

'Pat, the Vet'

Mohill memories

Bláithín Gallagher



I WAS MOVED by the sight of the crumbling facade of Kelly's Hotel on the Main Street of Mohill in September of this year. Passing through the narrow path, created to allow pedestrians pass safely up and down the town, I was amazed at how quickly so many of us transformed from epidemiologists (skills gained during the pandemic) to engineers. People were definitely solution focussed and each of us had our own right idea of what should be done to fix the situation. I wondered what smart quip my father would have come up with in relation to our newly acquired skills, if he was still around.

Every time I pass Kelly's I think of my father. Yes, I know it is now Clarke's but sorry Sean, it will always be Kelly's to me. Kelly's Hotel was the inaugural place of residence of "Pat the Vet" as he was affectionately known, in what was to become our hometown of Mohill. It was the place he first set eyes on my mother, Anna Rose Sheridan, 'a slip of a girl', who had come to visit Mohill with her good friend, Dr Mary O'Riordan, one of the first women vets at that time in Ireland, and a great friend of my father. She was matchmaking and somehow knew that her two friends were destined for a life together. Little did she know that the result of that union would lead to nine offspring, one of whom would be writing about it 70 years later. Apparently, the first night Pat met Anna Rose, he said "I will be marrying you, girleen." My mother tells of ensuring her hotel room was locked and blocked that night, having observed the sincerity in Pat's declaration! "Getting out of Mohill, as I came in, was to the forefront of my mind!" she said. Six months later, on October 16th, 1952, they married. Kelly's Hotel



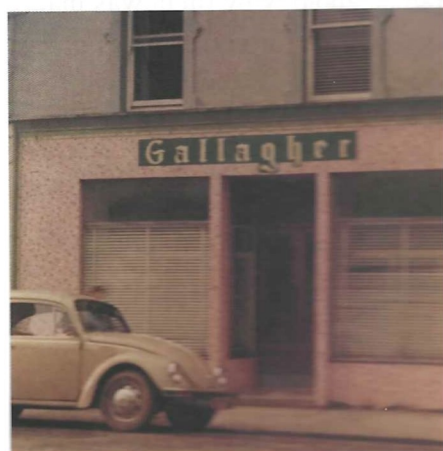
Pat Gallagher seated

PHOTO BY MADELINE MCGAHERN

was their first temporary dwelling place as a married couple.

Pat moved to Mohill in the late 40's, I am unsure of the exact date. A proud Mayo man, my father was born in a home that straddled the border of Mayo and Sligo, in the townland of Dooastle. but he identified strongly as a Mayo man! We followed Mayo in the football as children. Mind you, I don't recall Leitrim ever being on the telly! His mother was the headmistress of the national school while his father was an RIC officer. He attended

Gallagher shop front with Pat's Beetle



Pat & Anna Gallagher Wedding photo

St Nathy's College in Bal-laghadereen for his second level education.

It seems my father quickly adopted Leitrim as his home and it definitely captured his heart. The warmth and welcome of the Leitrim people touched him deeply. He passed on a love of this county to all his children, a love so strong that

it inculcated a resolute connection to this place in all of us. It is hard to believe that we are the first generation of our family to be raised here. I feel Leitrim in my bones.

Pat was one of six children, Alfie, Frank, Ena, Maura and Brendan. Each of his siblings have their own interesting life stories but they are for another forum. Pat played many roles in his life, son, husband, father, uncle, grandfather, farmer, veterinary surgeon, advisor to many men on personal embarrassing medical conditions, campaigner on many issues, a 365 day Santa Claus and last, but not least, several roles down through the years in Mohill's famous annual pantomime show. I was privileged to share a stage with him in Little Red Riding Hood, where I played 'Impie, Spirit of the Woods,' while my father played 'The Big Bad Wolf'. There are some great stories from those times to be told another day.

My father, Patrick Mary Gallagher, was born on Sep 8, 1917, he told us although christened Patrick, he was known as Padraigín. Born before independence, perhaps they were unable to assign an Irish name on his birth



Entire Gallagher family

certificate. He suffered from polio as a child and talked of walking to church using a stick, following the path with the old men of the area. His mother had great faith in Mary and my father believed that her prayers to Our Lady were the intercession that cured his ailment and allowed him to advance his education to attend university and become a veterinary surgeon. In his gratitude, he named every one of his children, yes, all nine, Mary. So in our house there were ten Mary's, one for each prayer in the decade of the rosary, something we had to do every night, without fail, on our knees. And there was no escaping for anyone. Visitors and all present had to join in, no matter if you were protestant, atheist or Jew, you had to get down on your knees. "The family that prays together stays together" was his common refrain. Let me tell you, there was no such thing as a shortened version. Ours was the whole nine yards, including the various litanies and post rosary prayers. It was so long, that even his brother, Frank, the Columban priest, gave out about it being like an endurance test.

Pat's wit and humour, traits he carried through his life, are evident in a letter he wrote to his brother Alfie, when he was a 'poor student'. Pat was looking for some monetary support from Alfie, who had already qualified and set up practice in Ballymote. He suggests that Alfie familiarise



Two sets of Gallagher twins

himself with 'The Sermon on the Mount'. Pat goes on to say, "The Lord says Blessed are the poor in spirit. Well, I am going to give you a chance to be poor in spirit. Take £1 out of your wallet and put it in an envelope and address it to me and I hope that yours will be the kingdom of God."

This is a transcript of that letter which was written by my father to his brother, Alfie, in the 1940's. Pat was a student at the College for Veterinary Surgeons, which at that time was located in Earlsfort Terrace, now the site of the National Concert Hall. His brother, Alfie, had just set up a veterinary practice in Ballymote. One of my cousins transcribed it many years ago and sent it to me.

*41 Dartmouth Square
Leeson Park
Ranelagh
Dear Alfie*

I hope you are well or moderately well anyway. Furthermore, I hope you are in good humour and when you get this letter into your hand that O'Dowd or some such guy was after being sort of witty, or shall we say, has attempted to the extent of causing you a little merriment. Because of recognising my bold hand and (hard neck understood) you feel you are going to be touched. I feel that now is the right time to touch, but time honoured formula and convention demand that any request that your make yourself poorer be relegated to the end of this epistle and who I am I to upset convention.

Well, that is the introduction anyway. Well, there



Pat and Anna Gallagher

no news alarming in this village. Frank Molloy is set up in Mohill. I met him and he was in Ballymote but he heard news that you were not at Hoggs, so he did not call there. It was late at night anyway.

Well, I don't think I have much more to say except you should look up The Sermon on the Mount. The Lord says, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit'. Well, I am going to give you a chance to be poor in spirit. Take £1 out of your wallet and put it in an envelope and address it to me and I hope that yours will be the kingdom of God. I would be over the moon with pleasure if I received some envelope before Whit. Try it anyway and see do you feel good and I will pray for an epidemic in your district.

Your expectant?

Brother Pat

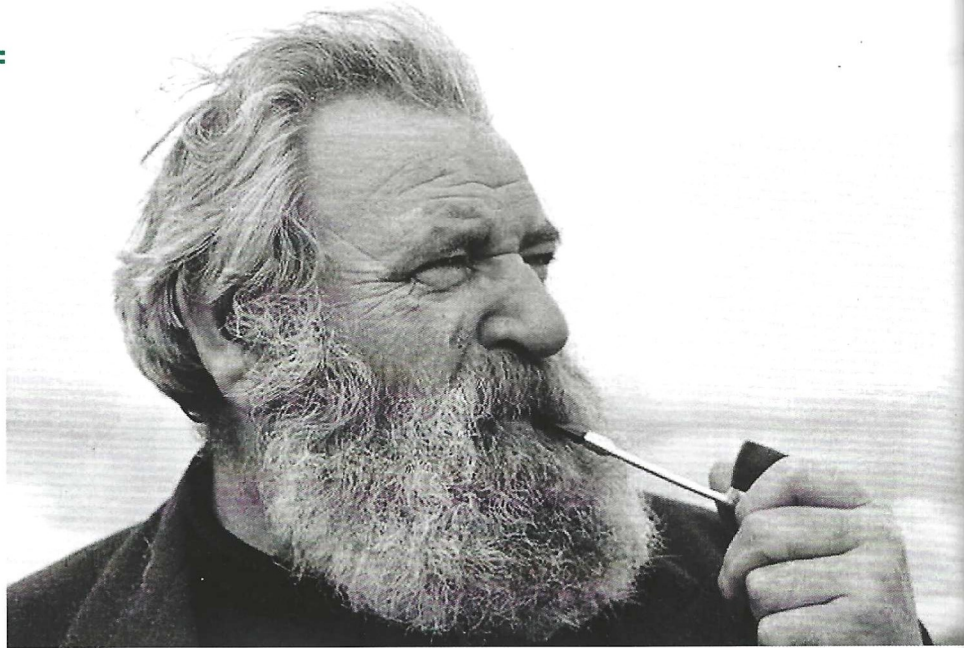
PS I broke the 4th commandment to the get the notepaper and envelope and my next worry is a stamp. I'd send it unstamped but it might not be conducive to your good humour and I'd upset its reaction on the possibilities with which this letter is pregnant. PMG

I was told a story by Maurice Knightly, whose father Michael, trained with my father, about some of the antics in which my father engaged. A delivery was being made to the College for Veterinary Surgeons via horse and cart. My father decided to play a joke on the delivery driver who had parked up at the railings of the college. He threaded the chains from the cart to the horses via the railing. When the man got up on the cart and whooshed horses on, it took him a while to figure out why he wasn't moving!

My father was a great believer in 'staycations', although that word never crossed his lips! He loved what we had on offer in Ireland and was happiest tipping along locally in his VW Beetle, alert to all that nature had to offer and sharing his knowledge with his passengers. Week after week, we traversed the county of Leitrim on our 'Sunday drives', in and out of every nook and cranny, up and down every by road, while Daddy pointed out the beauty and glory of this county. I was too young to treasure the gifts of his observations and usually car sick, but most of the love he was sharing did sink in! Believe it or not, all of us nine, plus Mammy and Daddy and any other adult in the house at the time, travelled to mass together in his Beetle. We all fitted in. In fact, we thought it was normal. For daddy, the Beetle was a car, everything else was a vehicle!

Despite his death over 26 years ago, people still relate stories about my father, most of them quite amusing. We have been blessed in our family to encounter story after story about his exploits, many new ones still emerging from those with whom he crossed paths over his lifetime, in particular, his encounters with the farmers of Leitrim and surrounding areas, where he made his mark. People describe Pat as 'larger than life', a 'character' and 'one of a kind'. He was indeed a large presence, his wedding ring used to fit across two of my fingers! There is no doubt he was a very interesting man, with a breadth and depth of knowledge on so many subjects (in a time before Google!) that made him a fascinating storyteller.

What I wouldn't give to have an opportunity to spend a few hours in his company over a nice meal and ask him some of my many unanswered questions. For me, the desire of making the change one would like to see in the world became more urgent for me when I became a parent. This desire to make change was fuelled by my father. He was a



Pat Gallagher

smart man, an activist, who never wanted to be top dog, he just wanted to make a difference by changing the things in the world that were important to him, where he felt he could have some impact. I think it would make for a very interesting dinner conversation.

The date and time of his death is seared on my brain, Friday night, August 18th, 1995. My heart was broken and I thought it would never heal. Our father, Pat, was gone. He, whose presence had filled our lives, was no more. He lives on in my heart and his legacy is retained through the stories people tell me about him, often stories I have never heard, which reveal something of the man that we expected to go on forever, such was his character. It is a real joy to hear those stories. It is wonderful to uncover other aspects of the man I knew as my father, when I hear of his exploits and the craic to be had in his company. I miss his wit and wisdom and I wish my own children could have shared in some of that.

"The life of the dead is placed in the memory of the living." Marcus Tullius Cicero

It is my plan to collect these stories of my father and ones told by my father, so I would really appreciate it if any of you readers have a story to share, if you would contact me by me email blaithingallagherLM@gmail.com or by phone to 0860423828, so I can record your tale.

Below: Pat and Anna at dinner dance

