

She comes in colours everywhere
She combs her hair
She's like a rainbow
-The Rolling Stones, She's a Rainbow

Chapter 3: She's A Rainbow

Armistice Day

After we had used up our one-week car rental in England, we dropped it in Edinburgh, Scotland. From the rental place, we hiked up to the Royal Mile – the old part of the city that is full of castles and closes (little courtyards off the main street). Coincidentally, we wandered into St. Giles Square just in time to observe the ceremony commemorating the end of World War I; it being the 11th of November, at a few minutes to 11 o'clock. This was the precise day and moment, 72 years before, when the daily slaughter of an entire generation of Europe's young men finally came to an abrupt halt after four long years. Americans today know very little about World War I; other than it had something to do with Hitler's rise to power and World War II, which was a more profound experience in our nation's past. But for many non-Jewish Europeans, it is remembered as being far worse in terms of the toll it took. For four years, Europe sent millions of young men to be cut down in systematic machine gun massacres. And yet, no one knew then or now what they were really fighting for. Rampant nationalism and the war machine proved to be difficult trains to slow down or turn around. It took four years and the virtual elimination of a generation of young men before it ended in a virtual stalemate. Over the four-year course of the war in which millions died at the front in a futile attempt to gain ground, the front itself had moved only a few miles in either direction. When a cease fire agreement was finally reached, it was decided that the war would end on the eleventh day of the eleventh month at eleven o'clock in the morning. At that precise moment, the guns and grenades that had been firing almost continuously for four years were suddenly silenced. The world's people breathed a collective sigh of relief and began trying to rebuild their lives. There were very few families in England, France, or Germany that had not lost at least one member of their family to the insanity. It was thought, at the time, that it would put an end to all wars, so terrible a price was paid. If only we were that wise, or even a little bit wise. Men are crude beasts and will be forever at war for power and territory.

But some men and women do mourn. Scotland was still mourning 72 years after the end of that terrible conflict. We were all crowded into St. Giles Square, watching the small procession of a small handful of 90-year old veterans, lined up at attention, while bag pipers played a proud, sad dirge. At the stroke of 11 o'clock a cannon was fired from the Castle and for the next 2 minutes, in this square jammed with people, within this large, busy city, you could hear a pin drop. It was a beautiful, moving, tribute of respect and mourning that has been going on, uninterrupted with the exception of WWII, for 72 years. Following the silence, the Scottish National Anthem was slowly played. I was profoundly moved. It allowed a glimpse into a nightmare so far out of the scope of my life experience.

We trudged on feeling small and insignificant in the eyes of history, to our youth hostel. It was one of the private traveler's hostels, not one run by the non-profit International Youth Hostel Association. Consequently, it was scruffier, funkier, louder, and stranger. I've seen hash dens in Amsterdam that were less Rive Gauche than this place.

Private hostels are usually great for people watching, and in my case, making fun of particular traveler stereotypes. One of those is the Trust Fund Bohemians. TFB's eschew just about everything in life except "experience," and a few fringe rock bands who "haven't sold out yet" (selling out is best measured by the fact that you, a square, have also heard of the band). These kids are usually travelling on a somewhat indefinite schedule. They tend to favor the funky private hostels in big cities like Paris, London, Edinburgh, Berlin etc. and can be known to spend weeks at one right down the street from some of civilization's richest treasures and yet never actually manage to get there. They are more about being earnest and staying up late in the common area, regaling their audience about the mundane chore of visiting the embassy to get pages added to their passport because they just have so many damn stamps in there at this point, thus establishing their cred as beyond well-traveled. Our favorite in this hostel was couple sitting off in a cozy little picture window alcove. She was gently strumming a mandolin with the most brooding, disinterested look on her face that seemed to say: "I play this so well and so often that it is no longer fun nor interesting." Her boyfriend was writing, what I assumed was bad poetry. He was sporting his best tortured genius look. He would scribble a word or two and then stare off into space for a bit in search of further inspiration. Probably this is how he imagines Dylan Thomas wrote at the White Horse tavern, whom he admires very much, and might even read some day, time permitting.

In the midst of all this bohemian angst was another travel stereotype. The hapless, cheerful American male from a big university who is on the requisite European summer, but by himself, and desperately trying to meet people. Tough crowd for that (I know, I was that guy just a few summers earlier). He doggedly persists in trying to make friends as he prepares his dinner in the communal kitchen. And, if it doesn't work out here there's always another hostel tomorrow night. Unlike his bohemian counterparts, classes start in 2-weeks and he's got 4 more countries to squeeze in before his flight home.

These hostels usually show videos at night to homesick Americans, Canadians and Australians. That night was The Rachel Papers which was well done adaptation of the classic coming of age novel by Martin Amis. That night was another of the, thankfully infrequent, nights for us in single sex dorms. Usually these are gigantic rooms, stuffed to the gills with cheap metal bunk beds. I was used to this environment from my college fraternity days, but nevertheless, it's tough to go back. Some bozo was up at about 4AM noisily packing and spraying air freshener around his bed for reasons I didn't even want to begin to speculate about.

The next day we toured the incredible Edinburgh Castle at the top of the Royal Mile. Great Tour. The Castle is surrounded on 3 sides by vertical cliffs. There are 7 gates leading into the castle proper. It is a magnificent edifice in a magnificent setting. We saw Mons Meg, the world's largest cannon. That sucker was like a submarine on wheels. They fired it just once, a long time ago.

Hostels are usually decent sources of paperbacks. And travelling is a terrific source of reading time. At home between working, reading the paper, cleaning the cat box, and keeping my head above water, I don't get a lot of novels read. But when you're travelling, if you don't get through one a week, you must either be involved in a new relationship or you just can't get your hands on any. I picked up Richard Bach's *Illusions*. It was okay. Some good stuff about being true to yourself and setting no limitations on your abilities. This kind of stuff is easier to swallow in the unreal glow of a travel experience, far from the grounding realities of life on Earth. *Illusions* is the kind of book you hope will stick with you as you go through your life helping you to be a happier, more successful, self-actualized individual, but I usually forget them in about 2 days. I also read *Ragtime* by E.L. Doctorow during the Edinburgh stay. Great stuff. The second night at the Hostel after enjoying the movie the night before, we stupidly allowed ourselves to watch the featured video that night: *Fatal Beauty* with Whoopi Goldberg. So miserably bad that I hesitate to even acknowledge it here, but just in case someone tries to make

you watch it some night against your better judgement here's a quick warning review:

FATAL BEAUTY Whoopi Goldberg plays the hard boiled, cynical, plays-by-her-own-rules, police detective. Tough female street cop up against an Uzi toting, crazy-lowlife-drug-pushing-scum. She prevails. Utterly predictable plot, yet at the same time so illogical as to make you wish you were dead.

Thumbing It

Since we no longer had our wheels by this point and the train was "bloody" (prohibitively) expensive, we decide to hitchhike. We walked out of town a few miles and stuck out our thumbs. After an depressingly slow start we began getting rides. We made it as far south as Chester the first day which was a very quaint city all lit up with Christmas lights. Apparently, Kevin Costner was in residence filming Robin Hood. The youth hostel appeared to be closed (we later found out it wasn't) so we had to splurge the 20 quid (\$40 American – ouch) on a Bed & Breakfast. But it is always a treat. The next morning we set out Westward into Wales. We got a terrific ride with a Welsh gentleman who served as tour guide as well. By the late afternoon we reached Holyhead and were soon on a ferry crossing the Irish Sea. It was beautiful and stormy, like the country.

Eire

Like many an American, Ireland has powerful associations for me. I have recent ancestry right off the boat, and I feel a strong, instinctive connection to this land of terrible beauty.

Our arrival into Dublin coincided with the big England-Ireland football match. We stepped off the ferry just as the game had ended. There were almost as many drunken soccer hooligans spilling out of the pubs onto the streets as there were policemen ready to apprehend them. We were trying to reach my friend Ross's house, who I had befriended years before at a training center in Chicago for the company we both worked for at the time. His phone was busy or out of order or something, so we tried to find a pub to wait in as it was mid-November by this point and freezing cold outside. We had heard that the Irish were very friendly people, but we were still amazed when 4 or 5 different people, from Grandmothers waiting for the bus, to drunken soccer fans, saw our backpacks and spent several minutes warmly welcoming us and suggesting places to visit on the island. It's hard to imagine that in

many other countries. Of course, they were drunk, but still. And I'm kidding, only the grandmother was drunk.

We had been on the road and carrying our packs all day. We needed a pay phone to keep calling Ross since he was our bed for the night. The public pay phones all had lines and we didn't have any Irish coins yet. We were chilled to the bone as well. What we wanted was a nice quiet Irish Pub, a hearty pint of Guinness and a phone we could borrow. It wasn't to be though. The pubs were full to bursting with elated soccer fans (Ireland had won). Eventually, we found one for regulars only who wouldn't let the rowdy fans in. They let us in because they sensed that we hadn't had a dog in the fight and were unlikely to start throwing pint glasses around. We ordered a couple of Guinness straight away and then I went off to wrestle with the early century pay phone and the unfamiliar Irish money while a completely sloshed Irish lech sang to and harmlessly pawed at wife (you can't buy atmosphere like that). The phone kept taking my money because I wasn't pushing the right buttons in the correct sequence. And even after I eventually managed to do it correctly: I kept getting an unfamiliar and suspicious tone that sounded neither busy, nor like a ring tone. Eventually, I thought to call his parents whose number I also luckily had and found him there, sick in bed with the flu. He dispatched a sister to come pick us up and off we went on an Irish family adventure.

St. Patrick's Well

The Brennans live on 16 acres of land outside Dublin in a farmhouse, complete with horse and a dog. Ross and I had become fast friends, but we really only knew each other from a one week training course a year before and a few letters. His family didn't know me, much less my wife, from Adam. So, we weren't expecting a grand reception, just a bed. But as we walked in the door, a 50ish Irish gentleman (Ross's father Stephen it turns out) rushed toward us screeching "Lorrri, Lorrri, Lorrri" and embraces Lori with hugs and kisses. Irish hospitality apparently. It is impossible to imagine a more Irish man than Stephen Brennan who lives at 15 St. Patrick's Well. He is a sometimes accountant, most times poet, musician, meditator, and prolific gabber. We were instantly ushered to the table for tea and soup. The Irish drink more tea per capita than any other nation on earth (and contrary to popular notion, they are 18th in alcohol consumption; well behind the good old USA which puts more liquor away on St. Patrick's Day than the nation of Ireland does in a year). Within minutes of our arrival, Stephen was ready a love poem to us that he had penned that afternoon to his wife Ann. Family

secrets were revealed next and by the 3rd cup of tea, we were the oldest of friends.

Stephen is torn by Irish angst. He is passionately Catholic on the one hand, given his strict upbringing and indoctrination into the Church. He desperately wants to believe in all of it. On the other hand, his rational brain is frequently outraged by many of the Church's archaic, mind control tactics. He deals with all this internal conflict with equal parts frustration, confusion, Catholicism and Transcendental Meditation. We talked and talked and stayed up late laughing about episodes of Fawlty Towers that we had all seen many times before.

The next day, we walked the streets of Dublin. James Joyce once said that it would be impossible to cross Dublin from end to end, on any route whatsoever, without passing a pub. Rather than pass by them, we decided to just stop and go in. We also thoroughly enjoyed seeing Trinity College, the oldest in the world, and the impressive painting collection at the National Gallery.

She Comes in Colours Everywhere

After Dublin it was off to the West toward the Ring of Kerry and the Dingle Peninsula. We were hitchhiking again and after a slow start getting out of Dublin, we made it to Limerick, namesake of the short verse poem (There once was a man...). We looked up a friend of Ross's there and enjoyed a few pints in The Lockes Pub with him.

It was very cold hitch hiking the next day. Moments before we froze to death, we got a ride from a guy on his way to a semi-pro rugby match his brother was playing in. He invited us to attend the game with him which we gladly accepted. After the game, we stuck out our thumbs again and eventually made it to the Dingle Peninsula. Our intent had been the actual town of Dingle, but since our ride was actually going a bit further, and we had learned to never turn down a lift, even if it was in the wrong direction, on we went. Out to the Westernmost tip of Europe, the edge of the known world, to a tiny little hamlet called Dun Chaoin. Dun Chaoin would make an apt metaphor for the Irish character. It is battered by the elements, beautiful beyond description and stoic as a monk. Dun Chaoin has a tiny little hostel and little else beyond sheep and the Atlantic Ocean. The only store is about the size of an American's closet. It was like the stores you see in old western films where all the goods are kept behind the counter, and you must ask the shopkeeper for each item. It was run by a very old woman who stood behind

her wooden counter lording over her meager selection goods. She slowly and dramatically placed each item we asked down, paused a beat, straightened and then fixed us with her stern gaze, which was apparently our cue to speak again as to which item we wanted next. She then carefully tallied it up on a little brown paper bag and then put our meager selections inside, all without a word. This may in part be because she spoke little to no English anyway. Dun Chaoín is one of the last little enclaves in Ireland where Gaelic is still the lingua franca. When we visited the only pub in town, that was all that was spoken among the men there too. Unfortunately, they were very old men. The language is unlikely survive as a practiced dialect into the next century.

The scenery on the Dingle Peninsula is pretty much how you imagine Ireland to be. Bright green mountains dropping straight into a cold, stormy sea. We took long walks along the winding, green coast. We watched the sheep dogs moving their charges through fields and across roads in a very business-like way. These dogs are bred for this work and are generally considered to be the smartest dogs in the world. It was a delight to watch them work.

Wedge into the rocky cliffs, we saw an massive shipwreck that vividly told the story of the storm that must have deposited it there. Offshore were the glistening Blasket Islands that are still inhabited by a handful of stalwart fishing families but are increasingly deserted as that economy and way of life slowly dies.

We walked for miles but saw few cars on the narrow, winding road. Around a point called Sleah Head, nestled into the rocks, was a huge crucifixion statue. It was so wonderfully Irish to have this magnificent icon standing out there alone and isolated, staring out at the violence of the sea, a symbol of Christ's intent to suffer for his flock what they cannot endure themselves.

After a few nights absorbing the rugged isolation of Dun Chaoín, we walked over the mountains to the larger town of Dingle. Dingle is the quintessential Irish fishing village. It is situated on a picturesque bay with a respectable 52 pubs to its name, a per capita record evidentially, though many seem to claim this mantle. Some of the pubs are true classics, like Dick Mack's Pub which is a tiny cobbler shop by day and an even tinier pub by night. Most of them are filled with some of Ireland's finest traditional folk music in the evenings. People gather every night to watch and to join in singing along to the traditional songs.

The Dingle Peninsula is also the land of 10,000 rainbows. Growing up in the Pacific Northwest, where it rains a fair bit, I remember seeing maybe one or two decent rainbows a year. In Ireland, we saw something like five to ten *perfect* rainbows every day — not misty one-quarter jobs, but the rainbows of fairy tales, rising thousands of feet into the sky, stretching from horizon to horizon, shimmering with brilliant colors. No single rainbow could not be captured by my wide-angle camera lens. It's no wonder that the myth of the pot of gold originated in this enchanted land.

Dingle a magical place. For, living right in its beautiful bay is a single male dolphin who has adopted the town. It is highly unusual for a dolphin to live alone and it's even more unusual for it to remain in the same place for long. Fungie, as he is called, has been living as a bachelor in Dingle for ten years already. After hearing about Fungie in town but not quite believing the story, we decided to go have a look for ourselves. The walk out to the head of the bay where he lives was so beautiful that we almost forgot why we had come. The contrast between the silver-gray sky, brilliant green fields and sparkling blue sea was absolutely breathtaking. And, almost on command, we were treated to one of Ireland's unparalleled rainbows. The walk was so enjoyable that we weren't going to be too disappointed if we didn't see a dolphin, which I assumed to pretty unlikely anyway. I mean we were going to look for a fish... (okay a mammal, but still one that spends its time under a dark body of water) so the odds didn't seem particularly great. As for our Fungie spotting instructions, we had been told that one should wade into the cold dark water and bang two rocks together to attract him. This had all the hallmarks of a popular practical joke played on tourists by the locals. You could just imagine the framed photos back in the pubs of gullible tourists out in the bay, bent over in their rolled-up trousers banging rocks together. But we had to try, as you never know. Being late November now, it was very cold out, and the water was... well, it's the North Atlantic. That's where the Titanic went down. It was super cold. The sky had clouded over and the wind was picking up. Nevertheless, I stripped off my jeans and gingerly waded into the dark, choppy water. I bent over to find some rocks. There were lots to choose from, but none of sufficient heft to alert Dolphin sonar it seemed to me. After a brief search, I grabbed the biggest ones I could find and started rapping them together underwater, eyeing the shoreline for locals with telephoto lenses. A barely audible, "click, click, click" emanated from my efforts. It was hard to imagine Fungie was even in the neighborhood, much less able to hear this pathetic pinniped call. The water was beginning to take its toll on me, and I was pretty sure that I wasn't nearly deep enough, or loud enough, to attract a dolphin. Just as I was about to give up, a huge dorsal fin suddenly sliced through the water about twenty yards away from me. It was

not shark fin (thankfully), but it was still a pretty big “fish” and it startled the living shit out of me. I was completely stunned. I immediately forgot the cold water and began to marvel at this amazing creature. He had never been trained, he just liked people. It was too cold to go in deeper without a wet suit and I was in too shallow a water for Fungie to come in closer to me. He was clearly disappointed by this, as he kept motioning with his body language for me to come out and play, like a golden retriever with a tennis ball. He kept looking at me with his big, imploring, dolphin-eyes saying "come out and swim with me." To this day, I regret not saying to hell with the cold and just going in with him. Later in the pub, we met people who had wet suits and who regularly frolicked with Fungie, fin in arm. As I dressed on the rocky beach, I asked Lori about the photos she got. She gave me a sheepish look. Not wanting to waste film, she hadn't taken a single shot. She had been waiting for just the right one, which apparently hadn't arrived before I began to get hypothermia. Just then a cold rainstorm blew in and we had to take shelter in an old, abandoned bell tower near the shore. Then, as quickly as it appeared, the storm passed. Another beautiful rainbow appeared. We walked back to town, discussing the relative cost of film.

It was time to hitch our way north and meet Ross and his girlfriend Mary in Galway, as we had agreed to do back in Dublin. We got several more happy, talkative, opinionated Irishmen as drivers on our way North. After hooking up with Ross and Mary in a Pub, we headed west again to Connemara. On the way, Ross asked if we ate pork because they had already bought groceries and apparently most edible parts of a pig were well represented. We arrived late at Ross's uncle's summer house. It was freezing cold, and the heat couldn't be turned on. Or maybe there was no heat source besides the fireplace. So, we huddled around a turf fire. Turf is the mossy stuff that the peasants used to dig out of the bog and then dry out for fuel. It's really more mud than grass, and even grass doesn't burn all that well. What happens is you get a great deal of smoke billowing into the room from the hearth and virtually no heat. You seal yourself off in the fireplace room to conserve the sparse warmth and pretty soon you can scarcely see the person next to you through the haze. But you're still shivering despite wearing two sweaters and a coat. To combat the discomfort of both bone chilling cold and smoke inhalation, you drink a lot of Guinness. Then you smoke some hashish and pretty soon the whole situation is quite a bit more tolerable. This must be how the peasants did it too.

We got quite drunk and had a passionate argument about whether England or America should be rightfully acknowledged as Rock n Roll's first nation. The next morning, we woke up in the freezing cabin to see what incredible

beauty we were surrounded by. The cabin is perched up above a narrow Y-shaped peninsula with two exquisite bays to either side. The terrain is even more mountainous than the Dingle Peninsula. There are house size boulders laying around everywhere that had tumbled down the mountainside some decade or century earlier. They didn't bother to dynamite them to put in the road, they just ran the road around them, which I found charming. The sea is crystal blue. After a hearty breakfast of eggs and pig parts, we set off in the car to explore the area. We saw that side of Ireland that you fear has gone extinct but somehow has not: an old woman leading a donkey through town, craggily-faced men sitting on a storefront porch discussing the days news.

We spent an extraordinary 5-days walking, examining tidepools, watching sunsets, exploring deserted foggy castles (one of which had a trap door in the banquet hall allegedly used for dropping unwelcome guests into the subterranean river below) and drinking Guinness in freezing, but very comely little Irish pubs.

On our drive back to Dublin, we stopped for one last pint a tiny little general store pub. The hunched over little proprietor moved so gradually as he drew our pints that I couldn't be 100% sure he was still moving at all. After delivering four pints and collecting our money, a process which I swear occupied the better part of a fortnight, he methodically reclaimed his post next to his old potbellied stove. I hate to think what happens during the evening rush.

Back in Dublin we thanked Ross for the Irish experience of a lifetime and said goodbye to him, his family, Ireland and to the *best* Guinness (the lore being that it "doesn't travel well." Though I'm willing to give it the benefit of the doubt there).

The Princes of Wales

Our route back to London took us through Wales again and this time we had a little look around. We passed right through the incredible Snowdonia National Park. England is not really the sort of place you typically think of as having tall mountains, but these were peaks by any standard, already blanketed with snow in late November. It looked like we had just wandered into an Austrian village. One of our rides was provided by a very provincial Welshman who spoke beautifully measured and cadenced English but was very definite about his nationality: a Welshman, full stop. He was currently compiling a book of Welsh poetry. He asked that we tell our friends back in

America that not everyone in England was English. We said that we would, and now I am. You've been told.

We hitched along in the cold along one of the loveliest and loneliest mountain roads I have ever seen. We met two Australians named Darren and Ricky at the Hostel in Capel Carig and went to a pub with them. The pub sat at the base of a mountain and the mountain was actually *in* the pub. The back wall of the pub was just the rocky base of the mountain, complete with climbing petons and ropes hanging off it. The Australians entertained us with tales of fear and loathing on the tourist trail. They had that infectious cheerfulness about them that seems endemic to their countrymen. "Wee slapt een tha troin stayshun faw seex noights" and so forth as if it had been a terrific experience. They were going back to Austrailia months earlier than originally planned because they had burned through all their money already (this was not surprising given the way they were downing the expensive pints). But they weren't fussed at all about it. "So-kay mate!, Wee ad a fucking groit toime!"

We did some incredible hiking in Snowdonia before moving on again back toward London.