

Charmaine's Diary

22nd March 2010

Monday

Indulge in a three tier breakfast/brunch in New York's Alice's Teacup. They have the most scrumptious chocolate and fresh strawberry scones. I wish that all Mondays could begin like that! The Irish Consulate in New York hold an afternoon reception to honour the work of the International Rose of Tralee Festival in the States. Deputy Consul General Brendan O'Caollaí is our host and he compliments the work being done by the festival in connecting the global Irish community. The Niall O'Leary School of Irish Dancing provide the entertainment and amongst the attendees are Ashling Colton (2009 New York Rose), Rita Talty (2008 New Jersey Rose) and Sarah Conaghan (coordinator of the Philadelphia Rose Centre). Ashling's Dad kindly takes us to Smith and Wollensky, a celebrated New York steakhouse and treats us to drinks and snacks. Meet Philip Regan, a board member of charity Suas Educational Development with whom I recently travelled to India; he is temporarily based in New York doing a project for UNICEF and I am thrilled at the opportunity to catch-up. End the day as it began – eating. Being a vegetarian, I try out a restaurant called Pure Food and Wine whose style of cuisine is "raw food". The menu is entirely plant based and does not use any processed ingredients, and nothing is heated above approximately 118 degrees in order to preserve vitamins, minerals, and enzymes... an interesting dining out experience!

Tuesday

An early rise as I am guest speaker at an IBO (Irish Business Organization) business breakfast. The organisation seeks to promote, foster and advance the business interests of Irish and Irish American business people. I do my little talk and the President of the IBO later sends me an email declaring that the Rose of Tralee was a big hit at the breakfast and that they had underestimated its popularity by holding the event in such a small place! Play tourist by going on a Food of New York tour around Greenwich Village, a walking tour that includes delicious food tastings from specialty food shops and ethnic eateries. Our guide is a quirky middle-aged New Yorker, Cindy, who is a more mobile version of one of the Golden Girls. Hilarious. Attend an INNYC (Irish Network New York City) event at which Irish businessman and philanthropist Denis O'Brien is interviewed by Margaret Brennan, reporter with Bloomberg TV. Denis shares his thoughts and experiences with a captivated audience and also talks about his involvement in recent relief efforts during the aftermath of the Haitian earthquake. The event is held in the Mutual of America building and the view is unbelievable. New York City is oriented so vertically that you miss so much when you go about your business at street level. Later go to The Bowery Wine Company where singer Tara O'Grady and her band are performing. Tara was raised on Irish traditional music, as well as the sounds of Hank Williams, Louis Prima and Elvis Presley. And so she sings songs like The Fields of Athenry and I'll Tell Me Ma in the style of jazz. Unconventional but very striking and fun. She is soon to release an album called The Black Irish.

Wednesday

Determined that I have not packed my runners in vain, I take them out for an airing in Central Park, around the Jackie Onassis Lake, on my last day in the Big Apple. Refrain from shopping due to baggage constraints. Fly back home to Dublin.

Thursday

Arrive into Dublin airport in the afternoon and drive home to Athy. Spend the evening with my parents, filling them in on my adventures of the past fortnight in London, Washington DC and New York.

Friday

Wake up to the post-travel chores of unpacking, sorting and washing. My mum swears that her washing machine is sure to blow up when she sees the pile of clothes. Attend the evening reception of a wedding in Maynooth, Co Kildare. Drive to the Carlton Shearwater Hotel in Ballinasloe to lie down for the night. Reminisce on the good times had in this hotel during the Rose Tour last August.

Saturday

From one Carlton hotel to another - drive to the Carlton Hotel Galway City. The ten hotels across the country of The Carlton Hotel Group (who is a sponsor of the Rose of Tralee International Festival) have been my home away from home so far this year. They have provided me with many a great night's sleep and delicious breakfast! Stroll along Galway Bay for some fresh sea air in Salthill before the madness of the evening. The 2009 Rose of Tralee Escorts have organised a Roses and Escorts reunion – this is the first time that we have had an opportunity to party all together since the Festival. We have a brilliant night out that begins in a dog track and, as per tradition, ends in a sing-song. I am very impressed that Roses from as far away as Texas and Ottawa make it to Galway for the weekend.

Sunday

A late rise after a late night. Drive back to Dublin.