

BERT HENDERSON - PASSING OF SHORE ROAD STALWART

Long ago in my youthful days as a young school teacher, I was in the company of the late great Master Eddie McLoughlin, exemplar for us all, former County great and Railway Cup star with Ulster in their winning years of 1943 and '44.

He was looking very thoughtful while puffing his pipe and I enquired why he was so philosophical. He informed me that he had just received word of the death of a childhood companion. He also gave me a wise saying that was brought home to me last week. He said that one only begins to have a real personal insight into death when one's own generation begins to be called to judgement - not to mention of course, the sadness of death of one's own nearest and dearest.

All this was brought home to me last week as I attended, as a neighbour, the Requiem Mass of a schoolmate Brendan Henderson of 15 Ennis Close and formerly of the Shore Road in North Lurgan. Brendan or Bert as his family and friends called him, was born there under the benevolent shadow of the big oak tree guarding the entrance to Major Alexander Greer's Demesne.

His dwelling was at "The Stones" end of the road and his neighbours were family rooted splendid couples just like his own parents. William and Cathenne. These families of O'Neill, Brady, McGibbon, Mitchell Carville and Leathem and others were the salt of the earth. They had come to occupy the splendid houses with all "mod cons" sturdily built by Charles Lavery and Sons, a tradition carried through to the present day.

Brendan was a twin with his brother, Philip surrounded by the tender companionship of his sisters Kathleen and Eileen and protected by big brothers William, Tommy, Harry, Isaac and Sean. Their parents William and Catherine who had come in to the town from the family holding in Tannaghmore North to work and rear their family. This they did with all the virtues and values of dignity in work, good conduct in the community and firmness of faith with love of Ireland and things Irish. They were of a generation which moved from primary school at Tannaghmore to the world of work in farm, building site, factory or office.

The Henderson men were noted for their prowess in sport and its development above all in matters relating to the GAA. Father William had been a founder member of Tannaghmore Davitts who played in Ferris' field and a stalwart sturdy player. All his sons followed in his footsteps, particularly Isaac who was a valuable member of the 1953 All-Ireland Final Armagh panel. Harry like older brothers, Willie and Tommy was a key player in the first Clann Eireann Championship winning team of 1946. While Phillip and Brendan only dabbled on the verge of teams they came into their own when the late great Master Alf Murray gathered valiant men around him to launch Clann Eireann G.F.C. into the modern age.

Alf, later President of the GAA had the vision but he needed men like the Henderson's fulfil that objective. He certainly found it in Brendan. He may not have starred like brothers Isaac and Harry on the football fields of Armagh but his gigantic strength allied to great good humour kept us going in digging the foundations of the first purpose built GAA clubrooms in the land.

Every club needs its Bert Henderson to survive. When the clubrooms are built and the recreation area complete it needs someone to supervise and keep order and do the thousand ancillary tasks which keeps all running smoothly. Clann Eireann was fortunate in having two - Dinny Thompson and Bert Henderson, his trusty assistants at all times. When one thinks of Bert in the prime of his life words like honesty, integrity, faithfulness, commitment spring to mind. He was always the eternal optimist in bad days in particular. He always had the merry quip on the way home in the bus to take away our downcast memories of a bad match. His size and strength did us no harm either in tight corners when a dodgy tackle or decision by a referee - shall we say - caused an upset. All his life he was dedicated to his family, his club, his neighbours and friends. He was a character and fixture in our area and lives and it was a great shock to hear of his passing after a prolonged and debilitating illness.

Thus we gathered in the eloquent and reverential presence of Father P J O'Driscoll C.C. St. Peter's on Wednesday 29th January for the Requiem Mass of a good man. In his tribute to him Father PJ, newly arrived from the Diocese of Cloyne in County Cork, while admitting to only a brief acquaintance with Brendan had learned lately of his goodness, honesty and big heartedness. He used a lengthy gentle metaphor concerning his own father in Mallow in Co. Cork, contentedly smoking his pipe in the corner yet contributing much to family, friends and community in his own quiet gentle way. He was able in this good narrative to ensure the Henderson family that Bert would receive a hearty Cead Mile Failte from the generous forgiving Lord. The large attendance of neighbours, friends, including past and present committee and playing members of Clann Eireann G.F.C. was a testimony to the esteem in which Bert was held. The family fully participated in the Liturgy of Readings, Bidding prayers and Offertory procession capably led by his nephew, Mr Joseph Henderson, Vice-Principal, Lismore Comprehensive School.

We offer sincere condolences to his sister Kathleen and his brothers Tommy, Harry, Isaac, Sean and Philip, his nephews and nieces and all his extended family. As a tribute to someone I had the greatest respect for via Tannaghmore Primary School, The Shore Road and Clann Eireann I have selected the words of Patrick Kavanagh, one of Ulster's greatest poets about a road not unlike the Shore Road called: **"Inniskeen Road: July Evening"**.

*The Bicycles go by in twos and threes,
There's a dance in Billy Brennan's Barn tonight,
And there's the half-talk code of mysteries
And the wink and elbow language of delight.
Half past eight and there is not a spot
Upon a mile of road, no shadow thrown
That might turn out a man or woman, not
A football tapping secrecies of stone.
I have what every poet hates in spite
Of all the solemn talk of contemplation
Oh, Alexander Selkirk knew the plight
Of being King 'and Government and Nation,
A road, a mile of kingdom. I am King
Of banks and stones and every blooming thing".
Bert in many ways was the 'King' of our road and club all his days in his coming*

and going.
Go ndeanriaigh dia trocaire ar a anam dilis.

By Brendan McStravickShore Road and Clann Eireann