

The family of the late Barney O'Dowd wish to thank everyone for their tremendous and overwhelming support over the last few days. The huge numbers from Tullylish Parish attending the wake and funeral in Navan meant so much to the family and brought back so many memories of happier times.

Thank you!

**The family have kindly shared (below) the eulogy delivered at Barney's Funeral.
(Written by Barney's daughter Mary (Adams))**

Eulogy

Bernard O'Dowd - Barney - was born on May 3, 1923; the fifth of six children of Joseph and Dinah in the townland of Ballydougan in County Down, three weeks before the end of the Irish Civil War.

There was little money to spare, and from a young age Barney had a strong work ethic that endured through his long 100 years. Well into his 90s, Barney was still cutting miles of hedges, and loved nothing better than to be complimented on his prowess and skill with the clippers. Nobody felt they were exaggerating when they told him he was the best hedge cutter in County Meath, and maybe all of Ireland. He took pride in every job he did, no matter how small. 'If a job is worth doing, it is worth doing well', on many occasions was an exasperated expression to his children who often failed to get the message first time around.

Barney's parents were pragmatic, and he, along with his siblings, attended the local Protestant school less than half a mile away, where his mother acted as caretaker during the school holidays. He was a good student and loved English, storytelling and especially poetry, where the poems he learned by heart he was still able to recite many decades later.

He enjoyed making up rhymes: both poems about nature and dedications to friends whom he missed. A raconteur who could paint a picture in words, he was able to bring characters and their foibles from his past to vibrant life. He possessed a huge store of historic knowledge of how things had traditionally been done on the land before mechanisation changed the face of

farmwork, whether it was churning butter or cultivating flax

Barney's most memorable early working years were spent at Blanes, a family farm close to his home. A lean, wiry youth, he was taken under the wing of an older worker who used to crack a raw egg down his throat every morning, concerned that the hollow in the back of his neck needed to be filled if he were to be fit for the day's hard, physical labour that lay ahead.

Barney was ambitious. When his older siblings left to work in Scotland and England during the second World War, Barney began to farm at home, before setting up as a milk delivery man; an enterprise which would later - along with a thriving coal delivery business - sustain him and his family through a sizable chunk of his working life. He began life as a milkman, delivering his milk in cans, dangling from the handlebars of his bike.

Barney met and married Kathleen Durnien, a young woman from Co. Fermanagh, who'd come to work in his parish of Tullylish. He first saw Kathleen, perched on a wall with her friend, Eileen Byrne. Captivated initially by Kathleen's red hair and later by her strength of character, they began a courtship that led to their marriage in 1950, with the first of their eight children born a year later.

Barney and his brothers grew up within the fledgling Northern Ireland state, designed to maintain a Unionist ascendancy in which Catholics knew – and were expected to keep – their place. But Barney and his brothers had a healthy scepticism (inherited from their father Joe) of the systems of authority, whether those systems were implemented by political overlords or authoritarian representatives of the church.

The birth of the civil rights movement in 1969 was welcomed by Barney, who embraced it with his customary optimism, seeing it as an avenue to a more open, democratic, accepting society where Catholics would enjoy the same, equal rights as protestants: access to good housing; the prospect of better paid, more secure employment; parity of esteem irrespective of political or religious affiliation beckoned. It beckoned, but failed to materialize. Barney's growing family and prospering business, at which he worked seven days a week, were doing so against a backdrop of turbulence and increasing violence in the North. In the face of all of this, Barney persevered: families would always need milk and coal in the rapidly expanding new town of Craigavon. And Barney - thanks to his work ethic and positive, can-do attitude – would provide them.

The tragic event that shattered Barney's life and that of his family has been well documented and was again highlighted most recently in local and national media on the occasion of his centenary in May 2023. It seems almost miraculous that Barney - severely wounded and left for dead alongside his fatally injured sons and beloved brother Joe - would survive the horrific events of January 1976, never mind live to commemorate his 100th birthday and a little beyond.

How did he do it? Good genes on their own certainly played a part, but to understand how he got to almost 101 is to get to the essence of the man, a man who had a grip on life and refused to let it go.

He and Kathleen made the decision to leave the North and move to County Meath. They and their children settled and established themselves in their new community, making firm and lasting friendships. Remarkably, this stage of his life lasted almost as long as his time in County Down.

Despite all the adversity in Barney's life, including losing his beloved Kathleen 24 years ago, one of the secrets of his longevity was his optimism. He had zest for life and tenacity, able to adapt to and embrace the changing circumstances of his life.

Kathleen died in December 1999, after which point Barney went to live with his daughter Eleanor and her family. For the next 24 years, they all worked together to keep him at the centre of the family and connected to community.

Throughout his life, Barney had a gift for connecting with people, one of the reasons being his curiosity and interest in others. He loved to hear that people were doing well and flourishing. Those he spent time with, particularly his grandchildren, felt cherished by him. People trusted Barney with their problems and often confided in him, and with the wisdom of a long life well lived, his advice was often sought and valued.

One of Barney's grandchildren remarked that a life lesson he learnt from him was not to hold hatred in his heart. Barney had every reason to be consumed by bitterness for those who murdered his nearest and dearest. He chose a different route, achieving his own justice by outliving the forces that had sought to destroy him and his family. Barney remarked recently that he knew instinctively what was good for him. Up until the day before his death, he was taking

his daily walk, still pushing himself to the limit.

You don't live to be 100 without being resolute. Although Barney's health declined over the last couple of years, he was determined to live until he was 100, delighted to receive recognition from the President, numerous dignitaries and his community... reward indeed for a life well-lived.

Anyone who met Barney will know his firm handshake, his iron-like grip that threatened to incapacitate the limp-handed. But Barney had another grip – a grip on life itself and all it could offer. He had a grip on politics, a grip on morals, on family, on the difference between right and wrong, on the belief that understanding must win out over hatred. As well, of course, as an unshakeable grip on the way a hedge should be cut and the way the lawn must be mown. So when he knocks on the Pearly Gates and St Peter, jingling the keys in his left hand, while extending his right hand to the new arrival, clad in jaunty hat and beige trousers, beams at him and says, 'You're most, welcome, Barney', he'd better watch out that when he finally gets his hand back, that it's still in working order.

Someone who met Barney only once, and that fairly recently, emailed to the family his condolences, ending with these words about Barney. He was "A very special man who will be remembered for all those most uplifting reasons that are so precious in dark times."

That, I think, provides a fitting epitaph to a singular man who refused to let tragedy loosen his grip on life or to define him as a person, a life fully-lived, a life that coincided with the birth of the Ireland we know today and which continues beyond his demise.



<https://www.rte.ie/news/leinster/2024/0415/1443652-barney-odowd-funeral/>