

# Book of the Week

***An Irish Country Childhood: Memories of a Bygone Era* by Marrie Walsh**

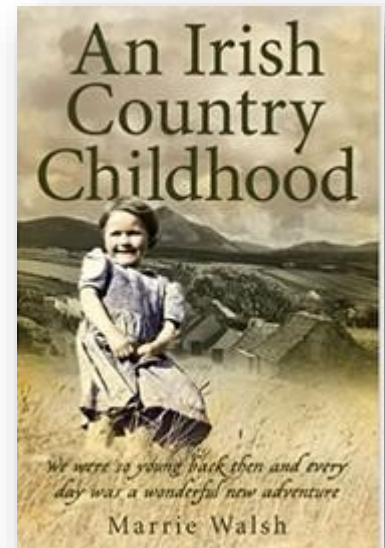
**Book Review by Linda Morse**

Libraries are amazing places for the many treasures they hold! While recently browsing books near the front desk, I found a gem of a book: Marrie Walsh's *An Irish Country Childhood: Memories of a Bygone Era* (1995, St. Martin's Press, Inc.). This delightful, easy to read large print book describes life in rural Ireland from the 1930's up until the time the author immigrated to the US around World War II. Although a memoir, it does not tell of her life in a sequential way, but instead describes people, places, and practices that framed Irish rural life in County Mayo nearly 100 years ago.

In this book, you'll meet many delightful characters: the spinster aunt, her grandparents, the bachelor, the teachers, the priests, the fiddlers. She tells stories of the everyday, with people and places within farm life that are unforgettable. As examples, I felt like I could taste the fresh milk or the potato bread warm from the kitchen. Her childhood antics with her siblings are funny and charming. Daily life revolved around the family and farm, and weekly life around the church. While these stories are enjoyable, the truth was that life in that era was very hard with food insecurity and political strife daily concerns.

Ever since I visited Strokestown Park in Ireland, a museum dedicated to the Irish potato famine, I've wondered what Irish life was like in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and how the famine led so many to leave for America. Imagine being so hungry that you turned to eating grass in the barren field (which made you sick) because there was nothing in the barn or larder to feed you or your family. When they came to America these hardy people brought their stories, their foods, their traditions and religion, and their music, which is particularly reflected in the cultures of Appalachia and the South.

This book is an example of the unexpected and enjoyable treasures you can easily find in our local library. I greatly enjoyed learning about the life and times of an unknown woman from this era and place. If you have any interest in Ireland, you will find this a welcome read. As the jacket says: "Return with her now, to a land where every neighbor was family; where hermits and bogey men and ghosts



were equally real and equally frightening; where time, for just a moment, seemed to have stopped for a leisurely rest. You won't soon forget it."

One of the many treasures in your local library!

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