

Clare's Diary

25 August 2010

Wednesday

A very early start with RTE arriving in my bedroom at 7.15am but at least I was lucky enough to get breakfast in bed! Accompanied by my fantastic escort Donal by midday I have done 11 interviews and a photoshoot in the rose garden in Tralee. I even come face to face with William Mulchinock and Mary O'Connor hand in hand, although both are in statue form! I have my picture taken with Daithi O'Se a miniature Jack Russell puppy and visit the wonderful Kerry County Museum which has a fantastic exhibition of Rose of Tralee dresses including a recreation of the dress worn by Alice O'Sullivan, the very first Rose of Tralee. I feel very proud indeed to think that this time next year people will be looking at my dress. I am ravenous by lunchtime and delighted to be back at the Carlton Hotel Tralee, where there has been a delicious BBQ organised by both Tralee and Kerry Councils. I get the opportunity to chat to some of the other Roses and spend a bit of time with my family before heading for a quick nap! I have a chat with the committee about my plans for the year before attending a prize giving at the beautiful Barrow Golf Club-my very first official event. I pop into Kirby's in Tralee for a wee while to say goodbye to the Roses and Escorts who I am lucky enough to have shared this amazing experience with, I am excited about the coming year and only hope that I represent these 61 amazing people to the best of my ability.

Thursday

A delicious lie in until 9 am, I feel blessed and like a new woman when I wake. I do several more interviews including one with the Irish Examiner over the telephone before packing. Every dress now holds a special memory and I find it difficult to put things away without pausing to think about this. Following a speedy brunch with my aforementioned superhero escort Donal, I check out hurriedly as I am due to catch a flight to a wedding in Spain. At Shannon airport I decide to return to Kildare with my family instead and wave goodbye to my boyfriend James. It strikes me that while it feels like the end of one journey, I am just about to embark on another and the emotion of it all comes rushing in. I am glad to have one of my mum's hugs to hand! We arrive home to find that our neighbours have decorated the garden in white bunting with a big sign which reads 'Welcome home Rose of Tralee'. I am truly touched.

Friday

I speak to a couple more journalists throughout the morning including one from the Irish Post in London. There is a constant stream of visitors and well wishers, all of whom I am delighted to see. In the afternoon one of my oldest friends Catherine picks me up and we go for a beautiful long walk in Stradbally Woods. We have a long chat about nothing in particular which does me the world of good. On the way home we very excitedly spot a giant picture of my face in one of the local petrol stations! I get a much needed early night and sleep like an infant.

Saturday

I am up early to go for a run, I am very conscious that if I don't start training again I will indeed be completing the half marathon in October on horseback. After another telephone interview I am off into Athy for the first time since returning home. I meet local photographer Robert Redmond who is going to be taking some pictures of me in the Kildare football strip as they are playing in the semi-final against Down tomorrow. We pop into Zebbles Salon, run by Robert's daughter Tara who I was friends with in school. It is great to see her again and we have a very quick catch up before I change into the jersey and shorts. Tara has done some great things over the last few years raising money to buy three defibrillators for the hospital and school in Athy. It is great to see how successful she has become and I promise myself to come back to the salon when I move home as it is the most relaxing environment I have been in for months! I pose for a few pictures with a football before the rain begins to descend. I pop into Bradbury's restaurant for a quick coffee with my family before visiting my close friend Ciara and my god-daughter Rebecca. At 7 she was very excited to have been allowed to stay up to watch the Rose of Tralee on the Monday and Tuesday nights. Having met Charmaine a couple of months ago she is so excited that I have won and is determined that when she gets a little older she will be a rose too.

Sunday

I drag myself out of bed again to go for a run, knowing I will feel much better for doing so. I excitedly do my hair and makeup as my parents and I are visiting the Curragh Racecourse today where I will be judging the 'Style Icon' competition sponsored by Newbridge Silverware. I cannot believe that I will be meeting Gay Byrne and Anne Doyle, two television icons! We are treated to a gorgeous lunch courtesy of Moyglare Stud before I meet my fellow judges, Gay and Anne, Bairbre Power, Laura Coates and Sarah Donnelly. The style is fantastic and the judging a difficult task indeed with the prize eventually awarded to Sarah Cass from Kilkenny whose striking beige suit and vivid red hat won us all over. A great day had by all and it was lovely to see Phil Donnelly from Newbridge Silverware again. She is the lady who so beautifully co-ordinated all of our jewellery with our dresses in Tralee and is a wonderfully familiar face now.

Monday

Another early morning as Mum and I make our way to the La Stampa hotel in Dublin, where my interview and photoshoot with VIP magazine has been arranged. I meet my old pal Laura in the foyer and she pops up while I try on a variety of beautiful clothes. My makeup and hair is done to perfection and I have so much fun with Alison, the stylist and the rest of the crew, I cannot wait to see the publication when it comes out. My Mum drops me to the airport where the lady at the check in desk loudly says 'excuse me'. I groan internally as I realise my bag must be over-weight before she continues with 'congratulations, you were brilliant on the tv'. I cannot wipe the smile from my face. Reality hits in with a bit of a bump as I battle with the crowds to get home from the airport. I could definitely do with my Escort now as I haul my bags up the tube station steps. Oh well at least my cats are glad to see me! As of course is my boyfriend James.

Tuesday

Back to work today after over two weeks holidays. I have decided to hand in my notice and have some time out of work so I can make the most of the year and take advantage of every single opportunity that it might bring. Despite the fact that I outed my Mum for buying a horse on live national television she has very graciously forgiven me and I am looking forward to moving home to Athy in October. It has been a decade since my parents, brother and I lived together last so I am sure we will have some great times over the next few months. I am sorry that I am letting my manager and workplace down by leaving so soon after starting there but they are very understanding and aware that this is the opportunity of a lifetime for me. My parents very proudly call to tell me that I am back in the Kildare Nationalist again. I feel quite emotional when I consider the huge amount of support I have received from the community in Athy as well as the Irish community in general and hope that I can repay some of their kindness over the coming year.