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So many people wanted to go up the coast to Clifden from Galway; they boarded me on an old school bus for the two-hour trip. The bus creaked along by rushing streams on small rises from rain in the mountains. At any shallow pool, fly fishermen's lines floated into gentle spirals the way the books tell of Ireland.

Mist and fog opened around Kylemore Abbey, a gray-spired castle going back to the English gentry of the 18th century. Along the way, a pack of young campers came on board smelling of wet clothes and wood smoke. They filled the seats in the vigor of youth, slouched in the aisles, and gave the old crate a true feeling of being a school bus once again.

In Clifden, heavier rain drove the passengers into a small coffeehouse to share triangular tables big enough for a cup and a plate. Waiters fitted the backpacks and suitcases into every odd space. Had the telephone not been touch-tone, I wouldn't have been able to dial the number of the B and B without elbowing a stranger.

For the next three days, I learned more about raindrops than in a lifetime in the shortgrass country. Irish raindrops wet the front and the back of the body regardless of wind direction. I continued practicing umbrella control indoors; but on the sidewalks, my ineptitude sent citizens off the curb to keep from being struck by the stem.

The clearest afternoon turned into the hardest day of the whole trip. Encouraged by a clerk at an outfit called *Walking Center*, I signed on for an afternoon bog walk.

One-third mile of distance in a bog equals one mile of normal terrain. I trudged 4.5 miles stepping from one clump of palmetto-looking grass on deceptive mud mounds to the other for five hours, or 13 miles of normal walking. Winds roared in from the ocean; highlights of the trip were long pools of peat excavations to ford in low-topped walking shoes. In the way of animal life, we saw four ravens and two rusty frogs. Comparing the eight bucks I paid to see the whole San Diego Zoo and the 15 pounds to bog walk, admission to see the Irish ravens and the rusty frogs came to \$3 a head.

The final lap descended toward the sea over a rocky trail. Perspiration ran off my brow and stung my eyes. For the first time, I gained on the other hikers, and then I fell. Fell like always: wham onto the muddy ground and slick rocks with knees, elbows and camera striking hard spots.

My friend untangled the camera and binocular straps from around my neck. She wet a bandana in rainwater to wash off the mud. Watching the agile hikers disappear, scenes flashed back of the humiliation of bucking off horses in front of the Big Boss and his cowboys. ("Thar goes ol' Sonnie Noelke's kid for another mouthful of dirt.") The rest of the party moved on ahead without looking back to see whether I needed a stretcher.

The Irish are burning away their topsoil in layer after layer of peat for fuel and power. Bogs are archives of time. Human remains last forever ensconced in the layers of wet charcoal. Archeologists find evidence of farming 5000 years ago by uncovering stumps cut for clearing. The old-time method of digging the peat with a spade and hauling it home for winter fuel on a burro was a sounder practice than machines disrupting drainage by ripping up large swaths in sausage-like pieces.

Toward the end of trips, suitcase life becomes easier. Exhausted from the walk and soothed by a hot bath, I sat reading a mystery story, listening to stairs creaking and rain striking a restless gutter pipe. A bit uneasy, I arose to lock the door and found a piece of duct tape over the keyhole. I peeped through the keyhole, only to see a glass doorknob shining in the hall.

Unwilling to be caught in the hall looking inside, I knelt at keyhole level. Shooting a poison dart through the keyhole the way the mystery in THE BLOWGUN MUDERER OF DUBLIN, or MAD MILLIE SENDS EM TO THE GREAT BEYOND ends, I discovered, sitting at the desk, meant I'd take the dart at mid short rib. Further, I'd collapse on the desk top, turn over an ink well, and leave an eerie imprint on the parchment, except the desk didn't have an ink well, and Irish B and B's don't furnish parchment for guests.

Stunned, I crisscrossed Band-Aids over the duct tape. Tired as I was, I spent a restless night dreaming of bodies

falling in the bog and blowguns rolling down staircases.
Whoever put the tape over the keyhole may have saved my
life. Packed and ready to leave, I asked the owner for an
explanation. He has yet to reply.