

**F**OR those of the acting profession, television tags can have varying effects on careers, and while long-term soap parts succeed in preventing the bank manager from making uninvited visits, many of this art form hold a lingering fear that the public are reluctant to accept them in different roles.

"People still remember me as Des Brennan from Glenroe, but I'm not complaining," said Nigel Mercier, sunglasses hanging around his neck from a black cord and adding to an appearance of rugged handsomeness.

"Being type-cast can be less harmful depending on the role you play, and there are unquestionable benefits relating to being part of any television series, for as well as providing regular employment, it gives actors the opportunity of wider exposure."

Nigel was recruited to the cast of the successful RTE saga in rather unusual circumstances.

"I was assisting with the direction of a play in the Project Arts Centre in Dublin and was serving teas and coffees at the interval unaware that amongst the attendance was a tv drama producer in search of an actor to take the part of Des Brennan.

"It appeared that I had the right appearance for the role and following audition, to my surprise, I was in, and spent six most enjoyable and fulfilling years as part of the cast."

A change of policy within the directors of the programme resulted in Nigel, among others, being scripted out of the series earlier this year, but apart from being out of work since, he has few regrets.

"Series like Glenroe must be kept alive all the time. They need changes of direction and producers must experiment to find the right formula. Unfortunately, when you play a mean role people tend to view you as such in your personal life — but it's all part of the job."

**B**ORN in Limerick and spending his formative years in Shannonville in the Ennis Road, Nigel says little about his young days in

the city.

"I always wanted to be an actor, although I was in my late teens before I took part in any major stage performances. I was a member of the Quarry Players for a short while, and co-founded the Limerick Youth Theatre group which won the one-act 'Feile Luimní' drama title in 1982 with a presentation of One Season's King."

Following his primary education, Nigel undertook his secondary studies at St Munchin's College in Corbally.

"It was there, in fact, that I practised much of my acting — mostly when I was seeking time off or when I was trying to cover up for incomplete homework," he said with a broad smile.

While parents frowned on their offspring following careers within the theatre during the higher employment eras of the 1960s and mid-1970s, Nigel's decision to become a full-time professional actor on leaving school in 1978 was greeted with parental encouragement.

"Even at that stage young people had a completely different attitude to life. Their views were not stilted. They had a broader outlook. They were not biased in any way. And if their immediate future did not appear to be as secure as the older generation would have preferred it to be, then so be it. They followed their own direction and ambitions and many within the acting profession continue to do so.

"I have a high regard for the young people of today. I have a great love and appreciation of Limerick and have always been proud to say that I am Limerick. Fortunately, I am equally as happy living in a big city or living in the countryside, and although I left my native city when I was 20, I always loved to return and am now living in Fedamore."

But not for long, added Nigel, who is married to Monaleen girl and antique china restorer, Róisín, as plans are at an advanced stage for a house move to Mungret.

"Things are a bit hectic at present as we are buying a house, and with baby Nicole, who was born on New Year's Day, adding to our joy and taking a lot of our

# Glenroe's Des waits for next big tea break!

By AIDAN CORR



Nigel Mercier . . . people still remember me as Des Brennan, but I'm not complaining.

attention, the past few weeks have been pretty busy."

**F**OLLOWING his departure from Limerick, Nigel attended the Oscar School of Acting in

Dublin, and before his Glenroe break, was cast in a series of varying stage parts.

"The cast of Glenroe all got on very well together, but they never socialised. Some of them I had known and worked with in earlier

stage productions, and I was particularly friendly with Enda Oates, who plays the vicar. Unfortunately there is not enough work in this country for the one thousand-plus members on the union's books, and while RTE provides good employment, 93 per cent remain out of work for most of the year."

For Nigel, unemployment does not result in inactivity, and he admits to being of a very active disposition.

"At present I am out of work and have been for close on a year, but I don't let it get me down. I am not disillusioned with acting. In fact, the worse things get in my life, the more determined I become, which is the ideal temperament for acting. Many of those who attended drama school with me have since dropped out of the profession, but I am determined to face the future with confidence and optimism, and look forward to my next big break."

Nigel's pragmatic approach was refreshing. Sitting in his company there was a feeling that success for the young suntanned Limerickman may not be too distant.

"I get totally bored if I am not doing something. I must always keep on the move and this is one of the reasons that I set up the Limerick School of Acting over a year ago. I love working with kids. They are so receptive to guidance and technique, totally devoid of inhibitions and so full of fun. A lot can be learned from them, from their innocence, their enthusiasm and their vitality. This weekend we put on our annual presentation at the Belltable, when four groups varying in age from six to 18 perform a couple of sketches that I wrote specially for them."

**N**IGEL makes his task appear easy, but is prompted to elaborate that devising the plays can be quite an arduous task.

"Yea, I suppose there is a bit in it alright. You have to devise the plays and the script to suit size, sex and character of the classes, and while I allow a certain amount of improvisation, the students are quite good at following

direction."

With his immediate goal of landing a major film role, Nigel has been paying a keen interest in international castings, but looks back with some slight regret at an opportunity that slipped away through lack of funding.

"I had been cast for a major role in a film with James Coburn, but at the last minute the money was pulled and filming was cancelled."

A similar setback occurred soon afterwards, when, once again, Nigel was chosen for a part in a film with Tom Cruise.

Undaunted, he sees his future in the more lucrative market of the big screen.

"When I am not acting I love writing and have almost completed my first novel, which is total fiction, and tells of a young Limerick boy who sought fame and fortune as an actor in Dublin!"

Nigel's sense of humour comes as naturally as his striking good looks - his general appearance would not be out of place in the jet-set world of film-making.

"I am not that great to learn lines, but once I have to do it I get stuck into the task. I think the process of learning is much the same throughout the acting profession. Personally, I spend a lot of time studying the character role that I am to play and trying to create as perfect a re-enactment as possible."

Nigel, whose brother Robert, works in Waterford, and younger brother, Crofton, is employed with Dell Computers in Raheen, likes music and admits to being "an armchair sports fan".

Had he not decided to ply his trade within the theatre he would, he says, "be running some business or other. My father, David, now lives in New York. He came over to see us when our little baby was born. Mum, Nuala Moorehead, runs the Arthurs Quay Pharmacy."

When the curtain comes down at the Belltable on Sunday night, Nigel Mercier will turn his thoughts to other summer projects. It will proclaim the end of the Limerick School of Acting's 1994 season, but for the former Des Brennan, it will only be the beginning of what promises to be a very busy future.