

The Better Offer

By Michael Hayes

As I was enjoying a nice leisurely stroll along the prom in Salthill, I was in good spirits because my brother Peter who works as a pilot with Heathrow-based Atlantic Airlines had just been promoted to captain on the Boeing 757. This aircraft has a special place in the hearts of many pilots because of its performance and versatility.

My friend Colin, who was guiding me, said, “Dave, will you be going to that respite centre in Mullingar any time soon?”

“No. To be quite honest with you, I’m a little apprehensive about going back to that place because of Joshua and Jacob, two lads who used to bully me whenever they could. They used to call me hurtful names”.

Colin was horrified to hear me say this as he knew how much I enjoyed going to the respite centre and meeting other visually impaired people like me. He suggested that I touch base with the centre staff and report Joshua and Jacob. I thought this was a very good idea and made a mental note to mention it to my parents when I got home.

Meanwhile, I asked Colin how his sister Kayleigh was getting on in Waterford where she works as a veterinary nurse.

He replied, “Dave, I’m delighted to tell you Kayleigh is getting on really well. She’s on annual leave next week so she has invited you down for a few days.”

This was like music to my ears as I really enjoyed Kayleigh's company. She was always in good humour and had a very kind nature. I mentioned this to Colin who was delighted to hear me say such nice things about his sister.

He replied, "Dave, you wait until I tell Kayleigh what you've just said about her. She'll be dead chuffed. Anyway, I take it you've accepted her invitation?"

"You bet I have. I've accepted it with a heart and a half," I replied.

Colin told me Kayleigh was coming up to Galway on Monday morning to get her car NCT'd so she'd be able to collect me. This was good enough for me, so long as she didn't mind driving for fifteen minutes outside the city to get to my house in Moycullen.

When I mentioned this to Colin, he replied, "Dave, Kayleigh won't mind that one bit. She'll message you tomorrow to tell you what time she's collecting you at."

"Sounds good. I presume Kayleigh lives in shared accommodation?"

I was pleasantly surprised when Colin told me Kayleigh lived by herself in a two-bed apartment in Springfield Crescent, which is in a picturesque area on the Tramore Road called Gracedieu. The Jetlands Flying Club was based here so I wondered if it would be possible for me to visit the club and explore one or two of their aircraft, as I was quite passionate about aviation.

When I asked Colin, he replied, “Dave. I’m not too sure about that as I’m not very familiar with the Jetlands. But Kayleigh knows a few of the lads in the club who’d be delighted to show you around.”

“Oh, unreal. I might ask her on Monday morning and see what she says.”

When Colin dropped me home, a half-hour later, I told my parents about Kayleigh’s invitation. They were thrilled. They told me the break would do me the world of good, due to the raw deal I’d received from Joshua and Jacob.

I was just about to tell them I wanted to report the two bullies to the centre when my father said, “Dave, I’ve to go to Limerick on Monday morning for a work meeting so I suggest you come with me and meet Kayleigh there to save her driving all the way to Galway.”

“Kayleigh has to come to Galway to get her car NCT’d so she doesn’t mind collecting me,” I replied.

I was up bright and early on Monday morning as Kayleigh had said, in her message, she’d be collecting me at 8.30. As I made my way down the stairs, I could hear my parents chatting away happily in the kitchen.

Upon entering the kitchen, I was greeted warmly by my mother who said, “Good morning, Dave. Are you all packed and ready to go?”

“You can be sure of it. Kayleigh has suggested I bring my cane as it will help me to navigate my way around independently”.

This gave my parents peace of mind as my cane would prevent me from walking into any obstacles that might be lying around, in unfamiliar territory. Kayleigh arrived right on the stroke of 8.30 so I said goodbye to my parents and allowed her to guide me out to her car.

As we loaded my luggage into the boot, she said, “Dave, this old girl has passed the NCT with flying colours. Therefore, I’ll be holding onto her for another while.”

“Good for you. How long will it take us to get to Waterford?”

Once we were on our merry way, Kayleigh told me it would take us about three hours depending on traffic. This didn’t bother me in the slightest as I was a very good traveller.

The minute we hit the M18 Galway-Limerick motorway, Kayleigh connected her iPhone 16 up to the car radio and selected none other than the Druids from Spotify. The band had really grown on me, ever since Colin and I went to see them in The Roisin Dubh, two years ago. I recounted the gig, in detail, to Kayleigh telling her how lively and energetic it was.

She replied, “Dave, it sounds like you and Colin had a fine auld time.”

“You bet we did. Something tells me I’m going to have an even better time, in the Deise county, over the next few days.”

After we arrived in Waterford, when we were making our way up the steep stairs to her 4th floor apartment, Kayleigh told me

she was overjoyed to hear me say this, as she'd been looking forward to spending some quality time with me.

As she unlocked the door she said, "Dave, I've booked us a table at the Riverside restaurant in the city. They do a smashing lunch and their staff are really friendly."

"Sounds like a plan, I might even have a pint."

I stepped through the door into a spacious apartment which had a nice, homely feel to it. When Kayleigh was showing me to my room, which was next to hers, I suddenly remembered the conversation I'd had with Colin, about visiting the Jetlands Flying Club. I asked Kayleigh if this would be possible, as some clubs weren't open to the public.

She replied, "Dave, of course it would. My friend, Darren, is an instructor in the club so I'll contact him and ask him to arrange a visit for you."

"That would be amazing. I hope he won't mind," I replied.

Kayleigh told me Darren wouldn't mind at all, as he was the nicest chap you could meet. I was satisfied to hear her say this, so I asked her to get in touch with him whenever she got a chance. In the meantime, we got ready to head to lunch as we were both ravenous. Before we left the apartment, Kayleigh turned the heating up a notch so the place would be warm and cosy when we got back to it later.

We decided to walk to the restaurant, as Kayleigh thought it would be a very good idea for us to get our steps up. I was

agreeable to this so I asked her to guide me as the cobblestones would make it impossible to use my cane.

She replied, "Sure thing, Dave. You can take my left arm as that's my dominant one."

"You kept that quiet. I happen to be a lefty as well so let's take one for the team," I replied as I gave Kayleigh a friendly punch.

While we were walking to the restaurant, which took us about 25 minutes, Kayleigh described the vivid scenes around us in great detail. This was something she'd been advised to do, by Colin, who understood how much I loved learning about new things and places. We arrived at the restaurant without any drama and, as we were being shown to our table by Ruth, a very pleasant waitress, I could tell by their chitchat that herself and Kayleigh were very good friends.

When Ruth had gone to get us menus, Kayleigh said, "Dave, you've just had the pleasure of meeting my good auld friend Ruth MacGowan from Golden, County Tipperary. She lives on my block and we're both on the Gracedieu Gaels Camogie team."

"That's awesome. Where do you play?"

Before Kayleigh could respond, Ruth returned with the menus which came in both print and Braille. The Braille menu was a bit of a surprise for me as I didn't think the Riverside restaurant would have one. I was very thankful when Ruth handed it to me and I told her so when we were paying our bill an hour later.

She replied, “No problem, Dave, hope I see you again soon.”

“Oh, I’m sure you will. I might come and see yourself and Kayleigh in action on the hurling field sometime.”

After we’d left the restaurant, Kayleigh told me she’d messaged Darren, while we were having coffee, to ask him to arrange a visit to the Jetlands for me, as we’d discussed earlier. He replied promptly, saying he’d be more than happy for me to visit tomorrow morning, at 10.30. This was a dream come true for me, as I’d have the opportunity to explore some state of the art aircraft and maybe meet a pilot or two. When we were on our way back to the apartment, that evening, I told Kayleigh how grateful I was for such a kind gesture.

She replied, “Dave, it’s my absolute pleasure. Colin was telling me about your passion for aviation so I’m very happy Darren was able to facilitate you.”

“Same here. Does the Jetlands have many members?”

Kayleigh racked her brains, for a second or two, before telling me that was a question for Darren as he knew more about the Jetlands than she did.

As we walked through the communal door, which Kayleigh unlocked with great difficulty, my mobile rang. It was my auld friend Declan, from Galway city, ringing to tell me his trad band Uisce Beatha were playing a gig in the Gracedieu Inn, tonight, if I was interested. I was absolutely mad about Uisce Beatha so I told Kayleigh about the gig when we were having supper.

I thought all my Christmases were coming together when she said, “My dear Dave. The Gracedieu Inn is a very fine pub and serves a very good pint so I think we should go to the gig and make a night of it.”

“That’s an absolute smasher of an idea. Can we go in the next hour or so as I’d like to say ‘hello’ to Declan before the gig?”

Kayleigh told me this was no problem. When we were walking to the pub, which was only a stone’s throw from the apartment block, she informed me that she had a proposal to put to me which I could say no to, if I wanted.

When I asked her what this proposal of hers was, she replied, “Dave, I know it’s only your first night in Waterford but would you like to move to the city and live with me? We can get in touch with the Waterford branch of Vision Ireland to see what supports are available.”

“Oh, I’d love that. It would be much better than the offer of a second respite break.”

We’d reached the pub by now so nothing more was said on the subject. Instead, I said a quick ‘hello’ to Declan - who was busy tuning his banjo - and allowed Kayleigh to guide me over to a corner table where she had a nice, creamy pint of Guinness waiting for me. When the band started, everybody in the pub began to clap and stamp their feet. It was class.

Half-way through the night, Declan came on the microphone and said, “Folks, can we have your attention for a few minutes please? We’re going to do South Australia for my good friend, Dave, who’s in the pub with his friend, Kayleigh.”

At the first note, Kayleigh and I got to our feet and proceeded to dance around like mad things. I loved every minute of it. This happened to be my favourite song of all time.

When we were walking home, at the end of the night, Kayleigh asked, "Dave, did you enjoy yourself?"

"You bet I did. Fingers crossed there'll be many more good nights to come."