

Glencree Reunion August 2009

Between the 8th and the 11th of August 2009 former volunteers and staff of the Glencree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation were invited back for a reunion. Most of us hadn't been back to Glencree in years and Saturday was one full of emotions (excitement, anxiety, joy, nostalgia and more) as more and more people arrived. Every time another car entered the driveway, there would be a curiosity in finding out who else had come. Many happy reunions could be seen on the lawn that day as people hugged and kissed each other as they met again after such a long time.

At first glance there were many changes that had taken place at Glencree – the new Office Building, the newly renovated Centre Building, the Armoury Café... but after a walk around most of us met old "acquaintances": rooms we had vacuumed, stairs we had scrubbed, toilets we had cleaned and places where we had lived, laughed and cried - this helped to make us feel right back at home.

After the "official" welcome by Ian White, Colin Murphy and Eamon Rafter in the Canada Room (which at least still looked the same) we got the chance to do some catching up with old friends over a few drinks. The first night was a long one, laughter and stories, music and smiles, old friends and new – it was good to be back in a place that was a home to all of us for such a long time.

Sunday morning started with a workshop by Eamon, Sean O'Boyle, and Phil Killeen on the changes in Glencree and updating us all on what Glencree was doing now – including the Women's Programme and the International Programme's activities in Afghanistan. The afternoon was spent in Glendalough. walking and reflecting on life past and present and appreciating the beauty of Ireland. Later that evening, we were all able to indulge in a gourmet dinner at the Glendalough Hotel and afterwards a long bus ride back to Glencree. Again the Canada Room brought everyone together with more drinks and stories to share, the tireless chatter of people really happy to be together could be heard well into the night.

Monday was an intense day. During the morning session with David Bloomfield various topics were discussed such as the changes that had taken place at Glencree and the role of volunteers. It was a chance to sit together and realise what common energy there was in a room full of volunteers and staff who had all been part of the history and present of Glencree.

In the afternoon we had some free time (those who hadn't taken the obligatory walk to the lake already, found some time to do then whilst others left for a quick trip to Bray) and before dinner we met once again to discuss a recurring theme of the weekend: What can we, as former volunteers and staff, do to support Glencree and each other?

The first concrete decisions and suggestions were made: a Google-group will be set up in order to stay in better contact, there could be a restricted-access-area on the Glencree webpage with contact information and a skills database of current and former volunteers, and a Glencree-Couchsurfing scheme will be launched. Probably something we can all look forward to is the idea of having the next big volunteer reunion – the date is set for August 2013.

Somebody who would have been pleased with those plans was Brendan. He always saw the great potential of a network of "Glencree-people" all over the world and often encouraged us to set up a volunteer database. During our days on the mountain many of us were half expecting to see Brendan walk up to the Centre, Finn in tow, and a joke or word of wisdom on his lips. On Monday evening we got a chance to say goodbye to someone who was so dear to all of us. Amidst a mixture of tears and laughter we all sat together and lit candles as we recounted stories he had told us, things we remembered about him and the way he made an impact on our lives. For all of us, coming back to Glencree was connected closely to Brendan and a chance for us to be closer to him whilst being able to say goodbye.

The last evening together in the Peace Garden was one that lasted a long time and won't be forgotten by any of us soon: we sang, danced, laughed, talked and drank around a big bonfire that continued until dawn started approaching – a few lucky ones saw shooting stars of the Perseid meteor shower in the clear night sky.

Looking back on the reunion over a month ago now, it's clear that it was an occasion that meant a lot to each of us who was there. The memories that seem to stand out and stay in our heads the longest are those of all the moments we were laughing, sharing, reminiscing, catching up, seeing familiar faces or sitting alone and reflecting on how Glencree was and always will be a big part of our lives. The words of a former volunteer Zoli sum it up nicely – he wrote on his blog "It was really that much fun. Each of us are still part of Glencree and we will come back here again." And hopefully when the time comes, we will see you there too.

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