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Cover photograph by Lorraine O'Sullivan

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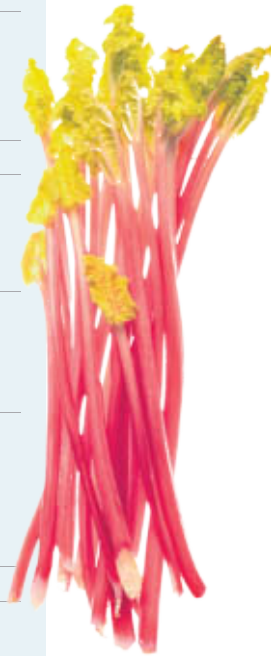
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IN ANOTHER LIFE

I set out to learn life lessons and passed the screen test

Dublin-born actor Patrick Bergin taught in London in the 1970s before heading to Hollywood. The star of Patriot Games reveals he still enjoys leading a class — and now he has the real life experience to back it up

When I left Dublin, I was 17. I went to London and had my first legal pint on the Kilburn High Road. I had a Leaving Cert, but in order to get to university or do anything, you had to have A Levels, so I worked in factories and building sites and studied for them in the evenings. You needed two to qualify for a grant and I got them in maths and English. I then studied to teach English and drama from 1971 to 1975 and got a Bachelor of Education degree.

During my teacher training I considered studying law, so for a time I worked for a solicitor's office. The solicitor prepares the case but is not always in court when the barrister presents it, so he has a representative in court and I did that. I was involved in a lot of the cases. It was a fascinating period.

I thought I would continue with my education, so as I studied I worked in a Rudolf Steiner school called Paradise House in Gloucestershire with special

needs children. Rudolf Steiner had been a social reformer and educationalist in the 1920s — Hitler said he was the only man he was afraid of. I found it a little bit too serious and wasn't quite prepared for that. It was the same with the law. I just wanted to get out into the world and enjoy myself for a while.

I ended up teaching from 1975 to about 1979 or 1980 and worked for a time in schools in London's East End. At one point I got a job with Camden council, which was setting up a project for kids who were skipping school and getting into trouble. They sent a social worker into the Kilburn area and identified a group of youngsters and got them attending a workshop, just to keep them out of trouble really.

Officially the kids had to be taught, so a woman called Angela Monroe and

myself were hired to work with them so that they got schooling of a sort. Over four years we got nearly all of them jobs. It was very interesting work and satisfying to get the kids some stability. None of them ended up in trouble again — except one: his family were all in jail and he wanted to join the family.

It was a nice group of people I was working with. It certainly wasn't discouraging. I think teaching is a very noble profession, though I genuinely believe you have to see the world a bit yourself before you can teach anything. So, with the old adage, "those who can, do and those who can't, teach" ringing in my ears, I realised I had a lot to learn and thought I had better just go out and do what I wanted to do. And that is what I did.

I went off with my guitar, mainly around Europe. I did all the bad things — Paris and Amsterdam, busking on the streets and having too good a time. Eventually I came back and formed a theatre group, as my father had done in the past, and gradually got more work.

I toured England acting in a repertory company, the Channel Theatre, based in Ramsgate in Kent. I got spotted in that, got a better agent, and did a film

None of the kids ended up in trouble again — except one: his family were all in jail and he wanted to join the family

BOOKMARK A LITERARY FESTIVAL

The Mountains to Sea DLR Book Festival, now in its 9th year, returns to Dun Laoghaire on Wednesday for five days of panel discussions and poetry recitals. This year's big names include authors John Banville and Roddy Doyle, director Neil Jordan and comedian Julian Clary, right. Kate Summerscale, author of The Wicked Boy, and Graeme Macrae Burnet, author of Booker-shortlisted His Bloody Project, discuss the Victorian murder cases at the heart of their bestsellers, while Ryan Tubridy and Irish children's laureate PJ Lynch will discuss their picture book Patrick and the President. There's live music, workshops and a Poetry Now fringe festival. [mountainstosea.ie](#)



MAKE A RUN FOR IT ON THE JAIL BREAK TRAIL

Next Sunday's Wicklow Gaol Break Half Marathon and 10k starts and finishes in Wicklow's Historic Gaol. The race, now in its 7th year, attracts about 1,250 jailbirds of all ages. Runners of all abilities are welcome, and there is a dedicated walking section that starts 40 minutes prior to the half marathon to ensure that everyone enjoys the atmosphere at the finish area in the courtyard of the 18th-century prison. [wicklowhalfmarathonand10km.com](#)



GO RETRO AT BALLYMALOE

Ballymaloe Vintage and Antiques Fair, taking place today at Ballymaloe House in Shanagarry, Co Cork, is a celebration of all things retro. Browse more than 50 stalls of collectibles, including homeware, fashion and furniture, view classic cars, and hear tunes from the 1920s and 1930s provided by the Cork Light Orchestra. Visitors can cap off their day with refreshments from food stalls in Ballymaloe's Big Shed. Entry and parking is free. [ballymaloe.ie](#)



HAVE AN OUT OF BODY EXPERIENCE

The Real Bodies exhibition, currently running at Dublin's Ambassador Theatre, is a thought-provoking exploration of human anatomy comprising 14 preserved bodies and more than 200 anatomical specimens. Many of the bodies are displayed in athletic poses that show bone and muscle function in a way that is more powerful than a textbook picture. Adult tickets start from €14, under 15s from €8. Runs until May 31. [realbodies.ie](#)



Well schooled
After teaching, Bergin spent time busking in Paris, below



for a screenwriter here in Ireland called Shane Connaughton, who would go on to co-write the Academy Award-nominated film My Left Foot. He was teaching in England at the National Film and Television School, and through that, I did a film. Agents saw it and I started to get better work. It was quite a quick rise once they saw my wonderful presence on screen!

In a way, the structure of teaching helped. Also, I was studying English and reading everything that I could get my hands on, and that in itself was an education.

It's something that I still do. I run a workshop, a film acting course for young people in particular. I call it "acting by numbers, zero to 10". I have done it in a few places around the world — New York, LA, Dublin — and last year I did it down in Waterville in Co Kerry for the Charlie Chaplin Comedy Film Festival. I also worked with Cinemagic, an international children's film festival in Belfast. So I do that once or twice year. I do like teaching; I like being able to help young people — it gets some focus into their life.

Patrick Bergin joins TV3 drama Red Rock as Jim Tierney, grandfather of Detective Rory Walsh, from April 17.
Interview by Yvonne Gordon

Brian McEvoy