

## **Welcome Home to Knappogue Castle**

Don McNamara

When planning a family vacation to Europe several years ago an idea sprung to my head. Why not surprise my children by having them be Lord and Lady of a Knappogue Castle, Ireland medieval banquet. After consulting with my wife, we agreed on the date that we wished they be honored. Thereafter I meticulously prepared a complete itinerary through the continent so we would arrive in County Clare on the evening of August 16<sup>th</sup>. The following day is a special day; it is my daughter Amy's birthday.

So I called from the United States and spoke with the banquet manager at the castle requesting this consideration. Soon afterward a letter was sent to him confirming our agreement that my children would become Lord and Lady of the castle at the evening sitting on August 17<sup>th</sup> 1997. Naturally, I requested his letter confirming the conversation as well.

Now the anxiety began. Admittedly, I was a ball of nerves leading up to and during the vacation, because anyone who has done any travel knows all sorts of mishaps can occur, from illness to cancelled airline flights. Nonetheless, we arrived at Shannon Airport the afternoon of the 16<sup>th</sup> and speedily found accommodations in a nearby bed and breakfast.

After touring many of the historical sites in Clare we returned to our rooms the afternoon of the 17<sup>th</sup> in preparation for going to the banquet that evening.

Even though it was pouring rain making the driving even more treacherous than normal on the narrow roads, we managed to arrive in the castle vestibule well in advance of the sitting. I wanted us to be first in line thereby eliminating the possibility of passengers on the tourist buses wanting to be Lord and Lady.

As expected the buses arrived, and just like a scene out of a movie the rush was on to get to the entrance cord. I was stymied; the cord was aligned in such a manner that those departing the buses were funneled directly to the banquet hall entrance. Instead of joining the crowd, I insisted we remain in the vestibule. I needed an opportunity to speak first hand with the headwaiter and present the letter to him thus obviating the unabashed crowd that had stopped just short of bursting into the hall.

My family was visibly upset that I had insisted we hold back and let so many people in the entrance queue before us. Stating everything was going to be all right I proceeded in haste to locate the headwaiter. Upon presenting the letter from the banquet manager to him, he examined it carefully, verified it was their stationery and the signature was authentic.

Both of us returned to the vestibule and he asked my children to follow him. They looked at me like I was trying to give them away. They complied only after I gave them my best reassuring nod that everything was going to be fine.

Then my wife and I were escorted directly up to the dais with apologies offered to those who had previously been selected.

A few minutes after being seated, a spotlight appeared on a small stage in the hall and there were my son and daughter wearing magnificently embroidered silk capes. Then the master of ceremonies, adorned in fine period clothing himself, made a proclamation that “with the passing of this sword, herewith you are proclaimed Lord and Lady of the Feast.” He asked my son his name. “Brian McNamara”. The master of ceremonies immediately responded, “Welcome Home.” You see Knappogue Castle is the hereditary home of the McNamara Clan of Clare County.

Later, after sitting next to me at the head table, Brian leaned over and asked “Dad how did you manage to pull this off?” I responded, “Easy, you have just learned the lesson of advanced planning.”

Welcome Home, indeed! What a memorable ending to a fun filled family vacation. And it certainly is a birthday Amy will never forget.

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