



Post Fellowship Reporting - Project Summary

Report Title: From Myth and Magic to a New Reality **Name:** Carolyn Geraci
Other Team Members:
Program: Greater Houston Area Program
Trip Dates: 11/30/-0001 - 11/30/-0001 **Location Visited:** Ireland and Northern Ireland
Post Fellowship Reporting Template: PFR Template 02

Project Summary: My original intent was to visit the places exposed in Irish myths and legends and see how the landforms and culture affected the telling of the tales. I came home with an appreciation for locally grown produce and an understanding of the importance for the preservation and maintenance of historical and sacred sites without turning them into tourist traps overrun with cheap souvenirs.

As I travelled and talked to people, I did develop an understanding of how Celtic mythology developed along with the culture in Ireland. My appreciation for mythology in general was heightened as I had a chance to see how history and geography often affected the beliefs of the people. Besides the remains of early civilizations, there are glimpses into the myths that cover the land. Seeing the remnants of Formorian village below the mountain where there stands a rock thrown by Balor of the Evil Eye is just one example of the overlay of history and mystery. The rock is of volcanic material, but the mountain where it stands is far from any volcanic activity.

Johnny Daly showed me an example of how Christianity affected the mythology by telling two versions of one tale. In the first version, it was obvious that the emphasis was on human relationships with the gods and goddesses; in this case it was Brigid. In the second version, Brigid became St. Brigid, and the story centered more on human's relationship with the church and with the Christian God.

After a tour and a talk with Rathcroghan Tour Guide Mike Croghan, I began observing how the places I visited were developed and marketed. I began to understand how the "disneyfication" of sacred and historic sites can cheapen or demean the experience for visitors.

I knew Ballaghboy Lodge Farm used locally grown organic produce, but was amazed when owner Karen Litton told me most of the restaurants and pubs in Ireland had the same policy. In fact, it was a matter of being fiscally responsible since local produce also costs less to purchase. As I continued to travel, I often inquired about the source of the fruits and vegetables I consumed. In several instances I had the opportunity to talk to the local farmers providing the produce.

Career Impact: I have begun to understand how the Christian church used the pagan symbols to meet the needs of the early Irish people. While this has not affected my Christian beliefs, it has allowed me to be more accepting of those who still hold to the pagan beliefs of our early ancestors.

Rathcroghan Tour Guide Mike Croghan is responsible for opening my eyes to stewardship of historical and sacred sites. His family has a deep and personal connection to the land where he lives and works. When I next plan a vacation for my family, I will consider who the places we visit are maintained.

I thoroughly enjoyed all off the fresh produce in Ireland. When I returned home, I learned one of my local grocery stores had a section of locally grown produce. Another store that is opening soon promises to have a much larger selection. I have begun planning meals around what I can get locally either from my grocery store or the farmer's market.

I have returned home with so much material to use in my writing classroom, and so many stories to teach my students, I feel as if I am a little overwhelmed with ideas, However, I am looking forward to a greatly enriched curriculum.

Classroom/Community Impact: I have come home with enough material to cover every unit I teach. We will begin with personal narrative and I will write about my last evening at Ballaghboy using my writing to teach my students about dialogue and character description. In the expository writing unit, I will teach my students how to avoid plagiarism through paraphrasing by using source material I have collected about the Giant's Causeway. I can use the myths I have collected to teach the structure of mythology, as I originally planned. I can also use what I have learned about the stewardship of historic and sacred sites as well as the benefits of using locally grown produce in our unit on argument and persuasion.

My classroom boasts signs of my trip with Brigid in a place of honor near my desk, a children of Lir wall hanging decorating the

reading corner, and posters depicting early Celtic kings and gods as well as photos of the places I visited. These, along with the books, CDs, and DVDs I collected, will aid on our discussions.

I am meeting with my department to discuss curriculum and will present my ideas for using this material.

Open Response: Currently I am involved in writing more articles for my blog. Rather than a simple travelogue, this blog concentrates on brief lessons for my students that introduces them to the people of Ireland. Some of my blogs have a more historical point of view, some are scientific, and some concentrate on the mythology. I have also outlined some of the lessons I want to teach and connected them to the materials I brought back to enhance each lesson.

Quote: It is amazing to see how the people of Ireland cherish their culture through their reverence of the land and the mysteries it still contains.

Photos:



I faced my fears and survived crossing the Carrick-a-Rede rope bridge



I also conquered the Giant's Causeway.



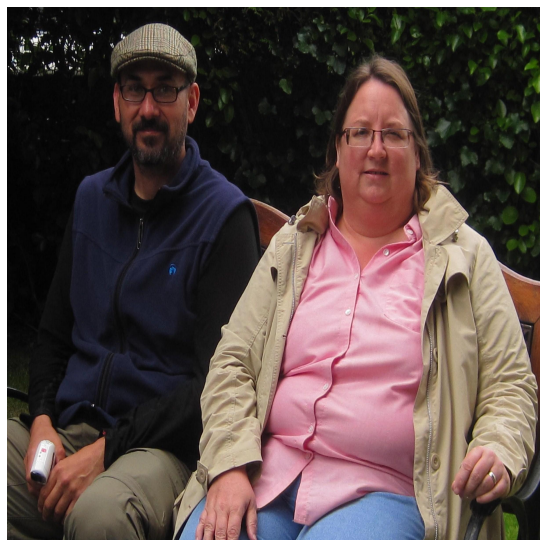
Ogham stones may have been used as place markers.



To get into Owenygart cave, you have to crawl over rocks and through mud.



Johnny Daly is a great storyteller!



I met Will Beshear, a FFT Fellow from California, in Dingle.



I left the cairns at Carrowkeel with a deeper appreciation of the early Celts.



The Doolin cave boasts one of the world's largest stalactites.