

Lives Lost to Covid-19: Jim Ryan was an adventurer who ‘loved life’ and helping others

Born in Cobh, Co Cork, in 1940, Jim Ryan travelled the world with his wife, Brenda



Jim Ryan with his son Jimmy and daughter Valerie

Jim Ryan, 1940-2021

Jim Ryan had what his family would gratefully describe as “a really good, long retirement”, having taken advantage of Bernie Cahill’s 1993 restructuring programme to leave Aer Lingus when he was aged just 52.

Jim was an adventurer at heart and in the following decades fully embraced his new circumstances – he travelled the world with his wife Brenda, sought out time with his children and grandchildren, sang, played golf and bridge, and simply “loved life”.

He was born in Cobh, Co Cork in 1940 and grew up in nearby Clonakilty, third from the bottom among nine children. His father was a garda and his mother ran the home. By the time Jim was ready for secondary school, his eldest brother Paddy was an Augustinian

priest, and the brothers enjoyed a happy teacher/pupil relationship at St Augustine's College in Dungarvan, Co Waterford.

Jim, too, seriously considered the priesthood and spent two years as an Augustinian seminarian at Orlagh in Dublin, but left at age 20 to join the exciting world of the national airline. He worked there for the following 32 years, rising to the position of cargo terminal manager.

It was at Aer Lingus that he met his wife Brenda Craig, a native of Ardara in Co Donegal. They married in 1968 in the John's Lane Augustinian church in Dublin and set up home in Swords, Co Dublin, before settling in Malahide in 1977. They had four children: Gillian, Valerie, Jimmy and Margaret, and over time gained 14 grandchildren.

The family's life was rich, with travel a passion and priority for all. Jim and Brenda, benefiting from subsidised Aer Lingus travel and associated hotel benefits, would often take the children out of school to bring them on trips around Europe and the US. When an opportunity arose for Jim to assist Saudi Arabian authorities in the development of the cargo operations of their airline Saudia in the 1980s, he and Brenda took it. They spent two years in Jeddah with their children, using the Gulf as a base for further travel to locations such as Korea and the Philippines.

Jim was always interested in people and took pleasure in helping others wherever he could. This happened in Jeddah, when he habitually took fellow Irish people under his wing, especially when they were encountering difficulties. Back at Aer Lingus, he put special focus on supporting grieving families bringing home deceased relatives through the airport mortuary, often when his shift was long over.

In his retirement, he was known for fundraising activities such as quizzes and golf outings for the work in Uganda of his sister Mary, a Franciscan nun. He was extremely sociable, always seeking out the quietest guests at parties, and singing with highly respected choirs, including the well-known Enchiriadis Treis group and St Sylvester's church choir in Malahide.

Jim's family are particularly glad now that they all enjoyed a hotel stay last August to celebrate his 80th birthday.

Jim Ryan died on January 15th after contracting Covid-19 in hospital, where he was recovering from surgery. Jim's sister, Betty Hart, died with the same disease in 2020.