

FREEDOM OF LIMERICK AWARDED TO BRAVE GARDAÍ

The Freedom of Limerick City and County has been awarded posthumously to the late Detective Garda Jerry McCabe, who was shot dead by the IRA, and retired Detective Garda Ben O'Sullivan, who was shot and seriously injured, for their courage and bravery in foiling a post office robbery in the Limerick village of Adare in June 1996.

The Freedom of Limerick City and County was conferred on retired Detective Garda Ben O'Sullivan and posthumously to his former colleague and lifelong friend Detective Garda Jerry McCabe, at a special ceremony 22 years after that fateful day in the village of Adare, Co. Limerick in June 1996.

Jerry McCabe was shot dead by the IRA in a post office robbery while Ben O'Sullivan was shot and seriously injured in the attack. The Freedom of Limerick is the highest honour that can be bestowed by the citizens of the city on those who have made an exceptional and unique contribution to the community.

This was indeed a special ceremony at the Istabraq Hall in Limerick City and County Corporate HQ. Garda Síochána Retired Members' Association (GSRMA) President Matt Givens and General Secretary Paschal Feeney were among the invited guests to witness this historic evening full of memories, many sad with lots of emotions grief, joy and gratitude.

Limerick City and County Chief Executive Conn Murray read aloud the text of the Scroll of Freedom, while the Mayor of Limerick Cllr Stephen Keary presented the ceremonial



Ann McCabe, wife of the late Detective Jerry McCabe, and retired Detective Ben O'Sullivan at the presentation on 28 June 2018, which bestowed the Freedom of Limerick to her husband and his best friend.

documents to Ben O'Sullivan and to Ann McCabe on behalf of her late husband Jerry.

AN EXCEPTIONAL CONTRIBUTION

Mayor Keary spoke of the privilege to confer the title of Freedom of Limerick on "these two fine men", adding that "this honour is reserved for those who have made exceptional and unique contributions and they certainly have".

"Jerry gave his life and Ben, who was seriously injured,



Pictured at the signing of the certificate on 28 June 2018 (l-r): Conn Murray, Chief Executive, Limerick City and County Council; Ann McCabe; retired Detective Ben O'Sullivan, and Mayor of Limerick Cllr Stephen Keary (who had presented the ceremonial documents to Ben O'Sullivan and to Ann McCabe on behalf of her late husband Jerry).

thankfully made a great recovery. That terrible incident shocked the whole of Limerick and Ireland, with the revulsion people felt when they woke to hear the news that two men – detectives, husbands, fathers – were shot while doing their job,” he added.

Upon accepting the award Ben O'Sullivan said: “I’m lucky enough to be with you here this evening. I was lucky to escape with my life. People said at the time that I was invincible but that is totally inaccurate. If I had been shot in the same places as Jerry was, I would be with Jerry today.

“Both Jerry and I held each other in such high esteem. We entered the Gardaí at the same time, and progressed through the ranks together until that fateful day in 1996. My family didn’t have to suffer what Jerry’s family did, but it was a struggle and I recovered. I am humbled with being conferred with the Honorary Freedom of Limerick.

“Jerry deserves to be adored; I deserve to be remembered. Jerry paid the ultimate sacrifice”. Ben reminisced about some of the times he and Jerry served together in a highly emotional speech. On conclusion there was rapturous and sustained applause for him.

LIFE TURNED UPSIDE DOWN

Ann McCabe, on accepting the award on behalf of her late husband Jerry, said: “My family and I are delighted and greatly honoured to celebrate the conferring of this title on my late husband. The experience we are enjoying as we come to understand and appreciate the high esteem and great regard the

community of Limerick have for Jerry and Ben.

“My husband Jerry died for Ireland. It was not his choice. I would hope we would reflect not on the way Jerry died, but on the way he lived – a life dedicated to his much cherished family, total commitment to his duties as a member of the Special Branch of An Garda Síochána and a willingness to help anybody in the community.

“Twenty two years ago my life and the lives of my five children were literally turned upside down. A few minutes before 7am on 7 June 1996 Jerry and Ben were ambushed by six criminals on Main Street in Adare. These men who set out to rob and kill to show how much they cared for Ireland and its people – they claimed to be patriots.

MIRACULOUS SURVIVAL

“The car in which Ben and Jerry were sitting was raked by a blitz of high velocity bullets – Jerry was killed instantly, when he was shot in the back. Ben was hit by 11 bullets, but miraculously he survived.

“In the days and weeks and months that followed life was changed forever for me and for my young family. The well recognised symptoms of emotional trauma affected all of us. – eating and sleeping disturbances, low energy, depression, spontaneous crying, despair and hopelessness, anxiety, irritability, anger and resentment, emotional numbness, withdrawal from normal routines, decreased ability to concentrate, sudden floods of emotions related to the awful

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murder.

“During those dark and awful days I received tremendous support and encouragement from my family, from my neighbours and friends, from An Garda Síochána and from the general public – particularly the great community of people in Limerick City.”

GREATEST FAMILY HONOUR

Ann spoke of kind-hearted institutions in the years that followed, such as Rockwell College; John Jay College in New York, Aras an Uachtaráin; Templemore Garda College, Adare Catholic Church, University Concert Hall Washington, Na Píarsaigh Golfing Society, Peace Institute Dublin, all of whom honoured Jerry’s memory with awards. Likewise Limerick County Council commissioned a magnificent plaque, which was designed by Una Heaton and erected at the Garda Station in Adare.

In a highly charged and exceptionally well-delivered address Ann outlined the many events in Jerry’s life and following his murder. She said that the award of the Freedom of Limerick to Jerry and Ben will rate as the greatest event and honour experienced by her and her family over the past 22 years.

Ann spoke of Jerry, the family man, and recalled and shared many stories with the gathering. In her concluding remarks, she said: “I think Ben is making history as he has already been awarded two Scott Gold medals, and the conferring of the Freedom of Limerick on him places him in a special and niche place in history. Well done Ben and family.”

FREEDOM TO BE TREASURED

“My husband Jerry died for Ireland, it was his choice. I would hope that we reflect NOT on the way Jerry died, but on the way he lived – a life dedicated to his much cherished family, total commitment to his duties.

Though born in Kerry, Jerry loved Limerick and its



Jerry McCabe, who loved cars, drove to Templemore himself on enlist in An Garda Síochána on 9 September 1964.

people and its characters, and he knew most of them and they loved him, as evidenced by the thousands who attended his funeral service over two days back in June 1996.

“We shall forever treasure this beautiful Freedom of Limerick Certificate. It shall be displayed in a prominent place in our home so that each day we are reminded of the magnificent tribute afforded today to Jerry and Ben.”

Again rapturous sustained applause echoed throughout the chamber as Ann finished this powerful address, which concluded the formalities.

**This article first appeared in the Autumn 2018 edition of SIOCHAIN (the official magazine of the Garda Síochána Retired Members' Association. Photographs courtesy of George Daly, GSRMA Newcastle West Branch.*



Matt Givens, President of the Garda Síochána Retired Members' Association (GSRMA), Ann McCabe and Paschal Feeney, GSRMA General Secretary.