

In preparation for my King of the Fairies class, I asked Mary McGuiggan for some background information on **May Allen** (Close), it was her son Tom / Thomas Close who taught me the dance.

13/10/20 – from Mary McGuiggan

May Allen was born in 1928 and died in 2016 at the age of 88 years. She lived, all of her life, outside Randalstown in the townland of Gillistown. She taught throughout South Derry and West Antrim and northern area of Tyrone. Mostly on both sides of the Bann River.

I was lucky enough to attend her class in Bellaghy (my home town) when I was four. I remember getting my first dance costume ... blue ... Bellaghy GAA colours!

Then, because my daddy was travelling to Belfast on a Wednesday, I moved to Greenlough, just down the road in the opposite direction. No big deal, same teacher but purple costume.

And there began a friendship that continued until she died.

She married Joe Close, had 4 children, Anne, Thomas, Aileen and Deirdre. Although she hadn't learned her dancing through an Coimisiún (feiseanna), she decided she wanted to compete there and so had to attend classes with a qualified teacher. This meant her taking lessons with Anna McCoy in Belfast.

She went on to qualify as a dance teacher and adjudicator. She played piano accordion in the Green Cross Ceili Band, taught dance in all the local primary schools, choreographed concerts and talent competitions, Scoreanna, her dancers involved in feiseanna at local, Ulster and All Ireland level.

She was also involved in organising many of these events and found time to have extra practices in her house where she found the time to bake scones and apple tarts.

Phenomenal woman. We learned jigs, reels, slip jigs, hornpipes and many set dances including King of the Fairies. We had no taped music, she lilted everything but for our set dances, she played her accordion. We loved it when she brought it to class.

Most of the music we danced to was Scottish Dance Music. I only became aware of that in later years. Our only live dance music was Ceili House on Saturday night on the radio. Makes sense as we lived in the heart of what is now called "Ulster Scots". She taught lots of 2,4,6,8 team dances including a newly composed which we called the Big Twelve!!

She encouraged me to teach, sending me off to teach a class of over 100 children in a wee hall outside Portglenone when I was 16!!

Myself and her daughter Anne became her first dancers to qualify as teachers. She has many more since then, including all her own family.