

Maeve Wallis RIP
Funeral Mass
Tuesday 23rd March 2021

Maeve Wallis (nee Gibbons), Coolkerry, Rathdowney, Co. Laois and formerly Leighlinbridge, Co. Carlow. March 19th 2021. Peacefully at Portlaoise Regional Hospital following a brief illness. Predeceased by her husband William (Bill) and her infant child Brian, her brothers Jim, Michael, David, sisters Rita and Dolores. Sadly missed by her sons Kevin, Derry and Niall, daughter-in-law Marie, grandchildren Aisling, Eilis, Gearoid, her brother Noel and her sisters Geraldine, Helen, Rose and Claire, nephews, nieces, neighbours and a wide circle of friends.

At the end of Mass today, Maeve's son Kevin will share something of his mother's life story with us. He very kindly sent me a copy of what he is going to say so I'm going to do my best not to encroach on what you will say. I suspect we may both may be in danger of a reprimand from under the coffin lid. Maeve did not believe that what happened in church should be overly extended by either excessive music or lengthy verbiage from this side of the sanctuary. Kevin I know you have cut five minutes from your eulogy. I will endeavour to do likewise.

During this past year since the Covid virus hit our shores I have telephoned Maeve on a few occasions to see how she was. Now while we would always have a most interesting conversation about all kinds of things I could not help but feel that she was surprised that I was calling her in the first place. Despite the fact that she was over 90 I don't think Maeve ever saw herself as being more vulnerable than anybody else. AS I reflected back on those conversations Maeve always mentioned three things to me. First of all maybe she thought that this was something you should tell the parish priest when he called but she would always mention that she got Mass every Sunday on the television or the radio. Perhaps I was afraid of the answer I might get but I never got around to asking her why she didn't tune into mass on the webcam from this church.

The second thing she would always tell me was that every morning (and I think this was your job Derry) she got the Irish Independent and the Irish Times And the third thing I was always told was how fortunate she was that in Niall, she had her own live-in chef who could produce a wonderful meal for her in minutes. So I remember thinking; 'There's Maeve Wallis at 92, Her Spiritual life is being fed, her intellectual life is being fed and her body was also being well fed and cared for. Somewhere in there, I suspect is the key to the contentment and fulfilment in life which Maeve Wallis felt and enjoyed up to the very last days of her long life.

After my conversations with Maeve I was reminded of a book that was published a little over a year ago which was co-authored by the former US First Lady and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and her daughter Chelsea. The book was called The Book of Gutsy Women. It is a collection of 100 essays about very strong formidable women who have made quite a contribution in their own communities and beyond. Some of them are well known, many are not. What they all share in common is a can do kind of approach to life often in the face of personal or community adversity. I kind of feel that Maeve Wallis and her life story might well have made it in to the pages of a book with a title like that.

One more little insight I had to the 'gutsy' nature of Maeve's positive and 'can do' approach to life was something I realised very early on in my time in Rathdowney. In my first year here I realised I needed to buy some items of furniture for my house. So sometimes I would take myself up to Larkin's in Templetoohy on a Sunday afternoon. I thought I recognised the lady behind the counter as being vaguely familiar. It wasn't until the following Sunday that I met her outside the door here after Mass that the penny dropped who she was. I remember thinking how impressive it was to see this woman in her mid eighties at the time driving up to Templetoohy every Sunday to work in the shop. She loved that work and the interaction with customers. When Larkins had to close to the public a year ago because of Covid, almost 92 year old Maeve was still on the job.

Over the years as I came to know Maeve a little better she shared some of her story with me and I knew that she had known the Joyful, Glorious

and Sorrowful mysteries of life. As I read through Kevin's eloquent account of his mother's life which we will hear later I came to admire her even more. I was reminded of a quote from John B Keane who incidentally was born the day after Maeve in July 1928. In his novel; 'The Contractors' John B uses the line:

"There's only so much to a lifetime and often it lets you down when you're best geared for going on."

Well if at times in Maeve's life she did experience, let down, setbacks and loss then her incredible strength of character combined with an equally strong simple but rock like faith helped her to pick herself up and move forward. That first reading from The Book of Wisdom today put it in another way: *'God has put them to the test and proved them worthy to be with him; he has tested them like gold in a furnace and accepted them as a holocaust. When the time comes for his visitation, they will shine out; as sparks run through the stubble, so will they.'* When Maeve somewhat unexpectedly slipped away last Friday night, the time for God's visitation had come. I don't think she will have had fear of that visitation. I believe the last lines of the second reading from St. John probably reflects Maeve's spirituality:

'My dear people, since God has loved us so much, we too should love one another. No one has ever seen God; but as long as we love one another God will live in us and his love will be complete in us. In this is love perfected in us, that we may have confidence for the day of judgement.'

Confidence in the day of Judgement. That's our Maeve

As we prepare to bring Maeve to be buried alongside her beloved husband Bill let us remember that while we lay her to rest there

we bury her body, but not her spirit;
we bury her hands, but not her good deeds;
we bury her heart, but not her love;
we bury her head, but not her memories.

Maeve, May you rest in Peace

Text of eulogy given by Maeve's son Kevin at the end of the Funeral Mass

Our mother, Maeve was born on July 20th 1928 in Woodford Co. Galway. Her mother was Ellen Lyons from Woodford, and her father was David Gibbons from Louisburgh Co. Mayo. She was born not long after the establishment of the Irish Free state in 1922, part of the first generation to be

born after the end of British rule, and she has lived to see the growth of this country from a newly established independent state to the wealthy progressive country we are today. Despite a few hiccups along the way, she and her generation have a lot to be proud about in the country they have created.

While she was still an infant her father was moved by the Gardai from Portumna to Leighlinbridge Co. Carlow. My mother attended national school in Leighlinbridge and stayed there until she was about 11. She loved Leighlinbridge and throughout her life always enjoyed visiting there for a Sunday drive.

In 1939 her father was posted from Leighlinbridge to Rathdowney and the family moved over into a new home in Coolkerry.

Shortly after moving to Rathdowney there was an incident that changed her life forever. She got TB and was sent to the Cappa hospital in Dublin (the forerunner to the current Crumlin Children's hospital) where it was decided that the treatment was to immobilize one of her knee joints and the result of this is that for the rest of her life she had one straight leg and was unable to bend her knee. She stayed in Cappa for over a year and attended her final year of national school there.

When she returned to Rathdowney from Cappa she was considered too unwell to attend secondary school and so formal education came to an end after finishing national school. Her health did gradually improve and when she was 16 she attended a secretarial course in the Vocational school and got herself a job in Donaghmore Co-Op in the mid 1940's. She made many good lifelong friends from her time in the Co-Op and she has even contributed a chapter to the excellent book published a few years ago on the history of the Workhouse in Donaghmore.

While her formal education ended at 12 years of age, she was a voracious reader and throughout her life stayed fully abreast of current affairs by reading the newspapers every day. She read both the Independent and Irish Times daily and also loved a good novel. She always had a book on the go.

She had a strong intellect and I am sure if she was afforded the opportunity of a secondary and university education she would have had excelled at her chosen profession.

Another reason she liked to get the papers each day was because she was a crossword aficionado. One memory I have is of visiting her with my own family on one of her hospital stays about 2 years ago. All 5 of us sat on the bed with her and did the crossword. She read out the clues and we all tried to get the correct word. She clearly enjoyed seeing us all participate with her in one of her favorite pastimes.

It was in Donaghmore Co-op that she met my father, Bill Wallis. They were married in August 1955. They moved into a thatched cottage and some land in Coolkerry and set up home. They build a new bungalow 50 yards from the thatched cottage and they moved into it in 1961. My mother lived in that bungalow up until last Tuesday when she was taken to Portlaoise hospital. It was always her wish to remain in that house up to her final days and she dreaded the thought of spending her final days in care in a hospital or retirement home unable to care for herself and not recognizing anyone, a fate that had befallen her own mother. Thanks to Derry and Niall who both chose to come back to live in Rathdowney and to the kindness of our neighbors who all looked out for her, she managed to get her wish.

My mother faced many adversities during her life. Not only did she have TB when she was a child but her pregnancies were difficult. Her first born was Brian who was very premature and only lived to 12 days. She was lucky herself to survive that pregnancy. The loss of Brian caused great sadness to both

my mother and father and as children we were reminded to remember Brian in our prayers every night. She was deeply religious and I know that she prayed for Brian every day for the rest of her life.

She also faced into, and beat, cancer in the 1960's. After she recovered from this cancer she returned home but had to return to Dublin for checkups every 6 months and this continued right up until the 1980's when they finally gave her an all clear.

When she was well enough, and we were old enough, she went back to work as the clerk in Rathdowney Mart. She again made many good lifelong friends and continued to work there up until its closure. I'm sure that as a result of her years working in Donaghmore Co-Op and her years working in Rathdowney mart, she knew, and was known to, every farming family in South Laois, North Tipp and North Kilkenny.

She had a great interest in the world outside Ireland and she loved to travel. She visited Derry in Turkey, Bahrain and Saudi when he lived there and when it was uncommon for Western women to visit these Muslim countries as a tourist. She also took the opportunity when I was living in the US to visit us and came over frequently. She made it her business to be there for the birth of each of her 3 grandchildren who were all born in the US.

My father was the love of her life and they had a great life together until he died in October 1990. I know that, although she was not looking forward to death, she was looking forward to rejoining him in heaven one she departed this world. When my father died, none of the 3 sons were living in Rathdowney, and my mother found herself isolated from town living out in Coolkerry. She decided that despite being in her 60's and never having driven before, she needed to learn to drive. Like many other things in her life, once she set her mind on it there was no stopping her and in no time she had her own little car to drive into and out from Rathdowney. This allowed her to become a daily mass goer in Rathdowney and for years she rarely missed morning mass. Eventually her arthritis became very severe and she had difficulty walking more than a few steps pain free and she had to give up going to mass. She overcame an early setback where she lost control of the car on a bend and crashed into the wall of the very house where she grew up in. She broke her leg, gave herself some serious cuts and ended up in hospital. This setback might have ended her fledgling driving career, but she quickly put this accident behind her and took to the roads once again. The cars range of travel stayed limited to shuttling between Coolkerry and town until she discovered Michael and Mary Larkins Furniture and Antiques shop in Templetohy. After that the car could be seen travelling the 12 Km from Rathdowney every Sunday afternoon never going any faster than 30mph. She was interested in Jewelry, Crystal and China and Mary Larkin offered her a position in the shop working behind the counter of the fine goods section. Again she met many lovely people while she was there, not least Mary and Michael themselves, with whom she became good friends. She constantly threatened to quit because of her age, but Mary always refused to accept her resignation and she worked away right up until Covid forced the business to close last March. So, as I've said to Mary Larkin, right up till the day she died, she was still a part time employee of Larkins.

She was an excellent cook and particularly liked to bake. She had an expertise in Sponge Cakes and Black Forest Gateaux. She was very active in Country markets and for a long time was Treasurer of the local branch. I would not be surprised if the majority of homes in Rathdowney sampled one of her sponge cakes from the Country market, and so most of the town have probably tasted her cooking without knowing it.

She was a good piano player and we had a piano in the house when we were growing up. We often woke up with her practicing in the morning. I think it may have been her way of getting sleepy teenagers out of bed.

As she or my father never had the opportunity to pursue education past national school level, she was a big believer in everyone getting a good education and was adamant that we all got a good one.

When talking to people who knew her over the last few days, the most frequent comment on her personality was that she was a straight talker and was not shy about sharing her opinions. She also was a believer in the virtue of hard work. Everyone noted that she loved a good chat and every shop she ever visited and every queue she was ever in was an opportunity to talk to an old friend or make a new one. She had a great memory and could remember people, times, places and events in forensic detail.

Over the course of her life she met many challenges , TB, a straight leg, ill health curtailing her education, ectopic pregnancies, the loss of her first born child, Cancer, a serious car crash, various other illnesses, and the loss of her beloved husband 30 years before she died. But she never dwelt on her misfortunes, she was an optimist and just put these behind her and focused on the future.

Above all she was a kind and caring woman, personality traits that I feel are often undervalued in our busy modern world.

I'd like to thank all the people who have contacted us by phone or in person over the last few days. It is such a pity that the Covid restrictions mean that many people cannot be here today and have to join us by video link, but your kind words are very appreciated by all the family members.

I'd also like to thank the people who were with her in her final hours and made her passing so stress free and peaceful. Unfortunately we did not get the names of the nursing staff and doctors in Portlaoise but they could not have been more compassionate, professional and helpful to us. While they are nameless, they are a credit to their profession.

She always said that she wished to wake up one morning to find out she had died the night before. Well she woke up last Saturday morning to find that she had passed away peacefully on Friday evening.

And now we all have the opportunity to make Maeve's final wish a reality. It was always her wish to be buried alongside my father in the family plot in Rathdowney and now is the time to grant her that wish.