

Article 4: Growing up on a croft in Lumphanan.

Part 1 – 1957 - 1965

by Ann Raeburn

Imagine you are a young boy, living in a comfortable Council house in Cults. The house, built after the War, has hot and cold running water, a bathroom, electricity and is warm in winter. You have plenty of pals to play with living nearby. Suddenly your world changes completely when your parents buy a 6 acre croft in a place you have never heard of. The little croft house has no running water, no electricity, no bathroom and just an open fire to warm it in winter. The croft is on top of a windswept hill by Lumphanan.

This is how Brian and Kenny Paterson came to Oldtown Croft in 1957, aged 10 and 9yrs respectively.



Oldtown Croft

Their Dad, Bill, had joined the Gordon Highlanders during WW II. He had fought in the fierce battles of Alamein and the Italian campaign but he talked little about his memories and experiences. A croft hardly produces a sustainable income and Dad found casual work in the neighbourhood. He helped the Thomsons of Craigton “giting” hay, that is making hay to collect seed. A sheaf for seed collection was tied high near the grass heads unlike an oat sheaf which was tied in the middle. The Thomsons were famous for their hay seed and Dad would help to stook the sheaves. Later Dad found permanent work at Craighash quarry, bringing in a steady income.

Meanwhile, Mother Jean set about crofting life. A milk cow was acquired, four sows produced piglets, and 200 laying hens were housed in a shed and run. Apart from being a major culture shock, the boys found themselves put to work in their spare time to help run the croft. Eggs needed to be washed before sending to the packing station at Torphins. Later the packing station decreed that eggs should be cleaned by rubbing with fine sandpaper. This was an evening task for the boys as they sat by the fire at night, perhaps chatting to a neighbour who dropped in. Without electricity there was no television and lighting in the room was by Tilley lamps burning paraffin. The eggs were picked up by Cecil Smith the grocery van driver. When the road up to Oldtown was blocked with snow the boxes of eggs would be taken by sledge down across the fields to the Mill of Auchlossan and collected from the public road. The boys were often responsible for this task and not popular when there was an accident with the sledge!



The milk cow with Jean, Brian and Kenny



Snow drift by the croft door

What about the mod cons they had enjoyed in Cults? Now Brian and Kenny used an outside loo, spooky and cold to reach on winter nights. Water for the house and the animals had to be pumped using a hand pump situated inside the living room window recess of the croft over a large stone sink. Bathing was a Sunday night ritual in a tin bath in front of the black range. The croft interior was pine-lined throughout with a red tin roof.

With no Hoover to make housework easy, mats were taken outside and beaten. Washing day involved boiling water on the open fire, using the swey to hang the pot of water. The clothes and sheets were immersed in a tub and rubbed by hand up and down a washboard. They were then rolled through the wringer before being hung to dry.

In Winter the stabled cattle needed feeding with neeps pulled from the frosty ground and hay pulled from the ricks. On a frosty winter's day this was the coldest job of all and ensured frozen hands. Four stalls in the byre held the milk cow, the suckler cow and 2 young stirks. The boys fed the cattle and pigs in winter evenings so Dad could sit down to his tea when he returned from work.

Daily, Dad would walk home from work up the hill to the croft from Auchlossan where the Council lorry dropped him off. Sometimes Dad would carry a big sack of "caaf" (chaff, the separated husks from the cereal grains) on his back up the hill. This was obtained from the Mains of Auchlossan and used as bedding in the hens' big shed. Mucking out the byres and deep litter hen shed in the winter months was done with a "graip" (fork) and barrow and in Spring the rotted muck was spread on the field in the same manner.

Four sows lived in a pen with a small run. If a sow needed the boar she would be walked down to the Mains of Auchlossan and coaxed over the small bridge; pigs hate water! Jimmy Anderson at the Mill kept a boar. Later, when it became necessary to take the sows to a boar further afield, the old Austin car was pressed into service. The back seat would be removed and the sow enticed into the back of the car with a bit of feed! There she stood happily for the journey. When it came to farrowing time, Brian would sit up with the sow all night to check the safe birthing of the piglets. Dad would rise at 5.00 am and take over, giving Brian some sleep before school.



The old Austin

In Spring Alec Bain collected gulls' eggs from the colony of noisy screeching black-headed gulls who nested in the bog below Oldtown (now part of Deeside Activity Park). Alec Bain, the Oldtown farmer would box up the eggs, sending them to Aberdeen on the train. Brian thinks they were used to make glue. Gulls' eggs were a delicacy so perhaps they were sold as a culinary delight.

In the Summer evenings the boys' playground would extend all around the hill to Newton, Minew, Hillhead, Hill of Dess and the Falls of Dess. They would check on birds nests in the area, to see how the occupants were faring. An egg collection was a prize possession but the boys took only 1 egg from each variety of bird, not illegal in those days.

Crops were sown by hand; Dad would walk the park throwing the seed corn either side with his hand from a "happer", a tray which hung from his neck. Hay was made by scything by hand and pulled into rows with a "smiler" or big rake. Hay was stored for winter in a "ruck" built on top of a "foun" (foundation) of broom branches which lifted it off the ground and prevented the hay from rotting. How you sharpened a scythe depended on where you lived: "Up Dee and Down Don". On Deeside you held the point of the scythe blade up to sharpen it but if you were from Donside you held the point down and the heel up!



Dad sowing corn with a happer



Hay time with the smiler

Dad's car ownership progressed from the old Austin to a Ford van. The boys had to sit on the wheel arches in the back which were cold, hard and slippery. If young pullets were purchased and collected in the van it was the boys' job to sit on the wheel arches and prevent the pullets from suffocating themselves by crushing into a corner of the van as they journeyed home. Brian found perching on the wheel arch in a hard bumpy van a painful experience!



The Ford van

Shops were hardly required as the surrounding countryside was well served with grocery, butcher, fish and baker vans. Gilberts of Dinnet and Gordons of Alford supplied haberdashery. Vans were the "Amazon" of their time. One van often didn't arrive till 8.00pm, so long was his day. Donald McDonald would come round collecting rags. A family of travellers camped annually by Satan's Den as they passed through Lumphanan.

Every 2nd week the family attended church. Both churches were in operation then.

Brian and Kenny developed their own money-making schemes. The boys borrowed "clucking" (broody) hens from neighbouring farms and set duck and goose eggs under them. This was an art, involving digging divots of turf on which to set the nest of straw. The damp turf helped ensure the growing embryos did not dry out. The clucking hens would sit tight and sometimes needed encouragement to leave their nest daily to feed and drink. The boys would dampen the eggs as waterfowl need a moist atmosphere, and hopefully a successful hatch would follow in 28 days. Day old ducklings could be sold for 2/6 and goslings for 21/-. The Council lorry which collected Dad on his way to work at Craighash, would deliver the day-old ducklings and goslings to Woods Emporium. Jock Stuart and Murray Hossack were the drivers for Woods Emporium, situated at the 'T' junction in Lumphanan and they would take the box of little ducklings and goslings in to the Mart in Aberdeen. The boys were never charged for this service. Sometimes they would take their precious ducklings and goslings to the Mart themselves. The boys knew the Bluebird bus driver, Sandy Burnett, who would turn a blind eye to the crates under their seats. They would then carry their heavy crates through Aberdeen to reach the Mart at Belmont.

Friendly neighbours are important in rural communities and the Patersons enjoyed Willie Ellis of Ardierar, and the Mowats of Mowat Newton. Mr Mowat could sex goslings which was a useful skill and he provided the boys with clucking hens. There were Hector and Mrs Christie at Newton who came weekly at 9.00pm after the village football for a news and fly cup with the Patersons. Newton Croft, now Morven View, was the home of two old ladies who were very proud of their nephew, Robert, an architect.

Christmas was just a working day. Brian and Kenny would wake to a stocking at the end of their beds, filled with peanuts, a tangerine, a pencil and other small treats, but no special meal was cooked. Hogmanay was an excitement. The boys would be put to bed mid-afternoon and then in the evening they would motor to Dunecht in the van, perched on the cold wheel arches, to first-foot Granny at her farm. Granny's house had the attraction of electricity and TV!



Dad and Kenny



Dad scything oats



Piglets by the outside toilet

All photographs courtesy of Brian and Kenny Paterson.

Coming soonPart 2 – Lumphanan “Skweel” and beyond.