

Chaperoning a field trip to St. Mary's City, our first family hotel stay, a poetry reading, and The Irish Blessing (7 Quick Takes)

~1~



Ever been to St. Mary's City, Md.? I hadn't gone until this week when I chaperoned a fourth grade field trip there. We rode the 2 ½ hours down to southern Maryland to explore the historic site.

It was fascinating and lovely. We learned some history, saw some pigs and cows, and explored a boat. Who knew tobacco flowers were so beautiful?

I had never been to that part of Maryland. I'm not sure where my fourth grade class went on their field trip since my parents didn't let me ride school buses, so my class might have gone to St. Mary's City. Maybe they went to Disney World. I never asked.

But I think I got more out of the trip now than I would have then, and I got to be with Leo. So we enjoyed it for the first time together.

~2~



I could write a whole post about chaperoning field trips and lessons I've learned, and maybe one day I will. But the biggest takeaway for me was "Whatever you do, don't embarrass your child." That was my mantra for the day, and I think I did all right.

At one point I almost started a conversation with a parent I thought was being a bit obnoxious, but then I remembered my primary reason for being there was not to embarrass my son. So I turned and walked away.

Look at me, still learning things long after fourth grade.

~3~

We traveled to New York for my brother-in-law Eric's funeral last weekend. It was a hard trip, but also a good one. I think I was so focused on the emotional challenges of the weekend that I didn't think about all the people I would see—all the family and friends I would be with, and all the people I would reconnect with after years and years. It was amazing to see some of the lives Eric had touched.



Our boys wanted to dress up for Uncle Eric, and they did. My niece Eileen (14) and nephew David (13) read the readings at their father's funeral, and the strength they showed honoring his memory would have made him so proud.

It was a weekend full of tears, full of laughter, full of comfort, full of pain, full of love. Our prayer for the month in Sunday School has been the Prayer of St. Francis and, as our family has been praying it together every night, I have been thinking of how appropriate it is that that has been our thread through October.

Going into the weekend, I prayed I would be the instrument God needed me to be. I didn't feel I was enough for anyone or anything I was facing. But that prayer made sense...where there is darkness, let me bring light. Where there is sadness, let me bring joy.

~4~



On our trip our sons also experienced their first hotel stay in an American hotel.

We stayed in hotels in China on our adoption trips, but when we travel in the U.S., we typically stay with family or make it a day trip.

Our children have now discovered room service, and they thought the whole hotel experience was amazing.

It's true that room service is hard to top.

~5~

The night before the funeral we went to a poetry reading that Eileen's high school poetry club was holding. When the teacher asked whether anyone in the audience had brought a poem, I think she was astonished that my hand shot into the air.

"Oh!" she said. "Please come up and introduce yourself."

So I went to the podium. And I looked out at this enormous audience and realized just how packed the place was. But then I noticed that half of them were my relatives and many of the rest were family and friends of Eileen's who had come to support her.

I read my poem, "I Do Not Want to Have a Mouse." It was a crowd pleaser in front of

a crowd that was yearning to be pleased. I enjoyed every minute of it. But even better was the next day when someone who had been in the audience approached me to ask whether the mouse represented anything. My head started spinning. What should I say? World hunger? A Roth IRA? A flat tire? I couldn't think of anything. Next time maybe I will be more prepared.

~6~



One of the best parts of traveling is visiting new churches.

We went to Sunday Mass at a beautiful church, St. Pius X in Scarsdale, N.Y., and we were able to light candles on our way into Mass. Daniel, who's 7, stopped to write a couple names—including Uncle Eric's—in the book of intentions.

Behind the altar was an extraordinary stained glass window showing American saints. I love seeing the art in different churches. And our boys each made three wishes, as we always do.

~7~

When my brother-in-law Eric was a student at Yale, he was in an a cappella group, the Spizzwinks (?). That question mark is part of the title, as Eileen patiently explained to me. Some of his fellow Spizzwinks (?) alumni offered to sing at his funeral, and my sister Maureen asked whether they could sing The Irish Blessing.

They did. She had asked me beforehand to try to capture it on video. And somehow I happened to be sitting in exactly the right spot with a clear view and two sons who sat still and silently next to me during the whole song.

Even in the most difficult moments, there can be such beauty and such joy.

Those takes weren't all that quick after all. Read actual quick takes at Kelly's blog, This Ain't the Lyceum, and enjoy the weekend.