The Leader Interview: Win Harrington

WIN Harrington has devoted her life to the underdog, whether that meant setting up a home for the disabled or championing women's rights. Today she is still interested in politics and tells AINE de PAOR that her mother, Edith, was a great role model.

Win, lose or draw she is one tough cookie.

THROUGHOUT her life Win Harrington has followed her own path; she was one of the first women elected to Limerick City Council and went on to open the Cheshire Home for the disabled.

Then in her retirement, when most people like to put their feet up, Win enrolled at college, studying for two degrees at UL. That's what she is doing at the moment, taking a course in Women's Studies, and making it her business to retrieve from obscurity important but some-

House for women Limerick women. said: "The people of Limerick were extremely good—they surrounded her and supported her." A collection was taken up and £165—a massive sum in those days—was gathered for the family. Edith had nowhere to turn, her own family's fortunes had declined in England and there was nobody who could bail her out. She decided to go into business and before her last child Win was born, she had Kilkee and Mullaline up and running. She educated all of us out of that," said Win. "We went to the Loreto Abbey in the disabled by providing a small group with a home where the emphasis was on normal family life. The movement went a long way towards revolutionising the care of the disabled.

Leonard Cheshire was himself a war hero who answered the call for help from a fellow ex-service-man who was dying of cancer and had nowhere to go.

Credo, Win wanted to make Rathfredagh House a true home, where residents lived more as an extended family than anything else. By the time Win stepped back from the Cheshire home ten years had passed and she was ready for a fresh challenge.

It was the first time in the 800 year history of the council that it happened. Through her work as a councillor she quickly came up against some pressing problems like the fact that married women who had gone on to have a child by another man were not being allowed to register the birth in his name. Win brought the problem to Women's Studies today. It's a subject she is very passionate about and loves doing assignments on Limerick women who may have been a little neglected. She did an essay on the work of Frances Conells and says she got a great kick out of introducing her to the other members of the class who may not have heard of the former mayor. Win also
Through her work as a councillor, she quickly came up against some pressing problems like the fact that married women who had gone on to have a child by another man were not being allowed to register the birth in his name. Win brought the problem to national attention and lobbied to have the rules changed.

In Sweden 50 per cent of the seats in parliament are reserved for women and France is about to bring in a similar parity law for parliament. It is something Win would like to see happening in Ireland which is a long way from having equal representation.

"If you look at what Bertie Ahern did after the last election when it was his privilege to nominate 11 people of his choosing to the Senate - he nominated just two women. He should have taken on board the messages of the 1995 All Women's Election."