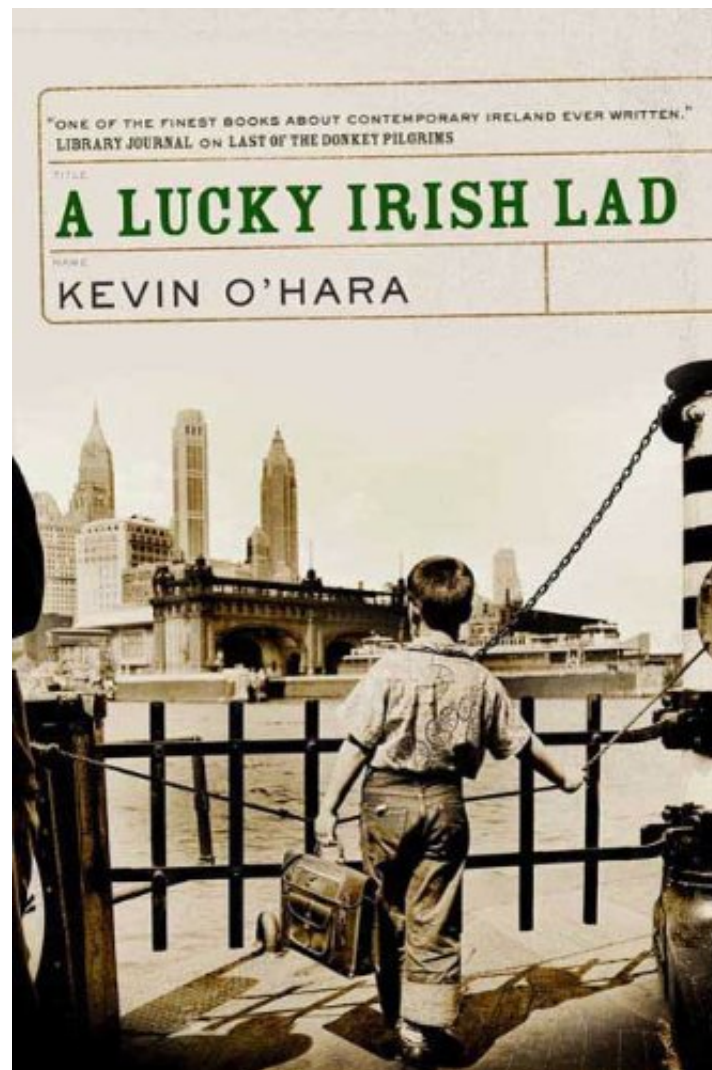


# A Lucky Irish Lad

*by*

Kevin O'Hara



**DOWNLOAD E-BOOK**

## Synopsis

Kevin O'Hara recreates his boyhood with these wonderful stories of growing up in Massachusetts in the 1950s and 60s as one of eight children. His parents, born in Ireland, came to this country for their children's sake. His family struggled against grinding poverty but they never gave up and never lost their faith that God had a plan for them. Kevin learned the lessons of making do and making things last, and what the true riches of the world are: good health and the love of a united family. All these lessons grounded him as he reached adulthood...and was sent off to fight in wilds of Vietnam as a reluctant soldier. This book will tug at your heart and make you cry tears of both sorrow and joy. It is a story about the Irish-American experience but it is much more--it's the story of a generation growing up in the shadow of the Second World War and the start of a new age of hope and promise, a time when people believed that anything was possible as long as you dared to dream and had faith in yourself. And a little Irish luck couldn't hurt either. At the Publisher's request, this title is being sold without Digital Rights Management Software (DRM) applied.

## Sort review

From Publishers Weekly On April 20, 1949, O'Hara subjected his mother to a dangerous and difficult night of labor; when the baby finally came out of the womb, his nose bled unabated until his father rushed into the room, whereupon the bleeding ceased immediately. Although a relative casually remarked that the young boy shared the same birthday as Adolf Hitler, O'Hara's mother quickly remarked that her son would redeem the day and bring nothing but good into the world. As if to confirm his mother's prophetic vision of her son's future, O'Hara prosaically recounts the days of his life from when he arrived in Pittsfield, Mass., to early 1973, when he launched his career as a psychiatric nurse and married his wife. Like the countless memoirs of growing up Irish in America, O'Hara struggles with the demands of Catholicism, especially with the nightly devotions led by his father and in which he must participate on the pain of corporal punishment. He falls in love with a beautiful young Protestant girl, but the unremarkable adolescent yearnings and the puppyish nature of his first love fails to capture our attention. In fact, so little of O'Hara's life is unique or noteworthy that his mundane memoir fails to distinguish it from so many other anecdotal autobiographies of other Americans coming-of-age in the 1950s and 1960s. (Feb.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title. From Booklist Frank McCourt, in *Angela's Ashes* (1996), and, more recently, Joe Queenan, in *Closing Time* (2009), have covered the territory of the Irish Catholic boyhood in detail, from the poverty to the boozing to the strappings. O'Hara, the fourth of eight children of Irish immigrants who settled in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, in the 1950s, casts the experiences of his childhood and early adulthood in much more glowing terms. Although they never had enough money, since Kevin's devout dad

worked for the Catholic Church, first as a janitor, then as a chauffeur for the nuns, his family always rallied together, making do with hand-me-downs, peanut-butter sandwiches, and spartan summer vacations visiting holy shrines. It was his gregarious Irish uncles who introduced him to the joys of Guinness and his own mischievous antics that earned him stinging strokes from the nuns' rulers. Told in a loquacious style and hitting all the iconic moments of childhood, from his first baseball mitt to his first kiss, this engaging memoir is sure to warm hearts and elicit knowing nods from like-minded baby boomers nostalgic for their own childhoods. --Joanne Wilkinson --

This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title. Review "Told in a loquacious style and hitting all the iconic moments of childhood, from his first baseball mitt to his first kiss, this engaging memoir is sure to warm hearts and elicit knowing nods from like-minded baby boomers nostalgic for their own childhoods." --Booklist "With great affection and narrative skill Kevin O'Hara brings back an era that needs to be remembered--a moment common to many Irish Americans." --Mary Pat Kelly, author of *Galway Bay* "Kevin O'Hara's memoir of being Irish and growing up in small-town America of the Fifties and Sixties captures the time, the place, and the ethnic family values with such an unerring eye that you'll hear the bands on the Fourth of July, taste Mallow cup candies, share in the cadences of the rosary—and smell a young draftee's fear in the horror that was the Vietnam War. This is memoir as tour de force." —Patrick Taylor, New York Times best selling author of *An Irish Country Doctor* "A story of growing up Irish and American that will stir deep emotions in every reader. Read it now and enjoy the movie later!" —Thomas Fleming, winner of the Lincoln Prize for Lifetime Achievement in History; and the New York Times bestselling author of *The Secret Trial of Robert E. Lee* "Kevin O'Hara crystallizes the Irish-American experience of the mid-Twentieth Century as vividly, as accurately, and as humorously as anyone has yet. So read the book. You'll feel lucky, too." --William Martin, New York Times bestselling author of *Back Bay* and *The Lost Constitution* "This funny, sweet and fast-moving memoir tells the story of growing up in a large Irish family in a small Yankee town -- a way of life that has almost disappeared. Kevin O'Hara deserves a prominent place in the long tradition of the Berkshir...About the Author Kevin O'Hara is the author of *Last of the Donkey Pilgrims*, an autobiographic telling of his travels around the coastland of Ireland with his beloved donkey Missy. A psychiatric nurse for more than 25 years, O'Hara still resides in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, the place to which his parents emigrated.--This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title. Excerpt. © Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. ONE Dad's Heart, Mom's Heartache BELL RINGER OF ST. CHARLESTHE SKIPPY JARA MOTHER'S FAITHDAD'S NIGHTLY DEVOTIONMOM'S MALADYHOME FROM SCHOOLDAD'S GOLDEN GLOVERSTONSORIAL TORTUREHEALING MASSESWHERE THE THREE COUNTIES MEET Bell Ringer of St. Charles "THERE NOW, BOYS, a sliver of hope," my father would say at the first sight of a crescent moon. "Hurry, turn the coins in your pockets for luck." My brothers and I would quickly flip over our pennies, if by chance we had any, and gaze above trees and rooftops to catch a wink of the young moon. Dad's expression came to mind recently as I passed St. Charles Church, in my boyhood parish in Pittsfield, Massachusetts,

where I still live. The moon's scant shaving of burnished gold appeared to have hooked itself onto the turret of the bell tower, as if a band of angels were sliding from their starry loft to the belfry. At that moment, the evening Angelus tolled, stirring a host of childhood memories. Upon our arrival in the States, the tears of greeting soon turned to tears of grief as Aunt Nellie told Dad that their mother had passed away on March 9, the week before we had set sail from Southampton. The following morning, Dad and his three sisters—Mary, Brigid, and Nellie—attended a memorial service for their mother, little knowing that Brigid would die the following month after a long illness. If that wasn't enough, Dad's older brother Patrick, home in Ireland, passed away that May. Three deaths in three months' time. Welcome to America. Dad had little time to grieve, however, as the seven of us moved in with Mom's sister, Aunt Nancy, and her family in Lenox in the Berkshires. Uncle Joe, a much-respected principal at Lenox High School, quickly found Dad two jobs—one in a textile mill and the other on a construction site, digging foundations. With his native gregariousness, it wasn't long before Dad caught wind of a janitorial position in St. Charles parish in Pittsfield, a modest city a dozen miles north of the village of Lenox. The job didn't pay well, but it came with living quarters—a great incentive for a growing family trying to establish a foothold in a new land. This Irish parish consisted of church, rectory, convent, and a grammar school that his young brood could attend, less than a football field's distance from their new home. "Why not the GE?" someone suggested. At that time in Pittsfield, the county seat and so-called heart of the Berkshires in the far western hills of Massachusetts, General Electric employed nearly 8,500 residents in a city of sixty thousand. No wonder everyone invariably referred to it as "the GE." Dad's experience working at a power plant in England might have served him well, but he wanted to start anew, and he could imagine no better place to do so than the house of God. So, that long-ago autumn of 1953, our family took up residence in the drafty caretaker's quarters behind the rectory of St. Charles, bracing ourselves for our first harsh winter. Upstairs in this small dwelling lived Mrs. Durette, a pious little woman of French Canadian birth with a large heart. Her rocking chair by the window faced the church's high steeple. She explained to us children that the golden cross atop the steeple was as tall as any man in the parish, though it appeared no larger than the crucifix on the prayer beads in her lap. After supper we would assist Mrs. Durette down the rickety staircase to watch westerns on our big-console, small-screen black-and-white TV, kindly left to us by the former custodian. She was a friend to our family and a comfort to our mom. One morning that first winter, as a heavy snowstorm blanketed Nobility Hill, the old and incongruous name for our neighborhood, Mom and Mrs. Durette looked out at Dad, bent low with an old coal shovel, clearing heavy wet snow from the sidewalks and steps of rectory and church, and up both sides of Pontoosuc Avenue to the convent and school. "Jimmy's no janitor," she consoled my fretful mother with a hug. "No, your Jimmy's a gem." My brothers and I would often accompany Dad on his daily chores. In the summer months we'd play tic-tac-toe on classroom blackboards while he polished the wooden floors to a lustrous gleam. In winter we'd stand back and shield our faces as he shoveled mountains of black sooty coal into the fire-breathing furnaces with blistered hands. On Saturdays

we'd help out in the church, filling vestibule fonts with holy water and straightening missals and songbooks in the pews. Chores done, we'd venture up to the choir loft where, blinded by the light streaming through the stained-glass rose window, we'd giddily play in a kaleidoscope of colors until Dad, sloshing a mop of soapy water in the long aisles below, would glare up and hush us with a sshh! that echoed through the high Gothic arches. My dad rang the church bell at masses, weddings, and funerals, and tolled the Angelus morning, noon, and night. He'd unlock the bell closet, take grip of the thick rope, and with firm pull and steady hold—lest the bell double-clang—pour out the mellow-toned "voice of God" over the parish. Parishioners praised his bell ringing, especially at Christmas, when the merry and sleepy-eyed shuffled into midnight Mass. "Jimmy, you can make that bell sing," they'd say. "Solemn at funerals, joyous at weddings, and magical on Christmas night." "It's a knack you have," another man chimed in, as he and his family stood back to admire Dad working the ropes. "You should be ringing the bells at St. Patrick's Cathedral." Of course, we too loved to ring the bell, like tonsured monks of old. Dad would hold our hands between his own, and after one mighty tug the rope would lift us clear off the floor, as the bell resounded to the heavens. There was no clowning around on the bell rope, however. Dad called it "God's work," explaining that the Angelus, which echoed the Ave Maria of Our Lady's Annunciation, had been calling Catholics to prayer three times daily since medieval times. The Angelus peals in a rhythm of 3-3-3-9, and Dad rang its sequence with impeccable timing, reciting the Hail Mary in Irish for deeper devotion. A few years later, when Dad was no longer janitor, but still rang the bell, my friend Michael Nichols and I discovered a secret passage in the choir loft that led to the bell tower itself. Daring to enter, we climbed wooden steps that creaked and spiraled toward the stuffy confines of the belfry, but quickly retreated at a loud clap of pigeons above. But the next Saturday we reached the one last ladder and emerged into the daylight of the belfry, ducking low in fear Father Foley—or worse still, my dad—would spot us amid the commotion of pigeons. On that spring morning, Michael and I crouched behind the railings and surveyed our dominion as if from a castle parapet. We looked down upon the gnarly woods and dark flowing river to the west, and sent a signal to our ally in the south, the glistening blue limestone spire of St. Joseph Church. We circled the bell and boldly ran our fingers over its Roman numerals—MDCCCXCIX, laboriously calculated to 1899—and its given name, Maria et Julia, etched on the curved surface. Before descending, I reached underneath the massively heavy bell to grasp its metal tongue, which burned with cold fire. Afraid that I had profaned the holy object with a touch that might corrode the bell's shining ring into a rasp, the next Saturday I confessed my wrongdoing to Father Kane, a young curate whose people hailed from beneath Croagh Patrick, Ireland's holiest mountain. There followed a long silence in the stuffy box of curtain and screen. "What compelled you to do such a thing?" "I don't know, Father. To feel the weight, I guess, and how it was inside the bell." "Well, son, no harm done. But I wouldn't want you to get caught by Mr. O'Hara. He tolls that bell with great reverence, you know." I gulped. "Yes, Father." "For your penance I only ask you to stay out of the bell tower. Can you promise me that?" "I can, Father, yes." And I kept that promise out of respect for my earthly as well as my

heavenly father. On the present night, beneath this crescent moon, the evening Angelus peals automatically on some electronic circuit. As the last notes of the carillon echo over Nobility Hill, no janitor in metal-clasped boots is making his way toward the old house. No Mrs. Durette calls down to watch "the cowboys." No brick school house, with its silent swish of nuns, remains. The moon speaks no folk wisdom of old, though it whispers of the past. I remember, as I walk to my current home—still within earshot of the bell—how one Christmas night as a young boy I stirred in my sleep at the pealing of the bell, and rose to the window to watch my father trek across the churchyard, a humble figure heralding the birth of the Christ Child, but to my eyes like a rose-robed seraph trumpeting on that long-ago Bethlehem night. Yes, I can picture the old man still, just as he was. How his mighty hands would clasp the bell rope, his chin anchored firmly to chest, the smooth repetition of pull and hold, his blue watery eyes intent but half closed, and his mumbling the Hail Mary in Irish, a quiet prayer for all the world to hear. The Skippy Jar MY YOUNGER BROTHER DERMOT and I—all of six years old in 1955—watched Mom drop a single dime into a large empty Skippy peanut butter jar. "What ya doing?" I asked her. "I'm saving our dimes for Ireland. 'Twill take awhile, God knows, but it's a start." She sighed as I peered into her glass container, her lone silver Mercury dime laying flat on its bottom. "Can I go?" "You can both go, ...--This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title. Read more

[Download to continue reading...](#)













































## What people say about this book

Bernadette J., "Endearing, entertaining, humorous, fast moving, delightful..... It was my turn to propose the next novel for the Irish Authors book club to which I belong, and both this book and Kevin's other book, *The Last of the Donkey Pilgrims* were my suggestions. We chose to read *Lucky*, so as to read Kevin O'Hara's books in chronological order. We were totally delighted with *Lucky*, and Kevin offered to make himself available the night we held our review. It would make him feel important, he said! What a treat it was to have him join in via telecon. What other authors do you know who would do that? Browse around [www.kevin-ohara.com](http://www.kevin-ohara.com) to get a feel for the author and to listen to an excerpt from "*Lucky*." Especially, click on the article entitled, "*Missy and Kevin on the Road*" to see a video of Kevin and to learn about the book you are sure to want to read after this one! I happen to be the grand daughter of Irish immigrants, one of five children growing up in a loving but poor family. Rich in poverty, as Kevin's father would tell his children. Kevin's memoirs brought back so much long forgotten from my own childhood it was amazing. If you don't share the same background as the author, don't let that stop you from buying this book -- you will surely enjoy so much about it that I do highly recommend it to you without hesitation. And while you are at it, add *The Last of the Donkey Pilgrims* to your shopping cart because you will surely want to read it next!"

Joan in massachusetts, "Good read - well worth reading - so many relatable childhood events.... I liked the way the book moved right along. Kevin is a very likable person who could be any number of childhood friends. He certainly nailed the Catholic education sections! So many memories came back!"

Lance Timmer, "And I always thought that I was the Lucky Irish Lad.. Amazon has asked me to review this book that I never received from the seller: Bonita Flores. "*A Lucky Irish Lad*" . I started off my life by being born at an Army Air Base during World War Two in Oscoda, Mi. My Dad was away in Iwo Jima with the B-29's and so I grew up on my Grand Parents farm near Hale, Mi. Theirs was a hard scrabble existence and they had 9 children which was necessary for tending to all of the farm chores. My Grandpa was half American Indian - Oneida, I think from New York State and his other half was English. My Grandma was Scots- Irish. My dad was a mixture of Irish and German/Dutch. You could always see it in my dad, he had the hardheadedness of a German, the frugality of a Dutchman and the love of drink of an Irishman. He was a mean spirited son of a bitch and I don't think that he ever really liked me at all. I got dragged out of my warm and loving Grand Parents home and was brought down to Grand Rapids at about age 12 and only saw the Grand Parents after that for the summers, when I would work on their farm until school started again in the fall. When I was 16 I hitchhiked up to Traverse City and picked cherries for the summer. In 1963 I joined the US Navy a month after high school as a way to get away from the old man, I got shipped out to Scotland to a

Submarine Base and I didn't come back to America until January of 1966. I spent 10 years in the Navy trying to figure out what I was going to do for my life's work. As luck would have it, I hired into an auto plant in Grand Rapids as a Millwright and spent my next 32 years doing basically the same thing I did in the Navy. After taking a buyout retirement from GM, I went back to school and got licensed as a USCG charter boat Captain and I have been growing the company steadily. Last year I made enough money to cover my slip fees and fuel costs. I'm hoping to break even this year and hopefully, with my "Irish" luck, I will. My website is [...] Who knows, maybe I will get lucky enough one day to actually read "A lucky Irish Lad". Lance Timmer"

Marybeth Kennedy, "Fantastic story of Kevin O'Hara. Excellent second book by Kevin O'Hara. A nice companion to Last of the Donkey Pilgrims. If you buy this, buy the other one as well. You won't be disappointed if you love Ireland."

Renfrew, "Great read. Lots of stories about growing up in Pittsfield Massachusetts. I almost "got religion"!"

[DMCA](#)