



- MEET A TOWNIE -



Rolling back the miles with Cormac

For Cormac Gallagher the miles and the memories roll by like the wheels of the heavily loaded trucks he drove around the roads and routes of the country for forty-five years.

Never missing a single day in his long-term employment with Kellys Mills and always with home in his guiding light and the warmth of family and fireplace and the characters who populated – and continue to – the Drum Bar which he purchased in the mid-sixties.

An afternoon in his company is a rewarding journey in itself – loaded with stories and weighed down with distant recollections from when he transported bags of maize from the train station on a horse and cart before the motorised world took him further afield. And the consignments of cargo faithfully reaching their destinations in the expert hands of a driver who eventually got to know every one of those roads and the towns and townlands he passed through.

Even the members of the Drum Bar Golf Society could never collectively lay claim to the ground he has covered – a driver at the top of his game!

He came from a family of nine, born to Cormac and Mary Ann (nee Mullen) in Glenswilly.

“A short time ago, seven of us were over eighty,” Cormac points to a sense of longevity in the family. His siblings included Denis, James, Peter, Charlie, Nellie, Rose, Pat and the eldest, Lizzie. Two of them, Denis and Peter, have sadly passed away while both Nellie and Pat reside across the great pond in New Jersey.

“I went over there in 1972 but haven’t been back since,” Cormac refers to his one and only trip to the States.

He attended Rashedoge National School and weeded out a job at Kellys Mills in Ballymacool. “My sister, Lizzie, worked there and I went along to weed the garden. There were no weed killers back then so I was kept busy after school hours and during the summer time.”

With his schooling over, he continued to work “several jobs” around the Mills. “And then Eddie Kelly asked me would I drive a lorry and I went to Bradley’s Garage in Ballybofey to learn how to drive one.”

And for forty-five years driving the length and breadth of the country was his stock in trade, heaving and hoisting heavy bag loads of coal and maize, lime and flour, and other cargo. On one occasion he recalls transporting asbestos. “There was no word back then about it being dangerous,” he reflects.

“It was heavy, hard work but you got to see the country.” His mind’s eye recalls the towns and counties he visited or passed through, Belmullet, Ballina, Limerick, Galway, Ennis, Ballyhaunis, Crossmalina, Kilkenny, Waterford, and many a point besides.

“In those forty-five years, I never missed a day,” he declares with a measured degree of pride.



Cormac Gallagher

“And I was only late for work on three occasions, ten minutes late two times and twenty minutes late at another time. They were very sharp about punctuality and I always did my best to make sure I was there on time.” Not bad for a man who has never worn a watch.

Didn’t vote!

For someone well versed in politics, it may be difficult to believe that Cormac never once voted in close to half a century! Not, he stresses, due to adverse political reasons but for the simple and practical reason of his full-time job. “I’d be away early in the morning before the polling booths opened and home again after they’d closed. So I never got to vote in my forty-five years on the road!”

Adds Cormac: “But I enjoyed the driving and I made sure to take plenty of exercise. And the Kelly family were great to work for.”

His personal life would also see some movement.

It was in the Butt Hall in Ballybofey – scene of many a relationship kindling – that he met a young woman called Annette Larkin, native of the Lower Main Street area of Letterkenny.

From her mid-teens after leaving school she had been involved in running the well know Larkin’s Bakery – but the young Cormac wasn’t quite ready for the wedding cake yet!

“I had no notion of getting married. She was working and I was working and I was a bit shy and never too pushy.”

But marry they eventually did though not in their home town. “We got married in Sligo. I was one for the quiet life, there was not twelve or thirteen at the wedding.”

From a good match to a Matchless. Away from the cabin of the lorry, Cormac required his own set of wheels to get around and in 1951 purchased a Matchless motorcycle from an engineer who worked in the local Nestle’s factory. “I paid £125

for it which was a big price at the time.

“I had it for about four or five years and the one mistake I made was selling it,” he admits. But he agreed a deal with Manorcunningham farmer, Jim Devenney, who bought the bike.

“I then bought a wee van for £150, an old Beech Wagon, a sturdy wee vehicle.” But that, too, was replaced by a Ford Prefect for which he paid £400.

Two more significant purchases helped offer a change in life’s direction – a farm he bought in New Mills in 1958 – “I still have it” – and a pub purchased from Peadar McGeehan in 1966 at Lower Main Street.

The Drum Bar was to become a popular haunt for locals and indeed visitors alike, a bar frequented by memorable characters though no less so than the couple who traded behind it.

“We opened and closed it as we liked,” says Cormac. And he continues to do so to this day.

By 1995, he had retired from Kellys but the memories of his working life with the company continue to load up like the cargo he once carried all over the country. He recalls some of the other drivers employed to do similar, Paddy McGavigan, Frank Bradley, Joe Kincaid, and Eamon O’Donnell.

“Eddie Crossan was my helper on the lorry, a decent man too.”

Thirty five hours on the road!

And then another particular memory stirring. Driving a load of steel and iron from Cork to Letterkenny. “I never once went over 10 miles an hour – thirty-five hours on the road altogether.”

And two of the iron bars coming loose and drilling themselves into the cabin and hitting the driver’s seat, narrowly avoiding the man in that driving seat.

On those lengthy journeys he would opt to sleep during the day and drive at night but he always was on the look-out for the historic old buildings he would view along the way. “I passed Kilkenny Castle and promised myself I would visit it at some stage.” And he and Annette did just that on one occasion.

His eyes sparkle at the memory of it – and of his beloved spouse who passed away four years ago last January.

The couple had three children – Ann-Marie, Mary and Cormac and mention of the latter prompts Cormac senior to point to a postcard on the sideboard of his comfortable living quarters, a card depicting Cologne Cathedral, the sole structure standing alone in a bombed out landscape during the Second World War.

And another war. The First World War where three of Cormac’s uncles, Denis, Paddy and John, fought and survived and returned to present their brother, Cormac’s father, with an open razor, with Cologne Cathedral engraved on the side of it.

“There were a couple of Germans in the pub one night and they wanted to buy it but I wasn’t for selling it whatever they were offering.”

Some things are just too priceless and a conversation with Cormac Gallagher and the miles and memories he’s put behind him rank up there with the best of them.

 **connecthearing.ie**
connecting you to life...

€10 OFF
Wax Removal by
Microsuction for over
65s in October.

Unit 10 Courtyard Shopping Centre, Letterkenny | Tel: 074 911 3296

Offering Full Examinations By Qualified Audiologists using the Latest Technology

