

# Mother-to-be punched by man who jeered 'boo hoo'

A MAN with 21 convictions punched a mother-to-be 'very hard' in the stomach and said, 'boo hoo, you're pregnant,' a court heard yesterday.

Bernard McGrath has admitted the unprovoked attack on Barbara O'Beirne, who was 23-weeks pregnant.

He left her in complete shock and pain and she could not feel her baby moving, the Dublin Circuit Criminal Court heard.

She struggled to a nearby hotel and then to Holles Street hospital, where she was scanned to check on the baby.

In a victim impact statement, Ms O'Beirne said a punch in the stomach is every pregnant woman's worst nightmare. The

By Sarah-Jane Murphy

attack left her vulnerable and scared, but thankfully she gave birth to a healthy girl a couple of months later.

McGrath, 27, who is homeless, admitted assaulting her on Burgh Quay, Dublin city centre, on November 23 last year. The court heard Ms O'Beirne had left work at around 5pm and was crossing the road with a colleague when McGrath ran out and began shouting at cars who were beeping at him.

Garda Niall Reilly said: 'The defendant then turned and faced Ms O'Beirne and punched her very hard in the stomach.' McGrath then said to her: 'Boo

hoo, you're pregnant.' Ms O'Beirne described McGrath as 'a danger to people on the streets' but hoped he received help for his mental issues.

The court heard McGrath, who is schizophrenic, had been taking his medication while in custody. His 21 other convictions are in the District Court.

Judge Terence O'Sullivan described the attack as a 'deeply cowardly and bizarre incident'. He said it was very fortuitous that Ms O'Beirne's baby was unharmed, and sentenced McGrath to three years with the final nine months suspended on the condition that he engage fully with the probation services.

# Dr Mark Dooley



## MORAL MATTERS

# Truth vs love? The answer lies in a family beef.. over beef

**W**ELCOME to the Dooleys' dinner table. Dad has just lit the candles and put on some soothing music. He removes the meat from the oven and begins to carve.

Then the clarion call: 'Dinner's ready!' They emerge from the four corners of the house ready to be fed. 'What are we having tonight?' asks the active child. 'Roast beef', to which he replies: 'I can't stand roast beef!'

Seeing an opportunity to get one up on his little brother, the chatty child says: 'I can't tell you how much I love roast beef. Did you know that, until now, I didn't like beef?'

'But now, I love everything about it. I love the smell, the taste and the fact that it is full of protein. Did you know that it is full of protein?'

'By the way, even though I like beef, I really would like to become a vegetarian. How old do you have to be to become a vegetarian? But where will I get my protein if I am a vegetarian?'

The active child, now swinging perilously on his chair, roars: 'Stop! You're only saying that to make me sad.'

'Stop it you two,' says Dad, as Mum and the mature child arrive. 'What's going on here?' asks the mature child in an imperious voice intended to irritate his younger brothers.

'Stay quiet!' says the chatty child, before announcing that he is making plans to replace beef with tofu. 'You won't like it,' says Dad, to which the chatty child declares: 'Oh, this beef is so nice! If you cook it like this, I promise to eat it every week until I start my tofu. I will really miss this beef... so nice... yum, yum.'

Standing on his chair, the active child screams: 'You're only saying all this to upset me! You know I don't like beef and you're pretending that you do!'

'No, I am not!' says the chatty child, 'I absolutely love it. Did you know that it's my favourite meal - except for tofu?'

'Well, why did you say you couldn't stand it before we came into the kitchen?'

'I did not! I only said I couldn't stand the smell but, now that I've got used to it, I adore it!'

'OK, OK, you two, just eat up your dinner,' says Mum, noticing that Dad is showing signs of boiling blood pressure.

The mature child pipes up, as though speaking at a pulpit: 'I think the world has lost its way. What it needs is a new set of values - values that are grounded in truth. Truth: that is what we need!'

The active child - who is now walking around in circles - says: 'Oh, for heaven's sake, will you stop talking nonsense?! What is truth anyway?'

'Exactly,' exclaims the mature child, 'that is the question! "What is truth?" is a question that Pontius Pilate asked in the Gospel and we still don't know the answer!' The active child, who has one leg perched on the table at right angles, rolls his eyes and takes another mouthful of beef.

'I know what truth is,' says the chatty child. 'It is like when I said that I love this beef. I might have been lying just so you wouldn't get upset, Dad.'

'But because I really do love this beef, I wasn't telling a lie. The truth is when you say something and mean it.'

**F**ROM somewhere under the table, we hear a muffled voice: 'Well, if that's true, why did you say you want to become a vegetarian?' 'Sit on your chair now,' demands Mum, to which the chatty child smiles and says: 'Yes, sit on your chair and listen to me: Just because I want to become a vegetarian does not mean that I don't like this beef.'

'I know I didn't like last week's beef, but this is delicious!'

'Dad makes lovely beef and I love eating it. But even if I prefer tofu, it doesn't mean I don't like beef.'

Between cartwheels, the active child asks: 'Have you even tasted tofu?'

'I can't take this mediocre debate any longer,' announces the mature child as he begs to be excused. 'Neither can I!' says the active child, dancing his way out the door. Soon, the table is empty except for poor exhausted Mum and Dad. The music stops, and we stand to begin preparing for yet another day. I quench the candle and smile. All the plates are empty, except for that belonging to my chatty child.

—mark.dooley@daily mail.ie—

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