

In Robbie's eyes, Michael is a hero

Glenavy courier praises Crumlin optician for preventing him from 'going blind' in one eye

by Mary Magee

A GLENNAVY courier driver has praised the quick actions of a local optician for helping to save his sight.

Robbie Connolly (29), from Johnston Park, believes it was Michael McCourt who prevented him from going permanently blind.

It was Michael who discovered a tear in the back of Robbie's right eye, which if left untreated could have caused serious damage.

Robbie (pictured with Michael), who had no previous history of sight problems, awoke one Friday to find that a black shadow had formed over part of his right eye.

At first he thought it was simply a low lying eyebrow or a hair in his eye.

But when it had not disappeared by the following day he contacted Michael and told him of his symptoms.

Michael, owner of Opticare Opticians in Crumlin, told Robbie to meet him at his Mill Road premises where he would open up for him.

The 34-year-old, who has 13 years' experience as an optician, examined the eye using an OCT (Optical Coherence Tomography), a 3D scan.

When he shone a light at the back of the eye Michael noticed a small tear in Robbie's retina and said that it would need to be investigated further.

A detached retina happens when the thin lining at the back of the eye begins to pull away from the blood vessels and if left untreated can cause blindness.

"Sometimes people can see floaters in

their eyes and that is quite common," said Michael.

"They are normally quite harmless however, when I saw the tear at the back of Robbie's eye that set alarm bells ringing."

Concerned by what he saw, Michael advised Robbie to go to the Royal Victoria Hospital where he would be seen by an eye specialist.

But when he attended hospital, the courier driver admits that he was still unaware of the seriousness of the situation.

Expecting to be given an appointment for a later date, much to Robbie's surprise once he was seen by a specialist he was quickly prepped for laser treatment.

It was during the five minute laser session, Robbie told the optician he felt the full force of the beams going into his eye.



"The response I got was, 'of course you can feel the laser. I am welding your eye back together again!'" he said.

After the session, Robbie was advised not to return to work for the rest of the week to prevent further strain to his eye.

But it was some weeks later when he was called for a follow-up check-up that Robbie realised just how grave his diagnosis had been.

"I was told later that had the problem not been detected quickly, I would certainly have lost the vision in my eye," Robbie said.

"That was really chilling."

Robbie is still unsure of what caused the issue.

"A few weeks earlier, I was tiling and thought maybe a little grit had got into the eye. I really don't know."

"I was told that I was extremely lucky I had not lost the sight of my eye."

"Had I ignored it I would have risked

losing my sight.

"During the examination I was asked if I was double jointed."

"Apparently the condition is very common with people who are double jointed."

Michael added: "There does not necessarily have had to have been a trauma."

"The jelly (vitreous) in the middle of the eye can sometimes pull on the retina, causing a tear."

"Obviously, I would recommend people to attend the optician regularly but anyone who might experience sudden floaters like what happened to Robbie should get it checked out."

"It may be nothing but it is not worth ignoring. Get it checked."

Robbie concluded: "I have to really thank Michael for helping me. I think I was very lucky."

"He opened up the shop for me that day."

"I might have just not bothered going to the optician and hoped it would simply have gone away."

Ordered drugs to work

AN Antrim man has been fined £75 after he ordered parcels of cannabis to be delivered to his workplace.

Carl Wilson (20), of Meadowlands, was charged with two counts of attempting to possess the class B controlled drug on January 22 and 26.

The court heard that a local shop reported to police that a package had been delivered addressed to an employee.

The manager believed it to contain drugs, the prosecution explained. A second parcel was delivered and the manager opened this one and discovered that it contained herbal cannabis.

Police were informed that Wilson was a 'past employee' of the store and when he was arrested and interviewed, he declined legal representation.

"When asked about the parcels, he said 'well I have ordered some weed - hash, I think it's hash', he said."

"He said he had ordered it to the shop in case his mother and father found out and that he had

had other parcels for birthdays and Christmas delivered there in the past because his mother would open them."

"The first oackage contained 9g at £15 and the second was 4g with a value of around £5."

After District Judge Nigel Borderick made a destruction order for the drugs, a defence solicitor said that the amounts were 'lesser than those stated'.

He said his client believed them to be 3.5g and 1g.

"He was self-medicating because of a back problem and has been to the GP before," defence explained.

"It seems to be a degenerative problem. He realises where this is taking him and the consequences are very real. He had life plans to go to America but now he has this conviction

there is going to be dramatic consequences for his hopes."

"If he had been more sophisticated, this may never have come before the court."

Fining Wilson £75 on each of the two offences, Mr Broderick also imposed a £15 offender's levy.

"Be careful," he warned. "If you are back in court for drug offences again it may not be a fine."

Darren returns to his musical roots

by Lisa Gourley

A TEMPLEPATRICK musician who has played with The Killers is joining local jazz and blues legends at the Old Courthouse next Wednesday (March 20).


Darren Beckett (pictured below), who has performed in Carnegie Hall and at Glastonbury, will be on drumming duty for the Ronnie Greer Organ Band for the Antrim date of their current tour.

Darren has drummed for artists like Brandon Flowers, the charismatic front man of rock super-band The Killers, on his solo projects.

Indeed, he co-wrote the star's debut song, Can't Deny my Love, from his best-selling second album, The Desired Effect.

Beckett also recently performed with Juanita Stein, as the opening act for The Killers during their UK and Ireland tour.

When Ronnie's usual drummer was unavailable, he called Darren to propose a return to his hometown: "He said, 'It's in Antrim, you're from there, it will be fun.'"



Darren reflected: "It's probably been about 20 years, maybe longer, since I played in Antrim."

Drumming from the age of four, he attended Antrim PS and Antrim Grammar, before being 'discovered' by legendary New York percussionist Aaron Copeland.

He went on to attend one of the most respected jazz schools in America, The New School, New York.

After more than 20 years in New York as a studio and touring drummer, Darren has recently moved back to the UK.

He reflected: "Since I moved back, I am doing loads more jazz. I was over at the Cork Jazz Festival last year with my own trio."

"I am also going to be in Londonderry for the City of Derry Jazz and Big Band Festival in May with a piano player from New York and my trio as well. I'm getting back to the source of what I was playing in my first few years in New York before I got into rock."

However, he hasn't given up on rock completely.

He has just reformed with his old bandmates, Ambulance LTD, following two sold out gigs in New York in January.

The band, whose music has been featured in The OC and Grey's Anatomy, hopes to record a second album this summer.

Having recently completed a five-week tour in America, Darren is currently a drums and ensemble tutor at the Academy of Contemporary Music, which counts Ed Sheeran among its alumni.

He also recently returned to studying himself, completing a Masters degree in Music at Ulster University Magee.

Darren lives in Brighton, with his wife Sara, and their five-year-old daughter, Delphine, and three-year-old son, Theo.

*Next Wednesday's concert in the Old Courthouse, featuring special guest Jim Mullen, will begin at 7.30pm.



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