

# LOVE LANDED ME IN LOVELY LEITRIM

Betsy Hauge

SOUNDS LIKE a lot of Blarney, doesn't it? Well, the Blarney stone was involved... but that's later.

I was 50 years old. Widowed at 41, and then divorced some years later from a rebound marriage. Just beginning to think I might be willing to date again after having sworn off men for a good while. Late August 2006 found me hiking in a Wilderness area in Oregon with a friend I'd made through my late husband's sister. My ears perked up when she suddenly said I should meet her brother, Joe Hart, a retired Fire Chief. He was sounding pretty terrific until she said, "He lives in Ireland. He moved there a year and half ago". I thought, "Well, Forget about that!"

*The adventures of Betsy and Joe  
Got a start that was anything but slow  
The e-net lines sang  
Their telephones rang  
No tellin' where this story will go  
Joe*

Now, 7 years later, I am married to him and I am living in Ballinamore, County Lovely Leitrim, Republic of Ireland...IRELAND... A place most Americans dream of as a magical holiday destination.

So how did I make the leap? I was contemplating an invitation from this friendly unknown man to

visit Ireland when not just one, but two, four leaf clovers appeared beneath my feet. They were the first I'd ever seen in my life.

"Has to be a sign", I thought. So I accepted. By then, we'd corresponded by email and phone for only a few weeks. We'd already found lots in common: love of travel and adventure, same primary school in America, similar family & work backgrounds, and love of the outdoors. What the heck! I had enough frequent flyer miles for a return ticket that cost only \$43 dollars in taxes. Not too risky. Just in case, however, I bought the Lonely Planet Travel Guide of Ireland. I figured if things flopped, I could head off on my own and finally see the land of green and rainbows and pots of gold and fairy folk that had been on my 'Wish List For Travels' for some years.

"Tours with A Hart" was the title of the itinerary emailed to me by Chief, and only, tour guide, Joe Hart. It promised fun and adventure; however, there were a few prerequisites. I had to learn the words and tunes to "Sweet Molly Malone" and "Danny Boy", which Joe made me practice on the phone before I left America. He also warned me that I had to have a Limerick prepared for each of our proposed destinations. This

turned into a collaborating competition, and between us, we wrote a saga of 80 limericks. Here's part of the story.

*The first day to Temple Bar they went  
Betsy'd traveled far and was spent  
After one glass of Bailey's  
She was spinning like Hailey's  
And Joe carried her home, like a gent  
Betsy*

*They took a stroll to Trinity College  
Hoping to have some fun and gain a  
little knowledge  
They saw the Book of Kells  
And listened to the campus bells  
Then embraced along the Liffey's edge  
Joe*

*They began a hike 'round Glendalough  
Three hours was the plan for the walk  
I have heard it said  
Shoulda turned right to St Kevin's bed  
Instead they ended up in Dundalk  
Joe*

*Blarney Castle has its famous stone  
You kiss it from a position inverse of  
prone  
Betsy gave it a peck  
And now she's a wreck  
She's forgotten all the French she's  
ever known  
Joe*

*In Cork, Joe and Betsy saw fountains,  
Further North, they climbed up the  
mountains.  
They scrambled up and down  
With nary a frown.  
Then lunched on potatoes au gratins  
Betsy*

*Cork is a big city for sure  
For many it holds an allure  
But after peace far and wide  
In the countryside  
The congestion can be hard to endure  
Joe*

*Joe and Betsy were in Dungannon  
Where they ran into a talking Salmon  
He gave them a tour,  
Including the sewer  
Then sent them to swim in the Shan-  
non  
Betsy*

*They rode through the Gap of Dunloe  
Side by side on bikes they did go  
They lingered a while  
Enjoying mile after mile  
'Til the clouds in the West started to  
glow  
Joe*

*Joe and Betsy went to Glengariff  
By some spies they were forced off a  
cliff  
Hand in hand, headed down  
They spun round and round  
Joe said, "Betsy, Let's head for that  
skiff"  
Betsy*

*A couple was drinking some Guinness  
Discussing physical fitness  
He asked "Do you Run?"  
She said "just for fun"  
So he chased her clear to Dunmanus  
Betsy*

*We stopped for the day in Dingle  
Some Guinness made our toes tingle  
A couple of pints, no more  
We headed for the door  
And both thought we saw ol' Kris  
Kringle  
Joe*

*We walked out on the Cliffs of Moher  
Cold and wet, unfit even for a mean cur  
Went back to McCliskey's  
Sipped a couple of hot whiskeys  
With backs to the fire we started to  
purr  
Joe*

*We got lost on our hike in the Burren  
'Til we ran into an old man named  
Curran  
He saved the day  
By pointing the way  
Then went back to some mash he was  
stirrin'*

*Joe  
Joe and Betsy hiked up Croagh Patrick  
Where Joe taught her a nifty Hat Trick  
He threw it up high  
With a twinkle in his eye  
But it landed on her head like a brick  
Betsy*

*They hiked to Slieve League's top  
Up and across One Man's Pass with a  
skip and a hop  
When they reached the summit  
They were careful not to plummet  
Although, falling for each other they  
could not stop  
Joe*

*On a trip thru green Ireland they went  
All their cash Joe and Betsy had spent  
For a moment they feared  
But then what appeared?  
Rainbow's End. Pot of Gold. Heaven  
sent.  
Betsy*

You can imagine by now, Joe might be regretting having insisted I kiss the Blarney stone. (He should have done it himself in self defense!) I eventually realized that some of the tour was really a test: like climbing Croagh Patrick, and singing "Sweet Molly Malone" in public on the footpath in front of her statue in Dublin. I must have passed, and so did he, because we were married two years later and set up house in Ballinamore because of Joe's ancestry in North Leitrim and Cavan.

*They walked upon many a strand  
Preferring to go hand in hand  
In all kinds of weather  
On sand and in heather  
A life together they planned  
Joe and Betsy*

Never could I have imagined the richness our life would hold in County Leitrim. We initially volunteered as cooks and grocery shoppers for Jampa Ling Buddhist Centre in nearby Bawnboy. We also joined Civil Defence, where my background as a doctor and Joe's as a fireman and emergency medical technician led us to be volunteer casualty instructors and part of the ambulance crew. Because of this work, we have met lovely people from all walks of life and all parts of the county. Our classes have included librarians, road and water crews, artists, administrators, farmers, secondary school students, teachers, engineers, the fire brigade, traffic wardens, and more. We have seen an incredible number of activities available in Leitrim: agricultural shows, road races, drama festivals, horse races and shows, vintage car shows, storytelling and music festivals, table quizzes, rowing competitions on the Shannon, reading, writing, and film making groups, international bike races and charity rides and runs, GAA games, triathlons, and freezing Christmas swims.

We have hiked the hills, biked the beautiful roads, kayaked on the many lovely lakes and canals of Leitrim. We found a place with friendly folks all around us and incredible natural beauty. So it's no Blarney to tell you that two four leaf clovers steered me to the veritable land of rainbows with pots of gold—the people—in County Leitrim, and to the love of my life, Joe Hart.