

The Tele boy

“Tell ey, sixth tell ey, tell ey o”. We each had our own distinctive call when I sold the Belfast Telegraph. Some said it short, “Tele, Tele., Tele” others, like me, much longer.

I started delivering the Belfast Telegraph for Legget’s shop on the Springfield Road. I would go round pushing the paper into doors and sometimes a man would ask if I had any for sale.

Dominic spotted me delivering one night when he was on his rounds. He told me I could earn more by selling the Tele than delivering it. He offered to set me up with a supply of papers and so I became a ‘Tele boy’.

The first time I was out I was scared and nervous. I had a huge pile of papers to carry around and had to be quick with change and figures. Over time the figures came easier and I learnt to ‘stash’ some of my papers and come back for them as I needed them.

Such a feeling that job gave me. I had independence with money. I could buy my own hair shampoo and conditioner! Mum would never buy any for us boys even though our hair got longer and longer. I was as proud as punch to go into my mum on a Saturday night and give her some of my wages.

The more Tele’s we sold the more we got paid. I became one of the top sellers. I would stand at street corners near bookmakers shops. I loved to travel on the buses. I got on for nothing and just hopped on the rear platform and walked up and down the bottom then the top floor of the bus shouting my “Tell ey, sixth tell ey, tell ey o”. Once I had covered the bus I usually jumped off again at the White Horse Inn that used to stand opposite Springfield Primary School. I would go into the pub and go round all the punters to sell the paper.

I was in every pub on the Springfield Road well before I was legally allowed to do so! I was easily able to get on and off moving buses. It was a grand life!

The Telegraph came out in different editions. The 4th was an afternoon edition and the 6th the early evening edition. The 8th was the last edition of the day except for Saturdays when they also brought out the Ireland’s Saturday Night, a paper full of Sport – soccer and horse racing in those days.

I had lots of opportunity to make money and I sometimes got tips as well. Some people wouldn’t wait on their change and just wave me off. That went straight into my back pocket. People wanted the 6th edition more than any other. That was the one they read over their tea when they got home. I would sometimes be left with several 4th editions that might have been ‘damaged’ and the edition stamp ripped off so I could sell them as 6th editions!

As the Troubles got worse it also got to be a bit more dangerous selling Teles. A few of the Springfield Road pubs were bombed and mum got worried about me going into them. Some comments began to be made to me by some of the men going home – especially Mackies men. “Where do you come from?”, “What school are you at?” That soon persuaded me to give up the Teles for something a bit safer.

