

CYCLIST DIES IN CRASH ON PASS

By SUN REPORTER

A HOLIDAYMAKER cycling over one of Ireland's highest mountain passes has died after crashing into a roadside ditch.

The woman, in her 30s and understood to be from Germany, was travelling along the Conor Pass on the Dingle peninsula in Co Kerry when the accident happened at around 10.40am yesterday.

She was with her boyfriend at the time.

Weather conditions were said to be poor as she descended the pass when gardai said her bike "left the road and hit a ditch".

The victim was pronounced dead at the scene.

Her body was removed to University Hospital Tralee and the road was reopened to the public.

The couple were due to return home to Germany in the coming days after their holiday in Ireland.



Tragic... mountain route

Gardai are appealing for any witnesses to the crash to contact them on the Garda Confidential Line or any Garda Station.

The scenic Conor Pass is one of the highest mountain passes in Ireland, rising to 410metres above sea level, and is a popular cycling climb.

Missing teen plea

GARDAI have asked for help in finding missing teenager Aaron Murray. He was last seen in the Celbridge area of Kildare around 6pm on Thursday.

Aaron, 16, is 6ft 2in tall and with short brown hair. When last seen he was wearing a grey hoodie and bottoms, white t-shirt and black runners.

Anyone with information should contact Leixlip Garda on 01-6667800.

GANDALF'S NO Ian McKellen turned down €1.3million to officiate a billionaire's wedding dressed as Gandalf, from Lord of the Rings.

SWIMMING ACE PADRAIG BATTLES ON AFTER INJURY

EXCLUSIVE by RUAIRI COTTER

PADRAIG Schaler was a top swimmer with real dreams of competing in the Olympics – now he can't walk or talk.

A road accident left him fighting for life in 2013 and doctors even told his stunned parents to consider donating his organs.

But the 6ft 7in athlete and Trinity College student at that moment started to defy medical expectations.

The then 23-year-old, who was in the US on a J1 visa, suffered a severe brain injury in Cape Cod, Massachusetts when a four-ton truck knocked him from his bike.

His dad Reinhart told the Irish Sun: "They began to ask us if we'd consider donating Padraig's organs as if he was dead already, it was shocking."

"They probably looked at him and thought, really young, fit and healthy man with a low chance of survival, we'll start talking organ donations."

Talented Dubliner Padraig, 26, once dreamed of competing in the Olympics and of promoting the Irish language – which he studied with history at Trinity College Dublin.

His dad said: "He finished up the degree and had the world at his feet, but decided to take a few months out in Cape Cod to think about his options first. That's where his life changed for ever."

Reinhart and Padraig's mum Pat took him home to Ireland after his accident and he was taken to Beaumont Hospital.

But the Schalers were shocked to find out they would have to wait a year in an acute hospital in Dublin before getting one of the three high-dependency beds in the National Rehabilitation Hospital – and that his care there would be limited to three months.

They moved Padraig to Germany instead where he received intensive physiotherapy and support something the Irish health service could not provide.

The family have been travelling back and forth to Germany to avail of this care ever since.

Reinhart has spoken of his frustration at the lack of care being made available in Ireland – and believes his son is being denied his basic human rights.

The German-born college lecturer said: "It's amazing how little care is available here. People like us are told that there is no treatment here, no hope, and that the health system needs to look at the bigger picture and spend their money on people who actually have a chance of getting better."

"This is so wrong on so many levels, mainly because Padraig has shown that he did have a chance of getting better."

"He did get better, and is still improving all the time, because of the care he is receiving in Germany. "If we accepted what was on offer here then what you're really looking at is for people like our son to be just sent to some sort of nursing home to live out the rest of his days."

"To be medicated so that he is more manageable, and with no hope of any sort of improvement to his life. If anything, people would just go backwards in a place like this. That's no way to live."

Three years after the accident, Padraig is back in Dublin, where he is proving experts wrong every day.

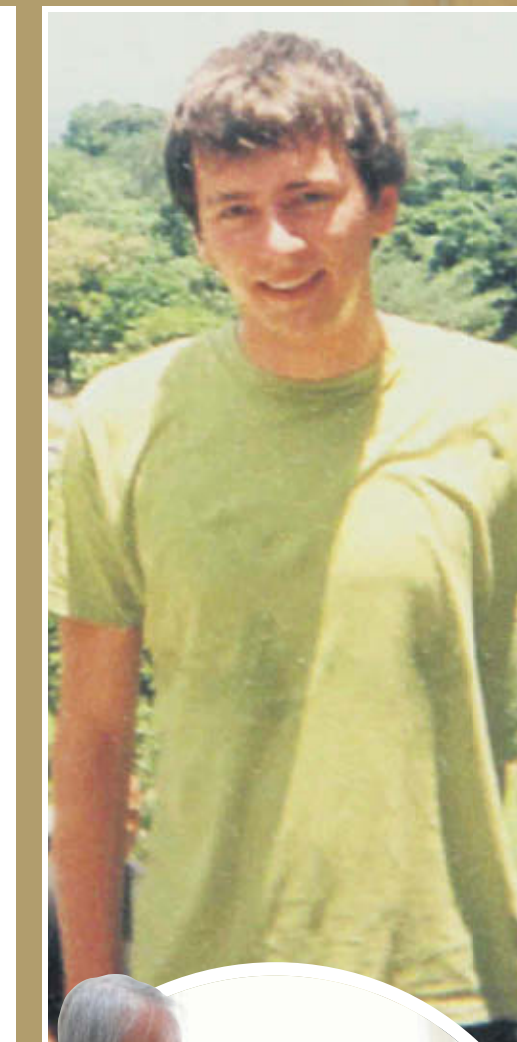
Having been told his condition would never improve, Padraig has gone on to achieve things that no one thought possible.

And Reinhart says if he has learned one thing it's not to believe that doctors know everything.

He said: "I've learned that doctors aren't always right, that's for sure. We were given a whole list of things that Padraig can't and won't ever do but he's proving them wrong one by one. Only this year we learned that he can hear us and understand us."

"He can now respond to us and make choices for himself using this buzzer. We place it under his foot and he would beep once for yes and twice for no."

"He can stand up, albeit with my help, which is so important for his muscle movement. This would not



Brave fight... Reinhart and Padraig



Docs began to ask us about donating organs as if my son was already dead

have happened if we weren't fighting because carers in Ireland won't try things, they are afraid."

Reinhart revealed how after receiving a swimming scholarship to study in Kentucky, Padraig's Olympic dream became a real possibility.

The proud dad said: "He had a real chance, he was a terrific swimmer."

"He said if there was a real possibility to compete in the Olympics following his move to Kentucky then he was prepared to take it."

"He did a year in Kentucky and his passion for swimming remained,

but ultimately I think he was just a home bird and missed Dublin."

Padraig, a lover of the Irish language and a keen promoter of it, came home to study Irish and History in Trinity and was heavily involved in TCD Cumann Gaelach.

And for Reinhart, watching his son "having the time of his life" during this period is a particularly fond memory of his.

He said: "He was organising trips and concerts, featuring on Radio Ri Ra and Radio na Life, and decided he wanted to become a journalist and push the Irish language." Speak-

ing about how the accident changed the whole family's lives, Reinhart explained the care involved with looking after his son on a daily basis.

He said: "I usually sleep with Padraig, because he needs someone there with him in case and just to make sure nothing happens."

"I get up at 6.15 and wake him shortly after, then I do the stuff that carers in Ireland aren't allowed to do, such as shaving, and the carers arrive at 7am every day."

"They basically do the stuff that Padraig can't do himself, washing, eating and getting dressed." Reinhart

also told how Ireland is only one of two EU countries that has not ratified the UN Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and relies instead on 19th-century lunacy acts.

The father-of-three is an ambassador for An Saol – a pilot project that has been developed with the help of Irish and German experts which proposes the setting up

of a unit with high-dependency capability and specialist medical staff, but with the atmosphere of being at home.

Reinhart said: "An Saol was set up to give survivors of Acquired Brain Injury the chance to live their life with dignity and respect."

OTO find out more, visit An Saol's website www.ansaoil.ie or follow them on Twitter (@an_saoil).



VISIT... Padraig with his gran before accident



Make contact... Taoiseach

HEALTH CHIEF IS DUE TO CALL

PADRAIG'S dad Reinhart is ambassador for An Saol – a pilot project aimed at setting up of a high-dependency with specialist medical staff but the atmosphere of home.

No extra funding is needed at this stage – it just requires the approval of the Minister for Health.

However, Reinhart said several letters to the health chief have gone unanswered despite assurances from Taoiseach Enda Kenny.

He said: "I've tried again and again to get in contact with Minister for Health Simon Harris, but he has not responded to any of my letters."

"We received a letter back from Enda Kenny saying that Simon Harris would get in touch with us, but there has been nothing since then."

In a letter to Reinhart and Pat Schaler, Mr Kenny said: "My office has discussed the details with the Department of Health and I am after asking the department's officials to get in contact with you without delay."

"You are right that Padraig should be able to receive care here in his own country."

INJURY FALLOUT

AN Acquired Brain Injury is any sudden damage to the brain received during a person's lifetime and not as a result of birth trauma.

Support provider Headway's definition is "a non-progressive acquired injury to the brain with sudden onset".

Each injury is unique, which means symptoms can vary widely according to the extent and location of the damage to brain tissue.

Cognitive changes can include changes in the ability to think and learn, lack of insight and memory problems.

There are no official statistics for the number of people in Ireland with brain injury.

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