

Saturday, August 1;

After a very long flight, with a layover in Philadelphia (where people were rude and dismissive, and the weather made us about an hour late), I finally landed in Dublin. As I left the plane and went through customs, I could almost feel the difference in cultures. I was so nervous and excited, when I noticed a gentleman standing with a sign that said "Lilli Lovberg" – I felt like a Celebrity!!! It was Brendan Bradley, the Festival Secretary, and right off he made me feel welcomed. After some brief confusion, and a little laugh, about driving on the wrong side of the road, we drove north for about an hour through some of the greenest, most beautiful countryside until we made it to Warrenpoint. Since I was the first 'Maiden' to arrive, Brendan and his wife Myrtle decided to welcome me into their home for my first night in Ireland. Myrtle, a warm and kind woman, prepared a lovely meal of bacon, pancakes, egg & tomato – I have to say, the pancakes are really different – but the whole meal was delicious! I took a brief, but MUCH appreciated nap before it was time to begin the Maiden of the Mournes Festival with the 1st big party and fundraiser at the Whistledown Hotel. Potato Leek soup & roast beef - "I think Irish food and I are going to get along very well". White sugar for tea – brown for sugar, silly American girl. Early night – midnight, and the party was just starting!

Sunday, August 2;

Day started around noon when the Event Chairman, Paul Braham, picked me up and we went to the local Radio station. Along the way, we picked up the Warrenpoint Maiden, Danielle, and she and I did an interview and PSA for the event with the DJ, "Big O". Afterwards, we moved into the Boathouse Inn, which would be our home for the next week. Throughout the afternoon, the other Maidens trickled in – only 9 in all as the Russian, Louth, Limerick, and Derry Maidens couldn't participate for various reasons, and I met my roommate Lauren, the Armagh Maiden. Once everyone had arrived, we were paired off into vintage cars for the Parade, and then were formally introduced to the town. We were invited to a local hat shop so that we could pick out hats to wear the next day, and I chose a wide rimmed black hat with flowers on the front (see Pictures). After all this, we headed back to the Boathouse Inn for a snack of sandwiches and tea, and to hang out together before dinner and found that we had been left gifts from Newbridge Jewelry and Aarins Cosmetics! After all hanging out in my room for a while, we headed out to 'Restaurant 23' for a little local flavor and 'girl bonding'. The waitress was kind of rude and the food wasn't that great so we checked out a comedy show in the Town Hall instead. Still full of energy from the excitement of the day, Lauren and I decided to throw a pajama party back at the Boathouse Inn, and we had a blast with Bridget (Pittsburgh, PA), Danielle, and Emma (County Down) until around 12:30am.

Monday, August 3;

Today we went to Belfast. After breakfast, we all piled onto a tour bus and went first to Belfast Harbor and toured the dock where the Titanic was built. Next, we headed to Stormont, home of the Northern Ireland Parliament. It was raining, so as we drove through the Loyalist and Nationalist areas, we could only see the historic murals from the bus, but they depicted the resistance and fight for freedom from British rule. We did get a chance to get out and actually see and touch the Peace Wall, and actually were

able to sign our names to it! This was so amazing to experience – I am now immortalized as supporting the peace process in Northern Ireland. We got back to Warrenpoint around 6pm and rested for a bit in Pamela's (Pamela Cassel – the reigning 2008 Maiden) room before going out to 'Balmoral' for a very nice dinner. Afterwards we again headed over to the town hall for some dancing and singing, this time mostly with local children.

Tuesday, August 4;

After a 'light' breakfast of bacon, toast, and cereal, we again boarded the tour bus but today it was to explore the Warrenpoint Harbor area and Narrow Water Castle. The countryside was all so lush and beautiful, and we had an incredible view of the entire harbor from the top of Narrow Water Castle. This was a privately owned castle, and the owner said it had been in his family for generations. They were doing a lot of renovations during our visit, and his sons kept running around and making noises out of sight so it almost sounded haunted! Back at the harbor, we went for a short sail in a small boat and ended up stopping for lunch at a place called 'Friar Tuck's'. To my surprise, the menu was mostly burgers, pizza, and chicken sandwiches. As I was fast learning, the 'meal for one' was more than enough to feed 2 or 3 people! After lunch, we went to the town square and had another radio interview, this time with Hugo Duncan. We were announced and presented on stage again and spent some time dancing and mingling with some disabled guests of the festival before heading over to 'Panto Hall' for the 'Friendship Club Tea Dance'. Panto Hall is the local Retirement Home for the Elderly and Disabled. We all danced, sang songs, and then each of the Maidens performed her individual 'talent' to the private audience. It was all very sweet, and the people we met were exceedingly kind. It was still fairly early, so we went back to the Boathouse for a couple hours rest before an evening out at 'The Duke'. Before we were allowed to eat, we had to go around and introduce ourselves and chat a bit with the other patrons – talk about having to sing for your supper! Dinner was actually very fun, even though the waitress completely forgot my order (luckily I wasn't very hungry after Friar Tuck's), but we were all glad to see the end of a very long and busy day.

Wednesday, August 5;

Today we went for a tour of South Down and Rostrever. One of the things we saw was the Ross Monument, in honor of Robert Ross – a British soldier who was best known for allowing the British soldiers to burn down the original White House in Washington D.C. back in 1814 Grrr! After that, we went to Rostrever Cemetery and visited a rather well known gravesite of a local 'giant' who stood 8'1" tall! It was most interesting in that the Cross was actually 8'1" as well, and there was a base stone for you to stand on and compare your height! I thought this was supposed to be bad luck, but just in case there was also a well with a statue of Mary that was rumored to cure any sort of problem with your eyes. After the Cemetery, we continued up the mountains, past Spelga Dam where we stopped for some pictures since the water looked SO beautiful against the mountain backdrop, and eventually made our way to 'Mary Catherine's Cottage'. It was freezing! Ciara (the Antrim Maiden) and I danced for the crowd and we all 'tried' to sing some songs together until finally an elderly gentleman came up to join us. After a few hours, we headed back down to Warrenpoint and rested for a bit before going down to the 'Whistledown Hotel' to grab a bite and watch the fireworks display. It was raining and I had a

stomach ache, so we all went into the Whistledown for some tea, sandwiches and little snack foods. It's true what they say about tea curing everything ... my stomach ache went away after just one cup!

Thursday, August 6;

Today we went out to tour a Mattress factory and learned how mattresses are made. It was actually very interesting, and they gave us free pillows. Next, we went down to 'Newry' and visited some of the shops and had a photo shoot at the local Newspaper office. We had lunch with the Mayor, John Feehan, in the Council Chamber, and then spent about an hour and a half shopping at the mall – Quays Shopping Center. We all sort of split up, so I spent the time shopping with Laura (the Belfast Maiden), and we all met up at – believe it or not – STARBUCKS! After gathering us all back together, we headed back to Warrenpoint and took part in the local Fair, went on some rides, and mingled with the people. It was raining again, so we decided to take a break and went back up to the Boathouse Inn where we all just sort of hung out and got to know each other better in my room until it was time to get ready for dinner. Tonight we went to the Warrenpoint Golf Club for dinner, and even though we were all completely exhausted, we sang and danced and performed our various 'talents' until almost midnight. It was surprisingly tough to keep smiling and looking energetic when all we really wanted to do was sleep! Is testing out our newfound knowledge of mattresses and pillows from this morning a 'talent'??

Friday, August 7;

We started off our day by playing Football (Soccer) with some of the local kids. This was a lot of fun! Afterwards we all went back to the Boathouse Inn to freshen up and change for our 'Official Interviews' back at the Whistledown Hotel. We enjoyed a quick, informal, lunch with the judges before getting started, and I had the opportunity to sit with 'Sheryl' from the Quays Shopping Center. It seemed the judges panel was made up of local 'dignitaries' and members of the business community, who had actually been observing us all week. My interview was the 2nd to last, so I had a very long wait. Finally I was called in, and a bit to my surprise the interviewing lasted about 20 minutes but went well, I think? After the last girl was done with her interviews, we went back to the Boathouse Inn to change again for our Formal Banquet. We all felt pretty awkward at first, just left standing around outside, not knowing what to do or expect for the first time all week. Finally someone came and brought us in for dinner, which was excellent, and then we went through another round of interviews on stage with the evenings' Master of Ceremonies, 'Paul Clark' – again, I think mine went ... okay? Afterwards, we all danced until after 2am and didn't get back to the Inn and to sleep until 3:30!

Saturday, August 8;

Today is the final day. We spent the entire morning with rehearsals in the town hall. Myrtle said she wanted me to do a hardshoe dance instead of the soft shoe I had practiced and been performing all week, since the sound was more dramatic, so I switched. Good thing I brought both sets of shoes! We took a little break for lunch before heading over to get our hair and make-up done at 'Aveen's'. I was so impressed with how supportive and helpful everyone was for all us girls. Myrtle even ironed my dress for the evening. Once we were all dressed and ready, we were escorted off in alphabetical order, each riding in vintage cars. What a sight! As it worked out, I was second to last, so I got to see all the others.

As I was watching all my new friends take their turn, someone accidentally spilled tea on my dress! Luckily Myrtle jumped into action and got it out right away, so I didn't panic – much! Finally it was my turn, but honestly I don't remember much – it sort of blurred until suddenly we were all there and they announced that Laura, the Maiden from Belfast, had won! We had become such good friends that I was just so happy for her and proud of us all, but I was also relieved that it was all over because all I could focus on was that I was SO hungry!! I heard later, at the After Party, that I got 1st runner up (unofficially)! We finished with the celebrating and dancing at 4am and headed back to the hotel. Laura stayed with me and we kept talking while I packed, eventually falling asleep at about 5 in the morning.

Sunday, August 9;

Ugh – I'm so exhausted! Time for us all to say our 'goodbye's' and go our separate ways. We had a bit of breakfast, and I quickly finished packing. Brendan drove me down to meet my family, who had come to spend another week with me in Ireland, and I bid a fond farewell to Warrenpoint. I will really miss all my new friends – (Still, I had made such good friends with some of the other Maidens, that Laura, Christine, & Dorianne met me in Dublin on Thursday for a fantastic 'Girls Night Out'!)