

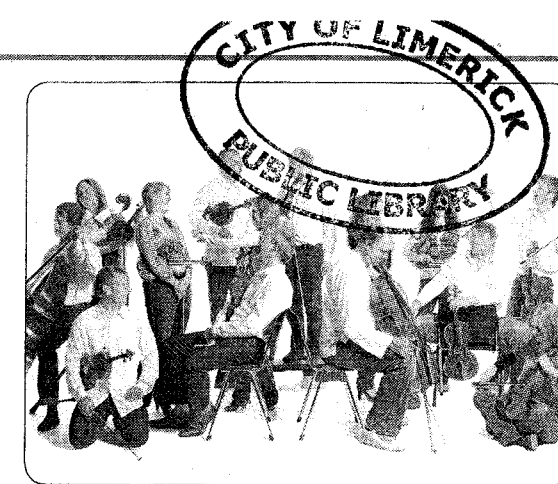
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Saturday March 24 2012

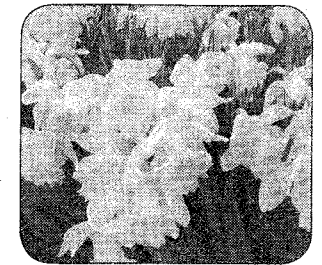
Treating mothers to a stylish day mother and daughter photo-shoot at a Limerick boutique >>P22



Portuguese maestra debuts with the ICO Special concert at the UCH to welcome talented conductor Joana Carneiro >>P4



In Bloom The best thing about spring are the daffodils >>P3



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Homecoming from Everest

In May 2004 Ger McDonnell became one of the youngest Irish people to reach the summit of Mount Everest. This excerpt from a new book, *The Time has Come: Ger McDonnell, His Life and His Death on K2* by **Damien O'Brien**, recalls the triumphant homecoming to his native Kilcormac

SHORTLY after arriving in Cork airport to a huge crowd, the Irish team embraced their families and friends. Ger scanned the crowds to see his mother and the entire family. What a sight it was, especially for Ger who had made history in more ways than one.

Pat Falvey and the team met the press and did their interviews and had photos taken, and then it was off to City Hall for a reception with the Lord Mayor of Cork. At this point Ger and the team were exhausted, but they knew they had a duty to fulfil with their audience. Speeches and thank-yous all followed. As Ger held his niece and goddaughter Rebecca in his arms, his

“The homecoming parade had begun. Car horns were blown, music played loudly and locals cheered...”

mother, Gertie, whispered to him that they should be heading back home as a small group of children was expecting him in the primary school. And even though he was exhausted, Ger did not let the children down. They had followed his entire adventure on the Internet, so he agreed.

As Ger and the family headed back to Kilcormac, little did they know what

was in store but as the entourage entered the village of Adare, Ger must have realised something was going on. A group of children with their parents were on the little roundabout in the centre of Adare village, waving the colours Ger knew only too well – the red and white of Kilcormac. At the head of the entourage was a jeep with a camcorder recording the entire

10km/8 mile trip down from Adare. Ger laughed heartily, taking it all in.

Arriving in Kilcormac, Ger and the family were overcome with emotion. Outside the entrance to Curraghchase Forest Park they were met by a group of parishioners, a bagpiper and a Garda escort. Ger was handed a Kilcormac flag and an Irish flag, and marched proudly behind the Garda car. The homecoming parade had begun.

Car horns were blown, music played loudly and locals cheered, and as Ger turned off the main N69 to enter the car park he saw the huge placard that read, ‘Welcome Home Ger from the Top of the



Continues on page 2 Ger McDonnell crossing a crevasse between camps on the Western Cwm, a glacial valley basin at the foot of Mount Everest in 2004

New book aims to set the record straight

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World'. There were tears in his eyes: he had never expected anything like this – the press, photographers, bonfires blazing and huge applause from the hundreds who turned out to welcome him home.

Ger was greeted at the entrance of the community hall by one of the main organisers of the event, Bridget Griffin, a former teacher of Ger's and a family friend. Locals, politicians and Cathaoirleach (chairperson) Bridget Teehy all queued to enter the hall to congratulate Ger and hear him tell his story. During her opening speech Bridget Griffin described it as a very special occasion and a great honour for her to welcome Ger home to Kilcornan. Sitting down facing the filled hall, Ger's heart was pounding with both excitement and pride – Bridget said he had reached his innermost strengths and beliefs and had heroically conquered this mountain known as Everest.

She then asked Ger to say a few words. 'In my wildest dreams I could never have imagined a warmer welcome, so thank you so much,' he began. 'One thing I've always said over and over again is that I was privileged to be a part of this team. I've always climbed with different nationalities but I've never had the experience of climbing a big mountain with an Irish climber, let alone an entire team. I was really excited by that and the prospect of climbing with one of the first Irish females to summit Everest. I think both Hannah and Clare were unlucky: Clare suffered a stomach problem which ended her climb, Hannah had some circulation problems – had she a different layering system I've no doubt she could have summited. Both are strong ladies and I know both will summit Everest within the next few years. Pat Falvey was a wonderful leader and I've learnt a lot from his huge qualities. He listens to all members and takes on board what they have to say;



Limerick mountain climber Ger McDonnell embraces his mother Gertie at his homecoming party in Kilcornan after he successfully scaled Mt Everest

that's a sign of a true leader. I guess the low points on the trip were losing team members to illness.'

Somebody in the audience put up their hand and asked what was it like on the summit, to which Ger replied, 'It was a bit draughty! Seriously, it was very cold and the winds ranged from 15 to 25 miles per hour [25-40 km/h], and visibility wasn't great, unfortunately there was cloud on top. One of the main things about Everest was its summit; it's a bit like

standing on a snooker table at 29,000 feet [9,000m]. The most important thing about any climb is getting back down; the longer you stay there, the more exposed to the elements you are. I thought about my family and my father and just paused for a second to think just how beautiful it was.' Then Ger shook his head as he looked around and repeated, 'This is truly amazing, I'm completely blown away. Thank you.'

Cathaoirleach Teehy then stood up to address Ger.

'It gives me great pleasure to congratulate Ger on his achievement. When I heard the announcement that Ger was successful, we were all thrilled. Ger is a hero who pushes the boundaries to achieve the impossible; we are lucky to have such a man walk in our midst, a man who climbed Everest on 22 May 2003, a week short of Sir Edmund Hillary's fiftieth anniversary. Ger has many humanitarian traits like Hillary: not many people know, but Ger in 1999 raised €15,000



On top of the world: Ger at camp before making the final push to the summit of Mt Everest in 2004



Cathaoirleach Bridget Teehy and Ger at the homecoming

for Milford Hospice while summiting Mount McKinley [Denali] in Alaska. Gerard is a role model for the youth today, he shows you if you have focus and a goal you can achieve what you want to. Gerard is also the first Limerick man to summit Everest, and with that Limerick

County Council will be bestowing civic honours on Ger in recognition of this.' (Ger held this distinction until fellow Limerick man Mark

Quinn reached the summit on 22 May 2011, aged twenty-six.)

TD Dan Neville addressed the crowd. 'What an excellent achievement. When someone has a feat to do, you say they have a mountain to climb. Well, Ger has climbed the biggest feat of them all. The parish of Kilcornan should be proud of the work you all did tonight to make this night a success. Well done.'

Kathleen Wixtead, the primary school principal, then took to the microphone. 'It's difficult to be a great man, but to be a great man among great men is harder. Gerard, you are up there with the best of explorers such as Crean and Shackleton, your name will be emblazoned in stone forever, you have been an inspiration to the children.' She then proceeded to hand Ger a framed picture of him in his climbing gear with some of the students.

"In my wildest dreams I could never have imagined a warmer welcome"

The night continued with the heads of local organisations presenting Ger with different awards. It was a night that neither Ger nor his family could ever forget.

Sitting at home later that night, Ger was in total disbelief at the display of support that he had received from his fellow parishioners. It made it all worthwhile.

About the book

The Time Has Come: Ger McDonnell his Life and his Death on K2

■ In August 2008 Limerick man Ger McDonnell became the first Irish person to reach the summit of K2, the world's most treacherous mountain. But what he and his fellow climbers didn't know was that below them an avalanche had swept away their ropes. The descent witnessed one of the worst tragedies in climbing history. Eleven climbers died, including 37-year-old Ger McDonnell.



■ Ger's brother-in-law Damien O'Brien now presents the compelling story of Ger's extraordinary life and his tragic death in this new book published by The Collins Press. The Time Has Come pieces together the details of what happened on that fateful day in 2008 on K2, the world's second-tallest and most dangerous mountain. What exactly went wrong? Could the disaster have been avoided? This book draws on eyewitness accounts, interviews with the surviving climbers, family and friends, photographic research, and Ger's writings to recount a moving story of bravery and heroism in the face of terrible odds.

■ The Time Has Come also recalls Ger's earlier experiences, from his successful climb to the summit of Mount Everest in 2003 to his first, failed attempt to scale K2 in 2006 when he was hit by a rock and airlifted to hospital. It tells the story of how an ordinary person from a small parish in County Limerick, through sheer determination and skill, managed to conquer the most fearsome of challenges and realise a long-held dream. However, it was a dream that turned to despair for his family and friends at home in Kilcornan, as Ger's status remained 'unknown' for what seemed like an eternity.

■ This book reveals a man who was passionate about life and lived it to its entirety – a life that was short but filled with adventure. It will be launched at Kilcornan Community Hall on Friday, March 30, at 7.30pm.