

# THE ULSTER-SCOTS LANGUAGE SOCIETY

**On 19th March 2002, Elizabeth McLeister interviews Minnie McKillen of County Antrim. They chat about Minnie's schooldays, taking a 'piece' for lunch, the food they ate, observing the Sabbath, Minnie's work days when she was 'hired out', recycling flour-bags, domestic housework and breeding pigs.**

[00:00:00.00] Elizabeth: Did ye like school?

[00:00:02.12] Minnie: A did, an A wud hae, before onieboadie touched me brither, A wud hae focht for them.

[00:00:11.16] A wus a wile fighter at schuil - but A cannae mine, A cannae mine very much....

[00:00:20.03] Elizabeth: That's your clock... striking! Ye've had that clock a long while.

[00:00:26.20] Minnie: Oh ay, the clock's oul, oul like mesel.

[00:00:32.07] Elizabeth: You're not that old.

[00:00:33.29] Minnie: A am oul (laughter).

[00:00:37.03] Elizabeth: Well, goin back to school, like how, what was schooldays like?

[00:00:42.28] Minnie: The' wur happy days an we had tae waak a brave wee bit, A'm sure it wus a mile an a half oniewye doon through Buckna.

[00:00:55.12] And anither thing A can mine, we uist tae get a piece in the mornin tae take tae schuil - an we wud hae haed it et before we wur in schuil.

[00:01:07.24] Elizabeth: Then that meant you had nothin for your lunchtime?

[00:01:09.27] Minnie: We haed naethin at lunchtime, ye niver heerd the word 'lunch'. Ye jaist wud hae sayed, 'Whut'll ye püt in yer piece'.

[00:01:18.23] It wus mair caaed a piece nor lunch in my day. Ye niver wud hae caaed it a lunch.

[00:01:23.26] Elizabeth: And what was your lunch in them days?

[00:01:27.02] Minnie: A bit of soda breid an a wee colour o buttèr on it - 'split an buttèr' - that was aa we got fur oor lunch, nothin tae drink.

[00:01:39.14] The Maister's residence wusnae far fae the schuil an sometimes he wud hae sent us, he wud hae picked some o us tae hae sent us doon a message

[00:01:51.21] an she wud hae gien us a wee slice o loaf an lemon cheese on it. We niver got lemon cheese an we thocht it wus powerfu guid.

[00:02:02.07] Elizabeth: Well then your mother would have to bake all that soda breid?

[00:02:06.05] Minnie: Ma mother baked a bag o flure iverie fortnight, that was brave bakin.

[00:02:14.05] That wus pit on the griddle, fried in the mornin fur yer breakfast. Thair wur a fry iverie mornin, sometimes in the evenin tae.

[00:02:23.23] Elizabeth: Did you get a bit of bacon with the fry or jaist...?

[00:02:26.06] Minnie: Well, if ye'd an egg... Sometimes it wus an egg divid between two o us. The' wurnae that...

[00:02:36.00] We kep hens but the' wurnae that...

[00:02:38.24] Thair wur nae sellin eggs in oor day, it wus aa fur the femlie jaist. We kep wur own hens an banties.

[00:02:48.02] An ye got the buttermilk, a big, great big tin can o buttermilk an a pun o buttermilk sweemin in the top of it.

[00:02:57.12] We got that fae Eddamses iverie week.

[00:03:00.18] But thair wur nae luxuries in them days. But we wur aa happy.

[00:03:07.15] Elizabeth: And did you have music in the house all the time?

[00:03:09.22] Minnie: Music all the time - an on Sunday evenin we'd hae been sittin roon the fire,

[00:03:15.08] we wurnae allooed tae play outside or oniethin, an we wur singin hymns roon the fire, a fire in the hearth.

[00:03:22.26] We wurnae allooed tae g'oot an kick a ball or oniethin on a Sunday whan I wus young.

[00:03:29.28] Ye wurnae allooed, jaist, tae dae it, an ye didnae luk fur it.

[00:03:34.03] Elizabeth: But you had a good life all the same?

[00:03:35.19] Minnie: Oh ay, A left schuil... My birthday wus in Febuarie, ye had tae go at the en o the quarter, an A left schuil at the en o March.

[00:03:50.07] An A helped farmers wi hey an coarn an prootas fur a yeir, an then - or fur less than a yeir.

[00:04:00.01] Then whan it cum the wunter, A went tae Bob Robysin's oul mill an split lint fur wunter.

[00:04:06.27] An then in the, whan A wus finished wi that, A went tae Bob Robysin's daughter an styed wi her fur six month,

[00:04:16.28] an then A went tae M'gummerie's tae luk efter two oul men, their nephew an the sarvint boy an mysel,

[00:04:28.06] an A haed tae milk eight cows night an mornin

[00:04:33.26] an feed aa them oul calves, an ye brought out wee birds, raired them an the' wurnae sowl.

[00:04:43.11] The roosters, ye pülled thair neck an made the soup fur the dinner.

[00:04:49.01] Ye aye set twa clockin hens - an then ye pit them aa tae the yin whaniver the' cam oot, ay, the' aa cum oot.

[00:04:58.21] Elizabeth: The oul clockin hens cud hae been gye cross tae feed.

[00:05:02.02] Minnie: The' wud hae been, some o them wud hae gien ye a dab, the' wud. Oh the' wud hae dabbed ye an hurt ye, wud hae liftit a bit oot o ye.

[00:05:14.00] Ye püt them aa tae the one hen whaniver the' cam oot, that wus the wye it wus done in them days an the' wur fed wi prootas an meal.

[00:05:23.09] But then ye onlie haed eggs in them days in the summertim, ye haed nae eggs in the wuntertun.

[00:05:31.08] An it wus the same wi milk. Ye'd onlie milk in the summertun. On the wunter day thair wur nae milk harly.

[00:05:38.23] Thair wur harly onie milk in the wuntertun in them days, but nooadays the'r milk the yeir roon,

[00:05:45.12] jaist whutiver wye the'r able tae hae thair kye, it's diffrent noo aathegither.

[00:05:53.02] Elizabeth: And how much did you get for that, wages?

[00:05:56.23] Minnie: Ten poun fur six months.

[00:06:00.04] Elizabeth: Was that sort o 'hired', were you sort o hired?

[00:06:02.21] Minnie: Ay, ye wur. Ye wur hired May an November. Ye wur hired oot. But I niver sut oniewhaur tae be hired.

[00:06:14.05] Folk jaist cum an asked me if A wud cum an work fur them, ye know, it wus...

[00:06:20.28] Elizabeth: Well tell me, had you tae darn the socks?

[00:06:24.06] Minnie: A haed tae knit fur them, darn thair socks, patch thair claes, waash thair claes, A haed iveriethin tae dae fur thaim.

[00:06:32.13] Elizabeth: An thair wur nae waashin machine?

[00:06:33.26] Minnie: A think no!

[00:06:35.02] Elizabeth: Wus it a waash boord?

[00:06:36.22] Minnie: Nor nae powdèr - it was Queen's Pale Soap. Hae ye mine o Queen's Pale Soap?

[00:06:42.24] Elizabeth: No, A dinnae mine that, A dinnae mine that.

[00:06:45.06] Minnie: Dae ye no?

[00:06:46.10] Elizabeth: No, A mind the 'Posh'. A mind me Mammie working wi 'Posh' takkin the rings, or the black words aff the flure bags.

[00:06:58.21] Minnie: Oh ay, we boilt... We bocht, it wus kid-skin bags o flure, an ye boilt them but it wus wi' waashin soda.

[00:07:13.24] The' wud hae got waashin soda an we aye got the stains oot o thaim

[00:07:17.17] An then the sheets an the pillas wur made oot o that an the tea-towels.

[00:07:24.03] Elizabeth: An dish-cloots.

[00:07:25.11] Minnie: Uh-huh. The' wur aa made oot o the flure bags an the' wud hae wore a lifetim.

[00:07:30.05] Tell ye the truth, A hae plenty o them yet, efter aa these yeirs. Thair wur great wear in them.

[00:07:36.18] Elizabeth: Ay. But people wudnae be bothered with that nooadays. Thair wur nae duvets then.

[00:07:43.29] Minnie: Thair wurnae, naw.

[00:07:45.18] Elizabeth: Wus thair a when o blankets, haed ye tae waash blankets every spring?

[00:07:47.27] Minnie: Oh, ye waashed the blenkets iverie spring. An if ye'd a spare bed, the' wur ether pit oot on an oul stane dyke or a hedge.

[00:07:59.26] Thair wur nae claes lines in my day. Thair wur nae claes lines at all, it wus aa the dyke, stane dyke, or a hedge.

[00:08:10.10] Elizabeth: Well did the hedge no tear them, no?

[00:08:12.21] Minnie: No. Nooadays the' wud get green aff them an iveriethin, but in them days A niver heard tell o oniethin like that. A niver heerd tell o oniethin.

[00:08:26.19] Elizabeth: Well then, whut soart o meat did ye mak them?

[00:08:30.12] Minnie: Well ye boilt the dinner iverie day an it wus... A wud hae pit a pig in the saut iverie wunter, an ye wud hae haed bacon tae yer dinner

[00:08:42.19] an then the oul kale that grew oot in the fiel, ye'd hae cabbage an turnips. It wus mair then, an if ye wur haein peas, ye steeped the dry peas the night before.

[00:08:55.20] An it wus jaist usually an egg fur yer tay in the evenin, an if thair wur nae eggs, it wus jaist breid, buttèr an jam.

[00:09:06.01] An very, very little loaf - it wus aa nearly soda, fadge, roosel soda an pancakes an wee scones, griddle scones.

[00:09:17.10] Elizabeth: And you made all o those?

[00:09:18.18] Minnie: A daed. A wush A cud dae thaim noo.

[00:09:21.16] Elizabeth: I suppose you were only about seventeen then or eighteen?

[00:09:25.02] Minnie: A wus, ay, A wus.

[00:09:28.09] Elizabeth: It was a brave undertakin fur a wee lass.

[00:09:31.25] Minnie: It wus. Ay but in them days, it's diffrent, A tell ye, fae noo. Ye had tae work fur a livin, an A tell ye, ye got that little fur it...

[00:09:50.04] An whan, the' aye kep twa breedin soos an ye wud hae sut up wi them fur a foarntnight.

[00:09:58.27] Elizabeth: Ay, before they pigged?

[00:10:00.28] Minnie: Whan the' wur sick an efter the' pigged tae keep them fae lyin doon on thair pigs. An that wus the time we liked fur we cud hae got a boy.

[00:10:10.26] Elizabeth: Ye got somebody in tae help ye, tae stay with ye?

[00:10:14.22] Minnie: Somebody fur company.

[00:10:17.24] Elizabeth: Can you mine any o the boys you had in them nights?

[00:10:20.13] Minnie: A dae - although the'r aa deid an gone. A suppose it's no much wonder! (Laughter)

[00:10:28.06] An thair wur ither nibors brought the oul soo in below the table tae pig, in thair kitchen, the' daed. Ye niver heard tell o that?

[00:10:37.08] Elizabeth: No, I never heard tell o that.

[00:10:38.11] Minnie: Oh well, the pig, the oul soo whan she tuk seek, she wus brocht intae the kitchen an folk used tae bring oot thair wee birds in the kitchen table.

[00:10:48.26] The' wud hae pit a bag, split up an oul feedin' bag tae keep the birds in, an the' wur in below the table an A can mine o that - but it wusnae fur very lang.

[00:11:01.06] Elizabeth: No, well A can mine ma Granny haein a wee pet pig inside for a while. Wud ye iver...?

[00:11:06.14] Minnie: Ay, oh ay. I petted wee pigs, the' wur sut in beside the fire in a wee oul box.

[00:11:14.16] Elizabeth: And had ye tae feed them then?

[00:11:16.10] Minnie: Oh ay, ye haed tae feed them.

[00:11:17.21] Elizabeth: What way did you feed them?

[00:11:18.24] Minnie: Fed them wi a bottle, a sookin bottle, somethin like fur a wean, ye did.

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