

WALES AND IRELAND TRIP MAY 12 TO JUNE 4, 2009

What a coincidence! Meaningless, to be sure - but a coincidence, nonetheless. Our trip to the British Isles in 2009 began and ended one day earlier than our trip to Scotland, May 14 to June 5, 2001. (One can only hope that September of *this* year doesn't hold the same sort of unpleasant surprise that was visited upon us eight years ago.) OK, so I made a "small" error - we are departing *two* days earlier, not one. And, OK, so it wasn't much of a coincidence, was it? I mean, a real coincidence - one of excruciating consequence - occurred at the Polo Grounds in NYC on October 3, 1951 when Ralph Branca of the Blessed Brooklyn Dodgers was called in to pitch in the 9th inning and, by coincidence, Bobby Thomson of the Bestial New York Giants happened to come to bat, and, by coincidence, Mr. Branca happened to throw a pitch that the aforementioned Mr. Thomson happened to swing at, and, by coincidence, made contact with said pitch and drove it a miserable 309 feet into the first row of the left-field seats of the absurdly apportioned Polo Grounds, thus ending the Dodgers' season and causing a certain 12-year-old, watching on TV, in Brooklyn to burst into tears. Now *that* was a coincidence! But I digress.

Tuesday, May 12 to Wednesday, May 13

Rather than leaving our car at the Seattle Airport Parking Garage (cost for three-plus weeks \$468) or at an airport hotel (about \$335) we decide to try the new Gig Harbor Taxi (at \$95 each way, including tip). When I call to make the reservation, Steve (the owner) asks where I come from, as he claims to detect a bit of Brooklyn in my accent. Wow! He, too, grew up in Brooklyn (not too far from where I lived) - and, during the drive to Sea-Tac, we have an interesting conversation about our misspent youths. I ask if he's had any notable passengers during his time as a cabbie in Gig Harbor - he tells about a retired gentleman, 85 years old, who had received the first Computer Science degree awarded by Stanford in the 1950s. Despite some traffic on Rte 16, we get to the airport at 9:45, just 45 minutes from the time that we left home.

We check our luggage and pass through airport security very smoothly, thus portending good luck for the start of our trip? Maybe, but read on. We are flying Delta, not because they have the most convenient connections but because we are cheap (or, as I prefer to call it, "thrifty" or "parsimonious" or "frugal" but *not* "niggardly" - one can get in trouble for saying that innocent word, as happened to a hapless academic a few years ago) and we want the frequent flier mileage. Yes, we do have to change planes in Atlanta, but, in fact, there are no non-stops from Seattle to London, except for British Airways whose fare is considerably higher than Delta's. And although we are decidedly cheap, we can also be spendthrifts: we have chosen to fly Business Class (at the cost of punching a gaping hole in our dwindling retirement accounts). Aside from the extra leg-room, wider seats, and better(?) food, an advantage to Business Class is that one can use the Delta lounges at airports ... perhaps. Our flight is scheduled to depart at noon from Gate A12 at the far, far, far, distant end of Terminal A, but the Sky Club that once was located opposite Gate A12 is now closed - a new one is under construction in South Satellite Terminal, but that's not of much use to us on today. We are informed, however, that we are welcome to use Alaska Air's lounge in Terminal B. Letters A and B may be close alphabetically, but it is a very long walk, a very very very long walk (even with some moving sidewalks) back to the beginning of Terminal A and then to the alleged location of the lounge in Terminal B - and when we get there we can't find the damned thing (we find only the Continental Airlines lounge) nor can any Alaska Airlines personnel help us. So we trudge back the length of Terminal B and then the length of Terminal A, arriving at Gate A12 at about 11:15 (having spent a nearly an hour on our trek). It is a cool day, but the airport is overheated ... and we work up a good sweat. Our plane, due in by this time, is still *en route* from Atlanta, but finally arrives at 11:30 and

begins boarding at noon. The passengers board amazingly quickly and the doors are closed at 12:17.

The flight is uneventful - we are fed turkey sandwiches and snacks (well, at least we didn't have to pay extra for them) but we also experience considerable periods of turbulence. There is extensive cloud cover over the U. S. of A., so sight-seeing is at a minimum. I (a.k.a. *The man of us**, hereafter abbreviated as TMOU) take advantage of the long flight to read *Time* magazine and work some puzzles while Lee (a.k.a. *The woman of us**, hereafter abbreviated as TWOU) watches three movies:

*These two expressions were used extensively in my Scotland travelog from 2001 (<http://web.utk.edu/~rmagid/europe01.pdf>) and are "explained" in the index to that travelog (<http://web.utk.edu/~rmagid/eur01index.pdf>) as follows: "At several points in the document, I found myself using the expressions 'the man of us' and 'the woman of us' ... It's not plagiarism if I admit that I lifted these expressions, albeit quite subconsciously, from a favorite book. A prize of inestimable value will go to the first person who can identify the source." Although thousands (and, perhaps, even millions) of readers have enjoyed or hated or fallen asleep reading the Scotland travelog, not one has come forth to claim the prize. So the offer still stands.

Frost/Nixon, Marley and Me, and Last Chance Harvey. We touch down in Atlanta at 7:33 EDT and reach the gate at 7:40, ahead of the scheduled arrival time of 7:53. As our flight to London doesn't leave until 10:10, we make our way to Terminal E and take full advantage of Delta's Sky Club to rest, drink, and eat snacks. When we board, I discover that my seat (I mean my assigned seat on the plane) is defective: it resists mightily being "returned to its full upright and locked position." After the flight attendants wrestle with it to no effect, maintenance is called in - they take it apart and re-assemble it, but still it won't return to fully upright. There's no solution, so I will have to endure a semi-reclined aspect throughout the flight. Because the plane is fully booked, the doors are closed at 10:01, ahead of schedule, and we are shortly on our way.

We are offered several English newspapers and I choose *The Daily Telegraph*. The first surprise is how *wide* the fully-opened paper is (a "broadsheet" in journalistic parlance) a huge contrast to the incredible shrinking local newspapers we've been reading. When fully opened, its wing span is 29", as compared with 22" for the *Seattle Times*. May 12, it turns out, is Day 5 in the *Telegraph's* ongoing exposé of excessive spending by Members of Parliament. We had heard about this in the U.S., but had no idea how extensive the cheating was. The front page has color photos of some of the worst offenders and an opening story under the provocative heading *The Expense Files, Day 5*. Following this, pages 2 to 10 are devoted, one page per MP, to some of the most egregious excesses. It's pleasing to realize that both Labour(sic) and Conservative MPs are implicated, several of the former currently in Gordon Brown's cabinet. It appears that MPs routinely submit their living expenses to a government office that essentially rubber-stamps every request for reimbursement.

The underlying principle is legitimate: MPs, like members of the U.S. Congress, are required to maintain residences in their home districts as well as in London, so housing allowances are part of the system. But consider Tory MP Douglas Hogg, a former agriculture secretary, who billed the government £2,000 for clearing the moat about his country estate. The *moat*? Quoting from the newspaper, "The taxpayer also helped meet the cost of a full-time housekeeper, including her car. The public finances also helped pay for work to Mr. Hogg's stables and for his piano to be tuned." David Heathcote-Amory (now there's a name!) claimed £380 for 550 sacks of horse manure for his garden. Michael Ancram, who is the Marquess of Lothian (really!), claimed over £14,000 despite owning three properties, not one of which has a mortgage and that are worth, together, about £1.8 million. Well, one could go on and on - swimming pool maintenance, gardeners, chauffeurs, new porticos, etc. etc. are all paid for by the public. Scandalous, yes, but also undoubtedly illegal in some cases: e.g., asking for reimbursements for mortgages that had been paid-off years before. Accompanying each individual story on pp 2-10 is a color photo of the MP and his or her loving spouse, smiles and warmth emanating - and why not, considering how they are bilking the exchequer. Often there is also a photo of the

"humble abode" that these fine men and women own - palatial estates, nearly every one of them. An especially delicious case involves Sir Michael Spicer, the senior Tory MP, who put in claims for gardening work, repair of an oven (£1,000!), local taxes (£4,000), construction of a helipad, and installation of a chandelier.

What's extraordinary is that these revelations had been going on for four days before I see this newspaper - and will continue during our entire time in England, Wales, and Ireland. By the end of our journey, some three weeks from now, the Speaker of the House will have taken a fall and Gordon Brown's government will be in danger of collapse - more about this later. I've saved the newspapers from May 12 and later on as reminders of just how flagrant this whole thing is. And to think, the worst scandals (recently) by our own elected officials rarely involve taking public money, focusing instead on sex: a governor's passionate romance with a South American woman who doesn't live anywhere near the Appalachian Trail; a senator's *affaire de coeur* with the wife of his own chief of staff whom his parents try to "hush" with a payment of \$96,000; an ultra-secret house in Washington, D.C. (133 C Street) owned by an ultra-secret religious cult (*The Family*) where many of these men either lived or sought spiritual guidance as they were violating their marriage vows; a former Congressman from Mississippi whose wife has filed a law suit against his mistress for ruining his marriage and his career by allowing him to bed her in the C Street house; *und so weiter*. Back to England: one of the Labour Party MPs was quoted as saying "History had seen the Long Parliament, the Rump Parliament, and the Addled Parliament. If we are not careful, we shall finish up with the Moat Parliament or the Manure Parliament." Sounds about right, eh?

I am amused by the video display at my airplane seat that initially lists our flying time as 9 hrs 30 min and our estimated arrival time as 1:56 p.m. (London time) - why such a delay, given that we left ahead of schedule and that the published ETA is noon? A short while later, the two numbers change to 7 hrs 35 min and 11:16 a.m.; and still later to 5 hrs 32 min and 10:32 a.m. I hope that the flight deck gets better information than this!

Despite the late departure time from Atlanta, at about 11:00 p.m. EDT we are served a nice dinner (beef tenderloin, *au gratin* potatoes, broccolini [Ed: love that word!], salad, and cheese platter for dessert). I then do my best to get some sleep, and although I recline and close my eyes for about two hours, I doubt that I get more than an hour of actual sleep. Lee manages to get some serious sleeping done. When she and I open our eyes, we have an energetic and extended discussion of who is going to have the "opportunity" of driving the first leg when we get our rental car at Heathrow. Polite to a fault, each of us tries to defer to the other, but I "win" ... which means that TWOU loses ... which means that she gets to drive first ... in all of that London area traffic! Good! I still break into a cold sweat when I recall my difficulty as the initial driver in Edinburgh, eight years ago in driving on the "wrong" side of the road with the steering wheel on the "wrong" side of the car, and having to negotiate "roundabouts" (i.e., traffic circles) in the "wrong" direction (clockwise), and having to manipulate a stick shift with the "wrong" hand - eventually one gets accustomed to it all, but it does take some time and often involves some harrowing experiences and close calls. This time, however, we've chosen to eliminate one of those difficulties - we've order an automatic transmission car.

Breakfast is served at 9:00 London time (that's 4:00 Atlanta time and 1:00 according to my own West Coast biological clock): eggs with too much salt, bacon with much too much salt, French toast (unsalted, *Gott sei dank*), fruit, and bagel. I've put on five pounds already and we haven't even deplaned. We arrive in the London area early but are in a holding pattern and don't land until 11:17 (still well ahead of the announced ETA). We clear immigration and customs and board the bus to the car rentals, quite a distance from the terminals. We're not in Scotland, I realize, but Robbie Burns had it right when he wrote "The best laid schemes o' Mice an' Men, gang aft a-gley." That is, prior to our departure we had gone to great pains to inform our credit card companies that we'd be overseas and to make sure that our cards would work in a variety of ATMs. Ha! Lee tries her AMEX card in an AMEX machine in Heathrow but it fails. Fortunately, an AMEX office, right there, allows her to purchase British pounds.

When we get to Avis, we learn that our Vauxhall Vectra (a nice sensible sedan) has morphed into a Citroën Picasso C4, a somewhat ungainly looking van filled with all sorts of electrical and electronic wizardry (more about this later) and powered by diesel fuel. Upon our return to Gig Harbor, I will use the internet to learn that the C4 is an MPV (a multi-purpose vehicle, if you please), and although it seems large it is only 2" longer and 5" wider than a Vectra, albeit a stunning 11.5" taller. (Compared to a Dodge Minivan, it is shorter by 26", narrower by 5", and less tall by 2".) In fact, it does turn out to be manageable ... with certain "interesting" features that will be revealed as we discover them. Although the name is written in script on each fender (*Picasso*), from here on I'll just use italics when I refer to it. Lee's comment on the car: "Sexy, it's not; cubist, maybe."

We are fortunate that there is an operator's manual in the car's glove compartment, although that doesn't help in the Avis parking lot when we can't even figure out how to open the rear hatch - an Avis rep helps us with that. But the manual turns out to be essential when it comes time to start the engine. The first thing to note is that there is no conventional gear shift, neither on the floor nor on the steering column. Instead there is a small lever (maybe 2" long) located at the top of the steering column and, inconveniently, behind the steering wheel than can be flicked among four settings: Reverse, Neutral, Automatic, Manual. The instructions for starting the engine call for the lever to be in N and the foot to be on the brake pedal; then, when turning the key to the first position, the dashboard will light up with all sorts of messages and displays, one of which indicates that the diesel fuel has been heated to the right temperature. Then, and only then, is the ignition key turned the rest of the way (foot still on the pedal); and when the engine catches, the gear lever can be flicked to one of the other three positions. Then, when the foot is removed from the pedal and the car begins to move forward or backward, the electronic parking brake is automatically released. At the end of the drive, when the ignition key is turned off, the electronic parking brake is automatically engaged. (Invariably, over the course of the trip, our attempts to flick the gear shift lever with the right hand results in activation of the windshield wipers, but eventually we learn how to avoid this ... most of the time.)

It is most disconcerting that there is no "feel" to the gear shift lever as there would be with a mechanical shift and that the emergency brake is released and re-set without any action by the driver. (Much later we will discover that there is a way to set the parking brake manually, not with any conventional lever or a pedal on the floor but by the push of a small button on the dashboard, just another of the electronic controls that continue to confound and surprise.) One final thing at this point: although we did specify an automatic transmission car, this one has settings for both A and M - the manual transmission is electronic (of course) without any need for a clutch (of course); shifting is accomplished by flipping little paddles on the right (up shift) or left (down shift) of the steering column. At the start of our trip, we use the A setting exclusively. But things will change, soon enough. Oh, yes, one more thing - both front fenders are made of a flexible plastic than can be deformed by mild hand pressure; over the course of the trip, whenever I see another C4 in a parking lot I poke its fenders - apparently the older models, unlike ours, are constructed of metal.

So we set out on the M4 (M = Motor Way) toward the west, TWOU driving the first 90 miles and I the remaining 50 on the way to Cardiff. (Why am I stating distances in miles rather than km? It's because the United Kingdom [England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland] has resisted going metric in its weights and measures, just as it has resisted giving up the British pound for the euro.) The M4 is an excellent highway with (thankfully) nice wide lanes, but the height of the car and my lack of three-dimensional vision make it difficult for me to gauge when I am staying within the lines - fortunately, side-view mirrors on the left and right help me position the car in its lane, and eventually I become comfortable with it. I even get brave enough to turn on the car radio and we manage to find Classic FM which plays short (very short) selections and which employs announcers who pronounce composers' names entirely different from what we're accustomed to - for example, they say vi-VAL-di and rock-MAN-inoff, expressing the accented syllables with a flat, nasal vowel sound.

We have only a notional map of Cardiff and written instructions from the hotel's web site:

M4 from the East (from M5 direction). Exit at Junction 29 & head into Cardiff on the A48(M) / A48. After 7 miles, at Gabalfa Interchange, exit at signs for the A470 'City Centre'. The slip road leads to a roundabout, take the A470 'City Centre' for about 1.5 miles. At a set of traffic lights (Civic Buildings on the left) turn left onto Boulevard de Nantes A4161. Immediately move into the right hand lane and take the first right onto Kingsway. Continue to T-junction and turn left onto Greyfriars Road. Park Place is the next right and our hotel is at the end on the left."

Sounds easy enough, but the roundabout is confusing and my navigator is less than competent, so we find ourselves driving some distance on the A470 but with no "Civic Buildings" and no "Boulevard de Nantes" in sight. I pull over and ask two guys who are washing their cars, but they have no comprehension of the hotel's instructions nor do they know where the Parc Hotel might be, even though we tell them that we think it's near Cardiff Castle. We try calling the hotel desk but get, instead, the Thistle Hotel chain's general operator; somehow, I don't recall how, Lee manages to get a phone number for the hotel itself, but when we call the receptionist, she has no idea where we are even though we give her the names of various intersections that we'd passed. Somehow we conclude that we've gone on the A470 in the wrong direction, so we return to the roundabout, take the opposite direction, *et voilà* there are the Civic Buildings and the Boulevard de Nantes and Kingsway and Greyfriars Road.

What was *not* mentioned in the instructions is that the final half-block to the hotel is not only pedestrians-only but that the approach street (a dead-end) is blocked by what must be every taxicab in the city. The hotel's web site had indicated that they had no parking lot (not true, as it turns out) so we decide that we need to pull temporarily into a lot behind the hotel ... if only we can get through the scrum of close-packed cabs. Now picture this - an American driver without three-dimensional vision and very unsure about the width of his car, trying to navigate (with the "able" assistance of the taxicab dispatcher and several of the taxi drivers) among and through the various obstacles until finally we can turn into the driveway to the parking lot. (TWOU has had her eyes closed throughout this escapade, just as I had done when she negotiated her way through The Pass of the Cattle in Scotland eight years earlier - actually the earlier event was more dramatic, as the slightest miscalculation would have thrown us off the side of a mountain.) There is a mechanical gate preventing our entering the lot, so I park and walk to the hotel desk to find out what to do. Turns out, this *is* their lot and they control the mechanical arm from the front desk. So I return to the car, enter the lot, and park.

We check into the hotel - a nice room, but not spectacular, and decide to eat at the hotel's dining room. This was not a good choice. Not only is the food overpriced (£45 with tip for the two of us) but it is very poorly prepared - I send my nearly raw calves liver back to be cooked; and Lee deems her Chicken Tandoori as totally inadequate (a steam-table boiled chicken that had been rubbed with some red spices, accompanied by garlic bread instead of the promised naan). Not an auspicious start for our journey! After dinner, we go for a walk (in the drizzle) along the pedestrian streets that surround the hotel. The city does shut down early (only a few stores are open, even at 8:00). We walk past a Marks & Spencer store, one of some 800 such establishments world-wide. They have been in the news recently because "ample" British women are "up in arms" (so to speak) about M & S's decision to charge higher prices for larger sized bras. This story will just not go away - we will revisit it toward the end of this travelog.

Thursday, May 14

The hotel shower does present some challenges ... until we master the beast. It has two square controls: the lower one we figure out is for temperature, the upper for water volume; the default is the rain shower directly overhead, but there is also a hand-held wand that is activated by turning the upper control past the OFF position. (There is also a small button whose function is never discovered.) A not very sturdy glass window, half the length of the shower stall, is supposed to keep water from flooding the bathroom floor, but it is less than successful because the floor of the stall is *higher* than the

bathroom floor and is only barely tilted toward the drain.

We sleep off the jet lag and get up at 8:00. Breakfast (included in the price of the room) is served in the same room where we "enjoyed" last night's dinner, but it is buffet-style and reasonably good. Because we are a bit late, many of the serving dishes have been pretty well picked over, but we don't starve - far from it. We help ourselves to bread, sweet rolls, cold cuts, cheeses, scrambled eggs, mushrooms, tomatoes, baked beans (Lee thinks: "Heinz, straight from the can"); bacon, sausage, and black pudding* (which is on every breakfast menu, unless it is replaced by white pudding*); the black pudding is especially loaded down with salt. This morning and the next two, we learn that there is a "toast wench" ("toast wala" in Lee's journal) who comes around to each table and offers ... well, toast. Except she either skips our table or runs out of toast just as she gets to us. Flagrant xenophobia, I think, but I resist calling the U.S. Consul to register a complaint.

*According to a helpful web site, "Black pudding, otherwise known as blood sausage, is a dark sausage stuffed with animal blood seasoned and cooked with fillers such as bits of meat, suet, oats, or barley and congealed until solid" and "White pudding is a type of sausage much enjoyed in the UK. It is similar in construction to blood pudding, containing sugar, oats or bread, suet and shredded pork. It often contains onions, and may have cinnamon or other sweet-oriented spices." And now you know.

AN UNCHARITABLE OBSERVATION (but that doesn't make it any less true): the British are *not* a pretty people. That is, most have a pale and pasty look, along with such features as strangely shaped noses, hair where it shouldn't be balanced by lack of hair where it should be, chins that are either weak or prominent, pointy ears, etc. What is most strange about this is that American descendants of the British immigrants do not share this unhealthy and unwholesome appearance. Maybe the lack of sun in the British Isles is partly to blame, but I attribute most of it to a diet that includes either blood pudding or white pudding, neither of which would be approved by any cardiologist.

The *London Times*, probably miffed at not having broken the story of the poorly-behaving MPs, does carry a few articles on the scandal, but not until p. 7. (The *Times*, when fully extended, is a full 7" narrower than *The Telegraph* and 8" shorter than *The Seattle Times*. Thus, in its dimensions - but not its quality - it is comparable to *The New York Daily News*.) Columnist Lisa Armstrong, who appears to be even snarkier than Maureen Dowd of *The New York Times*, sniffs about the poor taste and sheer chutzpah of these elected officials, such as charging the public 5p for an Ikea carrier bag and 59p for a chocolate Father Christmas. And, of course, there were expenses on a somewhat grander scale such as £1300 for an intercom and brass name plaque or £600 for hanging baskets. On an even larger scale is the revelation that there is a very nice severance package available for MPs who choose not to stand for re-election: they get zilch if they step down while Parliament is in session, but are eligible for a "grant and winding-up" allowance if they choose not to run or if they are defeated in a re-election bid. And how generous is this allowance? Depending on years of service, it can reach £65K for "resettlement" and £41K for "winding-up"; and, if the MP had been a member of the Cabinet, why there's another £20K available. The full £126K did go to one John Hutton, former Defence(sic) Secretary, MP for Barrow and Furness, and in Parliament since 1992. In contrast, Ed Balls (sic!!!) got a total package of "only" £93K.

The morning sky is grey but there is no rain as we walk to nearby Cardiff Castle. An excellent guidebook for the country's features and history (and a long and bloody history it is!) is *The Rough Guide to Wales*, from which I'll quote from time to time. Among the people who have civilized and/or conquered Wales over the centuries are the Iberians, Britons, Celts, Romans, Irish, Normans, and English. No wonder their motto is SAVE THE WALES! In the succeeding days, we will see the incredible ring of castles built by Edward I of England in order to subjugate his Welsh subjects, who then retaliated by spelling all of the town names with a double L: e.g., Llabaehaeearn (take that, Spell Checker!!), Llanandras, LLanbadam ... Llanrhaedr-ym-Mochnant ... Llyn y Fan Fawr. The double L is

pronounced, more or less, like the CH in chutzpah (thus establishing, once and for all, the etymological relationship of Welsh and Yiddish), followed by an L sound - imagine saying CLAM while gargling. Among the greatest Welsh heroes are the 13th century's Llywelyn ap Gruffydd, grandson of Llywelyn ap Iorwerth, who forced Henry III and his English invaders out of Wales, only to be crushed by the armies of Henry's successor, Edward I. (The double D, by the way, is pronounced like TH, or so we are told.)

Cardiff Castle was built by the Normans within a Roman fortress wall, parts of which are still visible. One wing is now a history museum where we encounter a guide who is quite knowledgeable about the country's history, its language, and its close connections to America (particularly the coal-mining regions of Pennsylvania and West Virginia). The grounds are huge and we explore the "keep" (the final impenetrable refuge of the castle), the domestic buildings (from Tudor times), and so on. We climb the battlements with a gaggle of Breton school kids. (I stole that line from Lee.) During a lunchtime coffee and sweet in the castle's dining room, the rain starts and will continue for the rest of the day. We next walk to the Natural History and Art Museum, which features displays of the archaeology and history of Wales, along with an art collection, mostly British, but also celebrating American artists like Diane Arbus, with her phantasmagoric photographs, and Europeans like Rodin and Sisley.

Either by rule or custom, it's not clear which, the staff at our hotel refuses to recommend any restaurants for dinner, save the wretched one that's right there off the lobby. Even when we ask specific questions about this one or that one, we get a shrug of the shoulders. Similarly at the city's tourist office the staff would not make recommendations. So, rather than starve to death, we walk a very short distance to an attractive Italian restaurant called Bellini's and have an excellent meal, even though a bit pricier (£58, including tip) than last night's. Not yet accustomed to the time change, both of us awaken at 2:30 a.m.; I finally get back to sleep at about 4:00, and sleep until the alarm goes off at 7:30.

Friday, May 15

It is a dark and stormy day (I've always wanted to write that), dreary and with heavy rain early, but it clears up (somewhat) at about the time we leave the hotel (10:00). The breakfast "experience" is similar to yesterday's, although the serving platters and bowls are replenished better than they had been. We retrieve the car and are relieved that the taxi congestion is minimal compared to Wednesday's arrival. We drive a few miles to St. Fagans Castle (a 16th century country house built on the site of a castle ruin) and the vast, open-air Museum of Welsh Life, covering Welsh history and culture from the Celts to modern times - excellent! The restored homes, school, farm, shops, church, arsenal, etc. are wonderful, but clearly the highlight is the newborn piglets being kept warm by infrared lamp. An employee of the museum demonstrates the "wattle and daub" construction method for making walls. The sun, mercifully, stays out most of the time that we are walking from one restored building to another. Throughout the day and in various locations, we hear lots of Welsh being spoken.

We drive to Brecon Beacons National Park. Brecon Beacons is a mountain range about 30 miles north of Cardiff. The park is one of three national parks in the country. It is famous for its waterfalls, mountain scenery, wild ponies, and sheep, although we see very few of these as it has begun to rain again. The road from Cardiff is pretty good, but the trip takes a wee bit longer than it should have owing to a major directional screw-up on the A470 by our intrepid navigator, who shall remain nameless but whose initials are Lee Magid. Nevertheless, the drive does pass through some prosperous towns with lovely homes and neighborhoods. We had heard about narrow, almost impassable roads, but encounter none ... today. (Our drives tomorrow and on the succeeding days will come as rude awakenings.) At the visitor center, we treat ourselves to coffee and Welsh cakes (yum!!), the first of many that we will enjoy. We drive through the park in the rain, then head back to the hotel. As in the morning, the taxis offer only minimal resistance. We have dinner at Bellini's again (thus demonstrating a distinct lack of imagination, but it beats walking aimlessly in the rain) and use a two-for-one coupon that allows us to get out for a grand total of £35, including tip.

Here's an interesting feature at Bellini's and many of the other restaurants where we'll eat during the remainder of the trip. When paying by credit card, as most of the customers do, one's card is not taken to a back room where its number can be copied and then distributed to thousands of unsavory characters all over the world. Instead, a small machine is brought to the table. One swipes one's own card, enters the amount, enters the gratuity, and clicks SEND or DONE or some such thing. And that's it. Nice. (I've never seen anything like this in the U.S.)

IMPORTANT FACT: within the Brecon Beacons Park live 32,000 people and 1 million sheep!

SIGN ON A BATHROOM (LOO) DOOR: "Using a water *butt* is a cheap and effective way of collecting rain water. Have you got a water butt to re-use your rain water?" [Ed: That's a rather personal question that I'd prefer not to answer.]

UNCHARITABLE OBSERVATION (PART DEUX): After observing the locals in Cardiff and in the museum and in the park, we conclude that we were right after all: the Brits are definitely *not* a pretty people. They are doughty, doughy, pasty, ashen, and pale - and they frown a lot. Think Margaret Thatcher and Queen Elizabeth rather than Keira Knightley and Kate Winslet. Lee's comment about the customers at tomorrow's breakfast: "multiple pensioners with bad hair, unstylish clothes, and amazing clunky shoes." Such a tart tongue for such a nice lass!

Saturday, May 16

We get up at 7:30. The morning's *London Times*, in its continuing coverage of the MP scandal, quotes the former chairman of the Tories: "There was a '*spivery*' in the way that politicians had used the second-home allowance to furnish houses and play the property game ... I call them welfare junkies." *Spivery??* Upon our return to the U.S., I was unable to find the word in either Merriam Webster's or the Oxford English Dictionary but I did locate *spiv*, which is British slang for "one who shirks work or responsibility; a slacker" - thus we can guess at the meaning of spivery. But is it that well known a word that a British newspaper reader would understand it?

We eat breakfast at the hotel and check-out. The day is cloudy with occasional rain, much as the past three days have been. We are driving toward the Llanthony Priory "in the secluded Vale of Ewyas, a steep sided once glaciated valley within the Black Mountains area of the Brecon Beacons National Park ... seven miles north of Abergavenny on an old road to Hay-on-Wye" according to Wikipedia. In other words, it's in the middle of nowhere - and the roads leading to it get narrower and curvier (a word rejected by Spell Check, but you know what I mean) the closer one gets. The first part of the trip is familiar - just the reverse of our drive to Cardiff - the A470 to the A48 to the M4, but then there's the A4051 and the A4042. [Ed: Memo to self: when they start using four digits for road names, do NOT expect a four-lane highway.] There isn't a lot of traffic, but we do encounter cars and trucks coming in the opposite direction and, "experienced" driver that I have now become, we manage to pass by them ... very slowly, and in some cases with our right side-view mirror retracted to make us as slim as possible. (This is yet another electronically controlled feature of the car.) The road does have occasional pull-outs to make passing easier, but they are not as frequent nor as well marked as the passing places all over Scotland; besides, there seem not to be the clearly defined rules for using them as existed in Scotland.

On the way, we find another classical music station, BBC Radio 3, which seems to specialize in playing single movements from "popular" classical music, accompanied by much-too-chatty announcers of the Top 40 style popular in America, and lots of ads. Worst of all, we are treated to the Rodrigo guitar concerto *Concierto de Aranjuez*, a melodic work whose very traditional style belies its having been written in 1939. Why do I write "worst of all"? It's because KING-FM in Seattle seems to know the moment that I get into my car because that damned piece is on the air much too frequently than to be just a bad coincidence. KING-FM is also a commercial station that airs lots of ads (mattresses, nutritional supplements, debt-relief agencies, etc.), but at least it plays entire symphonies and other

long works, and its announcers have excellent pronunciation skills for foreign names and they don't talk too much - with one glaring exception.

As we approach the Priory on this narrow, winding road, *Picasso* (which has a mind of its own and will be referred to, from here on, as if it were a person - a malevolent person, at that) chooses to start racing its engine ... violently. I have my foot on the brake, trying to keep my speed below 10 mph, while *Picasso* is trying to win the Indy 500. Needless to say, I'm leaving a trail of bad smelling smoke from burning brakes as I manage to pull into the driveway that leads to the church ruin. There being no available spaces in the official parking lot (oops, I mean *carpark* - Brit speak, doncha know), TWOU gets out of the car to see if there's room for me to negotiate a turn while avoiding various strategically located bollards ... at which moment the skies open and the wind starts howling and she gets drenched, as do I because TMOU has the window open. I manage to "limp" to an illegal parking spot, blocking an ambulance, and finally shut off the engine. I wait a while, but when I turn the ignition on again, the tachometer pegs at the very top, so I quickly shut it off. This occurs twice. And why is there an ambulance? We learn that there is a Mountain Rescue Charity Walk and Run that traverses the crest of the nearby Black Mountains - the Mountain Rescue people are present, just in case there are accidents.

What to do? We decide to call Avis, but discover that we have no cell phone signal. (We are, after all, in the Vale of Ewyas, in case you'd forgotten.) One of the Mountain Rescue guys suggests that I go into the small hotel next to the priory to see if they'll let me make a call using their land line. In fact they do. Avis says that they'll send someone to check out the car - and if it's defective, they'll make arrangements to trade it for another one. They estimate that the wait will be at least an hour, so Lee and I take advantage of a break in the heavy rain (it's still drizzling) to walk around the grounds of the priory and admire the ruins. After a while, the rain stops and the sun even comes out. One of the Mountain Rescue men tells us that he once owned a Citroën C4 but finally got rid of it when he realized that when one of the electronic controls goes, all of the others are bound to go as well. Thanks! Two men from the RAC (Royal Automobile Club) show up after only 45 minutes and take the car for a fairly long drive. Of course *Picasso* does not misbehave for them. (Readers with small children will understand.) They then ask us to get into the rear seat and they take the car for another drive - I can't believe how fast they drive on this narrow road, both in forward and in reverse, but they do. Their suggestion: since the problem occurred only once, probably it's only a small malfunction - but just to play safe, maybe we should start driving the car in Manual rather than Automatic mode. What this has to do with a racing engine, I don't know - but we do take their advice.

We head toward the town of Hay-on Wye, this time encountering a very very very narrow single-track road, more challenging than the merely very very narrow double-tracks we'd been driving. Lee is driving at this point. When narrowly passing cars going in the opposite direction, we scrape the left side of *Picasso* on the thick brambles that are very close to the roadway and taller than our vehicle. 'Twas the first of many *rambles through the brambles* that we would undertake over the coming weeks. But we make it to our destination, without *Picasso's* having acted up again. Maybe it really was a one-time event? Alas, no - read on.

DOUBLE PUN ALERT: I ask my intrepid tour guide if Hay-on-Wye derives its name from the Wye river and she, punster *extraordinaire*, replies that the river is used for numerous other town names such as Ham-on-Wye ... to which I reply "Do disaffected people in this region suffer from on-Wye?" (*Picasso* could have misbehaved had he/she/it been listening, but didn't.)

Hay-on-Wye is known for its many bookstores, 41 of them according to Wikipedia although we don't check their count; we visit only a couple. One is unattended and is called Honesty Books - they trust you to put 30p for a softcover or 50p for a hardcover into a letter box opposite the entrance. Among the second-hand books on display is a random copy of *The Yale Review*. We have a coffee and then set out again, but not before experiencing another misbehavior by *Picasso*: in the parking lot at Hay-on-Wye, the engine races wildly the first two times that I turn the ignition key, but settles down the third

time. This is *not* good.

The weather is very changeable - bright sun, then drizzle, then strong winds, then torrential rains, then clearing ... and repeat. To its credit, the area has beautiful bucolic scenery, charming towns, and lots and lots of sheep. We pass through the town of Three Cocks (as Casey Stengel would have said, "Yez can look it up") and arrive in Llandrindod Wells at 5:30 where we find Guidfa House, our "home" for the next two days. When she unpacks, my intrepid tour guide makes the awful discovery that she has left something of great value (OK, I'll say it: a bag of clean panties) at the Parc Hotel. We call the hotel and learn that their housekeeping staff has found it. Rather than leaving her nether regions unprotected for the next two weeks, she tells the hotel operator that we'll return to Cardiff tomorrow morning to pick up her belongings. This was *not* part of our planned itinerary, but it is charming incidents like this that make travel so interesting, eh?

Guidfa House is a Bed and Breakfast in an old Georgian House. Our room is smallish and overheated, but adequate, with decent lighting, a nice bathroom, and over-large towels. We ask for a recommendation for where we might find good pub food for dinner and are told to go to Gwystre Inn, about 1.5 miles away. The food is most enjoyable and costs only £32 for the two of us. Whereas TWOU had a single malt scotch, I enjoyed a local beer: *The Reverend James Bitters*, if you please. At the next table there are some "elderly" folk (well, they appear to be older than we, but maybe not) whose round vowel sounds are very distinctive. It's difficult to reproduce them, but I'll try: "George can't dance" would sound like "Jawge cahnt dahnce." We hear "sawting" for "sorting" and "tawl" for "tall." Upon returning to Guidfa House, we use the Wi-Fi available in the lounge to check our email for the first time since leaving home. A couple from Northern Wales, also in the lounge, give us some useful touristic and travel suggestions for the region. They are celebrating his 70th birthday and he is determined to play golf, regardless the weather.

Sunday, May 17

The next morning, we are proud to have mastered the folding glass for the power shower. The breakfast is excellent: fruit or juice is self-service, and we order the rest: full breakfast (consisting of eggs, sausage, bacon, tomato, mushrooms, toast) for TMOU, smoked salmon and scrambled eggs for TWOU. (As was true in Cardiff, what they call bacon is what we would call moderately thickly sliced ham.) Each morning of the trip, so far, the temperature has been in the 11-15°C range, but today it is a chilly 8°C. And it is raining (so what's new?) and continues to rain most of the day with occasional patches of sun. First things first, we drive to the Parc Hotel in Cardiff to retrieve you-know-what. This time, we make the correct turn from the roundabout and avoid getting lost. On the way, we pass through many towns whose names have very few vowels (at least what we would call vowels) and lots of double L's. Examples: LLyswen and Llanwrtyd Wells. Sometimes, the English town names (e.g., LLandoverly) appear on signs alongside their Welsh spelling (LLanymddyfri). And did I mention it is raining?

We drive to the afore-mentioned Llanwrtyd Wells and visit the Cambrian Woollen Mill where we have coffee and (yum) Welsh cakes and get a free guide to Welsh pronunciation from two of the staff. Having expressed my disappointment to Lee at how few sheep we'd seen, relative to what we encountered in Scotland, today my wishes are granted. There is a field in the middle of the country with lots of black-face sheep, so I get out of the car and walk to the fence to take pictures of a ewe and her nursing lamb. They see me and start walking toward me, as I continue to snap pictures, and soon they are joined by every one of the several trillion sheep in the pasture, all racing toward me (as I continue to snap pictures) and bleating, making a cacophonous racket of BAA on top of BAAA on top of BAAAA. (Imagine a roomful of drunken Yalies singing The Whiffenpoof song!) Thank heavens there is a fence separating them from me. When back in the safety of the car, I ask TWOU why the sheep all ran toward me and she replies that it's because I was covered with sheep dip. (I'm not sure how to take that. I rather think it proves that I have animal magnetism.)

We drive to Bulith Wells, where we see more sheep and take lots of pictures, mostly from the safety of the car. From there we drive to Rhayader, the oldest town in mid-Wales, dating to the 5th century - despite the rain, we walk around a bit and see the river and other sights. Back in the car, we see signs directing us to the towns of Pant-y-Cudd, Pant-y-Waun, and Pant-y-Dwr (all cruel reminders of what we fetched from Cardiff in the morning) but we return to Guidfa House where we have a platter of cold cuts and cheeses, that we had ordered in the morning, followed by coffee and cakes in the lounge (total £25 for two). We spy several bottles of Scotch and Irish whiskey in the lounge; Tony, our host, draws two single malts from Scotland and charges only £2 each.

Monday, May 18

Today is my 40th wedding anniversary. Lee's too. Talk about coincidences!

It is another grey, cloudy, cool (10°C), and rainy day as we check out of Guidfa House and head north toward Llangollen, which must be important because *The Rough Guide* devotes eight pages to it. During the drive, the sun comes out briefly and the temperature soars to 15°C before falling to 12°C. The *Guide* describes the town's location as "seven miles northwest of Chirk and clasped tightly in the narrow Dee Valley between the shoulders of the Berwyn and Eglwyseg Mountains" - well, that should pin it down. On the way, we pass many fields with rape seed (canola for those who are offended by the word) or sheep or cattle and hedge rows or stone walls or wire fences separating the pastures. For a short stretch (about 7 miles) we are across the border into England before reentering Wales.

Llangollen is a lovely town (despite the drizzle) and we do a fair amount of walking around, snooping in shops, taking pictures, observing the river, etc. Near the train depot is a large sign that reads "Site under surveillance. No tipping ... If you witness anyone tipping here, contact ..." (The words are also written in Welsh.) Does "tipping" have some meaning other than the one we know? Or is it possible that this is the Welsh variant of "tippling"? (Which reminds me - if someone asks if you like Kipling, your answer should be, "I don't know - I've never kippled." But I digress.) It is in the town's carpark that I see two other Citroën C4s; I poke their front fenders and discover that they are made of inflexible steel, in contrast to the pliable polymer of *Picasso*, which (by the way) has not misbehaved for two whole days! Is it possible that the problems near Llanthony Priory and Hay-on-Wye were just a one-time occurrences, a glitches, small burps? (The perceptive reader will sense, *immédiatement*, that trouble looms ahead.)

We head toward Conwy Castle, part of the "Iron Ring" of castles built by Edward I in the 13th century. On the way, we pass additional fields of sheep, many of the long-haired variety - a few even cross the road, causing us to stop the car. We are also along the northern shore of Wales with views of the open sea. The castle ruin is impressive and the signage very informative. Of course there is no roof, but most of the time there is no rain. We wander around and through the castle ruins for about 90 minutes, then have a coffee and set out on our way again.

We are heading to Tan-y-Foel country house whose location is indicated in the following driving instructions from their web site:

Tan-y-Foel is situated two miles north of Betws-y-Coed within the Snowdonia National Park. Your own transport is highly recommended. If approaching from A5 or A470 at Waterloo Bridge: Betws-y-Coed continue onto A470 (North). Follow signs for Llanrwst and Llandudno traveling approx two miles. Do not take the first single track right turn marked Capel Garmon/Nebo. Continue onto the second right turn marked Capel Garmon and Nebo. Travel 1.5 miles up the hill. Tan-y-Foel is on the left.

In fact - we find ourselves approaching from the opposite direction, and thus pass through the town of Llanrwst rather than Betws-y-Coed (loose translation: "Betsy was a Coed," which is a sequel to

"Sorority Girls Gone Wild") which we will visit on subsequent days. Llanwrst is a town without much charm, except for its very narrow streets, its tricky turns, and its cars illegally parked on both sides of the road. But we do manage to find the single track marked "Capel Garmon and Nebo" and proceed to climb. Sight lines are very poor because of the trees, the curves in the road, and the hill, but we will find ourselves driving this road several times over the days we're here and will rarely encounter an oncoming car ... except when there is just no place to pull over and disaster seems imminent. Again, we put bramble scratches on the left side of the car. When we see the sign to Tan-y-Foel, the left turn leads to an even narrower single track that climbs quite a steep hill ... and finally we arrive. There are numerous fields surrounding the grounds, some with cattle, others with sheep, and one with two large rams who eye us suspiciously as we stop to take their picture. Tan-y-foel is Welsh for "house on the side of a rounded hill," an apt description because we have a gorgeous view of the valley below and of the town of Llanwrst, which looks pretty good from this distance. This beautiful house dates from the 1600s but has been an inn only since 1991. Janet Pitman, one of the owners and also the chef for the restaurant, provides us with a key to the outer door, the combination for the lock on the inner door, and another key to our bedroom. Our room and bathroom are quite modern (some details below), and our window provides an excellent view of the valley.

A brief guide to Welsh pronunciation. We now know that there are more than five vowels; the extras are: *w* (as in *Betws*) is pronounced -oo- as in *shoe* but can also be a short vowel sound as in *look*; *y* can be a long sound (as in *sea*) or short (as in *pin*). Adjacent vowels, unlike in English, are almost always pronounced as two separate sounds, with the stress on the first vowel; commonly found examples are *ae*, *ai*, *aw*, *ew*, *iw*, *oe*, *oi*, *ou*, *wy*, and *yw*. The double L and double D we've already dealt with, although *The Rough Guide* suggests that LL sounds more like *TL* than *CHL*: "The proper way to pronounce it is to place the tongue firmly behind the top row of teeth [Ed: one's own teeth, I assume] and breathe through it without consciously making a voiced sound." Duh.

Because it *is* my anniversary (and Lee's as well), we had reserved a table for dinner. We begin in the lounge where Peter Pitman, who will also function as the server in the dining room, offers us Penderyn, a Welsh single malt whisky. (It's interesting that the Welsh spelling, whisky, is the same as the Scottish and different from Irish whiskey.) From some source (perhaps a brochure accompanying the whisky?) I copy the following florid description: "Balanced with the aroma of cream toffee and fleetingly of fresh heather. Then, as the initial sensations fade, the finishing notes of tropical fruits, raisins, and vanilla emerge slowly and are long lasting." Methinks the writer had partaken a bit too much of the spirits, eh? But perhaps not, because at the official Penderyn web site, visited upon our return to the U.S., there is a picture of Prince Charles serving said whisky to friends, along with this description: "Absolutely staggering arrival on the palate of malt, landing with almost snowflake delicateness. Immediately a second movement, this time of bitter-sweet fruit, blood orange included, sweeps down over the startled taste buds. Astonishing stuff." My notes say that we ordered Scotch whiskey (Lagavulin), but it's hard to imagine that we passed up a chance at the toffee/heather/raisin blend. Along with our drinks, we are served hot celery soup, anchovies on biscuits, and olives.

Then comes a menu with these appetizer choices: fish pie (containing salmon, haddock, cod, prawns, and scallops) or carpaccio of Welsh beef; I choose the pie. The choices for the main course are lamb loin, Tandoori style (not for me because of allergies) or sea bass with anchovies and caper potato cake - I need to select the latter even though I really don't like this sort of fish. The servings that come to our table are artfully arranged, but not very large. For dessert, I choose a cheese plate and coffee. The cost of the meal is steep: £42 per person plus £4 for each coffee plus £6 for each whisky. OK, it was an anniversary dinner and it was quite special, but it is well-known that I have low-class tastes - the whole affair is entirely too precious for me. My uneducated palate will, alas, remain ignorant forever. (A useless aside: depending on which dictionary is consulted, it appears that there is a legitimate triple homophone consisting of *palate*, *pallet*, and *palette*. Isn't that interesting?)

PUN ALERT: Lee asks me how I managed to get the entire field of sheep to run toward me. I answer "When I was a boy, my mother hoped to give me eternal youth by dipping me in the Fountain of Ewes."

As mentioned, earlier, our room is quite modern even though the building is old. The sink is like the one that we had encountered in a B-and-B in Penticton, BC - it consists of an old-fashioned wash basin mounted on the surface of a table. What is disconcerting is that the rim is raised rather than flush with the counter-top, as is true of most sinks in the U.S.; but what is advantageous is that it provides more surface area for placing brushes, combs, toothbrushes, sexual aids, whatever. The shower is modern and excellent, except that the glass doors do not make a good seal - lots of water escapes onto the floor. (In certain unenlightened circles, fur trappers say that the only good seal is a dead seal. But, again, I digress.) As in our other hotel rooms in Wales, there is a machine for heating water for instant coffee; what is unique, here, is a bowl of various types of chocolates from which we take generous helpings over the three days we'll be here.

Tuesday, May 19

We had planned, either today or tomorrow, to take the tram to the top of nearby Mount Snowdon (elev. 3650 feet), but the rain and dense clouds convince us to scrap the trip, especially since Peter tells us that even on good days the train only goes 75% of the way up the mountain because a new restaurant is being built at the summit. But even though we fail to pay homage to the mountain, I do need to remind any readers who are still awake of the rhetorical question asked by Yossarian in *Catch-22*: "Où sont les Neigedens d'antan?" (Another prize of inestimable value will be awarded to the person who can "translate" this pseudo-French and explain its significance.)

The morning begins quite cool, no rain yet, but with heavy clouds and mist over the valley. Although last night's dinner was served in a rather formal room, breakfast is offered in an informal modern room. Unlike Guidfa House, there is no self-service; everything is order off the menu. First course: stewed fruit or grapefruit, juice; second course: eggs or fish or full Welsh breakfast (eggs, bacon, sausage, etc. etc. etc.)

[During breakfast, the Magids speculate (for who knows what godawful reason) about whence cometh the expression "to take a gander." Most web sites are silent on this essential issue, but upon our return I did find the following by Michael Quinion at a British web site. The first printed definition, it seems, was in an 1887 guide to the folk-speech of South Cheshire: "*Gonder*, to stretch the neck like a gander, to stand at gaze" In 1903, a Cincinnati paper had: "*Gander*, to stretch or rubber your neck." Quinion writes, "Think of a gaggle of farmyard geese, wandering about in their typically aimless and stupid way, poking their noses in everywhere and twisting their necks to stare at anything that might be interesting. Geese are the archetypal rubbernecker. No doubt '*to gander*' became the term because 'to goose' had already been borrowed; this was taken from the way that the birds were known to put their beaks embarrassingly — and sometimes painfully — into one's more private places." Hmm, never experienced that sort of adventure - is it too late for me? Quinion's analysis also includes a joke written in 1955 by Spike Milligan for *The Goon Show*: he has Harry Secombe entering an antique shop: "Good evening. Do you mind if I take a gander around the shop?" to which shopkeeper Crun replies, "No, as long as it's housetrained."]

We drive north through the still unlovely town of Llanwrst, heading to the Victorian* and Edwardian*

*It's interesting that architecture, furniture, and eras are described by the names of British monarchs (also Georgian, Elizabethan, and others) but we've not started such a tradition in the U.S. Besides, who wants an architectural style named Zacharian or Millardian or Groverian or Calvinian or Lyndonian or Ronaldian(!) or Barackian, eh?

seaside town of Llandudno. Our goal is to visit The Great Orme, which sounds like it should be a character in *The Wizard of Oz* but is, in fact, a small mountain (really a limestone headland) with a superb view of the sea (on days that are not cloudy and misty and rainy, that is). According to Wikipedia, "It is referred to as *Cyngreawdr Fynydd* in a poem by the 12th century poet Gwalchmai ap

Meilyr" but you probably knew that. Because directional signs are not to be found in the town, attractive though it may be, we ask a knowledgeable-looking person if he knows where the road to The Great Orme is; alas, he is as lost as we are even though he has GPS in his car. Finally, a clerk at a hotel tells us how to find the single track road that will lead us upward to our quest and across the tram tracks. On the ascent, we see a sign: "CAUTION AHEAD: Crossing for golfers and tractors." Noted.

Part of the way up the mountain, we stop at The Great Orme Copper Mine, an archaeological excavation of a Bronze Age (ca. 4000 years old) copper mine. We are issued hard hats (orange for TMOU, yellow for TWOU), a good thing because I clobber my head several times on the roof of the poorly lit, narrow, slippery, and steep mine shafts, as we descend to Level 1 and then to Level 2 (some 60 feet below the surface) before finally emerging. (The hard hats have the additional function of protecting us from the rain that has started up again.)

Upon starting *Picasso* in the parking lot, he/she/it decides to misbehave for the first time since last Saturday. The engine races wildly and the tachometer pegs at maximum RPM. I turn the ignition off, then on - and it races again. Doing it once more, the engine settles into its normal speed. It would appear that the throttle, which is (like everything else) electronic, is getting a false signal and is feeding too much fuel to the engine.

We resume our drive up the single-track mountain road. The rain has now begun in earnest (... as well as in Wales). At one point, a car is descending the single track so fast and coming right at us that I have to slam on the brakes. *Picasso* does not like this and registers its complaint by racing its engine. At this point, not yet knowing that one can engage the emergency brake by the push of a button on the dashboard, I have to shut the engine down and restart it while trying to avoid rolling backward down the hill. We do manage to get to the summit where we enjoy (to the extent that we can see anything through the awful weather) the view of the sea. Only upon leaving the parking lot do we discover that we never saw the pay station at which we were supposed to deposit some coins. Oh, well, the life of a scofflaw can be such fun, eh?

I recall having driven past a small Avis Car Rental in Llandudno Junction, some four miles south of Llandudno. I am feeling so uneasy about the car, especially since I know that we'll be doing some challenging driving in the countryside of both Wales and Ireland, that I suggest that we go to the agency to see if they can exchange *Picasso* for a more compliant vehicle. (We whisper, of course, lest *Picasso*, channeling HAL, overhears our conversation and decides to lock the doors and asphyxiate us with carbon monoxide.) The two Avis clerks are most understanding and say that they will try to find us a replacement in the two-and-a-half days that remain before we are scheduled to take the ferry to Ireland. We say that we're not fussy about what sort of car they find, but (for the reasons stated earlier) we insist that it have automatic transmission. They warn us that they get very few drop-offs at this remote location, but there's always a chance that one might be returned at a not-too-distant larger city in Wales or England, assuming that they can then get the car to Llandudno Junction.

Just north of Llanwrst is the town of Trefriw which I don't even dare to try pronouncing. The main attraction is a woolen mill, which has a store where one can purchase (surprise!) woolen goods. More interesting, there are several working looms and an excellent display of all stages of wool production from shearing the sheep to chemical treatment, spinning, dyeing, and weaving the final product; best of all there are samples of the material at each of about 12 stages, so one can finally understand just how different raw wool is from its increasingly modified descendants. The loom operator is willing to stop his weaving and answer all of our (well, my) stupid questions. I've often asked my knowledgeable spouse, "What is life to a ____?" whenever we are watching some mammal, bird, fish, or undergraduate football player. Here at the mill, I get a partial answer to "What is life to a sheep?" through a detailed set of pictures and descriptions on the wall. We learn about the rôle of the rams who, in the fall, are brought together with the ewes for the purpose of romance and marriage, although the verb that's used is *tup* (as in "He tupp'd her real good?") On leaving the parking lot, we can't resist taking a picture of a street-cleaning truck with these ominous words posted on the rear: CAUTION -

LEFT HAND DRIVE. Where can I get one?

PUN ALERT: I imagine that the fee for getting a ram to perform as stud is set at tuppence?

We stop for a coffee and Welsh cakes (love those things!) in the cafeteria at the mill before setting forth again. Much to our delight (and surprise) the sun comes out and the rain stops. We head south through Llanwrst (nope, not any prettier than before, but TWOU does score a hat-trick by hitting three curbs in less than two minutes) to Betws-y-Coed, a truly lovely town, where we park the car and walk about, admiring (but not pronouncing) the River Llugwy and the buildings and peering into restaurant windows in the hope of deciding where to eat this evening. A bridge over the river bears the words "This arch was constructed in the same year the Battle of Waterloo was fought" which is 1815 ± 50 . I'm not a devotee of lamb, but I believe that I should sample some of the little critter when in Wales, so we ask a woman at the tourist bureau to recommend restaurants that are known for their lamb. She's a farmer's wife and says that she never eats the stuff, but cites two that are within walking distance; we make a reservation at Ty Gwyn Hotel for tonight and will make one tomorrow for Craig-y-Dderwen The Riverside Hotel. During this stroll about town, the sun continues to shine. Amazing!

We return to Tan-y-Foel before setting out for dinner. On the way, we hear over the radio that Michael Martin was forced to step down as Speaker of Parliament, the first to do so since Sir John Trevor (who??) in 1695. Martin was not implicated in the mischief that we've been reading about, but it's considered that because this all took place under his watch he bears some of the responsibility. (In olden days, he might have been sent to The Tower and/or beheaded.) Two days ago, two Labour members of the House of Lords were suspended, the first such action since the days of Cromwell in the 1640s.

Driving to and from Tan-y-Foel on the narrow single track, sections of which come perilously close to a stone wall, I'm reminded of the poem "Stone walls do not a prison make but they sure can put scrape marks on a car" or something like that. Thus far, we've avoided such skirmishes, but there have been some close calls.

The dining room at the Ty Gwyn Hotel is lovely: exposed ceiling beams and wooden tables, the building itself dating from 1636. Although Charles I was king at that time, we get into a discussion about an earlier king, Henry VII, also called Henry Tudor, who was succeeded in 1509 by his son, Henry Sedan. No, it was really Henry VIII. TWOU orders chicken liver paté as an appetizer followed by trout with baby prawns and declares them delicious. TMOU, after a starter of scallops (with sex organs still attached), makes good on his promise to eat some lamb and orders one of the evening's specials: "Half Shoulder Welsh Lamb, Redcurrant & Rosemary Jus £14.95" (still on the menu, even today, at the hotel's web site). Oy! What arrives at my place is a platter with a huge hunk of meat (a HUGE hunk) that Lee describes as looking like a tank with a gun turret protruding. Because it is coated with a sticky sauce that was then baked, it is essentially impossible to grab hold of it with one hand while trying to cut with the other. It doesn't help that the knife is much too dull and flexible, but even so - with fork stuck into the beast in order to keep it from sliding off the platter and onto the floor, I try approaching from every possible direction to see if I can slice off even a small piece. Nada. Lee takes pity on me, comes over and sits in my chair but she, too, is unable to tame the critter. No wonder we were talking about Henry VIII - in my mind's eye, I see Charles Laughton grabbing the hunk of meat, holding it in two filthy paws, and devouring it while washing it down with pints of ale. I'm convinced that everyone else in the restaurant is enjoying this display of ineptitude immensely, but if they are they are at least polite and try not to stare and giggle. Finally, I manage to hack some chunks off meat off the bone but I find them tough and chewy - maybe it's supposed to taste like this? I finally admit defeat and fill my tummy with the vegetables and potatoes that are served as sides.

We head back to Tan-y-Foel, wiser and not as full as I might have been. After having spent the first few days of our trip catching up on magazines (*Time*, *The New Yorker*, *The Progressive*, *Fanfare*, *Gramophone*), I finish a novel, *Old Filth* by Jane Gardam, a moderately interesting tale of an

Englishman who had led a surprisingly interesting (and secretive) life. "Filth" is an acronym and refers to an expression that people muttered about the man's early career as a barrister: "Failed in London, Try Hong Kong." (My principal criterion for selecting the six books that I bring on the trip, only four of which I'll be able to finish, is that they be paperbacks and light in weight.)

Wednesday, May 20

We have breakfast at Tan-y-Foel (same as yesterday). A retired couple from Stafford in the English midlands are sitting adjacent to us. In the course of conversation about travel in Wales and England, the MP scandal, and their honeymoon many years ago in Ireland,* the woman asks what we think

*On their honeymoon night in Dublin, a maid walked into their hotel room at 3:00 a.m., not an auspicious beginning for their marriage. But even stranger was what occurred at another hotel near The Ring of Kerry where they had booked a room in advance. When they arrived, there was a "closed" sign on the hotel door but they were directed to a different hotel across the street - when they returned from sight-seeing the next day, not only had this second hotel been remodeled but all of the furniture in their room had been changed.

about "Ida." We have no idea what she's referring to, but she returns to her room and brings us a page from *The Guardian* that describes a beautifully preserved, 47-million-year-old, complete fossil of a lemur-like creature, nicknamed "Ida." She also lets us have the rest of the newspaper, where we read about the resignation of Speaker of the Commons, Michael Martin, along with the latest revelations of bad behavior in Parliament and what this is doing to Gordon Brown's cabinet and his grip on power. Upon returning to our room, I begin a second book: "Gentlemen of the Road" by Michael Chabon. (I may be the only person in the world who was not wowed by his "Yiddish Policeman's Union" but I decide that he deserves another chance to win me over.) The morning begins grey and misty (this is getting repetitious!) but there are occasional sun breaks.

We drive through Snowdonia National Park, over Nant Ffrancon Pass (which I just have to mention, in recognition of our chemistry colleague at Tennessee, Ffrancon Williams) to Caernarfon Castle (which we had been mispronouncing but which we learn is pronounced something like kair-NARV-on). This is another of the castles built (1273) by Edward I and is the traditional venue for the "creation" (that's the word that's used) of every new Prince of Wales. It gives the impression of being better preserved than was Conwy; and, as at Conwy, there are informative signs and excellent displays, both indoor and out. A continuous video shows the "creation" of the current Prince of Wales, Charles, in 1969. There is, not surprisingly, no mention of the protests that are described in *The Rough Guide*: "Charles' 25-year commemorative return visit in the summer of 1994 was less than triumphant, a low-key affair significantly characterized by the local constabulary ruling that the local joke shop risked committing a public-order offence by selling 'wingnut' ears and Prince Charles masks." And, according to *Wikipedia*, "The tradition of investing the heir of the monarch of Britain with the title of 'Prince of Wales' began in 1301, when King Edward I of England, having completed the conquest of Wales, gave the title to his heir, Prince Edward (later King Edward II of England). According to a famous legend, the king had promised the Welsh that he would name 'a prince born in Wales, who did not speak a word of English' and then produced his infant son to their surprise; but the story may well be apocryphal, as it can only be traced to the 16th century. However, Edward II certainly was born at Caernarfon while his father was campaigning in Wales, and, like all infants, could not at the time speak English. (Indeed, growing up in the royal court over the succeeding years his first language may well have been Anglo-Norman, not English.)" We spend a fairly long time exploring the castle, its rooms and towers, its stairways, etc. both inside and out, while trying to avoid the rain that has started up again.

We drive south in the direction of the town of Pwllheli (*The Rough Guide* suggests the pronunciation "Poothl-heli." Noted.) and stop about halfway down the A449 at Parc Glynllifon where there is a craft shop filled with overpriced and fairly ordinary works; the artists, all of whom have apartments or studios

directly outside, are not in residence. From there, we head north to Llandrillo yn Rhos on the northern shore, not far from Conwy. It is a charming seaside town with nice views and, even better, a very nice restaurant/coffee shop where we stop for refreshments. We're fairly close to Llandudno Junction, so we call Avis to see if they've acquired a car for us. Alas, no.

CULTURAL OBSERVATION: We note that very few people are walking with cell phones glued to their ears, nor do many cars sport either "imaginative" bumper stickers or personalized license plates. What sort of civilized people do the Welsh think they are, if they don't adopt these essential tribal rites so common in the U.S.?

Driving south toward Tan-y-Foel, we again pass through Llanwrst (just as ugly as yesterday, but this is also our final opportunity to enjoy its splendors). This time, Lee clobbers only two curbs. Good girl! We have dinner at the other hotel recommended to us in Betws-y-Coed: the dining room in the Craig y Dderwen Hotel. There are no adventures in eating to compare with last night's. Dinner is excellent ... if also considerably more expensive (£95.20 for two, including tip) than at Ty Gwyn (£57.20). We rate it the best meal we've had in Wales. We start with Lagavulins in the lounge where we also place our dinner orders. Then, according to TMOU's journal, she "has a Thai duck pancake with a chilli(sic) sauce and greens, followed by lamb chops with mustard/red currant glaze and creamed baby leeks - like the taste of spring! Ron has a smoked salmon/broccoli quiche to start, then sirloin steak with fresh peas and chips that are to die for!" Fortunately, I did not die. Wine, two desserts, and two coffees contribute to the (not unreasonable) price.

Thursday, May 21

We eat breakfast for the final time in the hotel's dining room and negotiate for the final(!!!) time the narrow single-tracks that lead from Tan-y-Foel to the highway. Upon check-out, we call Avis to find out if they've got good news for us - they don't, but they suggest that we try again in the early afternoon. The day begins cloudy, rainy, and cool. Boring.

Our first stop is in the town of Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwlllantysiliogogoch (try pronouncing *that* one!), purportedly the longest town name anywhere in this or any other universe, but most likely a press agent's invention. For those who have forgotten their highschool Welsh, it translates as "The church of St. Mary in the hollow of white hazel trees near the fierce whirlpool by the church of St. Tysilio's near the red cave." Got it! It is located on Anglesey, an island off the northwest coast, reached by a bridge from the mainland. At the far western tip of Anglesey is Holyhead, the port from which the ferry to Dublin leaves. Our initial destination is Bryn Celli Ddu, a neolithic burial chamber (about 2000 BCE) just outside of town. To get to it, we park the car on the side of the road and start a lengthy hike (700 yds each way, according to a guide book, but to me it felt more like 0.3977 mile each way), avoiding fox scat or whatever, and past pastures filled with curious cows and sheep. The burial chamber is built into a dirt mound and has two entrances. It must be a place of great religious significance because sheep amble into and out of it. As the Brits would say, "Mind the poop" which is underfoot everywhere. And, *mirabile dictu*, the sun has come out.

BREAK-THROUGHS IN ANIMAL HUSBANDRY: TWOU has been studying the nursing behavior of lambs ever since we began observing them in Scotland. At first, she was convinced that they twirled their tails when nursing, but she now believes that they do a serpentine motion from butt to the end of the tail. It's hard to describe ... and probably not worth the effort.

For the final time, we call Avis. They did locate a car, a Ford Focus, but it is standard shift; besides, they aren't sure that they can get it in time for us to make our afternoon sailing. An obvious question that you may be thinking: "Why don't you just exchange cars in Dublin? Surely there are many Avis dealers there." Well, yes, but there are issues concerning car rentals in Ireland vs. the U.K. For example, when we were planning the trip, we learned that we could not fly into Dublin, rent a car there, and then travel to Wales before returning the car to Dublin. Why not? Because Ireland has different

rules and laws concerning collision, liability, ferry travel, and who knows what else. In fact, having rented the car in the U.K., we were also required to shell out big bucks (I mean big British pounds) to purchase a Continental Coverage Package as if we are taking the car to "the continent" which, by the way, Ireland is *not*. Oh, well.

We return to "The church of St. Mary in the ..." and find a café for coffee and Welsh cakes. My goodness, those things are good! We then head west to Holyhead and drive about the town a bit. We also visit the ferry dock to get a sense of where we'll need to go later in the afternoon. At one point in the town center we decide to head in the opposite direction, so Lee drives up a street hoping to circle the block; this street, alas, turns out to be a dead-end. It is also a narrow street. A very narrow street. I don't recall if she succeeded in turning around or just backed out but we did get back to the main road. There's a bird sanctuary (Ellin's Tower) near here and we head toward it but decide, after inquiring at another attraction, not to try to find it because of concern about getting back in time for the 5:15 ferry.

OBSERVATION: In every Welsh town (Betws-y-Coed, Hay-on-Wye, Llanwrtyd Wells, Llandudno, and even the hideous Llandwrst), the main "thoroughfare" is a 30-mph, two-lane street in which not only are cars parked illegally on both curbs but, also, they are parked facing whichever direction they please. The result is that the road is now effectively a single-track but one with oncoming traffic. And to make matters even worse, when someone (i.e., MOI) is unsure about which is the right (meaning the left) side of the road, it is most disconcerting to see a parked car on the left that is facing toward us.

HELPFUL SUGGESTION: We see many cars, both in Wales and Ireland, that display a large L (but not a double L, heaven forbid) on the back, signifying "Learner." Why not issue a large A for American drivers, such as yours truly, who are confused about which side of the road is the correct one for driving? Hell, even Hester Prynne wore one on her gown, so I could just as easily put one on *Picasso*.

Irish Ferries requires that passengers arrive at the terminal 90 minutes before sailing. For us, that would be 3:45. We're a little early, arriving at 3:30, and we line up behind a few other cars; over the next 30 minutes, many cars line up behind us. While waiting for the ferry to board, we get a call from our Dublin friend, Rory*, who wants to be sure that we understand how to get from the Dublin ferry terminal to our hotel; he also phoned to tell us that he'll pick us up at our hotel at 2:00 tomorrow.

*Rory More O'Ferrall is a chemistry professor at University College Dublin. His "More O'Ferrall Diagrams" are well-known to practitioners of the arcane and vanishing art of physical organic chemistry. Rory was a visiting professor at Rice during the late 1960s, which is where I got to know him. Not having seen him in nearly 40 years, I was a bit apprehensive about contacting him to see if he would like to have us visit when we're in Dublin. In fact, he said that he'd be delighted to show us things that we'd not likely see if we just followed the typical guide books. He reminded me that he and his wife, Margaret, attended Lee's and my wedding in May, 1969. I don't recall his having been there, but, then again, I don't even remember being there myself.

After all of the terrible things that I've been saying about the weather, it's only fair that I report that the sun is shining brightly and that there are very few clouds ... for now.

Irish Ferries has an unusual way (at least it seems unusual to us) of loading the ferries. At precisely 4:00, 75 minutes before departure, all cars are directed to a nearby lot (where our "boot" is inspected for contraband and, probably, Welsh cakes) and from there to a quite distant lot called Terminal 3 where we are directed to one of five available lanes. We sit until 4:45 when we are directed to board the ferry. There are three narrow lanes on each side of the ferry; we are squeezed so far to the right and against the wall of the vessel that I can't open the driver's door - I'm forced to climb over the seat so that I can exit on the passenger side before the next line of cars fills that lane. This raises the question: How will either of us be able to get into the car when we arrive in Dublin? We have "dinner"

on board: a baguette sandwich and a sweet. During the crossing of the Irish Sea, the beautifully sunny day has turned cool and rainy. So much any hope of good weather. And, contrary to our concerns, above, when we return to the car there actually is room to open the passenger side door and for both of us to get into the front seat.

We arrive at the Dublin terminal right on time at 7:15 but it is 7:30 before our lane of cars gets to leave the ferry. Having printed a Google map ahead of time and having memorized it (both the words and diagrams), we drive flawlessly to the Shelbourne Hotel in about 20 minutes. This is considered a minor miracle because when I brag about it to the desk clerk, she rewards us with glasses of lemonade. The hotel dates from 1824 but has been recently restored and now boasts of air conditioning, good lighting, well-appointed furniture, and modern bathroom facilities. The bathroom, in fact, is *huge*, larger (it seems) than was our entire room at the Lady Hamilton Hotel in Stockholm. The toilet paper is scented, a familiar aroma that is either almonds or hydrogen cyanide. Because we'll not need the car until Sunday, we leave it in valet parking.

After seeing our room, we take a brief walk through St. Stephens Green (directly across the street). It is truly beautiful. I make a note to return tomorrow to take pictures of the grounds and its ducks and swans when there is more daylight. In a repetition of our ATM problem at Heathrow (p. 3), both my MasterCard and Visa fail to work in a machine that should have accepted them; we are fortunate that our KeyBank debit card does work. We walk along nearby Grafton Street (pedestrians only) which, even at 8:30 in the evening, is much more populated than was the nearly deserted Queens Arcade in Cardiff. We have coffee at a Starbucks located on the second* floor of a clothing store called BT2,

*Well, *they* would call it the first floor, whereas what we call the first floor they would call the ground floor. This is of very little consequence, most of the time, but it can lead to some unpleasant surprises. I recall having arrived at an inn outside of Munich on a very hot day and having to carry our heavy suitcases to our room on "the second floor" which was really the *third* floor.

which is described in a web site as "the most recent offshoot of Brown Thomas ... BT2's market is largely the younger, richer kids of the parents who shop at the Brown Thomas. It's the foremost shop in Dublin for all the latest expensively-priced labels." When we enter, we are warned that it is only 20 minutes before closing time, so we order only one coffee and share it. Many of the walkers on Grafton Street are dressed smartly, but others (mainly young women) look trashy (not that I object, not at all); there are (sigh) lots of cigarettes being smoked, and (double sigh) many cell phones in use. We return to the hotel at 9:15.

Friday, May 22

Breakfast, included in the price of the hotel room, is served in a huge restaurant, in keeping with the 265-room size of the hotel. We help ourselves to the hot buffet, consisting of eggs, bacon (as in Wales, more like thick slices of ham), sausages, mushrooms, potato cakes, white pudding and black pudding; and a selection of cold items (cheeses, cereals, meats); and rolls, bagels, bread, sweets, etc. Hey, just because I list all of the items doesn't mean that I ate all of them! The butter and cold cuts are extremely salty, the bagel a "fake" (i.e., more like bread dough than *echt* bagel consistency).

It is drizzling when we walk to the tourist information office to purchase Heritage Cards (good for free admission to many attractions around the country) and a Heritage Island Explorer 2-for-1 card that's good at many of the other attractions, such as The Book of Kells which we'll visit shortly. For information about Ireland, we rely heavily on the *DK Guide* and *Rick Steves' Ireland*, both excellent.

As we walk (in the rain) toward Trinity College, we pass the huge bronze statue of Molly Malone, she of the huge bronze boobs overflowing her bodice, pushing a cart undoubtedly filled with "cockles and mussels, alive, alive-oh." I would describe her (and the other notable Dublin statuary) further but Pete

Hamill has written a delightful essay on the attractions of Dublin in the April, 2007 issue of *Gourmet*, so I'll let him do the heavy lifting:

"In all weathers someone is posing before—or upon—the statue of fair Molly with her abundant bronze breasts and her ancient cart. On this wet day, her shoulders and bosom are glistening with rain and four wet young Irish people are taking turns with three wet Japanese students to photograph her indomitable amplitude. Dubliners call the statue “the tart with the cart.

"Poor Molly Malone, involuntary sex symbol, is part of a cheerful unplanned archipelago of public statuary that has been subjected to traditional Dublin irreverence. On the north side of the Liffey near the Ha'penny Bridge, two bronze women sitting on a bronze bench with bronze shopping bags at their feet are called “the hags with the bags.” A statue of Anna Livia, goddess of the Liffey, sat for a long time in a fountain on O'Connell Street, water bubbling and gushing over her body. Poor Anna Livia became “the floozie in the Jacuzzi.” She was removed in 2002 to make way for a 394-foot silvery needle officially called “The Spire of Dublin,” expressing the soaring ambitions and accomplishments of Ireland as it entered the Millennium (two years late) in the boom years of the Celtic Tiger. The monument was instantly renamed by Dubliners “the spike,” slang for an addict's hypodermic, in honor of O'Connell Street's junkie population."

It was raining too hard for us to pay a visit to "the hags with the bags" and, alas, "the floozie in the Jacuzzi" is no longer on display, although the More O'Ferralls tell us that there are plans to bring her back. There are numerous pictures of this sculpture available on the web - here's one that justifies its irreverent title: <http://www.norbiton.com/ukdave/dublin/10livia.htm> Rory and Margaret tell us about yet another piece of public art, a digital clock that was partly submerged in the mid-1990s in the Liffey and was supposed to count down the time to the Millennium; alas, it quickly clogged up and stopped working, leading local wags to dub it "The Chime in the Slime." According to Wikipedia, other names attached to the aforementioned works are: for "The Spire of Dublin" we have "The Binge Syringe," "The Stiletto in the Ghetto," "The Stiffy at the Liffey," and "The Rod to God"; alternatives for Molly Malone are "The Dolly with the Trolley," "The Trollop with the Scallop," "The Dish with the Fish," and "The Flirt in the Skirt." And, of course, Anna Livia has been described (using the Irish dialect for whore) as "The Hoor in the Sewer." (Wikipedia also lists many rude names for the statue of Oscar Wilde, but these are best left for the reader who is curious enough to search for them.)

We walk, in the persistent rain, to Trinity College and arrive, shortly after opening, at the Old Library, which houses The Book of Kells. (When we leave, an hour or so later, the line of people waiting to get in is extraordinarily long ... and wet.) No, baseball fans, The Book of Kells is not about George Kell, the great third-baseman for many American League teams (most notably the Detroit Tigers) in the 1940s-1950s. Before being ushered into the room where the main attraction is stored, we get to see many other beautifully illustrated and elegantly lettered ancient books, painstakingly created by monks early in the country's history. The Book of Kells dates from the 8th century and derives its name from the monastery at Kells, where it was taken to prevent its destruction in Viking raids. We then get to tour The Long Room of the Old Library (built in 1732) with its 200,000 old books, musical instruments, and displays of historic documents. There is also a special exhibit devoted to the murder mystery, featuring classics from Edgar Allen Poe, Arthur Conan Doyle, Dorothy Sayers, Agatha Christie, Nero Wolfe, and many others.

We walk (in the rain) to the nearby National Gallery, most of whose art is Irish or English. There are many paintings by the 20th century artist Jack Butler Yeats (brother of the poet) which did not impress this cultural boor very much. There is also a Vermeer (one), a Gris (one), a Monet (one), and a Picasso (one, but not the same as our car). We then walk (in the rain, of course) along Dawson Street, where there are a depressing number of American eateries: Starbucks, McDonald's, Burger King, etc. The Irish must be great fans of the murder novel because we pass a bookstore called Murder Ink. We choose an overheated local coffee shop, Costa, for some refreshments before returning to the hotel shortly before 2:00 for our meeting with Rory.

Pete Hamill, *op. cit.* has some choice words about the incessant rain:

"Begin with the rain. On my first day back, I leave the hotel, and the morning sky is bright. Eleven minutes later, a frail sunny rain is falling. Most Dubliners ignore it, as they have shrugged off rain since visiting Danes founded the city a thousand years ago. Dubliners now hug the walls, make quick calls on cellphones, light defiant cigarettes, and keep walking through the rain. A slight breeze rises, coming up the Liffey from Dublin Bay, and the rain falls harder. Umbrellas flop open. Ancient cobblestones glisten in Temple Bar. The bricks of the wonderful Georgian houses around Merrion Square are stained with rain. And then it abruptly ends. A few strangers look up, as if trying to decode the rushing clouds. Dubliners don't look up. 'There's not a damned thing you can do about it,' an old Dublin friend said to me one soggy morning. 'You don't come to Dublin for a tan.'"

We hadn't seen Rory in 40 years, but he was easily recognizable in the hotel lobby by his dapper, elegant look (a long-sleeved green sweater covering a long-sleeved shirt and a tie); also, I had seen a picture of him at his college's web site. He had told us that owing to a laryngectomy he might be difficult to understand, but this is not the case. If we had any trouble at all, it was because of his veddy British accent. He escorts us to a bus stop where we board one of the double-decker vehicles that are the norm in Dublin. By sitting on the upper level, we get a good view of the city as we head toward University College. Along the way, he and I catch up on gossip about the people whom we knew at Rice and about our individual career paths over the intervening 40 years. When we arrive at the college, quite a distance from city center, he takes us on a tour of the chemistry building, his research labs, the teaching labs, and so on. We then pick up his car in the faculty lot and he drives us to his home.

This drive, and all of the succeeding car trips, is an adventure in itself. Rory drives a small Fiat sedan with standard transmission (i.e., a gear shift on the floor). To drive and speak at the same time, he needs *three* hands (one for the gear shift, one for the steering wheel, and one to close the air hole in his throat to allow him to speak in moderately extended intervals). Alas, the surgeon did not give Rory a third hand, but somehow the good professor manages to carry on a lively conversation with his passengers in the front seat (TMOU) and the rear (TWOU). As he maneuvers through traffic, I try to be brave and keep my eyes open, but it's difficult. And to compound my fears, many times I'm convinced that he's turning directly into on-coming traffic until I remember that I'm in a country whose cars drive on the left.

At his home, we meet Margaret whom we also have not seen in 40 years. She was a teacher of Latin, until the schools stopped requiring it. Now she is a masters student in Italian and is writing her thesis on the role of avarice in Dante's *Inferno*. The four of us drive to the foothills of the Wicklow Mountains, 20 km* south of Dublin, for a visit to Powerscourt, an 18th century mansion (now a Ritz Carlton hotel)

*We are now in a country that has gone metric, so we have km instead of miles, kg instead of pounds, and euros instead of pounds (the currency £, that is, not the weight).

with grounds and statuary that, while they don't rival Versailles in Paris or Schönbrunn in Vienna, are so elaborate as to verge on the grotesque (in the 'umble opinion of yours truly). Beyond the estate is an Italian garden built on six levels, flowers galore, "enhanced" by fountains and statues based on mythological creatures. There is an elaborate cemetery for the estate owners' pets who had gone on to the great kennel in the sky. I can't resist taking pictures of several head stones: "Doodles Chow, died August 10th, 1938. Loved and faithful friend for yrs. You've gone old friend ..." and "Chou Sun Yat Sen, Died Feb. 1st, 1923. When the body that lived at your single will with its whimper of welcome is still how still when the spirit that answerd(sic) your every mood is gone where ever it goes for good." (This inscription has no punctuation, but even if I were to introduce commas and periods I doubt that I could make sense of it.) Because we've arrived at Powerscourt just 45 minutes before closing time, we are in a bit of a hurry to walk the grounds but we find ourselves impeded, on more than one occasion, by a

group of French visitors (one of whom is wheelchair-bound) who amble slowly (is that redundant?) and block the entire width of the path. I remark to Rory that this seems to be a characteristic of the French; to my surprise, he says that he's observed the same thing on his visits across the English Channel.

We return to the More O'Ferralls' home where we are invited to dinner (an excellent meal, somehow prepared by Margaret in her "copious" free time) and are joined by John Kelly (a physics professor at Trinity College) and his wife Iskra, who is from Croatia. The conversation is stimulating, the food excellent, the wine wonderful but eventually it's time to leave and Rory drives us to our hotel at about midnight. We are stunned by the number of inebriated young people (young meaning about 20 years old), often unattached females, staggering out of the pubs and taverns and onto the streets. We had expected to tour Dublin on our own, tomorrow, but Rory announces that he's going to pick us up at 11:00 a.m. OK.

Saturday, May 23

Breakfast is at the hotel again. Calories and cholesterol, yum! A curiosity: the hostess in the dining room yesterday and the new hostess today both bear unmistakable Eastern European accents. So did the food service employees on the Irish Ferries crossing. Later (May 31) we will get an explanation of why Ireland has so many young immigrants from places like Hungary, Russia, Poland, Rumania, etc. We try to access the internet from the hotel room but are unable to do so (even though we did have connectivity yesterday). The front desk is not very helpful - when they suggest that Lee call the ISP in Ireland, who then wants us to pay additional money for the service, we decide to try again tonight.

We walk the short distance to the National Museum of History and Archaeology. (Our hotel is really ideally situated, given the many attractions that are so close.) There are artifacts from prehistory (7000 BCE) through medieval times (carvings, jewelry, weapons, etc.) Among the treasures are the Ardagh Chalice (8th century), the 'Tara' Brooch (about 700 AD), and the Derrynaflan Hoard (from about the same time). We arrive at opening time (10:00) but leave at 10:45 in order to meet Rory at the hotel.

As yesterday, we drive south to the Wicklow Mountains and stop at a scenic place where a short hike (through grounds that are somewhat mushy and bog-like) takes us to a beautiful view of Lough Tay, below. From there, it's on to Glendalough (about 27 km south of Powerscourt), with its impressive grounds and lakes and, best of all, its marvelously preserved ruins: St. Kiernan's Church, St. Kevin's Church, the Round Tower, gravestones, etc., most of these dating to the 13th century or earlier. We go to the on-site hotel for lunch, but Rory decides that he doesn't like it and so we drive a short distance to another restaurant in Laragh. We return to Glendalough where we walk about 1.5 miles to see a waterfall, a lake, and other scenery. Of course it's another 1.5 miles back to the car. Fortunately the path is either a paved road or a boardwalk over various bogs. Nevertheless ... have I mentioned my injured foot? No I haven't - I'm a stoic and I try to keep my ailments to myself, but the damned thing is really acting up on this forced march. How did I injure it? My theory is that it happened on April 2, the day after son Steve, his friend Melynda, and I visited The Baseball Hall of Fame; the next day, I had some time before I needed to catch my plane from Albany so I walked around Cooperstown, wearing leather shoes that my feet aren't accustomed to. (As a retiree, I wear sneakers most of the time.) So I wore those unyielding shoes from 6:00 a.m. EDT to 11:00 p.m. PDT when I got back to Gig Harbor. Over the next few weeks, my foot (the ball, the top of the toes, the side of the big toe, all at the same time or separately) would ache terribly. It got so bad that I had my toe x-Rayed just three days before leaving for this trip, but there was no fracture. So I've been a good soldier for the first ten days of our journey, but not today. (The pain gradually lessened over the remainder of the trip. Upon returning to Washington State, I had my annual physical exam. My doctor, refusing to believe my self-diagnosis of metatarsalgia, is convinced that I have gout. He's wrong - but won't admit it.)

We're back in Rory's car. He is really very funny - while maneuvering through traffic using only two of his three hands (see earlier), he tells us how these country roads are now vastly improved. In what way? Well, they're no wider and no safer, but the government did paint yellow stripes on each side to

let you know when you're about to plunge off the edge. We return to his home for tea and coffee. Because she is busily packing for a trip to Italy tomorrow, Margaret spends only a little time with us. Rory then drives us back to our hotel, but before going to dinner we return to St. Stephen's Green where we get some excellent pictures of the grounds and of the water fowl who inhabit its various ponds.

Throughout the day, the weather has been variable. The rains, mercifully, stayed away when we were walking through Glendalough, but the clouds persisted much of the time. At Rory's suggestion, we eat at a casual Italian restaurant near the hotel, Milano's, which proves to be very good, modestly priced (€65 for two), and great for people-watching, both in the restaurant and on Dawson Street. As reported earlier, I am amazed at the large number of unattached women who arrive in groups of two or three, perhaps happy to be with friends, but more likely hoping to meet young men. After dinner, we again note the large number of inebriated people leaving the pubs and staggering down the streets. Pete Hamill, in the *Gourmet* article cited above, provides some appropriate commentary:

"The most common Dublin crimes are 'public order offences,' where, in the Irish phrase, 'drink was taken.' This is part of the great change in pub culture. The days and nights of the Irish pub, smoky and dark and intimate, are giving way to another phenomenon: the superpub. These are immense places, loud with music; part honkytonk, part dance hall, some servicing as many as a thousand drinkers on several floors. As the Yeats line goes, this is no country for old men.

"Many of the young men in the superpubs have the shaved skulls of British football fans or civilian contractors in Iraq. Some of them are down from Belfast for the weekend, or over from Liverpool, and, along with their Irish counterparts, are in pursuit of young Irish women or visiting Europeans and Asians. When the young men fail at romance, they often end up battering each other on the sidewalks. Watching them on a recent Saturday night in Temple Bar, I am happy to be old."

Back at the hotel, I finish Michael Chabon's "Gentlemen of the Road" which leaves me even colder than did "The Yiddish Policeman's Union." I enjoyed the opening chapter immensely, but it was all downhill after that. Oh, well, as the French say "chacun à son goût" (loose translation: Elio Chacon's son is covered with goo). As was true this morning, we're unable to access the internet from our room; now, the front desk confesses that there is a problem with the connection involving Marriott Hotels all over the world, or so we're told. This is a crisis, because before tomorrow I need to get to *The New Yorker* website to submit my entry for their Cartoon Caption Contest; to Yahoo for this weekend's NYSE closing prices; and to NPR to check our answer to last week's Will Shortz's puzzle and learn what the new puzzle is. Travel is supposed to be broadening, but without the internet

Sunday, May 24

"The sun is shining ... oh happy day!" - this is the opening line of a song written and sung by high school students in 1952 that surprised everyone (including the singers) by being recorded and reaching #1 on the hit parade. There! That's enough culture for now. We have breakfast in the hotel again and ask the concierge for driving instructions that will get us out of Dublin, with as little opportunity for wrong turns as possible, and to our next destination. His directions coincide with those offered by Rory, so we figure that we're on safe ground. We retrieve *Picasso* and we're on our way to New Grange, about 60 km north of Dublin. More properly written as one word, Newgrange is a neolithic burial site from about 3000-5000 BCE. We arrive at the Brú na Bóinne visitor center at 10:15 and buy a ticket to visit Knowth (a related burial site) at 11:45. (Visiting both Knowth and Newgrange would seem to be redundant.) The visitor center has many excellent exhibits and a short film to keep us occupied before the bus takes us to Knowth. There is a guide who escorts our busload to the various burial sites, built deep into impressive mounds that are now covered with grass (and sheep dung, but that's another matter). The stones surrounding the mounds have neolithic drawings and are (mercifully) completely free of modern graffiti. We descend into one of the chambers, but unlike those who were buried there we are allowed to emerge. Did I mention that the sun is shining? Well, it still is. We return

by the bus at 12:50 and have coffee and a scone (no more Welsh cakes!) at the visitor center. By 1:30, we and *Picasso* are on our way again.

TRAFFIC SIGNS IN IRELAND: We frequently encounter signs that say TRAFFIC CALMING which, apparently, means that the road is going to narrow and the speed limit is going to go down. (I like it better than SLOW DOWN or similar signs that we might see in the U.S.) Another sign NO PYLONS has us confused but Lee finally figures out that it means that candidates are *not* to post political signs on this tree/pole/whatever.

PUN ALERT: When TWOU asks me "What has 'pylon' got to do with political ads?" I reply "This forbids the major candidates from choosing to pile on those with less support."

We drive northwest, some 230 km, to Dunkineely where Castle Murray, our hotel for the next three days, is located. We pass through somewhat attractive countryside and some quite ugly towns, several of them with factories. TMOU wonders if the glorious photos that one sees of the green green green Irish countryside were actually taken in Wales.

The most direct route would proceed through Northern Ireland, but we were apprehensive about this until Rory and his friends* from Trinity College, along with the concierge at the Shelbourne, all

*John and Iskra Kelly told a story about a B-and-B in Northern Ireland where they had booked a room. They called ahead, because they knew that they'd be arriving late, and asked the proprietress how they could get in. She put a key under the doormat, saying "There's no crime in Northern Ireland!" Noted.

encouraged us to do it. In fact, crossing the border is not only seamless but we encounter no armed thugs along the way. Indeed, about the only way that we know that we have entered Northern Ireland is that the speed limits and distances are quoted in miles rather than km. We drive through the village of Derrylin and are surprised (but maybe we shouldn't be) to see that the betting parlors are open on Sundays. We escape into Ireland without harm to us or *Picasso*.

Castle Murray lists its address as in Dunkineely, a small town near the open sea. The driving instructions to find the hotel are: "Situated on the N56, 8 km from Killybegs, 20 km from Donegal Town on the coast road to St. John's Point; first left outside Dunkineely village" but we miss the "first left" the first time we drive through Dunkineely and we have to return. Castle Murray is perched on a hill between pastures that have cows or horses or sheep, and is very close to the water and to the ruins of McSwyne's Castle. It is a funky place. The entrance is through a small (unmanned) office and from there into the lounge/bar where we are greeted by a manager who, by his accent, is probably German. We proceed up a staircase alongside the bar, turn, up two more steps, turn, down one step and finally we're at our rustic room with its beveled walls, poor lighting, and small (but modern) bathroom; on the plus side, it has two excellent window views, one of the horse pasture and the other of the open water with distant hills. The sunny day ain't no more, but I take quite a few pictures of the misty, foggy vista from one of the windows. We knew that there would be no internet connection here which means that we've been cut off from the civilized world since last Friday and will not be able to re-connect until we get to Ennis next Friday. Oh, dear, this means no *New Yorker* cartoon contest, no stock prices, no Will Shortz puzzle, no emails, no *New York Times* headlines, and no news about the New York Mets (which actually might be a blessing).

Although I don't like "rustic," when in the U.S. or Europe, the three-course fixed price dinner menu looks very promising. (Which reminds me of the Knoxville *News Sentinel* restaurant review in which the writer complimented the establishment for its five-course "prefix" menu.) While we sit in the lounge and drink Lagavulins, we read the menu and place our dinner order; when the meal is ready, we are ushered into a lovely dining room with, of course, beautiful views ... of the damned rain, which has

started up again. The food is excellent, beautifully displayed and lovingly prepared, and not at all as fussy as was the meal at Tan-y-Foel. Our starters are a crab/spinach quiche and a warm chicken salad with quail's egg; our main courses are excellent local scallops and ratatouille ravioli. Also, the waitress is yet another Eastern European. The horse pasture is populated by three mares and their three foals; in the pasture above it are several cattle. After dinner, I begin reading "The God Delusion" by Richard Dawkins. We are so far north that there is still daylight at 10:30, but not enough for reading (obviously); fortunately the room light is not as poor as I had thought.

Monday, May 25

'Tis a gloomy, grey, rainy morning. Nothing new, in that. Breakfast in the hotel consists of a cold buffet (cereal, fruit, rolls, cheese) and warm items ordered from the menu (French toast for TWOU, an omelet for TMOU).

We drive some 65 km northwest to Letterkenny. According to its web site, "Letterkenny is the largest town in County Donegal. It is situated on a hillside overlooking the River Swilly. Letterkenny is an exciting town with some newly constructed shopping centres to complement the many traditional craft shops, restaurants and pubs." A roundabout in this town bears the name Knocknamona, which sounds more Native American than Irish, but in fact is a town on the eastern shore, far from here. Perhaps all roundabouts had names, but this is the first we've noticed. We encounter a fair amount of car traffic, but fortunately there are TRAFFIC CALMING signs to calm *Picasso* and us.

From there, it's 25 km to Glenveagh National Park, one of six national parks in Ireland. We spend some time in the visitor center, then go for a half-hour walk in the rain/mist/clouds at temperatures of 12-13°C. The park is quite beautiful, with lots of greenery, water, gardens, old homes, Lough Veagh, etc. The promised "herd of red deer" never materializes. Perhaps the highlight of the visit is discovering, in the bathroom at the visitor center, the highest-tech hand dryer we have ever seen. 'Tis a *Dyson Airblade* (guaranteed to be "tested, certified, hygienic") into which one inserts both hands, gingerly at first lest the machine chop them off at the wrists, and enjoys the hot wind that blows over them. The damned thing actually works. The visitor center also has a water fountain, the first that we've seen.

From there, it's about 20 km north to Dunfanaghy on the northern coast, passing fields with lots of sheep. I mean, lots of sheep. Did I mention that the weather is cloudy and misting? Well, it is. From there, it's a single track road to the nearby Horn Head Loop Drive that circles the peninsula and makes for spectacular views of old homes, ruins, cliffs, the open sea, etc. During the drive, the single track gets narrower and narrower such that it is barely a car-width wide. (TMOU is very happy that TWOU is driving at this point.)

Back in Dunfanaghy, we tour the old workhouse (built in 1842 at the start of the potato famine) that is now a museum - very interesting (and depressing). The presentation borders on the hokey (i.e., an animated character named Wee Hannah Herrity, who was born 1835 and lived her entire life at the workhouse, provides the recorded commentary as one passes from room to room). The blight that destroyed potato crops across the country led to the great emigration that populated the U.S. and other countries. The population of Dunfanaghy dropped from 18,000 to 16,000, a much smaller decrease than experienced in other parts of the country. As there was no wheat, no grain, no potatoes, nor any other food that could be grown, the workhouse became a place of last resort for the destitute. (It borders on the ironic and disrespectful that, having seen displays of such incredible poverty and hunger, we have coffee and sweets in the adjoining café.)

From there, it's southwest to the Bloody Foreland (or Bloody Headland) which derives its name from the color of the heather at sunset, according to one guide book; other books have alternative explanations. The road is narrow and the surface terrible, despite the posted speed limit of 80-100 km/h! We find that we are lucky if we can hit 30 km/h on the straightaways. The sun comes out, at

last! We also see the many "vacation cottages," large homes that are plopped down among more modest older homes, that are ruining the ambience of the place, according to the year-round residents.

We turn south to Bunbeg, still hugging the rugged coast. The road becomes less bumpy but, alas, more curvy. And, of course, the speed limit is posted as 100 km/h. In this region, all of the road signs are in Gaelic along with English; for example, our favorite sign Traffic Calming is translated as Ceansú Tráchtá. We see (and smell!) houses that are being heated by burning peat and we see the cuttings where the peat is "harvested" from the fields. We then head south 50 km to the town of Ardara, which is well known for its woolen shops; we arrive near closing time, but will return tomorrow.

We drive to the busy port city of Killybegs (near our hotel) where, after numerous wrong turns, dead-ends, and one-way streets we find The Clock Tower restaurant. We have an early-bird dinner (but no fowl): for TWOU steak and ale pie, for TMOU sausages and mashed potatoes. The menu has witty comments about food, such as "My favourite(sic) animal is steak": Fran Lebowitz; "I've been on a diet

OK, I'll make a deal with you. From here on, I'll resist inserting (sic) every time I see favourite, colour, humour, harbour, flavour, rumour, labour, rationalise, ritualise, specialise, maximise, defence, etc. if you'll promise to insert a virtual (sic) whenever you think it's needed.

now for two weeks and all that I've lost is two weeks": Totie Fields; "My grandmother is over eighty and still doesn't need glasses. Drinks right out of the bottle" and "When I read about the evils of drinking, I gave up reading": both Henny Youngman; and, my favorite, "Never eat more than you can lift": Miss Piggy. The food is good, the portions large, and the cost reasonable (€47 for the two of us). We return to our hotel and walk to the nearby McSwyne's Castle ruin along the shore. (On the radio, an announcer is reporting something about our president, but pronouncing his name with the flattest possible vowel sounds, something like BAA-rack o-BAMM-a.)

Back in our room, I come to the startling realization that having taken over 500 pictures, we're going to run out of room on the camera's flash drives unless drastic action is taken. So I delete all of the stored pictures on the smaller 32 Mb drive and I delete the pictures of Cooperstown and Billy Ruth Sudduth's studio from the 512 Mb drive; I also lower the resolution from 1 Mb to VGA which increases the available space from 251 pictures to over 1000. (That we will actually take nearly 600 more shots by the time we leave for home suggests that this was a wise move.) During the night there is a huge storm with pounding rain and strong winds. Because we've left a window open for air circulation, the door to the hallway is continually banged and slammed, jiggling the old-fashioned key that we left in the lock. TWOU was concerned that someone was trying to break in, until she realized what was making the sound. (The key to our room in Murray House is like the one that we had at Guidfa House: a large, ungainly, old-fashioned thing that is used to unlock the door from the hallway and to re-lock the door from the inside.)

Tuesday, May 26

Last night's storm is over and the sun is out in the morning, but it remains very windy. During breakfast at the hotel, there is a sudden heavy shower; when it ends, there is a spectacular rainbow on the opposite shore that persists for a good 20 minutes until the next heavy shower arrives. At times, the storm is so strong that the three mares and their foals actually take shelter under some trees. We drive west about 25 km to Glencolmcille, a coastal town in the Gaeltacht (Gaelic-speaking) region of Ireland. The route traverses many bumpy, narrow roads, up and down small mountain ridges. The rain comes and goes, but it remains very windy and the squalls are impressive. South of Carrick is the Slieve League, the highest cliff face in Europe (and higher, by far, than the famous Cliffs of Moher, which we'll visit in a few days). To reach the peak requires that we drive up the side of a mountain. We get about half-way up and stop in a parking lot for a look. Contemplating the steep climb that still remains, TMOU, who has been driving, decides against making the ascent. There are no dissenting votes. We

are content to look with admiration at the color picture in *The DK Guide*, whose text warns of "alarming switchbacks" for the second part of the ascent; that's all the more reason for turning back! But to our delight, we see lots of sheep, both on the side of the road and on the very road itself.

We retrace our steps and go to the Folk Village Museum in Glencolmcille, created in the 1960s by a local priest, Father James MacDyer, as a way of instilling pride in the locals and slowing the rate of emigration from the region. The museum has a wonderful depiction of rural lifestyles over the years. There are also six restored cottages that had been homes in various decades and one that was a schoolhouse. We have coffee and a sweet at the center. The area has been settled since neolithic times and was the residence for Saint Columba (6th century). According to Wikipedia, "Tradition asserts that, sometime around 560, he became involved in a quarrel with Saint Finnian of Moville over a psalter. Columba copied the manuscript at the scriptorium under Saint Finnian, intending to keep the copy. Saint Finnian disputed his right to keep the copy. The dispute eventually led to the pitched Battle of Cúl Dreimhne in 561, during which many men were killed. A synod of clerics and scholars threatened to excommunicate him for these deaths, but St. Brendan of Birr spoke on his behalf with the result that he was allowed to go into exile instead. Columba suggested that he would work as a missionary in Scotland to help convert as many people as had been killed in the battle. He exiled* himself from Ireland, to return only once again, several years later."

*His name and the account of his expulsion from Ireland reminded me that we encountered this gentleman during our Scotland travels. Quoting from my 2001 travelog about Iona, "Supposedly he chose this place because it was the first island from which he was *unable* to look back and see his homeland. He is a new-found hero of mine because he banned cows and women from the island: 'Where there is a cow, there is a woman, and where there is a woman, there is mischief.' How true, how true. No wonder he achieved cult status and eventually was made a saint ... Legend has it that the original chapel [on Iona] could only be completed through human sacrifice. Oran, one of the older monks in Columba's entourage, apparently volunteered to be buried alive, and was found to have survived the ordeal when the grave was opened a few days later. Declaring that he had seen hell and it wasn't all bad, he was promptly reinterred for blasphemy."

Outside the museum, I'm admiring a small lake when I notice that the man standing next to me is wearing a *hated* New York Yankees hat. I can't resist sneering, "Oh, another Yankee fan" to which he responds, in a German accent, "Is there something wrong with it? I bought the hat because it was inexpensive and I figured it wouldn't offend anyone in Ireland." Turns out he is a retired school teacher from Nürnberg who is sightseeing with some other Germans by tour bus. I try to explain to him that while the Yankees are by far the most successful baseball team in history, they are viewed by many of us as *The Evil Empire Incarnate*. Although his English is excellent (that's the subject that he taught in school), I'm not sure that I get the message across to him.

We drive back through Killybegs, stopping to take pictures of the trawlers at this busy commercial port. A directional sign at the water baffles us: DESIGNATED CASUAL TRADING AREA. We then head north 18 km to Ardara, whose woolen shops were closing when we arrived late yesterday. TWOU makes a purchase. What a surprise! It is still very windy (but mercifully no longer raining). We then drive to Donegal town, the main city of County Donegal and the site of the 15th century Donegal Castle, which we walk through and get to learn about the O'Donnell Clan, who provided much of the opposition against English rule in the 15th to 17th centuries. Because we'd like to have some Irish music that is characteristic of this region, we wander into a local CD shop and find not only an excellent CD but also the German tourist from the Folk Village Museum. "Most suspicious," think I to myself. "If he shows up at our next stop, I'm calling the police." But he doesn't.

We return to Castle Murray House, taking pictures of some of the ruins on the approach road, and have another excellent dinner (prawns and monkfish starter for TWOU, then turbot as a main course, and chocolate ginger mousse for dessert; TMOU starts with a crab/spinach tart, then chicken for the main

course, and amarena cheese cake to finish up). From the main window of our room, I take a series of pictures as the sun sets and thick clouds roll in - some of the shots are very impressive.

Wednesday, May 27

This is getting repetitious but ... the morning is very dark, the winds are fierce, the rain is strong, and the temps are low. After another excellent breakfast, we are ready to check-out of the hotel. The clerk is a delightful young woman with the most beautiful of all of the Irish accents we've heard. I wish that I could have bottled it and taken it with me. We ask the age of the three colts in the adjacent pasture. From her, we learn that colts are born with their legs at full length (only their upper bodies will grow as they mature) and she tells us about a difficult birth for a mare owned by a relative; the colt was so long in the womb that when he was born his legs were bent, which did not allow him to stand. But after a few days he got the knack and now he is *perrrrrfect*. (It really is a beautiful accent.)

Our next destination is directly south, but because there is water south of us we need to go east and then southwest. The roads are decent, by Irish country road standards, but we are in drizzle most of the way; and some of the towns (e.g., Sligo) are just plain ugly. But then just when one thinks that this is the Irish version of Appalachia, one sees some surprisingly large and new homes in unexpected places. Our destination is the Connemara National Park whose entrance is in the singularly unattractively named town of Letterfrack. (It looks better in its Gaelic spelling: Leitir Fraic.)

We begin by driving on "major" roads, the N56 and N15, but over the course of the trip, the other N roads that we take become narrow, bumpy, and slow. All of them carry an N-designation which means, officially, that the speed limit is 100 k/hr. Yeah, sure. In general, Irish drivers are better than in the U.S., with some notable exceptions when very slow-moving cars and farm vehicles refuse to pull to the left to facilitate passing. According to Lee's journal, "We see the best-ever squeeze play on a narrow road: a tour bus passing a Scania lorry. Super!" During the drive, we are following three major stories on the radio: (1) Elections for the European Parliament and for local and national offices are scheduled for next week. There are numerous campaign placards posted everywhere. (2) The Ryan Report, issued by the Irish National Government last week, details the abuse of school children many years ago by 18 religious orders; many of the children attended "industrial schools" which were essentially trade schools run by different Catholic orders; for a clearer explanation of this, see p. 37. (3) Sectarian violence is never quite eliminated from Northern Ireland. In the town of Coleraine, some 80 km from where we drove on our way north, a group of Protestant soccer toughs, ranging in age from 18 to 49, left a pub and walked noisily through the town. When a Catholic resident came out of his house to see what the commotion was, he was beaten to death; his wife, who is Protestant, was beaten but will survive her wounds; and there are now death threats to their son. In the parlance of the sectarian strife, the attackers are dubbed "Loyalists" (because they are loyal to the British crown?) or "Unionists" or "Ulstermen" to differentiate them from Catholic "Nationalists" who want to re-unite Northern Ireland with the rest of the island.* Wasn't "And the Beat(ing) Goes On" one of Sonny and Cher's hit songs?

*What's in a name? Were one to ask someone who was unfamiliar with "The Troubles" of Northern Ireland which person, a Nationalist or a Loyalist, was more likely to consider him/herself Irish or British, there would be no rational way to answer the question. Similarly in the politics of the U.S., how many people know that in the election of 1796, the Federalist John Adams was elected president and the Republican Thomas Jefferson was elected vice-president. "Republican?" you ask. "Jefferson? I thought that the Republican Party didn't begin until Lincoln." Well, yes, but that was the new Republican Party. The old Republican Party, officially called The Democratic-Republican Party, was founded (had it been "lost"?) in 1792 by Virginians Jefferson and James Madison and was successful in electing those two and James Monroe to the presidency, each of them for two four-year terms. Federalist John Quincy Adams broke the string of Republican victories in 1824, defeating Republican William H. Crawford. After that, the Democratic-Republican Party broke into two groups: the Democrats, under the leadership of Andrew Jackson, and the National Republicans, which evolved into the Whigs. After Jackson's two terms, the parties

alternated in producing one-term presidents: Martin van Buren (D) (1836); William H. Harrison (W, died in office) and John Tyler (W) (1840); James Polk (D) (1844); Zachary Taylor (W, died in office) and Millard Fillmore (W) (1848); Franklin Pierce (D) (1852). The "modern" Republican Party ran its first candidate in 1856, but John C. Fremont lost to James Buchanan. In 1860, however, Abraham Lincoln ran as a Republican and won. So it's interesting that the modern Democratic Party calls itself "The Party of Jefferson" and the modern Republican Party labels itself "The Party of Lincoln." So, I ask again - what's in a name?

As we enter Connemara National Park, it's raining and windy with low-lying clouds, and we are greeted by a sign announcing IT'S BOG WEEK. Whoopee! We drive to the visitor center where we learn lots (and I do mean LOTS) about bogs and why they are important. Yeah, sure. It's too wet to walk or hike or slog through the bogs (for which at least one of us is very grateful) but the photos in the visitor center tell us just how much fun we're missing. We see a display of the Meenybraddan Woman who was buried some 400 years ago and whose body is remarkably preserved by the bog. Do tell! (According to the posted information, the peat in the bog slows down the process of decay.) This gloomy display notwithstanding, we have coffee and a snack at the cafeteria.

We now drive some 250 km southwest to Galway which we hit at rush hour. We crawl through the city (traffic made worse than usual because of the Volvo Ocean Races, a yachting event) and negotiate nine, count 'em - NINE, roundabouts. From there it's another 65 km to Ennis,* where we finally

*Ennis is the county seat of County Clare, the sister city of Phoenix, AZ (because of their similar climates?), and the 2005 winner of the "Ireland Tidy Towns" competition. It is not to be confused with Del Ennis, a power-hitting outfielder for the 1940s-50s Philadelphia Phillies.

locate our hotel (Old Ground) through the use of a crude, notional map in the Rick Steves guide. It is a very old hotel, but we're in the newly refurbished wing: our room is large, air-conditioned, and equipped with wi-fi. This is our first opportunity to use the internet since last Friday. Walking to and from the hotel entrance to the staircase that leads to our floor, we pass through a stuffy, old-fashioned sitting room whose furniture looks as if it had been bought in the 19th century and not cleaned since then. But that's just my imagination. We decide to eat dinner in the hotel dining room where we both enjoy lamb cutlets. Maybe I shouldn't say "enjoy" because Lee's description is "We have a tasteless seafood chowder and lamb cutlets in a 'currant reduction' that had seen nary a berry."

By the way, has anybody noticed that *Picasso* has not caused any problems since May 19? Could it be that the big beast behaves badly only in Wales?

OBSERVATIONS ABOUT ROUNDABOUTS: Roundabouts are a feature of every city and town of any size at all throughout Wales and Ireland. Usually they are very well marked and the rules for entering and exiting them are quite clear. The least complicated roundabouts are those that replace a traffic light or four-way stop sign when two roads cross: i.e., the four spokes coming off the circle are exactly 90° from one another. Most roundabouts, however, are not so simple - and this American driver sometimes gets confused when circling in a counter-intuitive counter-clockwise direction, especially when there are "exits" at seemingly random points to five or more roads going in various directions. Some of the roundabouts are just one lane wide, but those in the larger cities and on major roads can have three lanes - it's important to choose the correct one before entering, lest one be forced to keep circling the damned thing *ad infinitum*. In a few cases, we even encounter a remarkable invention in which the exit from one roundabout is actually the entrance to another, sort of a huge figure eight. The good news is that the local drivers are excellent about not entering the roundabout until there is room - either that or they're frightened to death by the sight of a panicked American at the steering wheel of *Picasso*, screaming at his navigator "Which damned exit is mine?" One final thought: some of these take up a huge amount of expensive real estate. Clearly they are less expensive to install and maintain than

traffic signals but still ... Of course we have roundabouts in the U.S., but they're usually called traffic circles. Not always, however - here in Gig Harbor there is a warning sign that reads ROUND ABOUT AHEAD. Noted.

OBSERVATIONS ABOUT CURRENCY FLUCTUATIONS: At the start of our trip, the currency conversions were $1\text{£} = \$1.51$ and $1\text{€} = \$1.35$; as of May 27, the numbers are $\$1.60$ and $\$1.39$. I mean, just because the U.S. economy is in a shambles and we can't pay our debts, that's no reason for the rest of the world to take it out on us ... is it? And after converting £ or € into dollars and converting litres into gallons, we estimate that we've been paying about $\$6$ per gallon for diesel fuel.

Thursday, May 28

The morning begins promisingly: a grey sky, some wind, a little sun, and no rain ... yet. Breakfast is served in the same hotel dining room where we had dinner. We pass up the continental breakfast and opt for the hot food: a "full Irish breakfast" of eggs, sausage, bacon (see earlier comments about how this differs from the bacon in the U.S.), tomatoes, mushrooms, black pudding and white pudding: one can choose among these or, if a glutton, order all of them. On reflection, by far the best breakfasts, so far, were at Castle Murray. One day there I had a mushroom and cheese omelet, another the smoked salmon and scrambled eggs - they were very well-prepared and beautifully presented. The two dinners there were also excellent: chicken one night, scallops another, each accompanied by a lovely dish of potatoes and vegetables. That hotel reminded me of Inver Lodge (see pp 26-27 of our 2001 Scotland travelog, if interested) in the sense that we sat comfortably in the lounge, sipped our whiskies, read the menu, and ordered our meal; we were then ushered in only when our food was ready. One significant difference between the hotels is that Inver Lodge was quite elegant in all respects whereas Murray House tended to be rustic (except in its preparation and presentation of cuisine). Lee thinks that the best dinner of our current trip was at Craig-y-Dderwen in Betws-y-Coed: bistro-style, but delicious. The manager at Castle Murray told us that they had had the same chef since 1998 - hard to believe, but it would explain the high quality of the food.

The sun is shining as we drive 40 km west to the Cliffs of Moher. On the way, we pass through the town of Lahinch, which would be of no interest at all except that it was mentioned in a play that we saw last season. Conor McPherson is an Irish playwright whose "The Seafarer" was presented at Seattle Rep. The drama is set in Howth, a low-class northern suburb of Dublin, and features five hard-drinking (very hard-drinking), unemployed or underemployed men. One of them makes the claim that Lahinch is the gay pickup capital of Ireland but this is disputed by one of the others who claims that Lahinch is too small for this distinction, that in fact the gay pickup capital of Ireland is Cork. Lee and I have no opinion, one way or the other, on this vital issue. But it is a wonderful play, highly recommended if it appears on a stage near you; and also excellent reading if you can find it in a bookstore or library.

Do you, dear reader, recall the question that I posed on May 27: "Has anybody noticed that *Picasso* has not caused any problems since May 19?" Well! On the way to Moher, the car feels like it's racing. When we get to the parking lot for the attraction, the engine is racing very badly when I stop for a ticket at the main gate. So it's not just a phenomenon that occurs in Wales. Damn!

According to the official web site, "The Cliffs of Moher stretch for 8 km and rise up to 214 m above the Atlantic Ocean." The interpretive center (indoors) is superb, filled with well thought-out and very imaginative displays relating to geology, astronomy, the oceans, and the interaction of humans with this part of the world. When it comes time to leave the center and get a closer look of the cliffs, the fog and mist have begun to move in; the longer we stay outside, the thicker become the clouds such that after a while the cliffs have disappeared entirely from view. And for this we paid good money? While climbing steps for a better look, the winds and rain pick up. One amusing thing involves a park ranger who has a raven that seems to be under his control most of the time but that can scare a visitor or a small dog when it decides to take flight. There are numerous tour buses in the parking lot and a great many languages being spoken.

We drive about 20 km inland to the Burren Visitor Centre in Kilfenora; the roads are fair, narrow but with pretty good surfaces. The region is called The Burren, which comes from the Gaelic Boireann which means Great Rock; and indeed the rock surface extends in all directions. The visitor center (oops, I meant centre) features information about the unique geology and history of the region. We spend a lot of time inside looking at the exhibits. Of particular interest are the models of the 15th century tower houses, one that featured a garderobe (i.e., a privy) for "pooping" out the window and onto ... whatever or whomever. We drive a short distance north to the Poul nabrone Portal Tomb, dating from about 3800 BCE. (We seem to be visiting lots of neolithic burial tombs, but such are the interests of my intrepid tour guide.) We walk around and close to the stones that make up the tomb. Making our way (mercifully, it is not raining) across the large rocks makes one understand how unusual this region's geology is. We turn back toward Burren and visit the ruins of Curran Church (with grass growing on what remains of its roof) and Leamaneh Castle, the latter from the 16th century. The exterior of the building is largely intact.

Rory had recommended radio station RTE Lyric for its classical music and news, but we find that it plays only single movements of classical works, along with lots of jazz and (ugh) easy listening. RTE1 is much preferred for its news and talk-shows, although it has no music. Later we will find a station that does play lots of classical music, but RTE1 is very useful for trying to figure out just exactly who is running for office, what the issues are, what the Ryan Report is revealing, and so on. We also hear a review of two strangely-named beers: Waggle Dance (from England, but made in Belgium) and Icky (from Japan). Not believing these names, I looked them up when we returned to the US. As for Waggle Dance, its web site proclaims "Unusual name, unusual beer! The 'Waggle Dance' is the movement a bee performs to alert the hive to a source of nectar. The Waggle Dance beer is a beautifully balanced, sneakily seductive, golden coloured beer." Icky Beer, we cannot find, but perhaps it is a shortened version of Kirin Ichiban?

We drive south to Quin, a town just to the east of Ennis, to visit Craggaunowen, an open-air museum of Bronze Age and Celtic culture. Adjacent to the parking lot is a small pasture with farm animals, the details of which I'll reveal shortly. The museum grounds has replicas of ancient forts, stone huts with thatched roofs, an Iron Age timber road (that permitted travel across bogs), stone burial chambers, etc. There is even a reconstruction of the leather-hulled boat that St. Brendan the Navigator (6th century) is alleged to have sailed on voyages to France, Wales, and Scotland ... and in some tales to America! Here's how his most famous (and fictitious?) journey is described in *The DK Guide*: "This story tells of a shipload [Ed: that's shipload with a P!] of monks who, after seven years of all kinds of strange encounters designed to test their faith, found The Land of Promise." Wikipedia tells it this way: "Many versions exist that tell of how he set out onto the Atlantic Ocean with sixty pilgrims (other versions have fourteen, plus three unbelievers who join at the last minute) searching for the Garden of Eden." Whatever the details, Brendan is one of the most revered of Irish saints and is a charter member of the Saints Hall of Fame. (I made that up.) Not only is the museum enjoyable and informative but (*mirabile dictu*) the sun has come out and the air is warm. We enjoy the beautiful grounds, the paths, and the flora, but undoubtedly the highlight is that small pasture that has goats, sheep, and a male donkey who is (blush!) in a condition of impressive tumescence. Of course I snap several pictures.

WHEN IS A ROUNDABOUT NOT A ROUNDABOUT? Answer: when the approach signs identify it as a roundabout but it consists of just a small painted circle (maybe five feet in diameter) in the middle of an intersection of two roads, for which the rule (as with all roundabouts) is that one must yield to traffic already there (i.e., a "four-way yield" if one can imagine such a thing). There is one of these near our hotel in Ennis and we see a few others as we drive around the country. One feels slightly strange driving "around" this small circle rather than just going straight through the intersection, but the law is the law. As Mr. Bumble (in *Oliver Twist*) would have expounded, "The law is an ass." (I wonder if he, too, had seen the donkey mentioned above.)

We walk a few blocks from the hotel to an Italian restaurant called The Sicilian which we rate as "pretty good" (€56 for the two of us). We also take the opportunity to walk the very narrow and busy streets of one of the oldest parts of Ennis. In fact it was the crowded, one-way, narrow O'Connell Street that we

tried to negotiate in *Picasso* when we were first seeking our hotel. Now that we "know" the city better, we're smart enough to walk, but not drive, on such "thoroughfares."

Friday, May 29

As we did yesterday, we have the "full Irish breakfast" but choose specific items instead of "one of everything." Aside from the eggs and coffee, everything is highly salted: the bacon, the white and black puddings, the sausage, etc. This has also been true in many other restaurants. One wonders if the Irish have a high incidence of coronary disease based on this extraordinary consumption of sodium ions. I am convinced that in this one meal I have reached my RDA (recommended daily allowance) of NaCl.

OBSERVATIONS ON IRISH-SPEAK AND WELSH-SPEAK:

- When a waiter/waitress takes a food order or a ticket agent sells an admission ticket or after any similar transaction, the answer in response to my "thank you" is often "no problem!" (as is now true in the U.S.) or "perfect!" or "brilliant!" (both of which make me feel important). I felt especially important the time when I produced the exact change for admission to a castle and I was rewarded with a rousing "Brilliant!" But fear not, "you're welcome" has not disappeared entirely from the language. For example, on TV news broadcasts after an advertising break, the announcer will often say "You're welcome back" or "You're welcome to listen."
- Another unusual bit of phraseology, at least to an American's ears, came in the TV news announcement that "Irish President Mary McAleese has just returned from a state visit to Massachusetts." Massachusetts is now a country?
- A very common language trope, used throughout the British Isles, is the insertion of an apparent question into (or at the end of) a sentence, when in fact this insertion is not a question at all, but a statement that your partner in the conversation is an idiot if he/she doesn't agree with you. Examples: Baseball, except when played by the New York Mets, is the most sublime of games, *isn't it?* Observers agree, *isn't it so*, that rugby is a more violent sport than American football. It's a fact, *isn't it*, that Queen Elizabeth is shorter than Prince Philip. Everyone agrees, *don't they*, that a wee dram of single malt Scotch whisky is a wonderful way to begin the day.

OBSERVATIONS ON IRISH POLITICS: The president is not to be confused with the prime minister who is called the Taoiseach, pronounced more or less like tee-shook. The former is Mary McAleese, the latter Brian Cowen of the Fianna Fáil Party (pronounced more or less like feena foil). He is the head of government and is appointed by the president upon recommendation of the ruling party in the Dáil Éireann, the lower house of the Irish Parliament. Cowen's standing in recent polls is astonishingly low, leading to speculation that his party will be soundly defeated in those few races that are being contested in next week's elections: three of the 12 Irish MEP out of 736 total seats (if you guessed Members of the European Parliament, you'd be right); two seats in Dublin by-elections; and some local council seats. What I find surprising is that the rumped, overweight, and rather homely Mr. Cowen looks nothing like the handsome, slender, well-coiffed, expensively dressed politicians that American political parties seem to turn out, there having been notable exceptions such as our own rumped, overweight, homely people like Dan Rostenkowski, Barney Frank, Fiorello LaGuardia, and (if author David McCullough is to be believed), John Adams, 2nd president of the country and referred to in the opposition press as "His Rotundity."

Back to tourism. We begin with a grey, cloudy morning, cool (15°) and windy, exactly as it has been except that there is no rain ... right now. We are heading 100 km southeast to Cashel. The most notable cities and towns through which we pass are Limerick and Tipperary. As the song says, "It's a long way to Tipperary" but that's because the traffic pile-up in Limerick* is awful. Most of the problem is

*Many sources contend that there is no connection between the city of Limerick (the 4th largest in

Ireland) and the familiar five-line poems, although some web sites do refer to a pub song "Will you come up to Limerick?" where bawdy songs of all sorts were sung. *Macht nichts*. The "poet" who popularized these ditties was Edward Lear who published over a hundred of them in the mid 19th century. Most of his, alas, are not bawdy. For example: "There was a Young Lady whose chin/Resembled the point of a pin./So she had it made sharp,/And purchased a harp,/And played several tunes with her chin." (Like most of his limericks, the rhyming word in the first and fifth lines is the same - shows a definite lack of imagination, I think.) I much prefer the bawdy type, but most of these are just too *outré* for this "family journal" that I'm writing. Nevertheless, here's a relatively mild one that I found while surfing the web: "A young undergrad at St.John's/Was caught trying to bugger the swans./Said the loyal head porter/Here, please, take my daughter./The swans are reserved for the dons."

that there is a detour over one of the bridges that crosses River Shannon, but we have no choice other than to crawl along behind the other cars. One small bonus is that we get to view the many storefronts, one of which is the unexpected "Slovak & Czech Delicatessen." There is also a slow-down when we drive right through the center of Tipperary, where we encounter (for the first time in Ireland) rude and dangerous driving behavior along with some very brave pedestrians. The highways outside of town are basically good and we make decent time, encouraged even more by the balmy 18° temperature and the occasional periods of sun. Of course when we get to The Rock of Cashel, the temperature has dropped and the wind and rain have picked up, but we're seasoned veterans of the climate wars and do our best to ignore the elements.

The "rock" overlooks the town of Cashel from an impressive height (which we, of course, have to ascend). Early kings (3rd century or so) ruled from here, but none of their dwellings remain. For a modest admission fee, we acquire an entertaining and well-informed guide who escorts a small group of us from building to building. We start at the castle ruins, dating from the 1400s, alongside which is a very impressive round tower that looks out over an ancient graveyard (with some not-so-ancient recent headstones for VIPs of the region). There is an impressive Celtic cross that is taller than the others in the graveyard but not as tall as it once was, the casualty of a lightning strike in 1976. On the ground is a massive chunk of castle wall, although it's unclear from where it broke off and when. The Cormac Chapel (12th century) is a treasure; some of the original frescoes are in good enough condition to be made out. The cathedral is massive (13th century) and quite beautiful. An amusing story is told by Rick Steves: "The grand wall tomb contains the remains of Archbishop Miler Magrath, the 'scoundrel of cashel,' who lived to be 100. From 1570 to 1622, Magrath was the protestant archbishop of Cashel ... He married twice, had lots of kids, confiscated the ornate tomb lid from another bishop's grave, and converted back to Catholicism on his death bed." The Hall of the Vicars Choral is relatively new and contains original furniture, tapestries, and stained glass windows. After we have seen most of the structures on the rock, our guide takes us back for a better and closer look at the interior of the chapel and for the opportunity to enter and exit through its two doors. Above one door is a beautifully carved animal: I'm thinking rabbit, but the tour guide imagines it is a hippo. Not bloody likely, I think. At the door we are stopped by a stern bus tour guide who assumes that she has priority because she is awaiting not one but two groups who are just now arriving. Our guide ignores her and points out that as he is an official guide, employed by the Rock of Cashel, he and his group have priority over her. This time, while inside and not pestered by the throng who have been held at the gate, I manage to capture some excellent pictures of the friezes, wall paintings, sculptures, and tombs within. Before leaving the grounds, we visit a small museum below the Vicars Choral to see a display of headstones, stone crests, and crosses, brought there from ... wherever.

Descending from the rock and crossing the parking lot, we visit the Brú Ború Cultural Centre, another wonderful treat. In the parking lot is a sculpture of "three blissed-out dancers" (Rick Steves's description). TMOU snaps a picture of TWOU as she attempts to channel the attitude and altitude of one of the dancers. The museum has excellent displays that highlight the history, poetry, music, and literature of the region. Our favorite is of a "crothall," a bronze bell used in early Irish music, but to us it

looks like Monty Python's "Holy Hand Grenade of Antioch" - we take a picture, of course. After having coffee and a sweet in town, we head back to Ennis. Among the more amusing town names on the way are Sixmile Bridge, Oola, Hore, Brackyle, Hurlers Cross, and Newmarket on Fergus. On RTE1 we hear a surprisingly erudite discussion and scholarly analysis of "Jonas Brothers: The 3-D Concert Experience." Among other salient facts about these young men, we learn that they are followers of Christ, that they abstain from drugs, and that they wear chastity rings. (One wonders where the rings are placed.) The cynic in me is convinced that it will be not more than nine months before we read about their drunken escapades in pursuit of young women, but I could be wrong.

When we get back to Ennis, we walk to a restaurant called Coco, whose cuisine is described as a fusion of Chinese and Irish. Hmm. Watching the TV news in our room, we hear mention of "an accused murderer of no abode." Say, what? Is "homeless" too pejorative a word for them to use? The dollar continues to slide: now 1£ = \$1.61 and 1€ = \$1.41.

Saturday, May 30

We check out of The Old Ground Hotel, but not before having the "full Irish breakfast" again with its RYA (recommended yearly allowance) of salt. There are some clouds, no rain, and a bit of bright sun as we set out and drive to Tralee (real name Trá Lí or Tráigh Lí, depending on one's source, mercifully one of the few Gaelic place names that we can read on road signs), the largest town in Ireland. Ya see, towns are different from cities, so it's not even close to being the largest city, but with a population of about 25,000, it can rate as the largest town. OK? It is the county town of County Kerry, whose best known product, to American visitors, is U.S. Senator and failed presidential candidate John Kerry.

Tralee is directly southwest of Ennis and there is a direct route, 95 km, that passes through towns with picturesque names such as Lissycasey, Lismulbreeda, Garraunnatooha (which sounds like a disease), Knockanira, Knockalough, Knockaderreen, Knockakaska and Knockacasca (these two should prove confusing for the postal service), Knockbrack West, Knock (where's the ending of its name?), Lack East, Lack West, Tullycreen and Tullycrine (another pair that is designed for confusion). Alas, we do not choose this direct route because it requires crossing a wide section of the River Shannon by ferry. (Neither the intrepid tour guide nor the hapless tour guidee can remember why we avoided the ferry, but we did.) So ... instead we drive to the southeast through the highly congested Limerick again (which also requires crossing the Shannon but by a bridge), then southwest to Tralee, a total distance 140 km. Hmm, 140 km vs. 95 km, there must have been a good reason for choosing the longer route and missing all those great town names. We do go through our own assortment of towns, each undoubtedly with a roundabout or a Traffic Calming sign, but I don't bother writing these down as they are, by now, commonplace to these seasoned travelers. The roads are surprisingly good most of the way, and we arrive without our bones jangled and our nerves shattered. Driving into Tralee, we note again how many of the cars parked at the curb (kerb in Britspeak) are facing no matter which way, which remains disconcerting (even so many days into our trip) to one who still is not comfortable with which is the proper side of the street to drive on.

On the drive to Tralee, Lee makes two astounding discoveries about *Picasso*: (1) There is a button on the dashboard that we learn is an air freshener. Scents of various sorts are available, but the car's instruction manual warns us "Never recharge the cartridges with fragrances not supplied by Citroën ... Keep out of the reach of children and animals" (the latter sounding like good advice for all situations). We are too cowardly to give the car a squirt of Citroën-esque Aroma to learn what Avis might have installed for us. (2) Because there is no gear shift on the floor, the space below the dashboard is given over to a large bin that is, *Gott sei dank*, refrigerated. Thus, drinks can be kept cold as long as the car's air conditioner is running.

PUN ALERT: A car is following very closely behind *Picasso*, which is making TMOU angry. Growls he, "OK, Bud, you can finally pass us now" to which TWOU says, "The driver's a budette, not a bud" which elicits this response: "Au contraire, *ma jolie amie*, a budette is a fountain for washing one's nether

regions."

SECOND PUN ALERT: There is a bevy of crows on the street who don't scatter until I drive quite close to them. I figure, if I run them over we can dine on that well-known delicacy, "crow con carnage."

OBSERVATIONS ON ACCENTS AND WORD CHOICES: As I mentioned earlier, I love the Irish accent. The vowel sounds, the up-and-down lilt, and the song-like character are utterly charming, even when serious issues are being discussed (as on radio talk shows). And to emphasize the beautiful sounds, many Irish have open faces and a twinkle in the eye. (Americans who watched Hollywood films of the 1940s-60s might be convinced that all the Irish will look like Barry Fitzgerald or Maureen O'Hara - and they wouldn't be far from the truth.) The guide at Rock of Cashel, for example, gave the impression that we was about to break into a joke or to burst out laughing after every sentence. So why is it that the English and Welsh look so miserable and pale and dour? And, for that matter, why is it that all denizens of the British Isles accent syllables differently from the way we do? After all, English *is* the language of the U. S. of A., *n'est-ce pas*? Examples: weekEND, SingaPORE, teleVISION, telePHONE, laBORatry, noTATed, conTROVersy, orienTATed, etc. And far be it for me to say that "orientate" isn't even a word - at least, I don't believe it is.

And now for an automobile adventure that is not *Picasso's* fault. In Tralee city center, we park in an indoor garage. Level 1 has no available spaces, so we descend to Level 2 ... and discover that it is in pitch darkness. Further, because we haven't driven the car at night, we have no idea where the headlight switch is. The only illumination we have is from the dashboard screen. I finally locate the switch for the headlights, but even so it is difficult to drive without careening off columns. We also wonder, once we do pull into a space, how in the hell we're going to find our way out of the garage when the headlights are turned off. So we circle, looking to park near the exit ramp when, *voilà*, the garage's lights come on, by what mystical means we know not. Whew!

Our principal destination in Tralee is the Kerry County Museum. Upstairs is a special exhibit devoted to one of Tralee's native sons, William Melville (1850-1915), who became the original MI5 of British Secret Service. He had an amazing career in law enforcement, first for Scotland Yard when he was assigned to track down anarchists in Ireland; then as personal guard for visiting royalty (e.g., the Shah of Persia) and the British Royal Family (in which rôle he foiled an assassination plot against Queen Victoria); then Superintendent of Special Forces for Scotland yard where he broke up an anarchist plot; then (1893), according to Wikipedia, "He went to Victoria Station to personally arrest bomber Théodule Meunier. In 1896 Melville recruited Shlomo Rosenblum (later known as Sidney Reilly) as an informer in an organization he suspected to be involved with Russian anarchists. In 1901 he worked with Gustav Steinhauer of the German Secret Service to thwart a plot against the Kaiser during the state funeral of Queen Victoria. In June 1900 Melville met future stage magician Harry Houdini when he came to Scotland Yard to showcase his abilities as an escapologist. When Houdini released himself easily from the police handcuffs, Melville befriended him and reputedly learned lock picking." Whew! And if this was not enough, he created and headed the British government's Secret Service Bureau where he sought out German spies during Word War I.

At this regional museum, we never expected to find such an interesting, amusing, and well-presented exhibit, but we are even more impressed by what's on the lower level. This is a beautifully created replica of Tralee as it must have been in the Middle Ages. Through full-scale dioramas and reproductions, we walk the streets, visit the shops, see the church, hear the sounds (but fortunately do not smell the smells) of city life. Clearly these animal and human figures are *papier-mâché* but it is still amusing to walk among them as if they are alive. Returning to the 20th century, we have coffee and scones in the museum's coffee shop. Following this, we stroll through a lovely flower-rich park adjacent to the museum.

We drive some 35 km to Killarney (population about 20,000 and winner of the "Best Kept Town" award for 2007) where we check into our hotel, The Brehon. This is a very different city from those we've been

in. It seems largely geared to the tourist trade, especially those tourists who are also interested in hotels that have spas. There are many such places on the highway leading from city center to The Brehon and many others in town. Our hotel lobby is spacious and our room is large, bright, and modern. The bathroom is also very large but not as capacious as the one at the Shelbourne. (Well, what could be?) On the downside, there is only one washcloth and (shocking!) no coffee in the room. By the way, the sun is out during our drive here and the temperature soars to a near-tropical 20°! (Bad news: in the large city lot next to the tourist information office, *Picasso's* engine races wildly, two times. When I start it a third time, it behaves. We have now established that its problem is not confined to Wales, but I come to another startling - and depressing - realization that it has acted up only when I'm driving. Maybe it hates men, in general, or me, in particular? Uh-oh.)

We drive into the city and have dinner at Danny Mann's Restaurant and Pub - perrrfect! We stroll about this part of town, taking pictures of the street scene and shops when, "top 'o the mornin' t' ya" and "faith an' begorrah," do me old eyes deceive me or ... yes, there are collections of young (or not so young) women, gathered hither and thither, wearing the most outlandish pastel-colored dresses, their faces heavily rouged, teetering in the highest of highly colored high heel shoes, and, in many cases, sporting bunny ears upon their coifs. As me purrr Sainted Irish mither might hae said, "Oy gevalt!!! Was ist's?" (Of course I snap numerous pictures - just for the sake of posterior - I mean posterity, of course.) One gaggle of gals is entering a pub and I note that the chubbiest of the chubs not only is wearing a bridal veil but is carrying a life-sized manikin of a nude man. "Faith an' begorrah," indeed!! I ask an amused employee at Danny Mann's, who is standing at the door and gawking (as any normal male would), what is going on. I learn that this is a "hen party" in which friends of a bride-to-be treat her to an evening of food, drink, and "useful" information about what marriage is like. Most of this, of course, has to do with sex - hence the manikin and hence the Learner's Permit that was fixed around the groin area of yet another nascent bride in yet another group at yet another pub. The city center is teeming with these parties, which makes one wonder: What in the hell sort of mischief might all of the absent males be up to right now? In another group, the (apparent) bride is a woman of a certain age and though she wears an L on her bosom, she looks like she might not really be a learner. Her frock (sounds dirty, doesn't it?) is purple and is accented by a pink boa about the waist. Her ladies-in-waiting, who follow her, are dressed either in purple or pink, their gowns low-cut and their hair bouffant, with earrings and jewelry in the color (I mean colour) of the gown. We pass some other women who are dressed like hippies from the 1970s, but they (I think) might not be amateurs at all but true professionals for whom love is not a game but a business. We encounter two more of these hen parties (I wonder - who is making a fortune by selling so many bunny ears?). The good people of Killarney must be accustomed to this scene because they ignore it completely - only TWOU and TMOU are astounded and amused.

Sunday, May 31

Our breakfast is in the hotel's dining room. There are cold offerings buffet-style (cereal, yogurt, fruit, juice, rolls) along with hot food from the menu (Eggs Benedict for Lee, an omelet for me). The hostess, by her accent, is clearly Eastern European and the clerk at the front desk last night was Polish. (I know because I had asked him, "That's not an Irish accent, is it?") This is reminiscent of the two hostesses at the Shelbourne in Dublin, the food service people on the ferry, the waitress at Castle Murray, and the hostess at Craig-y-Dderwen Riverside Hotel restaurant in Betws-y-Coed. And of course there was the manager at Castle Murray Hotel whose accent was clearly German. Upon leaving the dining room, we stop at the front desk and chat with one of the managers, Akos Csontos, who is from Hungary but who, like the others we've encountered, speaks fluent English. When I ask why there seem to be so many Eastern Europeans in Ireland, he explains that of all of the countries in the EU, this is the only one that does not require a work permit. (In contrast, he had previously worked in Germany but was permitted so stay for only one year.) I compliment him on his English and his use of idiom. He says that he studied four languages in school and is fluent in all of them. Now I hate him!

We pick up an *Irish Times*, the first newspaper we've seen in a while. (Tucked inside the newspaper is a DVD of a 1977 movie version of James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. When was

the last time that a U.S. newspaper made such an effort to raise the literary IQ of its readership?) The newspaper has further details on the Ryan Report. Various Catholic congregations, denying that they ever ever ever harmed the children in their care, are still paying sums of money to the state and to some of the now middle-aged men and women who are suing them. One reason for this renewed effort, years after it had apparently been settled, is that in the original agreement the church had said that it would make its payments with property that it owned; however, during the heady years of the Celtic Tiger, when all of Ireland prospered, they reneged on their promises because the property had become just too valuable.

It's only after returning to the U.S. that we are able to learn the full details on the history of abuse. According to the online May 20 edition of *The Guardian*, "Rape and sexual molestation were 'endemic' in Irish Catholic church-run industrial schools and orphanages, a report revealed today. The nine-year investigation found that Catholic priests and nuns for decades terrorised thousands of boys and girls in the Irish Republic, while government inspectors failed to stop the chronic beatings, rape and humiliation. The high court judge Sean Ryan today unveiled the 2,600-page final report of Ireland's commission into child abuse, which drew on testimony from thousands of former inmates and officials from more than 250 church-run institutions. Police were called to the news conference amid angry scenes as victims were prevented from attending. More than 30,000 children deemed to be petty thieves, truants or from dysfunctional families – a category that often included unmarried mothers – were sent to Ireland's austere network of industrial schools, reformatories, orphanages and hostels from the 1930s until the last facilities shut in the 1990s ... The report found that molestation and rape were 'endemic' in boys' facilities, chiefly run by the Christian Brothers order, and supervisors pursued policies that increased the danger. Girls supervised by orders of nuns, chiefly the Sisters of Mercy, suffered much less sexual abuse but instead endured frequent assaults and humiliation designed to make them feel worthless. 'In some schools a high level of ritualised beating was routine ... Girls were struck with implements designed to maximise pain and were struck on all parts of the body,' the report said. 'Personal and family denigration was widespread.' The report concluded that when confronted with evidence of sex abuse, religious authorities responded by transferring offenders to another location, where, in many instances they were free to abuse again. 'There was evidence that such men took up teaching positions sometimes within days of receiving dispensations because of serious allegations or admissions of sexual abuse,' the report said. 'The safety of children in general was not a consideration.'" This sounds very much like, but on a vastly larger and more brutal scale, the scandals in the Catholic schools in the U.S.

For a town of only 20,000, Killarney has a vast number of resort/spa hotels, both within the center city and the outskirts. Among these are some American chains (e.g., Holiday Inn) but most are local. There are many large and attractive parks, including the Killarney National Park that is huge. We are not here long enough to visit them but it would be enjoyable to return some day to explore the grounds. The city's own attractions and the proximity of Killarney to the Dingle Peninsula may explain why this is such a tourist mecca.

Question: why do I giggle when I say "Dingle"? After all, it's a name I've heard for the 54 years that John Dingell (different spelling but the same pronunciation) has been a congressman from Michigan. Wikipedia reminded me that "At the beginning of every Congress, Dingell introduces a bill providing for a national health insurance system, the same bill that his father proposed while he was in Congress." (His father had represented this same district from 1933 to 1955 at which time the younger Dingell took over.) And here we are, in the summer of 2009, and President Obama's efforts to get Congress to enact healthcare reform are being battered by absurd claims such as Sarah Palin's assertion that the plan has a Death Panel that will decide who is worthy of living for another five years.

We drive about 65 km due west to the town of Dingle, hugging the shore of Dingle Bay for much of the way. The tip of the Dingle Peninsula is the westernmost point in Ireland and, in fact, in Europe. The town of Dingle marks the beginning of a loop road called The Slea Head Drive (Slí Cheann Sléibhe in Gaelic) that one can traverse in either a clockwise or (as they say here) anticlockwise direction. Along

the way we see numerous political signs (how appropriate when one thinks of the long-serving Dingells in the U.S.) These signs are huge (maybe 2 ft by 4 ft) and are mounted on nearly every post and many trees. As we get nearer to Dingle, the language on the signs gradually changes from English to Gaelic, but the signs still feature the requisite color photo of the smiling politician. On radio and TV, it's clear that the Irish are fascinated by polls (as well as pols). Every day, the TV news reports the percentage of support for each candidate (of which there are often a great many for a given seat) as if they were actual votes. Example, "... is at 27.6%, up 0.8% from yesterday." The announcer will give the percentages for the five or six major candidates and will then list, without numbers, the names of the five or six minor contestants. And this will be done for the first local council seat, and then for the next, and so on. And it will be repeated the following day. And the following ...

The roads between Killarney and Dingle are reasonably good: decent surfaces and reasonable widths; but the loop road away from Dingle is an adventure: a very poor surface and absurdly narrow lanes; the road is allegedly a two-track but it doesn't seem so when there is a large tour bus (of which there are many) coming rapidly in the opposite direction. As we are traveling clockwise, the open sea (and often the high cliffs with steep drop-offs) are just to our left, but we do not plummet to our deaths ... as you might have surmised. It is fortunate that most of the tour buses are traveling clockwise with us and that there are enough sightseeing turnoffs for us or them to get out of the way of one another. There are also many bicyclists, some quite professional-looking and some who seem as if they've not been on a bike since childhood, sharing the road with us.

Our first stop on the peninsula is at Dunbeg Fort, an Iron Age ruin. I quote from the official web site because I don't understand the words well enough to cast them in non-military English: "This small but impressive fort is located on a sheer cliff promontory which projects south into Dingle Bay at the base of Mount Eagle. The defences consist of four lines of banks, five fosses, and an inner drystore rampart with a complex entrance flanked by two guardchambers. A souterrain extends under the causeway from this entrance and in the interior is a single beehive. The fort dates back to 500 BCE." Whatever, it is quite beautiful and impressive. (A donkey in the adjacent pasture seems not as "excited" to see us as was the one at Craggaunowen.)

PUN ALERT: Our intrepid tour guide informs me that the rocks along here have no moss, only some sort of lichen, to which I reply that "I'd liken it to something else." Weak, I know, but it's early in the day ... and late in the trip.

I take numerous pictures of the fort, the surrounding sea, and the "mountain" (more of a hill). The best shot shows TWOU raising up like an adorable prairie dog, claws and teeth bared, from within a rock formation. It is not one of her better moments, but the picture may come in handy later on when I need ammunition to win an argument. Based on our clothing in these pictures, it's clear that the day is pleasantly warm with a delightful sea breeze; in fact, the thermometer in the car registers a balmy 24°. Perhaps the most interesting picture that I take is of contrails in the very blue sky that form a double helix. Hooray for Watson-Crick! Alongside a pasture of the ever-present sheep is an inverted boat that Lee insists I stand next to for her to take my picture. (The boat looks better than I do.) It is a traditional boat that is used in these waters, if one is brave. It is called a curragh (which sounds like someone gargling, but so be it) and it is modeled after the boat allegedly sailed by St. Brendan (see May 28). On one very narrow stretch of road, I generously pull off to the left and signal, with my headlights, that oncoming traffic may proceed safely past me. Suddenly, a moron who is directly behind me decides to gun his engine and pass me, right into the teeth of the oncoming traffic. He is forced to screech to a halt and then drive ever so slowly and ever so carefully, lest he plunge off the side of the cliff, as he nudges past the line of traffic.

Driving to the west, at the end of the loop road before it turns north (still skirting the coastline) one can see the Blasket Islands; and a little bit further north is the Great Blasket Visitor Centre, a treat for us where we learn about an intrepid group of people (no more than 100 at any time) who inhabited those islands. In the early 20th century, famous (well, not to us but to the Irish) writers and poets lived and

worked there. They were joined by scholars from England who learned Gaelic in order to study the local poetry and to write down the oral tales of the old-timers. *The Playboy of the Western World*, a play by John Millington Synge, is based upon some of these folk tales, even though not appreciated by the locals for its stark realism and dark plot. The visitor center is devoted to these people, their works, the history and culture of the islands, and the decision of the government to force everyone to vacate the islands in 1953; only 21 were living there at the time because most had left to find work or get married. Many islanders who had left during the potato famine of the 1840s emigrated to Springfield, MA, to work on the railways. Holyoke, MA and Butte, MN were also popular destinations. A good portion of the displays are devoted to the Gaeltacht, the regions where Gaelic is principally or even exclusively spoken: Cork, Kerry, Donegal, and Galway, all of them along the western coast. There are displays, written and spoken, to compare the four branches of Celtic languages (Welsh, Irish, Scottish Gaelic, and Breton). *Fun Fact*. In Irish Gaelic, the word for seal is *Rón*.

From there, it's a 9 km north and then turn east to the town of Ballyferriter (Baile an Fheirtéaraigh) for the Louis Mulcahey Pottery where we browse but purchase nothing. The countryside is beautiful, with stone walls separating one pasture from another, stretching from the roadside far into the foothills. Then (5 km further on) is a real treat: the Gallarus Oratory Visitor Centre. After watching a brief video, we walk to this ancient church, dating from before the 9th century, that looks like an inverted boat. It is an example of dry-stone corbelling, a technique from neolithic times in which stones are placed on top of other stones, each new one somewhat closer to the center of the structure. The result in the Gallarus Oratory are two outer walls that lean in toward one another and meet at a cusp. There is no roof, as such, just the curved meeting of the walls. Amazingly, the structure is water-tight. (It is from the center's video - and confirmed by the young man at the ticket desk - that we learnt that Ogham, the ancient written alphabet of the early Celts, is pronounced Ome. Who knew?)

The weather is holding up nicely, and the temperature is 24° as we return to the town of Dingle, where Lee does some looking in shops but purchases nothing. I walk about the city and take pictures of the buildings, store names in Gaelic, churches, etc. At one point, a young man asks if I need directions. I reply that I'm just taking pictures while my wife shops. He says "You're not from around here, are you?" Bright man! Among the images that I capture are: *Paudie's Bar and Hotel*; a storefront or residence, it's hard to tell, with three-dimensional models of dolphins protruding all over it; *Hannie Agnes's* (no, I don't know what they sell); *An Capall Dubh* (apartments, apparently); *Percussion Workshop*; a Hall of Fame street with large stars, one of which is for Dolly Parton; *It Must Be Dingle!* (no, I don't know what they sell, either); *Foxy John's Bar/Hardware/Bicycles* (I do know what they sell); *As You Like It Dick Mack's* (haven't a clue, but opposite it is a garage door with these words painted on it: "Where is Dick Macks? Opposite the Church. Where is the Church? Opposite Dick Macks"); and a store front with nothing but Chinese characters on it (maybe they were Gaelic Chinese characters?).

From there, it's back to Killarney. We encounter two huge traffic jams: one in Milltown, about 3/4 of the way to Killarney, where an outdoor fair attended by every resident within 100 km is going on; and the other in Killarney where we are following a parade of Honda motorbikes as they slowly wind their way into town. We have dinner at the hotel: gourmet quality and large portions, a great success. One of the hostesses from this morning is working the dining room this evening along with a male host - both of them have Eastern European accents. Are there no Irish employed in the restaurant and food trades?

On a few occasions, we've been able to watch TV coverage of two sports (at least they seem to be treated as sports): *Gaelic Football* (a brutal game with all of the worst features of rugby, American football, and hand-to-hand military combat) and *hurling* in which a lethal weapon is swung with great ferocity at a ball and, occasionally, at an opponent. To the untrained eye (mine), Gaelic football looks a lot like Australian Rules football, even to the point of having officials in white dusters standing alongside the goal nets. In hurling, the sticks are called hurleys (sounds reasonable enough) and the ball is called a sliotar. According to Wikipedia, "No protective padding is worn by players, and although a plastic protective helmet with face guard is recommended, this is not mandatory for players over 21."

Another curiosity of TV coverage: When in Wales, weather reports for the British Isles would give the expected highs/lows and chances of rain for England, Scotland, and Northern Ireland. The announcer was notably silent about that huge hunk of real estate that is attached to Northern Ireland. In contrast, weather reports on Irish TV stations give the forecast for all of the Emerald Isle (i.e., Ireland plus Northern Ireland) as if it were a single country. This is in keeping with our observation that there was nothing to indicate when we were driving into and out of Northern Ireland on May 24. Now whether the good Protestants of the north are as sanguine about imagining the island as a single entity ...

Monday, June 1

At breakfast, I again have the "full Irish breakfast" (black pudding, white pudding, eggs, mushrooms, bacon, sausage) with its RLA (recommended lifetime allowance) of salt. The temperature is a pleasant 21°, although the sun is quite intense. We check out of the hotel and head east in the direction of Cork, but in Crookstown (great name!) we veer south to a seaside town called Kinsale (total distance 90 km), highly recommended by both of our tour books and described in *The DK Guide* this way: "For many visitors to Ireland, Kinsale heads the list of places to see. One of the prettiest small towns in Ireland, it has a long and chequered history."

We arrive at about 11:00 and our collective comment is "Big Whoop!" The tour books lie! It is not quaint, not attractive, and not interesting, at least in our collective opinion. Nevertheless, we are here and we need to make the best of it, so we walk along the waterfront where we take pictures of the scenery and of the very noisy jackdaws. A fascinating shot, taken from the waterfront and looking up toward a residential area, is of a series of attached buildings, each roof of which is higher than the one closer to the water. Along the waterfront is a van advertising "The Original Madame Rose, The Last of the Fortune Tellers, Specialising in Crystal Ball, Tarot Cards, Palm Reading. This gift is handed down from generation to generation." Noted. The best of the store names are *Angel's Secrets* (no idea what they sell) and *fat face* (all lower case, apparently a clothing store for women). But the tour books are correct in mentioning the bloody history of this port town. In particular, Irish chieftains (not to be confused with the modern singing group) Hugh O'Neill and Red Hugh O'Donnell, who had successfully fought the English in the late 16th century, allied themselves with Spain for the ultimate battle against the limeys. As Rick Steves puts it, Spain's motive was "to rescue the dear Catholics of Ireland from the treachery of Protestant England (as if democracy and not oil were the rationale for the modern conflict in the Middle East)." So in 1601, the Spanish Armada landed 5,000 troops in Kinsale. "After the ships left, the Spaniards were pinned down by the English commander (who, breaking with martial etiquette, actually fought in the winter)." The Spaniards were joined by some 5,000 Irish clansmen who attacked the English on Christmas eve of 2001. Somehow, the outnumbered English forces routed the attacking Irish. Wikipedia then says "Following this battle, *the Flight of the Earls* occurred in which a number of the native Irish aristocrats, including the Earls of Tyrone and Tir Conaill abandoned their lands and fled to mainland Europe." England then made peace with Spain and began the "plantation" of Scottish Protestants into Ireland, thus sowing the seeds for today's "Troubles" in Northern Ireland. Two other claims to fame for Kinsale: in 1915, the passenger ship *Lusitania* was torpedoed and sunk just 10 miles offshore; and in 1703 a Scot, Alexander Selkirk, sailed from Kinsale and was later marooned on a desert island. Selkirk was the model for Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* who, according to a recent *New York Times* crossword puzzle, was the first person to utter T.G.I.F.

We drive north from Kinsale, about 20 km, to the outskirts of Cork where we pick up the N25 for the long drive (about 200 km) to Rosslare, the ferry town where we'll spend our final night in Ireland. The drive is quite beautiful through a verdant countryside and on an excellent highway, even when it narrows to only two lanes. OK, the truth is that the speedway is not always speedy. There is significant traffic in the outskirts of Cork and there are no fewer than eight roundabouts as we make our way toward the N25. In Castlemartyr (about 30 km from Cork) we encounter a huge traffic jam, with cars able to proceed only very slowly. The cause is not evident nor is it clear why we run into another traffic jam, about 6 km further on in Killeagh.

While we are driving to Rosslare, RTE1 is broadcasting an interview with the Rev. Ian Paisley. Now in his 80s, he rose to fame in the 1960s when he founded the Ulster Constitution Defence Committee which spun off the para-military group, the Ulster Resistance. Their goals were to maintain Northern Ireland's connection to Protestant England and to oppose the Irish Republican Army whose goal was to reunite Northern Ireland with Catholic Ireland. The radio host is amazed at Paisley's demeanor: "I thought that I was going to interview a tiger but in fact you've turned into a pussycat." This is in front of an audience who get quite a chuckle out of it. Paisley maintains that he is still a devout Ulsterman and that he holds Gerry Adams of Sinn Féin at fault for the difficulties of the previous 40 years. My favorite segment was when Paisley described the teachings of the Catholic Church and the belief that the Pope is infallible as "absurd" without recognizing just how equally absurd some of us consider the teachings of his Presbyterian Church. In *The God Delusion*, which I had begun reading on May 24, Richard Dawkins has some choice commentary about "The Troubles": "It is frequently and rightly said that wars and feuds between religious groups or sects are seldom about actual theological disagreements. When an Ulster Protestant paramilitary murders a Catholic, he is not muttering to himself, 'Take that, transubstantiationist, mariolatrous, incense-reeking bastard!' He is much more likely to be avenging the death of another Protestant killed by another Catholic, perhaps in the course of a sustained transgenerational vendetta ... The real problem in Northern Ireland is that the labels are handed down many generations. Catholics, whose parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents went to Catholic schools, send their children to Catholic schools. Protestants, whose parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents went to Protestant schools, send their children to Protestant schools. The two sets of people have the same skin colour, they speak the same language, they enjoy the same things, but they might as well belong to different species, so deep is the historic divide. And without religion and religiously segregated education, the divide simply would not be there."

PUN ALERT: Also on the radio, we hear a discussion of the story mentioned earlier (May 13) concerning the decision of Marks & Spencer to charge a higher price for larger sized bras. The moderator interviews many women with "expansive bosoms" (my attempt to be delicate) and wonders if it all wasn't "a tempest in a D cup." (Dammit, why didn't I think of that?)

During this morning's drive time, RTE1 featured an on-going satire in which, at random times, a quavering voice would break in and say things like "Because of the emergency, this program is reduced from 30 minutes to 27" and "If you had a real government, it would have been taken out and shot a long time ago" and other equally strange and provocative things.

As we continue driving east, we pass through such amusing towns as Cock-and-the-Bull, Knockagranagh Cuschcam, and Lower Southknock. The largest town/city that we drive through is Waterford (population about 50,000) where we stop for a coffee at, of all places, McDonald's. At the conclusion of the long drive, we arrive at Churchtown House, where we'll spend the evening. This building's history dates from the 1650s; it has been in the hands of numerous families over the years. The current owners purchased it in 1988 and ripped out everything (plumbing, electrical connections, inner walls, etc.) and restored it to its present condition. There are 12 guest rooms, but we and one other couple are the only ones staying there today. Our room is a nice size with a modern bathroom but, of course no A/C or internet connection. The bathrooms here and at The Brehon are the only ones on the entire trip to use U.S.-style handles for flushing the toilets. The significance of this, if any, or why I even mention it escapes me. But since I've begun ... the most commonly found flushing device on our trip is a large button that is split down its diameter: one half is for a small flush, the other for a huge flush. 'Nuff said.

At the suggestion of the hotel owner, we drive a few km to The Lobster Pot restaurant. We deemed the food excellent although a bit pricier than we had expected. In the parking lot is a sign: NO CHILDREN ON THESE PREMISES AFTER 5 PM. ADULT SPACE. SORRY FOR ANY INCONVENIENCE.

I'm sorry that I now have to report several instances of misbehavior by *Picasso*. On the drive to the restaurant, we take a short detour to check out the ferry site where we'll have to line up tomorrow

morning; as I slow down for a U-turn in the ferry parking lot, the engine begins to race. Then upon entering the parking lot for The Lobster Pot, it races again, badly. Lee is gradually coming to the belief that *Picasso* is not only alive, but that he/she/it has evil intent. My professional diagnosis of this irrational idea is that she is suffering from *HADD* which I had just encountered in the Richard Dawkins book. On p. 214 of *The God Delusion*, Dawkins tells us "Many will remember with affection the day Basil Fawly's car broke down during his vital mission to save Gourmet Night from disaster. He gave it fair warning, counted to three, then got out of the car, seized a tree branch, and thrashed it within an inch of its life. Most of us have been there, at least momentarily, with a computer if not with a car. Justin Barrett coined the acronym *HADD*, for *hyperactive agent detection device*. We hyperactively detect agents where there are none, and this makes us suspect malice or benignity where, in fact, nature is only indifferent. I catch myself momentarily harbouring savage resentment against some blameless inanimate object such as my bicycle chain." So, clearly Lee's assigning "human" qualities to *Picasso* demonstrates her dementia, but I remain convinced that the underlying problem is that *Picasso* hates male drivers, in general, and me, in particular (see p. 36 for the inception of this thought).

Our room is uncomfortably warm overnight, but we do manage to sleep. The following morning, as we had been warned, it takes "forever" for us to get any hot water, but eventually the hot-water-gods hear our plea and deliver said material for our shower and bath.

Tuesday, June 2

The morning is bright and sunny. At breakfast (in a lovely room overlooking the grounds), we have a lively conversation with the owner who tells us the history of the building and of its relatively short life as a hotel. TWOU is eager to leave (our ferry departs at 9:00) and so I don't get to hear the full story. But I am reminded of a curious difference between BritSpeak and USSpeak. In the American version (which is, of course, the preferred version) of English, we have the concept of the collective singular noun, whereas people in the British Isles say things like "the orchestra *are* tuning" or "RCA *are* putting out new CDs" or "The government *are* making new laws" and so on. But why, then, do we Americans say "The people *are*" when we are perfectly comfortable with "The public *is*" or "The citizenry *is*" and so on. Was it George Bernard Shaw who said "England and America are two countries separated by a common language"? Quite so. Another expression that catches us by surprise each time is a warning to "Mind the step" or "Mind the bump" or "Mind your head"; to an American, an imperative like "mind" ought to be followed by "the children" or "your manners."

After checking out and putting our suitcases in the car, the Old Dear (I'm tawkin' to you, *Picasso*) races wildly when I start the engine and again when I start it a second time. The third time, at last, it is much calmer and well-behaved, but I am rattled enough that in squeezing the beast between two metal posts at the exit of the hotel's lot, I scrape the left side of the car. Badly. When we get to the ferry terminal, Lee gets out to examine the damage and reports that a protective metal piece has been torn off; the good news, however, is that the new scratches in the paint obscure all of the bramble scratches we'd been putting in since the single track driving in Wales. (A minor miracle - while TWOU is outside the car, a gull flies in low and deposits a huge load on the inside of the door that she has left open. Had she been opening that door just seconds later than she did ... Somehow there must be a joke based on a phrase like "The gull shat on our karma" but I can't come up with it.) I call the hotel to apologize and tell the owner to send me a bill for repair. He is very generous, saying that a little paint will restore the post to its former condition. He does, however, have the car's metal strip which I have no intention of retrieving.

On May 16, I described how KING-FM (in Seattle) always seems to know when we are in the car because they play, with frightening accuracy, the Rodrigo *Concierto de Aranjuez*, a work that I wish that I never have to hear again. KING-FM has another "interesting" trick that they play on us: Mendelssohn's 3rd and 4th symphonies, both beautiful, are called, respectively, "Scottish" and "Italian" so it should be "easy" to listen to an excerpt from either and identify which it is. Not so. Invariably, when KING-FM plays the "Scottish" we think it's the "Italian" and, of course, *vice versa*. So RTE Lyric, this morning,

good to its game plan of playing only single movements, airs the first movement of either the 3rd or 4th symphony of Mendelssohn. Lee and I both guess "Italian" and, guess what, we nail it! Still, I'm amazed that KING-FM's tentacles are so long that they followed us to Wales/Ireland and have tormented us with the Rodrigo and the Mendelssohn.

The ferry crossing takes 3.5 hours, considerably longer than the trip from Holyhead to Dublin because the latter was on a fast-moving hovercraft. Lee buys a copy of *The Daily Telegraph* which is now headlining "Day 26 of The Expense Files," the scandal that keeps on giving and giving. And there are additional stories of MPs claiming living expenses for homes they owned before they even became MPs, and so on. Many MPs, either stricken by a guilty conscience or fearful of being prosecuted, are paying back some rather large sums of money: hundreds or even thousands of pounds. (Question: are two thousand pounds equal to a ton?) In a totally biased and unofficial view (mine!), the worst offenders appear to be Tories who are presently out of power but are, nonetheless, enjoying the perks of office. But I guess that this story has nearly run its course: the *Telegraph* devotes "only" seven pages to it (in contrast to the 12 pages on May 12). In other news, we learn that General Motors has declared bankruptcy causing(??) the Dow to soar(???) by 217 points! And the embattled U.S. currency continues to sink: at the start of our trip, the numbers were 1£ = \$1.51 and 1€ = \$1.35; as of today, they are \$1.65 and \$1.43. Oh dear. (By the way, the restrooms on the ferry have the *Dyson Airblade* dryer for wet hands - see May 25.)

From the ferry terminal in Fishguard, it's only 15 miles (no more km) to the town of St. David's, located on the westernmost tip of Wales. Wikipedia tell us "With a population of 1,797 in 2001, it is the smallest city in the United Kingdom." *This* qualifies as a city? Also, "St. David's is the only city in the United Kingdom to lie entirely in a national park." Really, *this* is a city? Our purpose is to visit the magnificent St. David's Cathedral, dating from the 12th century, with several restorations over the past couple of centuries. It is a functioning cathedral, holding services several times a day. The building is huge, with enormously high arched ceilings, beautiful tile and stone floors, and elaborate ornamentation and sculptures throughout. There are several chapels, each with its own pulpit(s) and pews. According to *The Rough Guide*, "At the back of the right-hand choir stalls is a unique 'monarch's stall,' complete with royal crest for, unlike any other British cathedral, the Queen is an automatic member ... A sign - 'Reserved for the Sovereign,' as if she might pop in unannounced - underlines the point. The misericords [wooden shelves under the folding choir seats] display some ribald medieval humour; there's one of a chaotic wild boar hunt and another of someone being seasick." Of course I take pictures of all of these. As we walk from one end of the cathedral to the other (quite a long distance through many hallways and chapels) it's clear that the building is sloping downward by a considerable amount.. As it is at the top of a hill, one wonders if its safety is ensured. Aside from the relatively young and sprightly Magids, all of the other visitors to the cathedral are ancient and look as if they're rejects from the cast of the BBC sitcom "Waiting for God."

We have coffee and cakes at the cathedral's refectory and are then on our way. The day is sunny, the temps are mild (25°), and the drive beautiful as we head southeast (35 mi.) to Penally, a village next to a small town called Tenby. Our destination is a country inn called Penally Abbey, which proves surprisingly difficult to find (owing to the roads that get more and more narrow and the road signs that become more and more non-existent), but it is gorgeous. There are three buildings that comprise the inn; we are staying in the Coach House, adjacent to the main structure. There is no A/C, but the room does have enough windows to provide decent cross ventilation. The bathroom is conventional but for one feature: this is the only bathroom on our entire trip that has had a bidet. (There is also an American-style flush handle on the toilet making this the third hotel in a row that has had one.) The wi-fi signal in the room is very weak, but we get a good signal in the bar that's in the main building, thus allowing us to check email. The room does have coffee service, something that we've found in every Welsh hotel but not in Ireland, except for Old Ground. In our room, there is a lovely brochure for the inn. This is a bit difficult to describe, but the pictures of the grounds and of the public spaces are photographs on whose surface an artist has drawn outlines and figures. The text in the brochure describes the inn in each of the four seasons. My favorite is a winter picture for which the caption is "winter weather in wild, woody,

wonderful Wales." That's w⁶ in case nobody is counting.

Near the inn is the ruin of a 12th century Norman church. (Perhaps it is the French influence that led the inn's owners to install the bidet?) It is then but a five-minute walk to *The Cross*, a traditional pub where we decide to have dinner. Because the door is left open, a spaniel named Suzie wanders in and scarfs up some chips (i.e., french fries) that Lee has accidentally dropped. This is very cute, I suppose, except that Suzie will not go away - she stares at us with a mournful look and then begins to bark. I have to ask the manager to remove the beast so that we can finish our dinner. I get to enjoy a Hancock's HB Ale, described at one web site as "original cask ale enjoyed by many of our customers. This traditional pull-pump ale gives a faint malty aroma with a subtle flavour of fruit and hops in its roasted finish. A light bodied mild bitter." Whatever. The only thing to spoil our pleasure is a very noisy foursome at a nearby table, one couple British and the other German. Nearly everything said is so hysterically funny (at least to the people at that table) that the German woman cannot stop laughing and laughing and laughing. (Only the German man shows restraint, perhaps because his command of English is not too good.) The laughter is so raucous that Lee and I can barely hear one another. And then, upon returning to our room we are disappointed to discover that the anticipated cross ventilation has not cooled things off at all; perhaps it will be better after the sun goes down.

Wednesday, June 3

It is sunny and warm, today. albeit a bit hazy. We have the "full country breakfast" at the inn but an item on the menu, new to us, is *bara lawr brechwast* which is translated as "bacon, cockles, and Laver bread." Huh? Here is a recipe that I found online upon our return to the U.S.:

"Y peth gorau yw hel bara lawr ffrès o lan y mor. Dylid ei feddalu drwy ei ferwi mewn d̄ r a halen am tua 40 munud, neu nes i'r gwymon ddechrau torri i lawr. Wedyn dylid tynnu'r dw^r cyn gwasgu'r bara lwar mewn tywel. Ar y pwynt yma dylid gallu siapio'r bara lawr i siâp cacen cyn ei rollo yn y blawd ceirch."

So your Welsh is a bit rusty? Mine, too. Laver, it turns out, is an edible seaweed (really!) that is found on the Welsh coast and tastes a little like spinach. (Whew! I thought it was going to taste like chicken. Or Lava soap.) Here is an online translation of the instructions (which could benefit by the introduction of a few suitably placed commas) for the preparation of *bara lawr brechwast* :

"The best thing is to get fresh laver from the sea shore (though shop-bought will also work). If using fresh soften by plunging in lightly-salted boiling water for about 40 minutes, or until the seaweed begins to break down to a slurry. Drain, allow to cool then wring in a tea towel. At this point it should be possible for you to shape the laver into small cakes before rolling the the oatmeal. Put a frying pan on the fire and add a little oil and begin frying the bacon. Add the laver cakes and fry until the oatmeal begins to brown and the laver cakes are cooked through."

Well, that settles that! (But didn't they forget the cockles?) Of course the "full country breakfast" also includes black pudding, sausage, bacon, egg, mushrooms, and a DNRLA (definitely not recommended lifetime allowance) of salt. The only downside to the breakfast is that the raucous couples from the pub are staying at the inn and are eating at the same time that we are. They are still noisy, but not as much as last night. Perhaps they really need a little beer or wine to loosen up? The dining room is quite elegant and very British, including the place-settings and decor. The only distressing thing about the inn, aside from the overheated room and the noisy guests, is that there is a very narrow passageway that one must negotiate upon driving to the parking lot. Yesterday afternoon, with my excellent guidance (from outside) and Lee's superb driving skills (from inside), she successfully slides the car past a stone wall on one side and the stone inn on the other, without doing any more damage than has already been done. You'd think that *Picasso* would be pleased, but ... (see below). She does this so well that she is

called upon to repeat this feat when it comes time to leave today.

We have a five-hour drive ahead of us (290 mi.) as we head east toward London and then south to Brighton where we plan to visit and have dinner with Sylvia McLain and John Turner. Sylvia had been an undergraduate and then a graduate student in the chemistry department at Tennessee; John was an assistant professor in the department. John, English-born and -bred, had a brilliant beginning to his academic career, but also had ample reasons for wanting to leave Tennessee; and when an offer came from University of Sussex he accepted it. Sylvia received several prestigious postdoctoral positions in England and the U.S. She and John were married last year. We retrace our steps from yesterday, taking the A4139 to the A477 to the A40 (as the numbers get smaller and the roads less challenging) to the M4, which will take us most of the way. The best town name along the way? Why 'tis Pantyffynnon. The driving is quite smooth, except for a couple of minor slowdowns.

I was a bit unfair when I complained about BBC Radio 3 earlier. In fact, most of the time they do play full-length works (unlike RTE Lyric) which we enjoy during this long drive. Well, almost. One of the segments features James Jolley who, I assume, is the former editor of *Gramophone Magazine*. He is very well informed about music, but spends too much time (at least in my view) talking about (rather than playing) the music. And he has a classic way of speaking, common among the upper classes of Britain, of beginning a sentence at normal volume but dropping his voice until he's almost inaudible at the end of the sentence - and of course, with the noise of the car, he was truly inaudible.

The M4 traverses familiar territory, but in reverse order from three weeks ago: Swansea, Cardiff, Swindon, Reading. *En route*, we stop for a snack and change of drivers at a service station at which point Picasso decides to remind us of its bad behavioral problem. Why now??? Just before the Heathrow exit (or, as they call it, junction) we turn south on the M25 and the M23. We stop at Pease Pottage Services (where one pees, of course) where we pick up the A23 to Brighton.

OBSERVATIONS ON DRIVERS AND ROADS AND MANNERS:

- I hate to admit this, but the English, Welsh, and Irish drivers are vastly better than those in the U.S. They rarely speed or tailgate, nor do they pass on the left (or is it the right?), nor are they the least bit concerned to be driving on very narrow country roads that were clearly designed for vehicles no wider than a motorcycle.
- Although cell phones ("mobiles" in BritSpeak) are commonplace, we see very few cell phone towers to mar the countryside. How can this be? Also, cell phone use in public places is kept to a minimum; when a call comes in, the person receiving it invariably walks out into the street. (An exception: on our ferry crossing, there were two men seated nearby who carried on very loud conversations on their phones, but as their accents were clearly foreign I can still make the statement that denizens of the British Isles have excellent cell-phone manners.)
- The road signs, in general, are very clear especially on the major motorways. Exits and entrances to the highway are clearly marked with symbols and numerals that indicate how many feet or yards or meters or whatever remain before it's necessary to merge. When approaching a complicated interchange, there are both overhead signs and route numbers painted on the road surface,
- In these three weeks, we have driven through more roundabouts than in our entire lives. And, as noted earlier, drivers here not only understand but actually obey the rules for entering and exiting these fiendish devices, something that has not penetrated the thick skulls of our fellow drivers in Gig Harbor or throughout the U.S.

The temperature for most of today's drive is a pleasant 23-25° but as we approach Brighton the clouds thicken, the wind picks up, and the temperature drops to 20°. We arrive at Sylvia and John's flat at about 3:00. John, who is famously insensitive to time (or, perhaps, unable to tell time), doesn't get

home until about 6:00, but we have an enjoyable time catching up on what Sylvia and he have been doing and about the new job that she seems almost certain to snag. We go for a short walk through a lovely park not far from their flat. John and Sylvia treat us to dinner at Preston Park Tavern, a "gastro pub" nearby. We then head north toward our hotel (next to Heathrow) at about 8:30 and, with only one significant wrong turn near the end (plus a massive traffic slow-down whose cause nobody seems to know), we get to the Heathrow Airport Marriott at about 10:30. While Lee checks us in, I park the car in the hotel's carpark. After we have taken our luggage to the room, I ask Lee to walk with me to the carpark to help me straighten *Picasso* in its parking space. (I'm still not comfortable with the car's height and width, but what these have to do with pulling successfully into a parking space I don't really know.) Well, of course *Picasso* has to prove its independence by violently racing its engine two times before it finally calms down and follows my command to drive slowly forward. As this infirmity has never arisen when Lee is driving, this establishes, without a doubt, that the problem is the result of by *Picasso's* intense hatred of me.

Thursday, June 4

It's sunny this morning, a bit of a surprise because we had expected clouds. And we learn from the internet that the mild temperatures that we've enjoyed and the icy temperatures that we've endured during the past three weeks will be replaced by unusually high temperatures in the mid 90s when we get to Gig Harbor. Breakfast is served at the hotel: a warm buffet (egg, mushrooms, bacon, baked beans, but no white or black pudding) and cold (bread, cheese, cold cuts, etc.) Oh, yes, and also *salt*. From a Google search, I learn that salt is not only a condiment but also an acronym for Society for Applied Learning Technology and for Systematic Analysis of Language Transcripts; I also recall its use as a shorthand for the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks of the 1970s. And, according to Wikipedia, "there are forty-one verses which reference salt in the English translation of the King James Bible, the earliest being the story of Lot's wife, who was turned into a pillar of salt when" she complained about too much NaCl in her breakfast food.

We pack the car and drive to the Avis lot, a very short distance from the hotel, ready to be scolded and made much poorer once the staff discovers the damage to *Picasso*. A man comes over, looks, and rubs his chin; he calls his boss who comes over, looks, and rubs his chin; and the two of them look, converse, and rub their chins. This does not bode well, but a very nice woman at the desk listens to our tale of woe (in which we rat on the damned car and say all of the miserable things about its wretched hide that we've been storing up) and concludes that we've had a really bad time of it and that she'll ask her boss to waive the repair costs. (We had been prescient, I suppose, in choosing the more expensive collision package when we leased the car - whatever her decision, we would not have been liable for more than £100.) And, she continues, if the manager doesn't agree with her, she'll bill our credit card for two days less than the time we had the car, which should be a "wash" which, now that I think of it, is something that this car definitely needs. And this is what actually transpires.

Check-in at the Delta counter goes rapidly, but the line for recovery of the VAT (from Lee's sweater purchase) proceeds at a snail's pace. One reason is that several people ahead of us have unusual problems or are trying to make claims without a receipt as evidence. But a major reason is that the one clerk (later to be joined by a second clerk who takes an inordinate amount of time to settle in) reminds one of an officious bureaucrat at a driver's license office. But we persevere, get the money, sail through security, and head for the Delta lounge ... where we lounge until flight time.

In today's edition of *The Times* there is additional news about the MP scandal. Some members of Gordon Brown's cabinet either resign or are forced out. Some 75 Labour back-benchers call on Brown, himself, to step down. (John Turner had explained to us that there are two factions in the majority party: one is loyal to Brown but the other is loyal to his predecessor, Tony Blair, and the two have never reconciled.) The latest resignation, the fourth in just the last two days, is one Hazel Blears who held the title "Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government" which sounds bizarre to an American's ears as we are conditioned to think of the Secretary of State as dealing only with international affairs.

Under her picture (on p. 1, of course) is this description "She normally comes to work in black biker leather, but Hazel Blears was careful to look whiter than white as she resigned from the cabinet after criticism of her expenses. Mischievously, she wore a brooch of a cat and dog cast adrift, titled *Rocking the Boat*. When pressed, the boat rocks up and down, the little dog laughing its head off." For a view of the brooch, see: <http://tinyurl.com/mk28mo>

It turns out that Ms. Blears had avoided paying capital gains on two properties, rather than just one, by designating each as a second home. For those for whom *schadenfreude* is a pleasurable sport, here is the up-to-date report that Wikipedia has written about her:

On 8 May 2009, *The Daily Telegraph* began publishing leaked details of MPs' expenses. *The Telegraph* revealed that Blears had been claiming the maximum allowable expenses, to under a pound, for 3 properties, as well as for stays in luxury hotels, £4,874 on furniture, £899 on a new bed and £913 on a new TV, the second such TV in under a year, and the maximum £400 a month in groceries. *The Daily Mail* printed allegations that Blears 'flipped' her homes in London three times in one year. Flipping is a technique whereby Members of Parliament switch their second home between several houses, which has the effect of allowing them to maximize their taxpayer-funded allowances.

On 10 May *The Sunday Telegraph* reported that Blears had not paid capital gains tax on profit from the sale of a London flat. The property was registered as her main residence with the Inland Revenue but Blears had been claiming MPs' second home expenses relating to the flat. She is reported to have pocketed a profit of £45,000 on its sale without paying capital gains tax. The same day, *The Guardian* website reported that HM Revenue and Customs were to investigate cases of possible capital gains tax evasion by MPs such as Blears. On 12 May she volunteered to pay the £13,332 capital gains tax she had avoided on the sale of her 'second home.' It was subsequently claimed that Brown had ordered her to repay the sum.

On 20 May, Brown publicly accused Blears of 'totally unacceptable behaviour', leading to speculation about her immediate political future, and, after he subsequently appeared to backtrack by affirming his confidence in her, the possibility of a cabinet revolt. On 21 May, Brown defended cabinet ministers Geoff Hoon and James Purnell, who allegedly had also paid no capital gains tax on the sale of their second homes, arguing they had acted 'within the letter of the law and the spirit of the parliamentary rules'. The contrast led allies of Blears to accuse Brown of 'pursuing a political vendetta' against her over her recent criticisms of his political performance. However, on the day of her resignation from Cabinet there were widespread rumours that her repayment of £13,000 was not for her alleged capital gains tax liability, but for another property, and that she had resigned before such rumours were published in the press.

Another exciting story in *The Times* tells of two "gay" male Humboldt penguins, Z and Vielpunkt, at the Bremerhaven Zoo who hatched an egg that was abandoned and are now raising the chick. Many other news outlets have picked up the story. Here's how it was reported by the BBC News:

The zoo made headlines in 2005 over plans to "test" the sexual orientation of penguins with homosexual traits. Three pairs of male penguins had been seen attempting to mate with each other and trying to hatch offspring from stones. The zoo flew in four females [Ed: all of them penguins, one assumes?] in a bid to get the endangered birds to reproduce - but quickly abandoned the scheme after causing outrage among gay rights activists, who accused it of interfering in the animals' behaviour.

The six "gay" penguins remain at the zoo, among them Z and Vielpunkt who are now rearing the chick together after being given the rejected egg. "Z and Vielpunkt, both males, gladly accepted

their 'Easter gift' and got straight down to raising it," said a zoo statement. "Since the chick arrived, they have been behaving just as you would expect a heterosexual couple to do. The two happy fathers spend their days attentively protecting, caring for and feeding their adopted offspring."

Life in Heathrow's Delta Business Elite lounge is delightful and we loaf around for about 1.5 hours, but then discover that the monitor that had showed no gate for our flight suddenly reveals that not only is there a gate but that the plane is boarding. Well, they daren't leave without us (I think) - and they didn't, despite our rather long walk to the gate and our discovery that boarding is nearly finished when we finally arrive. In fact, the doors are closed about 10 minutes ahead of the announced departure time and the jetway is pulled away, but we are held there for a very long time. The plane finally lifts off an hour later than scheduled. We spy a "celebrity" on board, the host of the various Extreme Home Makeover shows on TV, but it's only upon getting home that we can look up his name: Ty Pennington, as everyone except the Magids would know immediately.

A five-course meal is offered during the flight, but I reject the food after having consumed more than my share of rich food (and, of course, salt) during the past few weeks. During the flight, I finally finish *The God Delusion* (a bit of a disappointment in comparison to the breezier Sam Harris books) and I begin *Sin Boldly!: Dr. Dave's Guide To Writing The College Paper* by Dave Williams. The latter had received a rave review by Louis Menand* in *The New Yorker* but I found it stiff and unnecessarily pedantic. So,

*In the September 8, 2000 issue of *The New Yorker*, Menand wrote "It is a strange fact of life on earth that a human being who reaches college age under the impression that *it's* is the possessive form of *it* cannot be disabused of that belief. No amount of red ink will wash it out. When I was a college writing teacher and knew no better, I used to deduct half a grade for the misuse of *it's*. This was using a flyswatter on an ox: students took the hit and moved on, confident that somewhere, in some other classroom, there existed a teacher who share their primitive faith." Amen!!

four books read on this trip, but none of them really enjoyed. Sigh. Despite our late departure, we make up the time and arrive in Atlanta 15 minutes ahead of schedule. Well, actually not. Our wheels touch down at 5:35, but we are shunted first to the end of one taxiway and then another, not arriving at our gate until 5:54, four minutes later than scheduled. It is raining and humid and hot. Yecch.

It takes a very long time to get through customs. Several people in line ahead of us do not speak English and the staff are having trouble finding translators for them. And when we finally get through, it is another long wait until our suitcases arrive. But the next step (re-checking the luggage) goes smoothly and we proceed from International Terminal E to Terminal A for our Seattle flight. Had we been smart, we would have gone to the Delta lounge in the international terminal; instead we seek out the SkyClub in Terminal A, which proves to be crowded and noisy and hot. But we do have time to kill, as our flight doesn't leave for a couple of hours. We are seated across from a very loud, probably tipsy, laughing floozy of a woman who fills the ears of two men who are even closer to her with tales of her travels to Cuba, Brazil, and Argentina. And there is a man nearby who is carrying on a very loud and extremely lengthy cell phone conversation. What a contrast from England and environs, but it's our country and these, alas, are our fellow citizens.

I had no cell phone service anywhere in Wales or Ireland, but when I turn on my phone upon arriving in Atlanta I find a voice mail message from Steve, the owner of Gig Harbor Taxi. When he drove us to the airport on May 12, I told him that we would be returning on Delta 1063, arriving at midnight on June 4. Alas, he interpreted that as 12:00 a.m. in the morning of June 4 and couldn't understand why we were not at the airport when he was. I called back and we straightened out the mistake. He said that he or another driver would meet us at midnight *tonight*. But things never go completely smoothly because the plane needed for DL 1063, scheduled to depart Atlanta at 9:35, hasn't arrived and the replacement plane does not finally leave until 11:05. We arrive in Seattle just before 1:00 a.m., but fortunately the

taxi (with a different driver) does meet us. Because the confusion about arrival dates could have been attributed to what I had said, I give the driver an extra \$30 to soothe hurt feelings. Also, the 90° heat from earlier in the day has broken because a storm came through and dropped the temperature 20-25°. When we get home and unpack, I discover that the magazines and books that I had placed in the outer pouch of my suitcase have gotten drenched. Sitting in the rain on the tarmac in Atlanta didn't do them a lot of good.

Oh, well, the trip was still a great success.

Picasso, despite its faults, did get excellent mileage. We drove 2723 miles and filled up five times. Diesel fuel in Wales cost anywhere from £0.98 to £1.03 per liter; in Ireland it was close to €1.00 everywhere. (For comparison with prices in the U.S., the cost was about \$6 per gallon.) At some service stations, diesel was a little more costly than regular petrol, at others a little less. At the various fill-ups, the calculated mileage varied from 34.8 to 38.6 mpg. (Who knows how much higher it might have been had fuel not been wasted when the engine began to race.)