The O’Connor-O’Hagan Migration
The Journey to America

Spring of 1946

I, Letitia Mary Irene Brigid O’Connor-O’Hagan grew up in Toronto Canada, a child of Irish immigrants, Mother from Belfast and Father from Ballymun. With three brothers and one sister we grew up in a great family. There were many days that they would have to shovel their way out of all the snow that could pile overnight. I have many great memories of our life in Canada and where I lived. From snow forts, snowball fights, and being pulled in a sled. I went to a small Catholic school. My father decided that we would move to America. My Dad simply made the decision and didn’t tell us why. We were “just moving to America”. I was six at the time, I waited to see America's great cowboys and Indians but was disappointed when we arrived and the streets were just like the ones in Canada, not the rugged western streets I saw on movie screens. We made the journey by train. I have a clear memory of the train because the trunk with my toys and books got lost on the train. I remember having to have all the correct paperwork to start our new lives. To me, a child, “papers” didn’t mean much but to my parents and older brothers I was everything. Looking back now I see it for the stressful time it must of been to the older members of my family. I was just a little girl on a big adventure, and now my toys where gone! That was my focus--finding my toys! Our final destination was to be California, Alameda California. My uncle owned a mattress company and agreed to be our sponsor. We as a family had to have a sponsor; he was considered the big brother of the family, helping us settle in and swore to that fact that we were good people with an honorable background. We had to be examined physically and morally. Thus it all began: we started our new lives, in a new school, making new friends all for my Dad and his unilateral decision that we would move to America.
The move may have been the easiest part. Within months my mother became a single parent. My Dad left us. He went back to Canada. Without us. Being a little girl you can imagine my confusion and sadness. This meant that my, oldest brother Terrance, “Terry” was the man of the house. He was only 16 years old. So here I was, growing up in Alameda California, with a mom that was working tirelessly to keep us in house and home. My Mom also worked to pay the tuition for our Catholic schooling. My Mom’s faith life meant everything to her. When we started school my brothers were made fun of for the length of their shorts. In Canada the boys wore shorter shorts than boys did in America. They didn't take well to getting made fun of and solved many of the conflicts with a fist. They were pretty tough boys and the teasing didn’t last long. They gave out a few jabs and got new shorts. My Mom cleaned houses to pay the bills. She took lots of housekeeping jobs. This was how our family got by. When the boys were old enough they went to work too. They’d work after school and on the weekends. Everyone contributed to the family finances. While my Mom and my brothers worked I took over the duties of keeping the house. After school it was my job to take care of my little sister, help her with homework, clean, cook and help with the laundry. School uniforms need to be ironed and I really hate ironing! While I was in middle and high school my Mom got a job as the housekeeper for the priests at our parish, St. Joseph's. She cooked and cleaned for a house full of priests. It was a good fit for my Mom and our family. Her Catholic faith could be supported and she could support us. She worked tirelessly. When she died, the entire parish and school closed in honor of her. Her funeral was very well attended and her presence will remain in that parish for years to come.
GROWING UP IN AMERICA

Immigrant families tended to stick together. Every social gathering that I can recall focus around other immigrant families (mostly from Ireland) in our parish. My Mom knows the O’Hagan family in passing, they aren’t great friends, but friends. I know their son John; we’ve been in the same parish for years. I think he is a bit spoiled. After high school John enlisted in the Navy. His mother has asked my mother to write to him and to pray for him. My Mom makes time to write to John and to send him prayer cards. She hates to address the envelopes (as they are complicated addresses to get the letters to follow him from port to port). I always get stuck addressing the envelopes for her. Recently, he showed his sarcastic and teasing spirit in asking my Mom “Can’t your daughter do anything more than address an envelope?” That got me fired up so I wrote a letter telling him to mind his p’s and q’s and behave or his letters would stop arriving at all. That began a two year correspondence, a courtship, and finally a marriage.
MOVING TO IDAHO

Spring of 1976

John and I got married on July 20, 1963. We settled down close to my Mom in Alameda and started our lives together. John worked at various jobs and I did too until we started our family. Our family was blessed and grew quickly to six children. Our youngest was born in 1971. With six children and only one income we didn’t have all the material things most people have but we had a house full of love. Vacations meant packing all the kids up and going camping. Our camping adventures took us all over the Northwest and oh the adventures! Each time we came home, back to the crowded and noisy streets of California we missed the open areas and adventures Idaho offered. Wanting a better atmosphere for our kids to grow up in and a better opportunities for us all, we did what our parents had done. We migrated! We packed up all of our possessions, said goodbye to family and friends and the eight of us headed to our new home in Middleton, Idaho. For the second time in my life I was starting all over, moving at the age of 35, leaving the place where I called home. Our journey began on our March 6, 1977 with the help of Grandma O'Hagan and Uncle Al. We loaded the truck with household goods and cars with kids and off we went. Between "are we there yet." and "I have to go potty" it seemed longer than the two days it took. I think our most memorable experience was in Winnemucca where Hugh asked if could order a steak dinner. Dad said if you can eat it all." To Dads surprise he did! It was also the first and only time Dad got Mom to gamble. A whole dollars worth of dimes, with not one winning.Moms response, "You know John that would have bought a loaf of bread for our family."
BUILDING AN IDAHO FAMILY

Summer of 1977

We moved from San Francisco, a major metropolis to a tiny town in a very different state. We rented a little farm with a lot of space for our kids to grow. The kids loved it. They had each other for company and playmates and an amazing farm surrounded by fields, trees and the Boise River. I remember the first time that I set irrigation lines with the siphon tubes and how proud I was that I finally learned how to do it. The kids played in the milking stations—pretending to be astronauts flying into space. The house always seemed to be a home for the lost animals. I have one rule, no rats and no snakes. The kids have begun taking care of animals their Dad brings home. Chickens, geese, a few dairy cows and a goat or two. Our first holiday in Idaho was Halloween. Two things happened to make this a holiday like no other. It snowed and we had no neighbors to trick or treat to. I popped a big bowl of popcorn and Dad brought home Jolly Ranchers. We played a board game at the kitchen table and laughed about the snow. Now the children’s days are filled with school, 4H, jobs, and academic opportunities. We’ve decided to move to Caldwell as the kids spend most of their time there at the library. We moved into a huge house on Washington Street, the kids I think the children were of mixed feelings, especially when they thought of friends they would miss and new schools to attend. The house on Washington Street in Caldwell gave us years of laughter, tears, hope and joy. I liked the fact that the children could walk to school, all of them, elementary, middle and high school. We had six children but the house was always full of many more. We had summer barbeques, with friends and as each child graduated from high school we had a special barbeque where Dad’s letter to the graduate was read and the sibling one step down would give them a scrapbook filled with memories and pictures of them from babyhood to high school graduation that they could take with them to college. Life in Caldwell with all the family is filled with many memories that would take a book to tell all.
LIVING IN IDAHO NOW

Spring of 2017

The children have grown. John and I have watched them as they graduated high school. We put all six of them through college. This was so important to us. A few of them have gone on to graduate degrees. As the kids left the house one by one, I found myself haunted by the memories we built in our home on Washington Street. I’d turn a corner and see the girls playing as they washed dishes in the kitchen. The boys would be tumbling down the stairs, and as I hung laundry on the line in the yard I would remember all the barbecues and gatherings— including Bridget’s wedding reception we had in the yard John so lovingly cared for. I told John about these memories and because he was working in Boise, commuting every day, we decided to move to Boise. It was a bonus that my first grandchild, a sweet little boy, lived there too. We have filled with joy as we have watched our kids get married and settle down and start their own families. I now have 21 grandchildren and now they are growing up and beginning to settle their own families. Fifty three years of marriage, a family built on mine and John’s love and hard work are the possessions I hold dear. I have never regretted moving to the United States, because of the opportunities it gave me. It gave me my husband, my children and my grandchildren. The United States has always taken care of me.