

The Last Word

Person of the Year 2015

FRANK BRADY

WHEN I SAW Ann Murray's number flash up on my Caller ID at the end of summer, I feared that she was calling about the remittances for the previous year's *Guardians*. Immediately the mind surged to the default mode for excuses, and I was about to tell her that the cheque would be going out any day, when she informed me about the purpose of her call. Well as they say, she caught me on the hop, and I was virtually speechless when Ann told me that I had been selected as the 2015 *Leitrim Person of the Year*. To say that I was honoured would be an understatement, and to be honest, I was both astonished and thrilled. Astonished that I was now joining a long list of illustrious Leitrim people who have left their marks on the county in various ways. I was thrilled as this is the acme of Leitrim awards. That thrill and appreciation were accentuated all the more by the fact that I'm not a permanent Leitrim resident, as I have made New York my permanent abode for nearly four decades. Well, the Presidents of the USA may have Camp David as their country retreat house, however mine is in Lurganboy, outside Manorhamilton and truth be told, the scenery and serenity of the Lurgan locale are much greater than that of the presidential pad in Maryland. Interestingly the cover of the 2015 *Leitrim Guardian* depicted a bridge over the Bonet adjacent to Lurganboy, which has become a virtual source of peace and tranquility for millions since Johnnie Lawson posted the film of the soothing stream.

The 2015 launching of the *Leitrim Guardian* was certainly a very memorable occasion, in part due to the location and timing. It was launched in the famed and refurbished Ballroom of Romance in Glenfarne. The famed oasis of love was a happy hunting ground when we were involved in youthful amorous pursuits, attempting to sew some wild oats many moons ago. However on mature reflection, perhaps I should not digress or divulge further, lest I be subjected to a wifely inquisition. Anyway I could adopt the American politician's preferred ploy for dealing with peccadilloes, namely take the Fifth Amendment. However the launch was also timely as it coincided with *Thanksgiving*, America's greatest secular holiday. Basically it's a time to give thanks for what you have, and also a very popular time to perhaps to take a trip to visit family and friends. Well I felt blessed to have been with

such large numbers of family, friends, acquaintances and people from all areas of Leitrim on such a wonderful occasion in Glenfarne. As *Leitrim Person of the Year*, I was delighted to attend and address the Leitrim Society in Boston at their Christmas Party. It was great to meet so many wonderful and successful Leitrim families in Boston, among whom were the Mawns, Gallaghers, Murphys, Gaffneys, Fitzpatricks, McDermotts, Bohans, Keaney's plus several others. The trip to the London Leitrim Association's dinner dance was a very welcome respite from the harsh Arctic type weather that we were experiencing in the Big Apple at the end of February. The Crown Moran Hotel in Cricklewood was packed as the Leitrim exiles, their friends, and those who travelled from Leitrim enjoyed themselves to the hilt. Once again it was great to meet so many expatriates who have kept Leitrim to the fore in John Bull's other island. The McGovern's, Donoghues, Redicans, Mulveys, Moffats, Geoghans and Keegan families and the O'Hara clan were out in force. The O'Hara brothers certainly travelled far on the road to success since the days when we were altar boys in Mullies. The Chairman of the Leitrim County Council, Paddy O'Rourke was on hand to sum up all the positive things that were happening in Leitrim. Frank Keegan, as MC moved the proceedings expeditiously, and interspersed the dialogue with well-directed jocular barbs at suitable targets in the audience. However I had to remind Frank that he got one of his championship medals under rather dubious circumstances. Anyway, as Mohill snatched victory from the closing jaws of defeat this year, I think it might be better to stay clear of the former Mohill stalwart until the Ellis cup comes back to a more natural habitat in the northern glens of Leitrim. Anyway Mohill should have won it the first day, but I was quite happy for once to jump on the plane back to the Big Apple the next day, and thus avoid the painful postmortems. Meanwhile the Leitrim London dinner dance was a rip-roaring success as the Ceannabo comedian, Tommy Moran had the audience in stitches with his repertoire of hilarious ribaldry. The Association was also doing their bit for charity as the Cloone jockey, SW Kelly bid £850 for the signed London Irish Rugby jersey, though Pat Gallagher pushed him all the way to the winning post. I was on home territory for the *New York County Leitrim Society Dinner Dance* as there were over five hundred people on hand. Des McWeeney, a native of Aghnasheelin was the guest of honor, and Noeleen Bohan McGovern, originally from Cloone, was recipient of the distinguished service award. Both honorees have been great ambassadors for Leitrim in their



adopted country. Once again Paddy O'Rourke, the Chairman of the County Council was on hand, as was Senator Michael Comiskey, and his brother Father Gerry, a former editor of the *Leitrim Guardian*. Incidentally the annual dinner dance is the occasion where many of the exiled Leitrim natives obtain the *Leitrim Guardian*. Over twenty years ago the late Joe McNerney, a native of Lurganboy, though he was born in Aghavas, roped me in as the US distributor. Joe had delivered *Guardians* in the States for the first twenty-five years. Incidentally, the First Leitrim Person of the Year was Eddie Shanley, originally from Annaduff and President of the New York Leitrim Society at the time. Since then, there has been a strong bond between the Society and the *Leitrim Guardian*, though unfortunately as the older generation declines, the younger folks do not have the same grá for it. It's a great tribute to the various *Leitrim Guardian* committees that the publication is approaching the half century mark. Many counties have marveled at that achievement, or perhaps being downright envious of Leitrim's proclivity of publishing an annual magazine.

Well as my reign as honorary Leitrim ambassador comes to an end, I wish to thank Bláithín, Hubert, Ann, Rosaleen, Fr John and the rest of the *Leitrim Guardian* Committee for bestowing such a prestigious honor. It was greatly appreciated and will be cherished, hopefully for many long years. I had the opportunity to meet more than my usual quota of Leitrim people over the last year, and that innate Leitrim generosity and friendliness were always to the fore. I greatly appreciated the cards, the emails, the good wishes, and all who travelled from the USA, England, plus family and friends who travelled to the Ballroom of Romance last November. I wish to congratulate Joe and Rosie Dolan, on being this year's Persons of the Year; they are truly great Leitrim Ambassadors. I look forward to being in Kiltyclogher for the 2016 of the *Leitrim Guardian*. Indeed Kilty has a very special resonance for me, though little more than a cub at the time, I was chosen to read the proclamation and recite a decade of the rosary during the fiftieth anniversary of the 1916 Easter Rising. I plan to be there too for the celebrations in 2016 in honour of Leitrim's greatest son, Seán MacDiarmada.