

# IN BED WITH A REVEREND MOTHER AFTER A NIGHT IN THE RAINBOW

*Thomas Clancy*

WHAT IS GLENFARNE coming to, to have such salacious material published in a local magazine? A person openly admits to having been in bed with a Reverend Mother after a night in the Rainbow Ballroom at that. Is this another Church scandal of a different nature altogether?

In 1966 John McGivern was pushing his romantic interludes and encouraging boy to meet girl, shake hands with her and ask her to have a mineral he'd say.

He never went so far as to encourage a 15 year old boy to get into bed with a Reverend Mother of the Medical Missionaries of Mary Order. Before you think this is a piece plagiarised from some top shelf adult magazine I had better try to explain why such a possibly scandalous occurrence happened in a rural backwater such as Glenfarne 45 years ago.

St Michaels School was being built and money had to be raised by the local community to match Government funding in order to complete the work. Cullentra, Tawnyinshinagh, Carrickingeere, Cornamon, Loughross and Brockagh National Schools were being amalgamated under the newly launched rationalisation of National schools programme. Several fundraising ventures were initiated. House to house collections, church gate

collections and a bazaar in the Rainbow. No, no, nuns were not prizes in the raffles but nearly everything else was. Local households were asked to donate prizes of anything with a monetary value of about five pounds or thereabouts for the bazaar. In today's terms we are talking about 200 Paraffin heaters, small items of furniture, bikes, bed clothes, tablecloths, tea sets, ducks, hens, turkeys, an ass cart load of turf, a calf or ass foal, which had to be collected from the donor's farm.

A bazaar was a series of raffles, where a number of prizes were put on display and raffled with tickets costing a few pence each. This format was repeated all night until all the goods were raffled.

I myself won two kitchen stools with leatherette covering on them. One is still in the shed in Stradrian (*pictured below*). There were also other money making attractions at the bazaar. A shooting gallery was set up, where for a small fee; one could try their luck at shooting a live air rifle at a bull's eye target to win a prize. No health and safety legislation then. The bull's eye opening on the target had an alarm clock bell suspended directly behind it. If your shot was a direct hit, a sharp ping from the alarm bell was audible and everyone around

knew you had won a prize. There were also darts and ring throwing competitions, wheel of fortune and every conceivable way of getting every last penny from the punter's pocket. I delightfully carried the two stools home to Stradrian where it could be said I had a strange experience.

Now up the fields from our house lived the Travers family known as the John Patricks, some readers may remember Milo, one of the sons, RIP to them all. John Patrick had eleven children, one son Frank was married to my aunt Annie Kate, so we were related through marriage. John Patrick took ill and died, and almost all of his children came home to Cullentra for the funeral. One of the daughters was called Kathleen or Sister Kathleen to us, as she was a nun down in the Medical Missionaries of Mary Order in Loughlyn in Roscommon. One of her siblings asked my mother could the nun stay in our house for a few nights during the funeral. This was agreed and it was decided she could have my room, which got a very quick spring clean, new bedclothes and a lamp stand and lamp.

My room was being readied for the VIP visitor while I was getting ready to go to the aforesaid bazaar in the

Rainbow. I was allowed to go to the Bazaar as it was for the Church or School but would not have been allowed to go to a dance as I was only fifteen years old.

I got a lecture from my mother, to sleep in the front room where there were two double beds with the brothers. I was warned: "make no noise, no banging doors, no frying or watching television, when I got back from the Hall, as Sister Kathleen would be asleep in my room". I agreed to all regulations and stipulations, as to get to the Rainbow was a very big treat indeed.

Now the wake was in full swing in John Patricks with tay and cigarettes and whispered tones among the crowd of neighbours and relations when Sister Kathleen arrives and holy, holy God, the Reverend Mother was with her. This was akin to Benedict 16th arriving at the wake. When all the God Blessing and kowtowing and reverencing was done the realisation soon set in to those in charge, where was Reverend Mother to sleep tonight?

My mother, as always, came to the rescue. She could sleep in our house as there were two double beds in the front room and sure it would be no bother at all to move the lads into the back room for a night of two. She rushed home; spring cleaned the front room, cleared out the wardrobe to make space for the new guests to hang up their clothes, borrowed extra linen from the McGourty family up

the road and moved in the new lamp and lamp stand into the big room. Now with the beds made all was ready. My mother then hand wrote a note in big print:

**"THOMAS SLEEP IN YOUR OWN ROOM, NUNS IN FRONT ROOM."**

This note was then pinned to the curtains in the living room where I could not miss seeing it. After all I had to go through the living room when I let myself in the back door.

I being the dutiful son followed the earlier instructions to the letter, no noise, no frying or television. I crept into the house placed the new stools I had just won in the Rainbow in the living room, didn't even put on the light so as not to disturb the special Guest. I went straight to the front room quietly undressed to my Y-fronts and got into the big bed beside the door. There was someone in the bed, but that was no problem it was either John, Phelimz or Michael, one of my brothers, so I snuggled in very close as it was February and it had been a long cold walk from the Rainbow. Suddenly I heard a soft low female voice about two inches from my left ear whispering: "I think you are in the wrong bed". With that the bedside lamp goes on between the two beds and a grey haired lady in the other double bed is smiling at me and repeating what the first lady had just said.

I was dumbfounded and frozen into inertia, now I could see two grey

haired ladies none of whom I had ever seen before, and them looking at me and both in convulsions of laughter.

The penny dropped...these must be Sister Kathleen and some other lady. Nuns used wear head dresses which covered most of their faces and all of their hair. So I did not know who they were. The one that I was snuggled in beside introduced herself as Reverend Mother such and such and that is Sister Kathleen over there pointing at the other bed, "And what's your name my dear"? By this time they were in the giggles of uncontrollable laughter. They were both now resting up on their elbows and I was still tightly snuggled into this elderly female stranger. I literally couldn't move, I was mortified and crimson with embarrassment, bad enough being in bed with Reverend mother and Sister Kathleen looking on but how was I going to get out of bed with only my Y-fronts on.

After some time I rested myself up on my elbows too and must have been there for what seemed an eternity, now I also started laughing and strode from the bed in my near nakedness saying, "good night ladies". I sneaked into my own room in silence still hearing the two nuns trying to stifle their laughter at what had just transpired.

God rest all of them now, I sure relived that night many times. For years I never told anyone, not even my family. It had been a secret between me and the religious.