

Corrymeela – For the Record.

Pre-History - Who am I and where am I from?

Bill Boyd, and I come from the Lisburn Road, Belfast. My father, Robert Boyd, was a Presbyterian minister, missionary to India and then secretary or convener of overseas mission based in Church House, Wellington Place.

Ray Davey was my cousin. His mother, Charlotte Higginson, and my mother, Annie Higginson, were sisters. Ray's father, Robert Davey was minister of Dunmurry Presbyterian Church, two miles along the Lisburn Road from us.

There were five Daveys and four Boyds and we were on the average six or seven years younger than the Daveys, but the families were close and used to holiday in rented houses in Ballycastle at the time of the August Tennis Tournament.

Another Presbyterian minister who holidayed there was Rev. Edwin Burrows of Knock, also with a family of four, whose daughter Kathleen had a very distinctive two-handed backhand volley on the tennis court.

Billy McAllister used to say that there were many practical and theological reasons for choosing Ballycastle as the site for the Community, but sentiment was what really decided it.

In my early memories Ray used to carry me around on his shoulder. By the time I was ten years old Ray was in training to be a minister and I was looking up to him as a role model which was not always the safest thing. One wet Saturday he turned up from Assembly's College and decreed that we would have indoor games in the Ballycastle Church Hall. He rode into the hall on a Wolf two-stroke motor-cycle with his friend George Cromey [Irish out-half] on the pillion and announced we were going to find out how many riders can fit onto a two-stroke at one time? The answer is not recorded but there were no casualties requiring hospital treatment.

Ray organised a trip to Rathlin. We had games on the cliff-top where a stiff south wind was blasting across the Water of Moyle. Someone discovered that if you threw your hat over the edge it would blow straight up into the air and back over your head. That was all right till someone threw their beautiful new Burberry coat and it sailed straight over the cliff. It is a long way down and up again.

Those same high spirits went into the making of the sportsman. One weekend my father brought home our first proper "wireless". Up till then he had made do with a crystal set and earphones. We all crowded into the study to listen to the commentary on the great Rugby game, All Blacks versus Ulster, with Ray playing at full back. According to the commentator Ray was slaughtering the All Blacks all over Ravenhill. Result, All Blacks 3, Ulster 3. Every Inst boy shone with reflected glory on Monday.

The Formative Years of a Leader Prison Camp and Number Seven

I was twelve in 1939 when war was declared. Ray had been appointed as assistant minister in First Bangor; but now he applied to the YMCA for civilian work with the Army. He had not been "ordained" as church law did not allow ordination until a minister received "a call". Had he been ordained he would later have been sent to a prison for officers, but as a Civilian Voluntary Worker he was given the choice to go to prison with "other ranks". This choice led to his unique adventures in Italy and Germany during his captivity.

When I went to Queens in 1944 each denomination used to appoint someone to act as "dean of residence", with responsibility for the spiritual welfare of students at the university, It was very much a

part-time job while the Bible Union and the Student Christian Movement served as student societies. Realising that this was inadequate the Presbyterian Church appointed Ray to the position of Presbyterian Chaplain to the university. He and Kathleen did not want a residence obtained for them till they had assessed the situation, so they moved into a house at The Minnowburn, Shaws Bridge. and from there he flung himself into university life, and quickly found the need for a student centre. One of the professors' houses connected with Assembly's College, Number Seven, was made available. Ray and Kathleen moved in and No7 became the home of the Presbyterian Community in the university .

Ray loved people. He had experienced God to be love. In the hardships of prison camps in Italy and Germany he had learned, literally, to love his enemies. Now it was his calling to love the members of the university community - groundsmen, domestics, students and lecturers, administrators and landladies. His vision of "church" was of a community that was inclusive rather than competitive, that encouraged discussion and debate, was adventurous and challenging, and yet was caring for the failures and weaker members. When you compare his work in Ballycastle with that in Queens, you could say that the vision and skills necessary for Corrymeela were forged in the university, in that gathered group of mostly young people at the Presbyterian centre, No7, often just called "Ray"s.

A New Kind of Church

The Redeeming Community

The "churchy" religion of the pre-war era did not meet the needs of the post-war world or of the veterans coming back from service. In his studies in Edinburgh Ray had come under the influence of George McLeod and of the Iona Community. Like McLeod, Ray wanted to clothe the faith in a different language, he wanted to open the student mind to visions of the redeeming community and not simply the salvation of souls. So began the long series of student visits to Germany, to the communities of Taisez, Agape, Iona, and to Dresden and Coventry. He already sensed the call beyond his work at the university towards the re-shaping of the Church, even beyond the historic denominations. Ray was always a team player. He knew more than half of the world's population are women, so women must take their full share of responsibility. Milly Jackson, Ruth Patterson, Joyce Moran, Desney Kempson, were all to become church leaders as did so many members of the Presbyterian community. Ray felt it was important to share his vision for the Church with senior church people, Jack Weir, Austin Fulton, Culbertson Jackson, Tom Patterson, W.G.M. Thompson, Jim and Mary Boyd, Carrie Barnet, their name is legion.

At this time I was minister of College Square congregation. The actual church building had been demolished but the church hall was refurbished for worship and the College Square Youth Club, founded by W.J.Thompson, was based there. I was charged with trying to find a way to set up Industrial Mission in Belfast. Ray was very supportive. Sometimes groups of his students would drop in to discuss plans and Ray invited me to join the growing group who were thinking and praying about forming a community of reconciliation. I remember being amazed at the tremendous vision and determination of this group of students, powered like a new reformation, Bill and Angela Breakey, Craig Cameron, Joyce Neice, Basil Glass, Robert Carson There were ministers Alec Watson, John Morrow, Carlisle Patterson, Gordon Gray, people from all walks of life, Sidney and Denise Smith, Alistair and Heather Kilgore, academics, and professionals, people of one mind, determined to follow their dream of a new kind of community of reconciliation that would bridge or bind up the broken Christian family in Ireland.

The growing sectarian bitterness was making any approach to industry problematic. One senior manager had said to me quite seriously "I tell my workers to leave their Christianity at the factory gate." because of his own experience of sectarian trouble. One night Ian Paisley marched a riotous crowd through my parish and up the Falls Road to remove a tricolour from a shop window. In reaction a crowd burst out on Durham Street at our meeting place of College Square, hurling rocks and breaking the windows. The Churches' Industrial Council, a truly ecumenical group, who had encouraged industrial mission advised us not to hold any meetings in workplaces. Industrial Mission was being put on hold.

By autumn 1963 an embryo community of reconciliation was in existence and rarin' to go, conscious that its hour had come. Ray felt ready to leave university life having built a firm foundation. The group had weighed up various alternative models of community, the organisation required, the costs involved, the conditions of membership. Each step of the road had been the object of fervent and sustained prayer.

I think it was one day early in 1964 we were summoned to No 7 to make decisions. Various groups reported and the outlines of the proposed community made clear. The cost, in round figures was indicated and it was made clear what kind of support members would have to be prepared to give. Management structure, the need to find a suitable centre, the appointment of a leader, all was talked out. We had gone over it all before. The work had been done. Corrymeela House, the centre for the Holiday Fellowship had come on the market and HF wanted an early sale. The price seemed reasonable. The building itself needed a lot of work done but the site was full of possibilities.

I was asked to chair the meeting. We constituted ourselves by prayer as "The Council", to invite nominations for the position of Leader of the Corrymeela Community.

One name was proposed and seconded. There was silence.

Those in favour say "Aye." "Aye"

Those against say "No." There was silence.

I declare Ray Davey to have been appointed Leader of the Corrymeela Community and that we, the members of the Corrymeela Community, undertake to provide such salary and expenses as are agreed. The Benediction was pronounced. A beginning had been made.

By January 1964 we had formed ourselves into a Limited Company, we had bought Corrymeela House and then we stood and looked at what we had bought. Storm, wind, rain and snow had wrought havoc on that noble building of Norwegian timber. You couldn't even ask a work camp to stay there. Billy McAlister moved in alone, got a few planks together and made a bed in one of the sixty odd bedrooms, painted it and decorated it and locked it up as the guarantee of things to come. Being a handyman he fixed up temporary sources of electricity and running water. Billy was God's good gift to Corrymeela. He was a retired engineer from the GNR railway engineering works at Dundalk, who turned up at No7 one day. He had heard about Ray's plans for community and wanted to know more. He offered his services. As well as being an engineer he was brilliant working with young people and turned out to be a competent theologian. Billy got things done.

"You have a youth club at College Square" he said to me, "Can any of them paint?" One of the young club leaders, David Cleland, was a master painter. Billy talked to David, David talked to the club. Would they be prepared to spend a weekend in Corrymeela to make a start? That Friday an ancient minibus pulled into Corrymeela, packed with young people in their oldest clothes to find paint brushes and cans

of white paint laid out for everyone. Billy McAlister had procured two ancient industrial heaters that looked like jet engines and sent two roaring blasts of hot air through the house, one upstairs and one downstairs. The lighting was appalling but each brush stroke seemed to make the house brighter.

David was normally a relaxed individual but on this occasion he drove his team hard. Outside it was snowing, inside it was like a furnace. The minister and his wife were allocated the room with a bed, club members bivouacked happily where they could. By tea-time on Sunday when the youth club had to go home one could see that at least there was light where once it had been dark. Now we had at least a construction site and Billy could plan to bring in a whole series of work camps. Those who made the meals in the kitchen talked for many years about those slippery teak sinks where they washed the dishes. Anna Glass had not joined the staff of Corrymeela that weekend but what a blessing she was when we got to know her. To see that primitive kitchen with its wooden sinks and gas rings change into a modern catering kitchen while keeping the same warm, noisy welcome to everyone who came through the door was her contribution.

Hope for the Young Unemployed Fifty Years Ago

While I was still working on industrial mission the Youth Employment Service organised a course for long-term unemployed lads at Corrymeela. Twenty lads attended with a high ratio of expert staff. The YES put on an intensive programme of work, adventure, recreation and counselling for some six weeks. At the end of the course each participant got a job. Six months later when the course was assessed all the boys were still working. Fifty years later the challenge of under-employment of the under-privileged has never been faced.

On Saturday 30th October, 1965 The Corrymeela Centre was declared open by Tullio Vinay. There was a great crowd and after the meeting Ray stood at the gate to say goodbye to all the visitors. As we shook hands I said, "Ray, I have received a Call from Eglinton Presbyterian Church in North Belfast."

"Go to Eglinton." Said Ray,

"It means I have to resign from the community."

"Go to Eglinton."

So we went to Eglinton "and the road rose with us."

Leaving the community was difficult but Mabel and I continued our connection as Friends. One summer we went with the children to Corrymeela for a week's family holiday. It was great. We continue to enjoy events run for Friends and to benefit from being on the mailing list. One thing for which we are most grateful is the great help and blessing that Corrymeela has been to our whole family in helping us find a new way of being Church since 1964 and in giving us so many memories and friends.