

# EARLIEST MEMORIES



**LEFT: My mother, Muriel, with me at two months.  
ABOVE: My father; the first time he saw me he was in prison in Belfast.**

**M**y earliest memory is of standing on a beach surrounded by big, black rocks and looking at the waves breaking on the sand. I was told later it must have been Oysterhaven, a seaside resort near Cork. I was with the Fleischmanns, friends of my aunt, Mary (Máire) MacSwiney, who were on a holiday there. At the time, the autumn of 1920, my father, Terence MacSwiney, the Lord Mayor of Cork, was on hunger strike in Brixton prison, so all the family were in London while I must have been staying with my mother's mother, Grandmother Murphy. I was two years old.

The Murphys owned the Cork distillery. They lived in a large house, called *Carrigmore*, in Montenotte and must have been one of the wealthiest families in Cork. They were surrounded by luxury, with a full staff from butler to housemaid, including a nursemaid for me. I have no distinct recollection of my stay there at that time but I remember well when my mother and I visited later.

I was born on 23 June 1918, in Cork. When my mother was expecting me it was taken for granted that the baby would be a boy, so I was referred to as Traolach Óg. As my Aunt Máire was leaving after visiting my mother in the nursing home, she met one of their acquaintances on her way in to visit. My aunt informed her, 'It is only a Máire!' I was known as Máire Óg to distinguish me from my aunt,



Mary MacSwiney, known within the family as Min or Máire. I called her Aunt Máire.

The first time my father saw me was when my mother, accompanied by Aunt Annie MacSwiney, visited him in prison in Crumlin Road jail in Belfast in 1918; I must have been about three months old. My mother asked the prison attendants to please go and heat the baby's bottle, which was quickly attended to as my mother had an



imperious manner and a pronounced Oxford accent. The first vision of his baby daughter must have been a moving event for my father. After the visit he wrote the poem, 'Máire':



*Máire*

Baby, baby, sweet and wise  
 Deeper than the morning skies  
 Is the wonder of your eyes.  
 While we pause before this wonder,  
 All life's cares must drop asunder  
 In the spell you hold us under.  
 Ah, we had been sad, reviewing  
 Barren years and fruitless rueing.  
 Lo! you give our lives renewing.  
 Night had flashed to us a warning;  
 Ah, we prayed, and God, not scorning  
 In your eyes restored the morning.

**LEFT, TOP:** When I was born my parents decided they would speak only Irish to me. When my father returned home to Cork from prison in Belfast, in 1918, he had a little *fáinne* made for me (a gold brooch in the shape of a ring indicating that the wearer could speak Irish), which he pinned to my baby frock before I could speak at all.

**LEFT, BOTTOM:** I don't recall my father. He died when I was two years old. Apparently he often spoke to me on the telephone from his office at Cork City Hall. My mother later wrote that, when she was speaking to anybody on the telephone, '... the baby would snatch the receiver out of my hand and think it was her father, and she would whisper, just whisper to him.' On my first birthday he wrote me another poem. It is called 'Máire Plays' and is more lighthearted and playful. Another one, 'Athair's Prayer', written in August 1919, is more solemn and full of foreboding:

**ABOVE:** He is wearing his *fáinne* on his tie in this photo of a rare occasion when we were together as a family.

HISTORY'S DAUGHTER

*Máire Plays*

(one year old)

Quick, a mháthair, take that knife  
How on earth did Máire get it, -  
Heavens! oh, I'll lose my life!  
The paper - Lord, she can't have eat it!  
No - or she'd be surely sick -  
See a trifle will elate her -  
There! She's jumping - stop her quick  
She'll upset the perambulator.  
God preserve us! take that string -  
She herself will surely throttle. -  
Stop! What's that she's going to fling -  
There I knew! - Smash goes her bottle!  
Hush - she's keeping quiet now.  
Let her be or else you'll fret her.  
Heavens, keeping quiet! How?  
See she's tearing up my letter!  
Oh her mischief, sunny sprite,  
And our hurry scurry after.  
And she understands it quite -  
Hear the glory of her laughter!  
But see the tiny hands now drooping  
Drowse along her eyelids creep -  
And we a spell of calm recouping  
In the beauty of her sleep.

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*Athair's Prayer*

Here, far away from those I love, to Thee  
 I cry, oh Lord, Thy saving hand to raise,  
 To guard them from all peril and to be  
 Their hope and refuge in uncertain days.  
 I feel the shadow of a danger hovering  
 Over my wife and child – yet have no fear  
 If but Thy mercy like a garment covering,  
 Close round their path – if Thou be ever near.

With Thy great sacrifice I offer mine.  
 I offer all that Thou may'st give them all:  
 Thy truth, Thy constancy, Thy love divine,  
 Thy saving strength whatever may befall.

Oh, but my sacrifice is poor – yet still  
 Thou hast said 'all for all'; and all I yield,  
 Strong in the faith that by Thy sacred will  
 My loved ones from all peril Thou wilt shield.

The press of labour through each trying day  
 I offer all its burden, and I strive  
 For patience, zeal and constancy, and pray  
 Only for them to be preserved alive.

But if Thy will is death – Thy will be done;  
 And be the time, the place, the manner Thine,  
 with all the sorrow of the things undone –  
 for them I offer all before Thy shrine.

But if Thou wilt that rather I should live  
 But see my projects perish – still I trust  
 Thy dispensation – all my dreams I give –  
 Be each brave project shattered in the dust.

Or let it be thy will, I should achieve  
 Some noble work – fruitful in many ways –  
 Let mine be all the labour, and I leave  
 Glory aside – to others give the praise.

I can give all for them, for Thou hast deigned  
 One breath to give me of Thy love divine,

And in my sacrifice I am sustained  
 For Thou hast strengthened me, oh Lord, with Thine.  
 Both life and death, all joy, all praise, all pain,  
 I lay them all, O God, before Thy feet  
 That those I love Thy promise full may gain –  
 The purpose of my life is then complete.



**LEFT: The poem my father wrote about me in his own hand, written 9 November 1919. 'Athair's Prayer', above (see page I for hand-written version), was written on 25 August 1919.**

**LEFT, BOTTOM: My father playing with me in the play-pen!**

## HISTORY'S DAUGHTER

My father, Terence MacSwiney, died on 25 October 1920 in Brixton prison, London, after seventy-four days on hunger strike. I did not know until many years later that his death was worldwide news. Shortly after his death President Éamon de Valera asked my mother and my aunt, Mary MacSwiney, to go to the United States to look for support and recognition for the Irish Republic. The grieving widow, who was very beautiful, and Aunt Máire, who had never given a public speech in her life, went to get support for the Republic, and obviously to raise funds. Money had been collected originally for the Irish Republic by issuing £100 bonds; my father had bought



EARLIEST MEMORIES

CERTIFIED COPY OF AN ENTRY OF DEATH

ISSUED AT THE GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE

Application Number: Y534464

REGISTRATION DISTRICT: Lambeth

1920 (DEATH in the Suburb of) Starwood County of London

No.	When and where born	Rank and service	Sex	Age	Occupation	Cause of death	Signature, Description and Address of informant	When registered	Signature of Registrar
1	County Fifth 10 October 1850	Jarvis	Male	45	Volunteer	Heart failure from	Certificates received from the Registrar General's Office for County of London & London Borough of Brixton	19th July 1920	M. C.
	20th Street Brixton	Miss Jarvis	Female	45	Wife of the deceased	Heart failure following influenza and to exhaustion from prolonged hospital treatment in Cork, Ireland		19th July 1920	

CERTIFIED to be a true copy of an entry in the certified copy of a Register of Deaths in the District above mentioned.

Given at the GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE, under the Great Seal of Great Britain, this 19th day of June 2003

DYA 149177

WARNING: THERE ARE OFFENCES RELATIVE TO FALSIFYING OR ALTERING A CERTIFICATE AND ISSUING OR PURSUING A FALSE CERTIFICATE (SERIOUS OFFENCE)

WARNING: A CERTIFICATE IS NOT EVIDENCE OF IDENTITY



LEFT, TOP: Irish musicians play at the door of Brixton prison in the final days of my father's hunger strike.

LEFT: Peter, Annie, Seán and Mary standing on either side of their brother's body lying in state in Southwark Cathedral.

TOP: My father's death certificate.

ABOVE: Headlines on the *Boston Evening Globe*.

one of these bonds in my name.

It was not long before Mary MacSwiney discovered that she was a natural orator. *The Boston Globe* reported on her great power as a speaker, her remarkable diction and her comprehensive knowledge of American history in relation to Ireland. The following story shows she could also think on her feet. At one of her meetings she spoke to the Daughters of the American Revolution, an organisation of upper-class Republican women. One woman stood up at the end of the speech when questions were being asked and said, 'Miss MacSwiney, could you explain to me about ambushes. I don't think it very fair to hide behind a bush and shoot at people. I hear the Irish are hiding and shooting

## HISTORY'S DAUGHTER



at the Black and Tans, it doesn't sound very fair.'

My aunt replied, 'In order to explain it to you, I will describe an ambush.' She went into great detail describing an ambush, and at the end asked the lady what she thought of that. The lady said, 'Well, yes, I can understand it, but I still don't like it, it doesn't seem right to me.' My aunt asked again did she understand and the lady said that she did. Mary MacSwiney replied, 'Well, I'm glad you do as I have just described the main ambush of the American War of Independence.' She had described in detail the stand at Concord Bridge in 1775!

**ABOVE: Muriel and Aunt Máire arriving in New York in 1920 to look for support and recognition for the Irish Republic. My mother did not wish to go to America and was glad to have Máire to accompany her.**  
**RIGHT: Muriel contacting the Irish Consulate on 29 December 1922, in New York.**