



# - MEET A TOWNIE -



## From Glencar Scotch to Thorndale – and a Lane full of memories in between for Joe

**For his retirement gift, Joe Harvey's offspring acquired him a greenhouse to help him nurture the flowers and fruit that form part of his passion for gardening.**

His grandchildren are regular visitors to his home in Thorndale where he has watched them grow and blossom – just as he did with his own brood and as his own parents did in houses far removed from the green variety, in the Church Lane, at College Farm, and originally in Glencar Scotch where the young Joe was born in close company with his twin, Jim.

Joe's parents, John and Roseann, moved the family of six to College Farm Road when it became clear that space at Glencar Scotch was somewhat confined.

His father was an asylum keeper at St. Conal's Hospital. "He played for the county and was one of the founding members of the St. Eunan's club." A native of Tyrone, Joe's mother worked as a housekeeper for one of the doctors at St. Conal's. There were six in the family – Philomena (the only other surviving member); Sean; Michael; the twins Joe and Jim; and Jerry.

Not all his early memories are happy ones. John Harvey was the proud owner of a motorbike but fate took a pillion ride with him one day when, swerving to avoid a lorry, he crashed into barriers on the High Road and was knocked unconscious. "He was in a coma for six weeks afterwards.

"It was Dr. McGinley who actually saved him and then he was nursed at the lodge at St. Conal's by Nurse Susanna Tracy."

Joe reveals that the latter's husband, Eddie, was interned on a prison ship in Larne Harbour back in the 1920's. "He eventually got a job as a nurse at St. Conal's but he died young. In fact he and a young baby son died within three months of one another."

Joe arrived in the world as one of twins, his brother, Jim, having passed away three years ago. "Dr. McGinley and Nurse Harkin delivered us and he insisted that one of us be called Joseph Columba after him!"

When the Harvey family moved to College Farm, there were just five houses in the immediate vicinity. "It was all open fields back then."

He recalls the great snow of 1947 when the country endured blizzard like conditions for months. "It was that deep in most



Joe Harvey.

parts that you couldn't walk on it. Three or four feet deep. The harshest conditions you can imagine.

"We would take to the fields in short pants and wellies to get to school," says Joe, nodding with a wry smile when he reflects on how most educational establishments would close their doors these days for much less hazardous conditions. On any given snowfall, even outside of 1947, Letterkenny was the proverbial paradise for sleigh riders. "We'd sleigh from the top of Glencar down Convent Road on home made sleighs and more often than not end up in a heap down at the foundry wall. You'd have four or five on the sleigh and one of us steering it." And not always with radar like accuracy...!

His First Communion prompts another memory. "My father and my twin cycled to Strabane to smuggle over our suits. And my brother wore both the suits when they were cycling back!" And Joe produces a framed photograph depicting the two boys in their smuggled outfits on their First Communion Day. Belligerent customs officers look away now...!

No family celebration, however, on another occasion when young Jim ended up in the Fever Hospital at High Road, a victim of an outbreak of Scarlatina Fever, to be followed precisely four hours later by Joe. "There were between six to eight

beds in our ward and me and the twin shared one of them.

"The boys would be swinging off the curtain rails in the ward like Tarzan. At least we had company with each other because we weren't allowed any visitors." Though he does recall Nurse Tracy bringing them in a packet of Mikado Biscuits which didn't survive too long, fever or not.

Like many of his peers, Joe recounted football matches on the old Cockpit at Sentry Hill. "There was a great rivalry between Glencar/College Farm and the Burma in those games. They didn't always end in handshakes!"

No record whether the student strike at St. Eunan's College in the late 1940's ended with any form of handshake but it brings back a raw recall. "The poor boarders had to eat raw turnips taken from Solomon Harris's field." Almost literally, a turnip for the books...!

Joe and siblings spent five years at St. Eunan's and delivers a fairly firm 'NO' when asked if he enjoyed his time there. "It was a real regime, very tough. " And the severest memory of one specific priest and his reaction to Joe's twin and a group of other boys heading out to watch the County Final. "He asked me where they had gone and I told him. And when they got back, each of us got four

on the arse, and I wasn't even involved. Anyway, I said to the priest that I wasn't my brother's keeper and he punched me in the face." The Letterkenny courthouse of those days would have been filled to overflowing had the law then been able to take recourse to such brutality. "But that was accepted back then and if you went home and told your parents they probably believed you deserved it."

Away from school, however, there were much more rewarding outlets.

Rodgers Burn was, as again any of the young of old Letterkenny will relate, a popular location both for swimming and fishing. For Joe it was the latter pursuit that particularly engaged him. "When there were flood waters there, it was great for fishing. I would use a hazel rod and tackle bought from Cullen's shop. Many's a good brown trout I caught in it."

It was in the fifties that the Harvey family moved to the Church Lane. "My parents brought a wee house and we kept a cow and calf. It was a great place to live."

Joe remembers cycling out to borrow a horse and cart from a cousin of his father's and meeting a local Guard while travelling up the Cullion Road. "And we stopped and talked away about the horse and cart and then I went on my way to go and get my bike.

"And then later the same Guard stopped me and booked me for not having a light on my bike and fined me a half a crown for it. I think I was only about thirteen at the time. And him after being so nice to me earlier."

In subsequent years, Joe decamped to England with his brother, Jim. "We had four Irish pound notes when we left and our sister, Philomena was living in Birmingham. We crossed over to Holyhead and were due to get the train there and she was going to meet us off it. Unfortunately, we took the wrong train and ended up near London!"

The plan after that was to get the train to King's Heath and then get the bus. "But when we got there we found they wouldn't take Irish money."

Thanks to a travel agency, they got the notes changed and arrived at their destination some four hours after they were scheduled to.

"I was working at anything and everything – in offices and wherever and also as a bus driver."

But when his father took unwell back home it was time to return. Joe secured employment with Donegal County

Council in the roads section for up to seven years.

"I got involved in the Union – the Local Government and Public Services," says Joe with a bit of twinkle in his eye when asked if he represented the militant end! He also served on the National Executive.

He recalls his departure from the Council and an equal twinkle in the eye of former County Secretary and County Manager, Tom O'Reilly, when the latter waved him farewell!

Joe's career switch brought him into the folds of the North Western Health Board where he worked as a clerical officer before a vacancy came up for the post of Community Welfare Officer.

"I worked in an office where the Brewery Bar is now and where Boyle's pub was back then." Names from his Community Welfare time merge into memory including Leo Friel, Benny Gordon, and Joe Crawford. "There were sixteen full-time and one part-time, Joe being the part-timer as he owned a big dairy herd and couldn't have afforded the time."

Eventually he, Joe Harvey, relocated to the Health Board offices in Ballybofey soon after they opened.

All told he was employed for just over forty years between the Council and the Health authority – a rewarding period of his working life.

Away from the toil of that life, he joined with the Labour Party and proved an active advocate for the local branch.

Sport, too, had been a passionate outlet throughout and he can be found at most home games supporting Finn Harps in his familiar standing area close to the tea cabin. And the nearby MacCumhaill Park, or wherever Donegal happen to be lining out, is another venue of choice.

Gardening, meanwhile, is a fulfilling pastime and his retirement was marked with that practical presentation. "The kids bought me a greenhouse which has been a great addition to the garden."

Married to Margaret, a native of Gortaway, Ramelton – he recalls them meeting initially in his brother, Sean's singing lounge on the Main Street and subsequently at the Fiesta Ballroom – they've raised a family of six, Nicola, Kelvin, Tamara, Donnan, Odhran, and Caolan.

There are, of course, grandchildren to spoil and rarely a dull moment in between the past-times and pursuits that now occupy his days at his comfortable Thorndale home.

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