



## - MEET A TOWNIE -



# From Magherafelt to Letterkenny – and all points in between!

**He turned 90 on January 18th last. But sit in the company of Michael (Mickey) Ronaghan in his comfortable home in Rosemount, Letterkenny, and you see a man that could pass for much younger with a mind and a memory that's never short of alert.**

By Paddy Walsh

Not quite his native locality – he was born and briefly reared in Magherafelt in County Derry, six years after the Treaty was signed, and spent some years in Gweedore and Scotland before eventually

settling in his adopted town.

His father, Tommy, was a member of the R.I.C. but the young Michael would not enjoy the parental guidance of a dad for too long.

“I was just four and a half years old when my father died,” he reflects. It was 1931 and a combination of pneumonia and pleurisy claimed a life far too soon.

Tommy was a native of Manorcunningham while his wife and Michael's mother, Bridget (Molloy) hailed from County Mayo.

The couple had three children, Mary, Brid, and the youngest, Michael. “I was the spoiled one,” he laughs.

But death again brought the darkest of clouds to the Ronaghan household – Brid succumbing to

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*Mickey | Ronaghan recalls*

pneumatic fever in 1947.

Before then, his mother, Bridget, had, along with her own father, purchased the house in Rosemount

to where the family relocated in the early thirties.

“But she got itchy feet and she went back to Magherafelt in 1936.”

Those feet, however, continued to tickle and the family's next port of call was Gweedore. “My mother believed it was a good way to learn Irish by going to live in a Gaeltacht area.”

It was a move that benefited Michael greatly. “I spent the best years of my life in Gweedore. I had no Irish before I went there but after two years I was fluent. Two years because I was among people who spoke it.

“It's the only way to learn it,” says Michael who attended Cashnagore School. “A great school”, he recalls.

From 1944, Michael spent five years working in Scotland in the agricultural sector before returning to Gweedore.

In the early 50's, he took his mother back to Letterkenny to live, taking rooms in the Burmah. “I remember the roads were very rough, no tar on them.”

But the draw of Rosemount wouldn't subside. And in 1960, Michael purchased the house his mother had originally sold!

In the mid-eighties, he would combine the house next door into one dwelling. And there he has been ever since.

In 1955, Michael walked the short distance to St. Eunan's Cathedral for his marriage to Mary Duffy. “She was from Gweedore and the two of us had been at school together.”

Forty-one years of married life followed until Mary passed away in 1996 – a day rarely passing when her spouse doesn't dwell on her memory.

Six years prior to his wedding, he had started a nursing career in St. Conal's Hospital. “It was a great place to work though the hours were very long. A sixty hour week,” Michael remembers, though that would subsequently be reduced to forty hours.

At its peak, the hospital accommodated around 800 patients and an extensive nursing staff.

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Gardening was a particular hobby of his and he would invite the patients to work in the hospital garden. “And once they got their tea, they'd be tired and ready for bed.”

Mickey's son, Tommy, fittingly, works in the garden centre at St Conal's – underlining the old saying that an apple never falls far from the tree.

Michael's two other offspring, Brid and Deirdre, both reside in Manchester.

His other sibling, Mary, passed away in Glasgow two years ago at the age of 93 years.

When this reporter called to the Ronaghan home in Rosemount, Mickey was indulging in another favourite past-time – watching the racing on television. And on route to the house, Ricky Blake asks to remind him of the time he, Mickey, had advised him to put money on a horse called ‘Green Ruby’ at a race meeting many years previously.

Ricky duly did and it came in at 25/1, earning him a tidy sum and his eternal gratitude to Michael.

On the great racecourse of life, Mickey Ronaghan is still well out in front.



(Mickey) Ronaghan in his comfortable home in Rosemount, Letterkenny.