

**Interviewer:** Austin, thank you very much for agreeing to be interviewed by us. And we're fascinated to hear all about your traveling shop. And we'll start off with when did the traveling shop start?

**Austin Francis:** The traveling shop started in September of 1971. I think it'd be about the 17th or 18th of September. It was a Saturday I started off it. And what did spark that traveling shop was, I was at a fair on the fourth or fifth of September, and at that time we had a fair in Louisburgh every month, and there was a chap selling lambs, a bunch of lambs across the road from me, and I was selling a bunch of lambs on the other side of the road. And I sold my lamb's, and they were sold. I can remember them, well, they were sold for four pounds apiece. That was now in September 1971.

**Interviewer:** That would have been a good price.

**Austin Francis:** Yeah, it was it was pretty okay. And I never thought any more about that. Actually, that was on a Monday and on the Tuesday, I was in Louisburgh, and I went into Richard Lyons shop anyway to get groceries or whatever. And the man that was across the street from me, he had 19 lambs. And didn't he say to me, you know the farmer dam it you'll come up and buy them lambs off me. And I said sure I sold my lambs yesterday ah, but he says you'll come up and you'll buy the lambs of me. And to be quite honest with you, he was getting three pounds apiece for his lambs. The only thing about them was they were all male lambs and mine was female.

**Interviewer:** They were all wanted the ladies, very good

**Austin Francis:** Yeah so, the ladies were very good. So, after I eat my dinner here anyways, myself and my late father anyway, I begged him because he wasn't into that work either, but I was always wanting to change. So, I sat in my car, and I went up to Furmoyle, and I purchased the lambs off him, and I give him 10 shillings apiece more than he was getting in Louisburgh.

**Interviewer:** Very good

**Austin Francis:** And that's when he brought them and when he brought them down. Now I do tell it to people, like you can imagine. He says I'll leave those lambs at you in the evening. And he was just with his bicycle and his dog, and he drove his 19 lands from Furmoyle down here. And when they were put into the shed and my father was there and they had been talking because they had been mates they did some work together as gangers and all that and I says to the man, like I said, would you buy a hind leg off one of them and the whole place just you could hear a pin drop because none of them knew that I had something in mind

**Interviewer:** Brilliant

**Austin Francis:** And ah he says I will. And the story about it was the hind leg was usually of that type of a lamb would weigh eight pounds and I was charging five shillings per pound. So that was two pounds for one quarter of the lamb and the he asked me for three pounds 10. That's what put me on the road.

**Interviewer:** Brilliant

**Austin Francis:** And then the first thing that I done was I had to go out the country because like that time it was three or four butcher shops in Louisburgh but had to go out the country and I canvased and I said I'm opening a butcher shop a traveling butcher shop and I had orders got for six of the Lambs before anything else has happened so I had done my homework before I started and with that and I spent 10 years at that along with everything you could think of in the groceries line

**Interviewer:** Brilliant and what sort of vehicle did you use?

**Austin Francis:** Well at the start when I had an Opel Kadett car and you see you killed your meat and you put it into your grease proof paper and your brown paper rounded and your twine around it which was a lot work and then you could just have your cardboard boxes and you could call up to the house and they wanted a hind leg or they wanted chops or they wanted a roast of a shoulder or they wanted what we used to call it boiler mutton that was the shoulder and that would be the cheap cut.

**Interviewer:** Very good.

**Austin Francis:** And it was left on the table, so I was doing it online long before

**Interviewer:** And how did you store the meat Austin Francis

**Austin Francis:** Well, you see the point about it was them times I built a slaughterhouse and a butcher house in a shop and done everything up to, as a matter of fact there was no pipe water in the area, and I piped water from the top of the field into the shed. So that was the first pipe water that ever came to Doughmakeon six years after before Loch Coinneal came

**Interviewer:** Before it even came into your own house.

**Austin Francis:** Yes

**Interviewer:** Wow That's incredible.

**Austin Francis:** Yeah, and then the meat the sheep or the lambs they were killed on a Thursday evening at four o'clock I killed the lambs at four o'clock and they were hanging until six o'clock Saturday morning. And I get up and I'd start my butchering cutting down the meat and I often think I could keep you know if you ordered a piece last Saturday. I could without ever writing it down. I could tell now I had 65 customers, and I could tell everybody's and write it down their name on the piece

**Interviewer:** That's amazing. Who taught you butchery Austin Francis?

**Austin Francis:** The only thing was my late dad, always we had sheep here. And we did always kill a lamb at Christmas. And that's how that started. That's how I started.

**Interviewer:** So, it was handed down basically

**Austin Francis:** And there was a lady in Louisburgh that I knew, and I went in, and I sold her some meat, and her husband was an agricultural adviser. And she had a book with all the cuts of meats you know, the rack chops the gig chops the hind leg the whole lot, and she gave me that and I learned how to do it from there, that time you see here it was just your saw and your clever but there was no electric so there was nothing it was all by hand

**Interviewer:** Some job though. Yeah, yeah, it was hard work. And was it only meat you sold Austin Francis; did you have anything else on your in your shop?

**Austin Francis:** What started me then I was maybe six months or thereabouts doing that, when everybody started asking me because them times Brige, there was very little cars on the road. A woman that said to me, why don't you bring me a loaf of bread could you not bring me bread, and matter of fact, Jeffrey Gibbons the late Jeffrey Gibbons had started, he was in a creamery, and he had started to bottle milk and crates. And I used to collect them at Seamus Durkan's, and I'd have my crate to milk anybody that wanted milk. Now. Nearly everybody at the time will say 80% of people were milking their own cow. But the trend was just starting to come in as a nation, the market, and the other side of the coins was the late John Joe Philbin. He had a shop in Louisburgh now where Books at One is that was John Joe Philbin's store, and he had he sold everything, and he was closing and, I always used to be in and out buying stuff and he knew that I was on the road and anxious to get going and he gave me his card to go into what do you call it, it was down by the hat factory in Castlebar

**Interviewer:** Like a cash and carry

**Austin Francis:** Joe told me he said, you go going there, and he says I'll vouch for you, and you could buy, you could buy all your groceries in there

**Interviewer:** So, like tea and sugar, everything

**Austin Francis:** Everything, I sold everything from the soother up

**Interviewer:** Obviously, you couldn't do this out of your car all the time Austin Francis

**Austin Francis:** No, I bought, I bought a Long-based Opel estate van and I could fill that, honestly, I often think of it, I used to go there with that Opel estate, because you know how you could put down and make a van, you know, and I used to fill that in cash and carry for that times and hasn't things gone mad for 90 pounds.

**Interviewer:** Wow. Now, that's brilliant.

**Austin Francis:** And everybody was like, like we're here, now they're complaining too, I know. But like the money was scarce.

**Interviewer:** Yeah, absolutely. But then you were a lifeline to people.

**Austin Francis:** Yeah, because, like, as I say, I bought those groceries and left them on the table to the woman. Now there was nearly every house you went to that and there was a big family, you know, and it was, it was just a gift. Now you had you had a bachelor, or you

might have an old maid in house as well. And they had the welcome as the world because they never seen anybody from Saturday to Saturday me and the Post Man.

**Interviewer:** Yeah

**Austin Francis:** I started here in the village selling and I used to go all the way, there's no house in it now to the back of Croagh Patrick, there in Culleen. There was an old lady there and her son and there were two or three other houses all occupied along the way.

**Interviewer:** So that was your distance.

**Austin Francis:** And then I'd finish up mostly now, we'll say a go as far as James Gallagher is and Thallabawn down that area, right around that circle. Because I'd start here into, we'd say Doughmarkeon onto Askilllaun, Carrowmore into Louisburgh up into we'd say the road I take would be Shraugh I'd a few customers there, and into Mullagh and Cnoc and Kilsallagh all of them.

**Interviewer:** Did you just start off by just going around once you had your meat you went from door to door and there was word of mouth?

**Austin Francis:** It was a word of mouth.

**Interviewer:** Wow. Absolutely brilliant.

**Austin Francis:** It was all okay, because all cash and the point about who was Brige if there ever was somebody I knew would get? No, there was no, I never put anybody's name in a book or anything, if there was a woman hadn't money will say Saturday today, and I'd say you know she'd say well I haven't got any money today well, I'd say there's none of your kids going to bed hungry tonight or anybody they had to have you know

**Interviewer:** Fair play that was a huge relief for people

**Austin Francis:** It was

**Interviewer:** Because it was often when you went into a shop in town. It was the embarrassment of not having enough money

**Austin Francis:** Correct? Yeah. And then the shopkeeper naturally enough he had to put it in a ledger, you know, and a lot of people in them years or even before that what they're doing was they raise a bill but you know, when a beast was sold, sheep was sold the cattle were sold the pigs were sold, or something like that, they were cleared and they take them on again. That's how they ran their businesses them times.

**Interviewer:** How often did you go around

**Austin Francis:** I went round very Saturday,

**Interviewer:** Every Saturday,

**Austin Francis:** Every Saturday, hail rain or snow, and the funny thing about it, you'd leave here now in the month of January, February, and I often left here and there would be no snow and when you get as far as Cregganbaun there would be a bank of snow there as far as and sometimes it's very hard to get to hill to get onto the main road

**Interviewer:** And if you were going up Culleen it wouldn't have been easy

**Austin Francis:** Yeah, that's the truth. Yeah. And then what would hit you as well in them hilly areas were a big flood. If there was a big flood, it would tear the roads. There was one that lady that I mentioned that I used to call and there was a road at the very end of that Culleen road. And it used to come down and it used to tear like a big drain down the centre of the road. And, it was amazing, after I got to be elected into the council, I got a letter from women in America that had left that area, but they couldn't get to their home. And they had tried everybody to try and get work done on the road. And they asked they sent me a letter anyways. And I got the council to spend thirty thousand to fix that road so they could come home and it's there to this day.

**Interviewer:** Did you have any competitors?

**Austin Francis:** Yes, there was but you had John Joe McDonald, the late John Joe McDonald, and the late Henry Joe Gill, from Lecanvy on the corner there a lovely house they reconstructed. But I never slaughtered anything, but the mountain mutton and they used to go to a Ballinrobe, and they'd buy the white sheep. And it was a lot of fat. So, I always had the lean meat. So, I had that niche in the market, they couldn't understand that they were pulling away they couldn't sell anything, and I could come in behind them and sell you know

**Interviewer:** You must have been thinking about this for years Austin Francis as a young lad.

**Austin Francis:** I thought about a lot of things when I was in England. The most thing when I was in England the landlord, I had, he was always into making a few pounds that way and he used to say to me, if we ever go to Ireland, Francis will open a travelling shop.

**Interviewer:** That's clicked it off in your mind. Yeah. And why not. Was there any bartering going on?

**Austin Francis:** Yeah. Because, you know, we say if when you when you would add up, I don't know we'll say for 10 or 12. Or if it was 12 pounds, everything was pounds, 12 pounds. 10 shillings 12 pounds you would always like if you wanted to try and make it as even, you know, the poor woman might or she might not have the 12 pounds, she might have 12 pound and eight shillings, but you didn't

**Interviewer:** You didn't get the 8 shillings

Austin Francis: No, no, no, no. You, you'd always find it on around about way you know?

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** Would anyone give you eggs in lieu of something? Or milk lieu of some?

**Austin Francis:** No, no, no. I used to buy the eggs as well of people and sell them I used to buy eggs off one woman one side of the road and sell the eggs to another woman the other side of the road.

**Interviewer:** Good man yourself

**Austin Francis:** I used to laugh to myself. Lord have mercy on them both, one woman would be waiting patiently for me to come to buy the country egg. You see, that's what they wanted the country egg.

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Austin Francis:** And the other woman was waiting patiently at the other side of the road. And blessing me asking if where you could get a country egg and the hen were eating

**Interviewer:** Eating her front lawn

**Austin Francis:** And that woman, she'd never let you go. The woman that I had sold them to she had to put two of them down maybe and a rasher then, and you had to have the tea with her. Oh, yeah.

**Interviewer:** You must have spent till 12 o'clock that night going around?

**Austin Francis:** Well, you'd have to you couldn't, you couldn't have tea everywhere because everybody wanted you to, because I think it was the company and the bit news from you know

**Interviewer:** And they knew that you were going to be good, fair.

**Austin Francis:** No, no, no, that was the way it was I tell you it was a university of life. And it's, it puts a foundation in to my political career.

**Interviewer:** Absolutely.

**Austin Francis:** Everybody knew me that was alive. You know, the story. The old story was, the customer is all there, right? Whether they're, whether they're right or wrong. It's just customers was always right. And as I said, if that person didn't want something today, and what I found about people like that had shops, if you didn't go into them, they wouldn't speak to you which you was a very wrong thing.

**Interviewer:** Wow.

**Austin Francis:** Oh, yeah, that's you know, they didn't want to know you. And if somebody didn't want my custom today well if I met them the day after you had a smile and a wave for them because they, where you know they, where they were always going to come back again you know

**Interviewer:** Did you find you got much opposition from the butchers and the shops in town

**Austin Francis:** No, they just had to grin and bear it as much as they could I sold chops and meat in five or six houses in Louisburgh

**Interviewer:** But the thing is there was probably enough room for your both

**Austin Francis:** Ah sure why wouldn't there. And to this very day, there's enough room for everybody to use their common sense.

**Interviewer:** Exactly.

**Austin Francis:** There's a lot of people that begrudge the other fella. And it's, it's the same business we'd say that's why Louisburgh hasn't ever developed. Because they were, they were afraid of the next fella making a pound in Louisburgh long ago they should have got to be a corporation and they should have kept their businesses going and stuff like that. I said, you know what Louisburgh could do with is, if they had a greenfield site, like a market hall, and to have them all within and everyone has their own stall in it. And that they could go in and you know, we're like sheep, you won't wait in the one place all the time you will go and do your business

**Interviewer:** Absolutely. Did any of your family join with you to do it?

**Austin Francis:** Well, at that stage because when I opened a shop, I got married three weeks after it

**Interviewer:** Oh my God and did she put up with this shenanigan's

**Austin Francis:** I have to say that Celia was my rock.

**Interviewer:** Yes.

**Austin Francis:** You know, because like to this day I'm never at home. And now the other end of it was great business that time with the weekends. Because Lord Sligo's in Westport they had started their horse caravans you'll see.

**Interviewer:** Oh right.

**Austin Francis:** Yeah, and they would come out to the late John Ternan's father and John Ternan himself, and a drove of horse drawn caravans would come out and he'd accommodate them down at the beach and that was Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. And the first thing they do was to ask Johnny Ternan they'd be hungry, and they were thirsty is there anywhere we can get anything to eat. And they were directed, there would be a stream of them coming over Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. They were mostly from we'd say Germany and Italy, and those foreign countries. That was like, language wise if they might maybe we have to have an interpreter with them at times. But they used to come in droves. But they loved they love the fresh meat.

**Interviewer:** Yes.

**Austin Francis:** And they used to barbecue it behind on the beach, you see was the meat they said they never tasted anything like it but the point about it is the Black face mountain mutton down of the heather is lovely taste

**Interviewer:** Lovely taste yeah

**Austin Francis:** They wanted we'll say any commodities that you had you know, fair play to Celia that time she was young and fit, they loved homemade cake of bread. And that would be baked there fresh for them, and they would love it.

**Interviewer:** Brilliant, so Celia added to your empire

**Austin Francis:** She did, without women we'd be nowhere

**Interviewer:** You had obviously then had kids with Celia, was that coming to an end then your shop?

**Austin Francis:** Well, the nine of them was born inside 12 years so the youngest was only about 12 when I finished up the shop because they got to be able to carry out the box of groceries or pack with me and stuff like that.

**Interviewer:** Yeah,

**Austin Francis:** You know, the oldest of them

**Interviewer:** And did you still, continue to sell it out of that estate car?

**Austin Francis:** Oh, I did

**Interviewer:** So, there was no step up to a truck

**Austin Francis:** No there wasn't the petrol wasn't to dear at the time and stuff like that and then if I ever we'll say had run out of stuff and didn't want to maybe hadn't time to get to Castlebar, Kelly's in Westport at the Octagon they ran a shop out to the local shops if you wanted flour, or tea or sugar they ran a shop always on a Monday, he'd land here and you would have it

**Interviewer:** And Austin Francis how would you sell your flour because like that it wouldn't have been bagged up. It would be big bags of flour?

**Austin Francis:** Yeah, if you wanted to have the flour, I bring that with me. Yeah, but you want usually the little, small bags were just coming into play at a time then.

**Interviewer:** Yeah,

**Austin Francis:** You know

**Interviewer:** And where they still in the hessian bags

**Austin Francis:** At time it was the old flour bags yeah for sure. It was more or less a ten stone of flour or a 100 weight of it, you see when I was growing up, it was a 10 stone we all were purchased.

**Interviewer:** Yeah, yeah.

**Austin Francis:** And that cost one pound and 19 shillings.

**Interviewer:** Wow

**Austin Francis:** Yeah, the point about it was, there was so many cakes of bread baked. Everything was like I said people had learned from ration the ration books. And everything was because like, it's not like now you see you had your breakfast, you had your dinner. And summertime you had your evening tea, and you had your supper. The food in my thinking was nourishable and when you eat it, you weren't hungry. It's no, it's, it's, it's very

**Interviewer:** It's very convenient, isn't it?

**Austin Francis:** Yeah, the kettle is on every five minutes, there was rarely there was no in the farmhouse at that time, you had your duck eggs and your hen eggs.

**Interviewer:** Yes

**Austin Francis:** For the breakfast, and then you had your meat and potatoes and vegetables for the dinner and that we'd say the pig was killed in November, and that pig lasted you until to probably March or April, you see it was pickled and everything and you know, and you cooked your lovely rashers or you could put you piece down with your cabbage as well. You had your butter, you'll see your homemade butter, and you had your milk. So, like

**Interviewer:** You were self sufficient

**Austin Francis:** Yeah. And then you'll see the point about it was, we said they'd have themselves supplied, I don't know if you'll ever hear about crock butter. That was when you made the churning there was a big crock, and when you made the churning then and you could take so much of that butter for fresh butter, and you put it into the crock. You put salt on the crock and put your piece of butter down on that and put it in the crock. And when you made your next churning. churning was made usually every seven days or thereabout, and they'd have that, and they would have a full crock of butter and when the cows would dry in the wintertime waiting on them to calve, they had their crock of butter, and they had their home-made butter then

**Interviewer:** Very clever

**Austin Francis:** Yeah, so they sustained themselves that way because I grew up here I never we never had a pound of what they called at the time creamery butter Black Swan I think I could remember was the name of it and you had it started coming out then the creamery to Killsheeclougher was another type, Killsheeclougher was the name that you'd see it on, in the shops on a pound of butter Yeah

**Interviewer:** Yeah, no Kerry gold? No.

**Austin Francis:** No there was no Kerry Gold. Black Swan I can still remember that.

**Interviewer:** Brilliant You never made your butchery bigger than it was?

**Austin Francis:** As it came towards the end then, Michael Tom Durkin where we had the men shed until lately. Michael Tom used to ask me to slaughter with them, I used to go in there and I used to slaughter the sheep for himself and John there and he used to let me use the cold room which was an I have to say the two Durkin lads were two gentleman like they always let another butcher in and you could hang your sheep in the cold room and you could go in there on a morning at six o'clock in the morning. And you could take your sheep your carcass and you could cut it up

**Interviewer:** That's incredibly generous when you consider that they're making the business

**Austin Francis:** And then to back it all up. It was amazing because you see in them times gone by there was never beef, killed in Louisburgh it was only killed at Christmas. You could never get beef. You'd have to go for Westport to get it

**Interviewer:** Why was that? Austin Francis

**Austin Francis:** It seems they hadn't got the facilities, or you know killing a beef is big work. And Michael Tom had to good slaughterhouse, and he spent a lot of money on it it's a petty what happened that he went out of business, but it was always at Christmas. And they'd be what they call a cow heifer for Christmas, Kane's would do it and Durkin's would do it that would be only, probably the only two that would do it. And it would be all sold out then over the Christmas week or there about, and then Michael Tom started killing his own beef. And then when he was in the business with them, somebody might say to me is there any chance any chance that you could bring us a bit of beef or something like that? And I'd say to Michael Tom, I had him an order of beef, and he'd give it to me, and he'd give me my you know, cushion and that ways, I had to take it further and he'd often say to me where are you going with that today and that's how we run our business. And a lot another thing he used to slaughter were pig's,

**Interviewer:** Right

**Austin Francis:** And there were lots of customers that time who wanted pig's heads they wanted pig's heads. And there were old fellas like you know that are old as I am and Michael Tom couldn't get it, he, couldn't get around it. You wouldn't have a customer much in town to buy a pig's head, do you know off you and I used to buy a pig's head and he'd split it down the middle and I'd sell it in two half's or anything like that.

**Interviewer:** And was that just like a country tradition for this Aston France.

**Austin Francis:** Oh yeah. You see a pig's head was good kitchen. It was good kitchen.

**Interviewer:** Yeah, yeah, you can make a lot from a pig's head.

**Austin Francis:** Yeah, sure isn't there, brawn

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Austin Francis:** But that was how myself and Michael Tom worked. Yeah,

**Interviewer:** Yeah. Why did it all come to an end Austin Francis?

**Austin Francis:** It All? Well, I'll tell you, my, my late dad was here with us then and passed away, like I was running I was making 10 cows by hand for along with that and I had three sous and their bonnet's, and I had 20 cows as well to look after, you know, and it was that, something had to give

**Interviewer:** And your father was ailing too so when

**Austin Francis:** He passed away suddenly, you know, so it was a shock to the system as well.

**Interviewer:** So how long did you work in England for Austin Francis?

**Austin Francis:** I was, it was roughly six years. I started in January 65, and I worked until August 69, and I came home here to stay and absolutely Brige there was nothing here. There was nothing here. Like you there wasn't the only thing that was here that kept you sane was, there was dances six nights a week. six nights a week.

**Interviewer:** Wow, that's a lot of dancing.

**Austin Francis:** A lot of dancing but

**Interviewer:** In the area

**Austin Francis:** And well I'll tell you, you'll start, the only night there wasn't a dance was on Monday night. And you got to go to the hall in Newport Tuesday night, to the Halfway that were that antique shop was on the Castlebar road that was Wednesday night. You had Thursday night in Louisburgh, and you had Friday night in Aughagower, and you had a choice of Castlebar or Westport on Sunday you had the Starlight, and you had the Travelers Friend

**Interviewer:** Wow.

**Austin Francis:** And there was no dancing on a Monday night

**Interviewer:** You would want to be selling a bit of mutton for the petrol for that one as well.

**Austin Francis:** Yeah, but petrol was 4 shillings a gallon or fourth and sixth or something like that you

**Interviewer:** Did you meet some customers when you were out dancing

**Austin Francis:** Of course, you would

**Interviewer:** Some promises for the week ahead.

**Austin Francis:** I spent six years between I left then again just as I eat my Christmas dinner I say's I'm going back again, and I went back again to work in Huddersfield where I am back to the same company that I worked all my life with you know, I worked with John Lang's in the building construction work. And the only thing that was there was I was left. I was always left in charge of everything. I had to be in charge of everything and I said to myself what have I done wrong he'd say Francis you'll do this Francis; you will do that. I was just looking at pictures there. That's when I went back again to England with the council I showed the fellas, the job I had and where we worked, and they took pictures of me and stuff like that. And it was it was amazing. Because the last time I was back, it was the town of Halifax and the last job I had was taken out the foundation of Barclays Bank. It was Halifax building society they must have been passed on from Barclays anyway. And I that's where I hijacked and come home to this country but when I went back again anyways, I was at a black tuxedo on me, and Dickie bow and I was represented the county. Because there's a town twinned with Castlebar and Calderdale is the name of the town, and they twined so I had to go back to twin that town. And of course, you had to think of something you know, there was always a speech to be made. And when I went up to the podium anyways, I took the mic, and I says good evening, ladies, and gentlemen. And as I'm very much at home here in this town, I said I took out the foundation of Barclays Bank across the road and of course they were all round me and we never got into it and what was it like, but there the little things you have

**Interviewer:** Absolutely. But you had no regrets coming home in the end

**Austin Francis:** No, not at all

**Interviewer:** Well, it's then you met your lovely wife Celia

**Austin Francis:** No, I met Celia in December I came home in March

**Interviewer:** And Is Celia a local girl?

**Austin Francis:** She's from Cong

**Interviewer:** Not far at one of the dance's I'd say

**Austin Francis:** 40 miles away she worked in Hotel Westport

**Interviewer:** Ah very good

**Austin Francis:** Hotel Westport was just after opening at the time and all the girls had come there

**Interviewer:** It was a different time and a different world

**Austin Francis:** It was it was

**Interviewer:** Legislation now you wouldn't have ben able to open up

**Austin Francis:** No, sure you can do nothing not

**Interviewer:** No

**Austin Francis:** I think the worst legislation that came in is where you have to, if I went out today and bought an animal you would have to have him 47 days in ownership before you can sell him again that is wrong because is there any shopkeeper or any business that will buy stuff and has to hold it 47 days. That is one thing that should not have been passed. But that's the way you make a few pounds you know

**Interviewer:** Yeah, you have to make a living out of it

**Austin Francis:** You have to make a living out of it, you see that's where the whole thing has gone wrong too and that's why you have the youngsters today not wanting to go into farming because everything is red tape red tape.

**Interviewer:** You worked a long day

**Austin Francis:** You went round I'd say maybe you start at 11 o'clock in the day until around when I was selling the meat first you be home maybe a 6 in the evening but by heck it used to be 10 or 11 when I had the groceries, and you know it was great because I sold every article under the sun that you would use in the house. I can even remember a girl buying a shirt for her boyfriend

**Interviewer:** My goodness

**Austin Francis:** Yeah

**Interviewer:** And where would you get that from?

**Austin Francis:** You could go in a buy them from the shops you see you know

**Interviewer:** Really

**Austin Francis:** Yeah, and the Pretty Polly's if you can remember

**Interviewer:** Yeah, the tights

**Austin Francis:** As I said everything and baby's food the SMA and Gold Cap and the whole lot and the baby's bottle the soother and the nipple

**Interviewer:** How did you figure out the mark up for it, Austin Francis:

**Austin Francis:** That time you were allowed now you mightn't get it, but it was 7% that was the mark up

**Interviewer:** And that was enough to cover

**Austin Francis:** Yeah, that was enough every shopkeeper was allowed about 7%

**Interviewer:** Right and did you have to register yourself as a shopkeeper

**Austin Francis:** No, no you see you had to have nearly everything that you see them times it was penny and pence and three shillings and 4 shillings like even to be quite hones with you that time we'd say if you sold a bottle of Cidona like there was a 2 shillings back when the bottle was drank and you returned the bottle there was 2 shillings back on it again and you know the amount of youngsters would have a bottle and 2 shillings was good and then what would they do they would spend it you see

**Interviewer:** Yeah, it was a win, win wasn't it

**Austin Francis:** Yeah, they'd spend it

**Interviewer:** It's an awful sham we didn't carry on with this thing you bring back the bottle and you get a discount

**Austin Francis:** Yeah, and in my younger days it was on the bottle of Guinness a small bottle of Guinness you would get 3 pence back

**Interviewer:** Be God

**Austin Francis:** Yeah 2 shillings, it was a great reminder when I was in the council there was cleaning awards given and like that you would bring as chairperson of the county council you could bring them to whatever area you wanted so I brough them out that night to give out all the cleaning awards I brough them out to the Hotel back there. There was people there from the council and there was people from all parts of Mayo to it you know but one of the things was one girl anyways I hadn't met for donkey's years she said do you remember you used to give me the 2 shillings for the bottle

**Interviewer:** Brilliant

**Austin Francis:** Something else which was catchy was when I was when I was canvassing and it was on Saturday I never forget it there was a lot of children you know like my own grandchildren they were around the car anyways everyone of them would have 2 pence or 3 pence for a Peggy's leg or a butterscotch or whatever but this day anyway oh it was raining cats and dogs anyway and they were all there and I delt with them all I just turned around anyway and there was maybe 6 or 5 girls away there was this little girl and she was crying and I went up to her and I says what's wrong? And she says I had no money for sweets today. You know the poor little thing would have be 5 or 6 or 7 but anyways sure I just walked back to the shop again and I put my hand in the thing and I give her a full fist of sweets like she got more that if she had money that sort of way because all the rest of them had gone off playing eating and chewing and everything and she was left on her own. It was amazing how probably 40 years after I knocked on this door one evening I was canvassing for my first time and this fine young woman came to the door I didn't know her from the hole in the wall, and I told her who I was and would she give me her vote and everything and she said Oh certainly you are getting my number one do you remember the day you give me sweets when I had no money

**Interviewer:** Wow, see generosity will stand to you Austin Francis and that's why you kept your customers

**Austin Francis:** Yeah, she says you are certainly getting my number one she says, and I won that seat on 5 votes. And there was another woman that she died actually the night the polling booth closed but she had posted her vote and her daughter asked her who did you vote for? And she wasn't here in this area she was out near Westport she said I voted for the man who bough my hens years ago and one day I was looking in the Mayo News and didn't I see hens for sale and the name on the bottom of it and I went straight to her and I bough the hens off her now she needed a few pound for them like but I bought the hens off her and she said I voted for the man who bought my hens

**Interviewer:** Wow

**Austin Francis:** They always used to say a hen died in debt but them hens didn't

**Interviewer:** Did you get much backing from you father, was he happy you were going out doing it?

**Austin Francis:** Well, he was when I got on the road, and he seen that I could make it

**Interviewer:** Make a go of it

**Austin Francis:** And my late mother was here at the time

**Interviewer:** And as long as you could keep the farm going at the same time

**Austin Francis:** Yeah, it was all hard, hard work

**Interviewer:** And were you the only brother left on the farm?

**Austin Francis:** At that stage they were all gone to England. No but the work we done that time was really, like there was no tractors I had no tractor it was all spade you know, and everything was self-sufficient you know, it's a different world now

**Interviewer:** You worked hard Austin Francis

**Austin Francis:** Yeah, it was around 1980 or there about when it ended, I was 9 or 10 years on the road and I've 10 years in politics

**Interviewer:** Wow, Politics came after the shop

**Austin Francis:** That's right and I think it was the foundation I got because everyone knew the guy I was and of course the point about it is you don't get into politics overnight because I was chairperson of the I was first chairperson of the parent's council in Killeen which I worked hard on I was the person along with Walter Davitt that got the lotto for the school established. I proposed it on the night and one fella said that you have ten heads he said because it won't go. I said to him because that time we used to have had a dance on Easter Sunday night you could get a few pound that way but you but I said to the man that said that

to me I said if we could get 50 pound every Friday night you see and I think the first Friday night we took in nearly 300 and that has continued on to this very day and that's how we got computers into the school we got all them trees bought round the school

**Interviewer:** Ah it was the saving of the school

**Austin Francis:** Yeah, that time you would have to chair the meetings and by heck there would be some rows you know you would have 20 people sitting in front of you that type of thing I was the chairperson and I had to take in and go into the solicitor and get registered and get everything up and running. But it was the making of the school there's no doubt about it.