



- MEET A TOWNIE -



Family woman Kay McGlynn looks back on life in the town

She has thirty-nine grandchildren and twenty-four great-grandchildren and the gallery of photographs in her cosy sitting-room in Ballymacool bears the pride she has in each and every one of them.

By Paddy Walsh

For Kay McGlynn, family is everything and the smile that lights up her face when she talks about them or any of the eleven children she has raised tells you all you need to know.

Meet her on the street or any other location and that smile will be present along with the hearty laughter that goes with it. And time spent in her company is indeed time well rewarded.

She is Letterkenny through and through but cannot claim it as her place of birth.

Instead she arrived in this world in Glasgow on May 3rd, 1934, in the country where her father, Francie Doherty, was born. Tragically, he was a man she never got to know as three weeks later on May 26th, at the age of 33, he passed away.

Her parents – her mother was Mary Gallagher, a

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Kay McGlynn recalls

native of Derry – had been living in Scotland at the time. “Granny Gallagher brought us home to the foot of the town,” Kay reveals her initial links with Letterkenny. The “us” included her mother and her siblings, Charlie and Patrick.

A few years later, Mary married Arthur Friel. “I was about ten then, and they had two sons, James and Terry.”

Mary and Arthur set up home in Ard O’Donnell – “that was supposed to be in the country back then and Granny didn’t want to move there for that reason!,” smiles Kay.

Some of the Council houses in Lower Main Street had been condemned and consequently they all relocated to Ard O’Donnell. “My mother went to the Lower Burmah and I went up to Upper Ard O’Donnell to live with my granny, Cassie Gallagher.”

Kay attended National School and the Tech before finding employment in the Oatfield sweet factory. And it was there that she met one Tony McGlynn, another Ard O’Donnell resident – “a sweet romance” she likes to call it!

“We got married in 1952 when I was 18 years of age and got a Council house in Ballymacool.” They became the first people to engage in a buy-out scheme for the houses, purchasing the dwelling for the princely sum of £135. “We paid 8 euro in rates for the year as well.”

As was the case in those days for a married woman, she had to give up work in Oatfield but recalls her time there with fondness. “I worked alongside Sally Hegarty, Phylis Kelly, Eileen Roarty, Bernadette Duffy, Bridget Keyes, Liam Blake and Jim Russell,” Kay reflects.

They all worked in the department that brought the world – literally as the Oatfield brand was exported internationally – the tasty chocolate Emeralds.

“The McKinney family were great people to work for – very straight with everybody. If you needed time off for something they were always obliging.”

Kay also recalls living in the Burmah with great fondness. “I remember ‘Bump’ Coyle used to drop into the house every evening when we were in Lower Main Street and sit by the fire. And he continued to do it after we moved – coming up to see granny and the rest of us.” Or into the country as her granny might have put it.

It was a time when Letterkenny was a community in every sense. “There was only one taxi in the town back then. Columba McGrath, who lived across the road from Joey Blake’s shop, drove it – an old brown taxi.”

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And another memory. The old Fair Days at the foot of the town. “They were held on the 8th of the month and always got big crowds. I remember the stalls lined up and I remember a man who used to come and sell delph.”

Kay is pleased that the Letterkenny Reunion re-enacts the Fair Days at Lower Main Street during their three yearly event. “It’s a great idea and gives the young people a chance to see what the old town was like.”

What it’s like now and what it was like then bears, of course, little comparison. “It was a smaller place back then and everybody knew each other and helped each other whenever they could.”

And while motor vehicles were indeed rare, there was always the train. “I remember getting on the train at the Station House and going on the train to Kilmacrenan from where we walked on to Doon Well.”

Kay can also recall travelling on the excursion train to Bundoran which stopped off at Rosstown. “And every time I have gone through Barnesmore Gap since then, I still look up to see where the railway line used to be. “And an image of her and her fellow passengers waving from the train at any cars that passed on the road below.

“Mind you if you put your head out the window of the carriage, you might get a mote of black soot in your eye and that would be the end of your day.”

Like many people of that era, and indeed those who never got the chance to ride the trains in Donegal, Kay bemoans its loss. “When my daughter, Annette, goes to Dublin, they’ll be asking her what time her train leaves at and she tries to tell them we have no trains and they can’t understand it.”

The tracks of time also bring a sense of poignancy. On Christmas Eve, 1981, her husband of almost thirty years died and his loss has been felt ever since. “Tony would have been 85 on February 15th – it’s so hard to believe he’s thirty-five years gone. A young man he was when he died. And a good man,” her eyes communicate his absence.

After the death of her beloved spouse, Kay worked for seven years in Charlie McGee’s café on the Pearse Road. “I enjoyed working there and was glad of the work.”

She was a member of the I.C.A. and recalls going away on outings with the group. And for forty years was involved with the Cathedral Choir. “I loved every minute of it. I never went to Bingo as I had the choir practice and all.”

Kay will be 83 on May 3rd – a fresh-faced octogenarian who is still so full of life.

And wouldn’t you have to be with 39 grandchildren and 24 great-grandchildren!



Kay McGlynn standing proudly in her doorway. (Inset: Kay in her sitting room)