

Margaret Mussen

“Write this one down Margaret ... it is a good one”



It was a good one, but Margaret wasn't there to write it down ... not in the flesh anyway but she was with us in spirit.

It was just after one o'clock on Tuesday 22nd November, a silence came over the packed congregation gathered in the church of St John the Evangelist in Hilltown as Fintan Mussen made his way to the Lectern on the high altar. In that packed and hushed congregation were Gaels from all over Down and Ulster, officers past and present of Down county Board and Ulster council. They had seen

and heard Finty in action before as a Fear an Ti, a presenter and an orator. They knew of his passion, his knowledge and his love of his subject, they knew that he had few equals when in front of the microphone but now they were to witness his finest hour. We had just celebrated her funeral mass and now Fintan was about to say his last farewell to his beloved wife Margaret.

Margaret Barden was born in Dromore county Down and after attending the local primary school she went to Our Lady's Grammar School in Newry and St Mary's training College from where she qualified as a music teacher in 1962.

Her teaching career brought her to St Columbcille's primary school in Crossgar where she spent her early years before moving to St Joseph's secondary school in Newry which was to be her place of employment for most of her teaching life. From St Joseph's Margaret moved to St Patrick's Primary School in her adopted home village of Hilltown from where she eventually retired. Her last years with pupils was in St Mark's Secondary schools Warrenpoint.

But teaching was not a job to Margaret, it was her vocation. Delivering her homily Canon Kearney recalled his visits to St Joseph's as the "Ecclesiastical Inspector". He knew the young teacher entrusted with the spiritual welfare of the pupils in St Joseph's – her brother had been a classmate in their days together at St Colman's College.

Those were difficult times for teachers in a large urban school. The 'troubles' were at their height – there was rioting on the streets, almost nightly. One of her pupils, a young boy of 16 years was shot dead by the security forces in the street where he lived. "Some day" Canon Kearney said "History will tell the real story of the contribution that our teachers made to maintaining some semblance of normality in the lives of our young people through those troubled years".

Margaret married Finty Mussen on 12th August 1968 and together they set up home and lived happily together for over forty years raising two children Mairead and Lorcan. The Mussens had come out of Dromore generations before and Mrs Mussen Senior had a special 'gra' for Margaret "the girl from Dromore".

It was their mutual love for things Irish which brought them together and when Margaret came to Hilltown the Gaelic way of life which she was to share with Fintan for the next 43 years came easy to her.

Sharing some of those moments with the congregation in St John's on Tuesday Finty recalled the journeys to Croke Park and county grounds all over the country. But Margaret's love of things Irish was not confined to the games. She had a deep passion for Irish music, this brought her to halls, big and small all over the nine counties of Ulster as she acted as an adjudicator in Scor Sinsir and Scór na nÓg and nearer to home many were the young musicians from Clonduff who went down to Mrs Mussen to train for the Instrumental Music and the Ballad Group.

In the two years of research leading to the publication of "Sceal Chluain Daimh" the award winning history of the Clonduff Club Fintan recalled how he and his colleagues Jerry Quinn and Hugh John Harper, deep in papers on the sitting room floor said to Margaret "We need a crest for this book". Twenty four hour later he recalled "we had our crest". Today every young boy and girl, man or woman who wears a Clonduff jersey carries that crest as a lasting memory to Margaret Mussen. Her touch was on that book as it was on the many award winning Down Yearbooks and county final programmes produced by Finty.

Margaret Mussen never craved the limelight but she was at ease in any company. "Margaret was a lady" was the phrase most often heard from the lips of the many callers to the house over the days of mourning before she was laid to rest in Ballymaghera graveyard.

As Fintan shared his farewell with us in that spell-bound congregation we knew that he had shared the pain of Margaret's suffering over the last six months, we knew that the real loss was to himself, Mairead and Lorcan, the grandchildren, the Barden family and the wider family circle but we knew too that the community of Gaelic Clonduff and those who knew Margaret Mussen were saying farewell to a very special person.

No, Margaret was not there to write it down, but she was looking down on Finty, Mairead and Lorcan silently in the background as she had always done. She had made her contribution, she had woven the tapestry, Finty was now delivering, as he had done on so many times with style, with emotion and aplomb.

'Our Maggie' was sitting quietly with the angels and wearing a smile.

Slan abhaile

Ar Dheis lamh De go raibh hanam usal!

JQ

