

Imelda Ryan RIP
Funeral Mass
Rathdowney Church
Monday 15th August 2022

Imelda Ryan (nee Cahill) Daly Terrace, Rathdowney, Co. Laois. Predeceased by her husband Paddy, son-in-law Joe Davy, her sister Marie and her brother Kieran Cahill. August 11th 2022. Peacefully on her 85th birthday in the presence of her loving family. Sadly mourned by her children Anne, Mary, Catherine, Teresa, Margaret, P.J., Eileen and John-Paul, sons-in-law, daughters-in-law, her beloved grandchildren, great-grandchildren, her sister Bea, her brothers Seamus and P.J., her brother-in-law Larry, step-sisters Judy, Margaret and Per, nephews, nieces, relatives, neighbours and a wide circle of friends.

Throughout my years here in Rathdowney and particularly over the last few days the word I have heard most used to describe Imelda Ryan was “a Character”. I have often wondered how you define what a character is. This may not be totally accurate, but I think when you are describing someone in a community as a ‘character’ it is our Irish way of describing someone who for the most part we like a lot, and if there some traits we might not like they are far outweighed by the bits we do like. A character is someone who is knowledgeable, passionate and opinionated about certain things. A Character is identified with particular things or activities that become part of our memory about them. A character is someone who is part of the fabric of a community.

I don’t know how much of that definition or description of what a character is resonates with all of you who knew and loved Imelda Ryan, but she was certainly part of the fabric of this community in Rathdowney. She was born here, raised her family here and lived all of her 85 years. The familiar images of Imelda, riding her bicycle on the streets and roads of this parish with the headscarf flapping in the wind, or from her particular corner in O’Malley’s singing ‘From The Candy store on the corner’ or Danny Boy, speak to how she was part of the fabric of this town and how much she loved this place she called home.

Imelda Attracta Cahill was born on the 11th of August 1937 in Kilcoran, one of six children to be born to Patrick Cahill and Mary Finn.

According to our parish records they didn't delay in having Imelda baptised because it also happened on the 11th of August. Her godparents were Thomas Purcell and Kitty Cahill.

Imelda's mam died when Imelda was just 18 years old, and this meant that she took on a mothering role to her younger siblings. Outside the home Imelda was no stranger to manual work, helping farmers, saving turf on the bog and harvesting apples out in Colley's Orchards, something she did for many years. When Harp Textiles came to Rathdowney like many other local women, she joined the workforce and remained there for many years. Later she would work as a caretaker in both St. Fergal's College and the local Church of Ireland Primary school.

The first lines of that song which was synonymous with Imelda read
*from the candy store on the corner
To the chapel on the hill
Two young lovers are
Longing to go there and
They dream someday they will*

I don't know when Imelda first learned and grew to love that song but those words of it were very real for her in her late teens and early twenties. Imelda met and fell in love with Paddy Ryan from Knockiel. I'm not sure where the Candy store on the corner was (I suppose it was whichever one stocked her beloved chewy fruits) but the chapel on the hill was out in Grogan and that is where Imelda and Paddy were married on Easter Monday the 18th of April 1960. In those days you could not get married during Lent and I gather Imelda and Paddy always celebrated their wedding anniversary on Easter Monday no matter what date it fell on.

The words of the song go on to say.....

*Both their hearts are
In tune with a love song
Every promise they make
They mean*

Imelda and Paddy were to have forty-seven years of happy marriage before he died just after Easter in 2007. The fruit of their love was of course to be you, their eight children Anne, Mary, Catherine, Teresa, Margaret, P.J., Eileen and John-Paul. Imelda had; I understand great dedication to praying the rosary every day. I'm sure that every time she fingered those beads the intentions of one or more of you her children was uppermost in her mind. She could not be a mother of eight without experiencing the Joyful, Glorious and sadly the Sorrowful mysteries of life. As a mother it was only natural that she would look to and rely on another mother, Mary the mother of Jesus, who knew something of the struggles of being a parent. It is really appropriate that Imelda's funeral takes place on this feast of Mary, her mentor and friend.

Having initially lived in Knockiel, Paddy and Imelda moved to live in O'Daly Terrace. Imelda was to go to become as one message on the condolence page described her: 'one of the stalwarts of the Terrace'. A unique aspect of the location of Daly Terrace is its close proximity to the hurling pitch. That gap in the fence or gap in the hedge in some way symbolises a close connection with all that happens in the hurling field. It certainly symbolised that for Imelda and her family. Imelda, I believe had a unique relationship with Rathdowney hurling and Rathdowney hurlers. When access to dressing rooms was strictly controlled Imelda would get in with one mission in mind and that was to douse the hurlers with Holy water before a game. If she wasn't dousing them with holy water, she was using less holy water to wash their jerseys. That gap in the fence was also an open invitation for so many people attending matches over the years to come into Imelda's home for a cup of tea and some warm hospitality. As noted at the beginning of Mass the tea would always be Barry's and it would always be tea leaves too. With the hospitality also came that unique laughter and all of that together and so much more made Imelda the character she was and the character so many people loved and admired. In many ways she was the valiant

woman spoken of in the first reading today from the Book of Proverbs. A Woman of strength, a woman who invited good not evil every day of her life, a woman who did not neglect her tasks, a woman who worked diligently.

To *Anne, Mary, Catherine, Teresa, Margaret, P.J., Eileen and John-Paul*, I want to extend our heartfelt sympathy to you and the wider family today. As I have found myself saying to other families who have sat in that front seat before you, the death of your mother brings with it a unique kind of heartache and even as an adult you can feel very much the pain of being an orphan. Her death brings a new kind of un-belonging into your lives. And that is totally understandable. Your mother was for each of you, your first friend and your longest friend. No friend that you will ever meet on life's journey will have been so interested or committed to you. Together with your father, your mother gave you, your first experience of home, they created a safe place for you, a safe place to be born, to take initiative, to believe, to start the journey of loving. Your mother was the heart of your home. Your sadness today is that the heart is not at home. It is gone from this place to a different space. Today your home is joined to heaven in a very profound way. Imelda, your mam has gone before you to join your dad, her relatives and friends in their eternal home, our eternal home. That is the Hope that St. Paul talks about in the second reading, it is the same Hope and Faith your mam lived all of her life. That Hope and that Faith which Imelda treasured and lived so faithfully is part of the legacy she leaves to all of you whom she has loved and cared for and cried over and laughed with all of your lives. The greatest tribute you can all now pay to her is to incorporate in your lives what was best in hers.

I want to leave you with a little reflection which I think might very well be words Imelda could use to say goodbye today as she heads to that new chapel on the Hill.

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*It was beautiful as long as it lasted, the journey of my life, I have no regrets
whatsoever, save the pain I'll leave behind.*

*Those dear hearts who love and care, and the heavy with sleep ever moist eyes,
the smile in spite of a lump in the throat and the strings pulling at the heart and
soul,*

*The strong arms that held me up when my own strength let me down, each
morsel that I was fed with, was full of love.*

*At every turning of my life I came across good friends and family who stood by
me, even when the time raced me by.*

Farewell, farewell my friends, I smile and bid you goodbye.

*No, shed no tears, for I need them not, all I need is your smile, If you feel sad, do
think of me, for that's what I'll like, when you live in the hearts of those you
love, remember then..... you never die*

***when you live in the hearts of those you love, remember then..... you
never die. I suspect that in the hearts of many here today Imelda Ryan
will never die. May she rest in peace Amen***

From the candy store on the corner

To the chapel on the hill

Two young lovers are

Longing to go there and

They dream someday they will

They dream some day they will

They dream some day they will

Walk hand in hand

From the candy store

To the chapel on the hill

Both their hearts are

In tune with a love song

Every promise they make

They mean

For true love is the

Treasure of treasures

When you're only seventeen

At seventeen, it's a thrill

To dream some day you will

Walk hand in hand

From the candy store

To the chapel on the hill

Readers: Trevor and Olivia

Prayers: Anne, John Paul, Millie and Larry

Poems Emma and Trevor.

Words of Thanks: Joanne