

Ballyfarnon's man final book a collection of a life well lived

By James Fogarty

The final book from the pen of a Ballyfarnon man and author is a fascinating and beautifully written portrait of life, love and Ireland gone by.

Patrick J Power was born in Ballyfarnon in 1929, the son of a garda sergeant, and has lived in Dublin since 1950. Writing his whole life, he had several plays performed on RTE Radio One and BBC Radio 4 over the years and in 1993 he self-published a book of short stories.

In November 2020 he self-published a book of short memoirs, *Light Reading for Short Journeys*, many of which feature his early life in Roscommon and Sligo. Sadly in March of this year, he passed away at the age of 91.

Patrick spoke to his daughter Nessa about the book and his writing before his passing, and she very kindly transcribed and shared this interview with the *Herald*.

"*Light Reading for Short Journeys* is a collection of short memoirs and articles that were all published in various magazines and newspapers, over a lifetime of writing," Patrick said. "I have set out to create a picture of life as it was at the time; from growing up in a small Roscommon village, surviving the trials and tribulations of a Sligo boarding school, and coming to Dublin in the 1950s, where I worked, studied in Trinity and found love. Some pieces are serious, others are humorous, many are nostalgic."

When asked which was his favourite story, Mr Power said 'Memories of the Shannon' was close to my heart.

"As my father was a garda sergeant, we were constantly on the move. I was born in Ballyfarnon. By the time I was seven we had lived in four Roscommon villages including Keadue and Tulsk," he said. "Tarmonbarry was the last place I lived before moving to boarding school in Sligo, and if I have any childhood roots at all, they are there. I have wonderful memories of my first glimpse of the Shannon. Fishing became my passion and I spent many summers showing English anglers where to fish and what bait to use."

He recalled how 'Pitch and Toss' was another favourite story of his.

"A French visitor to Ireland once described the natives of Ireland as a most devout and religious people, because he had seen small groups of men clustered at crossroads, throwing pennies to heaven, bowing their heads, and invoking the name of the Lord with the words 'Oh Jesus'," he said. "Little did he know that what he had seen was a pitch and toss game we would play on weekend evenings at the junction of the Strokestown and Ballytoohey roads. Each 'pitcher' would toss two pennies in the air, and money was bet on how the coins landed."

Another story which was popular with readers is 'Going To The Pictures'.

"When I came to Dublin in the 1950s, long queues would form outside the cinemas, an usher patrolling to ensure that the queues were two abreast and didn't block the footpath. In those days, they had intervals during the film, which was a chance to hear the organ playing of Tommy



Nessa with her father Patrick; she said her father passed away in March, three days before his 92nd birthday.

Dando in the Savoy or Norman Metcalfe in the Theatre Royal. Dublin was simply a cinemagoers' paradise, and a place where many romances began."

Mr Power also published a book of short stories called *The End of the Honeyflow and Other Stories* in 1993, as well as an autobiography *Turn Up the Light* on Amazon. He also wrote radio plays which have all been broadcast on RTE Radio and BBC Radio 4, between 1984 and 1999.

A volume of these scripts will be available later this year, entitled *Five Radio Plays*. His daughter adapted and directed one of them, *Under the Plum Tree* with the Dublin Shakespeare Society in 2005.

"I have been writing my whole life. When I was working, I used to write in the evening," he said. "The day job was necessary to provide for my family, and for some years I was chairman of an EU committee on port planning, which involved constant travel to meetings throughout the EU. In those years my writing was spasmodic. After I retired, I was able to dedicate myself to writing every day."

Regarding advice for aspiring writers, Patrick included some of his experiences in the middle section of *Light Reading for Short Journeys*.

"Here I share my own experience on writing and plotting short stories and radio plays, the importance of place, and how to go about self-publishing a book. In 'Writer's Block' I put forward reasons as to why this happens. The main thing is to write consistently, trust the imagination and let the words flow."

Speaking to the *Herald*, Nessa, who is a teacher living in Dublin, said her father passed away in March, three days before his 92nd birthday.

"He was a hard worker and provided for his family but writing was his passion," she said. "When he retired he really got to concentrate on it."



Patrick with his father John — a garda sergeant who was a very formative figure in his son's life.

She said her father's childhood and family in Roscommon was a huge part of his writing, saying Patrick's father, John, was a very formative figure in his son's life.

"His mother's name was Mary and she was from Monaghan. She died of TB when he was four. John was from Wexford," Nessa said.

She said that her father received a scholarship to study at Summerhill College in Sligo. While the family were justifiably proud, it was a bitter-sweet moment too.

"He always had this feeling that his childhood was over,

the freedom to go fishing on the Shannon was gone. And boarding school was harsh. But he learned a lot, he said he read every book in the library."

A proud Roscommon man who put himself through Trinity College Dublin, Patrick was a keen follower of his county's sporting fortunes and he and his family regularly holidayed here.

Sadly his wife, Doreen, passed away in 1994, the same year he retired from work. The couple had three children: Aoife, John, and Nessa.

Last year, the family came

together to design and publish *Light Reading for Short Journeys*.

"He took the pandemic in his stride. He was a real newsman, read all the papers, and always had the radio on," said Nessa. "Lockdown didn't really affect him, he just got on with things."

For Nessa and her siblings ensuring the book was published was a perfect way to honour their beloved father.

"He was a wonderful man and writer and we're delighted to do it."

■ Visit www.patrickjpower.com or call Nessa on 087-7650089 if you wish to order the book.



Patrick J Power with his children Aoife, Nessa, and John.