

Mary Flanagan RIP
Funeral Mass
Errill Church
Friday 3rd of March 2023

Mary Flanagan, Ballagh and formerly Castlefleming, Errill, Co. Laois. Tuesday February 28th 2023. Peacefully at her home. Deeply regretted by her husband John, daughters Fiona and Catherine, sons-in-law Jason and John, nephews, nieces, sisters-in-law, neighbours, relatives and friends.

Granchildren present Karl (Matthews) and great grandson Kieran. Emily and Natalie in London (mention Emily, future little daughter due to arrive this month)

John's brother timothy in London also Susan and Denise Flanagan

Other great grandchildren not here Riley, Finley and Arthur

We greet Mary's sister Ciddy in Donegal

We think of Catherine and John's three little children who died Siobhain, Sinead and John Patrick

One of the things I have learned in recent days is that Mary was hugely interested in racehorses and greyhounds. Herself and John trained them, won awards as we saw at the beginning of Mass. Mary loved to ride horses and maybe even had the occasional flutter . Keeping all those things in mind and also that the annual pilgrimage to Cheltenham is just a few days away I was reminded of a story I heard recently which I suspect isn't true but then why should the truth get in the way of a good story. I hope ye won't think it inappropriate for me to share it today.

The story goes that one year in Cheltenham an Irishman who incidentally was from Rathdowney met a man from Belfast and he got chatting with him. For some reason the Belfast man revealed to Rathdowney man that he was from the protestant tradition. Later in the conversation the Rathdowney man told his new friend that often before a big race he would light a candle in the nearest Catholic church as a

prayer for a successful outcome. The man from Belfast, not familiar with the tradition of lighting candles in churches listened with great interest and decided to give it a try. Unfortunately, after many unsuccessful attempts he eventually complained to his new Laois friend when they ran in to each other a few days later. The Rathdowney man enquired if he was lighting the long candles or the short ones? "The short ones" replied his friend. "Ah! That explains everything," said the Rathdowney man. "The short ones are for the dogs to win"!!

Mary Gallagher was born near Ballybofey in County Donegal on Sunday 22nd of April 1945. Incidentally that week was one of the most significant in terms of European and World History. It was the week that Adolf Hitler realised that he was losing the Second World War and before the week was out he had taken his own life thus heralding the end to the terrible conflict. I'm not sure what impact if any the events in Germany had on the people of Donegal but no doubt there was relief that the Emergency as it was known in Ireland might be coming to an end. The ending of the Second world War did have a significant effect on the life of Mary as she moved from childhood into her teenage years. Post War Britain needed a lot of rebuilding and that in turn created opportunities for young Irish people to cross the Irish sea to avail of a much better standard of living than was available here at home in those years. Mary had a number of jobs but one she loved was to be part of the maintenance team at the famous Q Garden in London. Like all emigrant communities, the Irish in England gravitated towards places of music and entertainment where they could meet their fellow Irish men and women and dip into the music and culture of home. From an early age Mary loved to dance and one of the places she loved to dance in was the famous Garryowen Club in Hammersmith. It was there that she was to meet her future husband, John Flanagan from Errill. That partnership which began on the Garryowen dancefloor has remained in step and in harmony for more than six decades and on the 24th of this month John and Mary would have celebrated their Diamond wedding Anniversary.

John and Mary lived the first half of their married life in England before moving back here to Castlefleming in 1993. On both sides of the Irish sea

they pursued their interest in horses and greyhounds. However Mary's love for animals was much wider than just those who could jump fences or win trophies. Birds and cats will always find their way to a house where they will be fed and Mary looked after them all. That little robin that has been following you around over the last few days John may well be a little messenger from Mary to tell that she is now in good hands but it may also be to remind you not to forget to look after the birds as she did.

Fiona, when I suggested you read that passage from the book of proverbs describing the valiant woman you immediately chose it to be the first reading for today's mass because in those words you found a very strong echo of your mother's life and character

Who can find a valiant woman, who can find a woman of strength. She is worth far more than jewels.

She works diligently, taking pride in her inner resources and strengths

She invites good, not evil, every day of her life.

She does not neglect her tasks;

She willingly works with her hands.

She works diligently, taking pride in her inner resources and strengths.

The final line in that reading also tells us something significant about the woman we honour with Christian burial today. *Charm is superficial and beauty fades. But the woman who honours the Lord is to be praised*

Mary was a woman of Faith and her faith was very important to her.. When I visited her at home in Ballagh last Friday I was struck by the fact that mixed in with pictures of her beloved horses, the many greyhound trophies, and family photographs was a number of very strong religious symbols including that very striking photograph of Pope John Paul, now of course a canonised saint. In my experience people do not put up religious pictures and symbols because they feature in the latest interior design trends. They are there because they symbolise and reflect the faith of the one who put them there.

Therefore, I have no doubt that with St. Paul in that second reading today, Mary Flanagan can say at the end of her life, *the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness.*

As a final thought today for someone who loved to listen to music and even better still dance to it I think it might be appropriate to end with the Dancer's Prayer

The Dancer's Prayer

Giver of life, Creator of all that is lovely,
Teach me to sing the words of your song;
I want to feel the music of living
And not fear the sad songs,
But from them make new songs
Composed of both laughter and tears.

Teach me to dance to the sounds of your
world and your people,
I want to move in rhythm with your plan;
Help me to try to follow your leading,
To risk even falling,
To rise and keep trying
Because you are leading the dance

Mary, may your gentle soul rest in peace