

DENIS O'MAHONY

27 May 1934 to 29 August 2022

A Life Lived Well...

Denis was born the sixth of seven children on 27 May 1934. He spent his childhood and teenage years growing up in the village of Cashel, Co Tipperary enjoying rural pursuits.

My life with Denis started in London in early 1969 when I visited his photographic studio in Hammersmith for some photos to send home. We married in November 1970 and would have celebrated our 52nd anniversary in November.

During the 1970s Denis was a very successful professional photographer in London, particularly as a freelance press photographer and with studio based portraiture. On the 18th June 1972 a British European Air flight crashed on take off from Heathrow – we heard the news on a scrambled police broadcast and he grabbed the press pass and we took off. In those days photos were taken on film, you brought them back to the studio, developed the negatives and then drove to Fleet Street at 2 in the morning to see if there were any buyers. And his photos were on the front page of the UK papers to record a rare crash at Heathrow.

Denis had an enduring passion for Irish politics for all of his life. In late January 1972 there were 13 deaths in Derry on what became known as Bloody Sunday, and major demonstrations in London followed in the aftermath. Denis attended the demonstrations in London as part of his Press work and the photos that he took on that day in London as a press photographer later formed the basis for the acquittal of some of the demonstrators later charged with conspiracy. That was in the day of roll film in cameras and the numbering sequence of the photos proved that the prosecutions case could not be upheld. Denis had to produce about 15 sets of photographs overnight for the judge and jury in the trial.

Then there was time in Ireland as accredited freelance press photographer to record the visit of the Pope to Knock Shrine and to catch up with family and friends making the pilgrimage to Knock.

His portraiture work included presenting a photo of the Queen at the Trooping of the Colour to Buckingham Palace, as well as photos of President O'Dalaigh of Ireland, and of the first papal nuncio to the UK Bruno Heim which have also been published, and of the Archbishop of Westminster, Basil Hume.

We lived in the Wimbledon area of London. As well as full time work in the studio and as a wedding photographer we had a fulfilling family life with Kevin, Brendan and Frances as well as with lots of pets including great danes, jack russell terriers, and even some peregrine falcons at one time. There were lots of outings and activities. And lots of Irish, American and Australian visitors passing through on their adventures in Europe. We also had regular theatre and opera outings – having a friend in charge of the ticket office at the Haymarket theatre for 20 years was definitely a plus. Then there was the excitement of the Hammersmith studio being used for episodes of the 'Sweeney' and 'The Professionals'.

Denis always said that if he had an Irish Wolfhound then he would be on top of the world – and we finished up having 8 Irish Wolfhounds while living in Wimbledon where we had a large back and side garden – and the joys of Wimbledon Common and Richmond Park an easy car ride away, and with a large area of vacant WW2 land just across the road.

There were holidays and working holidays to Ireland and to Europe including Germany, Belgium and Greece – none of that touristy stuff, but follow the locals to their haunts. And then to holiday in Australia. Soon after we returned home to London Margaret Thatcher came to power and one day Denis suggested that we consider moving back to my home of Australia, which we did in the early eighties. Denis had one condition, that the children who wanted to come with us should come, as well as the Irish Wolfhounds and the terriers come! At that time there were livestock flights from UK to Australia, but after being booked on a couple of sets of flights which were cancelled there was the outbreak of foot and mouth disease in the UK and no livestock movements. So Denis brought 5 Irish Wolfhounds, 2 terriers, and some German Shepherd Dogs for another party by sea on the 'Botany Bay'. They travelled from the UK to Genoa, then through the Suez Canal and on to Fremantle and then Melbourne, where the dogs quarantined. All arrived safely.

By that time we had managed to purchase a very small timber house on 5 acres of land in Cranbourne, with existing kennels and dog licences and settled into life in Australia before buying and moving to the KooWeeRup farm in early 1985. There was a photo studio set up in Pakenham for during the day, while there was milking every morning and evening as the farm was a dairy farm at that stage and Denis remembered it as a time when he was up to his knees in S*** and up to his neck in debt.

Frances joined us in Australia in 1985, married, and gave us the absolute joy of two grand daughters. Frances had initially stayed with us at the farm for a period of time before moving to Sydney for a while. And now we also have a beautiful great granddaughter in Australia – Kasey. While Brendan does not have children Kevin has provided us with 5 grand children and another 7 (plus one on the way) great grand children. Then there was a trip to the USA for Irish wolfhounds and visits to the Blue Note Jazz Club in New York, as well as Philadelphia.

Then there was attending mass at a visit to St Peter's Basilica in Rome before catching an overnight train to Paris.

Denis enjoyed farming and until a couple of years ago was always hands on with farming, including delivering calves, and management of the broad range of farming operations. In his farming life he knew everyone and got on with everyone with the exception of the folk at Melbourne Water. But along with most other residents you can be forgiven for that if you live in KooWeeRup or surrounds.

The last of the Irish Wolfhounds passed away and we took time out in the garden, operas and ballets, and to go on a Jazz Cruise. Soon after that the pandemic and lock downs hit us and we missed a family celebration for our 50th wedding anniversary. Just before another lockdown we took delivery of our beloved British bulldog Elliott who brought great interest and joy to our lives.

Denis health and well being had been exceptional for a man of 88 years. But early in July he started to have some health issues and in mid July he was taken by ambulance to Casey Hospital, and then on to Monash Clayton. He was in hospital for just under six weeks before our wishes prevailed and he came home to palliative care a week ago and was mostly at peace for the 3 days before he passed away on the evening of 29 August 2022. He knew he was at home.

An Irish Blessing:

May the road rise up to meet you

May the wind be always at your back

May the sun shine warm upon your face

May the rain fall soft on your fields

And until we meet again

May God hold you in the palm of His hand.

