



irresistible learning

Creative Volunteering

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Senior Volunteering Project
between
Workers Educational Association
Northern Ireland
and
Club Amici Di Salvatore Quasimodo
Sicily**

GETTING READY FOR SICILY

Tuesday 7th June 2010, Re-packed my case, decided to go to bed for a couple of hours. This didn't work out as I had visits from Patrick, then Ann and Hannah, then Patrick's wife, Nicola.

Read over my notes from the Italian classes, then watched television until Attracta collected me at 2.15am on Wednesday morning. We drove to Philomena's house, then collected Tony and headed off to Dublin Airport via Portadown, Tandragee, Scarva, Poyntzpass and Newry.

Wednesday 8th June, 2011 we arrived at Dublin Airport at approximately 4.30am and checked in, went to baggage control, then for something to eat, did some shopping in the duty free then finally boarded the Aer Lingus plane and headed off to Sicily.

We arrived in Sicily at 12.30pm and waited for our luggage to come through. I think ours must have been the last! Met Peppino and Thomasso and they brought us to the Apartment. Then we went to the Ice Cream parlour and had some really lovely ice cream, went back to the apartment unpacked and had a rest. Went to the Park, met Carlo, had a very enjoyable meal, went back to the apartment and had a good night's sleep.

Sadie Hamill

OUR TURKISH FRIENDS

We knew the day we met you
You were thoughtful, caring and kind
And we really want to tell you
You will always be in our mind.

Your fun and laughter,
Your caring ways,
So much we have learnt
In a very few days.

We wish you safe journey
And a great day in Rome,
And hope you remember us
When you return home.

Sadie Hamill.

24/06/2011

IRISH/SICILIAN EXCHANGE PROGRAMME

CREATIVE VOLUNTEERING PROJECT

EVALUATION

The mere words wonderful and beautiful do not do justice to the experience of a lifetime that I have had on this exchange visit to Sicily. It has been life changing for me.

The friendliness of the people, the organising of the programme, the beauty of the people, their culture and their history. The knowledge I have gained has been breathtaking. Everyone involved in Sicily deserves the highest of praise. This Sicilian experience has highlighted for me the need for more of the same, and has stimulated the desire to learn more of the language and culture of this wonderful country.

I wish to thank sincerely all the people involved in this part of the exchange programme and for giving me the opportunity to experience this “adventure of a lifetime.” I will never forget it.

Tony Creaney

28/6/2011

THE MOUNTAIN TOP

Had we reached heaven?

It really looked that way

The top of a mountain,

And the lake where the goldfish play.

The sun was shining brightly,

The view took our breath away,

We talked to some young cyclists

And they had a lot to say.

We moved into a shaded place

Where people had come to meet,

They made us feel so welcome

And showed us to our seat.

We seemed to eat for hours

And the food it was so good

That even though we were so full

To refuse would have been very rude.

We thanked the mayor and his friends

We had so much to say

For their kindness and generosity
They gave us a wonderful day.

We said goodbye and headed back
For our journey down in the jeep
To Mandanichi to meet some friends
And hoped we wouldn't fall asleep.

We met up with the others
And walked round this lovely town,
Where Peppino spent his younger days
And we never saw a frown.

We saw some interesting buildings
And some really ancient books
We were amazed that we were allowed
To have the chance to take a look.

We wandered further round the town
And looked at different things
Then all at once we heard
The sound of someone sing.

We went to see St Joseph's
Where a Mass was taking place

The priest was preparing Communion

I can still see that look on his face.

We stood and watched,
His face just seemed to glow
As he held the Host on high
And then he knelt so low.

We left this lovely chapel
And went for something to eat
I really didn't need it
And was nearly asleep on my feet.

We then decided to go back home
And it didn't take long to say
Good night and God Bless
And thank you for a magical day.

Sadie Hamill

23/06/2011

Sicilian and Irish Exchange Programme

Creative Volunteering Programme

Evaluation

Never in my life did I think that I would ever visit Sicily, but to do so at the age of 74 has been really wonderful.

I would really love to learn more about this beautiful island and its people. What came across very clearly to me was the sense of community and the family bond. I would be very interested in learning more about the history of the island and its people. We learnt that Sicily had the First Parliament in the World. As I listened to one man talking about the island I was fascinated by what he said.

My feelings are that three weeks (in one year) is not nearly enough to learn about the culture of these lovely people. We did learn some things, but not nearly enough, as the time was too short.

I would dearly love to be fluent in the Italian language. We were able to get across what we wanted in the shops by gestures etc., and the small amount of language we knew. It would be great to carry on a conversation in Italian without needing someone to translate.

When I arrived in Sicily I did not know what to expect, but I have been amazed at the reception we received everywhere we went.

The Cultural Exchange has been mind-blowing to say the least.

In Mandanichi the people literally welcomed us with open arms. The Mayor even invited us to a picnic at the top of a mountain on our first Sunday there. I can't begin to describe the beauty of the place and the generosity of the people.

People sitting at the front door with their friend made me think of Ireland when I was growing up.

During our time in Sicily we met some young Turkish people who had just graduated from University. They were taking classes of disabled people for Sports and Leisure type activities. Their degree was in Sports etc. and they had a class of blind people doing archery!!! We sat in on one of their projects and found it very interesting. We learnt a bit about their culture. These friendly young people are determined to keep in touch with us by Email and Face Book.

More computer lessons are required for all these things.

“Thanks” is too small a word to express our gratitude to Peppino and Thomasso for being our guides and chauffeurs during this trip. Every day when we finished our placement we were treated to visits to different areas. To say that one day was the highlight would be unfair as they were all spectacular. We even visited the beautiful Parliament building in Palermo, and Mount Etna. How would we describe these? One word “WOW”!

People who didn't even know us, greeting us with a smile, and Buongiorno or Buena Serra or Ciao.

A very sincere thank you to all who were involved in this project, it has been one of the most wonderful experiences of my life.

A big thank you to Carlo and Peppino for their part in organising this Cultural Exchange, meeting Graziella and Dominico was the icing on the cake. They are really lovely people who went out of their way to show us hospitality. Peppino, Randie, Thomasso and Graziella went out of their way to help us.

I do think a five year plan would be even better, as we would know more about the culture, history and language.

Sadie Hamill

28/6/2011

A NIGHT TO REMEMBER

We went to the diner as usual
And had some very good food,
Chatting to our newly made friends
Soon put us in the mood
For fun and laughter and some jokes,
Even a few glasses of wine.,
Then Carlo arrived with a pianist
And everything was fine.

The pianist went to the piano
Sat down and started to play
The music was so entertaining
It just blew our minds away.

He played old tunes and new tunes
And songs that we knew,
Everyone got up and danced
They even danced in a queue.

We enjoyed all the music
We really had fun
And soon it was time

That the music was done.

Another great night

We'll recall this for ever

The music so wonderful

It was "A Night to Remember.

Sadie Hamill

23/06/2011

CULTURAL EXCHANGE

How do I start to talk about

The three weeks we have spent

On the Sicilian/Irish cultural exchange

And how much this time has meant.

We have met some wonderful people

Their kindness has been so amazing

They go out of their way to help us

These people I'll for ever be praising.

Their artistic ability alone
Has to be seen to be believed
The crocheted bedspreads we saw
And the lovely lace mats we received.

People who had never met us
Smiled and said buon giorno,
And the people we have met
We really want to get to know.

We really cannot say enough
About the kindness we were shown
We made so many friends there
A new family of our own.

Sadie Hamill

June 2011

MANDANICHI

Sunday evening ,on a mountain top.

Enveloped within a soft twirling mist.

Our expert driver safely returns us to,

Mandanichi.

His home town. A tour of his play area.

A community eager to please.

Proudly displaying five hundred year old books and ancient buildings.

Posing for photographs.

Attending a peaceful, joyful Mass.

Irish, Sicilian, Turkish worshipping together.

Another feast;" you must try a little piece".

We do and are not disappointed.

Loving, caring affectionate, dignified people.

Mandanichi.

Philomena Gallagher

HEAVEN ON EARTH

A hot Sicilian Sunday morning, early.

We travel higher up the mountain.

The narrow dusty road giving birth

To a dirt track with grass growing

Down the middle.

At times, holding on by our fingertips

To the ageing jeep.

We round a bend on the snaky road

WOW!

A plateau of serene beauty.

Large gold fish lake; picnic area resting

Under a canopy of tall pine trees;

Crystal clear cold mountain drinking water.

Hot, hot sun.

A six hour orgy of home-made food.

Sweet cool red wine.

An orgasm of tantalising tastes.

Pine cones dropping gently occasionally

To add to the orchestra of bird song;

Children playing; soft foreign conversation;

Cackle of an open stove; much much laughter.

PHILOMENA GALLAGHER

IRISH/SICILIAN EXCHANGE, 2011

Evening drops gently like a delicate
Sicilian-crocheted curtain caught in a warm
Summer breeze.

Calming the senses; refreshing the soul.

Hot sun energised ageing bones,
Returned a brief feeling of youth.

Rich Sicilian wine and Irish vodka

Frolicked through veins.

Tantalising exotic foods danced on the tip of tongues.

Irish, Sicilian, Turkish lips move in harmony.

Talking with hands and eyes enabled stimulating

Conversation and much much laughter.

Bodies moved in rhythm to mystifying music

Alien melodies drifted in the clear night air.

“THE GREEN GLENS OF ANTRIM”, rang out clear in

ROCCALUMERA

PHILOMENA GALLAGHER

MANDANICHI 2

A hot Sicilian evening.
Our small jeep climbs the mountain
Like a young wild goat.
Gasps of astonishment at the raw beauty
Of this magnificent country.
Lemon, olive. Lavender. Charcoal fragrances
Attacks pleasantly the backs of our throats.
Dusks falls gracefully as we approach.
Embraced; welcomed.
Skills and experiences shared.
Beautiful, delicate crocheted work carried
Proudly from homes and displayed in the
Warm glowing sunset.
A grandmother's work of art.
Mental image of a young woman calming
Sewing exquisite stitches by candle light,
Taught by her mother-
Never to know that we from
NORTHERN IRELAND would stand in awe
Of her Sicilian skill.

Philomena Gallagher

TURKISH DELIGHT

Dark eyes danced with mischief and fun.

Dazzling white smiles readily given.

We ate; drank; sang; danced.

Oh, how we laughed-tears flowed!

Talking with hands and eyes secured communication.

Our beautiful translator highlighting strange words.

Turkish delight displayed with a loud clapping of hands and a high pitched yodel from
the back of female throats.

Beautiful in mind, body, spirit.

“SEREFE”

PHILOMENA GALLAGHER

Impressioni / Valutazioni

Grazia (1937)

Quando mio figlio Peppino ha cominciato a parlarmi di questo viaggio in Irlanda ho pensato che era una pazzia.

Alla mia età con tutti i miei acciacchi, la mia difficoltà di stare a lungo in piedi, per non parlare di camminare con i miei continui dolori.

Preferisco rimanere a casa tranquilla che fare valigie

Ma si sa, i figli ti fanno fare quello che mai penseresti di fare e a malincuore sono partita, convinta che me ne sarei pentita.

E' passato un anno ...

Mai avrei pensato di fare un'esperienza che non riesco più a dimenticare.

Ho una certa età e nella mia vita credevo di avere già avuto le mie gioie e i miei dolori.

Come mi sbagliavo ...

Sono siciliana dovrei essere abituata alla bellezza dei paesaggi, al calore della gente, all'ospitalità,

ma da quando ero arrivata in Irlanda tutte le sere quando andavo a letto, pensavo a un detto "nostro" che mi ripeteva sempre mia madre:

"A vecchia avìa cent'anni e ancora 'nzignava" (la vecchia aveva cent'anni e imparava ancora).

Quasi mi commuovo quando ripenso a quel viaggio.

Quando i miei nipoti mi raccontano che sono stati in posti bellissimi, che gli “stranieri” sono così gentili ... non dico che non ci credo, ma pensavo sempre: “questi giovani basta che vedano cose nuove, sono sempre più belle di quelle che hanno a casa loro, sempre pronti a disprezzare quello a cui sono abituati.

Se non l'avessi visto con i miei occhi non avrei mai creduto che c'erano posti più belli dei miei.

E' proprio vero che più si invecchia e più si ritorna indietro con il tempo.

Avevano messo a mia disposizione una carrozzina ed io, seduta comodamente, , mi giravo in continuazione, con la stessa curiosità, la stessa meraviglia, la stessa ingenuità che hanno i bambini quando sono nel loro passeggino.

E' bello, alla mia età, avere dei ricordi.

Ricordi che ti scaldano il cuore, che ti fanno compagnia.

Nelle persone che ci hanno accolto non c'era solamente gentilezza; è l'affetto che ci hanno dimostrato che non dimenticherò.

Sono orgogliosa dei miei lavori di ricamo, ma sentirmi dire che metto soggezione con la mia bravura mi mette in imbarazzo ...

Mi viene da ridere pensando a quanta ansia, a quanta preoccupazione avevo prima di partire.

Se mio figlio non avesse insistito mi sarei persa tutto.

A volte i figli hanno ragione ...

Grazia (1942)

Mi è stato chiesto di scrivere qualcosa sull'esperienza dell'anno scorso in Irlanda che il "Progetto Europeo Grundtvig denominato Creative Volunteering" mi ha permesso di fare.

Così piena di entusiasmo mi metto all'opera e vado indietro con la mente allo scorso anno e ripenso all'Irlanda ...

Io sono convinta che chi è nato in un'isola ha delle caratteristiche comuni.

Essere circondati dall'acqua ti mette su di un piedistallo, è come vivere in un enorme castello medioevale dove per entrare bisogna gettare il ponte levatoio.

E' per questo che "noi siciliani" ci sentiamo speciali, è da questo "isolamento" che deriva l'orgoglio che ci caratterizza.

Ho sempre avuto una curiosità per l'isola irlandese, colleziono l'euro con l'arpa celtica, ma non avrei mai creduto di rimanerne così affascinata.

E non è solo per le bellezze della natura; ho ancora la sensazione di essere inghiottita da tutto quel verde; ho finalmente compreso cosa significa il modo di dire "sommersi dal verde".

Non sono state le visite al villaggio irlandese ricostruito come era agli inizi del '900, l'imponenza della Basilica di San Patrizio.

Non sono stati i diversi centri che si occupano di assistenza agli anziani con strutture degne di un albergo a cinque stelle.

Ad un certo punto, mentre continuavo ad ammirare tutto quello che mi si presentava davanti agli occhi, ho avuto la sensazione di un “déjà vu”.

Tutto mi sembrava familiare, come se l'avessi già visto in un sogno, sensazioni intense, ma non nuove, già vissute con la fantasia.

Intorno a me tutto mi accoglieva, le persone e perfino le cose, non era un saluto di “ben arrivato”, ma un vero e proprio abbraccio di “ben tornato”.

Mi sono sentita finalmente “a casa”: un'emozione unica che non riesco ad esprimere con le parole.

Non era la mia lingua, ma era come se la comprendessi.

Anche se non capivo il significato delle parole, già prima della traduzione, percepivo un animo comune: la stessa passione viscerale per la propria terra, lo stesso spirito orgoglioso e ribelle, quasi selvaggio, che ci caratterizza.

Certe esperienze ti cambiano, ti sconvolgono, ti restano dentro per sempre, ormai faranno parte di te.

Sono tornata a casa diversa, come finalmente appagata, e ancora oggi continuo a sentire l'eco di quel “magico” periodo..

Domenico

Grazie facebook e grazie skipe! E chi me lo doveva dire che ci sarebbe stato un giorno dove tutto è possibile: parlarsi per telefono e vedersi contemporaneamente dall'altro capo del mondo, come se la distanza non esistesse.

Che esperienza appassionante! Che amici meravigliosi che ho scoperto!

Ma quale anziani! E sempre con 'sta storia dell'età avanzata, le forze che ci abbandonano, la memoria che non è più quella di una volta ...

La verità è che a forza di sentircelo ripetere, ce ne convinciamo e piano piano ci adattiamo a quello che i "giovani" pensano di noi "vecchi".

Il nostro tempo, ormai, l'abbiamo fatto e cerchiamo di vivere alla giornata, quasi rassegnati e in attesa.

Questo viaggio mi ha fatto capire che è tempo di dire basta!

Ho ancora tanto da dare, tanto da imparare e quello che è veramente importante è che mi è venuta la voglia di farlo.

Tanto tempo fa c'era in televisione una trasmissione che si chiamava "Non è mai troppo tardi". Ed è proprio vero, mi sono convinto che sono ancora in tempo per tutto.

Voglio sentire i miei amici Tony, Sadie, Philomena, Attracta, Carolyn. Voglio comunicare con loro.

Abbiamo tante cose da dirci ancora, voglio sapere come continuano i lavori di Tony nella sua officina, che cos'altro ha costruito sul suo banco da lavoro con il suo trapano vecchissimo e la sua saldatrice.

La distanza non è più un problema per rimanere in contatto con le persone. Adesso spetta a me.

Ed è tale e tanta la voglia di continuare ad essere in contatto con i miei amici che ho deciso di mettermi di impegno e cominciare a studiare.

Una cosa è certa: a noi anziani l'unica cosa che non manca è il tempo, ne abbiamo in abbondanza.

Ora mi metto al computer, mi collego con facebook e mando un messaggio a Tony e gli parlo di tutti i miei propositi.



Education and Culture DG

Lifelong Learning Programme