

Fiona may represent Ireland in Miss Universe

By TRISH O'DEA

MISS Limerick, Fiona Mullally, may be representing Ireland in the Miss Universe competition after the decision by Miss Ireland promoter, Kieran Murray, not to enter Miss Ireland, Niamh Redmond, in the competition.

Niamh, who represented Dublin in the Miss Ireland contest, expressed her shock at Mr Murray's phonecall informing her that she would not be representing her country in the competition.

Mr Murray was not available this week for comment on the controversy.

It is believed, however, that Mr Murray does not have to choose Miss Ireland to represent Ireland in the competition.

Fiona Mullally was second runner-up in Miss Ireland 1997, and is eligible to be chosen.

Originally from Athlone, Fiona was chosen as Miss Limerick when she was studying construction at Limerick RTC.

She is at present working with Eddie Shanahan's The Agency in Dublin.

Second man is found dead on streets

GARDAI at Henry Street had still not released the name of the 35-year-old man, said to be from Limerick, who was found dead in a porch on O'Donnell Street, shortly before 8am this Thursday morning.

He had been covered by a blanket and had apparently slept out overnight. His body was removed to Limerick Regional Hospital by ambulance where he was formally pronounced dead on arrival. A postmortem was due to be held.

Mixed reactions smoulder among the embers of Angela's Ashes

BY ANTHONY GALVIN

TIMES were rough, said Pat Dillon, agreeing with Frank McCourt's assessment of Limerick two generations ago: it was a miserable childhood.

Mr McCourt's harrowing account of a childhood of poverty and deprivation won hearts across the world, but has divided people in Limerick.

"They all have different opinions, and some don't want to remember those times," said Tom O'Connor, barman in South's, where Mr McCourt downed his first pint at the tender age of 16.

But the overall assessment seems to be that the author deserves his success after enduring the pains of his early years.

"Fair play to him. I wish I had done it," said one woman who grew up in similar poor circumstances.

The McCourts lived in a number of locations around Limerick, including Schoolhouse Lane, off Little Barrington Street. The original houses are all gone now, levelled in the Seventies to make way for small modern bungalows.

"There is no comparison between what you see now and what was there then," said Ray Greaney, who works in the lane, and has done for the past 27 years.

"Even in the early Seventies what little houses were left were in poor condition. There were a few old people holding out, and when they died the houses

were levelled."

Pat Dillon is in his Seventies and remembers the hard times before the war. He was a few years older than Frank McCourt, but remembers all the places and people Mr McCourt writes about.

"Times was rough, and there was no employment here. Lots of city men went out the country to work on farms to earn a few bob," said Mr Dillon, who grew up on Wolfe Tone Street, and went to school in Leamy's on Hartstonge Street.

"I used to play on Barrack Hill, where the McCourts lived for a while. I remember seeing the Welsh Regiment marching out of the barracks to the Protestant Church.

"The whole country was relying on the St Vincent De Paul at that time, and the Vincent De Paul had little to give them, not like it is today. Everyone at school was badly shod, or not shod at all, and things were tough at home. Even our meals weren't certain.

"It was a game of swapping clothes. Children grew out of cloths and they were passed on to other neighbours. Only the rich could afford coal. It was all turf.

Arthur's Quay was all turf where the park is today.

"It was a regular occurrence to go down scavenging for coal on the Dock Road, and to go to the dump rooting out bits of firewood.

"I remember the shores running along the lane. The smell of chlordelime, the disinfectant used for

Tom O'Connor pulling a pint in South's Bar: "Uncle Pa comes in and tells me sit next to him against the wall. The barman brings the pints, Uncle Pa pays, lifts his glass, tells the men in the pub, This is my nephew Frankie McCourt, son of Angela Sheehan, the sister of my wife, having his first pint, here's to your health and long life, Frankie, may you live to enjoy the pint but not too much. "I tell him I want to stand him a pint with my last wages from the post office but he says, No, take the money home to your mother and you can stand me a pint when you come home from America flushed with success and the heat from a blonde hanging on your arm."

shores on an empty stomach going to school in the morning..."

Mr Dillon's nose still wrinkled at the thought, half a century later.

School ended with Leamy's, as few went further.

"No one went beyond primary school. Everyone was mad to get a job - delivering milk, delivering papers, going out the country to help farmers. I knew a lot of guys who started as messenger boys, then started their own business in the after years. They were sensible enough."

Times were so tough that emigration was often one of



Parents threaten to make school election issue

By JOHN O'SHAUGHNESSY

THE residents of Castletroy are growing impatient with Minister for Education, Niamh Bhreathnach.

They claim that nearly a year has passed since the Castletroy School Action Group wrote to the Minister requesting a second level school for what is the fastest growing suburb of Limerick city.

There are now upwards of 18,000 people living in the area, and projections are that the population will expand to 22,000 within the next few years.

Unless there is a swift response, they plan to make it an election issue.

Despite an assurance that investigations would be completed by Christmas, the group have expressed their disappointment that no reply has been received from the Department of Education as to their decision on the matter.

"There is no good reason for the Minister to delay making an announcement," said spokeswoman, Patricia Forde Brennan.

The case for a second level school for Castletroy, she said, was overwhelming.

"Indeed, the figures very much support the provision of a second level school for Castletroy. The town of Clonmel, which has a lower population than Castletroy, has four second level schools. We feel that we are being discriminated against."

The group has now called on the Minister to announce her decision within the next fortnight.

"The Minister should not play politics with our children, their education and their future," stated Ms Forde Brennan.

The action group have already won the support of local TDs, senators and councillors.

A site for such a second level school has been earmarked close to the

would say he has exaggerated conditions. I think that when he started the book he wanted to write about the things that hurt him. But I don't believe times were as rough as he wrote.

"I've discussed this with people who grew up with them, and they say that the McCourts were ok."

He added that TB was rife in the Thirties, yet none of the McCourts succumbed to the disease.

Mr Morrissey dismissed claims that Frank McCourt's father would have been discriminated against because of his Northern origins.

his first pint, described in the book.

At least one man he grew up with, and went to school with, is still a regular in the premises, now owned by David Hickey.

"Frank McCourt was here when he was making a tour to promote the book," remembers barman Tom O'Connor.

"I'd say he's found an awful lot of changes in Limerick from his previous experiences. There are normally a few in the bar who knew him, and one guy who went to school with him. They all have a different opinion, and some don't want to remember it."

on arrival. A postmortem was due to be held.

Gardai say that, although he was known to them and was from Limerick, they still had at that stage to contact relatives; some of them possibly living outside the country.

This is the second such death in Limerick city in recent weeks. Several weeks ago, the body of a man in his 50s was found in a laneway off Upper William Street having died overnight. He had been ill for some time.

'Service better than jail'

COMMUNITY service is much more satisfactory than jail for certain offenders, according to Sean Moriarty of the Limerick Community Service office. Since its inception in 1985, there has never been an offence committed by a person working with the community service in Limerick. It costs 25 times more to send someone to jail than to enrol them in community service. A total of 139,530 hours of community service have been carried out by offenders in the Limerick area since the service was introduced in 1985.

Wedding

MATTIE and Vera Kennedy, of 48, Lenihan Avenue, Prospect, have celebrated their golden wedding anniversary by returning to St Mary's Church, where they were married 50 years ago, for a special Mass. Their daughter, Susan, travelled from New York to be with them for the occasion.

Car

A UNIT of Limerick Fire Brigade quickly brought a car fire at O'Malley Park under control, just after 11pm this Monday night.

Windows

A LARGE number of windows were broken at Christ the King Boys National School late last Sunday night.

Crowdwell they'll all hit you."

And now Parish author in exile, John, follows in Frank's footsteps

A LIMERICK writer, now living in Florida, is about to tell his life story - and the story of Drunken Thady and the Bishop's Lady as well.

John O'Callaghan, a native of St Mary's Parish is writing an autobiographical novel.

As part of it, he tells the story of how he came to know of the story of Drunken Thady. The most interesting aspect of the story is that he tells the tale using the language and inflections as might be used by a six-year-old schoolboy in decades gone by.

Here follows the relevant passage of his work-in-progress:

"I go to the Model School. We learn everything in the Irish language, except for one hour a day for English speaking. Other than that, we are not supposed to speak English, even in the playground. And our mean old teacher, MacGilbourne beats us with the cane if he catches us speaking it.

"We live in a Corporation council house in St Mary's Park. That's at the other end of the city. I have to walk about six miles to school. In the way I have to cross over the Shannon river at Thomond Bridge, and cross back again over the Wellesley Bridge in about two miles. The Wellesley Bridge is a more grand bridge, but Thomond Bridge is more interesting on account of Drunken Thady's fingerprints.

"I am six, and it were my dad what first showed me Drunken Thady's fingerprints on the silver grey granite stone of Thomond Bridge. It were Dad who lifted me up and let me put my hands right on top of where Drunken Thady's fingerprints is.

"And it were Dad who also told me the whole story about the Bishop's Lady, who was really the Devil in disguise, and how she fought with Thady and tried to drown him and murder him.

"I'll tell it to you. Drunken Thady liked to drink and play cards with his best friends. He lived near us in St Mary's.

"Well, it happened just like this, see:

"One dark and stormy night, Thady was over in Thomondgate, playing cards and drinking, and that, with his friends. The clock in St Munchin's Church was just striking midnight when he was right in the middle of the bridge. It was there he met the Bishop's Lady, who was really the Devil dressed in disguise.

"Anyhow, they has this big fight and Thady is losing on account of he's drunk, and she's the Devil. After a while she gets him up on the high wall and tries to toss him over.

"Then the Bishop's Lady, who was wearing a long white flowing dress with no shoes, gets his legs over the wall, and has him with his feet kicking in the air. And there he is, hanging on to the stone wall with both hands, and screaming to be saved at the top of his lungs and all.

"Thady pleads with her and begs her not to kill him but she stamps her feet on his fingers again and again and again. And that's how his fingerprints got imprinted on the stone. Then she gives him a big kick in the head with her right foot and over he goes. Down, down and down he goes.

"Then he hits the dark water with a big splash. Then he goes down three times, and the dark, swirling current quickly carries him swiftly away. And nobody sees him in the dark, or hears his cries.

"He is carried down the river about a mile. In the morning, they find his body on the rocks at Curraghour falls.

"And, thanks be to God and our Blessed Mother, St Joseph, St Patrick and all the saints, he was only half-drowned. After they pumped him at

Barrington's Hospital, down on the end of Mary Street, they found Thady was still alive to tell the tale. And that's how it all got out about what really happened to him that night. Dad said the experience made Thady mend his drunken ways after that. Well, it would, wouldn't it, especially if it happened to you."

Mr O'Callaghan also writes short stories. This one, also with a local flavour, is entitled simply "Déjà vu".

"Everybody has dreams, although not everybody always remembers them. My guess is that most dreams are glimpses of what goes on every night as the brain sorts through the day's sensory input in an attempt to make sense of it before filing it away. On occasions, I've even noticed that my dog seems to be dreaming.

"Some dreams can be strangely prophetic. Maybe that's what Shakespeare referred to when he said: 'Coming events cast their shadows before them.' That's what this story is all about.

"I have this recurring dream. There is this large Georgian mansion. It is filled with beautiful antique furniture and oriental carpets. Oil portraits hang on the walls and, as I walk about the house, I get a strange feeling that the long-dead sitters are somehow trying to communicate something really important to me. There is never any more to it than that and, even if there were, I have never been able to consciously recall it.

"One day, while I was driving down this particular country lane on the outskirts of Newport, a beautiful small market town in County Clare (sic), Ireland, I suddenly came face to face with the identical house that I had seen again and again in my dreams. It was a beautiful Georgian mansion, but now, sadly, needing renovation. It had tall

casement windows and green painted shutters. The walls were covered with ivy, and then house and grounds were surrounded by a 6ft tall, spiked ornamental iron railings.

"I tried the handle on the double-wide iron gates and, with a squeaky noise, they swing open. As I walk up the brown pebble-strewn driveway, I am struck by the fact that everything seems so familiar. I really do know this house.

"I recognise the fan-shaped glass panel over the door; the dark-green Connemara marble pillars; the three grey granite hand-cut Wicklow stone steps leading up to the door; the iron boot-scrappers, set in stone, at either side. Somewhat nervously I raised the heavy brass door-knocker, and let it fall three times. Rat! Tat! Tat!

"I was beginning to think that there was nobody at home, and was about to leave, when the door slowly opens. An elderly man stands there, staring wild-eyed at me. He seems over-anxious, and more than a little bit afraid of me.

"What do you want from me?", he cried.

"Do you think I could speak to the owners for just a moment?" I say.

"No, they're not in," he replies. "They don't care to live here anymore. The house had been up for sale for the past five years. It's been sold three times already, but the people always back out when they hear about the ghost."

"Is the house really haunted," I asked. "Have you, personally, ever seen or heard anything strange?"

Very slowly, he raises his right hand and points his finger accusingly at me and says:

"I've seen you several times in these rooms, and when I get up close to you, you always disappear. You are the ghost!"

times were so tough that emigration was often one of the few options - but not always legal emigration. Stowing away on ships was a poor man's way of travelling.

"I remember once a fellow with me was smoking, and they saw the smoke coming up a funnel, and the captain pulled in to Fenit and we had to get off and walk home, sleeping in sheds along the way."

One character mentioned in Angela's Ashes was Ab Sheehan, an uncle of Frank McCourt. The McCourts ended up lodging with him. He had been dropped on his head as a child, and was a bit simple. He loved a pint of stout and his unintelligible song, the Road to Rasheen. He made his living selling The Limerick Leader on the streets.

"Leader-O, that's what we called him. That was how he pronounced the Leader when he sold it," remembers Mr Dillon.

Frank McCourt is remembered in South's Pub as well. It was here he had

want to remember it."

One who does want to remember, and who is surprised at Frank McCourt's recollections, is barber Eddie Morrissey.

"I don't believe that poverty ever existed," he said.

Mr Morrissey grew up on Joseph Street, and knew Frank McCourt's three brothers Malachy, Alfie, and Michael, as well as their mother. He was in the scouts with the three brothers. Frank was a few years older than him.

Mr Morrissey said: "I don't remember his early days on Windmill Street, but they were as well off as any of us in the lanes. There was a lot of work on the docks, and the family lived reasonably well.

"Things were relatively good. Everyone was in the same situation. Most of that side of Limerick were fed by offal, packet and tripe, and rabbit. With half-a-crown you'd feed half the road.

"There was an abundance of cheap, good food. I

Northern origins.

"The Confraternity was very strong in those days, and had a terrible influence as regards jobs. But if his father was a Catholic he would have had no problems. I wouldn't think it would have been held against his father that he was from Northern Ireland."

Leamy's school was not as tough as Frank McCourt claimed, and it was not so difficult to get into secondary school, according to Mr Morrissey.

"Leamy's had a reputation as a soft school. There was a man in the barber shop yesterday and he said that the thrashings in Leamy's never happened - and he was older than Frank. You got the odd clip, but we all did. And I don't believe the Christian Brothers would refuse you because you were poor. He could have got into Sexton Street if he had wanted to. I can't see it that he was turned away.

"But Frank has put his story together well, and fair play to him for that."



Schoolhouse Lane, off Little Barrington Street: "When we get home the room is empty. There are empty stout bottles on the table and the fire is out. You can see the hollow left in the pillow by Eugene's head. You expect to hear him and see him toddling across the room, climbing up on the bed to look out the window. Dad tells mam he's going for a walk. She says no. She knows what he's up to, that he can't wait to spend his last few shillings in the pubs.

"Malachy and I are back in the bed where Eugene died. I hope he's not cold in that white coffin, though I know he's not there any more because angels come to the graveyard and open the coffin and he's far from the Shannon dampness that kills, up in the sky in heaven with Oliver and Margaret where they have plenty of fish and chips and tcf-fee and no aunts to bother you, where all the fathers bring home the money from the Labour Exchange and you don't have to be running around to pubs to find them."

marked close to the University of Limerick.

Flat tenants' lucky escape

UP TO about eight people had a narrow escape, during the early hours of this Thursday morning when they evacuated their apartments at 57 Henry Street, after smoke alarms had gone off.

A fire had broken out downstairs, and they had to make their way down the stairs, to the street outside, as smoke began to rise.

The outbreak, which occurred at 4.26am, was confined to a television room at the front of the building, on the ground floor, which was extensively blackened by smoke. The sole occupant of that apartment also escaped.

Three units of Limerick Fire Brigade, under acting station officer Don McCarthy, arrived on the scene to find that everybody had evacuated, and the blaze was put out within a minute.

The brigade remained at the scene until after 5am. Some minor smoke damage was caused to other parts of the building, mainly the stairwell.

Drugs call

A CONTINUING presence of gardai in city housing estates to curb open drug dealing has been called for by Alderman Sean Griffin.

He said it was not good enough for the gardai just to surround major incidents as they happened.

"Drugs are now being sold openly on sports pitches, in some parts of the city, while young boys are playing football," he claimed at City Council. "The gardai have a major role to play in preventing this behaviour."

First Aid

A BASIC first aid course will be held this Saturday and Sunday, 9am to 5pm, at the Davis Street headquarters of the Order of Malta. It will include lifesaving and CPR; ph: 314250.