moved to the US in 1986. There wasn't any GAA reason for moving. In fact she asked the Cavan county chair for a contact of someone she could play with in NY but he only had a contact in Philadelphia. But it didn't take her very long to find a Camogie team when she arrived.</p> <p>18.00 Even though she was a county player in Cavan there was no attempts made to get her to stay at home. People just accepted that there was no work at home and you had to go if you could.</p> <p>18.50 She arrived in late 1986 and played her first Camogie game in Gaelic Park when the 1987 season started. She joined up with the New York Young Irelanders team.</p> <p>19.10 Gaelic Park pitch was in a bad state then, nothing like today. "There was humps and bumps and dust and dirt."</p> <p>19.40 But the crowds at Gaelic Park were unbelievable. It was absolutely packed in the mid 1980s, not like today. "You could meet anybody there." The social side of the GAA was the big thing.</p> <p>"You played your game on a Sunday and then you socialise after and you meet everyone and really get to know your team. Some of the best friends I've met was through the GAA, probably my closest friends were all team-mates."</p> <p>20.30 She was very involved with the Cavan GAA men's club when she came over and then later started the Cavan Ladies. At first the Ladies club was separate but now the two are joined.</p> <p>21.20 The Camogie in New York was much the same standard as at home because it was all girls who had just emigrated and many of the girls had played county at home. There were fantastic camogie finals then. New York had two teams, Boston had four teams, Philadelphia had two teams and that made up a league.</p> <p>21.50 Most of those teams would have at least half their</p> |
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players being inter-county players back in Ireland. Any given final might have players from Galway, Cork, Tipperary and Kilkenny all mixed in one team. You might have ten or twelve counties represented on one team.

23.00 At the end of the year the teams from the east coast would meet to play teams from San Francisco and Chicago in the North American championships. In 2004 to celebrate the centenary of Camogie there was an All-Star North American team picked to play at home in Ireland, which was a great weekend.

24.00 They trained for camogie in Van Cortlandt Park. The Americans thought they were crazy. One man came over to get them to play softball. Four of them ended up joining the softball team and all the coach wanted was for them to hit the ball. But she found it boring and only went a few times.

25.10 She never really got into any of the other sports they have in America. Baseball and football have too many stoppages and take too long. GAA is over in an hour and it's packed with running and action.

26.00 She almost always played centre midfield in camogie. Her idea of how to play the position was plenty of running and to catch the puck out. Depending on the game you might focus on helping out the backs if that was needed. You have to do both attacking and defending, not just hang around in the middle.

27.30 Doesn't think the style of camogie has changed much while she's been playing – it's probably a little faster.

27.40 She's had her finger broken 4 times. Injuries were a big problem in New York because of the expense of healthcare and nobody having insurance. They often had a little benefit after a game to raise money for someone who got injured. If the person was out of work the club would give them money and pay their medical bills. That was the done thing.

29.00 One friend of hers got a very serious injury – a blow of a hurl in her eye and she lost the sight in it. That required a major, major benefit to fundraise for that person. She was out of work for 3 months.

29.50 One problem was that back then hardly any of the girls

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|  | <p>wore helmets. There was also a danger with the bands on the hurleys – the band of a hurley cut one girl across the face and she got 51 stitches.</p> <p>30.20 The week after a serious injury we'd all have helmets when we went out to play, "but then that would wear off because nobody wanted to wear them. You wore them the following week because you were terrified but then you were like, the dangers gone..." If you didn't grog wup wearing ahelmet it's impossible to get used to. She wishes she'd been made wear one in national school. So many injuries could have been prevented. She wore one for half a game once but threw it off.</p> <p>32.00 There was no Ladies Football in New York when she arrived. Her boss at the Riverdale Steakhouse, Terry Connaughton, had seen the Ladies Football final at the North American Games, and put an ad in the paper asking if anyone in New York was interested in starting. The first meeting was in the Riverdale Steakhouse in 1991.</p> <p>33.00 She was playing soccer and camogie at the time and a few of the girls she played with had already played football so they put in a team. It really took off. Nine people showed up at that first meeting and nine clubs were formed from it. It grew and grew. Cavan stayed going, all the others stopped or amalgamated and now there are five.</p> <p>34.20 Cavan have been so successful, partly because of the contacts she's built up with football people back home. She always gets phone calls from people in Ireland saying such and such a good player is planning on going to New York and want a team to play for.</p> <p>"I do a little research too and I do approach some of them."</p> <p>35.10 You have to have new players coming from Ireland, because each year you could lose five or six players who retire and start a family or whatever. The players who come are a mixture of people who are coming anyway and want to play football and players coming on college placements etc. She took two players from UCD and had them coaching underage players for example.</p> <p>36.30 There's big competition between the ladies' clubs to get</p> |
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|  | <p>the best players coming over from Ireland.</p> <p>36.50 She got involved in training underage ladies football at the start about 2004. She's brought five or six underage players through to play Senior for Cavan Ladies. With the lack of emigration that's the future, that's what's keeping their team going. It's hard to keep them involved: som many other sports for them to play in US and other sports can get them a scholarship to college. Underage Camogie isn't really happening in NY though.</p> <p>38.35 She played in lots of positions up the centre of the pitch in her career. Her favourite place is to be half back. Ladies football has changed a little in her career, the way teams line out, a third midfielder and so on.</p> <p>39.30 "The tactics have changed and the game has gotten very fast. It's like the men's game. The women train just as hard as the men and are just as fit as the men and it's gotten very, very fast."</p> <p>39.40 The training for women has moved on a lot in her time. In 2008 when Cavan won everything in NY, they trained three nights a week and a game at weekends. They trained for 1hour 45 minutes and it was all running and ball work, passing drills and sprints. Training levels are so high now.</p> <p>41.00 The GAA in NY has been seriously affected by changes in emigration in recent years. The Celtic Tiger meant people were going home not coming out, and since September 11<sup>th</sup> the restrictions mean its very hard for people to come out. Also players can't go home to play in the Championship for New York if their immigration status is doubtful. And that meant NY stopped competing in Ireland, which had brought their game on.</p> <p>42.40 They had competed as New York in the Irish ladies Football Championship, getting a bye to the semi-final. They travelled four or five times before they made a breakthrough and beat Waterford to get to a final in Croke Park. Then everybody wanted to make the New York team, but now there's nothing to train for.</p> <p>43.30 Every girl wants to play in Croke Park...It's your dream to play there one day.</p> |
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|                                  | <p>43.30 New York would be fairly competitive if they could play in the Championship back home, certainly at intermediate level if they could bring their whole team to Ireland.</p> <p>44.30 The GAA still is a network to look after its people. Players coming over always have a place to stay until they find their feet. She probably had every player who came over to play for Cavan ladies staying in her house for a while.</p> <p>45.00 Grace McMullen of Antrim was probably the best camogie player she's seen. Very skilful. Deirdre O'Reilly of Cork was probably the best footballer she played with or against. Diane O'Hora of Mayo played with her in New York and stayed with her for a year. She was another top player.</p> <p>Players now are far better than when she started. The difference is like night and day.</p> <p>47.00 Her best GAA memory would be playing in the 1999 All-Ireland final in Croke Park. That would also be the one game she'd single out.</p> <p>48.00 The best GAA team she's seen is the 2008 Kilkenny hurling team. Cavan Ladies were the best team she played with, or New York in 1999.</p> <p>Her GAA heroes would be Jack O'Shea and Sean Kavanagh. Grace McMullen in Camogie and Diane O'Hora and Deirdre O'Reilly in football.</p> <p>What does the GAA meant to you?</p> <p>"The GAA is actually like a family. We treat it like a family here especially. We take people in and look after them and send them on their way. It's a way of life for us. I don't know how we would get through without the GAA. It's a meeting point, it's a social point everything is all entwined into one. It's just a way of life."</p> |
| <p><b>Involvement in GAA</b></p> | <p>✓ Supporter ✓ Player ✓ Manager ✓ Coach <input type="checkbox"/> Steward</p> <p>✓ Chairperson ✓ Committee Member <input type="checkbox"/> Grounds-person</p> <p>✓ Caterer ✓ Jersey Washer <input type="checkbox"/> Referee <input type="checkbox"/> None</p>  |

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|  | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify): _____  |
| <b>Record as a Player</b><br>(Titles won; Length of time played) | Played inter-county Camogie for Cavan in Ireland<br>Won 13 New York Ladies Football Championships with Cavan Ladies |
| <b>Record as an Administrator</b>                                | N/A   |
| <b>Format</b>  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Audio <input type="checkbox"/> Audio-Visual                                     |
| <b>Duration</b>  | Length of Interview: 00:50:00   |
| <b>Language</b>  | English   |

**To be filled in by Interviewer:**

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Signed:      Seán Kearns

Date:      1<sup>st</sup> July 2010