

AN IRISH INTERLUDE.

IN THE SUMMER OF 1955, DON AND I HITCH-HIKED AROUND SOUTHERN IRELAND FOR 2 WEEKS. (DUBLIN TO GALWAY, SOUTH TO CORK, ACROSS TO WATERFORD, THEN BACK TO DUBLIN).

IT WAS A PLEASANT TRIP, WITH MORE HITCHING THAN HIKING. RARELY, MORE THAN 2 CARS PASSED BEFORE SOMEONE GAVE US A LIFT. THIS WAS JUST AS WELL, AS THERE WEREN'T A LOT OF CARS THEN, SPECIALLY OUT IN THE COUNTRY. EVERYONE WAS VERY FRIENDLY, BUT WE THOUGHT WE HAD LANDED IN TROUBLE IN GALWAY, BUT ONLY FOR 2 MINUTES!

WE HAD A SWIM AT SALT HILL, JUST WEST OF GALWAY CITY, THEN DECIDED TO HAVE HALF A PINT OF GUINNESS BEFORE LUNCH.

WE WANDERED INTO A SMALL PUB, DROPPED OUR PACKS ON THE FLOOR, AND FRONTED THE BAR FOR OUR HALF PINT. (WE HAD EX-ARMY HANGERSACKS, WITH SLEEPING BAGS ROLLED ON TOP, AND I HAD A SMALL AUSTRALIAN FLAG STITCHED TO THE FLAP. DON HAD BORROWED STEVE WALSH'S PACK, WHICH HAD A SIMILAR N.Z. FLAG ON THE BACK).

THERE WERE ONLY A FEW OTHERS IN THE BAR - A MIDDLE-AGED LOCALS AT THE OTHER END, WHOM WE NOTICED, AFTER A COUPLE OF MINUTES, WERE EYEING US SUSPICIOUSLY, BUT WE IGNORED THEM.

THEN, ONE OF THEM SIDLED ALONG THE BAR AND, WITHOUT ANY PREAMBLE, SAID "YOU WON'T BE POPULAR OVER HERE, BOYS".

THEN THE EXCHANGE WENT LIKE THIS: - DON - "WHY NOT?"
LOCAL - "WE DON'T LIKE THE ENGLISH HERE". DON - "WE'RE NOT ENGLISH, MATE, WE'RE AUSTRALIAN". THE LOCAL TOOK 2 STEPS BACK - "IS THAT SO? IS THAT RIGHT? MY AUNT MARY WENT TO SYDNEY 30 YEARS AGO, YOU MIGHT KNOW HER!". (THIS IS TRUE - I'VE NEVER FORGOTTEN IT!)

THEN HE CALLED TO HIS MATES - "THESE BOYS ARE FROM AUSTRALIA", AND TO US, "HAVE A DRINK WITH US, BOYS".

I'VE NEVER SEEN SUCH A CHANGE IN SOMEBODY'S ATTITUDE.

WE COULDN'T GET OUT OF THE PLACE FOR AN HOUR OR MORE.

NO SOONER HAD WE FINISHED OUR OWN HALF PINT, THEN OUR NEW FOUND FRIENDLY GALLWAYMAN'S PINT, THAN ANOTHER BLOKE BOUGHT A ROUND.

(IT TAKES A WHILE TO PUSH DOWN A PINT OF GUINNESS, BUT THESE BLOKES HAD YEARS OF PRACTICE ON US!),

THEY WANTED TO KNOW WHERE WE'D BEEN, WHERE WE WERE GOING, ETC., ALONG WITH PLENTY OF "IS THAT SO? IS THAT RIGHT?", AND YIRNS OF THEIR OWN.

AND WHEN, AFTER THEIR SECOND SHOUT, DON PUT A HANDFUL OF COINS ON THE BAR, (MIXED ENGLISH AND IRISH), AND INSISTED IT WAS OUR TURN TO SHOUT, ONE OF THEM LOOKED AT THE COINS, SAID "ARRH, WE DON'T USE ENGLISH MONEY HERE", AND SWIPED THE LOT ONTO THE FLOOR!

BY THE TIME DON AND I HAD SALVAGED THE MONEY FROM THE FLOOR, THERE WAS ANOTHER LINEUP OF PINTS ON THE BAR.

WE EVENTUALLY GOT OUT - I THINK IT WAS AFTER $4\frac{1}{2}$ PINTS, BUT HAVE NEVER BEEN SURE - AND WERE OFF UP THE STREET LIKE SPRINGHEEL JACK!

WE DIDN'T BOTHER WITH LUNCH - INSTEAD, WE WALKED BACK TO THE BEACH AND HAD A SIT DOWN FOR A COUPLE OF HOURS TO RECOVER.

MORAL: BE WARY OF A GALWAY MAN WHOSE AUNT MARY LIVES IN SYDNEY!

(WE REALIZED LATER THAT THEY HAD NOTICED THE UNION JACK ON THE FLAGS ON OUR PACKS, BUT DIDN'T RECOGNIZE THE COMPLETE FLAGS).

IT WAS LOGICAL THAT THOSE MIDDLE-AGED FELLOWS IN THE 1950'S, WOULD STILL BE CARRYING A GRUDGE AGAINST THE ENGLISH, AS MOST OF THEM WOULD HAVE BEEN FIGHTING THE 'BLACK & TANS' AS YOUNG MEN DURING THE 'TROUBLES', PARTICULARLY FROM 1916 TO 1920.

THIS WAS IMPRESSED ON US A FEW DAYS LATER, WHEN A COMMERCIAL TRAVELLER WAS GIVING US A LIFT NOT FAR FROM CORK. AS WE CROSSED A BRIDGE OVER A SMALL CREEK, HE SAID "THAT'S WHERE WE FIXED THE 'TANS' ONE NIGHT - MADE A MESS OF A DOZEN OF THEM", AND HE WAS LAUGHING AS HE SAID IT. AS YOUNG FELLOWS AT THE TIME, WE DIDN'T REALIZE THE IMPORT OF THEIR ATTITUDE TO THE ENGLISH, BUT AS I'VE LEARNED OVER THE YEARS, THEY HAD A PRETTY ROUGH TIME IN THE EARLY 1900'S, FIGHTING FOR INDEPENDENCE. (AND FOR HUNDREDS OF YEARS BEFORE!).