
Travels in Ireland

Now, so..... Molly says I must write the story of our 2001 trip to Ireland. It is a daunting task, but I did prepare for it by buying a book on Irish history, a micropedia. Pull up your chairs.

Day One – *Our Departure*

Steve took Molly, Sara and me to O’Hare airport on Saturday, April 6, 2001. We were to fly out on Aer Lingus for a direct flight to Dublin, and then on in the same plane to Shannon, leaving Chicago at 7:40 p.m. Monica and Saul met us at the airport, and we visited at our leisure. Then they conducted us to the gate and left us, for they could not go beyond.

This trip was undertaken at the height (I hope) of the foot-and-mouth disease panic which saw thousands of animals destroyed in Great Britain in an effort to keep the very contagious animal disease from spreading to other countries. We were, of course, conscious of the hazards of either taking it abroad or bringing it home, because, although humans do not contract the disease, they can carry it on their shoes, clothing and even in their own respiratory systems if they come in contact with it. So we did not pack any cattle, sheep or hogs. We tried to travel light. Each of us checked a bag and took a carry-on bag. We were informed enough that we each took a raincoat.

Seven-forty came and went. We pulled out our books. Finally, an announcement came that the plane had been delayed. Actually, strong winds from the west that night caused the plane to run dangerously low on fuel, plus there were hazardous wind sheer conditions at O’Hare airport, so the plane landed at Detroit. We were all given vouchers to go back out to the concession area and eat a meal. Having just eaten with Saul and Monica, we were not very hungry. I ordered a sandwich and used the rest of the voucher up in bottled water. We returned to the gate. Sara went for a walk through the international terminal and reported that only our gate, and one serving passengers for Guatemala, were occupied. The wind must have been fierce.

At last the plane came. The pilots marched through, and behind them an army of lovely Aer Lingus flight attendants. The waiting passengers, especially a patient mother of a young son given to tantrums, gave both groups hearty applause. We took off at midnight and due to time zone changes, used up most of Palm Sunday in the air. When we landed in Shannon it was raining. The tarmac was wet, so I did not follow Father Weitzel’s exhortation to “when you get out of that plane, you kiss the Irish soil for me” either, in Dublin or, an hour later in Shannon. (Father Weitzel’s mother’s name was Quinn). We did dutifully step in the vat of foot-and-mouth disinfectant in the doorway of Shannon Airport and headed for our rental car.

We spent a few minutes in the rental car, acquainting ourselves with all the differences in a machine equipped for driving on the left side of the roadway – rearview mirrors in odd places, steering wheel on the “wrong” side of the car, etc. It felt oddly “naked” for the passenger in the front sitting on the left side of the car. When Molly was sitting there, her right foot kept trying to hover above the accelerator (or the brake!) We eventually screwed up enough courage to actually start the car and leave the parking lot.

At about four o’clock in the afternoon (Irish time, about three a.m. the next day for our bodies) we settled ourselves and our luggage in a little red Nissan and proceeded to drive on the left to our

previously reserved rooms at Angela Larkin's Barn Lodge Bed and Breakfast just off the Kinvara Road, Toureen, Ballindarein, Kilcolgan, County Galway. We met Angela, our hostess, and her children, Shane and Niamh (pronounced Neve).

Angela recommended Rosaleen's, in Kinvara, as a good place to eat, so we drove there. This gave us a beautiful view of the coast of Galway, and of Dunguaire Castle, which we passed on the way. Kinvara has the makings of a coastal resort town and is very pretty.

We saw a truck advertising "Terryland" which is not an amusement park as you might guess, but a huge furniture outlet. It did remind us to have care in any pictures we took, as they would more than likely end up as "Terry Cards" in the hands of Sara's brother-in-law, Terry Surratt.

Rosaleen's was quiet, and offered delicious food. I ordered Apple Crumble with cream and specified that I would like milk instead of cream, to the consternation of the waiter/owner. "You want to drink the milk?" "Oh, you will pour it on the apple crumble?" "Then you would like it in a pitcher?" but he willingly complied. I understood his bewilderment a little when I found that the apple crumble was not made with diced apples as we make apple crisp, but with applesauce. Anyway, it was very good with milk.

The incident reminded us of the story of Aunt Agnes's attempts to secure a glass of milk to drink in France during World War I. The waiter was completely confounded at the idea of anyone ordering milk to drink, rather than wine, and reappeared several times to ask "Did you wish the milk hot or cold?" "You wished the milk in a glass, or in a cup?", etc. Finally, Aunt Agnes smiled and said "Just wrap it in a napkin."

However, our waiter at Rosaleen's was very pleasant and very patient with our questions. We returned to the B and B, noting that there was a light on upstairs in Dunguaire Castle. Angela provided each of our rooms with its own coffeepot, instant coffee, tea and cookies. We were glad to drop in bed, and because of the timing of our arrival and the fact that we did not have to slog along all day without a night's rest, did not suffer too much from jet lag. We had arranged to stay two nights, so that our first day could be spent in exploring Gort.

The Barn Lodge B and B was just that, a converted stone barn. The remodeling had been done so well and so skillfully that the only evidence that it was an old building was the extreme depth of the windows, each about a yard thick. It made for a nice window seat, or a display area in each room. The Larkins had provided a little living-room area adjoining the bedrooms, and in the morning I sat there as I waited for the agreed-upon eight-thirty breakfast hour.



Day Two – *In John Swift's Footsteps*

We were served the “full breakfast”, which means we started with our choice of assorted cereals and orange juice while Angela prepared for each of us a plate of sausages, rashers of bacon (not like our fat bacon, more like Canadian bacon) and scrambled eggs, accompanied by a basket of warm soda bread. There was also coffee, milk and tea. We were relieved that nowhere were we served the black pudding and the white pudding, which are the same as the German blood sausage, described in the tour books as an obligatory part of the full breakfast.

With a little coaxing, Shane would talk to us. We learned that he will make his First Communion in May, and saw his new suit for the occasion. Sara tried to get him to name an Irish soccer team so she would have a clue about buying T-shirts, but his favorite was the Manchester United, a British team. His mother named an Irish team and asked “What about them?” “They’re worthless!” was his reply.

At the beginning of Day Two, we set out for Gort. Molly did a masterful job of driving on the left side of the road, though she didn’t pretend to like it. She especially disliked the “roundabouts”, the Irish equivalent of a clover leaf for the convergence of two or more roads. If you remember Halls Ferry Circle in St. Louis, that is what a roundabout is like.

When we reached Gort, we drove to the center of town, which is at a T on Bridge Street, the main thoroughfare, with the junction enlarged to form, not a town square, but more like a triangle, with shops all around it, and a little stone building (restrooms) in the center. When we went to Ireland twenty years ago, a livestock sale was taking place in the town triangle, with sheep milling about. Sheep were supposed to be confined and kept off the roads this time because of “the foot and mouth,” as everyone called it.

We went first to the bank and exchanged our money for Irish pounds and pence. I don’t know the exact exchange rate, but in one transaction, I changed two hundred American dollars for one hundred sixty-three pounds, so the pound is worth considerably less than the two dollars of twenty years ago or the five dollars of Aunt Agnes’s time.



The reason we wanted to go to Gort is that it is the place my grandfather, John C. Swift, left in Ireland to come to America in 1850. We did not so much hope to find relatives as to explore the places he knew, for as far as we know, all of his brothers and sisters followed him to America except for a sister Catherine (“I had a Kitty”) who died as a child. Even some step-brothers, the Cusacks, stopped in Washington, IA, to see him when they came to this country, and left a trunk which they never came back to get.

However, we carried old letters written to Grandpa from Ireland, which helped us with places and names.

When my brother, sister and brother-in-law and I went to Ireland in 1980, we carried copies of these same letters. We were sent at that time to a man named Brendan Downey as being a connection to some of the people named in the letters. He and his wife Mary made us welcome, served us cakes and tea, and I offered him the letters to read. At one point he said, “It says here ‘Your friend John Cooney is living yet-himself and your brother Martin were nearly the same age. Mother says he often inquires about you.’”

“John Cooney was my grandfather” said Brendan Downey. He read a little further, to a letter written in 1911 by a Bridget Larkin, and then read aloud, “Sorry to say that I am after burying my husband. He was not long complaining. We are feeling lonely after him. Your friend, John Cooney, is buried also lately.”

Mr. Downey wiped his eyes and said, “I remember that, when my grandfather died. I was a boy of 12.”

We found no such connection this time, though we did not try exceedingly hard. We went to the church of Saint Colman (which had burned and been rebuilt since my grandfather left Gort) and visited Father Kelly, who, another visitor told us with pride, “Is Canon Kelly now. He’s been made Canon.” (That might mean Monsignor?)

Father Kelly got out the book of the history of St. Colman’s, but seemed bewildered by some of the facts, even unaware that the church he presides over is the second one built on its site. He was very kind, and tried to be helpful, but I think the thing is that connections are hard to make from that long ago. In fact, I think he was trying to figure out “How can this lady be searching a grandfather born in 1831?”

Mike and I discussed this once, that Grandpa’s relatively advanced age (33) when he married, the facts that he had such a large family, that our mother was next to the youngest of that family, and that she herself married late (age 27) means we lack a generations that most other families have.

So, as Father Kelly had another visitor, we thanked him and went over to explore the church, St. Colman’s. There are plaques inside it, on the wall, from the original church, saying “The first Catholic Church on this site was erected in the year 1825. “ and “The present chancel and sacristy were built by the Rev. Timothy Shannon, VG, PP in the year 1876.”

One family researcher has written that, “From what we were able to gather, the original St. Colman’s was a couple miles out of Gort, at a place called Kiltartan.” Father Kelly did not seem to believe that, but said that if the family lived at Bally Lee, as they did, the burials would probably be at Kiltartan, but stones, if there were any, would be illegible now.

Aunt Martina’s memoirs tell that Grandpa and his brother Martin had an ongoing argument about Grandpa’s age, John insisting that he was born November 20, 1831, and Martin declaring him a year younger. Fortunately, Mary, John’s wife, and my grandmother, decided that she was not going to spend her married life listening to this argument and, unknown to the two brothers, she wrote to the pastor at St. Colman’s asking for a baptismal certificate and received this reply: “ Relying on the testimony of credible witnesses I hereby certify that John Swift born of Thomas Swift and Mary Connell was baptized on the 20th day of November, 1831. Martin Carroll and Mary Cusack having acted as sponsors on the occasion.” Timothy Shannon PP and VG (Parish Pastor and Vicar General) Given at Gort on the 6th day of September 1864.”

Eighteen sixty-four is the year Grandpa and Grandma were married. Also, note that it is “credible witnesses “ who serve as proof, the church of St. Colman and its records having already burned. We learned in 1980 that the Irish government did not start keeping birth records until 1964. Thus, we owe Grandma Swift a debt of thanks for writing that letter, for “credible witnesses” to Grandpa’s baptism would be hard to find today.

We roamed the church freely, talked to the cleaning lady, and took pictures, including one of me patting the statue of St. Anthony in gratitude for his help in finding my passport, which gave me a bad twenty-four hours of searching three days before our departure.

In the baptistry we found a relatively new baptismal font, and a very old pedestal basin which may have been the old font. The girls took pictures of both.

Now, from the sublime to the ridiculous. On the way to the church I had noted the aluminum containers standing in the street at intervals, some just being delivered, and asked the girls to “take pictures of the milk cans.” After a dumbfounded moment, they realized that I actually thought the daily delivery of the Guinness kegs to the taverns were really milk cans. I could only protest: “ Well, it IS mother’s milk to an Irishman.”



We went to Bally Lee, which WAS my grandfather’s address. Today, to most people, the name means the castle Thor Bally Lee, for a time the home of the poet Yeats, very near Coole Park, the home of Lady Gregory. Yeats and Lady Gregory were a large part of the Irish cultural revival and the founding of the Abbey Theatre. In our early talk with Brendan Downey, he said that in his younger days he had worked at Coole Park on Lady Gregory’s estate, and knew Lady Gregory. Neither the Castle nor its accompanying thatched cottage tea room were open as yet because “it is not the season until after Easter.” We strolled all around the castle, taking in not only its architecture, the river, but the wildflowers and blooming trees in the area.



Other visitors were a pair of Irish gentlemen also “just looking.” We struck up a conversation with them and found them most delightful, knowledgeable and helpful. The one with red hair and beard, Joe Dunne of Bray, County Wicklow, knew all the plants and answered many of our questions. One thing he said that I recall is that it is believed that persons who handle (and are stung by) the stinging nettle develop an immunity to poison ivy, and that first generation Irishmen who come to America are by and large immune to poison ivy, but succeeding generations lose that immunity, it is thought because they are not continually exposed to the stinging nettle. I am not sure I want to test the theory, because I have encountered the accurately named stinging nettle.

The other gentlemen, Arvid Åkerlind, of Dublin was of Swedish origin, but grew up in Ireland. They were in the area searching for a site to locate windmills for power generation, but find the Irish very resistant to anything that will spoil their skyline.

We plied them with questions and learned that ash trees constitute most of the trees in the stone walls and hedges, that the tree blooming white just now is the blackthorn, from which shillelaghs are made.

There is also a white thorn. We told them how lucky Ireland is that the Osage Orange hedge tree was never imported. They identified numerous wildflowers for us.

As to the name Bally Lee, they said the use of it as an address on the old letters was as the name of a "townland" (township) indicating a general area, not one particular point. They also disagreed with whoever told me "Bally Lee" meant "the river Lee" and said "Bally" meant "summer" and "Lee" meant "pasture". The best thing they did for us was to mention the passage burial mound and the antiquity of Newgrange, which we knew nothing of. Later we decided that any site dating from 5000 B.C. was worth our attention, and determined to go there.

Next we went to Kiltartan, just a cluster of houses, and visited the old churchyard, now only a graveyard with the ruins of the church containing yet more graves. Father Kelly was correct in that the very old stones were illegible. Probably even burials on top of burials as each generation fades into history.

Then we went to the town of Peterswell, because it is the source of many of the old family letters, some even bearing the heading "Bally Lee, Peterswell." The friendly gentlemen had told us that Ireland had hundreds of artesian wells, or springs, each given the name of a saint, and often naming a location, so it was originally St. Peter's Well. The well is still there, on the main street of the town, a pool of water surrounded by a stone enclosure. Unfortunately, this holy well bears a sign reading: "Notice: water unfit for human consumption."

We visited the church in Peterswell. Near the door was a box containing sprays of a flat type of fir. We reasoned that this is what had been distributed the day before as blessed palm and helped ourselves to some. Later we found our assumption was correct, that that particular type of evergreen is called the palm tree. There are many "real" palm trees in Ireland, and we wondered why they were not used on Palm Sunday.

For me, it recalled the story of my mother's uncle Frank Rimmer, who was a railroad engineer. One Palm Sunday he passed a Catholic church just as the people were emerging with their palms. He waved at them but got no response. So he blessed himself with the Sign of the Cross and waved again. This time they all waved at him.

Since the letter about John Cooney came from Peterswell, we dropped in at Cooney's grocery and post office, bought some stamps and tried out on the postmaster some of the names (Connell, Carroll, Cusack, Malone, Nolan, Linskey, Larkin, Cooney) from the old letters. She said none of those names are in Peterswell now (though we stood in Cooney's store as she spoke).

Back in Gort, we went to a pub for lunch. It was cold outdoors and the peat fire in the pub really felt good. Around a fire was a group of young mothers with very young children, the mothers enjoying their Guinness. At exactly three-thirty every one of them got up and left, presumably to meet other children coming home from school, while we enjoyed our plate of hot food and cup of hot tea (or Guinness). We decided enough with the nostalgia, and set out for the Cliffs of Moher. This involved a long and beautiful drive through western Galway.

The Cliffs themselves are awesome, with a strong wind blowing that would knock you over. We could go close enough to see the birds nesting in the cliffs and the roaring ocean crashing against them, but were restricted from walking to the top of the hill where there is a castle. Just as well. We might have

blown off. Several groups of young people were there, and we all fought against the wind to keep our footing as we enjoyed the sight of the cliffs towering 700 feet above the sea.

It was the drive back to Kinvara that was spectacular. We were on a road between the coast and The Burren, an unusual feature of the landscape that consists of bare gray rocky hills. We would call it the Badlands. On one side of us lay the coastline, with surf alternating between rough and still, the roadsides green and lush, with many new houses going up, and the roughest golf course we had ever seen tucked in among the rocks, and on the other side these gray slaty hills, with a few cattle actually grazing on them, though we could see very little vegetation. The ubiquitous rock walls, however, went up and over the bare hills, so every inch of rock must belong to somebody. We saw a lovely (everything in Ireland is “lovely”) ancient round tower silhouetted against the ocean spray.



In Doolin we saw the pier from which the daily boat to the Aran Islands departs. The waves were splashing over the pier so violently that it seemed as if no boat could approach it.

It was beginning to be dark, so we decided to eat supper, and found a really nice “fine dining” restaurant and settled ourselves in. It was run by a young couple, who apparently also did the cooking, and their dining room was full that night, an apparent surprise to them, for our meal took a long, long time. Obviously, they did not have enough help. The hostess was very apologetic, and when we assured her we had enjoyed the rest and asked the name of the place, she laughed and said “It’s Tri Na Chéile. (pronounced “TREE-na-KAY-la). It means “organized chaos.””

Day Three – Friends and Visions

Next morning we breakfasted again at eight-thirty and announced our intention to shop in Galway. Angela, our hostess, said she and the children were also going to Galway to shop for Easter and First Communion finery. Schools are out now until after Easter.

The drive to Galway was navigated with road signs as far as we could manage, and, rather than try to read a map and identify street names (particularly when we only rarely saw a sign identifying the name of a street!), we simply followed the signs to reach the City Centre. Driving this way – “by the seat of our pants” Molly called it – had the intended result. We were quickly in lots of traffic, with Molly trying to remember the rules for driving on the left. The ultimate goal was a parking spot, so we headed for the first (and last) multi-level parking garage we saw.

After leaving our car, we headed for the shopping area and went to a department store called Roche’s as the best source of soccer T-shirts. While Sara settled on those, Molly and I browsed and found some coasters with picturesque Irish scenes and legends on them for gifts back home. Next we headed for

Eyre Square, the park in the center of Galway City, and found a shopping center there, the Corrib Centre, which incorporates as part of its wall a remaining fragment of the old Galway city wall.

We found an art and antique shop which just begged our attention, so I wandered through it while the girls halted at the door to examine some matted prints. They found three scenes of the center of Gort, photographs from the late eighteenth century, we thought, and bought them. Molly also bought, for Reno, a color print of a team of sheep playing soccer, properly full of Irish whimsy.

Only a few steps outside the door of the art shop was a kiosk, selling jewelry, scarves and souvenirs, run by a personable young man, who expressed interest in how we liked Ireland, how we happened to be traveling together, and what we had found in the art shop.

I asked how he knew we were Americans, aside from our speech. “Ooooh, it’s yer long coats,” he said, “No one in Ireland dresses for the weather; they just go outside.” We had thought it would be obvious that we were a mother and two daughters, but we explained anyway, I taking pains to let him know I was the mother.

“And what is it ye do for the brown bread?” he asked next. This gave the girls pause for a while. “To earn yer living?” Molly explained her job as that of a grant writer for a hospital, (“persuading the government to give us money.”) “Aaaah, ye must have a great imagination!” he answered. Sara said she had taught special students for years but decided she would like to teach normal students, only “to find out that they’re not normal, either!” He laughed, agreed and said, “someboody lied!”

*“What is it ye do for
the brown bread?”*

Apparently the young man had watched us picking over the prints at the door of the art shop, for he asked what we had found there. I showed him the prints of Gort and explained why we wanted them, and the family connection with Gort. He said, “Gort, is it? I’ve lived there. Can I have a look?”

He was interested in the period scenes of the town and oriented us in the pictures, identifying the bank and various other establishments. He laughed and used a word which he said he and his friends used to call Gort. I attempted to echo his pronunciation of the word and he looked shocked and waved his hand back and forth, “Oh, no, no, no, YOU wouldn’t say that, it’s ...well... it’s what we just called Gort because, well, that’s what it is!” So I take it the word was not for little old grandmothers to be saying. I should have tried some of Grandpa’s expressions on him, like *misecrute*, and *kackmicky*.

By this time, I had found four little pendants that I had decided to buy, at five pounds each, and handed him a twenty-pound note. Apparently he was trying to give me a discount, for he said “Nineteen, and twenty” and handed me a note in change. I was still back on the “Nineteen”, and said, “You’re charging me nineteen for twenty pounds worth?” We all looked, and the note he had handed me was a ten-pound note, not a one. At my question, he became a little flustered and handed me back my twenty. There I stood, with the sack of pendants in one hand and all of my money, and his, in the other. The girls began to laugh and said, “We should have warned you to look out for her, she’s shifty.”

“Yeah, she knows some good tricks with money,” Molly said.

“She’ll cheat you and make you look like you did it yourself,” added Sara.

He blurted out “Well, will ye look at that! I hustled meself! Ooooh, she IS good!”

Every day we met someone memorable. He was it for that day, and we wish yet that we had pressed him for an e-mail address or a name.

Our lunch that day was at a kind of cafeteria, and we ate it in the show window of the place, right on the street, so we could watch the Galway shoppers. We drove around a bit, past the Spanish Arch, out to Salthill, got out and stood watching the water come in to Galway Bay so we could fit memories to the two songs about it. Then we headed for Knock.

Here Sara took the wheel for a try at left-handed driving. She did fine. I didn't hanker for my turn, and couldn't have taken it anyway, the rental company would not permit drivers over seventy.

We enjoyed the road signs. No Overtaking; End Dualway; Loose Chippings (gravel); Layby (turnout); End of Dual Carriageway (two-lane road); Accident Black Spot (blind curve); Use Crawl Gear (on a hill); Please Mind Our Children (along the Irish Sea); Roundabout Motorway Ahead (traffic circle).

Sara has said that her friends, when told of her adventures in Ireland, said, "I never heard of any of these places. How did you find out about them? Who planned this tour for you?" Well, WE planned the tour as we went, altering some plans and adding others. It was reminiscent of Bob's pretended vacation plan of "Go to the corner and toss a coin."

So, why did we want to go to Knock? Well, Mike, Esther, Bernard and I had visited it in 1980, shortly after Pope John Paul visited it in 1979. Six years previous to that, Drew and Lainie had included it in their tour of Ireland. Knock, a small town that was originally probably not even as large as Arenzville, is the site of a miraculous apparition which was witnessed by fifteen of the townspeople of Knock. On the back wall of their village church, at eight o'clock on an August evening, two women of the town saw materialize before them figures of the Blessed Virgin Mary, St. Joseph and St. John the Evangelist. The figures were in white, there was a golden crown on Our Lady's head, and on her forehead, a rose. St. John, dressed as a bishop, held the Book of Gospels in his left hand



Behind the three figures was an altar on which lay The Lamb of God, and behind the altar a tall plain cross. Hovering angels, also all in white, hovered around the Lamb. One by one, other villagers joined the two women until the amazing scene was finally witnessed by fifteen villagers, who stood in the rain and prayed the rosary for two hours until the apparition faded from sight. This occurred August 21, 1879. Ten days after the apparition, a miraculous cure was reported. Intense investigation by Church authorities

resulted in the apparition being declared authentic, and since then, the town of Knock has been visited by millions of pilgrims, including four popes. In preparing the site to accommodate all of these faithful, first the figures were reproduced in chalky white marble at the place where they were seen, then this shrine was enclosed in glass and used as a place for Mass and devotions. We saw it this way in 1980, and attended Mass there. At that time, the grounds contained 14 huge representations of The

Way of the Cross, built for the pope's visit. I remember that at that time I was amused and impressed at the site of an outdoor hydrant labeled "holy water".

Now the Stations of the Cross are gone and a huge basilica has been built, containing a center area, capable of holding 12,000 people, as well as five smaller chapels. On the grounds there is also a retirement home for sisters, who find the convenience to the holy site a benefit of their old age. However, the life-sized white figures of the apparition are still the focal point of a more permanent chapel which replaces the glass enclosure.

So, we reasoned, if this place is good enough for the Blessed Virgin and four popes, millions of pilgrims (54 busloads a day in the summer, our Bed and Breakfast hostess told us), it should be good enough for us. So we went to Knock. Knock is north and slightly east of Galway. The towns of note on our way were Tuam (pronounced as we would say "tomb") and Claremorris. We did not stop, as we had called Mrs. Mary Coyne's bed and breakfast and said we would be there around five. We were later than that, for we heard the Angelus ringing (six o'clock) in one of the towns we went through, but after negotiating yet another roundabout, we found our room at Aishling House, (Ballyhaunis Road, Knock, County Mayo) a large two-story house. ("Aishling" means "vision.") Mrs. Coyne recommended either the hotel or a restaurant called The Conservatory as good places to eat.

Thankfully, we chose the Conservatory, a nice, split-level restaurant on the main street. The proprietors, Victor and Sheila Bowen, were so eager to please, and we settled in for a delightful meal. Only one other couple was in the establishment. We detected a bit of difference in their accent as they spoke to each other, and we could tell they were intensely curious about us. Finally the gentleman turned to us as asked, "How is it you are traveling together?" Again we explained ourselves and the floodgates of conversation opened. The host and hostess, pleased that we were enjoying ourselves, brought their own dinners into the lower dining room and ate at a table near us. Soon we were discussing anything and everything with all four of them. The two other guests, Eddie and June Doherty, were winding up a month spent in Ireland with several of their grown children and their families. They all lived in Australia, where Eddie said his father had had to flee with his wife and nine children during "the troubles."

Eddie was retired, and his wife, June, was a realtor. They had obtained a house in Limerick for their month-long stay in Ireland and were taking several little daytrips from this base. The topic of George Bush as a leader resurfaced, and we were surprised to hear all of them agree that he would never be a leader of the caliber of Bill Clinton. "We don't CARE about his private life; that man is a diplomat!" They also knew about the vagaries of our recent election and were puzzled by them.



Victor, the host, refilled the Guinness glasses liberally, and after we had conversed a couple of hours, disappeared into the kitchen to reemerge with complimentary cups of Irish coffee for everyone. There ensued more conversation, until, finally, at eleven o'clock, we decided Mrs. Coyne might be worried about us, and made to go home. When she heard of our congenial companions, she volunteered the information that Victor is a horse trainer and trains horses for the races. His and Sheila's two sons are jockeys.

Day Four – *Castles and Lords*

Next morning we were again treated to the “full breakfast,” and arrived at the shrine again just in time for Mass. Following Mass we took our own tour of the basilica, enjoyed learning things at the book store, but we skipped visiting the row of holy water fountains, so do not know how it is now dispensed.



A visit to the main street disclosed indistinguishable shops, each filled with the very same types of souvenirs as the others, but of course we had to speed through all of them. Upon emerging from the last one, we noticed three workmen building a stone wall across the street. I wanted to watch this, so we crossed the street. They were just leaving for their lunch, but I asked one, with what I thought would be obvious facetiousness, “How do you find so many stones completely straight on one side?” “Oh, ma’am,” he said,

“They don’t coom out of the ground that way. We do that with a hammer and chisel.” So we parted, with me thinking “I have found the only man on this island who lacks a sense of humor” and with him thinking, I am sure, “At last I have found the dumbest tourist in the world.”

We decided that we had absorbed the atmosphere of Knock and that it was time to head for our major destination, the ancient burial tombs at Newgrange, which we had never heard of before this trip, but which the two informative gentlemen at Thor Ballylee had told us were as worthy of a visit as anything in Ireland, since they predate the pyramids of Egypt.

All this time we had been in the counties of Galway and Mayo, in the western part of Ireland called Connacht. When the hated Oliver Cromwell invaded Ireland during the Puritan period of English history, his repressions of the Irish people took the form of replacing them on their own land with Englishmen. When he was asked what was to become of the native Irish people, he replied, “Let them go to hell or to Connacht,” both sites being apparently equal in his estimation. Yet if a visitor wants a true picture of old Irish culture, today he will find it most evident in Connacht, the province west of the river Shannon. It is the area where Gaelic never did die out. It was tempting to turn west and spend the rest of our few days in this historic area. But every area in Ireland is historic. We decided to turn east.

Now, at home, one of our favorite music CD’s is Kilkelly, by Moloney, Connell and Keane. The title song “Kilkelly” is a plaintive rendering of a series of letters spanning half a century, from members of a family in the village of Kilkelly in County Mayo to two sons who have emigrated to the United States. The letters are a surprising parallel to the old letters we have which were written to Grandpa Swift from his relatives in Gort. Molly has used the song as a background to her own CD of family pictures.

We needed to go to Drogheda, on the eastern edge of Ireland, in order to visit Newgrange. Yet, just up the road fifteen miles from Knock lies the village of Kilkelly. The desire to visit Kilkelly was so plain on Molly’s face that by yet another Irish miracle, Sara finally convinced her that, yes, Kilkelly IS on

the way to Drogheda. In fact, we will probably save time by going there. We went to Kilkelly. We found another Irish small town, with homes and shops side by side smack on the street. As in other parts of Ireland, current prosperity has even old buildings painted and shored up until everything is shipshape. We parked in front of a building bearing a huge colorful mural and headed for the pub.

Once there, we ate lunch in a local pub, where newspaper clippings and trophies earned by the local soccer team hung on the wall behind our table in the corner. Molly ordered shepherd's pie, and as with every meal in Ireland, no matter what you order, it comes with at least two kinds of potatoes. Shepherd's pie, as best I can describe it, is an upside down baked version of hamburger gravy and mashed potatoes. It was good. We had been to Kilkelly.



After lunch we headed east for Drogheda, and were surprised when we reached the town of Trim to find ourselves at the Boyne River, with magnificent medieval stone ruins of castles on each side of the river. Also, though we did not realize it, we were within the Pale. As I was growing up, anything my mother did not approve of was declared to be "beyond the Pale." The Pale was the part of Ireland considered to be under effective English rule (from 1446). The town of Trim was part of the Pale.

Trim Castle was built between 1220 and 1225 and was once used to imprison King Henry IV. There are breaches in its wall caused by Cromwell's troops. It is still of impressive size, and for today's youth, its most impressive bit of history is that Mel Gibson came here to film part of "Braveheart." We walked around the castle, starting with its "Watergate" (Ha! Thought that was modern too, didn't you?")



Across the Boyne River here are also the Yellow Steeple, ruins of a 14th century tower for St. Mary's Abbey, founded in the 12th century by St. Malachy of Armagh. The remaining west cloisters of the abbey are known as Talbot's Castle, for the man who used it as a fortified home in 1425. Jonathan Swift and the Duke of Wellington lived here also, each in his own time. After the Reformation the building became a Latin school, attended by Sir Rowan Hamilton, the mathematician who discovered quaternions. I put that in there for Professor Franz. For all I know a quaternion is the predecessor of the hookeywonk.

Also, at this point on the Boyne Saint Patrick landed in the fifth century and converted Foitchern, the son of a local chieftain and later first bishop of Trim. And that is only half the serendipity of Trim. We skipped the Trim Visitor's Centre's displays of decapitation, plague rats and accounts of the lecherous behavior of hairy Hugh De Lacy. We were just passing through, for heaven's sake!

From our first glimpse of Trim and its resulting glimpses of history, the remainder of our trip is associated with the Boyne River. It flows in the background of the interesting sites of County Meath, just as it flows behind events of Irish history since 1690 saw the victory of the forces of King William III of England over the forces of King James II of the Stuart dynasty at the famous Battle of the Boyne. William is the same William of our William and Mary College, and he is William of Orange, husband

of James's Protestant daughter Mary. Their arrival marked the end of the (Catholic) Stuart reign in England and ignited the already smoldering Irish resentment of English rule. William is the reason it is undiplomatic to wear orange clothing on Saint Patrick's Day, so guess which side we are on!

At any rate, from now on, everywhere we turn, we are clothed in Irish history, and it is represented by the Boyne River. Even our next bed and breakfast, just outside the town of Slane, is Boyne View B&B, run by Mary Hevey and her husband (N2 Dublin Road, Slane Village, County Meath, Ph. 041-9824-121.) We came into Slane from the west, and for a mere second, way back in the trees, had a glimpse of an imposing castle which looked exceedingly well-kept. Mrs. Hevey told us that it is still occupied by the Conyngham heir, an old man of 92, "Who is very eccentric; he goes about town wearing just sandals and no socks." As she said this I had my eyes lowered to take in Sara's feet, which were clad in just sandals and no socks. I decided this heir might be someone I would like to meet. She said everyone is hoping that "when he goes, his son and wife will give the property to the country. And well she may hope, for just across the highway from her house is the eastern edge of the Conyngham property, behind the most beautiful gated wall we saw on the whole trip.



As to the Boyne View B&B, Mr. And Mrs. Hevey were attending a funeral visitation for a friend, and their daughter greeted us and made us feel at home before went back out for supper. The Boyne View is one family's share of a long gray building with perhaps four or five chimneys, each chimney marking an individual "house." A Georgian Period house, it looked as though it might have been built to house workers in a factory. This was once the site of a mill, perhaps it was itself the mill.

We dined very well at the Conyngham Arms Hotel, though the waitress told us that the "carvery" had just been closed. We took that to mean the buffet, and happily ordered from the menu. We ate and returned to the Boyne View. There, Mr. Hevey informed us that we would be sleeping in a house built in 1764 (before we were even a country!) so we knew there must have been another purpose in building it, since no factory workers were housed that well in 1764. We three shared one large room overlooking the highway, the Boyne and the castle gate.

Day Five – *Passage Tombs, Irish Kings and George W. Bush*

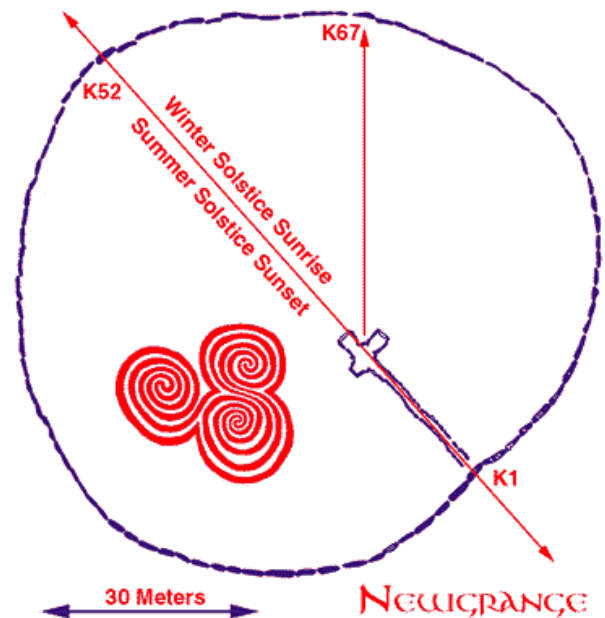
We by now were beginning to like the full breakfast, and especially enjoyed Mary Hevey's. Mr. Hevey helped her serve it and willingly answered all our questions. We headed first thing for Newgrange. Think of Stonehenge and Dixon Mounds. Newgrange is an ancient passage tomb, one of several believed to have been built by members of a large disciplined society who lived in Ireland about 5,000 years ago. Archaeologists date the tomb at 3200 B.C., 500 years before the building of the pyramids and 1,000 years before Stonehenge. It is now considered to be one of the world's oldest structural sites.

Fortunately, Irish historians have constructed a visitors' center at Newgrange which incorporates a life-size reproduction of the tomb and its entrance, else we would have been disappointed for, because of "the hoof and mouth" the actual tomb was closed to visitors. I could not believe they actually allowed people into the real one, anyway. Well, this spring they didn't, but there was a great explanatory display and then access to the replica. The tomb was built inside a huge circle of upright tall stones, with one narrow stone passageway leading into the center of a 280-foot diameter circle, where there is

a little stone room with a platform containing a stone basin holding the remains of a partial crematory process. The stone basin also held funeral offerings of stone and bone beads, bone pins, and small stone balls resembling marbles. We were told that this tomb apparently only held the partially cremated remains of very special persons; it was not a general burial site (as was Dixon Mounds.)

The passageway and the stone enclosure were roofed over with huge flat slabs of overlapping stones, in a process called corbelling (like shingles) which kept the inner chamber dry for 5,000 years! This tomb also reveals, as is suspected of Stonehenge, that these early unknown people had a knowledge of astronomy, for a small opening over the entrance, like a transom, allows the rising sun of the day of the winter solstice to shine through that opening, all the way down the passageway to illuminate the central chamber at the center of the mound for a few hours. The device of the transom was used because the entryway itself was closed by a huge upright stone.

Some of the large stones found at the entrance way have designs carved in them, variations of several spiral circles, a "Triskele" motif. Once the stones were in place, the entire site was covered over with dirt, so that, although other passage burial tombs



are known to exist at Knowth and Dowth and on the Hill of Tara, most such mounds have remained undisturbed. Thus, although they were recognized as possible dolmen burial mounds of the Bronze Age, it is only recently that the extremely early dates of the passage tombs and of the earliest Irish settlement found, at Mount Sandel on the bank of the River Bann near Coleraine (dating from 7,000-6500 B.C.) have been realized.



We lunched in the visitor's center, and re-entered the twenty-first century to get back on the road. Our modernity was short lived, for we rounded a curve on our narrow road to see that ahead of us an old stone house, newly white washed, was being re-thatched. We stopped and asked the thatcher if we might watch a while. He didn't care. We hesitantly entered the adjoining drive (We weren't supposed to go on any farms). A little boy was playing on the stone wall, and I began to talk to him. Pretty soon I gave him a new American Sacagawea gold dollar and he hot-footed it to a mobile home set up behind the stone house.

While he was gone a young man came out of the stone house, talking on a cell phone. That is one picture the girls missed, the anomaly of the thatched house and the cell phone. Meantime the little boy's father had waked from his nap and come out to see who was giving his little boy American dollars. He was very friendly, very well-informed (he asked me to say Sacagawea's name; and said "I know who she is, but I don't know how to say it") and as ever, up came the name of George W. Bush.

At this point, Tom O’Byrne, the thatcher turned on his ladder and said, “Ye got a real bastard there, ye know that?” We tried to tell them we had done our bit, but we weren’t sure if it counted, and the young father knew exactly what we meant—the Florida election. He told us he had paid 108,000 pounds for the stone house, the thatching would cost 18,000 pounds, and it would have to have wiring, plumbing and a floor put in. There had been a dirt floor they had dug out to a depth of five feet.

The thatching process was fascinating to watch. It was done with bundles of reeds which were brought to the site tied together. The thatcher hoisted each bundle into place, then pushed from the bottom so that the ends of the reeds were sticking out horizontally before he fastened each bundle in place. It was very different from the straw thatch I had seen in Connemara.



We drove toward the city of Drogheda to see one of the sites of the Battle of the Boyne. We came to a field which is the actual site of the battle. It is being readied for tourists such as we but now it is just a green field above the river. Across the road were two little boys playing in a stream, completely oblivious that they stood but feet away from the place where the defeat of the Stuart cause determined the balance of power in Europe, with outcomes echoing to this day in Irish and European politics.

In this battle, James considered his mission merely a delaying action; William fought for complete victory. The two armies were drawn up on opposite sides of the River Boyne on July 12, 1690. Five crossings of the river were made between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. that day. When finally William sent his main force across the bridge at Oldbridge to attack James’s Jacobites on the south bank, James, thinking to fight another day in another place, left for Dublin and the next day took ship for France, leaving his Irish allies to fight on in a hopeless cause. Forever, apparently.

We started back to the town of Slane to see two more ancient sites which played crucial roles in the lore of Ireland. The Hill of Slane and the Hill of Tara lie to the north and the south of the town of Slane, respectively. They are miles apart but the prominence of each allows it to be seen from the other hill. Although I had always heard and read more about the former, I believe now that, to the present-day Irish, the Hill of Slane is more important. The king at Tara in AD 433 was King Laoghaire. At that time the druid feast of the spring equinox and the Christian observance of Easter fell upon the same night. Tradition held that when the high king lit his fire upon the Hill of Tara, no other fire should be lit within sight. Such would be an offense punishable by death. So when Saint Patrick lit the paschal fire, the new fire of Easter, upon his hill of Slane, it was considered an outrageous piece of defiance. Laoghaire’s druidic priests are said to have said to him “If you do not quench that fire, it will burn forever.” Laoghaire sent orders for Patrick to be brought to him. And he listened to Patrick’s message of Christianity.

This is the occasion upon which Patrick is supposed to have used his famous illustration of the shamrock to show how the Blessed Trinity could be. Fortunately for Patrick and for the Irish, Laoghaire was a man extraordinarily broad-minded for his time, for while he did not himself accept Christianity, he allowed Patrick to teach the people and did not stand in the way of their conversion.

We went to the entrance of the Hill of Slane, only to be met again by the ubiquitous sign detailing the woes of the hoof and mouth. We obeyed the strictures here, but among the stone ruins at the top of the

hill, we could see Patrick, a white marble figure, looking down on us. It gave us a good feeling. If we looked further down ourselves, we could see the town of Slane laid out below us. A friendly dog from a nearby house circled us silently until Molly set up the camera and put it on top of the car for a timed shot of the three of us. She asked the dog if he would take our picture and he immediately decided we were a tremendous threat to the humans for which he was responsible and barked and growled until we took the picture and left. I think he may have been the spirit of Laoghaire's old druid.



After a quick look at our watches and the dimming late-afternoon light, we pressed on to see the Hill of Tara, which lies about 30 miles south of the town of Slane. I had especially wanted to see the Hill of Tara. Most people, of course, know Tara as the name of Scarlett O'Hara's plantation, but of course we know that her father, doughty Gerald O'Hara, was well aware that Tara was the name of the home of the ancient Irish high kings, most of them legendary.

Factual, however, is the rise of Brian Boru through triumph over Mael Sechnaill, who defeated the Norse invaders at Tara in AD 980. Mael Sechnaill submitted to Brian Boru without a fight at Tara in 1002, enabling Brian to proclaim himself *ard-ri*, or high king. He led the Irish in the last great battle against the Vikings at Clontarf on Good Friday, 1014. The Irish emerged victorious, but Brian Boru was slain. This marked the end of two eras, the reign of terror of the Vikings in Ireland, and the reign of the first true king of all Ireland. So I wanted to see Tara.

We drove south by way of the town of Navan to the hill of the Irish kings. Again, at Tara we could not get past the gate to enter the site – the hoof and mouth. We drove entirely around it, and we took pictures of what we could see of it. Molly held up her sack of leprechauns labeled “Sarah Bush Lincoln Health Center” in front of the sign “Hill of Tara” which assured her fifteen minutes of fame on the health center bulletin board. The only “little people” we saw were in the gift shop-tearoom, which was warm with a peat fire. They weren't much smaller than we.



By now, dusk was nearly upon us and the clouds had thickened, but a quick check of our tour guides assured us that we could not leave without seeing one more special place – this time northeast of the

town of Slane. So we climbed back in the car and headed toward Monasterboice. This is an old cemetery, once the site of a monastery



Founded in AD 520 Monasterboice Monastery was Ireland's most wealthy until the Vikings sacked it in 1097. The guidebook said "Always Open. Free." We got there, and the same government sign about the hoof and mouth hung on the gate, so we walked about a bit outside, and Sara went down the road for a walk. She met a man out walking his dog. The man said, "Yer goin' in, aren't ye?" Sara said, "Oh, no, we don't want to do anything we're not supposed to." "Aaaaaah! I guess if twenty-five French kids can climb over that fence and go in, ye surely can. Nobody around here'll care. Go on in."

So we did. We didn't climb over the fence; we walked through the gate. These grounds hold some of the tallest high crosses in Ireland, and a round tower that reflects the monks defense system against the Vikings. Part of the tower and its treasures was burned in 1097. Muiredach's Cross, erected in AD520, is a high cross carved with Bible scenes. These high crosses were used as pictorial "Sunday School lessons" to help teach the faithful the stories of the Bible. On one side of the cross arm are pictured happy souls entering into heaven, while on the other side there is a representation of a gleeful Satan kicking fourteen souls into hell.

Another High Cross, the West High Cross, is at seven yards tall, the highest high cross in Ireland.

We found one extremely eloquent monument among the lichen-covered stones and the ruins of two churches that had stood here. It read:



"ERECTED by Thomas Gregory of New York in memory of his father Francis who died 1823 aged 67 years. Also in memory of his mother Margaret who died in New York aged 63 yrs. Interred in St. Patrick's Mott St. Also in memory of his brother John aged 33 yrs. And his brother Matthew aged 28 yrs who died in New Orleans State of Louisiana. Also His brother Columb who died on the coast of Africa. Aged 25 yrs. Also his brother Peter who died in the West Indies, aged 50 yrs. Also his sister Bridget who died in New York. Aged 45 yrs. And his brother Patrick aged 23. And his sister Anne aged 68. Both interred in Mornington Burial Ground Colp Parish."

We said a prayer for all of them and went on.

By this time we were tired, it was growing dark (a sure sign in Ireland that it is later than you think because the latitude makes darkness later than we are accustomed to), and it was raining again. The girls decided that what was needed was a Guinness. We decided not to go back to the Conyngham Arms, but headed for a pub beside our parking place on a hill. We went in and settled into a back booth, only to realize that we were in the bar at the other end of the hotel where we had eaten the night

before. It was good enough. We had the roast of the evening, (turned out to be pork) and hot chips. I even had a sip of the Guinness and they took a picture of me at it, which will no doubt become a Terry card. We headed “home” to the Boyne View for our last night in Ireland, in the oldest house any of us had ever slept in.

Day Six- *Back to the New World*

Next morning Mr. Hevey informed us as he served our breakfast that it was raining, “And no clearing-off shower at all; it’s a dirrrty day.” We said our goodbyes, crossed the highway and lingered over a last look at the Boyne, and went over to the castle gates. Known as “the Gothic Gate” it was designed in 1795 as the entrance to Slane Castle by Francis Johnston. We examined it, cavorted in front of it in sandals and no socks, and took our regretful leave of Slane.

We didn’t take the direct road to Dublin, but swung by the coast to see the Irish Sea. We saw the Sea and the Velvet Strand at Portmarnock. It was cold and rainy, so we felt for the two kayakers we saw getting out of the icy water. We even got out of the car and walked about on the strand as our farewell to Ireland. We know we didn’t get to see everything, but some Irishers have never seen everything. Sara, especially will need to go back again and do some of the traditional things like kissing the Blarney Stone and picking shamrocks.

We arrived in plenty of time for our check-in at the airport, and after all the formalities had been completed at the ticket counter, we headed off to the duty-free shops. We intended to shop a while, grab a quick lunch and then go to our boarding gate. But the shops were *so* interesting! And of course we found things that we had passed up at other places and were made much more appealing at the thought that they would be simple carry-on luggage now. So we opted to forget about lunch and shop a little longer. Our bags became more numerous and heavier, but finally it was time to be at the boarding gate.

We had spent most of our paper currency (and some of us supplemented that with credit card purchases). Molly and I had finished our shopping and waited for Sara to appear. We weren’t really sure if she might have already finished her shopping and gone on toward the gate ahead of us. We started to worry after about fifteen minutes of waiting, but then we could see her walking toward us.

We were just reviewing the coins left in our purses when Sara decided it would be neat to have a supply of tuppence (the two-pence coin) for her students. She quickly dashed back to the money-changing windows to swap a few one-pound coins for the tuppence. Molly and I nervously waited in the boarding line as the minutes ticked by.

We were nearly at the end of a long line which first had to go through an immigration check, when we heard the boarding call for our flight. Sara was still not in sight, but a few minutes later, much to our relief, she appeared and we all whisked through to the boarding gate. This seemed like a good time to go to the restroom, so Sara and I headed off to do that, leaving Molly in the boarding line, practically chewing her nails. We returned to join the end of the line and were among the last passengers to board the plane. We may have been cutting it pretty close, but actually the flight crew continued with preparations several minutes after we found our seats, and we were confident that not a moment of our time on the Irish soil had been wasted. We relaxed enough to remember that we had forgotten to mail our postcards. Since they were all addressed and stamped with Irish postage, we asked a flight attendant if we might hand them over to be mailed in the Dublin airport. She happily obliged.

Before boarding the plane, we had waded through disinfectant. In fact, except for going into Monasterboice, we were very dutiful. Foot and mouth disease has not been known in the United States since 1929 and we did not want to be the ones to bring it in. Especially not to the wild deer in my backyard, for then all means of control would be hopeless. The Irish were annoyed at the situation, for they said the only two cases they had were in Northern Ireland and were sheep that had been smuggled in from Britain. Those Brits again! We saw the garda on all the roads, but they never stopped us or any other car, though they stopped every truck and insisted upon looking inside to be sure they carried no animals.

We left Dublin at 3 p.m., the flight arrived in Chicago at 7 p.m. Chicago time, 12 midnight Irish time. We were served a lunch and a "tea." Upon arrival, we were asked, if we had stayed in a bed and breakfast, if we had been on a farm, if we had walked in the country, to please identify ourselves to department of agriculture officials as we went through the gate. Of a planeload of perhaps 300 people, maybe fifteen or twenty of us reported to the ag officials. All they wanted was to remove our shoes, take them into a little room, disinfect them, dry them off and bring them back to us. I could have brought in a suitcase full of leprechauns and nobody would have given me any trouble at all.

Monica met us at the airport, we picked up Saul and headed right for Urbana. I guess we went right to bed; I don't remember. Next morning Monica, Saul, Lucienne and I attended Easter Mass at, most appropriately, Saint Patrick's Church, came home and Saul made omelets for everyone. Cele was there, and after a big dinner out, we came home. I followed her all the way until we hit the County Line at Arenzville. Adventure is over. Got that done!

A few weeks ago I retied the cord on one of the little ceramic pendants I bought from the lad in the Galway mall; then we went out for a walk in the yard and it slipped off. We, Tony, Molly and I, retraced our route three or four times and never found the pendant. It has not turned up in any of my mowing since. I was disappointed, but Molly said she has the solution. We will just have to go back next year and get another one.



Love,

Roberta/Mom/Grandma

