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Field Notes from Abroad: Person to Person

3-31-2014

Person to Person in Ireland

Emily Ing

Linfield College, eing@linfield.edu

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Recommended Citation

Ing, Emily, "Person to Person in Ireland" (2014). *2013-14 Field Notes*. Essay. Submission 10.
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Emily Ing
March 31, 2014
Galway, Ireland

Field Notes from Abroad: Person to Person in Ireland

For my assignment I chose to interview a small group of Irish girls who I play soccer with. When first joining the soccer team I was initially surprised and excited about the laidback and joyful atmosphere of the team. From hanging out with Eimer, Rachel, Leanne, and Maibve, I've really gained a sense of how people in Ireland enjoy every moment. I asked Rachel what her general understanding about the American way of life was, and she had the impression that Americans (more on the east coast) generally stick to themselves and are always on the go. This couldn't be more opposite of the Irish. The friendliness here is something I've found to be unique to Ireland. They love to have a good time, or some good "craic" as they would say. I've also really enjoyed the independent style of learning while studying at NUIG. The courses aren't exactly dependent on how often you attend, yet how you do on the final exams and essays depends on how much time and effort you put into the course. Most of the Irish girls are great students just because they spend their time and energy focusing on the course of study that they truly enjoy. They also spend a fair amount of time participating in hands-on labs since most of them are majoring in science-based fields of study.

I think there are more similarities between the girls and I than there are differences. We all enjoy to play soccer and also are much more laid back. However, one difference I have noticed is our outlooks on the rest of the world. Specifically, I was telling Rachel about how I chose to write my thesis on a women's group that originated from Afghanistan. Her reaction was "Why! I don't like the Middle East; all they do is shoot each other over there!" I was a little caught off guard, but then I realized that the low level of violence in Ireland, more specifically in Galway, is incomparable to the amount of violence Americans are exposed to in most cases. At home there is often a negative relationship between the police and college students that doesn't exist in Ireland. The friendliness of the Garda, which is the name for the police here in Ireland, is very much different than at home. They are not looking to get you in trouble, but instead are there to make sure you're safe and that you feel welcomed while staying in Galway. Galway is an extremely safe city, and even with the tension between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland the country I feel is generally less paranoid than the U.S. Simultaneously, the military aspect which is so valued in America is rarely used or discussed among Galway's youth.

Additionally, the stigma on underage drinking that we have at home is basically non-existent here. Based on the drinking age being 18 and the social acceptance of having a drink at dinner with your family, I think there is less of a problem with drinking. Although the Irish do know how to have a good time out drinking, I really enjoy how you can just go out and listen to live music and have a few pints without having the pressure to drink an excessive amount. The going out atmosphere is just so much more mature and better regulated than at home. Also the fact that you can walk everywhere is something I will miss once I return home. Rachel's reaction also made me realize how important it is to be informed and to learn about other areas of the world. In Ireland it is very common for students to go home every weekend from university, and I think this is partially due to the fact that family and community are very important to the Irish. This can sometimes make leaving Ireland or branching out and learning about other cultures more challenging. Yet, a few of the girls are

going to visit the east coast this summer and are very excited to get the American experience. Generally, I've found Irish girls to be very kind and welcoming.

Overall, there are some basic differences in the types of food (for example there is no ranch here!), fashion, and music preferences, but Ireland has easily become a second home to me. I think in general traveling to places in Europe will always be more familiar when compared to places in the Middle East, Africa, or Latin America, just based on our histories. Being here has made me value some aspects of the American lifestyle, however I personally think some parts of our learning style and fear-based society should be reassessed. I am not ashamed to be an American, but being here has given me a better understanding of how the rest of the world views Americans both positively and negatively.

Interview: Elmer, Rachel, Leanne, and Maibve