

In Which I get a New Name and Play Host to Some Students

We had the most fun this past weekend. We hosted two very nice boys from my old university, Lawrence, who are studying at the London Centre. When I studied at the Centre, we could do a weekend in Cornwall, with the fantastic John & Mary, a couple who knew how to show off their native land and feed college students really well. So, when we moved to Ireland, I thought, hey, why not? After months of emailing back and forth, we finally had our first visitors.

Dave and Jake arrived on Friday evening at Dublin airport, where Dan managed to find them, despite being forbidden to pull alongside the curb at Arrivals. They had written to us expressing their wish to tour the Guinness factory in Dublin, but when their trip was curtailed by their schedule (arrival Fri at 9 pm and departure Sun at 11 am) they professed themselves eager to "just see cool old stuff." So, after a big chicken roast on Friday night, complete with two veg, roast & mashed potatoes and a homemade deadly chocolate ganache cake, we retired in preparation for a big day on Saturday. Little did we know how big!

Saturday morning we started with a full Irish breakfast. When we were all stuffed silly, we lumbered into the car to head for Newgrange. The weather was cooperating stupendously, with mainly bright sunshiny skies, with the occasional sprinkle and a bit of hail during lunch. We took the scenic route through Drogheda (and avoided the toll) but missed the turn for Newgrange and ended up back on the motorway (and paying the toll!) to get there in the end. As we twisted and turned on the little roads to the site, we encountered the Mother of All Potholes. Before I could say "Pothole!" Dan was avoiding an oncoming lorry and dipped right into it.

We all discussed how large and jagged it had been, until I heard the faintly familiar "thwap thwap" sound coming from the car. I checked in my mirror, and sure enough, our tire was plastered to the road. As calmly as I could manage I said, "Honey, your left back tire has got a puncture." (Notice how it's "his" left back tire at this point...:) Dan said "Damn" and pulled over. He had that tire off and the spare on in no time! He really saved the day by announcing that we should go on to Newgrange without him and that he would get a new one fitted in Drogheda. We had a fun time at Newgrange, with an amazing guide who did some very useful speculation and story-telling about the site. Dave spent most of his free time at the site grinning broadly and exclaiming, "Big old stones!" and hugging them. Jake was relieved to find he could fold up to fit in the low passage into the tomb. When the tour was finished, Dan met us right outside with the mended car, and we continued on to Slane for lunch. We had a lot of silliness in the homey cafe when it was revealed that their desserts came under the heading of "Happy Endings" but instantly sobered up when we tasted the items listed. I had the most divine rhubarb/strawberry crumble EVER. We couldn't guess how they made the tangy sauce that was drizzled over it.

We drove to Carlingford next, to see the most wee castle we know. King John's castle dates from the 12th century and is nearly so small you can't go into it.

Hopefully they'll renovate it soon. We had some tea and treats in the cafe in town. Next, we went to the Friary to get the obligatory leprechaun pictures (there is a massive window there and if you sit in it, you look just like a little leprechaun.) After, we drove up to the Long Woman's Grave and to the Magic Hill. This is a spot where, if you go to the bottom of the hill and put the car in neutral, it goes backwards UP the hill all by itself. It has to be experienced to be believed. Finally, we sought out the Proleek Dolmen, a massive standing stone with capstone weighing an estimate of 40 tonnes. The lads were very nice and enthusiastic about the whole day, but this last site, in the back of a big golf course, struck them as especially amazing.

They tossed a few stones on top to see, according to local legend, if they would get married within the year. We turned homeward, for some Irish stew, and it was still light out at 9 pm. Dan and the boys repaired to the pub after dinner to try the local Guinness. We had a wonderful time talking to the students and were sorry to see them go on Sunday. They said we had the best food and the best night's sleep they've experienced since coming to London! They were particularly excited about the complete sheet sets and the long duvets on the beds. We're looking forward to the next ones in May.

I was especially relieved that I had managed to get over my bronchitis just in time for their arrival. It was so grim that I ended up in hospital twice. My new GP is very very careful about prescribing for pregnant women, and wanted me near the maternity facilities in Drogheda in case I had a reaction to the antibiotic (which I didn't) or to get something stronger than she could give me. The second time, I had been having asthma attacks on top of everything, and needed relief. Dan drove me into hospital, where we waited for a couple of hours. Nurses called out names every so often, and at one, which sounded exactly like "Ita Roe" Dan was convinced it was my name being called. I couldn't IMAGINE they could get it that wrong, so I stayed put while they called it again. When nothing happened for another hour, I went up to check. The guy who had called "Ita Roe" shot me a dirty look and said in a thick accent, "I called you at half past 7." So, we waited for another half hour, and finally got seen. Every doctor I have seen in the hospital is of a different nationality than Irish. I saw a Malaysian woman the first time, and the second time, the doctor reminded me of my Nigerian chemistry prof at Lawrence. Anyway, he was finally persuaded to give me a cough syrup and a nebulizer for immediate relief. The cough syrup turned out to be over the counter, but no pharmacies were open at 10 pm, when we arrived home. Apparently, "Late Night Chemists" here are open on some nights until 9 pm. At least the nebulizer allowed me to breathe and therefore sleep-yay!

Hope you're all doing well. As always, if you want off the list, you have only to mention it by return of post!