

‘A POINTED REMINDER’

Brendan O’Carroll’s alter ego Mrs Agnes Brown presides over a comedy concoction that stretches the television sitcom format to its limit and beyond. In the latest twist on that format ‘All round to Mr Browns’ O’Carroll interacts with cast, celebrity guests and now the audience in a playful but often shocking way, pushing the bounds of taste and decency but always taking the audience with him as he plays the matriarch of a close-knit Irish Catholic family.



Mammy of the Week is a part of the show where an unsuspecting member of the audience has been set up by her family. The BBC website sums it up nicely

'Is your mum an amazing Mammy... but also a complete nightmare?'

'She might burn every Sunday Roast, or post embarrassing pictures of you online, or make you cringe with her dancing, but she keeps the family together and the show on the road. Whatever the reason, we want to know why YOUR Mammy deserves this special award.'

After a mild ‘roasting’ by Mrs Brown the beloved ‘Mammy’ is rewarded with the chance to win cash and other special ‘treats’ by hitting a cast member with a tea towel to dislodge her ‘prizes’.

Last Saturday was the final episode in the current series. ‘Mammy of the Week’ was Anita Kelly nominated by her daughter Charlotte for the surprise award. We learned that in addition to being ‘simply the best’ Anita, like all of us, has her faults. She likes to loudly ‘break wind’ in public and then blame her family. She is accident prone when driving – hitting bollards and walls. She’s even managed to accidentally kill not one but two beloved family pets. Amidst the laughter and classic ‘comedy music’ comes the next revelation.

Anita has a bit of a temper which presumably like her flatulence she is unashamed to make public. ***'She really likes to throw things - and its dad that gets the brunt of it. He's had pretty much everything thrown at him over the years - toasters, hair dryers you name it. There's still a dent in the wall where she threw a knife at him - which he says is a pointed reminder to stay on her good side'***. Immediately following this revelation she is praised by the programme with the words - 'But still an amazing mammy'.

I must confess I had to watch the segment again because I couldn’t quite believe it. A comedic portrayal of criminal offences of assault with a deadly weapon in a domestic environment in which the whole family appear to be accessories and the victim is reported as reacting in a way all too familiar to anyone who has had the misfortune to know anything about these issues – a knife hole in the wall referred to as **‘a pointed reminder to stay on her good side’**.

Domestic violence and abuse is a huge issue. We know that more women are victims of violence and abuse. But who would accept a prime time show portraying knife attacks against a woman for

comedy value? For those trying to help male victims of abuse Brendan O'Carroll's comedy is unhelpful at best and profoundly damaging at worst.

It is the trivialisation of violence and abuse when directed AT men that is so problematic. We know men who have been stabbed, hit over the head with pots and pans and forced to comply with their partner or ex-partner's demand. When they finally seek help and support they face real problems. Most support services 'assess' men who call them for help. They do so to determine whether they are 'genuine' victims. These services are overwhelmingly run by women who regard themselves as feminists and acknowledge that domestic violence is 'a cause and consequence of gender inequality'. The National Standards for Domestic Violence services covering support for male and female victims specifically allows for a different treatment of men – requiring them to be 'assessed'. Equality & Human Rights Commission thinks that's absolutely fine. In a recent written response to Welsh Government Cabinet Secretary Mark Drakeford AM they stated that 'screening' men but NOT women seeking help was acceptable because

'Women comprise the overwhelming majority of victims of abuse and it is not possible to rely on this statistical probability with complaints from men'.

So it's ok to discriminate against male victims because they are in a minority!?

The Welsh Government passed the Violence against Women, domestic abuse and sexual violence (Wales) Act 2015. This established a National Strategy to tackle violence and abuse. The strategy is built upon an analysis of the experience of survivors entitled 'Are you listening and am I being heard?' This document graphically represents the experience of 66 victims of abuse. 65 of those victims were female. There was, quite literally, one 'token' man interviewed. The Office for National Statistics tells us that 1 in 3 victims of domestic violence and abuse are male. That is a self reported statistic. South Wales Police record that almost a quarter of victims are men; yet just 4% of callers to the Welsh Government funded Live Fear Free Helpline are male.

Treating serious assaults on men as a source of comedy is unacceptable. It masks the reality of domestic violence and abuse and contributes to the systemic refusal to recognise the impact of abuse on men - by men themselves as well as the services that could help and protect them. The husband of 'Mammy of the Week' Anita Kelly probably doesn't even think that he is a victim of domestic abuse. Let's hope for him that he does manage to 'stay on the right side of her' and that her aim doesn't improve.

Men need help to understand when they are the victims of abuse. They also need to be able to trust the services funded to help them. Sadly, our charity will NOT signpost men to any current service in Wales. We have no confidence that their experience won't be trivialised or worse that they will be 'assessed' as the perpetrator of abuse. After all 'Mammy of the Week' Anita Kelly is 'simply the best'! Her husband must have done something terrible to make her throw the kitchen knife at him.....

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