

Stephen Gately's sudden death was tragic – but not unusual

Up to 100 people under the age of 35 die of undiagnosed heart conditions every year in Ireland. **Sue Leonard** reports

Controversial columnist Jan Moir, whose *Daily Mail* article about Stephen Gately has provoked more than 25,000 complaints to the British press watchdog, said it quite bluntly...

"Healthy and fit 33-year-old men do not just climb into their pyjamas and go to sleep on the sofa, never to wake up again."

The truth is somewhat different, as many grieving Irish families know. Sudden cardiac death kills between 70 and 100 people under the age of 35 in Ireland every year.

Olivia Haney, a mother of four, knows only too well the pain and shock being experienced by Stephen Gately's loved ones right now.

Three years ago her husband Padraig died after suffering an arrhythmia – and the couple had no idea that the young farmer could be at risk.

"Padraig had no symptoms," says Olivia. "He was six foot two inches tall. He was healthy. He had no complaints at all. He ate well and was always health conscious. He was 41. "It was December 19, and our fourth child was 16 weeks old. He'd been carrying the baby, and he got into bed beside me.



Heartbreaking: Olivia Haney's (left) husband Padraig (centre) died suddenly after suffering an arrhythmia, having had no previous symptoms. Eithne Malone (right), a cardiomyopathy sufferer.

Picture by Mary Browne

We were chatting. He said he'd been eating some fresh brown bread his mother had made. He said he had a pain in his chest. We assumed it was indigestion.

He then said he had a pain in his wrist. He took Nurofen for it. He got back into bed and asked me how long it would take for the pill to work. Then he went to sleep.

"I woke at 2.20 am. The room seemed to be trembling. Something was shaking, but I wasn't sure if it was the wind outside.

I elbowed Padraig, and realised it was him; he'd gone into this shock.

"I rang 999 for an ambulance. I rang my mother-in-law, my mother and brother. They arrived within 20 minutes, but the doctor said he died instantly."

The post-mortem showed Padraig had died from an arrhythmia.

"It's a genetic condition, but there was no trace of it in the family before," says Olivia. "If he'd had symptoms, he could have had a pacemaker fitted, and that would have kicked in

when his heart stopped." Needing support Olivia contacted CRY – Cardiac Risk in the Young, a charity formed by Michael and Marie Green, who lost their son at 15. As well as providing support, the charity funds free screening for families who have been affected by sudden cardiac death.

"CRY has been a fantastic support," says Olivia. "The best thing is that my children have been screened, and Padraig's sister has too. They've had an echo and an ECG, and nothing has been picked up. But they're going to be screened every six



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