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Jaywalking with the Irish

David Monagan
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"Why a comfortable family should suddenly pack off across the seas to a rain-lashed chimera in the Atlantic is a question that confounds us still, as does the very essence of this brooding island that inspires, baffles, and wounds with equal sport," writes the author. He and his wife, Jamie, uprooted their three children from their comfortable existence in a "tight-lipped little town" in Connecticut, and transported them for a year to County Cork, in Ireland.

Before their departure, Monagan was writing a regular feature column for a large, unnamed publication, and Jamie, who had been a stay-at-home mom for years, was ready to stretch her wings in a new career on the auld sod. The two had travelled to the Emerald Isle several times since the early 1970s, when Monagan studied literature at Dublin's Trinity College. The author is lovingly haunted by the spirit of a dear friend named Bun Wilkinson, whom he had met during that academic stint.

All is not halcyon in the family's transplantation, despite the memory of Bun's watchful presence: the children are teased; the neighbors don't appreciate the family's American openness; and Jamie has trouble finding work. When Monagan decides to start a new magazine, his children worry that this venture means that they will remain forever on the shores of an island where they fear they will never be completely accepted.

Monagan recounts with humor and elegance the family's adventures and misadventures, their joys and worries, the glorious beauty and confounding confusion of the land of his ancestry. The title *Jaywalking with the Irish* refers to the movement of cars and pedestrians on the streets of Cork City, where "people of all ages were cavorting in the traffic, dipping and diving into its flow like surfers probing waves." This image stands as a metaphor for the American family's attempts to assimilate into Irish culture, in which the dipping and diving of societal norms is as flighty and filigreed as the music of Irish jigs and reels.

Monagan has worked as a freelance journalist, writing for publications like the *Irish Times* and the *Irish Examiner*. Despite his sexist tendency to refer to Jamie as "the wife" and to subtly denigrate her small triumphs, he tells his family's story with tenderness and honesty. He adopts the lilt of a native Irishman's use of language, which he found to be "the same English I had always spoken, but suddenly it had run wild, with twisted weeds and gorgeous orchids blooming in the midst of what should have been ordinary sentences."
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