

# Tom



'Uachtaran na hEireann,

Eilish and family,

Ladies & Gentlemen

Boys and Girls

Today is a sad day for all of us here and a particularly sad one for Eilish and her family and all who were close friends of this remarkable man Tom McCarty O Hea. The large attendance at yesterday's removal and at his Requiem Mass here today bear witness to the love and respect in which he was held by so many.

But it is also an opportunity for us to contemplate a life so very well led. Tom was an exceptional husband to Eilish - the love of his life; a beloved father to his four sons, John, Justin, Edwin and Thomas; an adoring grandfather to Muireann, Paul, Catherine and Dylan, and his two daughters in law Alissa and Alessandra, his nieces and nephews and grandnieces and grandnephews. He was also the glue that bound his own McCarthy O'Hea siblings together, some of whom like Justin, Frank, John. Dodette, Mick and Paddy who have gone before him and also his sister Gladys who is with us today and his brother Fergus who can't be with us and his sister Grace in far off Australia who I know are with us in spirit.

Tom was a loyal friend to so many people both here in Galway, throughout the length of Ireland and in many far flung corners of the globe. He was a man of great integrity; respect to others was a hallmark of his personality. He had a great style and presence about him and a tremendous work ethic. He had also a roguish sense of fun which endeared him to so many. Throughout his life long work in Hotel and Catering his name became a legend in the Industry. He is particularly associated with the Ardilaun House Hotel and his long relationship with Paddy and Breda Ryan and the Ryan family where he was so highly

thought of by the many staff who worked with him for over 37 years. Tom was an hotelier par excellence, a warm and welcoming host, and many of the young people who trained under him in the Ardilaun, and before that in the Gresham and elsewhere owe their subsequent success to the very high standards he insisted on setting both for himself and those who worked with him.

Toms working relationships were of a unique variety and more often than not a very personal one. I remember in his early Ardilaun days Tom would make time to walk around the grounds to have a chat with his gardener Coley to discuss Coley's plans for the day. Tom always referred to this particular activity of his as "light gardening" or you might say gardening by delegation.

Tomas Aquinas McCarthy O Hea - to give him his full name- had a great interest in history and a special interest and pride in the history of the McCarthy O Hea family. I can give you two good examples of this. His paternal grandfather Patrick O Hea was a member of parliament and private parliamentary secretary to Charles Stewart Parnell. After the fall of Parnell he emigrated to Durban, South Africa where he became active in politics and a founder member of the National party before his death in 1925. During A Galway Skál Club visit to South Africa Tom told me he was very anxious to trace the burial place of his grandfather. With advice received over the phone from the bishop of Durban we set out by taxi and duly found the cemetery and the grave, Somewhere in the family scrap book Eilish will have a photograph which I took of Tom kneeling in front of his grandfather's grave stone.

A second example occurred some years earlier. Tom was assistant manager at the Gresham hotel and plawmaused me into driving his Uncle Justin down to visit his Cork relatives, Uncle Justin had spent all his life working as a lumberjack in Canada and this was his first visit to the old country since his boyhood. So under strict instructions from Tom I gave Uncle Justin a whistle stop tour of Dublin, the GPO, Glasnevin cemetery and other points of interest before heading down to Cork . As we reached Watergrasshill and the long descent into the green fields of the Lee Valley I recalled Tom remarking once that Cork people were always homesick for Cork - even when they were in Cork and that hearing the Banks of my Own lovely Lee was a guaranteed recipe for instant tears of emotion; so I launched into "the banks". Looking sideways after the first verse I was disappointed to see that instead of tears trickling down his cheeks that of Uncle Justin was looking a bit bewildered. It turned out that he had never heard of " the Banks" as it had come into vogue long after his departure to Canada.

Tom was a native of Bandon, a very proud Corkonian and Munsterman to boot but he was also very proud of his adopted county - Galway - and the West of Ireland, Knowing his interest in rugby, and his loyalties to both Munster and Connacht I asked him one day if he didn't feel a bit awkward when Munster played Connacht in the Galway Sports Grounds or down in Limerick's Thomond Park. " Not a bit if it boy" was Toms reply "aren't I always on the winning side". A cute Cork - (u know what - excuse me father) - to the end.

On the same topic of rugby, two weeks ago I found myself sitting in Twickenham stadium awaiting the kickoff of what was to be Ireland's Grand slam when all of a sudden my mobile phone sounded. As things were getting a bit noisy and "The Fields of Athenry" were beginning to ring out around the stadium I turned up the speaker volume on my phone to hear an unmistakable baritone voice Singing lustily "Hail Glorious Saint Patrick, dear Saint of our isle". Tom was a bit off key but that didn't take from the delight of my English

neighbours in the stand. If I could, I would have liked to connect my phone to the public address system as I'm sure there were many amongst the 80,000 attendance who either knew or had heard of the same Tom McCarthy O Hea.

I could remain here all day and recount many great fun occasions in Toms life. He was my friend for 58 years. Many of you don't know this but name isn't really Brian at all. It's actually Tom and always was up to my 16th year and still is to my family and old friends. However in my anxiety to join Shannon Hotel school 58 years ago I was persuaded by our eccentric hotel school director Jorgen E. Blum to change my name to my second Christian name, which I had of course never used, as he already had one Tom in the class and as I was a late replacement in joining the class the the other Tom had preference.. That little scenario has caused confusion in my life ever since - thanks to you know whom- and was to set a pattern for the next 58 years. Tom took great delight in repeating thais story on many future occasions and insisting that he was the "real Tom".

There was only one occasion when I can ever remember Tom being lost for words. it happened during our London hoteling days and Tom and I were were in a small inexpensive Indian restaurant in Soho. After a couple off beers our table talk turned to Irish politics and got rather heated as Tom being a good DeValera supporter was giving my Hero Michael Collins 'down the banks' and getting the better of the argument - which wasn't unusual. We then became aware that the elderly restaurant proprietor was standing over us listening to every word. His voice shook with indignation as he berated Tom for being so disrespectful to Micheal Collins whose military tactics had been adopted by the Army in their fight for Independence. Tom for once was SPEECHLESS and that didn't happen too often.....

“Go neiri an bother leat Tom, and looking forward to meeting you ‘up the road’ “

So Uachtaran, ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls I would like to end this tribute by asking you to rise to your feet and give an enthusiastic round of applause for our great friend and marvellous man - Tom McCarthy O Hea.

with love

Brian Cronin