

**OLLSCOIL NA hÉIREANN, GAILLIMH**

**NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF IRELAND, GALWAY**

Text of the Introductory Address delivered by **PROFESSOR MIKE WILLIAMS**, National University of Ireland, Galway on 27 June, 2014 on the occasion of the Conferring of the Degree of Doctor of Science *honoris causa*, on **FINIAN O'SULLIVAN**.

A Uachtaráin, a mhuintir na hOllscoile agus a dhaoine uaisle.....

I first met Finian O'Sullivan when I was appointed to a Junior Lectureship in Geology at University College Galway, as it was then known, in 1975. I was a callow youth and on my first field trip, which was to North Wales, I overheard some of the students of his class discussing my performance - "why should we believe what he says, isn't he only a couple of years older than we are?!"

I was immediately impressed by Finian's attitude to life - he was energetic, forceful, optimistic and exuded a cheerfulness that was dangerously infectious. His determination to succeed in whatever he attempted was, I think, manifest in his living arrangements as an undergraduate.

In these days of student accommodation with en-suite bathrooms, shared jacuzzis, central heating, fridge-freezers and the like, Finian existed in a caravan behind Distillery Road.

Let us be under no misapprehension - this was no monstrous mobile home, with verandas and picture windows but rather a caravan reminiscent of the one used by Father Ted for his famous holiday by the sea. About the size of a family car.

Talking of "His Priestliness", a few years ago Finian, who was running a company called Burren Energy decided to bring his colleagues on a weekend to the Burren. He asked me to show them round the natural wonders of the area - the Geology, the Botany, the Archaeology and the scenic coast. However the thing that generated an almost hysterical response was not any of these but when the bus stopped outside Father Ted's house. It was obvious however from that single trip that Finian's colleagues held him in high esteem and that he was a part of the workforce, not the Fat Controller.

Finian graduated in 1976 with an honours degree in Geology from University College Galway. This is possibly the best type of degree available to prepare you for life's trials with its emphasis on change and evolutionary competitiveness. Immediately, and typically, he set off for Canada to seek his fortune. There he joined the Chevron Company and began to learn the nuts and bolts of the oil industry. He then worked with various geophysical companies in the USA and Australia involving exploration for hydrocarbons in the Far East.

Eventually in 1993, whilst working in London, he fell off his proverbial camel on the road to Damascus and realized he could do all this "stuff" with his own company and he set up the aforementioned Burren Energy Plc. This company started life managing rented oil tankers in the Caspian and Black Seas. However it soon developed into a company that

discovered and developed hydrocarbon resources in India and Africa. Finian also ran a shipping and trading venture around the Caspian Sea area making him sound like a mediaeval explorer, a Renaissance Man, with fingers in many pies.

Burren Energy went from success to success with flotation on the London Stock exchange in 2003. Eventually the company was sold in 2008 for a figure I can't even pronounce.

One would imagine a normal man might retire after such an achievement but, true to form, Finian joined the Bayfield Group in 2008, later merging with Trinity Exploration. He has oil in the blood. However Finian shares the products of his endeavours with the world. He has been generous to the university not just in terms of donation but also in terms of giving of his time and expertise.

About two years ago he joined the board of the Galway University Foundation helping to assess sources of funding for the University's capital programmes. This Foundation has raised approximately €180 million since its inception some 15 years ago.

Additionally, Finian, along with his wife Diana and three children has set up the O'Sullivan Family Trust, which aids in the advancement of education and health and respite care for children. Curiously, the alternative name for this charity on the website is The Caravan Charity Trust! Finian was a NUIG Alumni Award Winner in 2009.

So to conclude if I may quote John Steinbeck:

"It has always seemed strange to me.....the things we admire in men, kindness, generosity, openness, honesty, understanding and feeling are the concomitants of failure in our system.

And those traits we detest, sharpness, greed, acquisitiveness, meanness, egotism and self-interest are the traits of success. And while men admire the quality of the first, they love the produce of the second."

I think Finian typifies all the qualities of the first whilst still managing to generate the end-product of the second and to generously share that product.

It is thus a great pleasure to introduce **Finian Rory O'Sullivan** as a recipient of an honorary doctorate from this university.

**PRAEHONORABILIS PRAESES, TOTAQUE UNIVERSITAS:**

**Praesento vobis hunc meum filium, quem scio tam moribus quam doctrina habilem et idoneum esse qui admittatur, *honoris causa*, ad gradum Doctoratus in Scientiae, idque tibi fide mea testor ac spondeo, totique Academiae.**