

The McGovern Brothers

From Aughavas to High Achievement in Dublin, London & Beyond

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*"But I cannot deny my past to which myself is wed,
The woven figure cannot undo its thread,
Though yet her name keeps ringing like a bell
In an under-water belfry."*

The above lines of Louis MacNeice remind one of the importance of origins, of one's first universe. The parish of Aughavas and the townland of Bundarragh hold very special memories and affections in this scenic part of Leitrim for one remarkable family, the McGovern. It was from this micro townland to the macro world of Dublin, London and the United States that seven brothers and two sisters set out to make their fortune. There was no other alternative. The scale of emigration in the 1950's and sixties remained staggering. In the 1950's a half-a-million people emigrated from this small country, far more than in any other decade of the century, 120,000 left agricultural occupations. De Valera's Gaelic rural idyll of "comely maidens dancing at the crossroads" could not provide more than a subsistence living for large Catholic families. The small self-contained economy in Ireland at the time could not therefore contain its own population and the many thousands of young Irish had no alternative to emigration. The McGovern family had many advantages though in setting out on this new voyage of

self-discovery. They had a great work-ethic and dedication to whatever the task was on hand. They were and are to-day so bonded and united. It was surely always a case of "one for all and all for one". They had what we call nowadays an abundance of emotional intelligence so necessary for success in any walk of life. Psychologists tell us that our emotional intelligence is made up of high levels of motivation, the ability to shake off negative emotions, adopting positive attitudes and the ability to bounce back after adversity. In a word, we are talking here about an interpersonal social intelligence. I would give a first class honour to all of them in terms of this key social intelligence construct and we are speaking here of a pleasantness, an empathy, a friendliness and an ability to manage emotions in others.

New Horizons

London then offered young Irish men and women a new hope and opportunity from an otherwise dismal Ireland languishing under De Valera's insular economic model of development. It wouldn't be long until the McGovern Brothers would own their own pubs, haulage, and other businesses, and were now offering young Irish men and women good possibilities of following in their own enterprising foot-steps. On the way up, they learned the harsh lessons as employees in

Dublin as Tom so eloquently intimated to me on one occasion. But these were necessary experiences in honing skills for the future and in becoming more compassionate employers for as Viktor Frankl might say "that which does not kill me makes me stronger!". Tom Stoppard, the Moravian writer, puts it more elegantly: "Look on every exit as being an entrance somewhere else". Two of the family took the American route, Fr Andy was a priest in an American diocese, Kansas, and Maureen moved to New York. Another sister, Bridget, married locally in Aughavas and Paddy Joe inherited a good family farm and opted to remain in Ireland. James stopped off for a time in Edgeworthstown and established a pub business there before moving on to London and Dublin.

Parochialism is Universal

"Out of that childhood country/
What fools climb/To fight with
such tyrants Love and Life/ and
Time?" The Monaghan poet, Patrick Kavanagh, reminds us of this sense of place and the importance of roots where it all began. According to Kavanagh, parochialism is universal. Indeed, it is not by the so-called national dailies that people who emigrate or migrate keep in touch with their roots. The big run will be on the local Irish county newspaper, The Leitrim Observer, and who has won the match, who has died, the state of local politics! Of

course, interactive media has greatly aided this whole emotional pull- back to first beginnings. It is true to say that every emigrant has a double identity and a double vision, being suspended between an old and a new self, an old and a new home. The very notion of a new home, of course, is in a sense, as impossible as the notion of new parents. Parents are who they are. Home is what it is. Home is the wallpaper above the bed, the family dinner table, the school playground at Corduff, the church bells in the morning, the bruised shins of Corriga Grove or Leganomer, the small fears that come with dusk, the local shop and Post-Office (still there)! the friends at primary school, the loves that constitute one's first universe, Gerry sending Little Pat copies of the News of the World from London at a time of censorship in the theocratic state that was Ireland in the fifties and sixties! This very young primary school pupil was already, as a consequence, enlarging his first world with pleasure and with exciting political sex scandal stories of the Prime minister, Harold MacMillan, John Profumo, Christine Keeler and Mandy Rice Davies! In the confessional, one could only say when asked : "Did you entertain those impure thoughts?" "No Father, they entertained me!" Home then is one's birthplace, ratified by memory and in a spiritual sense, we remain in her briary arms despite having travelled far outside her whitethorn hedges whether in Dublin, London, New York, Missouri, Kansas or Chicago.

It is no wonder then that the McGovern family have remained

attached to this first universe, to the old homestead despite living away for many years. Their advocacy and commitment to many parish and county enterprises is truly remarkable. I refer here to the church and the GAA club, which has benefitted handsomely from the generosity of the family and their extraordinary philanthropy over the years. Aughavas GAA Grounds and the County Stadium at Carrick-on-Shannon are looking resplendent thanks again to major financial inputs by McGovern Brothers. Ruislip Park in London now known as McGovern Park recently received a major overhaul and refurbishment with a new stadium and state of the art facilities, again as a consequence of McGovern philanthropy. This new ground and its facilities, which were opened on the 28th May, 2017, will give an inspiration and a pride to current and future generations of young Irish in London. Tony is now the flag bearer of the family and McGovern Bros have been granted naming rights to the Ruislip GAA Ground and to the newly built McGovern stand. Each year the family returns to Aughavas in the month of June/July and have a remembrance anniversary for departed members of the clan. On each occasion a sumptuous lunch is organised for friends and neighbours at Glenview House and Restaurant, Ballinamore. The observation of the poet, Thomas Moore, comes to mind when referring to a banquet for another Irish clan: "For McGovern's noble feast shall never be forgot by those who were there or by those who were not!".

Making the world a better place for others is surely a powerful

source of meaning and in this regard, I am going to single out one other member of the family whose generosity and care of others knows no bounds. The patriarch of the clan, James, is truly remarkable in his sobriety, dedication and care for neighbours, friends and acquaintances. His many visits to the sick in hospital, to people in their hour of need are legendary over the years, bringing with him a natural ebullience and optimism, an extraordinary human interconnectedness. If he was a clergyman, he would be easily an Archbishop by now! Finally, we conclude with some insightful reflections on the powerful influence of one's first universe and the significance of those early impressions. In *The Deserted Village* Oliver Goldsmith speaks of "O Blest retirement, friend to life's decline" and reminds us: "And, as the hare whom hounds and horns pursue,/ Pants to the place from whence at first she flew,/ I still had hopes, my long vexations past,/ Here to return— and die at home at last".

Constantine Cavafy, the Egyptian Greek poet, expressed a similar notion when he remarked: "In those few fields or streets of your childhood there, no matter where you roam, you will live or die".

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