Jessica Scannell

SCS 380

*Media Personality Positive Aging Analysis*

*Fall 2011*

When I first sat down to plan this paper, I originally expected to find it very difficult to decide what or whom I should write about. However, I was pleasantly surprised at how quickly an idea came to me. I simply tried to think about someone who has had an impact on my life from an early age and who continues to influence not just me but countless others in a positive way. This man is none other than the legendary Mícheál Ó Muircheartaigh.

Although he may not be so well known on this side of the Atlantic, in Ireland he is a household name, a national treasure. He is known across the country as the voice of the GAA (Gaelic Athletic Association); he has made his living for the last sixty years as a commentator of Hurling and Gaelic football for RTE (Ireland’s National Television and Radio channel). He usually commentates on the radio since it was through that medium that his broadcasting career began back in 1949. He also makes sure to commentate on television from time to time especially for big occasions such as the All-Ireland final day, when around 80,000 passionate fans cram into Croke Park (the national stadium), in Dublin to cheer on their respective beloved county to glory. What happens in Croker on all-Ireland final day can only be described as pure magic. The atmosphere is electric to say the least, the victory hungry fans are the choir, Ó Muircheartaigh; their master.

He has always been at his best however, on the radio. If I were to think of a typical Sunday afternoon from my childhood, it would consist of driving in my father’s car to a beach about an hour from our home all the while listening to Mícheál Ó Muircheartaigh on the radio as he set the scene of that week’s sporting battle. If you closed your eyes you could easily see the game playing out in front of you as if you were really there. He had an amazing talent to capture the thrill of the moment and transport it directly to you wherever you were. There are not too many sports where fans frequently turn off the television and turn up the radio. When it comes to hurling, they do this just to listen to him because the picture he creates of the game is often better than watching it.

While Mícheál found himself a successful career, a loving wife, eight children and a happy home in Dublin city, it is not the place that is closest to his heart. In the words of the wise man himself “the most important place for anybody, is the place where you were born”. For Mícheál Ó Muircheartaigh that place was the village of Dún Síon, located around 3 miles outside of the fishing town of Dingle in county Kerry, Ireland. He was born in 1930, like most people his parents were farmers and he had many brothers and sisters. He grew up in beautiful farmlands with the Atlantic ocean crashing against the cliffs, nothing but miles and miles of green hills with the Kerry mountain range behind them. Dún Síon is a gaeltacht area so Mícheál would have grown up speaking only Irish at home, he probably wouldn’t have learned English until he went to school. By virtue of this fact the Irish language has always been very dear to his heart and he has commentated on many games through Irish only.

When he was a young man he moved to Dublin to attend college to become a teacher, upon graduation he was offered a job commentating on a local game on the radio and the rest as they say was history. Sixty years later at age 81 Mícheál Ó Muircheartaigh was still as vibrant, as energetic, as humorous and as youthful as ever. He has always had this amazing talent to connect with people. He is known for peppering his commentary with some of the most bizarre comments about player’s backgrounds and family histories. Here are some of my favorite Ó Muircheartaigh classics;

“And Brian Dooher is down injured. And while he is, I'll tell ye a little story. I was in Times Square in New York last week, and I was missing the Championship back home. So I approached a news stand and I said: "I suppose ye wouldn't have The Kerryman, would ye?" To which the Egyptian behind the counter turned to me and he said: "Do you want the North Kerry edition or the South Kerry edition?” He had both. So I bought both. And Dooher is back on his feet.”

“Pat Fox out to the forty and grabs the sliothar, I bought a dog from his father last week. Fox turns and sprints for goal, the dog ran a great race last Tuesday in Limerick. Fox to the 21 fires a shot, it goes to the left and wide... and the dog lost as well.”

“Pat Fox has it on his hurl and is motoring well now....but here comes Joe Rabbitte hot on his tail...I've seen it all now, a Rabbitte chasing a Fox around Croke Park !”

"Teddy McCarthy to John McCarthy, no relation, John McCarthy to Teddy McCarthy, still no relation.”

*- Mícheál Ó Muircheartaigh*

Sadly, in September 2010 Mícheál Ó Muircheartaigh announced that he was retiring. It seemed as though the nation went through a period of brief mourning until they realized just how grateful they were to this public servant and decided to wish him well in their thousands. He received letters, phone calls, newspaper tributes, radio tributes and television tributes, true reverence from all generations. This encapsulates what a wonderful example Mícheál Ó Muircheartaigh is of Harwood’s theory of intergenerational communication.

It wasn’t until I sat down to actually watch one of these television tributes that I realized just how involved he was and continues to be in things other than commentating. He does amazing work for countless charities in Ireland and around the world. He was heavily involved in the national movement for the promotion of gealscoils (schools that teach only through the medium of the Irish language), these schools have greatly helped in the revival of the Irish language in recent history. When this movement was started in the 1970’s there were only 14 gaelscoils in existence outside of gealtacht areas. With Mícheál’s help that number has risen to around 200 today.

He was also an avid sailor and has committed to commentate on sailing races in the future. When his daughter was asked how she felt about his retirement, she explained that she saw it as more of a career change for him than anything else. She added that he has never been idle in his life and he was certainly not going to start being idle now. Here Mícheál Ó Muircheartaigh shows us how Harwood’s continuity theory holds true for him.

When Mícheál Ó Muircheartaigh was asked why he made the decision to retire he simply replied that he would hate for there to come a day when he wouldn’t love every single moment of commentating on a match. He couldn’t bear the thought of someday thinking of what he does as work, something he just did for a living. So, after some further reflection he decided that it was best to walk away while he still absolutely loved it.

His views about aging are also very wise. He looks at age as an attitude, for him it’s a state of mind. He knows people who are old in their forties, “they think they are old, they are anti-change, they think the world is gone to hell entirely, they think all of this instead of looking at the positive aspects of it“. His motto is simple; “Isn’t it a great day to be alive?”!

When I look at Mícheál Ó Muircheartaigh’s it appears as though he is wonderful example of successful aging. He is a role model of mine, someone I not only aspire to be like but also to age the way he did. One of the reasons I relate so well to Mícheál Ó Muircheartaigh is because we share a love of sport. While I do love GAA as a spectator, basketball is the sport that is closest to my heart. In some ways I have always feared the day when I would no longer be physically able to play.

However, Mícheál Ó Muircheartaigh has shown me that it is possible to stay involved long after my playing days are over. As long as I continue to have a passion for the game but more importantly a passion for the people who participate in the game, who create the game, then I will find peace and happiness, in the same way he did. Showing me that I can always coach, or help out, or maybe even commentate has been the biggest influence Mícheál Ó Muircheartaigh has had on me.

One may ask the question what is next for Mícheál Ó Muircheartaigh who is now 81 years young. Well, there are rumors that he has aspirations to run for the position of president of Ireland, I would certainly vote for him!

Here is a link to Mícheál Ó Muircheartaigh in action.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K24Bpqtx5dc>

* All quotations are taken from various television and radio shows and interviews with Mícheál Ó Muircheartaigh.