

8th Oct. 2020

DEAR DAN,

I HOPE THIS LETTER FINDS YOU WELL. I APOLOGISE FOR ANY MISSPELLING OR TYPOS I MAKE. I FEEL HANDWRITING A LETTER IS MUCH MORE PERSONAL IN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES.

I HAVE FOUND THIS TO BE THE MOST DIFFICULT LETTER TO WRITE. AT TIMES I THOUGHT. WHY DO THIS? MY TIME IN MAINE HAS BEEN COMPLETELY AT THE BACK OF MY MIND FOR SUCH A LONG TIME THAT IT HAS FELT LIKE A DISTANT MEMORY. THEN ONLY A FEW WEEKS AGO I WAS AT A LAKE NEAR BELFAST AND WATCHED A SCULL ROWING BOAT BEING TIED BACK TO THE PIER BY A YOUNG GENTLEMAN. IT SUDDENLY REMINDED ME OF YOU AND THE GREAT TIMES WE SPENT ON YOUR ROWING BOAT ON JONES' POND AND FRENCHMAN BAY. WITH THIS AND HAVING PLENTY OF TIME TO REFLECT DURING THIS WORLD PANDEMIC, I FELT I NEEDED TO WRITE TO YOU TO GET A LOT OF THOUGHTS OUT OF MY SYSTEM. ALL WEEK, I HAVE BEEN PONDERING WHAT TO WRITE, SINCE ITS BEEN SUCH A LONG TIME SINCE WE LAST SPOKE.

AFTER I LEFT YOU, I THOUGHT MANY TIMES ABOUT PHONING AND EMAILING YOU TO STAY IN CONTACT. AS THE MONTHS AND YEARS WENT ON AFTER MICHAELS DEATH, I FELT IT BEST TO BYPASS THE COMMUNICATION, I FELT THAT TIME IN MY LIFE WAS BEST KEPT LOCKED AWAY. I'M NOT SURE THIS WAS A GOOD IDEA FOR MY OWN MENTAL HEALTH, AND IT WAS NOT MY INTENTION TO AVOID CONTACT, BUT THERE WERE DAYS WERE I FELT IT WAS THE RIGHT CHOICE TO MAKE.

NEVERTHELESS, I AM GLAD TO BE PUTTING PEN TO PAPER. CAN YOU BELIEVE IT WILL BE 10 YEARS NEXT FEBRUARY SINCE I FIRST ARRIVED IN WEST GOULDSBOROUGH AND MET YOU, LIZ AND JOANNA?

ON THAT NOTE, I AM SO SORRY TO HEAR OF LIZ'S PASSING. I WENT ONTO YOUR WEBSITE (THE FIRST TIME IN A LONG TIME) AND READ UP ON THE LOVELY TRIBUTE TO LIZ. SHE WAS SUCH AN AMAZING PERSON AND AN INSPIRATION TO ME. I REALLY ENJOYED HER COMPANY AND HER COOKING. HER FOOD IS LEGENDARY! SHE WAS SO HUMBLE AND FUNNY AND QUICK FOR A JOKE. SHE WAS LIKE A MOTHER TO ME IN MY 7 MONTHS IN YOUR HOME. I AM PROFOUNDLY GRATEFUL THAT I WAS ABLE TO SHARE THAT TIME WITH HER. I SEE HER ANNIVERSARY IS COMING UP IN NOVEMBER. I SAID A PRAYER AND LIT A CANDLE IN HER MEMORY AT MASS ON SUNDAY.

I HOPE JOANNA IS KEEPING WELL AND BLOSSOMING! SHE IS A BRILLIANT YOUNG WOMAN AND FROM THE CALIBRE OF THE WEBSITE, SHE IS EXCELLING IN EVERYTHING SHE DOES. I KNEW SHE WOULD BE BRILLIANT. JOANNA WAS A GREAT FRIEND TO ME AND WAS ALWAYS THERE TO TALK TO ME. SHE FOUND DELIGHT IN THE SIMPLEST OF THINGS AND MADE ME FEEL COMFORTABLE SINCE THE MOMENT I ARRIVED. I AM SURE YOU ARE PROUD OF HER AND I AM SURE LIZ WAS PROUD OF HER AS WELL. I HOPE I CAN MEET HER AGAIN SOMEDAY AND MAYBE SIT DOWN TO WATCH '7 SAMURAI' 😊. PLEASE TELL HER I SAID HELLO AND PASS ON THE BELOW QUOTE. I KNOW WE EXCHANGED SOME GREAT QUOTES,

"THERE ARE FRIENDSHIPS IMPRINTED IN OUR HEARTS THAT WILL NEVER BE DIMINISHED BY TIME AND DISTANCE."

I TRUST YOU HAVE BEEN NONSTOP DEVELOPING AND CREATING ALL NEW EXCITING PROJECTS. THE WEBSITE IS SHOWING THE FRUITS OF YOUR LABOUR FROM WHEN I WAS THERE. I REMEMBER YOU INITIALLY DISCUSSED CRYSTALLINE GLAZES WITH ME AND THE POSSIBILITY OF PHOTOGRAPHING THEM WHILST IN THE KILN - I SEE YOUR THEORY HAS BEEN WELL PUT TO PRACTICE! THE RESULTS LOOK FANTASTIC. I CAN ONLY COMPLIMENT YOUR PASSION AND DESIRE, SOMETHING I SEEN IN GREAT ABUNDANCE WHEN I WAS YOUR APPRENTICE.

THE NEW APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM YOU ARE SETTING UP LOOKS GREAT - I HOPE IT WILL BE SUCCESSFUL. I ALSO HOPE SOME OF THE EXPERIENCES WE HAD AND CHALLENGES WE CROSSED WILL BENEFIT BOTH YOU AND THE APPRENTICE.

I HAVE HAD A FEW SLEEPLESS NIGHTS THINKING ABOUT 2011 FROM START TO FINISH. IT WAS A YEAR OF HIGH EXPECTATIONS, GREAT MEMORIES & MOMENTS AS WELL AS DEVASTATING LOWS. I THINK THE LATTER OUTWEIGHED EVERYTHING ELSE FOR A LONG TIME, BUT I NOW HAVE COME TO TERMS WITH IT. IN MY TIME AT MAINE KILN WORKS, I CANNOT BE MORE THANKFUL. I APPRECIATE EVERYTHING YOU TAUGHT ME. I LEARNED SO MUCH AND MAYBE AT THE TIME I DIDN'T APPRECIATE IT ENOUGH. I WAS IMMATURE IN THE SENSE THAT I ASSUMED THE APPRENTICESHIP WAS SET IN STONE FOR ME AND IT WAS THE BE ALL AND END ALL. I THINK BEING AWAY FROM HOME FOR A LONG TIME AS WELL AS NOT HAVING THE CORRECT VISA TO CONTINUE LONG TERM WAS WEIGHING ON ME THEN. I FEEL I SHOULD MAYBE HAVE COME FOR A 3 MONTH TRIAL, THEN WENT HOME FOR A WHILE TO MAKE A DECISION TO COMMIT OR NOT. IN HINDSIGHT, THIS MAYBE WAS AN OPTION THAT WOULD HAVE WORKED.

THIS CERTAINLY DIDN'T TAKE AWAY FROM THE EXPERIENCE I GAINED. I CANNOT EMPHASIS HOW MUCH OF A POSITIVE IMPACT WORKING WITH YOU HAS HAD ON MY LIFE.

EVERYTHING I DO IN MY DAILY LIFE IS SOMEWHAT DIRECTLY OR INDIRECTLY INFLUENCED FROM WHAT I LEARNED FROM YOU. FOR THAT I AM THANKFUL. WHAT YOU DO AND HOW YOU DO IT IS WHAT MOST PEOPLE IN A 9-5 JOB ENVISAGE THEIR LIFE TO BE. YOU ARE ONE OF THE FEW IN THE WORLD WHO DOESN'T COMPROMISE AND I FULLY RESPECT THAT.

I WANT TO APOLOGISE IF I FEEL I LET YOU DOWN AT THE TIME BY NOT COMMITTING OR STAYING LONGER. I KNEW I COULD HAVE STAYED ILLEGALLY AND KNEW THAT THE VISA SITUATION WOULD PROBABLY NOT WORK OUT. IF I HAD TO DO IT ALL AGAIN, I WOULD HAVE TRIED TO GET A FULL WORKING VISA AND COMMIT WHOLEHEARTEDLY TO THE APPRENTICESHIP. LOOKING BACK NOW, IM NOT SURE IF I WOULD HAVE CHANGED ANYTHING OR DONE ANYTHING DIFFERENTLY. IF I WENT BACK, MAYBE IT WOULD WORK OUT - IM A BIT OLDER AND HOPEFULLY A BIT WISER NOW - WHO KNOWS?

IN MY OWN LIFE, A LOT HAS CHANGED. I AM NOW HAPPILY MARRIED TO MY BEAUTIFUL WIFE EMMA FOR JUST OVER A YEAR NOW. WE HAVE BOUGHT OUR HOME TOGETHER IN BELFAST. IT NEEDS A LOT OF WORK TO IT, BUT I WONT SHY AWAY FROM DOING IT MYSELF. WE ARE ALSO EXPECTING A BABY IN FEBRUARY 2021. (S)

I AM STILL WORKING IN SALES AND I DO ENJOY IT, AS YOU KNOW I AM A SOCIABLE CHAP. I KNOW IN MY HEART THOUGH IM A PRACTICAL PERSON AND NEED TO WORK WITH MY HANDS. I HAVE MY OWN WORKSHOP ATTACHED TO THE SIDE OF MY HOUSE WHERE IM DOING A SMALL BIT OF WELDING AND WOODWORKING. I AM ESSENTIALLY 'RE-LEARNING' AGAIN. I WILL HOPE TO BULLD A POTTERY WHEEL AND GAS KILN NEXT SUMMER, IF THE BABY DOESNT TAKE UP TOO MUCH OF MY TIME.

DAN, I HOPE YOU UNDERSTAND THAT MY LACK OF CONTACT IS NOT BECAUSE I DID NOT WANT TO STAY IN TOUCH, BUT MORE THAT 2011 NEEDED TO BE PUT TO THE BACK OF MY MIND IN ORDER FOR ME TO MOVE ON IN MY LIFE. I DIDNT WANT THAT YEAR TO DEFINE MY LIFE, BUT FOR REASONS ALREADY MENTIONED, ALONG WITH PEOPLE CONSTANTLY BRINGING IT TO MY ATTENTION, IT HAS. I CONSIDER YOU TO BE MY FRIEND, AND A GREAT ONE AT THAT. I ENJOYED WHEN WE GOT OUT ON THE BOAT ON JONES POND AND FRENCHMAN BAY, WHEN WE SHARED A BEER TOGETHER (AND THE BOTTLE OF GLENVEAGH IRISH WHISKEY YOU AND LIZ GOT ME FOR MY BIRTHDAY!) I ENJOYED OUR ROAD TRIP DOWN THE COAST TO THE BOAT WORKSHOP AND CRAFT BREWERY. I ENJOYED OUR HIKE TOGETHER WITH A RUCKSACK FULL OF BEER, CHEESE AND CRACKERS. (6)

I ENJOYED WORKING WITH YOU AND LEARNING FROM YOU. I KNOW WE HAD OUR CHALLENGES, BUT I HOPED IT WORKED WELL FOR YOU AND MY BEING THERE WAS OF SOME POSITIVITY, NO MATTER HOW SMALL. LOOKING BACK, THE GREAT DAYS I SPENT THERE DEFINITELY OUTWEIGHED THE BAD DAYS. I HOPE IT WAS THE SAME FOR YOU.

WHEN THESE RESTRICTIONS LIFT, I HOPE THAT I CAN BE IN YOUR COMPANY AGAIN, MAYBE CALL TO YOUR HOME AND HAVE A BEER AND TALK ABOUT THE GOOD OLD DAYS.

'GO RAIBH MAITH AGAT AGUS DGA-GHUI' AR MO CHARA'

CONOR MCGEAN

P.S. PLEASE PASS ON MY BEST WISHES TO GENIO AND SARAH AND EVERYONE AT MANDALA FARM. THEY WERE ALWAYS VERY WELCOMING TO ME.

ALSO PASS ON MY BEST WISHES TO MIKE AND LUCY SHAPIRO. I WAS VERY FOND OF THEM BOTH.

5 KILBOURNE PARK
DUNMURRY
BELFAST
NORTHERN IRELAND
BT17 0HZ