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Guess Who?



Two New Members Will Soon Be Joining the Family!

As most of you already know Nate proposed to Logan last April and of course she said yes. The above picture is from the weekend when he asked her to marry him. They have not set a date as of yet because they have been busy preparing for the next bit of news:

Sometime in mid to late October we will get to meet the latest Riel female to join our family. As you may have guessed, the cover is the first picture of her face. Both Nate and Logan are as happy as can be but when I questioned them on the name, all I got was TBD!

Both Jan and Ed are very excited about their coming grandbaby and can't wait to meet her. I'm sure we will all be getting together real soon to celebrate both of these additions to the family,



The Meehan/Mitchells Descendants Return to the Homeland

By Margaret Riel



The Meehan Family had been planning a trip to Ireland since before the pandemic. On July 16, we started our adventure with a caravan to the airport with Ashely's parents transporting Bud, Margaret, Michael, Ashley, and the two kids, Emily, and Addy. Megan would later join us, several days into the trip.

For the next 10 days, we toured Ireland centering around two amazing cities, Dublin, and Cork. Dublin is full of museums, a castle, a river, and an amazing park with play structures for the kids.



After exploring Dublin, we traveled south to see the Wicklow Mountains, as well as the monastic ruins, a beautiful lake at Glendalough, and the charming city of Kilkenny. The next day, we traveled across Ireland to the west to visit Galway, to see the cliffs of Moher, The Burren National Park, and then drove the “Wild Atlantic Way.”





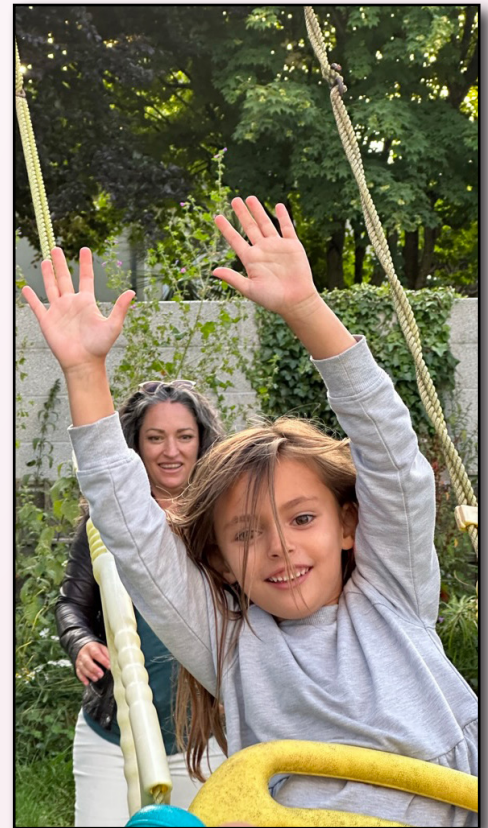
Megan joined us just in time for the move by train to our second home base in Cork. We stayed in a lovely home with lots of bedrooms, including a children's room with books and toys, outside play structures, and, best of all, a chicken coop with 6 hens who supplied us with breakfast each day.

The girls would run out in the morning and check for eggs, and, when we returned home, they would see all the chickens cuddled up in their coop for the night. Addy said the best thing about the trip was the chickens.



From Cork, we traveled around the southern coast. More specifically, the ring of Kerry, the Dingle Peninsula, and then on to the quaint city of Killarney which was the last port of call for the Titanic. We visited castles, forts, monastic ruins, medieval churches and so much more.

No trip to Ireland is complete without going to see the Blarney Castle grounds. And of course, the kissing of the Blarney Stone. To our surprise, we really enjoyed the Blarney Castle and especially the grounds.



What are some of the highlights of the trip?

Blarney Castle, Grounds, and a Blarney Bar

Megan doing a great job of figuring out the bus system, enabled us to take a short city bus ride from our house in Cork, to Blarney Castle and grounds. While we thought of this as a touristy thing to do, it turned out to be one of our favorite outings.

The Castle is a stone marvel, a weathered, medieval fortress that evokes tales of knights, nobles, and ancient rituals. It is a timeless symbol of Irish heritage and architectural grandeur. It dates from around 1446 and is known as a tower house which is a type of fortification built by Gaelic lords between the 14th and 16th centuries. It has 18-foot walls that gradually slope inward as they rise. The ascent up narrow staircases and through dim chambers adds an air of mystique to the experience, culminating in the breathtaking view from the castle's pinnacle.



Once inside the castle (assuming boiling tar was not dumped through the grates, a ploy to keep out unwanted visitors of old) is the continuous climb to the top where the legendary Blarney Stone awaits. Steeped in myth and magic, kissing the stone is believed to give of gift of eloquence and persuasiveness. (Winston Churchill kissed it early in his career.) While there are many myths about the stone's origin, science tells us that it is made of 330-million-year-old limestone local to the south of Ireland.

To kiss the stone, you first had to climb to the top railing around the castle and then lie down on your back on the castle rim walkway, holding on to two vertical handrails as you push your head out of the castle (fortunately, you are looking up, not down), arch your back and kiss the bottom of the wall now above your head. It is a bit of a backbend to get into the right position. A strongman is there to ensure you don't accidentally slide out of the opening as it was a long way down.





But it was not just the castle, but the amazing grounds around the castle we really enjoyed. We explored the serene “Rock Close”, an ancient druidic site where moss-covered rocks and twisting trees create an otherworldly atmosphere. As we meandered through this ethereal landscape, we encountered hidden gems like the Wishing Steps, where wishes are made as you walk backward with your eyes closed. We also passed a playground, the arboretum, and ended in the tranquil Poison Garden, showcasing a curated collection of toxic plants.



Michael and Megan ventured into the town of Blarney to engage in another ancient ritual – watching the sport of hurling. In fact, they found a bar to watch the All-Ireland Senior Hurling Championship Final game. Played for over 3,000 years, hurling is one of the world's oldest sports. Believed to be older than Christianity, it was introduced by the Celtic civilization and became predominant during the Iron Age in medieval Europe. Today, it is still one of the country's most popular games and is played throughout the world often by Irish immigrants.



Bog Bodies at the National Museum of Ireland in Dublin

Ireland has many innovative and impressive museums, as well as, preserved ruins, churches, and castles to help us understand the past. However, the bog bodies displayed at the National Museum of Ireland-Archeology were something we can honestly say we had never seen before. Peat bogs are amazingly and uniquely effective in preserving books, gold, and, occasionally, human bodies, with hair, skin, hands, internal organs, and other soft tissue still intact. Peat bogs cover about 15% of the Island. Bog people have been dated back to as early as 8000 B.C. (and as recently as World War II). The best example was Tashel man, from 2000 BC.

Emily hoped she would not have nightmares with bog people in them. To mess with the girls sleep a bit more, we learned that an Irish wake was not always to memorialize the dead. In the past, the Irish used pewter mugs to drink stout which led to lead poisoning, sometimes inducing a sleep so deep that it looked like death. Apparently, a few buried people woke up and clawed their way out of their graves. Not understanding the cause, the Irish began the process of holding an Irish wake for three days, after which time they gave up waiting for the “wake” and buried the body.



MAKING A MUMMY

Though the bog bodies varied by country, culture and era, they were often buried in the same way

Raised bog
The best preserved bodies were all found in raised bogs, which form in basins where poor drainage leaves the ground waterlogged and slows plant decay. A raised bog contains few minerals and very little oxygen.

Natural preservatives
Peat comprises decaying pollen and vegetation - mainly sphagnum moss - when bog bodies are found. The peat releases an acid similar to vinegar that pickles the skin like leather and dyes the hair ginger.

Cold conditions
The mummies would have had to have been placed in the water during winter or early spring when the bog was coldest to refrigerate the body and prevent it from decaying.

Handled with care
Despite having been brutally murdered, bog bodies often show signs of being delicately placed. Tollund Man was found in a fetal position with his eyes and mouth deliberately closed after his death.

Secured in place
Bodies were often held down by rocks or with sharpened branches driven into the peat, likely to prevent the corpses from floating back to the surface.

Wearing a noose
Elling Woman and Tollund Man were hanged, the ropes still around their necks in death. The Brinsford Man was hanged or strangled with a rope noose. Yfe Girl was strangled with a woollen belt.

Kilmacduagh Monastery and Cliffs of Moher

We visited the Kilmacduagh Monastery, a 1000-year-old ruin and graveyard, with a 12th-century Round Tower located among this abundance of early Christian buildings dating back to the 11th century.

The Churches are without roofs because of the destruction of Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658). He was the fanatical and puritanical Lord Protector of England, who in 1649 led a most vicious genocidal assault on Ireland.

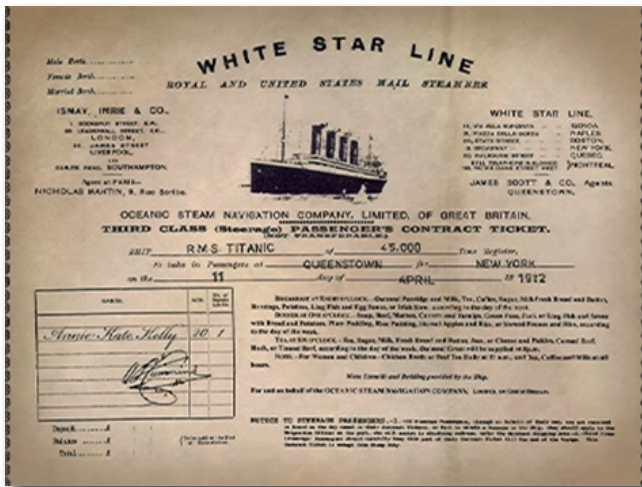
His campaign was intended to wipe out the Catholic religion and consolidate English rule in Ireland. He ordered the confiscation and destruction of food supplies, leading to the death from starvation, of about 20 percent of the Irish population. He destroyed the monasteries by removing their roofs and letting the weather destroy the contents.



Then we headed for the Cliffs of Moher which included a tower, that overlooked the sea, and a small museum. We hiked along the cliff face, saw birds soaring, and heard the full force of the Atlantic Ocean. We also visited the Cliffs of Moher Visitor Centre.



The Titanic Museum



At the Titanic Museum, on our entrance ticket was the name of a passenger from the last manifest of the Titanic. We stood on the balcony that looked at the images of the passengers who gathered at this very spot for their last pictures waiting to be ferried to the Titanic.

At the end of the museum experience, we could use the computers to look up the history of the person on our tickets. Bud was the only first-class passenger. The only survivors from our group were Ashley and the children who ended up in the same lifeboat.



Kinsale and Charles Fort

Overlooking Kinsale harbor, Charles Fort -- of British construction- was built in 1677, it is star-shaped, and at 12-acre it is the largest military fortress in Ireland. It has a long history and was well preserved over the centuries. The kids loved the pirate trail. They were challenged to find the 8 pirates who were hiding in doorways, windows, in or behind buildings and on benches. (The pirates were flyers describing them hidden throughout the fort). They had fun hunting down the pirates.

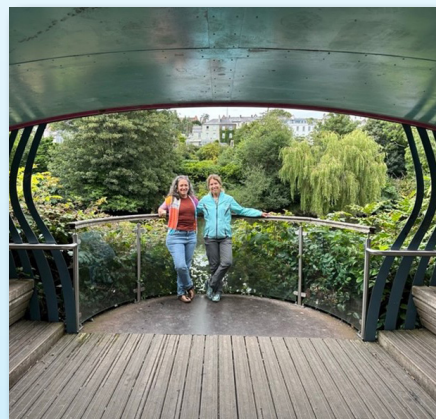


Food and Fun

While the adults reflected on memorable meals, all the kids talked about was the gelato pink palace in Dublin; thus, proving their link to the Riel clan. We seemed to find our way there almost every day while we were in Dublin. Megan also carried on the tradition even after we left.

In Cork we visited a famous open market filled with every form of food. We loaded up on cheeses, olives, fresh bread and fruit, and had a great lunch. Then the kids played while the adults explored the river and park.

On our last night in Cork, we went to the Hysterical Histories Cork Dinner Theatre. Three very expressive women regaled us with the complete history of Ireland with plenty of drama and laughs. The kids loved it. They were seated up front and were treated as special guests. They even got to have their heads on a spike.



Ireland -language and beliefs

Tour guides taught us some Irish language. It turns out that Craic (Crack) is a popular Irish term meaning 'having a good time' or 'having a laugh.' It is used in social situations such as drinking at the pub. Someone might say 'What's the craic?' meaning 'How are you?' or 'What's happening?' or one might say that trip or that person is craic meaning a good time or a fun person. We also learned that slainte (SLAHN-cha) is the word used for toasting with a pint which is similar to "salud" (Spanish) both meaning healthy or safe. However, Emily was the only one who could remember it.

Stories of the fairies captivated us. These are not Hollywood fairies but rather the wee folk (including leprechauns) that legend has it, lived on the land before the Celts came and pushed them underground. There are countless stories of humans seeing fairies, interacting with them or even visits to the fairy world. Even today there are people who claim to have seen fairies. Apparently, if you see a fairy, it is a warning that someone in your family will soon die. No one really wants to see a fairy. If you ask an Irish person if they believe in fairies today, they will smile and say it is a wee bit of fun. However, it is another matter if you want to interfere or harm a hawthorn or "Fairy Tree." Hawthorns are a common, wild shrub that grows in hedgerows all over Ireland.

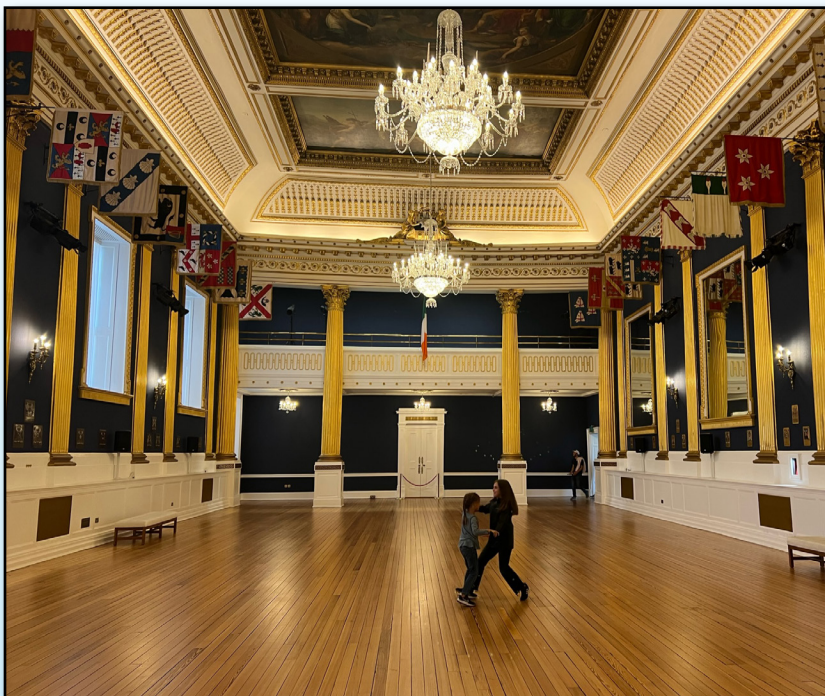
We drove by a very special Fairy tree in County Clare on the west coast. In 1999, a motorway was planned by the local Council. Locals were up in arms. Why was this? They believed that a large hawthorn Fairy Tree along its planned route was the meeting point for clans of opposing fairies. A local folklorist headed up the campaign. He warned them that if they bulldoze the bush to make way for a planned highway bypass, the fairies will curse the road and all who use it. The fairies would make brakes fail and cars crash, to wreak the kind of mischief fairies are famous for when they are angry, (which is often). After 10 months of heated debate, the council allocated more than 3 million Euros to move the highway away from the fairy tree. This story can be found in the New York Times - June 15, 1999.

We heard a similar story about a new airport runway that was to be built where a fairy tree existed. No one could be found who would risk the bad luck of removing the fairy tree and in the end, the runway was moved to a new location at great expense.



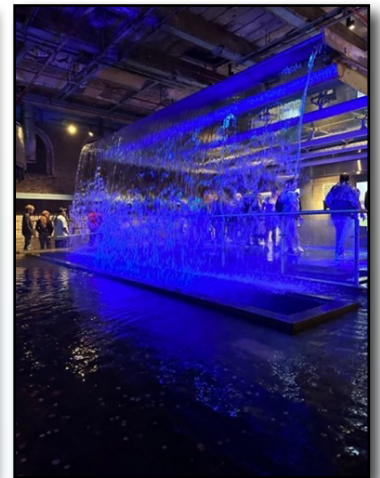
Leprechaun Palace

We drove through the first Hollywood (Irish: Cillín Chaoimhín, meaning 'Kevin's small church'), a village in west County Wicklow, we learned that it was the miners from Hollywood who heard about the gold rush in California and left home to settle in Southern California. They called their new community Hollywood after their mining village in Ireland.



Our last tour- The Guinness Storehouse

The visit began at the foot of a giant beer glass in the Atrium. We watched the process, from harvesting grain to the selection of water to the science of fermentation. In the Cooperage and Transportation section we learned more about this craft and saw barrels being formed by a master cooper. The displays showed how Guinness is distributed around the world. Guinness Ambassadors showed us the right way to pour a beer (so there is not too much froth and no bubbles). There was also a great nonalcoholic version that was quite tasty for those who thought 2:00pm was too early to start drinking.



The Future

Before we left Ireland, we discovered two photos that suggest that Michael Mehan and Ashley MacMitchell were destined to find each other. MacMitchell was originally Mitchell and Mehan was originally Meehan. In the first picture, you see that their clans and coat of arms were displayed side-by-side. We learned the Mitchell comes from French and means “of Michael.” And the second sign was found in the Guinness Storehouse. Michael Ash was inscribed in tall letters on this barrel. (Michael Ash figured out how to draft a perfect pint of Guinness.) So, there you have it. A match made in Ireland- raise a pint of Guinness and toast families!





Keeping up with the Halls

By Birdy Hartman-Hall

This is the summer of national treasures. First, we went to Yellowstone with the family (which Uncle Bob so beautifully outlined in our last family newsletter), and now we are in Deadwood, South Dakota. Home of famous outlaws like Wild Bill Hickok and Calamity Jane. It was a lawless city back in the day, and gun fights could happen on a dime. The famous Lawman, James “Wild Bill” Hickok was shot while gambling at the Saloon #10 In Deadwood. His shooter, Jack McCall, was able to get away with the shooting by claiming that Hickok had murdered his brother. They do a touristy reenactment of a gunfight in the middle of the old town three times a day. We enjoyed watching it but I was happy that I was never alive during the cowboy days.

The real thrill for me was our dinner in Custer State Park and then our drive to see Mr. Rushmore. I got chills when I spied the mountain. Such a work of art in the middle of absolutely nowhere. I can’t believe that an artist (Gutzon Borglum) could carve such a creation out of rocks while dangling off the side of a cliff so high, in the year 1927. No computers or fine machinery to aid in this task. Each president’s face is 60 feet high carved out of solid granite. It took him 13 years to accomplish this feat and for me, it was well worth the trip. The way he used shadows to create color and definition of the faces was incredible. I was just in awe! If you have this on your bucket list, I would say go for it! You won’t be disappointed.





Our group had planned to use the amphitheater for a presentation and salute to a retiring board member as a close to our evening visits. As Lyle got up to say his appreciation speech, a bolt of lightning lit up the sky. This made us all jump and the ceremony increased in speed to get it done before the rain would spoil our fun. We were disappointed because there is a lightening ceremony each night which they had to cancel because of the severe storm that was approaching. The news had said that there was a possibility of hail, and no one wanted to be caught in that kind of weather. As we drove away, we were treated to some amazing streaks of lightning, but thankfully, no hail followed us down the mountains.



The next day, Lyle's meetings ended early. So, we got to enjoy the Black Hills mountains and went out for some hikes. We saw streams, high granite cliffs, waterfalls, flowers, and an eagle's nest thanks to Lyle's sharp eyes. The nest contained two baby eaglets eagerly awaiting their mother's return. Lyle pulled out his binoculars and we had a Birds-eye view of the pair. It was a lovely day.



Our final day was spent with Birdy shopping around the old town and enjoying her book. We took the uphill, up 119 stairs, hike to visit the famous graveyard for the outlaws of Deadwood. It was really a very pretty area with a lookout for the entire city. Well worth the visit.



We had quite a few lovely dinners with friends from the AFSA association. Many of whom remember Francie and speak so kindly of her. It was a very nice trip, and I will cherish the memories.

FAMILY

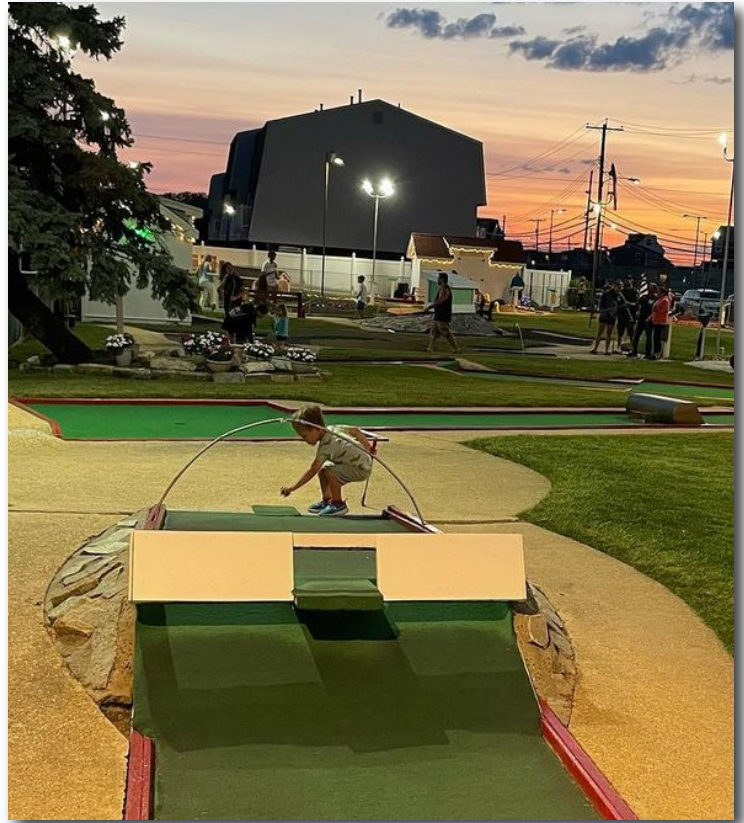
SHORTS



Listy and Bob are having a wonderful time in Breckenridge, Colorado with Holly and Rex! Hiking, shopping, playing around, and relaxing in the mountains! I'm sure Listy will be providing a full article for next month's edition.



Welcome to the family little guy. You're perfect. Our little 'discount puppy' because of a little black in his coat from some somatic mutations (happens a lot more than people think). But the very best temperament and a great bloodline. His name is Walt, and he will keep Chloe (our other dog) company for years to come!



Bryce is introducing the lil' dude (Kieran) to a lifetime of frustration by teaching him the game of Golf. As I recall Brett and Bryce were about the same age when they started to play!

