

Appendix 8

A Tribute to Frank Murray

Frank Murray died on Saturday 22nd August 2020 after a long illness borne with dignity. He leaves behind him a wonderful legacy in the education world especially in the Community and Comprehensive sector where he worked as Deputy Principal in Tallaght Community School, as Principal of St. Mark's Community School, later as General Secretary of ACCS and finally in the Department of Education and Skills.

Frank hailed from Listowel, County Kerry. He was a proud Kerry man who savoured every moment of their successes in Croke Park which happened on a regular basis. He was the Assistant Chief Steward there for many years. He knew every nook and cranny there. He was a great contact for tickets. He did favours for many people and was willing and able to source a better seat for friends on match day. Gaelic football was his passion. Other sports interested him but trying to play golf frustrated him.

He graduated from UCD with a B.Comm and then chose to complete the Higher Diploma in Education. The Irish Education system was the great beneficiary of that decision. His time in UCD showed early signs of what he was to become in later life. Seemingly it was not all study. He also met the love of his life there, Barbara Murray, two Murray clans coming together.

Frank and Barbara moved to Belfast where both worked for a number of years. Frank taught in Hopefield College, a school of a different persuasion to what he had experienced but he thrived there, no mean feat for a Kerryman. The Principal, Mr. Black, made a big impression on him. He loved his time there, speaking regularly of his involvement and experiences. As usual he also made lasting friends among the staff.

He was appointed as Deputy Principal in the new Tallaght Community School in 1972. Some people wondered how this young expert of a Kerryman, coming from Belfast, could be appointed to such a position. As we know this new Community School under Pat Heeran's leadership together with Coolmine Community School under Seán Ó Beacháin heralded a new departure for the Irish education system. Frank threw himself totally into the fray. A few short years later he was appointed as Principal to the new St. Mark's Community School in Springfield Tallaght, with Billie O'Hara, ex Tallaght Community School as his Deputy Principal. They formed a wonderful partnership. I was privileged to work with them for four years in St. Mark's before he offloaded me, his words, to Aidan Savage in Killinarden Community School in 1982.

Frank was a dynamic Principal, he was totally committed to the students, staff, parents and the local community. When he left Tallaght Community School which had a swimming pool, a superb sports hall and excellent sporting facilities, he left no stone unturned until he secured a special deal with Toyota Ireland to assist in the provision of an all-weather astro-pitch suitable for hockey and physical education. This was no mean feat as it allowed an international company to be party to an agreement involving state educational property. Frank's persistence, after many challenges, won the day for the benefit of the school and local community. This is just one example of what he was able to achieve. St. Mark's always had a special place in Frank's heart down through the years, right up to his illness. The loyalty, devotion, love, respect and concern of his former staff for him was and still is evident by their sadness and upset at his death. It is also worth noting that former students have posted wonderful comments when they became aware of his demise.

Throughout his time in schools Frank was very prominent in the then Principal/Vice Principal Association for Community/Comprehensive Schools, then called APVC. He was elected President of APVC and served on its executive for a number of years. This eventually morphed into ACCS. Frank became General Secretary of this new body with Susan Cunniffe as his loyal and superb administrator. Another great partnership. This role provided him with an all Ireland stage to promote the Community and Comprehensive brand. He travelled the length and breadth of the country supporting our schools. He was actively involved in the rationalisation of schools and the formation of new Community Schools. There are wonderful monuments to Frank up and down the country in the form of Community Schools serving the needs of local communities. Principals and Trustees of Boards of Management speak in glowing terms of his dedication, his support, his sound advice and his ability to resolve problems that seemed intractable to them.

His experience in ACCS, his expertise and ability to see the issues at play in the Education sector led to his entry into the Department of Education. He had gained the trust of the officials in the Department during his time in ACCS. They realised his talent for bringing people together, for finding solutions to complex local problems. The rationalisation of the long established VEC structures, the creation of new patronage bodies, new directions in primary schools were just a sample of the massive changes happening in the education world during Frank's time. He was ideally suited to this environment. Being confined to an office for hours on end may not have been Frank's style so

he wandered from official to official with effect. His wanderings allowed him to engage with people, to listen, to discuss the issues, to know where the power and influence were located, and as usual he made friends. He was still trusted by the many educational interests on the outside, Boards of Management, Teacher Unions, Religious Orders and Dioceses.

The foregoing is a brief summary of Frank's career. An article such as this could never hope to cover and recount all that he accomplished. But who was this man? It is not easy to sum up Frank. All those to whom I spoke over the past few days speak of his humanity, his genuine interest in people, that he was a gentleman, was invariably in good humour, full of fun and mischief. Frank had that great talent and ability to mix and deal with people in positions of power and influence and then to engage with parents and students. He excelled at meetings, conventions, gatherings. He was gregarious. He was a restless coiled up ball of energy, always on the go, full of stamina lasting the pace well into the night. He loved intrigue, he could cause a bit of it too. He had the politician's ability to work the room to get to know people, to suss out the issues and to get to know the prime movers. He was a wheeler dealer, a conjuror, always with so many balls in the air. But he was a solver of problems. He could bring warring parties together. He was a valued, skilled and an astute negotiator.

Frank has been out of active life for the past decade. Yet these past number of days have proven that he has not been forgotten and his legacy will not be forgotten either for quite a long time. The outpouring of grief, the messages of condolences to the family and the phone calls from all over the country are testimony to the esteem and respect he has earned during his long and illustrious career. Throughout his life in schools, in ACCS and DES he wanted to be helpful and supportive of all those he worked with and those who called on him for direction and advice. This was his trademark.

Personally, and there are many many others throughout the country in this same boat, we are fortunate to have known Frank, to have called him our friend, to have benefitted from his experience, his expertise, his time, his generosity, his support, advice and direction but above all his love and friendship. The Community and Comprehensive sector can also take great pride that one of our very own played such a central role in the educational field over 40 plus years.

To Barbara, his wife of some 52 years, to Michael, Catherine, Conor and his extended family, our sincere thanks for giving him the freedom and time to share his life with us. To all of you we offer our deepest sympathy and prayers on his passing. You can all take great pride in what he has achieved during his life of total commitment to Irish education.

Is deacair a shamhlú go mbeidh a leithéid arís ann. Slán a chara.

Tommy Flynn,

Former Assistant General Secretary, ACCS.