

Willie.

At ten to eight on November 2nd, Willie posted on Facebook 'If you have any happy stories of times or memories, we've shared together, post below or PM me. Thanks in advance'.

What followed was what can only be described as an avalanche of stories, some funny some sad, some about Willie's kindness, his legendary wit, his even more legendary apparent indifference and sarcasm, the music he brought to us, the careers he made, the shop he turned into a state of mind and every forty comments or so a contribution like this from Sheckles (Declan) 'Willie's one and only driving lesson, the car was a write off and the wall was demolished'.

The love that poured onto his page over the next few days was breathtaking. Like so many others, we sat at home, laughing and crying for hours. Hundreds and hundreds of stories that collectively painted a picture of a unique and special human being.

Some described coming to Kilkenny for the first time and being greeted and welcomed to our town. Paul Young said he was his gateway to Kilkenny culture and a true cultural champion. People described his kindness, often under the radar; a helping hand, a quiet word, gentle encouragement or a much needed intervention.

Here's some of what Clive Barnes said (swear words edited out). 'Your kindness absolutely knows no bounds and you've without a doubt been my champion over the last 11 years, introducing me to musicians who I admired and loved who I can now call friends, I'm always so proud that you believed in me enough as a musician to say to so many touring acts "I've got a friend who plays the guitar, he'll play with you" They always hummed and hawed a bit but you'd always convince them to give me a go. You put your neck on the line for me and NOBODY does that...!'

'For a guy who only got his first mobile phone at 40 and never drove anywhere, you are the best music promoter I've ever seen. A Willie Meighan endorsement for a tour or show actually means "real" arses on seats, such is the esteem and integrity your music knowledge is held in'.

Clive went on (as he does) to talk of Willie's dismissal of Dave Grohl of Nirvana visiting the shop, summing it up that we are all the same, no matter what our status is and that's how Willie saw the world too. I'm sure Stevie Scullion, Seamus Fogarty and many others could add their names to Clive's comments about his unwavering loyalty to friends, to family and those he believed in.

His home in Rioch Terrace, like his heart was always open. The Meighan house was legendary; the stuff of folk tales. It was a rite of passage back then to come home from Newpark Inn and sleep on his floor. And some country folk, like Paddy and Pender found long term refuge in there and indeed some woke up under a sleeping bag on the floor with a friend on a Sunday morning surrounded by Willie and crew watching football.

But he didn't pick up this attitude off the ground. His mam Mary, Dad, Liam and his whole family shared this openness and unconditional acceptance of others. He was brought up in a family that exuded love.

Although I'd known of him a while one of my early encounters with Willie was the night of August 14th 1988; the first Crawl Babies gig in the Red Lion where he tipped the hat off of a Garda with his bass guitar. The stage was beside the door and it was; apparently an accident, but nothing with Willie is ever an accident. I still have the body of what was left of that bass that night, in my attic. It's probably fair to say that Willie wasn't the greatest of musicians, but like everything in life he knew how to use what he had to make a statement. Willie was someone who never swayed from his path, his vision and his way of how he felt things should be done. That night was a statement of intent; and he saw it through by constantly kicking against the pricks throughout his life. With the magic of technology and with thanks to Kevin Brennan I will take you back to that night. (Play the tape Mallo)

Willie championed the Jerusalem Taxis long before anyone got what we were doing, He really wanted us to break through and he took great pride when Kerbdog and later Wilt flew the flag as the legacy of that great time in music in Kilkenny. I think that was the catalyst that led him in to the music business and the business of music.

When he and Darragh took over what was Top Twenty and then Rollercoaster Records, I don't think they would have imagined the journey it would have taken. I'll pass over his first foray into retail; Sabotage. Anyway for so long commercially it was a basket case. They saw off HMV, competition from others, falling sales and downloads. He started the Rollercoaster Records group page which became a platform for opinionated rants, the annual record poll, with Michael Lannigan as returning officer, a post for memories of gigs and bands past, promoting gigs, reviewing gigs, a vehicle to express his hatred of Led Zeppelin but mostly it became the most clever marketing tool ever and he never gave Facebook a cent for the privilege.

When the shop was really struggling, Davy Holland came along as his loyal understudy, his scentless apprentice. Together they blazed a trail, became the legendary Frying Burrito Brothers and all the while maintained the appearance of slackers who couldn't care less but really should have been considered among Kilkenny's business elite. And whenever anyone called in looking for support for a table quiz or a raffle, he always gave something, even when he hadn't got it to give. That's the measure of the man we are celebrating today. Pender said in Marie's house the other day, he wasn't religious in a Christian sense but he had a deep sense of what is fair, how we should treat each other and his complete aversion to material wealth or money.

Over time the shop became a social hub in Kilkenny. Many of us would just gather for some banter and leave without buying anything, often an hour or more after we walked in. It was wonderful to walk up Kieran Street on the Saturday of an in store session and see the crowds gathered around; families with their children in the sunshine. Or on Record Store Day where we all took a turn as DJ; Willie leaning over the laptop updating the page; surveying his kingdom. A town that has no record store is a town that has no soul. But Rollercoaster isn't a record shop; it's a

community centre in every sense of what a community centre is; a refuge, a hub, a place where conversations flow and ideas are born.

And then possibly his greatest achievement as a music promoter; Rollercoaster became a record label. It's first and second records both by an artist he championed and loved, Stevie Scullion and Malojian. Kilkenny had its own homegrown record label. There was never a more proud man, that night in Set Theatre at the launch of that first record and produced by Steve Albini. Rollercoaster was now well and truly on the music map.

Siobhan, Aisling's sister sums it up best...

Willie. A sound man...

I've got your number, written on the back of my hand.

But when I scroll through the contacts on my phone, there is nothing for Rollercoaster Records.

Every hit is Rollercoaster, Kilkenny, Ireland, The Happiest Little Record Store.

And there you are. A picture alongside one link. And I'm taken aback at this photo of you in your full strength. Kirk at the helm of The Enterprise. You have a self conscious smirk and I can only imagine what sarcastic comment is escaping the side of your mouth.

Rollercoaster Records, a store built of sounds, mortared with your love and intuition for music. Standing strong because of your gift. Polished by your eye and ear and hand and breath.

A place, an ethos.

A safe haven, a friend, a platform.

A precious stone dropped in water with ripples far reaching, far reaching.

I feel them on the back of my hand.

His harem of Brenda, Laura, Una and Helen have been constant in his life. He loved the company of his golden girls and aside from all the adventures; they came to the fore over the past number of months since Willie was diagnosed. Willie was a creature of habit and loved the chats in the car with Laura and Bren going for treatment. It was of great comfort to him.

Mrs Aisling Meighan met Willie some seven years ago in the Pumphouse, at a Barflies gig. The barflies was another one of Willie's planned accidents 25 years ago this week. Ais is his queen bee, two hands higher than a duck as someone said of her. For such a wee thing, she is indeed a very powerful, beautiful and a strong spiritual woman, fearless and formidable.

Theirs is a love that can never be quenched. A few weeks ago, they married in a lovely ceremony in Marie's house. It was the single most uplifting moment in time that we have ever been part of. The ceremony was full of meaning and was reflective of who they both are. It also revealed Michael Lannigan's (AKA Brides by Lanc) skills as a wedding planner and will long be remembered for Ian's rendition of Roy Orbison's 'In Dreams'. That day and night, you could see the love they shared. It's rare when two people find each other like they did and for that love to flourish through adversity and sorrow.

Willie managed three of my election campaigns; won one, lost two. Not quite Martin O'Neill territory. What I didn't know at the time was that he spent hours calling and texting people to vote for me. He'd lie to me after a canvass and say 'yep, all good' or 'be grand' when he had been run from half the doorsteps. It was an eye opener to see a side to him that was politically astute and had a deep social conscience. He got it more than anyone I have ever met in politics.

And then there's the Roots Festival. This was where Willie was at his most potent, where all his considerable powers shone as he held court in Ryan's or Cleeres; quietly and proudly propping up the wall at the back of a venue, quietly observing music fans from all over the World, enjoying the incredible bands and musicians that the festival had brought to this little town. The Roots Crew became his new global community of musicians and fans, travelling to gigs whenever they could or coming to Kilkenny because Willie had organised a mini roots in the middle of February. I think he did more for tourism in Kilkenny than anyone. I have no qualms about saying that. As Paddy Nash said on Tuesday, 'they've built statues to lesser men'. He was a true ambassador for Kilkenny, organising tickets, beds, places to eat, travel. A one stop shop for all things rock and roll.

He wasn't content at that. He constantly had the bigger picture in mind and was pivotal in bringing AKA Fringe Festival to light because he saw a need to provide a space for local arts and contemporary music that was not being met. He was a true social innovator and a promotional genius. Many's a night I was sitting in to watch the late late and was shamed into getting down to Cleere's because ticket sales were slow (according to Willie) only to find he had shamed another fifty or so of you to be there too.

But more often than not as he would say himself, he took a bit of a hit on more than his fair share of gigs. For every gig he made a few bob on, there were ten more where he had to shell out to cover costs. He didn't care. He just wanted the music to happen and to keep Kilkenny to the fore as a music city.

The dignity with which he bore his illness was something quite powerful to witness. Sure he was scared, but he maintained an outward persona that was as much about comforting those around him as it was about him coming to terms with his fate. A few weeks ago in the Irish Times he reflected

"In a way it means more than ever. I'm listening to as much as I ever did. The one sad part of it, you're not going to hear everything before you go. That's the same for all of us. It's more of an immediate worry for me now at the minute. I'm still going to keep tapping away with the shop and the gigs. I have no idea how long I'm going to be here and I'm just going to make the most of it while I can."

Isn't that just so powerful? I recall him working on orders up to a few days ago. When he spoke to Tom Stapleton about the last gig they did together: Tom Russell, he was happy that ticket sales were good and it was going to be a good night for all.

His openness about his cancer should serve as an inspiration to people who are facing into the same illness. The Cancer Diaries was heartfelt and moving but very often laced with his dry wit and his way of seeing the world. Sunday Prayer made us all stop what we were doing for a few minutes to reflect on what was his thinking behind selecting that particular poem at that particular time. Social media can be a cesspit of vile hatred and racism at times but Willie used it as a force for good. We will miss his presence there too.

Even in his last moments he rallied and rallied, defying the medical knowledge. A handwritten message on the fridge in Maria's house from Holly says it all 'Be strong always and never give up;'. He never did; the wheels kept on turning though he was running out of steam.

The visit of Mark Dowling and Richie Mulrooney with the Tom Walsh Cup following the win of his beloved Dicksboro senior hurlers in the County Final a few weeks ago meant so much to him. Only his love for Ipswich Town Football Club could match his love of Dicksboro and wasn't it great to see him wield his new found power on a higher plain to help Ipswich to a one nil win against Derby on the day he passed away.

Willie's family, his Mammy, Mary, Sister, brothers Harry, Jim and Decla, his dear wife Ais and wider family will be eternally grateful to the wonderful staff at St Luke's in Kilkenny, Waterford Regional Hospital, his oncology team and the incredible dedication, vocation and duty of care of the Carlow Kilkenny Homecare Team. They are grateful to everyone over the past few months, weeks and days for all the help that you have given, preparing for today and helping to manage the huge crowds who wished to pay their respects over the past few days. To all the lads for the really moving music. Simon Walton of Kilkenny County Council, Kilkenny Gardai, Niall Lacey, Mooresy, Arthur, Pender, Aidan, and all who put the marquee at Marie's. To everyone who prepared food, sat with Willie, Martin Bridgeman for the radio show, Dicksboro GAA, everything. If I've left anyone out its because there are simply too many of you! This is a true community of hope.

The priests, Fr Kieran and volunteers at St Mary's and all who have eased their burden at this sad time. Fr Kieran was just fantastic today. Condolences have come in from all over the music world; Alejandro Escovedo, Samantha Crain, John Murry, John Blek, Seamus Fogarty, James Yorkston, all among the array of artists who owe Willie a debt of gratitude. To Davy, Gary and Darragh for keeping the shop going during Willie's illness, that meant a lot to him although he brought OCD to a new height and no one could do it like him. His good friend Martin Walsh in Durrow, who has been equally inspirational in his battle with cancer.

I could keep going because there's so much more to this man. But I'll leave it to a man of few words to synopsis in half a minute, 48 crammed full of life years, Eoin Byrne (Byrnoes)

From the older lad in the cbs into music
The lad in the Newpark Inn
Sheckles ([Declan](#)) older brother
Willie
Music Music Music
Football Fan - Ipswich, Kilkenny City, Ireland, Italia 90
Hurling Fan - 'Boro and Kilkenny [Kev](#)
B & B supplier
Record shop worker
Record shop manager
Record shop owner
Campaign manager [Malcolm](#)
Vinyl supplier
Street leagues
Teammate
Opposition
Shots at ian
Shots with [Dave](#)
Rollercoaster christmas party
Confidant
Advisor
Fixer of problems - I told him that too
Hugger
Hulk 😊;-)
Stirrer - my first date with [Maria](#) comes to mind, with help from davy
Grumpy Bastard
Sarcastic (i know pot kettle)
Music promoter - from death valley to rollercoaster record
Bass player
Short wearing
Sea/beach loving
Non driver
Dj (95% are still same cd's in case from his first gig)
Kilkenny Roots
Travel companion
Late night chats
Wearer of wigs
Buses to gigs
Gigs near and far
Matchmaker
Music Music Music
Lastly as a loving husband to [Aisling](#)

Along with his cancer diaries, Willie's Sunday Prayer had become a regular feature for all of us who followed him on social media in recent times. I think he had started a cult and sucked us all in unwittingly.

But let's not leave here today without collectively pledging to keep Willie's flame burning. Go see live bands, support all that is local, support artists, believe in yourself, show empathy, be tolerant, cherish your family, be kind to each other and

yourselves and love each other. These past few days, weeks and months, Willie has made us look at ourselves and think, did I make it count? Am I making a difference? What will my legacy be?

He channelled all of that through his illness. Selfless to the end. To Willie's family, we want to say to you that we are all here with You and we will wrap You all in love over the coming days, months and years. We are today one family; Willie's family. Now Willie is on his journey to meet again his beloved Dad, Liam and the hickory wind is calling him home...

This was Willie's last Sunday Prayer from the pen of Derek Walcott

“Love After Love”

The time will come

when, with elation

you will greet yourself arriving

at your own door, in your own mirror

and each will smile at the other's welcome,

and say, sit here. Eat.

You will love again the stranger who was yourself.

Give wine. Give bread. Give back your heart

to itself, to the stranger who has loved you

all your life, whom you ignored

for another, who knows you by heart.

Take down the love letters from the bookshelf,

the photographs, the desperate notes,

peel your own image from the mirror.

Sit. Feast on your life.