



Derick Wilson

I have known Derick for over 45 years. I came to Corrymeela in 1978 as part of a North/South group of young people, meeting other young people from all parts of Belfast, Rathcoole/Twinbrook. My first memory of Derick was of the Michelin Man, due to his big puffy jacket, he was also the bus driver, the disco man, he was also the man that Ray Davey had complete faith in to direct Corrymeela.

Derick made a huge contribution to youth work and a big commitment to cross border exchanges and through this I began bringing groups of young people from Ballyfermot Peace Corps to Corrymeela. Ballyfermot was a huge sprawling working class estate in the Dublin suburbs. It was known as a no-go area with, drugs, unemployment, an education system that had no aspirations for the children they taught, no possibility of young people going on to college. Derick worked with me and sought funding for cross border youth work, opening up possibilities for young people north/south of the border to

meet, share common ground and look at things we had in common, the majority of these young people had never met a protestant/catholic before. Weekends happened in Corrymeela and then the Glencree Centre, lifelong relationships were forged.

It only takes one or two adults to make a significant difference in a young person's life and that Derick has done in the thousands. Derick was unique in his approach with marginalised young people who were judged by the wider society as not being worthy. Lifelong friends I made in the 80s regularly reminisce about the impact Derick had on their lives youth workers, social workers, parents, Corrymeela staff and community members, they all say the same that Derick was instrumental in shaping a future they had not realised existed for them until they encountered Derick with his ability to see beyond the presenting person and seeing the possibilities and gifts in them.

Derick seen the potential in young people and the gifts they had long before they even recognised them for themselves. I was one of those people. I became a long term volunteer in 1981, Derick was Centre Director at this time, living in Community as a group of volunteers from different cultures/classes was no bed of roses and at times there were tense moments and clashes of personalities. Derick would intervene and mediate between the various people and navigate solutions and ways forward through dialogue, a sense of humour, fun and adventure.

My time as a volunteer was coming to an end and my job in the glue factory in Ballyfermot was calling me. Derick had other ideas. A job he had seen in the Guardian newspaper was looking for a Project Worker for International Voluntary Service (IVS) to work with young people in Brixton, London following the Brixton riots of 1981. Derick encouraged me to apply, which I did as Derick could be very persuasive, even though I was quaking at

the idea of it. I was offered an interview. "Help!" I had never flown on my own before, "I don't think I can do this." Lo and behold Billy Kane was going to travel to London to pick up an award for Corrymeela on the same day. What a coincidence! I was offered the job and moved to London for two years.

I returned to Corrymeela in 1984 as the Volunteer Coordinator for three years working alongside Derick in his last year as Centre Director. I learned so much from Derick, he was an amazing Director and usually behind every amazing man is an amazing woman, and Dot thank you for sharing Derick with us for so long, and thank you Adam, Ben, Emma and Kate for sharing your Dad so willingly.

With Derick's support and encouragement, I started a Social Work course in London in 1987 and worked in Peckham for many years, returning to Dublin in 2000 with Andy and four children. I have ended the last 14 years going full circle and working in Ballyfermot as a child protection principal social worker. Never in my dreams in 1978 did I see myself as a social worker in the future.

My life and that of so many young people has been shaped by the faith, encouragement and support of Derick and the values and beliefs he held dear, which in turn I have embodied into the work I have been involved with when working with families. Just like Christmas with parents and adults creating the magic at Christmas it was also the people and staff who created the magic at Corrymeela. My life and that of my family have been much richer because of my friendships and encouragement and belief that Derick has shown to me over the years. I will miss him terribly but what a legacy he has left us.

Rest In Peace Derick