



- MEET A TOWNIE -



WHEN THE PORT ROAD THRIVED TO THE SOUND OF COMMERCE AND YOUNG BOYCES

Like the former cinema on the Port Road, the images flicker into Celia Harvey's vision.

A time when she and her siblings lived with their parents, Jack and Elizabeth Boyce – alas, much too briefly where her mother is concerned – and that same Port Road was a hive of commerce and trade and home to so many.

Nowadays, you don't even require all the fingers on one hand to count the number of residents who live there.

In front of her on the kitchen table in her comfortable Conwal home, Celia opens up a notebook, four pages on which she has listed the names of commercial and family owned businesses that were prevalent on the Port Road of the time.

Too many to mention here but some of those names include Noel O'Boyce, Nan Murphy, McCauley's Garage, Jack Harkin, the old cinema under the management of Tommy Mullan, Curly Doherty's Tavern, Roulstons, Joe Dechan, Rainey's, Johnstons, the old and newer Grill, Wests shop, Sloans, the Masonic Hall, and a host more, most if not all of them now but a memory. "O'Boyce's was a great shop and Noel a great character. Ita Birch worked there for forty years. Apart from the shop and café part of it, it was a great meeting place for a chat and a cuppa.

"The whole of the Port Road was thriving back then but look at it now," she bemoans.

"The only residential people left are Eileen Corry, Eddie and Margaret Tinney, and Pat Dawson.

"You'd never go without coal as the Tinneys would always supply it. That was the kind of good will that existed in those days."

It was on the 31st August, 1952, when Celia Boyce arrived into this world on that very same Port Road.

She was just a year and a half old when her mother, Elizabeth, passed away at the all too young age of 38 years. "Sadly, I never got to know my mum but she always remained very much in my thoughts."

Celia's father, Jack, followed in the craftsmanship of his own father, Johnny, and her late uncle, Frank, by being an expert carpenter who could turn his hands to anything. Indeed he used that skill during a term with the defence forces when he was based in Inishowen.



Maud Gormley (nee Boyce), Jack Boyce, Elizabeth Boyce, Ann McConnell (nee Boyce) and baby Celia Harvey (nee Boyce) pictured at gates of Oatfields on May 20th 1954



Celia Harvey.

"Daddy was transferred to Rockhill where he continued his trade. He worked with the fire service on a part-time basis and then joined the Council."

He was immediately appointed to the post of Letterkenny Town Foreman – a position that earned him the wholesale respect of, not just the councillors and

fellow officials, but of the townspeople in general.

"He could be called out at all hours of the day or night if there were bust pipes or whatever other problems might develop. And he'd be out in all sorts of weather making sure that things were put right." And all the time with a kindly and friendly disposition that also won him many friends along the way.

"It was hard for him when my mum died leaving five of us. Mum had kept lodgers when we were on the Port Road and she was also a great baker."

The young members of the Boyce family were subsequently reared by my great-aunt, Celia McMenamin and my granny, Maud Boyce. My aunt and uncle, Mary and Frank Boyce, who lived in Clonmany, were also very good to us." And her aunt, May, also helped out, as Celia's father, Jack, combined working duties with brining up his family.

Celia was closest in age to her sister, Anne, and consequently they were very attached. "I was the daft one and she was quiet. Now it's the other way around, she's the daft one!"

But it may not be strictly true to say that Celia is now the quiet one!

Her other siblings included Mary Hamilton, Maud Gormley, and Petronella (known to most as 'Peter') McConnell.

"The house never emptied. You'd have Council men calling in to see dad after dinner. People like P.J. McConnell and Benny Rodgers would be regular visitors."

The young Celia attended Scoil Mhuire gan Smal and the Tech while also working in Johnny Boyce's shop on the Port Road. "We all did our stint behind the counter."

She recalls the old television set they had with the meter. "And dad would put the money in and we'd watch the 'Lone Ranger and Tonto'. We thought we were great!"

Away from that T.V. set there was the great outdoors and playing hop scotch with the McLaughlins – Mary, Catherine, Brighdin, and Una.

Celia remembers one incident from her days at Scoil Mhuire gan Smal when her cousin, Margaret, dropped a slipper on a varnished desk. "And we were sent for and got six slaps on each hand for our trouble. But sure it did us no harm."

After five years at the Tech – "I enjoyed it" – she took up a post as telephonist

in Donegal Town. "Irene Kelly from the Oldtown and I would hitch up there. And we'd get a lift every Monday with Peter Campbell in his bread van. We would stay in Donegal Town for the week and hitch home at the end of it."

She recalls at the age of 19 getting a lift to Manorcunningham on another errand and the driver who stopped eventually telling her not to tell her Fianna Fail dad who she had got a lift with! "It was Paddy Harte – a real gentleman. I was so sorry to hear of his death," says Celia of the former Fine Gael T.D.

The call would eventually come from her home town and Celia took up a position as telephonist in the Post Office in Letterkenny, working alongside people such as Brid Vaughan and Mary McBrearty.

Other names spring into mind including Veronica Coyle, Sadie McLaughlin, Patricia McIntyre, Bridie Friel, and Jennie McGrory, all of them supervisors in the Letterkenny exchange.

And other tasty recollection such as savouring sausages and chips in the Dolphin café on Main Street, and getting dressed to go to the Grill and the Fiesta.

It's been forty-two years since Celia's family relocated to their home in Conwal where her father, Jack, retired to. "He was 68 when he died and, like my mother, a huge loss to us all."

But there have been happier moments too and Celia recalls friendships and laughs with the likes of Mary Hoey, Marie Griffen, Margaret Fowley (Doherty), and the late Margaret Price and Patricia Stevenson.

"Mary Hoey was getting married and we tied her into a wheelbarrow and wheeled her up the town!"

On a personal level, Celia married Gary Harvey on St. Stephen's Day, 1974, the couple going on to have three of a family, Sarah, Oliver and Cathal, each of them residing in the Letterkenny area. "I retired two years after Oliver was born and helped to look after daddy."

A short walk away in Conwal cemetery lies the eternal remains of her mother and father.

They remain close in spirit to Celia and her family – a bond not broken by their passing all those years ago and strengthened by resemblances in children and grandchildren.

Across the valley is the area of Rockhill where Jack Boyce once toiled – another reminder of days gone by and lives lived.

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