

infinite seascape, the village seemed compact and claustrophobic, its houses crowded close together in the one small corner of the Great Blasket that faced the mainland and offered shelter. The islanders were pragmatic people. In the years after the evacuation they returned in *naomhóga* to strip their former homes of doors, roof beams and slates, and anything else that might be useful in their new lives.

At the top of the hill, a day above, was the two-storey house where Peig had lived. It had been modernised and strong in 1910, but a storm had punctured the roof and blown out the windows. In the seventies it was bought by a rich and eccentric pilot from Alabama called Taylor Collings, who visited the Great Blasket on his holidays and fell in love with it. Seized with an ambition to turn the village as a holiday ranch, he called on existing owners and bought their plots, very cheaply. After all, who would expect big money for a derelict house on a remote island? One man sold for a bottle of brandy, another for a tin of marmalade. Collings was larger than life and the people of Dingle loved a character, so some were sorry when his plans came to nothing.

The next time anyone thought about the Great Blasket was in the mid-eighties when an advertisement in the *Wall Street Journal* offered the island for sale for a million dollars. That was the start of a long and complicated legal battle between a company based in the USA, which had acquired Taylor Collings's share of the land, and the Irish government – led at that time by Charles Haughey, the owner of Inis Icileáin – which wanted to establish a national park. The issue was still before the Supreme Court as I crossed on that first boat of the season, and the future was unclear. There were signs of the island being brought back to life anyway, I had