

Hair we go again

WHEN Galway girl Emer O'Toole raised her arms on breakfast TV to reveal her hairy armpits, she started a debate about 'natural' beauty.

Ms O'Toole is not the first woman to become embroiled in such a 'hairy' debate or make us question what is, or isn't, 'real' beauty. As 51-year-old mother-of-two, Molly Barker, and her 27-year-old friend and colleague, Caitlin Boyle, met for a coffee in their home town of Charlotte, North Carolina, they stumbled upon a question neither of them could answer.

"Molly is the founder of a self-esteem-boosting programme for elementary school girls, called 'girls on the run,' and I'm the founder of a site called OperationBeautiful.com," says Caitlin.

"One day, we were having coffee when I asked Molly, 'what do you say to the girls when they ask you, 'Molly, you say inner beauty is the most important thing, but you wear make-up and wear high heels and dye your hair. What does this mean'?"

"Both of us were stumped for a truly authentic answer, because we had always engaged in those habits and didn't really know why we did them."

By the end of their discussion, the pair had decided that the best way to find out about those habits and their motivations was to desist from doing them.

For sixty days, Molly and Caitlin went to what they call 'the beauty desert'.

They wore no make-up. They did not remove a single body hair. They refrained from altering the hair on their heads and they did not dye, curl or straighten it under any circumstances.

They did not wear what they classed as 'uncomfortable feminine clothing', such as high heels and tight skirts, and jewellery, with the exception of wedding rings, was not permitted.

They could not paint their nails, use anti-wrinkle or anti-acne lotions and deodorant was out of bounds.

"We thought 60 days would be enough time to really get into the project and get what we needed out of it," says Caitlin. "We were not trying to comment on anyone else's habits or on the habits themselves. It's not that I think make-up is inherently bad. I was more curious about my intention behind daily make-up use."

"I really didn't know what the end result of the project would be when I went into it."

Caitlin, who is expecting her first child, says she did feel uncomfort-

Annoyed with the pressure to look good 24/7, two female friends went 'au naturel' for 60 days, writes **Jonathan deBurca Butler**

able at first. But it soon became apparent there were major benefits to going without make-up and its associated paraphernalia. "It took a while to get used to not looking the way that I was accustomed to," she says. "But, after two weeks, I realised that my naked face was just my normal face, and it felt free to not feel like I had to wear make-up and shave. And my skin began to clear up, too. I always thought I had bad skin that needed to be covered up with make-up, but it turns out that the make-up was making my skin bad. That's one



Molly Barker and Caitlin Boyle: no beauty regimes for 60 days.



Irish woman Emer O'Toole shows off her hairy armpits and legs on This Morning on ITV.

of the reasons that I haven't gone back to regular make-up since ending the project."

Apart from getting a few sideways glances at the gym because of armpit hair, people's reactions during the 'naked face project' were positive.

Caitlin was pleasantly surprised by the numbers of women who were doing the same thing on a daily basis. They are, however, in the minority, and, says Caitlin, society has largely fallen into the trap of valuing people based on their appearance, thus burdening them with unachievable and superficial goals that end up masking their true potential value to society.

"There is too much pressure on girls and women to look good and more grown-up than they actually are," she says. "Our society teaches women, girls, and men too, that our most important asset is our appearance. It says that it's the primary thing we bring to the table, above our intellect, kindness and everything else. And that's a shame."

"I do not believe appearance is the primary asset," she says. "And it's dangerous for me and the girls to fall into the trap of believing

we're not good enough if we don't wear make-up, dye our hair, have a certain body type, or fulfil some particular expectation of what we should look and act like."

There is a multi-billion dollar industry that would disagree and it is unlikely that they are going

to stop their advertising bombardment any time soon. For Caitlin, the experience has been an eye-opener and she hopes that the project will encourage others to take a more balanced view of how they value themselves.

She is under no illusions, however.

COST OF LOOKING GOOD

- Today 60% of Irish adults think it is important to be attractive to the opposite sex. That's up from 40% in 2000, according to the latest data from researchers TGI Ireland.
- The same survey, which was carried out in 2011, reveals that the proportion of adults who think it's important to keep young looking is up from 40% to 49% over the same period.
- The average woman spends €14 a month on skincare and a similar amount on cosmetics.
- Since 2000 the number of women using cleansing creams, wipes and toners has gone up from 68% to 83% today. The proportion using

body creams and lotions has increased from 66% to 85%, and the proportion using eye make-up has increased from 54% to 77%.

- The number of women visiting beauty salons has also risen, from 760,000 in 2008 to 830,000 in 2011.
- Statistics from the data specialists Euromonitor, show people living in Ireland spent €92.8m on colour cosmetics (make-up), €7.4m on depilatories and some €109.5m on skincare in 2010. In 2005 the same figures were €78.8m, €5.9m and €88.2m.
- Interestingly, the same period has seen spend on men's grooming go from €78.7m to €108.1. Good news for the women of Ireland?

No wax please, we're celebrities

Brandishing hairy armpits like a badge of honour is nothing new.

Who can forget the gasps of horror when 80s German popstar Nena, right, bounded across the Top of the Pops stage singing 99 Red Balloons, with her follicles-in-your-face routine? Or when Julia Roberts, below, more than a decade



later, unveiled her furry armpits for the cameras on the red carpet at the Notting Hill premiere?

Even perfectly groomed wag Danielle Lloyd, below, fell victim to razor deficit in 2007, and held her hands high for snappers to get a eye-full of her pit tresses.

But she had a good excuse — they were glued-on 'wigs' for a Channel 5 experiment!

"I entered into this project wondering what to tell little girls at 'girls on the run' when they asked about beauty," she says. "I realise, now, that when I told them inner beauty is the only thing that matters, I was sugarcoating the truth. In our society, quite frankly, people do care about appearance, although I have learned that they care less than we think they do."

"But I still believe that we hold ourselves up to an impossible physical standard, and this isn't right. But I'm doing a disservice when I tell the girls that what you look like doesn't matter at all; they can see through that lie in their everyday experiences. The purpose of this project was to find a deeper and more authentic answer for the girls." Was there anything she missed in particular?

"I did immediately shave when the whole thing was over," she says. "I missed that a lot. But I haven't returned to daily make-up. I do know that I wore it because I felt like it was a socially expected part of womanhood. I just think I realised that I didn't need it anymore."

"If I want to wear it for special occasions, that's fine, but on a day-to-day basis, it's more than OK to just skip."

With God on their side

“YOU play to fight the idea of losing.” It's the mantra Eric Cantona once drew on his torso. It's also the maxim that will be on show in Shelbourne Park, next Sunday, when a team of Munster Sporting Legends dare to take on a team with a difference — the Moyross Monks.

The reigning Munster Challenge Cup champions aren't to be trifled with. They are hard-tackling, no-nonsense men of the cloth, who ply their daily vocational trade on Limerick City's northside. Why the collision of these elemental forces, you may wonder, the heavens versus the heroes?

It's to raise awareness for a host of Munster charities providing essential services in suicide and self-harming prevention and counselling: Pieta House, Limerick; Suicide Aware, Cork; and the Open Arms Project in Kerry. Organisers Jamie Daly and Paddy Hartnett say Limerick hasn't been found wanting when it comes to rolling out its sporting talent.

Hartnett, a former youth worker, made contact with the FAI to get their seal of approval. He and Daly were invited to HQ to meet the chief, John Delaney. They also met former soccer star Paul McGrath, who has lent his support.

"The event is really about getting people together ... and talking about a taboo subject," says Hartnett. "Suicide is a national problem, and Limerick's had more than its share of heartbreak. The more people know of the services out there, the better. There's help to be had."

"It's something that touches all of us," adds Daly. "And it's a problem that can only be tackled by the wider community, when everyone gets involved. On the day, there will be speakers and blessings from the monks, especially for the families who've lost someone."

Two years ago, the God squad played a much-fancied GAA team off the park. Spectators say they did so ruthlessly. In 90 bruising minutes, the 'force' was utterly vanquished. But how did such a fixture ever come about?

"I was coaching Moyross United," says Daly. "And Father Paulus

The Moyross monks are taking on the cream of Munster sport in a charity event, writes **David Young**

from St Patrick's Friary joined the team. We got talking about fundraising and the idea surfaced to arrange a match everyone would want to see. That's when we got the notion to get the monks and the gardai to square off."

Father Paulus, who spent four years in Delmege Park, Moyross, is now based in England. "I told Jamie of how the Franciscans in Germany had played against Bayern Munich," he says. "And how the brothers raised money by playing against the stars. That's the charisma of sport. Bringing people close in a very simple way."

Daly remembers: "People couldn't believe it. It was like bringing two galactic forces together. The gardai laughed off the challenge at first. They thought they'd win handy though. But the monks took them on and beat them. The Munster Legends better look out."

This time out, the monks are dipping into the foreign transfer market, and jetting in players from overseas to strengthen their



Brother Cyril of Limerick's Franciscan monks lining out against the garda team in 2011 — a match which the monks won. Picture: Sean Curtin, Press 22

ranks. Playmaker in chief, Father Paulus, will also be the Monks' team manager. Walking the sideline may be the safest place for him.

"I have to confess," he laughs. "I lose my rationality when I'm on the pitch. I get so involved in the game ... I'm known to lose my temper. So, I hope they can carry me from the field afterwards."

"We have no fear of the Munster legends, though. What's the expression? The bigger they are, the harder they fall," he adds, stoking the competitive embers. Originally from East Germany, Father Paulus remembers the Berlin Wall coming down 22 years ago, and the difference it made immediately to people's perceptions.

"We thought — if this can come down, anything can come down. Anything is possible. So, for people who are lacking in self-belief and confidence, living in doubt, a little encouragement goes a long way. We need to get that message out there to young folk — you are irreplaceable, and

you're needed. Sadly, it isn't said enough."

Champions elect, the monks have come out of retirement to meet Munster's sporting legends, who will be marshalled by the indomitable Pat O'Sullivan, owner of Limerick City FC. Even with an impressive assembly of athletes, spanning the region's sporting spectrum, from soccer to GAA and rugby, he's up against it. Who'll prevail? "I couldn't call it," says Daly.

"It's going to be tight. And very physical. The rugby players are only massive. But Father Paulus is a leader. He doesn't like coming second. He'll do some damage for sure."

Also on the day, Limerick FC will play the best of the Junior League, a tie in which scores will carry a lifetime's bragging rights.

And so, word coming out of the Treaty City is the monks have no intention of relinquishing their honours, even if faced with the likes of Mick O'Driscoll and Peter 'the Claw' Clohessy. Something's going to give.

Say a prayer.

SEÁN MONCRIEFF

ON *wednesday*

I'm on top of the world but circumstances change fast

JOURNALISTS can moan with the best of them, but sometimes you get a gig. I'm writing this from the 42nd floor of the Jumeirah Hotel in the Etihad Towers in Abu Dhabi, where, through a windfall of sponsorship, I am doing my radio show this week.

The United Arab Emirates is a small country, made smaller because the vast majority of it consists of boiling desert where the temperature frequently reaches the mid-40s during summer. It's a dry heat at the moment, but when the humidity comes, you can be drenched in sweat walking from your front door to your car.

Not that this has put off anyone coming to live here: more immigrants than Emiratis live in the UAE: a large chunk of them here from Asia to work on the unceasing construction around Abu Dhabi, while the rest are professional Europeans.

The Irish, of course, are everywhere.

But what's most striking is the wealth. Within a few decades, the people of the UAE have been transformed from desert nomads and pearl divers to some of the richest people on Earth. Not too long ago, to get to the town of Al Ain took five days by camel. Now, it takes an hour-and-a-half by car. A large, very expensive car.

A bit like during the Celtic Tiger, the ostentation is every-

where (this hotel seems to employ people whose only job is to open doors), yet beneath is a vague sense that something has been lost. There are Emiratis today enjoying the most blinged-up lifestyle in a city resembling Manhattan, yet whose parents were seasonal nomads.

And there is occasional embarrassment, too, when some — just as in Ireland — display more money than sense.

At lunch, today, we were told stories about one person who had the largest-ever Dodge pick-up specially made (it's the size of a house); another who had a canal dug to spell out his name, in letters so large it can be viewed from space.

We asked whether or not the world economic downturn has affected life here and our hosts shrugged and said, 'yeah, you can see it in small ways.' But then they failed to think of any.

Just before I boarded my flight to here, (and on Etihad airlines they give you a seat that turns into a bed and feed you grub as good as anything you get in a restaurant), a friend told me that he noticed his old house was for sale.

Through luck rather than design, he had bought this house and sold it at just the right time, making a multiple of what he had originally paid for it.

But the people he had sold it to were now putting it on the market for half of what they had paid him. This is how the world is changing.