



# - MEET A TOWNIE -



## PHARMACIST NOEL STILL BELIEVES THAT LAUGHTER IS THE BEST MEDICINE

### (And you don't require a prescription...!)

**From 1957 to 1994, Noel Crossan filled endless prescriptions and responded to the health requirements of the community in Letterkenny and beyond.**

It's true to say that the pharmacy business he established over those years left its mark – though not quite in the style he left his own on a desk in St Eunan's College which ultimately saw him leave the school and progress his education in Dublin where his career as a chemist was to take root.

Son of Michael and Ellen (nee Duffy) Crossan, his father and grandfather – known as Weeda William – achieved acclaim when they won awards for the best run farm presented by the Department of Agriculture for three years in succession.

The Congested District Board approached Noel's father to persuade him to join an organisation that was established to improve living conditions and as a result, he was a frequent traveller around his home county. "He'd cycle to Churchhill, Glenties and Ardara, and to Dungloe, Gweedore and Falcarragh. And he used to stay in Dunfanaghy with my maternal grandmother. And it was there that he met my mother and they got married in 1907."

There was eventually a relocation to Loughagannon at the Mountain Top which became the family home.

Noel Anthony Crossan arrived in the world on December 20th 1926 – bringing him to the age of 92 when the festive month falls this year.

As was often the case in those days, he was born into a large family – six sisters, Molly, Winnie, Margaret, twins Kathleen (Kitty) and Grania, and Florrie; and three brothers, Willie, Jack, and Foncie. At the grand old age of 101, Grania is the only other survivor.

Noel attended St. Eunan's College but his departure from there was a sudden one.

"One day I inscribed my initials on the desk and I was reported for that." And with it came the veiled suggestion that he might face expulsion from the College.

"So, I wrote home and told them that I was in trouble. And my brother, Willie arrived at the school one Wednesday and



Noel Crossan.

said to me 'come on, you're getting out of here'."

And off he went – having literally left his mark – shortly after having moved into third year. "At that stage, I thought I was going to be sent to work for some farmer in the Lagan but as it happened, that wasn't the case."

Instead he continued his secondary education at a day school on Stephen's Green in Dublin where he completed his Leaving Certificate.

His career objective was to be a pharmacist and he undertook training at Brown's Pharmacists acclaimed establishments in Dublin at Wexford Street and St. Stephen's Green respectively. "I was very lucky to be able to do my training there."

Having worked in hospitals in the capital, he undertook a locum in Tralee and it was there that a medical rep of his acquaintance asked him how he liked working in Kerry. "Lovely place and nice people I

said to him. And then he asked did I want to take over a chemists in Castleisland. Apparently, the pharmacist who ran it had been found dead in his bed and his wife was looking for someone to take over the business.

"She interviewed me on four occasions for the job, mainly I suppose, because she lacked experience in the field and had a lot of questions to ask. Anyway, I'd already done three interviews and I mentioned that to the medical rep and, finally, after the fourth interview, I got the job."

He spent eleven months there before deciding he wanted to move back to Letterkenny.

It was 1957 and he was keen to establish his own pharmacy in the town.

"I approached Johnny Boyce about a vacant premises he had on the Port Road but told him it was too small."

But local jewellery shop proprietor, James McCallion, agreed to vacate a larger unit

and move into the smaller one. And consequently, Crossan's Pharmacy became only the fifth chemist to be opened in Letterkenny.

Noel remembers Dr. J.P. McGinley at the time making the suggestion to Noel's brother, Willie: "Is he out of his head?"

Ironic in view of a request Noel received around two years later!

"I got a call from Dr. McGinley up at Letterkenny Hospital who said to me, we badly need you up here. I said to him, I'd already got a pharmacy on the Port Road but he told me they'd got four wee wards and if I could up come up in the evening, I'd be a great asset to them.

"A lot of people regarded me as an actual doctor," Noel smiles.

He agreed, to the request and while running his own chemist, spent eleven months working at the hospital on an out of hours basis. "The matron of the time was Nurse McElhinney who was brilliant at her job.

"I look at the hospital of today and while the individuals who work there are very good, the system is all wrong. There was a different attitude back then."

Crossan's Pharmacy continued to thrive on the Port Road and he remained there until 1967 when he purchased the former Speers premises – J.P. Speer had passed away – and opened up his chemist where the Quiet Moment restaurant is now located. The popularity of his business, and indeed the necessity for it, meant there were few quiet moments.

The shop was flanked by McGinty's drapery, owned by a Ballybofey family, and adjacent to the then Gallagher's Hotel.

Outside his working life, there was, of course, a better half and that came in the form of Galway born woman, Geraldine McCole, whose parents hailed from Dungloe. They married in Dunfanaghy in 1967 and went on to have a family of three, Elaine, Aine and Deirdre. Sadly, Geraldine, who trained as a radiographer at Letterkenny Hospital, passed away in 2011.

"She had been in San Francisco for five years and after I had opened the chemist shop on the Main Street, she opened a flower shop beside it around 1971 or 1972 where Willie McMenamin's grocery shop

had been. And there we were working side by side." Growing businesses in every sense.

In 1994, after a lengthy period handing our prescriptions and helping to maintain the health of the community, and not forgetting prescribing cattle dosage for "half of the farmers in the Lagan", Noel vacated the business and his career. "I sold the shop to a man called Kelly who owned a couple of pharmacies and he subsequently moved the business to the Courtyard Shopping Centre."

During his time in business, he and Donal MacLochlainn helped to establish the local Chamber of Commerce. "We managed to get the first ever Christmas lights put up and got all the businesses on board. David Ramsay was also involved." Back in the day politics represented an abiding interest in Noel Crossan's life and in particular the Fine Gael party. "Paddy Harte and my father were very good friends.

"We used to have our meetings above Boyle's pub in the Market Square. I knew Neil T. Blaney and his family well and I stayed with his aunt, Mary Ann, in Dublin at 54 Sandford Road in Ranelagh. A very nice lady, she was. Eileen Glenfield from Letterkenny stayed there as well."

While keenly involved in the world of politics, Noel was not someone who had designs on putting his name forward for election. "No", he responds, "I never thought of running at any time." Though that's not to say, he wasn't asked!

And the politics of today? "I can't make head nor tail of it now!"

"Once Paddy Harte stopped, I packed it up." And here he reflects with deep sadness on the passing earlier this year of the former T.D. "He did so much in his time both locally and nationally. He was a powerful personality and helped people of all shades and party loyalties."

Noel, meanwhile, remains active and at the ripe young age of 91 travelled to Dublin for the recent Papal visit and savoured every moment of Pope Francis's mass in the Phoenix Park.

As he approaches his 92nd year, the ever affable Letterkenny man continues to fill in the prescription that provides the reminder that laughter is indeed the best medicine.

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