

Looking back & Looking forward

PAUL MOONEY

When he started out, Clem Jacob said he had the foundation of a good rental company.

"We had the equipment, knowledge, we had backing of our suppliers, we had potential customers, we had vans and trucks bought and we had the most important ingredient, the perfect staff. What could possibly go wrong!" he said.

"What could possibly go wrong," Clem said again with a sort of a smile on his face. "I'll tell you now what could possibly go wrong – the second week in September 2008 was a horrific week.

"Waterford were beaten in the All-Ireland Final and the world economy started to come tumbling down around us. I didn't know what was worse. Just at that time it was the hurling that affected me more, but I very quickly had to put that to the back of my mind," said Clem.

"Our company had experienced dramatic growth over the first two years and now it was starting to fall apart very, very quickly.

"We were all set up to do a certain level of business and now within a matter of weeks we lost over 50% of our turnover.

"And to make things even worse, we had about 50% of our customers who couldn't afford to pay us the money that they owed us and not a blessed thing could I do about it. It all happened so quickly and it was absolutely horrific."

Clem continued: "My next big problem were the banks. I owed a lot of money to a number of banks and I simply could not afford to pay them what I had agreed to pay them".

"Straight away I sat down with them and told them exactly what my situation was. Some of the banks were, to say the least, less than understanding.

"AIB was my main bank and they were fantastic to deal with and we eventually came up with a new repayment plan. That took some time but once it was put in place I could then



Deise Hire circa 1988. Pictured are Harold Setters, Foreman, Padraig Griffin, General Manager and Clem Jacob, Sales.

get back to my firefighting.

"The next few years were very hard. Weeks on end where I didn't have money to pay myself a wage; nights and weekends in the yard trying to paint old rusty machines so they wouldn't look too bad for the customers that Monday morning.

"It was total hardship and very often I just wanted to pack up and run away. It's not too many people that you can tell things like that to, and trying to hide it all from family and friends was so difficult.

"It was then that the real strength and commitment of the staff came to light. It was pure hard work that got us through the next number of years and having some of those people still with me is one of the most important things that has come out of the last 20 years of business. I just can't thank them enough.

"Now as things become a little easier it makes me really appreciate every single day that we are in business," added Clem.

COVID YEARS

The Covid years didn't hit Clem Jacob Hire as badly as the economic crash of 2008. In fact, Clem Jacob Hire was deemed an essential service as they were providing services to hospitals and other essential services.

"We were allowed open – we'd come in in the morning at 6.00 am, we'd do our work and by 11.00 am, we were gone home," he said.

"The kids were all at home, it was spring time and the weather was fantastic. We spent evenings playing hurling out on the main road. Not a car on the road, not a person to be seen. Up and down the road with the hurley's to Jack Meades playing long puck. I know this sounds mad because so many families were affected badly by Covid, but we just loved that very strange time together.

"The government certainly made it easier with the support they gave us. The business was obviously affected dramatically, but we were able to manage that. We were providing service to the pharmaceutical sector and the hospitals in the south east."

Clem praised his staff for "putting their shoulders to the wheel" and they weathered the Covid pandemic.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Where does Clem see himself and the company in another 20 years?

"I hope to be well retired and relaxing on a sandy beach somewhere and I hope my golf handicap will be gone down a little by then," laughs Clem.

"But I'm very sure with the team that I have, Clem Jacob Hire will be still going strong. With all this new technology available to us I feel that our business model will be very different in the coming years. The advances made in this battery technology over the



The late Tom Aspul, Woodstown, Co. Waterford and Clem Jacob.

last number of years has been amazing and with Pat Walsh and Sean Moore driving on these changes, I really think that our business will be in a very different place in the next number of years," said Clem.

"I can see it already happening and even though I'm not ancient, I sometimes have to stand back and leave these younger, more tech-minded people take it on board and run with it.

"All these guys have the same drive in them to give the very best service that we can possibly give and now also with my sons coming on board, I really feel that the whole company is in great hands to keep driving forward long after I am gone."

Clem said that while putting time and effort into the company was important, he expects to wind down over the

coming years and devote more time to family.

Family time and work-life balance was brought into sharp focus more recently when he lost one of his closest friends, Tom Aspul, from Woodstown, who died suddenly last Christmas aged 58.

"Tom was a huge part of my life. His death was a massive blow to me and my family. We travelled to so many places together, and we spent so much time together. It's made me sit back and think what's it all about and balancing work and family life – spending time with the family, spending it with friends, and travelling. That's what's really important to me now."

QUALITY SERVICE

What does Clem hope people

will associate with the name 'Clem Jacob Hire'?

"I hope they associate it with quality service," he said.

"Over the years I was regularly asked to look at setting up a depot outside of Waterford, but no, I don't ever want to expand outside of Waterford. I think having one depot in one place, we can give that quality service to our customers. That's what's important, being able to give that service, and not diluting down things, and not stressing and stretching ourselves too much. It's all about quality equipment and quality service," he added.

I asked Clem if he had any regrets or what he would do differently, if he had the chance to start all over again. "If I had to start all over again I would certainly do some things differently. I learn new things every day and have done so for the last 20 years, but really I wouldn't change a thing. The one regret I have is that my father didn't live long enough to be part of the journey."

Clem finished the interview by saying that he just wanted to thank the people of Co. Kilkenny and Co. Wexford and of course Waterford for all the loyalty and support that he has received from everyone over the last, amazing, 20 years.



*Wishing Clem Jacob Hire
a very happy 20th anniversary!*

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Congratulations
to Clem Jacob Hire on their
20th Anniversary.