



European Tour - Dublin

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Corky's great (FREE) Irish heart!

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The wipers were still running and there was a bitterly cold wind blowing when we drove onto the ferry at Hollyhead, the north-western tip of Wales, bound for Dublin

"Not exactly nice weather out there is it... looks like rough crossing", I said. "Oh not at all, it'll be fine once we get outside", said one of the two men dressed in white overalls smudged with black who stepped into the elevator at the car deck level with me. As I started to smile upon hearing the lovely lilt of an Irish voice for the first time on this trip, the other Engineer turned with a droll look at his mate and said, "You're a great kidder Mike."

The crossing of the Irish Sea takes about 3 1/2 hours on an average (nasty) day. It took a bit more than 4 hours this time. The sea reminded me of a rough day in Johnstone Strait, with maybe 3 metre waves cresting white with blowing spray, our vessel pitching and rolling and occasionally shuddering with the impact of an especially big one. The crew had laid out two bags on each table, and there was an ugly smell in the bathroom. Perversely perhaps, I actually enjoy this kind of ocean, and after an hour, when the sky lightened and the sun came out, it was altogether quite lovely. As we drove off the ferry into Dublin the sun was setting orange amidst thinly scattered puffy white clouds, making us feel entirely hopeful about the day to come. Half an hour later, directed by Brendan Price (of the Irish Seal Sanctuary) via mobile phone, our Big Pink Bus pulled into our digs for the night. No garbage dump this time. We drove through the splendid 120 hectare grounds of the old Guinness estate, now a park, and wheeled into the Stables courtyard, now the Parks Works HQ of the Corporation of Dublin. Nice welcome. Bigger than most mansions, the Guinness Stables was impressive even in the half light, with its red brick walls and tall tower silhouetted against the darkening sky. Mick, our host, showed us the shower & toilets, gave us a key to the big wrought iron gates, and directed us to Dollymount House, five minutes walk away, for maybe food, definitely beer. What is it about 'five minutes away' walks? The last one, in London, took fifteen, I swear this one was even longer, me trudging along well behind the others, heavy briefcase in hand, just in case I can connect (to my email). The Dollymount was a great introduction to Ireland. About done in after the walk, I rested on a cushioned bench while Martina ordered a round of pints and Klaus and Uli scouted the spacious room looking for a spot to perch a dozen weary bodies. Nearby me, sat a tiny old man with a long white beard. He was leaning forward onto the table, clutching an almost empty pint glass of draft Guinness within his two hands. Another pint, with a full inch of white froth at the top, waited alongside. The old fellow was engaged in an intense conversation with another man seated across from him. I tried to tune in, but I couldn't understand a word that was being said. Soon, we were cozily seated in a far corner with Lile ('Leela') and John, Lisa and Mario, and Paddy. These kind folk, some of our hosts, I could understand perfectly. I don't know what it is about Irish voices, but I just love listening to them. And I loved what these bright, cheerful, smiling people had to say. Lile is an elementary school teacher. All her kids are totally into Corky and know every detail of her story... and they're no puppets either. A few nights ago they'd seen Jay Leno doing something idiotic on his Late Night show... pretending to give Shamu orders while a Sea World orca performed the usual silly tricks on a big tv screen. The kids had been outraged, and next day they insisted (without a word from an adult) on writing letters to Jay Leno, telling him what they thought about his cheap stunt... that Shamu is a stage name, that one of Sea World's orca captives is Corky, that she has a family in the ocean, and that she needs to be home with her mum. Probably by now, 30 very direct letters from young Irish kids have landed on Jay Leno's desk. I guess we don't need to hold our breath waiting to hear if he responds, but who knows, he just might... and he might even think first. Anyway, it was great to meet some of Corky's Irish allies at last, and to understand something of the depth of feeling the kids of Ireland have for Corky, and the commitment they have to seeing her free. The day to come was to prove these facts... beyond any shadow of doubt.

OUR LAST DAY dawned clear, and cold. There wasn't a cloud to be seen in the morning sky, and when the sun rose it didn't even take the edge off the chill air. All things considered... OK! We drove out of the Stables before the workers arrived for their day, and relaxed in the park while we waited for a call to confirm my interview on a morning talk radio show. The taxi driver who took me into town was a friendly chatty man of 50 named Joe Traynor. He'd seen Jay Leno's idiocy too... just happened to be watching the Tonight Show, though he rarely does so... and he enjoyed the story of the kids who'd fired off letters in response. "The thing about kids is they tell you straight what's on their mind; when you get older you think too much about how people are going to take what you say", he says, and I agree. We had a few good laughs about Budweiser & real beer before he dropped me off at Radio Ireland, encouraging me with how big the audience of the Pat Kenny Show is... just about everyone in Ireland with a radio should be listening. It turned out that Tuesday was a busy morning on the show, with heated political stuff and a lengthy debate between a geneticist and a preacher about proof of Evolution claimed

in a newly published study. In between, there was an unexpected conversation with a billiards champion that took up more time. In the end, my scheduled 12 minutes on air became the last 5 minutes of the show. Pat Kenny was great, keeping one eye on the second hand while he read the promo for our event on the beach that afternoon, and then took me rapidly through Corky's story, the campaign to free her, the GREAT BANNER, and the enthusiasm of Irish kids for Corky. He even got asked me about our BUD'S OUT UNTIL CORKY'S OUT slogan, giving me an opportunity to mention the terrible beer that Sea World's owner makes, and our campaign to get people to stop drinking it until Corky makes it home again. Altogether, it was a pretty nice way to start the day. Brendan, who'd been listening, was apparently very pleased with what Pat Kenny had done for Corky in a few short minutes. On the ride back to the BPB, another cheerful taxi driver offered his opinion that it shouldn't take much to get Irish people to stop drinking Budweiser beer to help Corky. I told him the story my encounter with a Budweiser drinker on the Channel ferry coming across from Calais. I'd happened to walk up to the bar to order a pint of draft Heineken and stopped alongside a thirtyish fellow waiting for his order. Of course, it was a bottle of Budweiser. The bartender turned away to make change. I couldn't help myself. "Excuse me, would you mind telling me why you ordered that beer?" I asked. "Well, I don't know really", he said, "Why do you ask?" I explained. "Well, in the first place it's one of the world's worst beers, and in the second place the company that makes it kills whales." He looked a bit shocked, so I said "I'm sorry if I've just spoiled your drink, but I couldn't help myself." "Oh it's ok", he says. "Thanks. I'll tell my mates about it too." And he wandered off. My Dublin taxi driver thought this was great, and I suspect he'll pass it on as well.

Back at the BPB, we headed for the beach in glorious sunshine, though there were now some darkish clouds in the sky as well. After a slow, torturous, drive along a tiny roadway that ran beside a golf course (and more admiration for Pete's driving skills) we arrived at our spot and drove out onto the edge of the beach. The long expanse of sand that is Dollymound beach stretched into the distance. GREAT. We stepped out into a cool, brisk breeze coming off the land, and started unloading. This time, we were determined to put out every section of CORKY'S FREEDOM BANNER. I can tell you, there's a LOT of cloth in that FABULOUS work of kids' art. In Zurich I'd had a chance to stroll around a lot of it, admiring all kinds of patches I'd never seen before. This time, I wanted to see it ALL. So we hauled everything we'd been using out of the BPB, stripping the wooden poles off because the kids wanted to hold the BANNER in their hands. Then we opened the last boxes that had been stored in the trailer. One by one we piled each section up, with an end on top, so they would be easy to pick up and carry when the kids arrived. Soon, a big area of sand beside the BPB was full of mounds of cloth, READY in plenty of time for the kids. Pete busied himself as usual, draping the top level of the BPB with CORKY'S GREAT BANNER. Our BPB looked SPLENDID, standing tall against the white sand and blue sky. The first bus arrived... big kids from a high school. We handed out red FREE CORKY! hats and white FREE CORKY! t-shirts and asked them to help organise the littler kids as they arrived. Niki's phone rang. It was another Dublin radio station wanting to do a live interview with me. Another plug for our event and for Corky. GREAT. Another hit on BUDWEISER, THE WORLD'S WORST BEER ("You won't have too much trouble convincing people in Ireland about that", said the host after he'd stopped chuckling). GREAT. Niki's phone rang again. This time it was a radio station in Brussels wanting to know what was happening in Dublin. Another blow struck for Corky's freedom. GREAT. The first bus loads of little kids arrived, and soon there was a sea of red FREE CORKY! hats milling about. We wanted to wait longer though, until there were enough kids present (& adults too) to pick up every section and carry the whole GREAT BANNER at once down along the beach. To fill the time, Niki asked me to speak to the kids through a megaphone. Sure, I agreed, but I needed a couple of minutes to finish fussing with a few last bits of BANNER. As I explained that job to a newly arrived adult, I felt the wind pick up a notch, and I LOOKED UP AT THE SKY.

We were still bathed in bright sunshine, but coming towards us, FAST, was the biggest blackest meanest looking cloud I've seen in a long time. OOPS. If only we'd done this in the morning, I thought, instantly feeling more than a little dismayed. Within about a minute the first big, cold, spots of rain hit hard, carried by a fierce wind which was picking up speed fast. Then THE SKY HURLED HAIL at us, and as many kids as could scurried into the shelter of the BPB or crowded against its lee side. Some of them were protected by our great inflated Orca for a bit, but we soon realised she needed deflating, lest she fly away. Pete did that. A quick debate ensued. WHAT TO DO? This time I was for holding fast and toughing the squall out, come what may, but wiser heads (pointing out how heavy a really wet BANNER section would be to little kids) prevailed, and we quickly picked up our neatly arranged piles of cloth and tossed them onto ONE GREAT PILE. I hunted down the megaphone and enticed the kids into gathering around me for a chat about orcas and Corky. It was still hailing hard. I stood surrounded by a sea of red peaked caps. The wearers were all so much smaller than me that it felt a bit like being up on that soapbox in Hyde Park a couple of days earlier. But this audience was much, much better. After a few minutes, it stopped hailing. A short time after, the sky was bright blue again and we stood in sunshine as I answered questions, all of them pertinent and perceptive. Eventually, most of my audience drifted away. I found out later than one of the most persistent questioners had been a girl who'd played the role of August Busch in a school play about Corky's life. Tough job. Tough kid. OK.

We decided to GO FOR IT with the kids on hand... maybe 100 by then. Niki gave them a short speech of thanks and Martina gave them instructions. They quickly organised themselves into groups of five. Just as quickly, we piled sections of the BANNER into waiting arms that trundled off onto the beach. More kids and adults were arriving in little groups all the time, then someone called out "Here comes another hundred and fifty", and I knew WE COULD DO IT. The whole scene suddenly became AMAZING. I stopped helping hand out sections and went off to watch the scene & take photos. The beach was alive with groups of kids holding on to sections of THE GREAT BANNER TO FREE CORKY! Each one, held onto firmly by five kids, was filled with the wind like a great kite wanting to fly away. And, back lit by the bright sun, each one was ablaze with colours. CORKY'S GREAT BANNER WAS ALIVE, weaving and dancing down the beach. It was altogether an INCREDIBLE scene, MOVING and SPECTACULAR, with sections of BANNER already starting to disappear along the distant length of the beach, and the kids all having FUN. Beyond, lay the sea... and the way to FREEDOM FOR CORKY.

If I'd stopped to think about what it all meant, and what the kids of Ireland were doing for Corky in that moment, I'd have probably found my cheeks suddenly wet. But it wasn't a time for thought, just for FEELING GREAT... and experiencing the GREAT moment. Besides, the wind was soon picking up again, and it became clear that some of the kids were having trouble controlling their sections. We stopped handing out new sections just before the great pile was empty, and directed newcomers into action as reinforcements. I kept glancing at the sky, hoping against hope that things would stay as they were. But the next OMINOUS BLACK MASS came rushing towards us. What followed was an UNBELIEVABLE scene, with

everyone trying to stay the ground, and hanging on to CORKY'S GREAT BANNER for dear life. Soon, Nature took control and the landscape became flashes of events happening too fast to track... whole sections of the BANNER careening headlong towards the ocean, with little kids digging their heels in, trying to stop it before it reached the water... more little kids literally lifted off their feet, like Mary Poppins, all the while clinging fast for Corky.... a lone adult standing still in the middle of a section, one foot firmly planted ahead of the other, a fiercely determined expression on his face, with the BANNER flying and flapping around him, and his gang of little helpers running about, desperately trying to regain control of the ends. The rain began again. Then more hail struck with fury. Sections of CORKY'S GREAT BANNER were being dragged onto wet beach and becoming soaked. A sudden gust grabbed my FREE CORKY! hat and it flew off through the air to join a flock of others tumbling over the sand towards the sea. I found myself beside the Hanson Island section of the BANNER. It was dragging the five kids holding it towards the sea. I fought beside them, digging my heels into the sand, to little avail. We tried to head it into the wind, but the wind was too strong. Then came the order to bring the BANNER back in. Bit by bit, CORKY'S GREAT FREEDOM BANNER came home to the BPB, hustled along by groups of kids... all of them with hair flying and faces pink from exertion and the stinging hail. I headed off to gather up the red specks that littered the beach near the water line. A lump of debris caught my eye and I stooped to pick it up. It was a tiny piece of CORKY'S BANNER, a square of white silk or nylon that had perhaps once been a handkerchief. I held it aloft by the corners. It flapped, snapping in the wind, shaking the sand loose. Through it, against the dark sky, I could see a beautiful black and white orca that some unknown child had painted on it, and, embroidered in yellow, the words BORN TO BE FREE. I like signs that come from out of nowhere I know about, and I tell you, I nearly lost it about then. But soon I was trying to hang onto a dozen red FREE CORKY! hats bundled in my arms... as was someone else who'd started from the other end... and I was trudging back up the beach towards the BPB. I was suddenly aware that my left thumb was in agony from the cold and my clothes were soaked. But my heart was singing and I felt GREAT.

It wasn't too long before the wind began to calm down again, and the sky quickly became lighter. It seemed possible the day might get bright again, but by then much of the BANNER was wet, and heavy. There was no point, really, in trying to carry on further. Besides, WE HAD DONE IT. Everyone, kids and adults alike, were by now exhausted... and, I'm sure, EXHILARATED. Quite quickly, almost all the kids left the wintry scene, in buses and cars, with their teachers and parents. Then came the unhappy news that some of the children had been injured. They were in the lower lounge of the BPB. Three girls. The littlest one, obviously in pain, was holding her wrist. It looked sprained... no doubt from trying too hard to stop the BANNER from flying away. The other two girls had been knocked flat and had hit their heads hard on the beach. All were being very brave. Soon, they were taken off to hospital. (It was a big relief to hear later that all three were ok. It probably helped that, by chance if such exists, two of the injured girls were in pictures of the event that were carried prominently by both major Dublin newspapers the day after.)

The scene changed again, becoming a mop up operation with the sun shining bright again. A heavy layer of sand was brushed carefully of the now deflated orcas. I was worried about damage to the BANNER, and, because of the sun and the wind, thought we might lay some of the wet sections out on the grassy sand dunes. Brendan reassured me... the BANNER had been a lot wetter the last time it came to Dublin, and it had dried out fine. So we gathered all the sections up and loaded them into the BPB. About the time we were finishing this job, the sky started to darken quickly again and another BLACK cloud rushed at us. As Pete finished cutting the last bits of string holding CORKY'S GREAT BANNER to the BPB, and Anna & Christina & I struggled to bring it in, the first bits of a new round of hail hit. As quickly as could be, everyone was inside the BPB, gazing out, mouths open, as the landscape turned winter white. We may as well have been in the Arctic. Hmmm. VERY COLD KIDS FOR CORKY.

Later, after dinner in a loud restaurant decorated in a motorcycle theme (I'm not completely sure we intended to be there but the food was fine), I found myself in a cosy old Irish pub named Hughes, with Brendan and Niki & Christina, drinking fine Irish beer and listening to Lile Ni Chonchuir and some of her friends playing lovely Irish music and singing songs from here and there. It felt like home.

What can I say to these dear friends, who made us so welcome, who gave us, and who give Corky, so much hope? Poor words, I know, but well meant....
THANK YOU ALL!!

And what can I say about the kids of Ireland?

To be truthful, I'm a bit speechless still. Their hearts are GOLD, their eyes are BRIGHT, their minds are CLEAR, they CARE deeply about Corky, and they are DETERMINED to see her free. It's a bit of a mystery to me... that in such a far off, unlikely corner, might be found the key to Corky's freedom. I'm quite serious about that. There was a spirit in the air on that day in Dublin that told me, absolutely, that Augie B III might as well quit fighting these kids and cut his losses right now.

There's an old Irish saying Brendan told me about that may explain it all...
Gan ter, gan Teanga.

Without a tongue, you have no country.

Think about it.

Think about FREEDOM.

Think about CORKY FREE!

My best to you all,

cheers, Paul.



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