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CelticLife

INTERNATIONAL

Around the Table

Celebrating Celtic Cuisine at Christmas

INSIDE!

*Holiday Gift Guide, Surviving Christmas
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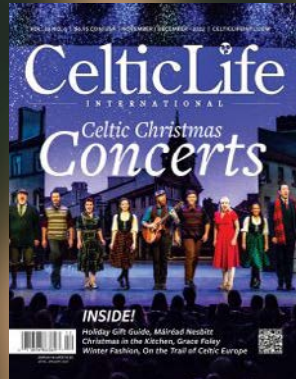
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first WORD

with Stephen Patrick Clare - Executive Editor

“It ain't no sin to be glad you're alive...”

~ *Badlands, Bruce Springsteen*

I recently checked a major item off my bucket list, seeing Bruce Springsteen in concert on Halloween night here in my hometown of Montreal. Fittingly, The Boss and his 18-piece E Street Band opened the 3-hour show with a rousing rendition of Ghostbusters, setting the soiree's celebratory tone for more than 22,000 fans.

As expected, the majority in attendance were baby boomers - folks who had grown up with Springsteen's music from the 1970s through today - who sang along to classic hits such as Born To Run, Badlands, Backstreets, Thunder Road, and Rosalita, as well as his newer tunes, including Letter To You, The Rising, and a particularly poignant performance of Last Man Standing - a 'Memento Mori' moment that brought the house to tears.

I was pleasantly surprised, however, to note the number of younger people in the audience. Perhaps children or even grandchildren of life-long fans, their presence was a testament to the power of great music and its ability to bring people together and transport them - even if only for a brief respite - from the challenges of their everyday lives to the higher ground of communal joy. Seeing them depart the Bell Centre with big smiles on their faces brought me a sense of satisfaction and surety for the future.

These are not easy times for young people; between political uncertainty, wars raging in the Middle East and Eastern Europe, inflation, climate change, gender identity issues, social media pressure, the housing crisis, and more, it is easy to understand why matters of mental health have been making

headlines in recent years. For many, a sense of being out of control in the world has become the new norm, and confusion is now a part of our daily reality.

And while the media has done well to document mental and emotional wellness issues, the “Fifth Estate” is still a major part of the problem, often capitalizing on (or even creating) both natural and man-made catastrophes to perpetrate social fears in a bid to draw eyeballs and drive advertising sales. The bigger crisis, however, is the dwindling trust in traditional media outlets, which is at an all-time low. Truth, it appears, has become a casualty of consumerism.

Ironically, at a time when there are so many reasons to be pessimistic, I have never seen so many young people optimistic about the future.

**“For Gen Zs and Gen Alphas,
hope is an open act of rebellion...”**

I witness it regularly with my own kids; my son Dylan, 28, recently opened his first business in Fredericton, New Brunswick. His passion and business acumen have served him well, and his 'Barcade' has bloomed beyond his wildest expectations. My daughter Sofia, 16, is a student athlete in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Her drive, dedication, and discipline in both her academic studies and her sporting activities are inspiring.

Thankfully, neither of my children are whiners. Instead of harbouring a sense of entitlement, they were raised to appreciate who they are, what they have, and the plenitude of opportunities they were born into. For my

family, gratitude isn't merely a Thanksgiving Day cliché - it is part of our daily lives.

Call me old-school or out-of-touch (I am 57), but I was raised in an era when, in times of trouble, my father - God rest his soul - would simply tell me to “get on with it...” By today's standards, that thinking is hopelessly outdated. And yet it seems that more young people simply want to “get on with it...” - growing both wary and weary of talking heads and the dirty tricks of politics. Instead, they yearn to inherit an Earth that is both environmentally and economically sustainable, and one that is enjoyable.

As such, they want to have fun - to share and celebrate the past, the present, and the future - even during an evening of “Dad Rock” from a 75-year-old who regularly puts performers one-third his age to shame, reminding us nightly that “after all, it ain't no sin to be glad you're alive...”





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One Scottish woman comes by her passion honestly



Gemma Noble was born and bred in Glasgow, with deep family roots in the city's east end - both of her parents and grandparents were raised in a vibrant, working-class East End community of Glasgow, an area rich in Scottish culture and history.

"My heritage has greatly influenced my love for Scotland and has shaped the passion behind Heartbox," she shares with Celtic Life International. "My grandparents worked in the thriving textiles and printing industries and this love for homegrown products and a strong work ethos was passed down through the generations - my gran was a sewing machinist her whole life and the floor supervisor in my dad's textiles business for over 30 years, retiring only after the age of 80!"

Noble started Heartbox 4 years ago as a family business alongside her dad, Michael, who has worked as a textiles manufacturer for over 50 years.

"His knowledge of traditional Scottish craftsmanship, paired with my marketing expertise, created the perfect opportunity to bring premium Scottish products to market. All our boxes are picked and packed in-house overseen by our head of packing Carol, who is also my Auntie! As a family business, we love bringing new and exciting gifts to market from our diverse range of artisans and suppliers, enabling us to provide exclusive and bespoke products which our customers can't get anywhere else."

Each month, Heartbox subscribers re-

ceive a curated box of unique items in line with that month's theme.

"We help our subscribers discover new products by taking them on a different journey every time. With every box, we explain the historical background and stories about that month's theme, and there are even some tasty Scottish recipes to try."

Noble - who, along with the day-to-day running of the business, curates the upcoming themes and box contents - notes that her customers play a significant part of that process.

"We work closely with our community to better understand what they would love to see in future boxes and themes. We give our subscribers the theme for each box a month in advance and 2 sneak peeks at what is inside, offering them the opportunity to pick and choose as per their wishes. Listening to their feedback, and evolving with their needs, allows us to offer additional products through our 'Add to Box' option, and this flexibility has been a huge success. Our customers now enjoy mixing and matching products, allowing for even more personalized gifts."

That engagement, she notes, makes all the difference in the world.

“I grin from ear-to-ear when I open my email and read how much they love our boxes and how they feel more closely connected to Scotland...”

"I left my previous corporate job to focus on having a family and to share our Scottish joy all over the world, and I am doing just that. It is the best reward I could ever have."

Her vocation hasn't been without its challenges, however.

"Running a business is always going to have ups and downs, but when things don't go to plan you simply need to find a way to work through it. My beautiful twin babies came whirling into the world 10 weeks early last year and spent their first 9 weeks in hospital. It was the biggest juggle as things didn't go anything like we planned, but we had a fantastic team to support us, and they did an amazing job of stepping in when we had to spend all our time at the hospital."

Despite those difficulties, Gemma is grateful to have the opportunities that come with entrepreneurship.

"We are lucky to be able to showcase our products at Highland Games and Celtic Festivals all over the world. I feel incredibly fortunate to be travelling to these amazing places and meeting all the wonderful people that we do. And I can't wait until we bring the twins with us on their first trip next year!"

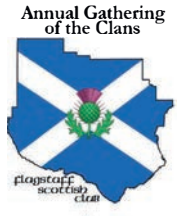
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The Liam Foundation

Little Steps But Always Forward has become a big deal

“What started as a journey to save the life of my son Liam has evolved into something much larger than any of us expected,” shares Kevin Reason by phone from his home in Montreal, Quebec.

“So many people have gotten involved - from Hollywood celebrities, sports stars, and politicians, to local folks here who have really taken to Liam’s story and want to make a difference any way they can. We have had all sorts of fundraisers over the past couple of years, including golf tournaments, bike rides, concerts, comedy shows...most of my weekends are taken up with Liam Foundation activities and appearances.”

Liam, who recently celebrated his 11th birthday, was diagnosed with Mitochondrial disease (Mito) at the age of 5.

By definition, Mitochondrial disease is “a group of disorders that affect the mitochondria, which are tiny compartments that are present in almost every cell of the body. The mitochondria’s main function is to produce energy. More mitochondria are needed to make more energy, particularly in high-energy demand organs such as the heart, muscles, and brain. When the number or function of mitochondria in the cell are disrupted, less energy is produced and organ dysfunction results. Depending on which cells within the body have disrupted mitochondria, different symptoms may occur. Mitochondrial disease can cause a vast array of health concerns, including fatigue, weakness, metabolic strokes, seizures, cardiomyopathy, arrhythmias, de-

velopmental or cognitive disabilities, diabetes mellitus, impairment of hearing, vision, growth, liver, gastrointestinal, or kidney function, and more. These symptoms can present at any age from infancy up until late adulthood.”

Liam was the first child with Mito in North America to try experimental drugs from Europe.

“There have been some big changes since he started taking them - things like making eye contact, trying to speak, walking better, being more aware of his surroundings.

“So, the medication is working, although we are aware that it is just buying us time until a cure can be found.”

Already a father of four, Reason never expected to become a surrogate papa of sorts to other children afflicted with Mito.

“I have had families from all around the world contact me - parents from Saudi Arabia, China, Australia, and elsewhere...they often find me through a simple Google search. We now have over 40 kids on the trial at the Montreal Children’s Hospital, all funded by the Liam Foundation. And we will continue to raise funds and awareness to make sure that these trials continue.”

The foundation also continues to seek out grants from other organizations and sources.

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“However, we are still leaving way too many youngsters behind. So, I have decided to work with doctors from other countries - including medical professionals from Brazil and India - to get the trials into different countries as what is called a ‘compassionate’ drug for now. This will allow other kids that cannot travel to take the medication and help slow down the progression of the disease. However, this is a long process in some countries, and it might or might not work, but we will do what we can, and we will definitely do our best.”

So far, 2024 has been a challenging year.

“We have lost too many kids to Mito over the past 12 months. I have had the privilege and honour of knowing many of these beautiful souls and every single day I think of each and every one of them. I keep them in my heart, along with their parents who are struggling to survive with the loss of their child.

“You would think all this loss would break me, but it does the complete opposite - I am more motivated than ever to find a cure for Mito. We will find that cure for them and everyone else and for Liam. Please keep these kids and families in your thoughts and prayers. For now, we keep taking little steps - but always forward...”

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Guieldu

The past permeates the present in Asturias

Derived from an Asturian expression meaning “collecting small fruits from the forest and the sea”, Guieldu was born from a passion for mystery, myth, and Celtic culture.

“We love creating and performing music that transports listeners to another world,” shares the band’s chief composer and multi-instrumentalist Héctor Aneiros via email from his home in northwest Spain. “We bring soundscapes to life that connect us to our roots, and our music is a tribute to nature, the ancient forests, the flowing rivers, the winds that whisper legends, and the stones of ancient ruins that hold stories.”

While the group’s sound echoes with ancient melodies, Guieldu’s repertoire is firmly rooted in the modern musical mainstream.

“We perform classic Celtic music with a millennial twist,” explains Aneiros. “We have a deep admiration for Celtic music from the 1990s - which, at the time, was as popular as the biggest pop and rock stars on the charts. That era of Celtic music was a turning point, and we wanted to pay tribute to those artists and songs by creating original compositions that bring the genre to the present. So, our sound can be described as a mélange of new age with early 90s funk-style basslines and the power and energy of rock.”

Formed in 2019, the sonic septet evolved quickly, overcoming the delays brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic.

“We took that time to refine our sound and have since been reinventing our performances by incorporating new instruments and arrangements. Mixing other musical styles into what we do has certainly enriched



our sound, but Celtic music is still very much at the core of who we are.”

Ironically, the band’s commitment to their Celtic musical identity has resulted in a connection to the diversity within the culture itself. As their name suggests, “Guieldu” is an Asturian allegory for collecting traditional music from the Atlantic arc and then reinterpreting it for contemporary audiences.

“With Celtic culture, we are dealing with two very different worlds; on one side, there is the historical and archaeological Celticism, which tells the tale of the Astures - the people who lived in our region during the Iron Age and were the last in the Iberian Peninsula to resist the powerful Roman legions.

“Contemporary Celticism, however, is a bridge that strengthens Asturia’s cultural ties with the other Celtic nations, mostly through music...”

The connection between Celtic nations - however divergent - is apparent, given that those situated on Europe’s central-western mainland celebrate their heritage with as much fervor as Celts to the north.

“Asturias has had its own delegation at the Festival Interceltique de Lorient (Bretagne) each year since 1987, and Asturian bands regularly participate in Celtic Connections in Glasgow. The great Irish musician Phil Cunningham has produced Asturian groups, and (Irish trad band) The Tannahill Weavers have Asturian songs in their reper-

toire. Other Irish bands like The Chieftains, Lúnasa, and Flook have dedicated songs to Asturias, and many traditional Asturian songs are well-known at jam sessions in both countries.”

Setting aside the varied geographical groupings and stylistic nuances, Guieldu’s accolades reveal more about the band’s musical legitimacy than any discussion of cultural precision.

“One of our biggest highlights was the reception we received from 3,000 people at the Ortigueira International Celtic World Festival - one of the most important Celtic music festivals in Europe. We also won the “Best Folk Song of Asturian Music” award in both 2023 and 2024.”

Citing influences that include Clan-nad, Loreena McKennitt, and Alan Stivell, among others, the band is equally inspired by international Spanish musical artists Carlos Núñez, and Nightnoise. Ultimately, however, Guieldu has succeeded in cultivating their own distinctive presence as performers and will release their first full-length album in 2025.

“With Celtic music, the energy, charisma, and authenticity of the musicians is very important. A band that is emotionally invested creates an enthusiastic environment. It is our job to inspire people - to lift them up - and a good recording or live concert will do that.”

@guieldu

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Ike Reilly

A new documentary film captures the soul of an American songwriter



As a proud second-generation Irish American, Ike Reilly has researched his roots.

"My grandmother was from the village of Kilkea in County Kildare, about an hour's drive southwest of Dublin. I visited there a few years ago and picked up copies of both my mother's and grandmother's birth certificates. My grandmother was married to an Italian man, and I remember one St. Patrick's Day my father putting a pin on my jacket that said, 'Kiss Me, I'm Irish' and me asking 'but, dad, aren't we Italian too?' - and he replied 'yes, but we don't have to tell anyone that.'"

A former gravedigger and doorman, Reilly was born and bred in Libertyville, just outside of Chicago - also the hometown of actor Marlon Brando, guitarist Tom Morello of Rage Against the Machine, guitarist Adam Jones of Tool, bassist Maureen Herman of Babes in Toyland, and many other successful artists and musicians.

The reasons he originally started writing and performing music have not changed much over the past four decades.

"I did it to have a voice - I played music to accompany these useless ramblings that I had written down. I wasn't having trouble expressing myself. I was having trouble getting anyone to listen."

"Even now, I could do it all day long. I don't know if it's always any good, but I do it every day and I have been doing it every day since forever; get up and play the guitar and write down words and hopefully some of them become songs - and many of them do. It is a cathartic process for me, and it is a daily practice and process too."

“Do whatever you can do to fulfill yourself and know that everything you create should be for yourself...”

True to that artistic axiom, Reilly has released almost a dozen albums of gritty, gutsy Americana since his 2001 debut *Salesmen and Racists*.

In time, the songsmith would discover the joys of being in a band.

"I have been with the same guys for a long time - Phil Karnats (guitar), Dave Cottini (drums), Pete Cimbalo (bass) Ed Tinley (guitar), Adam Krier (organ) - and at this point we can probably play 250 songs. Me and five other human beings - that is a lot of shared information; verbal, musical, spiritual..."

That sonic dialogue is detailed in *Don't Turn Your Back on Friday Night*, a new and insightful documentary film that covers over 40

years of the good, the bad, and the ugly of Reilly's career.

"It has only been out a few weeks, but so far people love the film, and I have been pleasantly surprised. It was way more personal than I originally thought it would be. I gave the producers boxes of footage, and then they followed the band on tour. So, over the past while we have been traveling around and performing at the premieres. To be quite honest, the hope is that the movie helps me get more gigs to better provide for the band and my family."

Interestingly, it was his fellow hometown musician - and close friend - Tom Morello, who served as executive producer of the new documentary film.

"Tom's mother was my teacher and today she is a good friend of mine. His very first gig was my wife's 8th grade graduation party. That is in the film. And Tom's mom and my mom are quite close - Tom's mom is 101 years old and my mom is 98!"

"Ike is kind of like a real-life version of Jimmy Stewart's character in *It's a Wonderful Life*," shares Morello. "Ike's path as an incredibly talented yet underappreciated heartland troubadour has taken many unexpected, hilarious, rocky, and ultimately redemptive twists and turns that are all beautifully captured in this great film."

Co-producer Mike Schmiedeler echoes the sentiment. "Ike isn't just a truly unique artist - he's a one-of-a-kind character. In this documentary, we were able to capture how his music, his band, and his career intersect and are influenced by his amazing family. Ike is the songwriter musicians wish they were, with a close-knit family everyone wishes was theirs. He has created his own world where his band, his fans, his family, and his assorted supporting players are all part of the same tribe."

The coming months will see Reilly and his tribe busy both on stage and in the studio.

"We've got new music coming out, and it is long overdue - it's been about three years since the last record (*Because the Angels*). And releasing albums can be a bit tricky as a songwriter - it is a little like a junkie getting a fix; it feels good for a while, and you hope you have a good run with it before you need more. That said, I just keep doing the music and, so long as I continue to grow as a writer and performer, and we keep moving forward as a band, I am satisfied."

@ikereilly

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The Wizard Earl of Kilkea Castle

~ Story by Brendan Farrell



Gerald Fitzgerald, the 11th Earl of Kildare, was born in 1525, a time of great upheaval and volatility for an Anglo-Irish Aristocrat and – especially – for a Roman Catholic. The son of Gerald Fitzgerald, the 9th Earl of Kildare, and Elizabeth Grey, Countess of Kildare, Fitzgerald was born at a very auspicious time in European history. The light of intellectual liberalism had signalled the end of the dark ages for medieval Europe, heralding a time of scientific and artistic enlightenment, and a new age of discovery – The Renaissance.

Fitzgerald would become the ultimate Renaissance Man, embracing the arts, and gaining a reputation as an astrologist, scientist, and alchemist. It was because of this interest in the emerging sciences that he also gained a reputation as a sorcerer, a practitioner of the black arts, and the soubriquet “The Wizard Earl.”

Sixteenth century Ireland was a perilous place and, like most Irish noble families, the Fitzgeralds were continuously involved in deadly power games where deadly warfare was rife and political alliances were mercurial. The spectre of death would always loom large for the Fitzgeralds; Gerald’s father, Gearoid Og had died in the Tower of London in 1534, and three years later Gerald’s brother – the 10th Earl, known as the Silken Thomas – would face a traitor’s death at Tyburn in London and hung, drawn, and quartered along with five of his uncles. Thus, Gerald was left as the sole male Geraldine heir and consequently, a child of 12 with a price on his head “whose life was sought with avidity equal to Herod’s.”

The Flight of “The Wizard Earl”

The Young Gerald sought refuge with his Aunt Eleanor McCarthy in Cork before being despatched to Donegal where, under the protection of Lady Eleanor O’Donnell he became a figurehead for an unsuccessful

rebellion mounted by a federation of Irish Chiefs. The English Crown offered a “most gracious pardon” which, unsurprisingly, he chose to ignore. Fleeing the clutches of the Protestant Monarch Henry VIII, Fitzgerald sought the protection of King Francis of France and Charles V, The Holy Roman Emperor, leaving Ireland with a small retinue of loyal servants and a most generous gift of 140 gold coins supplied by Lady O’Donnell. Fitzgerald was intelligent, hardworking and, above all, very curious. In France, under the patronage of his cousin Cardinal Pole – the last English Roman Catholic Archbishop of Canterbury – he received an excellent education. Moving then to Rome and mixing with the religious and intellectual elite, he would inevitably be pulled into the orbit of the powerful Medici family, where he served as Master of the Horse to Cosmo Medici Duke of Florence, receiving a yearly salary of 300 ducats.

Love and Marriage

Following the death of Henry VIII in 1547, Fitzgerald visited London in the company of some foreign ambassadors where he attended a masque ball given by Edward VI and met and fell in love with Mabel Brown, an English Roman Catholic who was his brother’s stepdaughter. They later married and returned to Ireland eventually to live at Kilkea Castle.

Death and “The Tower”

In 1552 Edward VI – “The Boy-King” – restored most of the Fitzgerald lands, including the old Norman castle of Kilkea where it was believed that Gerald “The Wizard Earl” practiced magic in a special ‘workroom’ located in the highest tower of the castle. The Roman Catholic Queen Mary would restore the titles of Earl of Kildare and Baron of Offaly to him in recognition for his help in the subjugation of the Protestant rebel Thomas

Wyatt. Ever the pragmatist, Fitzgerald eventually renounce his Roman Catholic status at the insistence of Elizabeth I, likely to defer a charge of treason. This, however, would not save him from a place only too familiar to the Fitzgeralds. He died in 1585 after a period of internment in The Tower of London. However, he would, at least, escape the executioner’s gruesome talents.

Ghostly Horseman

Legend has it that “The Wizard Earl” disappeared after demonstrating his magic powers to his wife. On the condition that she showed no fear lest he is damned for eternity, Fitzgerald first made the waters of the river rise up to her mouth, then caused a dead man to walk and shake her hand before conjuring up a large hissing snake which coiled its body around her. The countess remained impassive throughout the ordeal, until finally “The Wizard Earl” turned himself into a bird and flew up and landed on her shoulder and started to sing a most beautiful song. A black cat then pounced, and the countess fainted in shock. “The Wizard Earl” had disappeared, never to return in mortal form. His Ghost, however, returns to Kilkea Castle every seven years mounted on a fearsome white steed, shod with silver shoes. The same ghostly spectre has also been seen galloping across the Curragh leading a band of phantom horsemen.



A photograph of four students walking along a paved path on a university campus. From left to right: a man in a light green polo shirt and khaki pants, a woman in a teal dress, a woman in a black dress, and a woman in a black top and jeans carrying a laptop. They are walking past a large tree and a modern building with large windows.

Irish Studies Program

www.fairfield.edu/irishstudies

FAIRFIELD, CT

Fairfield University, located in southwestern Connecticut only 75 minutes northeast of New York City, offers a dynamic program in Irish Studies. With a significant Irish-American representation among its students and alumni, interest in Ireland has characterized Fairfield for decades. This interest continues unabated today, as Irish people on both sides of the Atlantic have sought to resolve long-standing issues amidst an increasingly global economy. Fairfield's Irish Studies program enables students to investigate

Irish contributions to a wide range of disciplines, including literature, history, film, and art. Courses focus on the troubled history of the nation, its colonial and post-colonial significance, the difficult politics of Northern Ireland, and the inspired art and

literature that emerged from the turbulent Irish past. To complete the Irish Studies minor, students must complete a capstone research project in an area of their choice. Affiliated with the National University of Ireland, Fairfield's Irish Studies program, through study abroad in Galway, also allows students to take Irish-focused courses in archeology, economics, sociology, linguistics, and the Irish language. The program also offers on-site lectures, concerts, plays, and readings that complement the academic courses.



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A photograph of Patrick Radden Keefe, a man with short brown hair, wearing a dark grey jacket over a dark shirt and dark trousers. He is sitting on a concrete staircase, leaning forward with his right hand resting on a blue book. He is looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

Patrick Radden Keefe Says Something

An award-winning staff writer at The New Yorker magazine, Patrick Radden Keefe is the author of several books, including the 2019 international bestseller *Say Nothing: A True Story of Murder and Memory in Northern Ireland* - an in-depth examination of The Troubles. Along with winning both the National Book Critics Circle Award for Nonfiction and the Orwell Prize for Political Writing, *Say Nothing* recently debuted as a 9-episode streaming series on FX.



Truth can be a bit of a grey area in Northern Ireland.

Well, that's part of the reason that I wanted to be involved in this production; the book was obviously close to my heart and the issues are still very present for people who live in Northern Ireland - it doesn't feel like distant history. And so, it was important to me that if the story was going to be dramatized, that it be done in a way that felt responsible and true to the book. I worked with two producers who I have known for many years, and what is crazy is that we have now spent more time working on the show than I spent writing the book. It has been a labour of love, but it was important for me that it feel true to the book and true to the conflict. I loved the 2023 BBC series *Once Upon a Time in Northern Ireland* - it was really well done - but we wanted to do something new and so vivid that made it feel as if the conflict was happening right now. So, it is scrupulously and historically factual;

the production design is incredible in terms of creating the feeling that you are in Belfast in 1972 - the excitement and the terror, the romance and the tragedy - and that comes through beautifully.

How did you handle language and accents?

One of my concerns was that I wanted to have a real sense of authenticity. Without mentioning any names, there have been a few films about *The Troubles* that don't feel organic to the place. I wanted actors that would nail the accents. I didn't want a bunch of Shakespearean actors from England putting on bad Belfast accents, so we ended up with a cast that included several folks from West Belfast. Others were from the Republic of Ireland, and - in some cases - we hired actors from England who worked with a dialect coach.

What about production design?

I didn't want it to feel too pretty, too cleaned up. I didn't want this to be the Disney version of *The Troubles*. However, Belfast today is not the gritty city it was in 1972, so we ended up doing much of the shooting in Liverpool, a community that was built around the same time as Belfast - all those classic brick row houses and neighbourhoods still look as they did back in the early 1970s.

How else were you able to convey that sense of authenticity?

The most important ingredients of the book were capturing the music, the language, and - even in the darkest times - the sense of play and gallows humor that was so intrinsic to life back then. That humour became a real coping mechanism for people there, and that was something that the writers managed to get down. So, the show, strangely



enough, is a tragedy in many ways, but it is also a very funny series with a lot of cross-talking back and forth.

Laughter heals. Has there been some sort of collective healing there since the signing of the Peace Accord in 1998?

I am a bit torn on this one because I feel as though there should be. The Good Friday Agreement was a miracle in a lot of ways, and if that agreement is worth the paper it is printed on, you hope that subsequent generations can grow up in that part of the world and not feel like they had this history hanging around their necks. On the one hand, The Troubles seem like a very long time ago. On the other hand, there are a lot of people there still living with a great deal of trauma and terrible memories. It feels very recent to a lot of people. It was interesting; I appeared at the Belfast Book Festival and also did a reading at the Seamus Heaney HomePlace and I had no idea who would show up, or even if anyone would show up. And both times they were packed houses of mostly young people, in their 20s and 30s, whose parents had lived through this but never talked about it. These younger people didn't grow up with it, and so they read the book to give them some sense of their own history here. I don't know that there is any greater affirmation that I could have asked for than that.



What has the response been like from those who have seen the series?

I am very close to this thing, emotionally, and I have seen a million cuts of it, so I don't have any objectivity. It has been really exciting and encouraging for me to have others watch it - some who have read the book, and others that have not. What I cared the most about was getting it right for two cast members in particular - Lola and Anthony - as their families were from there. I wanted more than anything for the series to feel like we have told the story about their home with a sense of integrity. Thankfully, they both loved it and called me to tell me how proud they were to be a part of this. And it really resonated with their families as well. One of our lead directors was Mike Lennox, who is from Belfast and directed every episode of Derry Girls. What I love about Derry Girls is that people of that city felt like the producers got it right - right down to all the little details. And that series wasn't just a hit

in Northern Ireland and the U.K., it was also a hit in Korea and in France and elsewhere around the world - there is a universality to the story. And that was part of the reason we wanted Mike on board - to both tell the story of a specific place and time and resonate with people who have never been to Northern Ireland and, in some cases, can't even find it on a map.

Has this experience stirred any interest in a sequel or a follow-up?

I don't know. Certainly, we are all very pleased with the way that things turned out for the first year, and that remains our only focus for the time being. I am curious to see if Belfast is still under my skin. I feel an intense attachment to that part of the world, and I will likely keep going back for the rest of my life. Whether that leads to another book or series, only time will tell. For now, I am content to have said something.

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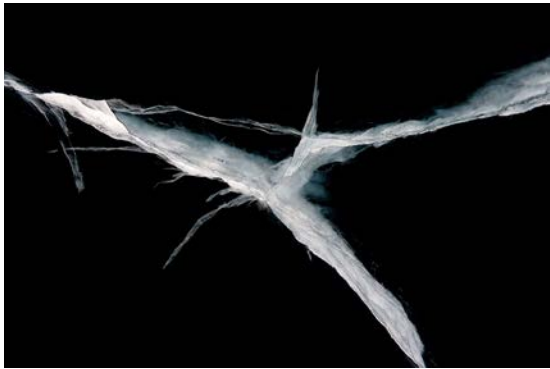
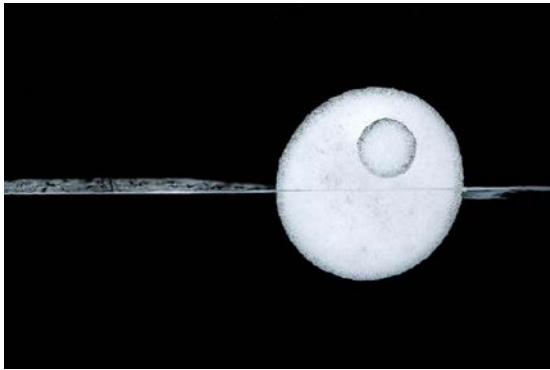


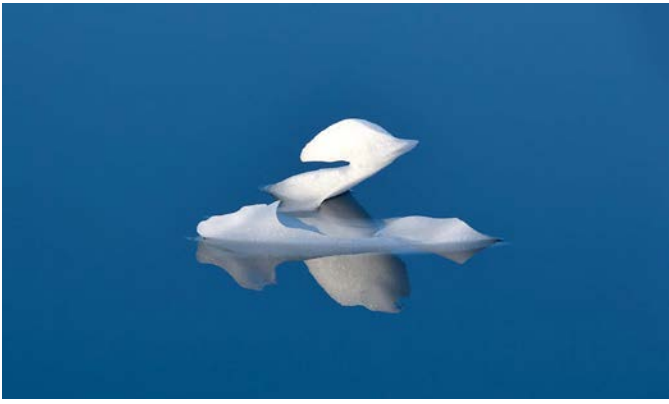
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Hugh O'Connor

My mum's family is from Limerick, and my dad's family is from Dublin, so I am a bit of a mix.

I started acting in TV and film when I was about eight years old, and I remember being fascinated by the camera even then. I have moved behind the camera, and I am still endlessly interested in its possibilities.

Although I mainly shoot on film, once I have scanned the negatives, I love working with them in Photoshop, often shooting with the aim of combining elements of different shots into one final piece. That is not something I would have thought about when I started

shooting with disposable cameras from the pharmacy.

I like to think that a photograph should have at least two different things going on within the frame. The subject and its surroundings should reflect and enhance the other. And it should hopefully create an emotional reaction in the viewer.

The challenges of the vocation are trying not to second guess

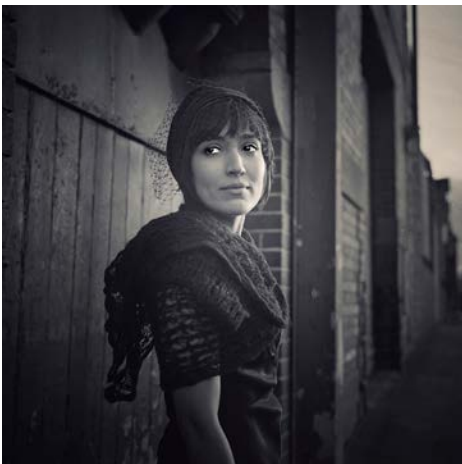
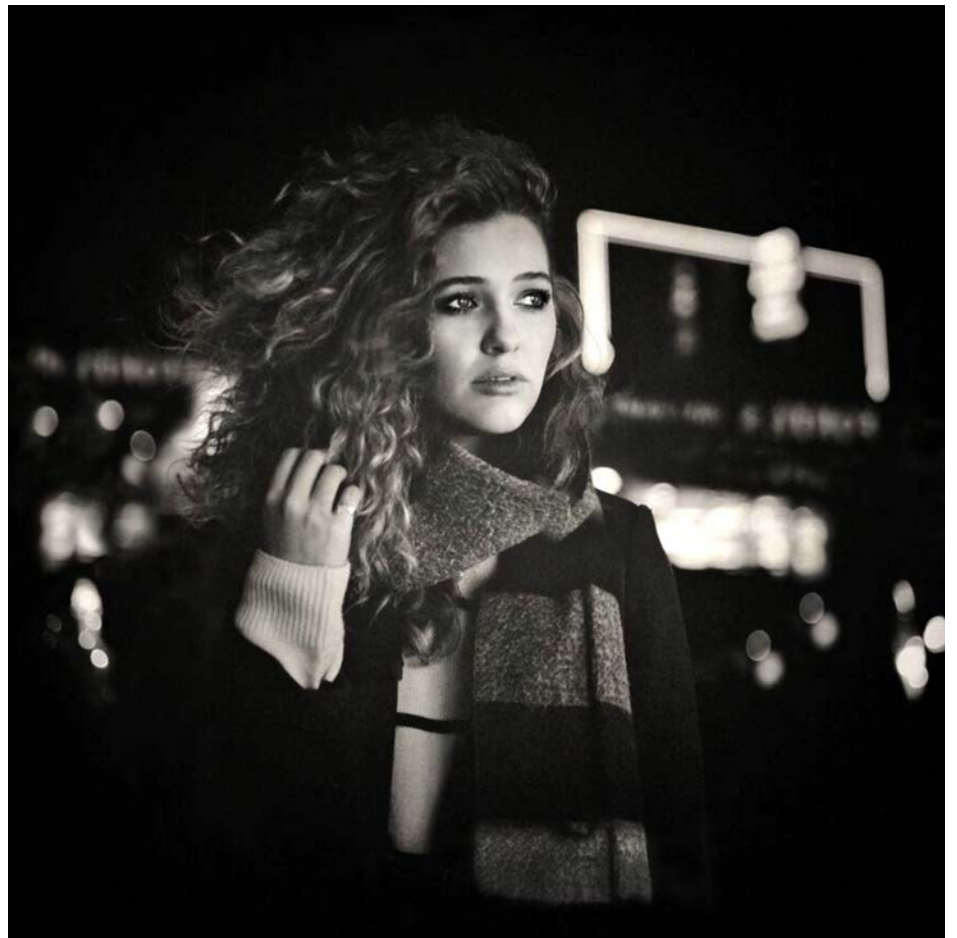
yourself, or repeat what you have done before, without beating yourself up too much in the process. The rewards are deep spiritual fulfillment and emotional well-being. That is the hope, anyway...

Having my first piece accepted to the RHA in Dublin was a big highlight - it spurred me on to keep going. Being shortlisted for the inaugural Portrait Prize at the National Gallery of Ireland, and having my work exhibited there, was another special moment for me.

Ireland offers a great combination of a wild landscape, and an even wilder population.

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Ginan Abbas

STYLE

My roots lie in Iraq, the land of Mesopotamia, often called the cradle of civilization. This is my homeland, rich with history, culture, and heritage. It's from this ancient and storied place that I came, and it continues to shape who I am today.

I inherited my love for making clothes from my family. Both my mother and father are skilled in making garments, and my grandmother was especially talented - she specialized in menswear and did all the embroidery by hand, without using a machine. Their dedication and craftsmanship have deeply inspired me, and I feel connected to that tradition every time I create something.

My love for fabric inspired me to learn how to shape it into various types of clothes and items. This passion eventually led me into the world of fashion and design, where I started my own brand. It has been my way of blending creativity with craftsmanship, turning my love for fabric into something others

can enjoy.

When I came to Ireland 25 years ago, I began learning the language while also deepening my knowledge of fashion and design. I arrived with just a basic understanding, but over the years, I've grown and refined my skills, which has been a key part of my journey here."

My love for making clothes pushed me to continually learn and refine my skills, especially in custom garment construction. I took various courses here in Ireland to study pattern drafting, fabric combinations, and the finer details of fashion. Beyond formal courses, I dedicated myself to self-study and practice, always setting the bar high because I wanted to create unique, beautiful garments. This drive also led me to explore different types of fabrics, understand their quality, and master the crafting of truly stunning pieces.

My creative process is more inspirational. I find that my ideas are often sparked by the world around me, whether it's through nature, art, or personal experiences. This inspiration drives me to explore and develop my designs, making creativity a deeply personal and expressive journey.

What makes my work unique is my extensive experience with high-quality fabrics and my expertise in cutting and sewing techniques. I utilize a variety of machines that allow me to bring my ideas to life with precision and quality. When I have a concept in mind, I carefully visualize it and work through every detail using these elements, which helps me avoid mistakes. This meticulous approach ensures that when I translate my vision into reality, it is executed to the highest standard.

The greatest reward for me is seeing how much people love my work. Their appreciation means more than anything else.

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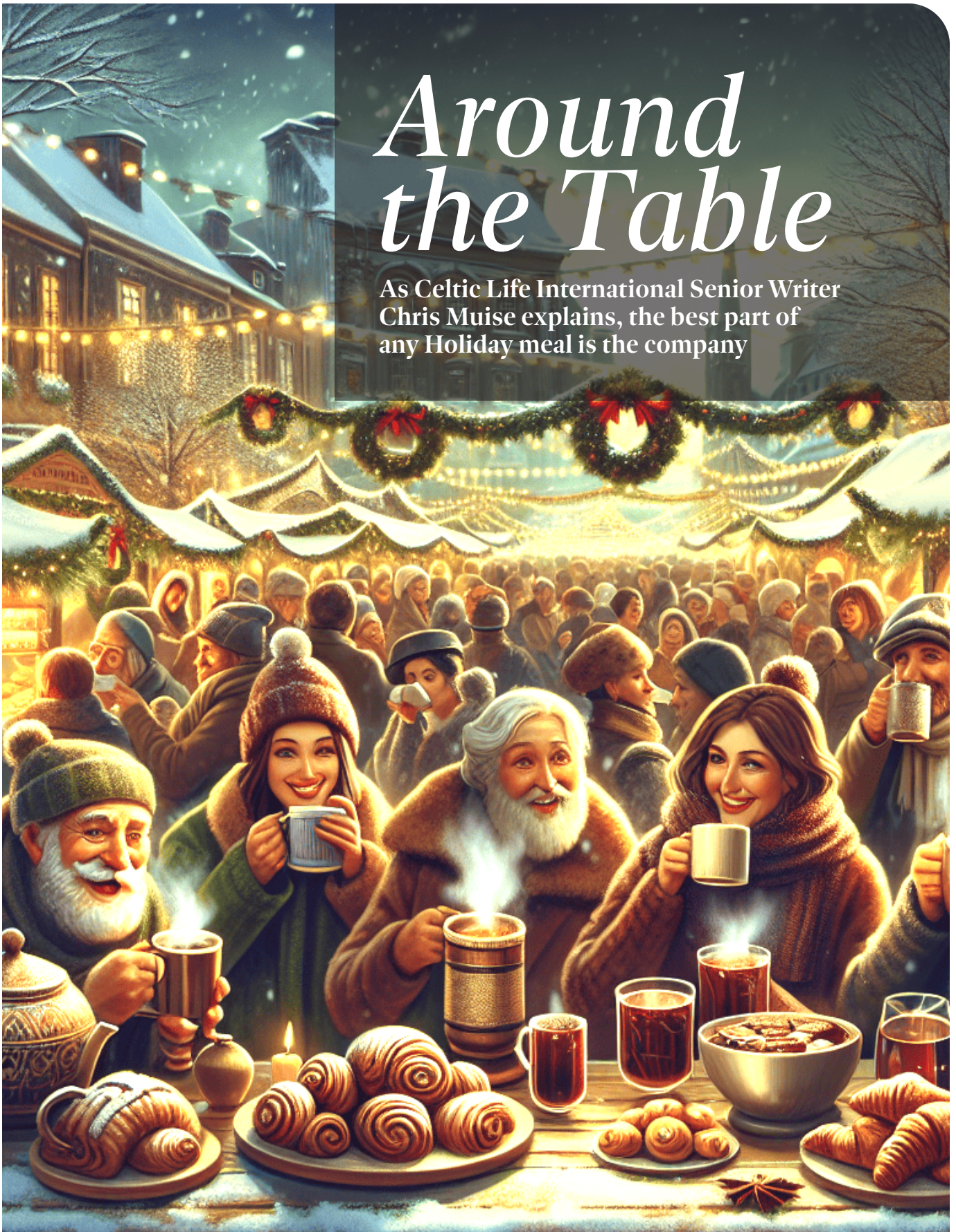

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Around the Table

As Celtic Life International Senior Writer
Chris Muise explains, the best part of
any Holiday meal is the company



Some of my favourite and most vivid holiday memories are of family gatherings at my grandmother's home for Christmas dinner.

I have written about my late grandmother Eileen Nickerson before; most recently about her Celtic heritage, and before that when I shared her Christmas Pudding recipe in a previous holiday edition of Celtic Life International. Her take on an English classic - packed to the brim with dried fruits, including currants and raisins, aromatic spices, and sweet treacle, and covered in festive cherries and a drizzle of creamy, melty hard sauce - was certainly a highlight of our festive family feasts.

But it wasn't her only dish; she also served up roast turkey - cooked to juicy perfection with savoury stuffing - and all manner of potatoes and root vegetables that came in every variety, from mashed to squashed to scalloped. Her love language was food, and she certainly spoiled us, (especially me!)

This is the typical Canadian/American Christmas dinner, save for perhaps the odd regional difference. However, it all goes back much farther than that - back to the old countries.

"A Christmas dinner in Scotland would typically be turkey," shares Bob Creighton, President of Scots in New England. "Or it could have been chicken. I can't speak for everyone, but in many parts of Scotland, they were considered a luxury. In fact, for years Christmas dinner was a luxury in its own right."

"Our ancestors ate to live," agrees Gary Maclean, First National Chef of Scotland and Celtic Life International's own resident culinary creator. "They didn't cook for fun or to show off - they cooked what was available to them and what was in season, and it was all really simple, with maybe only four or five ingredients."

"Our ancestors wanted to make the best use of what they had," continues Creighton. "All sorts of different vegetables and stuffings and everybody had their own unique offering. That's still the way it is done to this day at our house; everybody has their own special dish - somebody might make the stuffing, or someone else might make a particular variety of peas or Scottish smoked salmon or whatever."



“Interestingly, the modern idea of Christmas owes a lot to Celtic culture.

In fact, much of the trappings of the season - wreaths and Christmas trees or the very idea that Christ was born in December - harkens back to the ancient Celtic pagan tradition of Samhain, which the Christians adopted to make converting more palatable.

"Queen Victoria and Prince Albert kind of defined a lot of the traditions that we observe now at Christmas," notes Maclean. "Queen Victoria started a sort of Scottish revolution. After she bought Balmoral Castle, everything Scottish became quite trendy in Victorian times."

In much the same way, our modern concept of Christmas dinner was informed by immigrants from Scotland, Ireland, and other parts of the Celtic Diaspora who sought to maintain their cultural identity through cuisine.

That close connection between the yuletide and "yum!" was the spark of inspira-

tion that ignited Maclean's latest cookbook, *Scottish Celebrations*.

"I was always fascinated with the number of Scottish celebrations that involve food. As a kid, the only time we ever really ate well was during these celebrations. I thought it would be a great idea to write a book about those festivities and what they mean to me and my homeland."

Maclean's new book has 10 recipes for each month of the year, as *Scottish Celebrations* aren't only about Christmas - in fact,



Anne Robinson



“Today, dishes may differ across the Celtic Diaspora, but they share common ground in the customs, cultivation, and cooking of our ancient ancestors.”

Of course, one needn't hit up the dining hall for a heaping helping of haggis or be the first to cross someone's threshold bearing sweets, coal, and a dram on Hogmanay to reconnect to your Celtic identity.

Robinson's business rose from a tradition of gift-giving.

“I am married to a Scotsman, and every time we went to Scotland, I came back with wonderful things in my suitcase, including jars of Heather Honey. I gave them as gifts, and everybody raved and wanted more.

“I recall saying to my husband, 'I should probably start to do this thing with Scottish food, because look at all this stuff that I can find and all these delicious things that nobody has here in America.' Today, we are by far the largest seller of Scottish foods in the US.”

American residents can enjoy giving and receiving a taste of Scotland for the holidays; from a small, delicious amuse-bouche of Scottish shortbread to a virtual cornucopia of plenty.

“We have had gift baskets in the catalog since the very beginning,” shares Robinson. “I now have almost 15 different gift packages for Christmas, including one that focuses on Heather Honey - the iconic item that started it all. There is also our Highland Tea Box, with two different kinds of tea, salmon paté, cookies, scones, clotted cream, and jam - everything you need for a proper Highland Tea in one box. As well, our Scottish breakfast box comes with bacon and bangers and

there are a number of winter feast holidays on the Celtic calendar.

“Many people don't know that Christmas was banned in Scotland for a time, so Christmas is not the big holiday there,” says Anne Robinson, Founder of Scottish Gourmer USA, which has been providing American customers with delicious Scottish fare for nearly 20 years. “It is Hogmanay - New Year's Eve; you eat steak pie, usually with a root vegetable and tatties - you've simply got to have the tatties.

“Of course, there's Burns Night in January as well - and that is where the haggis comes in,” she adds. “And then there is Saint Andrew's Night on November 30th, which is another very traditional Scottish holiday.”

Scottish Celebrations covers all these

festive feasts and more.

“We use his cookbook religiously for big holidays and get-togethers,” says Creighton. “There are recipes for everything from Valentine's Day and Mother's Day to Burns Night, New Year, Hogmanay, and the rest.”

Maclean's literary effort is a follow-up to his previous tome, *Scottish Kitchen*, which he wrote for a North American audience - one that, removed by time and distance from their ancestral home, was hungry for a way to experience their heritage through food and drink. It is a hunger that needs satiating the most during the holiday season.

“I believe there are more Scottish Americans who celebrate Burns' Night than actual Scots,” muses the celebrity chef. “Burns Night in the US and Canada is huge, and it is not just about food - it is about culture, memory, and holding on to one's identity.”

There are more holidays still across the rest of the Seven Celtic Nations, each with its own unique haute cuisine. The day after Christmas is known as St. Stephen's Day in Wales, where residents make an eponymous stew of leftover ham and turkey. Local seafood like the Catalan-style of cannelloni called Canelons is a popular dish in Galicia on Nadal. Turkey is tagged out for the Game Hen in Cornwall, perhaps unsurprisingly.



Bob Creighton



Eleanor McGrath

crumpets, some tea, coffee, jam, and marmalade. This year, we went cosmic. We have a \$350 hamper with 36 items in it.

"There's something for everybody in that gift category, whether you want a basket or a beautiful box or something over-the-top."

Others, like Canadian author and filmmaker Eleanor McGrath, find a more down-to-earth way to connect with their Celtic roots - by planting some of their own.

"I had always wanted to own a farm, and the opportunity came up as I have family here," says McGrath, who, along with her husband Finbarr recently opened Springfield Farm in South Glengarry, Ontario.

While researching and interviewing for her 2009 book, *A Story to Be Told: Personal Reflections on the Irish Immigrant Experience in Canada*, McGrath came across the story of Irish children who came to Canada as indentured servants. In documenting their labours and hardships, she started to see her Irish ancestry - and its connection to the soil beneath her feet - in a new light.

"I began to appreciate how farming has really transformed our country, and yet as a society, we really do not value the farmer. Farming has really helped me to develop a greater appreciation for food, and for the people that built this country - people of all backgrounds and nationalities, including my own."



Gary Maclean



McGrath has traced her father's lineage as far back as 1847 when Thomas McGraw immigrated to America from Ireland - likely County Clare. Her mother's side is also of Irish heritage, by way of Chicago, and her husband is Irish born as well. And while she is proud of her Irish background, she hasn't always enjoyed such a close connection to the chow.

"Our family was all about meat and potatoes. It was identified as part of our Irish heritage, and it was always on the menu. At one point in my teenage years, I decided to boycott it - I simply wasn't having another potato! The irony of coming full circle hasn't escaped me; once again, it is all about potatoes - and I love growing them and digging them out of the ground, and staying connected to my heritage."

Today, life for McGrath resembles that

of her agrarian kin. Even her own father has made light of how off-the-grid she has become.

"When we restored the kitchen of this farmhouse, we installed a wood-burning oven to heat our home and make meals. My dad commented, 'you know, they've discovered electricity!' I responded with a chuckle, but I also told him it has been an amazing challenge because our old cookbooks actually refer to pre-electric ovens.

"I have two cookbooks that I use these days; Maura Laverty's *Full & Plenty: Classic Irish Cooking*, and *The Cooking Woman - Irish country recipes* by Florence Irwin. So, I am learning both how to make traditional Scotch-Irish-Celtic meals and how to cook them in a more traditional manner."

She admits that though her holiday feasts likely won't dazzle anyone, they are



simple, hearty and wholesome. Besides, she notes, there are other, equally important things about a great Christmas meal.

“Ours is a family dinner, and to me that is the most important thing. My kids are home; my eldest daughter is married, so her husband will be there, and possibly his parents. And we also invite friends if they are on their own. We want to enjoy company.

“This is a time of gathering - don't worry about the type of meal you put on the table; people want to feel welcomed and acknowledged, and food helps you do that.”

Maclean - perhaps surprisingly coming from a Michelin-starred chef - echoes the sentiment.

“We have done the same thing for years; we fill the house with as many people as possible. I mean, it might sound a little crazy for a chef to say this, but the food on Christmas

Day doesn't take centre stage. I don't want to be caught up in the kitchen - I do a lot of stuff in advance so that I can enjoy the day with my kids, rather than being stuck tending the oven. There is nothing I would rather be doing on December 25 than playing Lego with my children.”

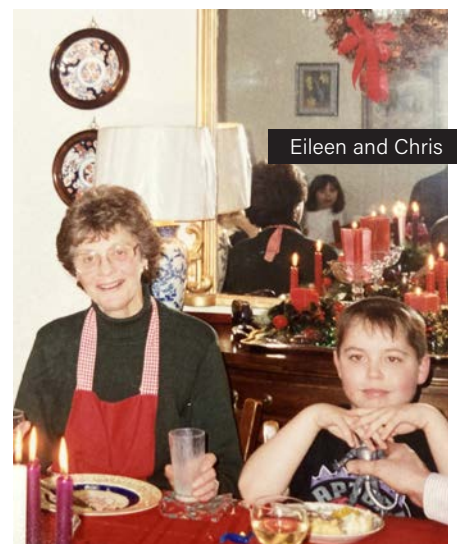
He has well-honed advice for those looking to sprinkle some scrumptious Scottish sustenance into their holidays.

“Be careful not to overdo it; start with familiar family recipes that you have tried and that you know your guests are going to enjoy. Then throw in some new stuff. The great thing with any traditional Scottish fare is, without exception, it is always very simple.

“I have learned over time - mostly through making many, many mistakes and spending hundreds of pounds and hours in the kitchen during the holidays - that your friends and family would prefer you to be with them at the table.”

Sure enough - looking back on my own

special holiday memories - what I remember most about my grandma's Christmas dinners wasn't what was on the table, but who was around it.





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Celtic Christmas Recipes

These Celtic Christmas recipes are sure to serve up the
scrumptious this holiday season!

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Irish Roast Goose



The Goose

Ingredients

Allow at least 1lb (450g) uncooked weight per guest

Instructions

Heat a saucepan, add ½ of the butter, then add the chopped shallot, diced carrot, and garlic and sweat for 3-4 minutes without colour. Add the soaked barley and cook for 2 to 3 minutes. Pour in the wine and reduce until it has totally evaporated. Once the wine has been absorbed, add the stock a ladle at a time, making sure the previous ladle of stock has fully been absorbed. Continue this method until all the stock has been absorbed and the barley is cooked. Check seasoning; add crabmeat, spinach, and parsley.

Apple & Potato Stuffing

Ingredients

2lb (900g) potatoes
1lb (450g) cooking apples, peeled and chopped
1lb (450g) roughly chopped onions
2oz (55g) butter
1 tablespoon chopped parsley
1 tablespoon chopped lemon balm
Salt and pepper

Instructions

Boil the potatoes in salted water. When cooked, mash without using milk or butter. Melt the butter in a pan and, over low heat, fry the onions for five minutes without allowing them to brown. Add the apples and cook until they are softened. Stir in the mashed potatoes, parsley, and balm. Season. Allow to cool before stuffing the goose.

Christmas Cornish Hens



CORNWALL

Ingredients

*4 Cornish hens
2 onions, coarsely chopped
2 tablespoons honey
12 slices bacon or pancetta
6 leeks, trimmed, chopped into 2-inch pieces
1 tablespoon olive oil
½ teaspoon salt
Freshly ground pepper*

Instructions

Heat oven to 400 degrees. Stuff the hens with onions. Brush with honey; cover each breast with 3 slices of bacon or pancetta. Settle into a roasting pan. Toss the leeks with the oil; add to the pan, tucking them in around the birds. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Roast for 45-60 minutes. If the bacon begins to blacken, cover the hens with foil. Remove the birds from the pan; keep warm. Using a slotted spoon, transfer the leeks to a serving dish; keep warm. Tilt the pan to one side; skim away any fat. Pour a small amount of hot water into the roasting pan; set over high heat. Heat to a boil, scraping up any crispy bits from the bottom of the pan; simmer for a few minutes. Pour the pan sauce into a gravy boat or pitcher; serve with the hens and the leeks.

Manx Scallops Marsala



Ingredients

*1 pound Isle of Man scallops
9 oz fettuccine
1/2 lb wild mushroom, chopped
1 tablespoon of butter
1 tablespoon of olive oil
1 teaspoon chopped chives
1/3 teaspoon minced garlic
1/3 cup Marsala wine
Dash of salt and pepper*

Instructions

In a large pan over high heat, sauté the scallops with the butter and seasonings – they will cook very quickly. When scallops are firm but still moist, remove from heat. Stir in the wine, adding the cornstarch. Serve immediately with pasta, accompanied by rice and vegetables.

Christmas Mince Pies



Pastry

Ingredients

200g (8oz) plain flour
50g (1oz) ground almonds
Pinch of salt
125g (4oz) butter, chilled
1 egg
50g (1oz) sugar

Instructions

Sieve the flour, ground almonds, and salt into a bowl. Dice the chilled butter and add to the flour mixture. Lightly rub in the butter to achieve a sandy texture by running your hands down the insides of the bowl and going right to the bottom. When your fingers meet, slowly lift them out of the bowl, rubbing your thumbs over your fingers as you go. The secret of perfect pastry is to make sure you do not handle it too much. Make sure that the butter is not completely rubbed in. There should be little flakes of butter visible at this stage. Mix the egg and the sugar. Make a well in the centre of the flour and butter and add the sugar and the egg mixture. Gradually incorporate them into the flour and carefully bring it together until you have a smooth paste. Press into a flat round, then wrap in cling film and allow to rest in the fridge for an hour before using. The reason you press the pastry into a flat round is so that you can roll it straight from the fridge.

Pie - Instructions

Lightly butter your tin. Thinly roll out the pastry. Cut out 12 circles with a fluted pastry cutter, large enough to fill the base of the prepared tin. Press gently into each hole, then fill with the mincemeat. Cut out another 12 slightly smaller discs (or you could use a shaped cutter and use to cover the mincemeat). Press the edges together to seal. Make a small hole in the top of each, then brush lightly with milk. Place into the fridge for 30 minutes. Preheat the oven to 180°C (350°F). Bake the pies for approximately 15 to 20 minutes until golden brown. Let them settle for a few minutes and then decant them onto a cooling rack. Dust with icing sugar. Makes 12 portions.

Mincemeat

Ingredients

170g (6oz) seedless raisins
125g (4oz) sultanas
125g (4oz) currants
50g (2oz) mixed peel
50g (2oz) dried prunes, chopped
170g (6oz) soft brown sugar
1 Braeburn or Cox apple, peeled, cored and grated
100g (3½oz) shredded suet or veggie suet
1 orange, juiced and zested
1 lemon, juiced and zested
50g (2oz) sliced almonds
½ teaspoon mixed spice
½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
Pinch of nutmeg
100ml brandy

Instructions

Mix all the ingredients, using only half the brandy, in a large, deep baking tray, cover, and leave to stand overnight. The next day, preheat the oven to 120°C (250°F). Cover the tray with foil and place in the oven for about 2 hours or until the fruit is softening and the juices are sticky to the touch. Leave the mixture to cool slightly, then mix in the rest of the brandy. Sterilize clean glass jars and spoon the warm mincemeat into them.

Welsh Plum Pudding



Ingredients

*1 ½ lb of raisins
½ lb of currants
½ lb of mixed peel
¾ lb of breadcrumbs
¾ lb of suet
8 eggs
1 wine glass of brandy*

Instructions

Stone and cut the raisins in halves, but do not chop them. Wash, pick, and dry the currants, and mince the suet finely. Cut the candied peel into thin slices, and grate the bread into fine crumbs. Mix all these ingredients together; then moisten the mixture with the eggs, which should be well beaten, and add the brandy. Stir, so that everything is well blended, and press the pudding into a buttered mould. Tie it down tightly with a floured cloth, and boil for 5 or 6 hours. It may be boiled in a cloth without a mould and will require the same time allowed for cooking. As Christmas puddings are usually made a few days before they are brought to the table – once the pudding is taken out of the pot, hang it up immediately, and put a plate or saucer underneath to collect the water that may drain from it. The day it is to be served, plunge it into boiling water, and keep it boiling for at least 2 hours; then turn it out of the mould, and serve it with brandy sauce. On Christmas day a sprig of holly is usually placed in the middle of the pudding, and about a wineglassful of brandy is poured round it which is lighted at the moment of serving. The pudding should be brought to the table encircled in flame. Cooking time: 5 or 6 hours the first time of boiling; 2 hours the day it is to be served. Serves 8 persons.

La Galette des Rois



Almond Cream

Ingredients

*1/2 cup (113 g, 1 stick) unsalted butter,
at room temperature
1/2 cup (100 g) granulated sugar
2 large eggs, at room temperature
2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract
1 cup (100 g) almond meal
1/2 teaspoon fine sea salt*

Instructions

Using handheld electric beaters on high speed, beat the butter and sugar until smooth and creamy, about 3 minutes. Add the egg and vanilla and beat until well combined. Your mixture may look a little curdled, but that's okay. Using a rubber spatula, gently fold in the almond meal and salt until you have a smooth paste. It will be quite stiff. Cover the almond mixture with plastic wrap and refrigerate for at least 1 hour, or overnight.

Pastry

Ingredients

*2 rolls of store-bought puff pastry (1 lb/454 g),
thawed but chilled*

Instructions

Roll out the pastry and cut two circles (10 inches/25 cm in diameter). Place them, separated and sandwiched by parchment paper, on a baking tray in the fridge until you are ready to use them.

Galette

Ingredients

*1 large egg, lightly beaten, for egg wash
1 tablespoon heavy (35%) cream
1 dried bean or fève
1 paper crown
1/2 teaspoon fine sea salt*

Instructions

Whisk the egg and the cream together to make your egg wash. Remove one pastry circle from the fridge and place it on a baking tray. Peel off the top layer of parchment, leaving the bottom parchment in place. Spread the almond cream in the center of one pastry circle, leaving a border of about 1 inch (2.5 cm) around the edge. Place the dried bean or fève in the almond cream so that it's completely covered. You can use an offset spatula to help spread the cream evenly over the pastry. Brush the edge of the pastry circle with the egg wash, making sure to keep the egg on the pastry and not dripping down the edges. (If you let the egg wash drip down, your puff pastry might not puff.) Remove the other pastry disk from the fridge, peel it off the parchment, and carefully place it on top of the almond cream, lining up the edges of both pastry circles. Gently press the edges down on both the egg-washed border and the almond cream with your hands, then use your fingertips (or the tines of a fork) to lightly press around the edges of the galette to seal it. Use the back of a small, sharp knife to score a pattern on top of the pastry. You can make a grid pattern or a sun pattern. For the sun, start from the centre of the galette and trace a slightly curved line to the very edge of the pastry. Do not cut through the pastry. Turn the galette slightly clockwise and repeat, until you have scored the top of the galette all over. Brush the top of the galette with more egg wash, making sure it doesn't drip down the sides. Place the baking tray with the galette in the fridge for 30 minutes. Meanwhile, preheat the oven to 375°F (190°C). Remove the galette from the fridge, brush it one more time with egg wash, then bake for 35 to 40 minutes, until the pastry is puffed and golden brown. Place the galette on a wire rack and allow it to come to room temperature before serving topped with a paper crown.

Christmas Ginger Cookies



Ingredients

3 cups all-purpose flour
1 ½ teaspoons baking powder
¾ teaspoon baking soda
¼ teaspoon salt
1 tablespoon ground ginger
1 ¾ teaspoons ground cinnamon
¼ teaspoon ground cloves
6 tablespoons unsalted butter
¾ cup dark brown sugar
1 large egg
½ cup molasses
2 teaspoons vanilla

Instructions

In a small bowl, whisk together flour, baking powder, baking soda, salt, ginger, cinnamon, and cloves until well blended. In a large bowl beat butter, brown sugar, and egg on medium speed until well blended. Add molasses and vanilla and continue to mix until well blended. Gradually stir in dry ingredients until smooth. Divide the dough in half and wrap each half in plastic. Let stand at room temperature for at least 2 hours or up to 8 hours. (Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Prepare baking sheets by lining them with parchment paper. The dough can be stored for up to 4 days, but in this case, it should be refrigerated. Return to room temperature before using.) Place one portion of the dough on a lightly floured surface. Sprinkle flour over dough and rolling pin. Roll dough to a scant 1/4-inch thickness. Use additional flour to avoid sticking. Cut out cookies with a gingerbread cutter. Space cookies 1 ½-inches apart. Bake one sheet at a time for 7-10 minutes (the lower time will give you softer cookies!). Remove the cookie sheet from the oven and allow the cookies to stand until the cookies are firm enough to move to a wire rack. Cool and decorate as desired.

Queimada



GALICIA

Ingredients

1 litre orujo
(substitute Italian grappa if orujo is not available)
2/3 cup granulated sugar
Rind of one lemon cut into strips
1/4 cup whole coffee beans

Instructions

To properly prepare this drink, you will need a large fireproof clay pot or bowl, sealed or glazed on the interior, and a very long-handled wooden spoon to stir the Queimada. Place the clay pot or bowl on a fireproof table atop a cold BBQ grill. Be sure to have a large lid handy to put out the flames. Pour approximately 4 Tbsp orujo and 1 Tbsp sugar into a small glass and stir, to dissolve the sugar, then set aside. Pour the rest of the orujo and remaining sugar into the clay bowl and stir. Add the lemon peel and coffee beans and stir again. Pour the orujo and sugar mixture from the glass into a ladle, and light it on fire. Carefully move the ladle very close to the clay pot until the orujo mixture in the pot catches fire. Stir frequently until the flames turn blue. Slide the lid over the pot to put out the flames. Serve hot.



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Surviving Christmas

Our resident Celtic Chef Gary Maclean serves up some tasty tips on how to best handle home cooking during the holidays.

My thoughts on home entertaining during the holiday season have changed over the years. I once thought it was all about the food - showcasing skills and providing restaurant-style, quality meals. These days, however, it is all about the people in my life. Here are a few suggestions for surviving Christmas.

Plan, plan, and plan again. Plan what you are going to serve, plan when you are going to prepare it and plan how you are going to deliver it.

Do not serve food on individual plates. Instead, serve it on platters, bowls, or large plates, which can be placed on the dining table. There are two reasons for this; first, if you serve in bulk, it is much easier to deliver food hot and in perfect condition. Secondly, your guests can simply help themselves to what they want and won't feel obliged to eat what you have doled out to them. Children eat more food this way. This style of serving food is fittingly called 'Family Service'.

Cook for your actual guests, and style the food accordingly. Think about the age group, the personalities, and the occasion, and then ask yourself what you would expect if you were going to this gathering. An event with a young family might be very different from a crowd of your closest friends.

Consider the equipment you have in your kitchen and take this into account when designing your menu. Try and have a good mix of food coming from every area of the



kitchen - some things from the oven, some done in the pressure cooker, some from the stove, and some cold food from the fridge.

Recruit a few assistants, even if you are a kitchen maverick who always cooks alone. Sorting the table, setting cutlery and glasses, tidying up, etc., can be a real time saver while you prepare the meal.

Work within your capabilities and don't be overly ambitious. Don't create a whole dinner with entirely new recipes - always have a couple of dishes that you know inside out. This will give you the time and headspace to try something different. It also ensures your guests have something to eat if the experiments don't work out.

Minimum work and maximum impact. Think of what you can serve up that involves very little work but provides a massive wow factor. The big flavours of smoked products are real crowd-pleasers - hot and cold smoked salmon, duck breast, or smoked chicken all take little work to make your own. Cured meats, pickled vegetables, and olives

make impactful intermediate courses as well.

Practice if you can, especially if you want to try something different. Chefs always practice new dishes long before they attempt to serve them up to hungry family members and friends.

Taste, taste, and taste again. It is vital to taste food when you cook. For most chefs, this is pure instinct. It is a little like driving a car - to change gears you press the clutch without any thought, but when you are learning you really need to focus on it each time. Seasoning is the same - the more you do it the more instinctive it becomes. And, when tasting, always remember the golden rule; don't double dip.

Chill out, relax, and enjoy the company. This is my most important tip. Remember, it is just a plate of food - the worst that can happen is that you end up ordering in.

Nollaig Chridheil!
Gary

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Camembert & Cranberry Bites



One of my favourite go-to appetizers, Camembert & Cranberry Bites are a simple and scrumptious way to please palates during the holidays.

Ingredients

3 sheets filo pastry
100g/3.5oz Camembert cheese (or any soft cheese)
50g/2oz cranberry sauce
25g/1oz butter, melted
Pinch of chives, chopped

Biadh math!
Gary

Instructions

The first job is to make the little filo baskets - this is very easy, especially if you have a small muffin tin. Take the 3 sheets of filo pastry and cut in half, then half again - keep cutting until you get a bundle of squares of pastry about 6cm/2inch wide. Each basket will use three squares of pastry - take one square of pastry and brush with the melted butter, then add another square on top, changing the angle slightly. Lastly, add the third square on top of that and - if you have your angles right - it should look like a star. Put the pastry into the muffin tin and repeat until all the pastry has been used. Bake in the oven at 175°C/350°F for 8 to 10 minutes until golden brown. Next, cut the cheese into small pieces and fill each of the cooked baskets with the cut cheese before topping with a little cranberry sauce. Pop back into the oven for 3 to 4 minutes or until the cheese starts to melt. Top with some chopped chives. Makes 6-8 portions.

Turkey Tips

Everyone is looking for advice on how to cook their turkeys - from what size bird they need, to how long they need to cook it. Follow these basic principles for a perfectly moist and tender turkey.

Use the best produce you can afford - don't scrimp on the turkey which will be the star of any Christmas meal. It is better to have less of something good than more of something poor.

Buy locally when possible, and always look for the country of origin. Choose free range when possible as it really makes a difference.

Do not stuff the turkey with stuffing! It may sound odd, but due to the shape of the cavity, the stuffing may not cook evenly, and - except for the small amount that sticks out of the end - it does not get browned and crusty. More importantly, by the time the center of the stuffing is cooked to a safe temperature, the breast meat on the turkey will be overcooked and dry. Make your stuffing separate. Roll it up tightly in foil and bake it in the oven, before allowing it to cool and slice.

Season the turkey thoroughly. Be generous with the salt and pepper, and always season inside the cavity. Avoid seasoning the skin as it won't absorb salt, and will leave a crust. However, do mix the salt and pepper into room-temperature butter and push it between the skin and the flesh, which helps keep the meat moist and well-seasoned. Rub the skin with the butter and cover it in streaky bacon to again help stop the meat from drying out.

Baste! Baste! Baste! It's the real key to getting a lovely and moist turkey, as fat helps protect the meat and stops it drying out in the cooking process.

Trussing, or tying the turkey is important as a) it plumps the breasts for carving, and b) it keeps the legs close to the rest of the carcass which stops the turkey from drying out. The legs protect the narrow part of the breast and help it cook at the same time as the thicker parts.

Bring the turkey out for an hour before roasting to take the chill off. Then take two carrots, two sticks of celery, and an onion, and cut them into large chunks, before placing them on the bottom of a deep roasting pan. Put the turkey breast side up on top of the vegetables. Add about a half-inch of water to the roasting pan and place in the preheated oven. This keeps the oven moist and helps to capture the juices that escape the turkey. This liquid can be used to baste the turkey while it cooks (along with all the natural juices and fats that are going to be released) and eventually turns into a golden, rich gravy.

Remember to make sure that you can actually get your turkey in your oven! It sounds funny, but measure the capacity of your oven before you go turkey shopping, and then measure the turkey in the shop to make sure you can cook it.

Use the chart included here to give you an idea of what size turkey to purchase. It is not an exact science, and some people eat more than others. And leftover turkey can be turned into loads of amazing dishes.



2.5kg – 3kg	5lb- 6lb	4-6 people
3.5kg – 4kg	7lb-9lb	7-9 people
4.5kg – 5kg	9lb-11lb	9-10 people
5.5kg – 6kg	12lb-13lb	10-12 people
6.5kg – 7kg	14lb-15lb	12-14 people
7.5kg – 8kg	16lb-17lb	15-17 people
8kg +	18lb +	18+ people

As a guide, if the bird is under 4kg/9lb, cook it for 20 minutes per kg and then add 70 minutes to that time. If the bird is over 4kg/9lb, still cook it for 20 minutes per kg, but add 90 minutes to that time. Use a preheated oven (fan-assisted) at 190 °C/375 °F.

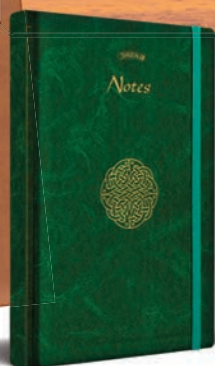
You must let the turkey rest for at least 20 minutes. When you remove it from the oven, turn the turkey upside down and rest it on its breasts, cover it very loosely with foil, and go about getting everything else ready. It won't get cold - a covered turkey will stay hot for over 40 minutes. Letting it rest not only gives you time to finish the gravy, and the rest of the meal but also allows the juices in the turkey to redistribute, which is the secret to moist, tender meat.

Slàinte Mhath!
Gary



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A Child's Christmas in Wales



COVER STORY

One Christmas was so much like the other, in those years around the sea-town corner now, out of all sound except the distant speaking of the voices I sometimes hear a moment before sleep, that I can never remember whether it snowed for six days and six nights when I was twelve, or whether it snowed for twelve days and twelve nights when I was six.

All the Christmases roll down towards the two-tongued sea, like a cold and head-long moon bundling down the sky that was our street; and they stop at the rim of the ice-edged, fish-freezing waves, and I plunge my hands in the snow and bring out whatever I can find. In goes my hand into that wool-white bell-tongued ball of holidays resting at the rim of the carol-singing sea, and out come Mrs. Prothero and the firemen.

It was on the afternoon of the day of Christmas Eve, and I was in Mrs. Prothero's garden, waiting for cats, with her son Jim. It was snowing. It was always snowing at Christmas. December, in my memory, is white as Lapland, although there were no reindeers. But there were cats. Patient, cold and callous, our hands wrapped in socks, we waited to snowball the cats. Sleek and long as jaguars and horrible-whiskered, spitting and snarling, they would slide and sidle over the white back-garden walls, and the lynx-eyed hunters, Jim and I, fur-capped and moccasined trappers from Hudson Bay, off Mumbles Road, would hurl our deadly snowballs at the green of their eyes.

The wise cats never appeared. We were so still, Eskimo-footed Arctic marksmen in the muffling silence of the eternal snows—eternal, ever since Wednesday—that we never heard Mrs. Prothero's first cry from her igloo at the bottom of the garden. Or, if we heard it at all, it was, to us, like the far-off challenge of our enemy and prey, the neighbor's polar cat. But soon the voice grew louder. "Fire!" cried Mrs. Prothero, and she beat the dinner-gong.

And we ran down the garden, with the snowballs in our arms, towards the house; and smoke, indeed, was pouring out of the dining room, and the gong was bombilating,



and Mrs. Prothero was announcing ruin like a town crier in Pompeii. This was better than all the cats in Wales standing on the wall in a row. We bounded into the house, laden with snowballs, and stopped at the open door of the smoke-filled room.

Something was burning all right; perhaps it was Mr. Prothero, who always slept there after midday dinner with a newspaper over his face. But he was standing in the middle of the room, saying, "A fine Christmas!" and smacking at the smoke with a slipper.

"Call the fire brigade," cried Mrs. Prothero as she beat the gong. "They won't be here," said Mr. Prothero, "it's Christmas."

There was no fire to be seen, only clouds of smoke and Mr. Prothero standing in the middle of them, waving his slipper as though he were conducting.

"Do something," he said.

And we threw all our snowballs into the smoke—I think we missed Mr. Prothero—and ran out of the house to the telephone box.

"Let's call the police as well," Jim said.

"And the ambulance."

"And Ernie Jenkins, he likes fires."

But we only called the fire brigade, and soon the fire engine came and three tall men in helmets brought a hose into the house and Mr. Prothero got out just in time before they turned it on. Nobody could have had a noisier Christmas Eve. And when the firemen

turned off the hose and were standing in the wet, smoky room, Jim's Aunt, Miss Prothero, came downstairs and peered in at them. Jim and I waited, very quietly, to hear what she would say to them. She said the right thing, always. She looked at the three tall firemen in their shining helmets, standing among the smoke and cinders and dissolving snowballs, and she said: "Would you like anything to read?"

Years and years ago, when I was a boy, when there were wolves in Wales, and birds the color of red-flannel petticoats whisked past the harp-shaped hills, when we sang and wallowed all night and day in caves that smelt like Sunday afternoons in damp front farmhouse parlors, and we chased, with the jawbones of deacons, the English and the bears, before the motor car, before the wheel, before the duchess-faced horse, when we rode the daft and happy hills bareback, it snowed and it snowed. But here a small boy says: "It snowed last year, too. I made a snowman, and my brother knocked it down and I knocked my brother down and then we had tea."

"But that was not the same snow," I say. "Our snow was not only shaken from white-wash buckets down the sky, it came shawling out of the ground and swam and drifted out of the arms and hands and bodies of the trees; snow grew overnight on the roofs of the houses like a pure and grandfather moss,

minutely ivied the walls and settled on the postman, opening the gate, like a dumb, numb thunderstorm of white, torn Christmas cards."

"Were there postmen then, too?"

"With sprinkling eyes and wind-cherried noses, on spread, frozen feet they crunched up to the doors and mittened on them manfully. But all that the children could hear was a ringing of bells."

"You mean that the postman went rat-a-tat-tat and the doors rang?"

"I mean that the bells that the children could hear were inside them."

"I only hear thunder sometimes, never bells."

"There were church bells, too."

"Inside them?"

"No, no, no, in the bat-black, snow-white belfries, tugged by bishops and storks. And they rang their tidings over the bandaged town, over the frozen foam of the powder and ice-cream hills, over the crackling sea. It seemed that all the churches boomed for joy under my window; and the weathercocks crew for Christmas, on our fence."

"Get back to the postmen."

"They were just ordinary postmen, fond of walking and dogs and Christmas and the snow. They knocked on the doors with blue knuckles...."

"Ours has got a black knocker...."

"And then they stood on the white Welcome mat in the little, drifted porches and huffed and puffed, making ghosts with their breath, and jogged from foot to foot like small boys wanting to go out."

"And then the presents?"

"And then the Presents, after the Christmas box. And the cold postman, with a rose on his button-nose, tingled down the teatray-slithered run of the chilly glinting hill. He went in his ice-bound boots like a man on fishmonger's slabs.

"He wagged his bag like a frozen camel's hump, dizzily turned the corner on one foot, and, by God, he was gone."

"Get back to the Presents."

"There were the Useful Presents: engulfing mufflers of the old coach days, and



mittens made for giant sloths; zebra scarfs of a substance like silky gum that could be tug-o'-warred down to the galoshes; blinding tam-o'-shanters like patchwork tea cozies and bunny-suited busbies and balaclavas for victims of head-shrinking tribes; from aunts who always wore wool next to the skin there were mustached and rasping vests that made you wonder why the aunts had any skin left at all; and once I had a little crocheted nose bag from an aunt now, alas, no longer whinnying with us. And pictureless books in which small boys, though warned with quotations not to, would skate on Farmer Giles's Pond and did and drowned; and books that told me everything about the wasp, except why."

"Go on to the Useless Presents."

"Bags of moist and many-colored jelly babies and a folded flag and a false nose and a tram conductor's cap and a machine that punched tickets and rang a bell; never a catapult; once, by a mistake that no one could explain, a little hatchet; and a celluloid duck that made, when you pressed it, a most unducklike sound, a mewling moo that an ambitious cat might make who wished to be a cow; and a painting book in which I could make the grass, the trees, the sea and the animals any color I please, and still the dazzling sky-blue sheep are grazing in the red field under the rainbow-billed and pea-green birds. Hard-boileds, toffee, fudge and Allsorts, crunch-

es, cracknel, humbugs, glaciers, marzipan, and butterwelsh for the Welsh. And troops of bright tin soldiers who, if they could not fight, could always run. And Snakes-and-Families and Happy Ladders.

And Easy Hobbi-Games for Little Engineers, complete with instructions. Oh, easy for Leonardo! And a whistle to make the dogs bark to wake up the old man next door to make him beat on the wall with his stick to shake our picture off the wall. And a packet of cigarettes: you put one in your mouth and you stood at the corner of the street and you waited for hours, in vain, for an old lady to scold you for smoking a cigarette, and then with a smirk you ate it. And then it was breakfast under the balloons."

"Were there Uncles like in our house?"

"There are always Uncles at Christmas. The same Uncles. And on Christmas mornings, with dog-disturbing whistle and sugar fags, I would scour the swathed town for the news of the little world and find always a dead bird by the Post Office or the white deserted swings; perhaps a robin, all but one of his fires out. Men and women wading, scooping back from chapel, with taproom noses and wind-bussed cheeks, all albinos, huddled their stiff black jarring feathers against the irreligious snow. Mistletoe hung from the gas brackets in all the front parlors; there was sherry and walnuts and bottled beer and crackers by the



dessertspoons; and cats in their fur-about watched the fires; and the high-heaped fire spat, all ready for the chestnuts and the mulling pokers. Some few large men sat in the front parlors, without their collars, Uncles almost certainly, trying their new cigars, holding them out judiciously at arms' length, returning them to their mouths, coughing, then holding them out again as though waiting for the explosion; and some few small aunts, not wanted in the kitchen, nor anywhere else for that matter, sat on the very edges of their chairs, poised and brittle, afraid to break, like faded cups and saucers."

Not many of those mornings trod the piling streets: an old man always, fawn-bowled, yellow-gloved and, at this time of year, with spats of snow, would take his constitutional to the white bowling green and back, as he would take it wet or fire on Christmas Day or Doomsday; sometimes two hale young men, with big pipes blazing, no overcoats and wind blown scarfs, would trudge, unspeaking, down to the forlorn sea, to work up an appetite, to blow away the fumes, who knows, to walk into the waves until nothing of them was left but the two curling smoke clouds of their inextinguishable briars. Then I would be slap-dashing home, the gravy smell

of the dinners of others, the bird smell, the brandy, the pudding and mince, coiling up to my nostrils, when out of a snow-clogged side lane would come a boy the spit of myself, with a pink-tipped cigarette and the violet past of a black eye, cocky as a bullfinch, leering all to himself.

I hated him on sight and sound, and would be about to put my dog whistle to my lips and blow him off the face of Christmas when suddenly he, with a violet wink, put his whistle to his lips and blew so stridently, so high, so exquisitely loud, that gobbling faces, their cheek bulged with goose, would press against their tinselled windows, the whole length of the white echoing street. For dinner we had turkey and blazing pudding, and after dinner the Uncles sat in front of the fire, loosened all buttons, put their large moist hands over their watch chains, groaned a little and slept. Mothers, aunts and sisters scuttled to and fro, bearing tureens. Aunt Bessie, who had already been frightened, twice, by a clock-work mouse, whimpered at the sideboard and had some elderberry wine. The dog was sick. Auntie Dosie had to have three aspirins, but Auntie Hannah, who liked port, stood in the middle of the snowbound back yard, singing like a big-bosomed thrush.

I would blow up balloons to see how big they would blow up to; and, then when they burst, which they all did, the Uncles jumped and rumbled. In the rich and heavy afternoon, the Uncles breathing like dolphins and the snow descending, I would sit among festoons and Chinese lanterns and nibble dates and try to make a model man-o'-war, following the Instructions for Little Engineers, and produce what might be mistaken for a sea-going tram-car.

Or I would go out, my bright new boots squeaking, into the white world, onto the seaward hill, to call on Jim and Dan and Jack and to pad through the still streets, leaving huge deep footprints on the hidden pavements.

"I bet people will think there've been hippos."

"What would you do if you saw a hippo coming down our street?"

"I'd go like this, bang! I'd throw him over the railings and roll him down the hill and then I'd tickle him under the ear and he'd wag his tail."

"What would you do if you saw two hippos?"

Iron-flanked and bellowing he-hippos clanked and battered through the scudding snow towards us as we passed Mr. Daniel's house.

"Let's post Mr. Daniel a snowball through his letter box."

"Let's write things in the snow."

"Let's write, 'Mr. Daniel looks like a spaniel' all over his lawn."

Or we walked on the white shore. "Can the fishes see it's snowing?"

The silent one-clouded heavens drifted onto the sea. Now we were snow-blind travelers lost on the north hills, and vast dewlapped dogs, with flasks round their necks, ambled and shambled up to us, baying "Excelsior." We returned home through the poor streets where only a few children fumbled with bare red fingers in the wheel-rutted snow and cat-called after us, their voices fading away, as we trudged uphill, into the cries of the dock birds and the hooting of ships out in the whirling bay. And then, at tea the recovered Uncles would be jolly; and the ice cake loomed in the center of the table like a marble grave. Aun-



"Perhaps it was a ghost," Jim said.

"Perhaps it was trolls," Dan said, who was always reading.

"Let's go in and see if there's any jelly left," Jack said. And we did that.

Always on Christmas night there was music. An uncle played the fiddle, a cousin sang "Cherry Ripe," and another uncle sang "Drake's Drum." It was very warm in the little house. Auntie Hannah, who had got on to the parsnip wine, sang a song about Bleeding Hearts and Death, and then another in which she said her heart was like a Bird's Nest; and then everybody laughed again; and then I went to bed. Looking through my bedroom window, out into the moonlight and the unending smoke-colored snow, I could see the lights in the windows of all the other houses on our hill and hear the music rising from them up the long, steadily falling night. I turned the gas down, I got into bed. I said some words to the close and holy darkness, and then I slept.

tie Hannah laced her tea with rum, because it was only once a year.

Bring out the tall tales now that we told by the fire as the gaslight bubbled like a diver. Ghosts whooped like owls in the long nights when I dared not look over my shoulder; animals lurked in the cubbyhole under the stairs where the gas meter ticked. And I remember that we went singing carols once, when there wasn't the shaving of a moon to light the flying streets. At the end of a long road was a drive that led to a large house, and we stumbled up the darkness of the drive that night, each one of us afraid, each one holding a stone in his hand in case, and all of us too brave to say a word. The wind through the trees made noises as of old and unpleasant and maybe web-footed men wheezing in caves. We reached the black bulk of the house.

"What shall we give them? Hark the Herald?"

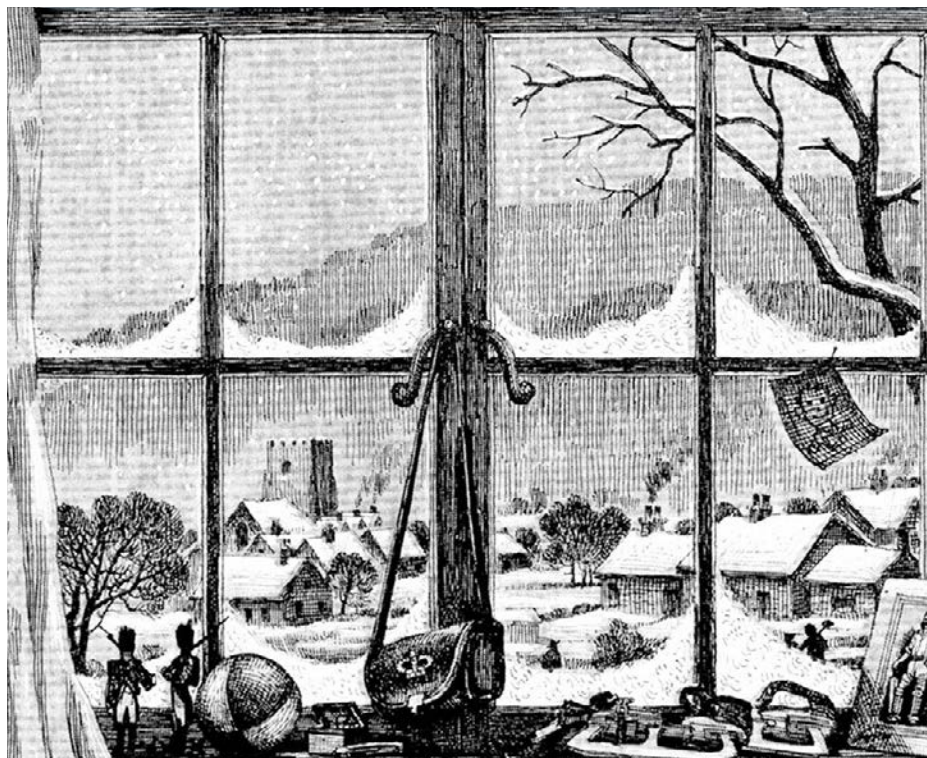
"No," Jack said, "Good King Wenceslas. I'll count three."

One, two, three, and we began to sing, our voices high and seemingly distant in the snow-felted darkness round the house that was occupied by nobody we knew. We stood close together, near the dark door.

Good King Wencelas looked out
On the Feast of Stephen...

And then a small, dry voice, like the voice of someone who has not spoken for a

long time, joined our singing: a small, dry, eggshell voice from the other side of the door: a small, dry voice through the keyhole. And when we stopped running we were outside our house; the front room was lovely; balloons floated under the hot-water-bottle-gulping gas; everything was good again and shone over the town.



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Hunting *the* Wren

By Lillian Holt



Trina walked across the schoolyard tugging her cloak tightly around her shoulders, but the ends just wouldn't meet. Mum had promised her something warmer once the cold weather set in, but it was almost Christmas, and she was still clutching at the threadbare garment to ward off the wind. Perhaps she would wake up Christmas morning to find something new under the tree.

Her classmates in Year 7 surely wouldn't be impressed, though. They fancied more extravagant goodies that Trina's mother couldn't afford. Once when she proudly wore brand-name sandals Mum had bought at the charity shop, Beca Baugh pointed at them and laughed, saying they were "as ancient as Ceridwen" in front of the whole class.

Trina's father had died three years before while working the coal mines at Aberpergwm Colliery, and since then she dreaded Christmas. Memories of her father proudly carving the Christmas goose, looking smart in a clean shirt and trousers, and Mum in her colorful apron, her blue eyes gleaming, were in stark contrast to how they now spent the holiday.

Mum now cleaned homes in areas far wealthier than the one-bedroom flat they were forced to move to in Gwynedd. Since then, they barely managed to set up a tree and arrange a proper Christmas dinner.

Trina clutched at the money in her pocket she earned helping several teachers clean their classrooms before the holiday break. It wasn't much but it would help with food and hopefully a little left to buy Mum a present.

When she finally arrived at High Street, it was lit up with bright colors and festive decor. The tall fir trees glistened with silver tin-

sel amid shops framed with white lights that looked like gingerbread houses. She wished Mum could be here to see.

She stopped to peer into the charity shop window where the sandals Beca had mocked, had come from. A small synthetic tree, decorated with a hodgepodge of ornaments sat in the center of the display next to a teddy bear with one missing leg.

A plump, rotund man with a faded red sweater and thinning white hair, startled Trina as he stepped outside. His eyes, almost hidden under woolly white eyebrows, reflected the light from the fairy tale scene surrounding them.

“Come in out of the cold, little hogan, that cloak is no match for the wind.”

Grateful for the invitation, Trina stepped inside. The musty smell of the shop reminded her of Da's workroom on the lower ground floor of their old house. She felt warm inside.

She wandered through numerous tightly packed clothes racks surrounded by plasterboard shelves indiscriminately filled with houseware items and toys, mindlessly discarded by their original owners. She spotted a plastic Christmas tree with built-in lights flashing in the corner and wondered if she had enough to buy it.

"How much is that tree, sir?"

"15 pounds," said the old man.

Trina hesitated. She wouldn't have enough to contribute to Christmas dinner, if she bought it.

The old man stood stoutly before her, hands on his belly, eyes smiling; the line of

his mouth buried beneath unruly white stubble. After a moment, he waddled to the front window and plucked something from the tree on display.

"You can have this for 2 pounds," he offered, chuckling.

Trina inspected the ornament - a glass brown bird as big as her fist; its surface balding where fuzzy fur had once been. It was frayed, but somehow, she knew Mum would like it. She paid the jolly man and thanked him as she left.

"Sometimes when we least expect it, we may find a treasure or two," he said mysteriously, his eyes still glimmering in the dim light.

It was dark by the time Trina arrived at her flat. She almost tripped on the loosened boards while looking up at a shooting star as she entered the building. She fished a key from her pocket, balancing Mum's present in one hand, but it slipped from her grasp and crashed to the floor.

Eyes welling up, she fell to her knees, her mind racing desperately, searching for ways to salvage the bird. She carefully took its delicate head, still intact, from the pile of broken glass. As she did, a folded, 100-pound note fell from within it.

Dazed, she looked closely at its beak inscribed with a single word: "Dryw".

The faded yellow glow from the bare bulb in the foyer seemed to dance on the shattered shards and as she blinked back her tears, she thought she saw Da's smiling face reflected warmly in the shadows and light.

The Bells of Bagenalstown

By Veronica Breen Hogle



When I was a girl growing up in Bagenalstown, County Carlow, I loved the hustle and bustle of Christmas Eve and the frantic last-minute shopping. Men who worked in Brown and Crosthwaite's Flour Mill were paid when they arrived at work on Christmas Eve morning. To the delight of the workers, each envelope had a cash bonus in it as well.

"I've more good news. Ye can leave at noon today. I hear you are going to deliver food hampers," Mr. Stevenson, the miller, said. The hampers were for the old men and women living alone and for poor families in hard times. Their faces lit up when a man arrived at their door singing Christmas is coming...and the geese are getting fat...please put a penny in the old man's hat...as he carried the hamper into the house and put it on the kitchen table. Local merchants put a card in that said, "Compliments of the Joyce family!"

When the men had delivered the hampers, they went to Dooley's Hotel and ate a big plate of colcannon, a dish made with mashed potatoes, parsley, scallions and a big dollop of country butter. The colcannon dish was a present to the men to thank them for delivering the hampers. They stayed at Doolley's for the afternoon, practicing the carols and the Latin for midnight Mass.

The four major streets of Bagenalstown - a medium-sized market town on the Barrow River - were crowded with shoppers buying exotic foreign foods and toys. People rushed from shop to shop buying grapefruits, oranges and lemonade, the kind we have only at Christmas. Some shoppers carried a plucked goose or a turkey under their arms. The trains whistled and steamed into the railway station. The young people coming home from England for the holidays were animated and friendly. Men shook the hands of other men and tipped their hats to women. Their warm breaths collided with the hard frost as they called out "Season's Greetings, Merry Christ-

mas! Happy New Year to ye. I'm home!"

Children old enough to be out by themselves pressed their noses against the glass windows. There was always a cluster of parents with children outside Cleary's window. They wanted to listen to the little man with the furrowed brow playing Christmas songs.

He looked smashing dressed in a black coat, white shirt, and a wide red tie. He had kind sea-blue eyes under a barley stack of silver hair. When he turned the handle of the organ, it ground out, "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer, "and Jolly Old Saint Nicholas," could be heard outside in the street. He also played "I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas." My best friend Ann and I would love to see real snow. We wondered what it felt like. Ann said she would give anything to be able to make a snowman.

As Christmas Eve went on, Christmas items, clothes, and perfumes with French names disappeared from the shop windows. "Jingle Bells, Green Sleeves, and Deck the Halls" drifted through the frosty air from the tin whistles of the tinker boys. They were part of a large family and had parked their horse-driven caravan down by the river. Their pie-bald pony swished his tail and grazed along the side of the road. The jingle of coins landing in the boys' caps at their feet kept the teenage boys playing Christmas carols non-stop.

“In the homes, children with rosy cheeks waited wide-eyed and tried hard to be good.

Tonight, Father Christmas will come down the chimney and leave toys in our stockings. I can count on finding an orange-stamped Seville in the toe.

The coal fire was banked high in the kitchen grate and the glow from it was reflected in the polished red tile floor. A fat candle was lit and placed in the window to

signal there was room at the inn. Our goose hung on a big nail in the scullery, ready to be stuffed with seasoned potato stuffing early on Christmas morning.

For weeks women deep-cleaned their houses, washed and ironed the lace curtains, cleaned the windows, baked the fruit cake, washed and starched the white linen tablecloth, and set the table with the blue willow china.

Dad went out with the clippers and cut a few armfuls of red-berry holly. He and Mom put sprigs over the framed photos on the wall, mantelpiece, and oil lamps. I arranged the Christmas cards, many with robins or other birds, on the front, standing around the window ledges. Now our house looked jolly and festive. Everything was ready.

As the day turned from light to dark, the bell from St. Andrews Roman Catholic Church rang out a call to parishioners to attend midnight mass. Hundreds of feet clad in leather-soled shoes could be heard walking towards the church. Inside, the smell of incense and candles spiraled up and were trapped in the dome of the high ceiling. The priest and mill workers sang the mass in Latin. We joined them in singing the Christmas hymns.

The young people home for the holidays were dressed in black drainpipe trousers and black leather jackets, miniskirts, and stiletto shoes with pointed toes, perfect for women with only three toes. The scents of different perfumes made their way into every pew in the church.

On the way back to our house, the bells of Saint Mary's Church of Ireland joined St. Andrew's Roman Catholic Church in ringing out a welcome to the newborn babe.

The echo of the Bells carried for miles along the Barrow River. The memory of it has remained forever in a little room at the back of my heart.

A Christmas Tale

When Deirdre O'Malley looked out the window she saw chimney pots, roofs, cars, and sidewalks bandaged in white fluffy snow. She was in bits trying to find a way to tell her three young children there would be no presents from Santa Claus this Christmas. She and their father had been separated for over a year. The court-ordered child support was always late or short. Because it was Christmas, Deirdre thought he'd give her some money so their children would have a happy Christmas. Instead, he left a message on her answering machine saying he was in Florida to celebrate Christmas and to play golf.

Here it was Christmas Eve in Buffalo, New York. Deirdre was 34 years old, and the only money she had was about 50 dollars in change. She was glad she got a turkey and all the trimmings for tomorrow's dinner. She could hear the sounds and the aromas of Christmas in every house, except hers. There was no cleaning done or fruitcakes being baked. She had no Christmas spirit at all.

"Can we get a Christmas tree, one like Charlie Brown's Christmas tree?" asked Kevin, Deirdre's eight-year-old son.

"I want to make Christmas cookies," said six-year-old Fiona.

"I'll put the cookies on Santa's plate," her twin sister, Caitlin, chimed in.

"Yes, we'll go and get our tree this morning," Deirdre said, fixing her face into a huge smile.

When they drove into the YWCA's parking lot, they saw that most of the good-looking trees were gone. They searched through skimpy trees with broken branches. Finally, they agreed on a small, tubby fir tree that could grow tall and slim or stay short and fat.

"How much is this one?" Deirdre asked the man selling the trees.

"All the trees are now 50 per cent off the price tag. You can have the one you're holding for five bucks."

"We'll take it," she said, handing him the money.

The man helped Deirdre to get the tree into the trunk of her old station wagon.



Back at home, the children began to pull the branches into shape. Deirdre watched them playing together and a feeling of contentment came over her.

Barbara, a tenant who lived upstairs, said she would show Deirdre how to make the Christmas cookies. At about four o'clock, Deirdre had a strong urge to go to the mall. She knew she'd get the Christmas spirit there if she mingled with crowds of last-minute shoppers. Barbara said she'd take care of the children while Deirdre went out again.

Back home in Ireland, many workers got paid on Christmas Eve and did their Christmas shopping that same day. The hustle and bustle created happy, friendly feelings as men and women rushed through the streets carrying parcels or calling out "Merry Christmas! Happy New Year!" Some shoppers would also carry a turkey or a goose under their arms.

While driving to the Boulevard Mall, Deirdre asked her guardian angel for help.

“At least we now have a turkey, a tree and we'll make Christmas cookies.”

When she entered the mall, a store with the name Sattler's caught her eye. She went over to where there was a cluster of people filling out forms. Then the public address system went on and a man's voice said:

"Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. To make your Christmas the best, Sattler's is inviting shoppers who don't have a Sattler's credit card to open one today. Yes...! You can get up to 300 dollars in instant credit. Just fill out an application, show your driver's license, and we'll give you a temporary card."

Deirdre could hardly believe her ears. Three hundred dollars! She could charge up to 300 dollars! That's 100 dollars for each child!

By Veronica Breen Hogle

With her temporary card, she raced to the toy department and got trains and trucks for Kevin, a telescope, and a doll that could talk for Fiona, and for Caitlin, she got a toy camera and puzzles. She bought several games and books. She rushed to the children's clothing section and bought jeans, sweaters, and socks. The PA system came on often, encouraging shoppers to get the instant credit offer.

"Sattler's will close at 6 p.m. sharp tonight so that our staff can go home and prepare for their own family's Christmas."

With 15 minutes to go before closing, Deirdre walked fast to the women's department and saw a beautiful red shirtwaist dress. With her blond hair and blue eyes, she looked great in red. It was not on sale, but she bought it anyway. She also treated herself to a small bottle of Channel Number 5 French perfume.

While driving home, Deirdre turned the radio up high and sang all the words of the Christmas Carols along with the singers. When she arrived back home, Barbara had the dough ready to make the cookies. They finished putting the lights on the tree. It did look like a Charlie Brown Christmas tree, and its pine scent seeped out into the living room.

When the children were asleep, Deirdre got the toys and clothes out of her car, and she spent over an hour wrapping presents.

At about five o'clock Christmas morning, Deirdre heard Kevin's door squeak open. He went into his sisters' room and woke them up.

"Santa Claus was here! He left bunches of toys outside our bedroom doors!" Kevin whispered.

Deirdre listened to her children's happy sounds of animated whispering, wrapping paper being ripped and crinkled. After a while, each sleepy child took one new toy from Santa's stash and brought it back into bed. The family slept late on Christmas morning. When they awoke, all of them had the Christmas spirit and it was in every corner of the house.

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A young girl with long brown hair, wearing a red and green plaid dress and a matching headband, is looking down at a small, ornate Christmas figurine she is holding in her hands. The figurine appears to be a miniature scene with figures. In the background, there are Christmas stockings hanging on a wooden mantel. One stocking is red with the word "Believe" and stars, and another is dark with a Santa Claus face. A red lamp is visible on the right side of the image.

Holiday Gift Guide

*Looking for that special something for that
special someone this holiday season?
We've got you covered with our annual
Holiday Gift Guide!*



Highland Coo Ugly Christmas Sweaters
Thistle & Stitch - www.thistleandstitch.com

Ugly never looked so good! Bring out the smiles and chuckles this holiday season with the Highland Coo Ugly Christmas sweater from Thistle & Stitch. Adorned with a cute and furry coo, traditional Scottish thistles, and a set of frolicking unicorns, this jumper may be customized with festive lights and other bits and baubles with an add-on embellishment kit. This items are 100 per cent acrylic and machine washable, with unisex sizing ranges from Toddler 2t to Adult 2xl. As one of the company's most popular annual holiday items, it would be wise to pre-order these jumpers before they sell out. Inspired by the history of Scottish tartans, the pleasures of plaid, and all things adventurous, Thistle & Stitch also offers a large selection of Celtic-inspired apparel and accessories, shipped worldwide from their shop in Magalia, California.

Celtic Knotwork Sapphire Solitaire Ring
Sheila Fleet - www.sheilafleet.com

Given its sacred history traced back to the ancient Book of Kells and the Lindisfarne Gospels, the Celtic Knot and its perpetual loop have long symbolized the enduring ties that last a lifetime. Pair an abiding love and long-lasting luxury with an exquisite Celtic Knotwork Sapphire Solitaire Ring from the exclusive Sheila Fleet collection. Adorned with an impressive 4mm blue sapphire set in 18ct yellow gold, this superbly crafted piece can be engraved and gift-wrapped in time for the holidays this year. Choose from a splendid selection of Celtic-inspired rings, available in a distinctive variety of precious metals and gemstones, made to order, according to your specifications. Every piece of Sheila Fleet Jewellery is carefully crafted in her Orkney, Scotland workshop.



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Heartbox - www.heartboxscotland.com

Wherever in the world you may be, Heartbox is committed to bringing you the very best in Scottish pride, culture, history, heritage, and heart. Each month, subscribers will receive a unique and bespoke assortment of Scottish treasures. Simply choose a plan and the Heartbox team will prepare and pack a selection of carefully hand-picked gifts from a panel of local, sustainable Scottish suppliers. As there is no minimum term, gifting options include year-long subscriptions or a single box. Particularly popular this year is the Fall for Scotland Heartbox, a warm and welcoming Christmas gift for family, friends, or for yourself.



Ireland Chauffeur Driven Tours
Sheenco Travel - www.sheencotravel.com

Discover Ireland's breathtaking beauty and heritage with a private, tailor-made, chauffeur-driven tour in your luxury vehicle of choice. Experience the Emerald Isle's stunning sights - from the scenic cliffs of Donegal to the historic castles of Limerick - incredible experiences that will leave visitors with memories to last a lifetime. This bespoke journey offers exclusive accommodations at the country's finest 4 and 5-star properties, customized according to individual preferences, including VIP private castle tours and the finest local culinary delights. Sheenco's concierge service ensures that every detail is meticulously managed, allowing you to fully immerse yourself in an unforgettable adventure.

Tartan Christmas Stockings
ScotlandShop - www.scotlandshop.com

An online retailer specializing in tartan, ScotlandShop offers a unique, seasonal gift that can be used year after year - Tartan Christmas Stockings. A ScotlandShop staple, these charming stockings are made to order using a variety of 100 per cent wool tartan fabrics. Available for order in over 500 clan and family tartans, they are fully customizable with a choice of complementary lining colour and the option of having a name embroidered on the fabric. The stockings can be shipped in a beautiful ScotlandShop gift box. For those interested in bundling up with another gift this year, the company also carries a variety of custom-made tartan products, including clothing, upholstery, home décor accessories, and more.



Free Travel Benefits in Scotland
Chicago Scots - www.chicagoscots.org

Chicago Scots and the National Trust for Scotland Foundation USA are proud partners, offering reciprocal membership. Join to receive local benefits on this side of the pond and free travel benefits at over 100 heritage sites in Scotland and more than 500 National Trust sites across the rest of the UK. Your gift will help two great Scottish organizations make good on their charitable missions to care. Reciprocal membership supports Chicago Scots' primary charity, Caledonia Senior Living & Memory Care, and the National Trust's important work to care for Scotland's natural and cultural heritage. You don't need to be in Chicago to be a member - you are invited and encouraged to become a Chicago Scot from wherever you are in the world. We welcome everyone who is Scottish by birth, by heritage or simply by inclination. Join for culture. Stay for care.





Perfume Oils

SAOR - www.saorperfume.com

SAOR - the Gaelic word meaning "to be free" - creates calming, captivating pure perfume oils for both women and men. Alcohol and water-free, SAOR's 10ml roll-on perfume oils last from dawn to dusk. SAOR's original fragrance - a hAon - transports you through the fragrant, enchanting mist that blankets the Irish hillsides infusing bergamot, fresh white tea, and airy musk. The warm, woodsy a Dó infuses neroli, ylang-ylang, oud, cedar, and sandalwood, and is ideal for both women and men. SAOR's "sunshine in a bottle" - a Tri - infuses uplifting grapefruit, soothing ginger, and warm cedar. You can enjoy all three, as SAOR now offers The Trilogy Collection, which includes a 5ml roll-on bottle of all three signature fragrances. The Find Your Fragrance link on the company's website helps you choose your SAOR fragrance. Free shipping in the USA.

Ingles Buchan Tartan Throw

Northern Waters Knitwear - www.nwknitwear.com

What better way to bundle up this winter than with a cozy tartan throw? The Ingles Buchan Tartan Throw is made from the highest quality 100 per cent pure new wool yarn, sourced through dedicated yarn merchants, and delivered in the colour ecru. The yarn is dyed into over 100 different stock colours in Selkirk, Scotland, before being broken down into cones for each colour ready to weave. The piece measures around 54" x 70" in size. Located on Granville Street in Halifax, and now with a second location at Pier 20, Northern Waters Knitwear is the only tartan shop in the city's downtown core. With a large selection of Clan kilts, traditional Highland dress products, British Worsted Wool Sweaters and Accessories, along with hundreds of different items to complete your Clan or Irish family collection, the company has many Celtic-themed gift options for everyone on your holiday list.



Scottish Thistle Necklace

Scoti Creations - www.scoticroations.com

Step back into the world of Celts, Picts, and Vikings with Scoti Creation's extensive array of handcrafted artisan jewelry designed to connect you with your heritage. Metal Smith Marilyn Scott combines precious metals and ancient forming techniques to give each piece a unique, antiquated look. The Scottish Thistle necklace nestles rare Maw Sit-Sit in Sterling Silver. The pendant hangs from a handwoven sterling silver Viking Knit chain. The Scottish Thistle reminds us of the legend of the Scots defeating Norse Vikings intent on sneaking into the Coast of Largs at night. A bare-footed Norseman stepped on a thistle alerting the Clansmen of their arrival. Other timeless and beautifully crafted gift items are available via the company's website, just in time for the holiday season.



Tour of Scotland Tartan Gift Box

Scottish Gourmet USA - www.scottishgourmetusa.com

Packaged with eleven delicious foods, the Tour of Scotland Gift Box is like a culinary tour of the country. An ideal gift for travellers, or those looking for a taste of Scotland at home, the Red Tartan Gift Box includes a map illustrating where each food item originates, and includes world-famous shortbread, clotted cream fudge, perfectly blended tea, whisky sauce, and more. Bringing the best of Scotland to America since 2005, Scottish Gourmet USA offers a variety of holiday gift packages to delight the most discerning foodie with scrumptiously prepared classics, including haggis, Scottish meat pies and smoked salmon, butterscotch, brandy butter, and more. Pair any edible with traditional non-food items like a Highland McMoo tea towel, red tartan aprons, Edinburgh tea caddies, or a Kilty Pleasures 2025 Wall Calendar for the daring gift-giver. Celebrate the holidays with heritage and history, and ship anywhere in the USA.



Knives and Accessories

Grohmann Knives Ltd - www.gknives.com

This holiday season, give a piece of handcrafted history that extends back to the Second World War when the Grohmann family began making handmade knives in Pictou, Nova Scotia, Canada. Offering a large selection of kitchen, hunting, and pocketknives crafted in the old-world tradition, Grohmann products are frequently passed down as heirlooms through generations. Created from both German carbon steel and stainless steel - famous for standing the test of time - Grohmann's knives are carefully set with several options of handles, including rosewood and resinwood. In addition to hunting and kitchen sets, other available products include cleavers, skinners, fillets, folders, and a complete line of sheaths, sharpeners, and other specialty items for the kitchen. Engraving and gift wrapping are also available on-site or online.



Celtic Journals & Ancient Irish Maps

O'Brien Celtic Gifts - www.obriencelticgifts.com

Direct from their dedicated Celtic craft bindery in Dublin, O'Brien Celtic Gifts offers a range of top-quality Celtic/Irish Gifts including Deluxe Celtic Journals and Notebooks with classic Celtic embossed cover designs. Choose from 3 different editions; the Claddagh Journal, the Celtic Journal or the Glenoge, each designed and developed in Dublin to the highest standards. Adorn the living room wall with an exquisite matted and framed Ancient Map of Ireland (circa. 1779), with a special "raised" effect, and reproduced in fine detail. Other historic items from the company's craft bindery include the 1847 Irish Emigrant Trail Map, a superb reproduction of The Historic 1916 Irish Proclamation - available in 3 different sizes - as well as stunning reproductions from the epic Book of Kells. All are matted and ready to frame. Take it a step further by personalizing your gift with the recipient's name embossed on the front cover. Other classic Celtic/Irish notebooks, journals and wall hangings are available via O'Brien's website.



Practice Chanter Starter Kit

Carbony Celtic Winds - www.carbony.com

Attention budding bagpipers! The GHB Carbony Practice Chanter - with engraved stainless-steel bell, true band chanter finger spacing, and diameter matching counterbored finger holes - is the ultimate practice instrument. Created by an established musician - who also happens to be a lettered engineer - the Carbony composite is an innovative material that is sonically more efficient than any of its wood counterparts, producing a quicker note response and ease of articulation. Virtually indestructible, this practice chanter starter kit will not rot or crack, combining state-of-the-art technology with time-tested design. Committed to creating quality Celtic instruments used by professional musicians worldwide, the Oregon-based company offers an ever-expanding line of high-quality wind instruments, including whistles & tabor pipes, bagpipes, gaitas, Irish flutes, and more.



The Haggis

Stahly Haggis - www.thehaggis.com

Since their first haggis was born over one hundred years ago in Dunfermline, Scotland, the Stahly family's line of haggises has earned the respect of aficionados worldwide. Much of the acclaim in the USA for the Stahly brand is due to the easy availability of their Canned Traditional Scottish Haggis. This popular version is ready to serve whenever the occasion seems right - just pop the can, heat, and serve. The ingredients include water, lamb heart, oats, pork fat, lamb liver, pork, salt, dried onion, malt extract, and fine spices. Stahly's Haggis contains no artificial colours or preservatives. For more information please visit the company's website.





Highland Storm

The College of Piping, July/August 2025 - Summerside, PE - www.collegeofpiping.com

It has been said that experiences make the best gifts - and what better gift than an evening of Celtic music and dance? Highland Storm showcases Highland and step dancing accompanied by the breathtaking sounds of pipes, drums, and fiddles, as well as the melodies of traditional songs. Audiences will be transported back over 250 years to a pivotal time in Prince Edward Island's history, when three ships - the Annabella, the Edinburgh, and the Falmouth - arrived in Canada, having carried families from their homeland in Scotland. Recounting the first year of settlement and the challenges that came with it, Highland Storm shares the experience, strength, and hope of first-generation Scottish immigrants. Directed by Peter Gallant and featuring fiddler Gilbert Arsenault and vocalist Christine Gallant, the show includes performances from The College of Piping's instructors and students.

Custom-Made Kilts

The Plaid Place - www.plaidplace.com

Founded in 1970, the Plaid Place remains the first choice for authentic Celtic treasures imported from Scotland, Ireland, and the British Isles. Specializing in custom-made Highland wear, the company also offers stunning Irish knit sweaters, Scottish crystal, tartan scarves, blankets and clothing, Irish and clan-crested jewelry and timeless handbags made with Harris tweed. This Nova Scotian Highland hub is the one-stop shop for holiday gift-giving. With an array of tartans registered with the Scottish Tartan Authority, customers can choose from a variety of colours, styles, and clan affiliations. The Plaid Place offers year-round shopping with its flagship shop in Bedford, online store, and their cruise ship pavilion in Pier 22 on the Halifax waterfront.



Recycled Winter Mitts Kit

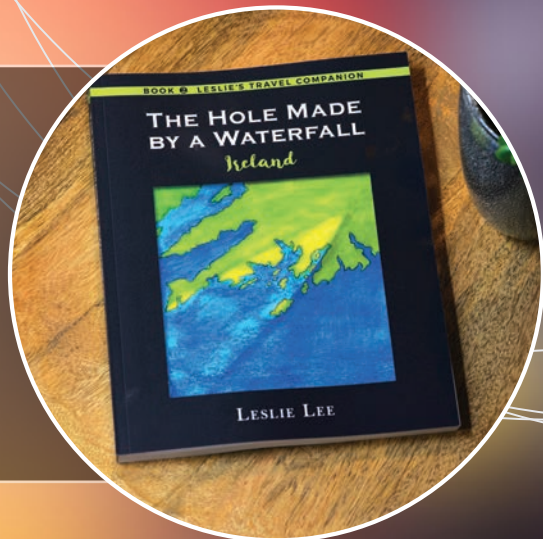
Northern Bohemian Studio - www.northern-bohemian-studio.square.site

Make your own hand-made mittens with love and a little help! Northern Bohemian Studio offers Mo Mògag * Mes mittens * My Mittens, in 'Sew-it-yourself-kits' that add a personal touch to gift-giving this holiday season. Offering uniquely Yukon goods and experiences, this quirky studio in Whitehorse, Yukon, Canada is passionate about textiles, striving to create one-of-a-kind custom wearable art from discarded fibers. Sewing enthusiasts can create an exclusive pair of Yukon Mitts that may be assembled using a machine or by hand. Other DIY kits for jewelry and crochet are available also. Recycled materials range from real leather and fur for guaranteed warmth, to faux leather and fur, as well as wool, fleece, and cotton piling as an insulating layer. Choose from an array of colours and embellishments according to taste. The Studio also offers an eclectic array of on-site, or virtual activities, including a Historic Recycled Fibres Workshop, and Movement and Dance workshops for kids that celebrate merrymaking and the designers' Celtic roots.

The Hole Made by a Waterfall, Ireland

Leslie Lee - www.leestudioc.com

In this charming travel memoir, the author-artist Leslie Lee searches for her maternal origins in southwest Ireland. The book is fully illustrated with people, landscapes, musicians, and meals that she encounters on her journey as she captures and conveys her unique personal experiences. The text is lightened by descriptions of chance meetings, visitors, and the vagaries of travel and is alternately sobered by her growing understanding of the generations of brutal starvation and subjugation of the Irish people. In this final piece of her Celtic Trilogy, which includes *We Are the Land, Ireland*, and *Six Degrees of Latitude, Ireland and Scotland*, Lee experiences a powerful sense of connection and understanding of her mother's people and the places that nurtured them. As with the pocket-sized Leslie's Field Guide to Ireland, the books include helpful travel information - from ancient and historical timelines, formative history, and mythology, maps, places of interest, and packing lists. The Trilogy is available as a box set.



GENERATION BY GENERATION

A Modern Approach to the Basics of Genealogy



Drew Smith

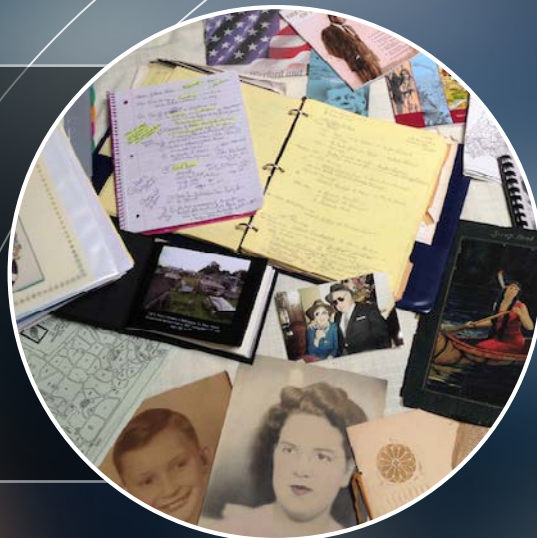
Generation by Generation: A Modern Approach to the Basics of Genealogy *Genealogical.com - www.genealogical.com*

As the ongoing popularity of tracing our genealogy continues, many have become fascinated with not only discovering their heritage with a saliva sample sent to a lab for a fee but also investigating the process behind it. A perfect guide for a budding genealogist, or those seeking to research their roots on their own, Drew Smith's latest book turns what might be a formidable challenge into an intriguing journey. In addition to providing the reader with a range of fact-finding tools and a blueprint for formulating a family tree, Smith shares tips and tricks for accessing free resources from big-name genealogy sites. Using a manageable step-by-step process and internet screenshots that cut search time in half, the author guides us through a discovery process that begins with the individual and extends back through generations breaking down the basics of DNA testing for the layman and covering specific periods from the present day to the colonial era. Of particular interest to those of Celtic heritage, *Generation by Generation* also devotes several chapters to the origins of families in records from Great Britain and Ireland, as well as Canada and the USA.

Let Us "Chase" Your Ancestors

Old Friends Genealogy - www.oldfriendsgenealogy.com

Old Friends Genealogy was established in 2015 by Kate and Mike Lancor. With their 70 years of combined experience in "chasing ancestors," the duo created a genealogical experience unlike any other. Old Friends Genealogy focuses primarily on Irish and Celtic ancestry and, through DNA analysis and research techniques, creates detailed family trees that "bust through brick walls," bringing customers closer to their ancestors - or, as the Lancors call them - "old friends." A great gift for anyone who wants to learn about their family history but hasn't the time to do the detailed research themselves. You'll love their services and prices!



Personalized Crest Badges

Crest Badges - www.crestbadges.com

Give the gift of legacy with a handmade, heirloom-quality crest badge made from the finest Argentium, tarnish-resistant, sterling silver. With 40 years of experience as a meticulous master silversmith, Don Kimble has crafted pins, pendants, bolos, and badges for 200 clans and counting. Pay homage to your heritage with a perfectly polished sterling silver crest badge that is carefully created with intricate attention to detail and design. Whether you require a specialty badge for Armigers, Chiefs, or Chieftains or a customized crest adorned with your preferred artwork in mind, Kimble can design personalized heirlooms that will be passed down through generations with pride. Available in solid sterling, gold-plated sterling, or solid 14k gold, no clan is too small, and no order too cumbersome. Inquire about his exquisitely jeweled plaid brooches and other specialty items for the ultimate in meaningful gift-giving this year. Item is shown here as 3" diameter plaid brooch with crest badge and lapis gemstones.



Custom Kilt & Tartan Design

Red Label Kilts - www.redlabelkilts.ca

Dress to impress at your next important event, or gift your favorite lad or lassie with a custom tartan from Red Label Kilts. Tell the story of your life and lineage with a hand-stitched, premium quality custom-designed tartan created by the clan crafting authentic designs since 1995. Choose your colors and then co-create a unique design with Red Label craftsmen before the weaving begins at a select tartan mill in Scotland. Each original design is then submitted to the Scottish Register of Tartans to make it official. Exemplify your familial heritage or company brand and bring your newly created tartan to life with Red Label's specialty Highland wear for men and women that includes finely crafted kilts, along with other traditional wear. Further enhance the distinctive look with buckles, broaches, blankets, and other baubles from a complete line of products and accessories for that extra splash of style and sophistication.





Learn the Irish Language **Oideas Gael - www.oideasgael.ie**

Since its foundation in 1984, Oideas Gael has attracted thousands of participants to its highly acclaimed adult Irish language courses and cultural programs in the northwest of Ireland. The Donegal Gaeltacht, with its breathtaking scenery, rich heritage, and warm welcome, is the setting for a unique holiday learning experience. Enjoy learning the Irish language with engaging, practical courses that cater to all levels from beginners to experienced speakers. The bilingual cultural activity programs span Irish traditional music, hill walking, exploring the environment, art and craft traditions, archaeology, geology, and more. All tutors are experts in their chosen field. Every year, participants of all ages come from across Ireland and from over 20 countries worldwide to learn in an immersive and informal environment.

Wearable Art **Celtic Crossroads NW - www.celticcrossroadsnw.com**

Holiday shopping for that special someone requires a combination of care and attention – especially when it comes to loved ones. Celtic Crossroads NW creates Wearable Art that transforms Maxx Sonandre's artwork into one-of-a-kind treasures fashioned by jewelry maker Charles Thompson Faddis. Notable pieces include The Wolf - set in finely crafted sterling silver with striking sapphire eyes that can be customized using white or yellow gold and a selection of eye colour variations. Choose from an array of exquisite, handcrafted jewellery such as The Circling Dragon, The Shield, The Moon, and additional upcoming bespoke regalia created for your special someone. Visit the new location on beautiful Bainbridge Island just a ferry ride from Seattle, Washington. Celtic Crossroads NW offers a variety of luxury clothing, gifts and bespoke pieces, and remains committed to helping others celebrate their own Celtic roots and traditions.



Scottish Highland Dress **UK EXPO INTERNATIONAL - www.bagpipers.eu**

A family business forged through hard work and dedication since 1975, UK Expo International is heading into its fourth generation of producing authentic, high-quality Scottish Highland Dress. Celebrate Hogmanay and share cultural pride with authentic Scottish attire from an established worldwide distributor. Choose from a vast collection of classic and utility kilts, sporrans, Prince Charlie jackets, uniforms, and more. As a testament and tribute to tradition, this incredible selection of Scottish regalia is manufactured with the highest-grade materials, using state-of-the-art production methods and rigorous quality control standards. Whether the occasion is formal or just for fun and frolic, UK Expo International also offers hundreds of accessories including a variety of kilt pins and badges, uniform accoutrements, and even period buttons to create a finely finished look, perfect for the festive season and beyond.

Graham Family Crest Ring **Postgate Fine Jewelers - www.postgatejewelers.com**

This custom-designed Family Crest ring (size 13½ shown here) is one of many bespoke creations crafted by master jewelers George and Suzan Postgate. Made with 14D palladium white gold with 18K yellow gold details, this piece is hand-carved in wax and then cast and soldered together. Designed with style and longevity in mind, this stunning ring can be proudly passed down through generations. Offering a range of styles from Celtic, Art Nouveau and Deco, George and Suzan enjoy the challenge of creating custom-made rings designed exclusively for men that are made to complement individual character and a distinctive bearing. Available in all sizes up to 24, choose from the finest gold or silver and pair it with any precious gem or stone. Make the holiday memorable for that special man in your life with a gift that lasts a lifetime and beyond.





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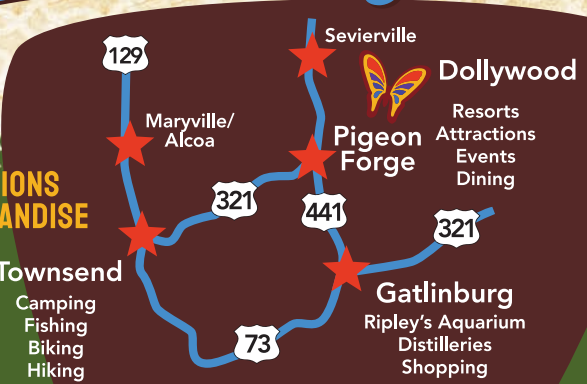
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A Christmas Childhood

~ by *Patrick Kavanagh*

One side of the potato-pits was white with frost –
How wonderful that was, how wonderful!
And when we put our ears to the paling-post
The music that came out was magical.

The light between the ricks of hay and straw
Was a hole in Heaven's gable. An apple tree
With its December-glinting fruit we saw –
O you, Eve, were the world that tempted me.

To eat the knowledge that grew in clay
And death the germ within it! Now and then
I can remember something of the gay
Garden that was childhood's. Again.

The tracks of cattle to a drinking-place,
A green stone lying sideways in a ditch,
Or any common sight, the transfigured face
Of a beauty that the world did not touch.

My father played the melodion
Outside at our gate;
There were stars in the morning east
And they danced to his music.

Across the wild bogs his melodion called
To Lennons and Callans.

As I pulled on my trousers in a hurry
I knew some strange thing had happened.

Outside in the cow-house my mother
Made the music of milking;

The light of her stable-lamp was a star
And the frost of Bethlehem made it twinkle.

A water-hen screeched in the bog,
Mass-going feet
Crunched the wafer-ice on the pot-holes,
Somebody wistfully twisted the bellows wheel.

My child poet picked out the letters
On the grey stone,
In silver the wonder of a Christmas townland,
The winking glitter of a frosty dawn.
Cassiopeia was over
Cassidy's hanging hill,
I looked and three whin bushes rode across
The horizon — the Three Wise Kings.

And old man passing said:
'Can't he make it talk –
The melodion.' I hid in the doorway
And tightened the belt of my box-pleated coat.

I nicked six nicks on the door-post
With my penknife's big blade –
there was a little one for cutting tobacco.
And I was six Christmases of age.

My father played the melodion,
My mother milked the cows,
And I had a prayer like a white rose pinned
On the Virgin Mary's blouse.

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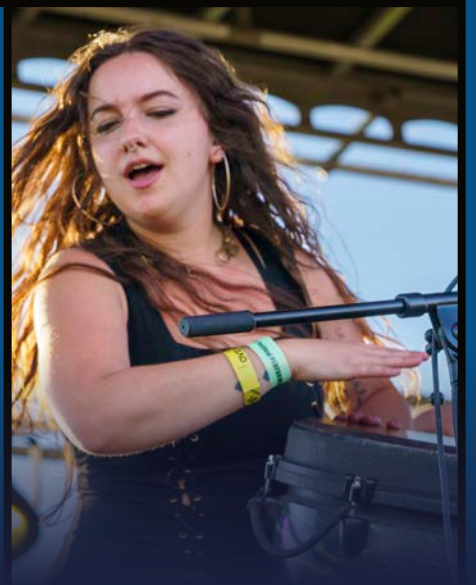
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