

# Vancouver & New York

*“A man travels the world in search of what he needs, and returns home to find it”*

GEORGE MOORE

*Sarah Commiskey writes about her summer travels*

I RECENTLY RETURNED home to North Leitrim after spending the summer travelling the West coast of Canada and visiting some family in New York. Before I left, I, like thousands of others who were leaving Ireland behind for the summer, was excited to see what the world had to offer!

My first port of call was Vancouver, which was to serve as my base for most of the summer. What a beautiful city! The weather was glorious and allowed me to explore some of the many beaches, lakes and mountains that Canada has to offer. The people were incredibly friendly, polite and welcoming. Most were delighted to hear an Irish accent and thrilled that so many young people had chosen to come to Canada for the summer. While in Canada I visited Whistler, a beautiful mountain resort that in the winter attracts snow sports enthusiasts and amateurs alike, and in the summer attracts tourists like myself that wish to explore the multiple lakes and tracks that the area has to offer. I also briefly visited Vancouver Island, about two hours from the city. Again, the island is incredibly picturesque. While I was only there for a short time, it was great to admire the stunning landscape and coastline, especially from ten thousand feet above sea level when I jumped out of an aeroplane and experienced something that can never be paralleled! I was free falling for around forty seconds and then my instructor opened the parachute and I was floating around the sky for a further ten minutes. The sky-dive was undoubtedly the highlight of my summer.

Despite the friendly atmosphere on offer, and the endless activities to keep me enter-

tained, I found myself longing for home. Especially for the first two weeks, I was homesick for my family, my friends, my home and everything that I had left behind. I discovered life abroad isn't all it's cracked up to be. The lifestyle was great—I was going to the beach every day after work, hadn't seen rain in weeks and was generally enjoying the laid back attitude that exists in Canada. Despite this I longed for the familiarity of home—being able to wave at a friendly neighbour when I drove past them on the road, my local shopkeeper knowing me by name when I went in to get a few bits for my grandmother, socialising with friends and knowing I could call my Dad for a lift home. These little perks are something we take for granted while at home, and miss dearly while away.

For the last week of my summer abroad, I visited some family in the New York/New Jersey area. I had a fantastic time, and am incredibly fortunate to have such welcoming cousins the other side of the Atlantic.

While in New York, one of my cousins took the time to show me around downtown Manhattan. He is a born and bred New Yorker and told me many stories—including about watching the towers fall sixteen years ago on the saddest day the city has ever witnessed and of the madness that was Wall Street in the nineties. However, my favourite tale was one of when he visited North Leitrim, the home of his maternal Grandparents in the seventies. He described the time as his favourite holiday, and proclaimed his longing to return in the near future with his children.

That same day we visited a Tenement

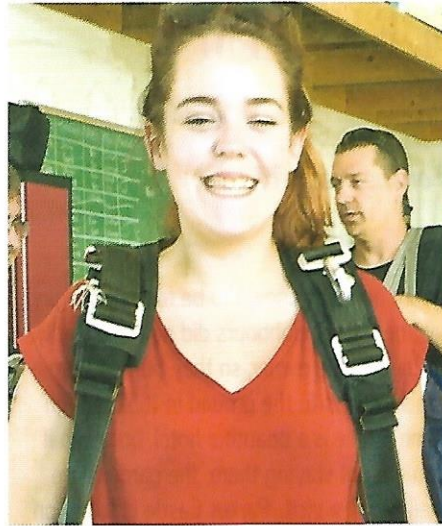
museum along Manhattan's Lower East Side. We chose to do the Irish Immigrants tour, and heard the story of a couple who had, like many others, left Ireland for America during the late 1800s. The apartment was refurbished to replicate what it was like when the couple and their family lived there. Our tour guide described the harsh conditions, tough work and discrimination that these Irish immigrants faced. The couple that lived in that particular apartment sadly lost an infant daughter and had to borrow money from a corrupt politician just to hold her funeral.

All of this got me thinking about my grand-aunts and uncles who left Ireland almost a hundred years ago to seek a better life. I decided to take a trip to Ellis Island, which would have been their first port of call upon landing in America. My granddad's eldest sister—Bridget Agnes—was only nineteen when she left her family and home behind in 1921. Two years younger than I am now. When I stepped off the boat and onto Ellis Island, I was struck by how much the building itself looked like a prison. Being so young, in a foreign country, never knowing if she'd get to return home ever again—she must have been terrified. In modern times we really are blessed in that home is never more than a phone call away. All summer I was easily able to keep contact with my family and friends using Facebook, Snapchat and Whatsapp—but back then their contact would have been extremely limited. I know I felt lonesome when I arrived in Vancouver, but I was able to ring home immediately for reassurance. How did Bridget Agnes, and the thousands

of others like her, feel?

I was struck by the pride my cousins had in their Irish heritage. Despite being the third generation to be born in America, my younger cousins are heavily involved in Irish music, dance and culture. In one of their homes, a map of Ireland is proudly displayed alongside a photo of Glencar Waterfall. It's nice to know that despite being born and raised in a foreign land, people of Irish heritage are still proud of their roots. It's something that I think Irish people who are lucky enough to call Ireland their permanent home do not cherish as much—a pride and love for their homeland. Maybe you have to leave to truly appreciate what you're returning to. It's only now that I realise how much I love my home county—I am speaking from a slightly biased point of view, but I think Leitrim holds something particularly special.

The sense of joy I felt when my plane



■ Sarah Comiskey

landed is something I cannot describe.

I had a great summer—don't get me wrong, I will probably never have another summer like it—but coming through arrivals in Dublin airport and seeing my Mum and Dad waiting for me made me realise that no matter how far I go, I will always return home.

It's easy to see what inspired the committee to begin *The Leitrim Guardian* fifty years ago. Irish descendants all around the world long to retain connections to the "Old Country" as I heard it referred to. I think it's important for Leitrim in particular to remain in contact with our diaspora, whether they are in Limerick or Longford, America or Argentina. I always admired the work of *The Leitrim Guardian*. It always played a big role in our home when I was growing up, especially during the years that my uncle Gerard, was the publication's longest serving editor.

*G K Chesterton was packing his bags for a world trip at his home in Battersea... a friend came in and asked him where he was going. 'I am going', G K replied 'to see Battersea'*

## CHILDHOOD MEMORIES FROM CARRICK-ON-SHANNON, 1960s

*Seamus Hanney*

### Johnny Feely and the Russian Connection

It's Friday evening and I'm doing my lessons at the kitchen table. Bro. Thaddeus said he will be giving us a test before Christmas so we should study hard before that. The radio is on and Philip Green is talking about soccer. Suddenly he is interrupted and the announcer says 'President Kennedy has been assassinated'. My father looks up from the newspaper and slowly repeats the words 'Kennedy has been assassinated'. Mrs Feely says "Lord have mercy on his soul" when I call to her house. She calls Johnny, who is upstairs studying. Johnny is older than me and when he comes down and says 'the Russians could be involved' I think Johnny knows a lot more about the world than I do.

### A Slice of Life

A big truck turned slowly on the square yesterday and moved down the road. It had a machine on the back. We all ran out to see what was happening. The driver pulled up at Carthy's bakery and Tommy Carthy came out to speak to him. Johnny McKeown was by Tommy's side. The machine was lowered to the ground and all the time Johnny was saying 'stand back there now stand back'. We moved back a few steps and then forward again. Someone asked what it was but Johnny just said 'never mind what it is, just stand back'. Then I heard Mick O'Rourke saying to Tommy 'God Tommy will this be the end of the pan loaf'. 'I don't think so Mick but the sliced bread is all the go now'