

Fintan Cooney

# From Adman to Undertaker



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When I first told my mother that I'd gotten a job in an advertising agency she said *"Oh Fintan, is that not a very cut-throat profession?"* *"Oh no, Mum,"* I reassured her, *"everyone seems very nice"*. Little did I know.

While I was at school I wanted to be a vet like my father or maybe a doctor, but because there was no mistake with my leaving certificate results I ended up doing Commerce in UCD, which I hated at first.

In second year we studied marketing and it got more interesting. Then I met Gary Joyce on a golf course. Neither of us played golf, but she had just started an advertising agency with Roddy Rowan and I got offered a job.

And so began a 25-year career in advertising which included stints at three agencies – all at very exciting times in their respective lives. I loved it. It was fast-moving and exhilarating, I met so many interesting and fun people and I enjoyed playing a part in creating famous campaigns and the thrill of pitching for and, sometimes, even winning new business.

In 2006 my life changed forever when my second child Rachel was born with Cerebral Palsy – a condition which left her severely physically disabled and requiring full care for the rest of her life. Life changing events like this are often the catalyst for other changes in one's life. I think that's because they put things in perspective.

By the time Rachel was born the gloss was beginning to fade from the world of advertising for me.



Over time I had noticed a fundamental shift in the relationship dynamic between agencies and their clients. While once it had been based on mutual professional respect (as exists between most professional services providers and their clients), it had become very much master and subordinate.

Client companies had become larger, often faceless multi-nationals who treated the procurement of their advertising services as they would that of the raw materials for the products they manufactured.

Respect for the advertising agency and the valuable experience they could bring to a client's business was diminishing, as was the importance placed on long-term, and usually very profitable, client/agency relationships.

Of course the advertising industry was as much to blame as the clients. We continued to pander to their increasingly unreasonable demands, providing hundreds of thousands of euro worth of free services in elaborate pitches, with no guarantee that any of the competing agencies would even win the business or have it for a set period of time that might allow them to recover their costs and even make some profit.

To keep up with the increased pressure of servicing these insatiable clients, on whom my and my colleagues' livelihoods depended, I found myself struggling to balance my work and home commitments – often returning to the office at 9 or 10 pm at night after I'd helped put my children to bed.

I decided I'd had enough.



At the beginning of 2012 I set myself the dual goals of exiting the advertising profession and finding myself a new one.

But what to do?

The most common question I get asked about my career change is “*Why did you choose funeral undertaking?*” The answer is, I think, that it was always my calling and I finally gave in.

My great great grandfather William Corrigan established one of Dublin’s oldest funeral directors: Corrigan & Sons of Camden Street. While my immediate family are no longer involved in this business, I was very curious when I discovered this connection.

Around the time I started my first advertising job I was looking at the funeral business in my home town of Mullingar. The town had no funeral home and it badly needed one. Fintan, the fresh-faced business graduate, thought he might be the man to open Mullingar’s first funeral home.

I started to research the idea intensively, getting advice and experience from a funeral director in Dublin. I was even looking at potential premises.

Unfortunately, someone else, with better resources than me, had seen the same opportunity and got there before me.

I scuttled back to my advertising job. But I never forgot what might have been and, when I was having a particularly bad day in the agency, I would think about how much easier life would be if I was a funeral director.



So when I finally made the decision to change careers, Funeral Director was high on my list of alternatives. I was fortunate enough to secure a position with a great company called Fanagans.

Unfortunately, one of the first funerals I arranged was that of my friend and former colleague Johnny Ferguson, in April 2013. There were people from the advertising profession attending the funeral who hadn't heard of my recent career change and were wondering why I appeared to be directing the funeral. My friend Richie Whyte described the occasion as my *“official coming out as a funeral director”*.

One of the refreshing aspects about my new profession is that it suits maturity - in fact it requires it. People say that the ad business has become a “young person's game” and, regrettably, I think there's some truth to that, which is a shame because, as I've learned, there's great value in experience.

I think looking back at it, while I really enjoyed my time in advertising and it brought me much success, I was always better suited to a caring profession – and a caring profession advertising is not. (You were right Mum).

Thankfully, I have no regrets. I don't regret my 25 years in advertising – it was a ball. I don't regret my decision to leave advertising and I certainly don't regret my choice of second career – it feels like I'm home.



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***Fintan Cooney** was a director and shareholder of Chemistry for 13 years.  
He previously held client service positions at McCann-Erickson Dublin  
and Dimension and he served on the board of IAPI.  
Since 2013 he has been a Funeral Director with Fanagans and recently  
he joined the board of the Irish Association of Funeral Directors.*  
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**Designed and typeset by Gerry McCloskey**

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