

Clare's Diary

20 January 2011

Thursday

I am deeply saddened today to be attending the funeral of Saoirse Heffernan in Kerry. This beautiful, bright and bubbly little girl was diagnosed with a fatal neurodegenerative condition called Batten's Disease in 2009. Her family began a charity in her name to raise money with which to send her and the other children in Ireland who have the disease, to the U.S. for groundbreaking treatment. Unfortunately for Saoirse and her family, there is still no cure and she passed away at home on January 18th 2011 aged 5. I have so much respect and admiration for her family, who despite all the hardship have continued to work tirelessly to help others affected by the disease, including their younger son, Liam who is now 2. The funeral is heartbreaking, the grief is still so raw but Saoirse is laid to rest on a beautiful sunny winter's day in a peaceful spot overlooking the mountain on which she and her grand-dad used to play. www.beeforbattens.org for more.

Friday

I wake up to the most spectacular view this morning looking out across Kinsale. I feel very chilled out having spent the night in the Carlton Hotel here. After a lovely long swim, I pan out in the sauna and steam room before I remind myself that I have an exciting afternoon ahead for which I need to ready myself. I am attending the Cork Person of the Year Awards and am lucky enough to be sitting at the same table as the legendary Maureen O'Hara. I finally get to ask her the question I have been thinking of since the first time I saw *The Quiet Man*; what was it really like to kiss John Wayne? The award goes to the very deserving Paddy O'Brien who has dedicated his life to helping the elderly. This evening sees me back in Tralee for the housewarming party of Paul O'Donnell, one of the festival's special supporters.

Saturday

A wonderful long walk on spectacular Banna beach this afternoon while mulling over the political turmoil that is fast engulfing the country. I pop into the Abbey Inn for lunch and to say hi to Danny and Tess Leane who were so good to my family and I during the festival. The first Saturday in a long time that I am asleep by 10pm!

Sunday

I brave the chilly morning and run the stretch of Banna beach that I walked yesterday. I am feeling mighty fit and healthy until I see three heroic souls in togs and flip flops making their way down to the sea to swim. Tonight I am very excited to be a guest judge at the grand finale of the Limerick Talent Search which sees the culmination of many months of effort on behalf of all the participants as well as the HD Events team. The decision is very tough as the standard is incredibly high but the eventual winner is the fabulous Hannah O'Brien who is definitely one to watch. She has written her own songs

throughout the competition and if that isn't enough talent she plays the guitar while singing live on stage. There is such a unique and contemporary feel to her music that I really hope she gets the break she deserves.

Monday

Before I leave Limerick I pop into the Peter Dee Academy of Music at which one of my fellow judges from last night, Denis Carey is director. I spent years learning the piano before promptly ditching all my practice after my leaving certificate. Recently I have been regretting the fact that I have lost the ability to read and play music and I am keen to pick it up again. Denis has promised me a quick piano lesson; an offer I am delighted to take up! Back to reality with a thump the second I get home as I realise one of my PhD applications is due in on Wednesday! Cue vaguely disorganised meltdown before I pull it together and seal the envelope which feels reassuringly heavy given all the hard work that has gone into it!

Tuesday

Today I am at the mercy of Brendan Galvin of Galvin Films who has tracked me down in order to record an ad and some voiceovers for this year's Search for a Rose. I have been dragging my feet on this in the hope that I can magically make time slow down, it feels too soon yet to be looking for my replacement! However, I know how lucky I am to be in the middle of this, the year of my life and it is exciting to think that somebody else will be given this amazing opportunity too. I never thought I would be sitting here typing this; it just goes to show how quickly life can change. All I would say to anyone even thinking about entering is just go for it. Every single stage of this journey, from the very first heat in London, has been more fun than I ever dared imagine. What on earth is there to lose!!!