



- MEET A TOWNIE -



How to sleigh your coat!

Annie takes a slide down memory lane

Annie Shaw is reflecting on childhood days in her home town when an image of a stylish coat she once had emerges from her memory. "We had gone sleighing up at Leck and didn't my lovely coat, which my mum had bought me, end up underneath the sleigh. I didn't want my mother to see it and so I hid it until I got to school the next day and me and a friend started to try and sew it."

"Anyway, when I got home, I told my mother it had got caught in the school gate."

But fate, in the form of a young scoundrel who blurted out to his own mother what had actually happened, stepped in to expose the lie. "My mother met this woman and she said to her 'ah, wasn't it terrible that the wee girl got her coat caught in the sleigh."

Caught in the sleigh and caught out in a lie. "I was so angry with the woman's son for telling on me. But not half as angry as my mother was when she learned what had actually happened!"

It taught Annie one salutary lesson. "Always tell the truth – you'll never be found out with it."

And the truth is Annie Shaw is one of those people who always appears to have a smile on her face when you meet her on the street and, as far as pride in her native town is concerned, knows full well the lie of the land.

Born at Lower Sallaghane to Joe Higgins and Maggie Collins, she was one of a family of eight.

Three of her siblings, John, Peadar and Margaret (Harkin) have passed on but sisters, Kay (McCafferty) and Bridie (Whoriskey), and brothers, Dolie (Donal) and Francis survive.

"We moved to Ros Suiligh in the Oldtown when I was eleven years of age."

She remembers boys from the College playing football in the O'Donnell Park. "And us girls would take a loan of their bikes when they were playing and that's how we got to learn how to ride bicycles."

The young Annie attended the girls national school close to the Parochial House. "Sometimes, I liked it," she reflects.

"But with eight of us in the family, we were told to go out and get a job. My father was a builder and there was no work in the winter months and he had to go off to Scotland to find some.

"I wanted to go to England to do nursing but my mum said I was too young.

"At seventeen, I wasn't even allowed to cross the border to go to a dance!," Annie remembers.

She undertook baby-sitting duties with a neighbour



Annie Shaw.

and then took up employment at the Bacon Factory where she spent four and a half years. "I worked with Pat Duffy and Agnes Duffy, God rest her."

Never a smoker herself, Annie was, however, on one occasion, ordered to leave the factory and never come back again over a smoking offence. "Agnes had lit up a cigarette in the factory and the manager came in and caught her and he told both of us to go."

Smokey Bacon? Whatever the case, the incident was forgotten and the pair of friends were able to return to work.

"I also worked in Gaeltex for five or six years on and off." And recalls rushing out one lunchtime – or dinner as it was in those days – and her card getting caught in the clocking out machine. "And none of the others could clock in or out because of it."

How was she going to explain this to the manager, she wondered. Annie was called to his office and immediately started to stutter as she attempted to explain what had happened. "But in actual fact, he hadn't called me in about the clocking in machine at all – an examiner had found a bit of oil on a dress or

an apron and that was what he wanted me for!"

The manager in question was Bill Orr. "A very good manager and a very good boss," she recalls.

Annie did clock out from Gaeltex for the final time and her working life also saw her take up a post at St. Conal's Hospital as a cleaner. "I loved the work and got on very well with the patients." She would also spend around five years working at Rockhill Army barracks – a significant move in view of the man she would accompany down the aisle.

In 1960, she married Galway native, Frank Shaw, who was a soldier in the army. They had first come into contact in the Dolphin café on Upper Main Street where she was enjoying a plate of chips with a few friends. "He was there with a group of lads and they moved over so we could sit beside them.

"He asked one of the boys would I go with him. And I returned the message did he not have a tongue in his own head! I was just playing hard to get.

"Frank was a very shy man and very quiet so I suppose this was why he had got someone else to ask me out."

Angling for a date which would eventually initiate a relationship that would result in the sounding of those wedding bells.

"He had a passion for fishing and had a boat and he would go out and fish on Gartan lake or on the Lennon. He took me out fishing on Sessiagh Lake near Creeslough one time and didn't the boat start letting in and neither of us could swim a stroke at that stage. We used a can to throw out the water and I said get us back to the shore as fast as you can. Eventually we did get back to dry land and I said, never again but he was as unconcerned as the Flowers of May."

The experience didn't deter Frank and he continued fishing in the company of locals such as Willie John Kelly, Joe Deehan and Fr. Tommy Curran.

Frank the fisherman was also a man who could turn his hand to cooking or frying anything he caught in the lakes or rivers of Donegal.

"He was a brilliant cook. I sat back and he did all the cooking when we had fourteen for Christmas dinner. I was going to make the trifle but he knew I would only put a small bit of sherry in it and so he made it and put plenty in it!"

Frank also excelled at basketball and running while Annie has been a keen golfer and bowler.

"I also like walking and dancing but Frank was not into the dancing. He would go out for the odd slow dance but it would be slow!"

Annie and Frank had five children – Maria, who spent over eleven years in the U.S. army and is married and resident in Tennessee; Eamonn, employed as a physio with the H.S.E.; Michael, a soldier based at Finner Camp; Willie, who works in the Dialysis department at Letterkenny Hospital; and Mark who is currently unemployed.

Mention of the hospital prompts Annie to look back with some regrets. "I would really have loved to have done nursing. I was all set to go over to England with a good friend but not to be."

But that ambition to help people stayed with her and she became a carer for Con and Agnes Harvey, for Paddy Kelly of Ballymacool, and for her own parents.

There were many moments, days, and weeks of caring for her beloved Frank who was besieged with ill health and suffered two strokes, two heart attacks and a bleed on the brain. And nine years before his passing was diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease. "It wasn't easy especially in the last two years before he died."

That departure from life and family came at the age of 79 four years ago on August 24th and Annie still misses the man who was too shy to ask her out but did manage to float her boat apart, perhaps, from the one that sprang a leak on Sessiagh Lake.

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