



MARCH 2018 NEWSLETTER

Dear Friends,

This is a very special month for all Irish People thought the world — all are Honorary Irish if not officially Irish on 17 March (and, as we do not do things by half, for the whole week!).

Mea culpa - i have been very lax in following up the possibility of having a ceile this month. It looks as though it will not take place in March as I had already hoped, unfortunately; however, we are working on having one large fling before we go our separate ways for the summer and will have a ceile in May! Stay tuned for more details on this!

In the meantime, there are a lot of activities taking place in honour of our Patron Saint: Battle of the Bands; Parade; fireworks, lightshow and activities around King John's Castle, and, for us, an Irish themed get-together chez moi/at my place on 21 March, 12.30. Stay tuned for more details on this — we will certainly celebrate in style. I was well-known wherever I worked for insisting that people wore something green on THE day (and everyone did so!) — and my Irish Coffees were/are renowned the world over! Maybe you will all have a chance to decide for yourselves on 21 March!!

So, my dear friends, all i have to say for now, is La Feile Phadraig shona daoibh go leir! sorry,
I am sure you get the drift
See you soon!

Linda

don't have the accents but
of the wishes!!



Member Focus

This month's member focus is Soo Ling Koh. Indeed, her remarkable story is a true proof of karma — if something is meant to be, it will be! and true love will always find a way! Enjoy the story of a remarkable lady and one very lucky man from Clare! I think Soo Ling personifies the richness of the IWO and the friends who helped her find her way to join the group personify the raison d'être for our group: welcoming women from all over the world to our green patch of land here, helping the whole group gain from the richness of our differences and backgrounds and experiences! Enjoy her story!



WHEN EAST MEETS WEST : Our story began 42 years ago when Michael and I were pen-pals. In those days when the internet was virtually non-existent and the mobile phone unheard of, corresponding with pen-pals was all the craze.

That day when his first letter arrived from Ireland, I had just returned from watching a movie where the theme song was the Circle Game by Joni Mitchell. I was 16 and riding a bicycle and Mike was 19, had black hair and green eyes. I used the aerogramme and he used the letter pad. There was always an assortment of stamps on every envelope because he knew I collected stamps. Whenever the postman came on his trusty old bicycle, I would get all excited and wondered if there was a letter from Killaloe for me. A letter from Ireland to Malaysia would take about 10 days and so on the average, we would get about 2 letters per month.

It was worth the wait. We corresponded for seven years and among the little gifts that he sent me was a lock of hair which I still have today in my box of keepsakes. As with long-distance friendship, the correspondence gradually petered out.

Then in 2008, as I was driving home from work in Malaysia, I heard the Circle Game by Joni Mitchell on the air.

*And the seasons, they go round and round ...And the painted ponies go up and down
We're captive on the carousel of time We can't return we can only look from where we
came And go round and round and round.....in the circle game.*

Hearing the song again after all these years caused me to wonder how life had been for Michael and I decided to carry out a yahoo search on his name. Amazed by the number of possible Michaels in County Clare, I saw one entry that looked promising and wrote a short note to him, assuring him that I was no con-woman, I wrote:

*Dear Mike, I'm from Malaysia and am wondering whether your dad, Mike Senior is the
same person I corresponded with many years ago when I was a student. Thank
you*

Incredibly the reply came back after a few days

Yes, I'm Michael Senior's son. Dad would love to hear from you...

So there was an onslaught of letters, emails, online-chats, and phone calls. I learnt that sadly Michael had lost his wife. The excitement between two long lost pen-pals was so

intense that I found myself flying to Ireland for the first time in 2008. When we first reunited, it was as if we had known each other all our lives.

One day, as we were sitting on the banks of the river Shannon, I was treated to some old-fashioned vintage declaration of love with all its charm. Michael told me what he could offer as a husband - his strengths, his humility, his assets, his love. As I watched the ducks waddling on the river bank making webbed imprints in the mud, I knew that Michael had made imprints on my heart.

In 2009, Michael formerly proposed beneath the Petronas Twin Towers.

My sister asked me, 'Are you sure you know what you're doing? You were on holiday then. Reality can be very different' My mum said, 'If I were you, I'll remain single after the divorce.' My New Zealand colleague who married a Malaysian told me 'In the early years, if my family had sent me an air ticket to go home, I would have done so.'

The decision to marry Michael and move 6800 miles to Ireland was a life changing one. I had to leave Sonya (23) and Samuel (20) behind in Malaysia because Sonya was about to graduate then and Samuel was midway in his tertiary studies. Audrey (16) came to Ireland with us. It was very heart wrenching to leave my children behind because I had been both father and mother for the most part of their lives.

I also had to quit my job as an associate professor teaching English at the university.

I had no friends in Killaloe when I first arrived. Someone asked me whether I was the new kitchen help at the Chinese take-away on Main Street. A lady followed me through the aisles of Supervalu, wheeling her trolley all the way, just to look at the face of this new person. Even as recent as 2017, someone asked me whether I wanted to join a class to learn how to speak English.

It was in 2011 that I met Marea Mulqueen in a sewing class in Limerick. She introduced me to the International Women's Organisation (IWO) and for the first time I felt I was in a safe place. I could vent my frustrations and there were so many lovely ladies who were talented and caring. I enjoyed the sessions very much.

I was the new person in an old set up. Michael's grown up sons were still living in the house and his brothers and sister were all living nearby. Any woman would love her privacy, much more so a bride who had left her country, career and loved ones behind. Mike created a craft and tea room specially for me where I found solace. I called it Howard's End after E.M.Forster's book. It also literally means the space where Soo Ling begins as my husband's surname is Howard. I could finally invite the IWO ladies over for tea at Howard's End.

Like myself, Audrey went through a difficult time. Back in Malaysia, she was a very popular student, a leader and performed very well academically. When she joined the school in Killaloe, she felt like an outcast. During break-time, the Irish students formed 2 circles and chatted. She could never be able to stand within the circle, and always had to be at the back. She tried to be helpful and friendly, but she received her fair share of hate mail and hurtful glances. Her school bag was rummaged during physical education class and her sponge bob pencil case was cut into 4 pieces and thrown into the bin. Her math was way beyond the level of her class and the teacher felt 'threatened' when she used methods that were different! Her English teacher was offended when Audrey pronounced Middle Eastern and Asian names the way they should be pronounced in [The Kite Runner](#) by Khaled Hosseini and [Never Let me Go](#) by Kazuo Ishiguro.

We frequently had hugging and crying sessions as we struggled to make sense of the country and its people. I told her she was made of more, to see the big picture and to aim for Trinity College. She gradually found a few good friends in her class and also found solace in the church youth group and scored 595/600 in her leaving cert (in a language that was not the medium of instruction in Malaysia) to secure a place in Trinity. Audrey graduated with First Class Honours just like Sonya did in medical college in Malaysia.

I have been in Ireland for 8 years now. Samuel is still working in Creative Media in Malaysia, Sonya is in Oncology in St James's, Dublin and Audrey is in Operations with the Dublin Airport Authority. I still have my fortnightly Sunday column in the The New Straits Times, (Malaysia) writing about my life in Ireland. My circle of friends has widened greatly among the Irish.



I am with the Killaloe Community Garden group, the Scariff Community Garden group, The Limerick Lace group, the Abundant Life Christian Church in Limerick and the Irish Countrywomen's Association in Castletroy. I teach crafts to Irish ladies and men, take up horse riding at Lough Derg Equestrian and am learning Irish at the Dun Muire - *CONRADH NA GAEILGE* /In Nenagh. Our story was featured in a play called the River by Helena Enright and it was held on a barge behind the Hunt Museum in 2014. I have made many lovely friends - both Irish and non-Irish in Clare, Limerick, Tipperary, Dublin and even Co. Down.



We bring out the best and the worst in each other. Anam Cara, which means the soul of a true friend, is like a mirror. Michael and I renewed our wedding vows at the Wedding Chapel in Cana, Israel on 16 February 2018. It was the place where Jesus did his first miracle, turning water into wine for the wedding guests.

Indeed our marriage and our lives in Ireland is nothing short of a miracle.

Our past is the mercy of God

Our present is the grace of God

Our future is the promise of God

Monthly (Feb) meeting speaker - None this month

Due to circumstances beyond our control, we were not able to have a speaker address the monthly meeting on 27 February. Apologies for this.

Next month's speaker (27 March) will be one of our new members, Donnah Sibanda Vuma. Donnah hails from Zimbabwe and hers is a story well worth hearing and a wake up call for all of us!

Chinese New Year Celebrations

Dear Yanan out did herself again in the organisation of the New Year dinner (Year of the Dog) in Chung's restaurant in Castletroy on 19 February. It was a great evening and we all had the best time. Thank you my dear for helping us celebrate such an occasion together. The restaurant went all out in their welcome and the food and repartee were wonderful! This seems to be one of the highlights of our year so, if you couldn't make it this year, try and come next year! Thank you, Yanan!



Two more of our wonderful and very active Chinese members - Lin and Susan - continued the New Year Celebrations chez Su on Monday, 26 February, when they organised a tai chi demonstration (Lin) and traditional tea ceremony (Susan). Thank you ladies - it was a wonderful day enjoyed by everyone and it is great to be able to celebrate your culture together!



New members this month

I am delighted to report that we have had two new members join our ranks in February:



First of all we have **Stanislava Raevska** from Bulgaria. Stani arrived in Limerick a year ago with her husband, Nikolay and her young daughter, Jasmine. Jasmine is 5 years old. Stani and Nik joined us for the great Chinese New Year's celebration recently and met a great cross-section of the IWO who were there (19 in all).



Second of all, we have **Donnah Sibanda Vuma**, from Zimbabwe. Donnah has been here for almost four years and has her children, Kendra, Alexandra and Ashton, ranging from 7 to 14 years. Donnah was recently named Clare Woman of the Year, and will address the monthly meeting on 27 March.



I would also like to welcome **Diane Gatterman** who is also a new member! Diane from Canada and arrived here with her husband and her 14 year old son. (sorry, Diane, this is the only photo I have of you so far!)

I realise that we are far away from reaching the heights of the heydays of the IWO - but it is great to welcome new members from different parts of the world to our ranks and to have such a wonderful exchange of customs and ideas and great get-togethers on a regular basis! Welcome to Diane, Stani and Dpnnah! That is three very different parts of the world represented in our small group!

March – Irish month

Many activities are taking place in March, as usual! fyi - and please see official Limerick City/County-Council websites:

11 March: Battle of the Bands

17 March: St Patrick's Day Parade

18 March: Fireworks and lights display at King John's Castle. Excellent light show (well-worth seeing!) produced by LiT. This show had originally been planned for New Year's Eve but because of the weather was postponed to St Patrick's Day weekend!

21 March: Irish goodies and repartee offered by your Irish members chez Linda, from 12.30. See further details in the Calendar and nearer the event!

March – Women's month

8 March is International Women's Day. We should try and celebrate this to the maximum! Sisterhood, ladies!

Inez has kindly offered to host the coffee morning at her place - thank you, Inez!

fyi: the Ukelealadies are planning an evening event in either Chez le Fab or the Boathouse on Sarsfield Bridge – I will send details around when I get them. Apparently,

they will have instruments for us to try. I remember someone once told me that you could not be sad strumming a ukulele!! Let's go for it!

i will send around more details of what is planned for International Women's Day when I get them!

Misc activity information

Dance Limerick: Date for your diaries!!! The - by now, annual! — show of the 50/55+ dance classes will take place on Sunday 20 May, in the Church in John's Square. If you are looking for something to do on a lazy May Sunday afternoon — or just want to check the group out with a view to partaking in next year's classes, come alone! Great fun and group!!

IWO dishes: Breda O'Connior and I met with Donnah to discuss how any dishes they need in their restaurant/cafe. She will let us know and arrangements will be made. This seems to be the never-ending saga but we are almost at an end!

I would also like to remind everyone of the volunteer work that Tyree does with refugees each Wednesday morning, teaching English. Volunteers welcome - contact her for details. She volunteers in Christ Church on O'Connell Avenue every Wednesday (anyone who would like to volunteer to teach EN should speak with her). It seems that this is also part of the group which Donnah is involved in so the dishes will go here!

Craft update from Mary Rose: Ladies....The Knitting group are working away on their projects..some are finished and others are nearly done ...just another few rows!! I know next week is a busy week for the IWO ladies but if any of you would like to come to my house on Friday 2nd at 2.30pm to do some knitting please let me know..



Our March craft is being hosted and taught by Louise Delany. She will be showing us how to make 3D Ceramic flowers. You just need to bring a rolling pin and approx 8 spoons of various sizes, Louise will supply rest of materials and we will re-emburse her the cost. The date is Tuesday 6th at 10.30am in Louise's house. Places are limited to 8 so please email me if you are interested in learning this fantastic craft.

Burren Walk: Reminder — Janet's annual Burren walk: to note — will take place first half of the month of May. More details nearer the time. Don't forget to let Janet know if you are interested!

Lime Tree Theatre: As usual, an excellent programme — please consult their website (www.limerickimetreathreatre.ie). Reminder: The Druid's "Waiting for Godot" will take place there from 7-10 March. I love anything the Druid do, and while I had reservations about going and - for goodness sake waiting for someone who never arrives (!!) I have been told that this is an excellent play and is highly recommended! (you can also find the schedule for the **Belltable** on this site).

Limerick Fringe: Lots of goodies taking place as part of the Fringe festival this year (4-7 March). consult their website for details (www.limerickfringe.com)

ADVICE: if you see something you would like to go to, I suggest you book asap. I left something on the long finger with the Limerick Literary Festival last weekend and missed out; was not a happy camper!

NEXT YEAR'S BOARD - CALL FOR INTERESTED MEMBERS: This is the time of year that we call for members of the 2018-19 IWO Board. Linda has agreed to stay on as President. If you would like to join her, please let our Parliamentarian (Theresa) know!

SUMMARY OF MONTHLY MEETING (27 FEBRUARY 2018)

Many thanks to Laura for chairing the meeting! She did a great job!

13 members attended the meeting.

Apologies:

Linda, Christine, Michele, Suzanne, Goretti, Louise

1. Newsletter of January was agreed without any comments.

2. New Board:

No objections for Linda to stay as president for another year. Theresa was calling everyone who willing to join the board give her a message. Both Lin and Susan are willing to step down due to uncertainty of the duration of staying in Ireland. Theresa is proposing to continue the practise of two persons carrying secretary job .

3. March Plans:

March will be Irish month as we are celebrating the St. Patrick's day in this month. Inez was proposing a theme lunch: everybody joining will bring a dish from the country and food/cost will be shared among the attendants.

Breda will discuss with Linda to fix the day and location before end of the month. Linda was proposed to continue to organise the dance event as proposed before, even though this can be happen later than March .

4. April will be **Canadian** month

5. Crafting

Friday 2nd March 2:30pm: knitting will take place in Mary Rose's house, weather permitting. Members should contact Mary Rose in advance if they intend going.

Tuesday 6th March 10:30am: Louise will show us how to make the beautiful poppies. Please contact Mary Rose if you plan to join, and bring with you a wooden spoon, some other spoons, and a plate to carry your work home. Cost will be split among attendants.

6. Book/plants swap

Every year Marie Morris organises a book/plants swap, which was proposed for April. More details will be forthcoming.

7. For **Thursday morning coffee get-together**, please refer to calendar. Special attention was drawn to the 8th March which will be held in Inez's. As it is just drop on international women's day, so everyone is proposed to bring something small for sharing.

8. Date of next meeting: **Tuesday 27th March**, speaker: Donnah

Reminder: Photos/privacy indications on members' list: As photos are usually taken at all IWO gatherings, it was agreed that **the onus be on those members not wishing to have their photos taken/appear on Facebook to take measures at the time of the photos being taken not to appear in the photos.** Members taking the photos will ensure that all know that photos are being taken so that those wishing not to be photographed have time to take measures to this effect.

Please check out our monthly calendar for the update scheduled events each week!

