

## **PROUD DAUGHTER OF A REMARKABLE WOMAN**

**I am the proud daughter of a remarkable woman, Mary O'Malley Carr, the matriarch of an Irish immigrant family who arrived in America in 1926. For many years, literally decades, I have been planning to record her story so that younger members of our family might come to know her or know her better. Yet, it took the interest and curiosity of Mary's great grand-daughter, Isabella Carr, to spur me on to put pen to paper and begin the narrative. It all started with Isabella's fourth grade school project on immigration. Each student was to choose a family member, living or not, who was an immigrant and then to imagine that person's experience arriving and subsequently living in America. Isabella had heard her grandfather, Mary's son Robert, talk about his beloved mother and quickly realized Mary O'Malley would be an ideal prototype for her project. So she gathered reams of information from her grandfather and father, also Robert Carr, and set to work. In fact, she collected far more material than she could include in her 20 minute or so presentation, which was a big success at the school assembly. Later, back at home, she wondered whether the family could add to the story and keep it going into the future (and into my narrative!) And so, it was a little 10-year old girl who was the guiding force behind getting this worthwhile story told.**

**Mary O'Malley was born in 1897 into a farm family of 6 children in Castlebar, County Mayo, on the rugged west coast of Ireland. She liked the atmosphere at her small, rural schoolhouse and enjoyed learning but for her, elementary school lasted only 3 years. Then, even as a youngster working at any available job, she seemed to understand and ponder the lack of opportunity in her homeland for the future. One of her jobs as she was growing up was barkeeper in a local pub (information that came as a shock to us kids in our teens as we became aware how our mother felt about excessive drinking.) Knowing her penchant for finding advantages in any situation, we surmise she listened to the pub patrons as they conversed and used this as her "window on the world". True, Castlebar was in a remote area of rural Ireland but pub conversation anywhere can be the source of insights into the human condition and we can assume Mary was alert to her environment. Perhaps she even heard about opportunities in America as she went about her daily tasks. However it happened, Mary made contact with someone in Cambridge, Massachusetts, who put her in touch with a woman prominent in the education field, Mrs. Carmelita Hinton, who was searching for a mature, competent young nanny for her children. Letters made their way back and forth across the Atlantic and Mrs. Hinton settled on Mary O'Malley as her choice for the family nanny.**

**We know few details about Mary O'Malley's first coming to America but we can assume it was an exhilarating though intimidating undertaking for a hitherto inexperienced young woman. Eager to start out on the right foot, Mary immersed herself completely in her new family, was drawn to the children Billy, Jean and Joan and grew to love them as they loved her. Mrs. Hinton was beginning to feel comfortable enough with the skills of her new nanny to give serious thought to developing her plans for the new type of school she envisioned, based on her philosophy of education. (More about this later.) For a project of this magnitude, a capable, reliable nanny was indispensable, and Mary willingly assumed more and more household responsibility in addition to the care of the children. Pleased to see her family thriving, Mrs. Hinton seized her opportunity. She made plans to relocate to London to research the British public school system (which somewhat resembles the American private school model). Mary remembered this time in her life with great delight, wheeling the**

children through Hyde Park in the heart of the city and playing for hours each day in leafy green groves in nearby parks. (I think my life-long wanderlust and love of travel was triggered hearing about these adventures!)

After this stay in London, the household boarded an ocean liner in Southampton and dropped Mary off at Cobh, Ireland from where she proceeded west to Castlebar to marry her intended, James Carr. Two years after their 1924 marriage, the young couple with their infant daughter bid a sad farewell to their families at the traditional send-off referred to as an "American wake" and left Ireland once again to settle permanently in America.

Though this is essentially a story about my mother, Mary O'Malley (Carr), it would be remiss to overlook her husband of 55 years and my father, James F. Carr. They raised seven children, the oldest of whom, our sister Mary Bridget, was born in Ireland in 1925. Our sister, Anne Theresa, was born in January 1927 shortly after their transatlantic liner, Samaria, docked in America. The ocean voyage must have been a nightmare, judging by the fact that Mary and James almost never talked about the experience and, of course, Mary was expecting her second child. The one thing they did talk about was how little Mary fared on the crossing. She was adventuresome, exuberant, untouched by seasickness and friendly to everyone. The newly arrived family made its way to Boston and Cambridge where Mary renewed contact with her former employer Mrs. Hinton who, understandably, was disappointed that Mary's current family situation precluded her availability for employment.

Succeeding decades passed, filled with the busy life and mundane concerns of an expanding family of five additional children:

Margaret Frances, born in October, 1928

Virginia Rita, born in July, 1933

James Francis Jr., born in May, 1935

John DeValera, born in May, 1938

And Robert Emmett, born in May, 1940

(the only child born in the hospital)

During this time there was little contact between the Carr and Hinton families, though frequent newspaper stories about Mrs. Hinton's project, the Putney School in Putney, Vermont, were published. Mary followed these articles as she retained fond memories of the family. It was from these occasional items that Mary learned the Putney School opened in the mid-30's and became well-regarded for its progressive, demanding curriculum paired with intensive, practical, instruction in skills for independent living. One of its first graduates was young William Hinton, who followed his graduation by going to China and immersing himself in the turbulent atmosphere of the period.

For purposes of this narrative, let's now leap across the years to ca. 1978. By then I had married Emmett Shea, a college professor with an expertise in International Relations and U.S.-East Asian Relations. Among his book collection I came across by chance a tome written by a William Hinton, entitled Fanshen: A Documentary of Revolution in a Chinese Village, described as a remarkable, on-the-scene account of China in the 1950's and 1960's. Imagine my surprise and delight! Mary O'Malley's precious little charge on their many strolls through London's famous Hyde Park had become a well-respected observer, participant and chronicler of a tumultuous period in Chinese history!

This intriguing discovery was followed a short time later by a notice in our local Sunday newspaper that none other than William Hinton was scheduled to speak during the upcoming week at the Science Center at Wellesley College on Agriculture and the Communist Collective Farm. (I learned subsequently that William's daughter, Carmelita Hinton's namesake who was raised in China, was at that time teaching Chinese Language and Civilization at Wellesley College).

So guess who was determined to attend the lecture!

That evening I went to the main lecture hall at the Science Center and sat at the rear of the middle aisle. I thought I knew a little about agriculture because James Carr was skilled in coaxing productivity out of poor, sandy Irish soil (and continued to till whatever plot of land he had access to.) But even the tall, massive bear of a lecturer who fascinated me, could not keep my attention focused on the agricultural benefits of night soil! But hanging in there for 90

minutes was a small price to pay for the extraordinary events that followed. After the lecture, I walked down the long aisle toward the stage where Professor Hinton was answering student questions. At one point he cast his gaze at the floor I was standing on, threw his very long arms into the air with a roar and shouted for all to hear-

**Mary O'Malley!!!!**

(Until that time, no one had ever indicated I looked remotely like my mother.)

Then, those same long, strong arms reached down, met mine and lifted me to the stage where he literally smothered me with bear hugs and kisses! I was overwhelmed, unable to speak. While I was regaining my composure he told me that he dearly loved and respected his accomplished mother, yet it was Mary O'Malley who held a special place in his heart. She was a warm, loving, ever-present constant for several years in his young life, never to be forgotten. In our time-limited but intense conversation, we agreed that in showering him with love, caring and little, though important life lessons, she was practicing and perfecting the maternal skills of which we, her seven children, were beneficiaries. After our emotional interchange we parted after I promised William Hinton to contact his 93 year old mother in Concord and arrange a meeting between two old friends.

On the appointed day, we drove to Concord, were welcomed by William's sister Jean and proceeded upstairs to where Carmelita Hinton was bedridden due to a heart condition. She was sitting up in bed facing a book rest holding her current read, Franklin and Eleanor. The two old friends greeted one another in a warm exchange and went on to catch up on the highlights of roughly 50 years of their lives. I think Jean Hinton recorded the conversation but somehow we didn't get a copy. We were all delighted at the reunion decades in the making.

That was the last contact we had with the Hintons, but it was, in retrospect, a fascinating chapter in the family's history. If more information on the progressive school founded by Carmelita Hinton is desired, refer to the internet under The Putney School.

I am including a few additions to this story on questions and suggestions from family members and friends who are interested in learning more about Mary O'Malley's early life or clarifying information in the essay. Because much of this section is so personal, I'll refer to Mama and Daddy.

Younger people, in particular, were mystified by my statement that our youngest brother was "born in the hospital". Where else? they wondered. So, I'll try to help. A few months after my sister Mary's birth in Ireland, Mama and Daddy started to prepare for their long-planned emigration to America, a fervent desire though none-the-less bitter-sweet prospect. By then, Mama was expecting my sister Anne, who was born two months after the ship's arrival in America. The subsequent 5 children were born in the United States with as mentioned, only Bob born "in the hospital".

Now for a little background. Many cultures world-wide have what is known as a mid-wife. Usually, but not always, the mid-wife is a mature female relative of the mother-to-be who makes herself available to the patient often on a reciprocal basis. In some cases, the mid-wife is a trained birth attendant. This was, and is, an accepted practice, highly practical and prized by a peasant and rural society. In the city of Boston where our family lived in the mid-20's and mid-30's, Mama was fortunate to have had the care of a city-sponsored and trained visiting nurse who made regular pre-natal visits to her expectant patients in neighborhoods with numerous young immigrant families. As the due date for each mother-to-be drew near, the family was given a phone number to summon the on-duty doctor, often in the middle of the night. Meanwhile the patient's husband or caregiver did his or her best to keep the patient calm and comfortable awaiting the delivery. When the doctor arrived, Daddy readied the boiling water needed for the birth and helped him wash the new baby and make it comfortable with Mama. (The doctor, fortunately, could be in contact with the nearest hospital or ambulance service if the need arose.) After the birth was completed, Daddy declared himself exhausted and I guess Mama did, too!

Two years later, when Mama was expecting her seventh child, the visiting nurse insisted she give birth in the hospital. Mama offered no objections! So Robert was born in the hospital and arrived home 5 days later with a happy, rested mother.

Many readers wanted to know more about the conversation between the two old friends at their "reunion." If only we had been able to access their interchange that eventful afternoon, taped thoughtfully by daughter Jean Hinton Rosner, we could all enjoy their reminiscences in their own voices! In any event, I'll try to recapture the content and excitement of that meeting.

Catch-up, was of course, the first order of the day. Mary inquired at once about her now-grown "charges" and learned that young William Hinton was one of the first graduates of his mother's renowned Putney School and soon went off to China to "try his wings" in a new culture (more about that elsewhere in this essay), deferring his college acceptance for a few years in favor of first hand experience in China. Then, from 1937 to 1939, he attended Harvard, furthering his studies on the country that had become the focus of his life. His sister, Joan, undecided about a career after college, joined him there.

After some moving about in relation to her burgeoning career and growing reputation in progressive education, Mrs. Hinton settled with her daughter Jean into a somewhat permanent residence in Pennsylvania. When Jean was ready for college, she enrolled at nearby Bryn Mawr. Meanwhile Joan found life in China to her liking and stayed long enough to experience life there before and after the Revolution.

Because of her lifelong commitment to education, Mrs. Hinton naturally was interested in Mama's family and how the Carr children fared in their parents adopted land. She knew of the births of our first two siblings but was unprepared for the news that there were five additional children. She listened intently as Mama provided details of the family. Intrigued by this information, her questions to Mama flowed freely. Basically a reticent and private person Mama reluctantly opened up to her old friend's obvious interest in the trajectory of the new American family through the decades.

**My oldest sister, Mary, graduated from the City of Boston Teachers' College, taught fifth grade for several years before earning an M.Ed. at Tufts University Graduate School. (Mary died of breast cancer in 1987.)**

**Next came my sister, Anne, whose intense interest in sports led her to Boston University School of Physical Education (Sargent College). She spent her career teaching, coaching and officiating countless sports. ( Anne died of breast cancer in 1968.)**

**Margaret pursued a life-long interest in foreign languages. She graduated from Radcliffe College and later Boston University with degrees in Romance Languages and Literatures, taught high school French and Latin and later became a foreign language textbook editor.**

**As our sister, Virginia, progressed through high school, she also was drawn to Boston University Sargent College, this time to the School of Physical Therapy. Recent emphasis on fitness, wellness and rehabilitation had made P.T. a viable career path.**

**Jim graduated from Boston College School of Business Administration and earned a Master's degree in Social Work from Simmons College. He worked in the field of youth services, rehabilitation and counseling.**

**John, too, graduated from Boston College School of Business Administration and from Babson College with an MBA. After working for a national packaging company, he started his own successful packaging firm.**

**Bob, younger than most of his peers at high school graduation and undecided about his next step, fashioned his own "gap year" by "interning" at a large legal firm in Boston where he gained knowledge, experience and confidence in working and dealing with people. From there he enrolled at Suffolk University and earned a degree in accounting. He has worked in computer sales and sales management.**

After our emotional and satisfying visit, I expected our ride home to be filled with chatter and comments about the day but, to my surprise, Mama was unusually quiet. I, too, felt inclined to quietly ponder the significance of this meeting so long in coming. In fact, I feel my thoughts duplicated hers-the emotions we were experiencing were so intertwined, we needed time to sort them out. I think, for the first time, Mama came face to face with the enormity of the task she had so bravely taken on-raising seven children in a new country and culture ready and willing to contribute to that country in return for the opportunities it had afforded. Her tranquil, peace-filled expression said more than mere words – a deep pride shone through! I think too, that Mrs. Hinton saw our family as validation of her choice of Mama as her children's nanny.

A frequent question from non-family readers of my essay is, "What was it like growing up with Mama? Tell us more about her." So, I set to work drawing up a list of adjectives that described her, and the longer the list became, the more I worried readers would think- "Wait a minute! No one has that many attributes!" So, to get other perspectives, I decided to ask Jim, John and Bob to present me with their list of Mama's traits, and duplicates abounded!

You will no doubt be surprised that "patient" topped all the lists-even in a family of 7 children! (Remember, Mama had practically "raised" the 3 Hinton children.) She knew that daily family life was repetitive, routines had to be repeated, children forgot what they were told or didn't listen, so frustration often followed. Being experienced and wise, Mama was flexible, understanding, empathetic, supportive, even-tempered, considerate, compassionate, positive, appreciative, optimistic and fair; yes, above all, fair, and she made sure we understood that fair did not have to mean equal. She was unfailingly gentle, loving and caring, always finding time in her busiest days to lend her support as she encouraged us to find our own solutions to our problems.

**From early childhood, we basked in Mama's love and happy contentment, never missing nor coveting the extras that additional family income could have provided. As for Mama herself, though she missed her native land and beloved family, she felt deep gratitude and enduring affection for her adopted country and its countless gifts to her family.**

**Just as I am about to conclude my essay, we've received some exciting news which, by coincidence, provides a fitting epilogue to the story of Mary O'Malley's family. Her great granddaughter, Isabella Carr, who launched this project, was recently notified of her acceptance into Boston Latin School, a prestigious exam school (grades 7-12) and the oldest of its kind in the country. Isabella is a dedicated student interested in a great variety of subjects and eager to excel. We feel certain she will represent herself and her generation of our family well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We're all so proud of her!**