

“We’ll Sort It Out”

My Run-In with the Irish Garda



By Jenny Dee

I am always down for a unique adventure, and the summer of 2019 was no different. I had this brilliant idea that I would travel to Ireland and...drive.

How hard could it be? I thought to myself.

So what if I'd have to figure out how to change my entire peripheral vision that I've trained for the past thirty years to the complete opposite side of my body, and consciously remember to not enter the right lane unless I am passing.

And sure, I'd need to learn how to swiftly and expertly navigate the hell that is the roundabout, drive past another car on a literal one lane (yet both ways) street and figure out how to not hit a sheep in the middle of the road.

I had insurance. *What's the worst that could happen?*

When I first got behind the wheel, I took my time getting to know the car and understanding the rules of the road. I had heard that if you just stay all the way to the left whenever possible, it's less tempting to swerve too far to the right. That was a genius idea that took me far.

It wasn't as difficult as I expected it to be, and though I drove slower than a church-bound Granny on a Sunday morning, I quickly became comfortable and familiar with the other side of the road driving thing. I actually impressed myself!

I even got the hang of the roundabouts. Well, that wasn't hard, considering I was granted tons of practice since every other kilo had another roundabout to conquer.

Side note: I became so good at them, that when I returned to the States and was faced with a roundabout, I went the wrong way here. Thankfully, no other cars were on the road as I self-corrected.

It wasn't all driving roses, however. There were some close calls with a speeding car coming from the opposite direction or a temporary zone-out that had my muscle memory veering a little too much to the side. In fact, there was one point when I swore the came in contact with a tree or something on the left-hand side, but when I looked at the car, it seemed to be fine, so I shrugged it off and went inside to spend a wonderful evening with my sweet family host.

The next morning, I said my goodbyes and was off to spend the rest of my trip scouting the country. All was well as I journeyed all over the southeast coast of Ireland, finding myself mesmerized by Blarney Castle, enjoying a medieval dinner banquet in Bunratty and meditating in the peaceful setting of the Cliffs of Moher.

It was literally after I left the meditation room at the Cliffs, feeling refreshed and balanced, that I returned to my car for the next leg of the trip, when I received a call from an unknown Irish number. I assumed it was my next hotel confirming my reservation or something, so it didn't alarm me.

What did alarm me was after saying hello, I was asked to confirm my name and then was told that I was speaking with the Westpoint Garda.

Say what?

All the color drained from my face and I think I stopped breathing for a second. I couldn't for the life of me figure out in that split second what I could have done wrong.

Oh, right—when I parked the other day, I think I was about 5 minutes over the meter, didn't put enough coins in and was now facing a parking ticket.

Yeah, no. That wasn't it.

Apparently, that little "I wonder what I could have hit" moment was more serious than a tree. In fact, my sideview mirror had fully scraped the side of another parked car sitting in front of the hotel where I stayed overnight with my family member.

I freaked the hell out. I had no idea that I had hit an actual car, and all I could think about was how I was going to Irish jail and I'd never see my kids again.

Luckily, I was speaking to a very nice Garda man, who continued to explain how there was a witness to me hitting the vehicle and doing nothing about it, how they had the license plate and were able to track me down through the rental car company and how there was some serious damage done to the other vehicle.

Nothing too frightening about that bit of info at all. *Yikes*

If I hadn't have just come out of a meditation room feeling centered, I can assure you, I would have dived off the deep end of dramatic hysterics.

But I kept my wits about me, apologized profusely and offered my unending cooperation to resolve the situation. Nice Mr. Garda man then explained how it was good that I had insurance, because it would be 100% covered, and that's all the owner cared about.

That was great, of course. But I needed to know:

“Sir, am I in a lot of trouble?”

I adored his answer.

“Well, a hit and run is technically a crime, you know, but we’ll sort it out.”

Well, it was sorted out—by my insurance company, and only my insurance company. I never heard back from the Garda again, and suffice to say, I was not thrown in Irish jail or otherwise detained in a foreign country. I’m guessing they are used to American idiots, and as long as I did the right thing, that’s all that was important.

I’d say I was a lucky lass.

I realized how much so the next day when I returned the car (after driving my final 24 hours in a state of neurotic panic), when the rental guy evaluated it for damage (also 100% covered by insurance—best \$72 investment I ever made). He took one look at the tires and asked:

“Miss, do you realize there are massive slits in your tires? I don’t know how you made it here without them blowing out. Lucky gal, ya are.”

I was, indeed. It could have been a few of those left-side curbs I ran over that damaged the tires, if I had to venture a guess. There definitely was a whole slew of Irish ancestors who were looking out for me that trip, shaking their heads and probably wishing for a Guinness in Heaven.

By the time I left the rental car facility and set out to finish my journey to Dublin, I had never been so happy to board a bus in my life. I’m not sure I’ll ever drive again in a foreign country—I just might have used up all my Irish luck in one shot.

But if I do, I’m sure whatever debacle I find myself in, “I’ll sort it out.”