

Our Trip to Ireland

"Finding the Challenges" is an original column appearing sporadically, by Verbal Vol.

This past Autumn, we finally made a trip to Ireland. It was so overwhelming that I could not decide where to start in writing about it. I've been fermenting the tale for nearly 4 months now.

The nature of goals. Back in the early 70s, when my wife and I were involved in a multilevel marketing (MLM) system, by coincidence I had a training session at my day job on the techniques of Management by Objective (MBO). One of the things I learned was that when success itself was ambiguous, tough to define precisely, try instead to identify a condition that would be true when you had achieved success. With that in mind, we posted a giant map of Ireland on the wall of our home office, agreeing that success would certainly manifest itself in a journey to the Emerald Isle.

But neither of these paths to riches worked out in the long run. I was making good money for the time at my administrative job with a coast-to-coast insurance firm, but Lin and I were disasters at MLM. We enjoyed the people we met, we believed in the products, we could see how the revenue would build. But we were awful at sales; we had no clue how to sell to strangers, we always felt bad when selling to friends, and I don't even need to talk about selling to family (that's like living in your parents' basement.) So, ambitious but ineffective, we didn't go overseas in our twenties. That goal, however, that map of Ireland stayed in our lives. Fifty years was all it took.

The last 20 years also prevented us from going to Ireland, but for reasons that Frédéric Bastiat would understand. Our trips were visible, but they caused us to defer Ireland, a trip that was not visible. We went to Bermuda, England, Wales, New Zealand, France, Switzerland, Italy, Austria, Germany, Aruba, The Panama Canal, (a sick cruise passenger caused us to miss Costa Rica, and we missed Costa Rica again when one of our horses stepped on and broke Lin's foot on the eve of our departure), and the farther reaches of Mexico (Huatulco, Acapulco, and Cabo), Lin went to Alaska, then we went to Maui, Spain, and Gibraltar. I wouldn't barter any of these experiences, but in hindsight I would have put Ireland ahead of any but New Zealand, in timing and in preference.

I also want to make a brief mention of another nearly lifelong goal, a trip to Australia. I first acquired this longing for a place when I first met Lin, and her Father, Charlie Smith. Charlie spoke glowingly of Australia from the day I met him (a few years before the map of Ireland exercise described above). He soon convinced me. Australia was #1 on my list, and I regret that Charlie never made it — his last decade was consumed in a fight against cancer, a fight in which he prevailed for 9 years, often by traveling beyond the tentacles of

the American medical establishment. My yearning for Australia continued until 2003, when almost by accident, an opportunity to go to New Zealand arose. Kiwi country has been the subsequent place of my life. I love Kentucky as I love my late Mother, eternally. I love South Carolina as my home away from home. I love New England as the origin of my late Mother. I love travel because of my late Father. I'll bet he visited every thoroughbred race track in America. But the place of my life is New Zealand.

New Zealand did cause, however, a reshuffling of priorities. I am extremely unlikely to ever actually go back to New Zealand. That 17-hour flight is a deal breaker. And, according to Bastiat, a choice necessitates the foregoing of another choice. New Zealand shoved both Australia and Ireland off of my front burners. Australia was gone permanently, because if I ever travel that far again, I'm going back to New Zealand. Then Ireland fell to the back row, over the years, due to the phenomenal success of my other travels.

But I am thankful for the passage of my time and the distortion of the modern world. The passage of my time has been thoroughly wonderful. Each new day is a gift from wherever the finest gifts are conceived. The distortion, on the other hand, relates to events such as the attack on the World Trade Center and the Transportation Security Administration (TSA). My wonderful new days are just as frequent here at home, where the distortions wrought by the power-addicts are far away. My advancing age makes it easy to enjoy the former, and makes it difficult to tolerate the latter.

Our trip to Spain's Mediterranean coast and to Gibraltar left memories that are more golden with each passing day, but the jet lag (3 flights one-way in 24 hours) was killing for 3 days — we laid around our ocean villa like dead fish washed up on the beach. Then the TSA in Detroit was an unimaginable bad dream. I never believed I would be treated that way by the people for whom I paid, as a taxpayer, their salaries. I swore I would not leave the USA again, unless there was some way to circumvent the TSA. The goal was disappearing with Life's Sinking Sun.

So, about four and a half decades separated the realization from the goal. Forty-five years ago, America, and in fact most of the world, was only about halfway chronologically, and far less than halfway developmentally, from the world today. Think just about the topsyturvy phenomenon that at the end of the 19th Century, 95% of humans lived in rural environs. In a hundred years 95% were headed for the larger cities, and their 'burbs. I was a bit taken by surprise that Ireland, particularly Dublin, was extremely faster, quicker, more dynamic than I could have imagined. There was a robustness that I could not have anticipated. Dublin has become an information age city, offering high tech jobs as its principal character in the modern world. I was reminded much more of New York City, Silicon Valley, and the Boston 128 Corridor than I was of Kentucky, which has retained many bucolic expanses. Check the comparative figures that follow:

Locale, 2016 Population, SQ Miles

Ireland, 4,713,993, 27,133

New Zealand, 4,565,185, 103,483

Kentucky, 4,339,367, 40,409

Ireland is both most populous and least endowed with *terra firma*. In Kentucky, there are 2 city areas with greater than 6 figure populations, and only 1 over half-a-million. Lexington accounts for 1-in-16 bluegrassers, while Louisville does for 1-in-8. Northern Kentucky, adjacent to Cincinnati, Ohio takes up most of the rest of the state's people. In New Zealand, there is one major city, Auckland, three times as large as the Capital, Wellington, as well as Christchurch on the far less densely peopled South Island (LOTR movie fans would recognize many venues). The only other 6-figure city is Hamilton, between Auckland and Wellington, all squeezed into a corridor of the North Island. Great expanses of countryside and spectacular scenery lie beyond the scattering of cities, observing the major industries of shepherding and forestry. Now, think of Ireland, with her 3 largest cities in a crescent from Dublin, on the River Liffey via Cork to Limerick, on the River Shannon.

Dublin City and County has a population of 1-and-a quarter million, about 5/8 of the people who live in the Greater Dublin Area, a region comprising Dublin and the counties of Meath, Kildare and Wicklow. The traffic jams are white-knuckle time. Dublin itself is about the size of Louisville, in Kentucky.

These are three of the most beautiful places on Earth, with two still largely quiet and rural.

Ireland has become one of the few vigorous places in the European Union's economy. Day or night the cities above are pulsing with life.

Next time, I will include my view of Bristol and Bath, in England, where we spent 3 days decompressing from the trans-Atlantic flight and the jet lag. That didn't work very well, getting blown away in our second experience with Heathrow International and first experience with Aer Lingus. I definitely wish to cover, in a future installment, why Ireland has historically been, and remains, one of the most voluntary and natural societies on Earth.