

Garda probe into death of right-to-die activist

THE widower of the late right-to-die campaigner Marie Fleming has expressed his surprise at the Garda investigation into her death.

Ms Fleming, 59, passed away in December 2013 after a lengthy legal battle for the right to end her own life failed. She had suffered with multiple sclerosis after being diagnosed in 1986.

Her husband Tom Curran said in an interview yesterday that he was disappointed to hear that her death is being investigated.

In its 2013 judgement, the High Court said it believed the Director of Public Prosecutions would act in a 'humane and sensitive way' when considering whether to prosecute any assisted suicide of Ms Fleming.

Mr Curran said that he inter-

By **Ali Bracken**
Crime Correspondent

preted this as meaning they would make an exception for this case.

He told The Irish Times yesterday: 'Everybody interpreted that as meaning while we can't change the law, we will make an exception in this particular case - and I think the whole country interpreted it that way.'

'Marie did, it gave Marie great comfort.'

Mr Curran stated that he has not yet been contacted by gardai in connection with the case, although there had been contact with members of his family.

Ms Fleming had argued that the assisted suicide ban breached her constitutional rights and dis-

criminated against her as a disabled person. The High Court and Supreme Court both rejected the former UCD lecturer's challenge of the Criminal Law (Suicide) Act of 1993, which makes it illegal to assist another person to take their own life.

Five years prior to that decision, Ms Fleming had registered with Dignitas, the clinic in Zurich, Switzerland, where terminally ill patients can bring about their own deaths under the supervision of qualified doctors.

She did not travel after vowing to try to challenge the laws around assisted suicide in Ireland instead.

In the final stages of her condition, she had no use of her arms or her legs, no bladder control, and difficulty swallowing liquids.

Dr Mark Dooley



MORAL MATTERS

Autumn is to be embraced... just like ageing

MATT is a senior member of the church choir. He is an octogenarian with a wonderful sense of humour. Each week, he tells me a joke which I feign to dislike.

'Two cannibals were feasting on a comedian. One turns to the other and says, "This tastes a bit funny."'

My eldest and I cover our faces in pretend disgust and Matt laughs out loud. He knows that humour possesses the power to burn away any cloud.

There is also a reflective side to Matt. 'Autumn is upon us,' I exclaimed, to which he responded: 'It's a reminder.' It was a short but loaded sentence that captured so much about life.

To many, autumn heralds a season of gloom, relieved only by the prospect of Yuletide joy.

The days are but a momentary suspension of seemingly endless darkness. The world is dying and we are left to pick up the pieces.

You might think that someone in their 80s would feel that way about autumn.

You might think they would see it as a mere prelude to a dark and dreary winter.

The fact that Matt does not think that reveals something beautiful about how he sees the world.

It shows that he has accepted the cycle of life, embraced the truth that in our beginning there is always the promise of our end.

In a time when we rage against growing old, when we struggle to erase all signs of decay and imperfection, Matt's humour and wisdom are inspiring.

They show a man at ease with life, at ease with himself and with the natural course of humanity.

Autumn is 'a reminder' that, from the moment of conception, we are getting old. It is a reminder that everything has its season and that there is no shame in change.

Our wrinkles and our blemishes, our grey hairs and our aches, are but the signs of a life lived well.

Why are we so determined to stay young? Why do we spend a fortune on products that promise to remove any sign of age? Why frightens us about the future?

It may be that, in a secular age devoid of an eternal destiny, we see only the corruption of the grave. If that is all that lies ahead, then it is only natural that we should resist the process of physical decline. It is only natural that we should fight against those forces that seek to rob us of the only life we have.

Either way, there is little point in resisting the inevitable. No matter what we believe, or what potions we spread upon our skin, we all have our autumn. Eventually, we all lose the fight. The trees do not cling vainly to

their leaves, and yet is there anything more beautiful than the autumnal colours of a beech or a birch?

The low sun dangles in the sky and the yellow leaves respond by waltzing in the wind. Even though they are barely alive, they reveal the full splendour of the tree.

The light of youth is a miracle. Babies radiate innocence and glow with a supernatural intensity. It is only as the decades take their toll that this light begins to dim.

We all have our autumn. The limitless light of summer soon gives way to sunless shadows, and eventually to nights without end. The days do not rail against the dying of the light, but simply surrender and sleep.

We compensate for the darkness by lighting up hearth and home. We give life to the lamps and set the fires aflame. As night subdues day, we glow from the inside out.

The light never really goes out unless we let it. Matt glows from within, each joke a reminder that he is young at heart. The flesh fades but the spirit refuses to sleep until the light flickers.

The life cycle reflects the natural cycle. We embody the seasons, each person gradually inching from spring to winter. But even as the green fields are laden with snow, new shoots are slowly emerging from below the surface.

WE reap what we sow. The seed that falls from the dying tree will one day take root and bloom in abundance. Without autumn there would be no spring.

As we age, we sow with love and wisdom. We sow with insight and guidance. We sow with all this and then we reap a rich harvest in our children and grandchildren.

They are the spring to our autumn, the new growth which follows our time in the sun. The tree sheds so that life may be renewed. It surrenders to the seasons so that the cycle may begin afresh.

Autumn is a reminder that we lose nothing in sacrifice. 'Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains alone. But if it dies, it bears much fruit.' We are born, we mature, we fade and we finally fall to the soil.

Slowly, as the new sun smiles upon the earth, green shoots signal a fresh dawn. In the light, the seed germinates and the wonder of life begins again. The promise of autumn is that there will always be a new spring - a new world born from the loving sacrifices of the old.

'It is a reminder,' said Matt, and then he was off to make someone else laugh. We went home in the cold autumnal breeze.

That night, our eight-year-old sat on my knee and poignantly asked: 'Are you getting old, Dad?' I smiled and said: 'Did you hear the one about the two cannibals?'

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