

Michael Harding's column is now published on Tuesdays



A city that has thrived against the odds

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I live with an insurance worker and his cat, I have a little identity card that allows me to eat lunch in the Bundestag, and there is new graffiti on my street nearly every morning. Welcome to my little part of Berlin



A LONG TIME AGO, when my mother and father were younger than I am now, the council of Europe held a schools' essay-writing competition. The theme had to do with "Willy Brandt's Ostpolitik".

My mother, a vivacious 18-year-old German girl from a family of nine children, and my father, 17, Irish and shy, buried their heads in their books and each penned an essay, which they sent off by snail mail to the ministries of education in Bonn and Dublin respectively.

A few weeks later, an envelope arrived on each of their doorsteps. My mother and my father had both been awarded prizes. They were invited to represent their countries at a prizewinners' conference in Saalfelden, near Zell am See in Austria.

My mother and father met there in the summer of 1971. "Der gefällt mir" (I like him) my mother said to herself when she saw my father. He probably didn't say much, but the feeling was returned.

At first they communicated in French, but in his final year of secondary school, my father took up German and sat the Leaving Certificate exam after just one year of study.

How strange, that if it weren't for those essays and the politics of freedom they espoused, I wouldn't be sitting here in my flat in east Berlin with a bottle of Weissbier and a jar of Nutella beside me. In fact, I wouldn't be here at all.

I grew up in Ireland speaking English and German. Dublin was my home, and the town of Regensburg in Bavaria, where my mother grew up, was a pleasant place to spend summers. I remember playing with my cousins under a garden hose, and swinging in the play-



ground with a view on to the Danube, which was dark and still. I grew up in an Ireland that my mother was constantly reminding me was "not as it had been".

In 2007, when I was on Christmas holidays from college, I worked as a postwoman delivering parcels on a bicycle with no brakes. I liked to peek through the letter boxes as I popped the cards through. I saw magnificent Indian furniture, well-groomed dogs and top-notch baby strollers. And lots of construction work.

The following year, I saw some incomplete extensions, and one of my colleagues was a builder who had just lost his job. In 2009, my Christmas job at the post office was gone.

In my last year of college in 2010, I benefited from the "weekly madness" deals at Londis and the €3 "coffee and muffin" offer at Insomnia. I sat until closing time in the library with my boyfriend, our faces buried in literary criticism, and our lives punctuated by coffee breaks. We sent each other email updates at 4am with live feeds of our essay word counts. We worked hard.

The summer after graduation is one I would rather forget. When I look back at the sent items in my inbox, I find hundreds of emails I wrote during those months offering to work for free, applying for work experience, begging for an internship. I was under 23 and living at home, so I couldn't claim the dole. I



Main, Kate Katharina Ferguson with her father in Berlin and, above, with her boyfriend Andrew Hayden on the day of their graduation from Trinity College, Dublin

handed my CV into the stationery shop in my local shopping centre, which had advertised a position. The lady looked me up and down and said: "Are you in college?" "No," I said. "I've just graduated."

She took the CV and cover letter. A few days later, the sign was gone. I saw a new member of staff sitting behind the counter. He was about 16, had a rat's tail and looked tired. Eventually, my mother insisted I do an Eng-

lish-language teaching course. She paid for it. I loved teaching and got a job at the school where I trained. I worked there until February of this year. I stayed living at home and saved.

And then I decided it was time to pursue a dream. Writing, after all, was in the family. I applied for an internship at an English news website in Berlin. I got it, and couldn't believe my luck. The recession and its pleasant side-effect, humility, had conditioned me for failure.

At this point, leaving the country was a choice, rather than a necessity. It was time to move out of home, to explore the flea markets in Berlin, to try to be a journalist.

This city has captured me entirely. I live with an insurance worker and his cat. I have a little identity card that allows me to eat lunch in the Bundestag. There is new graffiti on my street nearly every morning. I buy Weissbier for 45 cent and I drink it in the evenings while I write blog posts. At the weekends I hop on an underground and I explore a new part of town.

All around me are monuments to a terrible history, but in between them fire-breathing artists, hip hop dancers and punks with huge dogs puff energy into a city that has thrived against all odds.

My internship is drawing to a close and a familiar fear is creeping through me. What now? What next? The odds, anywhere, of making it in journalism are painfully slim.

Today, during my lunch break, I handed my CV in to a language school on Friedrichsstrasse in the centre of the city. The Australian lady at reception looked at me kindly and uttered an all-too-familiar phrase: "We'll call you if we have a vacancy."

On my way home, I bought a sack of potatoes. Tomorrow I'll mash them up and enjoy them with a Weissbier.

I may not know where in the world I'll be in three months but I am grateful every day for the freedom which accompanies that uncertainty.

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SMALL PRINT

Which-a-pedia?

An era of printed reference guides is coming to an end, with the news that the last Encyclopedia Britannica have been printed, and the company is now focusing its resources online. But how reliable and extensive are online information directories? Brian O'Connell trawls online for information on three items

The Battle of Clontarf

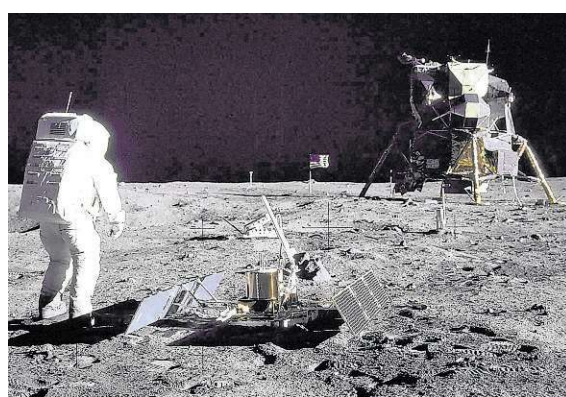
Wikipedia (free online encyclopedia resource): The entry contains a helpful panel on the main participants in the battle, a map of Ireland as well as a reproduction of a Hugh Frazer oil painting. In the bibliography, most of the information referenced is based on a 19th-century text translation of *The Annals of Clonmacnoise*. In relation to the death of Brian Boru (below), the entry says he was found praying in his tent and killed by Norseman, among them Brodir, who shouted: "Now let man tell man that Brodir felled Brian."

Encyclopedia Britannica Online (subscription-based service): The battle is discussed in four entries: Dublin, Ireland, Vikings and Brian Boru. We're told Brian was too old to take active part in the battle, and his son won victory. On Brian's death, the entry is a little more descriptive: "A little group of Northmen, flying from the battlefield, stumbled on Brian's tent, overcame his bodyguard, and hacked the aged Brian to death."

Quora (Q&A site with answers provided by members): No entries.

Google Scholar (search engine for scholarly literature): The entry contains 2,920 results, with a wide range of references, from 20th-century journals to FJ Byrne's *A New History of Ireland*, and a segment titled, "Ireland before the Battle of Clontarf". You can narrow the results to entries from particular decades.

Scholarpedia (allows access to online academic journals): No entries.



1969 Moon Landing

BEST Wikipedia: Most of the information relating to the actual landing is under "Mission Highlights" on the Apollo 11 page. There are images and links to audio recordings from the launch and landing. The entry runs over several pages and also contains links to newspaper archives, photo slideshows and more contemporary accounts of the astronaut's lives. Pretty comprehensive.

EBO: The site contains 46 separate entries on the moon landing, including individual entries on engineers, astronauts, the Apollo space programme and early satellite telecommunications. In one useful article we are taken through man's obsession with the moon, from the ancient Chinese onwards, including a useful timeline diagram. Very well laid out and user-friendly.

Quora: The topic is dealt with through several questions from users, including, have humans landed on the moon, how did Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin decide who stepped outside first, and are there any good simulations of the first moonshot?

Google Scholar: "Moon landing 1969" throws up 26,700 individual entries. Some of the early entries include insider accounts of the moon landing, a geologist's take on the mission, and how the landing impacted on science.

Scholarpedia: "1969 moon landing" throws up one entry, an academic paper on tensegrity, a design principle related to compression and tension. Typing "Apollo 11" into the engine brings up a paper on solar satellites.

Facebook

Wikipedia: The entry for Facebook is larger than the entries for many significant 19th- or 20th-century historical events. It contains 11 separate entries, including the company's impact on popular culture, privacy and criticisms of the company.

EBO: There are 44 separate entries, with the main one giving a solid overview of how the company was founded, but it doesn't go into as much detail or range as Wikipedia. Related topics include an entry on Facebook's founder Mark Zuckerberg, and multimedia links include interviews with Zuckerberg and others. There's also a very good link to a junior encyclopedia aimed at users aged 11 years and upward.

BEST Quora: Reflecting how this community platform is able to generate debate and discussion around different aspects of a topic, the questions related to Facebook include, how many hours a week does Mark Zuckerberg work, what has been the biggest mistake made by Facebook, and what percentages of applicants does the company take on? Contributions come from ex-employees, tech experts and stockbrokers. The topics are broken down into close to 2,000 separate discussions, which are prioritised into the best 200.

Google Scholar: 2.7 million results. Topping that list is a paper on the benefits of Facebook friends published in the *Journal of Computers* as well as entries on privacy, the impact of a digital trend on academic libraries, and the evolution of user interaction in Facebook. A separate search brings up solely legal document in relation to the company.

Scholarpedia: No direct references.



Jobs v Jobs

SOMETIMES, TWO films end up coinciding, such as the two *Snow White* movies that are out at the moment. So it's hardly surprising that two directors want to make a biopic of Apple's late main man Steve Jobs (below). So what do we know about the rival projects?

STEVE JOBS 1

Name of film: *Steve Jobs*.
Who's making it? Sony Pictures.
What do we know about the crew? Producers include Mark Gordon (*Saving Private Ryan*, *Grey's Anatomy*), Scott Rudin (*The Dictator*, *Moneyball*, *No Country For Old Men*) and Guymon Casady (*The Expendables*, *Game Of Thrones*).
Anything else of note? Well, yeah, Aaron Sorkin is adapting the screenplay after Sony bought the rights for last year's *Jobs* biography for \$1 million. Sorkin won an Oscar for best adapted screenplay in 2010 with *The Social Network* and was nominated again this year for *Moneyball*.
Who is playing Jobs? We don't know yet.

STEVE JOBS 2

Name of film: *Jobs*.
Who's making it? Five Star Institute (which has never produced a film), with Joshua Michael Stern (*Swing Vote*) as director.
And the crew? Lo-fi enough. An actor called Josh Gad is playing Steve Wozniak, and the writer, Matt Whiteley, has no notable film writing credits.
Anything else? It will almost certainly pip Sony's project to screens. With a rumoured budget of less than \$10 million, the film will probably have a quick turnaround in order to get it to Cannes in 2013.
Who is playing Jobs? Ashton Kutcher.
 - Una Mullally

