

MAMMIES KNOW BEST

Peter Gordon

MY GOOD FRIEND and neighbour, Gerald, had a mini-bar in his house. He had a great collection of liqueurs from around the world. In those days of the late 1950s and 1960s, my great friend Micheal Crossan and I went to different European countries on holiday each year. When in these countries I made a point of purchasing a few bottles of liqueurs for Gerald to enhance his collection.

One day Gerald visited me and asked for a favour. He said that although his collection was vast, it was incomplete as he had no poitin in it. I told him to leave the problem with me and I would source it for him in due course. As luck would have it, a few days afterwards a customer arrived into Bradshaw & Clarke where I worked. He required 25 kilos (56 lbs in the old money) of brown sugar. I knew that he didn't require that amount of sugar for his cup of Earl Grey or Barry's finest of a morning. If you are unaware that brown sugar is an essential ingredient of poitin you are herewith forgiven. I told him I needed a bottle of the finished product as soon as it was ready.

At that time, Bradshaws was the nerve centre of the Mohill GAA club with six of the staff on the Senior team (Billy McGowan, John 'Poucher' Gordon, Syl Kivlehan,

Brendan & Michael Gallagher and myself) and with three on the Junior team (John, Aubrey and Albert Bradshaw). John 'Poucher' Gordon was an outstanding goal-keeper for Leitrim for many years. Two other members of the staff, Dick Lawrence and Gabriel Moran, were noted assistants in the running of the club. They helped the Secretary (myself) with the running of the dances that kept the bills paid—such men are all too few. They were true men for the players and made great contributions to all areas of the club's activities. We had three high profile inter-county footballers on the team—Joe Tormey (Galway), Tom Mulvey (Roscommon) and Jim Sheridan (Leitrim) who happened to be Gardai. At that time the Gardai were trying to eradicate the cottage industry of poitin making; then as now, that remains a work in progress. My customer, requiring the brown sugar, made it clear that it was not for himself. I told him not to worry and that the product was not for myself either.

Two months passed and the bottle of the desired brew arrived. That evening I delivered it to Gerald who was only ecstatic—one would think that all of his birthdays and Christmases had come together. He felt that his collection was now complete.

My Mother was a friend of Gerald's

wife, May and used to visit them once a week. One evening Gerald said, "I've a special treat for you ladies this evening". He arrived into the sitting room with two little glasses of the poitin. My Mother took a sip from the glass and exclaimed, "There's a taste of paraffin oil off that poitin". Luckily by that time Gerald had left the room as both ladies disposed of their two drinks. Sometime afterwards, May told her husband what they had done and their reason for doing so. Gerald was not best pleased and was not sure of my Mother's diagnosis.

A few days afterwards the purchaser of the brown sugar arrived into the shop. He asked me how I got on with the poitin. I told him that the brew was not for myself but for a friend. He then said, "The clown that made the brew put the poitin into bottles that paraffin oil had been in before that". I allowed myself a wry smile and said to myself, "My Mother was right all the time and that there is no doubt that Mammies know best".

*'Gardai all from Donegal,
Sligo and Leitrim too,
We'll give them the slip and take a sip
Of the real ould Mountain Dew'.*

Amended from THE REAL OLD
MOUNTAIN DEW