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Article: "Ballycotton's Mairéad remembers her father Jerry Whyte" – Mairéad Whyte.

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AST CORK JOURNAL

## Ballycotton's Mairead remembers her father, *Jerry Whyte*

Mairead Whyte, Maytown, Ballycotton contacted the East Cork Journal to write a tribute to her much-missed father, Jerry Whyte, on the occasion of his third anniversary, which occurs around this time...

My father was stroking my cheek with the back of his right-hand when I woke. He had only partial use of that hand, stiff from the remnants of bullet pellets since he had accidentally shot himself at the age of sixteen. That was before he mangled his left leg in a thrashing machine which left him with a permanent limp.

'Your mother's been taken in,' he said through blurry eyes.

I instinctively knew what he meant by that but I was eleven years old and I believed parents lived forever.

'Daddy, what time will she be home,' I asked.

'I'll be going up later and find out,' he said after a long pause. His voice started to shake slightly.

'OK, wake me up later and I'll go for the spin,' I said. His weather beaten face smiled softly. I buried myself back under the blankets.

I was the youngest and neither my father nor my four elder sisters knew when she was coming back. She was confined to Intensive Care in the Bons hospital. They didn't allow children under twelve into that unit, and I would not reach twelve for another ten months which left me with no choice but to write her my first letter, which my father delivered.

"Dear Mammy,  
Sorry for writing with a pencil but I've no pen. Cath took it, she's doing the books with Daddy in the kitchen. News here is that everyone is as happy as Larry. It's roasting hot. I'd love to go to the strand."

As the days went by, there was no sign of her. I jumped on the daffodils hoping she would fly out of the porch shouting at me to get out of the flower beds. She never did. Daddy recognised my sadness, and no stranger to breaking rules, decided to smuggle me into the hospital. He limped sideways past the nurses with me at his front. Mammy lay silent in her bed when we arrived.

Today, Mammy makes up for that month of silence when she suffered her heart attack twenty-six years ago. Now her mouth churns out one speech after another. I wonder how her speech store is replenished to maintain the momentum she operates at.

My father is the one who lays silent now, happily buried in Cloyne graveyard. Inside my mind, he sits happily by my side smiling softly.