

Week 1: 5-11 January 2015

During the early part of this past week, I figured that there were a number of little incidents that might have made for interesting reading in this, the first of a series of blogs I propose to write on my time in Strasbourg as Lincoln's Inn's current Peter Duffy scholar. The fact that the most pleasant person I met whilst travelling through Basel was the Swiss customs officer, for example; or that I was trying to navigate thoughts as an explorer might try to wade through treacle on account of the agonising toothache that was searing through my skull; the small but not insignificant kitchen fire following a faulty toaster going up in flames whilst I tied my shoelaces ahead of my first day working at the European Court of Human Rights. All were, in retrospect, entertaining anecdotes with which to regale my family upon updating them on my safe arrival. The facts are, my journey went smoothly, French dentists can run rings around some of the sadists I have had the misfortune of dealing with at home, and I extinguished successfully the highly flammable pan white.

Of course, these minor travails pale into insignificance. I write following my return from the streets of the city that are filled with crowds rallying to decry the horror of the Charlie Hebdo massacre and subsequent terrorist murders in Paris. The mood is sombre yet defiant, with countless placards reading "Liberté" or "Je suis Charlie", and the echo of "Charlie" has been rattling off the beautiful architecture as the masses roar. The repulsive action of cowards that would deny others their right to free expression is disgusting beyond words, but in a perverse way in strengthens the positive arguments for cooperation in supranational bodies such as the Council of Europe.

I have arrived in Strasbourg at a time when the principles of liberty, democracy and free expression have been threatened by irrational, deluded thugs. What they either do not know, or refuse to accept, is that just as I can exercise my freedom by speaking in such pointed terms, so too can they engage in open debate. Instead, they made the coward's choice and assassinated innocent civilians. The staff at Charlie Hebdo are bastions of a civil right we are proud and blessed to have. The slain hostages were caught up in ideological warfare that should be fought with words, not weaponry.

As a proud representative of Lincoln's Inn I am now lucky enough to work at an institution that, for all of its problems, seeks to uphold those rights articulated in the European Convention on Human Rights. We might not like some of the Court's decisions, but because we are fortunate enough to have free speech, we can express our sentiments, whether positive or negative.

As intimated at the beginning of this piece, there were other things I could have addressed. Everyone I have met at the Court thus far, for example, has been extremely supportive. I have been welcomed by my fellow trainees and Strasbourg is truly a charming city. However, in light of everything that has happened in France since my arrival, all I can really conclude at this point is, quite simply, Je suis Charlie!

Week 2: 12-18 January 2015

Sit rep: The explosive toaster has been replaced and I have come to a definitive conclusion as to the answer of the apparently ambiguous ending of Christopher Nolan's *Inception*. I have also determined that, contrary to the beliefs in some corners of British society, high-visibility jackets are unlikely to protect us from the apocalypse. I say this because they are clearly no match for Strasbourgian cyclists. Having played rugby in what increasingly seems a lifetime ago, I am thankful that I can duck and weave. There are clearly no hard and fast rules in this city for the two-wheeled brigade. Although there are cycle lanes, pavements are clearly not off-limits, traffic lights are there for decoration, and the gymnastics I am forced to perform on the way to and from work each day could rival anything offered by Chinese or Russian Olympic teams. However, it is a small price to pay for having this terrific opportunity to work with fascinating, clever, insightful people on matters that are of high importance. Besides, if not for anything else I now have the reflexes of Thomas O'Malley from Disney's *Aristocats*.

You will forgive me, dear reader, for skimming over the nature of the work I do at the Court, but if you agree with Donkey's philosophising in *Shrek*, "Cake! Everybody loves cake!" Indeed a more welcoming prospect could not have awaited me at the beginning of the week. Although I'd like to think that all of my work colleagues feel compelled to indulge me with baked goods, I was lucky enough to settle in at the time of the Epiphany celebrations in France. Epiphany is a Christian feast day that celebrates the revelation of God the Son as a human being in Jesus Christ. As such, several types of cake are served, with a small token backed into the pastry. At the Court, the person in our division fortunate enough to find the token in their "king cake" was honoured with a paper crown, although presumably that would have been a cruel symbol were they to have choked on the little souvenir buried within the layers. In any event, being fed something called frangipane (similar to marzipan) temporarily took my mind off the fact that I have yet to find bacon in my new surroundings.

From a more substantive point of view, the opportunity to research, draft and generally chew over complex legal matters is proving invaluable. I was only too lucky to meet with several judges of the court and I took great interest in sitting in on a Dutch case in the Grand Chamber, the final opportunity for appeal. In *Murray v the Netherlands* the family of a recently deceased convicted murderer were appealing on the basis that the applicant should have had his whole life sentence reviewed. Given that this has had specific relevance in the UK, such cases deserve particular attention.

Indeed, speaking of glorious Blighty, I have found myself on the receiving end of questions such as: "Why is the UK being so difficult with the rest of Europe?" I have listened to criticism of our national politicians and media outlets about certain perceived British positions on Europe. I find myself engaged in discussion to try and explain the peculiarities of my nation state because of what many of our European cousins regard as the UK's frosty relationship to the EU and Council of Europe. I have always enjoyed exchanging ideas with my international friends, and Strasbourg will undoubtedly provide me with countless opportunities to do so. However, perhaps at this juncture the only reasoned answer I can offer is that nowhere else in the world quite serves up a bacon sandwich like the United Kingdom.

Week 3: 19-25 January 2015

I remember watching an episode of *Friends* where Chandler Bing professed a secret shame: he did not like dogs. The others were duly shocked. However, the beginning of my week suggested that Matthew Perry's alter-ego may have had a point. Shortly before I arrived at work on Monday a vicious little mongrel sprung forth on its lead, baring its teeth and barking aggressively. It may have been more threatening if it hadn't been wearing a custom-made body-warmer, but as I stepped back politely I slipped on a patch of black ice and fell on my Londonderry Air. Of course, the French that nearly escaped my lips would not have been recognisable to the kindly owner who concernedly asked if I was alright... at least I assume that was what she was saying, as all I could muster was "oui" and "pas de probleme".

Fortunately, my week picked up. Sure, it was disconcerting to have a lady step into the lift and stare up at me for what seemed like an hour as the elevator moved down three stories, but I have settled into the rhythm of the Court and the variety of work is terrific. The trainees are entrusted with significant responsibilities and it is fascinating to work with and learn from people from a variety of customs and legal traditions. In between the caseload I have been able to observe the Grand Chamber, which sits every Wednesday to conduct the final appeal hearings of the most complex cases. Just as last week, the case of *Dvorski v Croatia* concerned allegations of Article 6 breaches. The applicant complained about the unfairness of criminal proceedings brought against him in which he was convicted of aggravated murder, armed robbery and arson and sentenced to 40 years' imprisonment. He relied on Article 6 to assert that he had been denied a fair trial because he had not had legal assistance of his own choosing.

Of course, we have our fun, whether my Cypriot colleague regales us with pearls of wisdom from her homeland, my German friend finds it difficult to wrap her tongue around the word "squirrel", or I demonstrate why an Ulster brogue doesn't necessarily lend itself to the romantic French language. Indeed, you'd have been forgiven for likening us to the crew at Central Perk when we met for American cheesecake at a cosy cafe to end the week, but then I guess one of the ideas of the Council of Europe is to bring people together from across the continent in the spirit of friendship and cooperation. In saying that, don't think my friends didn't laugh upon hearing of my curious incident with the dog on Monday morning.

Week 4: 26 January – 1 February 2015

I never liked Radio One. Rather, the soporific sound waves of Terry Wogan's breakfast show used to accompany us when my dad drove me to school, and on family day trips during the summer we were much more partial to Steve Wright in the Afternoon, with his factoids and Big Quiz. Jeremy Vine always sparked interesting discussions between Mum and I, and I was outraged when they changed the standard Radio 2 jingle a couple of years ago. Now that I'm older and wiser (a subjective standard, of course) I am much more inclined to Radio 4 (whilst allowing for the witterings of Mark Kermode and Simon Mayo on Five Live on a Friday afternoon). You can therefore imagine my delight that the archivists at the BBC uncovered recently interviews with Louis Armstrong and Diana Rigg on Roy Plomley's *Desert Island Discs*. Both Satchmo and Ms Peel chose the former's 'What a Wonderful World' as one of their eight records. It has always been one of my favourite songs, and it was therefore a pleasant distraction for me at the end of my fourth week at the European Court of Human Rights. However, the message of the song provided stark contrast to the events we were to remember throughout the week.

Have you ever heard live testimony from a Holocaust survivor? I can now say that I have. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE)¹ convened this week to discuss any number of matters for diplomatic consideration. However, to commence a series of events to remember the Holocaust, the parliamentary programme opened with a speech from Madame Ida Grinspan, who recounted the horrors of her time spent in Auschwitz-Birkenau. This was followed by a commemoration ceremony at the entrance of the Palais de l'Europe. As 70 years have passed since the end of the Second World War, and fifty since the death of the great Sir Winston Churchill, it was humbling to remember the suffering and jointly vow "Never again" as a stagiaire of the Council of Europe.

The crowds that gathered for the commemoration ceremony were replaced on Wednesday by those of a different variety. Protesters descended down the streets encircling the Court as the Grand Chamber sat to consider the final appeal in *Perinçek v Switzerland*. The applicant, a Turkish national, had been convicted in Switzerland for publicly denying the Armenian genocide of 1915. Relying on Article 10, the applicant claimed his freedom of expression had been violated. He asserted that he did not deny that mass murders had occurred; rather he sought to challenge the legal definition of "genocide". Doughty Street Chambers' Geoffrey Robertson QC and Amal Clooney made oral contributions on behalf of the Armenian government and, unsurprisingly, given the public and media interest in the case the Court and press room were fit to burst.

Certainly, this has been one of the busiest weeks at the Court since my arrival. I was invited to a drinks reception with the European Conservative Group with British MPs as they were in Strasbourg throughout the week, and on Friday evening I had to bid farewell and bon voyage to a number of trainees whose internships had come to end. All in all, for any number of

¹ PACE is one of two statutory organs of the Council of Europe, made up of parliamentarians from the Council's 47 member states. It is not to be confused with the European Parliament, an organ of the European Union to which member states elect Members of the European Parliament (MEPs).

reasons, this week has been bittersweet, but the importance of international cooperation and friendship becomes ever more evident with each passing day. I am sure, therefore, that when Kirsty Young, or her eventual successor, casts me away on *Desert Island Discs*, I will recount warmly my days spent in Strasbourg before making the tough decision of whether to save “We Open in Venice”, by Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin and Sammy Davis Jr, or Gerswhin’s “Rhapsody in Blue”.

Week 5: 2-8 February 2015

My brother's fiancée once asked me what my favourite law was. By this, she was not inquiring as to which area of law was of particular interest to me. Rather, my future sister-in-law was half-jokingly asking me to pin-point which piece of legislation I liked above all else. Of course, at the time I explained that it was impossible for me to give such a precise answer. Sure, I was tempted to allude to the law that forbade a person from dying in the Palace of Westminster (for a constitutional quirk would entitle such person to a state funeral) or that which provides for a pregnant woman to relieve herself in a police officer's helmet should she have the urge. I'm sure there is a thesis to be written exploring the balance of interests of expectant mothers and the men and women in blue. However, upon reflection the one law that has stimulated my interest more than any other over the years is the First Amendment to the United States Constitution. Free speech laws fascinate me and formed the basis of my LLM dissertation. They allow for open debate, the exchange of ideas, and the possibility of holding our politicians and public figures to account, whether through satire or hard-hitting journalism. Why the US Constitution in particular? Well, without it I wouldn't have had a neat segue into my next paragraph.

I found myself defending the US legal system this week to a colleague from Germany. She accused our American cousins of having a horrific human rights record because they sign so few international human rights treaties. It didn't matter that the US Bill of Rights is in many ways mirrored by the European Convention on Human Rights. Nor did it seem to matter that the US Supreme Court has the power to strike down legislation as unconstitutional in order to protect citizens from over-zealous lawmakers. But surely we are concerned with Europe? Don't worry; there is a point to all of this.

You see, I am finding it fascinating to meet people from all across the 47 member states of the Council of Europe, because I am able to have debates like this. This week we old-hand trainees were joined by new recruits, thus presenting more opportunity to engage and discuss ideas. The views of each person I meet are shaped understandably by their particular experiences and education, and if it weren't for the guarantees of laws such as the First Amendment, or Article 10, then perhaps I would not have the opportunity to learn so much.

Perhaps the other reason I am so keen to advocate the virtues of the free press this week has to do with the fact that one story dominated legal headlines on Tuesday. The Court ruled that the UK was not in violation of the Convention in imposing a whole-life tariff on murderer Arthur Hutchinson. Given that review of whole-life sentences has taken up many column inches over the past couple of years, this has been one issue where some British attitudes have been at odds with those of international counterparts. Thankfully people are free to agree and disagree, and no doubt this debate will continue.

NOTE: I have just read that in France, it is illegal to name a pig 'Napoleon'. Please disregard everything you have read.

Week 6: 9-15 February 2015

How are you? How's your family? Everyone is keeping well? Pretty innocuous questions, you might think, but as with so many things, context is of the utmost importance. For anyone familiar with the peace process that continues in Northern Ireland, you are probably aware that certain people from the wee island get worked up over what might seem trivial matters. In 2012, during my first semester as a BPTC student on the big island, a decision was made in Belfast to limit the days upon which the British Union flag could fly atop Belfast City Hall. This sparked considerable backlash in my province's capital, which continued throughout the annual parades season in July where riots broke out over disallowed marching routes in Belfast. And so it was that, following the 12 July 2013 Ardoyne riots I returned to London where a dear friend of mine from the bar asked: "How are you? How's your family? Everyone is keeping well?" And suddenly the questions are no longer innocuous.

Of course, in the grand scheme of things, my generation has been more fortunate than those preceding it in that relative peace followed the Belfast Agreement, signed in the year of my tenth birthday. However, given that Northern Ireland is still known for the Troubles, I am used to being asked questions about the current state of affairs. Why, however, should I digress so much for this blog to talk about the home country? Well, to mark the retirement of the Court's Deputy Registrar, Michael O'Boyle, a daylong seminar was organised on Friday to scrutinise Article 2's development twenty years following the decision in *McCann and Others v United Kingdom*. You may remember the case. Three IRA members were shot dead by British military personnel in Gibraltar. In a 10 to 9 decision, the European Court of Human Rights found a breach of Article 2, sending the British press into frenzy. As my former professor Brice Dickson put it in the paper and speech he submitted for the seminar, there was: "a sense of bemusement that foreign judges, including from places formerly under Communist rule... could have the effrontery to declare British military practice and procedure to be contrary to international human rights law."² The controversy has faded over the last two decades, and indeed from the horrors of Northern Ireland terrorism has emerged the development of one of the most important rights enshrined in the convention: the right to life.

Given the high profile nature of this event, I was fortunate to be heard in a question and answer session in the press room, which had in the audience five presidents of the Court (four former and the current, Dean Spielmann), and a variety of judges and lawyers from a range of international and domestic legal institutions. As an Ulster native I take pride in helping advance knowledge about the history and nature of our six counties, and as a Lincoln's Inn representative I appreciate the fact that this tremendous institution has given me the opportunity to engage in such meaningful debate with some of the brightest legal minds. On a lighter note, it was also nice to see my island-folk beat France in their rugby clash on Valentine's Day, but not being a sports correspondent I'll save my hand-egg-ball conversation for the pub, where, when I'm asked, "How is everyone?", I'll be able to

² Professor Brice Dickson, *The Planning and Control of Operations Involving the Use of Lethal Force*, Human Rights Centre, School of Law, Queen's University Belfast, Paper for the seminar in honour of Michael O'Boyle, Strasbourg, 13 February 2015.

respond: "Great, we're looking forward to winning the Six Nations for the second consecutive year!"

Week 7: 16-22 February 2015

There aren't many things in life that are constant. Certainly, in my life, there are few things that I can take for granted. I like to think that there are a couple, such as my family's love and support, and my sense of humour. Of course, I'm maybe not the best person to judge the latter, but given that this blog is not a two-sided dialogue, I'm going to maintain that the Divine Potter gifted me with an acute funny bone. Certainly, I take comfort in these constants because of the fleeting nature of so many other things. It is hard to believe, dear reader, that I have now surpassed the half-way point of my traineeship at the European Court of Human Rights. In another six weeks or so, I will have to bid farewell to friends and colleagues and return to glorious Blighty. Of course I am excited for what lies ahead, but at this juncture I thought it best to reflect on my general impressions of Strasbourg and the Court to date.

You may remember my incendiary start to this internship (quite literally, as I nearly blew up my kitchen with a toaster!). Trainees are entrusted with important responsibilities from the beginning, and there has been much scope for interesting work in a number of areas. In addition to working on immigration cases for the British division, I have been working on research reports for the Grand Chamber, quite unbelievable when one considers that this is the final appeal chamber for human rights cases across forty-seven member States. Seminars and lecture events occur regularly, so there are significant opportunities to enhance one's knowledge of substantive human rights law.

On the social front, few places could have given me the possibility of meeting with as many like-minded people from a variety of backgrounds. Whether I've been eating American cheesecake in a cafe with a Turkish-German, Romanian and Cypriot, or having a home-cooked Italian dinner with friends from Verona, or explaining my stiff-upper lipped British aversion to European hugs and kisses to visitors from China, or trying to explain gangster-rap lyrics to French colleagues in a hippity-hop bar, I have learned from and hopefully brought knowledge to others from all corners. We all share a passion for the work we do, and I have settled into my Strasbourgian home as un canard takes to eau.

To any students who are considering applying for Lincoln's Euro scholarships, I can speak with confidence in asserting that you will have marvellous experiences, both in terms of the work you will do and the people you will meet. I'd like to think that the impression I leave will be more long-lasting than yours, but as I cannot guarantee that that will be the case, despite my best efforts, I will console myself with the knowledge that I can probably tell a better knock-knock joke than any of my successors. Happy applying!

Week 8: 23 February – 1 March 2015

I'm not a fan of modern art. Not that I know much about traditional art, but when I walk into the Tate Modern in London I can't help but feel that King Lear's Gloucester got off lightly. Perhaps I just don't get it, but tell me, does it make sense to you that in one exhibit, London's Tate had on display a mirror? I promise you, a mirror, with a caption laminated beside it that advised that I was looking at a piece of genius because I became a piece of the art. Well, if that's the case, I have a considerably cheaper piece of genius hanging in my bathroom. Whatever, I just don't see how a grey-painted canvas entitled "Grey" will capture the imagination in the same way as Da Vinci's Mona Lisa, or Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel. And it's not just art displays. I don't understand what possesses architects to design monstrosities such as the Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh. I don't know if you've ever seen it, but I can only imagine that the designer vomited all of his or her ideas into a notebook, and then decided to do all of it. In my native capital, Stormont Castle sits beautifully atop a hill overlooking Belfast, and in London the classicism of the Palace of Westminster speaks for itself. Likewise, consider any of the Inns of Court (especially Lincoln's Inn!), or the Royal Courts of Justice. These are timeless pieces of design.

In Strasbourg, a terrific city with areas as glorious as La Petite France, there is arguably a similar problem. Yes, five minutes from me is the stunning Cathédrale Notre-Dame de Strasbourg. Indeed, this impressed greatly my mum and sister when they visited this week. However, considering they were awed by the spectacular legal buildings I showed them in London, they were rather taken aback by the appearance of the European Court of Human Rights. You might wonder why this huge glass structure resembles an oil repository. I've been told it symbolises transparency and accessibility. Honourable as this is, I know many friends who were initially underwhelmed by the exterior. However, as happened with my work colleagues and me, my family quickly realised how open and welcoming the court is when I took them on a tour. They were quickly won over by the warmth and camaraderie of mes amis. A boy's mother always worries, and considering a guy from Ireland would rather be locked up than disappoint his wee mammy, I am truly grateful to all of my friends for making my family feel so welcome. And that's the point. The Court has been a super place to work, and the range of work I have experienced, and the relationships I have developed, have proved hugely beneficial in both professional and social terms.

I am aware that this week's blog is light on legal substance, but you will forgive me, dear reader, as my working week was shortened to allow me to see the sights with family. However, to any prospective Peter Duffy Scholar, you should know that Strasbourg is a city with fascinating history, interesting museums, quaint cafes, great river walks and good pubs. Yes, the modern art gallery isn't necessarily to my taste, but if you're the type of person that can walk through the Tate without making any snide remarks, knock yourself out!

Week 9: 2-8 March 2015

When I was around the age of 7, I remember watching the Jim Carrey starring-vehicle *The Mask* for the first time. There were many things I loved about the film. I know Carrey's gurning and impressions aren't to everyone's tastes, but at seven years old when you have a zany green-faced demi-god dressed in black and white wingtips and a yellow zoot suit, you don't worry so much about sophisticated cinema. However, there was one performance for me that stood out. Cameron Diaz made her movie debut and I was left open-mouthed when she first appeared on screen. When she later crooned for Stanley Ipkiss's alter ego in the *Coco Bongo Club* I couldn't help but envy our hero. However, there is now one thing that I can tick off my bucket list, for on Friday evening my friends and I attended the bar at Strasbourg's Opera Theatre (which shows that, despite my rant about modern art in the last blog, I have a modicum of sophistication), where I had the pleasure of being serenaded by a wonderful opera singer as she made her way through the lounge. Not that I'm reading too much into things, but I'm starting to believe in true love again.

This all got me thinking, as one does, about Barry Manilow's *Copacabana*. You remember Lola, the showgirl, with yellow feathers in her hair (in my case the love interest wore a magenta flower in hers). Lola was in a relationship with Tony, the bartender. One evening a flamboyant bloke called Rico came into the bar and made inappropriate advances to Lola. Tony stepped in to defend her honour, fisticuffs ensued, and then Rico killed Tony with a single gunshot... allegedly. Thirty years later Lola is sitting alone, still mourning the loss of her beloved in a Miss Havisham sort of way. All very tragic. However, as an aspiring practitioner, I want to know what happened to Rico. Was he ever convicted? If so, would he have been able to bring a claim against the State in an international human rights court? Let's say for the sake of argument that he could have brought a legal claim against his State in the Strasbourg Court (unlikely as Cuba is not a member of the Council of Europe, but bear with me). Which Convention article could he have invoked? I reckon he could have had a shout with Article 6.

This week, whilst I toiled away on my research reports, the Court held a Grand Chamber hearing in the case of *Schatschaschwili v. Germany*, where a man convicted of aggravated robbery and extortion maintained that his trial was unfair as neither he nor his counsel had had an opportunity at any stage of the proceedings to question the only direct witnesses of the crime allegedly committed. This is not the first Article 6 case the Court has heard during my time in Strasbourg. In fact, it crops up quite often. Now, let's look again at Rico's facts.

He is in a crowded bar. He is probably drinking and becomes a little too familiar with Lola. However, the aggressor in this scenario is Tony. He sails across the bar and then punches fly. Indeed, chairs are smashed in two. There is blood everywhere. Who's to say that Rico didn't fear for his life and had no choice but to pull a gun to fend off Tony? In fact, we don't even know if the gun was Rico's. All we know is that there was a single gunshot, but we don't know who shot whom. Tony could have shot himself in the scuffle. Now, if Rico was convicted of murder, there's the possibility that the State did not try him fairly. After all,

there were many witnesses. They would have seen Tony soar into a jealous rage. Did Rico's lawyer have the opportunity to question these witnesses, as is his right?

It's very easy to champion human rights when you're perceived as the good guy. However, it's not so easy when you're defending those who seem indefensible. I wrote a couple of weeks ago about the famous McCann case, where three IRA members were shot dead by British forces. As a native of Northern Ireland I despise paramilitaries, but it would be too easy to let passion get the better of me. At the end of the day human rights are there for everyone. That's why they are called *human* rights. If we are to be bastions of freedom, we must do our best to uphold our principles at all costs, even when it might seem unjust to do so. You might have no sympathy for Rico, but that does not excuse a State infringing his inherent rights.

Working in Strasbourg has taught me a lot. Perhaps, before I leave, I can learn to do the meringue so as to impress my new love.

Week 10: 9-15 March 2015

As I follow our domestic news from afar, there is one issue that has been dominating many headlines of late. I'm sure you've picked up on it, after sifting through the stories of Ed Miliband's two kitchens, the farce that has become the organisation of televised political leaders' debates, and what will inevitably come to be known as "Fracasgate" at the BBC. As we constantly hear of stories of the terrorists that call themselves "ISIS" or "Islamic State", British schoolgirls fleeing to Syria, or the crisis in Ukraine, the issue of government defence spending has leapt to the front of many political concerns. As I write, we are still awaiting an ironclad guarantee of whether or not the government will commit to defence spending of 2% of GDP. To paraphrase the words I read of a journalist earlier today, a government's primary goal traditionally was to keep its territory secure. And yet, as the country which led the charge for this spending commitment of all NATO member states, it looks increasingly as though we will be unable to meet this target ourselves. However, and regardless of one's views on the wars that have plagued political discourse in our country for over a decade now, I am thankful that our armed forces still represent courage and integrity, for the same seemingly cannot be said of armed forces in other parts of the world.

When I started at the Court and proposed my idea of keeping a series of blogs, I didn't foresee the ambition that would be required to complete this task. I assumed that every week I would easily come up with ideas that you, the reader, would find interesting. After all, I was coming to work at a place that has jurisdiction over the human rights claims of forty seven member states. Surely there would be no limit to the number of stories with which I could regale you. The fact of the matter is, however, that once you become accustomed to something you start to take for granted the special nature of the place in which you find yourself, and the work in which you partake. What may therefore peak your interest might now be lost on me as I have developed a comfortable routine. However, all is not lost, as I stumbled upon a decision issued by the Court that ties in to my opening remarks.

In this week's Chamber judgment in the case of *Lyalyakin v Russia*, the Court held, unanimously, that there had been a violation of Article 3 (prohibition of inhuman or degrading treatment), both on account of the applicant's treatment and on account of the authorities' failure to conduct an effective investigation into his complaints. The applicant was a conscript who complained about degrading treatment when he was caught trying to escape from the army. Amongst other forms of punishment, he was made to appear undressed in front of other soldiers. Although the Court recognised the need to maintain military discipline within the army, it found that the applicant's public humiliation had been unnecessary and could not be justified merely as a means of preventing his escape from the unit.

When you learn history in school, speak with family members who have served, or even watch old war movies, you feel a sense of pride in our nation's military accomplishments. However, if any of our personnel were to suffer such humiliating treatment, I would like to think that our collective response would be one of outrage. The last line of the *Bridge on the River Kwai* is apt: "Madness! Madness... madness!"

Week 11 – 16-22 March 2015

I have one very good friend at the Bar in London who shares my interest, and for the most part, my taste in movies. We often make suggestions to one another and then share our musings when time allows. It is him that I must thank, for example, for introducing me to a truly charming trilogy of movies in exchange for my suggestion of John Huston's *The Man Who Would Be King*. Richard Linklater's *Before Sunrise*, *Before Sunset*, and *Before Midnight* make up a trio of films, set nine years apart, which capture snapshots of single days in the lives of Jesse and Celine. Across the three outings, the audience is left to contemplate what could be, what should be and what is. As I enter my penultimate week working at the European Court of Human Rights, I am reflecting on my time spent in Strasbourg. I thought that this blog might be useful in a more direct sense with regards the application and interview stages for those lucky enough to be awarded the Peter Duffy Scholarship. At this point you may be thinking about what could be. When you read of some injustice in the newspaper you might think of what should be. If you become my successor and settle into the Court, you will, as I have, see what is.

Much like the solar eclipse that occurred this week (note also the not so coincidental use of the *Before Sunrise* analogy), opportunities such as those granted through the Inn's European Scholarships don't come around very often. There are many reasons why an individual might not wish to take a risk and jump into the unknown: family, relationships, job security, to name but a few. However, I would encourage anybody with any interest in human rights law to consider this opportunity. For fear of sounding like a broken record you will meet wonderful, fascinating people and work on important matters with a degree of autonomy you might not find elsewhere so early in your work experience opportunities. It might seem daunting, the prospect of upping sticks and injecting yourself into an international legal system, but if my experience is anything to go by, it will be rewarding. So, what should you consider, and what should you do?

The application you will make will give you the opportunity to demonstrate your interest in and commitment to human rights law. If you have any relevant work experience, highlight that. If you have an academic background in any particular area of international law, emphasise it. Keep abreast of legal news generally, but especially in the areas in which you are most interested. There are many reputable newspapers with good legal sections and a number of podcasts that can be downloaded for free to remain clued into the wider legal world. The Inn holds an annual human rights update, at which many prestigious speakers attend and give addresses. We all like the dining sessions and congregating in the MCR, but keep an eye on the Inn calendar and immerse yourself in what Lincoln's offers. If you do so, it makes the possibility of interview all the more likely.

So, what are you expected to demonstrate in interview? Well, you will likely appear before three panellists, each with questions geared towards a particular facet of your character. You will likely be propositioned on something in the realms of human rights law and be encouraged to engage in debate. You will probably be asked to consider what you hope to gain from the scholarship, and how you think the placement fits into your plan. It is also

important to the Inn that you act as its ambassador. Think of what you have done, or could do, to sell the Inn and its programmes to peers and prospective students.

My final piece of advice would be to be positive. I've spelt it out for you, so you now have no excuses. Think of what could be, what should be and, when you get the scholarship, what is.

Week 12... and a bit: 23 March – 1 April 2015

Towards the beginning of my traineeship at the European Court of Human Rights, my Cypriot colleague told me that she had dreamt that by the time I left, I would be running around Strasbourg hugging everyone in sight. My European cousins thought it strange that I should stick so rigidly to the British mantra of the stiff upper lip. Where they hugged and kissed I offered my hand for the customary vice-like handshake. Of course, at the start, I wasn't to know how terrifically affecting all of my new friends would become. That's not to say that I threw my arms around everyone in sight like that graceless drunkard at the party who everyone assumes was invited by someone else. However, the edges were certainly softened.

I should stress, I hate goodbyes. It's not that I become overly emotional. That's reserved for when I watch Disney Pixar's *Up!* or the *Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* episode where Will's father returns only to run out on him again (spoiler alert!). I just find goodbyes awkward, especially when you've been a part of a tight-knit group that has had to welcome and bid farewell to so many over the course of several months. It just seemed hard to believe that this week was to be my last, where we were the ones leaving and ushering in our replacements. Life goes on, I know, but you become attached to people and places.

I don't know how much in the way of legal substance I can add to this blog, what with it being the last. I look back at my time in Strasbourg in disbelief, as it seems as though everything has passed in the blink of an eye. The legal experiences have been second to none. I have drafted judgments on deportation and extradition appeals, witnessed judicial deliberations, observed Grand Chamber hearings, compiled national law contributions for research reports to be used for comparative legal analyses by the Grand Chamber, attended seminars, heard testimony from a Holocaust survivor, sat in on a press conference for the opening of the new judicial year, and rode the lift with the President of the Court. Hard work, yes, but rewarding and accompanied by wonderful working and personal relationships. I've travelled in the past. I've studied abroad. I have many friends from all over the world. When I think of the diversity of people I've met in such a short space of time, however, what I have learned from them, and hopefully what they have learned from me, it beggars belief. Until we meet again, I will miss my friends from France, Germany, Austria, Cyprus, Turkey, Romania, Ukraine, Italy, Moldova, the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, Croatia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Denmark, Belgium, China, the USA, Greece, and of course, the UK and Ireland.

I guess the best way of concluding is simply to express my heartfelt thanks to everyone else who made the opportunity possible. Within the British division I had a wonderfully supportive supervisor in Clare Ovey. Dr. Paul Harvey, a member of Lincoln's Inn, was most helpful and encouraging. I enjoyed working closely with Tanya Corrigan and Edward Slade on a number of immigration cases, under the supervision of Pamela McCormick. In the research department, I thank Rachael Kondak, a former Peter Duffy scholar, for entrusting me with lots of interesting work, and Lawrence Early, jurisconsult, for his backing of a fellow Northern Ireland native. The UK division as a whole, with lawyers, assistants and support staff, has been incredibly welcoming and accommodating, and I will miss the camaraderie.

Finally, I must thank Lincoln's Inn and its representatives who granted me this scholarship. As always, I am tremendously proud to be a member of this fantastic institution, and I hope that I can continue to avail of its opportunities and be of assistance.

Three months ago I set off for Strasbourg. It quickly became my home and my friends fast became my family. I hope that, in some small way, these blogs have given a modicum of insight into what you can expect if you are my successor. Trust me when I say that the totality of the experiences was worth spending a night in Stansted airport upon my return. If you are interested, I am happy for you to contact the Inn and get in touch. Of course, if and when we meet, expect only a firm handshake by means of a greeting.