

The background of the page is a light gray musical score. It features multiple staves with various musical notations, including eighth and sixteenth notes, rests, and dynamic markings such as 'p' (piano) and 'f' (forte). A large, diagonal watermark reading 'COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL' is overlaid across the center of the page.

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# IN THE BEGINNING







THE FLUTE WAS IN MY BLOOD, YOU MIGHT SAY. My grandfather, also named James Galway, was a highly regarded flute player in Belfast. He in turn taught my father—another James Galway—to play the flute, which he did very well. So as small children my younger brother, George, and I grew up to the sound of the flute.

Our grandfather came to live with us during the last years of his life. He didn't socialize much with us boys, or tell us stories about the old days. But in the evenings, after George and I had been sent upstairs to bed, he often played softly for a while, a few tunes he was especially fond of. I loved listening to him, and I held off falling asleep as long as he was playing. My father, meanwhile, was devoted to Mozart. By the time I was eight, I could recognize the main themes of Mozart's G Minor Symphony and *Jupiter* Symphony, because my father played them for me over and over.

Although my grandfather was self-taught, he was good enough that he had often played in the opera orchestra. But his real passion



was playing in the flute bands that we had in Belfast. These bands were the equivalent of marching bands in the United States, or the brass bands they had up in the north of England. The flute bands played traditional Irish tunes in parades—many of them Orangemen’s tunes, I should add, because most of the flute bands were Protestant. But they also gave concerts where they played classical music, if you can imagine playing an overture arranged for thirty-two flutes, four drums, a bass drum, cymbals, and triangles.

My grandfather was the conductor of one of the best bands in Belfast, called the Apprentice Boys, which regularly won the local competitions. In fact, they were the champions right up to World War II. My father was also a member of the Apprentice Boys. But to my great regret, I never had a chance to hear their band play. I was born just three months after the beginning of World War II, on December 8, 1939, so I wasn’t even two years old when Adolf dropped a bomb on the Apprentice Boys’ humble music-making abode and demolished it. They never recovered from that. They never found a new home after the war or even got together to play again.

For that matter, Adolf also bombed our first house, on Vere Street, and we had to move around a bit before settling in at no. 17 Carnalea Street. The problem was that our neighborhood was cheek by jowl with the shipyards, a part of Belfast that was a prime target of the Luftwaffe. Shipbuilding and shipping had been the big industries in Belfast, which had one of the largest dry docks in the world. In fact, the *Titanic* had been built in Belfast. My grandfather might even have worked on the *Titanic*, although we don’t have any evidence of that.

Anyway, this was industrial Belfast, and in the winter we had fogs where you couldn’t see a thing. You’ve heard of the “London particulars”—well, they had nothing on our Belfast fogs. I presume that half of the *Titanic* was built in the dark, because these fogs were so bad. They lingered all the way up to the sixties, when the British government finally forbade burning coal. Smokeless fuel was the order of the day, and all of a sudden we could see.





*When I was a very young lad, just nine years old.*



My parents and my grandparents and their friends were in the lower working class—not that they could always get work. Shipbuilding fell off after World War II, and my father was often unemployed, although he did pick up a nice bit of money playing the accordion in dance bands. My mother was the main breadwinner in the family, working as a winder in a spinning mill. She was also a keen amateur musician. She played the piano, entirely by ear—she had never learned to read music or wanted to. But if she heard a tune, she could play it, and she was a great favorite playing for women's guilds and other groups.

We didn't have a lot of money or special clothes—a nice suit was reserved for going to church on Sunday and for weddings and funerals. Otherwise, people basically lived in the same clothes that they wore to work or school. But we always had a roof over our heads, except when the Luftwaffe bombed us, and I don't remember ever going hungry, although there were times when we didn't have much besides bread and butter.

We lived in a neighborhood that was built by the people who owned the shipyards to house their workers. Like most of the houses on our street, ours had two rooms upstairs, and downstairs a kitchen, a little back room, and a sitting room. There was no toilet—just an outhouse in the backyard. And no bathtub. We used the same tub that my mother washed clothes in, and we had a bath every Saturday night. If it was cold, the tub was set up in front of the fire.

The idea behind the Saturday bath was to get ready to go to church on Sunday. In fact, my parents didn't go to church regularly, although if anyone had asked them, they certainly would have said they were Protestants. But at some point I started going to church. At first I tried the church on the corner, St. Paul's, which was next door to the primary school that George and I went to. But I found I didn't much like St. Paul's. It was Church of Ireland—that is, Anglican—and I felt that the ministers and many of the parishioners talked down to people like me. You know, they had a posh accent, and because we had real Belfast street accents, we didn't seem





*With my mum and my brother, George, at our home on Carnalea Street.  
That's George on the left, me on the right.*



to fit in. So I found another church, down by the docks, where they seemed to be sort of normal people. And I enjoyed that. It was a Presbyterian church called Sinclair Seamen's Church.

I went back to this church much later, one time when I was visiting Belfast, and it was just the way I remembered it from childhood. The leaded windows portrayed soldiers and sailors, the pulpit looked like the prow of a ship, and there was a lot of ship paraphernalia, including a big ship's bell, which had been recovered from a bad accident at sea. Sinclair Seamen's is still there, I'm glad to say, and seems to be doing very well.

At that time, nobody in our neighborhood had a TV. We just had radios, and our radio was pretty bad. It was likely to break down at the worst possible moment. You'd be in the middle of a heavy-weight championship fight, and the announcer was describing how there was a left to the head, a right to the body, and Joe Louis was down again—and then the radio would cut out. But the other side of it was that we listened to a lot of music. As a kid, I used to get the *Radio Times*, which was the official guide to the BBC. I always looked up the classical-music bits on the Third Programme, and I heard a lot of wonderful music for free.

Not that my life was all high-toned and classical music. I used to tool around the town with a few of my mates, and we got up to all sorts of devilment. For starters, there were the trams. The fathers of some of my friends were tram drivers, and we waited until one of their trams came along and then all piled onto it, free of charge. You can't imagine what ruffians we were. But the drivers got a kick out of it, and from our parents' point of view, if a bunch of ten-year-olds went into town on a neighbor's tram, he sort of kept an eye on you. Of course, once we got off the tram, the city was our oyster.

Then there was the railway station. It was very near Carnalea Street—you could see it from the next corner, and you could walk



there in two minutes. Now, the station was just one amazing place for us to play in. We ran all over it and got into things, and the porters would yell at us and chase us away. I realized later that it was in fact quite dangerous, as there was quite a bit of shunting of goods in the areas where we played. But I don't remember anyone ever getting hurt, and it was great sport.

It was quite a while after the war before lorries began to make deliveries from the railway station. When we were kids, they still used horses and carts—huge dray horses pulling the carts. We would go over and ask the guys who were going out on a run if we could come with them. They seemed delighted to have some kids along, keeping them company. They got us to do a bit of work for them as well—when they made a delivery, we helped them unload the things. Then they brought us back to the railway station. And this way we got to know Belfast a little, because they delivered to shops all over town.

Meanwhile, ever since we were youngsters, my brother and I had been fascinated by Dad's flute. We were constantly getting at it and trying to play it. He tried to hide it, but our house wasn't very big and we were very determined. So then he started taking it apart and hiding the pieces separately, but that only made it more of a game. Finally, to keep me away from his flute, he bought me my first musical instrument—a mouth organ. Only there was something wrong with it—I couldn't make the sounds that I wanted to. It turned out that it had only whole tones, not half tones, which meant that you could only play in the key of C major. So he found me another one that cost £2 and had a button on the side that let you play half tones as well, and then I was happy. I could play "White Christmas" and "Rudolph, the Red-Nosed Reindeer" and cowboy tunes like "Old Smokey" that we'd heard Gene Autry and Roy Rogers sing in the movies on Saturdays.



But I never gave up hankering for the flute, and finally my father got me one. It was nothing like the classical Boehm-system flutes I graduated to only a couple of years later—the kind used in professional orchestras. No, this one was a simple six-key instrument of the kind used in military bands, which is what most of the Belfast flute bands used.

Back then, I often wondered what the future would hold, and one day something very odd happened. I was at home with my mother, and we heard a loud knock on the door. Mum opened it, with me standing right behind her, and there was an old gypsy woman. She handed my mother a sprig of heather, but then she wanted to talk. Mum didn't invite her in but didn't close the door either. After a few minutes of chatting, the gypsy woman looked at me and asked me to let her see my hand. I thrust it out to her. She studied my palm and said, "You know, one day you're going to be a great musician."

I didn't believe that she could really tell the future. Yet those words stayed with me and may have had something to do with strengthening my desire to make music my life's work.

Around the age of nine, I was given a violin by Mrs. Shearer, who lived up the street from us, and I began to take lessons with a friend of my father's, Richard McKay, or "Wee Dickie," as we all called him. This was not a great success. In the first place, the violin was home sweet home to an army of Irish woodworms. Once I became familiar with the tiny holes where they lived, I realized they were eating up the whole house. Another problem I had was that my eyes were very poor when I was young, and the music for the violin has to be much farther away than for the flute. Well, it was a great day for the Irish worms when I abandoned the violin, and they could chomp away without my providing the music for their dinner. I had never stopped playing the flute, and now I went back to it full-time.



Somehow, when I was about ten and playing the flute not too badly, my father had the chance to buy me a more serious flute—a Selmer Gold Seal—for £21. That was an amazing amount of money, because even when he was working he earned only £4 a week. How he managed to scrimp and save to get this flute, I will never know, but I was very grateful for it. Unfortunately, the instrument had something wrong with it, and it did not improve with my efforts to fix it.

After a few months, I took it around to a man named Purdy Flack, who repaired instruments in his home. He looked it over and said, “I don’t think this is much good. But I have something here I think would suit you. Tell your dad it’s only thirty pounds.” That would be the equivalent of more than \$2,500 today.

My father almost died, but he had me play the flute for him, and he realized this was something that might really make a difference for me. So he somehow came up with the money again.

Now that I had a proper flute, all I wanted to do was play it. The problem was that I wanted to play tunes. Like my mother, I could pretty much hear a tune once and then play it. But my father believed that if you were going to learn properly, you had to practice your scales, and you even had to learn some theory—which he had managed to teach himself, without any formal studies. On the first score, I eventually realized that he was right; on the second, I had my doubts—and I still think music schools spend too much time on theory for students who are learning to be singers or instrumentalists, as opposed to composers or arrangers.

Because my father had quite a temper, there were plenty of rows between us. I wanted to play “White Christmas” or “South of the Border” or some of the great marches, like “Men of Harlech” or an Orangemen’s tune called “The Sash My Father Wore.” Dad wanted me to practice my scales. One time I went up to my room and was playing “Men of Harlech” in the key of A major, and I was having trouble with a G-sharp. Dad came tearing up the stairs and burst into the bedroom, yelling, “There, you see! If you’d learned the scale



of A major properly, you'd be able to play that." Anyway, after a while my father decided that we weren't getting anywhere this way, and so he sent me off to Uncle Joe for lessons. Uncle Joe wasn't really my uncle—he was actually a second cousin, and his full name was Joseph McAdorey—but that's what I always called him. He was the bandmaster of the Onward Flute Band, and he was a great guy. He lived with his mother, who was my grandfather's niece, but we all called her Granny Mac. She wore a black shawl, and she had her silver hair in a bun in the back. Her hair was very long—I remember once seeing it before she wound it up in the bun, and I was amazed at how long it was.

Granny Mac always had Joe's supper ready as soon as he came home from work, and I arrived with my flute not much later. After Joe had eaten and spent a few minutes chatting with his pet canary, he would turn to me: "Okay, young fellow, get your flute out."

So I would prop up my music and ask him to sing the piece to me and then to play it on the flute. I've always found this to be the best way to learn a piece of music: have someone else play it, or listen to a good recording—and then try to do it better.

Anyway, I thought the world of Uncle Joe's flute playing. Most of the players in the Belfast flute bands had a sluggish approach, but he had a clean, crisp way of attacking the notes that appealed to me very much. I learned a lot from his way of playing.

He was also very good at teaching the basics. Unlike Dad, he didn't discourage me from playing marches and songs from the movies. He even taught me another song, "Children's Love," that I'm still fond of. So I didn't resent it when he made me practice my scales or count out a piece before I ever put the flute to my lips, to get the rhythm right. I remember the first time I tried to play something in 6/8, I just *couldn't* get it right. It was one of the most frustrating experiences of my nine-year-old life. But finally, with Uncle Joe's help—and spurred on by his promise that when I was good enough, I could join his band—I managed to play the piece.

Another thing Joe insisted on was learning to read music. It was all well and good, he said, to pick up tunes by ear, but being able



to read the music would open up a lot more possibilities. So, one way and another, even though much of it was hard, tedious work, I enjoyed my lessons and my practicing.

When I was about ten, Uncle Joe did take me into the Onward Flute Band, and I thought that was the greatest, because it gave me a sense of belonging to something. We met every Tuesday and Friday evening in our practice room above a barbershop, and I was the youngest one there by a good bit. We had sixteen flutes, a bass drum, a couple of other drums, triangles, and a cymbal, and you can't imagine how all of that sounded in our little practice room. One time I complained to Uncle Joe, "I can't hear myself playing at all."

"That's good," Joe explained. "That means you're in tune—everybody's in tune. You can only hear yourself if you're out of tune."

Not long after I joined the band, we entered the annual Flute Band League competition held at the Ulster Hall, a big deal indeed in the Belfast flute world. We had a particular piece to play called "Silent Valley," and I practiced that piece as if my life depended on it. I had never been shy about playing in front of people, but this was the first time I had sat on a stage and looked out at a packed house. Our turn came pretty early in the evening, and I believed we had done well, but we had quite a while to wait before finding out what the judge thought. So we went to a nearby pub for part of the time, and I drank Coke while my dad and the fellows in the band mostly drank other things. At some point, we had dinner at a fish-and-chips place and then went back to the hall. It was after midnight when the last band finished playing, whereupon the judge emerged from his little box and announced that the winner was the Onward. I was beside myself with joy.

Although competitions were important to the flute bands, their real *raison d'être* was to march through the streets on special occasions. The Onward members wore dark-blue uniforms with red trim, and we each had a little music holder that fastened onto the left arm. I thought that marching through the streets in my uniform,



playing away, was the greatest thing in the world, especially if some of my friends were standing along the parade route and called out, “Hey, Jimmy,” as we went by.

The really big deal was “the Twalth,” to give it the local pronunciation—the Twelfth of July, when the Ulster Orange lodges celebrate the victory of the Protestant William of Orange over the Catholic King James II at the Battle of the Boyne. All the Orange lodges, as well as the bands, march in the parade. Before the war, my dad would have marched with the Apprentice Boys, but after they broke up, he didn’t join another band. So by the time I was in the Onward, he marched with his lodge, the Imperial Temperance 929—which may sound a little funny, given that temperance wasn’t exactly his style.

In any case, early on the morning of the Twalth, all the bands and the lodges gathered at Carlisle Circus and, led by the grand master, got set to walk the twelve miles to the Field of Finaghy. There the speeches went on forever, and I found them intensely boring. I really had no interest in politics—I still don’t—and one problem with Ulster Protestants is their tendency to believe you mustn’t enjoy yourself, lest you get up to the Pearly Gates and St. Peter tells you, “No, you’re not coming in here, my lad.” But during the three years I marched on the Twalth, I usually managed to have some fun at the Field—eating and maybe dancing a bit on the grass and getting a chance to try blowing other instruments.

The icing on the cake was that we actually got paid for this. I remember one time I was paid £35—an amazing sum for us in those days. I bought a bicycle with it, and that was the pride of my life until somebody stole it.

One day I was walking along High Street with a couple of my mates, and we came across a sign that read, “Atlantic Records.” We went inside; the room was only a little cubbyhole with no windows



underneath a big staircase. But there was enough space for Solly Lipschitz to have his shop and to conduct the business of selling records. He was rightly known as Solomon Lipschitz, but everyone called him Solly.

Now, we boys all looked like the hero of *Angela's Ashes* and were reckoned by the local shopkeepers to be up to no good. But Solly took one look at us and said, "What instruments do you fellows play?" Because everybody around there played something.

We said, "We play the flute."

"Okay," he said, "you play the flute. Well, let's see what we have." He hunted for a record and put it on the gramophone. It was the Berlin Philharmonic, he told us, conducted by Wilhelm Furtwängler. They were playing variations by Hindemith on a theme of Weber's. The piece has an impressive flute solo, and when the record reached the solo, we were all listening. Afterward, Solly asked, "What do you think, fellows?"

We all gave it the thumbs-down. In the Belfast flute-band tradition, we were letting on that if it wasn't in 2/4, and it wasn't called "Old Comrades" or "Under the Double Eagle," it didn't fall into our notion of what flute music was supposed to be.

"*What?*" Solly exclaimed. "This is the Berlin Philharmonic, and it's Furtwängler conducting!"

And we said, "We don't care—we don't like the flute player. Can you play us a march?"

Well, Solly didn't give up on us, and we went there every Saturday. He usually played us several records, and we had a wonderful time. In fact, he educated us as far as classical orchestral music goes.

Only years later did I realize that Solly was Jewish. It never crossed my mind at the time that anybody in Belfast would be Jewish. In Belfast, I thought, we had Protestants and Catholics; Jews existed only in the Old Testament and the New Testament. Solly was very proud when he heard I had got the solo flute job in the Berlin Philharmonic, in spite of what I had said about that orchestra in the innocence of youth.



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Although Uncle Joe had done a good job of getting me started on the flute, my dad thought it was time to send me to a more professional teacher. He had a friend named Ardwell Dunning, a book-binder by trade but also a fine flute player. He was a dapper little man, past seventy when he first started teaching me, but one of the finest teachers I have ever had, and that's saying a lot.

Uncle Joe had taught me to be rigorous about counting and had made me practice my scales. Now Artie introduced me to harmony and explained how understanding harmony would help me play the notes accurately. He also let me play his beautiful Boehm-system flute, which made the time that we spent doing the exercises in *Steiner's Harmony* less painful. He was always very encouraging to his young pupil. One time I said to him, "Look, Artie, why is it everybody else can play the flute louder than I can?"

He answered, "You know, Jimmy, you're just a small boy. All these other chaps you play with are grown up; they're big and strong. I can only tell you that one day when you're big enough, you too will be able to play as loud as you want." Well, like my father, I never did get to be very big—but big enough, at least, to fulfill Artie's promise.

I loved Uncle Joe, but as my playing improved, I yearned for bigger things than the Onward, so when I was about eleven I joined the Belfast Military Band. This band didn't stick to flutes and percussion: it had trumpets, cornets, clarinets, bassoons, and even E-flat euphoniums. Soon after I joined this band, a military-band competition was to be held in the Ulster Hall. The test piece was the *Coppélia Suite* by Délibes, which has a wonderful piccolo solo. I had never played the piccolo before I started to learn this piece. Although it's smaller than the flute and therefore has smaller finger holes and keys, it's played pretty much the same way. I worked and worked on my



part, afraid that I would let down my new bandmates. But on the evening of the competition, our performance went perfectly, and to my joy and theirs, we won.

My next competition was something else again. It was called the Irish Flute Band Championships, and there were three classes for soloists: one for ages ten to thirteen, the “junior class” for ages thirteen to sixteen, and the open class. Well, having a pretty good opinion of my playing after the previous competition, I entered all three classes.

The competition had three set pieces: an arrangement of an aria from Donizetti’s opera *La Favorita*; Anton Rubinstein’s “Melody in F,” originally written for the piano; and a Viennese song called “Schön Rosmarin,” written by Fritz Kreisler for the violin. Uncle Joe helped me with the rhythms of the Donizetti. At first, I found the Rubinstein the most difficult, but after I listened to the Palm Court orchestra play it a few times on the BBC, it started to fall into place. And I got hold of Kreisler’s own recording of “Schön Rosmarin.” But in that case listening wasn’t enough: the Viennese style was just too foreign to me. Fortunately, the father of a friend of mine, Billy Dunwoody, was able to help me get into it.

When the evening of the competition arrived, my father took me on the bus to St. Anne’s School near Sandy Row, just a few minutes’ ride from our house. We went upstairs to the third floor, where a large classroom had a platform that served as the stage. It turned out that there were ten players in each class, and we were given numbers that were then put in a hat for a drawing to determine what order we would play in. The judge, who sat in a sort of box on the stage from which he could hear but not see the players, was not given the names that went with the numbers until after he had finished judging us.

It may be hard to imagine nowadays, but most of the people in the audience were puffing away on cigarettes. By the time Dad and I arrived, the atmosphere in the classroom was nearly as thick as a Belfast fog. Each time my number was called, though, I managed to find my way to the stage and play my piece.



The competition started at seven thirty and didn't finish until after midnight. The judge didn't announce the results of each class when it was over; instead, he stayed in his box until everyone had played. When he finally emerged, he first mumbled a few words about the "fine playing" he had heard, then for each class he read off the names, starting at the bottom of the rankings, and gave the score for each. I remember my score in the soloists-aged-ten-to-thirteen class: 96½. Then the judge formally announced the third, second, and first prize winners, and first prize was James Galway. I went up to the stage and was given a little cup.

The same routine was repeated for the junior class, and once again it was "first prize, James Galway." So I went up to the stage and collected a second cup, this one a bit bigger.

Then the judge came to the open class—and yet again it was "first prize, James Galway." The house erupted, and the judge looked as if he couldn't believe the same player—and an eleven-year-old boy at that—had won all three classes. But he handed me my third cup. I dashed home with my dad and said, "Look, Mum, look at these!" and we put them up on the mantelpiece. My parents didn't fuss over me too much, not wanting me to get a swelled head. But up until then, whenever Dad called out to me, it would be, "Hey, big fellow!" After that night, it was, "Hey, Mozart!"

I was on the brink of a change in direction whose importance I wouldn't fully realize for years to come. By this time, I had joined another flute band, the 39th Old Boys. My best friends there were Billy Dunwoody, whose father had helped me prepare for the competition, and another fellow named Edmund Duke. Edmund was a brilliant flute player, and there were many other fine players in the 39th: Billy Drennan, an excellent bass drummer, and his two talented children, Joyce, a trumpeter, and Jim, a pianist. And Ray Stevenson, the brother of one of my teachers at the Mountcollyer school, was a fine flute player.



I loved playing with the 39th and didn't have any higher aspirations than that, but Billy and Edmund gave me some advice that changed my life. They told me of a woman named Muriel Dawn, a flutist with the BBC orchestra in Belfast, who had a remarkable technique. Mrs. Dawn also took pupils, and both Billy and Edmund said that if I could possibly manage it, I should study with her.

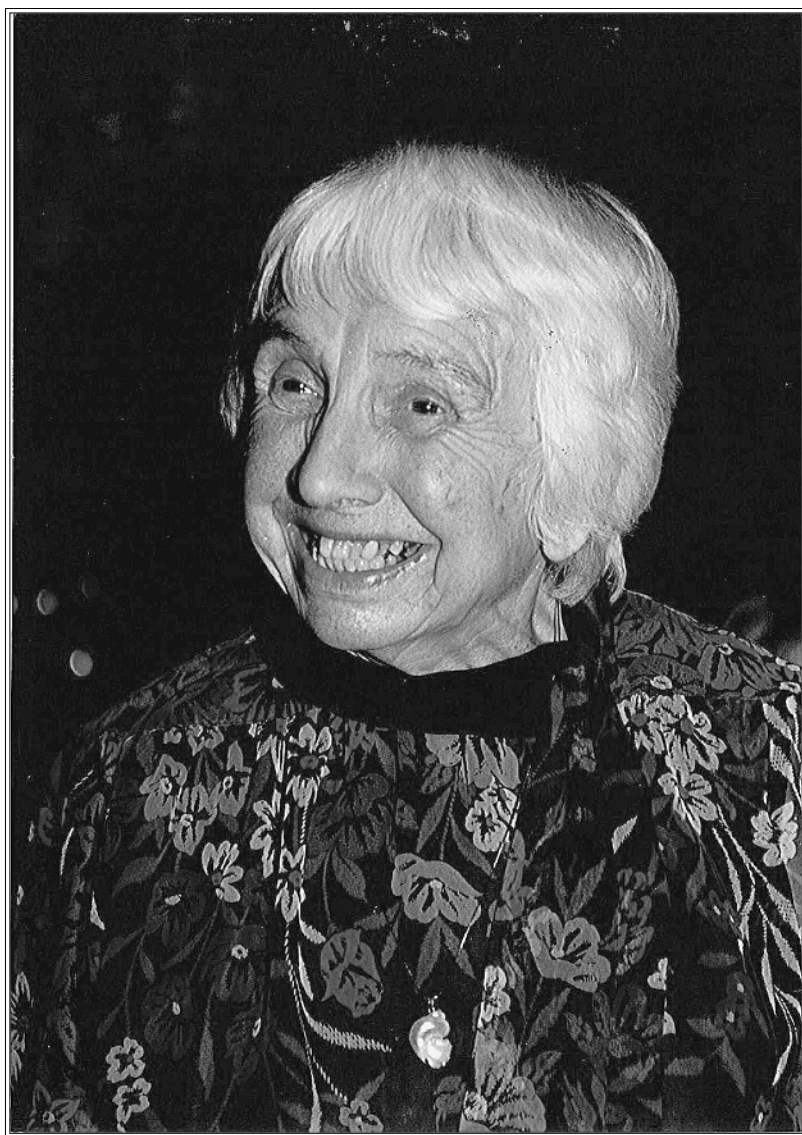
I badgered my father, and he finally called her up and made an appointment for the following Sunday. Mrs. Dawn lived in a rather grand suburb, Cherryvalley, which my father and I set out for on the appointed day. Of course, we got lost. We wandered around for quite a while and were two hours late by the time we finally found her house. Dad apologized, but Mrs. Dawn, a very impressive lady with a cap of snow-white hair, merely said, "Oh, never mind; let's have a cup of tea and talk things over."

We did that, and I found her very appealing, but no commitment was made either way. Much later, she told me about the conversation that ensued between her and her husband, Douglas. As she related it to me, he said, "What about teaching him?" and she retorted, "What's the point—teach him to play in a flute band? But where does he go afterward? There's nothing he can do except play better than the other people in the flute band."

Yet I kept phoning her to ask, "Are you going to teach me?" And finally she agreed.

I eventually learned that she and Douglas were English; they came from Sheffield, in Yorkshire. They had both had fine musical careers in England, he as a pianist and clarinetist, she as a flutist and singer. In fact, she had sung some of Ralph Vaughan Williams's songs with the composer as her accompanist. She had also sung with the Queen's Hall Orchestra conducted by Sir Henry Wood—the original conductor of the Promenade Concerts in London. But at some point, the Dawns had decided to move to Northern Ireland. As I've mentioned, Muriel played with the BBC orchestra, and in 1951, just about the time I met them, Douglas was appointed musical adviser to the Belfast Education Committee. Soon afterward he founded





*I owe more than I can ever repay to my beloved flute teacher Muriel Dawn.*



the Belfast Youth Orchestra, which gave a start to many musicians who went on to fine careers throughout the United Kingdom.

In any case, I was eleven when I began going to Cherryvalley, out in southeastern Belfast, every Saturday with my flute and my seven and sixpence (which seemed like a great deal of money to the Galways but was only the equivalent of about \$30 today).

The first lesson was quite a comedown for this lad, who had never lost a competition, even against grown men who were far more experienced players. Muriel started by asking me to play a piece for her. When I finished, instead of complimenting me on how well I played, she said, “Now, Jimmy, you’ve got to learn the basic method of blowing the flute.” She paused and then added, “We must now lay a groundwork that will last you forever. So for the next month, I don’t want you to play the flute at all, merely the headpiece.” And sure enough, for the next month she made me work on nothing but the embouchure—the way you hold your lips to control the flow of air into the flute. It nearly killed me, having to do this for twenty minutes every day, but I must have trusted her even then because I did as she said. Of course, when nobody was watching I would secretly play the flute. But this special training in the embouchure is something that has stayed with me all my life. Once I understood it, I could adjust it as the years went by and my physical makeup changed.

Finally, Muriel let me put the flute back together, but I still wasn’t allowed to play tunes. At first, she had me playing only one note, holding it as long as I could, then varying the dynamics—making it louder and softer. Next, she had me buy a book by Marcel Moyse, the great French flutist. Her teacher Geoffrey Gilbert had learned from a French teacher, and this tradition was handed down to her. Indeed, when Billy and Edmund had told me about her, they said her playing was in the style of Moyse. This book is called *De la Sonorité*, and it has a number of exercises that help the student control the tone and the dynamics, so that I started to learn how to play a low note loudly and a high note softly, two of the harder things



to do on the flute. When I left for England four years later, Muriel warned me, “Now, whatever you do, don’t let anybody change your embouchure and don’t let anybody change your system.”

Douglas Dawn also played an important role in my training. I was a charter member, you might say, of his Belfast Youth Orchestra, the first orchestra—as opposed to a band—that I’d ever played with. Through no fault of Duggie’s, it wasn’t much of an orchestra in its early days, although it later became a very fine one—one of the best youth orchestras in the United Kingdom. But for those first rehearsals, we had, as I wrote in an appreciation of Duggie after his death, “about 12 flutes, 8 clarinets, 2½ oboes, 1 cello, 1 viola, and a few violins.” And most of the string players seemed to be tone-deaf, judging by the sound of their playing. Still, we didn’t do too badly in our first concert, at which we played Beethoven’s Fifth and Handel’s “Where’er You Walk,” which has a wonderful flute solo.

Muriel was my teacher, but Douglas gave me some very helpful coaching. He had a tight hand with young players—he wouldn’t let you stray too far from what the composer had written. But he did leave room for you to express your own personality as well. And he never phrased his criticism unkindly. I remember once when I was playing the minuet from Bizet’s *L’Arlésienne* suite, and Duggie interrupted me: “No, look! This note has to sound very nice and easy. We don’t want it to sound too loud but nice and controlled and soft.” Of course, he was right. I never imagined that day that the next time I would play that little minuet would be in a recording with the Berlin Philharmonic under Herbert von Karajan.

Douglas and Muriel went out of their way to open my eyes and ears to new things. Whenever I was first learning a piece, Douglas always played me a recording of it by a first-rate artist, and he and Muriel both encouraged me to listen to the Promenade Concerts on the BBC, which my father and I gladly did. The Dawns also took me to museums to introduce me to great paintings. For that matter, their own drawing room was like nothing I had ever seen, with many beautiful canvases by Irish painters.



Most important, they took me to concerts, especially those by the British Music Society. Much later, after I had gone out into the world and had begun to make my way as a soloist, Muriel wrote to me: “Right at the beginning, the way you appreciated the phrasing and shaping was astonishing; as was the way you appreciated the best from the not-quite-so-good. It was built into you—not something you acquired. You brought *feeling* with you right from the beginning—it never had to be put into you. You know, with some of the singers I teach, you have to go inside and struggle to get them to release what’s there. There was never that trouble with you.”

Meanwhile, I had to think about getting a job. I was coming up to school-leaving age, which in those days was fifteen if you weren’t preparing to go to university. Even if I hadn’t had to contribute to the family exchequer, continuing in school wouldn’t have been my choice. I had liked some of the teachers a lot, especially our English teacher, David Honeyman; our form teacher, James Stephenson, whom we affectionately called “Stabo”; and our social studies teacher, Malcolm McKeown.

But what I remember about Malcolm isn’t what he taught us about social studies; it’s his musical side. He was a very fine tenor and performed around town in various musical events. He also sang in things like the Bach B Minor Mass with the local amateur orchestra. I played fourth flute with the orchestra, wearing my school uniform while everyone else wore black tie. Our budget at home did not run to a dinner jacket and black tie. Fortunately, the people running the concerts made allowances for the Galway household budget.

One day Malcolm heard me playing the flute during a break. He wanted to know what the piece was, and when I told him, he asked, “Is there a piano part?” I said, “Yes, there is.” The next day I brought the music to school, and he played the piano for me. Now, this was a big mistake on his part. Every day at lunchtime I would come



looking for him, and he never got a minute's peace. It was wonderful for me, though. We played Bach sonatas and that sort of thing. After he retired, he moved to England. Some years later, I visited him once, and he served me some very fine Scotch. That was the last time I saw dear Malcolm.

One thing I had loved in school was learning bookbinding. By the time I was fourteen, I had produced some leather-bound books that were really beautiful. But when I applied for a job with a book-binding firm, they passed me by. I was terribly disappointed, because this was something I really wanted to do. Despite all that the Dawns had done for me, it still hadn't occurred to me that I could ever make my living as a professional musician.

Then Duggie told me there was an apprenticeship available with a firm that made and reconditioned pianos. I applied for it, and this time I was accepted. I went to work there for twenty-three shillings a week (about \$80 today). The idea was that the apprentices would learn to repair and tune pianos, while doing various menial jobs in the meantime. So we sanded and buffed the keys and removed and replaced strings. Those were the better jobs; the one I really hated was cleaning out glue pots. To make matters worse, the tuners liked to keep us boys in our place, and the foreman was a petty tyrant. But at least the owner, Thomas Tughan, was a kind and decent man.

Whenever I wasn't working, I played the flute. One day Duggie said, "Jim, we'll have to get you into the Philharmonic"—meaning the Belfast Philharmonic. Well, the Phil accepted me, and I played with it for a little while, but I didn't care for its repertoire. I remember that we played some Elgar, *The Dream of Gerontius*, and it really wasn't for me.

But then a local BBC producer and conductor named Havelock Nelson invited me to join his orchestra, a semiprofessional group called the Studio String Orchestra. Despite its name, it had a woodwind section, and I got to play second flute to my idol at the time, Edmund Duke. This was more my cup of tea. I remember playing *St. Matthew Passion* with the Studio Strings, and it was first-rate. And this is when I took part in my first BBC broadcasts.



I was still playing with the 39th Old Boys—in fact, I stayed with them until I left Belfast for London. Meanwhile, my chums Billy Dunwoody and Edmund Duke and I formed a trio—the Zephyr Trio, we called it—and we staged a few concerts. Duggie helped us shape our repertoire, and he also accompanied us. I remember that at one of our concerts, he accompanied me in the rather flashy “Concertino” by Cécile Chaminade. I was amazed at how many of our neighbors turned up to hear that concert.

So, you might say I had a pretty busy schedule for a fifteen-year-old—Tuesday and Friday evenings with the Old Boys, Wednesday evenings with the Studio Strings, and Saturday evenings with the Youth Orchestra; plus my regular Saturday lesson with Muriel, performances with the Zephyr Trio, and visits to the house of a beautiful young woman named Myrtle Ellis, a fine pianist on whom I had a terrific crush. Not to mention my day job in the piano shop and an extra job, for eight and sixpence a week, delivering newspapers.

My life had already changed dramatically through the efforts of Douglas and Muriel Dawn, and I was about to take an even bigger leap.

The Dawns continued their generous habit of taking me with them to concerts. There was one evening I was especially looking forward to: a performance by the Wigmore Ensemble, with Muriel’s former teacher, Geoffrey Gilbert.

Gilbert was my favorite flutist—I listened to him on the BBC’s Third Programme every chance I got. But hearing him live was simply amazing. The Wigmore Ensemble played the Debussy Trio for Flute, Viola, and Harp and Beethoven’s Serenade in D for Flute, Violin, and Viola. All the players were excellent, but Gilbert was something else. I was especially struck by how beautifully and softly he played the high notes—which, as I’ve mentioned, is one of the harder things to do on the flute. The entire evening was simply exalting.



On top of that, Gilbert and Muriel had stayed in touch, and she had told him about me. She and Douglas took me backstage to meet him after the concert, and I asked whether I might see his flute up close. He showed it to me, a very special instrument by the French flute maker Louis Lot. I was already in seventh heaven, and then Gilbert said that he would be glad to hear me play the next day.

Of course, there had to be a snag to keep this from going too smoothly. When I told the foreman in the piano shop that I had to go out for a bit to play for a famous visiting flutist, he took on as if he wasn't going to let me go. Finally he did, but grudgingly. "All right, young fellow," he said, "but hurry up and get it over and get back here quickly." He wouldn't even let me take off the filthy green coverall that I wore while sanding piano keys and cleaning glue pots. I was humiliated, but nonetheless I hurried down the street to a studio Muriel had rented for the occasion.

Gilbert began by asking, politely but firmly, "Why are you late?" I stammered something—I didn't want to tell him what kind of man I worked for—and I was so embarrassed, I don't remember exactly how we got off that topic. But in any case, I started doing what I had come to do and played a Mozart concerto.

When I had finished, Gilbert turned not to me but to Muriel. He asked her, "How did you teach that lad to phrase like that?"

She told him, "I didn't. He's phrasing differently today because he heard you play last night. He always picks up the best out of everything he hears."

Gilbert said, "I've never come across anything like it. I want to teach him."

The two of them went back and forth over how this might be managed, because I could scarcely afford a trip to London to audition at the Guildhall School of Music, where Gilbert taught. But he said not to worry—the Guildhall would accept me on his say-so. And Muriel said, "I promise you, I won't let anybody else have him. He will go to you."



But this still didn't solve the problem of where I would get the money to go to London, let alone pay for my tuition. Here again, Douglas came to the rescue. As musical adviser to the Belfast Education Committee, he had been trying for some while to persuade the committee to give grants to underprivileged children. The committee had finally agreed, and so, along with several other kids, I turned up at an old building on Academy Street to audition for a grant. There were several of my friends there, and I think we all got grants. Mine was specifically for me to go and study in London for three years.

But there was yet another problem: my parents were frantic at the thought of my living in London. I was only fifteen, with no experience of life at all. I was streetwise enough on my own turf, from tooling around town with my mates. But except for one family trip to Dublin and a few holidays in Bangor, a seaside town just a few miles away, I had never been out of Belfast. Douglas suggested that I could stay with some friends of his, but Muriel was adamant that this wouldn't do, for reasons she didn't explain. In those days, the Guildhall didn't offer any sort of housing for its students.

While all of this was going on, John Francis showed up in Belfast. He was another high-level flute player and friend of Muriel's. He had come to Belfast to give a recital with his wife, the pianist and harpsichordist Millicent Silver. He had a gold-plated Louis Lot, and that made a huge impression on me.

Muriel suggested that he might want to hear me play, so he came to her house for my lesson the following day. I left when I finished playing, but Muriel told me what happened next. John Francis also wanted to teach me—he taught at the Royal College of Music in London. Muriel was firm: “He's going to Geoffrey Gilbert for lessons—and he's not going to anybody else.”

Francis seemed to accept that, but then the next day he turned up on the Dawns' doorstep. “Look, I haven't been able to sleep all night thinking of that boy. I want to teach him.”





*As I said, Geoffrey Gilbert was so angry with Muriel Dawn when she recommended that I study with John Francis that he broke off their friendship. But he did make it up with her, and they were both there when I received my doctorate from the University of Ireland. Geoffrey and Muriel are on my right; my good friend Irene Burri is on my left.*



Muriel repeated that I was going to Geoffrey Gilbert, but Francis played his trump card: “When he comes to London, who’s going to look after him? Is he capable of looking after himself at his age? If you let him come to me, I’ll take him into my house and treat him as one of the family.” Francis paused for a moment and then said, “I wish I were a great enough person to say I’ll take him into my house and let him go to anybody else he wants for lessons—but I can’t. If I take him in, I’ll want to teach him.”

This put Muriel in a terrible position, but she felt that she had to tell my father about this offer. My dad went back and forth on it a bit, but he finally said, “It’s in your hands, missus—you decide.” Then Muriel and Douglas talked it over, and she finally decided she had no choice. She wrote to Geoffrey Gilbert to break the news, and he was so angry, he broke off their friendship—although he finally made up with her several years later.

Of course, I was terribly disappointed, too—I admired John Francis, but Geoffrey Gilbert was my hero. Yet I knew I wasn’t capable of living on my own, and I did want to study in London. We made the arrangements with John Francis, and I prepared to leave for England.



