

THE Irish EXAMINER

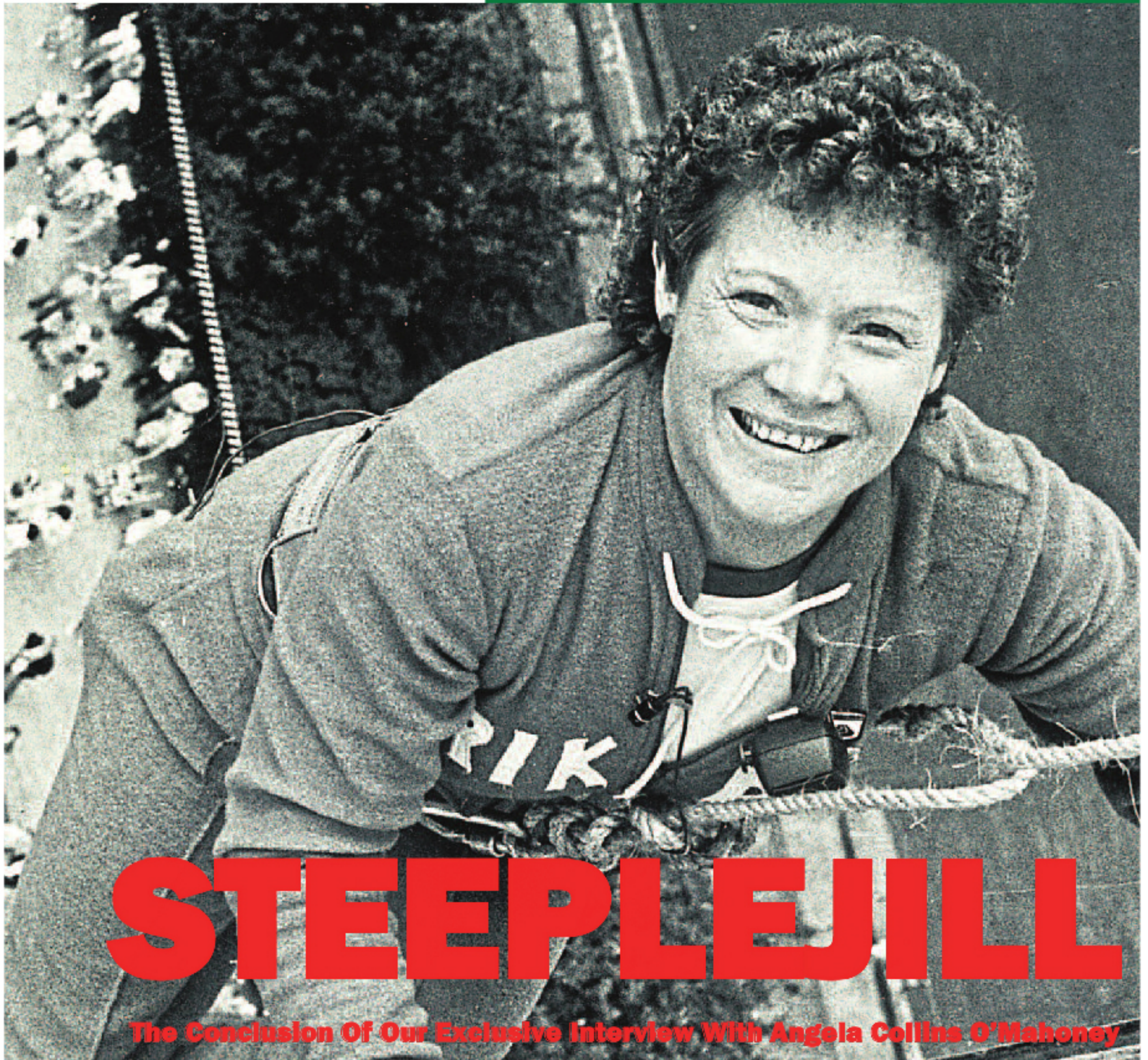
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STEEPLEJILL

The Conclusion Of Our Exclusive Interview With Angela Collins O'Mahoney

When I started the business, steeplejacks were in great demand as we had work on churches, convents and we had several manufacturing plants with tall chimney stacks.

We were so busy that my husband John left his secure pensionable job as a Garda and joined me. The first two years passed quickly as I was pregnant but still travelled around Ireland with my suitcase packed just in case I went into labor while up the country.

However, I was back in Limerick when our daughter Susan was born soon after my appearance on the Late Late Show.

Life then got very busy and wonderful but not for long as I had a serious car accident when travelling back from Millstreet, Co. Cork and Susan was five months old when a lorry backed onto a main road and I got badly injured.

I had to get ninety-eight stitches on my face, which was a setback, but life went on.

The following year I received a telephone call from an American gentleman who arrived in Ireland to carry out a contract near Shannon Airport quite close to where my parents originally came from and close to my own home.

I took the call and immediately knew he wanted "Man Talk" but I persisted and made an appointment with him.

I arrived to meet him on the site

which was at the top of a mountain. He was a lovely man, very gracious but I was scared that I would lose out being a woman. I talked - I could talk for Ireland! but he eventually asked when is Mr. Collins coming? and I had to explain and say I was the Managing Director of Collins Steeplejacks and there was no Mr. Collins and then convinced him my company could carry out the work.

He hired us, and a lifelong friendship began, which was amazing as my face was badly scared and I had little confidence.

He returned to America and not only did we get that contract but he went on to hire my steeplejacks, John and myself to do installation work all over the world. That was a real surprise and I could not believe my good fortune but better was to come.

Knowing now that they were happy with our steeplejacks and the service we gave, I decided one Christmas to visit Boston with John and try and meet the owner of the company to persuade him of the advantages in having a European base in Ireland.

I also told him and his directors of the grants given to start-up companies by the IDA Industrial Development Authority.

I explained that there were capital grants, training grants and that Ireland had sales offices throughout the world (then called CTT, now Enterprise Ireland) who can

assist in selling products manufactured in Ireland.

Also, Ireland had a low tax rate of twelve and a half percent which was very attractive.

The Americans were very happy to hear of this and came here, built their manufacturing facility, and availed of these benefits and, of course, Ireland's highly skilled and educated work force.

I offered four-acres at a very reasonable price and for that I received shares in the company. Life could not have been better. I kept wondering: how did all this come about?

I was Managing Director of this new factory, and of my own Collins Steeplejack company and went on to have our son John and another daughter named Martina and Hilda over the following years. So, life was hectic but enjoyable.

Many visitors and buyers visited the plant and one group asked to go golfing and though John or I had never golfed we took them to the most up market golf course at Dromoland Castle.

I felt silly trying to hit the ball, did many twirlies but did not get the hang of it. We stood aside and let the good golfers pass but had a great evening laughing and chatting.

Now, we had moved to an old Georgian house in Clonlara County Clare which had sixty-eight acres of land with it so on the way home that afternoon I said to John that we could build our own golf course on our land as there is a niche in the market.

We then converted our sixty-eight-acre farm to a nine-hole golf course and the late famous champion golfer Christy O'Connor officially opened it in 1986.

It was a real success as we catered for guests and school groups and had tours from as far away as Japan visit but then I got ill and sold it to an English company some years later who developed it further but nevertheless it was a profitable venture for us.

Later I got colon cancer and during the check-ups they discovered I needed four stents as I had heart problems, which were in our family so it was expected but soon that was all sorted and I got back on my feet.

I looked back at my life and the many knocks but realize that being disadvantaged in childhood helped me.

It was in my opinion as good as a Degree; having been accustomed to having little luxuries made me very appreciative.

Santa never found our house and many others but that was fine as we had love most of the time when Dad was sober but I really appreciated everything that came my way and took nothing for granted.

I had the most wonderful staff, we were more like family than employee and employer.

Being deprived of heat and comfort on occasions made me look after my business so I made sure we offered a good service in order that we never lost a customer so, surrounded by a wonderful dedicated staff, we always tried to give 100 per cent and often went beyond the normal aiming to attain that.

My parents passed on their values and a deep belief in God, which sustained me during my life and we in turn passed those values onto our children and they are doing the same with their children.

This I feel is very important especially now when we have a lot of confusion in our world. Parents can be stressed, pressurized, and confused with all the new technology and must be vigilant.

I wrote this book with all that in mind and use my time giving talks to students, and after dinner speeches and passing on this advice gained from my experiences.

I believe that parents should give their children pocket money but only if they work for it. Children usually follow in their parent's foot steps so setting a good example and providing them with love is vitally important.

It is difficult to keep young people from their iPhone and iPads but it is important to guide them to use those for education as we are being replaced by machines and they need to start thinking of their job prospects for the future. It is so great to read about young teenagers being entrepreneurs.

Work is often thought of as stressful but only if we think we should not be doing it, if we are brought up to understand that work is necessary we can thoroughly enjoy these 24/7 demands in a caring, respectful, and compassionate environment.

With the right approach, hard work can be gratifying and raise our self-esteem but we need appreciation and respect while still understanding the need to be competitive.

From reviews and comments from readers, my book THE STORY OF IRELAND'S ONLY STEEPLEJILL is a great read. It is a family story and a journey that

ends with success despite a bleak and sad start.

It tells how women were expected to work in the 50s and 60s, and many tell me that my story takes the reader into my kitchen as if going for a cup of tea.

It is also funny in parts. More readers tell me it is very inspiring and emotional and makes the reader wonder if it is true - that a woman could do this, but of course it is, and that was only possible by working through problems and being close to our employees and the backing of your community.

Together we can do anything. It is not a self-help book and I know it shows sheer determination and that must always be the goal. Ask for help, and advice, there are so many who want to assist and especially old people with time on their hands who have so much wisdom.

Of course, I was very lucky to be one of the first woman to be a steeplejack (steeplejill) and the first woman to build a golf course and so this will be inspiring all by itself.

The great advantage I had was that I got so much attention from the media because of my unusual work. I never forget that I was lucky.

In interviews my employees were often asked how they felt working for a woman and would they trust a woman? This was a very genuine question in those days, as I felt unsure myself but I just kept pushing on. Now of course we have all to watch our Ps and Qs.

It was a wonderful life and I got many Awards which I felt undeserving of but they are nice to look back on now.

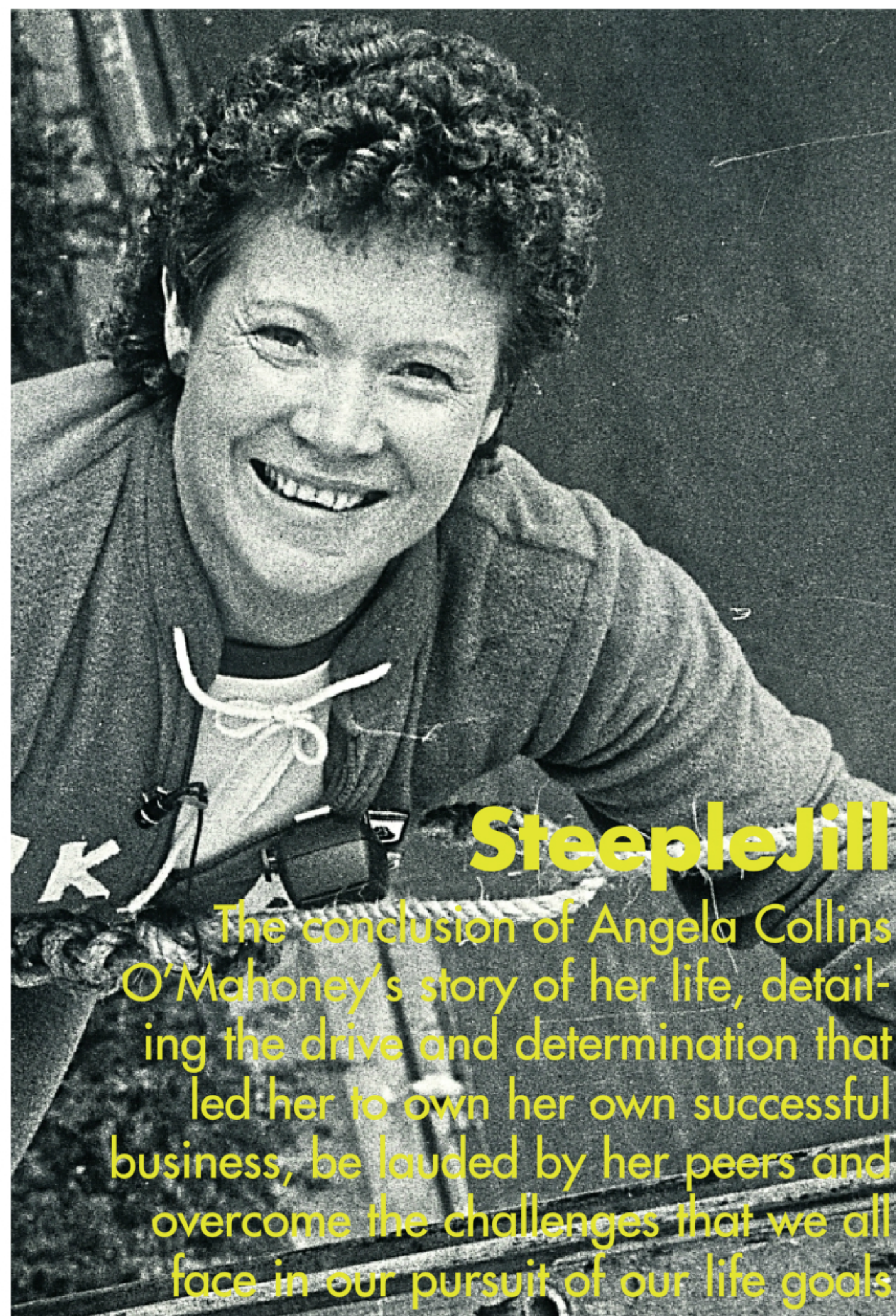
I was Ireland's First Veuve Clicquot Business Woman of the Year in 1980, and won the Bowmaker Award for Irish Industry in 1986.

I was asked to participate in the celebrations of the Cork 800 Charter in 1985 and that was the highlight of my career.

John a proud Corkman was especially delighted when I was asked to climb the County Hall, and then to win the Great Race was the icing on the cake and I received an Honorary Doctorate for work in my community in 1992 presented to me by the then Taoiseach, Leader of our Country.

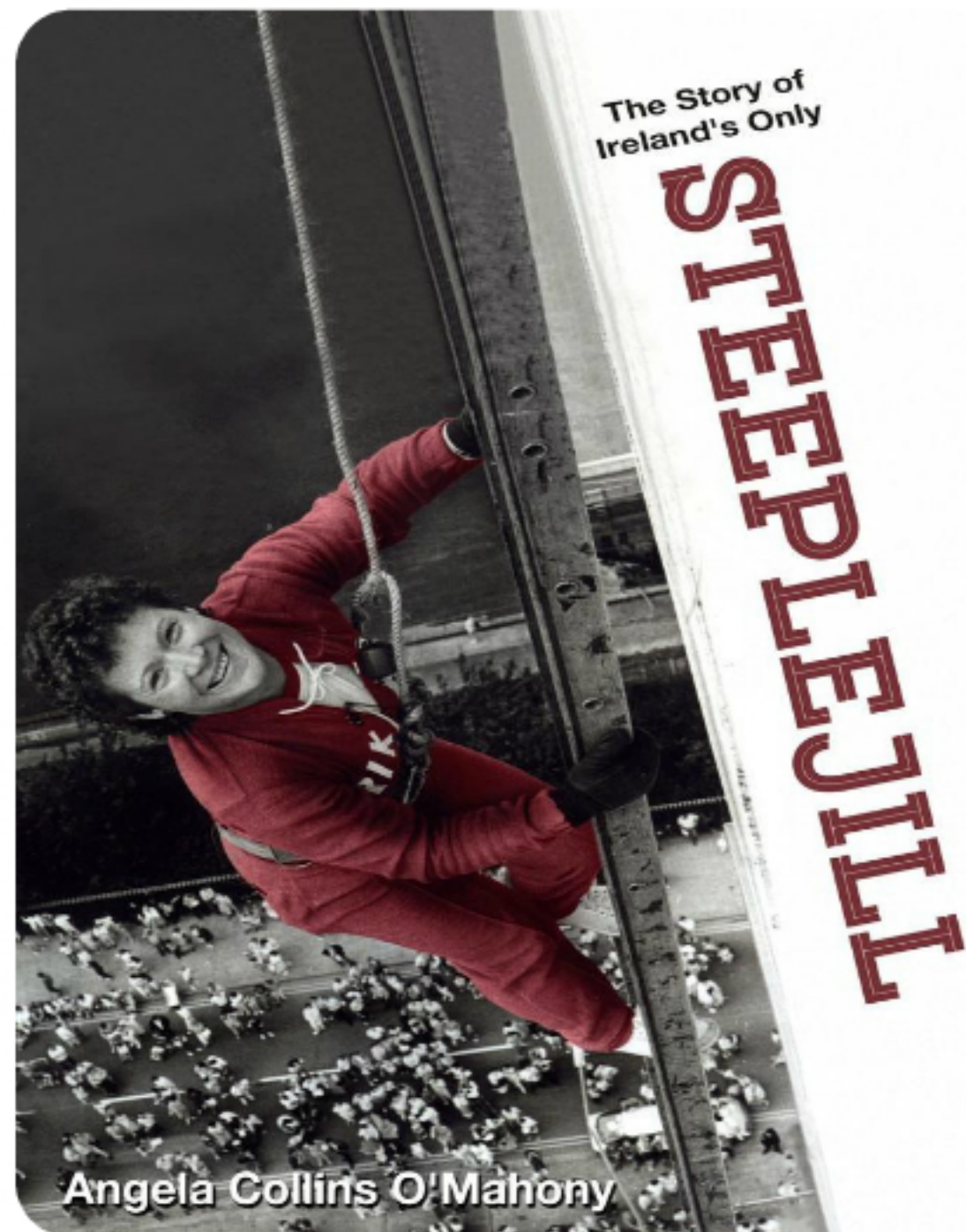
To the people who gave these awards and to the people who supported me I am most grateful.

To purchase a copy of "The Story of Ireland's Only Steeplejill" please visit www.collinssteeplejacks.com



SteepleJill

The conclusion of Angela Collins O'Mahoney's story of her life, detailing the drive and determination that led her to own her own successful business, be lauded by her peers and overcome the challenges that we all face in our pursuit of our life goals



The Story of
Ireland's Only

STEEPLEJILL

Angela Collins O'Mahoney