

AN POST DELIVERS SPECIAL COAST GUARD STAMPS

To mark the vitally important role played by Ireland's Coast Guard, An Post has issued two new stamps which features the artwork of the late Coast Guard volunteer Caitriona Lucas, who tragically lost her life during a search mission in Doolin, Co. Clare in September 2016.

The family of the late Caitriona Lucas says it is a great honour that one of her paintings has been featured in two new stamps issued by An Post to honour the Irish Coast Guard. Her husband Bernard Lucas is very proud that the stamps were based on Caitriona's original artwork.

"She painted stuff that she loved. She loved the Coast Guard, she was really into it, it was a very big part of her life, of our lives," he said.

In a statement released by An Post, it said the stamps, based on a painting by Caitriona Lucas who lost her life while volunteering in the coastal village of Doolin, Co. Clare on 12 September 2016, marked the important role of the Coast Guard in Irish life.

One of the stamps depicts a rescue helicopter while the other is a Coast Guard rescue boat. Both scenes were taken from the same original painting by Caitriona Lucas. They were

unveiled at Dublin's GPO, while a Coast Guard team also displayed a set in Dublin Bay.

STAMP OF RECOGNITION

Debbie Byrne, Managing Director of An Post Retail, said that the stamps pay tribute to the work of the Coast Guard, by marking important aspects of Irish life.

In media interviews after An Post released the stamps, Byrne said that "these beautiful stamps acknowledge the service given by Coast Guard members to keep us safe when we are in or near the water".

And she added: "We also recognise the families of those Coast Guard volunteers and staff who have lost their lives while serving the Irish people."

Gerard O'Flynn, national manager of the Coast Guard's volunteer branch, was particularly pleased that the work of

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Kyron O’Gorman with Sean Jennings, winchman, at the launch of the new stamp. (Pic: maxwellphotography.ie)

Caitriona Lucas was honoured in this way. “We would hope that the Lucas family will take some strength from this recognition,” he added.

In an interview with ‘RTÉ’s News at One’ around the time the stamps were unveiled, Bernard Lucas said he wants people to think of the Coast Guard when they see the stamps, of the people serving with the Coast Guard lost in recent years and “of all the volunteers who are still going out every day.” Asked if he was proud of his late wife, he said: “I’m always proud of Caitriona. She was a bright light that shone brilliantly.”

SARDA IRELAND VOLUNTEER

Bernard told ‘Emergency Services Ireland’ that she brought her love of animals, walking, climbing and travel together through volunteering to her local Doolin Unit of the Irish Coast Guard and SARDA Ireland. She also served as SARDA secretary for three years.

“Along with volunteering with SARDA Ireland she also gave more than 700 hours per year to the Doolin Unit of the Irish

Coast Guard along with a full-time job as a librarian,” he recalled.

“She first identified the need for a search dog while on a search and rescue mission for a missing person with her coastguard unit in Doolin. The search area was in very thick scrub and she felt a dog would be invaluable. Contact was made with SARDA Ireland and so began the long road of training a search dog.”

He recalled Caitriona having spent the first few months as “a dog’s body”, hiding in the mountains as part of the exercises



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Caitriona and her dog ‘Zac’ (a German Shephard and elk hound cross) spent many years travelling around the country to call-outs in jeeps, cars, helicopters and boats.

during national training weekends and also travelling to Oughterard or Moycullen in Galway at the weekends for training.

“Zac, a 12-week-old German Shephard and elk hound cross, arrived so the training took on another level. Every spare minute was put into training that puppy, socialising him with people, other dogs and other animals.”

'HIDE AND SEEK' GAMES

Bernard also fondly recalled when the training started in their family home. “The kids would hide in other rooms and then call Zac to find them; and this then progressed to the outdoors and to bigger areas in the fields.

“Initially Zac would see where you were going, and you would then duck out of sight, and Cairtriona would give him the command 'Go Find'. Upon finding the person he would then bark at them to alert Cairtriona. These search areas then became bigger and bigger up to a couple of kilometres square.”

After two years in training both Cairtriona and Zac were ready for assessment, which entailed a weekend search. They were given big areas to search but didn't know how many 'bodies' were in the area. On 17 May 2008 they passed their assessments by dog handlers from SARDA England, Wales and Scotland.

“They were on the call-out list and spent the next seven years travelling around the country to call-outs in jeeps, cars, helicopters and boats. While walking

the Camino in Spain Cairtriona made contact with Unidad Canina De Salvamento Grem – a search dog group in Northern Spain and a lot of information and training was shared over a period of time and many trips over and back.”

Bernard said that his wife always felt a lot of information could be gained from interaction with different groups. “At the end of the day the missing person is the priority and the more experience you have gained can only be beneficial to the casualty.”



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