

# Life lighting his lens

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IT was on one of those early trips in the 1970s to Clare Island when American photographer, Ron Rosenstock decided to impress the late Michael Joe O'Malley with his knowledge of the 18th century German philosopher, Immanuel Kant. So there they are sitting drinking O'Malley's homemade hooch (or mead, as he called it) in the shadow of his big open fire in the village of Ballytoughy Mór when the philosophy major from Worcester, Massachusetts quotes a short tract from the 'Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics', draws a breath and awaits a gasp of affirmation. Instead, the island philosopher - with his inimitable low-key delivery - simply continues reciting at least another two pages of the tract.

"I never tried that stunt again," Ron Rosenstock tells *The Mayo News*.

A young woman called Beth Sari (now Moran) was on those first trips with Ron, which always included a walk past Michael Joe's house to the lighthouse and the panorama of spectacular sea-

## IN HIS OWN WORDS

"For many years people have commented about my wonderful life, traveling all over the world making beautiful photographs. The truth is... I am a missionary. My mission is to be one of the caretakers of our world. I will work at this mission by raising the awareness of as many people as possible. Awareness of how beautiful and important our planet is. It is a living-breathing organism. The American Indians knew that over a thousand years ago and taught it to their children. Because there are so many of us now living in this technological era of rapid change, we must not only think of earth as 'mother earth' but also as brother, sister, father and lover earth. We won't make it without her support and she won't make it without ours."

scapes from its jagged cliff edges. Serendipitously, she since married islander, Máirtín Moran and runs the renowned Ballytoughy Loom at her home on the road to the lighthouse.

"She was an excellent photographer, just like she is a brilliant weaver now," Rosenstock muses, as we sit in the library of his longtime home, Hillcrest, in Kilmeena. (This *Mayo News* hack was late because of most confusing roadworks but we are not complaining about any upgrades to the N59.)

## HONORARY CITIZEN

FORTY five years after Ron first visited Westport, he has just sold the house to which he has brought groups of American photography students three times a year. He plans, however, to continue coming back to his second-home, town as it were.

"A family with children from Dublin has bought the house and I am sure they will be a real addition to Kilmeena's wonderful community."



As an honorary citizen of Westport, at the behest of the late Cormac Hughes, Rosenstock ensures he is back in the wild west each year for the annual St Patrick's Day parade.

"I feel like I've had two lives: one in Ireland and one in the States. When I am here I feel I've been here my whole life. I can't walk down Bridge Street without meeting great old friends."

The first time he visited the town was in 1971 after his photography teacher, Paul Caponigro,



▲ **ICE AND ASH** "This is a pattern of ice and volcanic ash made at Dettifoss, the largest waterfall in Iceland, in May of 2014. The ash from Ayafjallajökull settled on the ice as the winds churned it all into beautiful patterns."



▲ **ARTISTIC ENDEAVOUR** Westport resident, Pádraigh Morgan gives Ron some expert advice on how to drink a pint of Guinness

## MICHAEL MCLAUGHLIN, AWARD-WINNING PHOTOGRAPHER

"When I was starting out I came across Ron's images before I ever met him. I was just blown away as his work reminded me of Ansel Adams, who was the reason I was drawn to photography in the first place. I recognised the style and imagery - he brought out the personality and soul of the landscape. I think I first met him circa 2000 and it was a turning point for me. I went on some of his workshops here and in the US and we have become great friends. Ron was a large format photographer and he taught me the art of black-and-white photography. He belonged to that whole genre, known as 'the west coast movement', which was underpinned by 'straight' or 'fine-art photography'."