

One Man's Quest for a New Beginning

After the devastating deaths of his father and best friend, as well as a car accident in which Micilín Feeney sustained severe brain injuries, he had to start the painful process of rebuilding his life. Read his inspiring story ...

THE ONLY MAN I'LL EVER LOVE" is how Micilín Feeney describes his father Micil, who died of throat cancer aged 52 years in October 2004. Micilín remembers him as "a farmer; an honest man who loved children". His death was tough on Micilín who became head of the family at just 23 years. But harder still was waking up from a coma four months later with no recollection of it.

At Halloween 2004, Micilín's life seemed set out for him. He was working as a bricklayer and had recently been voted Player of the Year at his local football club where he was Vice-Captain of the team. However, after a night out with his friends he fell asleep at the wheel driving home to Knock in Lettermullen, Connemara, and his car went off the road. The lights were spotted by a local undertaker who was passing by. He had buried Micil Feeney two weeks before and immediately recognised his young son.

Micilín woke up on Valentine's Day 2005 – his twenty-fourth birthday – with no memory of his accident or his father's death. His family – his mother, younger brother and twin brother and sister – "went through hell" waiting for him to come round and were a great support visiting him. After a while, when his father didn't come



to see him, Micilín had an inkling something was wrong. He asked where his father was and was told the bad news. But more bad news was to come. His friend Michael, Captain of the football team, had been killed in a car accident only three weeks after his own crash. He was 28. "That was a complete shock, a real kick in the teeth," he says of the loss of his friend.

The two deaths were only the first of many changes in Micilín's life. The brain trauma he suffered had a great impact on him, both mentally and physically. The nurses and physiotherapists were "fantastic" but besides recovering from the shock and a broken collarbone, he had the harder job of relearning literacy and numeracy skills. In addition to memory loss, he had also lost some of his cognitive ability – being able

to deal with letters and numbers. He would lie in his hospital bed staring at the clock on the wall. He could recognise the numbers on its face, but would get annoyed because he could no longer tell the time.

Micilín's broken collarbone eventually mended and his memories came back to him, including the memory of his father's funeral. After discharge from the hospital, Micilín spent three months of "torture" at home. A bricklayer by trade, he missed the banter with the other brickies and had expected to return to work. However, with his impaired balance he couldn't carry a hod so he had to rethink how he would earn his living. "I had no idea what I would do," he says. The balance problem also ruled out a return to football and he didn't see his friends any more – "my social life was ruined," he says. It was a blow to the outgoing young man. He felt depressed, something he kept a secret. "I felt as low as I could go and I didn't even want to be here."

However, his life changed again when he was put in touch with National Learning Network's Quest Brain Injury Services in Galway. Nearly a year after his accident, he started attending courses at Quest. He found the staff very welcoming and was able to talk to other brain injury clients about his experiences.

Pictured left: Former National Learning Network learner Micilín Feeney

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Pictured above: Micilín is now channelling his energy into road safety campaigning

Courses on learning how to live with a brain injury, cope at home and cope with stress, have helped him to come to terms with his accident and lifted his depression.

The confidence Micilín regained at Quest has helped him to start rebuilding his life and reclaim his independence. He takes life one day at a time. As he says with characteristic good humour, "that's the only way you can with a brain injury. If you made long-term plans you'd forget them!" With Quest's help, he did a work experience placement at Údarás na Gaeltachta where he was able to use his fluent Irish. Micilín is now channelling his

energy into road safety campaigning. He has given talks to students at National University of Ireland Galway and to Ógra Fianna Fáil. As the survivor of a road accident, he is interviewed in the new Road Safety Authority DVD for Transition Year students. Last October, he spoke in front of 1,000 school children at the Road Safety Roadshow run by Galway County Council and AXA Insurance, something that would have been unthinkable three years ago when he had just woken up. "Quest gave me my life back. Otherwise I'd be at home staring at the four walls. I can't recommend them highly enough." ■

Who to contact

For further information please contact:



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