

Our trip to the west coast of Ireland by Kathryn Gallivan

"The word spectacular keeps coming to mind when I recall our happy ten days. All in all I had a trip filled with joy and new things to ponder and appreciate each day!" wrote Carol Melley after the trip. Our September 2007 Journey of the Soul tour was another unforgettable adventure for forty-four travelers from seven different states (including sixteen Massachusetts cities and towns). This was our third Ireland journey since 2004. We boarded our bus in the Gaylord Parking lot while several friends and family members bid us farewell, among them Sister Judy Kappenman who sent us off with blessings for a happy, healthy and safe journey, as well as wishes for making new friends along the way. After a smooth flight, our group arrived ahead of schedule at Shannon Airport. Our driver/guide, Martin Hogan greeted us with a smile and his usual Irish wit. As he loaded our luggage onto the coach, we had time to get some euros, make phone calls or relax. Our first day began as a typical "soft day" with some of that Irish mist as we headed out to Bunratty to collect our last passenger, Mary, who flew in the day before from Chicago. We headed to Andrahan for our first stop of the tour. The bus traveled down a narrow farm road until we came upon a farmhouse where we were greeted by Fintan and Frances Connelly. Fintan

introduced us to the farm that has been in his family for over 200 years. It has a well-preserved thatched roof cottage with white washed stone walls and colorful pots of flowers all around. He led us to the barn and spoke of sheep farming. His well trained border collies demonstrated shepherding; he showed us how to shear a sheep and feed a baby lamb. We were invited for homemade scones and tea. As we entered we smelled the turf burning in the carriage house. The warm scones, just out of the oven, were served with whipped cream, homemade jams and tea. Frances gave us a special treat sharing her family's recipe and a baking demonstration with "a little of this and a little of that," and a little sense of humor thrown in; the scones were made and ready for the oven! We ended our visit with a tour of the oldest part of the house. We marveled at the furniture and old pots and china and the fireplace burning turf. Frances and Fintan showed us their home and talked with members of our group. We couldn't have started our trip with a warmer Irish welcome! Next, we were off to Galway and since it was Sunday, some of us decided to go to mass at the St. Nicholas Cathedral. Completed in 1965 it is one of the last stone churches built in Ireland. It has Connemara

marble and wonderful mosaics. After we checked into the hotel some of us rested and others explored the city. In the evening we met for dinner. Later some visited the pubs and others called it an early night. My favorite pub is Tigh Coili on Main-guard Street with a lively session of traditional music. Next morning after an early breakfast we headed to Rosseveal for the ferry to Inis Mor, the largest of the Aran Islands. We even caught a glimpse of a Galway Hooker under (red) sail. On the island we met our mini-van drivers who took us to the Seven Churches with its high Celtic crosses, then it was on to the 2,000 year old fortress of Dun Aengus. About half of our group stayed behind to visit the quaint shops while the rest hiked up to the fort. A gradual climb at first, the climb gets a bit steeper before reaching the top. Once you get to the top, the views are spectacular! No warnings and no fences and a sheer drop of about 300 feet to the pounding waves. Not as high as the Cliffs of Moher but just as breathtaking! Our drivers, besides telling us about the history of the island, told jokes and kept us singing and laughing all the way to the village of Kilronan. We had time to get a bite to eat or more importantly, to shop at the famous "Aran Sweater Market" across from the pier. Tuesday morning, after another delicious breakfast, we

departed for the Connemara area where we visited the Connemara Marble Factory. The owner, Ambrose Joyce, gave us a tour and pointed out the variety of marble that they quarry—"the most authentic Irish product you will find in Ireland." The adjoining store buzzed with activity before we continued our tour to the nineteenth century Kylemore Abbey. On another "soft day" we arrived at the Abbey where some headed toward the Abbey and the Gothic Chapel where Ambrose had mentioned we would find all the colors of Connemara marble. Others went to the restored Victorian walled gardens about a half mile away by mini-van. Still others visited the cafeteria and gift shop. Still a bit misty out, we departed for Leenane where we boarded a catamaran for our Killary Harbour cruise. The mist turned to rain as we passed by the salmon and mussel farms and continued to the mouth of the harbor. Although it was a little damp sitting outside, inside was nice and warm with a video explaining all about what we should be seeing on our cruise. It was a nice alternative to outside, as we stayed dry and sipped on our Irish coffees!

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Anticipation of a visit to Ireland by Tim Allen

It's a new year. I'm going to Ireland this year. The anticipation of things in life is often helpful in keeping going. On a weekly basis, we might anticipate the coming of the weekend, a visit from a friend or relative, an event we are excited about. We anticipate the next game of the Patriots or Celtics or of a game played by someone in our own family. We look upon these as items that give us pleasure, time for ourselves, time to relax and avoid worry. Whether it's a warm weather vacation in mid-winter, a getaway weekend in New York or Boston, or some time at the beach or in the mountains in the summer. Let's hope we all have our places and times that bring more air into our lungs, more clear thinking into our minds, more sweetness into our spirits, more love into our hearts. I like everything listed above, but my favorite is visiting Ireland. I anticipate an Irish trip to Ireland. My family

says I'm a different person when I'm in Ireland. I often wonder if that means I'm tough to be around here. In Ireland, they say I laugh easier, I'm more spontaneous. I'm not on a schedule, I'm not doing paperwork, it is easier for my guard to come down. That must be what they mean. I must admit, I can feel some of it myself. Some of it comes from being on vacation, some of it comes from being in Ireland. I think of flying into Shannon and looking at the farms and fields. This view defines where you are as much as any ever could. Where else would you find that view? It has to be Ireland. I think of driving out of Shannon, on the left of course, and the signs for Limerick, Ennis, Galway (not all in the same direction). I think of Thoor Ballylee in Gort, Yeats' summer cottage, and the fine introduction that provides

on the first day. I think of the fun city of Galway, the beauty of Connemara. I think of the impressive Cliffs of Moher, the moon-like tapestry of the Burren, the ferry to Kerry. I anticipate the trip to Dingle and the hairpin curves and the views. I think of walking around Dingle seeing familiar faces and friends, heading to the Great Blasket for an adventure, the quaint village of Ballyferriter. I think of great places to eat and relax among friends, whether they be at Lord Baker's or The Old Stone House or Tigh Aine or Adams. There are so many places, I know I can't get to all of them, but I may someday. I think of free time in the late afternoon or evening with so many places to go. I think of spending time with Danny and Maura and Mick and Jim and Mazz and Maureen and Fran and Father Pat and John and Padraig and Micheal and Mags and Pat and Eva. I think of others too numerous to mention,

including my Stradbally friends, even though we won't see them this time unless they come to Dingle like they did last time. I think of being back in a country that is my favorite to visit. I have been blessed to include trips to Ireland on the resume of my life, in fact I've been more than blessed. I'm not sure how I've done it. Fourteen trips including every year from 2001 to 2006. My streak got broken in 2007. But I'm going to start another streak in 2008. I can dream, can't I? I anticipate my trip to Ireland this summer. I'm excited. I'm busy because I'm organizing the trip for many of my friends, but it's a good busy. I have hope for a great 2008. I'll be in Ireland for part of it. When I ask my friend Jim O'Connell of Inch and Dublin, how he's doing, his perennial answer is 'never better'. I know what he means.



Above; Thoor Ballylee, Yeat's summer home in Gort. To the right is a selection from "My House" section of *Meditations in Time of Civil War*.

*An ancient bridge, and a more ancient tower,
A farmhouse that is sheltered by its wall,
An acre of stony ground,
Where the symbolic rose can break in flower,
Old ragged elms, old thorns innumerable,
The sound of the rain or sound
Of every wind that blows:
The stilted water-hen
Crossing stream again
Scared by the splashing of a dozen cows;*

*A winding stair, a chamber arched with stone,
A grey stone fireplace with an open hearth,
A candle and written page.*