

Limerick people for Limerick people

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90p

Limerick Bill Limerick

Is this the picture of misery in the lanes?

By RON KIRWAN

AUTHOR Frank McCourt is a real Walter Mitty character, claims the man he worked for before leaving Limerick for America.

Despite being employed by William Street shopkeeper Jackie Brosnan for four years, the award winning novelist never mentioned it in *Angela's Ashes*.

In his best-selling book about life in the lanes of Limerick in the thirties and forties, Mr McCourt says: "I'm seventeen, eighteen, going on nineteen, working away at Eason's". Instead, it seems, he was repairing bicycles in Mr Brosnan's shop in William Street.

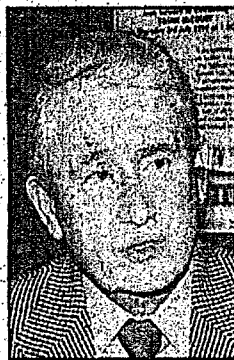
Nor does he mention that he was a patrol leader in—and played the drums in the band of—St Joseph's Catholic Boy Scouts in the early 1940s, even though he reports that his was "a childhood of extreme hardship and suffering in... Limerick slums".

Mr McCourt, who first came to Limerick when he was four, returns next Tuesday to receive an honorary doctorate from the University of Limerick, where he will become writer-in-residence.

"I'm not surprised that Frank forgot to mention he worked for me in the shop for three to four years. He was a real Walter Mitty character



Frank McCourt as a scout in Limerick in the 1940s



Today: Frank McCourt and Jackie Brosnan, scout master. (LL)

and had a great imagination" laughed Mr Brosnan, 83, still living in Limerick.

Mr Brosnan's shop was at 7 William Street—now occupied by Ryan's Locksmiths—and he sold records, repaired bikes, radios, prams and lots of

household items.

Frank spent teenage years repairing bikes and working in the shop right up to his departure for America when he reached his 19th birthday.

Mr Brosnan recalled meeting him first in St

Joseph's Scouts around 1942:-

"I met him when I joined St Joseph's Scout Troop as an adult when Frank was already a young member. That was early in 1942 so Frank was eleven at the time. He had the scout uniform which cost £1/10- (£1.50) in those days and Malachy and Michael joined him in the troop afterwards.

"The McCourts were poor all right but no poorer than most people in Limerick at the time.

"I remember going to parents of lads who hadn't the money for uniforms and arranging for them to pay us weekly for the uniform on the quiet but I never had to go to McCourts.

"He seemed to enjoy the scouts and was very attached to Fr Stephenson at that time. Anyway he never mentioned being in the scouts or Fr Stephenson either in his book, or so I've been told.

"I'm not too sure if he did because I only read a part of *Angela's Ashes*. I found the bad language too hard to take and it really surprised me to read it," added Mr Brosnan, who was to become scout leader with St Joseph's and later Scout Commissioner, in the mid-1940's.

"It was because of bad language that Frank came to work for me. He said that the language in Eason's was too bad for

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from' priest not



Malachy, Michael and Frank McCourt, in the back row, extreme left, of this 1940s picture of St Joseph's Scout Troop in Glenstal Abbey. Scout Commissioner, Jackie Brosnan is on the right of the second row from the back.

Further light on Angela's Ashes



Boating at Youghal during the 1940s with the scouts of St Joseph's.

McCourt

FROM P1

him to put up with. So I took him on and he stayed with me until he went to America.

"What an imagination Frank had. I remember when he reached 18 the American Consulate in the Crescent sent for him. When he came back he told me what happened.

"I went in," said Frank, "and they asked me how many steps I had come up to the door. So I told them and they said they wanted me to join the FBI," he told me."

Mr. Brosnan recalled that Frank had said his first job was to keep an eye open for communists in Limerick.

"Then he told me one day that he was going to a meeting of the communists that night and he would have a gun and would force them to stop holding their meetings. The next day he said he went and they agreed to stop the meetings," chuckled Jackie.

"I remember he showed me letters he wrote to George Marshall, the author of the Marshall Plan, and he told me to hold onto them for him. They were all about communism.

"I remember him playing the drum in the scouts band during the intermission of Cecil Sheridan and Mixer Reid's show at the Lyric one night. Malachy was in the band as well... but he (Frank) forgot to mention that too in the book," said Jackie.



George Wright, Eddie Donn at George's Head, Kilkee, in

