

Held in the loving hands of family and the hospice.

There's a spark in John Whelan's 87-year-old eyes. It's lit by the strongest power source of all – love. And there's another life force that makes it shine. It's John's natural sense of justice having worked in some of the poorest countries on earth.

We're chatting with John and his granddaughter, Aoife, in the new palliative care unit – a beautiful, state-of-the-art building paid for entirely by people's donations – and fundraisers like Bewley's Big Coffee Morning Social in aid of Our Lady's Hospice & Care Services.

Sitting in bed, John says he's lost for words to describe the person-centred care he has received. But, he isn't lost for words. The tears well in his eyes but can't cloud his lovely words:

"I've lived far and wide, but for me now, this is a home – in the sense of a place you feel safest and wanted. They'd move heaven and earth for you. Look at this room – they brought in my desk, photos, things that are so important to me."

In three simple words, Aoife sums up the gorgeous bond that connects her and her granddad so powerfully – three words that hold a lifetime of meaning. "We're great pals."

"Granddad has been a constant in our lives. After school, we'd call in to his and granny's house. Their faces would light up. Can you imagine how affirming that is for a child. They were second parents to me."



Young Aoife and granddad John.

John tells how he met his wife Clare, the love of his life.

"It was at a hop. I had my eye on her. Look at her photo over there – would you blame me? She's beautiful."

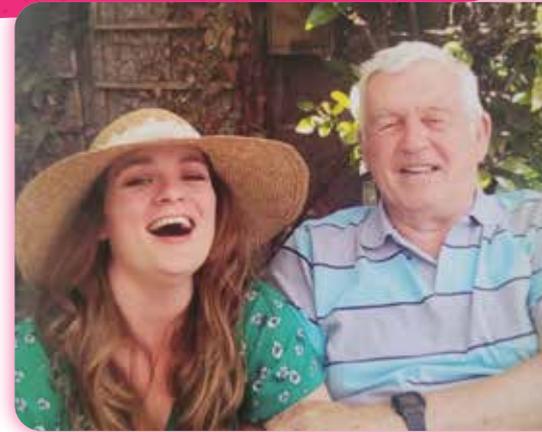
On 1st April, his pals sent him on an 'April fool's errand' telling him that Clare wanted to meet him.

"I knew it was a set-up but I didn't care. When I asked her if she had wanted to meet me, my God she was indignant. She said – 'I'm not looking to talk to any boy!' I said: 'I believe you. But does it matter?' And she said 'no'. And we were together ever since."

Sadly, Clare died in November and he misses her every day. But he remembers with joy the frequent social gatherings they hosted in their house. Three generations filling their home with happiness. Twiggy, the dog, and Beans, the tortoise, holding pride of place.

Looking around the hospice – it's a similar picture. A picture of growth, quality of life and living well. It seems fitting then that John and his extended family are enthusiastically supporting the hospice's coffee morning fundraiser. Because that too is all about social gatherings and celebrating people. And for John, it's also about giving back.

"I've received so much here. I'll do anything I can to help. If you could see how life-enhancing the work is here, you'd give without thinking. So I hope



Aoife and granddad John.

lots of people will open their hearts, their homes and their workplaces!"

With emotion in her voice, Aoife looks her grandad in the eye:

"When you were coming here, we were so anxious. We obviously wanted to look after you at home. We love you so much. But we knew we didn't have the medical expertise to keep you safe. And it's hard to hand over the care of someone you love. That's why it's such a gift because here you have the best medical care possible. But they also give you the love we would give you at home. We are so grateful."

Despite the most serious health challenges, John is a good place in his head, in his heart and in the hospice:

"I'm at ease whatever happens. I hope I've a bit of living to do yet. If it's months, fine. And if it's just a day, fine. I'm held in the loving hands of family and the hospice."