

Record Number 564.  
 MR. COMMISSIONER O'BRIEN.  
 ... day of December, One Thousand Eight  
 FRANCIS JOSEPH MURPHY, JAMES ANDREW MURPHY  
 FITZGERALD MURPHY,  
 Vendors of Land.



*The Killian cottage before restoration*

SCHEDULE ABOVE REFERRED TO:  
 ANNA KILLIAN ✓  
 (Widow), Lanesborough, County Longford

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*The Killian sisters in New York in 1901 in a photo taken to reassure their family in Ireland that they were alive and well in America.*

# Going Home:

BY JOAN KILLIAN GALLAGHER

“Do you have the money?” asked Rita Shea Connolly, grabbing my hand and looking me squarely in the eye. “I do, Rita, but it’s overpriced,” I explained. “Tis no matter,” she said. “You must get it now, or you will surely lose it forever.”

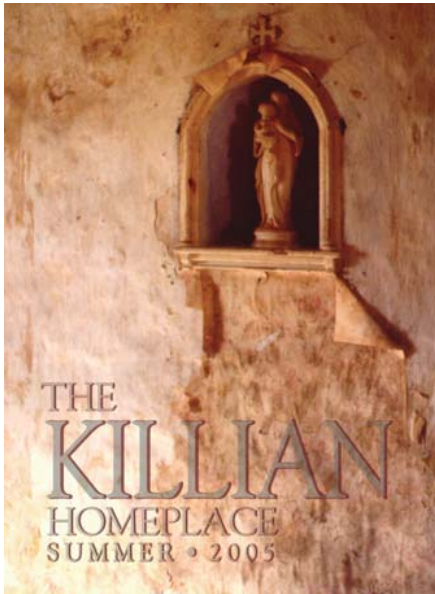
Rita Shea Connolly was a quiet, gentle soul who seldom spoke above a whisper. But, in this case, she knew both the players and the stakes, and she was determined to communicate the urgency. I treasured her friendship and respected her judgment, and I knew she was right. She was like a mother to me, especially since my own dear mother was slipping away, ravaged by Alzheimer’s disease. They had the same maiden name.

So, on the Tuesday after Easter in 2000, I set out for Roscommon, a woman on a mission with less than 24 hours to spare before my flight back to America. Rita had succeeded in lighting a fire in my heart, and I was determined to strike a deal and save the remaining half of the original Killian farm from real estate development.

When I was growing up in Yonkers, NY, my maternal grandparents, Denis and Katie Killian O’Shea, both of whom were born in Ireland, lived in the same apartment house as my family did. They were an integral part of our everyday lives, and whenever they babysat, my brothers and I would beg them to tell us stories of their child-



# An Ancestral HomePlace in Ireland



*The Killian cottage as it looks today after the restoration.*

hoods in Ireland. With their gifted storytelling, Irish farm life in the 1800s came alive for us, and we spent many happy hours, listening to stories and picturing our grandparents with their large families, happily tucked away in Irish cottages and doing their daily chores on the land.

Sadly, my grandfather's ancestral home in Tipperary went out of the family in the early 1980s and soon was demolished. The old farmhouse was torn down and the stones dispensed for stone walls in the area. His children in America were the only descendants of that branch of the O'Shea family, and it seemed no one was able to maintain the property. It was heartbreaking to me that my Grandfather O'Shea's cottage was lost forever because there were no O'Shea descendants in Ireland, and no one in America in a position to preserve the family's heritage.

Now, at the turn of the new century, the Killian Homeplace was facing the same fate, and I believed with all my heart that it must be saved and that it was up to me to save it.

## A LIFELONG DREAM

For as long as I can remember, it has been my dream to have a little stone house somewhere. I had saved photographs from magazines and articles from newspapers, fueling my imagination and creating the visual details.

On Sept. 19, 1996, I had even written in my journal, "Who knows what my stone cottage will look like, or where it will be ... maybe Ireland. It may be old, but for sure it will be in a beautiful, peaceful place, and I will be content there."

In March 1998, less than two years after writing that, I was the successful, mystery bidder at a packed land auction in the town of Longford, Ireland. The building boom had not yet hit, and it was the first sale of a family-held farmland in three years. My purchase included 24 lush acres of magnificent rolling hills and a derelict farmhouse that had been uninhabited for more than six decades. But, I had found my dream.

The magic for me flowed from the fact that it was a Killian farmhouse, the other

half of the ancestral Killian Homeplace where my great-grandfather, Laurence Killian, was raised, the eldest of the nine children of Luke and Anne Furey Killian.

The purchase was thrilling, but at the same time, immensely challenging. When all the excitement had died down, I found myself grateful to have had the winning bid, but a bit overwhelmed by the condition of the cottage and the prospect of rehabilitating it. Little did I know that two years later, I would do it again, purchasing the other half of the Killian Homeplace and completing the ancestral homestead as a unified whole.

## IRELAND, MY IRELAND

As the widowed mother of a seven-year-old child, I had come to the realization that Ireland was the perfect solution to my never-ending holiday-destination dilemma.

In addition to being a business owner, I was responsible for caring for both my 82-year-old mother, who was suffering from Alzheimer's, and my 85-year-old father, whose heart was slowly breaking as he





*Top photo: Joan Killian Gallagher stands at the hearth of the cottage.*

*Center photo: workmen restoring the cottage on the lush farmland that has been in Joan's family for more than 200 years.*

*Bottom photo: the Killian cousins at the cottage in 1998, including Joan's daughter Caroline Gallagher (left), with Louise Martin, Aine Hanley, and Mary Martin.*



watched his wife fade and also battled physical ailments of his own.

I needed to take a vacation where I could rest and relax and where Caroline Killian Gallagher, my precious little girl, would not get bored. Ireland seemed like just the place. In addition to its other attractions, it was home to our Irish cousins, who had children the same age as my daughter—four fresh-faced little ones who were intrigued by their newly discovered Yankee relative.

As the years passed, the bond between the American and Irish sides of our family strengthened. With each visit, we learned more about one another and also about our common heritage.

I was moved to tears imagining my own dear grandmother, Katie Killian O'Shea, coming to the Homeplace to bid farewell to her grandmother, Anne. I pictured Anne offering words of encouragement and reassurances of love as one after another of her grandchildren set out for a better life, traveling from the warmth of her hearth into the uncertainty of their new worlds.

My grandmother was the tenth of 12 children of Laurence Killian and his wife, Sarah Connolly Killian. By the time she turned 19 in 1898, there were already three nuns and a Capuchin priest among her 11 siblings. Peter Killian, her younger brother, had just announced that he, too, wanted to become a priest. So Katie, strong and quick-witted, made plans to leave the farm and travel to America to earn the money for his seminary education. After all, she reasoned, five of her sisters were already in America, and they would show her the ropes.

In Ireland at the time, it was customary for the relatives to gather at an "American wake" to bid the traveler goodbye. In Anne Killian's case, that goodbye was permanent, since most of her grandchildren who left Ireland never came home again. They built their lives in America and England, raising their own families with the same values of honesty and hard work they had been taught on the farm in Ireland.

Some of Anne's grandchildren lost their lives at an early age.



Mary Flanagan, 21, made the front page of *The New York Times* in April 1899. She was one of six Irish servants that died tragically in a Fifth Avenue townhouse fire, trapped by the flames in the basement. Her brother, James, 26, died four years later of blood poisoning, leaving behind two young children in Ireland. Katie's sister, Maggie, became a nun, but died of tuberculosis at 24 in a convent in Newark, NJ. Peter did enter the seminary, but died in 1908 at the age of 25, also from tuberculosis.

For me, the pieces of the puzzle that compose the story of the descendants of Anne and Luke Killian are just now falling into place. They are coming to light slowly, gathered from divergent sources and unexpected places. It is fascinating to connect the dots and discover new connections.

The Killians were brave and determined souls. Some died before their time; some never married, and some married, but remained childless. Those who became priests and nuns firmly believed in their calling and gave boundlessly of their energy to educate the young. There is no one left to speak on their behalf, so I have become the self-appointed keeper of the family flame, the one who will write their story and remember their contributions to the world and the Killian legacy.

In the course of the nine years we have been returning to Ireland on holiday, we have nurtured a growing love of the people and the place.

With my purchase of the two halves of the Killian Homeplace (the first in 1998, the second in 2000), the original farm has



*Joan Killian Gallagher, founder and president of Warden-Brooks, Ltd., says the success of her company helped make it possible for her to realize her dream of purchasing and restoring the Killian Homeplace in Ireland, a 50-acre farm with two cottages.*

been made whole again, and it once again encompasses the nearly 50 acres of lush, green fields that the Killian family has cultivated for the last two hundred years.

It is a source of pride that the Killian ownership of the land began when my Great, Great Grandmother Anne had the tenacity and the vision to take a stand for her family in 1893 and buy the family's lease holding from the English landlords. As tenant farmers in British-ruled Ireland, the Killian family had few rights, but Anne Furey Killian was determined to take advantage of the newly enacted land act and change that. In 1893, at the time of her purchase, she was widowed and at least 80 years old, but she was unwavering in her desire to get the land for her family, and so she did.

When I bought each of the two halves

of the original farm, I, too, was a widow determined to give my child the best that life had to offer. I wanted my daughter, Caroline, to know the place her great grandparents left and to understand how they struggled against all odds when they left home in Ireland to begin a new life in the New World. The simplicity and goodness with which our ancestors lived their lives is captured in the rooms of these tiny stone cottages and in the folds of the rich, green fields.

### COMING FULL CIRCLE

Looking back at the sequence of events, it still amazes me that the stone cottage I built in my mind so many times has become a reality. Not only do we have one stone cottage, we have two, and they are the original homes of our Killian ancestors. In Ireland, as in most of Europe, the family home remains in the family, passing from generation to generation. It is rarely, if ever, sold on the open market the way I acquired both pieces.

Strangely, the American dream that my grandmother, Katie Killian O'Shea, sought in 1898 helped make it all possible for me.

In the New World, I was able to start and build a thriving business that provided the capital to make this dream a reality. Having founded and run my own company for 28 years, I was not intimidated by

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*The Killian cousins all grown up as teenagers in this shot taken in August: From left, Aine Hanley, Joan's daughter Caroline Gallagher, Louise Martin, Mary Martin, and Deirdre Leavy. Frequent visits to Ireland make it possible for Caroline to stay close to her Irish cousins.*

the challenges of acquiring and renovating the Homeplace as they appeared. The dogged determination that helped my company, Warden-Brooks, become well known and respected in the corporate gift industry made me a fearless opponent at the auction that day in Longford.

I suppose serendipity also played a role. In 1991, recognizing the potential market in Europe, I had exercised my right, as a grandchild of Irish-born grandparents, to apply for dual citizenship. Little did I know at the time that being an Irish citizen would facilitate my taking legal title to the Killian Homeplace a few years later.

Having put the "two farms under me arm" by the summer of 2000, the next year a wonderful and unexpected event occurred in my life. I met and married a widower who soon shared my passion for the project. Christopher Clark and I joined forces, and we kicked the Killian Homeplace restoration project into high gear. We planned, we schemed, and we overcame hurdles, finally getting the builders to agree to preserve the old, unique features of the Homeplace, not modernize it at the expense of authenticity.

Five long years later, on July 29, 2005, we turned the key, walked through the door, and stayed in our little stone cottage for the first time. We were home at last! We

set about welcoming all the cousins and all the neighbors. We made endless pots of tea, shared our lives and our laughter, and spent three weeks enjoying the beauty of Ireland and the warmth of its people.

Our Killian cousins have been a big part of the project, contributing their energy and

keeping the dream alive after we return to America each year.

Since 1997, we have shared our lives with our cousins. Together, we have watched each other's children grow up, grandchildren be born, and parents pass away. We have shared all the other joys and sorrows that are part of the rich texture of life.

The Killian cousins have welcomed us with open arms and open hearts, and they have given us the love and safety we were seeking. After my marriage to Chris, they made a point of gathering the clan and welcoming him, making him feel at home there, as well. My daughter, Caroline, and her four cousins simply pick up where they left off on the last visit each time they see one another. They share a strong bond and a lasting friendship.

One day, in a quiet moment while walking from one cottage down the lane to the Homeplace, it struck me that it was exactly one hundred years after my grandmother Katie left Ireland for America that I pursued my "Irish dream" and purchased the first half of the farm in Longford.

Could Katie ever have imagined that one hundred years after she bravely volunteered to leave home, her own granddaughter would return to the place where her father was born and call it home?


The Homeplace, the actual cottage where the Killian children

were born and reared, has an adjoining compound of out buildings and gardens. The nine children of Anne and Luke all survived the famine there and then lived into adulthood, most of them into old age.

In the main room, the original slate floor and stone hearth remain intact. It is in this room, the heart of the Homeplace, that the Killian spirit is most alive. Looking out the back window, past the garden to the fields, the presence of the past surrounds the cottage.

And so it goes.

The Homeplace remains a labor of love and a work in progress for all the Killian descendants to behold and cherish in this topsy-turvy world that sometimes spins out of control. We can all go home to Fermoy in County Longford, Ireland, now and forevermore...to get our bearings...to breathe in the spirit of our ancestors' strength and goodness, and to celebrate their memory.

**JOAN KILLIAN GALLAGHER** is the founder and president of Warden-Brooks, Ltd. ([www.wardenbrooks.com](http://www.wardenbrooks.com)), a New Canaan, CT-based firm that designs, manufactures and sells corporate gift products. She is also a member of the Enterprising Women National Advisory Board. She can be contacted at 203-972-1111 (e-mail: [jkg@wardenbrooks.com](mailto:jkg@wardenbrooks.com)). 



*The Killian Homeplace has an adjoining compound of out buildings and gardens.*