



"An Angry Sea, Dingle, Co. Kerry"



"Curiosity, Co. Galway"

# Shea's Irish focus

## Grandparents' homeland keeps on giving for Cape Cod photographer

**By Michael P. Quinlin**  
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After 15 trips to Ireland, photographer Carol Shea still finds herself enraptured by the visual beauty of the countryside, particularly the West of Ireland.

That inspiration - borne from Ireland's natural beauty and the everyday folkways of the local people - is the subject of Shea's photography exhibit opening today at the Borgia Gallery, College of the Elms in Chicopee, Mass., and will run through Sept. 15.

Entitled "Ireland...Faces and Places: A Photographic Journal" the exhibit covers a span of 22 years of travel back to Ireland, during which time Shea has amassed a poignant and deeply personal portrait of Ireland.

"Nature has blessed Ireland with very special elements for a photographer," Shea said from her home in West Dennis, Cape Cod. "The light, in particular, seems to lend itself to exceptional shots. Whether in bright sunlight or during a storm, it is possible to capture the drama of the place."

Born and raised in New York City, Shea received her first camera as a Christmas gift as a child, and describes the camera as "my constant companion" throughout her life.

Years later, when the president of Mt. Holyoke College in Amherst chose one of her prints for the college Christmas card, she began to take her work seriously.

In recent years, she has had photogra-



Professional photographer Carol Shea posed with her brother Thom Crowell on the Bass River.

phy exhibits at the Guttman Library at Harvard University, the Culture Center of Cape Cod and at the Massachusetts State House in Boston.

Of her success as a professional photographer, Shea, who has no formal training and is self-taught, explains "it helps to be able to 'see' an opportunity for a good photograph. That's not necessarily something that can be taught."

Shea's photo journeys to Ireland also satisfy her family connections. Her four grandparents were from counties Mayo

and Galway, and she returns to frequently to visit her cousins who still live there.

On her most recent trip in May, Shea took the inaugural flight from Boston's Logan Airport to Ireland West Airport in Knock on flyGlobespan.

Shea came away with a renewed awe for Connemara, "my favorite place in the world," and was thrilled to discover the "hidden gems" of Ireland. "Previously, I had only passed through Roscommon, Sligo and Donegal, so it was exciting to discover yet another part of Ireland that

inspired me," she said.

Some of the photos from that trip will end up in Shea's upcoming exhibit, which features her nature photography, ranging from the wild landscapes of the coastline and the roaring ocean to narrow back roads of shady lanes or bright flowers in a field.

She'll also display some portraits of everyday life in Ireland.

"I have always tried not to be intrusive when photographing, which I feel can be quite rude," she says, rattling off a list of subjects:

"Schoolboys playing soccer in a churchyard on a Sunday morning, girls riding horses along a Connemara beach, or a woman proudly showing off her garden, a man pitching hay to his horse at the end of a lane."

Those types of images remain an indelible part of Ireland, at least for Shea. Coming back from Sligo on her last visit, Shea's bus driver heard about the All Ireland sheep shearing competition taking place in Clonbur, along the Mayo/Galway border. He diverted the bus to the competition so Shea and her companions could take pictures.

Such opportunities keep Shea coming back for more photo shoots. In October she and her husband Michael are leading a tour of 23 Americans back to the West of Ireland, where they'll continue to explore the island's hidden gems.

*For more images go to [www.carolsheaphotography.com](http://www.carolsheaphotography.com)*



"The Blue Gate, Co. Galway"



"Connemara, Co. Galway"