

Charmaine's Diary

21st June 2010

Monday

Wake up in the lovely Carlton Hotel in Tralee which, of course, will always have great memories for me as this is where all the Roses stayed during the Festival last August. Drive to Scoil Bhríde Loreto in Killarney. My Rosebud, Ruth Courtney, is a pupil here. Over the past ten months Ruth has been wonderful at staying in touch and I regularly receive emails hearing about basketball tournaments, her First Holy Communion and news about school. Absolutely brilliant to see Ruth again – I could not have had a better Rosebud – she did her job with such grace, spirit and sense of fun. I am given the honourable job of raising a Green Flag for the school, awarded for Water Conservation. A scorcher of an afternoon and back in Tralee I go for a run along the canal with one of the girls from the Festival office, Rebecca, who puts me through my paces! Meet up with some of the gang from the Rose of Tralee office including Valerie, the wonder woman behind the scenes, who amongst many other things organises my diary and keeps me in line. Pull the winning tickets for the Grand Prize Draw for the National Rose and Escort Raffles that supports over sixteen local and national charities.

Tuesday

Kerry schools are definitely doing their bit for the environment. I raise a green flag in Presentation Primary School, Tralee. My visit here has been organised by Nancy Keane, wife of the late Ted Keane who was heavily involved in the Rose of Tralee Festival for many years. Drive back home and briefly catch up with my parents before dashing off to another engagement in Ratheniska, Co. Laois. This branch of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann is having their end of year performance and awards ceremony. I receive an incredibly warm welcome, being treated to a concert of traditional Irish music performed by 5 year olds up to 55 year olds on a range of instruments and am given the honourable task of presenting medals. The talent present makes me feel a little inadequate and question whether I have lived a deprived childhood having never attended a single Irish music or dancing lesson. I'm sure that my mother will not agree that it was deprived as she played taxi for and benefactor to tennis, horse-riding, ballet, piano and all sorts of activities almost on a daily basis.

Wednesday

Guest of St. Enda's Girls National School in Monastrevin for their ceremony to celebrate achieving their fourth green flag for environmental conservation in transport. The children and teachers alike are dressed appropriately in green outfits and I am overwhelmed by the energy, enthusiasm and excitement in this school. Amongst the students is Rebecca, goddaughter of the new London Rose, Clare Kambamettu, and she is as proud as punch when I acknowledge her. Very cute. During my speech, just as I am stressing the importance of looking after the precious world we live in, my beautiful Newbridge earring falls out (I had put the wrong back on it). Completely unaware, the wave of commotion amongst

the students baffles me until the ceremony is over and they excitedly tell me about the earring – hopefully they will remember my visit for more than my earring falling out. Dash to Dublin cursing roadworks on the M7 and nervous that I will be late for my next engagement – visiting the elderly at Cairdeas Day Care Centre in Bru Chaoimhin on Cork Street. The warmth in the small unit is uplifting and I delight in meeting and hearing the story of a lady who turned 100 years of age in April and proudly shows me a framed letter from the President, another who is the wife of a doctor who played a huge role in inventing the TB vaccine and another who tells me the secret to reaching a ripe old age is hard work and a dropeen (specifically a dropeen of sherry). Next visit is to Rialto Day Care Centre and I am particularly charmed by one lady's rendition of the Rose of Tralee song. Retire for the night at the Carlton Dublin Airport.

Thursday

Immigration at Dublin Airport with a cross burly American. *Where do you live?* Kildare. *Kildare Town?* No, Athy. *Where are you going?* Philadelphia. *Business or pleasure?* Pleasure. *When was the last time that you were in the US?* March. *Oh, what's your occupation?* The Rose of Tralee (now I'm red-faced). *Oooo who's your escort?* (now he's smiling) Hee hee (now I'm giggling nervously) *See you on the telly in August....* I walk off speedily – US immigration never fails to scare me.

Friday

Breakfast with Anthony O'Gara, Managing Director of the Rose of Tralee International Festival, and his lovely wife Oonagh. An obligatory but quick trip to Macy's and, as always, love the 11% discount just for being a tourist. No serious damage done this time. Meet the Philadelphia and Mid-Atlantic Rose finalists in the early afternoon for lunch. We visit Liberty Bell and climb the Rocky steps, having our snap captured at the Rocky statue in our lovely summer dresses showing off our measly muscles. Later attend a reception at the Willows, a beautiful country mansion with fabulous scenery just outside Philadelphia. Delight in reconnecting with Jocelyn McGillian, the 2009 Philadelphia Rose and reminiscing on the good ole times in Tralee last August.

Saturday

Have a sneaky peak in the shops but decide to shelter from the stifling heat in the Walnut Theatre. Get a last minute discount ticket for Fiddler on the Roof - excellent. Quick turnaround into a ballgown and head out to the Irish Centre where the 2010 Mid-Atlantic Rose will be selected to go to Tralee. An overwhelming number of Roses from previous years are also in attendance and they warmly embrace me into their sisterhood. Mairéad Conley is selected as both the Philadelphia and Mid-Atlantic Rose and coincidentally it's her birthday too. A fun night made even more special by the presence of my uncle Gabriel who lives in Washington DC and travelled up to Philadelphia for the night.

Sunday

Jetlag is poking fun with me and I'm bright as a button at 6.30am – ugh! Grab breakfast with my Uncle, go for a little walk and then meet some of the Roses and selection night guests, hearing all about the

singsong antics from the night before. Take a train to New York City and am greeted by my close childhood friend Louise. Have a delicious home-cooked dinner (she's quite the little chef) and stay up til all hours having a good ole chinwag.