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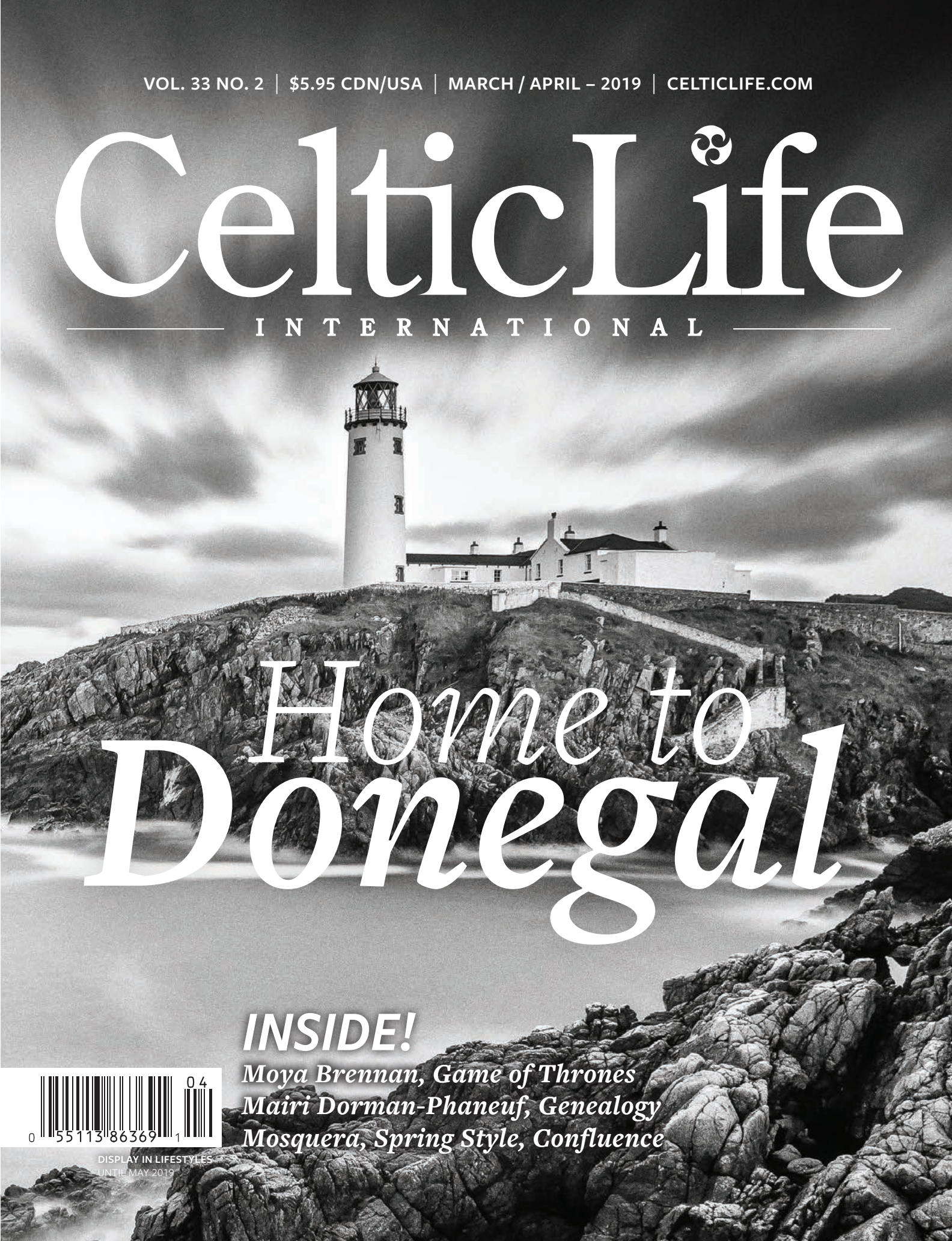

Home to Donegal

INSIDE!

Moya Brennan, Game of Thrones
Mairi Dorman-Phaneuf, Genealogy
Mosquera, Spring Style, Confluence

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Fáilte!

Borders and Chumocrats

Recently, a subscriber sent me a New York Times article titled "The Malign Incompetence of the British Ruling Class." The focus of the piece was Brexit, and the "borders and chumocrats" involved therein.

The piece notes that the borders imposed by the English Crown on Ireland in 1921 - which resulted in years of civil unrest - may, ironically, trigger partition should Brexit move forward on March 29; Scotland could renew its call for independence, and Wales might begin weighing its options. One columnist for the Economist even suggested that Britain's "Oxford lads" - the aforementioned "chumocracy" - has perhaps finally "met their Waterloo."

If recent events in Northern Ireland are any indication of what might happen, things could turn ugly; only last month, a car bomb exploded on Bishop Street in Derry, with a group calling itself the "New IRA" claiming credit. Fortunately there were no injuries. It is of note that pro-Republican political party Sinn Féin neither condemned nor condoned the car bombing.

Citizens from both communities, however, have been more outspoken. Near the border between North and South - which has been nearly invisible since the signing of the Good Friday Peace Accord of 1998 - a sign reads "Listen to our voices, Respect our Vote, No EU frontier in Ireland, Border Communities against Brexit."

It is a reminder that, at the end of the day - and against the will and wishes of "chumocrats" - people still have the power of self-determination. The struggle, though, has taken its toll.

I recall, as a young lad growing up in Nova Scotia, many community events where Gaelic songs and storytelling blended with the free flow of whiskey (some of it homemade!) It was here that I first heard the term "an t-sean dùthaich" or "the old country." Most of the older folks at these gatherings were no more than two generations removed from Scotland, but the memories and stories of their ancestors - often lamenting the harsh treatment at the hands of a foreign authority - remained fresh in their minds. They affectionally referred to "the old country" as a homeland they were forced to vacate for a better life.

The Irish were no different. Outside the village of Falcraghin Co. Donegal, an unassuming stone structure called the Droichead na Caointe ("Bridge of Tears") saw thousands of sons and daughters say goodbye to their mothers, fathers and other family members, aware that they may never see one another again. Their departures were treated like a death of sorts.

Today, given the uncertainty of Brexit, it is possible that we could again see large numbers of young people leaving Ulster, Scotland or Wales. Still yet, the fires of partition and independence might be stoked outright. At this point, it is almost impossible to predict how it will all play out.

One option, as brought forward by Adam Price - leader of the Welsh political party Plaid Cymru - is the formation of a united Celtic nation. Though unlikely, the idea of a state bound by common cultural landmarks - heritage, language, music, etc - should be considered as a viable alternative for a peaceable kingdom.

Enjoy and may God Bless!
Angus M. Macquarrie, Publisher

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Camilla G. Hellman

In the second instalment in a six-part series on prominent women in the Celtic community, we connect with Camilla G Hellman (MBE), President of the American-Scottish Foundation

Although Camilla Hellman describes herself as a "hodge-podge" - a mix of many different cultures - she has a real affinity for Scotland, due in large part to her heritage on her maternal grandfather's side.

"My great-grandmother was an Allen," she notes over the phone from her office in New York City. "Before that, we were Traills, linking back to Orkney."

Hellman grew up in the south of England and enjoyed frequent family visits across Scotland during her childhood summers.

"I always loved going up to Scotland; taking the overnight train and visiting the islands, especially Mull and Skye."

The powerhouse leader has a smorgasbord of experiences and accomplishments to her name, including an MBE (Member of the British Empire), which she was awarded for transatlantic relations.

A lover of the arts, Hellman first came to the United States as a music industry professional.

"My background is in marketing," she explains. "I went from representing musicians and artisans, to working as an agent and importer of luxury brands in the field of home decor. I later accepted a position as the Director of Marketing for London-based Luxury Channel.

"I believe that you need to take the same approach with regard to marketing a charity as you do with any commercial product; 'respect of brand' and a distinct identity are essential. As I wanted to do more with regard to helping others, it was only natural for me to bring these kinds of ideas to that field."

Over the years, her goals "migrated and changed," and she began spending more time on her not-for-profit endeavours.

Her first contact with the American Scottish Foundation (ASF) came in 2002.

"That year, I attended the Tartan Day Parade with several of my ex-pat friends. It was a celebration of the largest massing of the pipe bands in the U.S., and Sixth Avenue was awash in tartan. I remember thinking that I would like to be involved, perhaps as a volunteer. Little did I know what I was getting into!"

It was around that time that Hellman started spearheading the British Memorial Garden (later renamed the Queen Elizabeth II Garden) in Lower Manhattan.

As the project required the sourcing of Scottish stones - brought over from Caithness and Morayshire, and later cut in the shape of the British map and outlining the country's different counties - she reached out to the ASF.

During her tenancy as President of the British Memorial Garden (2002 – 2009) she first got involved with the New York Tartan Day Parade, joining the Events Committee in 2006. Only three years later she was appointed as the ASF's Director of Development, and began assisting the planning committee for the National New York Tartan Day Parade. The ASF is a founding member of the signature event.

In her new role, she looked to expand the Foundation's platform of work, most notably in the area of arts and heritage. "I wanted to help the organization bring greater clarity to its core message and aid in growing its platforms."

Today, Hellman is the President of the American-Scottish Foundation. Founded in 1956, the group's mandate remains to act as a bridge between the United States and Scotland.

"We have an extensive program of events - one that is always evolving. Whether it is delivering conferences, such as an energy forum or a roundtable discussion, or helping grow the Tartan Day Parade or Tartan Week events, we do our very best to grow the relationship between those two countries."

The rewards, she shares, are numerous.

"I love the idea of developing the ASF as a portal of information, and helping different organizations to better deliver their message. We have also been able to assist many young people further their personal and professional ambitions, mostly through our Lord Malcolm Douglas Hamilton Bursaries."

Youth, she adds, are a key focus for many Scottish-North American organizations.

> *"We are fortunate to have a vibrant and active community and we are excited by the opportunity to grow their participation."*

Fifteen years ago, the ASF - along with the Chicago Scots - formed the North American Leadership Conference.

"Our gathering is a way for leading members of the Scottish-American community - which includes the Detroit St. Andrews Society and COSCA - to connect, share best practices, and further discuss new ways and means to engage current and future generations. We work closely with the Scottish Government, which has been very supportive and encouraging of our efforts. It is incredible to witness what can happen when we all work together towards the same goals."

By way of example, she points to NYC Tartan Week.

"The parade, in particular - which takes place on April 6 this year - sees people of all ages and backgrounds celebrate Scotland's rich cultural legacy. I am very proud of the role the ASF plays in helping to promote and preserve Scotland's wonderful heritage."

www.americanscottishfoundation.com
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one

Welsh Hit

A teenage musical duo from rural northern Wales was taken by surprise when their Welsh-language song recently reached one million hits on Spotify. Dion Jones and Sion Land, both 18, make up a band called Alffa (or, in English, Alpha.) As Welsh is their first language, recording a tune in their native tongue felt natural. They uploaded their song "Gwenwyn" (Poison) to the music streaming service, and it has since been listened to more than a million times. The pair plans to record a full-length album soon in hopes that it will lead to opportunities for shows in other parts of the world.

two

Tallest Wave

A Cornish surfer believes he successfully rode the world's tallest wave. The event took place recently in Nazare, Portugal, where the waves are famously massive. Tom Butler - the Cornishman in question - became injured while surfing in the same area two years prior, but he has since gotten back on his feet (and his board). Since the wave was the tallest to be surfed during 2018's prime surfing season, Butler believes that it may be in the running to break the world record.

three

Dalí in Scotland

A lobster telephone created by Spanish artist Salvador Dalí will remain in the United Kingdom after being purchased by the National Galleries of Scotland (NGS). Although the piece of surrealist art was recently sold to a foreign buyer at an auction, the telephone was deemed too important to leave the country and U.K. arts minister Michael Ellis placed a temporary export ban on the work. In the end, NGS purchased the telephone for £853,000 and the piece is set to go on display at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art in Edinburgh.

four

Shoe Thieves

In recent months, a gang of shoe thieves have been causing a stir in the hamlet of Étables-sur-Mer, Brittany. Residents have cited about 50 cases of shoes being stolen or turning up in unusual places. The problem? These thieves might be adorable; foxes are the alleged culprits, although no one has actually witnessed one of the animals in the act of stealing. That said, even if a fox gets caught, the chances of it standing trial are slim. Community members are now being more diligent about taking their shoes inside.

five

Healthy Galicia

Perhaps it is easier to lose weight with the support of, say, your spouse. But what if your entire town was backing you up? That is what is happening in Narón, Galicia, where local family doctor Carlos Piñeiro introduced a town-wide weight loss program with the support of the area's council. According to a study by the Spanish Society of Cardiology, Galicia has the most overweight people in Spain. Piñeiro is hoping to change that, in part through the exercise classes he teaches. The challenge: by early 2020, town residents must collectively shed 220,500 pounds.

six

Manx Chronicles

The "most important" surviving Isle of Man medieval manuscript cannot be found on the Isle itself. The manuscript in question, The Chronicles of the Kings of Mann and the Isles, is a Latin document of early Manx history. It became part of Sir Robert Bruce Cotton's library and has since made its home among the collections of the British Library. However, Manx politician Bill Henderson recently called for its return to the Isle of Man. The problem, though, is that a permanent loan or transfer of ownership of the artifact would require a change in U.K. law.

Have an interesting tidbit to share with our Celtic community? Drop us a line anytime at info@celticlife.com

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Pegleg Bennett and John Hudson

Last year, Cornish surfer Pegleg Bennett teamed up with his friend John Hudson to embark on a 1,000-mile journey from John O'Groats, Scotland, to Land's End, Cornwall. Riding a four-wheel Surrey bike with no gears, the pair reached the final stretch of their trip in November. It wasn't an easy journey, however, as Hudson had to be hospitalized for three nights due to a perforated large intestine. Upon his release the duo pressed on, raising money for two charities: Handstand - The Appeal for Marshall Janson which supports a Cornish boy who lost all four limbs after facing meningitis as an infant, and The Wave Project, which offers surf therapy and mentorship for children and young people. "We are so happy that Pegleg and John are supporting the Wave Project by undertaking this incredible journey," a Wave Project spokesperson told Cornwall Live before Bennett and Hudson's trek began. Pegleg is Bennett's legal first name, by the way: he was Rik until 2016, when he decided to officially change his moniker to Pegleg (his nickname in the surfing community). Bennett is an amputee who uses a special prosthetic so he can run, cycle and surf. His previous ventures include climbing Mount Kilimanjaro, as well as hitting the waves in England's Severn Bore. Bennett told Magicseaweed.com that his name-change was not only a nod to his nickname, but also to poke fun at his own disability and prevent others from "getting weird" about it.

Alex Roach

A 24-year-old Welsh woman is advocating for people who, like her, live with endometriosis. Alex Roach, who lives in Cardiff, had been suffering for several years before she was diagnosed. The trouble began when she started her period as a teen and realized her menstrual cramps were much more severe than the norm. After seeing multiple doctors - many of whom simply dismissed her pain - Roach was finally diagnosed with endometriosis, a disorder in which the womb lining, which usually grows inside the uterus, grows outside of the uterus. Not only is it painful, but it can sometimes lead to infertility. "There needs to be recognition that there isn't enough being done to recognize and diagnose the disease," Roach told BBC News. "It is horrendous being in pain, but it is even worse when you have no idea why." After the diagnosis, Roach continued to have trouble getting doctors to take her seriously and look for an underlying cause. Eventually, she paid out of pocket for a private scan and her situation improved after having surgery to remove a cyst. Roach continues to advocate for changes in the healthcare system. A Welsh Government report later confirmed this, finding a lack of endometriosis understanding among medical professionals. Thanks to people like Roach who are willing to speak out about the issue, however, more patients may find the strength to self-advocate and find a solution that works for them.

Glen Sincock

Cornishman Glen Sincock found himself in a very dark place following a nervous breakdown and a heart attack in 1983. As he struggled with suicidal thoughts, his mother-in-law's doctor advised him to take up volunteering. Sincock listened to that advice and has never looked back. Now 78, he has been volunteering to drive people around Cornwall for the last 35 years. From bringing people to medical appointments to taking animal passengers to the vet's office, Sincock has seen his fair share of high stakes incidents over the years. On one occasion, for example, he had to climb in a window to help a would-be passenger when he realized she was stuck in the shower! He has also had to assist someone who was having a heart attack until emergency services arrived. Mostly, though, Sincock simply helps people get where they need to be. "If it wasn't for this, I'm not sure where I would be now," he said of his volunteer gig during a recent interview with Cornwall Live. "It really helped me to turn my life around, as it has kept me busy. I would recommend it to anyone." Sincock started off as a driver through the John Betjeman Centre in Wadebridge and has been a member of Volunteer Cornwall since 1993. In 2015, he received the Cornwall Volunteer Driver of the year. He says that he wants to continue doing the work for as long as he possibly can.

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St. Augustine Celtic Music & Heritage Festival

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The St. Augustine Celtic Music & Heritage Festival returns to sunny Florida this March for its ninth year of cultural celebrations. Winner of both the Jacksonville Bold City Best and the Best of St. Augustine awards, the annual gathering brings together some of the biggest names in Celtic music and dance for two days of food, fun and family festivities. This year's event kicks off with a traditional Whisky tasting, where visitors can sample some of the world's finest Irish spirits. The next morning, guests will enjoy many customary Highland Games activities, where men and women - from novices to the well-seasoned - test their strength in the caber toss, the open stone put, and much more. Musical performances will begin each day at noon, with the likes of Celt-rockers Albannach and Celtic Thunder's Emitt Cahill taking the stage. Visitors are welcome to explore the festival grounds, where vendors offer up some of the best in Celtic food and wares. And, this year St. Augustine celebrates the 419th anniversary of the world's original St. Patrick's Day Parade - the first ever historically documented, with Flagler College (in its 50th year) as Grand Marshall, and special honours given to the Clan MacLaren Society.

Tartan Day South Celtic Festival

April 4-7, 2019
Cayce, South Carolina
www.tartandaysouth.com

Since 2010, the Tartan Day South Festival has maintained its core mandate; to celebrate the Columbia region's deep historical and cultural connections to the Celtic nations. Each year thousands of visitors travel to Cayce, South Carolina, for four days of music, dance, fun and festivities. This year, things get into gear on Thursday evening with the annual Kickoff Party, where guests will enjoy an evening of great music, tasty beers, and even better food. The rest of the weekend will host numerous events and activities, including Friday night's "Celtic Commotion" - an evening of Celtic music, demonstrations and exhibitions - and Saturday night's campfire and musical merriment DrumsSmoke, which will be held in honor of Lanny Skinner, one of the original founders of Tartan Day South. The main events will take place on Saturday, with heavy athletics, musical performances, traditional dancing, and massed pipe bands comprising a busy and fulfilling agenda. Entertainment will include the Celtic tribal band Tuatha Dea, traditional Celtic sextet Syr, and Welsh rockers Brynmor. As per tradition, the annual Kirkin' of the Tartan will take place on Sunday morning.

Greenville Scottish Games

May 24-25, 2019
Greenville, South Carolina
www.gallabrae.com

For fourteen years now, the Greenville Scottish Games has celebrated South Carolina's rich, robust, and long-standing Scottish history. Over the years, the annual gathering - which is held on the lush fields of Furman University - has grown significantly, earning its reputation as one of the top events of its kind in the world. This year's festivities kick off Friday night at 6pm with the Great Scot! Parade on Greenville's Main Street, featuring floats, pipe bands and marching bands treating onlookers to the sights and sounds of Scotland. Saturday morning sees both piping events and heavy athletics - the heart and soul of the weekend's festivities - on the itinerary, showcasing men and women as they try their hand at the stone put, the sheaf toss, and other competitive, albeit friendly, activities. The festival will also feature Border Collie shows, a British car show, Miss Greenville Scottish Games, Scottish Clan gatherings, a Military salute, and high-octane performances from a number of Celtic and tribal bands, including the very popular Albannach. The wee ones will also be busy, with mini versions of the games in the "Wee Scotland" area.

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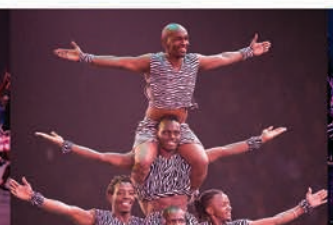

Authentic Ginger Clothing Co.

Inspired by their children, a Nova Scotia couple launched Authentic Ginger Clothing Co. in 2018

Darin Roche doesn't have red hair. Neither does his wife, Sheva Solomon. All three of their daughters, however, were blessed with ginger locks - and Roche's son has them too.

"Each of our children have their own distinct personalities and imaginative minds, and have been the inspiration and drive behind everything that we do," Roche explains via email. "We are both savvy entrepreneurs, always striving to create time so that we can savour these precious years with our children and spend quality time together as a family."

What better way to do that than to run a family business? Thus, Authentic Ginger Clothing Co. was born out of wanting to start something for their own four gingers, but Roche and Solomon also wanted to build a brand that would reach people on an international scale.

"We believe in being authentic and proud of who you are, while celebrating all the uniqueness and rarity that comes with being a ginger," says Roche. "It is important to us that we show our girls that they are special, and that it is cool to be different. We hope that our kids, and all of the gingers out there in the world, can embrace their individuality and be bold with originality.

> *"This is not just a family business, though - it is a community."*

Roche and Solomon's initial idea for a clothing business was quite different from what Authentic Ginger Clothing Co. is today, but it was inspired by their children just the same.

"We ended up challenging our eldest daughter, Raiyah, to draw animals that came to her mind, and the result was amazing," notes Roche. "We recall the first image she drew that came to life on paper as a dinosaur/unicorn with small wings, a long neck like a giraffe, and cute little feet."

Raiyah's creativity sparked an idea in her parents. "Sheva and I thought that we should look to create a small little business that would feature our kids' drawings on T-shirts, keeping the creations 'authentic' without any editing, and look to sell them at various kids' shops."

The couple ended up shelving the idea for a while, until one of Roche's marketing clients commented on a shirt prototype he was wearing during a business meeting. "I told her the story about what Sheva and I had wanted to do a few months earlier, and she recommended that I really should take the idea and run with it, and that it was a great concept."

Roche felt encouraged, but he and Solomon understood that they lacked an important aspect of selling the product: a brand. "We knew that 'authentic' was going to have to be part of the name. We also knew that we had four redheads (gingers) in the house, so that would need to be in the name."

Once they had established a name and a logo, the husband and wife team hit the ground running.

"We jumped online to research as much as we could about redhead culture, and found out that there are hundreds of redhead festivals that take place all over the world each year. I started reaching out to as many as I could with the idea of moving our clothing around the globe to these gatherings. While speaking with many of the festival organizers, I heard many words of hope with regard to creating a forum where redheads could feel appreciated and happy. We wanted to lend our support to redhead culture by creating a brand that celebrates the uniqueness and rarity of being a redhead."

Roche and Solomon currently offer Authentic Ginger Clothing Co. products - hoodies, tee-shirts and onesies - at their local market in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, as well as online via their website. While the business currently sells to a "very small global market," the hope is that visibility will evolve and grow, especially in places with a high ginger population such as the United Kingdom and Ireland. From there, they will look into establishing a non-profit organization as well.

"I feel that, although we cannot change the world, we can help reduce the stigma of having been born with red hair by encouraging change in the way redheads perceive themselves. It all goes back to our brand statement - 'Be Authentic, Be Ginger, Be Proud.'"

www.authenticgingerclothing.com

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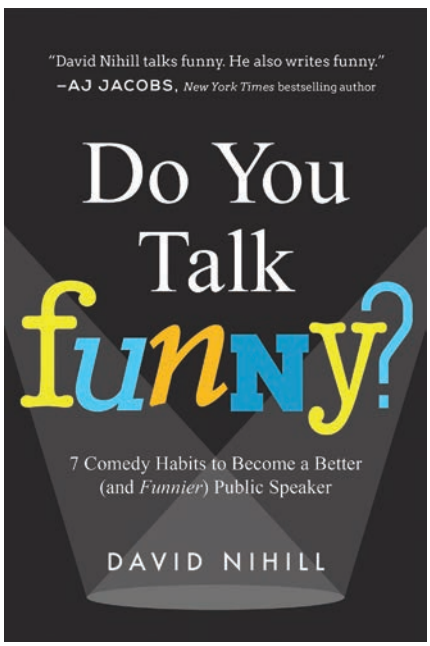
David Nihill

Irish author, comedian and speech coach David Nihill faces his deepest fears

All it took to get David Nihill up onto the stage was a close friend's spinal cord injury.

"I wanted to help him out after his accident, so I put together a fundraising comedy show," explains the 39-year-old Dublin native via email. "The only problem was that he wanted me to host and open the show."



Despite his deep fear of public speaking, both Nihill and the fundraiser were a huge success.

"Following that I decided to get up on stage as much as I could, even though I hated public speaking," he tells Celtic Life International. "From there it snowballed. I opened for comedians at local clubs, and put together storytelling nights and competitions."

Before long, the accidental comedian - who has appeared in a number of publications, including Huffington Post, Forbes, The Wall Street Journal, and the Irish Times, among others - founded his own business called FunnyBiz Influencer, an online platform that provides services in both speech coaching and ghost writing.

In 2016, Nihill published a 500-page, comedic guide called - Do You Talk Funny? Seven Comedy Habits to Become a Better (And Funnier) Public Speaker.

"I wrote the book because I wanted to address a fear within me," he explains, "the fear of public speaking. The idea was to help other people facing that same fear by providing solutions in text form; here's how to get over it, have a read and good luck to you! If you need more help ask comedians, as they are the true masters of this topic. Now I regularly get requests to speak at conferences and events. And if you write a book on a specific topic, folks expect you to be pretty competent on it; the only way I can be is to keep practicing."

In just under three years, the book has received great critical and popular acclaim.

"I get messages all the time from people who tell me they used the tips in the book to help them with their own fears in speaking, and this includes everything from people talking about their company's next quarter to their wedding speech."

The biggest challenge, notes Nihill, is keeping things sharp and topical.

"Even though comedy and public speaking are the complete opposite of sports, the nerve pathways seem to operate in a similar way. Miss a few days or games and you become a little rusty. For me, the easiest way to stay sharp for a business audience is to practice before a comedy audience. Comedians are on stage more than anybody, and in more difficult conditions. Audiences often yell things like 'Make me laugh! I've had a terrible week!'

"Then of course - as TV personalities like Stephen Colbert, John Oliver and Trevor Noah will attest - it is not enough to just be informative these days; in a world where people have entertainment at their fingertips, you need to bring something new to the table and, for me, there is simply no better practice ground than stand-up comedy clubs to hone it."

With that in mind, he believes that the deep connections made each day far outweigh the challenges.

> *"Barriers disappear as shared experiences emerge."*

"This has led me to some opportunities I never dreamt possible. I have had the opportunity to share the stage with some of my favorite writers, including Steven Pinker and Dan Brown. I have also shared the stage with some of my favorite comedians, and have even taught at Stanford Graduate Business School. When you do standup comedy you get more concise and economical in your words, and speaking in sound bites seems to be more in demand in today's fast-paced environment. It is no coincidence that actors, hosts, entertainers, top TED speakers and TV and radio personalities often come from or have dabbled in the world of comedy. There they learned brevity is levity."

The rest of 2019 will be busy for Nihill, who will appear as part of this year's Real Irish Comedy Tour, a 10-day event showcasing some of Ireland's premier voices in comedy and storytelling. In addition to that, he has a number of projects lined up with FunnyBiz Influencer.

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Amy McAllister

Irish harpist Amy McAllister moves toward what feels right

It was the sweet sound of the Donegal fiddle that first tugged at harpist Amy McAllister's heartstrings.

"My parents took me on a trip there when I was five and I saw someone play," recalls McAllister via email from her home in the Glens of Antrim in Northern Ireland.

"I was captivated, and knew right away that I had to learn how to make a sound like that. I dreamt of being able to play music, and I asked my mother for a fiddle every day until I was seven years old, when I first began lessons."

Having grown up on the coasts of Ulster, McAllister and her family were no strangers to traditional Irish music.

"Northern Ireland has a very strong Comhaltas presence. People of all ages would gather in the local pub to play. That is where I learned everything I know. We all learned together by ear. It was an enjoyable and unintimidating way to learn music."

By the age of 14, the young musician was ready for a change.

"My mother heard of a small orchestra of harps in the city, and she encouraged me to go as we could rent a harp rather affordably. It was then and there that I was first introduced to the instrument. By that stage of my life, my whole weekend was taken up with music, from Friday nights through to Sunday nights. I dedicated my entire social time growing up to musical pursuits."

> *"It is easy to love the harp if you play it; the sound is so beautiful..."*

That commitment paid off; today, she is one of the most prominent newcomers on the Irish music scene, both for her skillful playing and her smooth vocals.

"I have evolved massively as an artist. My sound now ranges from pure, straight-up traditional to my own songs, which are folkier and even poppier. I still love singing pure traditional as much as I do mainstream material, however. For a long time I felt loyal to traditional music, and even felt guilty about verging into singer-songwriting territory. These days, writing songs is my favorite thing to do."

In the spring of 2017, McAllister released her debut album, String on String. The 12-track recording blends her traditional Irish background with modern songwriting and vocals.

"Doing my own album was a dream of mine. Reading the reviews and having people enjoy the songs I have written has been beyond fulfilling."

Along with writing and recording, McAllister says that having the opportunity to travel is the vocation's biggest reward.

"I have led an incredibly colorful, eventful and interesting life. I have packed so much, so many countries and so many fateful meetings with wonderful characters into my ten years as a professional. I have friends all over the world whom I met when I was touring. I have now performed in every American state except Alaska and Hawaii. I have lived my dreams. I feel very free and very fortunate."

A career in music is not without its challenges, however.

"I changed my whole life around to do this, to get an album out. I moved from home and got a waitressing job. There are definitely easier career options, but this is what I have chosen and I feel lucky that I can do what I do for a living."

She notes that the Celtic music scene has "exploded" in recent years.

"A lot is being done here in Ireland to promote the music, culture and language; children from both sides of the political divide are learning traditional music and I see that as a massive and progressive step forward, as Irish music is for everyone.

"I would, however, like to see the speaking of Irish become depoliticized, and more efforts made for this part of the world to become a bilingual state. Irish music and dance have grown exponentially, and enjoy international renown today thanks to big-ticket productions like Riverdance. We are working tirelessly to preserve our unique heritage."

2019 will be a busy and exciting year for McAllister; she is currently studying classical music, and hopes to release a new EP in the coming months.

"My next album will be more Celtic and folk than pure traditional. I am always changing, and I keep moving toward what I feel is right for me."

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Scran

Scran seeks to preserve traditional Manx culture with their debut recording

The Isle of Man's cultural organization Bree has been promoting the country's creative edge through music and dance since 2006.

This year, Bree "super group" Scran is releasing their long-awaited debut album Nane (the Gaelic term for one), a terrific ten-track recording that seamlessly blends old-school Manx melodies with more modern sounds.

"This album is a collection of upbeat re-workings of traditional music with various other genres blended in occasionally," explains Paul Rogers, Scran's seasoned mentor. "Songs include everything that the group has been playing in concerts, plus a few pieces specifically created for the studio. About six tracks were recorded as a live band performance and the others were multi-track studio recordings. This enabled some members to play more than one instrument."

Rogers, who is of Welsh descent, says the ensemble is constantly evolving.

"Every few years the older members go off to university and new members come up from the Bree group," he explains. "As I am a teacher, I sometimes find possible members in school bands too. The original Scran line-up had two brothers, Callum and Fraser Rowe, on guitar and bass, respectively. They were both from a rock background, so they brought that rocky element to the music. The group currently sounds a bit more traditional, as Callum is away at university."

In addition to the Fraser brothers, the band's current lineup includes Aeerin Roberts (vocals and fiddle), James McNulty (banjo), Mera Royle (harp and fiddle), Owen Williams (button accordion, whistle and percussion), and Raygee Dolloso (whistle), many of whom began performing music at a young age.

"I started playing the fiddle when I was six, but I have always sung," explains Roberts, a Manx native. "A lot of my influences came from the Manx-speaking primary school I attended (Bunscoill Ghaelgagh) in St John's. We were always encouraged to get involved with music and dance."

"I also started playing music at school," adds Royle, who has lived on Isle of Man since he was two. "My primary school was really good at encouraging people to play the penny whistle in our folk group. I loved it because I got to do it with all my friends. It was almost like a game to see who could play the next tune first."

Similarly, band-mates McNulty and Williams took to music as children. Both believe that it is music like Scran's - and albums like Nane - that help keep Manx culture alive.

"The state of music in Isle of Man is strong, and that is all thanks to the local support from folks on the radio, and organizations like Culture Vannin," says Williams, who is of both Irish and Manx heritage. "All that needs to be done to preserve it is to show young people that bands like Scran play Manx music and speak the Manx language. They will view culture as something 'cool' and want to partake in it themselves."

"We should start teaching Manx to more children at an earlier age," adds Liverpool-native McNulty. "We need to get them interested in Manx music by listening to albums like Nane, and having them involved with groups like Scran."

> *Scran is a labor of love, though it is not without its challenges.*

"It is not always easy," admits Rogers. "The main challenge is to cope with a wide range of ages, abilities and languages, as we operate in both Manx and English. I generally do everything by ear and let the members play something that fits their ability. I will suggest accompaniments or harmonies sometimes if they aren't sure what to do. As mentioned, the group is constantly changing, so I have to adapt pieces to suit the current members."

Williams echoes the sentiment.

"You have to listen to yourself and others to fit into the sound and know your place. It can be difficult."

With that in mind, the band-mates remain passionate about their involvement.

"I think Scran is a revolving door of great musicians that we take in from a young age and send off to do amazing things," says Roberts. "I am so proud to be a part of Scran and how every set we play has been adapted to our own individual styles."

For Rogers, it is all about the future.

"Seeing the younger generations grow in confidence is brilliant," he smiles. "Seeing them take what they have learned in Scran and form their own groups independently brings me hope for tomorrow."

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Fernando Mosquera

Spain's Fernando Mosquera was introduced to music as a youngster

From the age of eight, music was a mandatory subject in school for Fernando Mosquera.

"At that time, I already knew that I sang well enough and had a good ear, so learning to play the flute was relatively simple for me," shares Mosquera via email. "From there, my father taught me to play the harmonica and the Galician tambourine. Then I picked up the Irish flutes and, finally, the Galician bagpipe."

That was more than 30 years ago. Today, Mosquera counts more than 50 instruments in his repertoire, including the bodhràn, the Italian ocarina and several varieties of pipes. He currently leads the Mosquera Celtic Band, one of the country's foremost folk-pop music groups.

Given his heritage, Mosquera's talent comes as no surprise. Part of his family hails from Sada A Coruña in Galicia. "It is a land with strong Celtic roots, very near to the music related to the land and the sea," he explains. More of his family come from Ledrada in the province of Salamanca - "another land with customs deeply rooted in its music and its dance, with Celtiberian origins. I was born in Toledo, a very old city with a very important medieval heritage that also has a Celtiberian background."

One ancestor, Antonio Mosquera, was a particularly brilliant musician. According to Mosquera, Antonio was born in Galicia and immigrated to New York in the first half of the 20th century, playing bagpipes in his own band: Antonio Mosquera and His Typical Group. "He recorded two albums, which I have since digitized, and, among many other achievements, he was invited to play a traditional Galician music concert for President Richard Nixon in the White House!"

> *"The mix of all these parts is what is reflected in the music we play in the Mosquera Celtic Band."*

The new group formed in 2010. The previous year, Mosquera had composed a piece for the Government of Galicia to use in its promotion of the upcoming Holy Year of Xacobeo (or, in English, the Jacobean year.)

"I gathered together a group of musical friends to help me record that song in a studio and sent it to the Xunta de Galicia. I liked the experience so much that I decided to create my own band to play the songs I had composed over the years."

The Mosquera Celtic Band - which already has two albums to its name, with another forthcoming - is currently made up of Mosquera and six other members. Sara Calatrava is a multi-lingual vocalist who also plays the Galician tambourine, Manuel Briega plays the electric violin, Javier García plays the acoustic and electric guitar, Óscar Hernández is on the electric bass, Manuel Agudo plays multiple kinds of tambourine and small percussion, while Jose Alberto Ortiz is on drums.

To say they are a talented bunch is an understatement; within eight months of forming, the band had landed its first record deal. Its debut album, Peregrinatio, was launched in 2012. The group released its second collection, Outlander, in 2015. That record, Mosquera says, was inspired by "love, anger and optimism."

"With Outlander we fused folk with pop, Irish music and sounds from instruments from other cultures and times - such as Arabic, Hindu or medieval - and everything combines perfectly. And if that melange can work in music, why would it not work in society?"

With a third album - Terra - scheduled for release later this year, the group is again bringing something unique to the table

"My intention is that each album sounds different," notes Mosquera. "The songs are always within my style, but I play with different musical elements. For example, Peregrinatio was based on Galician music, while Outlander leaned more towards Irish music. Terra will see us exploring traditional Americana through a combination of Celtic music and bluegrass.

"My own sound has been evolving since our first album," he adds. "My inclination has always been to bring Celtic music to all kinds of audiences - older and younger, amateur or otherwise. That is why I chose the fusion between folk and pop as a form of expression; it is the best style to reach as many people as possible."

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Mairi Dorman-Phaneuf

Mairi Dorman-Phaneuf has "wandered through life" with the cello

A veteran of 16 Broadway and off-Broadway shows - including The Bridges of Madison County, A Little Night Music, and The Last Five Years - Mairi Dorman-Phaneuf has also worked as a solo, chamber and recording artist.

"For me it is all about tone," she shares via email from her home in New York State, "and communicating emotions through the cello."

Dorman-Phaneuf was born to a family of musicians in Bearsden, Glasgow, Scotland.

"My great-grandfather, Charles Dorman, was a respected church organist and violin teacher; I have a copy of his violin method in my studio. His son, my paternal grandfather Harry, was a successful classical pianist with a busy career as a chamber musician and orchestral pianist, which included playing under Sir Thomas Beecham. Harry's wife, Marie Dorman (né Hall) was a professional pianist and singer. She played in the theatres of Glasgow, as did my mother's father, Robert Marshall, a percussionist and drummer. Robert Marshall - or Gramps, as I knew him - was also a freelance commercial artist and would sketch and paint during his breaks in the pit."

Dorman-Phaneuf's parents "are also very musical," she notes, having played together as children in the Glasgow Youth String Orchestra. Her father is a violinist and a pianist, and her mother is a cellist. In fact, Dorman-Phaneuf plays the same cello that was gifted to her mother as a teen.

"They started me on the violin at age four, but I guess I didn't take well to it, so they switched me to cello when I was seven. My first cello teacher in Glasgow taught both my mother and my grandmother. I remember, in that very first lesson, drawing the bow across the strings and feeling the resonance of the instrument."

The cello has resonated with her ever since; she used the instrument as a tool to make her way to the United States - a dream of hers from the time she was a child.

"First, I was hired as a cello teacher at Buck's Rock Summer camp, a progressive arts camp in New Milford, Connecticut, where I spent the summers of my undergrad. Then I was awarded an assistant teaching position at the University of Colorado in Boulder, where I stayed for a Masters and a Doctorate degree. I hadn't planned on getting a Doctorate, but it was a legal way for me to stay in the country."

While she was a student - though not yet a U.S. citizen - Dorman-Phaneuf could only work in relation to her degree. Out of necessity, she found ways to make money by playing the cello.

"It was all about survival. I don't know that it made sense professionally until I played my first show when I was in my late 20s."

> *Although she is grateful for her experience as a classical musician, she prefers "the immediacy of the connection of popular or Broadway song with the audience that feels simple and satisfying."*

Broadway may be her preferred line of work, but it is also a challenging and, at times, unstable profession; of the 16 productions under her belt, her current gig - My Fair Lady - is the first to last longer than 13 months.

"When a show closes, you go from a steady paycheque to zero income. It can take time to build up a subbing roster, if you are fortunate to be hired by your colleagues to sub for them. Otherwise it is hard to make plans, either personally or professionally. Part of the reason I have so many projects going on this year is the financial stability this show has provided."

By way of example, she points to a recent "Celtic Night" concert at NYC's Birdland Jazz Club.

"I spent so long trying to become an American, that once I finally had the passport, I found myself wanting to reach back and reconnect with where I am from. That concert was basically an excuse to bring Scots and Irish-born folk on stage with me, so we could perform the music we love in a way that felt most comfortable - less of the American version of what Scotland or Ireland is, and something that was more authentic to us."

Dorman-Phaneuf has at least one more Birdland show on tap for 2019, and hopes to release an album of original arrangements and Broadway melodies over the coming year.

www.mairidormanphaneuf.com

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Home of Thrones

A new exhibit in Belfast brings a smash series home...

In the world of Westeros, the coming of winter is foremost on characters' minds. Here in the real world, however, fans of the Game of Thrones franchise should be getting excited for winter's end, when the Game of Thrones touring exhibition opens its doors in the "Home of Thrones" - Belfast, Northern Ireland.

This spring, the HBO-licensed exhibition - which features props, costumes, and sets from the long-running fantasy series - comes to Belfast, courtesy of TBL International.

"These are things that take you right through from series one to series seven of Game of Thrones, and in anticipation of season eight airing just after the exhibition opens," says Eimear Lewis, head of marketing for TBL. "It is an up-close and personal look at a lot of the key things that fans will identify from the show, and lots of details about the characters and their costumes and all of the artistry that went into making them."

What curios can visitors expect to see, plucked from the wondrous world created by author George R. R. Martin? There's something from every corner of Westeros and the neighbouring continent of Essos, across the Narrow Sea.

"One of the themes of the exhibition is the Purple Wedding," says Lewis. "You are able to see all of the costumes; you can see Cersei's costume, Joffrey's costume, you can see all of the Lannisters'."

Also on site are some of the sets; the throne room of King's Landing, the conquered city of Meereen, and the frozen halls of Castle Black, home of the Night's Watch.

Not all the exhibit is behind glass, though; Lewis notes there are lots of pieces that fans can directly interact with.

"There are props like Arya's Needle, Ed Stark's sword - those are photo opportunities, so fans can really get up close and personal. Visitors can take a photo that looks like they are climbing a wall of ice. It is all done with mirrors, but they can hold a rope and it looks like they are on The Wall. At one point, as you can walk through the different areas of the exhibitions, you can look into an interactive digital screen and have your face put up on the Wall of Faces in the House of Black and White."

> *"While the exhibition has been a treat for Game of Thrones fans around the world, being shown in Belfast will add an extra dimension to visitors' experiences.*

Lewis doesn't call Belfast "The Home of Thrones" for nothing, after all.

"We have such a track record with Game of Thrones - it has been filmed here for over 10 years, and lots of the iconic locations that fans will recognize are in Northern Ireland. It is the Game of Thrones exhibition within Game of Thrones territory; that is what we call Northern Ireland. Fans who come to Belfast will be in the shadow of the studio where Game of Thrones is filmed."

Many of the historic castles that dot the countryside have played home to the denizens of Westeros. Winterfell, the ancestral home of the Stark Clan, was filmed at Castle Ward for the show's first season, while Gosford Castle stood in for Riverrun, home of House Frey.

"There are lots of different places that people will recognize from the show, but they are off the beaten track within Northern Ireland. The beauty of Game of Thrones is in getting people out of the cities and into the region."

Belfast is no stranger to screen tourism; the Titanic Belfast museum - on the original construction site of the famous vessel - is right across the road from the Game of Thrones exhibition. Titanic helped put the city on the map for cinephiles, but Game of Thrones has taken the area's popularity to new levels with its filming history, and also as many of the props and costumes were made in Belfast.

"The development opportunities for our film industry are really a testament to what Belfast can offer," continues Lewis. "So many local people have the custom skills that allow them to work all over the world, as a result of Game of Thrones."

If you are in the Belfast region when the exhibition opens on April 11, through to the first of September, there is no better place or time to explore the lore of A Song of Ice and Fire.

"This is the Home of Thrones, this is Game of Thrones territory, and you will have a much more immersive experience in Belfast."

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Confluence

Award-winning photojournalist Tom Langlands trips through time with Confluence

In his 1690 work, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, English philosopher John Locke argued that it is our memories that define us. Salvador Dali's 1931 surrealist painting, Persistence of Memory - with its famous melting clocks - challenges us to consider the meaning and illusory nature of time. While many of us may not consciously think about who we are, nor ponder time beyond practical applications, it has not escaped the notice of Laura Hudson Mackay, a photographic artist based in South West Scotland. Some of her earliest memories, and a fascination with time, have shaped who she is and brought direction and focus to her art.

I caught up with Hudson Mackay at The Stove - the premises of an artist-led collective in Dumfries. With auburn hair hinting at a distant Celtic ancestry, her large, hazel eyes sparkled as she recounted fond memories of her grandfather.

"I loved spending time with him. When I was seven years old he made me a wooden clock and taught me how to tell the time. When I was in my teens he asked me for 'a little box of time.' Unbeknown to his family he was ill and died soon after. My fascination and exploration of time began with him."

That interest grew alongside a passion for storytelling - something she attributes to her mother.

"She inspired my love of fairytales, folklore and all things otherworldly. I would sit bewitched as she told me stories of secret forests where castles stood, worlds deep under the sea and magical places far, far away."

In her mid-twenties, Hudson Mackay visited the Isle of Iona - a trip that would shape her future life. While there, she felt a timeless spirituality - one that preceded St Columba and Iona's Christian heritage - awakening within her a fascination with the Celts, their stories and their culture. It was here, by the sea, that her boyfriend proposed marriage. Five years later and married, they returned to Iona, where - with her first camera in hand - she began to understand that the essence of great photography is not solely to create a record, but also to capture a sense of something beyond what the eye can see. This would lead to an Advanced Diploma in Illustrative Photography from Glasgow Metropolitan College in 2006, a Diploma with Distinction in Art History from London Art College in 2013, and membership of the Royal Photographic Society.

In 2010, Hudson Mackay and her husband visited Morocco, a world of vibrant colours, music, sounds and storytelling steeped in Arabic traditions and culture. A melting pot between Europe and Africa, it was a far cry from the peace and tranquillity of rural, South West Scotland. Jemaa El-Fnaa is the main square in Marrakech where the hlaykia - traditional storytellers - have been reciting

Laura Hudson Mackay

Houssain Belabbes

tales for a thousand years. Captivated by its vigour, the couple built a property in Marrakech. Now, with a base in Scotland and one in Morocco, Hudson Mackay embraces two cultures with her love of photography and stories, bridging the two.

It was during her first international exhibition in Marrakech in 2016 that she met Mehdi El Ghaly, a traditional Moroccan storyteller. His enthusiasm was intoxicating; like Celtic storytellers of old, El Ghaly had memorized tales handed down through generations of Moroccan hlaykia, bringing them to life again and mesmerizing listeners with each retelling.

In 2017, an art and craft development organization based in Dumfries and Galloway called Upland sought expressions of interest to participate in a program encouraging international development between artists.

Hudson Mackay proposed a collaborative project between El Ghaly, Houssain Belabbes - a Morrocan photographer that she had come to know - and herself. It was an ambitious project based on the premise that there are similarities to be found in Celtic and Arabian stories. Titled Confluence, the proposal would test this premise, and identify and document any such stories before they are lost through the passage of time. The creative use of photography would enhance those stories, helping to give them permanence. Her bid was successful and Confluence was born. She sought out a Celtic storyteller to complete her team and enlisted Anne Errington, whose father also happened to be a passionate Arabist.

Headed by Hudson Mackay, the four-person Confluence team began the process of gathering stories. Initially using social media to communicate, they quickly inspired one another with their stories and images.

> *Before long it became evident that Celtic and Arabic stories often share similar themes.*

Thus, the group set about identifying those thematic similarities. From an initial list of forty-two they whittled it down to seven specific concepts that could be considered as common to the tales of both cultures; Water, Happiness, The No. 3, Old, Time, Silence and Money. After this, the group held public meetings in Scotland and Morocco, spreading stories, gathering more stories, making images and distributing information about the project in both English and Darija (Moroccan Arabic).

In 2017, Hudson Mackay was appointed Artist in Residence at Scotland's Wigtown Book Festival, and from that grew the idea of a book to celebrate Confluence. With Celtic tales, including The Kelpie and The Fiddlers of Strathspey, along with Arabian stories such as The Barber and the Merchant and The Princess and the Donkey, the 190-page hardcover book includes twenty-nine stories from Celtic and Arabic cultures spread across all seven themes. The stories are accompanied by beautiful images in monochrome and colour, many with a distinctly timeless quality. Launched in Wigtown in May 2018, and followed by a second launch at the British Ambassador's residence in Rabat later the same year, the book is testament to the success of Confluence.

The work is only part of the story, however; in the true meaning of Confluence there is now a fascinating flow of stories, and an exciting mingling of ideas, emanating from both Scotland and Morocco. Cultural barriers are being overcome, and shared workshops in storytelling and photography - as well as art exhibitions and installations - have been taking place in both countries, with more planned through 2019 and 2020. In addition, the Australian Ambassador to Morocco has commissioned a project to explore links between the two nations and similarly to produce a book.

Each year, Hudson Mackay embarks on a journey to explore cultural overlaps between Celtic lands and other nations. Two years ago she toured the coastline of Brittany, Asturias and Galicia, and last year she travelled through Denmark, Sweden and Norway. As a result of her efforts, Scandinavian storytellers have engaged with the project and events and workshops have been organized for the Shetland Islands, Norway and Denmark. From a small idea inspired by memories and time Confluence has gone global.

Through all of this Hudson Mackay never forgot her grandfather's request, and two years ago she finally created his 'little box of time' which contains a collection of photography, other time-related items, and his old pocket watch. It may have taken her three decades and a soul-searching journey to create it but - as Einstein is purported to have said - "time is just an illusion."

www.confluencetheworld.com
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Coming to know Cumbria

In the final instalment in a three-part series, Lesley Choyce combs through Celtic Cumbria...

One fine morning, we took the little car ferry from Bowness across Lake Windermere to Far Sawrey. On board were backpackers, bikers, and people out to enjoy a day on the other side of the long lake.

Our destination was Hilltop Farm in Near Sawrey. We were headed to the home of Beatrix Potter. Peter Rabbit was a long hop, skip and jump from Wordsworth and Coleridge's 1789 volume of Lyrical Ballads with its "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and "Tintern Abbey," but it was a story my mother had read to me as a little boy. The names Flopsie, Mopsie and Cotton-Tail still echo in my head because we raised rabbits back home in the early 1960s and had named three of our brood after these characters.

Exactly why were we raising rabbits is something I am afraid to ask of my memory.

There was also a Choyce connection here. One of Potter's close friends was a woman named Louie Choyce. They had an extensive correspondence which was later published as The Choyce Letters - revealing the details of their friendship, as well as their common interest in sheep, fungi (mycology), horticulture and all things living.

Potter herself is best known for her 28 children's books that she wrote and illustrated. They were somewhat cutesy little stories for the most part, which have since been translated into 35 languages and have sold over a hundred million copies. Like most successful authors, she initially met with rejection when trying to find someone to publish her work but, once she met publisher Frederick Warne, her career took off. She then connected with Frederick's brother, Norman, both her editor and lover - which sounds like a most unlikely combo - and things might have gone happily ever after had he not died of a disease known as pernicious anaemia.

In her heart and life, Beatrix was a lover of animals. Peter Rabbit was modeled on her own pet rabbit, Benjamin Bouncer.

As a child - a somewhat homely child one might observe from the photographs - she had mice, frogs, hedgehogs, and even a pet bat, to keep her company.

Through the years she had dogs for pets too, of course. Perhaps her most famous is her collie Kep who appears in a number of photographs of Beatrix as well as in The Tale of Jemima the Puddle-Duck.

In the car-park at the preserved Hill Top Farm - the Potter home - I chatted up a man standing there with a Jack Russell Terrier. We talked about dogs for a few minutes and he grumbled about dogs not being allowed in The World of Beatrix Potter, an engaging entertainment attraction back across the lake in Bowness. He also thought that the price tag for a family afternoon there with the show and afternoon tea was a bit steep: 84 pounds. I agreed and lodged my own complaint about the high price of going into Hill Top and other National Trust sites. Linda must have been off taking photos, because we two men grumbled and consoled each other like that for a while until, in the spirit of mutual male complaints, I mentioned how the unyielding British government would not allow us to fly our Westie into the country in the cabin of the plane. "It's just not fair," I said, one dog lover to another, but because he was an Englishman I added in jest, "You should have that fixed."

Instead of laughing and saying, "Yes, I'll get right on that," he frowned and said, "That and a lot of other things. It's this damn European Union thing, I bet."

Oops. He bet wrong, as France and other Euro-nations are easy-peasy on dogs compared to Great ("We're an island, you know...") Britain. After that, the conversation sort of peter-rabbited off and he allowed his Jack Russell to tug him off towards a trash can where the dog sniffed and then peed on the shiny metal, reminding me to avoid anything even slightly political when talking to strangers and never, ever mentioning European Union, Brexit, fox hunting or the lack of proper hot water to anyone I would meet in the United Kingdom from now on.

As the parking lot continued to fill up, and my wife came to rescue me from further alienating citizens of our host country, I began to wonder why Ms. Potter's fame had grown rather than diminished over the years. I had tried rereading some of those children's books recently and well...am I allowed to say it? I just didn't quite get it.

I know, I know, I know. "They are children's books, you flaming snob, jerk," you might say to my face.

And so I will simply say no more about the thin plots, the sil-

ly characters with even sillier names like Squirrel Nutkin, Little Pig Robinson and Mrs. Tiggy Winkle. And, besides, it was my own dear mother who loved the stories and was willing to share them with my brother and me when we were just wee ones.

The Potter house itself was smallish and dark and downright austere, but the surrounding countryside was heavenly. Beatrix proved herself to locals that she was indeed a true animal lover and a conservationist. When she died at 77, she left her fourteen farms (fourteen!!) and 4,000 acres to the National Trust. She was able to afford all that property thanks to the huge success of her book sales.

Although she was a famous writer, naturalist and land baron, she had begun farming here with as much difficulty as anyone else, even having to cope with a total of 96 rats in her first two years at Hill Top. Her passion extended itself to sheep farming - a predominately male domain at that time. Yet her fame for breeding Herdwick sheep led to her election as the president of the Herdwick Sheep Breeders Association which was a big deal in those days and in these parts.

As usual, we were channelled through the gift shop as we were leaving Hill Top Farm and I was sorely tempted to buy a Peter Rabbit shot glass but left it there on the shelf instead for a true fan to purchase and carry home and revere.

Driving on, it was easy to see why Potter had fallen in love with this rolling green, bucolic countryside

I was thankful that this side of Windermere was not quite as commercial as the eastern shore around Bowness, Windermere proper, and Ambleside.

We stopped for lunch at the Old Dungeon Ghyll Hotel on our way to Great Langdale. I had the chicken and leek pie, which I would recommend. On TripAdvisor, which is always a lively place to monitor other folks' opinions rather than facts, David L. of Preston, U.K. reports that it is "a no nonsense pub, popular with climbers and walkers enjoying the Langdale Pikes. The interior consists of stone floors and bare wooden benches and tables; perfect if you're wet or muddy (fairly common in this part of the world)... Service is efficient, but I am puzzled that the staff all appear to be from Eastern Europe. Are there no locals who need the work?"

While I can't answer his Socratic inquiry concerning the local employment situation, I would own up to the fact that we encountered many, many East Europeans in the service industry while travelling and they were all super friendly, efficient and helpful.

Despite some obvious lingering resentment of the European Union which had flared into the Brexit disaster, many a British veteran pub-goer will tell you that service has dramatically improved throughout the land once job-hungry folks from the continent were permitted entry into the kingdom.

Refreshed and restored, we motored on through Chapel Stile and on to our destination of Great Langdale. I had fussed greatly over what mountain we should climb - something difficult but not too difficult - a steep hike that Wordsworth would approve of and something that would get us breathing heavily and challenge our abilities. In a hiking book, I had read about the trek up to Stickle Tarn and decided that was the place.

A tarn is a lake, I had learned but when trying to determine what "stickle" meant, I could only discover it meant to have a stubborn

LINDA CHOYCE

LESLEY CHOYCE

argument about something trivial - or if you can believe the Urban Dictionary - it is "the space between you and someone else, when you don't want them touching you." I never did sort out how it applied to the mountain we were about to hike. I would maybe use the word out loud if ever I find myself on a subway ride in Tokyo during rush hour.

Instead, I chalked it up to one of a myriad of small mysteries in my life that would never be unravelled.

Parking the car at the foot of this most Cumbrian of the Cumbrian Mountains, we were certain Stickle was a worthy adversary and set out on the stony path behind the inn. Our first encounter was with some sort of Outward Bound-type group. About thirty twelve-year-olds in safety helmets, bright sports clothes and water shoes were scrambling up a ravine through the cascading water. They were being led by shouting, university-age counsellors and splashing each other as they hopped from rock to rock. It was a warm day and it probably felt good to be wet. Linda and I agreed that we approved of anything challenging like this that would get a contemporary English youth out of a classroom and out from behind the screen of a dastardly video game.

Sure, there would be a few scraped knees and some damaged egos, but it was the pre-teen version of real adventure, and made me think that perhaps the 'British Outdoors for Youth Anti-Internet Soak Your Bully in a Mountain Stream Central Office' should require all children between the ages of nine and sixteen to be locked out of their homes at least once a week and required to commune with Mother Nature on whatever terms possible.

There was, however, on the path before us, one chubby lad sitting it out on a ledge with his (or somebody's) mother, his safety helmet in hand, his ego battered, his self-esteem damaged beyond recognition. We didn't stop to ask what the problem was as that would only have exasperated his plight. But it was clear and universal that here was the boy who couldn't quite find the will or courage or whatever it took to join his peers in their wet and somewhat wild fun. Maybe he just had a bad stomach from eating too many Yorkies, Rolos, Maltesers, Milky Bars or Haribo Strawbs. Or maybe he had just chickened out and his schoolmates would never, ever allow him to forget it. Scarred for life from this and several similar episodes, he would grow up to be a murderer or a terrorist. Or it could go the other way. He could turn out to be an "I'll-Show-Them" type who comes up with a cure for cancer and a device that can convert poisoned water into clean healthy life-giving fluid for free.

We left the brooding boy and the shouts of his happier classmates as we ascended the trail that continually became steeper and steeper. Linda was in better shape than me, thanks to her running mornings, but I was coaching oxygen into my lungs, advising my calf muscles to muster their strength and trying to keep up with her the best I could.

There were sheep about perched on small ledges here and there and the view of the Great Langdale Valley just kept getting grander and grander. Sure enough, the tarn was waiting for us at the top with two even higher mountains - Harrison Stickle and Pavey Ark - looming above with a spectacular blue sky behind them. All the mountains around had been scraped mostly raw by retreating glaciers. There were no trees but hearty desert-like plants and enough dry grass to keep the sparse sheep fed.

At the summit, we were rewarded with a view of a pristine mountaintop lake.

It reminded me of photos I had seen of other mountain tops with circular lakes at the summit. And then it occurred to me; it was a volcanic cone. Stickle Tarn is what's

left of an extinct volcano. And here we were, me puffing heavily like a six-pack-a-day smoker and Linda still hopping from boulder to boulder like a twenty-something gymnast. We had worked hard to get here and this was our reward; a dead, but breathtaking volcano top.

We gorged our eyes on water, sky and distant peaks for a while, and congratulated ourselves on our success at a strenuous climb, vowing that if there were more hills like this around then bring them on. We wandered a bit there in the heights and snapped some of those photographs that never do justice to such natural magnificence. Then Linda led the way down on the far side of the tiny rivulet we had traced to the summit.

The trail petered out to nothing and we found ourselves on a much steeper slope with much less stable footing. It turned out to be a path mostly used by the mountain sheep and I feared we were not quite as adept as they were. But if I knew one thing about scaling down mountains (and I don't know much) it is this: when in doubt, slide down on your ass. And so we shuffled and crab walked and bumped our bums ever downward on these most ancient stones until we could cross the stream again and make our way back down towards the voices of the adventure-happy kids in the lower creek.

Uncommonly proud of having scaled such a difficult climb, I would later look up the hike in a Lake District hiking book only to discover that the author referred to it as a "nice family hike" - but refused to let that diminish my sense of accomplishment. In my memory, it continues to loom as large as an amazing and legendary ascent.

I was itching for a pint of beer from the pub below but settled on sharing an icy cold bottle of Coke purchased from the friendly barkeep. I had noticed that in most of the British hiking books, detailed descriptions of the trails invariably ended with some fairly precise directions as to how a weary, thirsty hiker could find his or her way to the nearest pub. At Stickle Tarn, you don't have to look far; we were barely off the trail when we stumbled into the Sticklebarn Pub. I don't usually drink sweet fizzy drinks, but I felt like they put something special in the Coke that day although it was probably the generous buzz provided by the mountain and the air. I was reminded that if a person needed to overcome a bout of what the Romantic poets would have called melancholy, a good challenging hike to any available stickle or tarn might do it - that and a slug of ice-cold Coke.

How exactly could it be that something so natural and magnificent combined with something so commercial, crass and unhealthy could create such a small cocktail of euphoria?

I don't quite know, but it does.

According to Engineering Timelines, the Langdale area "is the site of what might be called the first recognizable 'industry' in the British Isles. The scree slopes here were quarried some 5,000 years ago for the raw materials for stone axes, which were then shaped and eventually ended up distributed round the country." The stone in question was called greenstone volcanic tuff and it really did get exported far and wide, with at least one group of diligent archaeologists determining that a whopping 27 per cent of the axe heads from this period came from the Great Langdale area and some found as far away as Wales, Ireland and Poland.

Soon it would be time to depart from the Lake District, drive back to Glasgow airport and find our way back home to gear up for our month back in England (by way of a flight to France), this time with Kelty. I had noticed an English Facebook posting for a "Tails Trails - Events for Dogs and their Humans" coaxing folks to "Come Join the Pack," so I knew there was plenty of dog-friendly hiking to be had in Langdale and vicinity. But I had also read accounts of sheep owners shooting unleashed dogs in Cumbria - blaming dogs for the death of substantial numbers of their sheep - so perhaps Kelty would be safer some place other than on the steep craggy slopes of the fells.

In the morning, over coffee, I also found myself drawn to other tragic news of this Lake District that had been so generous to us; only a month before, a climber had died after falling at Raven Crag right behind where we had enjoyed lunch at the Old Dungeon Ghyll Hotel.

One such tragic story led to a plethora of others with headlines reading "Glaramara climber dies from head injuries after fall on Raven Crag," "Injured Lakeland climber airlifted from Raven Crag after 33ft fall," "Paraglider critically injured in crash on Tarn Crag, Great Langdale," "Great Langdale walker dies after fall in Dungeon Ghyll," and "Lake District walker dies after falling on Scafell Pike snow slope."

We were not mountain climbers, Linda and I, but I find that preparing for a long-distance flight anywhere, even when going home, sobers me to realities that haunt me from time to time. Adventure and danger are linked, as are beauty and loss.

Soon the car was packed and we were on the A 592 leaving Windermere driving through the stark beauty of Kirkstone Pass and skirting the shores of Ullswater where Dorothy and William had taken their "holiday ramble" and she had seen the vision of the white dog in moonlight. Then it was onward towards Penrith and the M6. As we crossed over Hadrian's Wall again without a trace to be seen, I realized there was so much more to experience in this corner of the Celtic world and that we would be back here again to take in the tarns, make footprints on the fells, wade in the waters, and sing praises to poets old and new.

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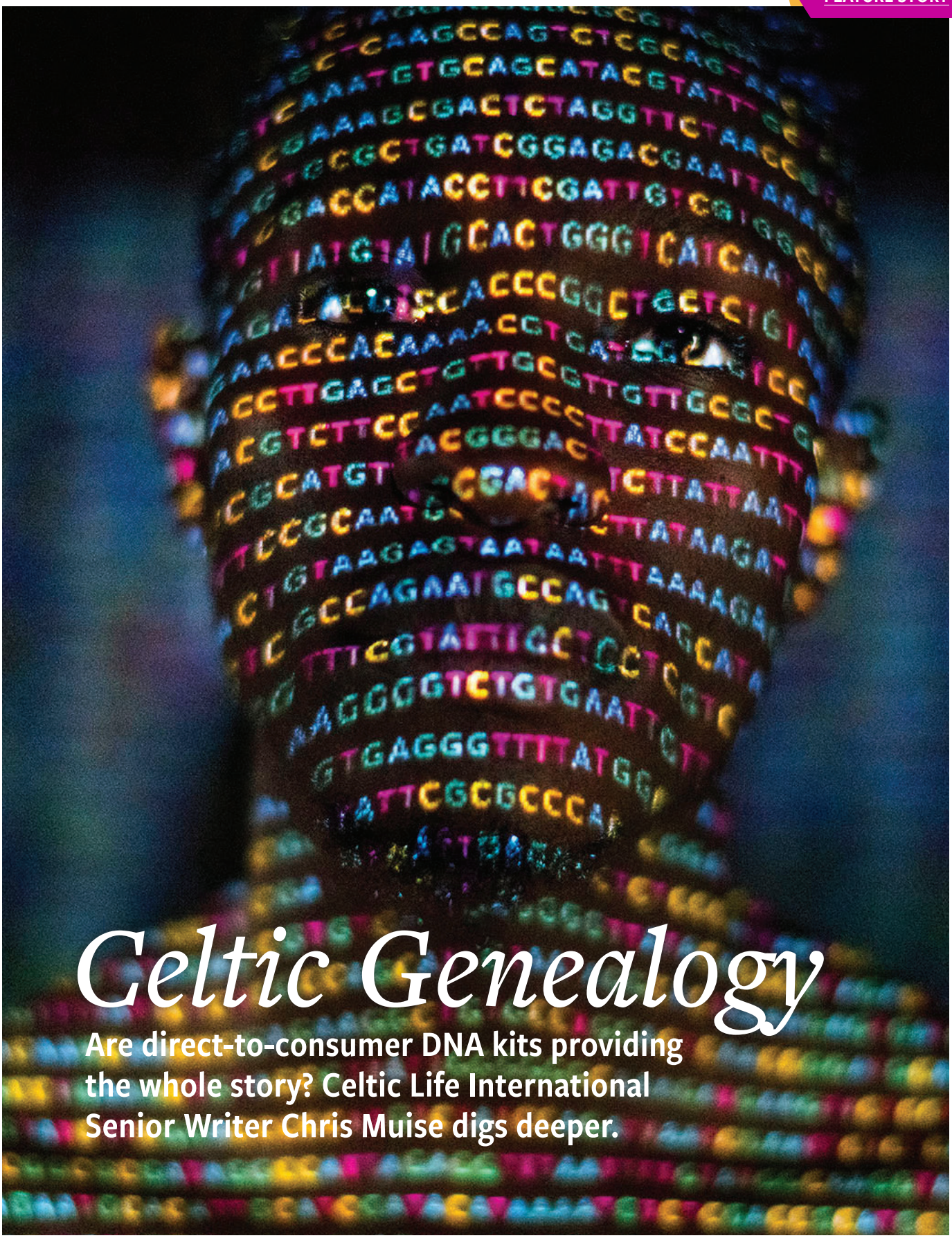


Celtic Genealogy

Are direct-to-consumer DNA kits providing the whole story? Celtic Life International Senior Writer Chris Muise digs deeper.

The history of the Celtic people is long and storied, as fortune, famine, and the hands of fate have guided their steps across the globe for millennia. Thus, there are many whose veins run red with Celtic blood, and may yet not know. There are even more of known Celtic heritage who wish to track that blood back as far as they can.

It is no surprise, then, that genealogy is an area of interest for many people with Celtic roots. Today, with the commercial availability of direct-to-consumer DNA ancestry kits - like those available from Ancestry.com or 23andMe - finding out where you come from seems easier than ever.

Or is it?

The abundance of commercially available DNA testing kits now on the market should not be considered an easy answer to all your heredity questions. According to genetics and genealogy experts who spoke to Celtic Life International, these services can only offer so much.

Take for example a recent story published by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), where a reporter and her identical twin took five different direct-to-consumer ancestry kits and got different results between them. Charlsie Agro of CBC's Marketplace program, along with her sister Carly, submitted genetic material to AncestryDNA, MyHeritage, 23andMe, FamilyTreeDNA and Living DNA. Having practically identical DNA, they should have expected identical results.

Instead, 23andMe showed that Charlsie had one percent more Italian heritage than Carly, three per cent more Eastern European heritage, and expressed a fraction of French and German DNA where her sister had none.

How is it possible for siblings – identical twins, no less - to differ even slightly in their ancestry results? This outcome is a little less shocking when you learn that the methodology of these types of kits are more of an estimation than a comprehensive list detailing your own particular gene pool.

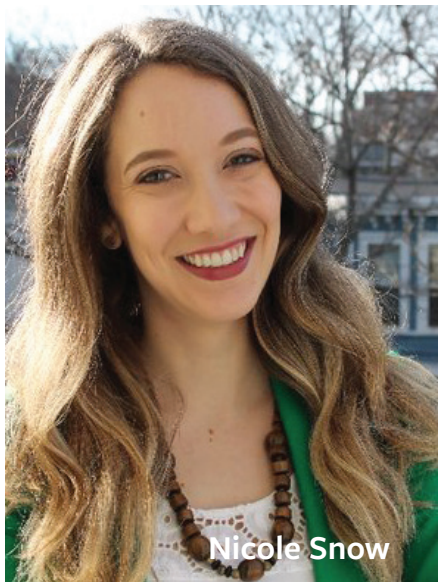
"A lot of the information is looking at a reference population," says Nicole Snow, a genetic counsellor with the IWK Children's Health Centre in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Snow explains that when you have one of these direct-to-consumer tests done, your DNA is being checked against the company's own private genetic database, mostly made up of other people who have taken their test. A proprietary algorithm then decides how much of your genetic make-up likely came from different population groups - and that can only take you so far.

"There are going to be some groups that have a smaller reference population," says Snow. "European ancestry tends to be very well-represented, as compared to some other ancestries. If someone is buying this testing, and they have a small amount of an ancestry that is not well-represented in that database, they might miss out on that diversity within themselves."

"People can get very excited and carried away by their ethnicity results, but these can be misleading," adds Rosaleen Underwood, a genealogist with Accredited Genealogists Ireland, via email. "A typical Irish result could give a mix of Scandinavian, Western European, and Germanic as well as Celtic, maybe Iberian, and maybe even some Mediterranean - all of which is easily explained if you know your Irish history. For example, some of the earliest settlers in the south-west of Ireland are believed to have come from Spain."

"Thus, a result that says your background is 50 per cent Scottish, or Irish, or of any ethnicity really, doesn't tell you a lot.

Lynn Brady


Nicole Snow

Rosaleen Underwood

It might tell you even less if you are investigating your lineage for medical reasons.

As a genetic counsellor, Snow's job is to identify genetic risk factors and use clinical testing methods to determine the cause or potential risk of any hereditary medical concerns, often using a mode called Next Generation Sequencing.

"It is a form of genetic testing that spells out a number of different genes at one time, and makes sure that there are no spelling mistakes in that gene, so to speak. We would order a panel of genes - that might be hundreds of genes that are all associated with something like epilepsy - and look to see if there is a spelling mistake in any of those genes that might explain a child's epileptic condition."

Make no mistake, the science of genetics has reached an all-time high in recent years. But Snow says that when it comes to the usefulness of that amazing technology, human understanding is where the buck stutters.

"The technology has improved faster than we can interpret the data that we are getting back. There are still genes whose function we still do not fully understand yet, or perhaps they have never been associated with human disease before. As good as the technology is, it is our knowledge that is the driving force for us to be able to make a diagnosis."

In most cases, the ability to properly decipher results from direct-to-consumer kits independently is nearly impossible. Snow notes that many companies keep their databases private.

"Not only do we not know how accurate the testing is in the first place, from a direct-to-consumer database, but even if it is accurate, we still don't know how valid those results are. It depends on the direct-to-consumer test itself, but with a test like 23andMe, there are specific mutations that they test for.

"For example, BRCA1 and BRCA2, which are the two most well-known breast cancer-associated genes; a direct-to-consumer test is not actually spelling out the entire gene and looking for mutations in that gene - it is just looking for some well-described mutations."

In short, these tests aren't looking for all the possible warning signs that you might have breast cancer - only the most common. A study from the genetic information company Invitae recently showed that 88 per cent of samples from families with a background of hereditary cancer would have had warning signs go unnoticed by most commercial testing, and worse, that about 50 per cent positive results from these tests were determined to be false positives when scrutinized under clinical testing.

"Getting a negative result from that is not reassuring to me," continues Snow. "If you have a strong family history of cancer, or you yourself had a young onset of cancer, there might be something else going on that this type of testing is missing.

"I do worry about people getting a false sense of reassurance when they do a direct-to-consumer test, because they are not getting the full picture."

Most of these companies will explain their methodology and their findings if you read through, but most consumers aren't doing that.

"If you look at 23andMe, they do have an explanation if you click through all of your results," says Snow. "However, we live in a world where we run into terms and conditions daily, and we automatically skip over lots of extra information without reading. When it comes to genetic testing, I really urge people to read the fine print."

> *"Genetic testing is not straight-forward, it is not an easy yes-or-no answer."*

"People still want short cuts, especially as we have become used to almost instant results with computers," notes Underwood. "Genealogy doesn't work like that."

How does it work, then? As it turns out, a lot like it did in the old days; with quill and parchment, and a lot of research.

Lynn Brady is the resident genealogist with The Glasnevin Trust, a museum associated with Glasnevin Cemetery in Dublin. She admittedly doesn't know much about genetic science, as she has been practicing genealogy the old-fashioned way since she started.

"Our cemetery opened in 1832, and we have burial records going back to that year," says Brady over the phone from her office in Dublin. "My job is to help people trace their families that are buried here. We could have three, four, sometimes five generations of the same family buried in the one grave, and people would not be aware of that. That is why they come in to me, and I go through the records and see what I can find for them.

"There's nothing science-based at all. It is just their burial registers."

Over 1.6 million folks rest at Glasnevin, and each one of them has a paper record detailing the person who owns the grave, who is buried there, their age, address, place of death, date of death, gender, religion, occu-

pation, marital status, cause of death, and even the name of the person who arranged the funeral. This even holds true for people buried there today - both electronically on a computer database, and on the same paper register they have used for centuries.

For those seeking their Celtic roots, these jotted notes are far more useful than a mail-away genetics test, according to Brady.

"You literally start with yourself, and work backwards, generation by generation. I always tell people, the first thing is to talk with your family members. Get all the stories out of them. These are things that will have been handed down. Once you start your family research, you uncover the truth to those tales."

As direct-to-consumer kits become more popular, Brady has had to disappoint many amateur genealogists who come to her certain that they must have a relative buried at Glasnevin Cemetery, which, she points out, was the only Catholic facility of its kind in the region for 100 years.

"I see people coming in, telling me that they have had their DNA test done. Sometimes it confuses people, and sometimes people will come to me and say they definitely have Dublin ancestors, and then we will get to the point where I can't find anything. If anybody died that was living in Dublin in those hundred years, then there is a good probability that they are buried here at Glasnevin. So, if I don't find anything, they can be disappointed because of what they had been told with their DNA results.

"People presume that, once they are told that they have, say, 50 per cent Irish blood in them, that I am going to be able to automatically find their relatives. That obviously isn't the case, because they don't have enough information. I can point them in a few different directions, but especially when you go pre-registration, which is 1864, you need to know where in Ireland the person came from, in order to be able to look up baptism and marriage records."

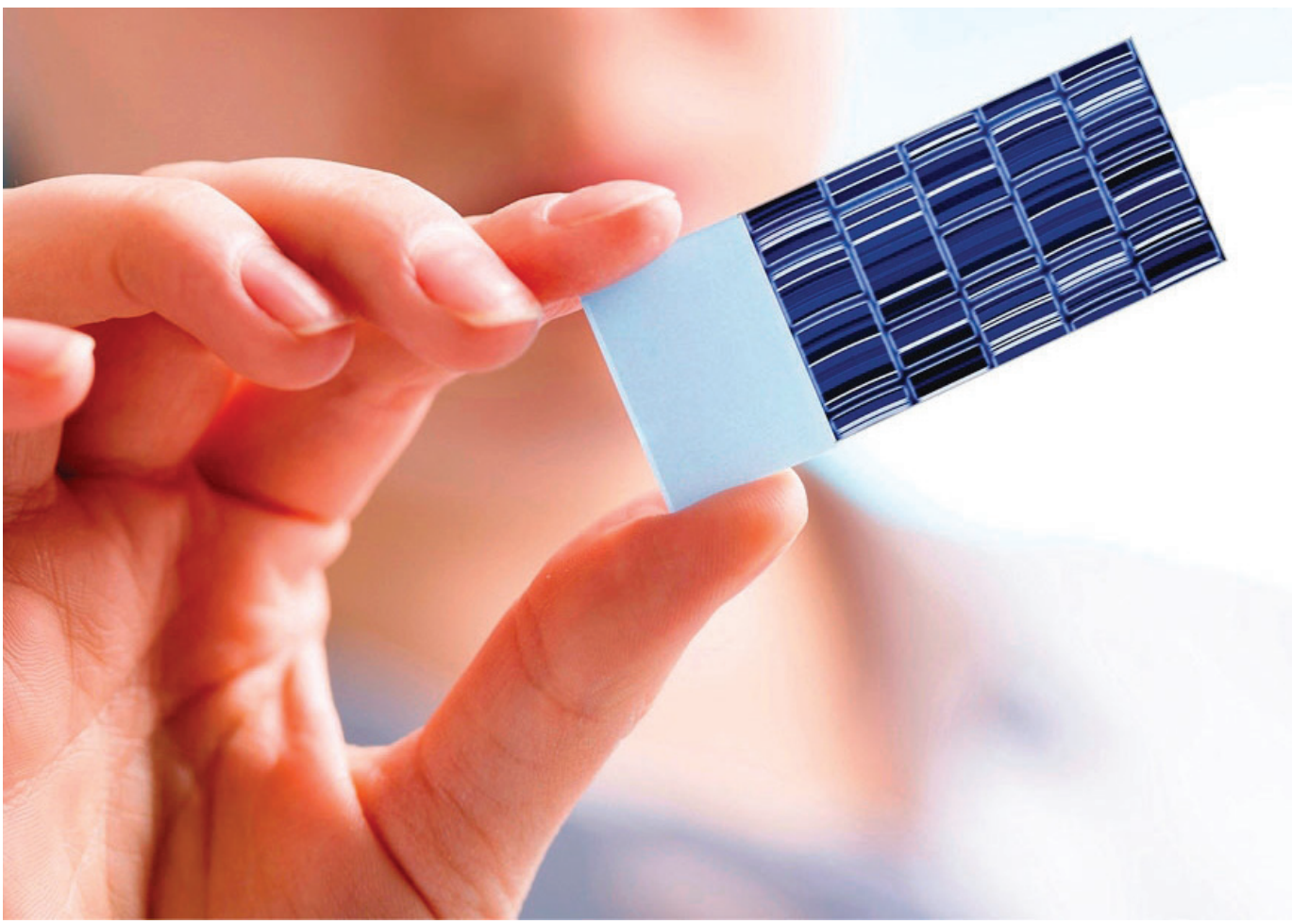
"So, does that mean that direct-to-consumer ancestry kits are bogus, and shouldn't be bothered with? Not necessarily.

What is more important, our experts agree, is in understanding what these tests are good at, and what their limits are. And, if nothing else, the popularity of these tests is getting more people interested in genealogy that might not have been otherwise.

"I have had people that wouldn't have come to me, but did because they had their DNA testing done," says Brady. "Sometimes, I have been able to help them, and sometimes I haven't. I think a lot of people that get the test done don't actually understand the results, or how it works, but they are still asking questions."

"I see amateur genealogists all the time," adds Snow. "There might be people who would not be interested in going through archives and being a genealogist from that perspective, but might be interested to spit in a tube and get their result back."

Of course, if your genealogical journey involves unknown parentage, DNA tests are great for that.



"For adoption cases, they can be fantastic," says Underwood. "Where the written records are poor, they can be very helpful, and give positive links with suspected families and relations."

And even though the possibility of false-positives appears to exist, any positive result you get on a direct-to-consumer test is still worth investigating with a clinical lab as it still could uncover a yet-to-be-detected ailment.

"I don't tell people, 'absolutely do not take this test,'" says Snow. "I think you just need to be informed about what it is going to offer, and that there are certainly limitations."

If you do want to take a direct-to-consumer test, Snow urges being a smart shopper; looking for companies that employ genetic counsellors like herself, who share their databases with the genetics community at large, and are up-front about what exactly they can and will do with your information.

"Some of the companies will sell consumer DNA information to other companies," warns Snow. "At that point, you are no longer the sole owner of your DNA anymore. Try to think about what the actual information that you want is, then, rigorously research the various different companies. There are a lot of different companies offering a lot of different things right now."

You might also want to prepare for the very real possibility that your test results could include some unexpected and potentially upsetting details. You could discover that your parents aren't your parents, or that you have a secret half-sibling you never knew about. According to an article by Scottish Field magazine, unexpected DNA results could even uproot long-held titles for people belonging to Scottish clans.

"In Ireland, there was always a great tradition of fosterage going back centuries, if not millennia, where local kings fostered each other's sons as hostages," adds Underwood. "This was continued until a generation or two ago as unofficial fosterage among families where a childless couple would take in a relation's child, especially if one of the parents had recently died, who would later inherit their farm. Very often, the neighbours would know more about the parentage of the children, legitimate or otherwise, than the children themselves. But they would be the last to know, as no one would ever tell them."

"Although you are the one consenting to getting that information, it might have big implications for people in your family," adds Snow.

No matter which company you may get your DNA tested with, and no matter the reason you may be exploring your heritage with them, all of our experts agree on one thing - don't just leave it at that.

"At least have the recognition that it is not the full picture," says Snow.

"Get it done, by all means, but don't take it as gospel truth," says Brady. "It is more of a guide than actual fact, but it is one of many tools, and not the only tool."

"Get a DNA test, but stick with the old reliables of the paper trail and talking to the family," says Underwood. "And read up on your history from all angles. We are all mongrels somewhere back along the line and that is one of the things that makes us all so interesting."

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Home to Donegal

Celtic Life International Managing Editor Stephen Patrick Clare pieces together the puzzle of his family's past

Our story begins nearly three years ago, with a casual, off-hand remark made by my mother, Joan Smart.

"My brother seems to think that the Smarts were once Magees, and that there is some sort of historical connection there..."

With deep roots in Newfoundland - birthplace of her parents, Stan Smart and Caroline Dunphy - Mom is one of six Smart siblings (three boys and three girls), each of whom sired children, leading to generations of grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Joan Smart

Along with being the "runt of the litter," Mom is, for the most part, the self-appointed family archivist. Now retired, she spends much of her spare time scouring through old letters and photographs, connecting with distant relatives by telephone and email, and collecting clues here and there through a myriad of sources in an effort to dig up the family roots.

"It's so fascinating," she shares. "And it's important; knowing where you come from helps you better understand who you are now, and who you are going to be..."

While those intentions are unquestionably noble and beyond reproach, piecing together the puzzle of the past is not without its challenges; an overload of information comes from all directions, be it from family members weaving wild tales and waving historical documents, or via a wave of ever-expanding and accessible online resources such as surname searches, ancestral forums, home DNA kits, and the like.

Ulster-based genealogist Brian Mitchell confirms that my mother has been moving in the right direction.

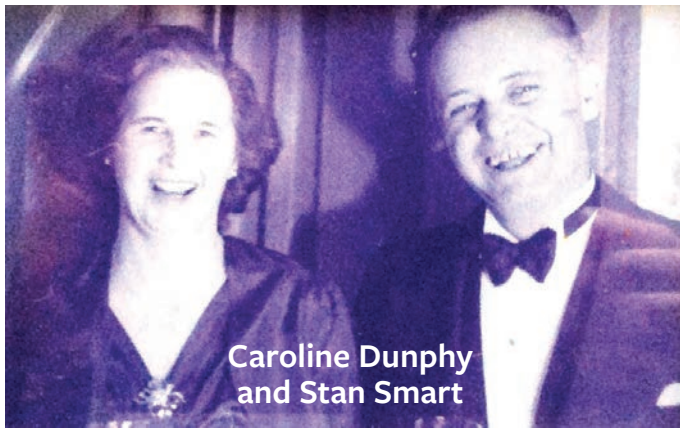
"Quite simply, start from the present and work backwards and build up a picture of your ancestor in their home country, looking for clues as to where they came from, before conducting research through record source."

He adds that the first, and perhaps most crucial, step in compiling your family tree is to quiz relations and family friends.

"Names, dates, places of birth and any anecdotes should be recorded. Family memories and knowledge should not be underestimated. There are many instances where family folklore, passed down through the generations, extends beyond what is written in historical records or captured in databases."

"Historical research and storytelling should not be separated.

"They are both crucial in any attempt to construct your family history. The information and anecdotes relatives can provide help bring the family tree to life, as well as providing much-needed clues for its construction. The oral traditions within the family circle are, therefore, of immense interest and value."


Caroline Dunphy and Stan Smart

To that end, Mom has done well to sift and sort through her mother's family history; originally from County Kerry on Ireland's plush southwest coast, the Dunphys scattered like seeds in the wind across Eire, into the U.K. and, later, North America. I have written extensively about those roots in previous editions of Celtic Life International.

But what of her father's lineage? Truth be told, we have but tidbits of information - at best, scraps and snippets of the Smart saga, held together with numerous, albeit much unsubstantiated, family lore.

This much we know; Stan Joseph Smart, my grandfather, was born in 1901 in Kings Point, Newfoundland, the son of Michael Patrick Smart (b. 1863) and Maggie Jackman (b. 1863).

Michael was the son of James Smart (b. 1822) and Margaret Flynn (b. 1831), both of Harbour Grace, Newfoundland.

James was the son of Amos Smart, who married Elizabeth Wilson on November 1, 1805, in St. Paul's Anglican Church, Harbour Grace, Newfoundland. Including James, they had eight children; William, Thomas, Michael, Joanna, Jane, Bridget and (Captain) Martin.

That narrative is supported by online research, including everything from Google queries to accessing parish and census records to deeper dives through sites like Ancestry.com.

From there, however, the trail goes cold. Thus, to further unravel the mystery of the Smart family's origins - and their possible connections to the Magees - I have enlisted the help of Brian Mitchell and other professional genealogists.

And though these portals into the past are essential components to better understanding one's heritage, there is simply no substitute for the real-life, real-time experience of visiting the land of one's forebears.

Alas, here I am, in the magical, mystical kingdom of Donegal along the stunning and serene northwest coast of Ireland, looking for that long-lost link.

I have been here before; first for a few days in 1989, then again

briefly in 2015. On both occasions, a few breadcrumbs of my family's past were tossed my way - just enough to temporarily satiate my desire, but not enough to quell my drive to know more.

More than facts, it was then - as it is today - a feeling of belonging that brings me back; a 'familiarity' of 'family' that runs in my blood.

This is my homeland, the place I was born in
No matter where I go it's in my soul
My feet may wander a thousand places
But my heart will lead me back home to my Donegal...

Geographically, Donegal is nestled in the upper northwest corner of Ireland, where the land, sea and sky collide in a kaleidoscope of colour and culture.

Spiritually - and perhaps as it only shares six miles of southern borderland with the Republic of Eire - the region is closer, both in heartland and heart-space, to the six neighbouring counties of Northern Ireland to its immediate east.

As such, and like its cultural counterparts across the Province of Ulster, Donegal's past casts a long - and often dark - shadow of English influence.

Nowhere is this more prevalent than at Donegal Castle in the county's capital. Once a home to the powerful O'Donnell Clan, the ominous 15th century stone structure was captured by English invaders after the Flight of the Earls in 1607 following the bloody 9 Years War.

> *Interestingly, the Gaelic name Dún na nGall translates to "Fort of the Foreigners."*

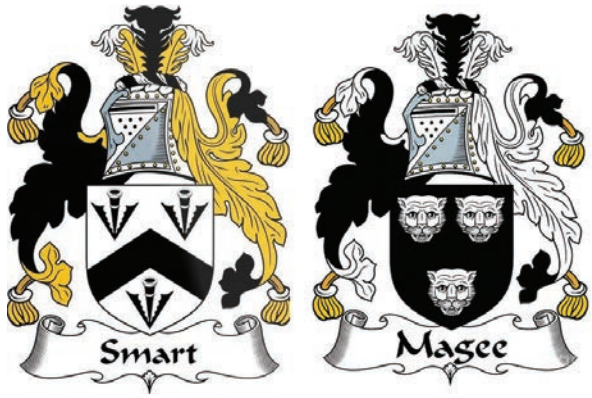
With a fortified beachhead in place, the new rulers brought tens of thousands of Scots and English to the region, starting in 1611, in what is known as the Plantation of Ulster.

While some still argue that the ensuing years were a form of cultural genocide - Celtic and Gaelic customs were mostly outlawed - others believe that England's efforts to secure the location for its strategic importance were better served by social assimilation.

Local records suggest that the Smart clan - my possible ancestors - were among the families that settled in the area at that time. According to HouseOfNames.com, the Smarts were originally a long-standing Anglo-Saxon tribe from the Suffolk region of England.

More records note that 12 members of the Smart family were counted in the Donegal area census of 1616, burgeoning to 27 by 1630. By 1652, there were 51 Smarts in the area, most living in and around the town center. Some were merchants, while others plied their trades as labourers and farmers. Local documents indicate that almost all of them were involved with the building of the town's first Protestant churches, some of which still exist today.

By 1696, there were 74 Smarts on record in the region, though that total would dip to 18 by 1731. As there is no reason given for the dwindling numbers (the region's overall population remained steady), one could speculate that disease, war, famine and other calamities may have taken their toll, or that perhaps the family "fell-out' with local authorities or with the church.



In any event, outmigration to greener pastures was a likely source for the Smart's complete disappearance from Donegal by 1762. Even now, one would be hard-pressed to find anyone with that surname in the region.

The first mention of Smarts arriving in Newfoundland - the birthplace of my maternal grandfather Stan - was the landing of an A. Smart in Placientia (on the then-country's southeast coast) in 1724, most certainly via merchant ship. Others were to follow over the next century, and by the mid-1800s the family name was firmly entrenched on "The Rock."

As census and church records for Newfoundland at that time were nearly non-existent, it is difficult to gauge who A. Smart was, where he (presumably he) arrived from, or if there is any connection to Amos Smart, my great-great-great grandfather. However, given the huge Irish presence in Newfoundland at that time (many stayed on after being employed by departed English settlers), and the emerging influence of the Catholic Church there, one could estimate that this individual arrived from Ireland.

So where is my family's Celtic connection in all of this?

As noted previously, an off-the-cuff remark by my mother's brother that "the Smarts were once Magees, and that there is some sort of historical connection there..." got me thinking.

Also, as a youngster, I often heard my grandfather (Stan) refer to my grandmother (Caroline) as "Mother Magee" - a common term of affection for members of that clan, unconsciously passed down through generations of aural tradition. In fact, I still use the term with my own mom to this day, something I surely picked up from my grandfather.

Magee is a native Irish name - derived from the Gaelic "Mag Aodha," or "son of Hugh" - and was first found along the border of counties Donegal and Tyrone. They are thought to be descended from the Colla Uais of the 4th century.

And then there is the element of religion; my grandfather (Stan) was Catholic. As the Smarts were originally Protestant, his ancestors would have converted at some point...but why?

It is possible that, upon reaching the shores of Newfoundland, there would have been greater social and cultural acceptance and economic opportunities amongst a strong Catholic community.

Another scenario is that - as with so many Celts and Catholics under English rule at that time - the Magees opted to change their name to Smart, as well as their religious affiliation, given the choice to convert or die ("taking the soup") - thus ensuring the preservation of their lineage.

Or, perhaps - and like some families did in Donegal in the early 1700s - it is possible that there was a point of assimilation, where two families were joined by forces beyond their control. Alas, it begs the question; would true love - in this case a passionate, albeit forbidden romance between a Protestant and a Catholic - be reason enough for both religious conversion and emigration to the New World?

We prayed that God would guide us and keep us by his hand
And send us fair wind while at sea bound down for Newfoundland

---

As the puffin flies, it is 3,163 kilometres (1,965 miles) from the very westernmost tip of Donegal to the extreme eastern edge of Newfoundland.

As stated previously, both of my grandparents were born and bred on "The Rock." My grandmother, Caroline Dunphy, is of Irish stock, with roots in Kerry. My grandfather, Stan Smart, was also a proud and devout Irish Catholic, though his ancestry remains unclear.

> *And though my grandfather's link to Eire remains uncertain, there is no doubting the connections between "ye' old country" and the New World.*

For starters, both are islands, each awash in a spirit of resiliency and independence.

Geologists now believe that, millions of years ago, Ireland and Newfoundland were once joined. In fact, if pushed together, the two land masses fit like puzzle pieces.

As such, much of the topography is alike; rugged hills and valleys, craggy coastlines, glacial divides, sub-strata and so forth are similar. Likewise, the top-soil, flora and fauna share commonalities, as does the dampish climate for much of the year. To that end, agricultural opportunities would be familiar for settlers, as would those for aquaculture.

It is easy to understand the appeal for long-ago Irish emigrants looking to build a new life for themselves; Newfoundland was, for many, a "home-away-from-home."

The first documented voyage between the two countries (Newfoundland did not join Canada until 1949) was in 1536, when the sea vessel Mighel returned to Cork carrying fish stock. The next recorded trip was in 1608. After that, traffic lanes became busier.

According to Wikipedia, "beginning around 1670, and particularly between 1750 and 1830, Newfoundland received large numbers of Irish immigrants. These migrations were seasonal or temporary. Most Irish migrants were young men working on contract for English merchants and planters. Migration peaked in the 1770s and 1780s when more than 100 ships and 5,000 men cleared Irish ports for the fishery. "Virtually from its inception, a small number of young Irish women joined the migration. Many stayed and married overwintering Irish male migrants. Seasonal and temporary migrations slowly evolved into emigration and the formation of permanent Irish family settlement in Newfoundland. An increase in Irish immigration, particularly of women, between 1800 and 1835, and the related natural population growth, helped transform the social, demographic, and cultural character of Newfoundland.

"In 1836, a Newfoundland government census listed more than 400 settlements. The Irish, and their offspring, composed half of the total population. Close to three-quarters of them lived in St. John's and nearby, in an area still known as the Irish Shore."

Today, the Irish influence in Newfoundland remains strong, with 21.5 per cent of the population claiming ancestry from the Emerald Isle. It can be heard in the language and in the accent across the island, and in the fiddles and bodhrans in homes and pubs. It can be read in the literature, where the custom of traditional storytelling continues. It can be tasted in the cuisine, where the Jiggs Dinner (salt beef, boiled together with potatoes, carrot, cabbage, and turnip) still nourishes. It can be seen in the art and architecture and in the Aranesque sweaters worn by many. In some areas the Irish turf still burns, scenting the landscape with familiarity.

Like Ellis Island, St. John's - Newfoundland's colourful capital - was a gateway for the Irish into North America. And while many of Eire's emigrants chose to embed themselves on "The Rock," many

more used it as a springboard to build new and better lives for themselves across Canada, in places like Halifax, Charlottetown, Fredericton, Quebec City, Ottawa, Toronto, Winnipeg, Regina, Calgary, Vancouver, and - in my case - Montreal.

And - like the Black Thorn and Black Sally trees that dot the landscape in Donegal, forever swaying eastward from the strong westerly winds - there are millions of Irish-Canadians, like me, with a deep and natural leaning to come home.

The time has come when I must go, I'll bid you all adieu
The open highway calls to me to do the things I do
And when I'm wandering far away, I'll hear your voices call
And please God I'll soon return unto the homes of Donegal...

Across Donegal, a handful of dedicated Irish have kept ancient Celtic customs alive for future generations.

In a tiny thatched-roof cottage in St. John's Point, a small seaside community near Killybegs, Cyndi Graham pumps the pedals on a 200- year-old loom, weaving wool and tweed threads into sweaters, throws, hats, mittens and other accessories.

Mamore Gap

"Some of these pieces can take days, and even weeks to complete," she explains. "The ancient art of weaving grew out of necessity here hundreds of years ago; the damp and cold of winter months would have taken their toll in an area like this. And even if you had a turf-fire going in the homestead, you would have had to bundle up."

Just a few miles up the road, the Glencolmcille Folk Village Museum, a bundle of six small cottages - known as a clachán - is perched on a hillside overlooking the sandy curve of Glenbay beach. Each cottage recreates a different era of Irish history, from the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries.

"The homes have been refurbished to appear as they would have back then," notes curator Margaret Cunningham. "Many of the furnishings - the beds, the tools for the fire, the loom, and so forth - are original era pieces, donated by residents from in and around the area."

The revamped village grounds are stunning, awash in colourful foliage.

"Conditions then would have been challenging - the weather and climate along the coast can be unpredictable, and a wild storm can still sweep in very quickly. Inhabitants would have had to be quite resourceful and work together as a community just to survive the elements."

Those conditions would have been even more pronounced at nearby Slieve League (Sliabh Liag), along the region's 2,600-kilometer Wild Atlantic Way route. At 601 metres, the stunning bluff has some of the highest, and most rugged, sea cliffs in Ireland - almost three times higher than the better-known Cliffs of Moher in County Clare.

"It offers some of the best coastal views in the country," shares local guide Paddy Clarke, who - along with his wife Siobhan - runs the Slieve League Cliffs Centre. "In past times, people climbed up here to look out over the sea, sending prayers to recently departed or long-gone family members who sailed to the U.K., North America, Australia, or New Zealand."

Similarly, prayers were often spoken aloud at the "Bridge of Tears" near the holy mountain of Muckish in the district of Cloghaneely, a crossroads where villagers said goodbye to their children during the Great Famine as they parted for better lives abroad.

Prayer continues to play a role in Irish life, though - like elsewhere - interest in religion, and thus church attendance, is dwindling.

"The older generations still attend Mass on Sundays here," says Donegal born-and-bred tour guide John McGroary, outside of The Church of the Holy Family in the picturesque village of Ardara.

"At one time, a place of worship like this was the hub of the community; from baptism to burial, the Church was where the local population gathered to celebrate or mourn."

Bridge of Tears

Area graveyards remain peppered with Celtic crosses.

"The majority of the population would have been Catholic, with Celtic roots," he continues. "The two movements assimilated over time, and the cross is an amalgamation of their respective symbols. Most people don't know this, but many of our current religious rituals find their roots in ancient Celtic rites."

After mass, it would not have been uncommon for the families to gather at a pub for food and drink.

In nearby Teelin, The Rusty Mackerel serves up scrumptious seafood chowder and hearty soda bread.

"So, this is very much what the local diet would have been here for generations," says pub manager John (the Miner) Byrne. "People would have harvested the soil and the surf for basic ingredients, and most of the meals would have been some sort of variation on fish, wheat and potatoes."

A proper Sunday meal would not have been complete without a proper beverage.

"Poitín would have been quite popular," he adds, referring to the long-imbued illegal Irish moonshine. "Over time, more refined spirits like whiskey and beer would have replaced that on the menu."

Inevitably, fiddles, guitars and bodhrans would have led patrons through now-classic melodies.

"Aye, that still happens," smiles Byrne. "We've a full house of locals and tourists here most nights, enjoying a wee bit of the 'craic' with traditional tunes."

As if on cue, I am handed a guitar and Byrne joins in on fiddle.

With the first few bars, I am carried away to another era - magically and musically transported from present to past and back to present - where time still stands still.

This is where we walked and swam
Hunted, danced and sang
Take a picture here
Take a souvenir

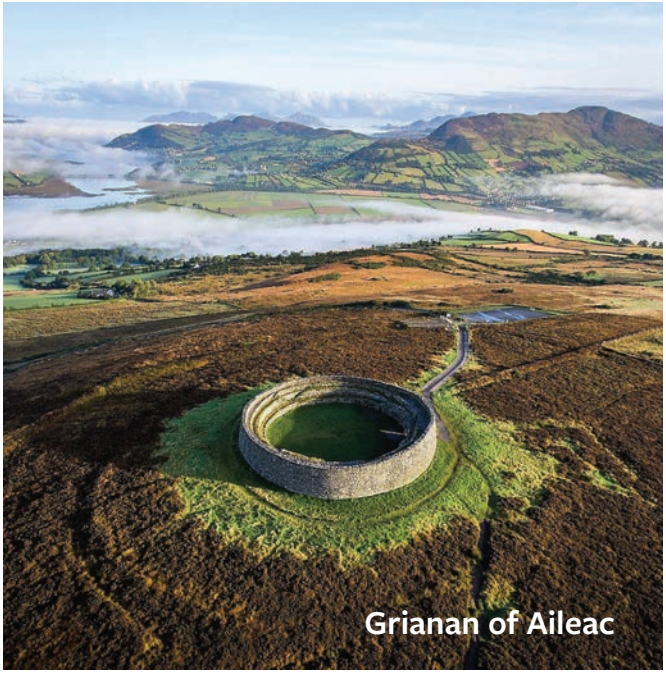
Ask visitors to name the most "Irish" part of Ireland and they will likely list the obvious; Dublin, the country's bustling capital city in the east, or perhaps Kerry in the southwest, where the landscape is plush and pure, or maybe Galway on the western coastline, where culture, claddagh and "craic" collide.

Inishowen

Ask the Irish, however, and they will say that you won't find greener pastures than in Inishowen, Co Donegal.

Known as "The Forgotten County," Inishowen's present population is a mere 40,544. It is the largest peninsula in Ireland, measuring 884 square kilometres (218,523 acres), bordered to the north by the Atlantic Ocean, to the east by Lough Foyle, and to the west by Lough Swilly. Though joined at the south to the Republic, the southeastern part of the region rests in Co. Londonderry, Northern Ireland.

Despite those geographical ties, Inishowen's Gaelic name is Inis Eoghain - meaning "own island."


Grianan of Aileac

"The name is quite fitting actually," shares area tour guide Henry Doohan. "Inishowen has always had an independent spirit. It is sort of its own little world, and folks here have always kind of just done their own thing. Our slogan for years was 'up here, it's different.'"

I reply that, as a native Montrealer with Newfoundland roots, I am familiar with the idea of a 'distinct society.'

Doohan nods and smiles, acknowledging the quirky and curious nature of "islanders" - like we are members of some sort of secret society.

Though just 36 years-of-age, my guide for the day is wise beyond his years. Personable and professional, he is more knowledgeable about the region than most.

"My family roots here go back generations," he notes. "I don't see why that would change with me and my children. We are happy here."

That solid sense of self-identity, he adds, runs in the blood.

"It gave us, as a people, both the will and skills to survive during some very dark and troubling times. In that way, Inishowen is kind of a microcosm of Ireland."

As we wind our way along the craggy coastline, passing old stone homesteads, farms and makeshift roadside shrines before visiting rugged Malin Head and Fanad Head Lighthouse - two of the four signature stops on Donegal's Wild Atlantic Way route (the others being Sliabh Liag and Glenveagh National Park) - wind and rain lash against land and sea.

> *"There is no such thing as bad weather here - only bad clothing."*

I remind him that, as a Canadian - and a seasoned traveller - I am prepared for any environmental scenario. As such, I step out of the vehicle often to snap as many pictures as possible. The photo opportunities at the mainstay tourist stops are spectacular, of course. However, I am more interested in the "in-betweens" - the lesser-known, out-of-the-way spots - where the hidden soul of this land and its people reveal themselves. It is here that the sea is a wee bluer, the pastures a wee greener.

The exception is Grianan of Aileac, an ancient Celtic ring-fort, thought to have been built by the Northern Uí Néil dynasty in the 7th century. Sitting atop the 800-ft high Greenan Mountain, the 16-ft high stone structure offers panoramic views across hills and valleys, overlooking both Lough Swilly and Lough Foyle.

We stare in silence for a few moments, before the talk turns to Brexit.

"At this point, no one really knows what is going to happen," says Doohan. "It will likely be a pain in the arse more than anything to be honest, especially if they end up going with a hard border; no-one really wants the hassle of waiting in line or going through the paperwork."

Another area tour guide, John McGroary of Donegal, believes that Brexit will be bad for business on both sides of the border.

"Derry is the hub of the north, where the Wild Atlantic Way meets the Causeway Coastal Route. The city, and the whole region, has enjoyed a lot of traffic since the Peace Accord was signed in 1998. A hard border would probably reduce that flow significantly."

Lesser numbers, of course, would have a major impact on local and area economies.

"We rely heavily on travellers and tourists," notes James Huey of the Walled City Brewery in Derry's hip, burgeoning Waterside district. "Fewer visitors hurts us all and could mean trouble for a lot of young entrepreneurs like myself who chose to settle down and set up shop here."

Trouble of another sort is also a concern, especially given the area's painful political past.

"There are a lot of people here who are scared that it will push things back to the way they were before - back to The Troubles," shares Eugene Coyle, a sixty-something cabbie who shuffles back and forth between Inishowen and Derry several times each day. "And we have already seen some fallout with the recent car-bombing here in the city-centre. I mean, if I were a young person, perhaps with a new family, I might start considering my options."

As we cross the border from Donegal into Derry, under both rain-clouds and a cloud of political uncertainty, my thoughts turn to those, whom - like my own ancestors possibly did generations ago - might now again depart this plush, picturesque northwest coast in search of a better life.

In truth, one would be hard-pressed to find greener pastures.

Will we treasure all the secrets with life's changing scenes?
Where our hearts were warm with love, so much love
Will the flowers grow again as I open out my hand?
Precious time, time for healing the beauty of this land...

Upon my return to Canada, I received extensive notes from Ulster genealogist Brian Mitchell.

An Amos Smart - possibly my first recorded family ancestor in Newfoundland (1805) - was born in 1784 in Wimborne Minster, Dorset, England, and was the son of Martin and Jane Smart.

Martin Smart, his father, was born circa 1757, and died May 28, 1835, at Wimborne Minster, Dorset, England.

Amos' wife, Elizabeth Wilson, daughter of Thomas, a sailor, and Mary, was born in East Lulworth, Dorset, England, also in 1784.

"There is very strong evidence of Dorset-Newfoundland connections in the early 1800s," says Mitchell, "including many oral traditions of merchants in Dorset recruiting young men each spring for seasonal fishery in Newfoundland, and other customs of young men leaving farms and villages of Dorset in the early 1800s and heading for Newfoundland. It is clear that extensive research has been carried out and the evidence you have gathered to date does raise a strong possibility that your Newfoundland Smarts originated in Wimborne Minster, Dorset.

"Strong traditions of forenames being passed down in families, the birth of an Amos Smart in Dorset in 1784, and the strong evidence of links between Dorset and Newfoundland in the early 1800s does mean, that until further evidence comes to light, it is very reasonable to assume that Amos Smart, who married at Harbour Grace, Newfoundland in 1805, originated in Dorset, England."

> *Alas, as it is for so many who attempt to piece together the puzzle of their family history, I am left with more questions than answers.*

The logical next step would be a visit to Dorset, with my mother, to scour local and area church and census records.

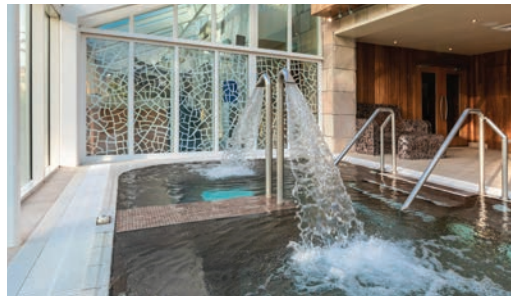
I have already begun researching those links online.

Interestingly, and as I draw this journey to a close, one small bit of new information has come up via an obscure Dorset-based genealogy website;

"Between 1607 and 1620, following the Flight of the Earls, many Irish Catholic families from Donegal crossed the Irish Sea to the southern coastal region of England. Most notable of those families were the Magees, who settled in large numbers in and around the Dorset area."

Oh come away, I say, I say
Oh come away, I say
Tonight we'll build a bridge
Across the sea and land
Oh don't sorrow, no don't weep
For tonight, at last
I am coming home
I am coming home

-Stephen Patrick Clare, 2019



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Where to Eat

Nancy's Barn, Ballylaffin

Quaint and quiet, this wee out-of-the-way eatery in Clonmany serves up scrumptious award-winning seafood chowder. Hearty, wholesome - and made on-site daily with fresh, local ingredients - the bountiful bowl of broth is doled-up with a thick slice of old-school Irish soda bread on the side - absolutely worth the trip. www.nancysbarn.ie

Where to Drink

The Rusty Mackerel, Teelin

While there are many great options in Donegal to whet one's whistle, the Rusty Mackerel might be the perfect Irish pub; cozy and warm with a rustic fireplace, awash in area ambiance, with a menu of good grub and a proper pint. Nightly 'trad' music sessions ensure that the time-honored inn is jam-packed with the 'craic.' www.therustymackerel.com

What to Do

There are simply too many incredible spots across Donegal to list them all in detail. However, there are a number of 'must-see' experiences - including the Sliabh Liag Cliffs, Glenveagh National Park, Fanad Lighthouse, the Grianán of Aileach, and Leo's Tavern - all of which are not to be missed. The region boasts the best - and most photogenic - off-the-beaten track excursions as well, where getting lost isn't a dilemma, it is an opportunity.

How to Travel

With only one area airport, no train service, less-than-ideal bussing, and hilly terrain that can be a challenge for both bikers and hikers, the best way to experience Donegal is by car. Either rent a vehicle, or - better still - hire a local guide to lead the way. Both John McGroary (www.walkingireland.ie) and Henry Doohan (www.donegaltourguide.ie) are warm, witty and wise, and know the region inside out.

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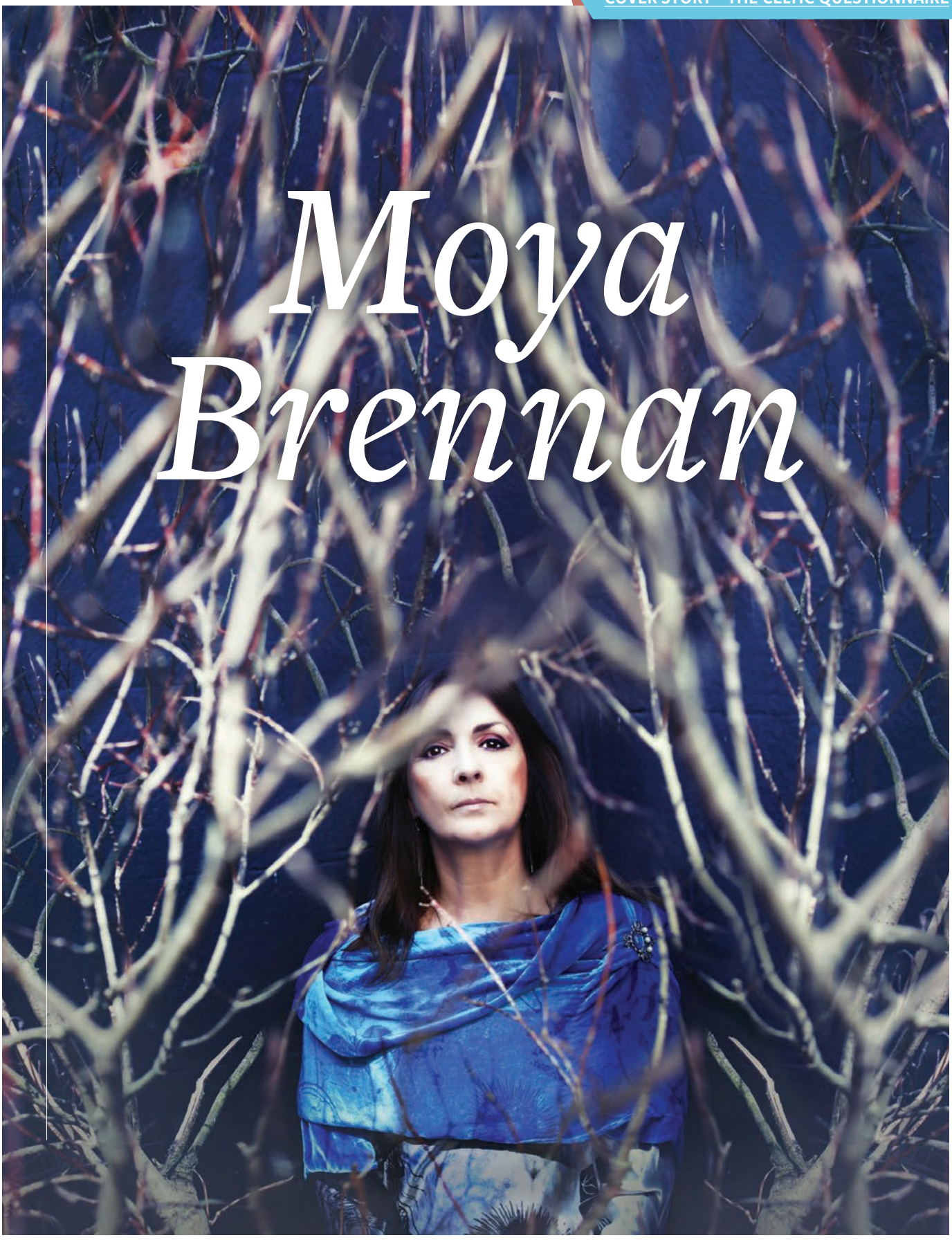
Moya Brennan



The First Lady of Celtic Music, Moya Brennan, is holding court in Leo's Tavern, the world-renowned pub and musical landmark that her father built more than 50 years ago in Meenaleck, Crolly, Co. Donegal. Despite the array of accolades that adorn the walls celebrating the many successes of her musical family - including gold records, concert posters, and photos with celebrity friends like Bono, Bob Geldof, Chris de Burgh and countless others - Brennan is heartfelt and at home, a warm cup of tea at her side.

You seem very comfortable here.

At this point I am part of the furniture. It is home, this place, these four walls, and I suppose it always will be. So long as there is tea and a fireplace and family and friends, I am comfortable.

Your father's presence is still very much felt here.

Oh his spirit is here, there is no doubt. It is a little like having a "phantom limb" in some regard I suppose - that part may be gone and sorely missed, but you can still feel it attached to you. Most nights I can still see him up on that tiny stage, leading a band through its paces. It was where he was happiest and at his best.

Leo loved the stage.

Indeed he did. He had performed in show bands for many years, but it was a rough go for traveling musicians at that time - the mid-1960s we are talking about here, long after these acts had enjoyed their post-war heyday - and with eight children to feed, and another soon on the way, he thought that maybe it was best to settle down.

He took a chance on the pub.

Well, not many here gave him much of a chance to succeed. There were a number of establishments already pretty embedded in the area, and the location is fairly remote to begin with, so he had his doubters. I am sure he himself had doubts. But the venue quickly became a Mecca for both musicians and music fans. Much of what you would have heard here then was the popular music of the day. After a while you might hear all sorts of styles on any given night; country, rock, blues, traditional Irish music. However, he would be up there, night after night, just playing for the sheer love of it. He was the thread that kept it all stitched together.

When did you and your siblings first start performing here?

It would have been around 1970. Dad would have us open the shows for him, getting us to play a few numbers to warm up the crowd. To be honest, we weren't very good, but we were having fun and kept at it. But he never put any pressure on us to do anything we didn't want to do. Both of my parents supported us in whatever interests we took up. They just wanted us to enjoy a happy and healthy childhood. I think he was pleased that we were all passionate about music and found great pleasure in performing. But, then again, how could we not in this kind of environment?

And then the band began playing in and around the area?

Yes, there were a number of local talent contests that we submitted entries to. There was a big one I remember quite clearly, not far from here actually, and we were all so excited when we were chosen to be involved in the competition. The problem was that we needed a proper name for the act. My grandfather suggested Clann as Dobhar, to reflect who we were and where we were from. That was a bit of a mouthful, so we simply shortened it to Clannad.

Did you have any inkling at that point that you would have a career in music?

No, not really. I mean, we were kids. Surely we all loved music, and with so many of us around the house you can't imagine how noisy things could get and how many different styles of music wafted through the place on any given day, but we were all much more focused on more important matters like school, boyfriends, girlfriends, television, movies, and the like.

At what point did you decide to give it a real go?

In all honesty, I can't really remember an exact moment that it hit me that this could become a full time gig. There was never any real talk amongst the band members - my brothers Ciarán and Pól, and our twin uncles Noel and Pádraig - about making it big or becoming rock stars or whatnot. I suppose at some point we were able to take it to the next level, but it was never our goal; we just did what came naturally and what we loved to do, which was to write and perform our own music. There were a number of early milestones along the way - getting signed to a major record label, and doing those first albums and tours - that should have tipped us off that it was moving forward for us. But it really wasn't until the success of Harry's Game (1982) that the reality that we could really make a go of it hit us.

What was it about that song that resonated with listeners?

There was a lot of added interest at that time about the Troubles in Northern Ireland, likely because of all the publicity surrounding Bobby Sands and the hunger strikes the year before. So, when the TV series came out (Harry's Game), the song just sort of rode its cinematic coattails. On top of that, it is really just a beautiful and unique piece of music, and there was nothing like it on the radio back then.

Many credit you with helping to forge a new musical genre.

There were a number of artists from Ireland at that time who could easily take credit for that. There was an explosion of new music coming from here, much of it inspired by the popularity of punk and nu-wave. MTV had just come on the air also. What we were doing with Clannad was a bit more unique. However, I wouldn't call what we did simply Celtic. Aye, the music we were making was rooted in traditional Gaelic melodies and rhythms to be sure, but we had other major influences; the Beatles, of course, and the American west-coast harmonies of The Beach Boys had a huge impact on us as well. And with the new technologies available to us - electric instruments, electronic keyboards and so forth - our sound became a fusion of styles that you might call Neo-Celtic or Nu-Celtic.

How much of that sound came from living here in Donegal?

We grew up just down the road in Gweedore, which is truly a magical place, especially for children. The landscape here in this part of the world is rich and dark, the soil is pure and deep, the sky is big, and there is something about being by the sea that just opens the door to creativity. If you listen closely enough, you can hear Donegal - there is an earthy and ethereal hum of sorts in the air. That sound just showed up in our music organically.

There are some who say that you single-handedly saved the culture.

Oh I wouldn't go that far. We have done our bit, certainly, and I suppose we are still doing it. But, really, we are just passing along what we grew up with. I mean, my grandfather was the town Shanachie, a fine storyteller, and sort of a modern day hedgerow teacher; many people in the area turned to him for local lore and history. He was proud to carry on our customs and traditions. And I believe that Dad did the same by making a space where younger musicians could gather and perform and create. He was very instrumental in preserving and promoting Celtic and Gaelic culture.

It is a tradition that you carry on here at the pub.

Yes. We have been hosting a showcase for amateur musicians here pretty regularly for the past six years or so. We take names, provide the instruments and sound production, and open up the stage to a few folks from around the area and beyond. There is no cover charge at the door, but we have a raffle to raise a few funds. I love it. It's a grand time, and there are always a few pints to be had. More importantly, it helps to carry on my father's good work and legacy.

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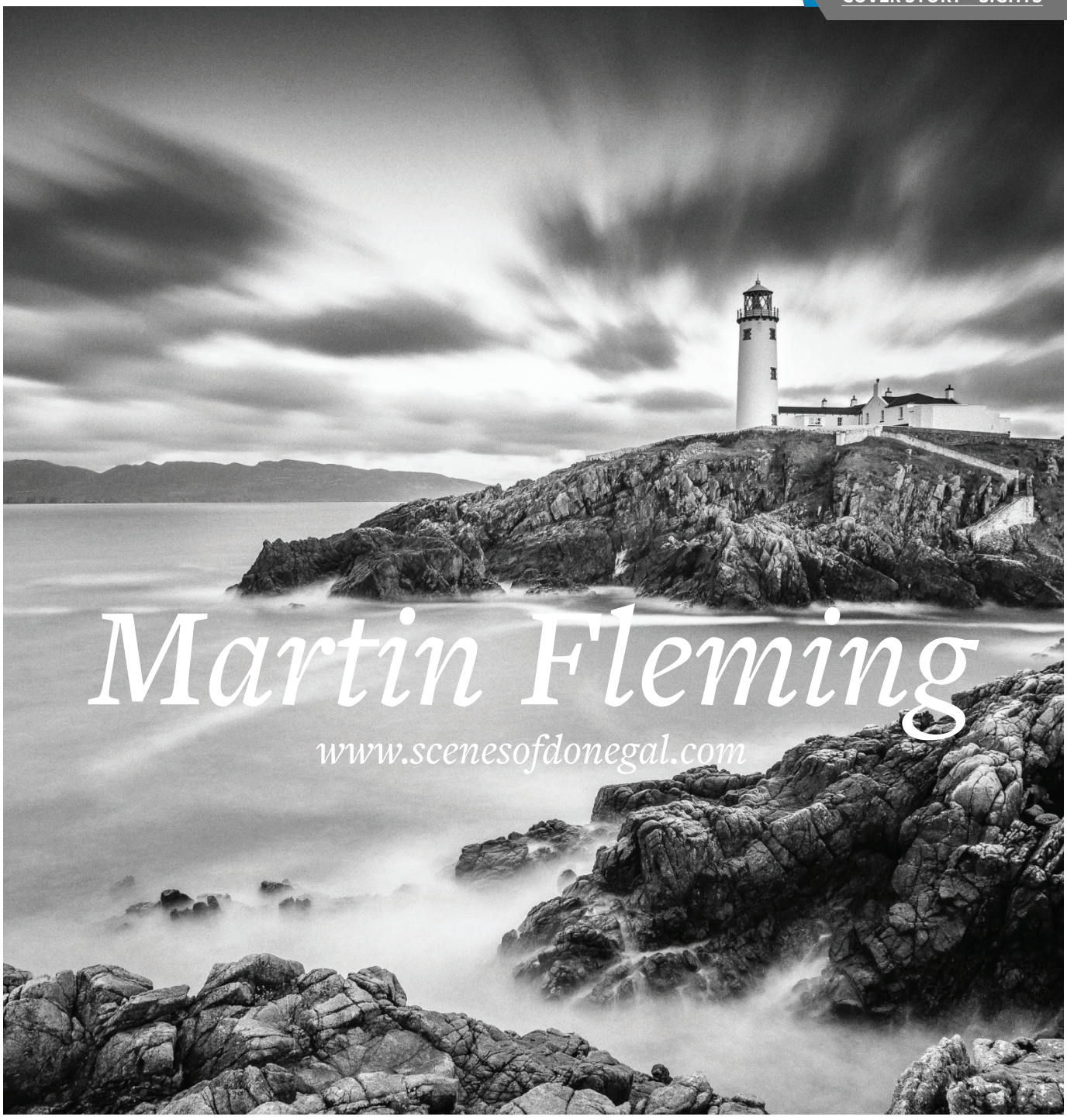

I am Donegal born and bred; I was brought up on the coast in the village of Carrigart. I now spend my time between Derry and Donegal.

It was my brother who got a second-hand camera kit. That first got me interested; I started to use it, eventually got my own camera, and have never looked back. What started as a hobby is now my full-time job.

At the start I was mainly doing landscape photography, something which I still love doing today. Now I also do portrait, wedding and commercial photography.

It is very difficult these days to be completely unique in photography, so I have to look at new ways of capturing the same scene. With landscape photography, especially, I am always looking to get a fresh angle on something that has been photographed a hundred times.

Being from Donegal, I really appreciate how lucky I am; the opportunities for photography here are endless. One of my absolute favorite places is Fanad Lighthouse; it is never the same, with different light and sea conditions - a special spot that is always changing.

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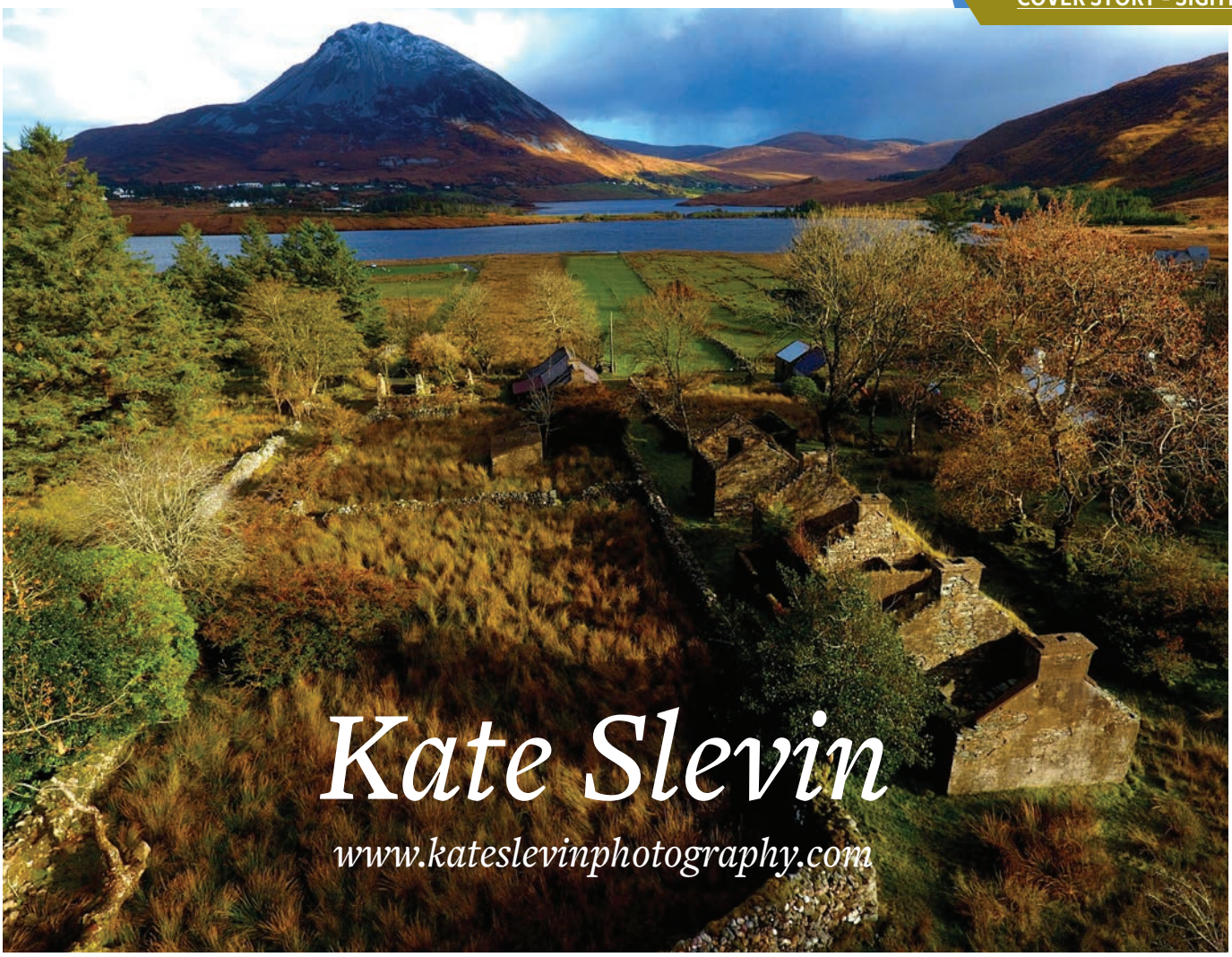


Kate Slevin

www.kateslevinphotography.com

I grew up in the countryside in Stranorlar in southeast Donegal. I met my husband John in 1994, and moved to Barnesmore in southwest Donegal. It is one of the most scenic areas in the county - the Bluestack Mountains dominate the landscape, with numerous lakes and rivers.

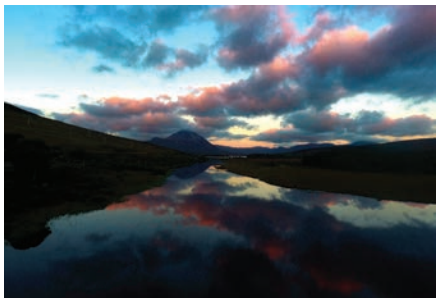
I always liked taking photographs; I was there to capture the family occasions and the camera was always in my bag. It was never something full-time - more of a hobby on weekends or holidays. All of my knowledge of photography is based on magazines and books and trial and error so I am self-taught.

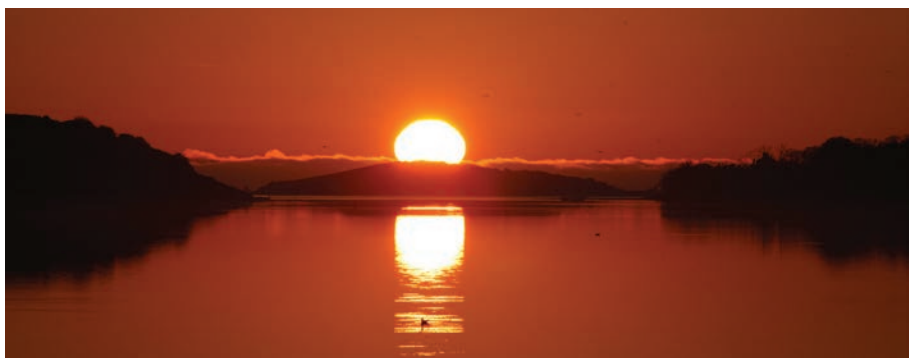
John passed away suddenly in 2014 and it was then that photography and its invitation to explore the natural raw beauty around me helped clear the head and mend the heart a little bit. It was something John always wanted me to do. So, our journey together continues through my photographs.

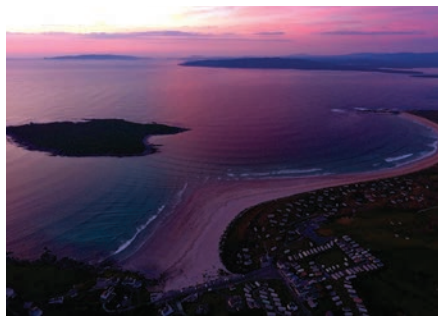
Inspiration is what drives me and creates the excitement of being a photographer. There are many opportunities for beautiful photos in Donegal, and it is easy to be inspired. I believe in creating photos by choice, and yet there is a magic in finding a photo opportunity by chance.

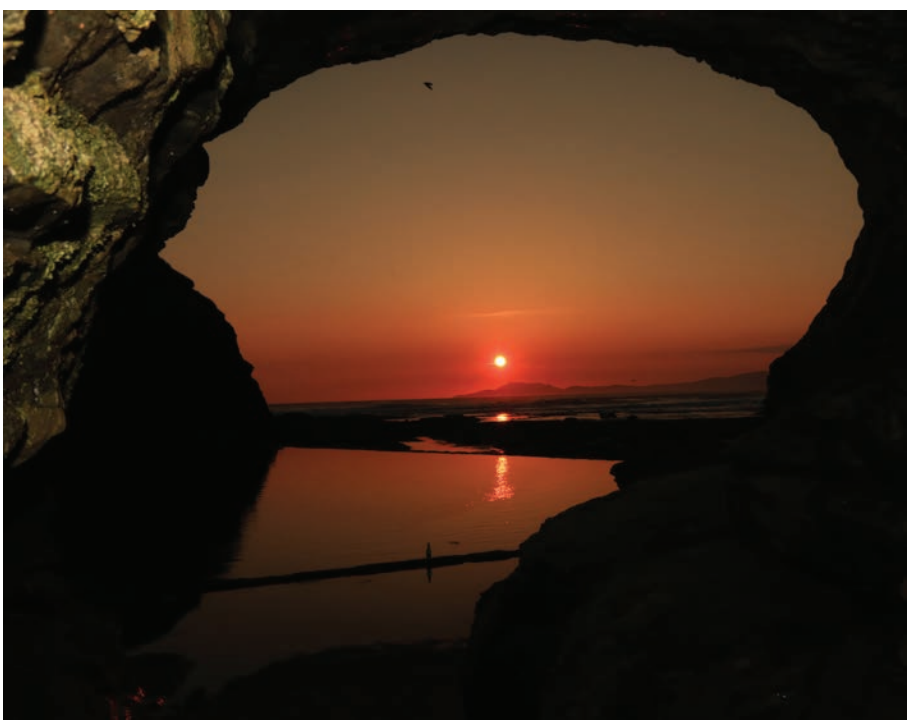
The weather can create a challenge, particularly with the changeable conditions here in Donegal. Usually I have to revisit a location maybe four or five times before the perfect light conditions are in place.

I will never tire of the feeling of awe and wonder at the different vistas I find myself in the middle of from sunrise to sunset. There are so many locations to explore in Donegal and, even after a few years, I have many left to find or revisit. It is an area of superb natural beauty that lends itself to landscape work, which means that there are plenty of opportunities to compose beautiful images.









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Bernie Murphy

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The path that has led me to becoming a textile artist in the North West of Ireland was less a choice than an unconscious inevitability.

From an early age I absorbed the lessons of craft and design from my grandmother and my mother, who knitted and sewed and were creative in the home. These skills were assimilated as part of home life. On leaving school, the textile manufacturers that then dominated the local industrial landscape offered me and many of my friends our first jobs, and here the skills we had learnt in the home were enhanced through employment. It was through work that I was encouraged to train in patternmaking and cutting room skills, which I did in Dublin. Here I perfected the technical skills of a garment technologist which today help me professionally execute my ideas in sculpting fabrics and producing contemporary textile art.

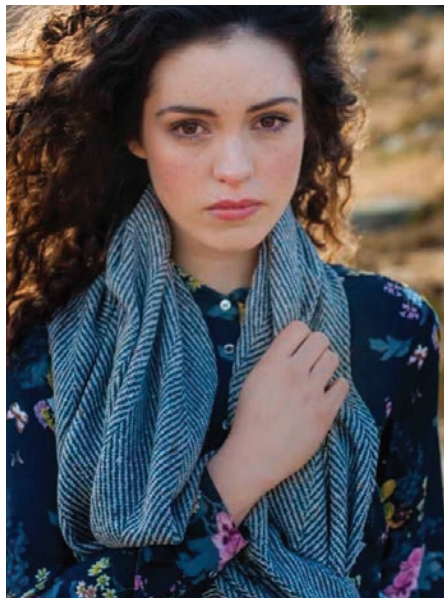
Once I had taken the step from manufacturing into design, new opportunities and challenges opened up before me.

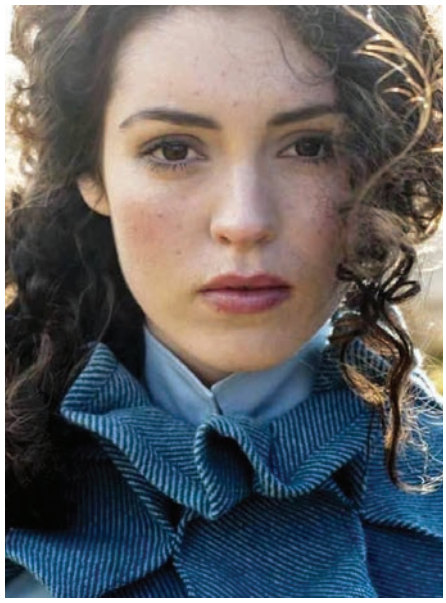
I undertook a HNC in Spatial Design, a HND in Fashion and Textile Design at North West Regional College, and a BA Hons in Fine and Applied Art at Ulster University.

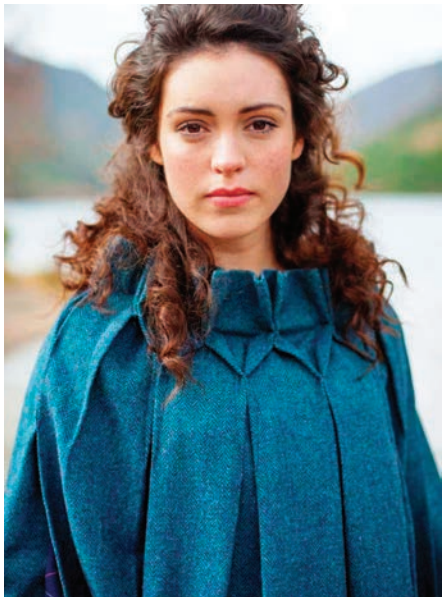
I believe that coming from the small traditional seaside town of Buncrana in Donegal has been as much an influence on my creative development as has my family, education and employment history.

Standing on the shores of Donegal, on the Wild Atlantic Way, feels like standing on the edge of the world; there is colour and texture and inspiration wherever you look. This is where I find my greatest inspiration - where my imagination can feast on the blues and greys of the wild Atlantic ocean, where the fields and hills suggest patchworks, lines and patterns, where the barren lands and peat bogs blend the russets of trees and heather with the neutrals of sheep fleeces and stones... all combine to suggest the structures, colours and textures for my contemporary garment sculptures.

My collections are designed to be worn or to be displayed, but always to be enjoyed. My aim is to capture in my textile art suggestions of the natural environment that surrounds me - its unpredictable beauty and spirit - and reflect elements of the textiles and design skills that have been handed down across the generations in this unique region, my homeland of Donegal.







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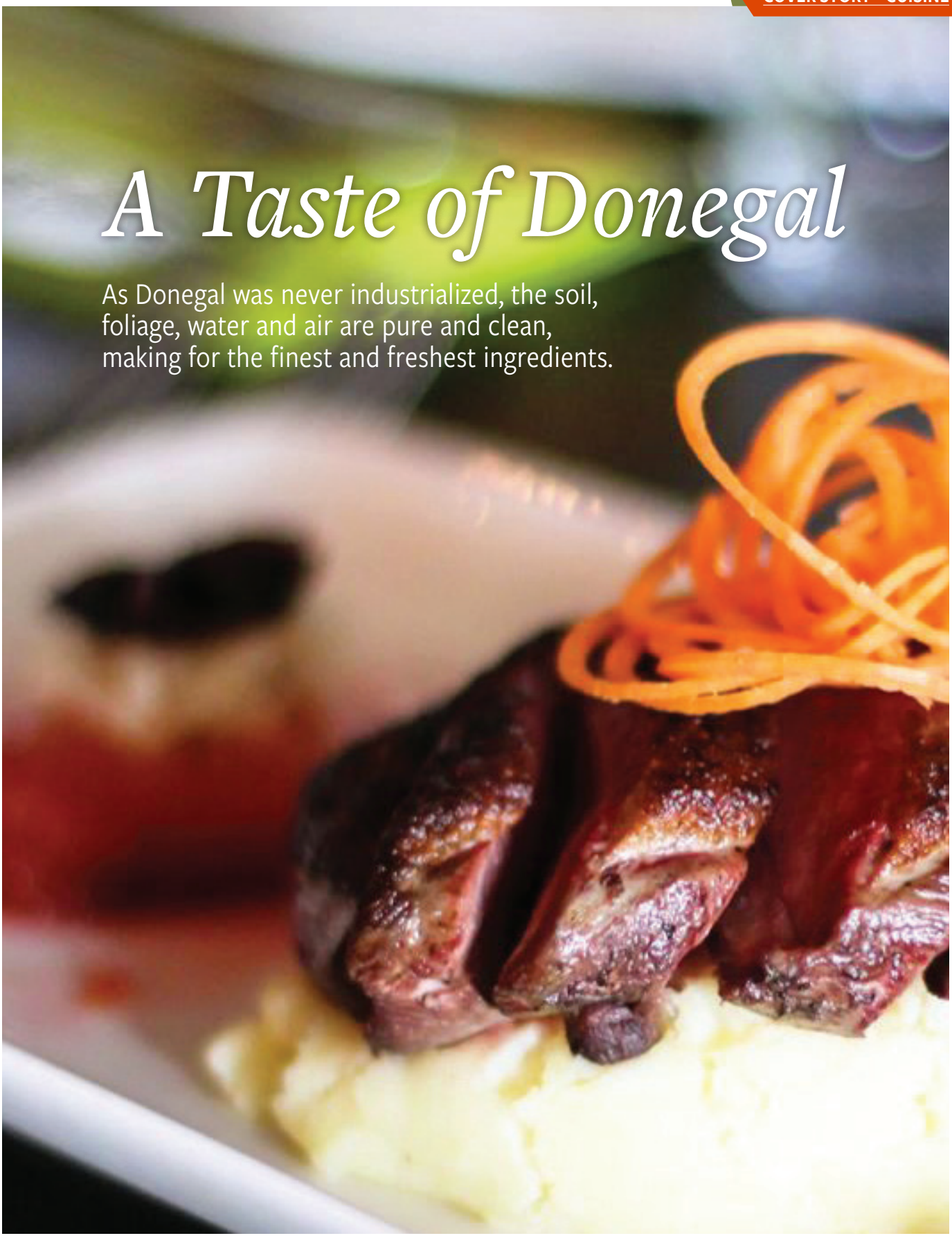
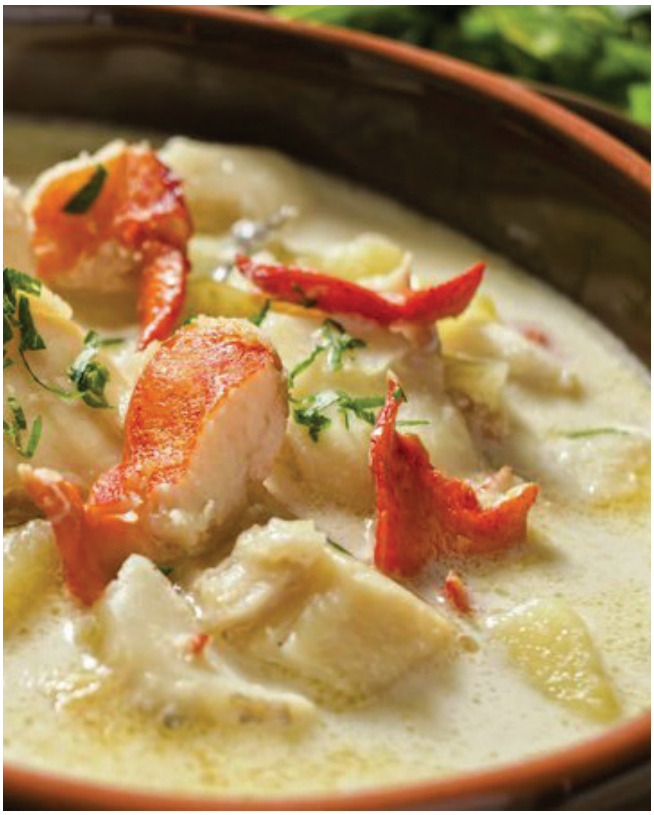


A Taste of Donegal

As Donegal was never industrialized, the soil, foliage, water and air are pure and clean, making for the finest and freshest ingredients.



Donegal Seafood Chowder

Ingredients

25g butter
1 onion, chopped
1 leek, chopped
2 carrots, chopped
2 large potatoes, peeled and cut into chunks
1 tbsp plain flour
950ml fish stock
150ml white wine
110g smoked coley (or cod) fillet, cut into cubes
110g whiting fillet, cut into cubes
110g king prawns
110g mussels
150ml crème fraîche
1 tsp dill or parsley, chopped

Instructions

Melt the butter in a large saucepan over a medium heat. Cook the onion, leek, carrots and potatoes for five minutes. Add the flour and cook for a few minutes, stirring constantly. Add the stock and white wine. Bring to the boil, then reduce the heat and simmer for 10 minutes. Add in all the fish and simmer for 10 minutes. Stir in the crème fraîche and fresh herbs. Season to taste and serve hot.

Lamb and Barley Hot Pot

Ingredients

75g barley
1 tbsp rapeseed oil
600g lamb, diced
3 cloves of garlic, sliced
2 small onions, diced
2 bay leaves
3 sprigs of fresh thyme
Freshly ground black pepper
1 carrot, diced
1 parsnip, diced
2 sticks of celery, thinly sliced
1 liter vegetable stock, warmed
4 medium potatoes
Handful of fresh parsley

Instructions

Preheat the oven to 325°F. Cook the barley in boiling water for approximately 25 minutes. Drain and leave aside. Heat a casserole dish, add some of the oil and lightly colour the diced lamb. Add the garlic, onions, bay leaves and two sprigs of thyme, and sweat for a few minutes. Season with pepper, then add the carrot, parsnip and celery and continue to cook for a further five minutes. Add the cooked barley followed by the warm stock. Cover with a lid and simmer for approximately 40 minutes or until the lamb is tender. While the lamb is cooking, peel and thinly slice the potatoes. Pan-fry them in the rest of the oil, turning regularly, until tender. Remove the leaves from the remaining sprig of thyme and sprinkle over the potatoes. Season with pepper. Arrange the potatoes on top of the lamb and replace in the oven for a further 15 minutes.

Traditional Donegal Soda Bread

Ingredients

340g whole-meal flour
113g plain white flour
1 teaspoon baking soda
1 teaspoon cream of tartar
354ml of buttermilk

Instructions

Heat the oven to 350°F. Have the baking tray floured and ready to use. Place all the dry ingredients - whole-meal flour, white flour, teaspoon of cream of tartar, teaspoon of baking soda - into the bowl. Make a well in the centre of the dry ingredients. Pour in most of the buttermilk and mix with the knife, cutting through it to bind it together. If needed, use the rest of the buttermilk as you will want a mix that is soft but not dry. Put a little flour on your hands and press the dough together. Place on the baking tray and fashion into a slightly flattened circle. Cut a cross through the dough to a depth of about quarter of an inch. Place the pan into the oven immediately and set the timer for 40 minutes. After 40 minutes turn the bread over for the final five minutes, then tap the bread on the bottom to make sure there is a hollow sound which tells you the bread is ready. Wrap in the dampened tea towel and place on a cooling rack until cold.

Wild Atlantic Way Fish Pie

Ingredients

100g butter
Bunch of scallions, finely chopped
Freshly ground black pepper
750g potatoes, cooked and mashed
350g haddock fillets
350g smoked haddock fillets
1 bay leaf
500ml milk
50g plain flour
100g local cheese, grated
1 onion, peeled and diced
2 carrots, peeled and diced
White of 1 leek, sliced
4 sticks of celery, diced
50ml rapeseed oil
4 cloves of garlic, crushed
Handful of fresh parsley, chopped

Instructions

Melt 50g of the butter in a pan and sweat the chopped scallions. Mix in the mashed potato along with a pinch of pepper. Leave aside. Preheat the oven to 400°F. Place the fish fillets in a pan with the bay leaf and cover with the milk. Bring to the boil and simmer for seven minutes. Remove the fish from the milk and place in tin foil to keep warm. Melt the remainder of the butter in a saucepan and add the flour to make a roux. Cook for one minute. Gradually add the milk the fish was cooked in, and season with pinch of pepper. Stirring all the time, simmer the sauce until it thickens. Add 50g of the grated cheese. Sweat the onion, carrots, leek and celery in the rapeseed oil until the vegetables have softened. Roughly break up the fish fillets, and then place in an ovenproof dish with the vegetables. Pour over the sauce and gently combine. Spread the mashed potato on top and sprinkle with the remaining grated cheese. Bake in the preheated oven for 40 minutes. Allow to rest for 10 minutes before serving. Garnish with chopped parsley. Leftover cooked potatoes work perfectly for this dish. You can also cover your pie with pastry.

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Native Donegal Lobster
(*"Les Halles" style*)

Guest Chef Gary Peake
McGrory's Hotel, Culdaff, Inishowen, Co. Donegal, Ireland
www.mcgrorys.ie

Upon hearing the tragic news of the passing of Chef Anthony Bourdain last year, I came up with this dish as a tribute to his life and the impact he had on the millions of people who watched his shows. It is a little outside of the box, and rough around the edges, but I think Anthony would have liked that. The dish comprises ingredients sourced within a 30 mile radius of McGrory's Hotel, as many of our creations are. Enjoy!

Ingredients

1 large live lobster
Garlic
Thyme
Bay leaves
Fresh fish stock
Carrots
Onions
Leeks
Celery
Beetroot
Clementines
Fennel
Watercress
Butter
Cream
Salt and pepper
2 large free range eggs
Smoked bacon

A glass of good chardonnay

Instructions

Sweat off the carrots, onions, leeks and celery for five minutes. Add the garlic, thyme and bay leaves, sweating for another five minutes. Be careful not to brown. Add the wine. Simmer and reduce for 10 minutes on a gentle heat. Add 500ml of fish stock and bring to a boil. Add the lobster and poach for 15 minutes. Remove and plunge into iced water for 5 minutes. Break off the claws and twist the body from the tail. Crack open the claws and set aside. With a skewer, remove the rest of the meat from the joints and put this in a bowl with some reduced cream and butter. Meanwhile soft boil the eggs for four and a half minutes and plunge into iced water. Take the lobster mixture in your hand and carefully form a small disc. Place the egg into your hand and fold the lobster mix around it. Coat this with flour, egg wash and breadcrumbs and set aside. To assemble the dish, slice the grilled tail and place in the middle of the plate. Place the deep fried egg in the centre of the plate, and place the claw on top. Arrange the beetroot, fennel and watercress on the plate and drizzle with Donegal rapeseed oil. **Makes 2 portions**

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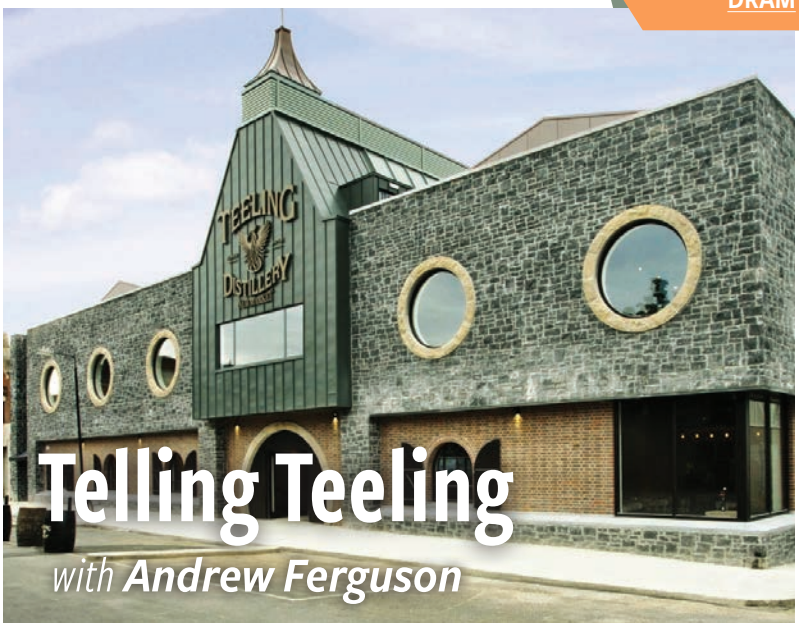


Telling Teeling

with Andrew Ferguson

John Teeling might be the most influential figure in the modern Irish whiskey industry.

In 1985, Teeling bought a potato ethanol plant from the Irish government, soon converting it into what is now the Cooley Distillery. When it first opened in 1987, it became just the second operational whiskey distillery in the Irish Republic. Including Bushmills in Northern Ireland, it was one of only three working distilleries on the Emerald Isle. The Irish whiskey industry had hit rock bottom a few decades earlier, having suffered a precipitous fall from its perch as the most respected producer in the world at the end of the 19th century. John Teeling saw an opportunity and he took it. In turn, he sowed the seeds of the explosion in Irish distilling happening today.

The Teeling family's connection with whiskey making can be traced back to the 1780s; Walter Teeling established a distillery in the Liberties area of Dublin in 1782 on Marrowbone Lane. Dublin was an epicenter for distilling in the 19th century, with no fewer than 37 operating facilities. The Liberties was known as the Golden Triangle. The Teeling Distillery was sold to William Jameson & Co., a distant relation to John Jameson, who had their own distillery, also on Marrowbone lane. The Marrowbone Lane Distillery was one of Dublin's "big 4" - it covered 16 acres and had more than 200 employees.

The turn of the 20th century was not kind to the Irish whiskey industry. The Irish were stubbornly traditional, and did not adopt the new technologies and techniques that their Scottish neighbours did. The Irish industry was already in rapid decline when both the American War of Independence and its Civil War brought it to its knees. Prohibition in the United States was the straw that finally broke its back.

Marrowbone Lane Distillery closed in 1923. In 1966, Ireland's three remaining distilleries joined forces to form Irish Distillers, and moved production to the massive new Midleton Distillery in Cork.

John Teeling's Cooley Distillery was a breath of fresh air at a time when almost every single Irish whiskey brand was coming from just the one distillery. Cooley opened with both column and pot stills. Notable for its single malts, Teeling opted to "double-only" distil his spirits like the Scots, instead of using the more time-honoured tradition of "triple-distillation" historically favoured by the Irish whiskey industry. Teeling believed the triple distillation removed too much of the flavour. The Cooley distillery and its brand made quite a name for themselves, and in 2011 the business was purchased by American whiskey giant Beam Inc. which, in turn, was purchased by Suntory of Japan in 2014, becoming the world's third largest whiskey company.

John Teeling & his Sons left Cooley with not just the €71 million Beam paid to acquire the distillery, but also a significant proportion of the maturing whiskey stocks. Jack Teeling, John's son, used the 16,000 casks acquired from the sale to start Teeling Whiskey in 2012, bottling whiskey under the family name for the first time in over a century. Jack was joined a couple years later by his brother Stephen. Together, the current generation of Teelings has gone on to found the Teeling Distillery in Dublin in 2015. Located in Market Square, not far from the original distillery on Marrowbone Lane, the new facility is the first to be built in the country's capital city in 125 years. As with Scotch and Canadian whisky, the spirit must mature at least 3 years in oak before it can be called Irish Whiskey, and Teeling's first official batch came of age late last year.

The new distillery is walking distance from central Dublin, and has a wonderful visitor center. It will still be a few years until the whiskey distilled in the heart of Dublin is of sufficient age and quantity to be regularly bottled and exported, though you may find some on the premises. In the meantime, the Teeling family's legacy stock will continue to grow the brand's reputation around the world.

Teeling Single Grain ($67) - watered in California red wine barrels - is a lovely entry point to the range; soft, fruity and elegant.

Teeling Single Malt ($72) - married from a combination of 5 different cask types - is round, full bodied and complex.

Teeling Small Batch Blend ($54) - finished in ex-Rum barrels - is amazing value.

If you are really lucky you might stumble across the odd bottling of "mystery Irish single malt" from independents like Cadenheads or Sansibar, the Whisky Agency and Maltbarn. These whiskies are almost all Teeling stock distilled at Cooley, and bottled under different labels.

www.teelingwhiskey.com
www.kensingtonwinemarket.com

From the Air ~ Ireland's Wild Atlantic Way

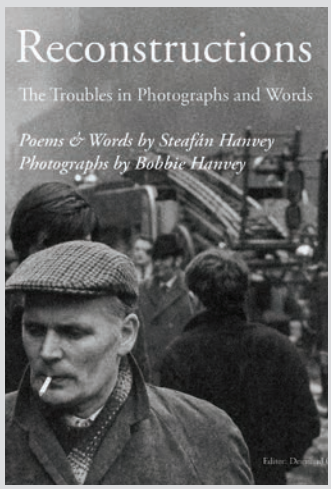
By Raymond Fogarty
O'Brien Press
96 pp / €9.99

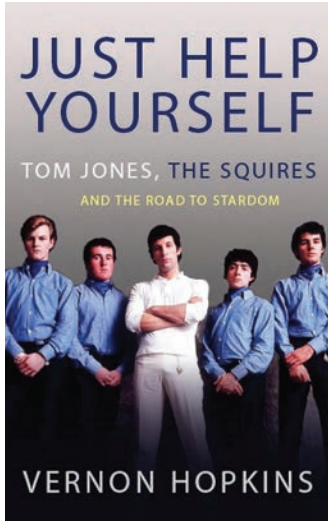
Though weighing in at just 96 pages, From the Air doesn't pull any punches with this overland overview of the Emerald Isle's 2500-kilometer route along the country's gorgeous western coastline. From Cork in the south to Donegal in the north - and all points in between - the tiny tabletop tome serves up a swath of unique, high-altitude looks at Eire's mostly untouched landscape. Along with stunning photographs of both well-known and out-of-the-way spots, author Raymond Fogarty doles out tidbits of trivia, historical information and travel tips that will entertain, engage and educate readers. This is an ideal introduction and invitation to the region for those who have yet to visit, and a reminder to those who have of what the area has to offer. ~ SPC

Reconstructions; The Troubles in Photographs and Words

Words by Steafán Hanvey / Photographs by Bobbie Hanvey
Merrion Press
155 pp / €19.99

If a picture is worth a thousand words, then a single word can bring a thousand pictures to life. Such is the case with Reconstructions, a collection of powerful and poignant portraits and poetry inspired by the Troubles in Northern Ireland. Father and son Bobbie and Steafán Hanvey have done well to capture and convey the violence, anger, sorrow and suffering brought on during the 30-year civil war. Credit the duo for their non-partisanship; both the stark words and dark images detail the devastation done to communities on both sides of the political and religious divide. Given the recent difficulties brought on by Brexit, the work is a chilling reminder that those who do not learn from the past may be doomed to repeat it.
~ SPC





Just Help Yourself

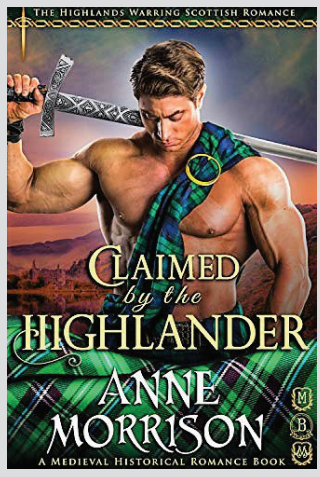
By Vernon Hopkins
Seren Books
376 pp / €9.99

Originally published in 2013, this tell-all account of Welsh singer and sex symbol Tom Jones' early years in the music industry is well-deserving of the reissue. As the bass guitarist and founder of Jones' first band The Senators (later The Squires), author Vernon Hopkins takes readers backstage and behind-the-scenes, from the group's early days playing rough 'n' tumble Pontypridd nightclubs to later successes strutting their stuff during London's "swinging sixties" era. Along the way, the band fall prey to the pitfalls of sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll, until the bottom falls out completely. By turns tender and tough, funny and unforgiving, the tale of minor league excess is more than a memoir; it is an important and in-depth look at a magical time and place.
~ SPC

Claimed by the Highlander

By Anne Morrison
Kindle
576 pp / $.99

Given the immense, and well-deserved, popularity of Diane Gabaldon's Outlander book and television series, it should come as no surprise that the marketplace is now awash in copycat Highlander pulp. Imitation may be the sincerest form of flattery, but I am pretty sure that the highly-esteemed Ms. Gabaldon would not appreciate this complete waste of 99 cents, time and headspace. Let me be even more blunt; while author Anne Morrison may enjoy some popular appeal, Claimed by the Highlander is terribly written, with a pathetic plotline, brutal narrative arc, insufferable dialogue, embarrassing character development, and might be the biggest pile of shite that I have ever laid my eyes upon. And the worst part of it is that I couldn't put the damn thing down.
~ SPC

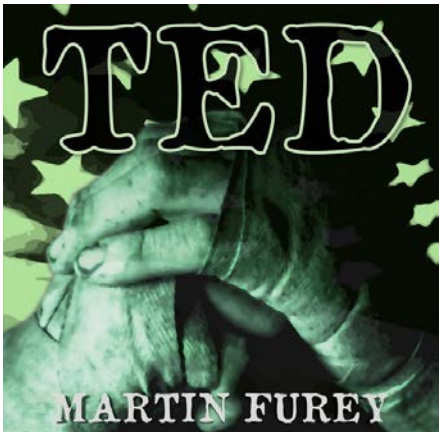


The Choral Scholars of University College Dublin
Perpetual Twilight

As a musician and a lover of music, I listen to almost all genres. And while I lean towards jazz, metal and opera, I have a passion for choral music, perhaps born from fond memories of singing in my high school choir as a teenager. It was a true treat, then, to close my eyes, kick-back and be whisked away to other times and places with Perpetual Twilight, the second full-length release from The Choral Scholars of University College Dublin. Under the artistic direction of Desmond Earley, the multi-member ensemble soars to magical and mystical musical heights with traditional tunes that are by turns beautiful, haunting, lush and gorgeous. Be forewarned fair listener; this stunning 13-track recording is sure to shake and stir the soul. ~ SPC

Siobhan McCrudden
Icarus Girl

Whilst Wales might be renowned for its multitude of magnificent men's choirs and marvellous male vocalists (Tom Jones, Bryn Terfel, etc.), Cardiff-based singer-songwriter Siobhan McCrudden is set to shift perspectives, due in large part to her debut release Icarus Girl. The short-but-sweet 9-song EP is evocative and emotive, moody and melancholic. Both Following You and The Forest showcase earthy, ethereal vocals, while Iron Goddess, Fragile and The Mermaid in Your Glass reveal the broken, beaten, bleeding heart of a romantic poet à la Rimbaud, Beaudelaire and, of course, fellow countryman Dylan Thomas. The title track is a masterpiece of musical simplicity with which McCrudden displays an artistic maturity that belies her age, making her one to keep eyes and ears on in 2019 and beyond. ~ SPC



Martin Furey
Ted

Frontman and creative tour-de-force with Dublin's finest 'trad' trio The High Kings for over ten years, Martin Furey brings his uillean pipes, whistles, guitars, banjos and bouzoukis to new and exciting places with Ted, his first full-length solo recording. A moving melange of 12 classic tracks (16 Tons, We Shall Overcome, If I Had a Hammer) and contemporary numbers (Revelator, Sigh), the new recording ripples with experimentation; bits of rap, spoken-word poetry, and unique arrangements and orchestration make a strong case for the songsmith's efforts to break away from his old-school musical past. The real treat here is the album's first single, Galway Guy, a clever and soulful response to Ed Sheeran's 2017 hit Galway Girl. Unlike Sheeran, however, Furey isn't afraid to take risks. ~ SPC

Christine Kydd
Shift and Change

One of Scotland's most noted troubadours, Christine Kydd, returns to her roots with Shift and Change, a sweet and sure 11-song selection of traditional tunes, modern melodies and original pieces. Hints of Joni Mitchell shade several numbers, including Just Another Rolling Stone and This is the News, while both Blue Murder and Braes o' Balquhidder bring Clannad's Moya Brennan to mind. Folky, with hints of jazz and soul, the album brings a who's-who of Scottish session players to the mix, including Gillian Frame (fiddle and backing vocals), Andy Shanks (octave mandolin and backing vocals), Fraser Speirs (harmonica), Innes Watson (guitar) and Angus Lyon (piano and Wurlitzer). Lingering lightly atop the instruments, Kydd's warm and wispy harmonies will likely bring listeners' hearts home to the highlands. ~ SPC

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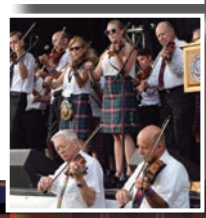

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Richard Neylon

A commitment to constant improvement on his instrument drives an Irish piper

Richard Neylon has been playing music for as long as he can remember. His mother taught him to play piano at a young age before he took up the Irish whistle and flute, later graduating to the pipes.

"I was inspired to pick up the pipes when I first heard them in person," says Neylon, who originally hails from Loughrea in Ireland's County Galway. He is currently based in Connemara, a Gaeltacht (Irish-speaking region), also in County Galway.

"I was attending a music workshop for Irish traditional music in Loughrea. The teacher, a man called Eugene Lambe - who still makes flutes and pipes - was giving us Irish flute lessons. He took out the uilleann pipes to play us a tune, and I was immediately entranced. Although I had heard the uilleann pipes on recordings before, they just seemed that much more amazing in person - the volume, the intricacy of the fingers and the complicated-looking 'machine.'"

Neylon pestered his father about the instrument, and before long he had his first starter set. He has been playing them ever since - over two decades.

The uilleann pipes (sometimes called the union pipes) are the national bagpipe of Ireland, and Neylon notes that they are "widely regarded as the most complicated of bagpipes."

"The word 'uilleann' is the Irish word for elbow," he explains. "The air is pumped with a bellows attached to the elbow. The melody is played on the chanter, accompanied by three drones, and chords are played on the regulators using the wrist. My own pipes are made by two pipe-makers: Cillian O'Briain from Ireland, and Andreas Rogge, who is based in Germany."

Pipes are very different from other musical vocations, Neylon adds, because "it's not like other instruments where you can just go to the local music store and buy a new reed; each one has to be made to suit the pipes."

On top of that, a piper must learn to be handy with repairs.

"Being a piper, you have to learn how to care for the instrument and that means being able to make small fixes by yourself. The reeds in the pipes are very sensitive to changes in heat and humidity, especially when travelling. You always have to prepare for the worst when going on tour. That means bringing spares and having some sandpaper, a knife and pliers at the ready!"

Even after two decades of playing, he is still enamored with the art.

"I can take them out at home and play and just enjoy the sound that they make. There's something so relaxing and meditative about it for me."

> *"When the drones and regulators are all playing perfectly in tune alongside the melody of the chanter, it still gives me great pleasure."*

Neylon has a slew of piping accomplishments to his name; winning the All-Ireland Senior competition at the Fleadh Cheoil was one of his proudest moments. "It was a pinnacle of my playing career and it was great to get that kind of recognition from my peers. The fact that I won both the dance tunes and the slow air competitions made it all the more sweet."

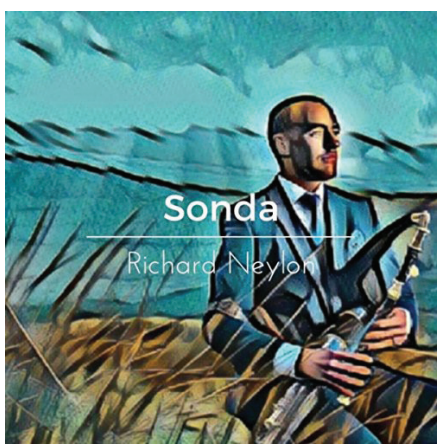
In addition, he looks back fondly on all his "firsts"; his first time playing in the United States, for example, and recording and producing his first solo album, Sonda, in 2018.

"In a review for my album last year, I was described as being 'virtuoso, in the bygone style of fairground pipers.' I would like to think I certainly came from a background of traditional Irish piping, but my style has changed and been influenced by many other cultures and genres. Today, I would describe my sound as a clean and pure type of piping - certainly leaning towards more modern rather than traditional at times, although another reviewer described me as being 'memorable, old style, grand tunes and big sets of powerful piping,' so I guess there is definitely the influence of the older generations."

Neylon has a few recording projects in the pipeline for 2019, both as producer and artist, and he is looking forward to experimenting.

"The uilleann pipes are such a challenging instrument to play and master that, even now, I always feel I want to improve. I think I will always be that way. It continues to drive me."

www.richardneylonmusic.com



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Mairéad Ní Mhaonaigh

Fiddler Mairéad Ní Mhaonaigh's sound is rooted in the plush countryside of northwest Donegal

Mairéad Ní Mhaonaigh has carried her music around the world with her for more than 30 years.

As fiddler and vocalist with Altan - one of Ireland's most iconic touring bands, which she formed with her late husband Frankie Kennedy - Ní Mhaonaigh has performed at the Sydney Opera House and the Hollywood Bowl, recorded with the likes of Dolly Parton and Bonnie Raitt, and shared the stage with Ricky Skaggs at the Grand Ole Opry.

There have been many highlights along her musical journey. For the moment, however, she is content to be at home in her native Gweedore, Donegal, where she lives with her teenage daughter.

"I love the simpler highlights more and more nowadays, such as playing with older Donegal fiddlers, including Danny...and the Campbells of Glenties, or teaching at Donegal Fiddlers' Week every August."

As a native Irish speaker, it was the call of motherhood that drew her back to the Gaeltacht (Gaelic-speaking) area, which is rich in both artistry and scenery.

"I came back to live here about 12 years ago, a few years after my daughter Nia was born, to raise her with the language, the music and the culture."

Ní Mhaonaigh's interest in the fiddle was sparked at age 10, after singing in Dublin and discovering musicians her own age who were playing traditional music.

"I heard people like Paddy Glackin on the fiddle, Mary Bergin on whistle, Máire Ní Chathasaigh on harp, Gay McKeon on pipes, Antóin Mac Gabhann on fiddle, and many others. They brought music alive for me and made it relevant in my life."

She immediately began learning from her father and other Donegal musicians who visited their home regularly. Soon, she was delving into more obscure, archival music - much of which was no longer being played.

"I was lucky enough to meet some of Donegal's master musicians - people like John Doherty, Danny O'Donnell, Con Cassidy, Francie 'Dearg', Mick Byrne and James Byrne."

Ní Mhaonaigh believes that, over time, Donegal wove itself into her sound.

> *"My location has influenced my style - topographically, aesthetically, sonically."*

"I think your environment influences you as a folk musician, more so than if you were classically trained. Formal training creates a different sound and technique, and over-steps a person's locality to a degree."

She still plays the fiddle by ear, and thus still considers herself a traditional musician.

"My parents always encouraged me to be myself and, whilst listening to the best fiddlers, to find my own voice, which I have always tried to do, and is something that I am still pursuing."

Her fiddle, a 1947 Collin-Mezin made in Paris, is played daily.

"It is an incredible instrument. I am also lucky to have a Noel Burke bow, which plays itself. Noel is a good friend, and he realized that my bowing style was rather unorthodox, so made the bow to suit me."

Though she never shirks on practice, she admits that she is not able to play music if she thinks too hard about it.

"I have to be inspired and be totally engrossed in what I am doing. It is like my lifeline, my breath, my food, and my solace."

Strong melodies that depict the Irish sensibility and psyche are among her favourites.

"I love the Farewell to Erin reel, which takes up the range of the whole fiddle, or a slow air like Bean an Fhir Rua (The Red-Haired Man's Wife) or Port na bPucai (The Tune of the Spirits)."

For the better part of three decades, Ní Mhaonaigh has been part of County Donegal's Cairdeas na BhFidleiri (The Friendship of the Fiddlers), a non-profit organization established to preserve and promote the instrument and the genre.

"I am glad to say the fiddling tradition in Donegal is healthy, with many young fiddlers playing amazing music, so our work has been worthwhile."

Ní Mhaonaigh's own musical taste runs the gamut; from classical to blues, jazz, folk, and world beat. She was recently introduced to the Irish singer/songwriter Hosier by her daughter.

"I am also listening to field recordings of old Donegal singers like Róise Nic Ghrianna, from Aranmore Island, who was recorded back in the 1940s, and Kitty Gallagher, a local lady who is alive and well in her nineties."

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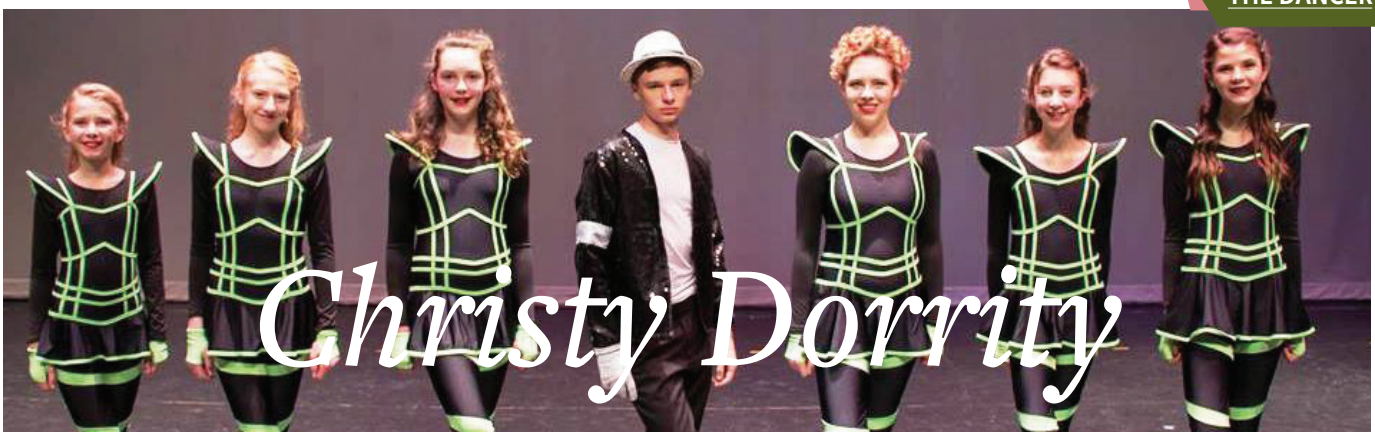

Christy Dorrity

Christy Dorrity discovered her passion for Irish dancing later in life

"Growing up, it was my life," shares Utah-based dancer, and dance teacher, Christy Dorrity via email. "I longed to be onstage, and I would often get emotional when I watched others dance."

As a youngster, Dorrity was an avid ballet and tap dancer. Years later, she fell in love with Irish dance through Riverdance, after her husband took her to see the internationally renowned spectacle. From there, there was no turning back.

"I was hooked," she says. "I took lessons from a performance-only studio for six years. Being in a group of dancers fulfilled a small part of my longing, but there was no performing outlet for adults there. When I discovered that people my age could compete, I found a new school and began competing as an adult."

Her efforts eventually paid off when she placed third at the World Irish Dance Association competition in Germany in 2014, an event she attended with her then 13-year-old son.

"It was intense, and I was proud to place on the podium in the O35 division. My son also placed in the U13 division."

The following year, Dorrity closed that chapter of her career to become a dance teacher at Utah's Legacy School of Dance. The school was formed in 2010, and she first set foot there as a student. After she had been teaching for a couple of years, she became the sole owner in 2017. Today, Legacy students range from as young as three years old, all the way to adults.

> *"Each step of my dancing career has been full of discovery. I still dance to express myself and to feed the passion that I have for performing."*

However, being a teacher and a studio-owner has been rewarding on an entirely different level.

"Sharing my love of Irish dance brings me a fulfillment that I never expected. I love to teach a young person their first steps and see the excitement in their eyes. When I see one of my more experienced dancers onstage, I don't just see their beaming smile - I see the countless hours of practice, the struggles to overcome personal trials, and the intense commitment it takes to make them a star both onstage and off."

It can be difficult, of course; when students must leave Legacy due to financial factors or other reasons they take a piece of Dorrity's heart with them. However, she still finds great joy in things as seemingly small as "tying a little one's hard shoes." She is especially proud of a recent performance of Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, for which the students had to demonstrate polished moves throughout a full-length show.

"My vision for the school is one of individuality. Each dancer has his or her own path and I strive to help them reach their potential, whether that path includes competition, performance, dancing for social support or simply for exercise."

The school's adult program, she notes, is particularly strong.

"They love each other fiercely and always encourage newcomers to be a part of their community. Most of our dancers are from Utah's Layton and Ogden areas, with some coming from as far away as an hour to classes."

While she feels that much has been done to preserve Irish dancing culture, Dorrity acknowledges that it is the responsibility of people like her to continue the effort.

"I applaud the push to preserve the old ways, and I am excited to see how this dance form will continue to evolve."

For her part, she is helping to promote Irish culture both through dance, and via her own literary efforts.

"My debut novel, Awakening: The Geis, is about a young woman who finds Irish dance, and through it is able to remove a curse that has been held on her family for many generations."

This year, Dorrity is looking forward to finding new ways for the school to give back to the community. For instance, the newly formed Utah Irish Dance Company - "an elite performance troupe" - will mount shows throughout the year. She is also preparing for her Irish Dancing Teachers Examination.

"Every stage of my journey has completed a part of me, and I never tire of the endless possibilities in Irish dance."

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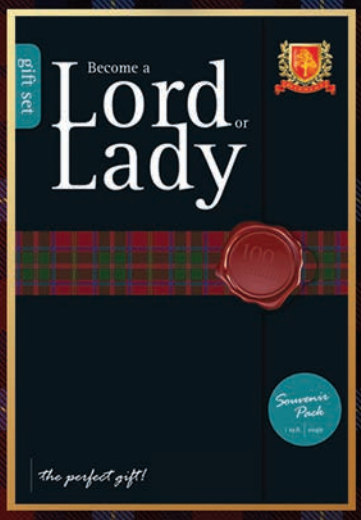

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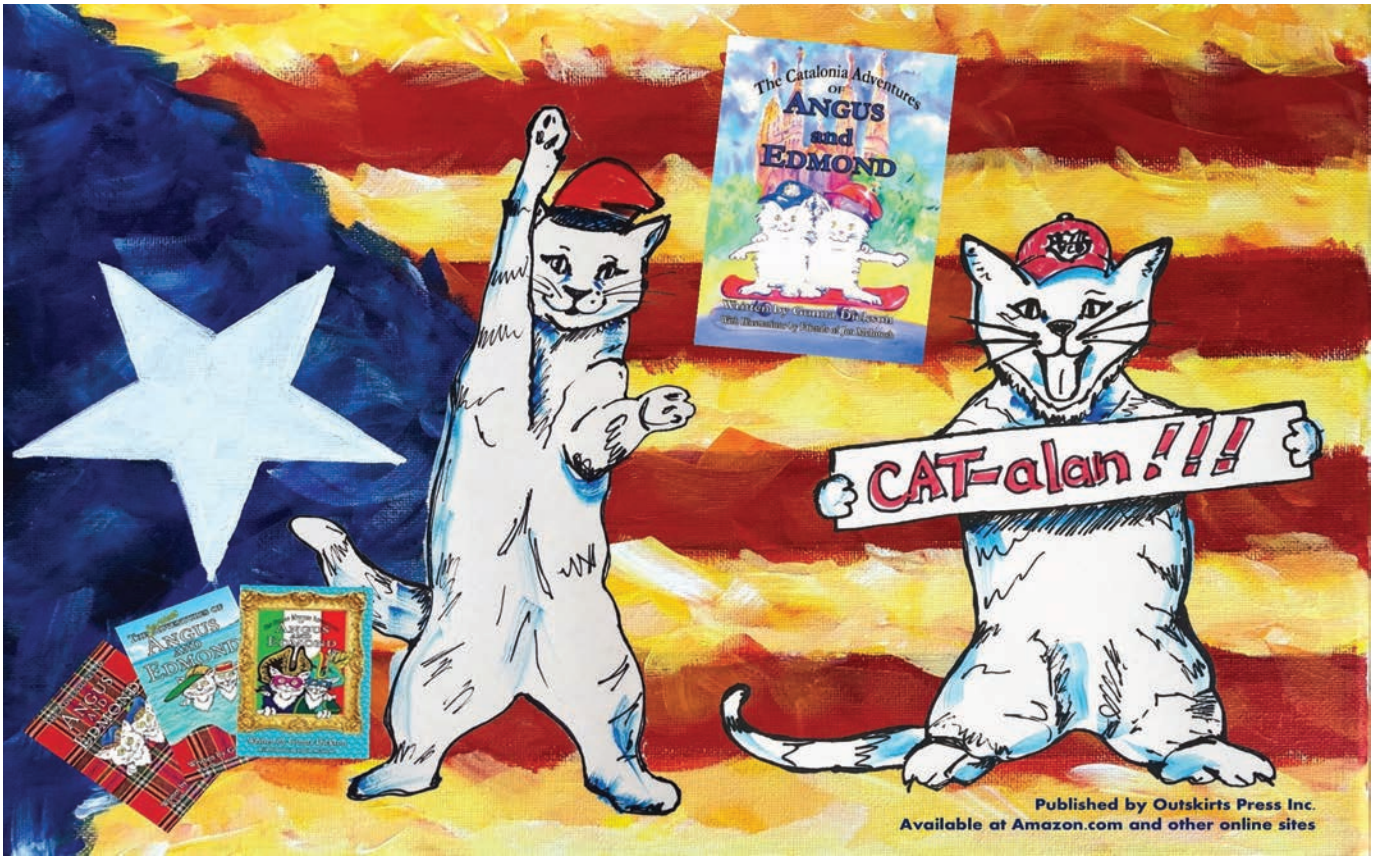

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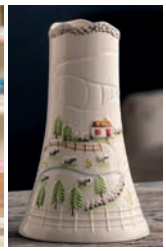

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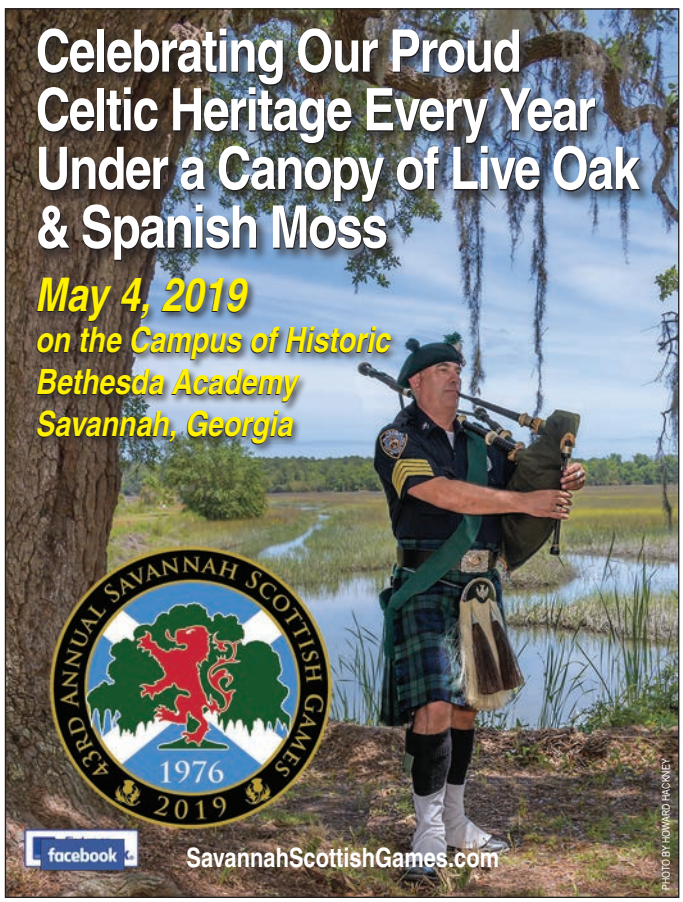

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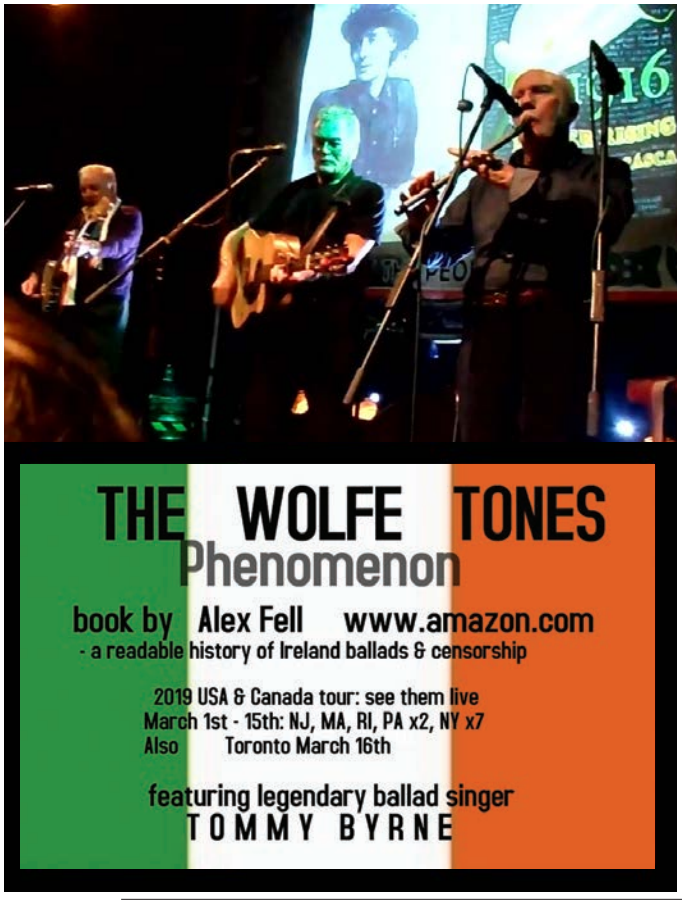
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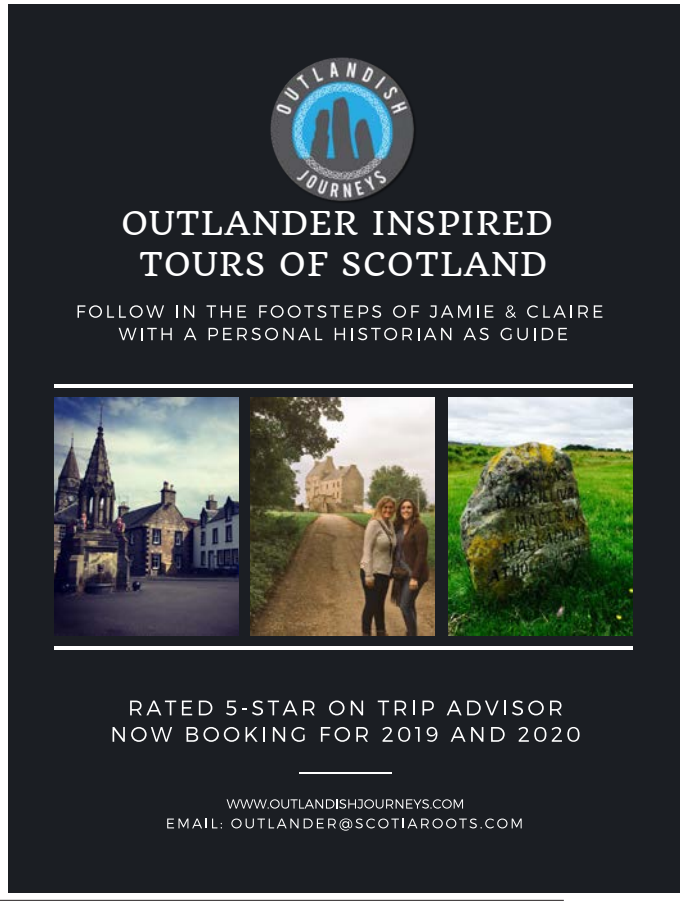
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Steffan Lewis; 1984 - 2019

Steffan Lewis' dream for his home country of Wales never dimmed...

Diagnosed in late 2017 with terminal bowel cancer which had already spread to other organs, Steffan Lewis - Plaid Cymru's Assembly Member for South Wales East - spoke openly about his disease and his grim prognosis while still hoping for a miracle that did not come. Determined, articulate and personable, the 34-year-old worked valiantly until he could work no more.

"We are in a state of shock and grief after losing our very brightest star," stated Plaid Cymru leader Adam Price following Lewis' passing in January.

Passionate about politics from an early age, Lewis was the youngest person elected to the National Assembly for Wales. He had previously run, unsuccessfully, but became a valued party staffer, serving for a time as communications officer and speech writer for his predecessor, Jocelyn Davies who reflected that she sometimes wondered who was mentoring whom.

Elected in 2016, he quickly impressed politicians from all parties, as was evidenced by the turnout for his funeral. Although a rookie AM, he was charged with drafting his party's response to Brexit. A champion of Welsh interests, he persuaded Labour to back a Continuity Bill aimed at safeguarding the country from a Westminster "power grab" during Brexit deliberations.

Lewis is survived by his wife Shona, who hails from Inverness, and a three-year-old son, Celyn.

Raised in a bilingual home, attending Welsh schools in Abercarn and Pontypool, Lewis later enrolled in religious studies and ethics at Cardiff University.

In an interview with Wales Online in the fall of 2018, he spoke openly about nearly losing his short battle with cancer in early 2018 when his kidneys began to fail. He pulled through and believed he was being given a second chance, though understood he likely had little time left.

He spoke of the cumulative misery of chemotherapy treatment and how he was better able to continue with his political responsibilities while participating in a clinical drug trial. For months, he worked Mondays, Tuesday and Wednesdays, rested on Thursdays and was back in his constituency office for a few hours on Fridays.

During the interview with Wales Online, Lewis said it is very easy to internalize the fear and worry of a terminal diagnosis but he urged young people not to do that.

"Talk about it as much as possible, particularly in the early periods," he advised, adding "it is okay to be scared."

Lewis also shared that he found himself very personally affected by the story of BBC radio broadcaster Rachel Bland who lost her life at 40 to breast cancer.

"She talked about how she was keen to write a memoir for her son as quickly as possible because she wouldn't be around to give him advice on life and all the rest of it. That's something I am doing now. I have started a memoir for my boy so whatever happens, I hope he will be able to get to know me through that memoir."

Poignantly, he noted his son's language skills were developing quickly and hoped they would be able to have conversations beyond baby or toddler talk.

In delivering one of two eulogies in a hillside church in Abercarn, party leader Price told mourners the young public figure had "a large heart and a huge intellect." He also called Lewis "courageously honest."

> *"Steffan found salvation in surrendering himself to Wales. His life, to his last, was a gift, outright, to the nation."*

Lewis' sense of humour never deserted him even in the sadness of his final days, he added.

"We pondered together the last message he could convey, through me to you. His face was illuminated with a mischievous grin when he said: 'I know - we'll ask them to pledge themselves to giving up beer and wine until we secure Welsh independence.'"

Price recalled a great sense of urgency about his young colleague.

"Not for him the languid language of independence as a long term goal - he wanted to get there while he was still young."

Lewis would not want his family and friends to despair at his passing, he added.

"Every morning when we wake, let's wake for him."

Rev. Aled Edwards, who had officiated at Lewis' wedding, said he was honoured to execute the funeral details outlined by Lewis, including a program printed alternately in Welsh and English. He also instructed that the three verses of the Welsh national anthem be sung in full.

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