

Barry Toomey

An Appreciation

Charles Barry Toomey, 'Barry' to us all, was born on 15 April 1947. His father was a journalist and his mother was the pharmacist at Mercer's Hospital. The family lived in Killiney and later in Dalkey. Barry and I were soul mates. We shared so many interests. Principal amongst these was a love of classical music at a time when it was definitely not 'cool' to admit to such. As day-boys in Willow Park we brought packed lunches and shared them while sitting on the lockers. Barry's mother made much better egg filling for sandwiches than mine did and her flapjacks were something to die for.

Although some classmates moved up soon after primary, we remained in the protective cocoon of Willow Park until the end of second year and did not enter Blackrock College until 1960.

Hormones rise and boys will roam and we soon found ourselves chasing what I now understand are called 'Mounties', who politely rebuffed our attentions. We found solace in concerts at the Phoenix Hall and later St Francis Xavier Hall and joined that band of brothers (and sisters) who stood for hours outside the Gaiety Theatre, hoping to get standing room at some concert.

Although classmates may have viewed us as assiduous students we shared a cynicism of academic marks as the ultimate goal and both sought 'education' in its widest sense. Barry did engineering at Kevin Street and his career took him into many of the leading technologies in the new Ireland.

I don't know how he did it, but he always seemed to attract the best from the opposite gender. I remember one lady in particular who joined Barry, myself and my wife-to-be on a driving tour of Germany in 1970. The strongest recollection of that trip was getting soaked in a bivouac tent during a thunderstorm by the River Rhine and trying to alleviate someone's fear by drowning out the noise with Schubert's String Quartet No 13 played on a portable cassette player.

Barry married a wonderful girl from Sri Lanka. Kokulam (Mary) had come to TCD to do a PhD in Biology/Soil Ecology. Since then she has made significant contributions to biology and to plants, particularly the cultivation of Clematis. They have one daughter, Aoife who is currently Associate Director, Foundation Relations at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington.

The pressures of careers and family meant that our paths diverged and it was only in 2005 when we collaborated on a history of Unidare that some of the old chemistry was reignited. Had he lived I feel sure that our sleuthing would have taken us to other areas of Ireland's industrial past whose histories have yet to be written: Comhlucht Siuce Eireann Teo., Bord na Móna and Ceimici Teo.

The end did not come easy for Barry. He was in Harold's Cross Hospice for almost eight months. He bore his illness with a fortitude that was the admiration of all who encountered him during that time. May he rest in peace.

Donard de Cogan