

Eulogy for Mark, 21 April 2011.

[*Introduction*]

We are all in shock. We are all lost for words.

On the surface, we know that Mark is gone.
But, at a deeper level, it is very hard to accept.

He was so full of life, so full of energy, so full of enthusiasm.
And his leaving was so sudden, so unexpected.
We are benumbed. It will be some time before we can come to terms with this loss.

[*School*]

Many of us present here have known Mark for a long time.
I have been his friend for more than fifty years.

- We were schoolboys together in Presentation College, just across the road.
- We were in the Scouts together.
- We were in the *Slúa Maraí* together, guarding the coast.
- We were in Bird's Eye, Grimbsy together, packing peas.
- We lived in London together for a Summer.
- We cleared heather in Wicklow together, staying in Derrybawn.
- We studied in UCD at the same time.
- And we partook of liquid refreshments together on innumerable occasions.

At school, we learned Latin together. And I remember a particular Latin phrase:

De mortuis nihil nisi bonum
(Speak, of the dead, nothing but good)

So, I have tried to list the many good qualities of Mark:

- Diplomacy
- Restraint
- Prudence
- Tact.

Hold on: I think I have the wrong list. Diplomacy was never Mark's strong suit.

It is fair to say that he was uninhibited by the niceties of political correctness:
Even before PC was invented, he was happily flouting conventions and breaking taboos.

He expressed his views with a candour that occasionally bordered on the outrageous,
but that was always refreshing.

He was fundamentally honest and sincere; incapable of being devious or conniving.

As computer scientists put it, he was WYSIWYG: *What You See Is What You Get*.

And he got away with his outspoken views, thanks largely to his tremendous sense of humour. You could never be long in his company without laughter breaking out.

His humour. Oh, his humour! His humour was ribald, verging on reckless. But always original, and always genuine.

If the roles were reversed – if I were there and he were here – he would have you all rolling round the aisles with mirth. And he would be generous in his remarks, for his generosity was limitless.

[*Home*]

Mark grew up in a home full of love and warmth and friendship and happiness.

There was always a welcome in 76 Dundela Park, and I was quickly adopted. So, when I met Mark I gained not just one friend, but a whole family of them. And I love them all.

Mark had great respect for his late father Jack. He often spoke of him with fondness and affection and gratitude.

And he took great care of his mother Mary, especially over the past few years.

He had a close bond with his brothers and sisters. A few years ago, he went on a holiday with Hilary and Gene to the land of Mark Twain and the haunts of Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn.

Jack had read Twain's novels to the boys when they were young, and the three brothers had tremendous fun reliving their childhood adventures.

Mark loved telling me of all the happenings in Hannibal, Missouri and down the Mississippi. So, Hilary, Gene: maybe you will take me there some day.

[*Dominique*]

I have clear memories of the time when Mark met Dominique. He was completely bowled over, and fell hopelessly in love with her.

When she gave him a copy of the collection "The Best of Myles", he was ecstatic. He said to me: "The woman I love most has given me a book by the author I love most." His simplicity was touching, and I remember his unbounded joy.

And Mark and Dominique had some wonderful years together – we must never forget that.

And their love produced three marvellous children – Gaetan, Leonie and Josen.

Gaetan and Leonie are here today. Sadly, Josen is not.

The loss of their beloved baby had a shattering effect on Mark and Dominique. And, ultimately, a shattering effect on their marriage.

But, when things became impossible, Mark acted, in one respect, with huge resolution and huge nobility:

He loved his children to a fault, and he was absolutely adamant that he should continue to carry out his responsibilities as a father to Gaetan and Leonie, not in some token way, but to the fullest possible extent.

This singular determination, in circumstances that were enormously difficult for everyone, was ultimately of profound benefit to all.

Mark did the right thing! It is not excessive to describe his actions and behaviour as noble.

[*Books*]

Mark was a voracious reader, not passively, but bringing great intelligence to his reading.

He read actively; he read critically; he read analytically. And he loved talking about books, about literature, and always had interesting comments and observations and insights.

We spent many hours discussing *Ulysses*, I generally listening, while he described some curious episode in the book, always bringing out new perspectives and new colour.

He also had a keen interest in and knowledge of history.

We enjoyed grumbling, like a pair of bigoted fanatics, about
“Eight hundred years of Saxon oppression”.

In fact, Mark had a remarkable capacity for objective and dispassionate historical analysis. And, again, he was always interesting to listen to.

[*Nature*]

Mark loved animals, and had a great understanding of their ways.

In his professional life, he was a healer, and brought great relief from suffering. Many of you have reason to remember this with gratitude.

And in his recreational hours, he loved to be out in the open air, enjoying nature.

His knowledge of the flora and fauna of Ireland was vast. He knew all the birds – not just their names, but their songs, their plumage, their feeding habits, their migration patterns and much more.

When we were rambling together, he was always first to spot and identify some species that we had not seen before.

And he knew the flowers and the trees, the mammals, and even the smallest creepy-crawlies, and how all life is interdependent and intertwined.

[*Rambling*]

Mark and I rambled round most of Ireland together, on a *Commodius Vicus of Recirculation*. We had enormous fun, and there was laughter with every step.

And every Sunday, we would ramble together, in Wicklow, or locally on Dalkey Hill or the piers in Dun Laoghaire.

When I suggested a new “grand adventure” recently – to ramble right down the centre of Ireland, from Horn Head in Donegal to Ballycotton, along the eighth meridian – he embraced the plan enthusiastically.

Sadly, we will now have to try and make it without him.

[*Sport*]

I couldn't share in all Mark's interests. He was passionate about sport; loved the rugby matches, and delighted in having a flutter on the nags.

He would be brimming over with delight if his horse came home and he won five or ten euros. You would think that he had discovered El Dorado.

And recently, he had joined a new group – a small, select band, with Peter Derbyshire and Cyril Byrne – to go wandering and bird-watching.

I was not admitted to this group:
Perhaps I was too hyper-active: they are called *The Idlers*.

[*Final Years*]

Mark suffered, in his life, more than his share of tragedy. And he went through several periods of great difficulty and sadness.

But we can take comfort that, during the past few years, he had found some contentment.

He showed strength and bravery and determination in overcoming a number of problems that had troubled him for years.

He had come to an acceptance of the harsh realities of life.
And he had found a measure of serenity.
I know that he was happier than he had been for years.

And he was blessed in having the love and support of his dear friend Shirley.
They were kindred spirits, each bringing happiness and fulfilment to the other.

And Shirley was with him at the end.

I recall telling Mark the old joke of Maurice Chevalier:
Old age is not so bad when you consider the alternatives.
He laughed at that.

And his own death wasn't so bad, when you consider the alternatives.

We often rambled over the lower hills of Wicklow, and he loved the splendour of the mountains.

He died in Wicklow – the beautiful Garden of Ireland – on the slopes of Derrybawn, with his beloved Shirley beside him.

There is no doubt: he went too soon. But, if he had to go, he could not have chosen a better place, or a better person to be with him.

[*Poem*]

I have been struggling – without much success – to put my feelings for Mark into a poem.

So far, it has been difficult, but I will keep going. We must all keep going!

I do have a title, and a closing line.

The title is “Adieu”.

This French word is particularly apposite, considering the importance of “The French Connection” in Mark’s life.

The everyday meaning of Adieu is “Goodbye”. But the original meaning is “To God”, which is even more appropriate, for it is to God that we commend Mark’s spirit.

The closing line of this yet-to-be written poem is: *Silent, upon a peak in Derrybawn.*
This, of course, is a steal from Keats’ sonnet “On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer”.

So I will let Keats speak for me.

His poem is about Cortez' discovery of the Pacific Ocean,
but it has much that resonates with Mark's life and interests;

Much have I travell'd in the realms of gold,
And many goodly states and kingdoms seen;
Round many western islands have I been
Which bards in fealty to Apollo hold.

Oft of one wide expanse had I been told
That deep-brow'd Homer ruled as his demesne;
Yet did I never breathe its pure serene
Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold:

Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
When a new planet swims into his ken;
Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes
He star'd at the Pacific--and all his men
Look'd at each other with a wild surmise
Silent, upon a peak in Darien.