



- MEET A TOWNIE -



JOSIE RECALLS A WORKING LIFETIME

From the tunnels to the timber yards and other occupations

When it comes to his working life Josie McCormack has been around the block.

Around the blocks in fact given that he spent some time in the building trade – a mere fraction of the occupations he has been involved in primarily in his home county but also in Scotland.

Not quite a career in black and white though both coal and milk have featured in his chequered working existence.

Like many of his peers, he left school in Glenswilly in his early teens – “I never got to school half the time anyway” – and consequently began a life that never shirked any job that came his way.

“I worked at everything and anything,” he reflects. His first employer when he was hired out at the age of 14 was Dan Devine who farmed at Tullygay. And after three years, he took up a position with the Kellys of Bomany, tending to the cattle on the respective farms and rarely inactive.

“I remember driving a horse and cart loaded with milk containers to the Rockhill Army camp.”

There followed then employment with Paddy Tinney of the Port Road. “Filling the coal in the yard. I’d be filling it, weighing it, and then selling it.”

Not quite steady work, Josie recalls (the coal industry can indeed be slack at times). “Paddy had a lot of help before I started and he would come looking for me if he needed me.”

Before eventually venturing to Scotland – following the trail embarked on by half of Donegal – Josie worked with Paddy ‘The Gate’ McMonagle and Manus McFadden in the undertaking business run by Eddie Crossan. “After that I knocked about a bit and then I took the boat to Scotland and the first job I got was in Inverness-shire in the tunnels.

“Aye, a lot of Donegal people there, especially from Inishowen. It was tough working in the tunnels but the winters in that part of Scotland



were severe and you weren’t working outside which was a good thing.”

He spent ten years in Scotland and his first day back on his native soil was to prove highly significant as his spouse of close to sixty years recalls. “I met Josie down at Mary McDermott’s eating house at the bottom of the town.

“But you’re getting no more information than that,” laughs Margaret.

They were subsequently married in Glenswilly. “Fr James Gallagher was the priest that married us,” Josie remembers.

Margaret had been employed in the Hosiery factory while Josie continued “jobbing here and there. If you got a bit of work you took it.” And he did get the work, taking up a position with local builder Con Harvey. “He built part of the houses in Ard O’Donnell.”

Josie and Margaret’s son, Patrick, was

just three months old when they moved to take up residence in Upper Ard O’Donnell. “We’ve been fifty-six years up here roughly. “A long time in this house,” Josie glances around with the affection that familiarity can bring.

The couple raised a family of nine – Mary, Johnny, Patrick, Gerard, Paul, Donna, Joanne, Majella and Joseph.

Mouths, consequently, had to be fed and Josie’s working career rarely subsided. He found employment in the Nestles factory in his home town. “I was employed in the section where the milk came in and you had to clean out these large pans before eight in the morning. Then the milk would be condensed.

“And then Johnny Duffy from the Back Road would deliver it to Omagh and Castledawson and wherever else.”

When Nestles closed the factory doors in Letterkenny for the last time, Josie started a job at Kellys Mills. “I was in the timber yard sawing the timber. I was there for ten years.” After that he took up a job involving land drainage, private work he and the late Joe Kelly – “God rest his soul” – undertook for the farming community.

And then one day he decided enough was enough. “I had worked a long time and I said to myself “I think I’ll do no more. I’ll just pull the plug and that was it.”

A lifetime dedicated to every conceivable type of work. Except Taoiseach though that’s not to say that a future one didn’t at one time occupy the McCormack household!

Recalling the days when her husband would be helping out Paddy Harte on the election campaign trail, Margaret relates: “A man came into the house and sat down as he said he wanted to write a letter to his wife. Our daughter Mary made him a cup of tea. I didn’t know him at the time but it was Garret Fitzgerald!”

And not the only prominent Fine Gael T.D. to visit their home – former Justice Minister, Nora Owen, another political high-ranker who shared the McCormack hospitality.

Away from his working career, meanwhile, Josie was involved in a supervisory capacity in the youth club at the then Literary Institute along with Charlie Collins, Liam Blake, and Fr. John McLoone. “It helped take the young boys off the street and give them something to do.”

For many years, Josie played his part in the St Vincent de Paul Society and also served as a lay Minister in St. Eunan’s Cathedral.

Again like his peers, Josie has seen his home town altered beyond recognition though the community ethos in places such as Ard O’Donnell still, happily, exists.

“Things have changed that’s for sure and times have got a lot easier.”

And indeed there are surely few of today’s generation who could boast of a working life such as his.

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Josie McCormack