

Kieran Cavanagh RIP
Funeral Mass
Donnybrook Church
Saturday 3rd February 2024

***CAVANAGH**, Kieran (Dublin and Easkey, Co. Sligo) January 30, 2024, after a short illness, peacefully, surrounded by his loving family, at St. Vincent's Private Hospital. Pre-deceased by his sister Mary Jo. Adored by his loving wife Judy and daughters Katie and Ava; also missed by his sons Kenneth and Mitch, and daughter Lyndsey, brother Sean, sister Carmel, sisters-in-law, brothers-in-law, nieces, nephews, his colleagues and friends in the Music Industry, relatives and many friends at home and abroad.*

Symbols:

- 1. Buck Owens Guitar;** His love of music particularly the guitar. First one bought in Ballina with his pocket money savings and 2 pounds from his mother. It changed his life. Brought by his daughter Ava who loved to sing with her dad and who has a stunning voice herself which we may hear later
- 2.** If Ava was his singing companion that her older sister Katie was her dad's skiing partner. Katie brings a pair of miniature skiing boots as a memory of so many wonderful skiing trips to Austria.
- 3.** Kieran was the Barbecue King and he was happiest with tongs in hand creating a summer feast for family and friends. Sean, Kieran's brother brings the tongs and a sign which simply says; Dad's Barbecue
- 4.** If it was Austria for the snow then it was Portugal for the sun and not just for holidays as Kieran and Judy and the girls lived there for a number of years. They were visited there many

times by family and friends and Carmel, Kieran's sister brings a piece of Portuguese pottery as a symbol of so many happy memories created there over the years.

5. It was at a barbecue in Kieran and Judy's home in Portugal back in 2015 that Daniel asked Kieran to become his manager. It proved to be a very successful partnership but perhaps more importantly a wonderful friendship. To reflect that friendship but also Kieran's unique contribution and achievement to the music industry in this country and beyond, Daniel brings the Country Music Association award presented to Kieran some years ago.

6. Anne Marie brings a *Rhythm of the Dance* poster. In 1999 Kieran formed and produced the show which has since toured in 57 countries worldwide and continues to tour on all continents.

7. Judy's sister Claire brings a picture of Kieran and Judy with Katie and Ava or as Kieran described them, his favorite Four Ball

Readings: Kenneth (Kieran's son) and Siofra Kieran's niece

Bread and Wine: Gillian and Mollie

Homily

I would like to begin this reflection today by sharing with you the words of a poem which may be familiar to some of you. It is simply called **The Dash** by Linda Ellis

I read of a man who stood to speak
at the funeral of a friend.
He referred to the dates on the tombstone
from the beginning...to the end.

He noted that first came the date of birth
and spoke of the following date with tears,
but he said what mattered most of all
was the dash between those years.

For that dash represents all the time
that they spent alive on earth.
And now only those who loved them
know what that little line is worth.

For it matters not, how much we own,
the cars...the house...the cash.
What matters is how we live and love
and how we spend our dash.

So, think about this long and hard.
Are there things you'd like to change?
For you never know how much time is left
that can still be rearranged.

If we could just slow down enough
to consider what's true and real
and always try to understand
the way other people feel.

And be less quick to anger

and show appreciation more
and love the people in our lives
like we've never loved before.

If we treat each other with respect
and more often wear a smile,
remembering that this special dash
might only last a little while.

So, when your eulogy is being read,
with your life's actions to rehash...
would you be proud of the things they say
about how you spent YOUR dash?

The two dates that may in time appear on Kieran's tombstone are 3rd of September 1956 and the 30th of January 2024. The little dash between those dates represents his 67 and half years of life.

*"What matters is how we live and love
and how we spend our dash."*

Well how did Kieran Cavanagh spend his dash? Many of you who have known him a lot longer and a lot better than me could answer that question very well. But, having met him many times in recent years having listened to some of you who worked and traveled with him and having had the privilege of spending precious time with Judy, Katie and Ava and other members of Kieran's family, if I was to make a stab at answering the question, *how did Kieran spend his dash?* I would think of a gentle, kind man who loved his life, loved his work but who always loved things to be done right. A self-effacing man who had met and mingled with some of the biggest international stars and yet never forgot his Easkey roots. I think of a man who was funny who loved the craic, loved the company of family and friends and yet valued his privacy. I think of a man who was brave and strong particularly in these last months of his illness and whose major concern was to protect Judy, Katie and Ava from the pain they were experiencing. Back in 1956 in the week that Kieran was born the most popular song in Ireland, England

and America was called *Que Serra Serra, Whatever will be will be the future is not ours to see* by Doris Day. In many ways that could have been Kieran's motto. In his life he has known enormous success and found himself in magical situations he could only have dreamed of. However he has also known what it was like to experience disappointment and for things not to work out how as he might have wished. *Que Serra Serra, Whatever will be will be, the future is not ours to see*. That bravery and strength of character allowed Kieran to begin again, to find new opportunities, to create new memories of love and fulfillment. In that wonderful interview on Eddie Rowley's podcast, *My Country Life*, Kieran described his life as being blessed. It is that Blessed Life that we celebrate today and commend to love and mercy of God.

Kieran was born on Monday the 3rd of September 1956 in Easkey Co. Sligo, the third of four children for Alice and Willie Cavanagh. His father was a farmer and also the local butcher. Long before the term was invented the carbon footprint and food miles traveled by the meat in Easkey was very short indeed. The farming and butchering business meant it was a busy life for the young Cavanaghs when they came home from school. By his own admission, Kieran wasn't that much interested in either school or the farm work that followed. He experienced sadness and loss at a very early age as his dad died when Kieran was just 12. Kieran always acknowledged the pivotal role his older sister Mary Jo played in his life following the death of their father. From as far back as he could remember Kieran had one passion in life and that was music and particularly any music that involved a guitar. Having scraped together months of pocket money and with a little help from his mam, Kieran bought his first guitar in a shop in Ballina when he was fourteen. He described that as a watershed moment because it was that day which set him on course for the life and career he was to lead. He formed a local band with two of his friends and he always remembered the great support and encouragement he got from his neighbor and now his life long friend, Mollie McMahon who is here with us today. He moved to play base guitar with one of the big bands at the time, *The New Blues*. Again Kieran would acknowledge the influential role the Gill brothers from Claremorris played at this stage of his career. Kieran later went on to manage that band and so in his early twenties, his career took its first

major change moving from performance to management and many of the top Country acts in Ireland in the 70's and 80's trusted Kieran to look after their interests. In his mid-twenties the young man from Easkey decided to push the boats out further and began to develop his skill as a promoter bringing the top pop bands from Britain to Ireland. But Kieran's first musical love would always be American Country and so he wanted to bring all of his Country idols to Ireland. At the age of 27 he flew to LA to persuade Johnny Cash's manager to bring the Great man in Black to the Emerald Isle. Despite the fact that he was stranded in his Beverly Hills hotel for a number of days because of an earthquake he succeeded in his quest, and he ended up bringing Mr. Cash and his family not only on one but three different tours here, all a huge sell-out success.

Over the last few days I have been wondering if there might be a Patron Saint for Music promoters. The thought struck me that the most suitable candidate would be John the Baptist. John The Baptist was the one who went ahead of Jesus and prepared the ground for him. He did his best to ensure that as many people as possible would know of Jesus and that they would be ready to receive him and listen to him when he arrived. When Jesus did finally arrive and took centre stage as it were, then John the Baptist somewhat faded into the background uttering those famous words, He must increase and I must decrease. Kieran Cavanagh knew a thing or two about preparing the ground for others to take centre stage. Unlike John in the gospel who only had to prepare for one Messiah, Kieran had to deal with a number of international stars often with Messianic complexes and egos to match. So whether it was Kenny Rogers' fifty page contract, Jerry Lee Lewis' wanting a piano in every hotel bedroom, or Chuck Berry's demand for a specific bed size and an S Class Mercedes, whatever the demand the man from Easkey delivered. How much simpler things have been since 2015 when the only thing Daniel asks for is a face cloth in the bathroom. But Kieran just loved his work and the magical memories created far outweighed the occasional difficult demand. And I know Judy, one of those memories which Kieran cherished was Glen Campbell serenading you at dinner in The Unicorn restaurant. Through his work as a music promoter, the man we honour and celebrate today has brought to Ireland so many incredibly talented

people. As a manager he has enhanced the lives and careers of a number of our best entertainers. In so doing he has been responsible for creating precious memories for literally hundreds of thousands of people who may have never even heard of the name, Kieran Cavanagh. They must increase and I must decrease.

A few final thoughts,

At Kieran's funeral today The Word of God has brought us that gospel passage where Jesus uses the imagery of the seed being planted when He wanted to share something very profound with us about death and resurrection. Jesus speaks of how the seed, every seed has to go through the act of dying before any new life can appear above the ground. During the week as I was writing these reflections, I looked outside my window at the frost covered barren landscape of my garden. But in one corner there was the appearance of fragile green shoots which in a very short while will blossom with snowdrops and daffodils. In the midst of winter is the promise and hint of spring. In the midst of death there is the hint and promise of resurrection and new life. That very same mystery of nature is at the heart of our Christian faith. As Christians we believe that death, our death, is not God's final word in our regard. Yes, we die and yes like the seed, we are planted, buried in the earth but that act of dying and burial also gives way to a new life. Today is Kieran's time to die and wherever his final resting place will be, we realise in faith, that sacred space will become the gateway for his new and eternal life. We also find further reassurance for Kieran in the Word of God proclaimed in the Book of Revelation today "happy are those who die in the Lord! Happy indeed, the Spirit says; now they can rest for ever after their work, since their good deeds go with them"

Another thought comes more in the form of a question. After the pain and sadness have eased what if anything are we going to do about the death of our friend. By way of suggesting an answer to that question I want to share a true story from the world of music.

The story is about Puccini, the great Italian writer of such classic operas as Madame Butterfly and La Boheme. It seems that like Kieran, Puccini

was relatively young when he contracted cancer, and so he decided to spend his last days writing his final opera, *Turandot*, which is one of his most polished pieces. When his friends and disciples would say to him, "You are ailing, take it easy and rest" he would always respond; "I'm going to do as much as I can on my great masterpiece and it's up to you, my friends, to finish it if I don't." Well, Puccini died before the opera was completed. Now his friends had a choice. They could forever mourn their friend and return to life as usual- or they could build on his melody and complete what he started. They chose the latter. And so in 1926, at the famous La Scala Opera House in Milan, Italy, Puccini's opera was played for the first time, conducted by the famed Italian conductor, Arturo Toscanini. And when it came to part in the opera where the master had stopped because he died, Toscanini stopped everything, turned around with eyes welling up with tears, and said to the large audience, "This is where the master ends" And he wept. But then after a few moments, he lifted his head, smiled broadly, and said; "And this is where his friends began". And he finished the opera.

You see the point of the question I posed. What are we going to do about **Kieran's** death. What are we going to do with his unfinished masterpiece. For Judy, Katie and Ava and his close circle of family and friends' life can never be the same again. But for those of us who knew Kieran through his work, benefited from his gifts of patience kindness and generosity, walked with him or shared life's adventures with him, will it be for us, in a month or so, life as usual? Or can we build on his melody, his sincerity, his loyalty, his enthusiasm, his positivity, his professionalism, his bravery, his commitment?. I would suggest that there is a fitting response to the sadness we all feel today at Kieran's death; it is life, our life, a life that is lived better, a life lived more selflessly and compassionately, a life that makes a difference, a life that brings the highest standards to whatever we do, whether it is as a parent, a partner, a spouse, a performer, an employee, a colleague, a student, a friend. Across the chasm of death, we can make Kieran live. The music doesn't have to stop here today, it doesn't have to be cremated or buried with Kieran. The choice is ours.

Judy, Katie and Ava. I felt very privileged that you invited me to watch that beautiful video you had made for Kieran on his 60th birthday. It gave me a very powerful insight into the love you shared together. In a family where words and music are so important the four songs you chose for the video captured the essence of what your husband and dad meant to you. Gladys Knight's *You are the Best thing that ever happened to me*, Shania twain's *You are still the One*, Joe Cocker's *You are so Beautiful* and Celine Dion's *Because You Love Me*. I am acutely aware that the pain and heartache you are feeling today is because of the unique and precious love you have known. Conscious of your pain I want to leave you today with some words which I hope in time may bring you a little comfort.

These words are taken from John O' Donohue's beautiful poem; '*On the death of a Beloved*'

"Though we need to weep your loss,
You dwell in that safe place in our hearts,
Where no storm or night or pain can reach you.....
Though we cannot see you with outward eyes,
We know our soul's gaze is upon your face,
Smiling back at us from within everything
To which we bring our best refinement.

Let us not look for you only in memory,
Where we would grow lonely without you.
You would want us to find you in presence,
Beside us when beauty brightens,
When kindness glows
And music echoes eternal tones.

When orchids brighten the earth,
Darkest winter has turned to spring;
May this dark grief flower with hope
In every heart that loves you.

So Kieran

May you continue to inspire us:

To enter each day with a generous heart.

To serve the call of courage and love

Until we see your beautiful face again

In that land where there is no more separation,

Where all tears will be wiped from our mind,

And where we will never lose you again.

Kieran . May your gentle soul rest in Peace
