

IRELAND VACATION

August 10-19, 2010

Marion, told her daughter Pat that she would like to go on vacation to Ireland and so that was the designation that sparked interests in many of Pat's friends. We had a group of eight, Marion "Mom", Pat, Mary, Donna, Rose, her husband Gerald John, Barb and myself, Audrey June. It was decided that we would take a bus tour called 'Shades of Ireland' with Collette Vacations. We were off to the Emerald Isle, a land renowned for its "forty shades of green" and I think we saw all shades. The Irish weather cooperated pretty well. We never had anything worse than light rain; and each day had bouts of sunshine among all the clouds.

We arrived in Dublin airport and was met by our guide Stephanie Finnigan and our bus driver Bill. After check-in at the Burlington Hotel in Dublin our group of 42 met in the lobby to meet and greet and then off to the Lansdowne Hotel & Theatre for an "Irish House Party." After dinner we were entertained by a group of musicians and a lovely lady that performed some traditional Irish dancing.

After a good nights sleep we enjoyed a sightseeing tour of Dublin. Our tour went down several of Dublin's streets lined with 18th century Georgians with beautiful lacquered doors painted in every color you could imagine. Many windowsill boxes were overflowing with summer flowers. We drove pass Trinity College that houses the Book of Kells, through the square to the head of Dublin's museum quarter, then Temple Bar area and Grafton Street. What caught my eye and still amazes me was when the bus drove down O'Connell Street and I saw a silver monument rise high into the sky. It was officially named 'The Spire of Dublin' but some locals have other names for it like, *The Stiletto in the Ghetto*, *The Stiffy at the Liffey*, *The Erection in the Intersection* and *The Rod to God*. We passed several bridges crossing the River Liffey, my favorite was Ha'Penny Bridge a pedestrian bridge built in 1816. We stopped and toured the largest cathedral in Dublin, St. Patrick's Cathedral where Jonathan Swift, author of *Gulliver's Travels* and his beloved "Stella," Mrs. Esther Johnson are entombed. On our route we passed Christ Church Cathedral that I had visited years ago during my first visit to Dublin.

We asked to be dropped off at the Guinness Storehouse so we could have a visit. The Storehouse was originally built in 1904 to house the Guinness fermentation process. This building was constructed in the style of the Chicago school of architecture, with massive steel beams providing the support for the structure of the building. The Storehouse building housed the fermentation of Guinness beer until 1988, and in November 2000, the new addition to Dublin tourist attractions offered opened its doors. The core of the Guinness Storehouse building is modeled on a giant pint glass, stretching up from reception on the ground floor to The Gravity Bar in the sky. If filled, this giant pint would hold approximately 14.3 million pints of Guinness! Mary and I stopped at the

floor where you could pour yourself the perfect pint of Guinness. The instructor at the bar told Mary that she did indeed pour the perfect pint! Even though Mary and I don't like beer we did give our pint the taste test and then headed up to the 7th floor where we could have a 360 degree view of Dublin and meet up with the rest of our beer drinking buddies.

After our Guinness tour we all piled into a taxi van and headed for the Temple Bar area and stopped at the Hard Rock Café and then had lunch at a quaint sandwich shop called 'The Alamo' and on the wall was a picture of Sam Houston 'The Raven', only person in U.S. history to have been the governor of two different states, (my birth state Tennessee) and Texas. Then it was off on a quest to find a location on O'Conner Street where a friend of Pat's had placed a sticker with his name and date on a garbage can when he had visited Dublin earlier. Pat was to find the garbage can with the sticker and write her name and date she was there and take a photo of her standing by the can proving she completed her mission. Mary found the can right away and pictures were taken. Later Gerry and I saw a statue of Philip Parris Lynott (1949-1986) outside Bruxelles on Harry Street. Philip's mother, Philomena (aka Phyllis) Lynott, was Irish, and his father was Cecil Parris, an Afro-South America, which explained the full afro he was sporting. He was a Hard rock, blues-rock, heavy metal musician. We walked the streets a bit more passing flower markets, stores, pubs and street performers, when the threat of rain arose we made our bee line back to the Burlington Hotel.

On Friday morning our bus group was off to Kilkenny to explore this medieval gem. After taking pictures of the Kilkenny Castle and touring its gardens we strolled through the town jumping into shops and finding some lunch. I found a quaint handwrought silver shop and had a chat with Desmond A. Byrne, gold and silversmith. I purchased a three plait silver ring that he had made. After a few seconds of last minute shopping for some Butler's chocolates I jumped on the bus and we took off for our visit to the Waterford Crystal facility. Our tour took us inside the craft areas of the start and finish of a Waterford crystal object, be it a vase to a special crystal memorial to the disaster of 911. After settling in at the lovely Granville Hotel we followed a local guide through the narrow streets of Waterford. Our last stop was at Reginald's Tower the oldest urban civic building in Ireland, and the oldest monument to retain its Viking name. To this day, it remains Waterford's most recognizable landmark. It is believed to be the first building in Ireland to use mortar. The River Suir, which flows through Waterford City, has provided a basis for the city's long maritime history.

Saturday was a day we had all been waiting for....our visit to the historic Blarney Castle to kiss the famous Blarney Stone. Donna and I rushed frantically to the castle. It was my turn to kiss the stone. As I was hanging upside down holding on to the rails with a man up above holding on to my hips I saw the area that I knew was where everyone's lips had slurped and slobbered previously to mine. I tried to forget that issue and fully planted my kissers on that area, before I knew it I was rapidly hosted up so that the next person in

line could add to the slippery mess. I was then eager to get to the souvenir booth to purchase the photos that were taken of me doing the dirty deed...can't say I acquired the gift of eloquence but it was fun anyways. We left the Barney Castle and passed some breathtaking scenery where the movie 'The Quiet Man' starring John Wayne and Maureen O'Hara was filmed. We slowed down and briefly stopped by some cottage ruins left behind by the Irish potato famine (1845-1852), during which the island's population fell by between 20 and 25 percent. Approximately one million people died and a million more emigrated from Ireland. How quickly we forgot their suffering as we got our keys to our nice rooms at the Killarney Ave. Kenmore Place Hotel. As soon as we got our bags inside our whole group met in front of the hotel for a time-honored Irish jaunting car ride, which turned out to be a horse-drawn carriage ride to the elegant Muckross House and Gardens. This is Ireland's oldest National Park and it includes the world famous Lakes of Killarney, as well as the mountains and woodlands that surround them. After some late afternoon shopping in Killarney and picking up my take-away dinner of chicken kabobs, potato salad, bread and Bailey's Irish Cream, I was ready to eat and then hit the sack.

Sunday was one of the most beautiful coastal routes in the world called the 'Ring of Kerry'. We enjoyed pristine ocean scenery and passed through picturesque villages along the way. We passed many interesting cemeteries with large Celtic crosses next to old churches. Twice we passed some ancient stone monuments called Ogham stones with inscriptions chiseled on them. Ogham inscriptions are letters of the Early Medieval alphabet used primarily to write the Old Irish language. There are roughly 400 surviving ogham inscriptions on stone monuments throughout Ireland and western Britain, the bulk of them stretching in arc from County Kerry in the south of Ireland across to Dyfed in south Wales. The remainder are mostly in south-eastern Ireland, western Scotland, the Isle of Man, and England around the Devon/Cornwall border. The vast majority of the inscriptions consist of personal names. Our wonderful bus driver Bill then stopped at a park in Waterville so we could get our picture taken next to the bronze statue of Charlie Chaplin. Chaplin and his family were regular visitors to the area staying in the Butler Arms Hotel. Out our bus widows the Lakes of Killarney came into view. We saw vast checkerboard stretches of scenery with field's of golden baled hay, green landscapes dotted with white sheep and colorful hydrangeas and wildflowers galore. We passed a few old stone ring forts. A ring fort was a small settlement of some sort surrounded by one or more earthen embankments in a roughly circular shape. The interior diameter can range from 50 to over 200 feet. The interior is sometimes sited on a natural or artificial mound. There may also be a souterrain, a subterranean room used probably for storage. The term "fort" is somewhat misleading since most of them were probably farmsteads for which the embankments (probably supplemented by wooden palisades) served as enclosures for domestic animals and protection against wild predators as well as a deterrent to attack from human beings. Our guide Stephanie had Bill stop the bus and she brought on board some examples of native flowers and a chunk of harvested peat moss for us to examine. She was very knowledgeable about the history, plant life, industry, and people of Ireland past and present and told us stories throughout our trip.

Monday we experienced the customs and daily life of a traditional Irish family to the Molanna View Dairy Farm of Paddy & Margret Fenton. The farm has been in the family for generations, passed from father to son. The farmer's wife prepared delicious mid-morning snacks for us, and the farmer entertained us with stories from his youth and information about Irish customs and traditions, as well as a tour of the farm itself. He showed us the tiny room where he was born, showed us family treasures, and shared intimate stories of the life and death of his parents. I was in a semi-yoga trance when Paddy Fenton recited by memory a poem while our group was all crowded in the living room of his boyhood cottage next to the bedroom he was born in. The poem was called "What Is it All When All Is Told". I wanted to ask him so many questions about his family that he had researched but time was not available for genealogy. He had huge lineage charts and many old family photos spread out on the bed showing his love for his family's heritage. As everyone left the cottage I stood behind briefly in the small living room and could feel his ancestors spirits gathering as I glanced at the heirlooms. We left the countryside behind and stopped briefly at King John's Castle located on King's Island in Limerick, next to the River Shannon. The castle was built between 1200 and 1210.

Tuesday was the highlight of the trip for myself and others. Having seen the sheer white Cliffs of Dover in England I was anticipating a repeat experience with the Cliffs of Moher. It was refreshing to see the eco minded nature of the visitor's center set into the hillside so as to not take away from the beauty of the area. The Cliffs are 214m high at the highest point and range for 8 kilometres over the Atlantic Ocean on the western seaboard of County Clare. O'Brien's Tower stands proudly on a headland of the majestic Cliffs. The Cliffs of Moher take their name from a ruined promontory fort "Mothar" which was demolished during the Napoleonic wars to make room for a signal tower. O'Briens Tower stands on a headland at the Cliffs of Moher commanding views south towards Hags Head and north towards Doolin. The tower was built in 1835 by local landlord Cornelius O'Brien as a viewing point for the tourists that even then were flocking to the Cliffs. On a clear day the view can extend as far as Loop Head at the southern tip of Clare and beyond to the mountains of Kerry. I climbed the winding staircase to the top and was awarded with fantastic views of the cliffs and a black and white striped tower lighthouse on Aran's Island to the west. I rushed back to the visitors center and spent my last 5 minutes cramming coins in the machine that squishes your coin with imprints of the Cliffs of Moher and other selections. As I inserted my last coin I heard our guide make last call for everyone to get on the bus. I frantically turned the handle and retrieved my precious memento! Sweat was streaming from some of my other fellows travelers and shoppers trying meet the deadline, packages in hand we rushed to the bus.

Wednesday we traveled across country to Tullamore where we had a visit at the Tullamore Dew Heritage Centre to learn about how Irish whiskey is made and I enjoyed a double tasting of the dew before heading out on the street to do some more last minute shopping. I was on a quest to find Celtic jewelry and a tasty sandwich for the ride back to the hotel. We left to arrive at our last hotel stay at the Cabra Castle. As we arrived an

antique car followed us with a newly wed couple on their way to the Cabra for their wedding reception. The guests were arriving in their best duds, ladies sporting some very elaborate hats that made them look like strutting peacocks.

After a stroll through the grounds and touring the inside of the hotel it was time to get ready for our farewell dinner. For dinner we had a choice of Irish beef or seabass and to our every expanding waistlines, as served at the other hotels, not just one potato dish but two different potato dishes on our plates along with some vegetables, ice cream and fruit for desert. After dinner I rushed to my room for the “cramming of the royal suitcase” for the trip home. Not much sleep as the people above me walked their room all night and the boards creaked and groaned.

Thursday was greeted with a very early awaking and hectic journey home. With a few irritating occurrences at the airport as usual...customs, over weight luggage, delays and gate changes... our group made it back to Detroit with our bodies still intact and our treasurers of Ireland in our bags. I do believe we all enjoyed our ‘Shades of Ireland Tour’. Next year the Amazon!!!

WHAT IS IT ALL WHEN ALL IS TOLD

**O’What is it all when all is told
This ceaseless tolling for fame and gold
The fleeting joy of bitter tears
We’re only here for a few short years
Nothing’s our own save the silent past
Loving or hating - no thing can last
Each pathway leads to a silent fold
O’ what is it all when all is told**

**What is it all a grassy mound
Where day or night there is never a sound
Save the soft low moan of the fanning breeze
As it lovingly rustles the silent trees.
Or a thoughtful friend with whispered prayer
May sometimes break the stillness there
Then hurry away from the gloom and the cold
O’ what is it all when all is told**

**What is it all just passing true
A cross for me and a cross for you
Ours seems heavy while others seem light**

**But God in the end makes all things right
He tempts the mind with loving care
He knows the burden that each can bear
Then turns life's grey into loving gold
O' what is it all when all is told.**