



## Rita Thomas Domestic

I was one of six children and times were hard. My mother took poorly when I was seven, and after that I didn't go to school all that much. My dad was working on a farm, so I stayed at home quite a bit to look after her, and I started earning money

too, by doing jobs for elderly people who lived nearby. You wouldn't believe what I managed to earn: ten shillings from one job, five shillings from another, presents, clothes. Then when I was ten or eleven, I used to wash, iron clothes, cook,

clean for my family.

I don't have a single photo of myself when I was young. The one photo I had was pinched from my bag. It was taken at a lady's house when I was doing jobs for her - bringing coal in, bringing coke in, doing the garden. She bought me a blue twinset to wear and she asked, "Can I take your photo?" I've kept it in my purse ever since then, till it was pinched.

At school, I didn't learn much because I'm dyslexic and the teachers didn't have time for me, or patience. In those days, if you were dyslexic, they just put you in a corner, or told you, "Go and clean that cupboard!" I used to

break down sometimes, and I got angry because I was supposed to be there to learn, but I wasn't learning.

*"I'm supposed to be a cleaner, fair enough, but if I can't be jolly to the patient, sing to the patient, tell them a joke, I might as well not come to work."*

Woodwork - now that's something I did like, because I'm handy. And cooking - the cookery teacher used to give me all my ingredients herself, and she used to stand over me and make sure I'd understood everything. She showed some effort and that's what I liked about her. I thought:

I've got to memorise everything I've got to do. I've got a really good memory now.

*"I've been working here thirty years. I just love my work, I'm just happy I'm here. If I could go on till I'm 100, I would!"*

I sing all the time, for myself and other people. I make up my own songs: Country and Western, Valentine's, songs for people who are leaving work. I did one for my mam's funeral - that was really hard. I stood up and the parson said, "Rita's going to sing a song for her mam," and all my family looked at me, they couldn't believe it. I didn't look at anybody, I just

started. And when it got to the part when she was laid to rest, I had to stop singing. He put his hand on my shoulder and then I could go on - if he hadn't done that, I couldn't have gone on. It was really hard, but I did it.

My real wish for my sixtieth birthday this year is to sing with Daniel O'Donnell. I've told my relatives - but I don't think it'll happen! When I hear him singing, I just feel as if I'm on top of the world. And I only need to hear a new song four, five times and I know the whole thing off by heart.

I've been working here thirty years. I just love my work, I'm just happy I'm here. If I could go on till

I'm 100, I would! If I see an elderly patient with heavy bags, I put down what I'm doing and I go and carry their bags all the way to their ward. I'm on the dialysis ward and every patient says to me, "Hello Rita, how are you, what are you up to?" You know that patient's poorly, you know you've got to give them that care. I'm supposed to be a cleaner, fair enough, but if I can't be jolly to the patient, sing to the patient, tell them a joke, I might as well not come to work.

