



Suspended sentence for man who 'knocked wind' out of PSNI officer
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A tie that binds: Love, loss, and living with dementia

Victoria Johnston

IN IRVINESTOWN, as December sunlight dances through the windows, Sharon Gormley's home glimmers with the magic of the season.

The baubles on her Christmas tree twinkle, her jumper gleams, and even her sparkly earrings catch the light, painting a picture of warmth and joy on a cool Monday morning.

Mrs. Gormley, aged 69, has openly shared her experience of living with the early stages of Alzheimer's.

It comes as the Impartial Reporter can reveal that 1,148 people in Fermanagh and South Tyrone are living with dementia, according to figures by Alzheimers Research UK, the leading Alzheimer's research charity in the UK who are aiming to find a cure for dementia.

The figures also show that 1.08 per cent of the population are living with dementia compared to the UK average of one per cent.

Mrs. Gormley's journey began shortly after the death of her beloved husband, Tony, in 2017, when she started noticing lapses in her memory.

Reflecting on that time, she recalled the moment she recognised the signs of dementia, initially attributing her forgetfulness to the grief of losing her husband.

"I was grieving really badly," she explained. "But then I went to the doctor down the town there, and I said I wasn't

remembering things and started forgetting things, but I thought maybe it was just grieving. They sent me up to Enniskillen and got a memory test, and I was diagnosed in 2018 at 62."

She explained the first time she forgot something, it scared her: "One morning, I made myself a cup of tea, and I thought it was my first cup of tea. I walked into my sitting room with my cup to my mouth, and I had my first cup of tea in there."

"I forgot I had made the first one. It scared me as I couldn't remember making it."

In another incident, she flooded her kitchen: "I left two taps running; it was a one-off. I walked back into my kitchen, and I remember looking at the floor, and then I remember looking up and seeing I had left the taps on."

Incidents

However, she has learned strategies to avoid incidents like this happening again: "I can't just do something and walk away to do something else. You should do that one thing first and finish it and then go and do something else."

"If I'm cooking, I have to put the switches off at the wall. It is now automatic for me to switch off all the plugs."

The loss of her husband, Tony, affects her deeply, and she recalls him fondly: "My husband died at 69, seven years ago. We were so close; we were joined at the hip. We went everywhere together, especially when he wasn't working



Sharon Gormley.
Photo by John McVitty.

anymore, and he had Parkinson's. So I was his carer."

Together with their son and a family friend, they performed together in a Johnny Cash tribute band: "We had a good laugh, especially when he used to pull the faces at me when we shared one mic."

Duets

"When I played the bass, I used to sing the duets with him. We sang that Thing Called Love, and we used to do 'Cause I Love You, and a part of it, I have put on his headstone."

She quotes: "If we're ever parted, I will keep the tie that binds us... and I'll never let it break, 'cause I love you."

She continued: "Every time I went out anywhere after he passed away, I went to Enniskillen. I would always see couples walking hand in hand. You'd think it was for badness. Every shop was playing Johnny Cash."

Mrs. Gormley has been deeply appreciative of the support to "live well" from her family, including her four children and 11 grandchildren.

She said she would be "lost without" **Dementia Northern Ireland** and Patricia Hutchison, Empowerment Facilitator for the Fermanagh and Omagh area.

She summed it up simply, saying: "They give me a reason

to live."

Mrs. Gormley meets once a fortnight with others living with dementia in the ARC Healthy Living Centre. Discussing the group, she said: "I am with people who understand, and with other people that are there, they are going through the same thing, so we're all the same."

Understanding

"It puts me in better form after I come home from the groups. You feel more comfortable because they have the same understanding, and they might mention things that they're going through, and I'm thinking, 'That's what was going on with me'."

Empowerment Facilitator Mrs. Hutchison noted: "Within **Dementia NI**, we would love some volunteers to help us with our groups. It is only hours a fortnight."

An exciting opportunity arose recently when **Dementia NI** members joined the Belfast-based The Rock Choir to sing The Climb.

One part of being a member of **Dementia NI** that she has particularly enjoyed is meeting schoolchildren and discussing dementia with them: "I went to the schools to chat to the young people, you know, to give them information about dementia, because I think it's important. They should learn it."

An exciting opportunity arose recently when **Dementia NI** members joined the Belfast-based The Rock Choir to sing The Climb, which brought her great joy and excitement.

Mrs. Gormley is the face of the Sparkle for **Dementia NI** fundraising campaign and had a simple reason for joining the campaign: "I was asked if I would do that, and I said yes if it supports dementia, and I will do it."

Karen Kerr, **Dementia NI** Head of Engagement, added: "Everyone can do something to shine for our Christmas campaign."

"Add sparkle to a coffee morning with friends by adding some glitter to your cupcake or wear your favourite sparkle item to work - even your pet can get involved!"

"Whatever you decide, we want everyone to get together, donate, and sparkle."