

Sean Creagh RIP
Funeral Mass
Rathdowney Church
6th April 2022

Seán Creagh, Church View, Mooreville and formerly Ballybuggy, Rathdowney, Co. Laois and Drumcondra, Dublin. April 3rd 2022. Peacefully at Milford Care Centre, Limerick. Predeceased by his sisters Moira, Anna, Lizzy, Breda and Teresa and his brother Patrick. Sadly missed by his loving wife Ann and his sisters Margaret and Kathleen, sister-in-law Breda, nephews, nieces, relatives and friends.

I want to begin my few reflections today by acknowledging something that all of us who are Sean's family and friends, and neighbours are very aware of and that is the last twenty years or so Sean's life has been very much influenced by his progressive visual impairment. It played a part in Sean and Ann's decision to move back here to his home parish of Rathdowney eighteen years ago and it has been a factor in so many other aspects of their lives since then. Recently I came across a poem written by a young woman about her experience of losing her sight. I cannot claim to have any understanding of what it is like for someone to lose their ability to see but Ann and Kathleen as I listened to you speak about Sean's journey over the last twenty years, I was reminded of the simple but very direct words of this poem which is simply called: A poem on Blindness It is a very long poem so I will only read the first part of it:

Poem on Blindness Written by Ilana Rei Goss

Going blind is at once the most private experience of a lifetime, and also the most public.

Using a stick is visible to others and completely necessary to self and safety.

Over the last few years, my walking stick has become a part of me.

I don't go anywhere without it.

It travels with me, protects me and gives me comfort.

Just having it with me, whether or not I take it out, just knowing it's there provides security.
I can use it if I need it.

I used to hate my stick.
It embarrassed me.
It branded me as "other."
I didn't want to think about what it represented: my diminishing sight.
I didn't want others to know.

I wanted to keep it to myself, personal, private, hidden.

It's hard to remain hidden when holding a long stick to guide me.
There are times when I want to pass.
When I can pretend that my eyes are normal, that I'm no different than anyone else.
I can get around on my own reasonably well.
I can see when people come up to me and can even recognize them if I knew them before my sight started getting worse.

Nowadays, I don't want to pass.
I want people to know, because I need more help than I used to.

I hate to admit that I need help.

I feel like I should be able to deal with it on my own.
I can cross a busy street by myself.
I can ride the bus to an unfamiliar place without fear.
I can read the menu at the coffee shop.

Only I can't.

It occurred to me that with all the challenges Sean faced because of his visual impairment and in more recent times when his ability to communicate became more difficult, he could have become bitter and

resentful about his lot and yet he did not. I think it is fair to say that despite the obstacles, Sean did not allow his life to be defined by his illness. For those of you who knew Sean well over many years you will be able to identify the influences that allowed him to remain positive despite the temptation to dwell on WHY ME? I would like to suggest a few of those possible influences. Firstly, Sean was a man with a great strength of character and a zest for life. That strength of character had its origins in the values learned at home in Ballybuggy and later to be developed further in his years of service as a member of An Garda Siochana. As a Guard he witnessed the lives of individuals and families at their best but also at their most broken and fragile.

Sean had a lifelong interest in sport. As a young teenager he was an All-Ireland Colleges medal winner with St. Kieran's College and also played a key role in helping his home team here in Rathdowney to a win a senior County Hurling title. His hurling skill later evolved into Golfing success (even though his wife claims he had poor on course management skills....whatever that means!!) Be it rugby or Gaelic games Sean loved to watch and listen to them all and derived hours of enjoyment from the games.

Another key influence in Sean's positive outlook on life was his strong Catholic Christian Faith. Again, it was a faith first nurtured in Ballybuggy. If I may slightly digress here. According to our Parish Records Sean was born on the 5th of March 1941 and baptised the next day. He was baptised by a Fr. Pat Delaney from Camross. On the 2nd of July 1953 Sean was among the first group of young people to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation in this church which had just been opened. The Bishop who confirmed him was one Patrick Collier, also from Camross. And here we are today at Sean's funeral, Another Delaney and another Camross man. Just how blessed has Sean Creagh been in his life. On the rare occasion that it happens such a hat trick of Blessings surely deserves a mention!! Seriously though Sean's faith has been a very

significant dimension of his life in good times and in more difficult ones. It is a faith characterised by a complete trust in his God. Those beautiful words from the prophet Isaiah in the first reading today must have been very reassuring for Sean: "Fear Not, I am with you....I am your God, I will strengthen you and help you....It is I who says to you Fear not I will help you"I will never forget you...upon the palm of my hand I have written your name.

In addition to that great strength of character, that zest for life, that faith and trust in the God who loved Him, Sean Creagh was also blessed to know great love and great care in his life. I picked that gospel passage today because it reminded me of Sean. The man in the gospel also had a disability. He could not come to Jesus on his own so he depended on his friends to bring him on the stretcher and lower him through the roof to meet Jesus who healed him and allowed him to go on and live a full and independent life. Sean's disability did not prevent him from walking but still just as the man in the gospel needed someone at each of the four corners of the stretcher Sean was blessed to have various people in his four corners who raised him up and carried him at various stages of his life and particularly in the last few decades. There were siblings, nieces and nephews, extended family neighbors, friends and carers and at different stages of Sean's journey they were at one of those four corners ready to help. But there was one person who was at all four corners all the time, and that of course was you Ann. When you met Sean was stationed as a Garda in Dublin and you were married on the 11th of December 1985 in St. Vincent de Paul church in Griffith Avenue. As you both stood before the altar on that December day you made solemn promises to each other For Better, For worse, For Richer, for Poorer in sickness and in Health till death do you part. No couple on their wedding day knows what those fateful words will demand of them. The first eighteen years of your marriage were spent in Dublin running the very successful Gurteen Guest House. The last eighteen were here in

Rathdowney. Ann, your care for Sean has been extraordinary. You have literally been his eyes and ears, his rock, his best friend. He trusted you completely. We give thanks today for the love that you have shared together.

I want to leave you today with the words of a prayer or reflection I came across a few years ago. I suggest these could be the words of Sean's prayer today addressed to both his God and also a prayer of thanks to you Ann. It is simply called Eyes to Heaven:

Eyes to Heaven:

Dear Lord, Thank you for this day. Because of you I woke up this morning. Because of you I can feel the sun's rays on my face this morning.

We have traveled many miles together, (halfway around the world and back.) You were by my side the entire way. For that I am forever grateful. You have been with me through the good times and surely the bad also, never forsaking me, just trying to show me the right path to take. For part of my life, I have been in visual darkness, but you have shown me spiritual brightness. I now know that the only vision that I need is the vision of your love. You have placed so many wonderful people in my life that no matter what trials and tribulations I face, I know that you will always be by my side.

Only you know what is next for me in my life. I just pray that you will continue to make me a good person. Give me wisdom, courage, and compassion to always help others the way that they have helped me. Your love is what makes every day worth living. (God, bless the entire world!)

Sean, May your gentle soul rest in peace

At a celebrity party some years ago, singer Stevie Wonder met Tiger Woods who was at the height of his golfing career at the time. Wonder mentioned that he too, is an excellent golfer. Tiger was a bit sceptical that a blind musician could play golf well but since Stevie was one of his personal heroes, he was too polite to say anything. "When I tee off" the singer explained, "I have a guy call to me from the green. My sharp sense of hearing lets me aim." Tiger was impressed, and Stevie suggested that they play a round. When Tiger agreed, Stevie asks, "How about we play for \$100,000" Tiger insisted that he wouldn't play for money, but Stevie argued until Tiger finally relented and said " So, when do you want to play?" Stevie laughed and replied" Tiger I'll play on any NIGHT you choose".