



- MEET A TOWNIE -



ENERGY TO BURN: CYNTHIA KEEPS DRIVING ON...

Cynthia Furey is busy at the Rotary stand at last Saturday's Letterkenny Enterprise Town event in the Radisson Blu Hotel but might have faced torn loyalties had the likes of the Letterkenny Golf Club, the Donegal Motor Club, or Conwal Parish Church taken part as exhibitors. For the popular Glebe woman could never be accused of resting on laurels and even early retirement from her nursing career in 2010 has not seen her slow down.

Nevertheless, 'The Leader' manages to prise her away to detail her involvement in those various organisations over the years and her passion for each of them. The energy burns in her like the oil in a rally car and as everyone who knows her and spouse, Ivan, that's something that continues to drive her on particularly in the month of June when the Donegal air is filled with the sights and sounds of the long running annual sporting event that's still very much close to her heart.

It was, as Cynthia recalls (though probably with no great clarity!) the old hospital on the High Road where she was first introduced to the world. Daughter of Joe and Mollie Moore, she grew up with one sibling, Albert.

Her father had been employed in the Hosiery factory before commencing work on the family farm.

The young Cynthia attended Robertson Hall primary school on the Port Road where the teachers were Delia Harris, who passed away recently, and Edith Ball.

The Royal School in Raphoe, meanwhile, took her into secondary education – "it became the Royal and Prior when I was in my fourth year." And memories of catching the Swilly bus at the top of the Glebe road to head off in the morning.

Her working life saw her initially employed in the former 'Lucky 7' where Liam Price, Paddy McDaid and Gerald Farrell were also stationed.

"It was owned by Sean Harvey at first and was then taken over by Clement Harvey and Seamus Gorman," she remembers.

But a chance conversation her mother, Mollie, had with Archdeacon Crooks, saw her career path turn. "He had a daughter who was doing nursing and my mother said to me "that's a good job for you."

And consequently she departed for the Ulster Hospital in Dundonald, County Down, to commence her studies. "I would rather have stayed in the Lucky 7 but there you are," she grins. She eventually undertook midwifery at Altnagelvin Hospital in Derry before coming home to take up nursing duties at Letterkenny Hospital in late 1978 where she answered to the then matron, Sr. Stanislaus.

Meanwhile, a weekly Tuesday night dance in the



Cynthia Furey.

former Ballyraine Hotel where Gardai, nurses and teachers would assemble, saw Cynthia met up with a young Ivan Furey and begin nursing a wee 'gra' for him. And him for her. And the wedding bells eventually sounded for the couple.

And not just wedding bells. For the sound of a Ford Escort or a Porsche Carrera or a Lancia Stratos back in the day could prove just as appealing to the two motoring enthusiasts. "Ivan had an interest but I introduced him to rallying," Cynthia insists.

Her brother, Albert, owned an Escort Mark 1 at the time which helped generate her own interest in motor sport. "Davy Wasson used to service it for him."

Both Cynthia and Ivan got involved in the Donegal Motor Club and for many years after

kept the wheels turning in their passion and commitment for the sport.

Two weeks ago they were in San Marino for the World Rally Championship Rally Legends event honouring the memory of Colin McRae. "Ari Vatanen was there and it was great to meet up with him," Cynthia refers to the Finnish rallying legend.

And immediately recalls his Donegal Rally victory in 1978 and his Mark 2 Escort nicknamed 'Black Beauty'.

Her own participation behind the wheel included a stint in the Quarry Cross event at Woodlands. "My time was better than the boys and I never got asked back," she laughs. She also remembers navigating alongside Noel Ingram in single stages rally in Buncrana.

We used to play at the Loreto Convent pitch and before each home game on a Saturday we'd be making sandwiches for the visiting teams and lining the pitch, changing them from the lines used for camogie, and getting the goalposts sorted.

Cynthia Furey reflects

Passionate as she is about rallying, it's not the only event in town as far as Cynthia is concerned. It was partly through her association with the late Jim Kennedy – "a real gentleman" – on the rally circuit that she was invited to become a member of the Rotary Club back in 2000. "At the time, they felt there wasn't enough ladies and I was delighted to join up."

And help attend at the Rotary stand at Saturday's Letterkenny Enterprise Town event.

Golf is another particular passion in her life and, quite apart from competition successes, she was Lady Captain with Letterkenny Golf Club back in 2005, an honour she still cherishes to this day. She made a little piece of history by becoming the first female to be elected Honorary Secretary of the management committee of the club back in 2009.

And while she reflects on this, another abiding sporting memory emerges from the mists. The formation of the Letterkenny Elks hockey club back in the late seventies and her participation on the field of play. "Joan Cowan and Hazel Russell and a few others got together and formed the club.

"We used to play at the Loreto Convent pitch and before each home game on a Saturday we'd be making sandwiches for the visiting teams and lining the pitch, changing them from the lines used for camogie, and getting the goalposts sorted.

"And then dismantling them when we were finished."

And sandwiched in between all that, the little matter of actually playing the game!

The club started off in the lower divisions but worked their way up through the respective sections and enjoyed a measure of success. "John McGettigan used to umpire for us as well as Kevin McDonagh and Tony Murphy."

Cynthia worked in the maternity ward at the time and remembers heading to play a game at 12.30.p.m. and donning the club outfit of yellow top and navy skirt before heading back to the hospital to get changed for her 5.p.m. shift. "They must have wondered where was this one going when I got to the maternity unit!"

After close to twenty years in existence, the Elks folded and, sadly, there has been no rebirth.

But for Cynthia there is still an active life, not least in helping to spoil her and Ivan's grandson, Jayden, the offspring of their daughter, Laura, and Gavin McMenamin.

"He keeps us going, that's for sure," the proud grandmother declares.

In 2010, Cynthia took early retirement from the nursing profession but continues to be involved as Secretary in Conwal Parish Church among her other pursuits. She is keen to acknowledge the role played by Rev. Stewart Wright who retired from his post earlier this year. "He has done so much for both the church and the local community – a great man who put so much energy into everything he did."

The church and that community could equally apply such plaudits to the woman speaking those words.

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