

## **KEVIN BROWN - GREAT LOSS TO NORTH LURGAN COMMUNITY**

There are some days in a lifetime which sadly only have true meaning when a traumatic event or happening is seared in to consciousness. For a moment time seems to stumble and almost stop - the news is checked and rechecked for verification until it sinks in that a human tragedy has really occurred. Sadly, too often recently it has been so with the untimely deaths of two young sportsmen, Cormac McAnallen and John McCall.

Now in North Lurgan we add to the sad list the name of one of the most respected and loved members of our community, Kevin Brown - master craftsman - loyal clubman - noted Gaelic footballer and good and faithful servant to his community.

There may have been a difference in length of years with the demise of Kevin and the younger members of the community already mentioned but the blow to his community has been equally severe. The unexpected manner of his passing doing what he loved best, working with wood, only adds to the poignan of it all.



Kevin belonged all his life to the 'down the road' area of Shore Road from the area of 'the stones' past Filbin's house and bakery now 'the Woodville Arms', the the corner leading to Tanna'hmore Hill and school. His Beloved parents, Jimmy and May Brown, settled into No 138 Shore Road beside and with good neighbours in a nixed caring community. They lived beside Weirs, Halls, their Smyth relatives, Lewsleys, Lennons, McAlinden's, Mitchels, McNeice, other Lennons, Byrne, Lavery, McCafferty, Maginn, McCorry, McShane and other families who came in and out of the area before and after the second world war.

These families were close knit, noble in their efforts to provide for their children, and diligent workers in local factories, bakeries and building sites. Jimmy and May Brown were no exception to this rule - father a master craftsman in wood - mother working hard in the local factory of Johnston & Allen as a skilled seamstress. Kevin was their eldest son and soon a fine family of boys, including Brian and Noel and sisters Sadie and Mary, completed this loving family.

Like all of us on the road our parents imbued in us, love for our faith, our fatherland, our family and our community. They taught us the necessity of having a good education, to have an opportunity of bettering ourselves in adult life. Thus Kevin found himself in 1939 as the grim warnings of the war abounded in the infants' class in Tannaghmore School, under the benign tutorship of Miss Maggie Kerr.

There I first met him and we progressed via Miss Billie Reid, Miss Nan Murray and Master Alf Murray to the tender mercies of school principal Master Joseph White. We

must have been throughout assessed unbeknownst to us because one day five of us were chosen to sit the first ever NI 11+ examination in the late autumn and early spring of 1948.

We then entered a period of tip top tuition from Master White in the finer points of verbal reasoning and intelligence tests, followed by that of English language and problematic arithmetic. Kevin excelled in all this as he was blessed with a keen intelligence and focus for study. On an April day, we happy band of brothers and sisters Sean O'Neill, Jim McCorry, Bernadette Henderson and Kathleen McAlinden and myself were informed that we had all passed and that we would be moving on the following September to secondary education - rare at the age of 11 in those days.

At decision time because of his love for the technical and practical, Kevin declined a totally academic route but entered Lurgan Technical College for a broader education, focussing in particular on technology and design in woodworking. In truth, he could have followed any particular route so various and skilled were his talents. In his chosen area, he was a diligent student, passing with honours, and on completion of his secondary education became a master craftsman with a master builder, Charles Monaghan & Sons. His work in the finer arts of joinery and cabinet making was recognised by the highest accolade of a Fellowship of the Institute of Carpenters, a rare distinction.

Throughout his working life, and indeed in retirement, he performed to the highest standards, including a spell as a tutor in the art and craft he was a master in. Kevin also reached the heights for club Clann Eireann and for the County of Armagh as one of its best ever Gaelic footballers at midfield. However, the many honours he gained in soaring for the ball never did make him anything other than a humble servant. He was as happy cheering on his club and county from the sidelines and none more so recently when Armagh attained at last the highest accolade. It was lovely to see at his wake his smiling face in the photograph in his orange jersey, hopefully No 9, beside his lifelong pals Seamus McConville, Liam McCafferty and Francis McNeice, on the sod of Croke Park on the day of victory. He was on the football field a complete sportsman - playing fairly and never facing the censure of a referee for unsporting conduct.

He was a true servant to his club, Clann Eireann in all aspects of club life and in particular its spurting life in the broadest sense. He founded the club's Golfing Society - was an accomplished player of basketball, badminton and was equally adept with a snooker cue. His academic prowess also came to the fore as a group of club members who produced a magazine - Glor Clann Eireann. With his ready, incisive wit, he was as natural as the cartoonist. We all wondered who was going to be gently lampooned next. Like many other talented people in his life, he shared his considerable skills liberally with others and for all this dedication to his community, he will be sadly missed.

We gathered on a day, Wednesday 31st March 2004, when spring was chilled with a biting breeze and daffodils danced in gardens along the way to bring his cortege to St Peter's Church in North Street, Lurgan. A guard of honour from his playing days accompanied him to the Church, consisting of Harry Hay, Seamus McConville, Danny McCrory, Brian Curran, Pat McGibbon, Liam McCafferty, Willie McConville, Lawrence

Mitchell and Danny McKavanagh. Other players were close by who remembered him fondly.

He was received by local curate Rev John Byrne CC, St Peter's. In his homily, Fr Byrne spoke of the lovely African legend concerning death and how a star is seen to fall from the sky at the passing of a community member to signify the true worth of that person. He felt the same must be the case with Kevin. He further explained to us how we can be consoled by the Lord as the widow of Niam was in the Gospel story of good news which Kevin followed all his spiritual life - He was a committed religious person, strong in faith and he would now be consoled and made happy in the presence of the Lord. He offered the condolences and sympathy of the parish priest, Rt Rev Monsignor Aidan Hamill PP VG St Peter's and on behalf of the large attendance at Kevin's Requiem.

It was a tribute to Kevin that his beloved family fully participated in the liturgy of the Requiem - the readings eloquently spoken by his nieces, Ashling Brown and Fiona Greene, the Psalm read solemnly by his lifelong friend and fellow club and county player, Seamus McConville. The entrance hymns and final parting music by the male voice choir, along with the organ tonal rendering of the Bard of Armagh reminded us of all the goodness of Kevin in this life.

Thus he was taken to rest in the cemetery of St Colman, with a guard of honour of present players, not too far from the old football field, which he graced in youth. We now offer sincere condolences to his sisters Sadie and Mary, his brothers Brian and Johnny, his sister-in-law Anna and his brother-in-law Michael, his nephews and nieces and family circle.

I am sure when he entered his place of eternal reward to meet his beloved parents perhaps he also had a greeting from his erstwhile companions who had made a little corner for him. Three would be Kate McAlinden from our 11+ cohort and then Chris Creery, Gerry Fagan, Paddy McMahan, Alf and Peter Murray, Gerry Kelly, Seamus McNeice, Dinny Boyle, Bobby Murray, Sean McKavanagh, Liam McCorry, Pat McGibbon, Francie McGibbon, Pat Creery, Dinny Thompson, 'Jaunty' Neil, Ambrose Lavery and Jimmy Rooney and many many other club members who also fought the good fight and tire equally rewarded in the presence of the Lord.

Perhaps they might even beseech Kevin not to try and repair a wee bit of damage to the pearly gates or draw a cartoon of Dinny Thompson and St Peter. As a tribute to Kevin and all that cohort of wonderful companions of an era poignantly passed, but always remembered, I quote from Psalm 22 so well sung by Seamus McConville on the day of Requiem. It applies first and foremost to Kevin and all those living and dead who knew and loved him:

You have prepared a banquet for me,  
In the sight of my foes,  
My head you have anointed with oil,

My cup is overflowing,

Surely goodness shall follow me  
All the days of my life;  
In the Lord's own house, shall I dwell  
Forever and ever.

Go ndeannaidh dia trocaire ar a anam Dhilis.

By Brendan McStravick - classmate, clubmate and neighbour.