



Eileen O'Kane

(1913–2009)

Eileen O'Kane was the eldest daughter of Hugh Kane and Ellie Murphy. She was born on 20th January, 1913 in a room above her father's spirit grocer's shop at 3 Glenalina Terrace on the Falls Road in Belfast, just opposite the entrance to the City Cemetery. At the time her maternal grandfather, Joseph Murphy, a spinning master, lived two doors away at 2 Clondara Terrace, separated from Glenalina Terrace by Clondara Street, while the family home of James Connolly, one of the leaders of the Easter Rising, was two doors away on the other side at 1 Glenalina Terrace. Eileen's father bought the Connolly family's Singer sewing machine when they relocated to Dublin.



Figure 1. A recent view of Glenalina Terrace (left) and part of Clondara Terrace (right) on the Falls Road. Eileen was born above the corner shop (now 424 Falls Road, McAuleys butcher's) which in 1913 was run by her father as a spirit grocer. The brown door at the right is the entrance to 2 Clondara Terrace (now 428 Falls Road) where her grandfather and several of his children lived. The family home of James Connolly was at 420 Falls Road; it is now a dental surgery. (Credit: Carl Murray)

“My grandfather, ... was born in Monaghan, in a little farm in Smithborough. His father coming home on his cart, the horse shied, and he was thrown out and broke his neck. So he died, of course, and the widow was left to rear the wee family. My grandfather, Joseph Murphy, was the eldest and he left home and came to Belfast and went in to work in the New Northern Spinning Mill on the Falls Road. It was after the famine time. In this job, they were sent out all around Ireland whether it was to take orders or whatever. But on his travels, in Cork, he met Mary Fitzgerald and they were married ... in Cork.”

Joseph and Mary had nine children: David, Thomas (Tom), Robert (Bob), Ellen (Ellie, Eileen’s mother), James (Jim), Margaret (Meg), Kathleen, Caroline (Carrie) and Joseph (Joe). Tom and Bob were born in Salford, England while Ellie and Jim were born in Sion Mills, Co. Tyrone, a town associated with one of the Herdman family’s linen mills. Eileen’s godmother Kathleen was friends with James Connolly’s daughter Nora and both were in Liberty Hall, Dublin during the Easter weekend in 1916.¹

Talking about her mother, Eileen said:

“... she was a great, great athlete and played camogie, the first camogie that was played in Belfast. And it must have been in that circle that she met my father.”

Eileen’s paternal grandparents were Felix Kane and Martha Magee. Felix started his working life as a carpenter but eventually became a property developer. He was born in Co. Tyrone but moved to Carrickfergus where he met and married Martha, a farmer’s daughter who ran a small corner shop and was known for her thrift. Although they had at least ten children, only five survived beyond their twenties: Felix, David, Henry, Hugh (Eileen’s father) and Martha.

“My grandfather was a builder. He built houses ... all those houses around Clonard: Clondara, Cawnpore, Lucknow, Bombay, Kane Street, ... those were all his ...”

Felix Kane (Eileen’s grandfather) had also worked on the extension of Carrickfergus harbour, the construction of Bangor railway station and Stoneyford Reservoir outside Lisburn. He was known to have had one of the first cars (an Argyl) in Belfast.²

“But what I remember about him was he had a finger missing. And it always used to enthral me watching the hand without a finger on it.”

By the time of the 1901 census Felix is listed as a “spirit merchant and grocer” living with Martha and their family at 66 Dover Street.

¹ Read Kathleen’s first-hand account of her experiences at <https://bmh.militaryarchives.ie/reels/bmh/BMH.WS0180.pdf> along with the accounts the Orr sisters (WS179) and Nora Connolly (WS286).

² According to the Irish Motor Directory 1911-12 (https://dn720003.ca.archive.org/0/items/irish-motor-directory-1911-12/Irish%20Motor%20Directory%201911_12.pdf) Felix Kane was one of only 21 car owners in the city of Belfast.

Felix's son Hugh had a keen interest in Gaelic Football and played for Antrim, the first Ulster team to reach the All-Ireland finals. The Antrim team played in the famous two All-Ireland finals of 1912, the year before Eileen was born.³

"... my father was at (St.) Malachy's College for a time, but I wouldn't say he was very well-educated and my mother wasn't at ... a secondary school at all. My father was a great athlete and was also a great ... elocution was his ... and he won prizes for that. He also won prizes for cycling, and he was one of the founder members of The Shaun's Gaelic Football Club."⁴

When asked about how her parents had met, Eileen replied:

"I don't remember where they met but I take it that they met in these athletic circles, playing camogie and football. My aunts were all camogie players too. My father proposed to my mother – I know this – on the banks of the Lagan and he always loved, although he hadn't a note in his head, "My Lagan Love"."

They were married on 20th April 1910 at St. Paul's Church in Belfast. Originally the wedding had been scheduled for the previous day which was Ellie's 21st birthday but someone told her that it was unlucky to be married on your birthday and so the wedding was postponed by a day.

By 1911 Hugh seems to have taken over the family business at 66 Dover Street and the census listed the premises as being occupied by him, his new wife Ellie, their infant son Felix along with with Ellie's sister Carrie. Meanwhile Felix and Martha had moved with the remainder of the Kane family to 215 Springfield Road. When Eileen was born in 1913 her parents had moved again and were living above the spirit grocer's shop at 3 Glenalina Terrace on the Falls Road (see Fig. 1). The premises were still being run as a spirit grocer's shop in 1924 according to a Belfast Street Directory.

Eileen recalls:

"I must have been about nine or something like that. I don't remember much. But the shop had a kitchen that was practically on the street, if you could imagine it, two steps would have taken you out of the side of the house. Of course, there's no such thing as a garden or anything like that. My earliest recollection ... was when I got ready for school. I must have been about five, going out to the corner and the teacher in the school lived close by and I was picked up by her and went down on the tram to St. Mary's School at Beechmount."⁵

Although Ellie's son Felix was born at their previous address, 66 Dover Street, Eileen and two more of her siblings, Martha (Mattie) and Josephine (Jo) were born at 3 Glenalina Terrace. However, at some stage the family moved to Spring Villa, a detached house at 195 Springfield Road opposite Mackie's factory, and three additional siblings were born there: Mairead, Hugh and Fergus.

³ See <https://ulster.gaa.ie/2012/11/ulsters-titanic-teams-antrim-1912/> This event was attended by Eileen's sister Jo.

⁴ See <https://www.southantrimgaa.com/about/history/the-early-years-2>

⁵ This was probably St. Mary's Practising Schools in Beechmount Avenue off the Falls Road.

“My mother ... my father, sold the shop and bought a pub in Leeson Street,⁶ and we all moved then from the shop down to Springfield Road. And at that time, there were no other houses around just ... Spring Villa more or less stood alone on the road. This is what we were led to believe anyhow. But I remember I went down to the new home on my scooter. I remember that so clearly, scooting round the convent wall on the Falls Road.”

Although it was detached, next to Spring Villa was a row of eleven houses, Glenview Terrace, and the end house at 215 Springfield Road was occupied by Eileen’s paternal grandparents.

“There was a little entry that ran from their house down to our house and ... one of my earliest recollections was my grandmother running down and looking in through the window ... to more or less announce she was coming. And she had a hatred of a teddy we all had. And we all knew that Grandma hated this teddy and we would always go away and hide the teddy.”

According to Eileen’s sister Josephine, their grandmother used to shout, “What is that naked child doing in that chair?”⁷

“... in my home it was my brother, Felix, the eldest. I was next. As my grandfather said, “You started off very well” – this was my mother – the son and heir and then four daughters: Eileen, Mattie, Josephine and Mairéad, and then Hugh and Fergus. And that was the ... seven of us, four girls and three boys.”



⁶ This was The Long Bar on Leeson Street but connected through to Cyprus Street. It is believed that Hugh purchased the bar from John McMahon, a survivor of the notorious MacMahon killings of 24th March, 1922 (see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/McMahon_killings). Hugh’s widow, Ellie O’Kane, subsequently sold the bar to John Leneghan, the father of future Irish President Mary McAleese (see “The Road from Ardoyne: The Making of a President” by Ray Mac Mánaís, Brandon/Mount Eagle Publications Ltd., 2005, p.112).

⁷ It is worth remembering that teddy bears only made their first appearance at the start of the 20th century and so Eileen’s grandmother may never have seen one before.



Figure 2. Pictures of Eileen’s parents, Ellie Murphy and Hugh O’Kane. In the left picture, they are standing outside Spring Villa, the family home at 195 Springfield Road. (Credit: The Murray Family)



Figure 3. *Left:* Eileen with her parents, brother Felix and their baby sister Mattie. *Right:* Eileen’s First Communion photograph. (Credit: The Murray Family)

Eileen’s father Hugh would pack the family in a car and take them for holidays in rented houses in different locations.

“Once we were in Cushendall, once we were in Carnlough, once we were in Killough. And when I say once I would say maybe we would be there for seven or eight years, every year. ... this was a very inexpensive holiday because the house cost us, I suppose, about £14 for the year. And five shillings a week, or something like that. But it meant that every holiday we were all packed up, off in this car.”

Eileen attended the Dominican Convent school on the Falls Road and then she went to a boarding school for girls run by the St. Louis nuns in Kilkeel; the school was founded in 1922. Eileen’s sisters Josephine, Mattie and Mairéad also went to the same school. Towards the end of her secondary education, in the summer of 1929, she met her future husband, Frank Murray, at the Gaeltacht in Ranafast, Co. Donegal. She recalls the circumstances of their first meeting:

“...in my first year, Senior, we were sent up to Ranafast, to study Gaelic ... we were the Dundalk crowd because we came from Kilkeel ... I didn't have any scholarship of any kind. But ... we went ... up to Strabane, got the narrow gauge and on to Ranafast. I don't ever recall having anything new. ... my aunt's clothes were handed down and my mother put a bit onto them or take some off them. And this was one of Auntie Meg's cast-me-offs that I was clad in when I went to my first ceilidh. Dad says it was a beautiful blue frock, but it wasn't really beautiful blue because of the big, big thing of white at the bottom of it. Auntie Meg was very small, as you know, and I was tall and skinny. And the ceilidh in Coláiste Bhríde. Oh, the excitement wasn't ordinary.”

“So we all went off to the ceilidh. And of course, the girls all lined up the side and the boys all lined up the other side, and they started off the music, ... and this handsome young man come down from the end of the room and seemed to be a mile away he started up along ... through the floor and everyone was all agog as to who he would pick and I was the lucky one. And we danced. Now that was the first night of the ceilidh in Ranafast and we danced every ceilidh from that until we went home, with Dad.”



Figure 4. Eileen (taller girl standing) at Ranafast with Pat O'Hagan and Mollie O'Hare. (Credit: The Murray Family)

Frank was totally infatuated with Eileen. On their return to Belfast he tried to see Eileen as much as he could.

“But I recall, Dad, no matter where I seemed to be, I could call Dad somewhere. I was going on the bus back to Kilkeel, to school. Dad was somewhere there. I knew if I looked around, I would see Dad somewhere, you know, very, very shy ... very, very shy.”

Frank even used his sister Una, who was attending St. Mary's Training College, to try to get a picture of Eileen.

“And then we went back to school for my final. And ... we played camogie ... and the team came up from St Mary’s Training College to play, and this girl said, “I have got to take a snap of your team and you’re to be in it because”, she says, “Una Murray’s brother wants a snap of you.” You see, so we got this snap taken anyhow, with the team.”

“But the nuns ... they got to hear of this and they said to me, “you were a good girl until you went to Ranafast” ... like I had become a scarlet woman in Ranafast.”

After leaving school, Frank and Eileen both went to Queen’s University. Eileen played camogie for the university and was a member of the first Queen’s team to participate in the Ashbourne Cup competition.⁸ They had a mutual friend, Frances McNabb, who lived in Castlewellan and was also at Queen’s. On one occasion Frank and his friend Paddy Shiels cycled to Castlewellan to attend a party at the McNabb’s house and both ended up spending a cold night in a haystack.

Starting from Queen’s University there were two main walking routes into Belfast City Centre – along the Dublin Road or Great Victoria Street. Frank would wait to see which road Eileen took and he would go the other way and meet her in town, “accidentally on purpose”.

“Can you imagine anybody being, like, frightened of that? Not only that, but my father and mother ... my father ... very, very strict. If I told them I had a boy, I thought he would have had a heart attack. And poor Frank used to come up and stand under a tree opposite Spring Villa and I had to make an excuse to go out for something to speak to him. You know, that was the way it was in that house. And when we ... announced our engagement, my mother and father said, “Who is this? No, never heard of him”, you know? And yet we had known each other for three, however many years beforehand.”

Eileen’s surname at birth was actually “Kane” but at some stage her father decided to change it.

“... we started off being Kanes. But one fine day my father got it into his head that it wasn’t Gaelic enough, and he announced that it was going to be O’Kane from that day hence. And it was the queerest thing at all because Felix and I were both at Queen’s and we get a degree as “Kane” and we were “O’Kane” to all and sundry.”

Eileen obtained her B.A. from Queen’s on 10th July, 1934 and started teacher training specialising in Geography. Meanwhile, Frank had failed all of his first-year exams because he had been “mooning about some girl over in the Springfield Road all the time”. During his time at Queen’s he participated in many sports activities and was very competitive. He finally graduated on 9th July 1937 and after three months as a house surgeon at the Mater Hospital in Belfast, he started work as a GP in Birmingham in October 1937. However, prior to this, during one fateful evening at McNabb’s in Castlewellan, Eileen had given Frank a “lecture”, advised him not to be so foolish and had effectively broken off their relationship.

“... I was very immature and Dad’s devotion just nearly frightened me, you know? So that was why Dad qualified and went his way, and I went my way ... and I began to meet other boys and he

⁸ See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ashbourne_Cup

meeting other girls. And the more I saw of the rest of them the more I decided that Dad was the one for me.”

Following her training, Eileen obtained a job teaching Geography at the Loreto Convent School for Girls in Omagh. A School Inspectors Report for 1936-37 for Loreto⁹ discusses the performance of the Geography teacher, thought to be Eileen. It states:

“Since the last special inspection the teaching of this subject has been entrusted to a young and inexperienced mistress with satisfactory academic qualifications and an enthusiasm for securing the interest of her pupils and for imparting information. Her teaching technique has developed very considerably and her work has been increasingly successful. She still lacks sufficient self-confidence to make her independent of a text-book, especially during revision, and this renders her teaching and her questioning bookish and formal.

...

On the whole the standard of the work is much higher than at the last inspection and the attitude of both teacher and pupils to the subject gives promise of even better things in the future.”

Her teaching went from strength to strength and later in her career her pupils achieved some of Northern Ireland’s top Senior marks in Geography. Eileen continued to play camogie and perhaps joined the Omagh St. Enda’s club which was founded in 1932; she played for the Co. Tyrone team in 1936 when her affiliation was listed as “Omagh”. She also coached the Loreto pupils in the sport. She took up golf and was a member of the Omagh Golf Club, eventually becoming Ladies’ Captain. Golf was to be her sporting passion for the remainder of her life. She also played tennis regularly while in Omagh.

One family photograph (Fig.5) shows a man surrounded by a crowd of mostly women, with Eileen just visible standing behind the man’s left shoulder. The man’s identity is not known but one possibility is that he could be the American singer and actor, Paul Robeson, who is known to have performed in Belfast in 1935 and then Belfast and Derry in 1936.¹⁰

⁹ Omagh, Loreto Convent School: detailed inspection reports, 1936-1958. Public Record Office Northern Ireland, Ref. ED/29/144

¹⁰ See, e.g., <https://www.irishamerica.com/2020/05/paul-roberson-a-renaissance-man-visits-ireland/>



Figure 5. Eileen standing with a group of women next to an unknown man in an overcoat with a charabanc in the background. She is just visible behind the man's left shoulder. (Credit: The Murray Family)

Eileen acquired a bicycle and rode it everywhere often going on cycling trips with friends. She had scratched her name on the handlebar and used the same bicycle (with only a few modifications) for more than seventy years, both in Omagh and throughout her married life in Belfast and Newcastle.



Figure 6. *Left:* Eileen and the bicycle she used in Omagh. (Credit: The Murray Family) *Right:* The same bicycle propped up outside Eileen's bungalow in Merrion Avenue, Newcastle some seventy years later in April 2008. (Credit: Carl Murray)

She stayed in various lodgings, the first being at Sedan House¹¹ on Sedan Avenue which she shared with her friend Una Walsh.

¹¹ See <https://www.geograph.ie/photo/276143>

In August of 1937 Eileen, Frances McNabb and another friend had a summer holiday together in Austria. On their trip they visited Vienna and Salzburg with photographs showing them in front of the Maria Theresa Monument in Vienna,¹² as well as next to the Pegasus Fountain in Salzburg. The group also visited the mining museum at the underground Hallein Salt mine, just south of Salzburg.



Figure 7. *Left:* Eileen, a friend and Frances McNabb in front of the Maria Theresa monument in Maria-Theresien-Platz, Vienna. *Centre:* Eileen in front of the Pegasus Fountain in the grounds of the Mirabell Palace in Salzburg. *Right:* The three friends dressed in protective white overalls at the entrance to the Hallein Salt Mine. (Credit: The Murray Family)

In 1939 Eileen accompanied her parents on a trip to the United States. Eileen may have been unwell at the time, perhaps due to being overworked at the Loreto School, and it is possible that the trip may have been part of her recovery. Her mother's brother Tom, who had been born in Salford in 1883, probably when his father was based there, emigrated to the USA in 1911 and had worked as a grocery clerk probably somewhere on the East Coast. However, according to Eileen, he had been "*a little bit foolish*" and so Eileen's parents decided to travel to the US to bring him back home. Hugh, Ellie and Eileen are recorded as passengers on the S.S. California which left Belfast on 22nd April 1939 bound for Boston and New York. It is thought that they visited the 1939 New York World's Fair before returning with Tom on the R.M.S. Transylvania, leaving New York and arriving at the port of Moville, on the shores of Lough Foyle, on 1st June 1939. Both ships were requisitioned for use during World War 2 and both were sunk during the conflict.

¹² See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maria_Theresa_Monument



Figure 8. Photographs of Eileen on her trans-Atlantic voyages. (Credit: The Murray Family and Robert Lamont Hill)

In Birmingham Frank had been in touch by letter with Frances McNabb and she had encouraged Eileen to write to him, probably in early 1938. There was a rumour that Frank was engaged to marry Patricia Day, the daughter of the practice's housekeeper and he wrote to Frances telling her that this was, indeed, just a rumour. In the same letter, dated 6th March 1938 he mentioned that he had received a letter from Eileen – his first one ever! In fact, as he revealed later, Frank received several more letters from Eileen but he ignored all of them. Frank was commissioned as a 1st Lieutenant in the Royal Army Medical Corps on 2nd December 1939 and after training was dispatched to Rawalpindi, India in early January 1940. At the end of that year, he sent a Christmas card to Eileen along with a photograph he had taken of the R.A.M.C. Mess. He signed the card, “Frank” – to his relatives he was always “Francis”.

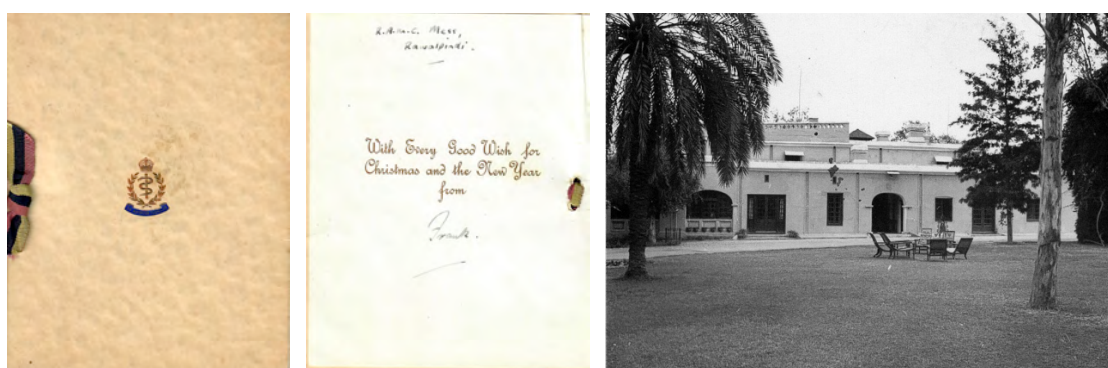


Figure 9. *Left and Centre:* The Christmas card that Frank sent to Eileen in 1940. *Right:* The enclosed photograph of the R.A.M.C. Mess in Rawalpindi, taken by Frank. (Credit: QUB Special Collections; The Murray family)

Eileen responded enthusiastically to Frank's simple card and wrote to him apologising for having broken off their relationship with the hope that he could forgive her. The letter was sent inside another letter to Frank's father, Charles, in Belfast and he forwarded it to Frank. Frank received it on 26th February 1941 and he wrote back immediately with a letter full of love for Eileen while

also recounting his life since they had parted. He quickly followed up his first letter with a telegram with the simple message, “RECD LETTER REPLY SENT STILL FEEL SAME” (see Fig. 10, *left*). This was the start of a voluminous correspondence, mostly by air mail, despite the fact that it could take weeks or even months for letters to arrive. Typically, Frank would send Eileen a six-page, double-sided letter every fortnight with Eileen sending an eight-page, double-sided letter every week. Eileen kept all of Frank’s letters. However, to prevent them being read by the Japanese, Frank burned all of hers when Singapore fell in February 1942. Eleven of Eileen’s letters that were sent from Omagh and Belfast between 3rd October 1941 and 27th February 1942 were returned to her as “Undelivered”. It is through Frank’s responses to Eileen’s letters as well as the returned letters that so much is known about the details of Eileen’s life during this period.



Figure 10. *Left:* Frank’s telegram in response to Eileen’s initial letter, telling her he still felt the same about her. It was received by Eileen on 1st March 1941. *Right:* Frank’s only picture of Eileen showing her with her school camogie teammates. Eileen is on the front row at the left. Her sister Mattie is standing to Eileen’s right. (Credit: QUB Special Collections and The Murray Family)

In one of his letters from May 1940 Frank reveals that for many years the only picture he had of Eileen was one given to him by Frances McNabb (see Fig. 10, *right*). Since he had no access to the original negative, Frank had a new negative made from the print in order to produce copies and an enlargement.

In his letter dated 18th May 1941 Frank proposed marriage and, not having received a reply, he proposed a second time in a letter of 12th June 1941 as well as in subsequent letters. Eileen, presumably having just received the original letter, sent Frank two telegrams which he received on 5th July; one stated, “*the answer is yes*”. Frank subsequently sent Eileen a cheque for £100 telling her to buy an engagement ring and to wear it until he came home. He also asked her to go to Dublin and introduce herself to his favourite sister, Una, who was a Dominican nun in a convent at Sion Hill; when she entered the order she took the name Sister Mary Villana.

At Frank’s request, Eileen went to Beechwood, the Murray family home at 95 Cliftonville Road, Belfast to introduce herself to Charlie Murray, Frank’s father. In fact, whenever she was in Belfast she would try to visit Charlie. In a subsequent letter to Frank, Charlie wrote of her first visit:

“I had a visit from Miss O’Kane last Friday just for a short time, but she will be back again soon. She is a wonderful young lady. I think she is the most suitable girl I have ever seen to be your wife. She is a splendid character, modest, nice, and plain – not one of the modern type – and she belongs to a splendid family. I do admire her very much and she is a very suitable person for you. You could take her into any company and none would surpass her. All I can say is that I am very, very pleased with your selection.”

In March 1941 Frank’s unit moved from India to Malaya. While in Malaya he would send Eileen copies of the Straits Times Annual when he could find them as they contained articles about the Malayan peninsula that would be useful for a geography teacher. He would also take photographs of everyday life in Malaya and then send them to her in sets of four, attached to air mail letter paper. Eileen saved these in an album and also used some of them to aid her teaching. It was not until 12th July 1941 that Eileen’s first letter reached Frank. By that time he was stationed in Keroh (Kroh) in northern Malaya.

In the first letter Eileen described her plans for a summer cycling holiday in Donegal and Frank suggested in his reply that she also visit the pilgrimage site of Lough Derg.¹³ The two-way correspondence continued throughout that summer, albeit with long delays. Eileen told Frank about her “*golf, tennis, dances, and pictures etc.*” She described the Belfast Blitz¹⁴ when Mackie’s Foundry opposite Spring Villa was attacked with incendiary bombs and large areas of North Belfast were bombed, including the Cliftonville Road where the windows of Beechwood had been blown in. Eileen also mentioned that she had sent Frank some photographs. These arrived on 5th August 1941 and consisted of a small portrait and a picture of Eileen in a garden in Omagh holding two trophies with her golf bag over her shoulder (Fig. 11).



Figure 11. Two small pictures that Eileen sent to Frank that he kept throughout the war. *Left:* A portrait of Eileen with a note on the reverse that read, “August 1941. Taken for you, Frank. All my love, Eileen.” *Right:* Another

¹³ See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lough_Derg%2C_County_Donegal. Frank mentioned that he had done a pilgrimage to Lough Derg at least six times.

¹⁴ See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Belfast_Blitz and “The Belfast Blitz” by Brian Barton (Ulster Historical Foundation, 2015). The city was bombed by the Luftwaffe in April and May 1941 with heavy damage and the loss of hundreds of lives.

photograph of Eileen, received by Frank in August 1941. It shows Eileen in a garden in Omagh holding two golf trophies with her golf clubs over her left shoulder. (Credit: QUB Special Collections and The Murray Family)

By now Eileen had informed her parents of the engagement and they were delighted although as an ardent nationalist her father had strong reservations about Frank being in the British Army. Her Auntie Kathleen had a different reaction.

“When my mother told my Aunt Kathleen, who was my godmother, ... she said, “Under God Ellie, that’s not Charlie Murray’s son?”. And my mother said, “Yes, it is, as far as I know”.”

Kathleen already knew Charlie Murray because as a young man he had been given a job by her father-in-law, Mickey Kelly in his bar in Belfast when Charlie and his brother Daniel first came to the city in the late 19th century. According to Eileen, Kathleen said:

“They had never met a more honest and trustworthy and good man.”

Kathleen’s husband, Eamonn (known as Eddie), had also visited the Murray’s house, Beechwood, on the Cliftonville Road and was a good friend of Charlie.

In July 1941 Eileen finally made the trip to Dublin where she visited Frank’s favourite sister, Una in the Dominican convent at Sion Hill. She also visited Una Walsh, who she knew at Queen’s and with whom she shared a house in Omagh before Una left to become a nun. It seems Eileen also met Louis J. Walsh,¹⁵ a judge and author whose works were well known to Frank. In one of his letters Frank asked Eileen to visit his best friend, Gerry McGuinness,¹⁶ who lived on the Falls Road.

Eileen had spent the summer of 1941 with the O’Kane family at Killough. Her brother, Felix, who had studied medicine with Frank at Queen’s, got married at the end of August and Eileen described the event in a letter to Frank dated 26th August. Felix subsequently joined a GP practice in Ballynahinch. In the same letter she mentions a *“clever” “young man”* who had been pursuing her in Omagh. Frank advised her: “Do not be afraid of his cleverness; you are strong and good”, and he went on to advise her that the man would stop annoying her if she told him about her engagement.

Eileen returned to Loreto in September 1941 to resume teaching at the start of a new term. From September 1941 onwards she had new lodgings with Major Denton de la Cour Ray, his wife Mrs Emily Ray and their family at 9 Holmview,¹⁷ a terraced house in the Campsie district of Omagh. Major Ray, a Canadian by birth, had served with the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers during the Second Anglo-Boer War in South Africa and in post-Boxer Rebellion China as well as in India and Japan. In World War 1 he had fought at Gallipoli and on the Western Front. Denton was a gifted artist who frequently displayed an anti-war theme in his work. His daughter, Celeste, who Eileen had taught at Loreto, described her father as “a

¹⁵ See <https://www.dib.ie/biography/walsh-louis-joseph-a8885>

¹⁶ Gerry was eventually to become Frank’s best man at his wedding to Eileen.

¹⁷ The address is probably now [9 HolmviewTerrace](#), the house with the yellow door.

professional soldier who hated war”.¹⁸ He retired from the Army in 1921 after contracting TB.¹⁹

In a letter to Frank, Eileen described her approach to teaching:

“I have no favourites amongst the schoolchildren, except those perhaps who are cold shouldered (for one reason or another) by the others. It is wonderful to see how they react to a little bit of praise and how they rise in the estimation of their classmates. Don't you think that children can be very cruel to other children in their own little ways. I believe teaching to be a wonderful vocation – there is a wonderful responsibility placed on our shoulders.”

By this time Eileen's pupils were well aware of her engagement. For example, Eileen later recounted the occasion when she was teaching her pupils about the geography of Australia and happened to mention the Murray-Darling Basin:

“There would be a little laugh all around the class and everybody would be having a wee joke about this ... because they all knew who he was. It was a happy time then. I just had to be patient. So I played my golf and joined in the teams.”

In October 1941 Eileen began taking an evening class in cookery at the local technical college in Omagh, bringing back home-baked goods to be eaten by the residents of 9 Holmview. She also took a sewing class on Monday afternoons so that she was continually either making or buying items for her “bottom drawer”. In fact, instead of a drawer, she had a trunk:

“Well this Summer I decided to invest the money I earned while superintending in Strabane, in a trunk. I got it in Erskines of North St. It was old stock (everyone looks for old stock these times because the new stuff is usually inferior) & there was no purchase tax on it, yet it cost £7. I made my purchase all by myself but when it arrived in Killough all agreed it was worth & well worth the money. It is dark blue hide and is fitted beautifully inside.”

When at her digs in Omagh Eileen continued her cycling and golf. In fact, she played golf throughout the winter:

“Our four ball ... play golf all winter through. We are the only ladies in our club who do this. ... Sunday afternoon is the day set apart for our game.”

On one particular day in November 1941, she had a close call. In a letter to Frank she wrote:

“While we were playing the 6th hole, some officer pulled his 5th tee shot, which ball missed my poor skull by inches – I could actually feel the breeze from it as it passed. You must have said a special prayer for me today.”

¹⁸ Brian Mathew, private communication

¹⁹ <https://timesofmalta.com/article/denton-de-la-cour-ray-british-soldier-painting-main-guard-malta.1120022>

When not teaching (or playing golf), Eileen kept herself busy. She socialised with the Murnaghan family and was a frequent visitor to their house, Birchfields,²⁰ located further along the Campsie Road. They went for walks and played card games together. When Frank sent her stamps from Pahang state in Malaya, Eileen shared them out between Kevin Murnaghan (12), Joan Murnaghan (10) and the Ray's daughter, Celeste (12). The Workers Educational Association had opened a branch in Omagh and along with about thirty others, Eileen joined a class on "Elements of Social Justice". Each one-hour lecture was followed by a debate which Eileen clearly enjoyed.



Figure 12. Four golfers at Omagh Golf Club. Eileen (far right) is pictured with three other women, thought to be Mrs Sheffield, Miss Cusack and Mollie Hughes. See the picture of the old clubhouse at <https://www.omaghgolfclub.co.uk/course-history>. (Credit: The Murray Family)

When the war in the Far East broke out after the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor, Eileen was back in Spring Villa for the weekend, having arrived on the train from Omagh on the evening of Friday, 5th December. She immediately stepped up her prayers for Frank as well as getting masses said for him. All the nuns in the Loreto Convent had Frank in their prayers and the Rev. Mother had the children praying for him every morning after mass. Eileen returned to Spring Villa for the Christmas break. She wrote:

"I have not told you yet that the whole family – 8 of us²¹ – were out at 6 o'clock Mass this morning. It was inky black but we crawled round to Clonard in two rows of four deep. I never miss 6 o'clock Mass but for years it was down to St. Malachy's church²² I went, to sing in the choir. With Felix gone I would not go alone. Perhaps next Christmas morning you will take me to St. Malachy's to 6 a.m. Mass!! Will you darling? Before we left home this morning for Mass, we were in a very frivolous

²⁰ This is probably <https://www.geograph.ie/photo/604360>. The Murnaghans are related to Dermott Murnaghan, the TV presenter.

²¹ Eileen's sister Mattie, a nun with the Little Sisters of the Poor, spent the war in occupied France at the order's motherhouse in St. Pern, Brittany. Her sister Josephine (Jo) had returned from England on Christmas morning.

²² St. Malachy's church was located in 24 Alfred Street in Belfast City Centre. See <https://www.saintmalachysparish.com/tour.html>. Eileen's sister Josephine's future husband, John Scullion, also sang in St. Malachy's choir and eventually became its conductor.

mood. The 3 lads²³ – now young men in their “longs” – had hung up their stockings. The holes in the toes were ungainly tied by a piece of string so that the contents!!! would not fall out.”

While in Belfast over the Christmas holiday, Eileen finally met Gerry McGuinness, Frank’s best friend on 8th January 1942 when he came to Spring Villa. She wrote to Frank:

“He came in for a moment & I introduced him to Mammie. There was no one else at home just then. After admiring our Anderson shelter (perhaps it is a Morrison!) we went off to see Lady Hamilton (Lawrence Olivier as Nelson & Vivien Leigh as Lady Hamilton) in the Imperial. It is the picture of the town this week & there were 2 terrific queues waiting to get in. However, our good friend had the foresight to book earlier in the day so we were escorted past the lines of waiting people to our seats. After the picture nothing would do Gerry that I should have supper with him. This was 10 p.m., mark you. So off we went to the Whitehall in Ann Street & lowered two well laden plates. It was then I showed Gerry my gifts from you, darling, which Fr Ashness selected and sent to me. They reached me a few days ago and how thrilled I was to receive them. It was like a little breath from Malaya.”

One of the items she showed Gerry was a silver “paper knife”. Eileen wrote:

“The paper knife is perfect. I have never in my life before, seen anything so uncommon – the more I show it around the more I love it. Have you seen it Frank? – the carving on the silver is magnificent.”



Figure 13. The “paper knife” referred to by Eileen is actually an asymmetrical dagger called a kris (see <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kris>) associated with many of the cultures of South-East Asia. (Credit: Carl Murray)

Eileen made a point of visiting Charlie Murray at Beechwood before she returned to Omagh.

“I waited & escorted your father through the “black out” to the Sacred Heart Church²⁴ to say our prayers. You would laugh if you saw the pair of us arm in arm groping our way in the inky darkness. He is not too able for the black out. ...He keeps on asking me to tell you, dearest that he will do nothing or change nothing until you return. I believe he means about retiring. He wants to know your views about taking the rooms above the shop for a surgery. Oftentimes he says, “I wish that boy of mine were home”.”

²³ Hugh, Fergus and Joe Murphy. Joe was the son of Eileen’s uncle, Jim Murphy. Joe’s mother had died soon after he was born and his father had died in 1939. At that stage Joe went to live with Eileen’s mother Ellie.

²⁴ The Sacred Heart Church was on the Oldpark Road, close to Charlie Murray’s shop. This was Frank’s local church and it is where he was baptised. See <https://www.sacredheartparishbelfast.com/gallery/Sacred%20Heart%20History.pdf> for a history of the area and the parish.

On Monday 12th January 1942 Eileen was driven back to Omagh by the parent of two of her pupils, Mary and Margaret. In the blackout the drive took them 4 hours. Everyone she met in Omagh was keen to learn any information about Frank. By this stage Eileen was attending Mass every day. Naturally, she continued playing her golf:

“With rubber becoming increasingly scarce we golfers must be very careful of balls. One must be careful with everything these times. Our sitting room wireless needs a new valve (whatever that means) which means that we cannot use it at all. We miss it very much but this does not prevent me from invading the Ray drawing room at the appointed times when the news is on.”

Eileen had already contacted Mappin & Webb in London to see if they had any information about the Christmas gift of candlesticks that Frank had sent to her. However, news of their imminent arrival in Belfast reached Eileen on 26th January and she started making arrangements to get them to Omagh.

Two days later the Loreto school received a visit from Mr Heron, the Schools’ Inspector:

“He is the bane of every teacher’s existence! I have experienced him both as a pupil & as a teacher. ... I was his first victim. He came to Form V Geography class (1st year seniors). We were doing the “Basin of the St. Laurence”, a part of America I have actually seen. The children were brilliant, drew magnificent maps for me & altogether the class went with a great swing. I asked him to question them, but he refused. ... In the afternoon great was my surprise to find him again in my class. This time the Form IV A (distinction junior grade). We were doing Malaya & the East Indies. He appeared very interested as all the islands mentioned in the daily war bulletin were pointed out. He refused to question them again. I was the only teacher to whom he gave the doubtful honour of a double-visit.”

Letters from Frank dated 3rd and 10th December 1941 arrived on the 29th January and one included the cheque for £100 that Frank had promised to send to enable Eileen to buy an engagement ring. In her letters to Frank, Eileen always made a point of telling him all the local news, especially concerning any mutual friends. Fully aware of the situation in Singapore, on the same day she received his letters she wrote back fully aware that this could be her last letter:

“Good night, my own dear Frank. God bless and protect you. Thank you for all the happiness you have given to me this day. The sadness came with the knowledge that this last might be your farewell letter. That cannot be – I shall go on hoping, no matter how long, that another will arrive soon. Please never say goodbye again in any of your letters. It really does hurt so very much. Goodbye sounds so final – I hate the word as I loathe all goodbyes. I cannot end today’s diary on such a note so I’ll tell you a joke. You remember Jack Finnegan? Well he is qualified now & is in the R.A.M.C. in Palestine, somewhere. He writes home to his mother, “I am in the place where Christ was born & I wished to Christ I was in the place where I was born (Falls Road).”

Eileen finally received the candlesticks on 2nd February after her sister Josephine brought the parcel to the station in Belfast to give to Aileen who duly brought it to Eileen in Omagh. She wrote:

“Darling they were beautiful! I have never seen candlesticks I love so much. To think that they are ours, to repose in our home, to burn our candles each Christmas Eve. They shall always be my most cherished possession.”



Figure 14. The silver Mappin & Webb silver candlesticks bought by Frank and sent to Eileen as a Christmas present. (Credit: Carl Murray)

On 7th February Eileen received a telegram from Frank. It would be three-and-a-half years before she received another one. Eileen wrote:

“It was not so much the news you gave, as the confident and matter-of-fact way you spoke about your coming home that made me so happy. My heart just sang all day long. I read that cable so often that I know every word has been written forever upon my memory.”



Figure 15. The final telegram sent by Frank from Singapore. (Credit: Queen’s University Special Collections)

Letters from Eileen dated 22nd September and 20th November were received by Frank in Singapore on 28th January 1942. These were the last ones he received before the fall of the city

on 15th February 1942 when he decided to burn all of her letters rather than having them read by the Japanese. Of course, Eileen kept writing letters and eleven of these dated between 3rd October 1941 and 8th February 1942 were returned to her as undelivered. These provide the most detailed account of her life in Omagh and Belfast at that time.

However, the correspondence did not end with Frank's imprisonment. Following the capture of Singapore, from June 1942 until February 1943 Eileen was permitted to send Frank one-page, handwritten letters, at first not even knowing if he was still alive. By Easter 1942 she had received Frank's cheque for £100 and other items sent before his capture and, following his instructions, she went to Dublin to purchase an engagement ring – gold, with three diamonds. In July 1942 Eileen wrote:

"I wear the ring always. It cost £45. Do you think this very expensive, Frank? How I long to throw my arms around your neck and kiss you to show my gratitude to you for such a beautiful ring, for the lovely Malayan souvenirs, for the silver candlesticks²⁵, for Thomasheen James²⁶, for the magnificent collection of snaps, magazines & books but above all these for the love of a very loyal heart which I have sorely tried in the past."

Eileen kept writing a short letter every week even though she had no idea if any of them had been received by Frank. In the summer of 1942, she made a pilgrimage to Lough Derg where she ran into Frank's best friend Gerry and his fiancée, Nan Gorman. When the Senior results were released that summer, Eileen discovered that all of her Geography pupils had passed the exam.

It was not until 21st September 1942, some seven months after the fall of Singapore that Eileen received word via Charlie that the War Office had sent him a letter informing him that his son Frank was a Prisoner of War. The information was published in that night's Belfast Telegraph and the next day's Irish News. She wrote:

"Can you appreciate darling how excited and thrilled I am – to hear that you, whom I love so much are safe and that a postcard written in your own dear handwriting is on its way to me. Thank God for His goodness to us both. He has never let us down and He never will, I know."

From the summer of 1942 until September 1943 all of Eileen's letters to Frank were written from Spring Villa in Belfast. She later recounted the circumstances that led her to remain in Belfast:

"I went back to Omagh, the holiday must have been over, and I started to teach. By this time the nuns had got great reports about my job ... and the children were delighted ... and were getting great places in the Junior and Senior. And these reports were going in about my job and I suppose that the nuns thought she must be qualified to teach History as well as Geography and so they gave me History to teach. I had never done History. I had twelve classes of Geography and jobs were hard to come by at that time and I felt glad to have one. And so I accepted to do it. I shouldn't have ... I knew it was too

²⁵ A pair of Mappin & Webb candlesticks bought as an engagement present. See Fig. 13.

²⁶ "Thomasheen James: Man of No Work" by Maurice Walsh. The book was published in 1941. Walsh is best known for writing the short story, "The Quiet Man", which was later made into an Oscar-winning film.

much for me to do. They knew I was an athlete and I was playing camogie. I was playing for the Tyrone county team. And they asked me to start camogie in the school which I did.”

The stress of the additional workload was too much for Eileen and that is why she decided not to return to Omagh. After the summer holiday in 1942 she was asked to resign her job with the promise of being re-employed when she was able. She was also requested to recommend a replacement teacher and so she asked her good friend, Margaret McGuigan,²⁷ who was then teaching in Wales, to fill her position. Margaret agreed without hesitation and resigned her current post even though she knew that she would face being made redundant when Eileen returned.

Although she was now living back in Spring Villa, Eileen made frequent visits to Charlie over in Beechwood on the Cliftonville Road. By this time (autumn 1942), Frank’s sister Anne was taking a one-year domestic science course in Sion Hill in Dublin, partly so that she could be closer to her sister Una the Dominican nun. Charlie’s nephew, Pat Murray, helped run the shop and lived in Beechwood at the time. Eileen would try to look after them both, as best she could.

“I am going over to Beechwood this afternoon – Wednesday is a day set apart to spend with your father. Last time I brought him some homemade cakes which he ate and said he enjoyed.”



Figure 16. Charlie Murray (Frank’s father) and Eileen outside the Murray family home, Beechwood, on the Cliftonville Road in Belfast. (Credit: The Murray Family)

²⁷ Although she did have to give up her job, Margaret McGuigan was very well qualified and quickly found employment elsewhere. However, she was eventually employed again at Loreto School and remained a good friend of Eileen’s for the rest of her life. She also became the godmother of Eileen and Frank’s youngest child, Carl. Another friend of Eileen’s and a former pupil of hers, was Marie Bradley; she became the godmother of Eileen and Frank’s son, Paul.

Eileen recounted another occasion when she brought Charlie some home baking:

“My pleasant surprise of the evening was when your father took 3 large pieces of the apple tart I baked especially for him that morning. The surprise was due to the fact that when I asked him did he like apple cake he said “No”! After the 3rd piece he said “that’s very nice apple cake”.”

During the winter months of 1942 Eileen along with her sisters Jo and Mairead decided to take a class in First Aid, with all of them taking the exam in late December 1942.

While she was recovering in Belfast a friend recommended that Eileen join Postal Censorship as a lot of teachers had found employment there. In a letter to Frank, Eileen described her job as that of “a temporary civil servant” without providing more details; she started work on 9th January 1943.

“Although it was a very happy time with so many teachers there with me, I loathed the work. The filth of the letters I had to read ... We used to have little trips on our bikes. We would take our bikes on trips up to Ballycastle and The Causeway with all the girls ... and it was a very happy time then ... and I began to feel much better.”

In March 1943 Eileen went to Dublin for a few days, meeting up with Frank’s sister Anne every day although Una was too ill for a visit. She managed to see a new play, *The O’Cuddy*, starring Cyril Cusack, at the Abbey Theatre.²⁸ She described it as “poor” and “very ordinary”. Eileen visited Omagh on 16th-19th March staying with Margaret McGuigan, her replacement at Loreto. Naturally, everyone wanted to know about any plans to return to teaching but at that stage Eileen had yet to make a decision. Her landlady, Mrs Ray, promised her that she could have her old room back if she returned to Omagh.

Meanwhile Frank’s brother Philip had returned to Beechwood and was helping to look after Charlie and the house. Many of the rooms were being repainted, including Frank’s old bedroom, and the sash windows were recorded. Eileen realised that this was all in preparation for Frank’s eventual homecoming.

Mother Teresa, the Principal of Loreto, came to Belfast in April 1943 and again wanted to know if Eileen planned to return to Omagh. At that stage Eileen agreed but only on condition that her replacement, Margaret McGuigan, was able to get another job.

From March 1943 Eileen’s letters to Frank had to be printed and finally, by September 1943 only small cards or letters every fortnight with a few words on each were permitted.

As Eileen waited patiently in Belfast, she continued to visit Charlie in Beechwood. In June 1943 she wrote:

²⁸ See <https://irishplayography.com/play/the-ocuddy> for more details.

“Last Sunday, your father and I walked round Hightown – your favourite walk, Frank. He is so sprightly on his feet! With all the years he has spent in the city, he is still a farmer at heart, so interested in the land, the crops & the livestock.”

In the same month Eileen went on a pilgrimage to Lough Derg, describing it as *“the 4th of my 9 consecutive visits.”* In a letter she wrote:

“Well dearest after all my prayers I am to return to Omagh in September. I can really register no feelings about this – the nuns want me back & the girl in my place²⁹ has secured an excellent position elsewhere. The past year has been one of ups & downs and I cannot say I am sorry it is passed.”

Although Eileen wrote to Frank regularly, she had received virtually nothing in return. In a letter to him dated 25th July 1943 she wrote:

“There has been no news of you since February 1942 except one postcard (with no date and no postmark) which reached me in October 1942. Still that priceless card gave me all the information I needed – you are alive and you are well.”

After a week-long religious retreat at her old school in Kilkeel, Eileen and her sister Jo set off for a cycling holiday in Wicklow on 26th July 1943 in the company of Edna McKenzie (a friend of Jo’s) and Nellie O’Farely (from Virginia). They took the train to Dublin and stayed in local youth hostels throughout their holiday.



Figure 17. Co. Wicklow trip, July & August 1943. *Left:* Jo, Eileen and two friends at a Wicklow youth hostel. *Right:* Jo, Eileen and Edna visiting the Powerscourt estate. (Credit: The Murray Family)

²⁹ Margaret McGuigan

*“Next day we did the famous demesne of Lord Powerscourt and saw the scene and some of the excitement of the shooting of Laurence Olivier’s latest film “Battle of Agincourt” – the country is hiving with bearded men ever since.”*³⁰

The group of friends went on to visit Glendalough and picnicked on Sugar Loaf Mountain. Eileen even managed to access the cave known as St. Kevin’s Bed, despite warnings not to do so from Charlie.³¹ Afterwards they continued travelling around Wicklow, visiting Avoca, Arklow (where Eileen had a swim) and Aughavannagh. The youth hostel at Aughavannagh was originally an early 19th century army barracks and then a shooting lodge that belonged to the Parnell family before it was bought by John Redmond after Charles Stewart Parnell’s death. The group then cycled to Co. Carlow to visit one of Eileen’s aunts in Bagenalstown. However, the weather had broken, and their last cycle was to the station in Dublin to catch the train to Belfast.

In September 1943 Eileen returned to teaching at the Loreto School in Omagh, once again staying with the Ray family at 9 Holmview.

“This time a ... teacher to do all the History of the school and people helped me with the Geography of the school which I had done alone before ... so that life after that wasn’t so very difficult.”

By this stage in the war Eileen was restricted to sending only short, letters or cards to Frank and this continued until the end of hostilities. Of necessity, these communications contained only a minimum amount of information, mostly relating to general health, and so little is known about Eileen’s activities during this period. However, it is clear from the examples below that she continued cycling (with a trip to the Antrim coast on the St. Patrick’s Day weekend), golf (she won the Clanabogan Cup, a ladies’ golf competition) and pilgrimages (she went to Lough Derg with her brother Hugh in July 1944). Ironically, given her temporary job in Belfast in 1943, part of one of her letters sent on 9th July 1944 was censored.

³⁰ The Powerscourt estate was the location for Olivier’s classic film, “Henry V”. The film was designed to be a propaganda boost for British wartime morale when it was released in 1944.

³¹ St. Kevin’s Bed is a small, almost inaccessible cave on the southern shoreline of the upper lake at Glendalough where St. Kevin is supposed to have lived as a hermit. See <https://www.go-to-ireland.com/what-to-see/st-kevins-bed/>

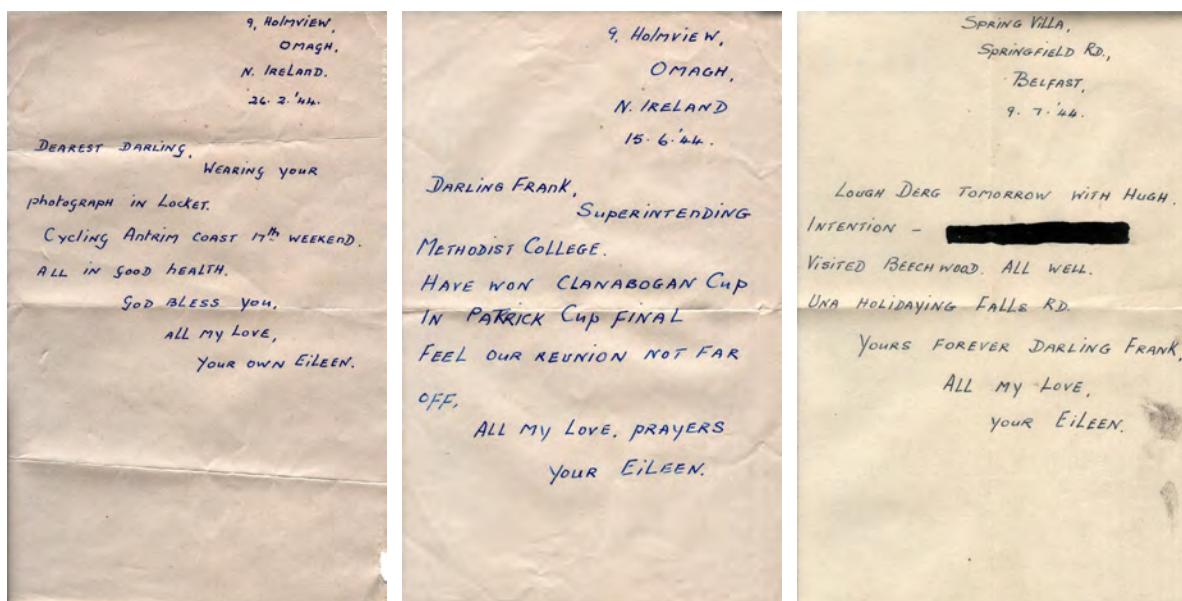


Figure 18. Examples of Eileen's short letters to Frank sent in 1944. (Credit: Queen's University Special Collections)



Figure 19. *Left:* Eileen wearing her locket containing Frank's picture, referred to in her letter of 26th February 1944. *Right:* Eileen standing outside the front door of Spring Villa on 18th April 1944 wearing her engagement ring. (Credit: The Murray Family)

Eileen was able to include photographs in her letters. In a letter dated 18th May 1944 she wrote:

"Shall send different snap with every letter, of our dear ones."



Figure 20. The uncropped version of the photograph of Eileen posing in Omagh with her golf clubs and trophies. (Credit: The Murray Family)

When the war finally ended Frank was able to send Eileen his daily letters to her in the form of a diary, amounting to more than 200 handwritten pages. She eventually received it in early October 1945. Frank also kept up the correspondence on his journey home, keeping Eileen informed of his travel plans. When he reached British Columbia he recuperated with relatives of Major Ray, Eileen's landlord in Omagh. Originally Eileen planned to meet him at the dockside in Southampton when he disembarked from the Queen Mary but she had been warned that the scene there would be too chaotic and even getting there would be problematic as travel was still restricted. In the end they finally met at the dockside in Larne around 18th November. Eileen recalled:

“He came in at Larne ... and he was due in at a certain time. I told the nuns and I said “He’s coming home and he will be in Larne at such a time ...” and it was early in the morning ... and I didn’t care whether they said you can or you can’t, but I said I am going to meet him. They said “Oh, certainly”. I had a lovely tweed, Donegal tweed royal blue suit which I was very proud of.”

“It was just wonderful. ... very, very thin and very emaciated ... and his beautiful hands ... so thin, long ... and hugged ... it was the first time I had ever kissed him.”

“He said to me, “Darling, we have got to get married because my father is neglected ... and the home is neglected. The quicker we get married and back to look after him the better.””

Eileen spent a week in Belfast before she had to return to Omagh. By this stage she had handed in her notice to the Loreto School but would carry on teaching until Christmas. Her place at the school would be taken by her friend and former pupil, Margaret McGuigan.

Eileen and Frank kept in contact by frequent letters, pre-arranged telephone calls (to the Melville Hotel in Omagh³²) and weekends in Belfast. During this time Frank made at least one trip to Omagh.

The couple were married on 4th February 1946 in St Brigid's Church on Derryvolgie Avenue, Belfast with Gerry McGuinness as Frank's best man. Eileen's uncle, Father Joe Murphy, performed the ceremony and the reception was held at The Carlton in Donegal Place.



Figure 21. Eileen & Frank's wedding and reception on 4th February, 1946. (Credit: The Murray Family)

Frank and Eileen based their honeymoon in Howth, outside Dublin. They went to the races at Leopardstown and watched the 'Chase of a 1000 Sovereigns. One particular horse appealed to Frank.

"Dad was always ... such a cool customer. Never got roused about anything This horse was running, "Cool Customer", so whatever we put on the horse, anyhow, it came in"

In fact, Frank put a £1 bet on Cool Customer, at odds of 12 to 1 and it won. He claimed that this was the first and only bet of his life. The couple spent some time in Dublin and visited Glendalough, probably on Eileen's recommendation following her cycling holiday in the summer of 1943.

³² The hotel was located in Georges Street and Eileen would pass it on her way to church. See <https://www.geograph.ie/photo/3435206>.

On returning to Belfast Frank opened a surgery in the rooms above his father's shop on the Oldpark Road while the couple lived in Beechwood. When he started out Frank would sometimes see patients in Beechwood:

“... they would come in to me in the kitchen where I would be working, or they would go upstairs to the toilet, you know, and it didn't work.”

Always competitive, Frank learned to play golf, and they both joined Fortwilliam Golf Club off the Antrim Road. At one stage Eileen played golf for Co. Antrim.



Figure 22. *Left:* Eileen and Frank outside Beechwood with their golf clubs. *Right:* Eileen in the front garden at Beechwood with golfing trophy. (Credit: The Murray Family).

Eileen and Frank had five children: Villana, Edmée, Josette, Paul and Carl. Beechwood was the Murray family home for almost thirty years and every summer the family would holiday together in Narin, Co. Donegal. However, Frank took early retirement after his surgery was destroyed during an arson attack in 1972. By this stage Frank and Eileen had purchased a bungalow in Newcastle, Co. Down, adjacent to the Royal County Down Golf Club. Originally intended as a holiday home, they finally moved there from Belfast in 1975 following Frank's retirement. Eileen already had relatives in Newcastle – her sister, Jo, with her husband John Scullion and four daughters, lived there too and Jo was also a keen golfer. To help facilitate Eileen's golf, the Royal County Down club installed a small set of steps adjacent to the back garden so that Eileen could conveniently access the course. Frank enjoyed gardening and created a small vegetable plot in the back garden. He would occasionally meet former patients in town, but he rarely returned to Belfast, except for hospital appointments. Eileen continued to play golf well into her eighties. Frank could see the 18th green from the kitchen window and would have Eileen's lunch ready for her when she came through the door. He would also put her clubs away and clean her golf shoes. Eileen continued to ride her bike around town and she sang in her church choir where her brother-in-law John was the choirmaster. She also took evening classes in dress making, another of her lifelong passions; she made many of her own outfits.

Despite having a heart valve replacement operation, Frank's health had deteriorated and he died peacefully at home in Newcastle on 25th September, 1993. Although Frank had been awarded the MBE in June 1943 his medal had been sent to him in the post. Following Frank's death his son Carl wrote to the Queen Mother outlining Frank's POW experiences and suggesting that she might like to present the MBE to Eileen. This led to an invitation to a private audience at Clarence House between Eileen and the Queen Mother in April 1995 at which the medal was duly presented. The two women chatted for some time. Afterwards, Eileen along with her children Josette and Carl, went for afternoon tea at The Ritz because "that was what Frank would have done".

When Eileen's health deteriorated to the extent that she could not look after herself at home, she entered a nursing home in Castlewellaun leaving her bungalow behind. However, in 2007 she moved to England and spent her final years living with her daughter Edmée in Reading. She was not very mobile and she spent a lot of time re-reading Frank's wartime letters and diary. Eileen died peacefully at Edmée's home on 22nd September 2009, almost 16 years to the day after the death of her beloved Frank.



Figure 23. *Left:* Eileen teeing off at Royal County Down. (Credit: Ingo Prosser) *Centre:* Eileen at the beach, Newcastle, Co. Down. (Credit: Carl Murray) *Right:* Eileen at the harbour, Portnoo, Co. Donegal. (Credit: Edmée Murray).

Eileen and Frank are buried together in the graveyard in the village of Bryansford, Co. Down in a joint plot that Eileen had bought for Frank as a birthday present.

Carl Murray