

Nancy Kavanagh RIP
Funeral Mass
Ballacolla Church
Thursday 7th December 2023

Nancy (Nora) Kavanagh nee Walsh, 1 St. Fergal's Park, Ballacolla, Co. Laois, December 4th 2023, peacefully at Castlecomer District Hospital, surrounded by her loving family. Predeceased by her husband John-Joe, and brother Joe. Sadly missed by her adoring family, Joanne, Michael, Mags (Maggie), Ned and Brendan (Duxie), sons-in-law Jimmy and Kurt, daughters-in-law Lisa, Gillian and Andrea, grandchildren Kayne, Georgia, John-Joe, Mikey, Brady, Casey, Logan, Ciaràn, Mackenzie, Sophia, Rylee, Jason, Oscar, Freya, Colby, Mila and nanny Nancy to Kevin, Frankie and Corey, brother Donie, sister Mary, sister-in-law Margaret, brother-in-law Seamus, nieces, nephews extended family, neighbours and a wide circle of friends.

I want to begin by sharing with you a very beautiful poem entitled
Nobody Knows but Mother by Mary Morrison

HOW MANY BUTTONS are missing today?
Nobody knows but Mother.
How many playthings are strewn in her way?
Nobody knows but Mother.
How many thimbles and spools has she missed?
How many burns on each fat little fist?
How many bumps to be cuddled and kissed?
Nobody knows but Mother.

How many muddy shoes all in a row?
Nobody knows but Mother.
How many stockings to darn, do you know?
Nobody knows but Mother.
How many little torn jumpers to mend?
How many hours of toil must she spend?

What is the time when her day's work shall end?
Nobody knows but Mother.

How many cares does a mother's heart know?
Nobody knows but Mother.
How many joys from her mother's love flow?
Nobody knows but Mother.
How many prayers for each little bed?
How many tears for her babes has she shed?
How many kisses for each curly head?
Nobody knows but Mother.

How for her care can a mother be paid?
Nobody knows but Mother.

As we gather here in Ballacolla this afternoon I am very conscious that I am celebrating a funeral mass for a woman whose life was so defined by her vocation to be a MOTHER. And that is why I wanted to begin this reflection with that beautiful poem; *Nobody knows but Mother*

The last line in that poem that really jumped out at me:

How for her care can a mother be paid?

I'm fairly confident that question will be answered emphatically today as Nancy Kavanagh knocks on heaven's door. I suspect St. Peter will be given the day off and Mary the Mother of God will be the one on duty and she will roll out the red carpet for this beautiful, gentle, placid, kind and loving woman. These two women, Nancy from Cloncracken, Roscrea and Ballacolla and Mary from Nazareth have been friends for a long, long time. The language of their friendship was the Rosary. Nancy's last words on Monday were the prayer addressed to Mary that she had spoken all her life.....*Holy Mary Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death*

As there are Joyful, Glorious and Sorrowful mysteries in the Rosary, there were also Joyful, Glorious and Sorrowful mysteries in Nancy's life too.

Nora Nancy Walsh was born in Cloncracken Roscrea on Monday 16th of October 1939. (I wonder if she ever knew that she was born the same day as Joe Dolan} I'm not exactly sure where Cloncracken is. I know it is near the monastery and very close to border between Tipperary and Offaly. I do know that Cloncracken is on the Tipperary side and while she spent more than fifty years of her life in Laois and the last few in Kilkenny, Nancy was always a very proud Tipperary woman.

The oldest of four siblings, Nancy had gone to school in Roscrea but at 13 she took on responsibility and a mothering role very early in life as a result of her own mother's illness. The perception we have, and there is some evidence for this, is that growing up in 1940's and 50's Ireland could be quite restrictive and oppressive. Many of Nancy's contemporaries left home for a different quality of life in England and elsewhere. As the 50's gave way to the swinging 60's a greater confidence and a more positive and open approach to life seemed to emerge in Ireland. One of the most obvious symbols of that new era was the emergence of the Showband era and the building of big Ballrooms across the country and particularly in the Midlands. One such Ballroom was the famous Rockland in Borris In Ossory. It attracted young people from all the surrounding counties. As a young woman who loved to dance, Nancy regularly made the pilgrimage across the border from Tipperary to Borris In Ossory. One of those nights would change her life forever as the Rockland became her Ballroom of Romance. She would meet a Laois man and another great dancer, John Joe Kavanagh from Kilbreedy in this parish and the rest as they say is history. They were married in Roscrea in 1970. The first nine years of their marriage were spent in Kilbreedy. Very soon the Five Joyful mysteries of Nancy's life began to arrive, Joanne, Michael, Mags, Ned and Brendan

How many cares does a mother's heart know?

Nobody knows but Mother.

How many joys from her mother's love flow?

Nobody knows but Mother.

If Nancy's primary source of Joy was that of being a Mother to all of you I can suggest a few other Joyful mysteries as well. Nancy was always close to the family she was born into and particularly her siblings, Joe who sadly died some years ago Donie and Mary. We extend our sympathy to you and your families today.

Nancy also got Joy from living here in Ballacolla among her neighbours and friends. In that beautiful phrase in the Irish tradition, Nancy and her neighbours 'lived in the shelter of each other'. Nancy, I understand maintained an open door policy and that open door in so many ways symbolised her kindness and hospitality. In particular that door was open to your friends at any hour of the day or night. And if the door was not open it was the worst kept secret in Ballacolla that the key could be found in the Meter Box!!

The open-Door policy continued when you her family became adults. At various stages many of you came back to live with Nancy while waiting to set up homes of your own. Nancy loved company and she did not like to be on her own. After your dad in 2001 Nancy particularly appreciated that ye came so regularly to be with her or she went to stay with you. You continued that care of your mam right to the end staying with her in Prague House and in Castlecomer. I know that Nancy received wonderful care in Castlecomer hospital in the last few weeks of her life but I would particularly like to say a few words about Prague House in Freshford which was Nancy's home for the last three years. I visited her there on a number of occasions and I was always struck by how happy she was there. She was happy because it was like home for her in every way. It is not a building that makes a facility like Prague house a home. Things like food and activities may help but ultimately is the people who work there and the other residents that make the difference. To all of you who shared Nancy's life in Prague House I say thank you and I know Nancy's family will want to do the same. It was another Joyful mystery of her life.

No woman can have a husband and five children and be spared the sorrowful mysteries of life. I suppose it is just possible that all of you who were the Joyful mysteries in her life could on occasion have been the source of a few sorrowful ones as well.

*How many prayers for each little bed?
How many tears for her babes has she shed?
How many kisses for each curly head?
Nobody knows but Mother.*

Her own illness in the last years of her life was no doubt the great sorrowful mystery of her life. But your mother Nancy was from a generation of Irish women whose extraordinary faith and trust in God, and his mother, allowed them to do something which we find almost alien today. That is the concept of 'offering up' to God whatever trial or suffering or disappointment they experienced. Somehow each situation was seen as part of God's plan for them and in some real way they united their sufferings and sorrowful mysteries with what had happened in Jesus' own life. I have no doubt that your mam brought her concerns and her worries, both big and small, to her prayer, be that the rosary or when she came here to Mass every weekend. Combined with what that First Reading from the Book of Proverbs described as her 'inner resources and strengths' Nancy's incredible simple but rock-like faith sustained her and moulded her into the beautiful lady that so many people recognised, respected and admired.

Joanne, Michael, Mags, Ned and Brendan ,the death of your mother brings with it a unique kind of heartache and even as an adult you can very much feel the pain of being an orphan. Your mam's 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. Your mother gave you your name and called you by your name for the first time, With your father she gave you your first experience of home, she created a safe place for you, a safe place to be born, to take initiative, to believe, to start the journey of loving yourselves. 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. Nancy, your mam has gone before you to join your dad, her parents, her brother Joe and other relatives and friends in their eternal home, our eternal home.

I have mentioned Joyful and Sorrowful mysteries in Nancy's life. But the Glorious ones were there too. I would suggest that all of you for whom Nancy was Grandmother or Nanny Nancy you were certainly the Glorious mysteries in her life. She delighted in you and you brought her so much happiness. I would suggest another Glorious Mystery of Nancy's life and that was the incredible care and attention you her family gave to her throughout her illness. It was incredible to witness.

As a final thought today I'm going back to when Nancy was born in October 1939. Just a few weeks earlier the second World War had begun. In Ireland it would be known as 'The Emergency'. Across the water a fairly new King and Queen were on the throne. George VI and Queen Elizabeth, the grandparents of King Charles. Elizabeth endeared herself to the British People during those war years. On the day of her funeral in 2002 The Times of London newspaper published on its front page a very moving tribute to this much loved woman.

Now I'm well aware that County Tipperary was often the place which provided the greatest opposition to British involvement in Ireland so I'm not sure how the Walsh's of Cloncracken would feel about me making this little Royal connection. However, because Nancy came into the world shortly after that new queen was taking over I thought I would finish by quoting this little tribute from the London Times. It may very well be familiar to you but I think it is even more apt today as we say farewell to this beloved sister, mother and grandmother

*We can shed tears that she is gone
Or we can smile because she has lived.*

We can close our eyes and pray that she will come back

Or we open our eyes and see all she has left behind.

Our hearts can be empty because we cant see her

Or we can be full of the love we shared

We can turn our backs on tomorrow and live yesterday.

Or we can be happy for tomorrow because of yesterday.

We can remember her and only that she's gone

Or we can cherish her memory and let it live on.

We can try and close our minds, be empty and turn our back

Or we can do what she'd want: smile, open our eyes

Love and go on

Nancy, May your gentle soul rest in peace Amen

*We can shed tears that she is gone
Or we can smile because she has lived.*

We can close our eyes and pray that she will come back

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