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Cover photograph by Declan O'Leary

IN ANOTHER LIFE

Cable guy dramas made me a livewire before college years

Hotelier and *At Your Service* star Francis Brennan thrived in his role selling television connections in Dublin during the 1970s – and even found the time to work as a waiter

When I left school, I went to work as a trainee with [the hotel chain] Jurys in Sligo. My father had a grocery store in Stepside, but he took ill and couldn't work, so I had to give up my training, come back to Dublin and work in the shop.

I was there for two years. We sold the store in February 1974 and I wanted to go back to the hotel business, so I got a place in Cathal Brugha Street. It meant I would go back to college in the September but I had nothing to do from February until then.

I saw an ad and went for an interview at a company called Marlin Communal Aerials. I got the job. In those days there was no cable television in Dublin; everyone had their own aerial. This Canadian company arrived and decided it would put cable along everyone's house, supplying the English channels everyone wanted. They would put up a huge aerial – don't ask me where – and the feed would be put out through the wire.

The job was calling at houses whose residents had refused to let the wire go on their property. If the No 2 house of 600 on an estate said no, you couldn't get to the other 599, and that was where the money was. The person would be sent to negotiate with house No 2 to see if the resident would let us put the cable through their property.

I trained with a lad in Malahide. He was terrified of people, so we would go to the Grand hotel and have two pints, and then go to Gibney's pub and have two more, before he would even go talking to anybody. He was so bad at talking to people, and I thought: "Oh, there's a much better way to do this."

The company policy was to get your wire on as many houses as possible. It was unregulated at that time, so you could go anywhere. The company

knew that it was going to be regulated by law, which did come in later, but wherever your cable was on the day it became regulated, you could leave it there. So the plan was "get the wires everywhere, quickly".

I ended up in Deansgrange and Stradbroke Road – that was my area. On the Monday morning the company would give me 12 or 14 cases to deal with. I was well able to chat, and when I looked at a garden I would know hydrangeas, roses and ivy – all the different plants. I was only 19.

I would arrive at your house, sit down and say: "We need to get this wire by your house because the lady up the road in No 11 is housebound and she loves the television, and if we don't get it by your house she'll never get the television." So I put guilt on the people to make sure they allowed it.

The 12 or so cases would be my week's work, but I would finish them by noon on the Tuesday, no trouble. I'd just get on with it – I wasn't going to the pub for four pints.

There were cases that were severe, when the fella would nearly take a shotgun to you to get out of the way. I would be sent on those "special cases",

There were cases that were severe, when the fella would nearly take a shotgun to you to get out of the way

THIS WEEK
WHY NOTATTACH YOURSELF TO
STRINGS IN CORK

Some of our finest young musicians will be at the Ortús Chamber Music Festival, starting on Friday. The three-day event kicks off at the Mall Arts Centre in Youghal, where composer Sam Perkin will debut *Pause*, commemorating the 1916 Rising. Saturday's concert at University College Cork features Bach and Mozart while Sunday's at the Sirius Arts Centre in Cobh includes Tchaikovsky and Beethoven. ortusfestival.ie



All in a day's work
Brennan had a job at Dublin's Step inn, below, while at Marlin



which could be anywhere in Dublin, and I had difficult ones. But I would explain that the wire would go underneath your hedge, over your pergola and around the back of your extension, and I could give you free service for a year – I could give it to you for life, actually, but I would never say that at the start.

We had to negotiate getting the wire across all these gardens and around the bushes. I did well and never had a failure.

The Marlin job was full-time but I got a second job, at the Step inn. It was Dublin's first pub with food, I would say, and I worked there as a waiter. I loved it. I ran two jobs because I had the time to. However, I left Marlin eventually because I just wasn't comfortable doing the work anymore.

To this day, at the back entrance to University College Dublin, off the Clonskeagh Road, there are five houses in a circle without piped television, and I told them they would get it 42 years ago. To bring a wire to an island of five houses would require digging roads, and they were never going to do that. They would say to me: "Tell those people they will have it on Tuesday," but they still haven't got it today. I hated that.

I did fine out of it, though, and interrailed in Europe for the whole of August on the money I had earned. I went to college in the September, and the rest is history. I still keep my head down in Clonskeagh as I pass those five houses.

Francis Brennan presents At Your Service on RTE 1 on Sundays, 8.30pm

Interview by Yvonne Gordon

LET THE CREDITS ROLL AMONG STARS IN DUBLIN

The Audi Dublin International Film Festival opens on Thursday with the European premiere of John Carney's *Sing Street*, left. Michael Collins will be screened at the Savoy cinema on Saturday to mark the film's 20th anniversary. About 400 of the cast are invited, and director Neil Jordan hosts a Q&A. On Sunday Angela Lansbury discuss her career, at the Bord Gais Energy Theatre. diff.ie



BECOME PART OF THE BEAT GENERATION IN KILLARNEY

Learn to play the bodhrán like a pro or make a song and dance of things at the Gathering traditional festival in Killarney. The event, starting on Wednesday, has five days of concerts, culture and craic. A céilí takes place each night and instrument masterclasses will be at the Gleneagle hotel on Saturday. INEC concerts feature We Banjo 3, Deirdre Granville and Brendan McCreanor. Passes cost €50 and individual tickets are €10-€30. thegathering.ie



BLIND YOURSELF WITH SCIENCE IN BELFAST

Get to work in the Nerve Centre, left, or take a celestial voyage among the stars at the NI Science Festival in Belfast, starting on Thursday. Visitors can see the latest technology and find out what the future holds through talks and lectures. Einstein's theory of relativity will be debated, while children's events include discovering the science behind Star Wars and Doctor Who. The festival has more than 100 events and runs for 11 days. nisciencefestival.com

