

Growing up with Kilts in the West of Ireland

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I love your site on kilts, having worn them growing up its great to see some one trying to revive them. I am 35 now but when I was a kid kilts were pretty common where I lived. My parents wanted me to try everything growing up, Hurling, football, Irish dancing, Scouting, Music. You know typical parents.

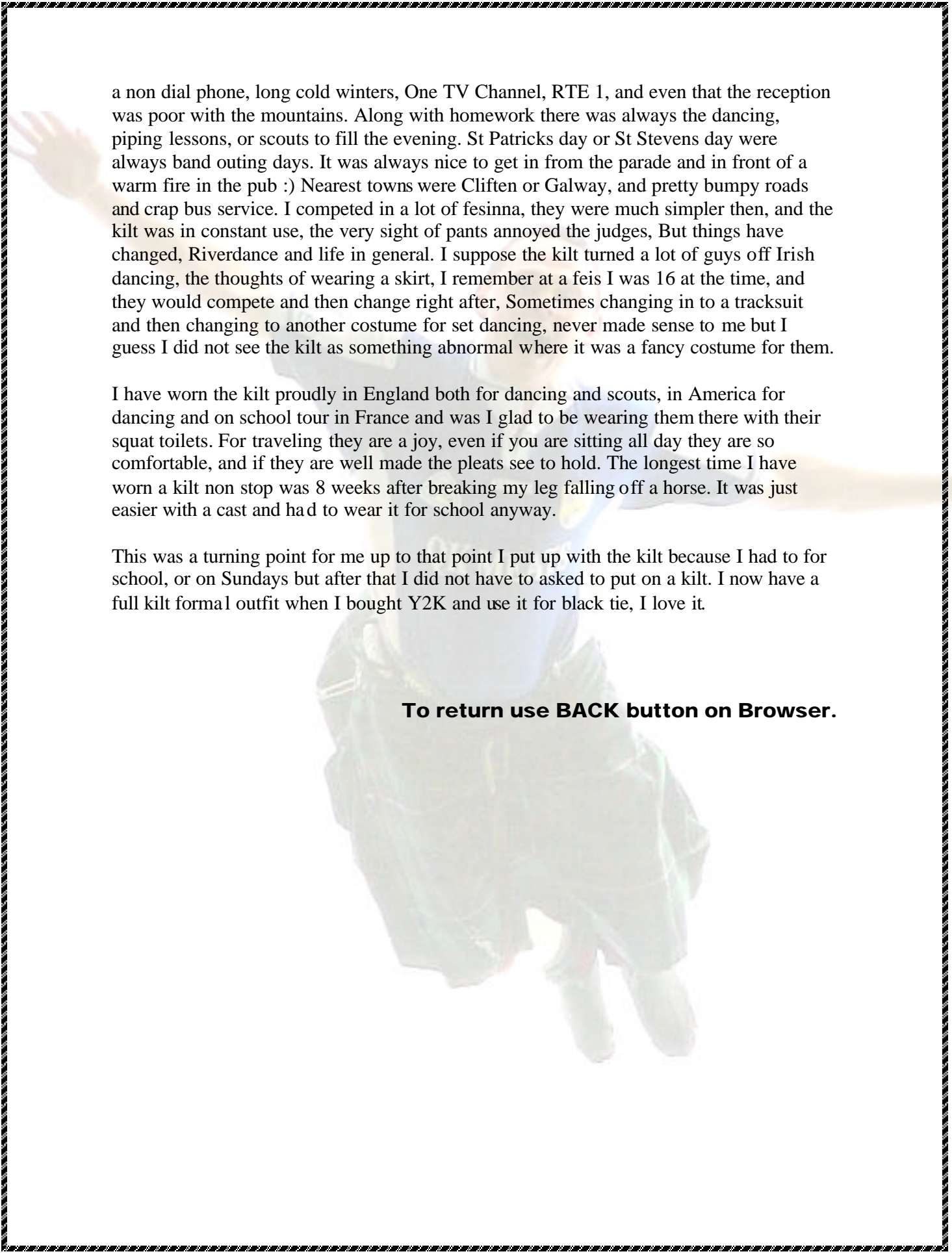
My first introduction to kilts was for Irish dancing, I started Irish dancing when I was 7 and for class we had to wear a navy kilt and white shirt, The "kilts" were wool pleated at the back but were just navy skirts, cheap and available and what did we know. The following year I wore my first real kilt, I was asked to do page boy for a wedding. At that stage I was comfortable wearing kilts, so it was ok. It was a tartan kilt much heavier than what I wore for dancing and I wore a jacket and a fluffy shirt with it. After the wedding I ended up wearing the outfit on holidays like Easter and Christmas for church.

It was not uncommon to see kilts at church, and generally on Sundays, My dad was a member of the local pipe band, so he wore the kilt for church during Christmas and when ever they played. The kilt lasted about 2 years it still fitted me on the waist but it was getting a little short, and the jacket was too small, I can't say I was upset to loose it but it did not bother me either. Mum though it was cute, and at that age you did what you were told. The following Christmas I got a new kilt and jacket as a present, and pretty much ended up wearing it all through Christmas.

Your clothing choices were limited then. Growing up you wore shorts and a shirt, kilt and a shirt, or a suit when you grew older. In cub scouts I wore grey shorts and the scout shirt, so the kilt was not too far removed and was warmer in winter. I got my first solo dancing costume when I was 9, Grey jacket, green kilt and sash, I was delighted, Around the same time I started lessons on the pipes and snare drum with the pipe band, I was not too interested but got dragged along anyway, ended up playing in the band and played until I was 19. The band uniform was a green jacket and saffron kilt, the same saffron kilt was worn by the scouts for formal uniform on away events so I ended up killing two birds with one kilt.

I suppose the turning point with me and kilts was first year in secondary school, Depending on where you lived the kilt was either in everyday use or not, Our school wore the kilt as did the other secondary school in the area, it was no big deal just a uniform, but they fought to keep it. So I was now wearing a kilt 5 days a week for school and most school evenings if I did not change, For Dancing on Tuesdays, for a lot of the scout meetings on Thursdays, pretty much every Sunday and anytime I played in the band. Nowadays the kilt has pretty much died, and traditions lost, so keep up the good work.

I was brought up in the gaeltacht area in Conemara called Roundstone, Nothing to do much there other than the activities mentioned, Simpler times, no internet, Lucky to have



a non dial phone, long cold winters, One TV Channel, RTE 1, and even that the reception was poor with the mountains. Along with homework there was always the dancing, piping lessons, or scouts to fill the evening. St Patricks day or St Stevens day were always band outing days. It was always nice to get in from the parade and in front of a warm fire in the pub :) Nearest towns were Cliften or Galway, and pretty bumpy roads and crap bus service. I competed in a lot of fesinna, they were much simpler then, and the kilt was in constant use, the very sight of pants annoyed the judges, But things have changed, Riverdance and life in general. I suppose the kilt turned a lot of guys off Irish dancing, the thoughts of wearing a skirt, I remember at a feis I was 16 at the time, and they would compete and then change right after, Sometimes changing in to a tracksuit and then changing to another costume for set dancing, never made sense to me but I guess I did not see the kilt as something abnormal where it was a fancy costume for them.

I have worn the kilt proudly in England both for dancing and scouts, in America for dancing and on school tour in France and was I glad to be wearing them there with their squat toilets. For traveling they are a joy, even if you are sitting all day they are so comfortable, and if they are well made the pleats see to hold. The longest time I have worn a kilt non stop was 8 weeks after breaking my leg falling off a horse. It was just easier with a cast and had to wear it for school anyway.

This was a turning point for me up to that point I put up with the kilt because I had to for school, or on Sundays but after that I did not have to asked to put on a kilt. I now have a full kilt formal outfit when I bought Y2K and use it for black tie, I love it.

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