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Mariner Travel Services in Rhode Island arranged travel for the Aran Island Prose and Poetry Festival in Ireland the first part of August. The committee picked a Rhode Island agency, I think, because Ireland is small, too. The agents booked a bulk fare at a good price on Air Lingus from Boston or New York to Shannon Airport in County Clare. Dormitory rooms were reserved at the site of the festival at National University in Galway for six nights. The next 18 days of travel were on my own.

I chose Boston to start my Irish exposure ahead of time. Sections of the Boston telephone book read the same as Dublin. The other incentive was to see my son John, who lives in Connecticut. And at the same time, see the John Singer Sargent exhibit on at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts.

John Noelke and I made a handsome father and son pair walking in front of Sargent's formal portraits of the founder of the Boston Symphony and the likes of John D. Rockefeller and J.P. Morgan. Might have puzzled the curator, however, had he overheard our discussion of an old straight fork saddle from Phoenix, Arizona, that John had just bought in a feed store close to Hartford. Thumbtacks to post the bills for the art show ran more than the second-hand Arizona saddle.

The flight to Shannon from Boston took six hours. Ireland is six hours ahead of Texas time and five hours ahead of the East Coast. The plane left at 8 p.m. Eastern,

and landed at 7 a.m. Irish time. Seeing the artwork just before taking off moderated the jet lag. The 17-inch seat and twice as much legroom on coach class made a cozy bunk.

Other than a few muscle spasms in my hindleg and a tussle freeing a blanket working up to the choke line under my chin, I slept as peacefully as I do at the ranch. All the characters in my dreams dressed the way John Singer Sargent posed his subjects. Only time John Noelke came on was a short sequence of riding a red roan colt named "Cindy" in a high-cantled saddle.

Upon landing at Shannon, I passed customs in the time ink takes to hit a passport. The wheels spun on my roll-a-board, weaving through the walls of people, eager to meet friends and family. The adrenaline pump started the frantic pounding of the racing traveler: *"O.K. little cowboy, catch the bus outside, then the next to Limerick to Cork, make the bus to Skibereen to change to Baltimore in time for the last ferry to Cape Clear Island, and you have gained an extra day to be on the Island."*

A "3-day Rambler Pass" good for eight days on any route of the national bus service cost less than fifty bucks in U.S. currency. The alternative is renting a car for \$400 a week to drive on the left side of speedways two front bumpers and a coat of paint wide. I'd already had a big dose of WSS or "Wrong Side Syndrome" walking in England. My short ribs are still tender from pressing against rock walls on my tiptoes to allow English Fords to squeeze by trucks at 60

miles an hour. It's enough of a handicap to remember the direction to look before stepping off the curb without having to think ahead backing from a blind driveway, or maneuvering a circle in a strange city.

On the Cork bus, locals going on shopping trips and short excursions replaced tourists. Old gals linked by time, freed of fare by senior passes, wearing hats and gloves, reigned over the seats around them. In spite of express symbols on the schedule, the drivers stopped for everyone. The stopping required buying a fare and a short exchange between the driver and the new passenger about the hurling game scores at Dublin, or the horse race the afternoon before.

After boarding, he or she stopped and talked to every stranger or acquaintance facing the aisle. One would come my adrenaline pump: "*Hurry, hurry or the next bus will be gone. Sit down lady; put your shopping bag under the seat. Damn it, driver, she's all right. Throw this buggy in gear.*" I was halfway through the trip before I realized all the buses were going through the same routine.

The older Irish are a verbal people, yet to be corrupted by taped media and canned laughter. I had read so much Irish poetry and plays the past two months, each change of passengers fit into previous stories or verse. The excitement of the constantly changing set of actors staved off jet lag. The closer I came to the coast, the more charming the towns and the people became. I ran one last

race to the ferry. I was too tired to even rock on the waves
of the rough Celtic Sea.