

Exploring Thin Places of spirituality



Rebecca Friedlander on Scattery Island.

Rebecca Friedlander explains to Dan Danaher what inspired her to include Scattery Island in her new film

THE rugged beauty of West Clare's most well-known monastic site is captured in *Thin Places*, a film that explores the powerful stories of Celtic saints during the Middle Ages.

Shot in idyllic locations across Ireland, Scotland and England, producer and film-maker Rebecca Friedlander steps back in time to follow the thread of revival history from the fifth to 20th centuries.

It features well-known pastors and ministers such as Heidi Baker, John and Carol Arnott, Ray Hughes, Emma Stark, Kevin and Rose Sambrook, Andy Raine, Charity Bowman, Webb and Mary Hamilton from the West Clare Fellowship.

Rebecca says she felt "a presence", even before she set foot on Scattery Island for her first visit in September of 2018.

Her friend, Mary Hamilton, had arranged the ferry service to transport the Wisconsin native to the OPW-managed island, which is situated 2.5km off Kilrush and won the 2017 Destination of Excellence (Eden) Award.

"I am always curious about the spiritual implications of a place. I felt the presence and that it was a special place before the boat even reached the island."

"I could tell in my spirit this was a heavenly place. There was something that was connected to the spiritual realm that was there."

"Walking on the island, I could have probably stayed for a few

days to really enjoy it and soak it in. It was one of the highlights of my trip to Ireland because I really felt there was this really sweet presence on the island."

"I think I am not the only one because a lot of people feel that when they go on the island," she says.

Asked what the "presence" like, she says she could sense the presence of the Holy Spirit and angels as she was getting ready to go on the boat.

"I had this moment when I felt the Holy Spirit spoke to me and showed me there are angels on that island today. Even from centuries ago, we know angels don't have a lifespan, they are just eternal beings."

"I believe that some of the prayers from the saints that were prayed to made such a thin place in the atmosphere, that we still have angels there today. Scattery Island is one of those places I tell people about all of the time because I can't wait to send more people there to have such a sweet experience as I had," she says.

Working in full-time ministry for 17 years, both locally and internationally, using creative arts and music, Rebecca subsequently got permission to include the island in her film.

She describes *Thin Places* as locations where the atmosphere between heaven and earth is thinner.

"These were places of prayer, fasting and worship. There were even places in Ireland where

people worshipped on a 24-hour basis. You can go to these places and sense the presence of God, it still hasn't changed."

"What the Celtic Saints had was pure and it was the real deal. Scattery Island represents that. It is authentic, beautiful and preserved in a way that people can just step into the past there."

"We see a lot of strong women who were given a voice in the Celtic church. They were strong, gracious and wise and kings came to them for counsel," she continues. "Everyone can make up a good story. We use first person witness, history documents and documented sources. We didn't want to use fables."

She believes the island's history is something that should be more widely shared with the public.

"I feel the island is part of Celtic history that has a great story that not everyone knows about. This really peaked my interest as I was studying the Celtic saints. It was a great way of telling this important story," she believes.

She interviewed West Clare Fellowship pastor, Mary Hamilton, on the film, saying it is great to be with someone who is so connected to the island.

Contributing to the film, Mary explained the stables where Jesus Christ was born was a 'thin place' where heaven came to earth.

"Jesus pushed the boat out to get a quiet time with his father when the people around him were crowding him too much

and we can also feel this in our everyday lives when we just want to get away."

"Getsemane at the foot of the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem, where all his friends deserted him and fell asleep, was another thin place and at the cross where heaven also touched earth."

"We can have a thin place even in a coffee shop when we are getting away from the crowd or reading a piece of scripture."

"Thin places like Scattery Island are sweet places because, without any effort, you can come into the presence of God and he can download into your system. Somehow or other, you don't say anything, you don't say give me this or that or what about this or that. Something happens that touches your spirit. Earlier on, I would have called it an open heaven," Mary explains.

Rebecca returned to Scattery Island recently, this time with a few friends, with a great sense of excitement about what the island has to offer.

One of the things she loves about the island is the fact that locals, such as the West Clare Fellowship, respect it and want to conserve it, in association with authorities such as the Office of Public Works.

"People like Mary Hamilton, who use the island, really love it and because of this, I see it as a good place that can be available to so many people. It was so clean when I was on the island. I was amazed."

"It felt untouched and manicured the same time. The West Clare Fellowship are doing renovation work on the lighthouse gatekeeper's house because they totally love the island. The fellowship are not viewing the island as a big tourist attraction."

"They want to make it a comfortable place for a small group of people. Keeping the authenticity is important to retain its location as a thin place," she stresses.

Born in Wisconsin, Rebecca now lives in San Diego, California. Her great-grandmother, Margaret Culklin Banning, was Irish, so stepping back into her Irish roots has been an "incredible adventure" she says.

Margaret was a well-known author in the 1930s and it was her parents that came over to the USA.

Initially, Rebecca started out delivering motivational speeches as a missionary while she worked with clay on her potter's wheel. She spoke about how God can transform, shape and mould people's lives.

A self-taught film-maker, she works with Christian channels, with programmes broadcast on Trinity Broadcasting Network, Day Star Television and God TV.

Rebecca has copyrighted more than 300 songs, released 13 CDs, and has authored 10 books.

A fine art composite photographer, she often uses art and photos while speaking.

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I did a few street interviews where I went up to women around the world and asked them what is your definition of the word beautiful. Most of them said it is confidence and how you carry yourself. I asked them if today's culture is doing a good job defining beauty in women. Across the board, they said no.

"I prayed, asked God for a camera and two days later he brought one," she recalls.

In a world that equates beauty with perfection and self-worth with beauty, she believes women spend much of their time striving to meet unreachable standards, without the perspective to acknowledge their own beauty.

Her recent TV production, *Radical Makers*, features makers and testimonies of 50 women from around the world, who have overcome image-related issues to discover authentic beauty.

It is based on her book *Finding Beautiful: Discovering Authentic Beauty around the World*. For that, Rebecca travelled to Paris, Hawaii, the Middle East, Ireland, and other locations to chronicle the stories of 12 women from a wide range of backgrounds, all of whom share their individual search for beauty within, and their ultimate transformations in Christ.

Accompanied by photos that represent the journey from self-doubt to their recognition of exceptional beauty in God's creation, she believes *Finding Beautiful* will touch the heart of any woman who has struggled to find her own unshakable beauty in Christ.

"Working in media, you always see the pressure to define your self on how you look. I did a few street interviews where I went up to women around the world and asked them what is your defini-

tion of the word beautiful.

"Most of them said it is confidence and how you carry yourself. I asked them if today's culture is doing a good job defining beauty in women. Across the board, they said no."

"There needs to be a different model presented for authentic beauty," she says.

She believes authentic beauty is not confined to a person's face but also includes their soul.

She also believes people should make space in their day to spend some time with God.

"When we make God about ourselves, more than us worshipping him and putting him first and looking at the Gospel, reading the words of Jesus and living by them, then we end up missing the mark."

"Ireland represents something good and holy in terms of the roots of what people carry here. Getting back to our roots and foundation within Christ and allowing the words of Jesus to define what religion really looks like today would be a great step forward," she believes.

Her first film, *Celtic Pilgrimage*, covered history from about 400AD with St Patrick coming to Ireland up to the Council of Whitby in 665. She says the actor that played St Patrick in that film is now working as a missionary in Asia, because of the encounters he experienced playing the role.

Thin Places builds on this film and helps the viewer to connect with Celtic heritage today.