

## A Charmed Existence



I'm blessed to work in a profession which, despite its current challenges, remains incredibly rewarding.

SOME moments remain happily vivid in the mind's eye, and as I inch towards middle age, I've found myself dwelling on more than a few of them these past few months.

Aged 17, sat in my black and grey Carrick CBS uniform, my face dotted with spots and with four teeth studded in 'tracks', I came through my first mock interview before a panel of three teachers with flying colours.

The career recommended for me? "A sports journalist," the interviewing chair heartily decreed.

Informing my parents of this disclosure upon my arrival home, both were pleased, although my father advised: "Just stay away from crime reporting. Too dangerous."

In a few weeks' time, thousands of students will receive their Leaving Certificate results, tallying up thereafter the points which shall determine not only the next three to four years of their lives, but, professionally at least, the next three to four decades.

I can't say what I'd be up to in 2028 was high on my agenda when I counted and then re-counted my 'LC' points all of 16 years ago (my second spin on the Leaving roundabout) but when I arrived at the golden tally of 455, I was overjoyed. Journalism School was on the agenda.

The bright lights of Dublin beckoned. Between 1998 and 2002, I was a thrilled and, at times, all too dedicated a student at DIT Aungier Street.

And I was doubly blessed when, in the summer of 1999, John O'Connor took the time to reply to my application for work experience at this august publication, and to all intents and purposes, I've been here ever since! To this day I consider journalism to have been my calling, my vocation, and life as a newspaper man has brought me to places and introduced me to people I'd never otherwise have visited or met.

Since my father had brought me to see Waterford United face Bordeaux in Cup Winners Cup action under the Kilcohan Park lights in 1986, the idea of writing about sport first took root.

As I reached double figures, which luckily coincided with the growth of live GAA coverage on television and the rise of the Republic of Ireland soccer team under Jack Charlton, sport tickled me pink.

With English second only to History on my list of favourite subjects at school, I genuinely loved essay writing - the stars were already aligning! The 'what I did during my summer holiday' effort we've all doled out when the time so demanded it by our new teacher was, at least in hindsight, always tackled with as much fervour and enthusiasm as my pre-pubescent self could muster.

I loved writing; I'd go so far as to say I actually adored handwriting itself, although it's a skill which has greatly receded due to a decade and a half of hastily scribbling quotes into my notepad.

By the time secondary school beckoned in September 1992, I'd spent a great deal of that summer compiling notes, drawing sketches and recording the events of the European Football Championships in Sweden and, a few weeks later, the Barcelona Olympics.

I can recall one glorious day when the elements were of utter irrelevance due to the 8am start of the swimming heats, followed by boxing, followed by gymnastics, followed by more boxing and rounded off by track and field.

No less than 16 hours after I'd turned on the television and picked up my biro, pausing only to answer nature and devour a plate of new spuds, nothing was going to come between me and my sport - and my writing about it. That I was catering for an audience of one was of no great consequence.

I simply loved observing the highs and lows of athletic endeavour and then recalling it for my own subsequent perusal.

At a time in my life when I should have been paying more attention to girls (they terrified me and, two decades later, in many ways they still do!) and more teenage-oriented derring-do, I was too busy plotting my long-term future.

The Junior and Leaving Certs would have to be tackled, but I knew what I had to do, dashing the hopes of both grandmothers, who believed my devotion to rosary reading and altar serving would lead to my answering a different type of calling! And, some 15 years after I first clanked out a story for The Munster Express, journalism remains my dream job, despite all the

challenges the print trade currently faces.

I just absolutely love what I do. I wrote this particular piece on my laptop on the bank of the Kings River in Kells, County Kilkenny, another stunning little gem in this stunning region of ours (40 minutes from Waterford city).

To the sound of water cascading down a weir, under wispy cloud and fading July sunlight, I took in the air, savoured the view and counted my blessings.

Like every job going, journalism has its fair share of drudgery, but the perks of the job: the people you work with, those you're blessed to meet, the places the job has brought me (South Africa twice for example), have, at times, proven incredible.

You never forget your first love. In hindsight, it's clear what mine was. And it's how I earn my crust today.