

## Charmaine's Diary

1st February 2010

### Monday

Fly to London. Dinner at the Irish Embassy in London with the Ambassador, HE Bobby McDonagh, his wife Mary and guests hailing from the sporting, political, cultural and business worlds all with UK and Ireland connections – actress Fiona Shaw, goalie Pat Jennings, entrepreneur Conor Foley, BBC journalist Justin Webb, to name but a few. The Ambassador greets me with “Have you met Bob Geldof yet?”; we get introduced and talk about how it's the melting pot of cultures that makes London such a great place in which to live. During the course of the evening it transpires that the Ambassador is a keen balladeer and starts a sing-song with “She Moved Through the Fair”.

### Tuesday

Take Kelly O'Shea, this year's Queensland Rose, out for dinner. She is on a six week tour of Europe and our schedules coincide beautifully. We reminisce on this time last year when we were both entering the Rose of Tralee, on the frantic borrowing and buying of outfits in the run up to the festival and on the wonderful sing-songs we had on the Rose of Tralee tour bus.

### Wednesday

Meet with some friends from Suas Educational Development, a charity with which I've been involved since my college days. Order a pre-dinner drink and get asked for ID. Being nine years over the legal limit, I take it as a compliment and order a water instead.

### Thursday

Attend an IIBN (Irish International Business Network) breakfast at the Embassy where our Minister of Foreign Affairs, Micheál Martin, who is taking a quick side-step from Hillsborough negotiations, launches the new IIBN website. Meet some interesting people. Mel Nally, who was a Rose Escort in Tralee on a number of occasions, introduces himself. Although he refuses to divulge when exactly he carried out these escorting duties he does admit to me how, although he didn't escort her in Tralee, he ended up marrying the Leeds Rose. Eugene Forde, the resident Economic, Commercial and Finance Counsellor, tells me of his mother in Carlow who had been keeping him abreast of my movements – she read in the Carlow Nationalist that I was to visit the Embassy this week. A small, small world.

### Friday

Lunch in the new Irish Club to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the Irish Post. I am sat between two charming gentleman – Brian O'Connell, RTÉ's London Editor, and Dan from Thomas Crosbie Holdings, and enjoy the chat about the newspaper sales, coeliac disease and Paul Cunningham's (RTÉ's Environment Correspondent) famous hat that raised €570 for charity. Very excited to reconnect with Anna Mullins (2009 Birmingham Rose), Rose of Tralee centre organisers (Sandwell, Derby and Leicester) and, of course, Kirsty Flynn (1993 Rose of Tralee). Fly back to Dublin.

### Saturday

One of 78,000 people who chant, whoop and clap as Ireland is victorious in the first match of their 6 Nations campaign against Italy in Croke Park.

### Sunday

Attend Leopardstown Races to do a short interview with TV3's Denis Kirwan about the Rose of Tralee. Continue to enjoy the day with a friend of mine, learning how to place a bet and between us managing to turn €20 into €40 with each-ways on Steviemac and Joncol. Philip Treacy, the Galway-born-London-based hat designer, is chief judge of the Best Dressed Lady competition. He spots us amongst the crowd on a screen and insists that we be part of the final line-up. A little embarrassed at the turn of events but keen for the adventure, we trot around the parade ring in our heels liked prize ponies. “And the winner of this year's Hennessy Best Dressed Lady is.... Charmaine Kenny”. I collect my prize in disbelief.