

# Roscommon in America

## Patrick J. Diegnan

My father, Patrick Joseph Diegnan was born on July 20, 1906 in Derrinacantha, Ballaghaderreen, County Roscommon. His parents were Michael and Bridgid and he had five brothers and two sisters. Michael Diegnan ran a small country store from a portion of the family homestead, which is still standing. Five of the children immigrated to the United States. When Patrick arrived in Boston in 1924 no one was waiting for him at the dock and he had to find his way to Philadelphia where his brothers Tom and Luke had settled.

Upon his arrival in Philadelphia my father was greeted by a funeral procession. His brother Luke's wife had passed away while Patrick was at sea coming to America. He always remembered 'dropping his suitcase at the door of Luke's house' and joining in the procession. Patrick first worked for Horn and Hardart where he was fired after working 'three days, five hours and twenty minutes' because his boss insulted his Irish heritage. (My father was a respectful and humble man but he always taught us to stand up for ourselves and to never tolerate prejudice).

Patrick ultimately located to Plainfield, New Jersey where he met the true love of his life, my mother Sally Byrne, at a Hibernian event. (Sally was born in Mayo). After working for the American Stores for a few years he became a milkman for Bordens where he worked his retail route for 30 years until he retired in 1968.

My father was a proud Teamster. He often talked about how the unions made America the land of opportunity for the working man. Patrick and Sally raised seven children, Maureen, Donald, Richard, Norman, Joseph, Evelyn and Patrick Jr (their favorite). My father embodied the Irish spirit: 'Hard work won't kill you', 'Stop complaining and do something about it', 'Have faith and a good sense of skepticism at the same time', 'No one is going to hand you things' and most importantly, 'Love, Cherish and Protect your family'. My biggest regret when I took the oath of office in January 2002 was that my mother and father did not live to share in the day. However what they taught by word and example I try to put into practice as a member of the New Jersey General Assembly. Those lessons learned in Roscommon have been passed on to succeeding generations and are carried on in Trenton, New Jersey.

**Patrick J. Diegnan, Jr.**