

GAA Oral History Project

Interview Report Form

Name of Interviewer	Regina Fitzpatrick
Date of Interview	9 th Feb 2011
Location	Cathedral Road Complex, Armagh City.
Name of Interviewee (Maiden name / Nickname)	Mary Keegan Paula Keegan
<u>Biographical Summary of Interviewee</u>	
Gender	Female
Born	Year Born: Mary: 1955; Paula: 1964. Home County: Armagh
Education	Primary: Mary: St Mary's Primary School, Mullaghbawn, Co. Armagh. Paula: St. Colmcille's, Grange, Co. Armagh. Secondary: Mary: Sacred Heart Grammar School, Newry, Co. Down. Paula: St Catherine's College, Armagh City. Third Level: Mary: University of Ulster.
Family	Siblings: Mary: 2 brothers & 1 sister; Paula: 1 brother & 1 sister Current Family if Different: Mary: Husband, 2 sons & 1 daughter
Club(s)	Mary: Ballyhegan Davitts GAA [Armagh]; Mullaghbawn Cú Chulainn's GAA [Armagh] Paula: St Colmcille's Grange Gaelic Football Club [Armagh]
Occupation	Mary: Administrator for Ulster Ladies Gaelic Football; Paula: Taxi Driver
Parents' Occupation	Mary: N/A Paula: Mushroom growers

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Religion	Roman Catholic
Political Affiliation / Membership (Optional)	None
Other Club/Society Membership(s) (Optional)	None
Date of Report	19 th July 2012
Period Covered	1970s – 2011
Counties/Countries Covered	Armagh, Tyrone, England, Great Britain, Americas, Australia, Australasia
Key Themes Covered	Travel, Supporting, Grounds, Facilities, Playing, Training, Managing, Coaching, Refereeing, Officials, Administration, Celebrations, Fundraising, Sponsorship, Material Culture, Education, Religion, Media, Emigration, Role of Women, Role of the Club in the Community, Volunteers, GAA Abroad, Identity, Rivalries, Culture, Scór, All-Ireland, County History, Earliest Memories, Family Involvement, Childhood, Impact on Life, Career, Challenges, Sacrifices, Alcohol, Violence, Politics, Northern Ireland, The Troubles, Ban on Foreign Games and Dances, Relationship with the Association, Professionalism, Food and Drink, Socialising, Relationships, Economy/Economics
Interview Summary	<p>Mary Keegan and Paula Keegan discuss their contributions to Ladies Football at club and county level in Armagh. They recall their earliest memories of the GAA and explain why they got involved in the sport. In addition, they outline the challenges they faced in gaining recognition and funding for ladies football within the organisation. They reflect on the rapid rise of the sport and the need to boost its profile in the media and also to increase attendance at matches. Finally, Mary and Paula discuss both the positive and negative effects of The Troubles on ladies football.</p> <p>00:50 Mary describes her father's involvement in the administration of his GAA club in Mullaghbawn, South Armagh. Currently honorary president. Her mother organising teas, washing jerseys.</p> <p>01:48 Paula discusses her father's involvement in administration and playing in in St. Colmcille's, Grange GAA Club. Recalls Joe Kiernan delivering Powers' whiskey to club. Reflects on going to Croke Park with her father, 1977 Senior Football All-Ireland Final, Armagh beaten. In semi-final, out on the pitch in Croke Park. Recalls kicking football with boys</p>

	<p>when she was growing up.</p> <p>04:56 Mary recalls her earliest memory of Croke Park: going to support her boyfriend, now husband, Peter Keegan, playing for Armagh in Division 3 games in 1976. No preferential treatment of wives and girlfriends. Mentions John Courtney. Tradition of Armagh team returning to pub called Jackie Murphy's near Dundalk, going to dance in Fairways Hotel. Alcohol. Her involvement with Scór. Mentions Jim McKerr.</p> <p>07:05 Discussion about changes in playing for Armagh. Mary's husband smoking after matches, going to pub after training. Comparison with football today. Amateurism, challenge of combining work and training. No kitbags or gear when her husband was playing in the 1970s.</p> <p>08:24 Mary describes playing camogie when she was growing up. No Ladies Football at that time. Coordination skills required for camogie.</p> <p>08:54 Paula mentions John Morrison. Difference between men and women at picking up skills. Camogie in her club, The Grange, decline as players moved away and had children. Rise of Ladies Football. Playing both, preference for football.</p> <p>10:34 Mary recounts story about playing camogie in Ballyhegan Davitts GAC. Practising with her husband, injuring him. Stitches. End of her career.</p> <p>12:08 Paula mentions injuring Paula McCormack during camogie.</p> <p>12:47 Discussion about dominance of football in Armagh over hurling and camogie. Gradual rise of hurling.</p> <p>13:23 Mary's loyalty to club over county. Recollection of footballers congregating in her family's shop, Pete's Shop, in Mullaghbawn, eating crisps and ice cream, drinking soft drinks, discussing game.</p> <p>14:20 Paula's passion for the Grange team and Armagh team. Mentions Peter Canavan of Tyrone, Peter Averty of Armagh.</p> <p>15:36 Mary mentions Paul McGrane of Ballyhegan Davitts, his influence in the club. Mentions Paddy Mo. Paula mentions Gerard Houlahan, Joe Kiernan, Kieran McGeeney.</p> <p>18:32 Discussion about lack of female footballers when they were growing up. Playing soccer in GAA pitch, viewed unfavourably in the past. Popularity of premiership soccer</p>
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	<p>gear in the past, popularity of GAA club gear nowadays. Identity of wearing club colours.</p> <p>21:05 Paula reflects on the ongoing nature of fundraising. Several fundraisers throughout the year to cover expenses. Demand for Gaelic gear. Mary ponders the risks of wearing Gaelic gear in Portadown during The Troubles, comparison with today. Success of the Armagh team popularising GAA. Still parts of Armagh in which people couldn't wear Gaelic gear today. Positive changes.</p> <p>25:12 No ladies soccer when they were growing up. Mary recounts story of her brother Eamon playing Gaelic football and soccer after ban was lifted, her father's disapproval. Bitterness from some GAA members about playing soccer, even today.</p> <p>27:34 Discussion about sports being split along religious lines. Catholic schools playing football and camogie, Protestant schools playing rugby and hockey. Gradual change now. Integrated schools. Rise of schools football in Ladies Football. Paula recalls no camogie or ladies football: playing hockey and netball in St. Catherine's Armagh. Mary recalls strong camogie tradition in Sacred Heart Grammar School, Newry.</p> <p>29:33 Mary mentions Louis O'Donnell, chairman of Ulster Schools Committee. Louis's attempts to introduce Gaelic games to school he taught in. Schools All-Stars.</p> <p>32:38 Discussion about start of Ladies Football. Grange club starting in 1989, 1990. Clubs with ladies football teams: Lissummon, Mullaghbawn, Tullysaran, Maghery, Ballyhegan. First county board in early 90s. Efforts to keep ladies football afloat, lack of assistance for ladies' teams. More support from Ulster Council now. Issue of female players leaving club to marry and have children, no involvement in administration. Fixtures of ladies football leagues arranged around men's.</p> <p>37:01 Mary ponders the huge increase in interest in GAA, challenge of accommodating so many teams. Ladies football the fastest growing sport in Ireland. Not recognised as separate sport by the Sports Council in Northern Ireland, no independent funding from GAA. Challenge of fundraising at club and county board level.</p> <p>39:25 Discussion about financial arrangements with Ulster GAA for Sports Council funding. Ladies Football not a spectator sport, low income from gates. No funding from Croke Park. Ulster GAA employing a full-time development</p>
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	<p>officer for Ladies Football, Sheena Kelly. No money from TG4 sponsorship. Financial challenges. Mary considers why the sport fails to attract spectators. No diving, purity of the sport. Lack of female support.</p> <p>44:31 Mary mentions initiative Gaelic for Mothers. Disorganisation to raise funds at gates, lack of help.</p> <p>45:43 Improvement of media coverage of the sport. TG4's role in promoting ladies football. Regular features in <i>The Irish News</i>. Also mention <i>Gaelic Life</i>. Inadequate coverage, lack of active PROs.</p> <p>47:36 Hopes for the future of Ladies Football. Success of integration. Support from Ulster GAA. Aims to be a subsection of the GAA. Mary's initial resistance to GAA involvement.</p> <p>49:33 Discussion about concerns that ladies football would get subsumed by men's. Opposition to the sport from some quarters. Efforts to get women into management positions in the GAA. Initial resistance from some older members to women playing football, changed now.</p> <p>54:17 Discussion about men's involvement in Ladies Football. Using men's referees, insufficient ex-players to referee. Male managers at club level. Difference between male and female players. Mary compares all-female involvement in camogie with mixed involvement at ladies football. More of a feminist movement in camogie. Explanation of tensions between camogie and ladies football. Dual players. Decline in numbers of camogie players since ladies football started. Efforts to unite both sports, cooperate over fixtures.</p> <p>59:32 Mary recounts story about chairing Armagh Ladies Football, fixtures clash between ladies' county final and men's match, Mary attending men's county board meeting. Mentions Leo Marley. Taking the door off the hinges in anger. Lack of understanding from men's county board about ladies football.</p> <p>01:04:23 Paula mentions Joe Jordan's involvement with men's county board, attending Armagh Ladies dinner dances.</p> <p>01:05:02 Mary reflects on getting involved in ladies football when her daughter started playing. Making tea and sandwiches, fundraising. Her daughter Louise's efforts to start the sport in her school. Mary's involvement in administration. County board delegate, various roles. Describes role of secretary in Ulster Council, tasks involved.</p> <p>01:09:09 Paula describes getting involved in administration through playing in the Grange. Involvement at county board</p>
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	<p>level. Mentions Kieran Cullen, Larry Crilly, Brian Meehan, Dolores Talbot. Early failed efforts to establish ladies football. Paula describes playing for county. Bringing her children to training sessions and matches. Joy of her involvement in the sport, friends made. Challenge of getting goalkeepers in ladies football. Coaching underage teams.</p> <p>01:13:34 Paula recalls the early days of ladies football. County board meetings. Divided into North and South Armagh. Lack of players in early days of county trials. Low points. Winning junior All-Ireland in 2005. Appointment of former men's county player as manager attracting more players.</p> <p>01:17:18 Discussion of rivalry: rivalry between Armagh and Tyrone in men's and ladies' football. Also between neighbouring clubs and counties. Mary ponders the opportunities presented through ladies football. Her daughter emigrating to England, camaraderie in GAA club. Paula discusses friendships made between girls on underage teams. Socialising together, bonds between them. Paula playing on same team as her daughter. Her daughter studying in Indiana, getting help from lads wearing Galway jerseys. Global family.</p> <p>01:27:02 Mary discusses her nephews and niece in Australia, Christmas barbecue for Armagh GAA supporters.</p> <p>01:27:43 They reflect on the amateurism in the GAA. Accessibility of players. Comparison between amateurism of GAA and huge sums of money involved in premiership soccer. Love of Gaelic games, pride in jersey. Negative responses to Mary's paid administration role. Rapid growth of ladies football, necessity of having full-time officers.</p> <p>01:31:29 Discussion about link between Gaelic games and Irish identity.</p> <p>01:32:42 Description of the impact of The Troubles on the games. Disruption of matches, roadblocks for match supporters. Involvement in the GAA a way of reinforcing Irish identity. Attacks on Ballyhegan club. Arrests of players for carrying hurls or camogie sticks. Impact of the marching season on the games.</p> <p>01:37:14 Mary mentions article in newspaper by Oisín McConville about Crossmaglen club, helicopters landing beside pitch. Paula recalls not publicising matches in papers, spreading news via word of mouth. Stories about GAA players</p>
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	<p>being stopped at checkpoints.</p> <p>01:41:05 Mary explains how The Troubles boosted the GAA. Strength of GAA in rural areas, people afraid of going to towns. Paula recalls living beside football field, fear of incidents.</p> <p>01:44:57 Reflections on reasons for getting involved in the GAA. Lack of political motives. Some politicians' vocal support of the GAA, boosting profile of the games. Some individuals' views of involvement in the club as increasing their status.</p> <p>01:47:26 Their opinions on Gaelic games being integrated into schools. Their beliefs that changes will occur at school level and progress to clubs. History of GAA clubs in Catholic areas. Projects in Ulster GAA, introducing hurling and shinty to schools on both sides. Health benefits of involvement in Gaelic games. Mary recalls making publicity dvd for ladies football, Unionist players.</p> <p>01:50:58 Paula discusses the significance of the GAA in her life. Winning the Ulster Council Volunteer Award. Passion. Mary mentions her children's involvement in the GAA, their passion for it.</p>
<p>Involvement in GAA</p>	<p>Mary:</p> <p>✓ Supporter <input type="checkbox"/> Player ✓ Manager <input type="checkbox"/> Coach ✓ Steward</p> <p>✓ Chairperson ✓ Committee Member <input type="checkbox"/> Grounds-person</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Caterer ✓ Jersey Washer <input type="checkbox"/> Referee <input type="checkbox"/> None</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify): _____</p> <p>Paula:</p> <p>✓ Supporter ✓ Player ✓ Manager ✓ Coach ✓ Steward</p> <p>✓ Chairperson ✓ Committee Member <input type="checkbox"/> Grounds-person</p> <p>✓ Caterer ✓ Jersey Washer ✓ Referee <input type="checkbox"/> None</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify): _____</p>
<p>Record as a Player (Titles won; Length of time played)</p>	<p>Mary: None</p> <p>Paula: Played for Armagh Senior Ladies Football team and won Ulster championship with them. Still playing for St.</p>

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	Colmcille's, Grange.
Record as an Administrator (Positions held; how long for)	Mary: Armagh Ladies Gaelic Football County Registrar; Armagh Ladies Gaelic Football Vice-Chairperson and Chairperson (7-8 years in total); Ulster Ladies Gaelic Football Provincial Secretary (5 years). Paula: Chairperson of Armagh Ladies Gaelic Football County Board; also served as treasurer, assistant treasurer, and on referees and fixtures committees. Vice Chairperson of St Colmcille's Ladies Gaelic Football Club.
Format	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Audio <input type="checkbox"/> Audio-Visual
Duration	Length of Interview: 01:52:36
Language	English

To be filled in by Interviewer:

I hereby assign the copyright of the content of the above to the GAA Oral History Project on the understanding that the content will not be used in a derogatory manner. I understand that I am giving the GAA Oral History Project the right to use and make available to the public the content of this interview.

Signed: Regina Fitzpatrick

Date: 19th July 2012