

A NEW YEAR IN A NEW COUNTRY *BEGINNING MY SPRING SEMESTER IN BELFAST*

Happy New Year!



I hope all is well for you and your loved ones as we close out the first month of 2023! Time sure moves fast. I am preparing for my second semester at Queen's University Belfast, where I'm working towards a Master's degree in Conflict Transformation and Social Justice. It has been such an eye-opening experience, packed with new skills and insights on how to understand and approach conflict.

In short, this program and degree focuses on ways to resolve violent conflict, whether between countries or smaller opposing groups, through a local and community-based lens. The end goal is not just peace, but also justice rooted in reconciliation and dialogue. I'm grateful to continue to grow my many years of experience as a problem-solver and leading advocate in my communities with all kinds of theoretical and immersive knowledge here in Belfast.

And the timing couldn't be better, as 2023 marks the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement, a landmark peace negotiation that ended 30 years of violent sectarianism and conflict in Northern Ireland. The agreement serves as a global model for the ways we can bring divided communities back together. From studying the politics of the Republic of Ireland, to breaking down the breadth of conflict transformation, I'd say this has been time well spent.





Adjusting to Belfast

Outside of my study and research, I'm more adjusted to Belfast, and living abroad more generally. While I don't think I'll ever get used to how cloudy the days are, I can now say I've had Guinness, fish and chips, and can adequately use the Interrail - the network of trains that allows you to travel across Europe. My family came to visit me for Christmas, and apparently the only thing I'm missing is a proper Irish accent!



Thanks to the length of our winter holiday, I also took some time to travel and see more of Europe. And after spending a week in Italy for New Year's, and another in Germany to go sightseeing, I feel recharged and energized to take on what will be my second of three semesters in the Master's program.



Looking Forward

While much of my time over the next four months will be spent crafting and executing my dissertation, which focuses on restoring public trust through local policymaking and engagement, I'll still be enrolled in exciting courses to expand my skillset, including democracy and civic engagement, along with a course in conflict intervention. I'm thrilled to dive deep and continue my learning. At the same time, I know my time here will be over before I know it. So, I am beginning to search for career opportunities where I can share my abilities as a communicative and engaging leader, while making good on the vast array of skills I've gained through my Master's degree. If there are opportunities you would like to share, please let me know!

And of course, none of this would be possible without you. Whether it was advice you imparted, a laugh we shared, or resources you gave in trusting support of my future, I remember it all with gratitude. I'm honored and privileged to be just one of the many examples of your impact. As I have said many times before, I will continue to fulfill my promise to keep in touch. It's the least I can do in return for all you've done for me.



Before You Go...

Before I sign off for this round of newsletters, I want to let you know about a new component I'd like to try. I think I'll call it "**Pen Pal Prompts.**" One newsletter can only hold so much, and I'd love to keep the conversation going with you. As such, I'll be including one short question to which I'd love to hear your thoughts and response. This is entirely optional for you and it can be as short or as long as you'd like. There's no catch - just a way to learn more about your experiences and insights on topics I've always been curious to engage with.

I look forward to seeing how this goes!

Whether at work, at home, or in your community, what have you learned about bringing people together?

Thank you for all you've done and been for me.

Sincerely grateful,

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