

## **“The joys of becoming Irish, Immigrants share their experiences of attaining citizenship”**

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By ROBERT CARRY

**“I WILL NEVER forget it,”** says Sorina Nabors of the day she swore an oath to the Irish State and became a citizen of her adopted country.

“When I came back to my office all my colleagues were waiting for me with flowers and a wonderful present which I still have – a crystal sphere with an Irish symbol engraved in it in gold,” she beams with pride.

Naturalisation didn’t come easy to the Romanian-born Nabors, and was granted some two years after she and her then husband initially submitted their application. The process was both lengthy and stringent for the pair, who were both working professionals with children enrolled and settled in Irish schools at the time.

Although Nabors – from the Transylvanian capital Cluj – already had residency in Ireland, she felt that securing citizenship was an important move.

“Ireland was the country in which we had been working and living, so citizenship was a very natural progression,” she says. Nabors, who works with asylum seekers and refugees in her adopted city of Cork, sees the granting of citizenship as the icing on the cake at the end of the process of integration rather than a part of the process itself.

“This is more about self-esteem,” she says. “For those who are really integrated and living like an Irish person, it is about being seen by the State as a normal citizen and knowing that from then on you will be treated as such.”

Nabors’ big day came in slightly unusual surroundings. “We were called into the courts on a day when the judge obviously had plenty of other cases to attend to,” she recalls. “There were solicitors, barristers and people who were in court on charges. It was an interesting audience.”

Also in attendance were other residents ready to get sworn in. Among them was a Somali woman with her two young boys.

“It struck me at the time that she didn’t have any English. She was going through the same process as me but her son translated when it came to swearing the oath.”

As well as facilitating easier travel and allowing Nabors to vote in general elections and referenda, her successful citizenship application would also help solidify her children’s status. At the time children had to have separate applications submitted, and it was a further year before they too received their Irish passports.

For Nabors, however, that extra step was one very much worth taking. “Everybody treats me as Irish until I open my mouth – my accent will always make the difference – but my children will have the whole package.”

Nabors feels that although applications are dealt with stringently, there is a lot that applicants can do to improve their chances of receiving a positive response.

“I would encourage people who are applying for citizenship to update their

application by contacting the department whenever there is a positive change in their circumstances.”

Although Nabors has been a citizen of the Republic of Ireland for six years now, she has found her life again being impacted by the lengthy processing period.

“My fiancé, a doctor who has practiced in Ireland for the last five years, is currently waiting for a decision on his application,” she explains. As well as having problems travelling abroad for conferences and other work-related events, her fiancé’s current status has impacted on the pair’s lives in other ways.

“We have been dreaming of a romantic trip to Paris, but it has been put on hold by bureaucratic checks.” BUT THERE ARE plenty of other success stories. Among them is that of Vitaliy, a Ukrainian national also living in Cork. He was in Ireland five years when he applied for citizenship and, after a two-year process, he received word last year that he had been accepted. “I was a bit nervous while I was waiting for the result,” he recalls. “I know people who had applied for it three or four years ago and still heard nothing. It’s a big lottery.” Yet the long wait made the positive outcome all the more enjoyable. “Physically, nothing changed,” he says. “It’s just a piece of paper that makes your life a little bit easier, but to receive it was absolutely brilliant. I was a free person; I could go wherever I wanted.”

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