

GAA Oral History Project

Interview Report Form

Name of Interviewer	Regina Fitzpatrick
Date of Interview	16 th July 2013
Location	Croke Park Stadium
Name of Interviewee (Maiden name / Nickname)	Helen O'Rourke
<u>Biographical Summary of Interviewee</u>	
Gender	Female
Born	Year Born: 1962 Home County: Dublin
Education (Optional)	Primary: Our Lady of Consolation, Donnycarney, Dublin 9. Secondary: Our Lady of Mercy, Beaumont, Dublin. Third Level: St Mary's College, Marino, Dublin.
Family	Siblings: 3 sisters and 3 brothers
Club(s)	Park Rangers LGFC [Dublin]; Whitehall Colmcille's GAA [Dublin]
Occupation	CEO Ladies Gaelic Football Association
Parents' Occupation	Bank Manager [Father]; Homekeeper [Mother]
Religion	Roman Catholic
Political Affiliation / Membership	N/A
Other Club/Society Membership(s)	N/A

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Date of Report	11 th August 2013
Period Covered	1940s - 2013
Counties/Countries Covered	Dublin, Leitrim, Limerick, Galway, Wexford, Leitrim, Kerry, Laois, Westmeath, Kilkenny
Key Themes Covered	Facilities, Playing, Administration, Celebrations, Religion, Role of Women, All-Ireland, Earliest Memories, Family Involvement, Impact on Life, Career, Challenges, Sacrifices, Politics, Professionalism, Grounds, Relationships
Interview Summary	<p>Helen begins by talking about the GAA tradition in her family and her interest in Gaelic football growing up, largely influenced by the strength of the Dublin football scene in the 1960s and 1970s. She talks about her short playing career with Park Rangers before she outlines the various roles she has held in Ladies Gaelic Football. She talks about the parallel growth and development of ladies football and her own administrative careers and cites the various landmark moments in the development of the games and of the association despite the many obstacles that had to be overcome. Finally she reflects on 40 years of the Ladies Gaelic Football Association and her own role in the development of the Association.</p> <p>00:00:00 Introduction</p> <p>00:00:24 Growing up in Donnycarney. Father from Leitrim, mother from Limerick. Family interest in Gaelic games. Uncles played football for Aughavas, Co. Leitrim.</p> <p>00:01:41 Playing basketball and hockey in school. Lack of sporting outlets for girls in the area. Going to Dublin club matches with her father. Popularity of Dublin club matches at the time. Craobh Ciarán, St Vincent's and Whitehall Colmcilles all clubs local to the area. Interest in football from an early age, playing football at home.</p> <p>00:03:35 Excitement of Dublin football in the 1970s, looking up to those players as heroes. Mentions Tony Hanahoe, Jimmy Keavney, Bobby Doyle and Brian Mullins. GAA was the main sports interest in Dublin at the time, talks about the 'wave of blue' and increase in female interest in the games.</p> <p>00:05:32 Living in close proximity to Croke Park, going to matches there with her uncles. Standing on Hill 16. Mentions Dublin v Galway game in which Dublin ended with 12 players. Social aspect after matches.</p>

	<p>00:07:09 Playing basketball in primary school. Played netball in secondary school and starting to get ladies Gaelic football going there. Ladies Gaelic Football Association just starting up at the time.</p> <p>00:08:17 Sport in St Mary's, Marino. Playing camogie there.</p> <p>00:09:10 Beginning her teaching career in Rathcoole. Finding a notice looking for ladies Gaelic football players for Park Rangers. Training, social aspects, travelling to games, making friend. Training in the 15 acres in the Phoenix Park.</p> <p>00:10:19 Park Rangers Club – ladies section grew out of the men's club. Mentions Gerry Nangle's Bar and the Ashling Hotel on Park Gate Street where they would meet up. Only about four ladies clubs in Dublin at the time. No underage clubs. Park Rangers, Portobello, Thomas Davis and a team around Walkinstown were the only four ladies teams at the time. Wexford, Leitrim, Kerry, Laois and Westmeath all good counties for ladies football at the time. Travelling to tournaments.</p> <p>00:12:52 Awareness of Ladies Football Association. First Ladies Football All-Ireland played in Croke Park in 1986. Starting to put a structure on Dublin Ladies Gaelic Football. Starting a county board.</p> <p>00:13:37 Playing career. More involved in organising the games than being a committed player. Coming to the games late in life. Media coverage of matches. Attitude towards ladies football at the time (mid-1980s). Grounds where they played – O'Tooles, Portobello etc. Reaction of people to women playing Gaelic football. No real relationship between Ladies Gaelic and the GAA at the time.</p> <p>00:16:58 Struggle to get recognition for ladies football from Croke Park. Belief that it was just a fad at the time. Association now forty years old.</p> <p>00:17:51 Starting Dublin Ladies Gaelic Football County Board. Formulating a development plan for the county. Mentions Cumann na mBunscoil and Gerry Grogan and an initial meeting in The Teachers' Club in Parnell Square. Reaction of the meeting to getting school girls involved in playing football. Huge growth of football for girls in the schools. Importance of sport in primary schools.</p> <p>00:20:40 Recruiting adult teams. Getting involved at national level and getting more counties involved around the county. Focus on underage structures at ground level. Mentions Féile</p>
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	<p>Peil na nÓg.</p> <p>00:21:50 How Dublin Ladies Gaelic Football county board ran its affairs. Mentions meeting rooms in Dublin County Board offices at Belvedere Park. Contact by phone. Mentions Brendan Dardis and other people involved in the administration and coach of teams. Early days more women than men involved in administration.</p> <p>00:23:55 Becoming a Dublin delegate to national convention in Wexford. Becoming National Cultural and Language officer the following year and shortly later becoming PRO. Aspects of administration that appealed to her. Teaching background also a factor. Motivated by what they were doing for women and girls at a time when there were very few sporting outlets for them.</p> <p>00:26:36 Role of PRO. Working with the media, building up a profile for the games and creating awareness of the sport. Challenges of the role, reaction of the media. Mentions Seán Óg Ó Ceallacháin. Trying to get television coverage, working with Tim O'Connor, Head of Sports in RTÉ.</p> <p>00:29:00 Football not seen as lady like. Comparison with camogie. Leinster Council view on girls playing football in the 1980s– not seen as a suitable game for women, physical reasons cited. Obstacles they faced and getting people engaged in the games.</p> <p>00:31:03 Television coverage. Importance of TG4 involvement and the impact of this coverage on the ladies football.</p> <p>00:33:35 Becoming president of the Ladies Gaelic Football Association at a young age. Continuing to teach while she was in the role. Aspirations and challenges during her presidency.</p> <p>00:39:16 Infrastructure and organisation of the Association when she became president. Her schedule at the time and how she approached the role.</p> <p>00:41:05 Relationship with GAA and Camogie Association presidents.</p> <p>00:41:47 Becoming the first CEO of Ladies Gaelic Football Association. Mentions offices at O'Neill's House of Sport in Walkinstown. Decision to leave teaching behind.</p> <p>00:44:40 Her vision of the role of CEO. Description of the role and challenges of being a paid employee working with</p>
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	<p>volunteers. Daily routine and key aspects of her work at the time. Milestones – mentions Bank of Ireland, Suzuki and TG4 sponsorship. Mentions peaks in attendance records, development of the structures of the games at county level particularly at underage level, rule changes including the introduction of the clock.</p> <p>00:49:33 Professionalisation of the organisation of the games. Mentions strategic plan and the Irish Sports Council. Mentions Seán McCague and the move of their offices to Croke Park. Increase in administrative staff levels. Mentions the recruitment of staff in the areas of injury fund scheme and registrations, development and finance. Funding, finance, grants and sponsorship.</p> <p>00:54:09 Autonomy of the Association. The Ladies Gaelic Football Association as part of the wider Gaelic games 'family'. Changes in their working relationship with the other associations of Gaelic sports. Developing joint projects etc. The idea of merging the members of the Gaelic games family – the challenges and opportunities that this presents.</p> <p>00:57:19 The speed of the growth of ladies football, particularly on the international scene. Systems to foster this growth. Level of interest among non-Irish people internationally. Reasons for this success.</p> <p>00:59:27 Reflections on the 40 year anniversary of ladies Gaelic football. Achievements, how far they've come. Returning to Hayes' Hotel to mark the occasion. Mentions the founding members of the Association. Reflects on the challenges ahead including the recession and emigration. Ambitions for the future of the Association.</p> <p>1:01:45 Role of the volunteers around the country. Mentions Gaelic for Girls initiative. Desire to see greater attendance at matches and particularly to see more support from women. Instilling a sense of community among women in sports.</p> <p>1:04:26 Working relationship with various presidents of the Association throughout the years.</p> <p>1:06:50 How she now manages her time and working around the ladies football calendar.</p>
<p>Involvement in Ladies Gaelic Football</p>	<p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Supporter <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Player <input type="checkbox"/> Manager <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Coach <input type="checkbox"/> Steward</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Chairperson <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Committee Member <input type="checkbox"/> Grounds-person</p>

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	<input type="checkbox"/> Caterer <input type="checkbox"/> Jersey Washer <input type="checkbox"/> Referee <input type="checkbox"/> None <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify): President of the Ladies Gaelic Football Association (1994-1997); CEO Ladies Gaelic Football Association
Record as a Player (Titles won; Length of time played)	Played for four years with Park Rangers.
Record as an Administrator (Positions held; how long for)	Secretary of Dublin Ladies Football County Board (1986-1990); PRO of Dublin Ladies Football County Board (1988-89); National Culture and Language Officer for Ladies Gaelic Football; President of the Ladies Gaelic Football Association (1994-1997); CEO of the Ladies Gaelic Football Association (1997-).
Format	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Audio <input type="checkbox"/> Audio-Visual
Duration	Length of Interview: 1:07:41
Language	English

To be filled in by Interviewer:

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Signed: Regina Fitzpatrick

Date: 11th August 2013