

This week's "Roaming Readers" feature, reminiscences of Ireland, is by John F. Downes of Syracuse.

BY JOHN F. DOWNES

My wife, Margaret, and I toured Ireland in the early '70s. We enjoyed our visit so much that we decided to return with our family and have done so on three occasions.

Having gone back to the same row house in the same village, we are convinced that vacationing in a small Irish town offers unsurpassed enjoyment.

We found our Irish "home" about 10 years ago. I was trying to trace a family tree and started a correspondence with James O'Reilly, a Dublin pharmacist, distant relative, and the finest friend one could ask for.

WHEN WE WERE ready to take our family to Ireland, I asked James to help us find a vacation home that we might rent. His reply was that we would be welcome to use a house that he owned and maintained for family vacation purposes. It was in Glin, County Limerick — at the mouth of the Shannon — and 12 miles from the ocean.

His letter described the house as "relatively small, four bedrooms, a fridge, clothes dryer, electric stove, and heated by a turf-burning fireplace."

First, a little about the village itself. Glin has a population of 1,200. The surrounding area is cattle country. Each day farmers, by tractor, truck and donkey cart, bring their milk and cream to the Glin dairy. The name of the town comes from a corruption of the Gaelic word "gleann," meaning a glen or valley.

What really makes our vacation enjoyable is the warmth and hospitality of the people of this small village. When we arrive, Maureen, a neighbor with a key to the house, has a peat fire blazing. Grocery staples are in the cupboard, milk and butter in the refrigerator.

THROUGHOUT our visit we are provided with a variety of baked goods, all delivered in person and accompanied by charming and interesting conversation. People on the street rarely pass without speaking and one after another welcome us back with a warmth reserved for friends.

People go out of their way to be helpful. One morning when the local shoe repair shop was closed a neighbor took my shoes to a nearby town, awaited their repair, and returned them to me.

WE USE THE house in Glin as a home base and, with our rented car, travel for one- and two-night stands to Dublin, Cork and other localities that offer entertainment or shopping opportunities. You can see much of the country in this manner, since Ireland is relatively small — 26,000

square miles compared to New York state's 50,000.

For our children, apart from being a wonderfully enjoyable experience, Ireland proved to be an education:

✓ Joanne, 18, went to the small store across the street to order a dozen eggs. The grocer had eight on hand and said she would go out and get four more. She returned with four warm eggs taken from the nest. Jo's city-bred appetite faded with the knowledge that strictly fresh eggs emerge at body temperature.

✓ We approved the idea of our girls hitchhiking, something we wouldn't do in this country. Among other things, they learned that a good song can afford many miles of enjoyable travel. One driver after another would ask if they could sing some particular American song.

THEY ALSO MET Paddy O'Brien, a manufacturer's representative, who went 50 miles out of his way to bring them home to our hearth. The attraction rested in the fact that the girls told him their father liked to sing. Paddy was a delight to meet and, with good baritone voice, gave out with "Kevin Barry," "Waxies Dargle" and a few others in exchange for my rendition of "The Letter Edged in Black." Ballads, including sad ones, seem to be well received.

✓ Ed, 12, learned a lesson in modesty. He put on his bathing suit and, in company with some village boys, started to walk through town to the River Shannon. The boys shook their heads and told him that that was not the right thing to do. To go to the beach he should wear his pants and shirt over his bathing suit.

I must say that one of the weaknesses of the lovable, gracious Irish is giving directions. You rarely meet anyone who does not know how to direct you to your destination. One baffling direction I have never figured out is, "Just follow the traffic."

I remember looking for the Ariel House in Dublin. We had been caught in one-way streets and had lost our way a number of times. The day was hot; the car was uncomfortable.

Finally we pulled up to an elderly man who appeared to be a watchman on a street repair construction job. I asked him for directions and, while lengthy, they were straight-on and specific. When he finished, a lady standing nearby pointed and said, "If you're looking for the Ariel House, it's just across the street."

If you'd like to have your travel adventure considered for "Roaming Readers," send your story, typewritten, on no more than three double-spaced pages, to: "Roaming Readers," Stars, Herald American, P.O. Box 4915, Syracuse, NY 13221. Please include your name, address, telephone number and a short biography.

**Ireland: a home
away from home**

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7