



# Inagh to China on two wheels

Peter O'Connell

"WE'VE had our moments," Brigid Rynne smiled, as the mist fell relentlessly on the valley in Knockogonell, Inagh.

On April 26, 2015 Brigid and her husband, John, will wheel their motorbikes from their shed and nose them towards Shanghai, before roaring off on their 10,000 mile fundraising trip in aid of The William Winder Rainbow Foundation and UK-based Young Minds.

The couple, who retired to John's ancestral home in Inagh from London, have biked the Route 66 route in the US four times and in 2011 they raised £15,000 for the Poppa Guttman Trust, on a trip from Moscow (in Ayrshire) to Moscow (Russia).

Their first US motorcycle trip was in 2001 and a particular moment lingers.

"We had been staying in Denver. Then we decided we would go to see a pen friend of mine who I've had since I was at school. She lives just outside Dallas. So we thought we'd go south to Texas. Midway, there was a place called Colorado Springs," Brigid recounted.

An uneventful enough day so far. "I am colour defective, so I had sunglasses on," John noted.

"We were riding down the interstate and we came to a junction. In the cities they have a business route. They call it the same interstate number," the now retired Metropolitan policeman recalled.

Brigid was biking just behind her husband but suddenly he deviated, leaving her speeding off alone into the great unknown. For a few miles at least.

"I'm far too close behind him it has to be said but to my great surprise, my husband suddenly peels away and disappears off this ramp. I've gone past it and I can't backtrack. I came off at the exit and I go back to have a look for him. I couldn't see him anywhere, so I got back on the interstate. The phones that we bought didn't work and our CB radios were out of batteries. So I went to a gas station and practically burst into tears. I said 'I've lost my husband. Can you call the highway patrol and find my husband? You'll see him easily. He's on a bright yellow bike and he's got a helmet on,'" she explained to her new friends at the gas station.

"This caused hilarity in the gas station. John had gone back to where we had last seen each other at the junction. Seething he was at this stage. He was furious with me," Brigid added.

John sat and waited.

"Eventually a truck pulled up in front of me and a guy got out and said, 'have you lost your wife? She's at the garage out the road,'" is his recollection of events. He biked towards the gas station where they couple had a frosty enough reunion.

"He had a face like a thunderstorm. He was furious. We probably didn't speak for the rest of the afternoon until we got a speeding ticket later on. It was only years later, repeating the story to somebody, I said to John 'I never really did understand why you were so angry'. He said 'it was because when we parted, I went one



■ Inagh's John and Brigid Rynne will travel from Inagh to China by motorbike, in aid of The William Winder Foundation and Young Minds in the UK.

Photograph by John Kelly

way and you went the other, the last thing I saw you do was wave. You gave me a cheery wave."

Their home in Knockogonell resounded with laughter at the ridiculousness of it all.

Out the back in their garage sits Brigid's BMW R 1150 GS and John's Triumph Tiger 1050. The pristine garage was once John's uncle (Johnny's) house. His Inagh lineage can be traced back to the 1830s.

"Everybody around here is either a cousin, a relative or has known the family going back generations. It's not something I've had before. We were brought up in London. Dad was from Inagh and mother was from Wales, so I had no extended family around me. I'd never known what it was like and, all of a sudden, I came over here and everybody knows us. We're still getting to meet cousins that I never knew existed," he marvelled.

His father Mikey emigrated to London in 1941. "He worked in the docks during the war. He didn't really say too much about it but he said they used to make concrete barges. I suspect they were the Mulberry Harbours they used for D Day. One one occasion, he had to dive down a ladder during an air raid because he'd felt the wind of a bomb going past during the blitz," John said of his father, who died in 1999.

Ending up in Inagh was not on Brigid's to do list, until she got there.

"I've lived all my adult life in London. I loved being able to jump on the tube, go round the corner to the pub or walk to the shops. Just walk everywhere. When we went to France to live after we retired, we had friends who had very rural houses and they had to get in the car to go and buy the baguette in the morning. I was saying 'I can't be doing that. I want to live in a town'. Between the gigs and the reels we came here. We're miles away from anywhere but we know so many more people here. Everyone is just so friendly. We feel so much closer to people. We're very rural here and, yet, we feel so much more part of a community," she has found.

John's uncle left him the original house, which they could not rebuild.

"It was a huge benefit to us because the original house was kind of where the garage is now. There was a sort of mound in front of it and you couldn't see the view at all," Brigid explained.

Instead, they built behind the garage, where the view is breathtaking.

"You can just about see the outline of the Burren in the distance. On a half decent day, you can see about 15 miles. On a really clear day from about

50 yards up the road, you can see the Connemara mountains. With changing weather the outlook changes the whole time," John noted.

"We have this sort of magical thing in the morning. If you get up early, you've got the mist down in the valley. It's extraordinary how it settles and you've got all these little trees and little mounds with houses that just sort of pop out of the mist. It's like a fairytale setting," his wife reflected.

A Croydon boy born and bred, John is not for stirring from Inagh now.

"The thought of living in the country didn't appeal at all but, frankly, now I wouldn't live anywhere else. If anarchy broke out and you had to build a moat and put down your machine gun posts, this is where my last stand would be," he laughed.

Brigid operates a dress-making business from their home in between criss-crossing the globe on their motorbikes. Before moving to Inagh, she worked with the NHS and in PR, amongst other areas. Ironically, it was during a London transport strike in the early 1990s that Brigid regained her love of motorbikes. Years before, she had worked in a dress-making firm, travelling around London on her moped running errands for her employers.

"When we met, he really didn't like motorbikes at all. I was a bit of a curiosity to say the least. We had a terrible transport strike in London in about 1989 or 1990. I'd long since passed my driving test and got rid of the moped. So, suddenly, with no public transport at all, I couldn't get to work. So I thought, 'I know what I'll do, I'll go back to two wheels'. So I got myself a proper motorbike," she said.

Before long, Brigid had trouble successfully easing past motorcycle showrooms.

"Something funny happens to you when you pass a motorcycle test. The long and short of the story is I bought a 650 and that was my main means of transport for a long time. Before that, I had the best tatty car that you've ever seen in your life. It was an old Morris Minor estate. You could see the road running by underneath your feet. It had no floor. So the motorcycle was a lot safer," she surmised.

In his last eight years as a policeman, John ran the teams responsible for implementing the computerised Crime Report Information System. On various work-related missions, he found himself borrowing Brigid's bike and, soon, he too developed a fondness for two wheels.

His retirement present in 2001 was a six-month world

trip, which involved three and a half months crossing America.

"The internet wasn't what it is now. We found a motorcycle dealer in what we thought was Boston. It turned out to be slightly outside Boston. We did a deal over the internet for two motorcycles. We arrived, got a taxi 23 miles out of Boston and picked up our bikes. There was John; suddenly he opened up the motorcycle and we were off. He is totally responsible for all these huge trips that we do. He's a complete fanatic, having hated them when we started," his wife maintains.

John has barely been off the bike since. "It's the best way to see the States. In that trip, we did 15,000 miles in three and a half months. There was no planning to it at all. If you drew a line across the US, it was just like a drunken spider. We went across it three times, up and down, north and south."

On leaving Inagh next April, John and Brigid will pass through Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Mongolia, along with Russia and China. Generally, they will camp and stay in hostels.

"The difficult bit is getting into China with the bike. You have to have a Chinese driving licence, you have to re-register the bikes in China and everything has to be in Chinese. They do bureaucracy like no-

body else on earth," Brigid said.

John's 19 years as a police officer should help if they come across any issues on their way east.

"I was working at Battersea when the riots started in 1981. Then I was in Fulham when the first Notting Hill carnival went off in 1976. I was on the Territorial Support Group for a year, so I did all the Poll Tax riots and the Trafalgar Square riot when that went up. It wasn't my fault honest. I really didn't start them," he joked.

John is confident that money raised in aid of The William Winder Rainbow Foundation and Young Minds will be put to good use.

"With all of the computers and social networking, it's not like when I was young. If you got bullied at school you went home and it stopped. Now, it never stops. It's always there. I think, in terms of education, they're tackling it in the wrong way. What they should be measuring is who is not getting exams. Never mind the bright kids, they'll do well enough anyway. The kids who are not succeeding at school are basically being forgotten and abandoned," he said, as the winter evening drew in rapidly in Knockogonell.

For more information on the Inagh to China trip, visit [www.inaghtochina.com](http://www.inaghtochina.com).

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## Christmas gigs at the Highway

Owen Ryan

THE Highway Bar in Crusheen will be the venue for two shows over the Christmas.

First up on Saturday, December 27 will be Frankie Lane and Paul Kelly.

Frankie was the original front man of the legendary Fleadh Cowboys. In 1993 he was nominated for an IRMA award for his acclaimed album *Dobro*, while in 2004 he was nominated for a Meteor Music Award.

Paul Kelly first came to prominence in 1983 as the fiddler with the Sackville String Band, a five-piece bluegrass outfit. Throughout that decade he concentrated on American music, playing with various bands such as Mick Hanly's Rusty Old Halo and he was also part of the Fleadh Cowboys, as well as appearing on many albums as a session musician.

Paul returned to his roots in the early '90s as a member of the Sharon Shannon Band, playing fiddle and mandolin, while more recently he has played with the Dave Munnelly Band, as well as touring with Frankie.

On Sunday, December 28, it will be the turn of Ger Costello and Band. A Limerick man, Ger released his first solo album *Letting In Water* in November of last year. It was a solo album in every sense, with Ger playing all the instruments, even producing the artwork for the cover.

"I've written songs for bands over the years and different musicians but, for me, this was a new challenge and it was very important for me. I did it on my own, played all the instruments on the record, I produced, I do a bit of painting, so I did the cover artwork as well. It was very exciting and I really enjoyed it," he said.

Regarding the genre, he says the album is "a folk/bluesy kind of thing".

While he says the song are his "babies", he does pick out two that he particularly enjoys. "*Babylon Girls* is one I love performing because the story is good. It's just about a prostitute growing old, basically. I also like doing *The Wisest People*. It's one I wrote a couple of years ago, it's about -isms really, capitalism and socialism and all the different -isms we have in our lives."

He has been very happy with the welcome *Letting In Water* has found. "It's getting great airplay and great reviews. *Rock & Reel* magazine and *Maverick* magazine are two big UK independent publications, they're the ones most musicians would watch for, and it got really good reviews in both of those. It got great reviews in the States as well."

He put together a band with three other musicians to play songs from the album live but taking full responsibility for the album is something he is glad he did. "I've played in bands over the years and if I was going to do this, I wanted to do it on my own and if it failed miserably then I had no one else to blame except for myself."

# Clare woman is The Face of charity calendar

Carol Byrne

A SHANNON woman has become The Face of a new calendar celebrating positive body images, regardless of shape, size or individual hang-ups, which has been released for the Christmas season in aid of Clare's Wish Foundation.

The calendar has been produced by Limerick photography company, Boudoir Darlings, which is run by women for women and creates an artistic interpretation of those it photographs, capturing the beautiful woman within.

In September, they launched a Facebook competition to find 2015's Face of Boudoir Darlings, who would be on all promotional material and would do various shoots throughout 2015. However, as the idea grew, they decided

upon partnering with a charity and Clare's Wish Foundation was chosen.

Clare's Wish is a Limerick-based charity, which was founded in April 2013 in memory of the founder's sister, Clare, who was born with Spina Bifida and passed away aged 24. The charity's main goal is to grant a wish for adults with a terminal or life-threatening condition.

This is the only charity offering this type of service to adults in Ireland. They grant wishes of various kinds, from weekends away, to meeting a famous person, to a bride-to-be who needs to bring forward her wedding.

Claire McCarthy, who is originally from Sixmilebridge but now lives in Shannon, was selected to be the face of the calendar and 11 other ladies were selected to feature for the remaining calendar months.

Claire said, "I was delighted Clare's Wish was the charity to partner with as when I lost my own mother 13 years ago. We looked for something like this and we found nothing. But I remember all too well how something like this would have been a godsend to us.

"The few hours or days of escapism from treatments, hospital, stress and sadness is something anyone who has suffered this would totally understand and I am so proud to be part of this story".

She had heard of Clare's Wish prior to the competition, following another personal connection and was delighted to get involved in the calendar competition.

"I got involved with Boudoir Darlings, who called for ladies of all shapes and sizes, ladies who loved the skin they are in to become The Face of Boudoir Dar-

lings 2015. The concept and the idea really struck a chord with me. I am always saying in life, if you don't like something or think something needs to be done, then get on and do it, do not leave it to others.

"Being a mum to two children, a 19-year-old and an 11-year-old, I am very aware that the world we live in and the things they are exposed to could have a negative impact on them and their confidence. I think the non-stop perfect images they are surrounded by can all be a little too much, so I wanted to get on board with Boudoir Darlings, along with 11 other normal ladies, mothers, daughters, aunts etc and show that beauty comes in many forms and to embrace this and love you for you.

"Being you is far more beautiful than you trying to be someone else. The message behind this is

a fantastic one and all of us feel amazing for doing it," she said.

All 12 ladies featured in the calendar have one common message, Claire said. "We wanted to create a calendar with real women, lumps, bumps, curves and all, with little or no photoshopping, to embrace us for who we are and to maybe inspire others to do the same.

"None of us are perfect, or what we think is perfect, but we are all confident and happy in our skin because we embrace ourselves and we celebrate our beauty in the many forms it comes in.

"I am a mum of two and for me I wanted my daughters to see real ladies being happy and proud, as I feel they are surrounded by the perfect image everywhere they look. I wanted them to know I am a mum, I am curvy, I am short but you know what, that is okay because I am beautiful as me;

leading by example so to speak."

The calendar is currently available directly from Boudoir Darlings, Clare's Wish and in Change lingerie stores in Dublin, Galway and Limerick, as well as in Bellissimo salons in Galway and Limerick.

"The partnership between Boudoir Darlings and Clare's Wish is the perfect partnership for me. I am so proud to support such a fantastic charity and I am thrilled to be The Face of Boudoir Darlings 2015.

"The calendar is just the beginning. Four to five other shoots are planned with a 'love your body' project coming down the line too," Claire concluded.

■ Claire McCarthy is the Face of Boudoir Darlings' charity calendar.

