

Belfast girl experiencing New York State summer

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — When 12-year-old Jennifer Lee Dawson returns to Northern Ireland next week, she'll tell her friends about the big buildings in the United States, a strange game called baseball and two slang terms common to American adolescents: "awesome" and "gross."

Dawson is one of 28 children currently staying with families in Monroe County and surrounding areas as part of the Irish Children's Program. Based in Rochester, the ICP is a not-for-profit organization that for the last eight years has brought an equal number of Protestant and Catholic children from Northern Ireland each summer to spend six weeks here.

According to Chris Klehammer, ICP's publicity director, demonstrations and violence generally increase in Northern Ireland during the summer months. The ICP takes children ages 10-14 out of this environment where many Catholics, seeking to be free of British rule, and many Protestants, loyal to the British government, view each other with suspicion and hatred.

Dawson, a Protestant whose family belongs to the Church of Ireland, lives in the Knocknatoone area of Belfast, Northern Ireland's capital. Since Knocknatoone is a generally peaceful section of the city, Dawson said she has not experienced the kind of violence many other program participants have seen. In fact, Dawson's disco-dance teacher in Belfast often brings her and her classmates into Catholic neighborhoods to attend dances.

Like most of the children in the ICP, Dawson was placed with a family whose religion differed from her own. And although her Catholic host family offered to take her to Protestant services, the girl opted to go to Sunday Mass instead.

"It was quite the same," Dawson said, comparing the Mass to her usual services. "But you just have to stand up, sit down, stand up, sit down all the time," she joked.

Dawson made quick friends with her host family, who found the girl even-tempered and humorous. "She so often makes comments that put us at ease," said Sandy Lund, a junior high teacher at St. John the Evangelist School, Spencerport.

St. John's has extensively supported the ICP, Klehammer said. The parish youth group raised \$500 for the program through a St. Patrick's Day carnation sale last March, and the parish folk group will play at an ecumenical service for the program's children at a closing picnic in Northampton Park on Saturday, Aug. 5.

Picnics and outings have made up much of the time the Lunds have spent with Dawson, Terry Lund said. Their youngest daughter, 12-year-old Jennifer, has introduced her new companion from Belfast to such American cultural phenomena as the roller-coaster ride at Seabreeze Park and rock star Jon Bon Jovi.

"She's really fun," Jennifer Lund said of her new friend. "She likes to do a lot of stuff." At Seabreeze, for example, Dawson impressed Jennifer's friends by testing her cast-iron stomach. "She could go on more rides than me. She went on the (roller coaster) a bunch of times," Jennifer remarked admiringly.

The recent Bon Jovi concert in Rochester highlighted the girls' summer together, Dawson noted. "He's a good singer, and he can sing live," she said, noting that some music stars are hits in the studio but don't perform well on stage. Dawson also listed Madonna and the English group Bros among her favorites.

The Lund family and their guest attended a Rochester Red Wings' game on Thursday, July 27, along with several other children in the ICP. Dawson said she enjoyed the game, but she found it confusing. "It was quite hard to follow both teams, with all the different scores on the board," she said.

The Belfast resident likes to swim, and said she spends a lot of free time in her city's pools. "It's good here, because we have our own pool," she said of the pool in the backyard of the Lund family's Rochester home.

Catching a tan by the water is what she'll miss most about the States, Dawson said, noting the gray weather of her native land. "It's mainly cloudy and rainy, but sometimes, if you're lucky, you'll catch a bit of sun," she commented.

Klehammer, meanwhile hopes that the children who participate in the ICP will



Tracy Lindsay (left) and Sinda Rea of Belfast, Ireland, seem to enjoy the refreshments more than the baseball game as they munch their way through cotton candy, popcorn and pizza during a Thursday night Red Wings game.

someday bring a bit of sunlight to their strife-torn homeland. "We're all just very hopeful it will play a part," she said, noting that the program has helped many Catholic and Protestant Irish children get to know each other over the years.

Gauging by a story related by the ICP's sister committee in Belfast, two children who met here last summer have already learned part of the ICP's lesson of neighborly love, Klehammer remarked.

One day, a Protestant boy who visited here last summer, tried to walk unnoticed through a Catholic neighborhood. Before he managed to leave the neighborhood, a group of Catholic boys spotted him and gave chase. Finally, the Catholic boys caught the Protestant and were preparing to beat him up when one of the Catholic boys

recognized him from their stay together in the Rochester program.

"He's OK. Leave him alone," the Catholic boy said to his compatriots, who let the Protestant boy leave the neighborhood safely.

After her stay in this country, Jennifer Lee Dawson might have a new word to describe that kind of behavior — "Awesome!"

• • •
EDITOR'S NOTE: For information about volunteering for, donating to, or becoming a host family for the ICP, call 716/865-5160 or write: Irish Children's Program, P.O. Box 22983, Rochester, N.Y. 14692.

Catechist training slated

The diocesan Office of Religious Education has announced a course to be offered at the Pastoral Center, 1150 Buffalo Rd., Rochester, during the months of August and September. This basic formation course will fulfill the requirements for course work for the Diocesan Policy for Certification of Catechetical Leaders, which went into effect July 1.

Patricia Lawlor, consultant for the Finger Lakes Office of Religious Education, will present "New Exodus" on August 14, 17, 21, 24, and September 7, 14, 21 and 28 from 10 a.m. to noon. This training experience is designed to provide Catholic leaders with leadership skills in such areas as communications and effective decision making.

Call Sylvia Mancuso at 716/328-3210 for information.

Please...
Tell them
you saw
their ad in
the
Catholic
Courier



Paul Murray of Belfast and his host pal David Kurtz of Canandaigua cheer for the Red Wings as the team runs off the field at Silver Stadium. The two boys attended the game with other children and families from the Irish Children's Program.