

## Ex-minister could make surprise bid in Dublin's MEP battle

By John Drennan

SENIOR Fianna Fáil sources have suggested former minister Mary Hanafin could yet be a 'surprise' nomination for the forthcoming MEP elections. Ms Hanafin is currently expected to run for the party in Dún Laoghaire in the next General Election. However, in a reference to the party's struggles in Dublin, party sources told the Irish Mail on Sunday: 'Don't rule out a surprise Hanafin run for Europe, the smoke signals from Dún Laoghaire are not good at the moment.'

Ms Hanafin's entry into an already crowded field will come as an unpleasant surprise to the current contenders where a battle royale is already emerging between two Fianna Fáil dynasties and new Fianna Fáil for the electoral nod.

Initially, former Junior Minister Barry Andrews had been the favourite to be selected



**SURPRISE:** Mary Hanafin is said to be considering Europe

for the party, but his candidacy has been accompanied by unease about his low profile.

The concern was summarised by one senior figure who said: 'Barry is somewhat milk and water in how he approaches politics.' The day, they added, 'where the old dynasties secured seats as of right are gone. A candidate must be charismatic or stand for something. Barry does neither.'

The absence of support for Andrews has sparked a revival of interest in another dynastic scion, Conor Lenihan.

He has yet openly to declare but the colourful former junior minister has already attempted to secure an electoral return to domestic politics via a quixotic bid to secure a place on the Fianna Fáil Dáil ticket for Roscommon. One source said: 'Say what you like about Conor but he has a public profile. He is unforgettable. And he has the experience.'

Mr Lenihan, who famously as Minister for Science, launched a book supporting creationism, would certainly be more colourful.

Both the Lenihan and Andrews dynasties, however, may be gazumped by new Fianna Fáil courtesy of growing interest in equality activist Tiernan Brady.

But Ms Hanafin's arrival into the fray may scupper all of their plans.

IT'S 11.30am on the morning after the presidential inauguration of Michael D Higgins and Peter Casey looks tired. It's nothing a Red Bull won't put right – though he drinks it from a whiskey tumbler rather than the can. At 61, Casey is still living fast and hard, trading off his wits and charm as always. One on one, he's easy company, speaking without any apparent censure and reeling off a series of jokes. Unfortunately, the funniest are just too risqué to print.

One gag involves Pierre, a French painter who laments that just because of one small indiscretion no one refers to him as the artistic genius he is. 'Do they call me Pierre, the great artiste?' Casey asks in an indignant French accent: 'No. I make love to just one little sheep...'

Casey has a similar problem to Pierre. The politically correct have branded him a cynical racist because of his comments about Travellers. But figuring out what Casey really thinks and believes is hard because his conversation strays all over the place.

'I'm ADHD, totally unmedicated, so you have to get used to that,' he explains. One of those who helps keep Casey focused is his brother Kevin, a Derry solicitor.

It was Kevin he turned to when 'I got myself into this mess in Tipperary with the Travellers. He texted me and he said, "Treasure all of the children of the nation equally," and I said, that's f\*\*\*ing brilliant, who said that? He said, "It's in the Proclamation, you plonker".'

Soon afterwards, a stony-faced

**'I'm ADHD, totally unmedicated, so you have to get used to that'**

Casey was on the national airwaves saying: 'My position is, the Proclamation says we should cherish all the children of the nation equally, it doesn't say we should cherish some more than others.'

Despite growing up in the heart of Derry during the Troubles, Casey never became politicised, or directly involved in the rights and wrongs of the time.

Instead, rioting was an exhilarating game – and an opportunity to collect rubber bullets to sell for profit. During one riot, he went to retrieve a rubber bullet behind a Saracen armoured car just as a nail bomb landed in front of him.

'I see the nail bomb and I'm thinking I've got a choice: do I dive behind the wheel of the Saracen or do I run past the fizzling nail bomb and dive behind the wall? In a split second I made the decision to run over the nail bomb and dived in over the wall and next thing it goes off. So that was probably my closest encounter. I couldn't hear for a couple of days after that.'

'I got knocked down twice by motor cars, ended up in hospital twice. I shot myself once and ended up in hospital for about a week. I had a couple of very close calls and my mother always said, you know God must have something special for you, because you shouldn't be around by now.'

Asked about his university days in Birmingham, he recalls: 'It was brilliant, you know. It was 12p a pint. I



**CHARMER:** Peter Casey with wife Helen the day after the presidential election



## INTERVIEW BY MICHAEL O'FARRELL

used to drink cider. So you know, you could get drunk for 50p on a Saturday night – it was a great.

'I used to go for yard of ale competitions. I did win one – 2.6 seconds or something for a yard of ale.'

Here, he met his first wife, Catherine, a French and business student who was one year ahead of him.

Casey applied himself to studies as well, finishing a four-year degree in business administration and philosophy in three years, securing first class honours in philosophy.

Suddenly Casey is exposing his love for philosophers such as Jean Paul Sartre, Soren Kierkegaard and Albert Camus. 'You know, the existential philosophers gave me answers I wasn't getting from Catholicism,' he says.

But Casey struggled with the business part of his degree. 'I nearly failed because I couldn't do the statistics or the maths.'

After graduation in 1979, Casey worked briefly in London as a salesman for cigarette firm Gallagher's.

He took the job, with a salary of £3,333, for the company car. His mother was the beneficiary of the 400 free cigarettes a week he received. Just three months in, a Xerox executive overheard his sales pitch – which he dramatically recites for me word for word – and hired him on the spot for twice the salary and a better car.

Then, one evening after work, he walked in to a pub near Oxford Street and by chance met another Xerox employee, an Irishman named John Campbell.

'He was just standing there drinking. We had like quite a few drinks on that Friday night.'

A round of golf was arranged for the following day. 'So I turn up in my little Chrysler Sunbeam, he turns up in a chauffeur-driven Jaguar. And I'm thinking, we didn't actually get into what you do for Xerox, John, what do you do? He said, I'm in charge of Europe.'

Guided by his new drinking and golf buddy, Casey soon found himself headed for Australia, where he would eventually leave Xerox to become a millionaire businessman.

## Unsuccessful candidate Peter Casey speaks frankly about an extraordinary career and the IVF struggles that ruined his first marriage

He arrived in Sydney on November 2, 1981.

'I remember crying when I got on the plane. I was so miserable and unhappy and homesick.'

That misery was compounded by the fact that Catherine had remained in London. 'I remember walking down the street one day and I saw this guy from Derry. I said, let's go for a drink, and half way through the second pint I remembered I didn't really like him in Derry – he was an f\*\*\*hole in Derry and not much had changed.'

After a month in the Hilton, he moved in with a sales manager called Tony Coburn (now dead), who had been in the Paratroopers.

'He came in one night and he just started smashing the place up and started banging my door and I put my bed up against the door to stop him. "I used to shoot bastards like you in Derry," Tony screamed.'

The next morning it was as if nothing had happened. 'The place was all cleaned up,' Casey recalls. 'He's cooking breakfast saying, "How are you, big man? Good night last night."'

**'I used to shoot bastards like you in Derry, he screamed at me'**

'I'm going, what the f\*\*\*? I moved out the next day – but he cooked me a nice breakfast.'

Catherine moved to Australia after they were married in Dorset, and in 1984 Casey bought his first home in his own unique way. 'I thought, cash will work. I had about \$50,000 in a briefcase. I said to the guy: "I like your house and I can move very quickly. I've got the cash, I can settle but I need your best price and I need it today." We were still about \$20,000 apart, so I opened up the briefcase and it did the trick – I got the price I wanted.'

Helen knew nothing of the deal. 'I took Helen out on the Sunday. It

was born but only lived for minutes. There was no grave.

'There should have been – that's one of my regrets. I was in complete denial of the whole thing.'

Was there a name? 'No – another denial. Another mistake. Should have, absolutely. If I was living my life over again, it's definitely something I'd change.'

Casey met Helen, his current wife, at Christmas 1990. 'The minute I met her I knew she was the person.' It wasn't long before they were married and children began to appear. Today he has five children – two sons and three daughters. He was present for the births, though he'd rather not have been.

'I don't know why men have to go through that – though in fairness, in Australia they did let me take the gas.'

Meanwhile, Casey's businesses in Australia were booming. One of them, Trinity People, ran a 'Champagne' recruitment campaign.

'If you hired a temp for one day, we'd give you a bottle of Moët Chandon. For three or four months, we were the largest purchaser of Moët Chandon in Australia and the business exploded – we were drinking it all after work as well.'

'It was bonkers. It's silly looking back – we were making silly amounts of money.'

In 1992, between the birth of their first and second children, the couple temporarily moved back to Ireland where Casey set up a new venture, Skydome, that ultimately failed. As a result, his Australian home was repossessed. But he was not made bankrupt.

In 1993, when Helen expressed a desire for an older property to do up in Ireland, he knew just what to do. 'What's the oldest place you got?' he asked a local estate agent, who set up a dinner with the owner that Friday night. The property – Learmount Castle set in 200 acres of gardens and forests – was magnificent but in need of restoration.

'I bought Learmount that night,' Casey recalls.

Helen knew nothing of the deal. 'I took Helen out on the Sunday. It



# My regrets over my baby boy who died

was an amazing, beautiful day and the rhododendrons were flowering and we went inside. There was no electricity but there was gas and these amazing fireplaces and cornices.

'I told her I'd just bought it and she went, "You what? I hope you're very happy here but I'll never live here." It took me about five years to sell the damn thing but I ended up making a profit on it.'

Having sold up in Australia, the family moved to Atlanta where Casey established recruitment firm Claddagh Resources in 1995, and made millions once more.

But a squash injury dating from his time in Sydney persisted and eventually needed surgery after years of steroid injections, often directly into the spine by epidural.

'I was living on Celebrex and Skelaxin – you know it's just bad for you, so eventually I had to have the surgery. I had a morphine pump, which I highly recommend. It was brilliant but they wouldn't let me take it home with me. It's brilliant. Morphine is just like, wow!'

He's also had recent surgery on both rotator cuffs. Jokes aside, he says he's never done drugs and can't take opiate pain relief because it constipates him.

Just eight weeks before the election campaign, Casey was hospitalised in intensive care in Atlanta.

'I thought I was having a stroke. I was really sick with temperature and my left leg and foot went numb. The next morning, the other leg went numb.'

He was diagnosed with e.coli,

**'I had a morphine pump. I highly recommend it, it's like, wow!'**

campylobacter and Guillain Barre disease. 'My legs and feet are still numb and my hands feel weird. Stairs is a problem – people think you are drunk or something.'

There are disgruntled employees of Casey's who have repeatedly claimed online that he is an alcoholic who is routinely drunk in the office. He denies this outright, saying the comments amount to 'corporate cyber-bullying.'

Asked if he has a problem with alcohol or if he has ever been to AA, he replies: 'Never. I'm blessed with my mother's genes. I've got my mother's liver. I've never had a hangover but the reason is I know when to stop and I don't drink hard liquor.'

He is proud of his wine cellar in his Donegal home that can hold 2,000 bottles. 'I love wine. I'm a sommelier with the Confrérie des Chevaliers du Tastevin, so I love my Burgundies. I'm an expert in a lot of wines. I did the test. I like good quality wine. Life's too short to drink cheap wine.'

The Confrérie is an exclusive fraternity of Burgundy wine enthusiasts which owns the 12th century Clos de Vougeot chateau. It counts among its membership many luminaries.

'I live life hard and fast but I never go over the line,' he tells me.

So where does that sense of control come from?

'I think partly you get it from your parents... In life, discipline is the horse you ride – that's what my father used to say.'

For Casey that means working out for an hour each day together with a daily dose of milk thistle and a Berocca tablet.

So far, at least, it's working.