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Kate's Chat

CONNECTING THROUGH THE COCOON



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Making a Special Occasion out of the Everyday

Now that the world has slowed down, a lot of us are finally 'getting round' to the little jobs we had placed on the long finger for too long – sometimes even years in the case of clearing out my garden shed! I can see this in the huge demand for the government to reopen hardware shops, I think as a nation we are sick of staring at the same blank walls and have a need to spruce up our homes if we are staying in them for so long.

I've discovered the quick and easy way to improve my home without traipsing to the nearest hardware store and slaving over paint buckets for weeks. I've simply stopped hiding away the good pieces of decoration. We all have the good dinnerware, the nice linens and the expensive throws that we hoard away for the visitors or a fancy occasion. Why not take them out during this lockdown and make an ordinary day feel that bit more special?

The hubby and kids were thoroughly mystified at the starched linen tablecloth that was laid out before them for an average Tuesday dinner. (Especially as I sometimes even forget to bring it out for Christmas Day!)

My morning coffee used to be taken in the same mug for years, but I've changed it up to the Aynsley tea set I received as a birthday gift years ago. Let's take out the good china for an ordinary lunch, and make the day to day a special occasion!



Sprucing up your Home

You don't need to leave your house to get some new furnishings.

An old tablecloth could be cut up to make good heavy napkins, and faded curtains could be folded and repurposed as place mats, let your imagination go wild with the bags of old things we don't know what to do with anymore.

I'd love to see some of your ways of being thrifty in this lockdown!

You can write to me the old-fashioned way at Kate Kerrigan, Quay, Killala, Co. Mayo, Ireland or email me at

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Northern Trip

Mum turned 80 last year so my sisters and I decided to take her away. We started planning back at the beginning of the Summer, asking Mam where she wanted to go. 'Anywhere in the world,' I said. 'Go for it.' She sat contemplating for a while then finally looked at me and said, 'Harveys point in Donegal - Jacinta says it's the last word' As jam-maker and cook extraordinaire, Jacinta's opinion counts.

'Is that it?' I said. 'Coach trip to Paris? Cruise? Come on Mam. Be adventurous!' Her voice took on an apologetic tone, 'Well, if its not too much trouble, I'd like to see the Seamus Heaney Homeplace in Derry.'

'Really?' the younger sister said when I texted her the plans. 'One night?' Our excuse for escaping on a five star jolly was slipping away from us. 'Tell her we'll take her to Belfast after,' she said. 'Three days. I'll do an itinerary. C can book the restaurants.'

I collected Mum early on Sunday morning and drove her to Sligo. Mum sat in the front, and snuggled back into her heated seat to enjoy the panoramic view.

'This is great' she said.

'Speak-up - I cannot hear you back here!' I complained from the back. As the responsible eldest, I often took responsibility for my younger siblings and expect the same royal treatment as Mam. I don't get it. 'Put your hearing aid in and stop moaning,' my sister barked, clicking her shellac off the leather steering wheel.

We had lunch in Harveys Point, took some pictures for Jacinta, then spent the night with the charming Martina in Brook Lodge, Magherafelt. We got a spotless, double bedroom room each and complimentary brownies with our tea & coffee

making facilities. As B&B aficionados Mam and I agreed this was 'Daniel and Majella standard'. A short drive away was the Seamus Heaney Homeplace, a purpose built museum and arts centre in Bellaghy. The great man's face, as man and boy, covers a large wall and grips you in his distinctive, twinkly gaze as soon as you walk in the door. I met him once at an arts festival. He accepted an invitation to drink tea in my 'Good Room' tent. In utter awe of being in his presence I somehow managed to thank him for a poem he had written called 'Mother of the Groom' explaining how I had given it to my mother in law the night before I married. 'And did he slip her soapy hold?' he asked me. I can't remember what I replied but I do remember feeling validated that he bothered to connect with my fandom. A pretty blonde woman showed us around the museum. Mary's family bought the Heaney first family home after they moved when Seamus was about fifteen. She was a mine of information and I stood talking to her for ages before calling my own family over, making her repeat everything she had told me. Heaney was 73 when he died, seven years younger than my mother. He was writing poetry, right up to the end and died too early. The tragedy of a legacy cut short, all those unwritten poems, that condensed wisdom unshared. Upstairs we had coffee and watched a video of him accepting the Pulitzer in '95. The footage showed that, despite his erudition and literary brilliance, Heaney was, mostly an engagingly grounded and 'ordinary' man, interacting with his wife and children with immense love and humour. That's poetry: the captured essence of that humanity. The living of it as important as the words on the page. I leant across and touched Mam's shoulder.