

# Bestselling author priest's 250-mile trek for charity

SEVERAL YEARS ago, bestselling novelist and scriptwriter, Walter Hegarty, literally vanished from what he describes as "the TV circuit".

With three bestsellers under his belt, and his family all grown up and gone, he decided it was time to get out of "the rut".

Now aged 69, and a Dominican priest in St Saviours in Limerick, he is still resisting the ruts. He is the only Limerickman, so far, to enlist for the 500-mile walk of the Choctaw Indians Trail of Tears from Oklahoma to Mississippi, starting on September 7.

Over 50 Irish people will be taking part in recognition of the Choctaws' humanity to the Irish during the Great Famine and to highlight hunger and injustice in the world today.

The Irish input is being organised by the Dublin-based justice and human rights group, Afri.

The 69-year-old Limerick priest who confesses that he finds walking "dull and boring", and who prefers fast cars, is doing the walk because "every year, I do something that I've never done before. I don't believe in ruts. In the religious life, it is very easy to fall into a comfortable bachelor existence."

Last year, Fr Hegarty ran a huge parish in Louiseanna, and the year before he spent his summer in a London drug addiction centre.

"If you want to be able to help people, and there is a high addiction problem here, you have to get right in there and experience what is happening," he said.

He gave up his job to care for his wife, who had cancer for 11 years before she died. And it was during those years that he became a novelist.

"I wrote for one very simple reason, because I needed the money," he says.

But his first novel, *The Price of Chips*, based in Derry in the 1970s was a huge success, and he found himself a bestseller almost overnight. After two more successful novels, he wrote the BBC series on the industrial revolution in Shropshire.

"Then I just vanished from the TV circuit," he says happily.

In 1980, some years after the death of his wife and when his youngest daughter had left home to study Japanese—she is now aged 28 and vice-president of the International Bank of Tokyo—Walter Hegarty found himself at a crossroads.

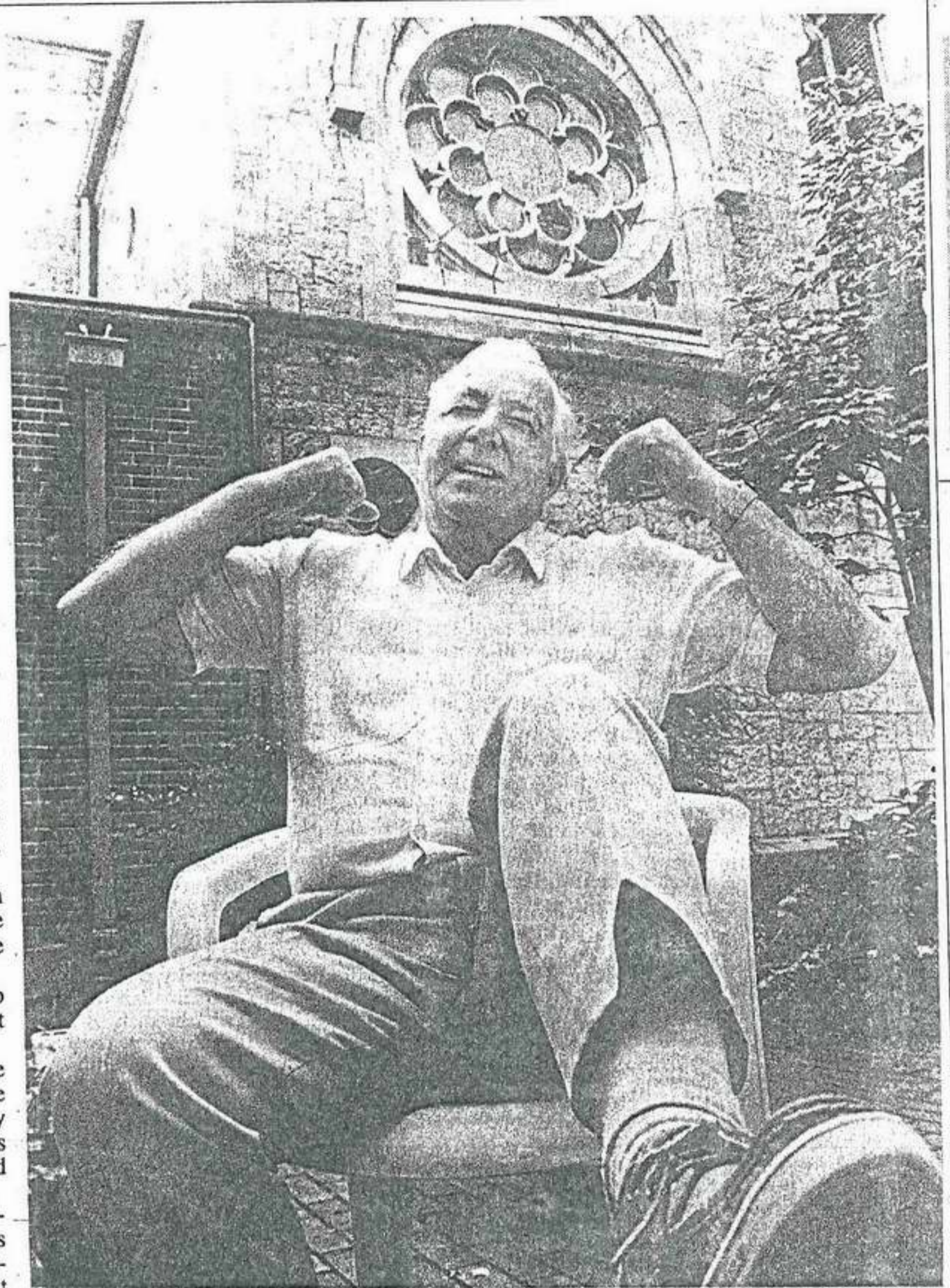
"I had thought about going to South America to head up a world bank project, and I had been in contact with Ted Heath, who put me on to Willy Brandt. But I went to confession in Cork and asked advice and I was asked if I had ever thought of becoming a priest," he says.

He has been based in Limerick for nearly three years now and loves the city.

He went on a retreat to Cork last week and did a bit of practice at the walking.

"To tell you the truth," he says mischievously, "I'll be cheating a bit. I'll be only walking 250 miles. That's what everyone is doing, and I think I can do that."

Fr Hegarty is now looking for sponsorship for his epic walk, and anyone interested can contact him at St Saviour's Dominican Priory, Limerick.



Tired out . . . Fr Walter Hegarty relaxes after getting in some practice for his long trek. □ Picture: OWEN SOUTH

## Carruth's mystery visit as O'Mara misses glory

YESTERDAY, a glory day for Ireland, was a bad day for Limerick's Olympic hopes, as Frank O'Mara faded over the final laps, and failed to make the final of the 5,000 meters.

And as the success of boxing star Michael Carruth was being toasted in Sarsfield Barracks, it has left the Army with something of a mystery — the fighter was stationed for three days. And now nobody, not even Army records can come with a reason for his appearance in Sarsfield Barracks.

Meanwhile, few people thought talented Ennis Road man Frank O'Mara, would have any difficulty making tomorrow night's final, and Frank appeared to be run-

ning a good race, shadowing the leaders as they went through the motions in a slow-paced heat.

But in the final two laps he seemed to be struggling to keep up, falling to the back of the five-man leading group. A storming finish closed the gap on the fourth placed runner, and Frank was chasing down the third man in the race as they crossed the finishing line, but he just didn't have enough reserves of speed or strength.

The heat was won by Bikila of Ethiopia in 13 minutes 32.93 seconds. Frank finished just over a second-and-a-half behind the third man, M Boutayeb of Morocco. Only the first three across the line were guaranteed a spot in the final, with the four fastest non-qualifiers also going

forward.

Frank had to wait anxiously for news of whether or not he was one of the fastest losers. But as the third heat was run faster than Frank's second heat, hopes faded. He missed out on qualifying for the final by less than two seconds.

Ireland's other two competitors, Paul O'Donovan and John Doherty, also failed to qualify, and in the 1,500 meters Marcus O'Sullivan was found wanting when the pressure was on over the final lap.

This will be the first Olympics in years in which Ireland does not have a representative in the middle-distance finals.

But there was better news in the boxing arena, where Michael Carruth and Wayne McCullough qualified for Saturday's finals, where

they are guaranteed at least a silver medal each. There was special interest in the event for at least some of Limerick's inhabitants.

But while those in Sarsfield Barracks who remember Corporal Michael Carruth from his (few) days here six years ago are toasting his Olympic success, Army chiefs in Dublin are scratching their collective heads in puzzlement.

What they can't figure out is why the Barcelona boxing finalist was transferred to Sarsfield Barracks for three days in 1986.

Stationed, since he enlisted in 1985, with the 2nd Infantry Battalion in Cathal Brugha Barracks, Dublin, he was transferred on October 28, 1986, to the 2nd Infantry Battalion in Sarsfield Barracks, and

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