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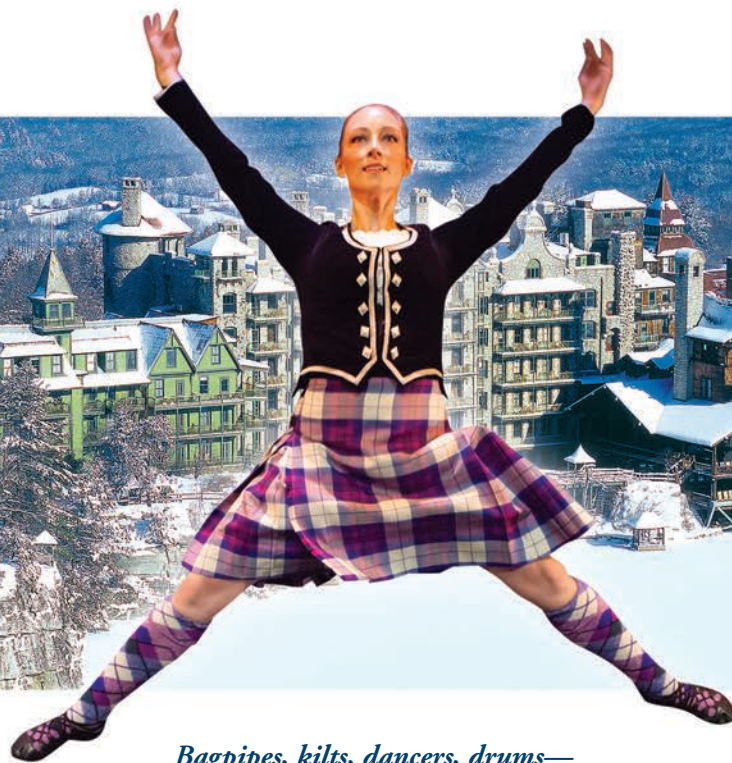
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Fáilte!

It's Christmas. Make a Difference.

Charles Dickens once wrote, "It's good to be children sometimes, and never better than at Christmas, when its mighty Founder was a child himself."

Christmas is truly for children, and the holiday season should be a time of joy for all. Yet, for many families struggling to make ends meet, gift giving and holiday feasts are just out of reach.

According to UNICEF, 1 billion children worldwide are now living in poverty. More than 800 million people do not have enough food to eat, and 22,000 children die each day from malnutrition. Amazingly, almost 1/3 of the food produced in the world every year for human consumption – approximately 1.3 billion tons – is lost or wasted. Food waste is not only an enormous drain on our natural resources, affecting water, land and energy, but it also has a huge impact on our environment.

Amidst the Christmas euphoria, many of us forget the true meaning of the holiday season, as we get caught up in the mad rush of last minute gift buying, often making purchases that are simply not needed. However, many people are now questioning that rampant consumerism.

The world needs to focus less on year-end profit margins and more on eliminating poverty. We need to do more to help the less fortunate. Christmas is a time when we can all make a difference. There are many organizations to work with where, even in a small way, our generosity is most appreciated.

I remember the unselfishness of Bob Hope who, for many years going back to World War II, gave up his Christmas at home to entertain US troops. Other entertainers, such as Bob Dylan and Rod Stewart, gave the royalties from their Christmas recordings to charities for children and other causes. But generosity is also found next door.

A little more than 20 years ago, I asked my friend Rob Pattison of Halifax about his Christmas. He replied, "On Christmas Eve we handed out around 1500 Christmas dinners to the needy. It was very rewarding." In October of this year, Rob and his wife Sandra began their 24th year of service helping low income families, with a particular focus on children. They continue to deliver more than 300 meals a week, and their Christmas Outreach now includes more than 3,600 meals.

In this issue we look at a few examples of people and organizations who are making a difference; The Black Santa Appeal in Belfast, The Pipes of Christmas in New York, and Santa's Angels in Prince Edward Island are each made possible through the selfless efforts of volunteers. We hope it inspires you to reflect on the true meaning of the holidays, and take a bite out of poverty. Give this Christmas and make a difference.

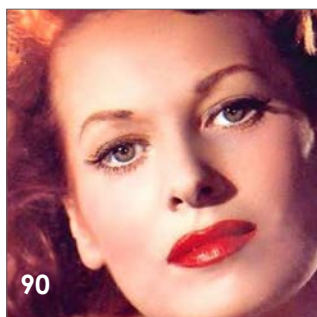
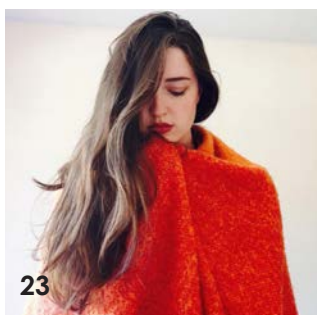
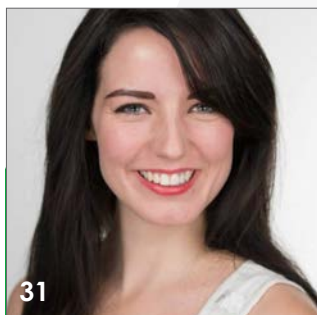
May God Bless!

Angus M. Macquarrie, Publisher



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Our December cover shot features The Littlest Christmas Angel



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DE a |DOL



Scotsman breaks world record by playing bagpipes for over 24 hours

Some musicians are so passionate they never want to put their favourite instrument down. Rikki Evans of Aberdeen took that to a new level recently when he played the bagpipes for over 24 hours. Under the Guinness World Records' rules, Evans was allowed a five-minute break every 60 minutes. The 29-year-old piped out a medley of 208 songs, repeating it six times. In total, Evans played for 24 hours, 10 minutes and 42 seconds. How did the extreme piper stay awake? Evans reportedly credits caffeine pills, as well as the enthusiastic support of his friends and family. During his pipe marathon, it is estimated he raised about £5,700 for multiple UK charities.

Korean food gets a Celtic influence in modern cookbook

If you love Celtic cuisine, but also enjoy diving in with chopsticks every now and then, a new cookbook by Jordan Bourke and Rejina Pyo may be for you. Bourke is Irish while Pyo hails from South Korea, and the married couple now live together in London. Bourke is a chef by trade, and Pyo is a designer who enjoys cooking in her down time. Bourke already has two successful cookbooks: *The Natural Food Kitchen*, and *The Guilt-free Gourmet*. With Pyo by his side, it's no surprise that they joined forces to make a third book: *Our Korean Kitchen*. The work includes over 100 dishes, such as bibimbap and kimchi, as well as pecan and cinnamon-stuffed pancakes. For the more adventurous, there's even a recipe for stir-fried spicy squid.



The Rose of Tralee beauty pageant challenges Irish traditions

The Rose of Tralee, an Irish festival and "inner beauty" pageant, has been running for 56 years. However, as cultural views have shifted, so have the pageant rules. One guideline hasn't changed, though; all participants must be Irish, a resident of Ireland or of Irish extraction. This rule has led to a hefty majority of white participants. The Rose didn't have its first black participant – Sinéad de Roiste – until 2004. Four years later, the stigma of single motherhood was cast aside and unmarried mothers were allowed to compete for the first time. The conservative Irish stereotype was shaken up once again in 2015, when the Rose crowned its first openly gay winner. Maria Walsh, a short-haired, tattooed beauty, won the tiara just nine months after Ireland voted in favour of same-sex marriage.

Maryland family becomes "Suddenly Royal"

Have you ever suspected you were of royal blood? Maybe you should hop on the internet and research your ancestry. Seven years ago, an American man found out he is the heir to the throne of the British Isle of Man by doing just that. David Drew Howe claims the lineage he discovered makes him a cousin of Queen Elizabeth II. Although Howe notified the London Gazette of his intention to claim the title, he didn't actually make the 3,000-mile trek until recently. Seven years after learning of his noble roots, Howe took his wife and daughter with him to the Isle of Man to learn the ways of blue-blooded clans. The family is now starring in their own reality show, entitled *Suddenly Royal*, which began airing in September.



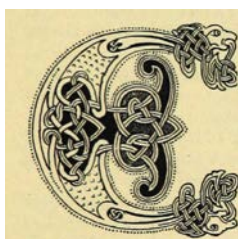
Have an interesting tidbit to share with our Celtic community? Drop us a line anytime at editor@celticlife.ca

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first word



In the sixth installment of a year-long, six-part series examining Celtic culture, Dr. Michael Simonton, Director of Celtic Studies at Northern Kentucky University, shares his perspective on what it means to be Celtic today.

One of the purposes of my work has been to dispel stereotypes and stereotypical behaviors in favor of more accurate portraits of the modern Celtic peoples within their ethnographic (anthropological) contexts. In my experience, the word “Celtic” commonly is misunderstood by the public, who may pronounce it (incorrectly) with a soft ‘C’, as ‘selt’, rather than (correctly) with a hard ‘C’ as ‘kelt’, and, upon hearing it, think first of a basketball team in Massachusetts or a football club in Scotland.

Historically, “Celtic” refers to people who inhabited what is today central France, north of the Garonne River and west of the Seine River during the first millennium BC. The Greek speaking colonialists of Massalia (today’s Marseille, France) referred to these people as Keltoi (the word also appears in earlier Tartessian inscriptions from southwest Iberia.) The modern word, “Celtic”, came into usage in 1707 when Edward Lhuyd used it to describe the languages of Gaul, pre-Roman Britain, Ireland, Brittany, Wales, and Cornwall.

When the creation of a Celtic Studies minor at Northern Kentucky University was announced in 2008, a comment was posted on a local newspaper’s website that such a thing was a waste of time, when students could be studying about Greece and Rome instead. I even have had to defend the program from assumptions that Celtic Studies is the same as English History, which it is not.

Many people in North America never would guess that modern Celtic culture is distinct from English (or French) culture – or that distinct Celtic cultures even exist. The Celtic scholar even may be rebuked that ‘They’re just the same as England. There’s no difference,’ which obviously is incorrect to someone who actually has lived in any of the relevant societies. I once had a student who had a very distinctively Welsh name in my Celtic Europe course say that he never even heard of Wales before taking that course. Others

find that their only connection with their Celtic backgrounds is by trying to live up to ethnic stereotypes, which may be exaggerated or inaccurate at best. Thus they appear at “Celtic” events wearing bright green clothing, drink (Bohemian) lager beer with green food coloring in it, eat (Yiddish culture’s) corned beef and cabbage, and become misty eyed at songs such as Danny Boy (written in England by an English Barrister, Frederic Weatherly) and My Wild Irish Rose (written by American actor/singer and composer Chauncey Olcott.)



When I teach Celtic Europe, I try to provide an ethnographic overview of Celtic cultures in Europe, and I have chosen to rely on anthropological descriptions of modern Celtic cultures, as well as archeology and (frequently inaccurate or exaggerated) classical histories for descriptions of ancient Celts. One item that surprises my students is that the Galatians in central Asia Minor, known to many people from St Paul’s epistles, actually were a Celtic people. Another surprise to many people is that a Celtic army was planning to take over Egypt during the reign of Ptolemy II. In my Irish Society Through Film class, I try to immerse the students in the cul-

ture with as many senses as possible by burning a turf sod, serving foods that are common in Ireland, yet rare in the United States (like smoked salmon on brown bread, or rashers and bangers,) and screening movies about Ireland that actually were made in Ireland, not Hollywood.

A dilemma in teaching Celtic Studies as an anthropologist is that anthropology students sometimes think that descriptions from 50 or 80 years ago still apply today. For example, if we say that the farmers of County Clare, Ireland had a council of old men called the ‘cuaird’ (from cuairt – visit,) it does not mean that they do so today, but that they may have done so when Conrad M. Arensberg and Solon T. Kimball described them in the 1930s as part of Harvard University’s Anthropology Department’s major study of Ireland. No one should expect that the citizens of County Clare still live today as they did in the 1930s. Nonetheless, it happens from time to time that people forget that the whole world has changed since their grandparents’ or great-grandparents’ times; that world progress happened elsewhere, too... Nonetheless, I use these ethnographic texts because the current ‘present’ is rooted in the historical ‘present’ – what anthropologists call the ‘ethnographic present’ – and the behaviors of today are rooted in the behaviors of their parents or grandparents.

Thus, as I teach Celtic Studies in anthropology, Celtic refers to the cultures in those countries, provinces, départements, and/or counties in which the Celtic languages are or were-until-recently spoken, and to the peoples and life-ways therein. Thus, for an anthropologist, “Celtic” refers to the (usually traditional) cultures of Brittany, Cornwall, Ireland, the Isle of Man, Scotland, and Wales, even though most of the people in those places also speak English or French in their everyday lives.

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UP FRONT

It was music that first gave form to the Manx language for Dr. Breesha Maddrell, and music that ultimately led her to become director of the Isle of Man's cultural arm, Culture Vannin

Maddrell, who is currently charged with the promotion and support of all things Manx, says her interest in the language was ignited in primary school. She recalls being fiercely jealous when the teacher of another class greeted students each morning with “Moghrey mie,” and exhorted them to ‘jeigh yn dorrys,’ or, shut the door.

“My time would come,” she explains. “And it would be through the music; learning traditional tunes and songs, before the shape of their names and words felt right in my mouth.”

Today she works with education, tourism and business departments, and agencies to revive and strengthen the Manx presence at home and abroad. The key areas of promotion are arts, crafts, dance, ecology, folklore, history, literature, music and language. The island has both a Manx primary school, and a roving team of language teachers for all other schools.

Maddrell was born in a fishing port on the south of the Isle of Man. Her father's family were Manx farmers and seafarers, while her mother's people came from Wiltshire, England, to settle on the island and become part of its fabric.

“We grew up with a good extended family on both sides, my paternal grandparents naturally using the rhythms and words of Manx English, connecting us to a sense of landscape, marked by place names of Norse and Gaelic origin.”

It was first as a singer/musician, and eventually as Manx speaker, that Maddrell developed her strong sense of being

a Celt. An accomplished vocalist, she is also renowned as a piano player and flutist, having led the Manx youth orchestra's woodwind section for many years. Her initial post-secondary studies were in music and Germanic studies, but she went on to graduate from the University of Liverpool with a PhD in sociolinguistics and Manx studies, writing specifically about cultural revival on the Isle of Man.

Maddrell initially joined Culture Vannin as a music development officer, and became director in 2014 with an enhanced mandate of promoting national identity by fostering language, music and dance at home, but also to bring them to a world stage at Celtic festivals and other gatherings.

“The Isle of man is the smallest of the Celtic countries, so it is perhaps even more important that we belong to something bigger,” she explains, adding the island's motto loosely translates to ‘Which ever way you throw me, I will stand.’

“Being part of a Celtic world gives us a shared identity that enables us to hold our heads high, to count cousins around the world, and to feel connected.”

She points out the Isle of Man and Cornwall, the two smallest Celtic nations, were centre stage at the recent Festival Interceltique de Lorient in Brittany.

“Festivals offer us a place to celebrate that sense of connection, to play with our

commonalities and differences, to see where we fit in. Manx performers have represented the Isle of Man all around the world – in North America, Canada, Scandinavia, Europe, Australia, Dubai, just to name a few.”

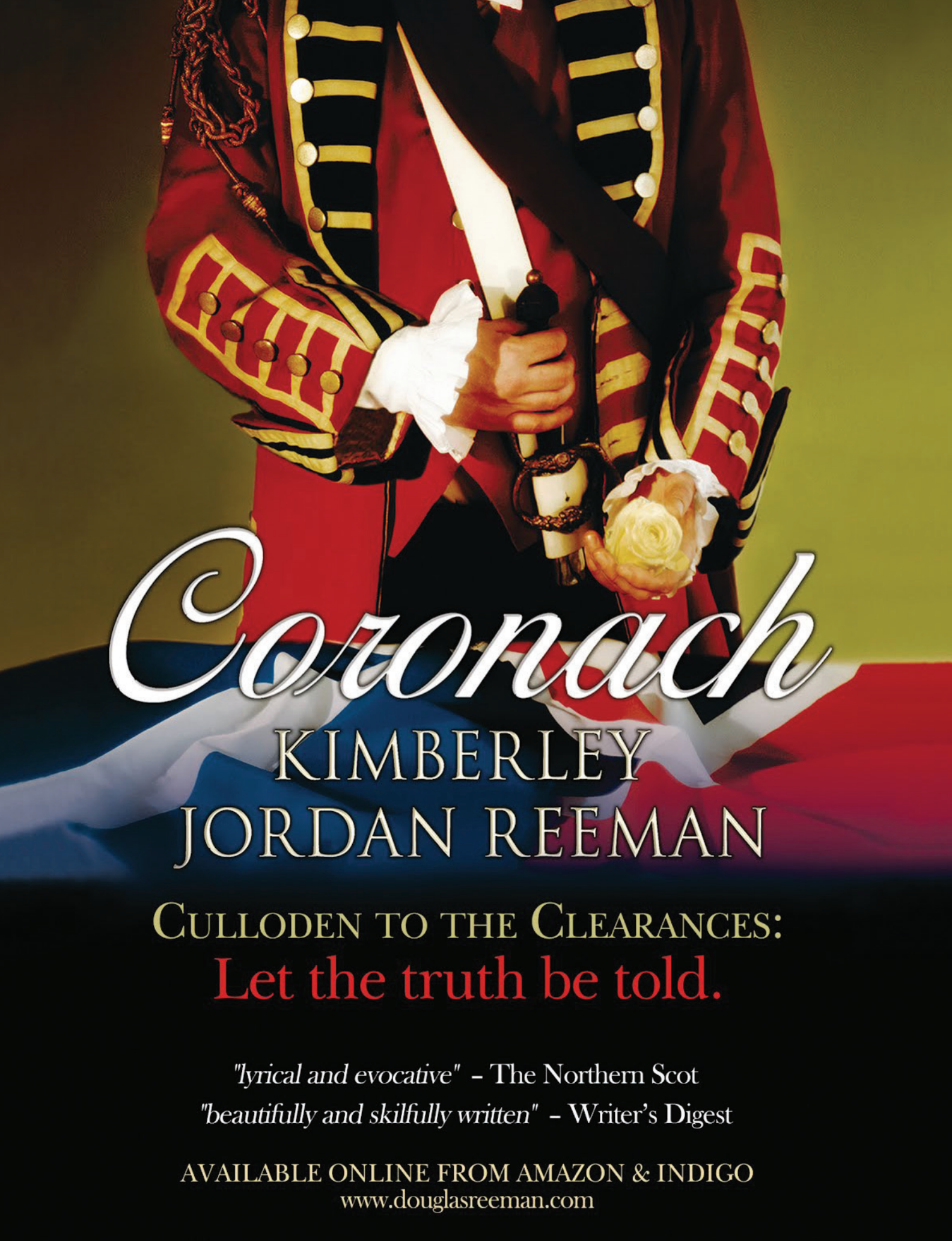
Yu Chruinnaught Inter-Celtic Festival, where Maddrell was first a young performer and is now a member of the organizing team, has been at the heart of the Isle of Man's cultural calendar since its founding in the late 1970s. In the spirit of its name, which means “the gathering,” the six traditional home nations are represented, but the doors are wide open to other Celtic acts.

As such, she says, being Celtic is as current as it is historic.

“I've come to the conclusion that being Celtic is constantly changing and is different for each and every one of us. For me, it's the play between tradition and innovation that makes it truly exciting. Identity is a negotiation, after all. It is who we are in relation to the people within the communities where we choose to make our homes that counts.”

A modern take on Manx is Culture Vannin's recent production of two highly-acclaimed apps designed to boost language learning, and Maddrell proudly points to young people who have become fluent speakers of a language “that has risen, phoenix-like, from the ashes.”

www.culturevannin.im

A person in a red and gold military uniform, likely a British Grenadier Guard, is shown from the waist up. They are holding a sword in their right hand and a white rose in their left hand. The background is a solid olive green.

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Toronto resident Eleanor McGrath is an active member of the Canadian Celtic community.

*In 2009, she authored *A Story to Be Told: Personal Reflections on the Irish Immigrant Experience in Canada*, kick-starting her passion for storytelling. Since then, she has produced three documentary films.*

Recently she answered our Seven Celtic Questions.



SEVEN CELTIC QUESTIONS

What are your own Celtic roots?

For years I have focused my energies on our McGrath family roots. My aunt Cynthia and I have been working together to trace the history of our great-great-grandfather Thomas McGrath, who is listed in the 1851 Canadian Census as "Laborer, Irish and Roman Catholic." I knew my paternal Granny Marguerite McLeod's roots were Scottish, but had no verification until my sister Kate sent me the name of Alex MacLeod - an ancestor that had emigrated from Scotland to Ontario. A 20-minute drive from my farm is where I stood in front of the grave marker of Alex MacLeod, Captain of the 3rd Battalion, who came to Upper Canada in 1793. He fought in the War of 1812, and settled in the area with his wife Margaret. My Celtic roots have not only come full circle, but my family has returned to the farming roots of my ancestors. I marvel daily when I move small rocks and weed through the garden patch how these early settlers built a nation from a very wild and rugged world.

Why are those roots important to you?

As I uncover our own family Celtic history, I am continually inspired by the stories of people I have known in Toronto and across Canada who have contributed to the fabric of our country in large and small ways, and this needs to be celebrated. Through documentary filmmaking I have found a lasting way to share what has captured my imagination with those who might not otherwise have heard of these people.

What does it mean to you to be of Celtic heritage?

This heritage is a celebration of the ingenuity, strength and determination of often very poor, uneducated peoples who cleared land, built canals, railroads, and sacrificed their lives with minimal recognition. It is sad that the only celebration of the contribution of the Scottish is Robbie Burns' Day, and of the Irish, St. Patrick's Day. The impact of the Irish and the Scottish on our country is incredible and remains underrepresented in Canadian history textbooks.

How are you involved with the Canadian Celtic community?

It was a privilege to work as Executive Director of The Ireland Fund of Canada, then as a writer in documenting over 128 stories of Irish Canadians, and now as a filmmaker committed to preserving and elevating the knowledge of our Celtic culture and its impact on our nation. I am proud to serve as a Trustee

on the Board of the Ireland Canada University Foundation, a not-for-profit organization based in Ireland which encourages and facilitates academic links between institutions and scholars in both Ireland and Canada. This past April, I chaired "Toronto with a Twist of Irish" - a benefit concert to raise funds for the James Flaherty Memorial Scholarship.

Why is it important to keep Celtic culture alive in Canada?

There is much beauty in the Celtic culture. Often, we are unaware that the art that documented our nation's early years was the work of Irish and Scottish painters. The most significant example I can provide is of the Irish artist Paul Kane. During Kane's early travels across Canada, he shared the beauty of our wilderness, and the First Nations peoples, through his art. I also want to draw attention to the Home Children who came to Canada from England, Scotland and Ireland from the 1870s to the 1930s as orphans. By elevating Celtic culture, we elevate the memories of those who had no voice in coming to our country and building it through their labour. Today, over 12 percent of Canada's population are descendants of these children, and nothing in my mind speaks more strongly to why we need to talk about Celtic culture.

In your estimation, are we doing enough to keep Celtic culture alive here?

Our country has neglected the contribution of the Celtic immigrants for far too long. Today, those with Irish heritage are the fourth largest population in Canada. But in my children's textbooks there are only two references to the Irish in Canada: Thomas D'arcy McGee, and the arrival of the Irish famine victims.

What can we be doing better?

The most critical first step in exploring the contribution of the Celtic culture to Canada is to revisit our Canadian history and to elevate the academics who are working in the area of Celtic Studies. Equally, Celtic community organizations can do focused work in promoting our heritage and giving voice to the requirement of more textbook history. By rewriting our textbooks, it is paramount to honestly discuss the relationship we had with the First Nations and the treaties made, but not held by, our government and England. A groundswell from the fourth largest segment of Canada's population would be hard to ignore!



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Brian O'Sullivan

Innovative Irish writer Brian O'Sullivan is determined to shine the light of day on a wealth of Celtic culture languishing in academia's darkest, dustiest halls...



A native of Cork, O'Sullivan is now based in New Zealand, which, as he points out, is as far from Ireland as a man can get. There, he is zealously writing, publishing, blogging and running a short story contest, all intended to beat back some popular Irish stereotypes and resurrect authentic culture with its mythological Fionn MacCumhaill and land goddesses.

"There's a serious amount of 'crap' out there when it comes to Celtic culture," shares O'Sullivan via email. "The Internet is overloaded with 'experts' reproducing information from sources such as W.B. Yeats or Lady Gregory and quoting them as authorities on Irish folklore, which they most certainly were not."

It was his own writing that brought O'Sullivan, albeit indirectly, to a wealth of manuscripts depicting ages-old Celtic experience. He was appointed writer in residence at Stout Centre, Victoria University, Wellington, following the publication of his short story collection, *Leannan Sidhe – The Irish Muse*. The appointment allowed him access to all university libraries, which he expected would advance his own non-fiction work on MacCumhaill.

The scale and complexity of cultural records stored in libraries and national archives around the world astounded him.

"These consisted of several thousand narratives collected from Ireland, Scotland and the Isle of Man, but a surprisingly large number still existed in ancient manuscript form. A number of them, written in Old and Middle Irish, still haven't been fully translated."

What particularly stunned O'Sullivan was that all the raw material available, and the century of subsequent analysis, was primarily restricted to academics - while most Irish, Scottish and Welsh people were unaware of its existence.

"In a sense, it seemed almost unfair that this stuff had never been made available in a form that could be accessed

by the very people whose cultural birthright it was."

He soon shelved his non-fiction book and changed direction to incorporate a wealth of cultural detail into a mystery/thriller titled *Beara: Dark Legends*, the first in a proposed trilogy.

"My partner and I were keen to retain creative independence so we set up our own publishing company and that is how Imbas Books was born."



The tiny company's objectives are to facilitate awareness of Celtic culture and heritage, transmit cultural knowledge in an entertaining fashion, and respect sources of knowledge while keeping content as culturally authentic as possible.

O'Sullivan is convinced most current tales of Irish mythology have been sanitized from the original.

"In Ireland, and in other colonized Celtic countries, from the 1600s native culture in any of its forms was suppressed,

and slowly eroded by colonial governments keen to remove the threat of insurrection associated with the different way of thinking. Later, during the 1800s, when people finally started to reinvestigate Irish mythology and folklore, the only people who were educated enough to write about it were the descendents of the English themselves."

The English, despite their best efforts, he suggests, often misinterpreted or interpreted tales differently. Then when the native population became literate and began to write their own stories, a new source of opposition was encountered.

"They were hit with a broadside from the Church who considered the 'pagan' beliefs and mythology of the original Celts blasphemous, and a potential competitor."

According to O'Sullivan, many people would currently find it difficult to tell the difference between a story based on elements of Celtic culture or a Disney fairy tale.

"There's certainly been a resurgence of interest in Celtic-themed literature since the Sixties. Despite the fact that Celtic-heritage writers are pumping out large volumes of books, very few of those actually write native stories."

With a second mystery/thriller coming out, and a new short story collection in the works, O'Sullivan is unable to turn out the volume of authentic stories he would like, so he hit on the idea of getting other people to submit short stories which will be enhanced with "cultural commentary/conceptual background added to each piece of fiction."

"This Celtic Mythology Short Story Contest seems to align well with our approach for getting the information out in an entertaining manner."

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New York-based Scotland enthusiast and blogger gives back to Celtic community

A wee dram of whisky and a colourful tartan; what could be Amore Scottish? Siouxsie Waller has been running her website, Whisky and Tartan, since April of this year. “The site was started as primarily an events listing and lifestyle blog,” Waller shares via email, “with the events being the main purpose. Anyone who knows me knows that I love road trips and Highland games. From when I first started going, I had trouble finding a comprehensive listing of all North American games and Scottish events.”

Although Waller is American, she does have Scottish and English ancestry. She’s had a fondness for Celtic culture for as long as she can remember, but her interest started running even deeper after attending the New York Tartan Day Parade in 2006.

“That started the ball rolling with attending Highland games, meeting contacts in the Scottish-North American community, traveling to Scotland numerous times, researching family history and eventually handling social media for the American-Scottish Foundation.”

Over the coming years, Waller’s infatuation with Highland games grew, as did her passion for all things Scottish. “I wanted to be able to say, ‘I want to go away for the weekend and attend a Highland games event...what are my options?’ The Association of Scottish games and Festivals has a great site, but understandably only list games of their members. The same with Scottish societies in different regions – most only list games or events they are immediately involved with or that are in their region of the country.”

After some reflection, Whisky and Tartan was born. According to Waller, the site has three aspects. Her goal with the event listing is to combine all Scottish events across North America into one hefty, complete list - from whisky tastings to pipe band championships. “People are welcome to contact me and I will add any and all Scottish-related events on the continent.” In addition, she runs a lifestyle blog on the site, featuring what she calls Event Wednesdays. The weekly feature highlights the events for the coming weekend. “I also feature businesses related to Scottish culture,” she adds.

The site’s third aspect, an online shop – which Waller calls The Distillery – is still in the works. However, there are a few items already available, including the 2016 North American Pipe Band Calendar. “One morning this past summer I woke up with the idea, quickly put it on paper, did some research and decided I would just go for it.”

Soon after, Waller began reaching out to bands to pitch her idea. One of the first groups she contacted was the Charleston Police Pipes and Drums. The group’s performance of Amazing Grace at the memorial service for victims of the Charleston shooting – which aired on national TV – had tugged at her heartstrings. She began following them on Twitter to support them. “I then saw they were trying to raise money for new kilts, as theirs were so old most had holes in them. I thought how great it would be to be able to give them a new avenue to raise some money.” Waller made the decision to set aside 75 per cent of the calendar’s \$20 price tag for the pipe bands involved with the annual almanac. “(The Charleston Band) was on board almost immediately. I flew down a few weekends later and they were my very first photo shoot.”

She continued recruiting bands, who would suggest a handful of members to be featured in a photo for the calendar. Waller would then make the final decision. “I made a conscious choice in choosing pipers, drummers and drum majors,” she says. “I also wanted both male and female, as well as a nice demographic in terms of age and experience. I think I was successful.”

She plans on making the calendar an annual project. Now that the 2016 project is done, Waller is looking ahead to the 2017 calendar. She says she will be working with several Scottish bespoke kilt designers, including Siobhan Mackenzie, who designed Miss Scotland’s national costume for the Miss World pageant in 2014. She believes the designers will help “to outfit the musicians for an entirely different look and feel.”

www.whiskytartan.com



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New Scotland Clothing Co.

A couple of competitive curlers from Nova Scotia are making a big splash with their new clothing line, creating a ripple across the pond...

Brothers Kevin and Scott Saccary incorporated New Scotland Clothing Co. barely a year ago, but Scottish world curling champion David Murdoch and his teammates will be sporting the fledgling company's distinctive gear on and off the ice this season.

"We are one of the Murdoch team's apparel sponsors, and it is advertising we couldn't even dream of when we started," shares Scott. "It is going to be pretty cool to have Scottish players promoting our history and culture."

In the weeks before Christmas, 2014, the brothers offered family and friends a test run of 50 hoodies and tees, sporting either of the company's two logos. They sold out, brought in a much larger order, and had nothing left by Christmas.

Scott remembers the thrill of walking down the street in Halifax and meeting a stranger wearing a New Scotland Clothing Co. hoodie.

"I was so surprised to realize I didn't know who he was, not a friend and not a relative. That's when I felt we might really have a business."

Since then, the brothers have acquired a mobile store, which they set up at markets and festivals, and have also established an on-line sales presence, enlisting family and friends, as necessary, to keep up with demand. Both Saccarys are employed with the same large construction company, Kevin as IT manager and Scott as an estimator, so New Scotland Clothing Co. is an after-hours business.

The brothers credit their Scottish grandmother, who was born in Carmun-nock and immigrated to Canada in 1951, with having a strong Celtic influence on the family and sparking their interest in curling.

"Kevin and I started when we were 10 or 12, but we'd always been around curling because our grandmother curled and our

parents both curled. Dad coached us for many years."

Their mother also ran a junior curling program.

Kevin was busy with a young family and Scott was just back from six months of backpacking in Australia, New Zealand and Southeast Asia, when they launched the business.

"We are the only two siblings so we've always been pretty tight," continues Scott. "Our parents had a motor home and we travelled everywhere together. We curled competitively together and played in the junior national together, so being in business together is nothing new."

New Scotland Clothing Co. emerged from a blend of entrepreneurial spirit, a pride in their Scottish heritage, and an old gripe about curling.

"I suppose it really began with us always complaining that there is never anything cool for curlers to wear," explains Scott, who at 30, is the younger of the two.

With the exception of the vibrantly coloured and patterned Norwegian men's curling team - not a look the Saccarys were going for - they had a point, though they quickly concluded they would not limit their products to curlers. One of Nova Scotia's competitive pipe bands is also sporting a New Scotland Clothing Co. line.

"We kicked around ideas and kept coming back to the fact that Nova Scotia has been great for us in terms of curling and life, in general. We decided to make our province, Nova Scotia or New Scotland, our brand."

They settled on "Share your Pride. Wear your Roots" as a company slogan. Their classic shirt logo features a maple

leaf and the company name, while the lion logo - which has been the more popular to date - depicts the traditional lion rampant above the company name.

Last spring the Saccarys hosted Nova Scotia Night at the world curling championships in Halifax after their provincial team was knocked out of national competition. Party-goers cleaned out their entire stock.



"We wanted to make sure that the athletes and teams in Halifax for the worlds (curling competition) knew that we've got Nova Scotians who are passionate about curling. We also wanted them to remember the great parties we throw here."

And if their New Scotland Clothing Co. tees and hoodies made it all around the world as a result, that is just good business.

Between their day jobs and the new business, the Saccarys still manage to keep their feet on the ice and a hand on a curling broom - Kevin as president of a local club and Scott as second on Nova Scotia's Team Murphy on the 2015-2016 world curling tour.

www.newscotlandclothing.ca





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The Vinyl Café

Twenty-two years into the Vinyl Café, Canadian author, broadcaster and storyteller Stuart McLean turns the page...



Stuart McLean just keeps on keeping on. “We are just outside of Huntsville, Ontario this morning,” shares the scribe over the phone. “We did a radio show taping there last night. The audience was fantastic. They are great wherever we go.”

Being on the road is de rigueur for the renowned raconteur, who spends months travelling from coast-to-coast-to-coast each year in support of his Vinyl Café book series.

McLean’s latest work is *Vinyl Café Turns The Page*, a new collection of stories featuring the Toronto-based family of Dave, Morley, Sam, Stephanie, their pets, their infamous neighbour Mary Turlington, and more.

The book’s title is apt, as for the first time in more than two decades the cast has aged.

“It is a few years down the line from previous stories,” explains McLean. “Everyone has grown up a little, grown older. The kids are moving on, moving out. Sam is interested in girls, and Stephanie has fallen for an artist who photographs roadkill. Dave and Morley are enjoying their space.”

The more things change, however, the more they stay the same.

“Oh, it just opens up a whole new can of worms from a comedic perspective,” notes the narrator, who already has more than two dozen Vinyl Café books and recordings to his credit. “Of course, it opens the door on other things also – and sometimes some not-so-pleasant things brought about by age.”

“I remember having a long conversation with myself about taking the stories to the next step. Like most people, there is a part of me that wants these characters to be frozen in time forever, to be a little part of the world that doesn’t change – almost a sanctuary of sorts. But it was also important for me to keep things interesting creatively, and to write from a different perspective.”

Perhaps surprisingly - or not - there has been no backlash to the move.

“No one has said anything negative to me about it,” says McLean. “And, to be honest, I didn’t really expect that anyway. I think people understand and respect that change is inevitable and they roll with it.”

And while Dave, Morley, Sam and Stephanie have evolved, McLean’s choice of medium has not.

“Bigger isn’t always better,” he contends. “A while back I was approached by someone at CBS about the possibility of bringing the Vinyl Café to the small screen. We were actually quite a ways into the process, but things didn’t pan out. In a way, it was a bit of a relief.”

McLean notes that maybe his characters are better left to audience’s imaginations.

“I recall someone once asking me what I would do if I knew that Dave was in the next room. How would I react? At first I thought that I would run right over and introduce myself. But then I thought what if don’t like the guy? What if it is this huge disappointment?”

“The beauty of radio, books and shows is that they give readers and listeners the chance to fill in the blanks in their own individual way. And that is part of what makes it so special and personal to people - they feel involved, engaged, like it is all taking place right next door.”

Radio, in particular, holds a poignant place in McLean’s heart, having worked in broadcasting for twenty years prior to his current gig.

“Actually, despite all of the other distractions out there these days, I believe that radio is in a really great place. The internet has, literally, opened up a world of possibilities with podcasts and accessibility to stations from all across the planet. At one time, every little town had a little AM station with its disc-jockeys and news staff, and that was a vital part of their community. Today, the same kind of closeness exists, except now it is for the global community.”

That sense of intimacy is also what makes McLean’s live shows both so endearing and enduring.

“Storytelling brings people together,” he says. “Whether it is around a campfire, a kitchen table, a theatre or a concert hall, it is a shared experience. And so long as readers and listeners continue to enjoy that experience, and those of Dave, Morley, Sam, Stephanie and the other characters, then I will just keep on keeping on.”

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Niamh Crowther

Listening to Niamh Crowther's captivating voice, it's hard to believe she used to suffer from overwhelming stage fright

"I still get quite nervous before performing," confides the young Irish singer-songwriter. "But I've come a long way from being a teeny 13-year-old literally shaking like a leaf on-stage."

Born in Ashbourne, just outside of Dublin, Crowther was immersed in music as a child. "Both of my parents were in a folk group for years," she recalls. "I was taken to practices and performances, so I was always surrounded by harmonies, guitars, keys, and renditions of some of the classics."

Her parents also had an extensive record collection, which helped feed her musical fires. The 18-year-old lists U2, the Beatles, Fleetwood Mac, ELO and Stevie Wonder among her biggest musical influences. "I'd always loved poetry and music, and one day when I was about 12, I was just messing around at the piano and tried to combine the two. I got such a buzz from it, and I haven't stopped since."

And though live performances still make her anxious, the rewards are worth the price of admission. "All musicians will agree that the feeling you get from being onstage and playing your own songs - and having people actually listen and enjoy them - is euphoric," she explains. "Experiencing a crowd singing along to your songs and knowing the lyrics is incredible."

Crowther's hard work has afforded her many opportunities: on her 18th birthday, she performed with an American rock legend - former Bon Jovi guitarist Richie Sambora. She has also shared the stage with the likes of the Heathers, Orla Gartland and Gavin James. In addition, the alternative-folk musician has hit the iTunes charts on many occasions, has been streamed on Spotify over 130,000 times, and has been play-listed on both national and international radio stations. "That feels so crazy," she laughs, "people's encouragement, support and praise constantly astound me!"

Crazy or not, there seems to be plenty more to come for the young songsmith. Crowther has been busy for the last few months, prepping her new EP, which was released in October. She notes that making the recording involved "a lot of random

and spontaneous late-night songwriting sessions, being a loner now and then in order to finish off songs, and quite a bit of studio shenanigans."

"I suppose underpinning all of that would be the various experiences I've had that inspired the tunes. And I get to work with really cool, talented and generally fab people - so it was a creative and insightful experience."

The songs, she shares, have to arrive naturally. "I just don't see how I could ever make myself write a song purely for the sake of writing a song. Without sounding like an angsty 'mom, you don't understand me' teen, music and lyrics are pure art forms."

"I don't think that honest and meaningful art can be manufactured. For me, music is how I express myself - it's a natural process."

Good songs, she continues, are a mixture of "simplicity, honesty, imagination and emotion - although I don't think there's a definitive formula."

These days, Crowther is trying to balance her musical career with her studies. Currently in her sophomore year of post-secondary, she is studying primary school teaching at St. Patrick's College in Drumcondra. "It's been tricky to say the least, but it seems to be working out at the moment so I hope to keep going... and keep improving my balancing act!" It's a team effort, she adds. "My management, friends, family and college are all fantastically supportive... so I'm extremely fortunate to have them around for advice and guidance."

Already looking to the future, Crowther is mapping out what's in store for 2016. "I've been writing a lot lately, so I hope to record a good bit next year and get more new music out there - that's my main focus for the time being. I'm always looking to improve as an artist and learn my craft as best as I can so I'll do that too. Hopefully we'll finish 2015 on a high note and set our sights on summer 2016 for a few festivals if I'm lucky!"

www.niamhcrowther.com



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Gillebride MacMillan

Growing up in South Uist, Scotland, Gillebride MacMillan fell in love with the language and culture of his forebears

“Gaelic is my first language,” shares the charismatic singer and actor over the phone, “and Gaelic songs and traditions were an essential part of my family life. From a very young age, I knew that keeping that past alive was important, and I took it upon myself to play my part.”

True to his word, MacMillan has carried that past into the present though the years, releasing two Gaelic music CDs, performing countless concerts in his native tongue, competing in language competitions at home and abroad, writing, translating, studying and teaching Celtic culture, and talking to anyone who would listen at speaking engagements.

“I might be a wee bit obsessed,” jokes the jovial Scot. “I might have a problem.”

In recent years, MacMillan has brought that gift of Gaelic, and a greater sense of authenticity, to the set of acclaimed STARZ series *Outlander*, where he was cast as the quirky Gwyllyn the Bard.

“It has been an amazing experience so far, and I cherish the opportunity to create a greater sense of awareness of Gaelic through Gwyllyn’s character.”

Behind the scenes, he has worked closely with the series’ composer Bear McCreary.

“Bear is one of the most talented and creative people I have ever met,” notes MacMillan. “He can read a scene, and instinctively knows what it needs to take it to another level. *Outlander* would not have the same kind of emotional impact that it does without his musical contributions.”

He echoes that sentiment about his *Outlander* cast-mates.

“We are very close on set, almost like a family of sorts. And we have a lot of fun working together – there are always plenty of laughs to go around. Make no

mistake, though, these people are all professionals, and when it is time to get down to business they get the job done quite effectively.”

He speaks glowingly of *Outlander* author Diana Gabaldon as well.

“She is an incredibly intelligent and inspiring woman, and she has been very involved with the entire process of bringing her story to the screen. I greatly admire her commitment to educating herself on Scottish history, and in particular, the preservation and promotion of Gaelic.”

While the smashing success of *Outlander* has indeed raised the language’s global profile, MacMillan believes that more needs to be done to ensure its survival.

“It starts with public will,” he explains. “If the demand is there, then the supply will come. Governments, both in Scotland and abroad, can create more funding opportunities to develop educational infrastructure. And schools, especially primary institutions, can make it a core piece of their curriculum – young people soak up second languages like sponges.”

To that end, he continues, learning Gaelic needs to be more than merely an exercise in education – it needs to be entertaining and engaging.

“I like what I see happening at a place like the Gaelic College in Nova Scotia. Their emphasis on the total cultural experience – history, literature, music, dance, crafting, kitchen parties and other events – brings the bigger picture to its students, giving them some sense of context to the language.”

The internet also offers new opportunities for learning.

“The number of websites now dedicated to Gaelic is impressive,” notes MacMillan. “And there seems to be more of

them popping up each week – apps for mobile devices also. It is exciting to see the language take off so quickly through these technologies – in just a short time it has been able to accomplish something that, previously, had taken generations.”

Popular culture is making a difference as well.

“Obviously, *Outlander* has had a major impact on visibility,” he says. “And now there are Gaelic comic books and graphic novels out there, and films and music done entirely in Gaelic. Highland games and Celtic festivals are also another great way to get the word out.”

Other events, including *The Pipes of Christmas* in New York City each December, carry the message to new audiences.

“Bob (Currie, event founder) has done a wonderful job keeping the language, and Celtic culture, contemporary and relevant. I am proud to have performed there in the past, and I look forward to contributing again in the future.”

While scheduling restrictions will keep him away from the Big Apple this holiday season, MacMillan has a full slate on his plate for the coming months and into 2016.

“*Outlander* is shooting its third season,” he shares, “so that is keeping me busy. And then there are the performances and appearances – house concerts, speaking engagements, private functions, etc.”

All of it, he adds, is to serve the history and heritage of a once-endangered language.

“The reasons I still do it today are the same as those when I was a little boy growing up in South Uist – our past can help to guide us through our present and our future.”

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A portrait of Chris Hadfield, a middle-aged man with grey hair and a mustache, wearing a grey t-shirt. He is holding a Gibson acoustic guitar. The background is slightly blurred, showing a workshop or studio setting with various tools and equipment.

Chris *Hadfield*

Canadian astronaut Commander Chris Hadfield shoots for the moon with his debut recording Space Sessions; Songs From a Tin Can



Chris Hadfield has no illusions about being a rock star.

"Those aren't the kind of stars I am interested in," deadpans the 56 year-old over the phone from his hideaway in Ontario's cottage country.

"I am not so sure the lifestyle suits me anyway," he continues, with a smirk. "I might be just a little past my prime for the whole 'sex, drugs, rock 'n' roll' thing."

All joking aside, Hadfield has long been passionate about making music.

"I started playing guitar as a youngster, and I haven't stopped. If this other thing - this going-to-space thing - hadn't been on the radar, then we might be having an entirely different conversation."

That "going-to-space" thing has driven Hadfield since he was a 9 year-old boy, watching the Apollo 11 moon landing on television, launching a 40-year career that has made him one of the most decorated, respected and celebrated Canadians in history.

En route, there was Air Cadets, Military College, the Armed Forces, fighter jet testing and training, and finally, in 1992, being named a full-fledged astronaut by the Canadian Space Agency. He skillfully maneuvered the Space Shuttle's Canadarm in 1995, after docking with the Russian space station Mir. Stints at the Yuri Gagarin Cosmonauts Training Center in the former Soviet Union, and later the NASA Johnson Space Center in Houston, set up his nomination as the first Canadian Commander of the International Space Station in 2010, a mandate he fulfilled from December, 2012 to May, 2013.

Of course, by now, most are familiar with Hadfield's musical forays during his five month flight around the world. Along with several simultaneous sonic collaborations with artists back on earth - including with Ed Robertson of Canadian supergroup Barenaked Ladies - Hadfield's stirring rendition of David Bowie's classic Space Oddity became a YouTube sensation, racking-

up more than 25 million views.

"I had brought my little Larrivée Parlor guitar with me," he notes. "It came in very handy in my spare time. Most of the vocals and guitar parts for Space Sessions were developed and recorded on the ISS using the GarageBand APP on my iPad."

"From what I know, it is the first album recorded in space. And it might be the first album someone has recorded on the job."

Back home, some of Canada's finest players were brought in to flesh out those original recordings, including Juno Award winning producer Robbie Lackritz, and noted musicians Don Kerr, Afie Jurvanen, Mike O'Brien, Ben Lester, Jay McCarrol and Dan Goldman.

"I was very fortunate to have a great team around me to help bring these songs to another level," recalls Hadfield. "Not

only were they able to grasp my own musical vision of the material, but they all brought something unique and personal to the tunes.”

Each of the twelve tracks on Space Sessions - 11 original songs, plus the Bowie tune - holds special significance for Hadfield.

“Obviously, the experience of being in orbit gave me plenty to ponder philosophically about life in general, and about my own life in particular. And all of those themes are on the album; childhood dreams, being a parent, space flight, the universe...”

“That said, most of the tunes had been floating around for awhile – folkie stuff that I had written on my own, or with my brother or my son. It all just kind of came together in the cosmos.”

Released last month, Space Sessions has already received both popular and critical acclaim for its heartfelt and homespun folk flavour. A series of new, animated YouTube videos have helped to push the recording’s visibility into the stratosphere.

“It was an incredible experience and a lifelong dream,” shares Hadfield. “I learned so much about the entire creative process – from the inception of a song to its completion – and it has left me with a new and greater appreciation for musicians and for artists of all sorts.”

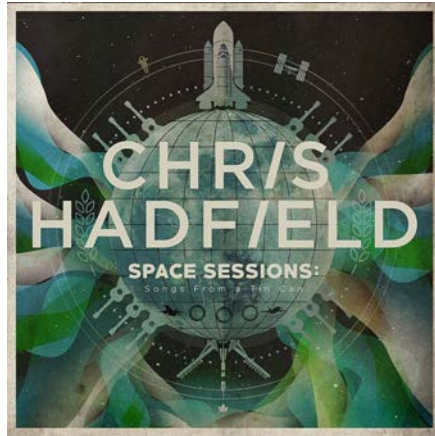
He speaks of a similar feeling when discussing his 2013 autobiography, *An Astronaut’s Guide to Life on Earth: What Going to Space Taught Me About Ingenuity, Determination, and Being Prepared for Anything*.

“Writing takes tremendous self-discipline. Facing the fear and staring down the page each day isn’t easy, and I have utmost respect for those who do it professionally and full-time. Once it was done, though, it felt quite rewarding, and I had a great time getting out to book signings and meeting people.”

He is, admittedly, more comfortable with the guitar.

“There have been a few memorable gigs through the years,” he says. “One of my all-time favourites was an impromptu jam at Matt Malloy’s in Westport in western Ireland. It’s funny - this is a little pub on a little main street, but it’s famous for its traditional musical sessions, and people come from all around the world to try their hand with the locals. The beer is very good too.”

Hadfield’s Celtic musical connections don’t end there; through the years he has performed alongside the likes of The Chieftains, and he has taken centre stage on two



occasions at the world’s largest Celtic festival in Lorient, Brittany.

“It was, by far, the biggest audience I have ever performed in front of on earth – over 400,000 people. I’d like to say it was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, but I’ve done it twice.

“What amazes me is to see how music from that region, or from Scotland and Ireland, has made its way so extensively around the world. Here in Canada, for example, you can see the influence of Celtic music in our folk music; artists like Stan Rogers, Gordon Lightfoot and Neil Young all come from that great melodic tradition. And in Newfoundland, you’d be hard-pressed to tell the difference between St. John’s and Dublin on a Saturday night with all those Celtic melodies floating out onto the street.”

Given his roots – his mother’s family is from the Borders area of Scotland, and further back there are Irish ties also – it is easy to understand his passion for Celtic harmonies and heritage.

“Like many Canadians, our family first came to this country several generations ago. However, and again like many Canadians, we were raised with the traditional values and music of our forebears.”

That ancestry also explains the sense of familiarity when traveling in Scotland and Ireland.

“I have been to both countries several times, says Hadfield, who was awarded the World Peace Tartan in 2014. “My wife and I raised a Scottish kid – he was an exchange student who just never left – so we attended his wedding at St. Andrews, and I’ve spoken and performed in Scotland on a number of occasions.

“My daughter lived in Dublin for a

while, attending Trinity University,” he continues, “so we got over there regularly to see her. Sometimes we would rent a car and just drive through the Irish countryside, stopping in all the small towns and villages. I love the lifestyle. Everyone is always so warm and welcoming, and there’s always a pot of tea on the stove, a pint to be had, and a few good stories to be told.”

In recent years, Hadfield has cemented his ties to the Emerald Isle by becoming a spokesman of sorts for the country.

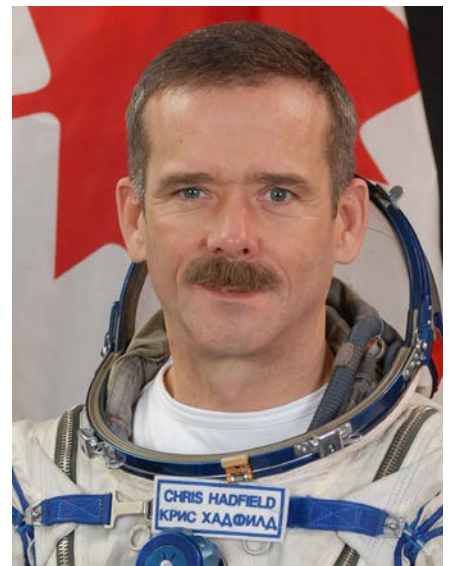
“We shot a series of promotional videos across the Island; at the Titanic Museum in Belfast, at the Guinness Storehouse in Dublin, along the Wild Atlantic Way...it was great fun and I was happy they asked me to be involved.”

He is fond of another Celtic region as well, this one a little closer to home.

“I spent time at CFB Shearwater in Nova Scotia years ago, and my daughter now lives and works in Halifax. I get down there all the time, sometimes for speaking gigs. I love the music scene there, though, strangely, I have never actually performed there as a musician. I really must change that. I have heard there are a few good pubs around that do that sort of thing.”

And while his interstellar days may be behind him, Hadfield’s second career opens the door to all sorts of new opportunities.

“I won’t stop playing music, that’s for certain. And I won’t stop traveling either. So, with guitar in hand, the sky is the limit. I mean, I have already been around the world 2,600 times – what’s a few more miles?”



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Mhairi Calvey

Two decades after making her big-screen debut opposite a young William Wallace in Braveheart, Scottish actress Mhairi Calvey looks back and forges ahead...



All eyes rest upon the bodies of Malcolm and John Wallace...all eyes except for those of a young girl named Murron. She tenderly gazes at the boy who has just lost both his father and brother. When the funeral mourners depart, and William Wallace remains behind to watch the soil shovelled atop his closest kin, young Murron breaks free from her mother's grasp. She picks a purple thistle and hurries to give it to the boy. Their eyes lock, Murron offering silent solace as William sheds a tear.

It is one of the most memorable scenes from an iconic movie, the five-time Oscar winning blockbuster, *Braveheart*. It was Mhairi Calvey, then five years old, who played the part of young Murron for the film. She had been scouted while going about her day on the Isle of Arran, a place she still considers home.

"My parents didn't take me to an audition," recalls Calvey. "I was spotted by Jina Jay and Patsy Pollock, the casting directors for the movie. They auditioned me in the school playground at Pirnmill Primary School in Arran, and a week later I was on set."

She says it was "luck" that led to the role in the major motion picture, but perhaps, in fact, it was fate. When most children her age were obsessed with cartoons, Calvey was watching black and white films. "My mum said from about the age of two she could tell I was going to be an actress."

Throughout her childhood and adolescence, Calvey gained valuable experience on the stage, from theatrical productions to walking the runway at the annual *Dressed to Kilt* fashion show in New York City. She trained at York College, before receiving a full scholarship to attend the Guildford School of Acting, where she completed an honours degree. Not long after graduation, she became highly sought-after for a series of independent films.

"My favourite moments are when you are on set at 3 a.m – it may be freezing temperatures, but you see all these incredible people around you working hard on creating an amazing project. Passion like that is infectious."

In the U.K. horror-romance production *Any Minute Now*, Calvey played narcoleptic teen Anna Brooks, a role she received a Best Actor/Actress nomination for from the *BloodGuts* U.K. Horror Awards. She played Ruth in *Five Pillars*, a part that British director Jon Rosling added to the script when he discovered her talent. She also took on the role of Anna in the zombie thriller, *Virus of the Dead*, and Jessica in the short film *Gemini*, for which she won a Best Actress prize at the LA Film Festival.

"Most recently I finished filming a movie called *Alan*," adds Calvey. "I got to work with the cameraman Peter Robertson, who filmed that amazing shot in *Atonement*. Working with Peter was incredible."

Another of the actresses' projects - *Abduct* - is currently in postproduction, but already has a significant social media following. The film is a sci-fi thriller, partially inspired by famous paranormal radio host, Art Bell. Calvey plays Crystal, who is desperately trying to escape supernatural phenomena and government conspiracy.

Fellow cast members include William B. Davis (*The X-files*), Sienna Guillory (*Resident Evil*) and Mark Arnold (*Teen Wolf*, *Threesome*).

Earlier this year, it was announced that Calvey has been cast as Flora MacDonald for the forthcoming multi-million dollar Scottish epic, *The Great Getaway*, which chronicles the life of Bonnie Prince Charlie. A Scottish heroine, Flora MacDonald helped the prince escape to the Isle of Skye after the Battle of Culloden. 500 extras are expected to participate in the film's battle scene.

"This is my dream role and I can't wait to film it," Calvey shares about the part - one that Kristen Stewart had also been in the running for. "When that movie happens it will be the biggest highlight of my career."

Calvey is particularly passionate about doing research for her roles. For the part of Flora she has already spent countless hours reading books and online sources. "Through the character research, you get to learn things that other people will never get to discover. I've learned so much about history, and because of the films I have already done, I have learned so much about Scottish history in particular."

She says acquiring new skills is also an important part of character development. For different acting projects she's learned to play guitar, sing and horseback ride. For *The Great Getaway*, she has been working on Highland dancing.



A love of acting has kept Calvey persistent in a challenging industry. "You can work hard to get the job, and after eight auditions, land the part - then you have to hope that the film gets funding and that it will go ahead. That is very difficult - it's a little like gambling."

While family members and friends have been extremely supportive of her vocation - watching her films, going to her premieres, and being there when she "falls" - others have been more cautious.

"My mum has always been supportive," shares Calvey. "She has never allowed me to quit anything regardless of how hard it may be. It's one of the reasons I am still in the industry today. But some people have told me I haven't achieved anything in my life, because I don't work in an office each day and get a regular annual wage. Being an actor is a bit like being a secret agent that way - nobody really understands the world you live in, but they all have opinions about it."

"I am very ambitious and always will be, regardless of what I want to do. I don't believe in being realistic because it leads to mediocrity. I believe in being a possibility..."

In addition to the upcoming productions she will be working on in Scotland and elsewhere, Calvey is keeping busy with other projects she's initiated. One is her Key Screen Academy, where she provides professional advice to emerging actors on the business side of the industry.

Another is raising awareness about mental health. Last year, she founded Think Differently Do Differently, a program that helps those dealing with depression. "I hope to grow this into a worldwide charity which can help more people."

One of her dreams is to establish a fund for independent Scottish filmmakers. She also thinks it would be beneficial to collaborate with other artists to work towards growing Scotland's film industry.

"A lot more films and television series

are coming out of Scotland these days, which is wonderful, as there are many talented artists who are finally getting the recognition they deserve. I hope it continues to grow, and I hope to be a part of that growth. Personally, I would love to do more productions in Scotland - and not just ones where I act, but where I am involved in the actual production process."

Although Calvey's ambition continues towards a variety of professional pursuits, acting will probably never 'fade out'. "My love for acting has kept me going through everything. Nothing makes me feel as happy or alive as when I am on set or stage. I know it's where I am meant to be."

www.mhairicalvey.com



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Galicia

In the first of a two-part series, our award-winning photojournalist Tom Langlands winds his way through the wondrous Celtic nation of Galicia



It was a balmy autumn evening when I sat outside a restaurant by Porta Faxeiros in Santiago de Compostela. The sun had long gone, and my glass of Estrella Galicia beer sent golden reflections from the street lights across the gleaming white tablecloth. Here, where the narrow, paved streets of the region's capital filter out through a gateway into the modern world beyond, my journey around the Celtic region of Galicia in northwest Spain began.

Renowned for its food and wine, I explained to my waiter that I would like to experience Galician cuisine. His face beamed as he described how each dish on the menu is sourced, prepared and served. With a 1,050-mile (1,700km) coastline, seafood is in abundance, and on his recommendation I chose barnacles - a Galician speciality - followed by scallops, clams, razor clams and crab, all washed down with a delicious Albariño. Despite stressing that I had but a modest appetite, over the next hour the flow of food to the table was as staggering as was its quality and taste. Galicia, I smiled, is apparently another word for gastronomy.

As I ate, I watched a group of high-spirited students participating in a freshers' week ritual. This involved marching in time to song, stopping to do press-ups, having a drink and repeating the process as they made their way through the old town. Santiago boasts one of the oldest continuously operating universities in the world, offering a wide range of degrees across 19 faculties. The city has a population of 90,000 inhabitants, is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and is a holy city and a place of Christian pilgrimage. I savoured the remaining drops of wine, thanked the waiter for his outstanding introduction to Galician gastronomy and headed for my hotel.

The following morning I met Flavia Ramil, Promotion Manager for Turismo de Santiago de Compostela. She had arranged a visit to the cathedral. Ramil was eager to point out that the city has much more to offer than just its famous cathedral, the spires

of which punctuate the skyline. Walking across the Praza do Obradoiro, we paused to take in the majestic architecture and observed a steady stream of pilgrims entering the square with their backpacks, staffs, and symbolic scallop shells. It is reputed that the relics of St James the Greater, one of Jesus' twelve disciples, lie inside the cathedral.

Walking the Camino to Santiago de Compostela is an important ritual, not only for many Christians, but also for those wishing an opportunity for peaceful, reflective meditation.

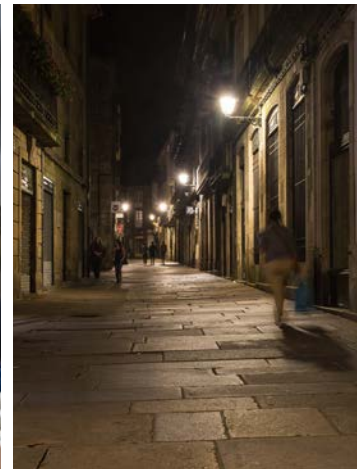
In order to gain the prized pilgrimage certificate - the Compostela - you must walk at least 60 miles (100km), although many I met had walked 190 miles (300km), and one man from Czechoslovakia had walked 1,865 miles (3,000km)!

From a privileged position on the cathedral roof I could see over the red, pan-tiled rooftops of the old town to the modern city beyond with its parks, and contemporary architecture. On a nearby hill stood the imposing Cidade Da Cultura, a monumental development which is intended to be a culture centre. Sadly, I found it a cold and soulless place. In contrast, a guided tour of the old town was heart-warming. It is beautiful, well preserved, and oozes history from every stone.

Back in Ramil's office I asked her if she considered herself to be Celtic. She looked at me quizzically, replying "Of course. We are a Celtic nation. While we are Spanish, our identity is not that of other areas of Spain. Our heritage is a shared one with the other seafaring Celtic nations." Over the coming days, I would hear many similar responses.

After several wonderful days in Santiago, I collected my hire car to explore further afield. Heading west, I skirted the Roman





town of Lugo before continuing northwest to a Celtic Iron Age hill fort, Castro de Viladonga, which was occupied between the third and fifth centuries AD. Here, there is an excellent purpose-built museum that tells the story of this place. Suitably enlightened I went outside to explore the remains of the settlement.

As I walked along the top of the banking surrounding the Castro I tried to imagine how it must have been when the buzz of life filled the buildings and streets below. I trod the pathways, stood in the houses and communal buildings, and thought of all the activities that would have taken place here. Clearly these were a sophisticated people, and I took away with me a fuller understanding of their lifestyle and ways.

I headed north to the coast pausing briefly to see the stunning As Catedrais beach - the beach of cathedrals. Here, near Ribadeo, the sea flows through towering arched, rock buttresses carved by the relentless pounding of the ocean. I would have lingered here, but a sudden squall drove me onwards to Viveiro. Based in this port, I spent the next two days exploring the beautiful coastline towards Ortigueira, where an annual Celtic folk festival is held. It is a paradise of secluded beaches, small ports and fabulous seafood, but it was another kind of Eden that interested me as I drove towards San Andrés de Teixido.

This remote village, atop the highest cliffs in mainland Europe, occupies a vantage point that affords spectacular views west over the Atlantic Ocean. In pre-Christian times, this place - from which the sun could be seen disappearing daily from this world - acquired a spiritual dimension associated with the afterlife. When Christianity arrived, it was forced to adapt these pagan beliefs.

One legend of San Andrés de Teixido claims that God charged St. Andrew with

establishing a church there. Fearing that no one would visit such an isolated place, St. Andrew pleaded with God for an alternative charge. God then assured him that everyone would come to San Andrés de Teixido because those that did not do so in this life would have to do so after death before their souls could enter the next world.

Adding other dimensions to the story, the ancient Celts believed that the souls of the dead could not see, and that sometimes the dead were reincarnated in the form of another living thing.

So, when you see someone holding an invisible hand at San Andrés de Teixido, it is because they are leading a lost soul to the chapel. And take care that you don't step on an insect, for it may be a deceased relative.



With hairs standing up on the back of my neck I drove to A Coruña, the former capital of Galicia, and a major seaport. The city has two bays on opposite sides of a small promontory. One of these acts as its industrial hub with docks and rail links. The other has an impressive esplanade running around a sandy bay, terminating at its northern end with the Tower of Hercules - a stunning, working lighthouse

and museum with an ancient pedigree going back through Roman times to Greek, Celtic and Irish myths. It is a World Heritage site, surrounded by a sculpture park. In front of the lighthouse is a large statue of Breogán, a mythical Celtic king and founder of A Coruña, who built a tall tower and, looking across the sea, saw Ireland. Legend has it that he sent his son Íth to conquer the land, but its inhabitants beheaded him. Íth's nephew, Mi, invaded, conquered and populated Ireland, giving the name Milesians to subsequent clans. As I gazed at the statue of Breogán with the Tower of Hercules behind, a large rainbow appeared stretching over the sea towards the Emerald Isle.

In a small café in A Coruña I met Suso Martínez, a guide and historian with a passionate interest in Celtic history. For over two hours we chatted about what it means to be a Celt. He told me about all of the clues - both fact and legend - that convince him that Galicia is undoubtedly a Celtic nation; in Lugo, there is an inscribed gravestone commemorating a woman who belonged to the Celtic tribe Supertamarica (the name Lugo may have Celtic origins - Lug is the Celtic god of light); a parish in Ortigueira called Celtigos; numerous Celtic iron age hill forts; the remnants of statues to Celtic deities; linguistic connections with other Celtic lands, and lastly that the Irish are descended from the Celts of Galicia through the ancient myth of the sons of Breogán, who in turn may just be the origin of the name O'Brien.

I had only been in Galicia one week and this amazing land, its culture and history fascinated me. My on-going journey of discovery stretched out before me as I prepared to head south.

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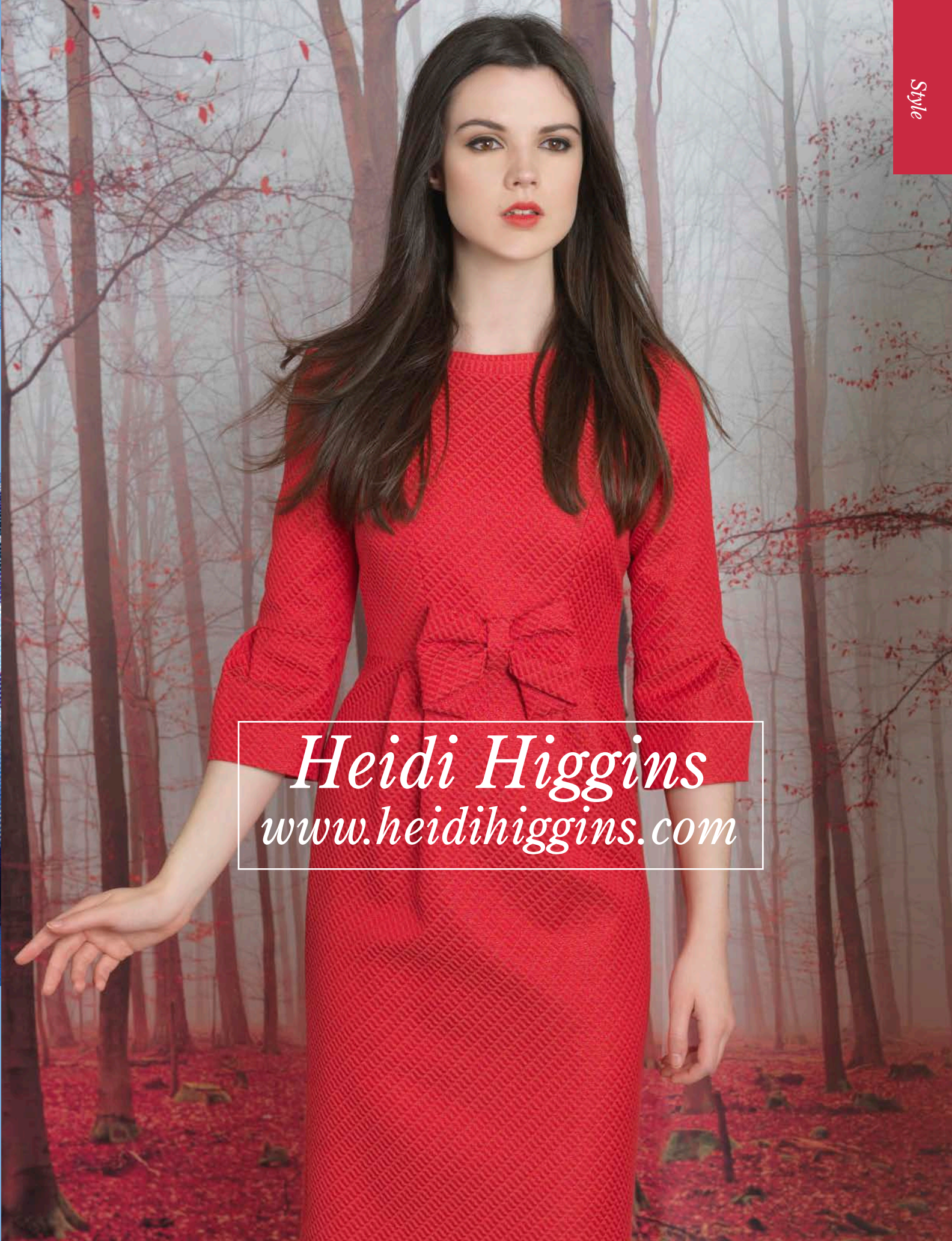


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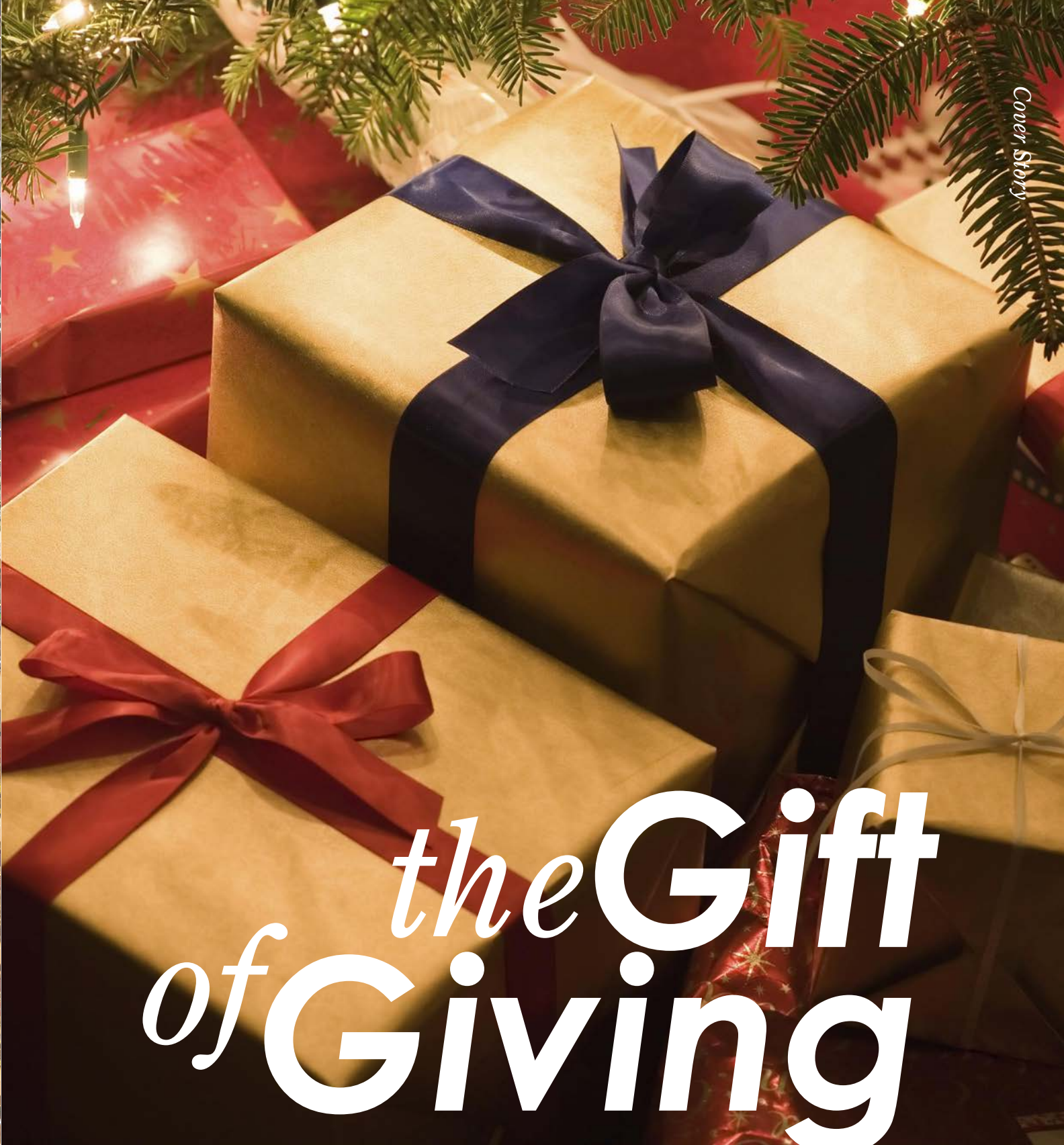
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the Gift *of* Giving

The holiday season is hallmarked by generosity, and this is particularly true in the Celtic community. Here, Celtic Life International Senior Writer Michelle Brunet looks at six inspiring people from Cornwall,

Scotland, the Isle of Man, Ireland, the United States and Canada who are generous with their time and spirit, and who understand that you can only keep what you have when you give it away.



Lady Mary Holborow & the Cornwall Macmillan Christmas Fair

A little over 20 years ago, Lady Mary Holborow and a few friends organized the first Cornwall Macmillan Christmas Fair in memory of a close companion who had passed away from cancer. The fair, they decided, would raise money for Macmillan Cancer Support in Cornwall.

"Macmillan nurses and support staff promote a holistic approach to cancer and life threatening diseases," explains Holborow. "They ensure that those who are suffering, particularly those who are homebound, have every form of help they need."

The first Cornwall Macmillan Christmas Fair was held at Holborow's home in Ladock.

"To actually have a gathering like this in one's own house and garden, with parking in a field in November, in Cornwall, where it rains a lot, is not the most sensible thing to do," she laughs. "And it poured rain that day! It was a great success, but most cars had to be pulled out by a tractor."

The event moved to local hotels in following years, and since 2013 has been held at Cornwall's renowned biome attraction, the Eden Project.

Each year the fair features new and returning vendors of gifts, clothing, jewellery, stocking stuffers and more. A special section highlights Cornish food and drink. Local crafters, artisans and businesses - another passion of Holborow's via her involvement with the Rural Development Commission - are showcased at the gathering, as are vendors from further afield.

Last year, the fair brought in £39,000. This year, Holborow hopes to raise £50,000 to support the construction of The Cove Macmillan Support Centre.

"Cornwall is one of the only Counties that does not have a

support unit," notes Holborow. "So this year we are helping to raise money needed to build one. It's a wonderful challenge, but we've got an amazing band of people who are a lot younger than me, who work extremely hard to make sure we have a chance to meet our goals."

She adds that helping others is rewarding for all involved. "Last year, in November, there was somebody at the fair and I knew - and she knew - that she wasn't going to see Christmas. She was with her daughter, who was pushing her around in her wheelchair. She was piled up with Christmas presents that she had bought and she was really happy. I will always remember that..."

www.cornwallmacmillanchristmasfair.co.uk

Marion MacInnes & Alzheimer Scotland, Lewis and Harris

Marion MacInnes has been working with Alzheimer Scotland - Lewis and Harris Services since 2012. She was attracted to the position because of the organization's mandate to support both people with dementia and their loved ones. Those afflicted with dementia, MacInnes notes, "still want to remain connected to their communities, and have a lot to give, particularly to the younger generation."

MacInnes often spends her weekends volunteering for the organization's charity events. "Fundraising is vital to run our community," she explains. "We put on dementia cafés, singing group, gardening group, walking group and caregiver support groups."

Christmas is also an important time at Alzheimer Scotland, as clients, caregivers, volunteers and staff all come together to enjoy

the spirit of the holidays. "There is a lot of fun and laughter, but it is important for us to remember that people's spiritual needs are very individual at Christmas and we try to be respectful of this," says MacInnes.

Yuletide activities planned for Lewis and Harris this year include their annual Christmas dinner, a Christmas cake-making workshop, holiday classic movies, and a Christmas jumper fundraiser. Ceilidhs, dementia cafés and festive meals will also take place in various localities across the island, and this year's Sing-along Christmas Concert is moving to a bigger venue - Stornoway's Town Hall.

"The sing-along concert is very special and the atmosphere is quite moving," MacInnes shares. "It is a great community event with supporters, families and friends gathering to spend time with people with dementia. Music and song evoke many memories for people living with dementia, particularly the Christmas Carols and Gaelic songs. Music and song are a powerful way to express emotion that is often suppressed. It's not uncommon for people to have a wee cry."

www.alzscot.org

Marcia Brabbs & PrisonWorks Isle of Man

The charitable PrisonWorks Isle of Man has been working with offenders and ex-offenders and their families, as well as prison staff, since 1997. The organization puts together a variety of programs, including running a restorative justice course, transporting loved ones to the prison, and initiating meetings "with offenders and prison officers to build relationships."

Marcia Brabbs got involved with PrisonWorks in 2010. That same year, she was asked to lead the group - which she continues

to do. "We challenge the people that we work with to make the choice for change for their own good, for the good of their families and for the good of the Island community as a whole," she explains. "And then we empower them to act upon those positive choices."

One of PrisonWorks' major activities is the Christmas Angel project, where prisoners request to have presents delivered to their children. Participating parents offer gift ideas, and also money if they are able. Donations made to PrisonWorks supplement the remaining cost of the gifts, which are purchased, wrapped and delivered by the charity's volunteers. Last year, 45 children received gifts through Christmas Angel.

"Christmas Angel is a program for children," shares Brabbs. "Many of us may not think about it, but the children of parents in prison are victims of crime as well. Having a Mum or a Dad who is incarcerated can be very isolating and embarrassing. It is a way to let the children know that they are cared about and loved and not forgotten."

One of Brabbs' favourite Christmas Angel memories is when she delivered a gift from a father in prison to a young boy with "tow-head blonde hair, round wire-rimmed glasses and clad in his jammies." When she handed him the present and told him who it was from, the boy "immediately said thank you and then turned to his mum again and said, 'It's from my daddy!'" Brabbs recalls, "I had a huge smile on my face, and it took everything I had not to cry."

Brabbs also spends a lot of time involved with community service. As a survivor of domestic abuse, she set up Safe, Strong, Secure (3S), the Isle of Man's only abuse charity. Additionally, she runs an endowment charity called The White Rose in memory of her friend, Dru Hamm, and her own son, Dosch MacLeod.

www.prisonworks.im



Mary DeCourcy & the Wicklow RNLI Fundraising Branch

The Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI) is a search and rescue charity run almost entirely by volunteers. Founded in 1824, the RNLI has since saved more than 141,000 lives in the seas around the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland.

One of the charity's 230+ stations is the Wicklow RNLI Lifeboat Station. A devoted group of Irish volunteers, the Wicklow RNLI Fundraising Branch, work hard to keep the station running.

Mary DeCourcy has been involved with those efforts for over 16 years. She's served as Chairperson for the last six, and last year she received a bronze medal from the RNLI for her service. "I have been involved with a myriad of different fundraisers, including cake sales, coffee mornings, athletic events, concerts, musical evenings, cheese and wine nights, Christmas lunch, knitting club - anything that will raise valuable funds to support our crews!"

Holiday gift ideas go a long way towards supporting the RNLI, and this year the organization is again proud to sell locally produced Christmas cards, CDs and calendars. As well, Wicklow's Second Coxswain, Ciaran Doyle, recently published a book - Wicklow Lifeboat Station - with all proceeds from the sale benefitting the charity. "Ciaran is our longest serving lifeboat man with more than 30 years continuous service," notes DeCourcy. "His book is a superb production which tells stories of rescues and the men and women of the service."

"The RNLI is, without doubt, an essential emergency service," she continues. "When the crews receive a call that someone is in trouble on the sea, they drop what they are doing and go immediately. These are ordinary, everyday men and women who do heroic work in all weathers."

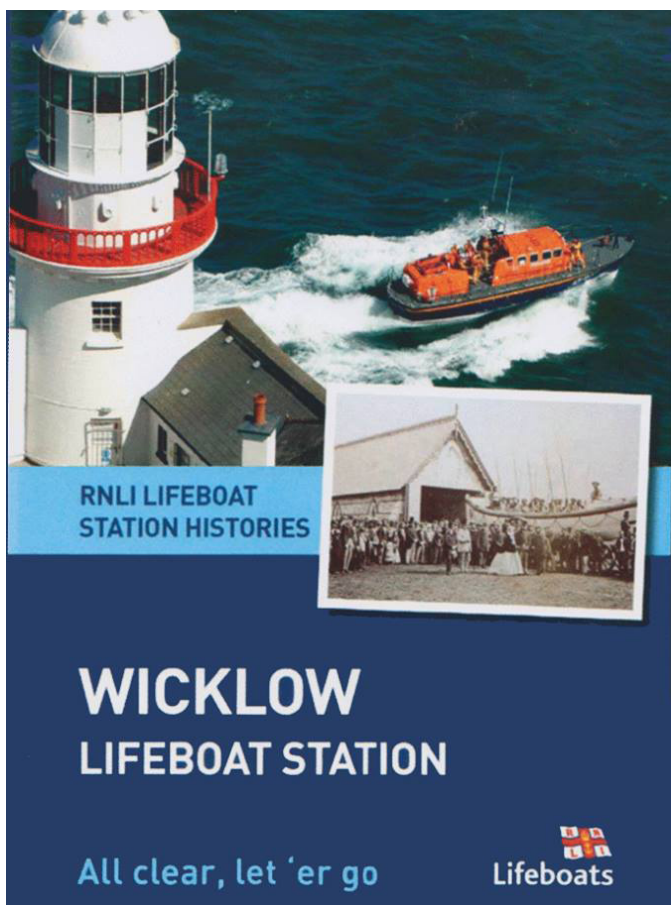
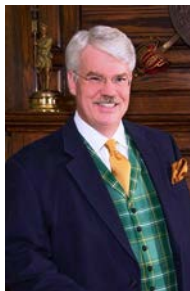
www.wicklowlifeboat.com

Bob Currie & the Pipes of Christmas

If you have ever attended or performed in the Pipes of Christmas, then you know that this "festival for the soul" is a true gift. The shows, which take place in New York City and New Jersey each December, are a marvel for both first-time attendees and for those that make the concerts an annual holiday tradition.

Now in its 17th year, the production was founded by Bob Currie, president of Clan Currie. Rather than boast about the tireless efforts he puts in each successful season, Currie instead expresses gratitude to his dedicated creative team, musicians, composers, event sponsors, and ticket buyers.

Attendees aren't the only benefactors. Currie shares that proceeds from the musical extravaganzas "help spread gifts year round. We are fortunate to bestow a number of international mu-





sic and history scholarships at many leading institutions, including the Gaelic College in Nova Scotia, the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland in Glasgow, the National Piping Centre in Glasgow, Edinburgh Napier University in Edinburgh, Sabhal Mòr Ostaig on the Isle of Skye, and Lyon College in Arkansas.”

Proceeds also go to support Celtic cultural events, including the Ceòlas Arts Festival and the US National Scottish Harp Championship. As well, Currie and his team donate Pipes of Christmas tickets to non-profits for their fundraising activities - something they have done for over 20 organizations to date.

More recently, they have been hosting food drives at the event. “Last year alone, we collected just under 400 pounds of non-perishable food that we brought to the Community Food Bank of New Jersey to help the less fortunate.”

www.pipesofchristmas.com

Kenny Zakem & Santa's Angels

Every child, and child-at-heart, dreams of meeting Santa Claus at Christmas time. For youngsters in and around Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island that dream has become a reality of humanitarian proportions in recent years.

Each Christmas Day, a volunteer organization called Santa's Angels delivers gifts and food to people experiencing tough times. Sometimes the recipient families put in a formal request. Other times, they are nominated and completely surprised to see Santa and his elves at their front door.

In its first year, over a decade ago, a small group - Kenny Zakem, Don Wright, Father Stephen Allen and Allen's son Josh - made the December 25th deliveries. Today Santa's Angels engages over 100 volunteers.

“It all began with Don Wright, whom I met at the Upper Room Soup Kitchen while I was doing some volunteer work there,” recalls Zakem. “He had a big white beard, and I asked him if he would like to play Santa. Luckily he said yes. We now have eight Santas!”

Santa's Angels takes up most of Zakem's time, and not just during the holiday months. He and the organizing committee have fundraisers, toy and food drives, and seek out donations all year round. “We just get the word out to the community and it is amazing how generous people are year after year.”

Nothing can beat the delight Zakem senses among the recipients and volunteers. “We let the spirit of Christmas touch the hearts and souls of people. When I see a volunteer come back from a house with tears of joy in their eyes, sharing their story, it means I have done my job.”

Zakem ponders the expression ‘you can only keep what you have when you give it away.’ “The saying it is better to give than receive would explain this one, the feeling you get when you give is always going to be special to you and you will remember that feeling more than anything. When you give, you make someone happy and I think it's a great feeling and I'm guessing most people feel the same.”

www.santasangels.ca



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Belfast's Black Santa

As Celtic Life International correspondent Eimear O'Callaghan explains, a long-standing holiday tradition in Belfast brings out the best in two communities

The clergyman unwinds a purple, green, grey and blue scarf — knitted for him by a 93-year-old resident of a Belfast nursing home — and wraps it three times around his neck. Behind the bronze West Door of Belfast's cavernous, pillared St Anne's Cathedral, he dons a long, black, hooded cloak, fastened at the neck by two brass clasps.

Dean John Mann is demonstrating how he'll ward off rain, hail, sleet and snow while begging for charity on the Cathedral steps, from December 17 until nightfall on Christmas Eve.

"The cloak is for wearing at gravesides, so it's fairly wind-proof," the 60-year-old Dean explains. "I'll wear multiple layers

— the black cassock that's used for all church services and extra layers of underwear, plus a black hat and gloves. Florence's scarf, too - but not for sentimental reasons. It stops raindrops running down my back."

Four Christmas sit-outs as Belfast's 'Black Santa' have taught the genial Londoner that he'll need all the protection he can get maintaining a tradition started by Dean Samuel Crooks in 1976. More than 300 people were killed that year, the second most violent period of the Northern Ireland Troubles. Inflation stood at fifteen per cent.

"If ever there was a time not to appeal for money for renova-



tions,” Dean Mann suggests, “that was it.”

But the unprecedented sight of a lone clergyman, defying winter’s ravages to collect for his beloved cathedral, stirred the consciences of Christmas shoppers and revelers. They responded magnificently, setting parcels and umbrellas aside, fumbling with numb, wet fingers to find money and drop it into a plastic bucket. Against all odds, the renovation costs were covered.

To acknowledge Belfast’s generosity and raise funds for local charities, Dean Crooks — in his distinctive black garb and woollen balaclava — repeated his sit-out annually until he retired in 1985. While violence convulsed the city, the solitary, hunched figure sat placidly at the Cathedral steps, pleading “Save the children, feed the hungry, heal the sick.” The public took the iconic cleric to their hearts, fondly dubbing him ‘Black Santa’.

Thirty-nine years after the first vigil, peace has transformed the violence-scarred area around St Anne’s into Belfast’s vibrant, fashionable Cathedral Quarter. A heavy oak whiskey barrel from the world-famous Bushmills Distillery has replaced the plastic bucket. The Black Santa sit-out is as synonymous with a Belfast Christmas as the bratwurst, gluhwein, lights and festive jumpers in the yuletide market at City Hall.

Belfast has contributed millions of pounds to the Black Santa Appeal. Eighty-five per cent goes back into the community, while the remainder supports Christian Aid.

For initiatives like the L’Arche community’s Green Buds project, a grant of a few hundred pounds can cover half the annual budget. In lush, tranquil countryside, only twenty minutes beyond Belfast, the scheme brings together people with learning disabilities and those who support them, to produce vegetables and fruit.

The cawing of rooks, circling above the hillside allotments, is the only sound disturbing the silence on a recent sunny autumn morning. Four red hens, re-housed from a rescue centre, peck contentedly in their coop, tended lovingly by a young man with autism.

The manager, Indiana-born Scott Shively, strides between rows of kale, chard and wilting, end-of-season sunflowers, and points towards the misty horizon.

“When it’s clear, you can see Scotland. That’s Strangford Lough down there. The guys just love the peace and quiet and open space.”

Inside a cluttered wooden shed, where workers seek time

alone, Scott offers me a coffee made possible by Black Santa funding. A row of waterproof jackets hanging on metal hooks are also thanks to Black Santa.

“One year we got £400, another year £800. For some, that’s not much but for us it’s huge. It pays for seeds and pest control.”

The Appeal accepts donations all year round but attaches great significance to the physical act of placing cash in the wooden barrel. Adults who visited Black Santa as youngsters return with their children, introducing them to the idea of charitable giving.

“They’ll set 20 pence aside from their weekly pocket money and just before Christmas they’ll bring it to Black Santa,” continues Scott. “Watching children emptying their piggy banks, encouraged by parents who’ve done likewise, is always touching. It signifies something deeper than the coins trickling through their fingers.”

The Dean relishes the opportunity that the sit-out provides for reflecting on “community, charity, Christmas and consumerism” and engaging with people he wouldn’t otherwise meet.

“People tell me, ‘I’m giving £50 because that’s what I usually spend on Christmas cards. I’m sending emails this year instead.’ My wife, Helen, and I send lots of cards, so gestures like that challenge me personally,” he concedes. “They make me think.”

“Every year, the Appeal touches certain people in a particular way and they’ll drop thick envelopes containing hundreds of pounds into the barrel. Almost always, they’ll do it without a word. They just drop them in and walk off.”

School choirs and carol singers fill the air with festive music. Despite the chill, shoppers linger for a chat, raising personal or social issues. “Occasionally, somebody asks a heavy theological question. It’s handy to have a bishop nearby to deal with that,” he jokes.

The eight-day sit-out is not for the faint-hearted. Dean Crooks staged a lone vigil but since Dean Jack Shearer’s tenure, other clerics have taken turns accompanying Black Santa.

Retired Canon Douglas Goddard admits that if he’d received the slightest encouragement in 2010 from the third Black Santa, Dean Houston McKelvey, he’d have abandoned the sit-out “in a flash”.

That December was the coldest on record for Northern Ireland, with an average temperature of -0.6 Celsius. Snow and ice





disrupted transport and schools. Home heating oil froze.

“Even at the best of times, a bitter wind blows through Donegall Street, wallops the Cathedral and ends up at your back. But 2010 will never be forgotten,” says Goddard.

“The longest we could bear to stay outside was thirty minutes. We’d go inside to thaw, then come out again and find ourselves back at square one.”

Canon Goddard insists, however, that Belfast’s extraordinary generosity means the tradition is destined to flourish. He recalls being summoned to meet a frail, elderly woman at the West Door. After helping her down the steps into a waiting taxi, he discovered that an envelope she’d left contained £2,000. “That woman didn’t look like she could afford it. What generosity.”

Stories abound of incredible selflessness by people of all backgrounds and faiths. The ‘Pennies from Heaven’ project at Fleming Fulton School has raised thousands of pounds by collecting coins in Coca-Cola bottles. Its pupils, who cope with physical disabilities, travel by minibus to deliver their contributions each December.

The late Dean Shearer related how a man once left a plastic bag silently beside him. It contained £30,000 in bank notes and a message stating it was a dying man’s instruction that Black Santa should receive it. The Dean maintained, however, that his greatest ever donation was a £5 note handed over by an unemployed man and his sons.

Séamas Ó Donnghaile, the headteacher at a small, Irish-language primary

school in nationalist north Belfast, asserts that the Appeal is proof that “people with very little always have enough to share.”

His 85-pupil Bunscoil Mhic Reachtain is situated in a busy side street in Northern Ireland’s third poorest neighbourhood, close to a maze of motorways and overpasses. It occupies what was originally a “ragged, industrial school,” built in 1908 so that “necessitous children would be gratuitously fed”.

Watched by a dozen helmeted youngsters who are practicing their hurling skills, Séamas borrows a hurl and slams a sliotar against the playground’s red-brick wall.

“Revival of Irish language and culture is my heart, breath and thinking,” he declares, “but it’s second always to community revival.

“I want to instill Black Santa’s example in the mindsets of the children we are preparing to be tomorrow’s leaders. What he does reminds us to look beyond the ends of our noses. It’s about reaching out to people less fortunate than ourselves.”

Before the school closes for Christmas, the children will brave the cold and “skip” the 500 meters to St Anne’s, laden with money they’ve collected. Last year, they brought their tin-whistles and played tra-



ditional Irish tunes inside the Cathedral. Dean Mann, an accomplished violinist, joined in.

“Just because the Cathedral isn’t a Catholic church, doesn’t mean we can’t support and be proud of the great work it’s doing,” Séamas remarks. “The children love the notion of helping others. They’re confident they’re doing something good.”

Back on the allotments, as a fellow gardener drops off a bale of straw for the hens, Scott looks forward to ‘Good Samaritan Sunday’ in February when the empha-



sis switches from givers to receivers.

Representatives of 200 organizations who’ve applied successfully for help will file into the Cathedral — under carved stonework depicting the triumph of peace and righteousness — and receive Black Santa cheques for up to £1,000.



“Despite the post-Christmas gloom, it’s always amazing,” Scott smiles. “You get a great sense of how the community supports the Appeal. It’s a reminder that we’re not alone — and that’s a great feeling.”

Next year, 40 years will have passed since “an extraordinary man with a particular set of circumstances” urged the people of Belfast to “save the children, feed the hungry, heal the sick.” While violence and division have dominated the city’s news since then, Belfast has been unstinting in its support for Black Santa.

“This Appeal is from the community, for the community,” Dean Mann explains.

“It’s about a city that’s been painted in a negative light for too long. Despite the bad times they endured, people worked hard to maintain the community spirit that Belfast’s so good at. Black Santa feeds into that.”





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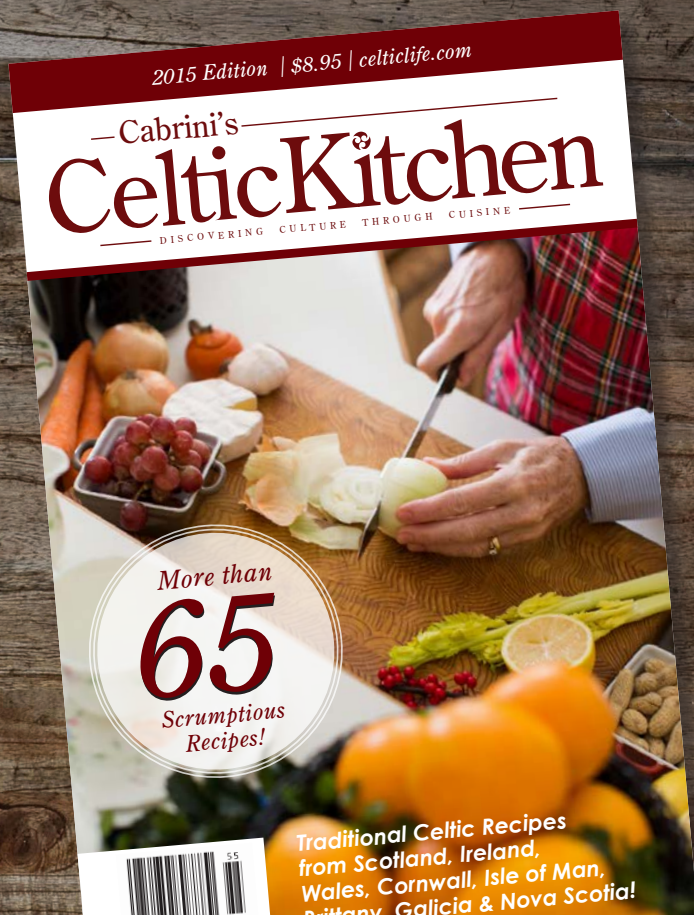
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Christmas Memories



Christmas was a time of letters in our household. The children wrote Santa with all their wishes and Santa returned the favor with a letter in each of their stockings on Christmas night. Each December, he expressed dismay at their wrongdoings and delight with their successes.

It was truly a time for sainthood and self-aggrandizement. It was always interesting to note each child's interpretation of their good deeds through the previous 12 months. There was never anything to disappoint Santa.

One year, a letter from our eldest child, Hector, had not been posted to Santa. He found it on Christmas Eve, lying behind a chair, after the post office had closed. He was very upset that Santa had not received his letter, and that he might not receive his special gift. The family and the letter

all went out to the back yard and we lit it on fire as he bore witness to the act. We all watched as the smoke wafted up to the sky and assured him that Santa had special talents that enabled him to read messages from children, no matter the form they took. The smoke signal was successful and Santa arrived on cue with the gift.

Another year a letter had to be posted after Christmas. It was from our youngest child, Meaghan, who was totally obsessed with Smarties. She loved the bright colors, the sweet candy on the outside with the chocolate centers. She did not want anything else for Christmas, except a large can of Smarties. Santa brought her a doll carriage and once she discovered her toy, she was very disappointed. She sat right down and wrote Santa a letter that he "sucked" at his job and from now on she would get Mom and Dad to buy her gifts.

I asked our eldest daughter Alison what she remembered from the Christmases of her childhood. She recalled that we always had CBC Radio broadcasting Santa's route and she would get very excited as he would near Nova Scotia. She was in that sleigh with him dropping presents to all the little boys and girls all over the world.

Our middle daughter Sheena remembered that each Christmas Eve, the children were allowed to open one gift and the rest would be opened on Christmas morning. She loved picking the one that had piqued her curiosity as it had no tell-tale rattle and the weight was innocuous.

Memories, fun to look back on with quiet delight, Merry Christmas to all and to all a good night... Cabrini



Traditional Christmas Turkey

INGREDIENTS

Turkey

10 lb (4.5 kg) turkey
Olive oil
salt and pepper

Herbed Stuffing

3/4 cup (175 mL) butter
2-1/2 cups (625 mL) chopped onions
1 cup (250 mL) chopped celery
4 tsp (18 mL) dried sage
1 tsp (5 mL) salt
1 tsp (5 mL) marjoram
1 tsp (5 mL) pepper
1/2 tsp (2 mL) dried thyme
14 cups (3.3 L) cubed white bread
1 cup (250 mL) chopped fresh parsley

Stock

4-1/2 cups (1.125 L) chicken stock
1-1/2 cups (375 mL) dry white wine or water, (approx.)
1 onion, chopped
1/2 cup (125 mL) sliced carrot
1/2 cup (125 mL) sliced celery

Gravy

1/4 cup (60 mL) all-purpose flour
2 tbsp (30 mL) butter
1/2 tsp (2 mL) salt
1/2 tsp (2 mL) pepper

INSTRUCTIONS

Remove giblets and neck from turkey; place in large saucepan and set aside. Rinse turkey inside and out; dry skin and cavity well. Loosely fill body cavity with stuffing; tuck legs under band of skin or tie together with string. Tuck wings underneath if desired. Place turkey, breast side up, on rack on roasting pan. Rub all over with

olive oil. Sprinkle with salt and pepper. Tent with foil, dull sides out, leaving sides open. Roast in 325°F (160°C) oven for about 3 hours. Let stand on platter, lightly covered, for 20 minutes before carving.

Herbed Stuffing:

In large skillet, melt butter over medium heat; fry onions, celery, sage, salt, savory, marjoram, pepper and thyme, stirring often, until vegetables are tender (10 to 15 minutes). Transfer to large bowl. Add bread and parsley; toss to combine.

Set aside.

Stock:

Meanwhile to saucepan with turkey parts, add stock, wine, onion, carrot and celery; bring to boil. Reduce heat to low and skim off fat; simmer for 3 hours. Strain into measuring cup, adding enough wine to make 3 cups (750 mL); set aside.

Gravy:

Skim off fat in roasting pan. Stir flour into pan; cook over medium heat, stirring, for 1 minute. Whisk in stock and bring to boil, stirring to scrape up brown bits; reduce heat and simmer for minutes. Whisk in butter, salt and pepper. Strain if desired.

With carving knife and fork, cut legs from turkey, twisting loose if necessary. Cut thigh from drumstick at joint; carve dark meat from each piece. Cut off wings.

With tip of knife toward body cavity, carve breast thinly, gradually angling knife to slice thick part of breast.



Maple Glazed Carrots

Braising carrots slowly in butter, rather than steaming or boiling them, brings out their natural sweetness. Maple syrup adds a delicate glaze and a rich flavor.

INGREDIENTS

12 large carrots, peeled
8 tbsp. butter
1/4 cup maple syrup
Fresh lemon juice
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
1 tbsp. fresh thyme leaves

INSTRUCTIONS

Cut carrots into 2" lengths, then halve or quarter the pieces lengthwise so that all the carrots are in equal-size strips. Melt butter in a large heavy sauté pan over medium-low heat. Add carrots, cover, and braise, stirring occasionally, until carrots are fork-tender (20–30 minutes). Increase heat to medium, and stir in syrup and a squeeze of lemon juice. Cook for 2 minutes, then season to taste with salt and pepper. Add thyme and mix well. Serves 8



Shortbread Cookies

INGREDIENTS

1 pound salted butter
1 cup light brown sugar
4 cups all-purpose flour

INSTRUCTIONS

Soften butter. Beat in brown sugar. Mix in flour 1 cup at a time. Dough will resemble pie crust dough. Press dough together into a ball. Roll out between two sheets of waxed paper to slightly less than one-half inch thick. Bake at 350° F, 7 minutes on the bottom rack and 7 minutes on the top rack. Cookie tops should feel dry when done. Let cool completely and then frost with butter frosting that has been flavored with almond extract. Top with a nut or part of a green or red cherry.



Baking Powder Biscuits

INGREDIENTS

2 cups flour
4 teaspoons baking powder
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/2 cup shortening
3/4 to 1 cup milk

INSTRUCTIONS

Heat oven to 450°F. Combine flour, baking powder and salt in large bowl; mix well. With pastry blender or fork, cut in shortening until mixture resembles coarse crumbs. Stirring with fork, add enough milk until mixture leaves sides of bowl and forms a soft, moist dough. Toss dough lightly on floured surface until no longer sticky. Roll or press dough to 1/2-inch thickness. Cut with floured 2-inch round cutter. Place on ungreased cookie sheet. Bake 8 to 12 minutes or until light golden brown. Serve warm.



Cranachan

Cranachan can contain charms with special significance that are folded into the mixture. You might find a ring for marriage, a button for bachelorhood, a thimble for spinsterhood, coins for wealth, and horseshoes for luck. The flavor

combination of lightly toasted oatmeal, cream, sugar, and whisky is very traditional.

INGREDIENTS

1 pint cream
3 tbsp. clear honey
4 tbsp. whisky
4 tbsp. thick plain yogurt
6 oz. fine oatmeal
6 oz. raspberries

INSTRUCTIONS

Toast the oatmeal in a pan under the broiler until golden. Set aside to cool. Put the cream, honey, and whisky in a bowl and whip together until it forms peaks. Fold in the yogurt. Spoon the mixture into a serving dish and chill in the refrigerator for 2-3 hours. Before serving, sprinkle the oatmeal over the mixture and pile the raspberries in the center. Serves 6



Fresh Cranberry Sauce

INGREDIENTS

1 cup (250 mL) sugar
1 cup (250 mL) water
1 12-ounce pack (340 g) Ocean Spray® fresh or frozen cranberries, rinsed and drained

INSTRUCTIONS

Combine water and sugar in a medium saucepan. Bring to boil; add cranberries, return to boil. Reduce heat and boil gently for 10 minutes, stirring occasionally. Cover and cool completely at room temperature. Refrigerate until serving time.



Garlic Mashed Potatoes

INGREDIENTS

1 head of garlic
1 tbsp. olive oil
2 pounds potatoes
salt
1/3 cup cream
3 tbsp. butter

INSTRUCTIONS

Preheat the oven to 400°F. Peel 10 cloves of garlic and lay on bake pan drizzled with garlic oil. Wrap lightly in aluminum foil. Bake for 30 to 40 minutes, or until the cloves feel soft to the touch and are beginning to brown. Remove from the oven and let cool.

While the garlic is roasting, peel and chop the potatoes into 1-inch chunks. Place potatoes in a medium saucepan, add 1/2 teaspoon salt, cover with cold water. Bring the pot to a boil, reduce to a simmer, and simmer your potatoes until tender when pierced with a fork, about 15 minutes. Warm the cream and melt the butter together, either in a small pan on the stovetop or in a bowl in the microwave. Drain the pot with the potatoes and put it back on the stovetop over low heat. Put the drained potatoes back in the pot. Squeeze the roasted garlic into the potatoes and begin mashing with a potato masher or a large fork. Add the cream and butter and mash until the potatoes are the consistency you prefer. Taste for salt and add some if needed.

Cook time: 40 minutes
Serves 4-6



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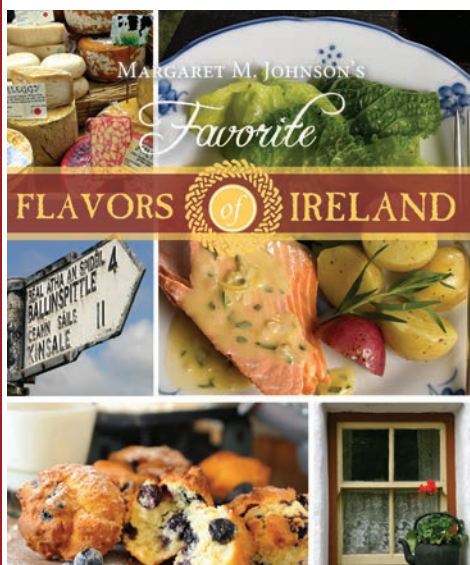


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The Haggis

Stahly Haggis

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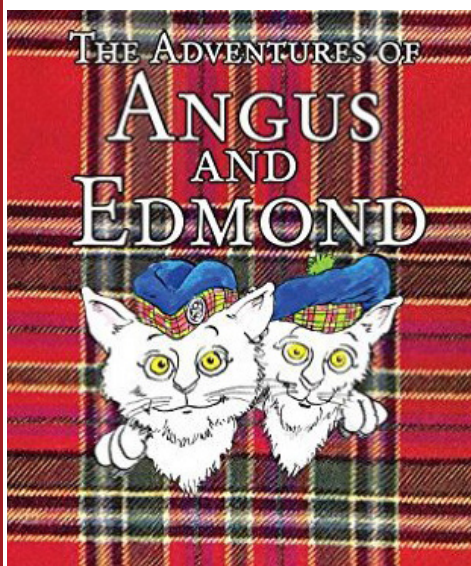




Iona Special Edition Charm Bracelet **Aosdàna**

The ultimate gift for someone who loves Scottish jewellery, this bracelet comprises a collection of twelve Iona charms, each with their own special meaning, and a wee piece of Iona marble. Known locally as Mermaid's Tears, Iona marble has for centuries been believed to have restorative and healing properties. The charm designs, originally created on the island at the turn of the last century, range from the beautiful simplicity of the Trinity Knot to the historic Iona Galleys and include zoomorphic and cross designs inspired by the Book of Kells. This bracelet is a timeless piece of jewellery to treasure and pass on. The charms are sterling silver, hallmarked with the Scottish Assay mark, and the marble has been collected from St. Columba's Bay, on the west side of Iona.

www.aosdanaiona.com/items/special-edition-charm-bracelet



The Adventures of Angus and Edmond **Gunna Dickson & Jon McIntosh**

The Adventures of Angus and Edmond, by Gunna Dickson, with illustrations by Jon McIntosh, is the story of two white Angora littermates, adopted from the New York City Humane Society, who learn of a Scottish connection and set out to find their roots. They are computer-savvy, fashion-conscious, talking cats who employ an aspect of time travel to accomplish their goals, visiting locales such as Paris, London, Edinburgh, the Highlands and St. Andrews in Scotland.

www.virtualbookworm.com



Stonewashed Embossed Hoodies **Celtic Fashions**

Wear your inner Celt this holiday season with Celtic Fashions' signature line of unique Stonewashed Embossed Hooded Sweatshirts. These 50/50 Heavyweight Hoodies are first embossed, which fuses the design with heat and pressure to a fabric backing, and then washed in a potassium solution that antiques and softens the fabric. The hoodies are ultra soft and warm, yet durable, and the image will last the life of the garment. Each symbol is offered in one color: Circle of Life in Brown-Gold, Tree of Life in Green-Gold, Scotland Lion in Royal Blue, Triskel in Purple, and Trinity Knot in Charcoal. Available sizes are unisex standard, S - 3XL.

www.celticfashions.com

Celtic Love Knot

Blue Frogs Company

Show your eternal love this holiday season with this TK-02 Heart and Trifecta Carving! Love knots have evolved over the years but their beauty and universal appeal remains timeless. Their intricate and interwoven patterns create endless paths which have no beginning or end. The love knot symbolizes the never-ending cycle of life in love, friendship, faith and loyalty. Beautifully handcrafted one at a time from mahogany, each wood carving starts from an original drawing. Every step of the carving and finishing process is performed by hand allowing for exquisite craftsmanship, quality and detail in every piece. Whether you're looking for a unique way to celebrate your heritage or you're trying to find that perfect gift for your loved one, this is a work of art to be treasured for generations.

www.bluefrogscompany.com



Tartan Collar

Caledonian Canine

A tartan collar tells everyone that your favourite canine is a proud member of your family clan. This holiday season, give the best gift that man's best friend can bark for. These tartan collars feature the sett on the bias to show off the colors and the pattern more vibrantly. The lightweight wool fabric is the actual sett size of your tartan, reinforced with interfacing, and wrapped around durable polypropylene webbing for strength and durability. There are currently over 20 tartans to choose from, with new options added weekly. Custom orders are available as well.

www.caledoniancanine.com



Celtic Pendant Knot

Echoes of Erin

Nothing equals the enchantment or the intricacy of Celtic artwork. Echoes of Erin is a jewelry design and manufacturing company that sisters Connie Hatt and Vicki Haddon began in 2003. The company is located in New Brunswick, Canada's scenic Passamaquoddy Bay. New Brunswick received large numbers of Irish immigrants in the 1700 and 1800s and one of the original suggestions for the province's name was New Ireland. This particular knot is etched in copper, treated with a patina to preserve the warm chestnut tones, combined with brushed silver and finished with a gold accent strip. The continual looping of knot designs suggests themes of eternity and interconnectedness. Knots may have also been created to confuse evil spirits in much the same manner as the Native American dream-catcher. Entirely handcrafted, the knot is a timeless gift to treasure for years to come.

www.echoesoferin.com



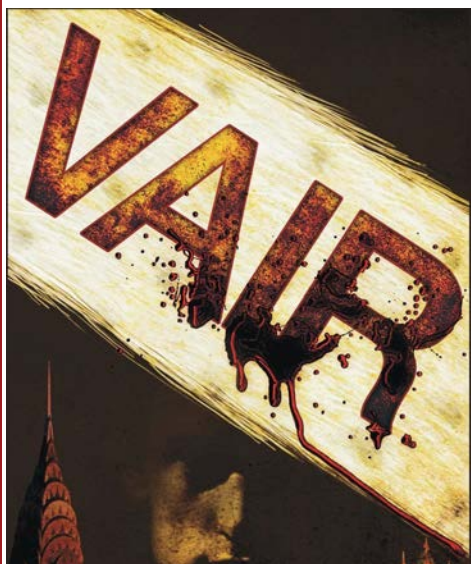


Easter Rising Centennial Tile

Wild Rose Pottery

In celebration of the 100th Anniversary of Ireland's independence, Wild Rose Pottery has introduced a special tile commemorating one of the key events in modern Irish history, the Easter Rising of 1916. The tiles are inspired by ancient Celtic designs, and their evolution into decorative wall tiles is the unique creation of Barry and Maureen Payne. The tile itself is made from stoneware clay. They are then painted with two coats of coloured glaze and a top coat of clear glaze. The careful choice of clay and glazes and the firing technique combine to give the beautiful rich colouring and the subtle crazing reminiscent of ancient pottery.

www.celticarttiles.com



VAIR

Stewart Dickson

Fact blurs with fiction as a trail of brutal murders using 16th Century weapons follows the modern-day U.S. visit of a British royal. Blood and intrigue commingle and the FBI and Vatican join forces on a wild ride across New York, Chicago, Palm Beach, Bahamas, Washington, D.C., London and Rome. Is the killer a madman or a human vehicle possessed by the spirit of one of history's most terrible tyrants? Vair is descriptive, fast-paced and informative with diverse characters including a jaded FBI agent, a wealthy blond actress, a Sicilian priest, an English herald and a beautiful Cuban special agent. As the FBI is trying to catch the killer, the clerics want to convert him, while the British hold the key to his identity.

www.vairbook.com



"A Celtic Mother's Love"

Birthstone Trinity Charm Bangle

Ashling Aine

To celebrate the unique and special bond between a mother and her children, Ashling Aine has created "A Celtic Mother's Love" Birthstone Trinity Charm Bangle. Customize your piece with as many beautiful and brilliant 6mm Austrian Swarovski crystal birthstones as you wish, including amethyst, crystal, emerald, rose, sapphire, topaz, and more. This lovely mother and child pendant is made from 316L stainless steel for lifetime wear, measures 14mm (5/8") wide by 1" tall from bail to bottom, is fully adjustable, comes in three sizes from child to adult, is made proudly in the USA, and comes in a protective package. Free shipping to the USA.

www.goo.gl/Ki0ZPT

Mo Chroí Pendant

Barry Doyle Design

For many, the holiday season is a time of love and romance, and of great memories celebrated through the lifetime gift of jewelry. For these special bonds, Irish silversmith Barry Doyle has created the exquisite Mo Chroí Pendant. Mo Chroí is an Irish Language term of endearment for a loved one - my darling, or my love. The striking contrast between the etched 22 carat gold and the high polished silver allows the interlocking hearts to shine. Designed and handcrafted in Dublin, this stunning ornament is sterling silver hallmarked, with a 22 carat gold vermeil heart, set with 5mm round faceted natural peridot gemstone, and comes in a stylish gift box - a perfect gift for a loved one at Christmas, or anytime of the year.

www.barrydoyledesign.com



Deluxe Celtic Journal

O'Brien Celtic Gifts

Get inspired with this Deluxe Celtic Journal. This 'open flat' wire bound edition, with miniature Celtic-Irish images throughout, is supplied in a deluxe 'soft feel' wallet. Other deluxe journals that are case-bound in 'soft feel' Monaco covers include Claddagh, Green Celtic, and Glenogueplus Celtic Eco editions. Also available are quality Celtic notebooks, address books, pocket books, and more. All can be personalized with names on the cover. Other great gift ideas include the 1916 Irish Proclamation, embossed ancient maps of Ireland on textured paper, embossed 1847 Irish Emigrant trail map, exquisite reproductions of Book of Kells, and the Ireland Remembered Art Collection - 30 Irish paintings and etchings from our archives. All items are designed and finished at O'Brien Celtic Gifts craft bindery in Dublin, Ireland.

www.obriencelticgifts.com



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www.celtictours.com





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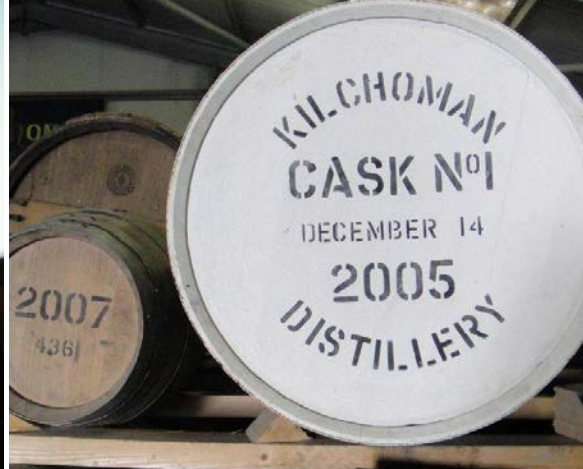
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Dram with Andrew Ferguson



The Quality of Kilchoman

On a cold, windy, rainy evening a few months ago, I made my way to a new maturation warehouse built on a low hill overlooking Loch Indaal. I was on the island of Islay for Feis Ile, the Islay Whisky Festival, considered by most to be the holiest of events in the whisky pilgrim's calendar. This year's event was extra special, as two of Scotland's most iconic distilleries, Lagavulin and Laphroaig, celebrated their 200th anniversaries. While these two industry giants were the focus of this year's gathering, they weren't the only distilleries marking a significant milestone. 2015 is also the 10th anniversary of the founding of Kilchoman - Islay's first new distillery in 124 years. So with the wind howling outside, and sheets of rain violently rolling across building rooftops, I made my way into a dunnage warehouse with 60 other whisky lovers for a very special tasting.

The tasting was a retrospective of Kilchoman's first decade, and what a ten years it has been for the fledgling firm. We sampled a cask from 2006, its first full year of production, along with other barrel samples from 2007, 2009 and a number from 2010. It was a rare opportunity to witness a whisky's evolution. The tasting was hosted by the distillery's founder and managing director, Anthony Wills, whose vision it was to build a small farm distillery, effectively taking Scotch whisky back to its roots. Many forget that most of Scotland's distilleries - even giants like Glenfiddich, Glenlivet and Macallan - all started out as farm distilleries.

In just a decade, the distillery has nurtured a cult-like following for its commitment to world-class quality. Founding a distillery, even a small-scale



farm distillery like Kilchoman, is no easy feat. Kilchoman's advisors knew the distillery couldn't wait 10 years to bottle their spirit, so it had to be as flawless as possible right from the start. As such, they would need top quality casks for maturation. To survive, Kilchoman would have to start selling its whisky at a young age, and it would have to be good. There was a lot of anticipation surrounding the release of the "Kilchoman Inaugural Release" in 2009. Interest in Scotch whisky was at a fever pitch, and Islay whiskies were hotter still. That first release did not disappoint, and neither have the subsequent editions.

Kilchoman is now entering its second decade with confidence, momentum, and a loyal following. The distillery is still turning heads with its young, very peaty Islay whiskies. Its success has encouraged other small-scale and farm distilleries to pop up all over Scotland - so many at this point, in fact, that it is easy to lose track.

For a time after its initial launch, Kilchoman mostly released periodic vintage expressions, but in 2012 the brand coalesced around a core of three whiskies. Kilchoman's production is small, and so is its footprint; you won't find these bottles in every liquor store, but no self-respecting whisky specialist would be caught dead without them. Do yourself the favour; grab one, and raise a glass to Kilchoman's first 10 years - and the next 190!

Kilchoman Machir Bay; The distillery's main expression is heavily peated, with intense smoky notes. Matured in a mix of ex-bourbon and Ex-Sherry casks, the expression is a good balance between fruity, malty and earthy notes. The whisky takes its name from the beautiful white sand beaches of Machir Bay.

Kilchoman Loch Gorm; Named for the peaty loch (lake) located a short distance from the distillery. This expression is matured in ex-sherry casks, which balance the whisky's big medicinal smoke with rich sherry notes of spices, dark fruits, leather, and chocolate.

Kilchoman 100% Islay 5th Edition; From barley to bottle, the 100% Islay is the only whisky in the range produced from estate grown barley, and then malted, distilled, matured and bottled on site. A more moderately peated expression of Kilchoman, 100% Islay is fresher with bright citrus and creamy oak!

www.fergusonwhisky tours.com





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For visitors with Welsh ancestry Dragon Tours offers a service to help you trace your family tree in Wales. Mike has helped numerous clients in this way and can even provide a genealogy tracing service prior to your arrival and can assist in your use of libraries, record offices and archives when you are here. We have helped many people find 'the old family home' and even long-lost relatives! We can plan your tour around places where your Welsh ancestors lived and/or combine a general tour of Wales with visits to places of family interest.

Dragon Tours also offers private tours of other regions of Great Britain and also Continental Europe. For more details please contact us:

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Marching through the Marches in search of fine wine



à la Cork

à la Cork
with Michael Davies

When the Roman legions abandoned Britain in 410 AD, the country was left wide open to invasion from northern Europe. Tribes, from what is now northern Germany and southern Denmark, swept into Britain and went to war with the native Celtic-Britons. These Anglo-Saxon invaders were ultimately to become the English. The native Britons were gradually pushed further and further westwards into the marginal mountainous regions of Britain.

Before England became one country there were various Anglo-Saxon kingdoms vying for superiority. The most powerful ruler in the mid-eighth century was King Offa of Mercia. His territories were in the midlands of England. Offa was responsible for one of the most ambitious building projects of the Dark Ages – the construction of an enormous earthwork wall and ditch along his western border with the native British. This ditch was to become known as Offa's Dyke and was to mark the border between two countries - England and Wales. This border region was fought over for many centuries and became known, in medieval times, as the March of Wales.

Many of my favourite places to buy and drink wine are in this beautiful part of Britain. East from my home in the Brecon Beacons area of mid-Wales, I cross Offa's Dyke near the famous literary town of Hay on Wye and enter the Golden Valley and the county of Herefordshire. This region was once the ancient Welsh Kingdom of Eryngand, and despite now being on the English side of the Dyke, it still has numerous villages and towns with recognisably Welsh names. The city of Hereford is a beautiful place with wonderful medieval streets and half-timbered buildings, my favourite of which is Tanners wine merchants. Tanners is one of the best small, independent merchants in the UK, and has been supplying the Marches with fine wines since 1842.

North, through Herefordshire and into the county of Shropshire, is another historic Marcher town – Ludlow, once the administrative capital of Wales and the Marches, where the Princes of Wales held court. Close to their castle today is Bent-

ley's Wine Merchants. The cross-border connections continue as the people who own this wonderful little shop are also one of the main suppliers of wine to a fantastic hotel and restaurant in Wales called Tyddyn Llanear Corwen, which recently won the Good Food Guide's best wine list in Britain award.

The capital of Shropshire is Shrewsbury. If ever you want to get a sense of what it was like to live in a medieval town (minus the stench, violence and disease) spend a night in the old part of Shrewsbury just over the bridge from the Abbey on the Wyle Cop.

At the heart of the Wyle Cop is Tanners Wines main shop and cellars, where visitors are welcome to observe the amazing spectacle of full cases of wine being dropped from the ground floor above the cellar to the cellarman some 25 feet below via a large wooden chute.

Tanners' Shrewsbury shop also has a tasting room with a wonderful new contraption that allows them to sell very fine wine by the glass while keeping it in perfect condition after opening. I was pleased to discover my favourite white wine was available this way; Andre Perret's Condrieu, Coteau du Chery. The only other place that I have seen Condrieu on sale by the glass was in Ampuis, in the heart of the Condrieu producing area of the northern Rhone Valley.

To return to the Welsh Marches, the town of Llangollen has become my home away from home in North Wales. This is largely due to the Gales family and their wonderful hotel/wine-bar/wine shop/restaurant 'Gales of Llangollen.' Opening a wine bar here in the 1970s was a bold move, but it has paid off; Gales is now a must-stop place for any wine lover making a journey to this area. The term "bon viveur" could have been invented for Richard Gale, who is the most genial of hosts. His knowledge of wine and wine makers is immense. Despite the small scale of his business, he stocks wines from some of the most famous producers in the world, including the legendary Chateau Musar from Lebanon, and Louis Roederer Champagne. His house port - of which every guest has a complementary taste from

decanter in their rooms - is an excellent offering from Ramos Pinto.

Richard's son Pip is now head of house and has an amazing palate. He was recently admitted to the prestigious and very exclusive Academie du Champagne. Every week he sets up wine flight tastings to match the excellent food served by Gales' kitchen team. This is a great and affordable way to sample a variety of wines in one sitting.

The best thing about small wine merchants like Tanners, Bentleys and Gales is that they mainly deal with small family producers and they know these producers personally – they visit their vineyards, taste wine and food with them, and form bonds that go beyond just business. Consumers benefit because all the wines they stock are tried, tested and vouched-for by the merchants. Therefore, for just a few pounds more than a discounted, mass-produced, generic offering from a supermarket, you can get great quality and taste from a local merchant with a great love for the product.

Mike recommends

Louis Roederer Brut Premier NV Champagne. A fantastic fizz from the same people who produce the Gangsta Rap favourite vintage Champagne – Cristal. £38 UK. Gales of Llangollen.

Condrieu, Coteau de Chery, Andre Perret 2011. £44 UK. Tanners Wines.

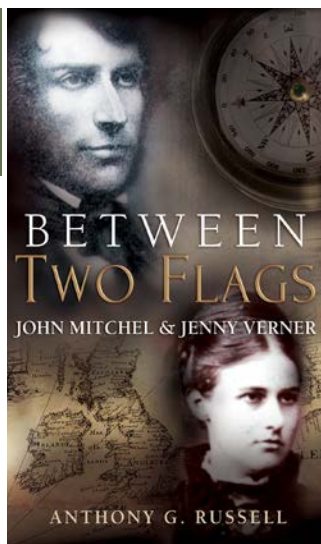
Rasteau 'Les Banquettes Escarpees' 2010. £14 UK. Bentleys, Ludlow.

Ramos Pinto 10 year old Tawny Quinta de Ervamoira. £25 UK. Gales of Llangollen.

Chateau Musar, 2007, Gaston Hochar, Lebanon. £24 UK. Gales of Llangollen.

Dr. Michael Davies is an author, historian and wine expert in Wales.
www.dragon-tours.com





Between Two Flags

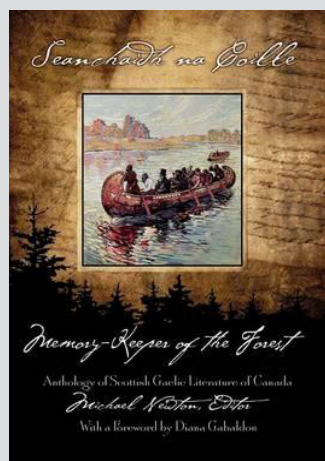
By Anthony G. Russell
Irish Academic Press /
296pp / \$39.95

Set upon the historical stages of the Great Famine, deportation, the US Civil War, Fenianism, and Homerule, this true-to-life love story of John Mitchell and Jenny Verner is both beautiful and bittersweet. Though divided by an ocean, the unlikely pair was united by ideologies, sharing a passion for politics. Like many couples, Mitchell was the dreamer, quick to oratory diatribes. By turns, Verner was pragmatic, helping to bring her partner's vision to life. The author does more than chronologize events here, however; by citing private correspondences, readers are privy to the private lives behind two very public figures, revealing a relationship beset by impossibilities, and filled with vulnerabilities. As such, these "lovers in a dangerous time" come to life, leaping from the pages, all-too human. ~ SPC

Seanchaidh na Coille

Edited by Michael Newton
CBU Press / 570pp / \$27.95

Complete with a forward from Outlander author Diana Gabaldon, this authoritative anthology of Scottish Gaelic literature in Canada leaves no phrase unturned. From coast-to-coast-to-coast, and spanning several generations, editor Michael Newton transcends academia in piecing together an engaging and entertaining exploration of the country's past, planting it firmly in the present. Along the way, a myriad of topics are examined in depth, including migration, militarism, tartanism, politics, language, literature and more. In particular, writings on the rise of religion in the new world are more than revealing and will be of interest to those of any creed and background. By book's end, what emerges is a glimpse into the mixed roots of the Canadian identity, with one voice clearly arising from a "multitude of solitudes." ~ SPC



Bruce, Meg and Me

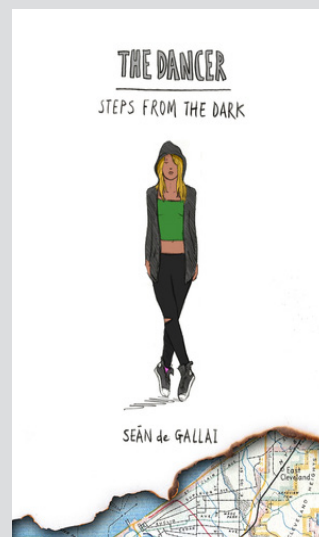
By Gregor Ewing
Louth Press / 192pp / £9.99

After the success of his first work Charlie, Meg and Me, Scottish history buff Gregor Ewing ups the ante with this sophomore effort. Over nine weeks, the author traveled 1,000 miles through the heart of his homeland, tracing the steps of Robert the Bruce. En route, the wizened scribe touches on times gone by, sifting through maps and legends in search of myth and lore. Kintyre, Ayr, Glasgow, Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Arran – each a signpost holding tidbits and clues to the events leading up to Bruce's finest hour as a military leader. More than a history lesson, however, Bruce, Meg and Me is a stirring and deeply personal account of one man's relationship to the past, his country's lush landscapes, and his trusted Border Collie sidekick. ~ SPC

The Dancer; Steps From the Dark

By Seán de Gallai
Independent / 258pp /
\$10.99

I gave this YA novel to my friend's 13 year-old daughter, who is an Irish dancer. Over cookies one afternoon, she gave me her review. "I like how Alex (15 year-old antagonist) is always, like, kind-of confused about her life and what she wants to do. Like, she's under a lot of pressure from her parents and stuff. And her relationships with her friends and her cousin, are like, so important to her. The parts about training and the competitions, were like, so realistic that I knew exactly what the writer (de Gallai) was talking about - even the parts about the parents. It's like he was right there y'know? Can I keep this book? I want everyone in my dance troupe to read it." ~ SPC





The Stanfields

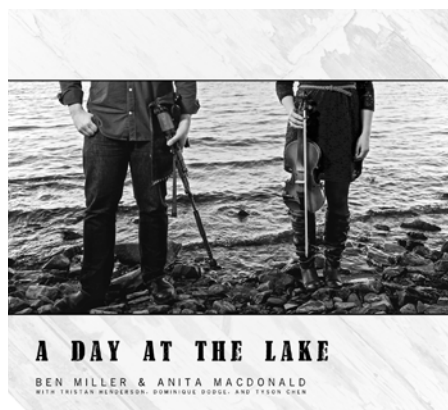
Modem Operandi

Two years removed from the subtleties of *For King and Country*, Nova Scotia's prodigal rockers The Stanfields return to their rollicking roots with the fire and brimstone of *Modem Operandi*. The opening track, *White Jaun*, booms like a cannon. The *Marystown Expedition* follows - a dark, dense and epic adventure. The first single, *Fight Song*, is catchy without being kitschy. Both *Sunday Warships* and *Lady Argyle* are a wall of gritty guitars, while *Mainline* and *Streets of Gold* showcase the quintet's steady growth as songwriters and arrangers. The sonic chaos of *Will the Circuit Be Unbroken* calls on the raw, ragged glory of 80's-era The Replacements. Clocking in at just over 30 minutes, the eight tracks leave you little time to come up for air. ~ SPC

Alyth McCormack

Homelands

At the other end of the musical spectrum, though no less stirring, is *Homelands* – a strong sophomore solo effort from Scottish singer/actress Alyth McCormack. Accompanied mostly by supple piano, McCormack's light lilt washes over listeners like gentle waves on *Thig am bata*, *A Mhàiri Bhòidheach* and *Chaidh Mo Dhonnachadh Donn Bhein*. Traditional Irish tunes *Carrickfergus* and *Raglan Road* are sparse also, allowing the melodies to breath with the spaces between the notes. The real treat here is *Buachaill Ón Éirne*, where the vocalist - accompanied by fiddle – reaches out a little more. While comparisons to Enya, Moya Brennan and Mary Jane Lamond are obvious and inevitable, the Isle of Lewis-born McCormack brings her own distinct voice and vibe to this warm and wonderful recording. ~ SPC



Ben Miller and Anita MacDonald

A Day at the Lake

Recorded at the Buck Mountain Lodge along the shores of gorgeous Lake George in upstate New York, *A Day at the Lake* brings the best of Scottish Border pipes and Cape Breton fiddle to the table for ten terrific tracks of old-school reels and jigs. *Yestreen*, *Hats Off to Jerry*, and *Auld Reekie* will have listeners' feet-a-stompin' and knees-a-slappin', while *O Cha Teid*, *Cha Teid Meise*, and both Ben's Solo and Anita's Solo, are tender touches of trad. At recording's end, *Southwest of Shinness* and *An t-Alltan Dubh* bridge the historical waters between old and new Scotland, connecting the Celtic dots with guitars, piano, bouzouki and harp. Playful, poignant and passionate all at once, here's hoping that Miller and MacDonald keep making beautiful music together. ~ SPC

Plantec

Kontakt

Bretagne's eccentric and experimental trio is back on the rack with *Kontakt*: 13 classic/contemporary tracks that both re-enforce and redefine the Celtic music genre. Unique instrumentation and melodies push the songs and sounds close to the avant-garde, new-age edge here, though given the glut of custom in today's musical marketplace, it is a welcome foray. Synthesizers and programmed percussion afford the band new opportunities to stretch out sonically on *Tenner*, *Nerzh* and *Kihaus Woods*. The faint echo of France's Arabic influence sits subtly below the surface on both *Speedwell* and *Den + Feulz*. While admittedly not for everyone's ears - particularly those with a penchant for the tried and true tunes of tradition - this is still a solid soundtrack for today's ever-evolving cross-Celtic culture. ~ SPC



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Witold Konopka

Down through the centuries the pipes have summoned many a man, to the home of a neighbour, to the churchyard or to the battle fields of Falkirk, Bannockburn and Culloden. While the days of hand-to-hand combat have long since passed, the pipes still have a compelling call, as one young Polish man can attest.

Witold Konopka, 28, was raised in the beautiful medieval city of Toruń, in the north of Poland. Like all Polish children he had a few rudimentary music lessons in primary school, but neither he, nor anyone in his family, ever learned to play an instrument.

Scotland was a distant country to the west about which he knew nothing and had no interest – until he “accidentally” watched the Academy Award-winning 1995 movie, *Braveheart* a few years ago.

The story of the legendary Scottish patriot William Wallace, who defeated the English forces at the Battle of Stirling Bridge in 1297 but was later captured and executed for high treason, completely captivated Konopka.

“To be honest, Scottish culture is not very popular in Poland so I had no clue about bagpipes,” he concedes. “Watching *Braveheart*, I fell in love with the soundtrack and the scenery. Since that day, I learned a lot about Celtic culture and bagpipe music.”

Increasingly entranced by the music, he made his way to Scotland in 2013.

“During the trip we visited many Scottish cities and interesting places. We saw some Scottish cultural performances, including live concerts by Scottish bagpipers. After seeing the Great Highland Bagpipes being played, I knew I wanted to be a part of it and I decided I would practice by myself.”

It was in the historic town of Stirling, in a small tribute to *Braveheart*, that Konopka purchased his first chanter.

“At that time I knew nothing about bagpipes and I bought a poor quality

chanter and unfortunately, I didn’t know that.”

Poor quality or not, he persevered and made the acquaintance of several pipers in Poland, who happily taught him the basics. He also joined an Irish dance group. Six months ago, he bought his first set of bagpipes.

“I find the pipes exciting, challenging and yet, relaxing. Every minute I spend with my practice chanter and bagpipes is a precious experience and an escape from daily life.”

As a student of piping instructor Lindsay Davidson, Konopka plays primarily traditional Scottish and Irish tunes, including a full range of marches, reels, strathspeys, airs and jigs.

“I like different styles of piping from Scotland, Ireland and Bretagne. I also admire bands like the Red Hot Chilli Pipers and Bags of Rock.”

His favourite musicians include Gordon Duncan, Clanadonia, Chris Armstrong, Tartanic, Gordon Walker and Fred Morrison.

Even before he began playing, Konopka’s enthusiasm for Celtic culture led him to help organize a new Celtic festival. He notes that Poland had, until recently, one Celtic festival, which takes places in Bedzin – a five hour drive to the south.

“To spread the culture of Scotland,

Ireland and Bretagne, we decided to create another festival for the north of Poland. As a result, the Celtic Gothic Festival was created in Toruń in 2012.”

Getting the festival off the ground and bringing international Celtic entertainers to Toruń has been a challenge. Celtic music is not widely known in the city of 200,000, the old quarter of which has been named by National Geographic as one of the 30 most beautiful places in the world. In the past year, however, the city has provided financial support to strengthen the gathering.

“People on the streets still look at a bagpiper in a kilt in surprise,” notes Konopka, “but I think interest is growing. For the past two years we have been able to organize a pipe band parade for pipers from Poland and the Ukraine.” He adds that the festival also includes lectures and workshops.

The country has only one pipe band, although two existed in the past, so Konopka is hoping to get a second one established in Toruń.

“I’d like to see more young people become interested. Recently I was at an international bagpipe festival in Slovakia and saw many talented young pipers. Many young people seem to play the pipes in Scotland, so one day I want to see the same in Poland.”

Personally, Konopka wants to improve his piping, participate in European events, and continue to spread Celtic culture in his native city.

“I also hope to be able to play the Scottish smallpipes and the border pipes one day.”





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Pumpkin Juice combines four very young and exquisitely talented Australian fiddlers, all caught up in the thrall of the latest Harry Potter adventure

Immediately popular in their hometown of Newcastle, New South Wales, where they play Celtic festivals, multicultural events, weddings, birthdays and charity shows, Pumpkin Juice recently toured Scotland, performing at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival and in the Orkney Islands with the Wrigley Sisters folk duo.

It is a two-family band, comprised of lead fiddler Gabriella Blissett, 15, and her sister Olivia, 12, along with Julius Roberts, 16, and his sister, Margot, 15. The fiddlers get support from the Blissett girls' father, Ray, on guitar, and mother, Jen, who plays bodhran and tells stories behind their music.

Gabriella, Margot and Julius met at a music-for-babies program, later taking violin lessons and performing together. The band officially formed five years ago, after Olivia began playing.

"They were all very into Harry Potter at the time," recalls Jen. "We wanted this to be fun for them, so when they suggested Pumpkin Juice - after a drink in the novels - we thought it was a great idea."

Their Fringe Festival audition took place over the Internet, and they were thrilled to win a spot performing on a main street.

"Being in an ancient city like Edinburgh was awe-inspiring for all of us. It was an amazing experience for the kids to be there performing."

After the festival, they spent a week in the Orkney Islands, working with Hazel and Jennifer Wrigley on new tunes and fiddle techniques, later performing at the Orkney Islands Fiddle and Accordion Concert.

"The kids cannot wait to go back to Scotland so we are hopeful for another opportunity."

To date, Pumpkin Juice has two recordings which have helped to spread their music and finance their travel.

"The greatest challenge in recording the CDs was to get a lovely rich violin sound," explains Jen. "It took a lot of trial and error, with Ray as sound engineer, to get the sound we wanted. We wanted just the right amount of tone versus bow scratching with no squeaks! Now we have amazing recordings of our kids as they progress on their journey."

Because the children are very busy with school and other activities, including classical violin exams, the group performs primarily in the summer, doing only a handful of travel gigs and an overseas festival every two years.

"We don't think about our success much," notes Jen. "Honestly, we just practice our tunes to get better ourselves each year. The band evolved naturally, and will carry on that way."

It was back in the music-for-babies program that the parents first thought the children might like to learn an instrument together, and Jen credits Margot with choosing the violin.

"Margot really wanted to play, and Ray's grandmother had been an exceptionally good violinist, so the violin seemed like the right choice. We went and found a Suzuki violin teacher and the kids all started learning together."

By the time their talent was obvious the kids already had a wonderful chemistry, and the decision to go pro was the next step.

"I had a strong Celtic background so Celtic music was the logical choice," says Jen, whose family came from Scotland, and who remembers her granny playing Scottish music for her.

While her children come from a Scottish and Irish background, the Roberts are of Welsh origin. Again, Celtic music simply made sense. As such, the band was initially inspired by The Corrs, The Dubliners and The Chieftains.

"Our audiences love our happy music. You can see the pleasure on the faces when they see and hear how good the kids are. Older audiences, especially, get great pleasure from our music. For some of them, it is the music they used to dance to."

Five years in, the young fiddlers are all developing their skills and finding their favourites. Gabi enjoys strathspeys, reels and jigs, but also composing new harmonies for old tunes. Composing new harmonies also appeals to Margot, who favours fast tunes. Olivia's favourite pieces tend to be jigs, and she loves fast and fun Celtic tunes. Drowsy Maggie, with its thundering, driving speed, is among the pieces Julius loves to play.

www.pumpkinjuice.com.au

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The Duncan Studio of Celtic Dance

Susan Theron teaches South African students to move their feet

It's no secret that Irish and Highland dancing is practiced in parts of the planet other than Europe. However, some may be surprised to learn the craze has reached as far as South Africa.

Susan Theron established the Duncan Studio of Celtic Dance in the Johannesburg area 27 years ago.

"I am South African, born to South African parents, but their parents and grandparents originally came from the UK and Scotland – our family names being Goldsmith and Duncan," she says, with a nod to the studio's moniker.

Theron began her Celtic dance journey at the age of 12 after a teacher came to her school to offer classes. "I had always wanted to dance, but I had working parents who could not 'ferry me around' to classes so I'd never had the opportunity before that," she recalls. "I have always been passionate about dancing and rhythm. Highland is special to me because of my roots, but I have been passionate about Irish dancing since it was first introduced to me in my early teens."

She began teaching in 1988, once she "felt ready to make a start and share my love of dance."

Theron is one of the founding members of Being Irish Dance, which was established in 1998. She is also proud to be involved with other elements of South Africa's Celtic community. "I am connected with members of the Johannesburg Chapter of the Irish South African Association, and we make ourselves available to perform at any Irish functions where possible. We are particularly busy on St Patrick's Day! We also participate in numerous Irish dance, Highland dance and piping and drumming competitions throughout the year, so I have a very busy calendar in this respect."

At her studio, all dancers are formally trained in the traditional methods of Highland dance technique, in which they compete and are graded – including both

solo and team dances. The dancers are encouraged to test their creativity by choreographing special exhibition items of a more contemporary nature as well. Since 2008, the Duncan Studio Highland dancers have participated in the South African International Military Tattoo at the Monte Casino each September.



When Theron was first learning dance, Irish dancing was a much smaller part of her repertoire compared to Highland. She credits popular performances such as Lord of Dance and Riverdance with Irish dance's global revival. As such, she teaches Irish dance through a series of specially choreographed performances. "I am also one of the few studios that offer

recreational classes to adults," she adds.

Theron coached her daughter, among other students, who has performed Highland dancing at the world-renowned Edinburgh Tattoo on two occasions. She was also one of the first dance instructors in South Africa to take solo and team dancers to the World Championships in 2007, and taught the first South African dancers to recall at both the All Ireland and World Championships.

"I have boys and girls of all ages attending my school and I believe they dance because they love it as much as I do."

Theron's daughter, Megan, now also teaches at the studio. Megan is an eclectic dancer, with training in ballet and Spanish dancing, as well as Highland and Irish. Although she retired from competitive dancing in 2007, she continues to be involved with the studio by assisting her mother with teaching, training and choreography. Now a qualified Highland dance teacher, Megan is currently preparing to undertake her Irish teacher's exam.

"I also train dancers to become both Highland and Irish teachers," explains Theron. "I now look forward to having one of my own teaching alongside me as a colleague in my Irish classes."

Teaching dance can be challenging, but Theron aims to "assist dancers in reaching their goals while maintaining a positive and realistic outlook." While competition is a core part of the Celtic dance curriculum, she wants to make sure it is balanced with social aspects of the art in a healthy way also.

"It is rewarding to help pupils develop into well-rounded, skilful and confident dancers and people."

www.irishdancing.co.za





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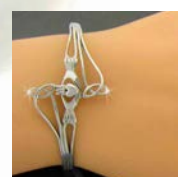
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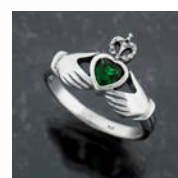
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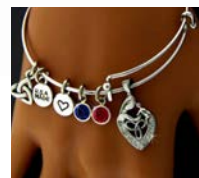
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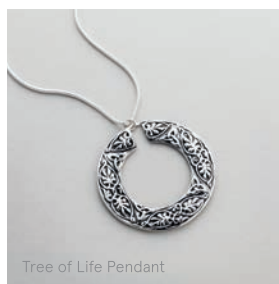
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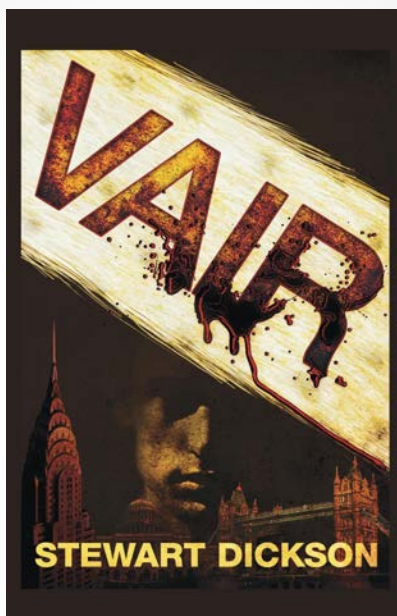
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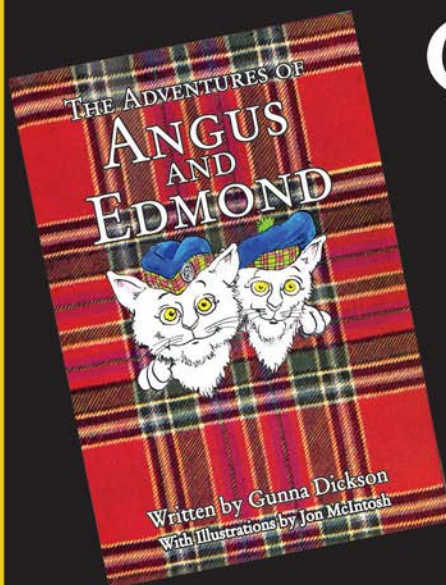


Leith-born journalist Stewart Dickson covered major international news stories in his native Scotland, London's Fleet Street, and as U.S. bureau chief of a British tabloid. He lives in New York City with his wife, Gunna.

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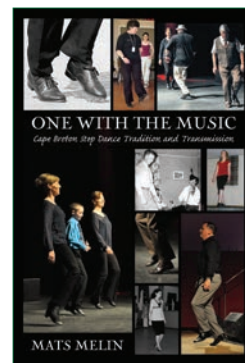
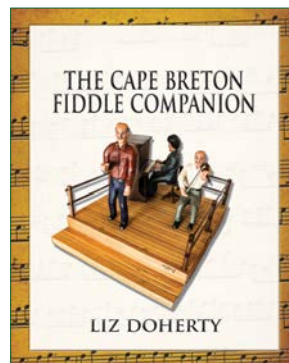
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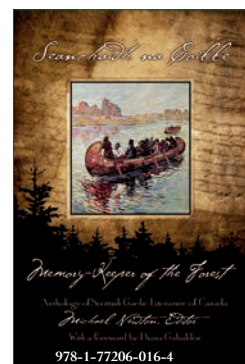
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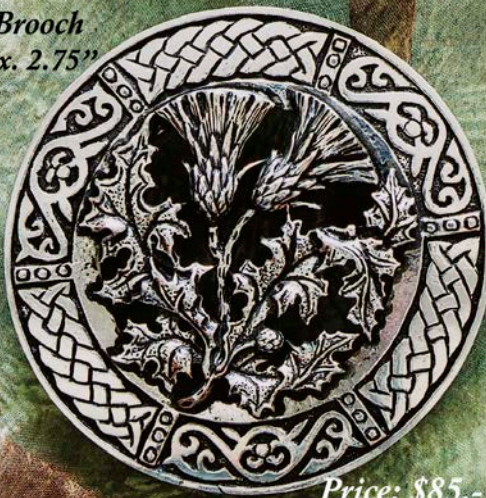
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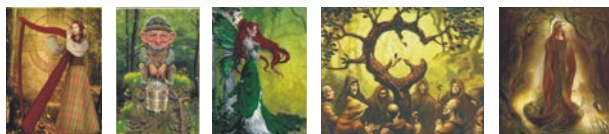
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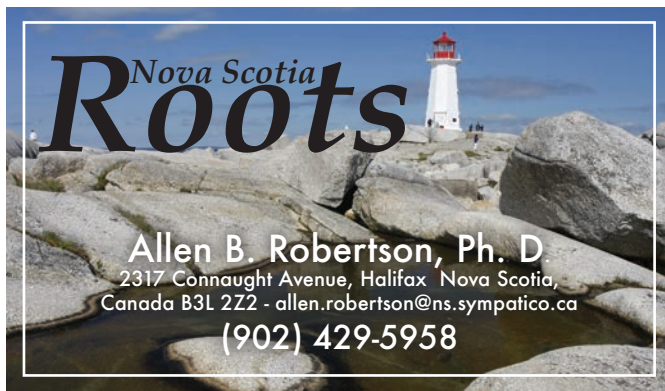
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Maureen O'Hara;

*1920-2015 ~ Fond Farewell for
"The Queen of Technicolor"*

Most know her as Doris Walker from the 1947 cinematic classic *Miracle on 34th Street*, but her Celtic audience remembers her best for her role as Mary Kate Danaher, opposite John Wayne, in 1952's *The Quiet Man*.

Maureen O'Hara became famous for more than her acting skills, however - she was also world-renowned for her fiery red hair, a telltale sign of her Irish roots.

Born Maureen FitzSimons in 1920 in the County Dublin suburb of Ranelagh, O'Hara was the second oldest of six children. Her father, Charles FitzSimons, was a football player, and her mother, Marguerite, became a successful women's clothier after retiring from a career in opera. And though O'Hara spent a significant portion of her life in the United States, she never forgot what it meant to be Irish.

"Being an Irish Woman means many things to me. An Irish Woman is strong and feisty. She has guts and stands up for what she believes in...Yes, I am most definitely an Irish Woman."

She began training as an actress at the age of six. As a teen, she was "discovered" by actor Charles Laughton, who convinced her to change her last name. In 1939, O'Hara starred in her first two films - Alfred Hitchcock's *Jamaica Inn* and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, filmed in England and America respectively. In both cases, she acted opposite Laughton. Both films received poor reviews. Luckily for O'Hara, "Hunchback" was adored by audiences, and RKO Pictures, the film's parent company, bought her contract from Laughton.

As a young woman making her way in Hollywood, O'Hara soon learned that she had little power over her roles. Often, she battled sexism, struggling against being typecast as an actress who always played the part of the "pretty girl." In the decades to follow, she stood her ground by standing up to movie moguls, including Walt Disney and John Ford.

"I wouldn't throw myself on the casting couch," she shared in an interview with the *Telegram* last year. "That wasn't me."

Off-screen, O'Hara's personal life had its difficulties; her first two marriages - the first with George Brown, and the second with Will Price - ended in divorce. Though the relationship with Price produced her only child - Bronwyn FitzSimons - her husband's alcoholism took a terrible toll on the family. "I was a stupid ass to marry Will," she would later say.

Through it all, she continued to make films. In 1941, she played Angharad Morgan in John Ford's *How Green Was My Valley*, which won Best Picture at the Academy Awards. The following year, she appeared in another award-winning film, *The Black Swan*.

O'Hara eventually found personal happiness with aviation pioneer Charlie Blair. The pair met on a flight to Ireland in 1947, though they only tied the Celtic knot 21 years later. Tragically, Blair passed away in an aviation accident in 1978.

Ever resilient, O'Hara took over as the CEO and president of the airline that had once belonged to her husband, becoming the first female president of a scheduled airline in the United States.

In 1991, she was coaxed out of retirement to star in several pictures, including *Only the Lonely*, *Cab to Canada*; and her final film, aptly titled *The Last Dance*.

And while she was never awarded an Oscar during her career, O'Hara was presented with the Academy Honorary Award for Lifetime Achievement in 2014. The prize proved timely, as she would pass away peacefully at her home in Boise, Idaho, on October 24, 2015, at the age of 95.

Shortly after her death, her family released this statement; "Her characters were feisty and fearless, just as she was in real life. She was also proudly Irish and spent her entire lifetime sharing her heritage and the wonderful culture of the Emerald Isle with the world. For those who may ask what they can do to honour Maureen, we have a simple request ~ visit Ireland one day and think of her."





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