

Our Seventh And Final Day In Ireland – Friday October 21st, 2005



We awoke to rain gently dancing on the skylight in our room. It was about 6:00 A.M. We went downstairs. Tom carried the luggage into the foyer while I made coffee. We sat in the dining room, drinking coffee, taking a few final photos. Tom took the trash out, and then, taking the vacuum out of the hall closet, cleaned the peat stove, the carpets, and all of the floors. I wiped all of the counters down, cleaned the dining table and coffee table, and went upstairs to do one final sprucing. Mr. McKeever was late. I prepared a light breakfast

of apples, pears, bananas, and pastries. We ate and had some coffee. Afterwards, Tom sat in one of the easy chairs and dozed. I walked outside, back into the cottage, looked out the windows, and waited. Suddenly, I heard a din of noise.



Running out the door I looked up at the sky. There had to be well over five hundred crows, the sky black with them.



I ran back into the cottage to get Tom, but he was too deeply asleep. I didn't even take time to grab the camera. I went back outside and watched as they split off into groups, each group flying in different directions. Wow! What a spectacular sight.

About 10:15 A.M. I woke Tom. He had put the luggage into the trunk of the car earlier. Walking outside, we noticed that our neighbors had returned from where ever they had been. We hadn't had the opportunity to meet them, and we never would. We heard a vehicle approaching. It was Mr. McKeever. He had come to read the meters so we could settle with him for the utilities. He was a nice man, a farmer. He spoke with a fairly thick Irish accent, so it was difficult at times to understand him. He told us about taking courses the summer before on tourism. He said he had met some really nice people, especially the owners of the gift shop at Tara Hill. I asked him if it was Maguires, and he



said, "Yes. That's them. Nice people." I suppose it is not so amazing that he would have met them, the Maguires. After all, it is a small country. He read the meters, and was quite surprised that we had used hardly any heat or electricity. Furthermore, we had re-stocked the peat bricks and starters, so we ended up owing him less than five euros. We chatted a few minutes, asked him if we could get a good rate if we came back the following year, to which he replied yes. He did tell us that it would be a good idea to e-mail the Mrs. just to make sure. We said our good-byes, and he wished us a safe trip. He



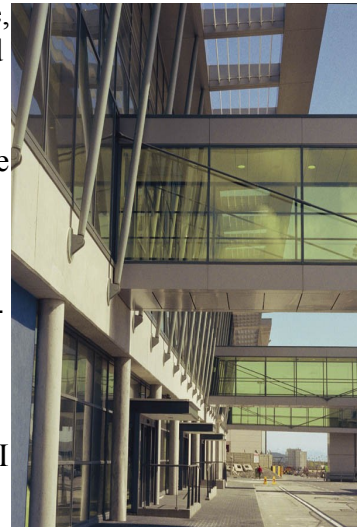
then left to strip the beds and towels for washing. He needed to get the cottage ready for the next group of visitors.

did get behind a few trucks, but these at least tried to pull over when they could to let the rest of us pass. From N-3 we took M-50 into Dublin.

Just as we were coming into Dublin, off to the left side of the M-50 freeway, we saw an area where there had evidently been an encampment. This would be Travelers, or Irish “Gypsies”. There is much controversy surrounding this group of people. Some would say that they are the descendants of the poets and scholars, others just drifters and grifters. I planned to study them, read about them, before I came to a solid thought about who they are. The abandoned encampment was a bit messy, a lot of litter and trash left behind. It wasn't very pleasant to look at.



We were finally on M-1, the road to Dublin Airport. We found our way to the Budget rental office, unloaded the luggage, and checked the car in. Then it was up the long, sloped ramp to the airport proper. Once inside, we found an exchange bank where we could cash in the euros we had left for U.S. dollars. That done, we hauled our luggage behind us to the Aer Lingus check-



in. We gave the representative our tickets and passports. He carried on with nonsensical drivel. Finished with that, we made our way to the security point. We stowed our carry-ons, coats, personal items, etc. on the conveyor belt. We both made it through the detector with ease. But on the other side, I was asked to open my carry-on. Apparently, the x-ray didn't work on the Waterford Crystal pieces, which contain lead. So, I obliged. I unzipped the bag, and the inspector, a nice enough lady, began unloading our belongings onto the table. There were only toiletries, along with the crystal and a few small items. It didn't take her long. There was



something that she found which she took to her supervisor to inspect. I am not certain what it was. I was juggling my boots, my handbag, and two water bottles, so I wasn't paying close attention. Tom didn't know what she had taken out either. All I wanted to do was re-pack the bag and get my boots on.



When we were finished there, we asked where the gate for our plane was. The inspector pointed just across the way. We wanted to get a bite to eat before going any further, and we had plenty of time, so we wandered down the walkway looking for a place to eat. We found a cafeteria a ways down the walk. Tom and I both had fish and chips, along with some water. Afterwards, we purchased a newspaper and some cookies. We returned to the departures desk, and asked the attendant where to go next. She handed us immigration forms for the U.S. and told us to fill them out. We only had to fill one out, one per family, which was nice. We then asked the same attendant where to go next. She pointed down a flight of stairs, which would take us to the I.N.S. waiting area. We asked if we could return upstairs once going down, and she said no. Once downstairs, that's where you remained until your flight departed. Plus, we were asked not to take any

photos of this area. We asked if there was a place to buy coffee downstairs, and she said yes.

So, down we trudged, Tom and I. Down two flights of stairs. There were three inspection stations, each with its own immigration officer. We approached one of them, waiting just behind a small group of people. Then it was our turn. He asked for our passports, and wanted to know if we had any liquor to declare. We told him that we had a bottle of Baileys Irish Creme, which we had purchased for Tom's father. He gave us a once over, then stamped our passports. This was, I suppose, a mini-customs area. We left to find our gate, which was not too far away. We found places to sit while waiting for our flight to be called. There was indeed a coffee stand, just across the way. I asked Tom if he wanted a coffee, which he did, so I offered to go get us both a coffee.



There was a young man behind the counter. His name was Stephen. He watched me as I walked to the counter. I asked if he had lattes. He told me his machine was broken, but if I gave him the money, he could have it ready for me in about a week. I laughed. I asked him for two regular coffees. He looked at me and said, "It's alright. Don't be upset. You're only having a nightmare, but you'll wake up. You're not really leaving. You'll wake up and you'll not have left. You'll still be in Ireland." He was quite serious when he said it. I can't imagine that he would say that to just anyone. I looked at him.

He grinned, then got the coffees. I asked him if he had ever been to the States, to which he replied, "Marry-land, Washington, and Virginia". That's how he pronounced Maryland. I told him that I had lived in Virginia at one time. He asked if I knew a certain person. I told him it had been many years since I had lived there. He served up the coffees. I thanked him and told him to take care. After pouring milk into the coffees, I walked back across to where Tom was and took my seat. I was a bit unnerved by what this young man had said to me, especially after my conversation with the old mother from the night before. I watched him from where I sat for some time. He never appeared to engage with anyone else quite the way he had with me.

We still had two hours to pass before it was time to board the plane. Tom read his newspaper, and I watched the people around us. Our name was called by one of the flight attendants at the Aer Lingus desk. I went up and she asked for our passports, which meant that I had to walk back to our seats and get them out of my handbag. I returned to the desk and gave them to her. She told me that the check-in attendant upstairs had not swiped our passports. Then she asked for a contact phone number in the states. I gave her David's. She gave me back the passports and I returned to my seat to await boarding. More people began arriving. I told Tom that I was going to use the restroom, and walked down the hall



around a giant curve to a dead end where the ladies room was. There were two little girls at the lav, one of them having a difficult time reaching the soap. I told her to put her hand under the pump, and I pressed down on it for her. She smiled and thanked me. Now it was Tom's turn to use the restroom. The mens room was in the opposite direction that I had gone, but he was back before I knew it.

Soon, our flight was called, and we waited for our group to be beckoned on board. Our seats were on the left window side,

with a wall behind us. We were very close to the restrooms, so had a lot of noise during the flight. There wasn't much space for our feet, but we were able to manage. Most of our carry-ons were stowed overhead. The flight took off about fifteen minutes after we boarded. During those fifteen minutes, I was fighting back tears. I couldn't bear to leave. I knew that we had to go back to the states, but I really didn't want to. I developed a lump in my throat so immense that I could barely swallow. I fought back the tears, gripping my hands into fists so tight that my hands turned white. I made small talk with Tom, and waited. The plane began backing up, readying for take off. Again the tears started. I refused to let them flow and developed another lump in my throat. This one was so large that I could hardly breathe. The plane left the ground, and I thought I would die. It took a while to regain my composure. I made Tom promise me that we would return. If I could have stayed, I would have. I looked out of the window, watching as Ireland faded into the distance.



We settled in for the long flight ahead. Tom tried to rest while I took photos of the sky and Atlantic Ocean. There was much busy-ness behind us, since there were three restrooms



located there. The flight attendants came around after about



two hours to serve us dinner. Tom had lasagna, and I had chicken with mushrooms. We both had a pasta salad, hard roll with butter, crackers and cheese, a cup of spring water, and a piece of sweet pound cake. After the meal, we were served tea. We tried to read, to watch the television monitor, to talk. My book was too complicated to begin reading, the headphones were uncomfortable, and we were overly tired, so conversation didn't come easy. We rested our heads on each other, trying to get some sleep. I noticed a young mother holding a baby who was about five months old. She was waiting in line to use the restroom. When the baby saw that I

was looking at him, he broke into the biggest toothless smile that I had ever seen. He had bright red hair, and very fair skin. He was just just adorable! The mother smiled at both Tom and I, then it was her turn for the restroom. There was also a charming young man just across from us. He was about five years old, and he had a Binky in his mouth. I took his photo, and when he realized that I had, he took the Binky out and smiled for the next photo.

After a bit, the attendants came through the aisles selling VAT-exempt merchandise. We had looked through the catalogs, but could find nothing that we wanted to buy. A little while later, I realized that there was yet another catalog, and even though all of the merchandise had been put away, one of the attendants brought us our purchases. We hadn't been able to find anything for Maggie's boyfriend, Jesse, while we were in Ireland. We found a nice t-shirt with a Celtic symbol on the front. We also purchased two crystal shot glasses and some coasters. It was getting later at the same time that it was getting earlier. We had left Dublin at 2:45 P.M., and were to land in Chicago at 5:00 P.M. Pretty cool, huh? And the total flight from Dublin was eight hours and fifteen minutes. Can you tell that I am new to traveling through major time zones? At least we had sunlight throughout the flight, and I was able to capture many wonderful aerial shots.



Before we knew it we were above Chicago. The plane circled for about half an hour before landing. We retrieved our carry-ons, and waited for the line of other passengers ahead of us to move off of the plane. Down a very long hallway, and we were herded into a baggage claim/inspection area. We were told that we would not be allowed to use cell phones or take photos while in this holding area. We waited for what seemed to be an hour for our luggage to come round on the conveyor belt. While waiting, I watched a little

beagle dog being led from passenger to passenger, encouraged by the customs inspector who was handling her to sniff luggage. This little dog had been trained to detect fruits, vegetables, and meat. When it did indeed smell something, it

would roll around on the luggage, kind of muffling it, rolling its eyes at the

handler, looking for a sign of approval. The customs inspector would then ask the traveler if they had any of the above “contraband”. And the answer was always “yes”. The items were given to the inspector, who then took them to an area where they were disposed of. The inspector rewarded the little dog with a treat each

time, praising her for doing such good work. The dog was brought around to me, but passed by without even a side ways glance.

Our luggage finally showed up. We took our place in line to pass through customs. The officer asked if we were together, and we said yes. He then nodded us through. After checking our luggage back to American Airlines, we made our way to the shuttle which would take us to terminal three. People all around us were complaining about the long wait. It wasn't so

bad. We were

actually able to find a place to sit this time. We had about two hours before our flight to San Jose boarded. We found a Dunkin' Doughnuts, bought some coffee and doughnuts, and sat for awhile. Chicago O'Hare is like a small city. People milling about, pushing past each other, talking on cell phones, busy with themselves. We knew we had another long walk ahead of us to get to the boarding gate, so we assembled our belongings, and set out for the gate.





There were very few seats in the boarding area. We found enough room for us close to a window. We decided that the doughnuts were not enough food, so Tom bought some McDonalds for us.

At this point, we had been awake for eighteen hours, with neither one of us being able to rest for any reasonable period of time. We

were beginning to drag. We only had four or so hours ahead of us, but it seemed like it would be days. Our flight was announced, and we were called to board, group by group. On the plane, we found our seats and placed our carry-ons in the overhead bins. We buckled ourselves in, waiting for take off. We were really exhausted, more so than ever. Even so, I was excited with the prospect of taking photos at night, to capture images of cities glittering in the darkness. Alas, it was not going to happen. As soon as we left the ground, I started to fall asleep, my head bouncing off of the side of the plane. I tried hard to stay awake. Tom was trying to stay awake as well, but found himself dozing. I pulled my tray out, and rested my head on it. Between the periods of passing out, I would glance out the window. The pilot would occasionally announce which city we were flying over, but I didn't have the energy to get the camera out of my handbag.



We both slept for most of the flight without even realizing it. Occasionally I would catch a glimpse of a city. Then, like magick, I realized that we were almost home. I could see I-680 below. I woke Tom and told him where we were. We promised ourselves then and there that we would be returning to Ireland before too long. The next thing we knew, we were landing at San Jose Mineta Airport. Time to do the round of luggage claiming. And we would have to find a taxi to get home.

And that, my friends, is an entirely different story.