

Good vibrations in John Roberts Square



The Christmas Memorial Tree at John Roberts Square was being prepared this week to receive its first 'visitors'.

The Christmas Remembrance Ribbon Tree is in operation at John Roberts Square once again. People write the names of their deceased loved ones on pieces of paper that are displayed as ribboned bows on the tree with all proceeds going to The Hospice Movement.

Quite a few years ago I wrote a little bittersweet piece about the tree and, for the last few years or so, I have received requests to use it again so thank you for your interest and here it is:

They started to arrive in John Roberts Square this week, each searching out their own personal friends and family members. Most hadn't had any contact with each other since this time last year and there were quite a few newcomers among them.

Mary, who was the uncrowned 'Queen' of the group because she had been the very first member, spotted her friend Liz on the edge of the crowd and quickly moved over to her.

"Well, girl, it's lovely to see you, how are you," called out Mary.

"I'm great, girl, but I'll be better when we're all sorted out and I can get settled into my own space," replied Liz, gazing at her old friend with deep affection.

"Hello, Jimmy," cried out Mary, as a former neighbour came into view, "you're looking very pleased with yourself, what's

happening?"

Jimmy grinned and nodded his head in the direction of the Book Centre. "Do you see that young girl carrying a baby in a sling? Well, that girl is my granddaughter and the baby, a boy, is my first great-grandchild. They named him after me."

"Fair dues to you," cried out Mary and Liz almost in unison, "if the little fella is half the hurler you were, he'll be on the Waterford team." Jimmy said nothing but his chest swelled with pride.

"Liz, will you look at who has just joined us, it's that snotty wan from the Dunmore Road, the one that knocked down your cat with her big car years ago. She always fancied herself no end, just because she married money. But I knew her when she had a runny nose, the same as the rest of us."

"Ah, sure, give the poor woman a break, she's not the worst of them. She was just silly and she had a hard life in the end," said Liz.

"You and your fecking kind heart," snorted Mary, "go on, so, invite her over and we'll make her welcome."

"Thank you," said Grainne, grateful that she had found somebody she knew, even if it was those two common girls from the top of the town she went to school with.

"This is my first year here and, to be honest, I'm finding it very difficult. I'm pretty certain that I'm going to see my sons and their wives but I don't know how it's going to affect me. They sided with my husband when we split up and things were never really the same between us again."

"Listen," said Mary, "your situation is nothing new so, if you take my advice, don't worry about it.

Just enjoy seeing them and your grandchildren and remember that, if they didn't love you, they wouldn't come here. Often, people want to make up and rebuild relationships but they're just not able."

"I guess, you're right," said Grainne, who seemed in a better mood and she cheered up even further when she saw one of her own friends a little distance away.

"See you later," she said. "I must go and chat with Margaret, she used to be the Lady Captain of our club, you know." Mary and Liz looked at each other and burst out laughing.

"She hasn't changed," grinned Liz.

Suddenly, there was a movement within the group and Mary groaned inwardly. "Here they come, trouble the houses in all their splendour," she muttered to herself. The new group was noisy, bawdy and not a little foul mouthed.

"I've sailed the seven seas and I had more than one girl in every port," boasted Tommy. "Do you see that shop over there

where Brenner's used to be," he said, nudging one of his companions in the ribs, "I once went out with a girl who rented a room on the top floor and manys the comfortable night I spent in her bed."

"Tommy, will you ever shut up boasting about your conquests and give us all a rest," shouted down Mary.

"I'll talk all I like. My grandson sees to it that I'm entitled to be here so you mind your own business, you old windbag," retorted Tommy.

He then looked down Barronstrand Street and coped two attractive teenagers making their way up from the Clock Tower.

"Look at the legs and chests on them," he drooled, "if I had met them when I was a young man they'd have been mad about me." "Shut up, Tommy," said the whole group in unison.

Then came the most poignant part of their annual reunion, the arrival of the first of the children. "Even after all these years, I still find this so hard to take, it's heartbreaking," said Liz with a tear in her eye.

"I know that," answered Mary, "but, look, there's no use getting upset. What's done is done. We must think of the children and we'll do what we do every year. Father Michael and the Sisters are very good with them and, if there is any child without a relative here, then one of us will take him or her under our wing so they won't be lonely until their own family arrives."

As usual, Mary was right. The children settled in immediately and their good humour and brightness rubbed off on everybody. Their presence brought an added joy to the proceedings and a new, shimmering sparkle to the spectacle that was the entire company.

It wasn't too long before many more people arrived to join the group and the more that arrived, the more they all seemed to settle down, contented with their company and happy with their own thoughts and reminiscences.

"Do you know what," said Liz to Mary, as she gazed out over the city. "I never thought, when I was alive, that, one day, I'd get so much pleasure and joy fluttering in the wind out of a big tree opposite Woolworth's."

"It's not Woolworth's any more, it's Penney's now," said Mary.

"OK, smarty-pants, I'll rephrase that. I never thought I would see the day when I'd enjoy being up a tree outside where Darrer's used to be and opposite where Penney's now is. Is that all right for you?"

"It is, girl, and, in answer to your question, me neither," said Mary, "me neither."

Suddenly, a thought struck Mary and she blurted it out so loudly that everybody heard.

"Do you know what, lads, it's just occurred to me that I used to be afraid of ghosts!"

Everybody on the tree laughed and cackled so hard that all the branches and ribbons fluttered in glee causing puzzlement to the mortals on the ground because they couldn't understand why the tree was shaking so much when there was little or no wind.