

Dear Friendly Sons of St. Patrick,

I would like to sincerely thank you for paying for my airfare and making my trip to Ireland possible. I can truly say that my experience in the Motherland has been life changing. During my first four days, I toured the Dublin and learned of much of the history first hand. I saw St. Patrick's Cathedral, Trinity College, The Book of Kells, St. Stephen's Green, Temple Bar Area. I saw the play, *The Shadow of a Gunman*, at the Abbey Theatre, The National Theatre of Ireland. I explored the historical post office, Grafton Street, and the prison where the Pearse brothers stayed, Kilmainham Gaol. I felt like my orientation in Dublin was the perfect start to my trip in Ireland as I learned so much about the culture and history and explored the capitol of the country.

After my days in Dublin, I traveled to An Cheathrú Rua, aka Carraroe, a Gaeltacht region on a peninsula on the coast of Galway. Here, I stayed with an amazing host family and seven other students. During my intensive three-week course, I felt completely immersed into the culture. Everyone in the area spoke only Irish, including my host family. During my three weeks, I spent seventy-five hours of the time in class studying Irish with native speakers; however, that did not prevent me from exploring the area and spending quality time with my new friends. I still had time to socialize with my host-family and housemates. During the night, we would all sit, study, and talk together. Many nights we went on walks around the beautiful countryside and many beaches (including the famous coral beach, Trá an Dóilin). My school would host cultural nights for us where the students could go to a local pub (teach tábhairne) named Tigh Kitt and listen to authentic Irish singing and music. As an avid Irish dancer, I even danced one night for the crowd at the pub. We also had Céilí nights, learned sean-nós dancing, and learned and sang Irish song.

My school also took trips to teach an Phiarsaigh (Patrick Pearse's cottage) in Rosmuck, Galway, Galway City, and Spiddal, Galway. In addition to these school planned trips, my peers and I also planned trips to the Cliffs of Moher (hailte an mhóthair), Connemara National Park, Kylemore Abbey, Sky Road, Clifton, and Roundstone. Living with an Irish speaking family really opened my eyes to not only the Gaeltacht and their culture but also the serious condition and the threat of extinction that the Irish Language faces. I cannot wait to continue my education of the Irish culture and help promote the language.

After my course, I was able to travel the country for a week and see parts of the North that my own family originates from. I went to Donegal and Meath and traveled up the West Coast.

This trip changed my life forever and will always be thankful for one of the most memorable times of my life. I have not only experienced an amazing culture and a beautiful country but I have made lifelong friends and memories and gotten in touch with my own Irish roots and heritage. Once again, I want to thank the entire society for providing me with the most amazing experience of my life. I will be eternally grateful for your generosity and this exceptionally memorable trip. I have enclosed some pictures inside and I can email more at your request. I can

even make a powerpoint of my trip and make a visit to the headquarters if the Friendly Sons want to hear about it firsthand.

Go raibh míle maith agaibh (a million thank yous),

Catherine M. Hamilton

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