

# Roscommon in America

## John F. Cryan

Born in 1929, John Cryan, the second of eight children born to Michael and Martha Cryan came to the U.S. in 1948. With five dollars in his pocket and a steerage ticket he left his home at the age of eighteen. He came to America, not from a lack of love of his homeland, but because there was no opportunity there for him. He worked hard, joined the U.S. Army and saw action in Korea. He came back to New Jersey with a dedication to hard work that was the pathway to his success. He opened the first of his many taverns in 1960. We often heard tales of sixteen hour a days, seven days a week toiling to take care of his growing family. In later years, my mom would chide him that he wasn't home much, and he would say "True, but I had mouths to feed." We learned later that before he emigrated, he often went to bed hungry. The Celtic Tiger was years away, and there really wasn't much on the farm in Baslick, just outside Castlerea, County Roscommon. It was a source of great pride for him that he made sure his family in America never wanted for anything. My dad had a love for America that was second to none, a love only an immigrant who came here literally with nothing and found success could completely understand.

Ireland, however, was never far from his heart. The trips back home to Ireland were something special. Whether it was a large charter or a small group, my father usually "came home" every year. Deeper than his love of homeland, was his affection for his mother, Martha. I remember sitting for hours around a turf fire listening to Granny and all our aunts and uncles regale us with tales of what it was to like to grow up in Roscommon: not much money, lots of work on the farm, but a strong sense of pride and self. We would be regaled with stories of walking into town, about 3 miles or so, to sell or buy cattle at the Mart. I'm convinced the bargaining skills my dad learned there helped him in business, and later in politics.

My dad became an Assemblyman in 1965. He loved the legislature, and would tell us stories of deal making and how things were done. Friendships from those days were some of the ones he cherished the most. Truth be told, he got along with the Irish legislators a little better than the others. From the legislature he became an Undersheriff in Essex County, and ultimately in 1970 Sheriff of Essex County. The seventies were strong times for Democrats in Essex County, and he worked hard to keep the party strong. Later he became Chief Of Staff for two County Executives, one a Republican, and neither of them Irish- Americans, a testament to how he could get along with everyone.

He owned or was a partner in eighteen different pubs and restaurants, and many an Irish immigrant got work at a Cryan's restaurant. His places were spots for the Irish to meet, politicians to talk, or families just to come and enjoy good food and good cheer. My father loved people, and it showed in his business. He served as Grand Marshal for the Newark Saint Patrick's Day Parade in 1969, and later as Nutley Grand Marshal as well. He was a founding member of the Friendly Sons of The Shillelagh, and received far too many awards to name. He never put much attention to the accolades, and kept his success in balance in his life. A man of success, from Castlerea, County Roscommon, my dad, John Cryan, was one of those Irishman who had to leave home to find success. To this day, we miss him dearly. He gave us great gifts, but most of all, he gave us the gift of being Irish, not just in our names, but in our hearts.

**Joe Cryan**