

“Galway Races” is a four-part narrative about 48 hours during the 1994 World Irish Dance Championships when all seemed lost for Trinity Academy of Irish Dance’s Under 13 Figure Choreography team. Central to the story is Trinity Associate Director and Team Manager Anne Blume –

who 25 years later has coached eight Trinity teams in preparation for the World Championships, six of them returning home with the gold medal – and former Trinity Instructor Katie Hughes whose spirit and dedication during the 1994 competition, and beyond, inspired an annual award for Trinity dancers. The story chronicles the dedication of Anne and Katie who took to the world stage themselves under the direction of a young coach, and former Trinity Managing Director, Amy Campbell Moran.

Galway Races: Katie Steps Up

Written by Mary Ann Fergus

The sun is setting in Dublin as Amy Campbell scans a hotel hall full of little girls. Amy is just

24 and coaching her first team competitions in the 1994 World Irish Dance Championships.

Earlier in the day, one of Trinity’s dancers, Anne McCarthy, sprained her ankle during her solo competition.

Now Amy faces the biggest challenge of her young coaching career and a long night ahead of her. She must prepare another dancer to master Anne’s position for the next morning’s Ceili and, even more daunting, she must rearrange dancers in Trinity’s promising figure choreography dance called “Galway Races,” for tomorrow evening’s competition, which is just 24 hours from now.

It is an unimaginable, next-to-impossible task for both dancers and coach.

Amy immediately taps 11-year-old Katie Hughes as Anne’s replacement. Katie, the best dancer of her age in Trinity, once had been on the Ceili team but after she suffered an injury, Katie’s doctors and coaches advised her to reduce the wear and tear on her feet and focus on preparing for her solo competition and the choreography dance.

“You know how to do this,” Amy tells Katie. “Just get out on the floor and do what you know.”

But Amy clearly understands the test ahead. Katie now has to learn Anne’s position in a matter of hours. She and seven other dancers will compete against teams that have been dancing together for years, not months – or, as it seems to have turned out for Trinity, mere hours.

Katie, who’s a slight girl with a big smile, has stood out as a stellar Irish dancer for several years. She also has been wracked by various foot injuries.

Now Katie must pick up Anne’s spot and learn to dance two Ceilis in the event that the team gets recalled. Then – if there’s time – she must try to learn a new position on her choreography team.

Anne resolves to stay positive for her team and particularly for her new



Katie Hughes at her first World Irish Dance Championship solo competition in Dublin in 1994 at age 11. Despite many injuries and a diagnosis of scoliosis, Katie remained a top world contender until she retired in 2004 after ranking 5th on the world stage.

friend, Katie. Anne, who's from Wisconsin, and Katie, who's from the South Side of Chicago, have grown closer through the months of practice, carpools and sleepovers.

"This is amazing that you're stepping in at the last second," Anne tells Katie. "You're going to do great."

Katie, who's typically one to crack a joke easily, responds stoically as other teammates gather to also encourage her.

Amy works fervently through the night with Katie and the team. Anne sits nearby, doing what she can to help the team perfect the uniformity of movement and precision that's expected in this dance.

It is a dance steeped in Irish tradition and life; not just part of competitions but a staple of weddings and parties. Trinity's competitors may look similar enough off the dance floor but once the ghillies are laced, it's like when American gymnasts face their peers from Romania or U.S. marathoners line up against Kenyans. The yanks don't have a chance.

Only after Amy is somewhat satisfied with the look of the Ceili can she turn to the figure choreography. It is well past 9 p.m.

Figure choreography teams are made up of 16 dancers and generally have one or two alternate dancers. This year, the alternate is Ashley Casey from Western Springs, a girl who has practiced with the team from the beginning but does not anticipate that she actually will compete.

Now, late on this Sunday night, Amy determines that Ashley will step into Katie's position, which is a spot she has practiced, and for Katie to take Annie's spot.

The name of the dance is Galway Races, created by Trinity's Mark Howard with help from British Choreographer Richard Griffin.

Their work together marks the first time that a European and an American choreographer have collaborated on an entry for the World Championships. The partnership has created a bit of a buzz because Richard also is coaching a competing team in the same age group and category. But both men put the art form above all else and have relished their work together.

Richard flew into Chicago twice and worked with Mark to help his creation of Galway Races, a dance that varies from all other choreography in its speed and formations. The dancers start in two straight drill lines and girls break off in twos with leaps that are meant to represent horses shooting out of the starting gate.

Mark is coaching the older Trinity teams and has given Amy this younger team to perfect "Galway Races." She has worked tirelessly for months to put into motion what Mark had created.

Days earlier, Richard had visited the hotel in Dublin where the team was staying and, in a small breakfast room, watched in amazement and delight as the team practiced "Galway Races." This Trinity team would be soon competing against a couple dozen other teams, including Richard's team.

"I'll have some explaining to do at home," Richard joked. "I might be sleeping on the couch." Back in this very same hotel breakfast room, on this late Sunday night, no such certainty exists.

McCarthy's fellow team parents strive to stay positive but they know that everything has changed in the past 24 hours. Most have spent years working to get their daughters to this moment in Irish Dance. Most recently, they've dedicated the past few months and lots of money to drive their girls to practices in union halls, Moose lodges and churches in and around Milwaukee and Chicago, then to fly them to Ireland.

Now, parents gather outside the practice room in the hotel restaurant and pub. Everyone feels sorry for Anne but fear her injury means the team has already lost any chance of even placing in the figure choreography competition. No one voices this concern; they don't have to.

Amy focuses on the choreography, knowing that she can't remove the tension and unease among dancers and parents. She moves her dancers around like puzzle pieces, and breaks down each section of the dance for Katie and Ashley.

The team works through the evening, finally stopping around 1 a.m. when Mark calls it a night. They will all be up again in a few short hours, sometime around 5:30 a.m., to prepare for the morning Ceili.

Finally, alone in her hotel room, the usually calm and confident Katie breaks down in tears as her mother, Kathy Hughes, sets out to roll her hair.

Kathy has never seen her daughter so rattled.

"What if I can't pull it off," Katie cries. "I'm so scared. I don't want to mess up. Everyone is counting on me."

Kathy Hughes, like Amy and Mark and the other adults, knows the challenge that's ahead. She admits nothing.

"You can do it, Katie," Kathy says calmly. Then in a firmer voice, "If Amy and Mark say you can do it, then you can do it!" Katie kneels beside the bed as her mother works on her hair. She soon falls asleep, still kneeling against the mattress. Her mother continues rolling her little girl's thick blonde hair and prays there's some truth to all her brash talk and bravado.



Her hair set in pink sponge curlers, Katie Hughes, 11, falls asleep exhausted with her buddy "Ozgood J. Z'Beard" after staying up past 1 a.m. to prepare for the next day's Ceili and choreography competitions in the 1994 World Irish Dance Championships in Dublin.

Coming next Thursday: Galway Races Part III: Simple and Worldly Gestures Mary Ann Fergus is a Trinity mom and former reporter for the *Chicago Tribune* and *Houston Chronicle*. The accompanying photos were taken by Jon Sall, who is a former *Chicago Sun Times* photographer who followed the 1994 team to Dublin.