

Charmaine's Diary

2nd August 2010

Monday

One of the most enjoyable events with which I've been involved this year is the 32 Marathon Challenge. Two Westmeath men, Gerry Duffy and Ken Whitelaw set out to complete the epic challenge for running 32 marathons in 32 counties in 32 consecutive days. Madness? Definitely. Though this be madness, yet there is method. The two boys managed to raise over €500,000 for Irish Autism Action and Autism Northern Ireland, as well as a donation going to the Irish Cancer Society. I ran Day 14 in the Kildare leg and here I am in Westmeath for their 32nd marathon. I pale in comparison, signing up to run only a half-marathon. Former Sawdoctor Johnny Davies, Ryanair CEO Michael O' Leary of Ryanair and over 200 others are joining in on the last day of this ambitious challenge. O'Leary is true to form and before I know it he is snatching the tiara on my head and puts it on his own. The grand maestro at getting the cameras flashing, he next sweeps me up off my feet – I think I am a tad weightier than he had bargained for. Impressively O'Leary runs a 1 hour 42 minutes half-marathon with Seán and I trailing after him with 1 hour 58 minutes. Also crossing the line before us is my uncle's wife Catherine and a close family friend Fr. Mark English. It has been so exciting to be part of this amazing feat and I am not the only one excited – half of Mullingar showed up at the start and finish line to cheer on the boys and with both my parents being from Mullingar much of my own family are there too – uncles, aunts and cousins. After a brief rest, Seán and I make our way back onto the running course in the car armed with packets of jelly snakes for the for the full marathon runners to grab as they zip by us. A very inspiring, uplifting and fun day out.

Tuesday

Back home in Athy after a few days on the road and I spend the day organising myself. My cousins who live in London pay a visit.

Wednesday

My time is coming to an end – this day three weeks and my successor will have been crowned! Start getting together my wardrobe for Tralee.

Thursday

On the way to the Blossomhill Ladies Day at the Dublin Horse Show, Miss Last Minute here pops into Aristohat Hat Hire to finish off the attire. Angela there never fails to match up an outfit with one of her beautiful hats. All dollied up and accompanied by Mum we join the other 500 plus ladies at what is regarded as one of the biggest fashion events in the Irish calendar. Ladies queue for over two hours to be in with a chance of being chosen as the Best Dressed Lady and most probably will not see a four-

legged creature for the whole day. Ladies Day at the Dublin Horse Show is a show in itself – style, chat, sunshine (even some sunburn) – very entertaining. Bump into some old childhood neighbours and absolutely thrilled when one of them, Laoise Hughes, is awarded the most colourful outfit winning a Longines watch worth a few thousand euro. Not a bad day's work! One of the judges of Best Dressed Lady is Amy Huberman with whom I have the opportunity to exchange brief hellos and congratulate her on her recent status change to Mrs. Meet the team photographer Tony from the 32 Marathon Challenge – his assignments are varied to say the least – and I try to convince him to come to Tralee for the Festival. Other familiar faces pop up throughout the day in the form of friends from Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO), the Festival's charity partner and with whom I travelled to Malawi with earlier in my reign. Lovely day out but glad to kick off the heels the second I exit the RDS gate!

Friday

Pound the streets of Kildare, Athy, Carlow, Kilcullen and Newbridge on a hunt for accessories to finish off some outfits for Tralee. Need to get my skates on – Valerie in the Rose of Tralee office tells me that the Dome is up – roof, tent, the lot!!!

Saturday

Catch up with my university girlfriends over lunch before toddling off to the Kilbeggan Races for the evening. This race meet is partnered with local charity, The LARCC Cancer Centre, who have invited me to present the prize to the winning owner of the LARCC sponsored race. Fabulous evening, meeting lots of old family friends and familiar faces. Amongst them is the Laura Young, who participated in the New Zealand Rose Selection this year.

Sunday

Today I am running my last charity race as Rose of Tralee. And no better way to finish up than by running in my home county – the annual Jim Roche Memorial Road Race Festival is taking place in Moone, Co Kildare in aid of Our Lady's Children's Hospital Crumlin. There is a host of races taking place for all ages and fitness levels including Ireland's first ever kilomarathon (26.2 kilometres instead of the usual marathon of 26.2 miles). Thankfully I've only signed up to the 10km and by golly I am happy that I wasn't more ambitious when I agreed. It is absolutely roasting today and the sun is my kryptonite – it completely zaps all energy from me the second its rays tickle my fair skin. Although famed for being the flattest county in Ireland, I come to the conclusion that the hills around the village of Moone rival the Mountains of Mourne. To add to my aversion of sun and hills, the battery in my ipod dies and by kilometre five I am losing the will to live. At this same point some poor young fellow running beside me sees the finish line and thinks his pain is all over until I tell him that we have to do another loop. Then he nearly loses the will to live. I am never so happy to cross a finish line even if the cameras are snapping at me in all my sweaty, tomato-faced glory. Dash to Croke Park to catch the second half of the Kilkenny v Cork hurling semi-final. The panic of my tardiness must show on my face – when I ask the Gardaí to direct me to the correct entrance, they offer me a spin in the squad car. Happy days! Kilkenny annihilate Cork and look to be bulldozing their way to five-in-a-row.