

Charmaine's Diary

5th April

Monday

Drive home to Athy after the Meath Selection night with a pitstop in Dublin to catch up with some friends. A lazy start to what is set to be a manic week.

Tuesday

On the journey up to Armagh indulge in the remainder of my Easter egg stash to keep up the blood sugar levels. Meet the Armagh Rose participants in the Armagh City Hotel for an action-packed tour of the city. It starts with a civic reception hosted by the Lord Mayor followed by a vintage car tour, a visit of Armagh Planetarium, a spin around the go-karting track and finishing with an evening BBQ. And of course, what a lovely opportunity to see the 2009 Armagh Rose Lisa McClelland and reminisce on the great times we shared in Tralee.

Wednesday

Travel to the Greenvale Hotel in Cookstown, Tyrone for breakfast with the Tyrone Rose entrants and Rose Escorts. Take a tour of the Rocwell mineral water factory who are main sponsors of the Tyrone Rose Selection. Am fascinated by the process and especially how a water bottle comes in the shape of a test tube and is then blown into the shape of the water bottle as we know it with high pressure! Have an hour free in the middle of the day and sneak down town to stock up on essentials that are much cheaper up North than at home. An incredibly impressive group of young ladies in Tyrone but unfortunately there can only be one ambassador for the county. Carla O'Brien is selected on the night and I'm sure that she will represent the other ladies brilliantly. Overwhelmed by the incredibly warm and generous welcome received in Tyrone - from the person on the street giving directions when we were lost, to all those who attended the Rose selection, to those in the shops and petrol stations – fabulous people. Drive from Tyrone to Dublin in the middle of the night to avoid the morning traffic.

Thursday

Drive to Athy. Later attend the Laois Selection Night in the Heritage Hotel in Portlaoise. This is the venue where the Irish Regional Final, British Regional Final and North American Regional Final takes place in June, when Roses will be selected to participate in the Festival in Tralee. Bernadette Ryan is the 2010 Laois Rose and no better woman for the job!

Friday

Drive to Tralee on three hours sleep to do a photoshoot for Lee Strand Milk, a sponsor of the Rose of Tralee festival, who have introduced a new Lowfat Milk. Casually ask at the end of the shoot for what the photos will be used. Expecting to hear "the Kerry's Eye and other local newspapers", I am told "oh just for the side of our milk lorries"!!! The randomness of this year never ceases to entertain me. Drive

to the Marriott Hotel in Druid's Glen for a Cocktail Reception organised by the Wicklow Rose of Tralee committee. Meet the Wicklow Rose entrants and Rose Escorts who are all excited about the magical journey ahead of them.

Saturday

Drive to Kilkenny for the launch of a cycle fundraiser in McDonagh Shopping Centre. Delighted to be able to lend my support to the Kilkenny branch of the International Chernobyl Children's Charity, an organization with which I travelled to Belarus in January to visit some mental asylums and children's orphanages. Other supporters on the day include Kilkenny hurlers Eoin Larkin, Jackie Tyrell and Michael Rice, as well as Na Fianna who were runners-up in the recent All Ireland Talent Show. Drive to Athlone. Although representing London in the Rose of Tralee Festival and born and bred in Athy, Co Kildare, I have 100% Westmeath blood with both Mum and Dad being from Mullingar. So I am thrilled to be attending the Westmeath Selection Night in the Athlone Springs Hotel. Yet another fabulous bunch of girls with Cathy Brougham being selected to represent the county.

Sunday

D-day has come for the Kenny family running challenge. The distance: 13.1 miles. The temperature: 17 degrees Celsius. The location: Connemara. The competition: Kenny men –v- Kenny women. The rivalry: fierce. The background to this running challenge is that when my Gran sadly passed away in October the family decided to raise funds for The North Westmeath Hospice, who did a fabulous job at taking care of her. As there is a strong running tradition in the Kenny household it seemed that a running event was the obvious choice – my uncle Louis is still the 7th fastest Irish marathon runner which is quite incredible as it was back in 1982 when he broke the record with a time of 2.12.21. It was his first marathon too. Truthfully there was a double incentive to this Kenny family running challenge; neighbours and friends of the family were so incredibly generous during Gran's illness, making sure that there was a constant stream of sandwiches, buns and Chester cake that everyone was also feeling a need to shed a few pounds! Having done only five 20-minute runs since the Dublin Marathon in October, I struggle every mile of the 13.1 mile route. And the sun is scorching. I make it over the finish line in a time of 2 hours 10 minutes – far from my best run ever but I am happy to have finished without needing to be hospitalised. And the Kenny women shine taking first, second and third place amongst the family. Drive from Clifden to Sligo for the Sligo Selection night in the Radisson Hotel. Delighted at the opportunity to catch up with the 2009 Sligo Rose (Sinead McGill) and the 2009 Waterford Rose (Orna Midleton). Congratulations to Stephanie Tempany who was selected the 2010 Sligo Rose.