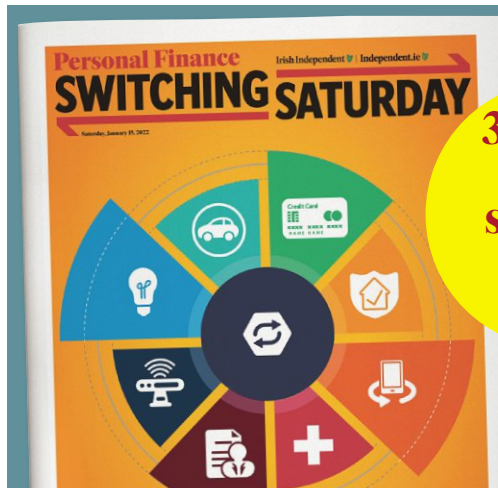


Irish Independent

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A nation mourns Ashling



Heartbreak: Ashling Murphy's parents Kathleen and Ray with her sister Amy and brother Cathal at a vigil at the entrance to Fiona's Way on the banks of the Grand Canal in Tullamore. PHOTO: GERRY MOONEY

Catherine Fegan

A NATIONAL outpouring of grief and anger over the murder of Ashling Murphy brought tens of thousands of mourners to vigils across the country. Amid calls for violence against women to be stopped, the family of the 23-year-old national school teacher led a gathering along the

❖ Tens of thousands attend candlelit vigils
❖ Priest appeals to killer to hand himself in

Grand Canal in Tullamore, close to where she was murdered. Her father, Ray, joined in a performance of Ashling's favourite song, *When You Were Sweet Sixteen*.

Standing in front of the Murphy family, Fr Declan Thompson issued an appeal for the killer to hand himself in to gardaí. "Somehow or another, somewhere

inside him he might find an ability to reach out and give the family the only thing he can give them now: admit what he did," he said.

A new suspect for the murder has been linked to a bicycle gardaí have made repeated appeals for information about since Thursday.

The *Irish Independent* understands detectives have CCTV images of a

man believed to be the suspect on the bicycle in the Tullamore area.

He is understood to be undergoing hospital treatment and has not yet been formally interviewed.

Tullamore councillor Tony McCormack warned that "fear is taking over the whole area".

Full reports: Pages 2-5

William HILL

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‘Everyone is thinking, what if it was

Amid shock at a young woman’s death, family makes quiet pilgrimage, writes **Catherine Fegan**



PAULA Lloyd had relocated to Tullamore from London in search of a safer environment to bring up her three daughters.

More than a decade ago, when she made the move, the scourge of knife crime was beginning to take hold on the streets of the English capital and gang culture was rife.

“It just wasn’t a safe place to raise three girls,” she told the *Irish Independent* while attending a candlelit vigil in Tullamore for Ashling Murphy.

“We came here so the girls would be safe, that they wouldn’t be exposed to danger. With what happened this week, I’m wondering is anyone’s daughter safe any more. My eldest is 23. Before Wednesday if she had told me she was going for a run I wouldn’t have batted an eyelid. Today I’m thinking twice about that.”

The mother-of-three, who attended the gathering with her children, had come to the vigil out of a sense of “duty”.

“I think we have all just been drawn here,” she said.

“Everyone was united in shock when this happened, then there was heartbreak

and devastation, but I went to bed last night thinking the person responsible was in custody. When I woke up this morning that small bit of reassurance was gone. Fear set in and now we are all standing here together in fear because a killer is still out there.”

Yesterday, as Tullamore absorbed the news that the wrong man had been arrested for the murder of Ashling Murphy, like Paula, locals who gathered at a vigil in Tullamore Town Park in memory of the 23-year-old were on edge.

The anger and upset over Ashling’s death, and what she has come to represent, led many to express their concerns for their own loved ones.

“We have all been thinking the same thing since this happened,” said Jim Murphy, who was joined by his son and two daughters.

“Everyone is thinking, ‘What if it was one of my children? What if this happened to our family?’ People are scared to let their kids out, scared of getting a knock on the door. You feel lucky in one sense because it hasn’t come to your door, but you are angry that this



has happened and now more angry that the person who did it is still out there.”

Others spoke of their horror at what had happened. “It’s so terrible,” said local woman

Mary Grant. “Somebody has targeted an innocent young woman. There are no words to describe it.”

Earlier in the day, Tullamore councillor Tony McCormack

warned that “fear was taking over the whole area”.

“People have woken up to that kind of news, the feelings were already heightened here in Tullamore and what’s

happened now has notched it up another rung,” he said.

“Everybody in Tullamore now, no matter who they are, male or female, will be second-guessing if they’re

Irish Independent

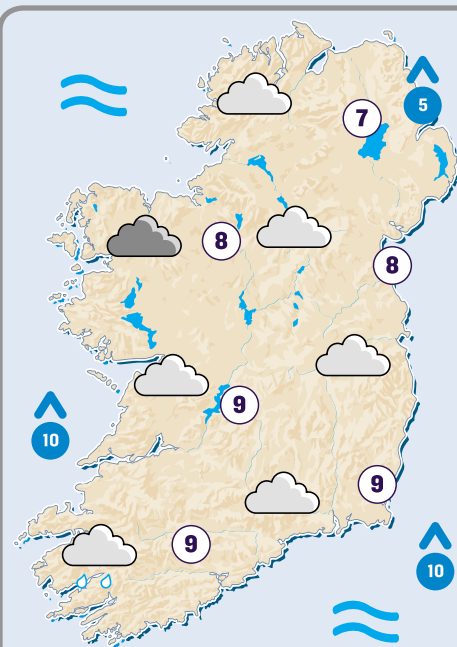
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Today’s weather



	AM	PM
Athlone	Cloudy 6C	Cloudy 8C
Ballina	Cloudy 5C	Cloudy 6C
Bantry	Cloudy 6C	Cloudy 7C
Belfast	Cloudy 9C	Cloudy 10C
Carlow	Cloudy 7C	Cloudy 9C
Carrick-on-Shannon	Cloudy 6C	Cloudy 8C
Castlebar	Cloudy 6C	Cloudy 7C
Cork	Cloudy 8C	Cloudy 9C
Derry	Cloudy 6C	Cloudy 7C
Donegal	Cloudy 7C	Cloudy 7C
Drogheda	Cloudy 6C	Cloudy 7C
Dublin	Cloudy 7C	Cloudy 8C
Galway	Cloudy 5C	Cloudy 7C
Kilkenny	Cloudy 7C	Cloudy 9C
Killarney	Cloudy 6C	Cloudy 7C
Limerick	Cloudy 7C	Cloudy 9C
Portlaoise	Cloudy 6C	Cloudy 7C
Roscommon	Cloudy 6C	Cloudy 8C
Tipperary	Cloudy 7C	Cloudy 9C
Tralee	Cloudy 6C	Cloudy 7C
Waterford	Cloudy 8C	Cloudy 9C
Wexford	Cloudy 8C	Cloudy 9C
Wicklow	Cloudy 7C	Cloudy 8C

OUTLOOK

Dry with thick cloud cover and early patches of mist and fog will be slow to lift and clear during the morning. Cloud will tend to break at times and some spells of wintry sunshine may develop during the afternoon. Light to gentle southerly winds.



DAYLIGHT

Sun rises: 08.31
Sun sets: 16.36
Lighting-up: 17.08



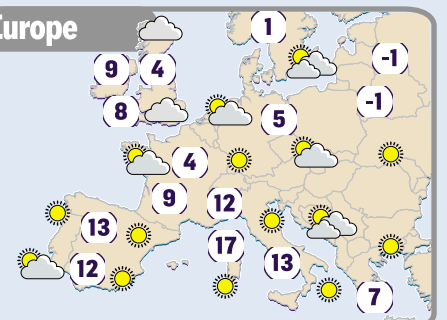
MOON PHASE

Full Moon January 17
Rises: 14.45
Sets: 08.02

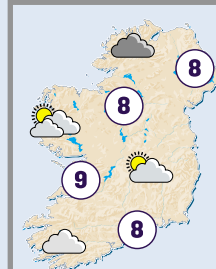
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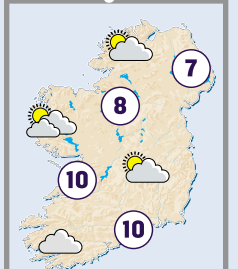
Europe



Tomorrow



Monday



my child? What if it happened to us?’



Vigil: Hundreds gather at Tullamore Town Park yesterday to remember Ashling Murphy who died this week.

PHOTO: GERRY MOONEY

their way into the woodland park for the vigil, candles were distributed among the crowds. At a makeshift memorial at the entrance, a photo of Ashling – placed above a sea of flowers and candles – acted as the focal point for many to pause in quiet prayer.

Among candles and the many bouquets of flowers left, one message, read: “I’m so sorry your ending is so incomprehensible. You will not be forgotten. You will live on in the people who knew and love you.”

Across town, as the clock moved close to 4.30pm, traffic was heavy at the busy junction leading to Grand Canal Walk. As cars jammed their way around the main roundabout, the sound of Garda sirens drew close as the blue lights of a Garda patrol car sped past. Against the backdrop of the numerous vigils taking pace locally, a glaring reminder that a killer was still at large.

At Digby’s Bridge, where the Garda cordon of the crime scene along the canal bank begins, a sea of candlelight twinkled among the crowd that had gathered. They had lined both sides of the bridge, forming a guard of honour that began at the nearby car park, where Ashling’s family emerged from a car shortly after 4pm. Arm in arm, in quiet pilgrimage, Ashling’s parents Ray and Kathleen, her brother Cathal and sister Amy, who were joined by her boyfriend Ryan, walked along the canal route that led her to her death.

While the section of the

path between Boland’s Lock and Digby’s Bridge is still cordoned off as a crime scene, the small group was accompanied by Garda liaison officers along the green pathway on the opposite side of the canal. As they looked across at the forensic tent surrounding the point where Ashling was killed, they huddled together and wept.

After a brief pause, the family turned and made their way back to the canal bank where a candlelight vigil

said Fr Thompson. “Of wanting to reach out and hit someone. All of these things, accept them because that’s all we have to offer you. We would like to pray for the one who did this. Somehow or another, somewhere inside him he might find an ability to reach out and give the family the only thing that he can give them now. Admit what he did. If only you could soften his heart and bring him out of the darkness into the light. At least that is

performed Ashling’s favourite song, *When You Were Sweet Sixteen*.

“Sing along please, everyone,” asked band member Ger Kidney, gently patting Ray on the shoulder.

And sing along they did. One by one, amid a sea of candlelight, everyone sang the words of Ashling Murphy’s favourite song

“I love you as I loved you, when you were sweet

“When you were sweet sixteen.”

In the end, it all became too much. As Ashling’s father played the final chords to the well-known song, he finally succumbed to his tears and wept openly. Looking on from the crowds, his wife Kathleen and daughter Amy were comforted by family. As the women wailed out in grief, a Chinese lantern passed overhead, sailing off in the direction of where Ashling’s remains were found on Wednesday. As the Murphy family were ferried away by car, the crowds petered out.

As a heartbroken family now prepares for a funeral, a bruised community rallies in support.

Meanwhile, a killer is still at large.

going running or walking to exercise, to make sure that they choose a route that’s safe and that they go with somebody else.

“It’s shocking, and fear is

the one that, I would say, is the feeling that is taking over the whole area as a result of what’s happened in the last 24 hours.”

As hundreds of locals made

Ashling’s grieving father performs at vigil for daughter at GAA club where she played

Gearoid Keegan and David Raleigh

FOR the second time yesterday evening, musician and grieving father Ray Murphy performed in public at a vigil for his daughter Ashling.

Mr Murphy was joined by his daughter Amy when he lined up with the Ballyboy Comhaltas traditional musical group in Mountbolus.

The vigil took place at the Mountbolus GAA grounds of the Kilcormac Killoughey club, and chair Joe Slevin extended the deepest sympathy of the community to the family.

Mr Slevin said he trusted and prayed that the family would have the support of the community in the future.

“We all remember the beautiful, vibrant person that Ashling was and maybe we can bring some of that beautiful person out in our own lives

every day from here on in to honour her memory,” he said. Ashling was a member of Ballyboy Comhaltas and played camogie with Kilcormac Killoughey.

John Leahy, GAA coach and local councillor, said he hoped the event would give the grieving family a lift when they needed it most.

Another local councillor and neighbour of the family, Neil Feighery, said the vigil was a way for the community to show their solidarity with the family in a physical way.

“In spite of the fact that this tragedy has touched people all over the country, this is a very local tragedy for us in the parish of Killoughey and Blueball in particular,” he said.

“We all grew up with Ashling and we know the Murphy family and the Leonard family, and they’re an integral part of the community.

“We’ve experienced a very dark tragedy in Tullamore this week with the loss of Ashling and we’re all finding it hard to put into words how we’re feeling.

“Their courage in the face of this tragedy is just incredible and for them to come here tonight in front of the whole community and play the music and play so beautifully with the Ballyboy Comhaltas is a testament to their character.

“But it also shows that they are getting some comfort in playing the music that they loved to play with Ashling.”

Elsewhere, thousands of people gathered at a candlelit vigil in Limerick city last night where Ashling Murphy had studied to be a music teacher.

Local musicians softly played slow traditional Irish music airs as a sea of candles lit up Arthur’s Quay Park.

“We came here so that the girls would be safe. With what happened, I’m wondering is anybody’s daughter safe?”

was held. Together with the extended family, they formed a large circle and said the Rosary. Several priests said prayers, including Fr Declan Thompson, who addressed the crowd and asked them to stand in solidarity with the Murphy family.

Standing in front of Ashling’s parents, siblings and boyfriend, Fr Thompson made an appeal for her killer to “admit what he did”.

“Accept our anger, God,”

something he can give them, instead of hiding there. Lord, we would like to say a lot more things but we can’t.”

As darkness fell, the most poignant moment of the vigil came in a father’s ode to a beloved daughter.

Ray Murphy, a well-known musician in Co Offaly, cut a fragile figure as he made his way to the microphone, clutching a banjo.

Joining his bandmates from Best Foot Forward, the group

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Gardaí search for motive in murder-suicide deaths of 'well-respected, decent' family in Co Kerry village

Worried neighbour found mother and son shot dead in their beds

**Catheine Fegan,
Sinead Kelleher and
Stephen Fernane**

GARDAÍ last night said they had yet to establish a motive for the murder-suicide that left three family members dead.

Eileen O'Sullivan (56) and son Jamie (24) appear to have been shot dead before Eileen's partner, Mossie O'Sullivan (63), took his own life at their home at Kilfeighney, in Lixnaw, north Kerry.

Eileen and Jamie were found dead in their beds by a neighbour who had called in to check on the family on Tuesday evening.

Mossie's body was found at the boundary of the rear of the property later by gardaí, with a legally held firearm also found nearby.

Gardaí have opened a criminal investigation and are not looking for anyone else over the tragedy. They have appealed for anyone with information to come forward.

Local officers said the family were well-regarded in the community and that they had not visited the premises in the recent past, nor had anyone raised concerns with them.

Mossie O'Sullivan was well-known locally for keeping sheep which were grazed on lands around Lixnaw and Crotta.

He also kept bees and sold jars of honey on the side as a hobby. A keen hurler, he played with Lixnaw and won a minor championship with the club. His son Jamie was also a keen hurler, having played for the neighbouring parish club, Crotta O'Neills.

Superintendent Paul Kennedy of Listowel garda station told reporters the family were well-regarded and private.

"This is a very decent, well-respected family who were not known to us and were very well regarded in the community," he said. "At the moment we don't have a motive and we are appealing to people in the community that have any information to come forward to us."

Supt Kennedy added: "A family liaison officer has been appointed to the extended families of the deceased and An Garda Síochána will support the families during this personal tragedy for them.



Horror: Gardaí at the murder scene in Lixnaw, Co Kerry.

PHOTO: MARK CONDREN

"An Garda Síochána is also appealing for privacy for the families at this time."

Supt Kennedy said local people were shocked by events.

"Obviously in a close-knit community of this nature, it is impacting on them profusely and I suppose that is in the light that we have a lot of unanswered questions in an incident of this nature," he said.

He said gardaí had not visited the address for any reason in the recent past and he had "no knowledge of anyone in the days preceding that would have contacted us" who had expressed concern for any family members.

Supt Kennedy could not say if there had been any notes found at the scene, which was sealed off ahead of the State pathologist and members of the Garda Technical Bureau arriving yesterday.

The bodies of the victims were taken to University Hospital Kerry in Tralee for post-mortem examinations.

"I am not going to confirm anything at this time as you can appreciate," he said. "Our technical bureau only arrived a short time earlier so we are at the very early stages of investigating the scene itself."

The family were well-known in the community and have been described as "gentle, lovely people".

Mayor of Kerry Jimmy Moloney said the county was shocked by the news.

"You read about these things in newspapers, but you never

think it will come to your own parish," he said.

"It is a terrible tragedy. There is a real sense of shock and sadness in the community. It is hard to get your head around what has happened. Our sympathy is with their entire family, their neighbours and the wider community in Lixnaw at this difficult time."

Councillor Aoife Thornton knew the O'Sullivans well.

"The entire community is gripped with shock at the horrific news that came to our doors last night and this morning. Our thoughts and prayers are with the families involved," she said.

Fr Anthony O'Sullivan, parish priest from Lixnaw, was called to the house at 11.15pm and administered the last rites.

"There is a sense of disbelief and shock in the community. There are three people dead all of a sudden in our community. There is a sense of numbness in the community," he said.

He said it was an upsetting situation for everyone involved.

"The gardaí were great. They were very sensitive to the situation. There was silence in the house," he said.

"The loss of three lives is a terrible tragedy."

Fr O'Sullivan added that he hadn't seen the family members since the pandemic began.

Justice Minister Heather Humphreys offered her condolences. "My deepest sympathies to all impacted by the truly awful tragedy in Lixnaw,"

she said. "The shock and devastation being felt by the family and the community is unimaginable."

"An Garda Síochána is engaging with the local community and will carry out a full investigation."

The neighbour who discovered the bodies of Eileen and Jamie said no one should have to witness what he did.

Farmer John Mahony visited the home of his neighbours at around 8.30pm on Tuesday when suspicions were raised after the front door of the house had been left open for several hours. He then called gardaí who attended the scene shortly afterwards.

"They [neighbours] said the door was left open so they asked me to go over and see was there anything wrong. I hopped into the jeep and drove over, not thinking anything. When I went into the house, I found them, both were in their beds... it's a terrible thing for any neighbour to have to witness," Mr Mahony said.

Locum assistant state pathologist Dr Margot Bolster, as well as members of the Garda Technical Bureau, attended the scene.

The results of the post-mortem examinations will determine the course of the investigation but preliminary findings are that all three died as a result of the gunshot wounds.

The deaths are believed to be the third murder-suicide in the southwest of Ireland in less than a year.



'I could tell

Neighbour who found family is mystified by deaths, writes Catherine Fegan



News

Murder-suicides across the country have left bereft families searching for answers

6

IT WAS around 8pm on Tuesday when John Mahony phoned his neighbour Mossie O'Sullivan for a chat. As well as living close to each other in the rural hinterland of Lixnaw, Co Kerry, the two men were firm friends, speaking to each other on a regular basis, either in person or on the phone.

"I wanted to talk to him about something," he told the *Irish Independent*.

"He never answered and I was waiting for him to ring me back. That didn't happen."

The unanswered call in itself wasn't unusual. But an hour later, while John was out mowing his lawn, the arrival of two women, expressing concern that something was amiss at Mossie's home, prompted John to call to the house himself.



Tragedy: Gardaí at the scene of the suspected murder-suicide in, Lixnaw, Co Kerry, where Eileen, Jamie and Mossie O'Sullivan died.

PHOTO: MARK CONDREN



by the scene they were dead ... it was dreadful'

"Two neighbours, two women, called to me and said they hadn't seen Eileen all day," said John.

Mossie O'Sullivan (63) kept bees and sold honey to the locals. One of the women had called to his house to collect a jar and met the other woman, who told her she hadn't seen Eileen all day.

They added that the family dog, which was always with Eileen, was there and the door was open.

John said: "They came over to me and said: 'Will you come over? We think there is something wrong.' I thought they were exaggerating but I said: 'I will of course'."

John hopped into his jeep and drove to the O'Sullivan house. As he walked to the door, he noticed it was open.

"I pulled up in the yard and thought it was unusual," he said.

"Then I saw that the dog was running about, which was odd too.

"I went up to the door, which was open, and I knocked it a few times.

"I was shouting out as well, 'Hello,' a couple of times. There was no response and no sound coming from a anyone so I made my way inside."

John found Eileen (56) lying in one bedroom dead and Jamie (24) in another room.

"I knew by the scene... by what I could see... that they were dead," John said.

"It was a dreadful scene, just shocking, but I

suppose somebody had to find them."

At this point, Mossie had not yet been found.

"I rang the gardaí straight away and I said: 'I can't see Mossie.' They said: 'Don't go looking for Mossie, don't go looking for anyone. Just stay where you are until we come.'"

John met the gardaí at the scene.

He told them that Mossie O'Sullivan helped out a man who lived nearby and kept some sheep out the back.

"The guards looked there and they found him. It's only a short distance away," he said.

John said his house is within "hearing



He loved talking about Jamie and he loved Jamie. I can't figure it out.

distance" of the O'Sullivans' house and that he would have expected to have heard gunshots. He speculated that the shots may have been fired during the night.

"I don't exactly know when it happened but I didn't hear anything, unless it happened at night," he said.

He said he had last seen Mossie "face to face" on Friday or Saturday and spoke to him on the phone on Sunday, "chatting for an hour about different things, things in general".

He added: "I do know that he was seen on

Monday and that a good few other people were talking to him in person that day."

According to gardaí, a legally held firearm was recovered from the scene. They have not provided any further detail on the weapon.

"Mossie would have had a gun," said John. "He was part of the gun club back in the day and he used to do a bit of shooting."

Yesterday, as the remains were removed from the family home which is now a crime scene, locals struggled to make sense of the deaths.

One local farmer said Mossie O'Sullivan had been "quite down on life" in recent days. He said he had been "complaining that nothing was working out for him".

It is understood that gardaí are keen to establish if he had disclosed any recent mental health problems.

John said he was aware of local speculation over the deaths, in particular claims that Mossie was experiencing financial difficulties.

"I wouldn't think that was the case at all," he said.

"He sold sheep to me and that's not unusual for this time of year. He wouldn't have a lot of sheep.

"There are certain people and you might say, 'he was always a bit touchy,' but Mossie was anything but.

"There have never been any problems in the house as far as I know. I've never heard anyone say that they weren't getting on and just can't figure out why he did this.

"I know Mossie well and I have no idea what has led to this."

However, John added: "I just thought he hadn't been himself for the last week or 10 days.

"He would be a very easy-going person but he didn't seem his usual self.

"I definitely would not have expected anything like this though."

John said the family were very respected locally and that Jamie O'Sullivan was particularly well-liked.

"He was a good worker," he said. "He used to work for Liebherr in Killarney and he would also give local farmers a hand.

"He would drive tractors and do a bit of baling for them."

Eileen O'Sullivan, who shared the same surname as Mossie but was not married to him, had suffered a stroke in recent years, but had made a good recovery, said John.

"She would always be out walking the dog," he added.

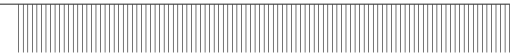
John said that he found it particularly difficult to comprehend that Mossie O'Sullivan had killed his own son.

"Any time you would go to Mossie's he was always talking about Jamie," he said.

"He talked about him all the time. He loved talking about Jamie and he loved Jamie. I can't figure it out.

"I'm not qualified to say what happened... but definitely, something must have snapped."

In depth



€50,000 stolen:
John O'Hegarty leaving Dublin Circuit Criminal Court in November 2005 after he was jailed for a series of armed robberies

'I am not here to hurt you': the story of Dublin's 'politest bank robber'

John O'Hegarty pulled on a wig and smoothed down the Velcro strips on his courier uniform.

It was a typically sunny afternoon in March 2004 as he cycles towards the Allied Irish Bank on Upper Baginbun Street, Dublin. At 5ft 9in and just over seven stone, the slender 33-year-old did not boast the muscle of typical bank robbers.

He had no accomplice or getaway driver. Instead, he gripped a hurriedly written note that read: *I AM NOT HERE TO HURT YOU OR ANYONE ELSE. I WANT YOU TO FILL THIS BAG AND I WILL BE GONE IN 60 SECONDS.*

If O'Hegarty didn't look like a criminal, he certainly didn't fit the profile of a bank-robbing thug. He had a diploma in journalism, a bachelor's degree in philosophy and a master's degree in psycho-analytic studies from Trinity College Dublin. But as he carefully parked his bike and walked towards the bank, he steeled himself to do the unthinkable.

O'Hegarty pulled open the heavy wooden doors, his heart racing as he felt a blast of air. He approached the young cashier, smiled, and slid the note over the counter.

John O'Hegarty, now 49, rests his thin hands on a table in a coffee shop in Bray, the seaside

John O'Hegarty had a high-flying academic career as a student at Trinity College before his life descended into crime — and he carried out a spate of 16 robberies. He tells **Catherine Fegan** how he turned his life around after his release from jail

town in Co Wicklow he now calls home. He runs Warehouse Gym, a place where he tries to keep young people who are having a hard time off the streets through sport and training. He meditates and is an avid sea swimmer.

"I was nervous about people knowing my past," he says. I have been testing the waters for the last year or two. I would say to people, 'Yeah I was in prison', and they would say, 'OK'. It wasn't such a big thing. When they ask, 'What for?' the last thing they're expecting is bank robbery. In a small town like this, I have had knockbacks. People talk. Rumours spread. I've reached a point where it's important for me to be able to rewrite some of my autobiography."

When O'Hegarty robbed his first bank in

2004, he had risked his liberty for little more than €900. Yet he then embarked on a one-man, six-month crime spree, robbing various banks in Ranelagh, Stillorgan and Ballsbridge.

Dubbed "Dublin's politest bank robber" because he did not use the usual abusive language heard during raids, he stole more than €50,000 and was sentenced to four years for his crimes. The term was later appealed by the DPP and upgraded to 12 years with four suspended. His story, one that sees a gifted intellectual journey through a destructive drug addiction to a life behind bars, does not begin on the day he robbed his first bank. It begins on a winter's afternoon in 2002, with a tragic event that ended one life and irrevocably changed the

course of another. "The best way I can explain it is that there was a fissure down my world," he says. "Everything that I once thought was real was no longer real because as far as I was concerned, it shouldn't have happened."

While studying for his master's degree in Trinity, O'Hegarty had taken on a side job as a pushbike courier. At that time, bike messengers were the fastest way to get a document across a city and O'Hegarty spotted a gap in the market.

With his studies complete, O'Hegarty decided to go out on his own and set up a courier business with a friend. "We were delivering mostly design artwork for engineering drawings, all that kind of stuff," he says. "After year one, we had a very successful little business with 14 people working for us."

The business was located on Dublin's Clanbrassil Street. It was from here, on Friday November 29, 2002, that O'Hegarty set off on a job. He was cycling up a one-way street in Dublin 4, on the wrong side of the road, when he hit a pedestrian who had stepped out in front of him.

Roger Handy (56), a respected auctioneer, had looked in the direction of oncoming traffic, but never saw O'Hegarty who was coming the opposite way. According to O'Hegarty, he

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offered to call an ambulance, despite Handy's insistence that he was generally all right. At the time, some questioned this claim on the grounds that Handy had suffered such serious injuries, it was unlikely he would have been able to respond to an offer of help.

"He was talking away to me," says O'Hegarty. "He was insisting he didn't want an ambulance, that I was making a big deal out of nothing. Eventually an ambulance came."

Roger Handy was taken to hospital, where he died some days later.

In the weeks that followed his death, the fallout from the accident and criticisms of the courier trade on RTÉ's *Liveline* programme took their toll on O'Hegarty, and he became ravaged by guilt. "It was an extremely difficult time," he says. "I went from being a guy that was doing this side business and had intentions of going on to do more study to becoming somebody that was effectively a murderer in some way. I cycled off the scene of the crime allegedly. I was being called 'killer courier'. I had to live with that for a few months even though that wasn't the case... My only way of being able to deal with it was through drugs."

John O'Hegarty was born and raised in Tallaght before moving to Dundrum. As an adult, he later moved to Waterloo Road in Dublin 4.

His father worked in sales and his mother was a dental nurse. He had two sisters and because both his parents were working, he spent a lot of time with his grandparents.

"My grandfather would have been quite instrumental in bringing me up," he says. "He was an ex-army man."

He attended school in Dundrum and then went on to study journalism in Newman College, then affiliated to UCD. Prior to completing a master's in Trinity, he had gained a bachelor's degree in psychology at the prestigious University of Leuven in Belgium, one of the oldest philosophy institutes in the world.

"I kind of envisioned myself going into some form of teaching or academia or research," he says. "Around the time of the accident, I was taking time out to allow myself to figure out exactly what I wanted to do career wise. I had always intended to go back to my studies."

After Roger Handy's death, O'Hegarty turned to prescription drugs to treat his worsening anxiety and depression. He stopped working and started to spend much of his time at home, alone.

"Everything fell apart," he says. "I felt if the radio was telling me I was a killer then in some way, I must be. Any future I had was gone. As far as I was concerned, my life was over and I wanted to expedite that process as best as possible. I felt that if somebody else's life had been taken, I had to punish myself in some way."

Meanwhile, an investigation into Handy's death saw O'Hegarty facing a charge of dangerous driving causing death. When the case finally reached the courts, the DPP had reduced this to two more minor charges, with O'Hegarty fined €350 for reckless riding of a bicycle and a €100 fine for cycling on the wrong side of the road.

It was at this time, he says, he turned to crack cocaine, rapidly forming a habit that took over his life. Soon, he had reached a point where he would do anything for a fix.

"It escalated very quickly," he says. "I started doing heroin a couple of times a week. Fast forward another 12 months and heroin was child's play to me at that point. On a bad day I was consuming a couple of thousand a day on crack cocaine. I was buying it, using it, selling



it. I was doing anything to get my hands on it." By February 2004, O'Hegarty had gone through all of his savings and sold anything he could to finance his habit. He was desperate for money and as he read the newspaper one day, a story about a man who had robbed a bank on St Stephen's Green piqued his interest.

"He was in possession of a wooden stick or something really innocuous," he says. "I thought, this is crazy. It was rolling around my head for a couple of weeks until one day I devised a plan to get money. I was in debt. It hadn't got heavy, but it was going to."

His plan was simple but effective. Dressed in various guises, one day a builder in overalls, the next a courier, he would fool his victims into thinking he was just another customer.

"I took the buttons and zips out of various uniforms," he says. "Suits or painter's outfits, builder's outfits, I had about four or five. I velcroed them up and the idea was that I could pull them off very quickly. Underneath, I had my courier uniform. I would walk into the bank dressed in a suit and tie with beard and as soon as I walked out of the bank, I could brush the beard off my face because it was my own hair just glued on and I would take off a hat with hair on it."

Casually holding a paper over an imitation gun that he had bought in a Smyths toy shop, he would line up at the cashier's desk and calmly wait. When his turn came, there was no shouting or abuse, just a gentle request bolstered by the illusion of a pointed gun to hand over the money.

At his peak, O'Hegarty was robbing a bank every two to three weeks. Gardaí dubbed him the "lone raider" and put a man on the door of

every bank in south Dublin in an effort to catch him. There were 16 robberies in all, carried out between March and December of 2004, which accumulated €50,000 in stolen cash. He was eventually caught and arrested on October 14, 2004 outside the Ulster Bank in Ranelagh as he was leaving with €1,960 he had stolen moments before. "I knew I was caught from the moment I asked the girl behind the counter for what I would normally ask," he says.

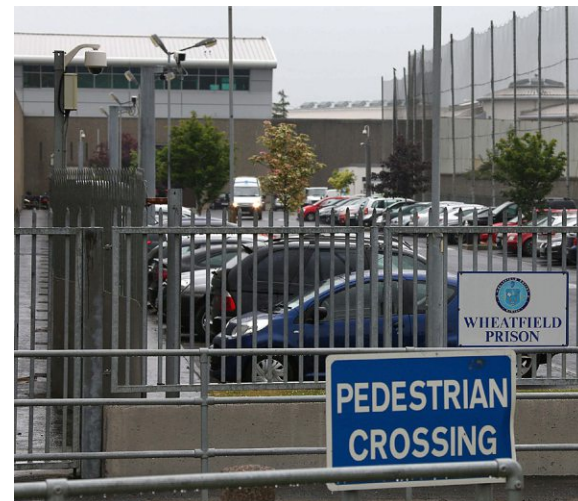
"It was her reaction. She was too relaxed. She calmly gave me the money and put a dye pack in the bag, after I said no dye pack."

After walking out with the loot, O'Hegarty was met by armed gardaí, pulled to the ground, handcuffed and taken to Donnybrook garda station. He was brought into the sergeant's office where about 10-12 gardaí were lined up, arms folded, to finally see who the man they had been chasing for six months was.

"The sergeant came in and stared me out," he says. "I looked back up from under the cap and one of the guards said, 'Take you cap off in front of the sergeant'. I don't respond. I was wearing a blue baseball cap with red hair stuck to it, a beard and a high-vis outfit. He came over and ripped it off. There was a collective gasp in the room, one or two sniggers as well."

O'Hegarty was allowed one call. He phoned his father. "Later that night a hand came through the little hole in the cell door," he says. "I recognised it straight away as my father's. He said, 'It's going to be alright'."

"That will forever stay with me. Bear in mind he was raised by an army father with the greatest of integrity and virtues, and here was me,



his son, in prison for bank robbery. He stood by me."

After several interviews, O'Hegarty was charged with a sample charge of one robbery. He was released on bail awaiting further direction from the DPP.

Two months later, however, his addiction relapsed and he raided the National Irish Bank in Stillorgan and the newsagents in Kilmacud before being re-arrested and charged.

"That was the lowest point," he says. "I was still using drugs, if anything probably heavier. Twenty minutes after robbing the bank, I went down and signed on in the garda station as part of my bail conditions with the money still in my

Reformed: Former bank robber John O'Hegarty in Bray, and right, a selection of newspaper cuttings from the time of his court appearances. Photo by Gerry Mooney



Diary of a Ukrainian refugee



Ksenia Samotiy: 'It's an opportunity to start a new life'
Photo by Damien Eagers

'It's made me realise the world is full of wonderful people'

Ksenia Samotiy (20) and her family were forced to flee Lviv in late February. Her mum and two siblings are now based in Warsaw while Ksenia is living with her third Irish host family in Dublin 18

I recently celebrated my 20th birthday with my host family. I decided to cook because my mum always cooked when I was at home. After dinner, the family surprised me with a white chocolate cake and we sang *Happy Birthday*.

It was the third time I've celebrated my birthday away from my family, and while it was a bit sadder than usual, it was also pretty good.

It's amazing how quickly people can go from strangers and friends of friends to friends to, basically, a family.

My mum is still in Poland with my younger brother and sister and she recently found a job in a foundation. My dad is still in Ukraine, hosting people who have moved from east to west in our home. He's doing as good as can be, given the situation.

My friends from back home are mostly living in Poland now. Some of my friends found educational opportunities in Belgium and the Netherlands. I think, geographically, I'm the farthest from Ukraine.

My hosts are planning to do some house renovations so I'm going to look for alternative accommodation soon. I think I'd like to get my own place. I wouldn't be able to afford a whole apartment but maybe a room share? I haven't started looking yet but I've been told how expensive it is, and how difficult it is to find anything at all.

I also received a few job offers for work in audit firms and I chose a position based in Dublin, which I will start in the middle of June. It means I still have some time to explore the city — and sleep!

My English has been a huge advantage to me in Ireland. Last week, my hostess took me to a lunch for Ukrainians in a Dublin community centre. I met loads of families who are currently staying in hotels and it made me realise how lucky I am in this situation.

For me, I see an opportunity to start a new life and I can allow myself to think of it like that. But for many Ukrainian people — especially those with poor English, or those with children or people to care for back home — for them it's not much of a new life. It's a broken previous life.

Recently, I've been feeling constantly tired and I think it's because of all the news I've consumed over the past few months. During the first few weeks of war it was constant and I was reading and reading and reading... Now I just don't have the mental capacity for it anymore.

It feels similar to the first few months of the pandemic. Also, I was living in Warsaw where I attended university when the world went into lockdown and my whole family was in Lviv. And I celebrated my 18th birthday in isolation.

It's kind of weird when I compare the two experiences. But it also makes me realise that the world is full of amazing people. And that's difficult for me because I was always really cynical.

● In conversation with Katie Byrne

trousers. When they discovered that, they were not happy. At this point I was waving a flag saying, 'Please come and get me... give me a bullet to the head.'

In court it emerged that O'Hegarty was extremely co-operative after his arrest, even going to the trouble of voluntarily bringing into the garda station the bag he had used in the robberies. After pleading guilty on all counts, he received a four-year prison sentence, the last 18 months of which were suspended.

Prisoner 33293 was housed with the general population in Wheatfield Prison in Dublin. There, he took his place among the ODCs, "ordinary decent criminals" — muggers and robbers, people who hadn't been involved in sex crimes or murders.

"They didn't know what to make of me," he says. "They knew what I had done so they kind of left me alone to a certain degree. It was a case of 'we can't work this guy out'."

He quickly adopted a "keep the head down" attitude to life on the inside, getting a job in the gym and helping other prisoners with boxing.

"I became friends with a very small group of people," he says. "But I was working in the gym and I got to know the better side of some of the prison population."

Keen to continue his studies, he enrolled in a master's degree in social studies with the Open University. Then, when a pilot project organised by the Samaritans was introduced, O'Hegarty became a trained volunteer on the prison "listener scheme" which aims to reduce suicide and self-harm.

"I was on call one day a week," he says. "It's one-to-one and you can be called out by any prisoner, that included sex offenders, murderers, drug addicts. You sit with them and you let them talk."

A year after his initial sentencing, an appeal by the DPP saw O'Hegarty's sentence upgraded from four years with 18 months suspended to 12 years with four suspended.

"The appeal really devastated me," he says. "I went from, 'OK I can make plans, I might even get back to studying,' to nothing."

His addiction to drugs, albeit much reduced, was still a problem and he was a heroin user for some time after entering the prison system.

"Heroin and hash," he says. "Then I was on methadone until I detoxed off it, maybe nine months in. There is still access to drugs on the inside, but at a huge cost."

By the time O'Hegarty was released in December 2010, his re-introduction to life on the outside was as difficult as his entry to the system. He was taken to a half-way house in Coolock, a place where he was living with other ex-prison-

ers for eight months. He had a daily curfew of 10pm and had to give routine urine samples. In prison terms, a home from home.

On paper, O'Hegarty was a free man. But reality quickly showed him that he would never be free from his past. As it turned out, it's not easy to get a job as an ex-con, even if you were a polite one. Having a criminal record can be a barrier to employment, education and training, travel, banking, insurance and more.

"You spend so long sitting in an 8 x 11 space thinking about everything you will do when you get out," he says. "But I was more restricted in some ways because I had all these opportunities in front me and my record was holding me back. It instils a mindset in you that you are different, that you can't get back what you had. You are always garda vetted, always going to have to take second best in jobs, always going to have to stay under the radar."

With dreams of getting back into the world of academia, O'Hegarty pinned his hopes on a library job in a university with the opportunity to study for a post-doctorate in parallel. But the university's board of directors held back because of the law preventing people with criminal records coming in contact with minors.

He spent years in and out of jobs: sales, cleaning, painting, until he decided he needed to create his own path.

"I always knew that being involved in training quite literally saved my life," he says. "With my background in psychology, I was fascinated by how movement could benefit the mind. I wanted to explore the connection between physical health and mental health and that's what led me down the road I'm down now."

John O'Hegarty, formerly Dublin's 'politest bank robber', has been living a life of relative obscurity in Bray for about five years. His business, Warehouse Gym, is his passion.

He has come to an acceptance that the past, with all its tragic and sensational twists, is also part of his present. He comes across as articulate, engaging and remorseful. Most of all, he is grateful for a second chance at life, even with its challenges and limits.

"I served my time, feeling guilty, feeling punished by the system," he says. "It's only in the last few years that I have been able to reflect on it all without having an emotive reaction that's negative. A big part of that was not separating what happened and what I did from who I am. "It's part of me. As much as I can say, 'yes drugs do change the way your brain thinks and you do not act as you are normally', I still did what I did. It took some years for it to sink into its own natural place of who I am. I'm at peace with it."

Prisoner 33293: Wheatfield Prison in Dublin where John O'Hegarty began life behind bars

'I felt if the radio was telling me I was a killer, then in some way, I must be. As far as I was concerned, my life was over and I wanted to expedite that process as best as possible'