# Lifestyle



Death is a universal experience but the way it is handled in the UK and Ireland is so different. Sophie Grenham speaks to experts and families on both sides of the Irish sea to find out why

last autumn, I couldn't help took place around a month after their death announcements. A gap with such heft feels unfathomable in Ireland, where the average turnaround time is three to four days from the moment of death to

As is my habit on social media, I asked X a nuestion: "I'm always mystified by the length of ne between a person's death and their funeral in the UK. In Ireland, we tend to wrap things up quickly - within a week, ideally. Why does it take

so long over there?" Many responses puttered in. Angela Tim-

who has lived in Ireland for 50 years, comment-ed: "My mum in England died on February 10 (2009) and her funeral was on February 25. It's ong time compared to Ireland, but the population is huge in comparison. It also gives you more time to process it and organise what has Richard Brown (54), a writer from Bright-

on with Irish roots said: "Priests seem to offer a limited choice of days, and coordinating with undertakers and burial grounds and gathering family and friends takes time. "But we do turn it round quicker for people

whose religion demands a quick burial." died," said Fiona McGowan (53), a stay-at-home mother from Kildare. "Doing shifts in the hos-

hour, the undertaker was there. Two hours late Iwas numb putting her things in a bag. I don't recall much of the funeral two days later." Isabel Kendrick (56), a psychotherapist from Mayo who is now based in West Sussex said: "I experienced my first UK family death and an-

> the Irish rush for a funeral." She has a theory that fast funerals date back ne Famine, when there was no space to store bodies, so this became a crude form of infecon control. Mass graves at Abbeystrowry, west Cork, are the resting place of 10,000 bodies.

"Without doubt, the lack of refrigeration and embalming skills meant that the challenge of holding on to a deceased person for longer than a few days was a great one," said Gus Nich

reland's history of quick burials. "I have often heard that lilies became the 'fu

neral flower' because their strong smell would in some way mask the unpleasant smell of the deceased and coffin." A key difference between the UK and Irish systems is that the death certificate must be ob

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tained before a funeral can take place in the UK, whereas in Ireland you don't need it. There's also a shortage of crematoria and cemeteries relative to demand in the UK, with a population estimated at 68.3 million in 2023 while Ireland has just under 5.3 million. While there might be a sufficient supply of funeral homes, the huge queue for services can lead to

backlogs in scheduling. I spoke to Michael Cooney (58), born to Irish parents in Camden, London, who has experience on both sides of the pond.

Currently based in Greenwich with his wife Karen and their children, Charlotte and Tom, he

Cooney's mother Bridget, from Ferns in Wex

"They don't want a rushed funeral, and they want to process it, plan it. That's important for some families, but a lot still want it done quickly"

Kill enaule in Tipperary, was a landscaper who went into the post office. Inspired by his paternal grandfather Jack, who worked for Foley's in Killenaule, which was both a pub and a funeral home, Michael Coon-ey has been in the funeral business for over 30

His father and mother retired back to Wex tively – he has organised all his family funera "The English have never really been in that much of a rush with their funerals," he says. "If we're having a repatriation back to Ireland they want it as soon as possible, which is under

standable. My generation of Irish Catholics [in

London] just understand that we have to wait. British people also have no trouble staggering proceedings for personal reasons. "Some family members come in and say that we've got ry, we can't have it this day. I've known people to say, I've booked a holiday next week. Can we de lay the funeral until after I get back?"

The month-long wait for high-profile ceremo nies aside, the average time frame in the UK is 10 days to two weeks, with over 85pc of the population opting for cremation (54pc in Ireland) especially in urban areas where they're running out of land and much of the local authority or private cemeteries are full.

As the British are accustomed to delays, fu-neral services have become Monday to Friday oriented, with two doctors required to complete

emation paperwork. Is there a happy medium between the lengthy K system and rapid-fire planning in Ireland? "You need time to process it. I felt the same with mum and dad," says Cooney, "I'm one of six but because of the nature of my work, I was giv

en the task of organising everything "We felt pressure from a lot of mum and dad's neral happening ASAP? We had one delay on both the funerals to allow people to travel." Cooney summered in Wexford throughout his childhood and has a special connection with funeral director Michael Kavanagh, who looked

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## **FIRST PERSON**

## 'I quit my dream job with the UN after a week-now I write slam poetry'

After Holly Hughes made the bold move to step away from her ideal career, she rediscovered her passion for writing. Now she is preparing to represent Ireland at the Slam Poetry World Cup, and performing in her own stage show

week into my dream job, I quit. I have always been socially concious - at the age of 10. I became a vegetarian, which at that time in Clonakilty was a bit of a bold move considering it's a beef county. In my mid-20s, I was living in Dublin and

working for a charity which mixed social justice with climate action. It was a real career job I was also freelancing as a features writer for Irish magazines and newspapers – it was dur-ing that time of 'lean-in' feminism. A time of hustle culture. So I was doing it all. Then I got this job with the UN Environmer Program. It had always been my dream to work for the UN, always, always, always. I thought,

"This is the best opportunity. I have to take it That full, ingrained Irish belief that if you're given an opportunity, you make the most of it. You're not even doing it for yourself, you're do-ing it for everyone around you. So I took the job. After a week, I quit. I then had to continue working there for a month, which was one of the hardest things I've ever had to do. But I'm

really glad I did. It was late 2020. We'd already been in lockdown for so long, and I just felt, "If I do this, I will never get off" - I would wake up one day at 50 thinking that I never had time to just be. So

I was also burnt out. I didn't have the motiva tion it would take to sit there every day and do the work. I just couldn't do it. I have dual Australian citizenship, so I moved to Australia. My goal was to become a waitress. Not a waitress saving for a Masters, not a waitress who has all these other things going on to justify this job that we look down on as a society, even though it's essential worker status. And that's what I did. I just travelled around.

I spent a few months in different places. I took every random menial job I could find. Iworked in motels, cleaning. I worked on a building site. I graded oats in the middle of the outback. I just did it all, and took that time to figure out what a life that focused on pleasure would look like. In the midst of all that, I rediscovered writ-

ing. I also started performing poetry again, just

trying to be brave, trying to get comfortable with taking up space and trying to stop doing the apologist woman thing. I found such a deep love and joy of being on stage and sharing stories with people.

I made the decision that I wanted to finally come back and study creative writing, feeling

there's nowhere in the world I could do that e cept Ireland because of our rich heritage and the way we use language. So last June, I moved home to do a Masters I think I may be one of the few people to do so

in the time of emigration. When I returned, a friend encouraged me to take part in last year's All Ireland Poetry Slam. For me, the appeal of slam poetry has been it is such a vibrant community. So I entered the poetry slam, and I ended up coming third. This year, I will represent Ireland

poets who came first and second in the All Ireland's couldn't go, so I was next in line! With slam poetry, you just have to get up away for three minutes and hope that other people will come with you. It's one of the most visceral experiences - a real high. I have also just written a new stage show called I Want To Speak To Your Manager (How I Was Radicalised and Became... Karen), which opens tonight at Smock Allev Theatre as part of

at the Poetry Slam World Cup in Paris - the



"I used to be the person who, if I went out to dinner, would be bringing all the empty glasses back up to the bar, overextending myself and trying to be everyone's best friend. Then something just snapped

It is about society's unsung heroes - us se-rial complainers - and tells the very true stor of how, over the past couple of years, I've reall n stepping into my Karen era.

Originally, it came as quite a shock to me. I used to be the person who, if I went out to dinner, would be bringing all the empty glasses back up to the bar, overextending myself and trying to be everyone's best friend. Then som thing just snapped. It basically started with being served a terri

ble pint of Guinness and just thinking, "I'm not having this. This is not good enough." The rush ion of that - what it felt like to actually stand up and say no - was intoxicating. What I'm really trying to play with is the ar-chetype of Karen, and how ultimately she is a construct of misogyny because where is the male equivalent? There is no male equivalent and if there is something comparable, they're regarded as heroes.

That's something I have played with in my personal life, in the sense of getting comfortable with being difficult, with moving away

being one of the worst things a woman can be emanding. Alot of the show is on that concept of feel-

ing like your voice isn't heard. Anytime that would happen to me, instead of letting it go, I would double down. And that's what the show

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I'm in this stage of my life where I'm just throwing s\*\*t at the wall and seeing what sticks. For the most part, I am trying to go back to childhood because ultimately, I feel like the tra-jectory of adulthood is just trying to return to a ense of play. It's pretty grim and it's pretty mis erable out here, so let's be as silly as we can be, and as stupid as we can be. And if we can have a augh while still doing the work, the better. I feel like now all I'm trying to do is be my seven-year-old self as often as I can.

I Want To Speak To Your Manager (How I Was Radicalised And Became...Karen) plays in Smock Alley Theatre's Boys' School on Tuesday 18 and Wednesday 19 February at 8:15pm, as part of the Scene + Heard Festival

As told to Kirsty Blake Knox



"Michael very kindly let me drive mum's hearse. I used to take her shopping in the car - it's the same route. I did one last journey for her," he says, tenderly.

"I was over for mum's anniversary mass and happened to be walking to the cemetery. Michael was passing and recognised me straight away. I had flowers in my hand. I know where ou're headed,' he said. T'll give you a lift down

Patrick Skeffington (28) of Ouinn's Funeral own father's funeral in December, chimes in

deceased.

Between those essential steps and adminis-

extra time. They don't want a rushed funeral, and they want to process it, plan it. That's imporemental extra day or two."

to the lack of available priests, who cover up to

Finding balance We're finding it difficult to get churches for days that families want. On top of that, lots of

"I understand if the priest has gone through three parishes and has his own funerals and his 10 o'clock mass. The priority is his own parishioners, so there is more of a delay. We're finding

For those families who choose cremation and humanist ceremonies, the process is mor straightforward. Skeffington, who is from Tubbercurry, Co Sli-

go, has a retail background and found his call-ing in funeral direction just five years ago when a former customer and subsequent colleague Having suffered many family losses to cancer

and suicide from a young age, he wanted to help others plan their funerals and provide comfort to the grieving.

contrasting sense of urgency? "For a lot of people, it does seem too long. We run into that problem in winter when cemete

KIRSTY BLAKE KNOX

8 standout Bafta moments -from Selena's slip up to Saoirse's Take That shout out, and a tricolour suit

razor sharp monologue

and gags. And by playing

it safe, the Bafta script writ-

e are now deep in season. Awards have been polished and handed out, carpets unfurled and champagne towers by the whole thing. stacked. On Sunday night, the 78th British Academy Film Awards took

olace in London. The Baftas has given us one of my fa vourite awards season moments of all time - Ariana DeBose's unforgettable 2023 rap in which she commended Angela Bassett for "Doing The Thing".

of Sunday night were, from snubs and set the bar high with her surprises to puffer jackets.

Selena's almost blunder It's hard to think of anyone who had a ing team fell a little short

better weekend than the English-born director of the Irish film, Kneecap: Rich Saoirse Ronan's Peppiatt, On Friday he became an Irish Best Director at the Iftas and on Sunday act and sang their 2008 hit Greatest Day. night he topped the Outstanding Debut category at the Baftas. In his acceptance speech he described

Kneecap as a moment and that everyone should have "their language respected, held as the trio manoeuvred through their culture respected". who is out there fighting that fight," he

The award was presented by Emilia Saldana, the former of whom had a small on-stage hiccup and faltered when an-

However, somewerevery impressed by nouncing the winner. Take That's performance. And by some, I After opening the envelope there seemed to be a bit of back and forth be-seemed to be a bit of back and forth be-

tween the two women before Gomez muttered: "I don't know what it off stage. She also told Tennant says." She then said, "Oh sorthat Gary was her favourite of rv. Kneecap... Rich Peppiatt the trio. Nothing like a bit of is going to do the announc ing honours before you g

Showbiz karaoke

Host David Tennant's opening monologue saw him stomp

Selena Gomez

Demi Moore would win for her through the room belting out The Proclaimers song I'm Gonna Be

bit like witnessing an aggressive showaudience, "I probably should've listened biz karaoke session.

The best part was when the camera

to my publicist when she told me to write a speech" before dedicatingher award to cut to Jeff Goldblum, who looked both totally bemused and utterly delighted

While Tennant pulled it off with ease, some gags later in the showwere laboured Tricolour suits and puffa and flabby, with one too many dad jokes.

Tennant had said in advance that the The Outrun star Saoirse Ronan chan jokes had been toned down after Cate nelled old school Hollywood glamour in Blanchett appeared to take offence a pale eau de nil Louis Vuitton gown But the reality is that Gold

unexpected 2025 comeback?) Special mention must g to Kneecap star JJ Ó Do chartaigh, aka DJ Próvaí who arrived in a tricol our cord suit, which was eve-catching but I'd im

Oscar is anyone's to win.

Elsewhere, therewere lots of Take That were the entertainment as Gwendoline Christie in Giles Deacon which features in the film Anora. The per-formance had plenty of cheese with kisses while Wicked's Cynthia Erivo showed off But maybe the most relatable look on blown to the crowd, heart shaped balloons

Coral ie Fargeat, who walked the red car the stalls at London's Royal Festival Hall. pet wrapped in a duvet like puffer jacket It wasn't a showstopper, however, and

personally, I thought it was upstaged by Jeff Goldblum when he movingly per-What did we miss? The telecast was two hours after the actual Perez actresses Selena Gomez and Zoe By on the piano during the ceremony's ceremony and so some jokes, and shout outs, remained on the cutting room floor

> A handful of David Tennant's jokes about Donald Trump fell by the wayside ed at the band as they made their way reaction when the music began playing her off during her acceptance speech for

## PDAs and lookalikes

Timothée Chalamet may not have takmultiple Oscar nominee. en home any awards for A Complete Ur nubs & surprises After winning at the Crit- award). But he and his girlfriend Kylie ic's Choice and the Golden Globes, many assumed that wood glamour.

They sat in the front row and their hand role inhorror-satire *The Substance*. Moore is getting long overdue credit (500 Miles). As if that wasn't entertain for her work (before The Substance, she their hands off each other", while Vogue es of unsuspecting stars such as James acting in 40 years). But the Bafta went to reaction as Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor in 1962".

> introgags of the night with Tennant say ing; "We're very privileged tonight to be joined by the runner-up in New York's recent Timothée Chalamet lookalike competition. Welcome to the BAFTAs, young nan... Lovely attention to detail, you're with a Kylie Jenner lookalike, well done

### Most moving moment Warwick Davis delivered the most emo

tional and heartfelt speech of the evening when he was given the Bafta Fellowship, which recognises an "outstanding and exceptional" contribution to the screen.

Davis dedicated it to his late wife Saa mysterious person referred to only as Sponge" for helping him "love again crowd he would "see them in the movies

after his parents' farewells.

with Cooney's facts.

"The main problem in the UK is you require a death certificate before you can have the funeral, and there's a lot of bureaucracy to that, lots of paperwork," he says. "That does slow it dow considerably, whereas in Ireland we don't re-

Whether you choose a burial or cremation is a factor, and a doctor must view and check the

tration, there are only a handful of days before a "I do notice that some people are opting for

tant for some families, but a lot of people still want it done quickly."

He mentions that churches are stretched due

priests now won't take a funeral outside their parish, so we're left looking for churches.

Is there middle ground when one considers the UK's more laid-back approach and Ireland's

ies only open certain days," he explains. "By the time you get to early January, there is a backlog of funerals to be processed. Many families are having to wait two weeks and mos of them find that very difficult to process.
"I suppose you feel like you can't grieve until

the repose and the funeral takes place." While a traditional Catholic church service is the main choice among the majority of Irish clientele, Skeffington sees cremation increas-ing in demand, and would be curious to obser shifts in preferences and culture.

"I don't think we'll get to the stage where it's as drawn out as the UK, because I don't envisage any reason as to why we require a death certifihow we adapt to changes in the future

