

Ireland - 2008

Anne Sexton Diary – Guerrilla Girls On Tour in Dublin

Day One: February 22, 2008

Guerrilla Girls on Tour arrived in Dublin, Ireland on a bonnie but blistery morning. We were armed with our Irish theatre and women's rights research, our posters and gorilla wear, but nothing could have prepared us for the week ahead! Ireland is clutching onto the Conservative Catholic doctrines with all its might, and within our first 24 hours, we were met with cross and shield.

Our whirlwind first was press, press and more press. Our producer and resident feminist, Rebecca Saunders, Coco Chanel, Laura Keene and I split up from Gracie Allen and Aphra Behn for a "press conference" on the beautiful, historic Trinity College campus. The only problem was... Irish media don't do "press conferences"--don't ask me why, as a Pulitzer prize winning poet and sex goddess extraordinaire, I acknowledge the helpfulness of press conferences--but alas, not one single person came! This actually worked to our benefit because instead we attended the "Women in Theatre" class taught by a lovely feminist named Elizabeth and had great fun answering questions and discussing the hardships of being a feminist in Ireland. In Ireland, Feminism is tragically the "F" word.

After my midday snack of 5 cigarettes and a vodka tonic, Coco Chanel, Aphra Behn and myself were whisked away in a taxi whizzing down the left side of the road to a rehearsal of the longest running and most prestigious of all late night Irish talk shows: *The Late Late Show*. This is the mack daddy of talk shows, the creme de la creme of Irish music and culture appear on this show, hosted by the heavily made-up, devilishly charming and obtuse Pat Kenny.

The Late Late Show hails itself as "the longest running chat show in the world" beginning in 1962. A glance at the past guest list reads like a who's who of contemporary history: Mother Teresa of Calcutta, Oliver Reid, Elton John, U2, President Mary Robinson, Colin Farrell, Bishop Eamon Casey, Peter Sellers, Bob Geldof, Jack Charlton, President Mary McAleese, Jerry Springer, Graham Norton, Cliff Richard, Sonia O'Sullivan, Rod Stewart, Roy Keane.. and last, but certainly NOT least, the Guerrilla Girls on Tour!

Coco and I performed our 3 minute routine, including a brand-new

song especially for Ireland, "The Pro Choice Blues", to a silent crew on the set. Our contact, the production assistant, Leslie O'Connor, greeted us with deadline-speed charm and prepped us on the questions Pat was going to ask us: who we were, our views on abortion, etc.. Meanwhile, the guitarist from U2 was tuning his guitar...say what? Well, well, well! Coco Chanel gushed over sharing the stage with the mega-force, U2. Little did she know she would accidentally bump right into Bono backstage and exchange words with him. His bodyguard only protects him from people, naturally, not Guerrilla Girls.

We did feel slight remorse that Bono would have to change the words "And I still haven't found what I'm looking for..." once he met the Guerrilla Girls on Tour in the hospitality room. Aaaah, Bono, your lightly blue tinted sunglasses are tres chic!

Needless to say, we were very excited and more and more nervous as the 9:45 PM air time approached. **We were going to reach the most people at one time with our message of feminism and women's rights than ever before in Guerrilla Girl history!** Not to mention brush shoulders with U2, Sinéad O'Connor, The Dubliners, Shane MacGowan, Ronnie Drew, current Brit pop sensation David Jordan, and more!

In the wise words of our feminist friend, Kaitlin G, "I quickly found out how wrong I was". Pat Kenny and *The Late Late Show* didn't want to hear our ideas with an open mind, they had a backwards, self-serving agenda. We were to be the shocking, rebel-rousing, "controversial" segment of the show. In other words, we were scapegoats of sorts. We are Guerrillas, not Goats, Ireland!!!

Take Exhibit One: GGOT placement on the show. We were to follow a group of Franciscan Friars, who ended their segment by praying with the audience. Now, I have nothing against praying, of course, but to Gracie Allen and Laura Keane who were watching us on TV with an objective eye, Pat Kenny was decidedly conservative and slanted his questions throughout, and the placement of the Friars praying seemed to send a message to the viewers "Thou shalt be devout Catholics and remember all we preach". (i.e. abortion, divorce and homosexuality are intrinsically sinful and wrong). If you'd been the live audience, as Rebecca Saunders and fellow feminists in section B12 were, you'd have witnessed a sexist comedian trying to "warm up" the crowd by berating women in the audience and getting a lap dance from a obviously placed "audience member". The plot thickens.

Exhibit Two: Aphra Behn happened to be standing by the live audience as Coco Chanel and I were being lead by the hand to our marks, and heard one of the PAs say to the audience, "Now you'll all gonna' boo if you want to, right?!" Even with an Irish accent, this is not cute and/or acceptable.

Exhibit Three: The actual interview had several awkward moments. Pat Kenny was very condescending and did not ask any of the questions that we had been prepped on. When he introduced me, he flat out said that I was a prostitute. Well, thank you, Pat, I know I was a sex goddess in my time, but please, let's stick to some real questions about Irish women's rights! He insinuated that women just don't want to bother with being in government, "too many meetings and not enough money". Are you kidding me? That comment was not even worth dignifying. He tried to trap Coco by asking her what she thought of Bill and Hillary Clinton's relationship, instead of Clinton's campaign it was "what will you say about sex". And he concluded by asking an overtly sexual question to Aphra Behn about "what it would take to get her to take her mask off". Disgusting.

Conclusion: Even though Pat Kenny tried with all his chiseled but greasy might to get us to lash out into some sort of "controversial" crazy feminist diatribe or misspeak, we did not. We conducted ourselves with dignity and poise. Poor Pat has some sexual tension to work through and on live television is not the time or the place.

We all went straight to the hospitality room backstage after our seemingly endless two-minute segment was over. I kicked back two vodka tonics and 17 cigarettes while Coco Chanel furiously cut out a pattern for a pair of silk trousers and Aphra Behn went in the corner and scribbled on parchment with her quill.

February 22nd, our first full day in Ireland, and our appearance on *The Late Hate Show* marked a rite of passage for me, Anne Sexton, as a Guerrilla Girl on Tour. I was put on the firing line for being an outspoken woman and feminist and came out a little shaken at the time I'll admit, but much stronger in the long run. It reminds me of my book of poetry published in 1966, "Live or Die"...

...I say *Live, Live* because of the sun,
the dream, the excitable gift.

Oh, and Pat Kenny IS a bit of a wanker.

Day Two: February 23, 2008

Rise and shine, jet lagged girls! Time to inhale a traditional English breakfast and get back on the front.

Our second day in Ireland consisted of our infamous Poster Making Workshop. Turn out was a bit skimpy, but the students who were there were brilliant women who poured their hearts out with sexual and gender discrimination and their plight as young women in a religious, male-dominated country.

Then we started the arduous rehearsal process for our back-to-back shows coming up in just two days. We sang, danced, memorized, edited, blocked, performed and munched on bananas like mad. We were Guerrillas on a mission.

After rehearsal, we had dinner at a great Italian restaurant by our hotel, Mona Lisa, and met our vivacious and talented videographer, Luanna. Luanna was joining us from London to work on pitching a documentary on GGOT to an English production company. Keep your fingers crossed that it will be produced, friends!

After dinner, Laura Keene and I decided to explore the vibrant pubbing district in Dublin known as Temple Bar. Ireland had beaten Scotland in rugby that night, so everyone in Scotland seemed to be there, dancing jigs in their kilts on the street. After a quite random run-in with some ultra conservative young Irish lads who wanted to argue with us that all "gays are pedophiles, and the Pope says it's wrong", we decided that we'd had enough raunch for the night, and headed back to the hotel. My ears are still buzzing with that unsavory exchange. It certainly added fuel to the fire: Ireland needs us now more than ever!

Day Three: February 24, 2008

Again--as on day two--we sang, danced, memorized, edited, blocked, performed and munched on bananas like mad from morning til night. We implemented lots of new material, I played Hillary Clinton in several new sketches and worked on honing my craft as a polished politician with wisdom and pearls of steel. Coco Chanel did a rip-roaring rendition of Barrack Obama, and Gracie tore it up with her Margaret Thatcher impression. After all, she **was** the funny side of the Burns and Allen comedy routine.

After 9 long hours of rehearsal (it's not all glitz, glamour and vodka martinis for us GGOT members), I wolfed down a \$10 veggie burger from Burger King and curled up to sleep. Tomorrow was the big day. Although Coco Chanel and I both agreed that we could accomplish anything after getting through that horrendous *Late, Late Show*, I couldn't help but wonder how our Irish audiences would react. Was Dublin ready for some feminist Guerrilla warfare?

Day Four: February 25, 2008

Show Day, Ladies and Gentlemen, Girls and Boys... Guerrilla Girls on Tour presents "Feminists Are Funny" at the Players Theatre at Trinity College, Dublin!

We teched then had a final dress rehearsal, and were raring to go for our first performance, at 6:30 PM. We packed the house and our audience seemed anxious to be entertained and open to our ideas. They laughed and exclaimed, and overall, had a grand time. When we opened the forum up to the audience, however, to give them a platform for burning issues, they immediately fell silent.

But the second show, the 9 PM crowd, started a volatile, excited debate on taking back the word "cunt" and how "words are just words" and how negative connotations of the word "feminist" were preventing Irish women from identifying themselves as such. It seems that we Guerrilla Girls on Tour had opened up an Irish can of worms. And I couldn't help but marvel while onstage and watching the audience's lively debate that I was so proud to have helped spark it. Their issues don't have definitive answers, the world we live in is not a black-and-white one, but allowing these women to state their opinions was a rare and valuable experience and brought them that much closer to the truth.

As a Confessional poet, I thrive on spilling out my darkest desires, grievances and joys, etc., but often times women in conservative countries like Ireland don't get that opportunity, women must remain silent about going abroad to get illegal abortions to escape prosecution and ostracism, and this is something that angers me and I hope will inspire people to act. If you would like to learn more, dear reader, please visit these websites: **www.safeandlegalinireland.ie** and **www.irishantiwar.org** among others to educate yourself on the current social and political climate in Ireland.

Day Five: February 26, 2008

In the morning, Gracie, Coco, Laura and one of our lovely Trinity ambassadors, Sarah, visited the precious Book of Kells in the old Trinity library, marveling at the craftsmanship of the medieval scribes who worked so assiduously on them.

Then we met our videographer extraordinaire, Luanna, at busy O'Connell Street, the main thoroughfare of Dublin, for a zany film shoot. We ran around the Spire of Dublin like gorillas with our heads cut off and crossed bustling intersections as people turned to gawk at the Guerrillas in their midst.

At 2 PM we had a date with our Irish producer, the Belle of the Feminist Ball, Rebecca Saunders, for an interview. Ms. Saunders, future Irish National Parliament member (in my opinion), is doing her dissertation on the GGOT, and picked our brains on women writers and artists, politics and post modernist feminism in general.

After the interview with Rebecca, we headed over to one of the theatre studios on campus for our Street Theatre Workshop, a first for me. We had a bang-up group, and street theatre pieces were brainstormed, rehearsed and brilliantly executed in a mere 3 hours on important issues such as gay marriage and nuclear pollution.

After another long day of fighting discrimination and raising feminist awareness, we went back to our hotel and enjoyed a veritable feast at the restaurant downstairs. We toasted to our accomplishments and exchanged stories; a good time was had by all...

Day Six: February 27, 2008

Day Off!! We started the day bright and early on a bus tour headed for the Hill of Howth and quaint Malahide Castle. Then we returned to Dublin, and split up for some serious sightseeing. Laura Keene and I walked the entire town, drinking in the medieval architecture, cathedrals, gardens and vodka gimlets--I mean, hearty, nourishing Irish meat and potatoes.

We all met up for dinner at "La Med" on the banks of the Liffey River and had a Guerrilla pow wow. This was our last night in Dublin, and we agreed that the best send off would be with some traditional Irish folk music at the historic pub, the Brazen Head. A pub in Ireland is a beautiful thing: people singing and toasting, smiling and chatting, and

the Brazen Head was a beauty that night.

Thus marked the end of our jam-packed week in bonnie Dublin, Ireland. We certainly reached out to more people than ever before and we hope that the Irish will keep Guerrilla Girls on Tour, in the words of Shakespeare "in memory locked," just as we will always keep them.

Regards,

Anne Sexton

Laura Keene Diary – Guerrilla Girls On Tour in Dublin

2/22/08 Friday 1:50pm

Flight was delayed almost 3 hours, but somehow we arrived only 1.5 hrs late (@ 8:30 am Dublin time). Traffic was awful getting to the hotel, but we finally made it!

In my exhausted, jet lagged stupor I noticed that the rumors are true...Ireland has very green grass!

Coco, Anne, and myself went to meet Rebecca and Sarah at the press conference – however no one showed up. So we decided to crash the Women in Theatre class on the other side of the campus.

The class was so enthusiastic and asked thoughtful and very intelligent questions. I am really looking forward to working with them in the workshops and hope that we live up to their expectations.

Observation of the day: Although the Irish Government is conservatively Catholic, not all Irish people are. In fact, as pointed out by one student, the young Irish are rebelling against the conservatives in a lot of ways. One example is that a lot of young couples are choosing to live together as opposed to getting married.

Abortion also seems to be a hot topic here. Everyone seems to have a lot to say.

Another rumor proven true – Irish people are some of the nicest in the world :o)

Saturday 02/23/08

Rehearsal is going well. Looks like line memorization will be our biggest challenge on this trip as the Girls have a lot to learn in a very short amount of time and we lost some rehearsal time yesterday due to our fabulous appearance on the Late Late Show.

Anne and I went to Temple Bar to take in the sights of Ireland post Ireland V. Scotland (rugby match). We had a blast watching the Scots dance to the bagpipes and the Irish having a great time. Our night became a little discolored when we met two Irish men on the street over hearing us talk about America.

One of the gentlemen was very bawdy and seemed to do his best to ruffle our feathers. It was all in good fun until the subject of homosexuality came up. Their views were shocking to me. One of the men said that he and his family had not spoken to his brother for 10 years since he came out, and the other man said that he saw this brother walking down the street one day and beat him with a hurling paddle because he was gay. He stated this assault with pride – as if it was the duty of all good, straight, Catholic men to rid the world of homosexuals.

But that wasn't the worst of it. He continued on to say that all pedophiles were gay, and it was proven in an interview with 18 convicted pedophiles who (he says) claimed they were gay. When I asked him about the pedophiles in the Catholic priesthood, he stated that they were all gay and were forced into the priesthood when they were younger because they were gay. He also stated that the Pope says that all gays are "inherently evil."

Then within the same breath this man states (as a group of scantily clad girls walk by) that if a woman dresses disrespectfully then to treat her disrespectfully – as if to say it is ok to rape a woman if she wears a short skirt.

I do not need to elaborate about how wrong all of the above statements are, but I was so surprised that young men actually have these views and stated them with confidence and no fear of retribution. I'm not knocking Ireland, but I wonder if it's the strong presence of the Catholic Church that allows these types of thoughts to form and thrive.

Perhaps this was a fluke and is not an epidemic as I feared that night. In fact, all of the students and other Irish people that we have met so far are extremely tolerant, intelligent, and well informed people.

I'm still excited to be in Ireland and hope that we can reach some of the people that have these damaging beliefs.

Sunday 02/24/08

Rehearsals are getting a little harder. The girls are clearly tired and there is a little tension in the rehearsal space. I'm not worried, however, as this is so typical of any rehearsal process pressed into a very short amount of time. I believe that conflict can be a wonderful catalyst for creativity – and this show is shaping up to be one of the best I've worked on with the GGOT. I think we all feel the pressure of wanting to have an amazingly successful show here. I know that I, for one, have been very impressed by the student base at Trinity and hope that we are able to live up to all of their expectations.

There seems to be a real need for these students to speak out against injustice and about the political and social issues that are affecting their lives. There doesn't seem to be an easily accessible forum for them to speak out, and I think that we all hope to provide that for them for at least the time we are here. Perhaps we'll be able to inspire more people to speak their minds. Sometimes all it takes is one voice to give others the courage to do the same.

Monday 02/25/08

Show time.

The DU Players has an absolutely incredible group of students running it. Everything was so professionally done that I never worried that we were going to have a knockout show.

The tech rehearsal was very efficient and we made fantastic progress with the help of Collum – the tech director of the DU Players Theatre (I'm sorry if I spelled his name wrong!).

The first show had an audience that loved to laugh, however, when given a chance to voice their concerns, they remained very silent. I think that is a concern in itself. They seemed shy to speak up – perhaps they went home and were able to talk about the show and the

issues we raised with people that make them feel safe enough to voice their thoughts.

The second audience was very attentive, however did not laugh as much as the first group. They seemed to latch onto the issues that were imbedded in the show rather than our humorous deliveries. When it came time for them to speak about the issues that meant a lot to them, their opinions and concerns seemed to bubble over. Dialogs were unstoppable as they spoke about the power of words and announcement of protests and marches. Many of the audience members seemed to look to Anne, Coco, and Gracie onstage to resolve their issues. One gentleman asked what we would suggest to do about the pay gap between men and women in Ireland. I know that the girls onstage had a difficult time addressing this issue. It was then that the thought came crashing down on me that although we wish we were omniscient, we do not have all of the answers – we are just a catalyst for thoughts and action. We pursue our cause and hope to give others the courage and drive to pursue theirs.

I know the girls onstage wished that they were able to resolve the issues that caused so much debate in the theatre, but I think we all realized that in the end just getting people talking is a success within itself.

Congratulations to the GGOT girls onstage, Aphra - our dynamic director, the DU Players, and our incredibly inspiring audiences on a remarkable production of Guerrilla Girls On Tour Feminists are Funny – Republic of Ireland Edition!

Tuesday 02/26/08

This was a day of firsts for me. As the GGOT stage manager I do not often get a chance to perform in front of a camera or even participate in a performance based workshop. Today I got to do both.

Filming was insane and fun. The people on the street probably thought we were nuts (and we are!), but it was strangely freeing to be behind the mask.

The street theatre workshop was really inspiring. Although I was never quite comfortable “acting” in front of everyone it was really great to see the workshop participants form their ideas and really create something I could see happening on the street some day. I

hope that they are able to use the techniques some day to further the causes they feel strongly about.

All in all I would say that this Ireland trip as been more than successful. I have learned more about myself and Ireland as a whole than I ever thought possible.

I want to say thank you to everyone at Trinity College for an incredible experience that I know I will never forget.

Céad Míle Fáilte!

Laura Keene