

Denise defies hard times with healing business

Ciaran Tierney meets **Denise Delaney**, who practises a range of complementary medicine

CITY LIVES

AFTER 13 years of living abroad, Denise Delaney could hardly have chosen a worse time to move back to Ireland to set up her own healing practice in Galway. The Co Laois woman laughs about it now, but admits that the year she spent in China just before coming home had made her blissfully unaware of just how bad things were getting back home.

She had always wanted to return to Ireland and yet she had spent most of her adult life overseas. Firstly, a stint in San Francisco where she discovered the joys of healing, then 12 years of running her own clinic in Belgium, taking winter trips to Thailand to learn Thai massage, and then the best part of a year practicing Chinese medicine in China.

The break-up of a long-term relationship galvanised her to leave the successful acupuncture and massage practice she ran in a Brussels suburb for a dozen years. She knew in her heart that Galway would become her home – even though she had never lived here before.

It was April 2008 when the Mountrath native arrived in a city she had grown to love during visits as a teenager. Her brother and sister both lived here, but she hardly knew a soul as she pounded the Promenade in Salthill. She began to practise in a treatment room above the Health and Herbs shop on Sea Road.

“I was so lucky in that I didn’t have a clue,” she says with a hearty laugh. “I was here two months when the recession officially started and, if I’d left it a few months later, people would have been telling me to stay in China and not to bother coming home. I had a year in China and I felt like I never knew the Celtic Tiger!”

“Now, four years on, I’m so delighted I am living in Galway. I came back to Ireland after having almost 16 years of my adult life abroad. It was difficult on one level, because everything about Ireland was familiar and yet I didn’t know many people here.”

As her business took off, Denise kept herself busy. She took a herbal medicine course and studied an MSc at Middlesex University in London. A friend told her to focus on what she could bring to Galway rather than what she could get out of the city. She soon built a whole new life, embracing volunteer work, prom walks, and music sessions in the pubs.

“By switching my focus, it took the pressure off what Galway was giving me. I got busy. I’d be doing volunteer work or helping out. Being really busy distracted

me, because the news on the radio and TV was so difficult I kind of had to be disciplined and independent of what was going on in terms of the recession. I literally had to ‘dig my own furrow’ and not get distracted by it.”

Her warm personality and caring attitude soon endeared Denise to a wide range of patients and, within months, she moved on to help set up the Crescent Counselling and Acupuncture service with psychotherapists Bernie Conway, Patsy Callanan, and Mick McGann, at 2 Devon Place. Her healing work complements their counselling sessions and she has enjoyed the challenge of building up a new practice in the city she now calls home.

“Galway was the town that I fell in love with when I was 19 or 20 and I always wanted to move here,” she says. “I never thought I’d be doing what I am doing now. Growing up in Laois, we were either going to become civil servants or teachers or nurses, and we vaguely dreamt of being air hostesses. That was it for the girls in our time!”

Denise got a ‘safe’ job with the Health Service Executive at St Brendan’s Hospital in Dublin after leaving school. But she took a career break at the age of 23, moved to California, and her whole life changed when she took a massage course. Denise had shoulder and neck pain since a fall in her teens, so she had tried out a host of potential solutions long before acupuncture and massage relieved her pain. Her own experience of pain gives her great empathy with her patients.

After completing a massage course in Berkeley, Denise returned to Dublin with the Belgian man she had met in San Francisco. She did not return to her job

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in the hospital, but studied both psychiatric nursing and acupuncture for three years.

By the time she qualified as a psychiatric nurse, Denise knew she wanted to work as a healer on her own terms. She moved to Brussels in 1995, setting up her own clinic in the Schuman suburb,



Denise Delaney. 'It was kind of inevitable that I would move to Galway. I was drawn here.' PHOTO: JOE O'SHAUGHNESSY.

speaking English, French, and “passable” Dutch to patients from a wide range of countries and backgrounds.

“I always wanted to work for myself. That was my dream. Once I went to Belgium, I sort of felt I had to do my own thing. My psychiatric nursing diploma wasn’t recognised in Belgium and I wasn’t fluent in Dutch, whereas I could set up an acupuncture clinic without being fluent in Dutch or French. It took off so quickly, it was unbelievable. I did no market research at all, but I was very lucky.”

Family members in Mountrath thought she was “mad” to leave the steady job with the HSE behind, but Denise has never been conventional or looked back with regrets. She wrote to a world-famous Thai yoga massage practitioner, the late Chaiyuth Pryasith, in Thailand after reading a book about him.

When he didn’t reply she turned up, unannounced, at his door in the northern city of Chiang Mai. She persuaded Chaiyuth to let her become his student and began to spend her winters in Thailand. He was the first teacher of note to teach Thai massage to foreigners and Denise practises the ancient art today at the Crescent.

“I love the freedom of being self-employed and the chance to be creative. I think it is very important to keep trying new courses and learning new things. As a healer, you are working on your own so it’s great to mix with other healers. It’s very good to go back to the level of being a student and it’s important to get good training.

“With Chaiyuth, everything changed. He challenged me to push past my blind spots, even though I was already working about 11 or 12 years. All my techniques changed. He began to really get me to listen, to listen to my hands. Healing really challenges your blindness, if there are things you don’t want to see..”

The break-up of her relationship in 2007 got her to think about returning to Ireland. She had always missed Ireland, especially the informal banter and chats with strangers which people almost take for granted here, but can seem refreshing in a place like Belgium.

“Brussels was always very good to me, even though I wasn’t ‘in love’ with Brussels. I had a very good lifestyle. I felt maybe I had done my time there. I was happy leaving and I was always very drawn to coming home. I missed my family and I missed the Irish culture.

“It was kind of inevitable that I would move to Galway. I was drawn here because I always loved Galway, the size of the city, the fabulous Prom, which became my first best friend here. The fabulous music, culture, and I had a

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brother and sister here. My sister-in-law, Aine Delaney, is an acupuncturist as well. She helped me to get started here.”

Denise is delighted by how open Galway people are to ‘alternative’ remedies and treatments. She loves the personal

contact with her patients, whether mixing up herbs for them, providing massages, or using her needles for a variety of ailments. She feels it is important to listen at the start of an appointment. She also clearly has the respect of her peers, as she was recently appointed chairperson of the national body of acupuncturists (AFPA) for a three year term.

Her partner, Bill Heaney, is a social worker with COPE, so health care is central to both of their lives. She lives in Mill Street and loves taking her dog for walks in Dangan before starting work in the mornings.

She works with a variety of organisations including Waterside House, the Galway Traveller Movement, and HSE Family Support Services. Health care professionals such as Mercedes Varona and Dr Dilis Clare gave her great support when she was starting off in Galway and she is thrilled by how the move has worked out four years on.

Denise practices a variety of healing methods, including acupuncture, reflexology, massage, Thai yoga massage, and Chinese herbal medicine at 2 Devon Place. She can be contacted for an appointment at (085) 1325700.

The Germans can take a Sunday break – so why can’t we?

A GROUP of us happened to be in the German city of Frankfurt last week and, with some downtime at our disposal on the Sunday, we had planned to take in a few of the shops. But apart from two souvenir shops and a small Turkish travel agency, our search was entirely in vain.

Because Frankfurt – boasting over 70 international banks and one of the four biggest stock exchanges in the world – doesn’t open for business on a Sunday. Every shop in this city of 670,000 people is closed.

And yet people in this city that is home to both the European Central Bank and the Bundesbank seem to survive just fine with just a six-day commercial week – which is what we used to do before greed got the better of us.

Indeed we used to take this to an even more extreme level because I remember the ‘half day’ when every shop in the village – in our case, Oughterard – closed its doors so that business people had the chance to draw breath.

But the half day is long gone and so is the notion of downtime on a Sunday; indeed you can now do your grocery shopping while most of the world is asleep because 24/7 is the working day in the supermarket trade.

So we have shops that only close on

HERE'S A THOUGHT

DAVE O'CONNELL

Christmas Day and we’re broke; Germany shuts up shop every Sunday and they’re paying the price of our profligacy. Isn’t there a lesson – or indeed an irony – there somewhere?

Would our world really grind to a halt if we couldn’t buy the groceries on a Sunday? Would nobody ever change their television if they only had access to electrical stores between Monday and Friday? Would the people of Ireland get cabin fever or withdrawal symptoms if we were forced to relax one day a week?

Of course those who are struggling to survive in business would argue that every second counts, and indeed it does if your competitors are open longer than you are – particularly if that’s on a day

when half the population are off.

And so many people no longer work the regular Monday to Friday, nine to five, week – so shift workers and those who do anti-social hours might only have a Sunday window to catch up on things whereas their forefathers knew that work finished on a Friday evening and didn’t resume until Monday morning.

But German shops didn’t decide to stay shut out of some sense of community conscience or on the back of respect for family values – they did it because the Government legislated for it, and only allows shops to open on three or four specific Sundays, special occasions, every year.

Instead people go to museums, parks and other municipal facilities; they can go to coffee shops or even to pubs. But the biggest crowd we saw in Frankfurt that Sunday was after the Mass for Croats in the city’s biggest and most historic Catholic Church.

Admittedly, we were drinking coffee in an adjoining restaurant, but the sight of hundreds of Massgoers flocking out of the Church and then standing around for half an hour chatted animatedly was like rolling back the years.

Perhaps they stayed a little longer because they are an ex-pat community who only get to meet up in such num-

bers every Sunday after Mass, or perhaps it was because there was no shopping to rush off to – but whatever the reason, they radiated a sense of community and relaxation all at once.

Of course the reality is that we won’t be turning back the clock here at this stage and 24/7 shopping is here to stay; for many who punch in unorthodox hours, Sunday opening is a Godsend.

But none of that explains why the eurozone’s best – maybe only – performing economy can fit it all into six days and one of the bailed-out brigade cannot survive if we don’t have access to shops every minute of every day.

Despite its enormously successful and driven economy, the church still carries some weight in Germany and Sunday closing has its history in the pressure it exerted. But even if you are devoid of a religious bone in your body, the notion of having a day to do nothing more than spend it with family has to be an appealing one.

This doesn’t just apply to hard-pressed shops of course – pubs used to close on a Sunday afternoon but no longer, because Sky Sports effectively put an end to that with Sunday football.

Indeed the pubs up north – and in the UK – didn’t open at all on a Sunday up to a few years back, which partly explained the thousands of Derry City

fans who religiously travelled to League of Ireland away matches on this southern side of the border.

You cannot turn back time, but the pity was that we were blighted by a succession of Governments which failed to govern on any level; they didn’t deal with speculators but equally they didn’t preserve traditional values because the pursuit of the pound was all conquering and more important than anything else.

If all shops were closed, there would be no problem because we’d re-adjust to a six-day week. And Sunday would be for family, sport, culture – religion for those who believe – or just kicking back, relaxing and recharging the batteries for the week ahead.

It won’t happen of course, not least because a huge demand has been established – when they close for Christmas Day, we overbuy and form food queues like we were living in the latter days of the old Soviet Union – and by now Sunday isn’t very different to any other day of the week.

So maybe we’re right and the Germans are just stuck in the past – even if the figures suggest exactly the opposite.

Penny wise, pound foolish perhaps? The truth is we’d probably open eight days a week if we could somehow manage to squeeze another 24 hours into the equation.

Wallace saga proves the tiger has no teeth

IF there was one thing worse than Mick Wallace’s original stunt of cheating the taxman, it was the utter ineptitude of his Dáil peers when it came to dealing with him in the way that the nation demanded.

Instead of muttering about low standards but doing nothing about it for more than a week, they should have found some way to censure the Wexford maverick and shown that moral compliance is as important as legal conformity when it comes to high office.

Wallace was by and large damned with faint criticism, with even that great socialist Joe Higgins pulling his punches.

The response should have been short and swift – there is no place for tax cheats in public life, and we will not split hairs between individuals cheating on their payments and sole directors of companies who dodge paying their VAT.

The failure of the Dáil to find a way to deal with this immediately just adds insult to injury – but once again it’s one law for the little man and another for the one with access to the corridors of power.