

*Eiry Thomas has lived in Colwinston all his life. His wife Joan is originally from the village of Llangynwyd. Eiry's late brother Gwyn was Chairman of South Glamorgan County Council from 19xx to 19xx. This is Eiry's story, in his own words.*

I was born in Forge Cottage in Colwinston. My father was born in Colwinston, and my mother was born in Coity. My grandfather was born in Colwinston, in Village Farm, and my grandmother was born in Tyn-y-Cae, in Llandow, and she wanted my grandfather to come to Tyn-y-Cae, instead of Colwinston, but he won his day and she came to Colwinston. Of course, they didn't travel far, years ago. We can see Tyn-y-Cae plainly from here now. A lovely little farm, that is. I could have been living down there now.

My father wasn't always in farming. During the First World War, there were three boys home, and one of them had to go to the army, so my father said he'd go. His cousin that was in Ty Draw, he was one of four boys; he said "I'll come with you, and we'll both go together". They went to the army together. I've often said this is a lucky village. There were eighteen of them and they all came back. [Colwinston was one of only three villages in Wales that suffered no casualties in the First World War.]

My father was learning to be an electrician. He learned a lot of his trade in the army. So when he came out, he thought he'd take it up. We had a small farm then; that was Chapel Farm. He used to do a lot in the nights.

I used to milk some cows before I'd go to school in the morning. I learned when I was very small. My uncle was living in Village Farm opposite. After Gwyn came from school, my uncle wanted him across there; there were no children. So Gwyn went to Village Farm and took over Village Farm and I stayed here. We extended the land – I had 300 acres when I finished. Gwyn then took Ty Draw Farm as well. So we haven't moved far from the village and they're all buried down in Colwinston, in the churchyard.

My father turned – I think he quarrelled with the vicar years ago – and he went to the Methodists. He was deacon and secretary there. So we went to the Methodist chapel then. You'd get about thirty to forty people there at night. The services were twice a day on a Sunday. The minister used to walk from Pencoed. He had a chapel in Pencoed as well. It's a long way to walk but he didn't think much of it. He'd stay the night sometimes, or perhaps he'd have dinner before going back. I think his name was Jones. He was there for years. I was christened in the chapel there [the chapel, which closed in 1997, has now been converted into a house]. When I was born, the nurse was from Cwmafan – and I think they were friendly with some minister down there and he said "Why don't you call him Eiry?" It means "white grape". That nurse used to come up to Colwinston, she had relatives here and she was a midwife. There was a big house next door to Forge Cottage and there was also a nurse living there, Nurse Williams, and Mr Williams was the gardener in Pwllwyrach. It was a nice house. He had all the garden there. Later they knocked it down and built four houses on the land.

We used to see the family in Pwllwyrach, the Prichards, quite a lot. They were advertising for a nanny to look after Matthew's father and uncle, so my mother came down and she was a nanny for the two boys. [One of these boys was Hubert, who later married the daughter of Agatha Christie.] Matthew wasn't very old when his father died in the war, only about six months old. His mother, Rosalind, she used to call for Joan on a Sunday to go to church. She was very friendly, and they came every Christmas to visit us. Matthew used to go up to my mother in later years, to tell him stories about his father, because he didn't remember him. Agatha Christie spent a lot of time at

Pwllwyrach. We used to have a tree in our field out the back and there was a stump that had fallen down. She used to spend hours sitting on that tree, writing. I used to go out to the cows and see her there. She used to walk around and she just had a little piece of paper and she'd be jotting down on it. Her second husband, Max Mallowan, used to come here too. Matthew Prichard's son now has Pwllwyrach, and Matthew has a house in Usk.

Somebody said we must have been here the longest of everyone in the village, especially in terms of past generations as well. We had the farm till 1987, and these two houses were built in 1989. We used to have the hay-barn here where this one is, and we had chickens down there, and turkeys. Aye, I always fancied this part, but we thought a big house would be too much for the two of us. We could have built a bigger one and put it in the middle, instead of building two houses! I've often said this is the best view in the Vale. You can see down to the woods and the Ogmoredale road, you can see part of St Brides on that side, and on this side you can see Llysworney.

When I was young, no one had cars. We didn't have one until Gwyn bought his first one. I did a silly thing when I was small. We'd had tea, and I was running about the room, and I knocked my chin on the wheel of the pram, and I was in the habit of putting my tongue out. I knocked my chin and cut my tongue off. We had friends in Ty Maen Farm, and he had an old Austin car. We ran all the way down and he was busy working, so he stopped working and they rushed me into Bridgend. My tongue was hanging off. They wouldn't stitch it then, because I'd just had tea. So the two doctors said they would come out after tea, and they stitched it on the table, by the light of the oil lamp. So they sent my father and mother out on the road for a walk, and this farmer from down the road, he sat by me. They didn't have the facilities then. They used to do everything in the surgery. It's still a bit of a nuisance – my teeth catch in it sometimes.

Halfway along the wall between Forge Cottage and the big house there used to be a pigsty. I don't know if there's any trace of it there now. We used to keep a pig and I used to go out and throw something to the pig and I used to talk to him. There was a little slope going into the pigsty yard and the trough was inside, so I used to roll pieces of bread down to him. I thought the world of him. One morning I heard the pig crying. I don't know where my mother was. I thought, I must go up and see what's wrong with him. Up I went, on my own, and of course they were sticking him. Oh, it was awful! So I went back and I said, 'No more meat for me!' And I haven't – I've never eaten lamb or beef, although I like a little bit of pork or ham. I was so determined. I was only two or three. A lot of people grew their own food in the garden. When we were small, after we moved from Forge Cottage to Chapel Farm – I don't know if you've noticed, but the roof slopes down to the road, and we've raised it. Before we built on the bedroom, that was one storey, with a door out onto the road, and my mother kept a shop there, selling sweets and cigarettes and groceries. I had too many sweets – I think that's why I had to have false teeth!

Most villages had their own shops, and carpenters and blacksmiths. There was a lady, Mrs Coffey, who had a little shop opposite the church. She used to sell sweets and groceries. Then there was a man up in the council houses. He was working for some firm delivering goods, but in the evening he had a little building and he used to sell groceries there. They used to call that part of the village "Nanny Goat Lane" because they used to put goats out there to graze. There used to be sixteen farms in Colwinston, selling milk to the creamery and putting out churns every morning.

I was about three when we moved from Forge Cottage. We had our own horse and wagon to move the furniture. I had two toy horses, on four wheels, and I wouldn't let them touch them. I

brought one up the road myself, and then I went back and fetched the other one. Of course, there was no traffic about then.

I used to ride ponies and compete a bit in the shows, the gymkhana mostly. I had two ponies, a white one and a bay one, two different sizes. The white one was called Muffet. Matthew Prichard's father had a sister – she married one of the Williamses. They were living in London, and they had a big furniture business there. She was very small and we called her Poppet. She used to come here and spend a lot of time in Pwlllywrach. She used to come up here to the farm, and she wanted a pony. She was so slight and small, and they used to have a wheelbarrow race. I used to let the two ponies run alongside the barrow and Poppet would sit in the barrow, and we used to run across the field and we used to win the prize *every year*. She spent a lot of time here with us, but then the war broke out. Her father said she had to go to Canada, and out to Canada she had to go! So I had to look after her pony right through the war.

They used to have the village fete at Pwlllywrach. There would be a competition for the ponies. The Village Hall, at that time, used to be further up the road. It wasn't as big as the one we've got now, but they used to have lovely concerts there and it would be packed out. People used to support it, because there was nothing else in the village. Gwyn and I used to go across to the Village Hall to play billiards. Then we heard that the Young Farmers had started up in Wick. There were two girls living down at Hilton Farm, about our age, so we went down to see if they would come with us.

We used to take a lot of stock to Cowbridge market, and to Bridgend market. Gwyn went to talk to the farmers in Bridgend to see if they would let their children join the Young Farmers as well. They were all full of it. We had thirty there the first night. It's still going now. Gwyn was a big supporter; he was President for years. It was a good thing, and there were dances and things going on. But after we got married, I gave it up.

As I said, this is a lucky village. Over thirty men went to the Second World War, and they never had to put their names up on a plaque, because they all came back. The village was in between an arsenal [now Bridgend Industrial Estate] and an airport, and there were no air raid shelters, and we never had any casualties.

One morning, during the war, I was going to school and I could hear this plane coming over, and he was going up the valley here, and I thought "He'll never make it". I ran down to the bottom of the garden and I saw him going into the ground there by the woods. So I ran down to see if I could help – I didn't bother about school – and my uncle from Ty Draw was just starting to walk up the field and we went together. But the pilot was killed outright. That was a Spitfire from Llandow. He was an Irishman. What had happened was that two collided over Pentre Meyrick. The other one went up in the air and baled out, but this one stayed with the plane, and the poor fellow got killed. I used to go down to the field sometimes and pick up shrapnel.

One night when I came home from school, I was getting the clothes in off the line, and I saw a German plane. He came right up the road from the direction of Llysworney and I could see him coming over Llandow. I saw the bomb coming out. He dropped it, but he missed Llandow and it went in the field. As soon as the siren went, they sent four Spitfires up, but, by the time they had circled round, he'd gone back out over the Channel. He swung around and back quickly, and they didn't catch him. See that clump of trees there? That's where the bomb dropped. Gwyn and I went down there at night, to try and pick up shrapnel.

When the war started, my father was put in charge of the electricity in Llandow aerodrome. I don't remember what year we first had electricity in the village but I remember when we just had

oil lamps. When my father wired the church down here, I had to go down and help him. We had one pew on top of the other and we had our extension ladder full out, and the vicar at the time, another Jones, he said "I'll come and try to hold the ladder". Father went up first and I went up after him and he said, "Don't look down!" Father worked over in Llandow and he used to cycle home. He'd be home about five o'clock and he used to do a lot of jobs on the farm in the night, and at the weekends. During the war a lot of people worked at Llandow, and a lot of people worked making munitions. They used to come home yellow in the evening [a side-effect of munitions work].

I remember once, I was milking out here, and a car pulled up and he said, "Where's your father?" It was the RAF car from Llandow. That plane had crashed and they sent over straight away to fetch him in case they wanted to open up the hospital and get the electric going. My father said afterwards, they didn't need him. [The 1950 Llandow air disaster was, at the time, the world's worst ever air disaster in terms of loss of life.] They got the helicopter out and put the bodies in one of the hangars. About 80 people were killed. It crashed near Sigingstone. It came in, they said, and he thought he was coming in too low and he pushed the front up and the plane broke its back. The ~~two~~ <sup>three</sup> men in the back seat survived. One died recently, about a month ago. He said that what he thought saved him was that he was leaning forward, doing his laces up. After that they never used it for commercial flights - I think they would have, otherwise.

I went to the village school until I was twelve. There was only one teacher in that school, and about twenty or thirty children of all ages from about five up to about twelve. Later they had two teachers. This teacher came down from London, and later she married my grandfather's brother. He was a carpenter, wheelwright and undertaker! They lived in a converted barn in the village. The shop and workshop was opposite. They knocked it down and it's just waste ground now; I don't know why they don't do something with it.

After that I met Joan at the private school we both went to in Bridgend - it was the Commercial School. I wasn't very good at school; I just wanted to go farming. Gwyn was the same, though he did think of going to work in the bank. Because of his eyes, the doctor said it would be best if he didn't do close work. My father had bad eyesight too.

I had to walk to the main road and get a bus to school, then walk again after I got off the bus. They've knocked that school down now; it was where the old stone bridge is. Joan had to walk two miles to get her bus in the mornings. In winter you would be walking home in the dark. Later we went to Young Farmers together. We got married at the church in Llangynwyd. Joan worked in an office for seventeen years.

My long sight wasn't perfect. I was going along in the tractor once - I was only wearing a tee-shirt. I could see this pile of something and I thought it was a bit of straw. It was a swarm of bees. When the blade went into it, they swarmed out and came into the tractor. I was brushing them off my arms. They were all over me. I took my cap off to frighten them away, and then they got up into my head. It was terrible. There was a tank of water up the top and I thought of jumping into it. Instead I tried to run home and they were chasing me all the way. My mother went out into the road to try to get help, but there was nothing much passing. Oh, I was stung! She rang Dr Anthony in Bridgend and he said, "I'll be out now. Tell him he'll never get arthritis." He gave me an injection. I've never had arthritis, because of what was in the stings. So it did me a bit of good.

My father died in June 1972. Gwyn became chairman of Cowbridge RDC in 1974. When asked why he never got married, he used to say he never had time. We used to joke that he was married to the council. My father used to do a certain amount with politics. He was secretary of the village and kept the minute books, and my grandfather used to collect the tithes years ago. So

Gwyn was following in my father's ways. I wasn't interested in that kind of thing. I was too shy. But I used to enjoy getting about – I've travelled a lot. I used to shoot competitively – not animals, just target shooting. I went out to Tenerife to shoot for Wales. Joan came with me. After I went out and shot, I went into the lead, but then Germany came out to shoot, and he came into the lead with me, so we had to shoot it off at night, on stage in the hotel. He just pipped me!

On the farm we concentrated on milking cows but we also kept sheep. At first we used to put the milk in churns and leave it out for the creamery to collect. Later we used to bottle the milk on the farm and deliver it. After we got married, about 1963, the village milk round came up for sale, and it paid well, better than the farm! Mrs Edwards Ty Maen used to have the round before us. [Her grandson Clive still lives in Ty Maen Farm.] We didn't have to treat the milk – they would come round and take samples. I used to milk about twenty cows in the morning and evening, when I was in school. You'd get a gallon or two from each cow each day – it varied with the different cows. After we took on the milk round, we kept more cows. We had two herds: Channel Island and ordinary Friesian. A lot of people in the village liked the Channel Island milk; it's creamy. We used to keep it separate. We had a machine to do the bottling. We didn't put foil tops on them, just cardboard tops. When we came home we had to wash all the bottles, then in the morning we had to bottle the milk before we went out. We didn't have a milk float, just a pick-up. You used to have to knock the door and find out how many pints they wanted.

It was awful delivering in the rain. I remember one Christmas, it was tipping down with rain and we didn't see a soul. I said right, that's it, I'm not doing it again! We used to go all the way to Wallace – a bit further than Llampha, halfway to Ewenny. The MP, Alun Cairns, lives there now. He bought an old stone barn at the side of the road, and did it up. [Note: Need to check with Alun Cairns that this is true and that he doesn't mind it being mentioned.] We used to go down to Stembridge and the kennels and up to Twmpath and other local farms. It used to take us about two hours. It was paying well, sometimes better than others. We used to deliver every day except Sundays – we cut Sundays out because by then people had fridges. I was in Cowbridge one day and you could see them carrying the milk into the supermarket, and I said then, "It's starting." We had the farm sale, but we thought we'd keep the milk round. We built the bungalow ourselves; we just had contractors in to help us.

After the farm sale, I had a heart attack. I think it was worrying about the sale that caused it. We got all the sheep in the night before, and stamped them. It rained that night, and we couldn't see a mark on any of them! So we had a fine job trying to work out which sheep belonged with which lambs. They reckon there were over a thousand people at the sale, and it wasn't a bad day. There was a caravan there doing refreshments. On the following Sunday, I thought I had indigestion. Joan said I'd better go to the doctor. Then they rang her to say they were taking me to the hospital in Bridgend.

Then Joan had a heart attack, worrying about me. She was in hospital then. We had boys who used to help us on the weekends and holidays. So we sold it to Edward Jones in about 1988. It had got a bit too much for us. As Gwyn's health was going, and my mother's health was going, and it built up in us.