

DISABILITY ACTIVISM LOSES A VOICE

Dara (Muredach) Gallagher, dies aged 62

Leo Enright

WHEN WE said farewell to my friend in Mohill on November 5th, 2015, I was reminded of something written by the modern Jewish poet, Zelda:

*Each of us has a name
given by the stars
and given by our neighbours*

*Each of us has a name
given by our sins
and given by our longing*

*Each of us has a name
given by our enemies
and given by our love*

My friend had two names: To his family and neighbours in Leitrim and to his school pals at Gormanston College he was Muredach Gallagher; to his very many friends in Dublin, London and Tuscany, he was Dara.

But these were just two of very many names that people gave to Dara Gallagher.

To his neighbours in Dublin he was Dara the Fighter—a doughty campaigner for the survival of a treasured inner-city neighbourhood threatened by “gentrification”. Dara was a leading member of the residents’ group, which successfully negotiated a renaissance of the Crampton Buildings in Temple Bar, where he lived.

To the people of Castagneto Carducci in Tuscany he was Dara the organic farmer throughout much of the 1980’s; years after leaving Italy, Dara could still source the very finest Italian olive oil and give it



Photo Courtesy Aideen Collard

the mystique of rare poitín.

To his many friends in journalism, he was Dara the Salesman—one of those unsung heroes of the Press who sell advertising to make it all happen. He worked at the Sunday Tribune, the Garda Review and Afloat magazine among others. He first showed a flair for business when he founded “London Menu” magazine—a new innovation to promote restaurants in 1970’s London. Dara worked in advertising in London, and it was while there that he developed a life-long love of BBC Radio 4. Throughout my years as the BBC’s Correspondent in Ireland, I would regularly encounter Dara the Radio Critic!

Dara the Businessman really came into his own in the late 1990’s, when he teamed up with friends to establish the iconic Temple Bar cafe “Joy of Cha”. But

the joy, for Dara, was short-lived. He was soon to become Dara the Disabled Rights Campaigner - or, as he put it so elegantly himself, Dara the Cripp... His decline was frighteningly fast, and all the more frightening because doctors could not explain it.

Ironically, Dara Gallagher’s years in a wheelchair were among the most active and creative of his entire life. He became a vocal campaigner for Independent Living and his use of social media, especially Facebook and Twitter, was a dramatic illustration of the power of these new technologies to transform the lives of people with mobility issues. Dara’s campaigning was the subject of an award-winning film, Freedom Driver, which can be viewed online at: <http://j.mp/DaraGallagher>

The name that Dara used in cyberspace was “Wheels of Ire”—a clever play on words that befitted a true wordsmith.

But I will close with some of the other names that Dara Gallagher adopted to describe himself to his many followers on Twitter: Male political inactivist; Wheelchair-user; Green & Red; Sometimes thoughtful, often cranky; Hates churnalism; Foodie; Loathes Rupert Murdoch.

Ní Bheidh a Leithéid Arís Ann

Dara was pre-deceased by his father Pat Gallagher MRCVS, and is survived by his mother Anna, and his siblings, Brónach, Ronan, Padraic Óg, Bláithín, Jarlaith, urlough, Orlaith and Naithí.