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CelticLife INTERNATIONAL

The State of Celtic Mental Health

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Fáilte

Gwyliau Hapus

Over the past eight years I have had the privilege of supporting St. Michael's Psychiatric Association as their Business Manager. This is a dedicated group of physicians that work from an inner-city hospital in the heart of downtown Toronto - a facility fondly known as the Urban Angel. A significant percentage of the patient population can be counted amongst the city's most vulnerable - facing challenges of homelessness, addiction, depression, and now, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, loneliness, isolation, and anxiety.

The past 18 months has brought unprecedented awareness to issues surrounding mental health. Paradoxically, perhaps, while more people around the world are suffering, critical resources have been disrupted and, in some instances, have ceased altogether.

The good news, however, is that evidence indicates that recent events have had a direct influence on people's willingness to start meaningful dialogue about mental health issues - and once the conversation starts in earnest, the stigma will likely begin to fade. Understanding that mental illness is a common medical condition that can be treated effectively will encourage more people to seek care.

We are now approaching a second holiday season amidst the pandemic. With 42 per cent of people noting that December is the most stressful time of the year (and 45 per cent saying they would prefer to skip the holidays altogether!) - and with our reserves of resilience at all-time lows - it is understandable that some are facing the coming months with trepidation.

It is often the unrealistic expectations - mostly the ones we create ourselves - which manifests in higher stress levels over the holiday season. While we should always try to have compassion for those around us, it is vital that we be kind with ourselves as well.

Perhaps we would be well served by starting each holiday season with some Grinch therapy, journeying along with him as he reaches his ultimate epiphany. Dr. Seuss' 1966 Christmas classic (and subsequent remakes) illustrates what is truly important - not just during the holidays - but every day of the year. The lessons are simple; love, laughter, friendship, and song will remain in our memories far beyond material possessions.

Our November/December edition illuminates the important issues surrounding mental health and provides some valuable resources for those facing problems and in need of assistance. Please remember, you are never alone, there is always someone you can talk with who cares.

From all of us at Celtic Life International we wish you and your family and friends the very best in happiness and (mental) health this holiday season and for 2022!

Siobhán L. Covington, Publisher

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Small Steps

I recently celebrated 29 years of continuous sobriety.

I was first introduced to the 12-step community in the fall of 1991, after hitting rock bottom in both my personal and professional lives. It took me a year of "research" before I became so sick and tired of being sick and tired that I finally surrendered and put the bottle and the needle down for good.

It wasn't easy - setting aside my false pride and asking for help was humbling, even humiliating. Thankfully, the right people came along at the right time, happy and willing to share their experience, strength, and hope with me, and I remain grateful for their ongoing support.

One of my early mentors in recovery often spoke about the importance of anonymity and urged me to keep my status as a card-carrying member of the "program" to myself and a close circle of family and friends. He explained that there was still a stigma attached to "problem" drinkers and dopers, and that there remained many who continued to typecast alcoholics and addicts as "bums & junkies."

As such, those who suffered from dependency were often seen as derelicts and dregs that tore at the moral fabric of society.

Much has happened in the fields of alcoholism and addiction since then, and today we recognize and respect dependency for what it really is - a matter of physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health. Thus, it is not a moral issue - it is a disease, a condition - and, over time, we have learned to view the afflicted as "sick" people - not "bad" people - no different than the way we might see someone who lay ill in a hospital bed.

It took decades of discussion (the 12 steps were first written and adopted in the late 1930s), but today our perception of alcoholism and addiction is radically renewed, and there are more resources available than ever before. With over 300 types of 12-step programs around the world, tens of thousands of meetings weekly, affiliated support groups, rehabilitation centers of all sorts, advances in medical treatments, dependency therapy, and a slew of online options, tens of millions of people are now living healthier and happier lives.

Sadly, other matters of mental health - depression, anxiety, ADD, ADHD, anhedonia, and "disorders" of any kind - continue to be plagued with stigma and, often awash in shame and guilt, the afflicted stay silent.

> *Changing the public perception on mental health will take time.*

However, as with issues of alcoholism and addiction, it can be done through dialogue and action. Regrettably, the majority of our "leaders" in the fields of politics, business, arts, sports, etc. still don't get it, and much of the work involved in raising funds and awareness continues to come from individuals and community groups. That grassroots momentum seems to be working, though, as more people and organizations are contributing their time and cash.

And while I wince when corporate entities "piggyback" mental health for profit, it is perhaps a small price to pay to grow our collective consciousness and further conversation.

These days, many of those exchanges are taking place online, as those who suffer share their stories, experience, strength, and hope with one another. Despite all its follies, fake news, haters, and purveyors of ignorance, the Internet can be an invaluable resource in the development and communication of ideas and emotions. And, as we have seen over the past 18 months with 12-step Zoom meetings, those with mental health matters can enjoy a certain degree of anonymity.

Interestingly, the true meaning of anonymity is that - regardless of age, race, sexual identity, creed, religion (or lack thereof) - we are all the same. To that end, we are only as strong as our weakest link, and (to paraphrase Mr. Spock!) the need of the one affects the needs of the many, and the few. It may be cliché, but we are truly all in this together.

As a proud and active member of the 12-step community, I see the impact that alcohol and drugs have on both individuals and society. I work with young men in the program who want to get healthy and be their best selves. It is rewarding, and I get as much out of these relationships as (hopefully) they do. In truth, most of what I do involves simply listening to them when they are ready to open-up - one person at a time, one conversation at a time, one day at a time. Their courage continues to inspire me.

Stephen Patrick Clare
Editor-in-Chief

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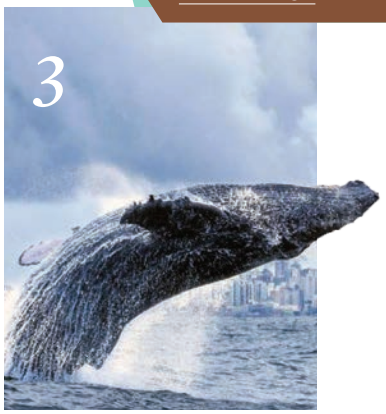

one

Cornish Crab

A Cornish fisherman was in for a surprise when he spotted a rare crab off the coast of Perranporth. The crab in question was none other than a furred sponge crab: a type of crab with a body covered in fine fur. It holds a piece of sea sponge or ascidian on its back for protection and camouflage. According to the fisherman - and proven through photos - this particular crustacean resembled a Cornish pasty, thanks to the texture of its sponge of choice. The unique catch was carefully returned to its ocean home.

two

Welsh with Scottish Roots

A Welsh woman is embracing her Galloway roots thanks to a collection of postcards created by her great-great-great-grandfather. Karen Sawyer is a descendent of Scottish photographer William Hunter, who snapped images of Galloway scenes and turned them into postcards. Sawyer, who happens to be a photographer herself, is in the process of collecting and digitizing those postcards. Recently, she even curated an exhibition of the postcards she had accessed thus far. Her goal is to catalogue as many of the photos as she can find so they're available for everyone to see, rather than being forgotten in private collections.

three

Blue Whales Return

Blue whales have largely been absent from Galician waters for 40 years. Recently, however, a sighting suggested the species is returning. According to the Bottlenose Dolphin Research Institute (a research centre focused on the conservation of whales, dolphins and porpoises), a blue whale was spotted by a team of scientists near Ons Island. This was the first sighting of its kind in 2021. Previously hunted to near-extinction in the area, it's unclear whether the whaling ban or the climate crisis is the key factor in the whales' migration.

four

Viking Discoveries

A Manx woman seems to have a knack for uncovering ancient treasure. Karen Giles, a retired police officer who enjoys metal detecting as a hobby, found two separate hoards of valuables within four months of each other. She discovered the first collection, which included several pieces of jewellery, in December. She found a collection of 87 coins the following April. Giles has previous finds under her belt as well, including a 4,000-year-old axe head and a 3,000-year-old Bronze Age sword. Both are currently on display at the Manx museum.

five

Environmentally Friendly Scotch

Have you thought about the impact your glass of Scotch has on the climate? Producers such as Bruichladdich distillery on the isle of Islay rely on fuel oil for their boilers, which contributes to the large amount of CO_2 emissions in the region. However, Bruichladdich is now setting out to change the game. The company has promised to achieve net zero emissions by 2025 and is currently working on an approach to hydrogen production which uses "green" electricity and water electrolysis. The hope is that wind and tidal power will eventually be employed as well.

six

Cape Breton Tourism

Celebrity interior designers Colin McAllister and Justin Ryan recently purchased a seaside resort in Louisbourg, Cape Breton. The Scottish, Toronto-based pair is known for television shows such as Game of Homes and Colin & Justin's Cabin Pressure. In addition, they produce collections of homewares. Over the summer, McAllister and Ryan also became known as the new owners of Point of View Suites. The designers told CBC that they hope to attract more visitors to the community, especially since Louisbourg was so impacted by the loss of tourism due to COVID-19.

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

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Sarah King

A Cornish woman has plans to trek across the Sahara Desert in order to raise money for charity. Sarah King, 43, is making the journey in honour of her father - who was diagnosed with early onset Alzheimer's three years ago. As of September, King had raised more than £1,300 of her £1,800 goal for the Alzheimer's Society of the United Kingdom. King's father has "quite deteriorated now at such a young age, and there's no cure for Alzheimer's, it's one of the worst hidden diseases people can get because there's nothing you can do," she told the Falmouth Packet recently. Sadly, King's father is part of a long line of Alzheimer's in the family. King's grandmother and great-grandmother had the illness as well. "I just felt helpless, so I just wanted to raise more money for the Alzheimer's Society to try and get more money for their research." She added that she wanted to do something far from her doorstep to earn the funds. King's cousin, Sadie, also decided to join in on the adventure and is fundraising herself. Over the summer and into the fall, they have trained themselves by doing practice walks closer to home (such as Rock Beach). The pair will embark from Morocco on Oct. 31 and walk 60 miles over four days.

Friends of Scottish Settlers

Friends of Scottish Settlers, based in Scotland's Falkirk district, is aiming to welcome families fleeing the conflict in Afghanistan. FOSS formed first as an informal project back in 2016 with the intention of helping Syrian refugees integrate into their new communities. Since then, the group became a registered charity and expanded its goal to aid all newcomers to the area. All volunteers are given training by the Scottish Refugee Council. FOSS volunteer work can be as simple as having a conversation, in part to help newcomers practice English and/or get used to Scottish accents. "We find that the children who have been here for four years now all use English perfectly and even have Falkirk accents – but it's very different for their parents," FOSS Chair Jessica Paterson told the Falkirk Herald recently. Other ways to help include accompanying a family while grocery shopping or getting them acquainted with the local public transit system. "We want to make it a little easier by providing an initial network for all new arrivals in need of support. Not only can we help with English conversation practice – we can also give you insider tips to this lovely part of Scotland," reads the FOSS website. In-person events were on hold for a while due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but as restrictions ease, volunteers have been able to interact with their new friends face-to-face. In fact, the group recently hosted a movie screening and was able to organize its first-ever Annual General Meeting on Sept. 30.

Lyn Sexton and Ian Pearce

Have you ever fantasized about winning the lottery? In 2012, Lyn Sexton and Ian Pearce got the kind of luck most people only dream of: after a weekend away, they learned they had chosen the winning numbers on the EuroMillions Raffle. In the beginning, the couple carried on living and working in the Welsh town of Merthyr while they mulled over what to do with the dough. Sexton ultimately retired from his job as a physiotherapy technician, while Pearce kept his government job for five years to wrap up a major project. While Sexton and Pearce treated themselves to vacations and a new car, they also wanted to use their time and money to help others. Over the last decade, they have helped raise thousands for numerous charities. The couple now live on a 400-year-old mill in New Quay, Ceredigion, which they are renovating into their dream home. Meanwhile, they are helping out with causes such as the Forever Flowers campaign: a project by the City Hospice in Cardiff. As part of the project, more than 1,400 flowers are displayed at Cardiff Castle in memory of people's loved ones. "We jumped at the chance to get involved with this important campaign, no one has been immune to the difficulties of the past year and a half. Forever Flowers was a great way of bringing people together. One of the flowers is even dedicated to our friend, which makes it even more poignant," Sexton told Wales Online recently.

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O'Leary Guitars

One Irish luthier blends passion and precision

Michael O'Leary spent three decades of his life in the motor industry working as a production manager. In 2002, however, he went back to his musical roots.

O'Leary was born to a creative family of Irish musicians in the quaint town of Graiguenamanagh, Ireland - home of the medieval Duiske Abbey National Monument. "We played music together regularly and I learned to play several instruments, without any formal training," he recalls. "My father mainly played guitar and we were all part of a traditional Irish band in Graiguenamanagh back in the '60s."

Unsurprisingly, O'Leary's own son, Alec, took to music as well and pursued a career in classic guitar. "As his studies progressed, his requirement for the ultimate instrument launched me into creative mode with the enthusiasm to develop a better concert guitar," explains O'Leary. "With my background and several generations of inherited woodworking tools, this development of the concert guitar was a natural progression. I had a B.Sc. Honours Degree in Design Technology and a Diploma in Design & Innovation which included much in-depth study into modern materials." As such, and after leaving his previous career, it made sense for him to apply his other skills and passion to becoming a luthier.

O'Leary first travelled to Spain to study famed guitar maker José Luis Romanillos Vega.

"On my return, I immediately began the process of designing a new instrument that would offer more for the performer in terms of volume and tonal characteristics. My research into each aspect of instrument construction led to an incredible new guitar."

As Spanish guitars are traditionally "parlour instruments," intended to be played for smaller audiences, it was difficult to find an acoustic Spanish guitar that was both "tonally sweet" and loud enough for a concert setting. "With my history of engineering, design and innovation and a unique insight into players' requirements and a passion for music (and a little madness) I developed a new type of guitar that was an instant success."

Alec once again took to the family business, helping his father produce guitars in their County Carlow workshop. "Our initial design has been refined over the years with constructive discussions and feedback from some of the world's greatest players," says O'Leary. Sérgio and Odair Assad, David Russell, John Williams and Berta Rojas have been among the company's clientele.

They make guitars for non-professional musicians as well. "We have collaborated with new suppliers to provide our customers with a unique selection of woods for their new instrument. Over the past 10 years we have also made progress in reducing our carbon emissions and now all our wood supplies are from environmentally managed forestry.

> *"We make classical guitars that are aesthetically remarkable and tonally profound for a world-wide market."*

"I don't really like to call what we make a 'product' as such, but it is more an expression of an artistic achievement. The instrument that we make is made with care and passion to a unique and personal design that reflects our belief in past traditions and future possibilities."

Alec and O'Leary work together on each instrument. In addition to quality of craftsmanship, the pair must be mindful of keeping materials in a controlled environment. Moisture content and temperature are two key factors for the durability of the finished guitar. In the end, the hard work pays off when they're able to hear the instruments for the first time. "It never gets old," says O'Leary. The father-son team has also been organizing The Guitar Festival of Ireland for more than a decade.

As for the future, they plan to launch an O'Leary steel-string guitar, thus opening to a whole new set of clients. The key, though, is to stay true to their commitment to quality. They currently have no need to advertise in any traditional way, as their guitars tend to speak for themselves. "People can hear them played by amazing musicians online and in live performance all over the world. Most of our inquires originate from experiences like this.

"Our plan is to maintain our unique position globally which for us means attention to detail in the creation of every instrument here in the workshop. This means that it is necessary that every inlay, every joint, every carving that we do is consistently perfect. This will ensure that our order book remains full for future generations."

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Karina Daly

A new book brings the past into the present

It took Karina Daly years of research to create the building blocks for her recent book: The History of Wexford Festival Opera, 1951-2021. She has been interested in the Irish opera festival - which takes place every autumn - since she was a youngster.

"As a child, I walked the streets of Wexford at Festival time with my family and marvelled at the shop window displays, all decked out in opera theme, to add to the festival ambience in town," recalls Daly, who still resides in Wexford. "We would go down to the Quay front on the opening night and watch the fireworks display in wonder, which was truly the highlight of the year for children in the town - an opportunity to congregate with school friends and welcome visitors from all over the world to enjoy opera."

Later in life, Daly met a history professor named Richard Aldous while attending University College Dublin. He encouraged her to take on a PhD and pursue further research about the origins of Wexford Festival Opera, as there was little documentation on the subject at the time. Daly did just that and chose to investigate Britain's influence on Irish musical development after the Irish War of Independence.

"As part of my research, I studied the relationship between Glyndebourne Opera Festival and the establishment of Wexford Festival Opera. I knew that there was no archive in Wexford at the time and I set about trying to identify sources of information to help me to understand how the festival had come about."

Daly struck gold when she was put in touch with the daughter of Thomas Joseph Walsh, the festival founder. As it turned out, Walsh's daughter still had all his material documenting the early days of the festival.

"It was a compelling story - how one man and a small group of his friends decided that, instead of listening to gramophone records, they wanted to stage an opera festival in this small, seaside town."

She continued to be fascinated by the story, so she kept up the research after completing her PhD in 2001. This resulted in her first book, Tom Walsh's Opera, which documented the Wexford Festival Opera's history from its beginnings in 1951 through to 2004.

"So much has happened since I published my last book - there is an archive now and the original theatre has been entirely rebuilt as a new state-of-the-art facility which is now Ireland's National Opera House. These significant achievements of Wexford Festival Opera mask the real challenges and threats that have simmered under the surface, not least the global recession which came to a head in 2008."

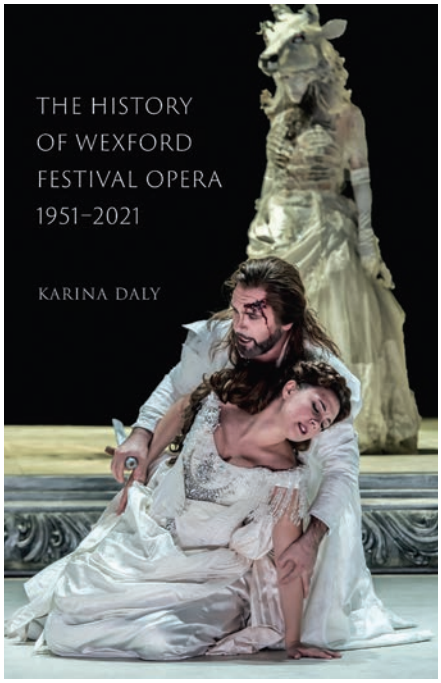
Despite the difficulties, the festival is now in its 70th year. Daly herself has volunteered on the Board of Wexford Festival Trust since 2018.

"It never ceases to amaze me how the opera company and the local community work together to ensure that the festival is of the highest standard possible and an unforgettable experience for all that attend. I have learned a lot about what it takes to keep a cultural organization such as this going - the sacrifices people make and the dogged determination to keep moving forward despite many obstacles."

Daly's new book not only documents the full origin story of the festival, but also how it has "survived and triumphed" over the last several decades.

In addition, the tome is adorned with more than 130 photographs, as well as written contributions from the likes of author Colm Toibin and Irish president Michael D. Higgins. Many people, Daly notes, feel a deep connection to the festival, and everyone seems to have their own story. Getting to meet those people and hear their stories has been a highlight of the work.

"I have spent many years researching the nuances of Wexford Festival Opera; I have interviewed many people and I have presented the facts, the ups and downs of running a world-famous cultural event in a small Irish town. It is an amazing achievement and there has been plenty of drama along the way - not all on the stage."



The festival continues to face challenges, of course, including the COVID-19 pandemic. But Daly, along with hundreds of other volunteers, is working to make sure it weathers the storm.

"I believe that an organization that has grown out of the community, with full community support, must nurture this and work to ensure that the community is acknowledged for what it contributes to the success of the festival. We need to plant trees that we will never see."

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Celtic Throne

For Brad Macdonald, preserving tradition is a family affair

Originally from Australia, with a family tree firmly planted in Scottish soil, Brad Macdonald is the co-director of Celtic Throne, a live Irish dance show that features youth performers.

He describes the gig in a way that a parent might describe their career - which, in this case, isn't far removed from the truth, as his own children are members of the group.

"A lot of the work revolves around logistics, setting goals and helping the troupe and crew achieve them, running practices, and keeping the kids focused and well-behaved," he explains via email. "When we are dancing at Armstrong Auditorium - our home court - we have as many as 35 to 40 dancers. When we are on the road, the troupe is a bit smaller. Working with this many children and teenagers is a bit like herding cats; just when you have one problem sorted, three others are popping up. But they are all great kids, and it is a lot of fun.

"Celtic Throne is comprised of a whole bunch of families, most of whom have been doing Irish dance for many years," he continues. "All of the dancers have been dancing since they were four to six years old."

Macdonald's time with Celtic Throne began in 2013, when he moved his family from Oklahoma to the U.K. for work and began searching for a dance school that his kids could transfer into. There, he met some of the other families that would bring Celtic Throne to the stage.

"In January 2014, we enrolled our two children, Isaac and Savannah, in Carey Academy in Birmingham. For Isaac and Savannah, this was a huge step up and an incredible opportunity - to take lessons from John Carey, an 8-time World Champion, Michael Flatley's understudy, and the former lead of Lord of the Dance."

The siblings thrived under Carey's tutelage, as did Jude Flurry, who now performs as the male lead for Celtic Throne. Today, Jude's parents - Stephen and Amy Flurry - work with Macdonald as producer and co-director, respectively, to bring the story of Celtic Throne to life.

> *That story - tracking the 3,000-year journey of the first Celtic peoples to today - is told through dance, song, and most recently, its own seanchaí.*

"Celtic Throne explores the story of Irish dance and how it is loved all over the world," shares Macdonald. "Since the summer of 2020, we have added the sublime voice of an authentic Irish narrator. We have also added a new dance piece and recently brought in more young dancers and singers as well.

"Few things in life are as rewarding as bringing joy to other people - putting a smile on their face, a jig in their step. This is what Celtic Throne does - our show is basically a bunch of smiling, happy children and teenagers dancing and singing. Their joy is infectious. The music is sensational, and utterly inspiring; it was composed by Brian Byrne, a Golden Globe-nominated, award-winning composer from Ireland. It is simply impossible to listen to his music and be unhappy. Finally, the show is comprised of quite a few families - we have so much fun together."

Since Macdonald and the Flurrys moved back to the U.S. last year, the troupe has toured across the country, with performances at the famous Ryman Theater in Nashville, which has previously hosted the likes of Elvis Presley, Johnny Cash, and Louis Armstrong. However, while infectious, Macdonald admits that due to COVID-19, there were fewer audience members coming out to infect than they would have liked.

"The pandemic obviously presented some big challenges for us, especially when the show first came out - the ground was shifting beneath our feet, and we had to adjust to the changing conditions. But the show went on, and while the audiences were smaller, they were enthusiastic, and we were really well received."

And though Celtic Throne is done for 2021, as many of the dancers have returned to school for the year, Macdonald hints that there will be plenty to see when the kids hit the road again in 2022.

"We return to touring early next year. Celtic Throne hearkens back to another world; a happier, more wholesome world, an age of family fun. I believe that a lot of people are yearning for this type of experience these days."

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Muirgen O'Mahony

The newest member of Celtic Woman puts her stamp on the band's latest recording Postcards From Ireland

Born and raised just outside of Cork, Muirgen O'Mahony credits her parents and teachers for both her passion and her profession.

"I started playing the violin when I was about five years of age, and I was terrible at it," she shares via email from her home in London. "From there, I took up the classical flute, the drums, and the piano. I was one of those children who would see a new instrument and then immediately want to know how to play it. My poor parents were driven mad as I would give them up one by one."

Interestingly, the vocalist didn't start singing until she was 14.

"It was around then that I was first introduced to Celtic Woman when my music teacher gave me their songbook and suggested that I sing one of their songs for my upcoming music exams. It is a very full-circle moment to be joining the group nearly 15 years later."

After studying as a classical soprano at the Cork School of Music, O'Mahony trained in musical theatre at the Royal Academy of Music in London. It was while performing with the RTE Concert Orchestra in Dublin that she met Susan McFadden of Celtic Woman.

"Susan was a real guiding star for me before I applied for Celtic Woman. She suggested that I submit myself for an audition as she thought my voice might suit their sound. So, I did, and I got called in for a try-out in Dublin. I was in London at the time and travelling was difficult with COVID-19, but I knew it was an opportunity that I couldn't miss. So, I booked a flight, did my PCR tests, did my quarantine, and auditioned for the creative team. I found out a week later that I had been offered the position - and I did not stop crying for 48 hours!"

The reality of the opportunity hit home after stepping into the studio to record the band's latest album Postcards From Ireland.

"I was like a child at Christmas going into the different rooms and just being amazed by all of the equipment. It was all stuff that I had only ever seen in movies or in music videos, not in real life."

So far, the experience has been beyond her wildest dreams.

> *"It has been absolutely amazing, and I am so grateful for the girls and the whole Celtic Woman team. They are incredibly genuine and all of them have been warm and welcoming."*

The timing appears to be ideal, as O'Mahony believes that Irish music is experiencing a rebirth of sort.

"Seeing artists incorporate elements of traditional music with more contemporary qualities is great and, I think, key in its preservation. Acts such as Lankum, The Gloaming, and Moxie are great examples of this. Ireland is a diverse and artistically rich country - the influence of Irish music has been monumental, and I am excited to see how it is going to continue to amalgamate with new styles. This is important, as Irish music will reach wider audiences and continue on in many other forms."

As such, she says that funding the arts is integral to the preservation of Irish music and other aspects of the country's robust culture.

"The pandemic has had a devastating impact on the arts sector and unfortunately it has been one of the last to return. Celtic music - and its influences - is something we as a nation are proud of. Continued support of the arts sector both from governments and communities is vital so that we can continue to promote it and, in turn, preserve it."

She has personal motives to keep performing as well.

"One of the reasons that I have always loved playing music and continue to do so is because of the community surrounding it. Be it in a theatre, a concert hall, or on set, creating and experiencing something collectively is a great feeling and a big part of why I keep doing it today.

"There is absolutely nothing like putting your mind to something that sets your heart on fire. And getting to do that as your job is the most amazing thing."

www.celticwoman.com

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The Shamrock Tenors

An Ulster-based band brings together the best of both worlds

Irish folk group the Shamrock Tenors describe themselves as a "cross-community" group.

"We represent both sides of the community in Northern Ireland," says Raymond Walsh, the group's producer. "We feel like we aptly reflect the complex mix of British and Irish identities back home, and through our music we celebrate our unique culture."

The quintet, comprised of vocalist (and champion Irish dancer) Jimmy Johnston, pianist Matt Good, multi-instrumentalist Matthew Campbell, along with Walsh and his brother Jack, came together in 2018.

"We have all been involved in music from our childhood, having performed together in a variety of shows throughout our lives," shares Walsh. "We felt that there was a gap in the music industry for a group from Northern Ireland that accurately represented our musical culture and the people as a whole."

He notes the group has gone through several changes since its inception, including a significant addition in 2019.

"We met Matthew Campbell after he filled in on a gig for us and decided that he needed to become a permanent part of the lineup because of how talented he was. In addition to his amazing singing voice, Matthew plays over 15 instruments, so we now have a portable orchestra that travels with us!"

Being in a band is not without its challenges, with considerable time spent on the road away from family and friends during tours. Still, Walsh says that the challenges are far outweighed by the rewards of the vocation.

"We are incredibly grateful for the opportunities that we have been presented with. We have been fortunate to visit parts of the world, such as French Polynesia and Newfoundland, and experience a variety of cultures whilst representing Northern Ireland on a global stage.

"During the pandemic, we were incredibly lucky to represent Northern Ireland for Tourism Ireland's 'St Patrick's Day at Home' which was streamed to over three million people. We filmed a live gig in the Duke of York Pub, which is also our favourite drinking spot in Belfast, and we were honoured to share the bill with Riverdance, among many other fantastic acts."

The work, he adds, is a complex combination of inspiration and perspiration.

"Perspiration takes the forefront for Jimmy when he pulls out his Irish dance routines. We have to be very careful with our running order to make sure he isn't singing lead on the song that follows his dancing. We have made that mistake before and were very fortunate that he didn't pass out."

The quintet makes sure every show takes their listeners on a journey and evokes a deep emotion within them.

> *"A good song speaks to your heart and requires no need for analysis. You know it's good when you feel a connection without having to think about it."*

Walsh believes that the future of Irish folk is strong across the region.

"It is music that remains in the hearts and minds of people across Ireland and the U.K. – it is still found in pubs across the country today.

"However, Celtic music has been kept alive much better in America," he continues. "Since the Gaelic revival movement of the late 19th century and the early 20th century, it has been sustained by specialist music colleges, and that is largely due to people immigrating from Ireland in the 1700s with the music that they were familiar with."

Despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic on the lives and livelihoods of musicians, the band will be busy over the coming months.

"We will be drinking lots of Guinness. In all seriousness, Jimmy is just about to have his first child, which is incredibly exciting. We also have recently signed to work with Daniel O'Donnell's manager, Kieran Cavanagh, to act as a Global Tour promoter and we have some exciting gigs lined up for the U.K. and the USA in 2022."

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Karen Myatt

Canadian vocalist Karen Myatt explores the feminine spirit with Femoir

Karen Myatt has her grandmother to thank for her love of music.

"I grew up in a musical home, and I have been singing for as long as I can remember," shares the singer, who has Scottish/French roots. "My grandmother, Madeline Joudrey (nee: McLellan) - who is now 102 years old - played the piano daily and still plays entirely by ear. I was raised on the music of Gershwin, Porter, Berlin, Ella Fitzgerald, Billie Holiday, Judy Garland, and Rosemary Clooney to name but a few."

While she remains inspired by her family matriarch, Myatt found other influences after leaving her hometown of Halifax, Nova Scotia.

"I studied music in New York City, discovering the rich culture of jazz, blues, and Broadway. Today I find inspiration in all musical styles and art forms. Music has always been both a physical and spiritual experience for me, so I still sing for the same reasons that I did as a youngster. What changed was my yearning to share ideas that may reach someone in some small but important way."

Much of that desire evolved out of sheer life experience.

"I have had the great fortune to visit some of the greatest cities in the world and be touched by various cultures. This, along with a passion for novels, films, and music, led to my development both as a person and as an artist. The result has been a deeper connection to the world, its history, and the amazing array of art there is to be consumed and created. Expanding my mind and heart awakened my creative spirit."

That artistry came to full fruition with her recently released sophomore recording, Femoir.

"It is tough to pinpoint exactly when the idea for the album planted itself in my psyche, but it definitely had something to do with a cappuccino and a cannoli at a café in Rome. That afternoon, it occurred to me that many of my favorite countries, characters, and cultures share a common theme; the preservation and promotion of beauty, sensuality, intuition, and creativity - all eternally feminine traits."

A musical melange of original compositions and contemporary standards, the 14 songs on Femoir explore the transcendent feminine spirit through a fusion of soul, rock, jazz, and worldbeat.

"Without sounding too abstract or ethereal, everyone and everything has this divine connection."

"It is a story that has been told throughout history and will continue to be told into the future - women, female archetypes and figures, but also the presence of the feminine spirit in all people, places, and things. The theme of a universal, infinite narrative is present throughout the album, however there is another motif of mystery, a sort of unseen, unspoken spirit. It is incredible how this little idea sort of whipped itself into being - the seed was planted, though it was the many voices and souls that came together that really allowed it to grow and become a living, breathing expression."

Some of Canada's most renowned musicians appear on the new album, including Chris Mitchell (saxophone), Matt Myer (trumpet), Lisa MacDougall (keyboards), J. Rimbaudelaire (guitars), Adam Fine (bass), Geoff Arsenault (drums), Shimon Walt (cello) and Jennifer Jones (violin).

"The recording process allowed me to discover a new voice, and being surrounded by world-class musicians and technicians made the experience all the more inspiring. It was magical. The time and the team were just right, and it all fell into place. A 'let go and let God' sort of experience. There were moments where I would say, 'there - what is that whirring? That hum? Who's playing that - it's so cool!' But there would be no related track, no decipherable instrument, and so it was chalked up to the frequency that was created when sounds blend and a new sound emerges - the ghost in the machine - and it whisps in and out all over the album. I like to think that is the Femoir spirit."

Myatt believes that most people relate to a song as it rings true in their own lives and memories.

"A really great piece of music can tell many stories through one narrative, so the listener has the freedom to interpret, fill in the blanks, find themselves in the song. Perhaps the most important thing is knowing what not to say - leaving a space between the notes, where the spirit of the song can live - like little secrets that are whispered amongst the words and melodies."

With the album launched and the video for the title track going viral, the coming months will see Myatt and her band touring across North America.

"It is a very exciting time, and I could not be more grateful. This journey has been beyond fulfilling. My grandmother is very proud."

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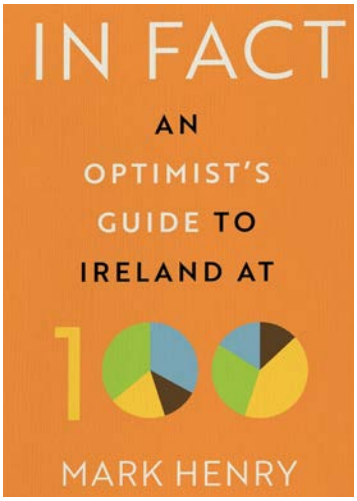
Mark Henry

A new book shines a light on Eire's evolution



Irish author Mark Henry knows his homeland from both a professional and personal perspective.

"Practically every person with the Henry surname in Ireland can be traced back to either Counties Mayo or Derry/Londonderry," he shares via email from his home in the seaside town of Malahide in north County Dublin. "We are from the Derry clan. I researched our family tree a few years back and found that my great-great-grandparents were evicted from their farm in 1880 for non-payment of rent."

After studying psychology at university, Henry pursued a master's degree in research while simultaneously completing a Diploma in Statistics. He then plied his trade in the world of business, before turning to do the same for the tourism sector.

Having spent the past two decades telling people all over the world what a great country Ireland is, he is on a mission to support his claims. To that end, and combining his love of both data and storytelling, he will soon publish his first book, In Fact: An Optimist's Guide to Ireland at 100.

"As we approach the country's hundredth birthday as an independent nation in December 2022, I wanted to celebrate our progress and to show readers how far we have come in every aspect of Irish life."

Putting the work together, he notes, was a three-year labour of love.

"I wouldn't have finished it on time if it were not for the Covid-19 lockdown. I rose at the same time every day and poured the hours that I saved from commuting into writing. The fact that my children's sports activities were cancelled freed up lots of time at the weekends too! I consequently like to think of the book as a lockdown love letter to the Irish nation."

Despite the challenges involved ("finding the figures to populate one hundred charts to illustrate one hundred remarkable achievements of independent Ireland - my laptop was brimming with Excel spreadsheets!"), the rewards were well worth the effort.

"I honestly enjoyed every bit of it. I loved the detective work involved in tracking down the right data to illustrate a point of progress. I loved speaking to fifty different experts across every domain of Irish life about the country's journey. And I loved synthesising all of that into hundreds of great stories that pepper the book."

The process proved to be a steep, albeit satisfying learning curve for the scribe.

"We work 20 per cent fewer hours than our parent's generation, yet we earn more than twice as much as they did when you allow for inflation. And inequality here is decreasing, unlike in many other developed nations. Half our adult population have completed higher education. Everyone takes a foreign holiday. And we are rated the eighth most peaceful nation on the planet nowadays. Thanks to improved health and nutrition, we are also taller than our ancestors - women have added 11 centimetres in height over the past century and men have added 12½ centimetres.

> *"And, positively, only 1 per cent of Irish people say they are unhappy."*

Henry believes that there are four things that explain why the Emerald Isle has outpaced other countries in improving its quality of life.

"Firstly, a high level of investment in secondary and third-level education over the decades has equipped many individuals to develop to their full potential. Secondly, the stability experienced by the country over one hundred years of uninterrupted democracy has enabled consistent improvements. Thirdly, the country's strong community bonds have helped maintain a sense of equality and justice that has ensured that all boats have been lifted together - not one at the expense of another. And, finally, the fact that Ireland is such an open country has attracted investment and talent from all over the world and enabled Irish talent to shine on the world stage. It's a winning combination.

"Ireland was ranked twenty-third by the United Nations for our quality of life in 1990," he continues. "We have jumped 22 places in just thirty years to reach second place. That speaks to huge improvements in our material well-being, our level of education and our physical health and longevity. Those are meaningful improvements for ordinary people. If a country's raison d'être is to improve the health and well-being of its citizens, then you have to conclude that Ireland has served its citizens exceptionally well."

Utopia does not exist, of course, and Henry has identified ten key challenges that Eire needs to address to successfully progress in the century ahead, including tackling the climate challenge and biodiversity crisis, meeting the health challenge of obesity, solving the housing shortage situation, and increasing civic participation in democracy.

"The job of building a nation is never done. I want to get as many people as possible to read about Ireland's success and to reflect on what they could learn in order to improve life wherever in the world they may be."

www.markhenry.ie

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with a foreword by Diana Gabaldon, author of *Outlander*

Thirteen-year-old Iain is homesick for the Highlands of Scotland. It's September 1773, and he has just arrived in Nova Scotia with his parents and little sister after the long, disastrous, Atlantic voyage of the ship *Hector*. They wanted a new life in New Scotland, but the land agent lied to them! With no money, no food, no shelter, and winter fast approaching, how will they survive? Author Margaret MacKay of Pictou County, Nova Scotia draws on the experiences of her ancestors to weave this tale of Highlanders in a new land. Perfect for Grades 4 and up, and historical fiction fans of all ages.

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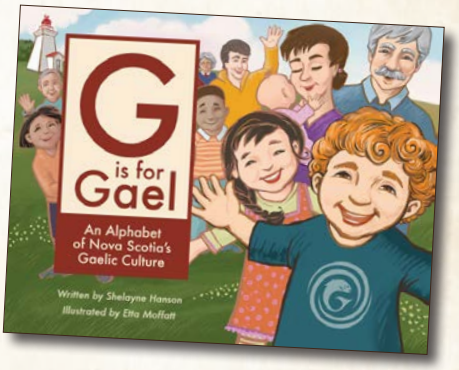

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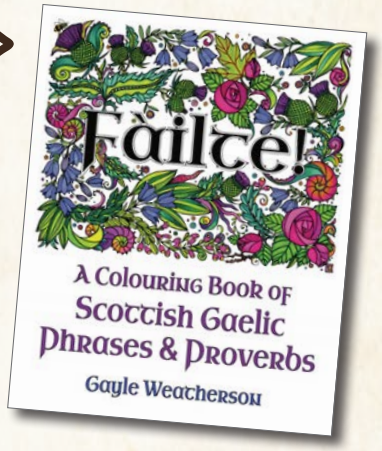

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Donna Morrissey

Newfoundland Author Donna Morrissey makes peace with her past

Donna Morrissey is the perfect example of "it's never too late."

"I was in my early forties when I started writing," she tells Celtic Life International via email. "It was something I started at a friend's prompting, and it took flight with each and every word I wrote. I wrote for no particular reason except the glory of linking words together and creating images and telling stories from my past. It is the same today, 25 years later - I write for the pleasure of creating stories."

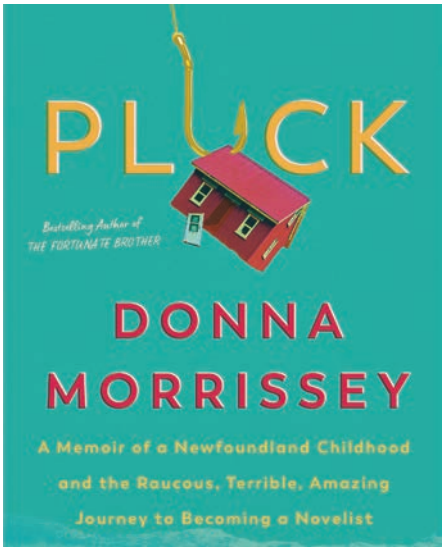
Over that quarter century, Morrisey has become a household name in Canadian literature, penning six books, including her immensely popular debut Kit's Law (1999).

"It is difficult to judge how one has grown as a writer over the years," she shares. "I know that I have - it is sometimes painful to read my earlier stuff. I can't believe those stories came out of me - I would never be able to recreate it. And yet, I would write my sentences differently today - or maybe not - that would interfere with the voice of the story. It is always the same - each time I re-read something I have written I want to rewrite it and make it better. So, have I grown? I don't know...I will always be growing. Am I getting anywhere? I don't know."

Morrisey's latest effort, Pluck, is a fresh venture for the seasoned author. Taking a break from fiction, the 320-page memoir depicts her years coming-of-age in Newfoundland and Labrador.

> *"Pluck is the story I have always wanted to write."*

"It took me six novels to get to that point. The stories of my mother and father, of me and my siblings. Each book of fiction mirrored some of those stories, but never enough that I felt satisfied. And then the day came when it felt as though I had no more fiction left in me. But I had my story of my mother, my brother, my father...and so it felt like the time was now for that memoir, which is as much as my mother's story as my own."



The new narrative explores a variety of subjects, including mental illness, cancer, grief, despair and love - all told with Morrissey's signature wit and charm.

She admits that the project could be both challenging and painful.

"I was seeing myself as the main character. I was so used to writing fiction that I objectified myself and wrote as though I were a character - which the publisher put the boots to – 'we don't want a character, we want 'you.'' That was tough. And humbling. To speak of oneself for so long felt like indulgence. But, eventually, the events kind of took over and it felt as though I were writing a work of fiction - but reality-based.

"It was also a great learning process," she continues. "How to write a memoir without hurting people. How to not take control of the story when it is as much of your sibling's story as your own. How to keep perspective and see the story from the outside while writing it from the inside. How much to leave out, what to include, how to disguise people so as not to bring undue attention onto them. The one good thing about writing a memoir is there isn't much to do in terms of research."

In the end, Pluck was a labour of love.

"The ending was the most rewarding part. Knowing that I had written this tribute to my mother and her tough story. And to my own. Lots happened in my family - tragedies, grief, and all the ramifications of that. I suffered a breakdown from the guilt I incurred from the accidental death of my teenage brother when he was on my watch. It nearly destroyed me. Watching my mother's battle with the fallout of my brother's death and then her battle with breast cancer - it was brutal. But we survived as a family. It was our love that kept us together."

The book is already resonating with readers and critics.

"Thus far the response has been surreal. I am astonished at the incredibly wonderful feedback, the people who have come to me wanting to share their stories of grief or loss or mental illness and spirituality. Everyone connects with suffering and joy; everyone has a story to tell. So many wish that they could write their story, and I tell them 'you can.' Simply sit and write it for you. Be the hero in your own story."

www.donnamorrissey.org

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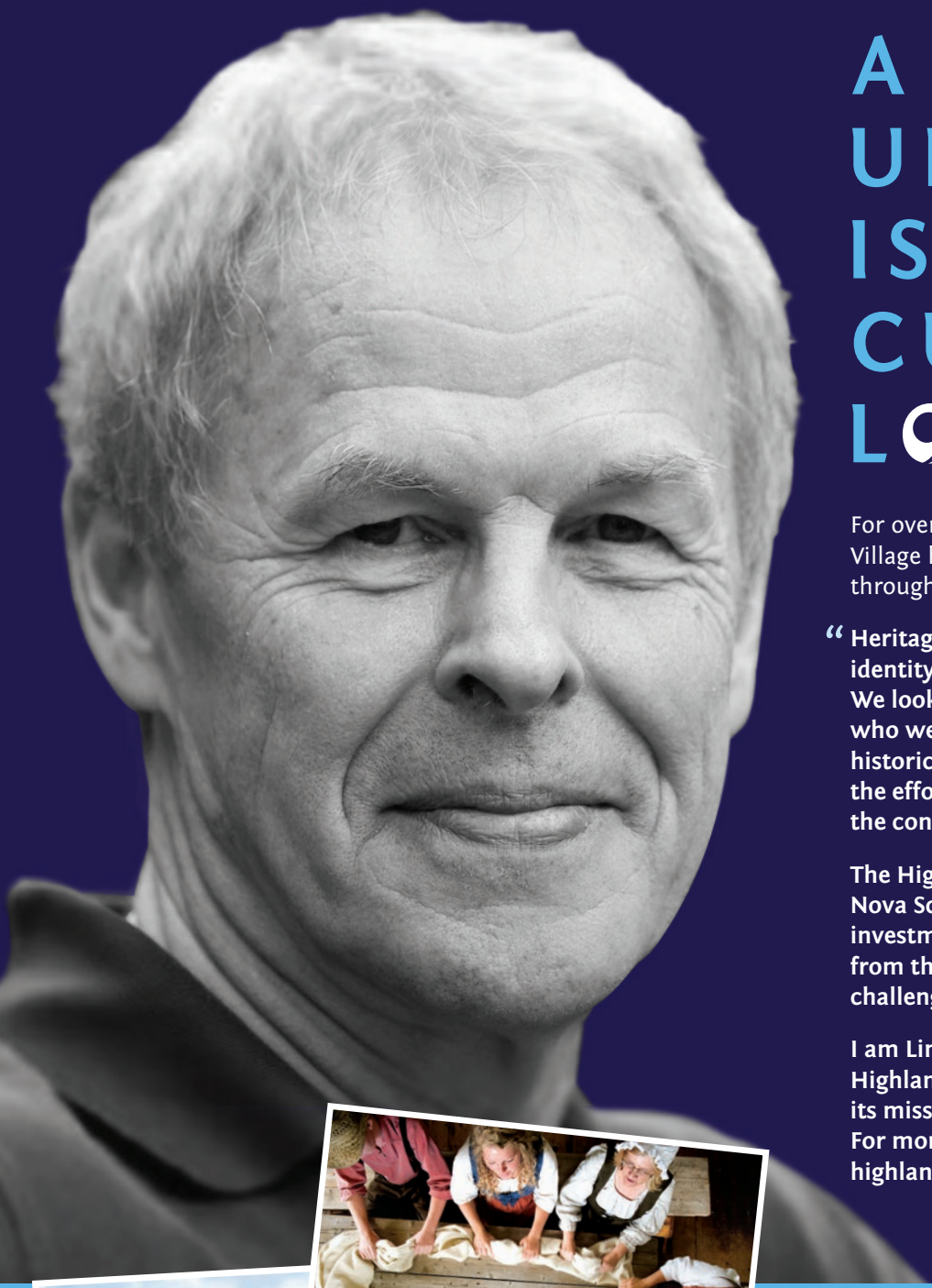

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The Highland Village has become a vital part of Nova Scotia's cultural mosaic, a worthy investment in a future that will draw inspiration from the past as we confront the daunting challenges that lie ahead.

I am Linden MacIntyre. Please support the Highland Village Next Chapter Campaign and its mission to grow Gaelic heritage and culture. For more information and to donate visit highlandvillage.ca"

Baile nan Gàidheal
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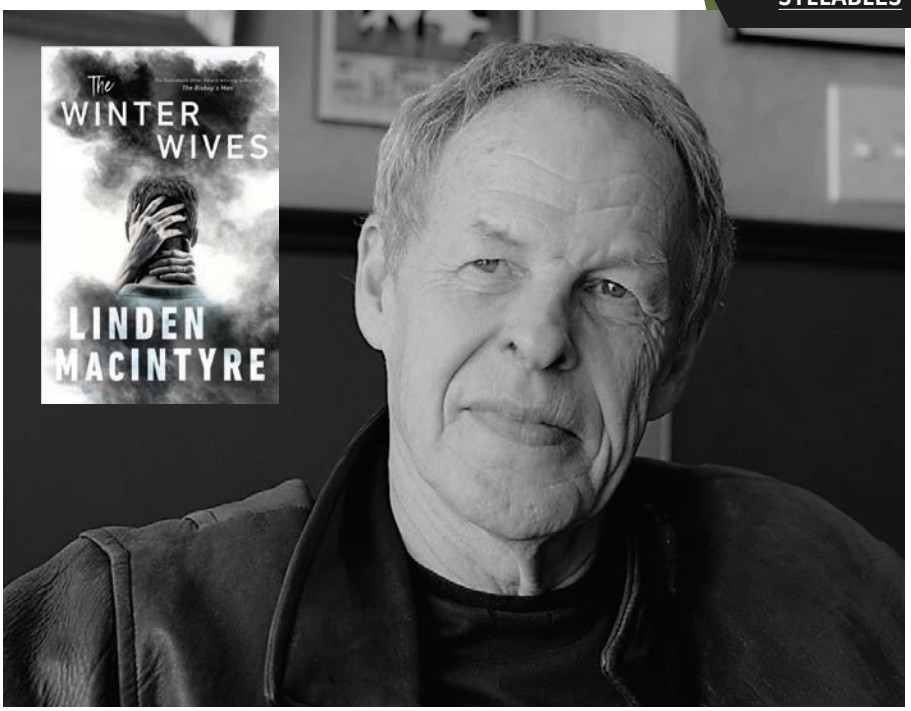
Linden MacIntyre

The award-winning Canadian author and journalist explores complex human relationships in his new novel



In his essay Being and Nothingness, French philosopher J. P. Sartre noted that "Human reality is constituted as a being which is what it is not, and which is not what it is."

This quote opens Linden MacIntyre's latest literary effort, The Winter Wives - an emotionally driven narrative that addresses identity and the intricate psychology behind long-term relationships.

Although only recently released, MacIntyre has been whittling away on the novel for years.

"I started out with a general interest in the impact of dementia on individuals and in relationships," shares the scribe with Celtic Life International by phone. "Early onset dementia creates a rapid disintegration of one's personality and memory and can change one's character quite significantly."

MacIntyre was inspired to tell the tale after reading a feature story in the New York Times about a man who researched his ancestry to gain a deeper understanding of his own health issues.

"I was curious about the normal evolution of a relationship based on what we know about people and how what we know about people can change over time. That sort of conceit that young people have about knowing everything about their friends is an illusion - it is simply never true that you know everything about everybody."

The Winter Wives follows four individuals whose lives have been intertwined for decades: the financially successful and well-respected Allan, his quiet friend Byron - the novel's protagonist, who lives with a physical disability resulting from childhood trauma and has spent years caring for his mother with Alzheimer's - and the titular Winter wives, Peggy and Annie, who are married to Allan and Byron, respectively.

The narrative begins the morning after a long night of drinking when Allan suffers a stroke. The group is thrown into a web of deception and lies as they discover Allan's successful business empire was secretly an illegal drug trade. This realization sends the remaining three - namely Byron, who is preoccupied with the notion that he may be developing early onset dementia - on a quest to better understand themselves and their social circle.

> *"It is a profound story about human relations and how lives change."*

"I believe that we know only about another person what that person wants us to know. Then, of course, when that person loses control, say in an illness like dementia or through the consequences of an accident, we start to see different people. That is basically what the book is about - four people that, early in life, get to know each other awfully well. They admire or are infatuated with one another and form a kind of bond that lasts all their lives. Then, of course, as life unspools, they discover that they don't really know that person that well at all."

MacIntyre admits that writing the novel had its fair share of challenges, noting specifically his desire to respectfully navigate writing from the perspective of someone with a disability without sharing that lived experience. Despite those issues, the project was filled with reward.

"It was fun to write, and it came together rather quickly. For me, the story turned a corner at a certain point in the second half. It was a book that I hadn't really sweated or worried about and then suddenly...it finished itself. The whole thing just became a legacy. I fully understood what was happening and why it was happening, and I understood the peculiarities of it."

While it has only been on shelves for a short while, The Winter Wives has already garnered considerable critical and popular acclaim.

"My publishers sent copies off to some really serious authors and they sent back really stunning reviews. Readers have also responded very positively. It has also been on the Canadian Bestsellers list for a few weeks now."

MacIntyre is already working away on his next project, which will see him make a return to non-fiction.

"It is rooted in the Irish War of Independence, from 1920-23. I don't want to go too deeply into it because it is kind of a delicious story. Although it explores the Irish struggle for Republican independence, it is told from a Canadian angle. I am quite taken with it so far."

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Clootie McToot Dumplings

As Celtic Life International contributor Tom Langlands explains, one Scottish family is serving up savoury flavours

Recently I visited Abernethy in the Kingdom of Fife. It was once the capital of the ancient kingdom of the Picts, and I had gone there as I have ancestors who hailed from the area. I also wanted to see the village's tall, circular, stone tower of Celtic origin - one of only two remaining in Scotland.

From the nearby Mercat Cross I admired the skill and ingenuity of the tower's 11th century builders. Taking a few steps closer I found myself beside a pair of large wooden doors that were slid open. Spilling from the building within was a mouth-watering, fruity aroma. Drawn inside, I found myself in the amazing world of Clootie McToot Dumplings.

Clootie McToot Dumplings is the brainchild of Michelle Maddox. The inspiration behind the business, however, is her son Jacob. Maddox holds several food-related qualifications, including a degree with distinction in Food, Health and Welfare. In 2001 she worked for eight months on the BBC's Food and Drink show while her mum looked after her three-year-old son, Kyle. In 2005 she married a firefighter with a degree in art. While on honeymoon Maddox became seriously ill with pneumonia. Pregnant with Jacob, she was admitted to intensive care fighting for her life. The skill of the doctors and the drugs saved her. Later, Jacob was born with a range of developmental issues, including autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and dyspraxia. At that time the family lived in England, but with Jacob's increasing needs and another child on the way they sought a more rural location. In 2010, they settled for the peace and tranquility of Abernethy.

A short time after relocating, a daughter - Eve - was born, and she too suffers from developmental issues - albeit less severely than Jacob. Completing the family is Ralph, the beloved French bulldog.

Once in Abernethy, Maddox worked on community-based education projects which included teaching primary school pupils about the basic financial aspects of life - such as savings, loans and banking. By the time Jacob had reached ten years of age it was a struggle to find appropriate support for his educational needs. It was often easier for teachers to suggest that he be excluded from things rather than included. On the run up to Christmas 2015 Jacob wished to participate in the school's Christmas fete by manning a stall and selling his mum's home baking. His teachers suggested this may not be practical. Not wishing to see her son disadvantaged or upset she took her own stall at the fete with Jacob assisting. Using her late grandmother's recipe for traditional Scottish dumplings made by boiling fruit and spice ingredients in a cloth - or cloot - she set to work. With half a dozen home-made, traditional, clootie dumplings to sell, mother and son set up stall. The dumplings all sold, and the following Christmas Jacob asked to participate again. Word had spread about the excellent quality of the home-made dumplings and demand now outran supply.

The children suggested that mum could make a business out of this, and the seed of an idea was sown.

Maddox realized this was an opportunity for her children to be involved in a family business and to have their own family support network around them.

Brainstorming ideas for branding the business, the children suggested a tartan-clad, potato headed character initially named Clootie McTootie which became shortened to Clootie McToot. In April 2017 Clootie McToot Dumplings was launched from the family home in Abernethy and soon the Clootie McToot stall, dressed in vivid blue and pink - colours chosen by the children - became a regular feature at local farmers' markets.

In the beginning, the dumplings were made in the utility room of the house using granny's recipe that had survived on a piece of paper from the years of WWII. As both meat and sugar were rationed during the war years it relied upon both vegetable suet to provide the fat content and locally produced fruit for sweetness. Now a closely guarded secret, this recipe is the basis of the traditional dumpling of a now expanding Clootie McToot range that includes such delights as apple, pear and cinnamon, plum and gin, and banana and toffee. Although Maddox experiments with different flavours she is keen to point out that, "All our dumplings are made with natural ingredients, and all are suitable for vegetarians." She remains true to granny's original recipe only adding other locally produced products to vary flavours and expand the range. This includes nearby Lindores Abbey gin and Old Perth whisky!

Shortly after the business had launched, an old horse barn and hayloft next to the family home came on the market. It was possible someone could acquire it with a view to building a home. For Jacob, living near others could cause anxiety and this was one of the reasons the family had chosen to live in a rural location. In order to protect Jacob, the family bought the adjacent property. With husband Alasdair running his own woodburning stove business his practical skills and artistic background were soon put to use renovating the building, and 2018 saw the barn opening its doors as the Clootie McToot Dumpling Shop. Next, a small cafe was created and the kitchen - complete with large customer viewing window - was relocated from the family home to the newly refurbished barn. It is an ongoing project with the upper floor of the hayloft being converted currently into additional cafe seating, a meeting room and a teaching kitchen.

Once based in the new premises the business continued to grow exponentially, awards were being won and word was spreading internationally. With food regulations limiting what could be exported

and imported Maddox hit upon the idea of "Make Your Own Clootie Dumpling" kits. By shipping the basic dried ingredients along with muslin cloth, string and instructions, this avoided restrictive laws, opened international markets and gave customers the opportunity to have a fun experience making their own dumplings. Alongside the traditionally flavoured dumplings and the kits, the Evermore range of characterful dumplings was created including options such as James Bond, William Wallace and Mary Queen of Scots.

As the family worked together on new recipes Maddox loved to make up stories for her children featuring Clootie McToot as the main character. A customer in Dundee had heard of the tales and persuaded Maddox to deliver some dumplings to her home. Once there, she was introduced to the customer's husband who was a former illustrator for publishers DC Thomson and had worked on comics such as The Dandy and Oor Wullie. He offered to illustrate one of Maddox's tales and the result was an engaging and colourful Clootie McToot children's book that now sits alongside the goods in the shop.

For Maddox it isn't just about the product, it's about a business that cares about its staff and provides people with an opportunity.

"When employing someone, it isn't their CV or qualifications that are most important to me. I look for interesting people and I consider how they will fit into the big family that I want everyone to feel part of." She employs people with additional support needs, even driving to the bus stop to collect them and bring them to work. Her motivation is simple, "I always treat people the way that I would like people to treat Jacob." It is an admirable quality that is often missing from the modern workplace.

Inside the big wooden doors by Abernethy Tower, I had stumbled upon an amazing business founded on a few sales at a school fete from a table manned by a boy who needed additional support and assisted by his mother. With mum at the helm the children still participate in the day to day running of the business. They can be found in the kitchen, serving at the tables or manning the shop. With Christmas, New Year and Burns Night fast approaching I will have the perfect excuse to savour a succulent, Scottish, Clootie McToot Dumpling - likely washed down with a wee malt!

Story by Tom Langlands
Photographs courtesy of JJ Greig Photography Ltd.

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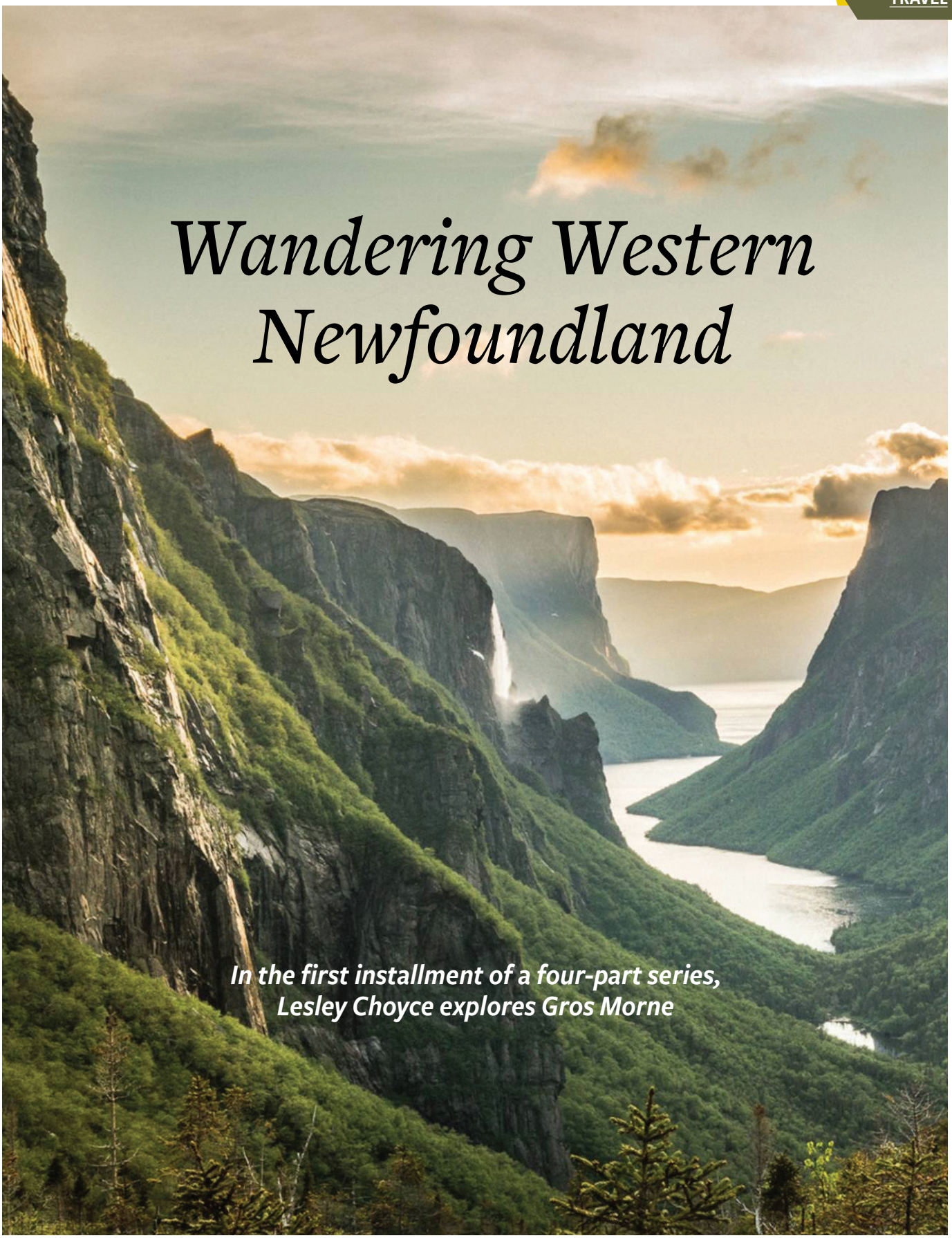

Wandering Western Newfoundland

In the first installment of a four-part series, Lesley Choyce explores Gros Morne

Lesley & Linda

Our 2020 love affair with Newfoundland was rekindled in 2021 when we were again permitted to travel (without quarantine) from Nova Scotia to the Rock. Both my wife Linda and I had our two immunization shots and were chomping at the bit for some outdoor adventure. By nature, we are coastal people, content on the flatlands as long as there is an ocean at our doorstep. But those stunning wilderness photos of ordinary people perched high on a rock ledge over a breathtaking fjord were just too tempting. We decided we needed to climb a mountain. Western Newfoundland has some of the most rugged wilderness within our striking distance and we had not yet explored Gros Morne National Park, so before fall schedules and teaching responsibilities kicked in, this was our window for travel.

The easy hour and half flight from Halifax to Deer Lake would take us to yet another northern world unlike anything most people experience in a lifetime. I know that sounds ~~like hyperbole but th~~ere it is. We would probably never make it to the fjords and cliffs of Norway, but the west coast of Newfoundland would provide challenges enough and it wasn't going to be just another "walk in the park." Linda had the lungs, legs, and stamina to master what all the guidebooks called a "difficult" mountain hike, but I have to admit that paddling a surfboard day after day upon a yielding fluid was not quite of the same physical calibre as clambering up the side of a 806 metre mountain. I know that doesn't exactly sound like Everest proportions, but Gros Morne Mountain is one mother of a challenge.

The other thing that drew us to Newfoundland, of course, was the people. It is only one province away, somewhat east and north of where we live, but everything about this island and its people is...well, different. I don't want to draw on a plethora of clichés to describe how distinctive Newfoundlanders are, but suffice to say that they are uniquely spirited and many who are still in touch with older traditions have a way of thinking, talking, and relating that is exceptional. So, even before we boarded the plane, we dreamed of getting to the top of bald mountain summits high up in the clouds, good feeds of cod tongues and cheeks, possible moose encounters, cascading remote waterfalls, cold pints of Quidi Vidi Dayboil IPA, as well as random conversations with store clerks who call everyone "Luv." Not to mention the fishermen encountered on wharves who would refer to me as "me son."

> *What else could a restless pandemic-weary poet and his leading lady love possibly want?*

We had booked a small cottage in Rocky Harbour as our command post and were a bit surprised at how expensive things were in that neck of the woods. Another splash of cold iceberg melt in the face was the cost of a rental car – the cheapest being $100 per day if you could even find one available. Which we thankfully did, as we definitely needed a car to get to our daily wilderness hikes.

Deer Lake airport is a delightfully small affair, as are many tiny airports across Canada. We walked the tarmac to make our way inside and were shocked at the heat. Yes, we had landed in Newfoundland in the middle of another heatwave. We checked in with the COVID squad who approved our documents and within minutes we were packing up the rented vehicle, parked mere inches from the front door of the airport. First stop was the Coleman's in Deer Lake, a true "northern town." While Linda shopped for food, I did my usual routine of buying some local craft beer in the attached liquor store. She had requested I find a bottle of prosecco and I couldn't seem to locate any, so I asked the cashier if they had any, feeling horribly like a know-nothing tourist used to suburban Yuppie comforts. "Never heard of such thing, Luv," she said. "What is it?"

"Well, it's bubbly," I said, now feeling like some wimpish wine dilettante who had no right being in Deer Lake or anywhere further north, so I added, "It's for my wife."

"Sure thing, darlin'. Look over here."

Well, there it was, but it was way too expensive. Below it, however, was a bottle of Friexenit Cordon Negro and I knew Linda would be satisfied with this. "Think I'll get this one. She'll be happy with that."

"Happy wife, happy life," she said matter-of-factly as I made my way to the till. I had to smile as I had never heard that line before. I also realized that somewhere buried in those few off-the-cuff rhyming words was the echo of the fading days of sexist husband/wife expressions like "my better half" and "the little woman." Suffice it to say that, back in chic urban Halifax, no one would have said such a thing to my face or if I had used such a phrase, I might find myself immediately posted on Instagram as "The Last of the Haligonian Male Dopes."

In the seafood section of the grocery store were fresh whole Atlantic salmon the size of small basking sharks for a reasonable price, but it looked like way more fish than we could eat in a week, so we settled for more humble fare, paid our dues and drove north on the 430 towards the beckoning mountains.

Outsiders like us gawk at the many moose warning signs with the iconic image of the full-antlered beast and the accordianed front-end of a sedan. Numbers are posted as to how many moose-related accidents have happened along a given stretch of finely paved roads, encouraging me to keep my eyes straight ahead and my foot trigger-ready to slam on the brakes should the monster suddenly emerge from the forest. But none did.

The drive from Deer Lake to Rocky Harbour is magnificent and the cost of

entering the national park is well worth it. Our digs were pretty much in "downtown" Rocky Harbour with a view north towards Lobster Cove Head. We were travel weary despite the ease of the flight and highway drive, so we retired to the oddly swank Anchor Pub in a large modern and oh-so-colourful town hotel. For dinner we had salmon. Go figure.

The first humans to inhabit these shores arrived from Labrador well over 4,000 years ago

They were followed by the Dorset people and later the Beothuk and Mi'kmaq who would have arrived by large, sturdy sea-going canoes from Nova Scotia. When the famed Leif Eriksson arrived around the year 1000 A.D., he encountered inhabitants he referred to as Skraelings. John Cabot (Giovanni Caboto was his real name) generally gets credit for putting Newfoundland (literally) on the map in 1497 and Jacques Cartier landed ashore at St. Paul's Inlet near Western Brook Pond in 1534. In the years that followed, the Basques and other European fishermen found their way to the Strait of Belle Isle and south into the Gulf of St. Lawrence to hunt whales and other sea creatures. France lay claim to this coast until the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713 changed that. Nonetheless, the French were permitted to continue fishing along the west coast and the name "The French Shore" stuck for quite some time. A later treaty in 1783 changed the rules again and declared it illegal for French, English and Newfoundlanders to make permanent settlements here, although many independent-minded people ignored the rules and settled here anyway.

James Cook had once cruised the waters along here to create detailed maps and charts and give English names that are still in use to many of the bays, coves, and inlets. Fish and wood attracted settlers and businesses and, by the late 1800s, there were canning factories in Rocky Harbour, Woody Point, and St. Paul's, with lumber mills springing up around Bonne Bay. Strangely enough, it wasn't until 1904 when the English paid the French a sizable chunk of change for full claim to the French Shore that settlements were considered legit.

Although some still thought of western Newfoundland as the forgotten part of the island, towns like Rocky Harbour, Norris Point and Trout River grew and shrank and grew again according to the whims of the economy. And then, of course, Newfoundlanders also became Canadians in 1949 when the province joined Confederation. Later, the establishment of Gros Morne National Park in 1973 would change things dramatically as it now put this chunk of Newfoundland coast on the world map for hikers and nature lovers.

Forecasts of weather in these parts changed by the hour, but Linda had predicted that our first full day on the ground was destined for the Big Climb up Gros Morne as rain was likely to follow in the days ahead. We had already read that, "if you can't see the top, don't go." Many days, the big flat top of the monster mountain is obscured in clouds even on an otherwise sunny day. So that Monday was our day to make a bid for the summit.

We woke early, packed some sandwiches and water and drove a short distance to the nearly empty Gros Morne Mountain parking lot. It was a misty morning, and the top was indeed in the clouds but the sun was quickly burning off the moisture and a few other cars were pulling in with hikers. As I checked to make sure we had enough water, sunscreen, drugstore knee brace for my downhill-troubled knee and enthusiasm, I noticed the other hikers jumping out of their cars, slapping on their back packs and rather rapidly making their way onto the trail. It seemed odd but then, according to the parks people, the round-trip hike would take 8 hours or more on the reported 16.5 kilometre route. (It was advised not to even think about the trek if you slept in late and dallied over brunch.) Clearly these folks were itching to ascend the famous mountain.

Soon, Linda and I were off the tarmac and on the first civilized stretch that would take us to the base of the mountain. Since it was all moderately up and down and had recently been groomed by a small dozer, our

discussion focussed on how foolish all the "difficult" propaganda was and what liars those office-bound parks writers were.

I much appreciated the sound of the racing river to our left and the shade of the tall trees on both sides.

At this point, we couldn't really see the mountain for the trees, so it was just an average walk in the woods and our spirits were good. So, what was there to worry about?

Linda wanted to run the first stretch of the trail, but she kindly hung back to keep pace with me, trying to shake off my sidewalk amble and achieve a more robust mountain-man march. There were streams here and there with what looked like very drinkable water, but I had read in a brochure that one might get some kind of terrible disease caused by beavers peeing in the ponds and streams above. Really? How Canadian that would be, to come down with an infection caused by the national rodent that didn't have the courtesy to get out of the water before taking a whizz?

A few hours into the hike, we crossed a bridge and hit a few swamped stretches of muddy trail. I leaped from rock to fern stump on the south side and came out fairly unscathed, but my independent-minded spouse took the route less travelled and sunk up to her knees in some primordial black muck that looked like dark chocolate pudding. A hiker behind us laughed when she let out a signature screech and this prompted me to laugh too. (Well, no one was really hurt, right?) This, according to the look on her face, was uncalled for, and a stony silence ensued for the next kilometre or so until we reached the base of the mountain.

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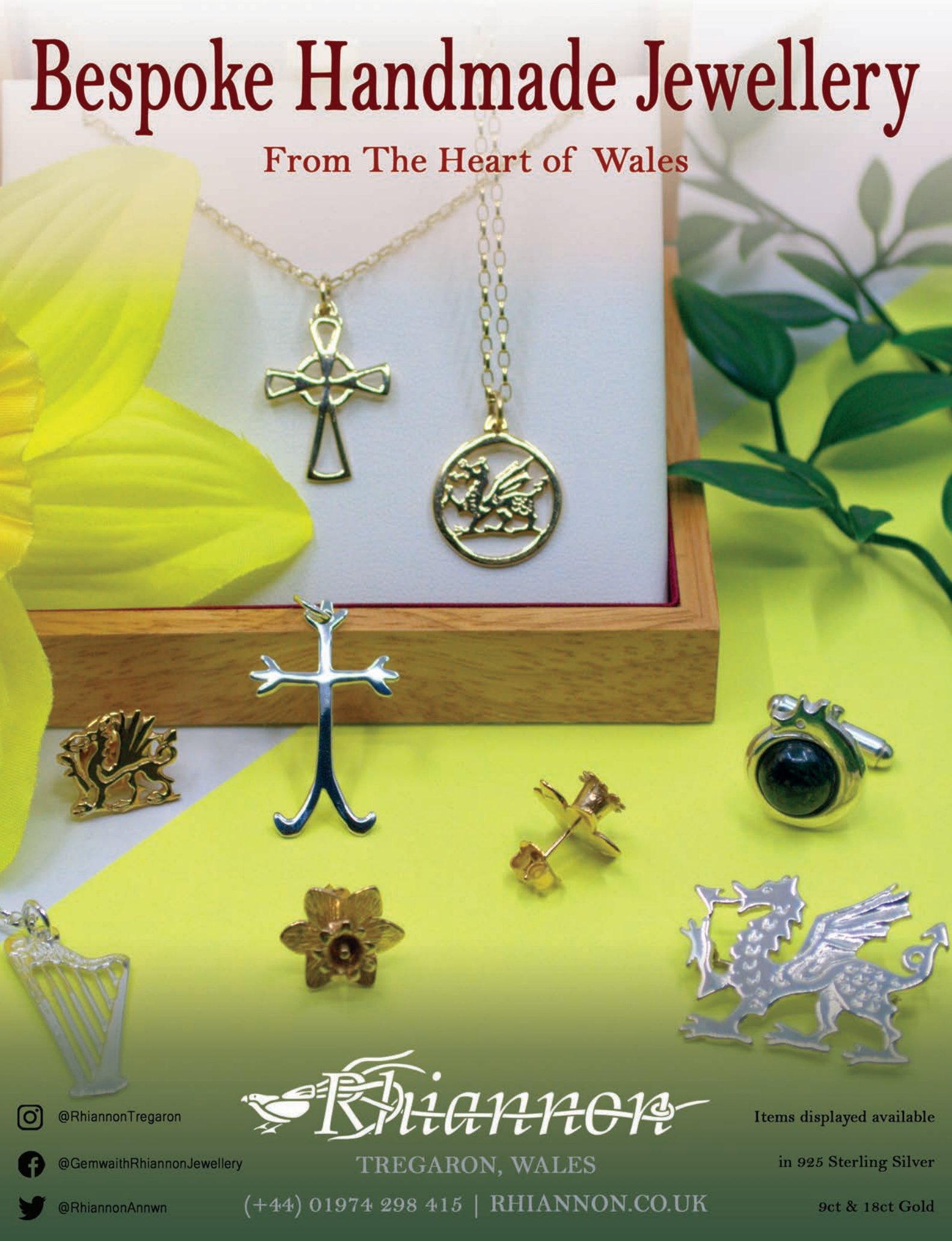

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Louise Elliot

I was born in England to Irish Parents. My mother was a native of County Cork and my father was from Dublin. We moved back to Cork when I was 10 years old. I studied at the National College of Art and Design in Dublin and, upon graduating in the summer of 1991, I went to NYC on a student work visa with my portfolio in hand. I was very fortunate to land a design job at Donna Karan. I later worked for an English company - Fenn, Wright and Manson - and then the knitwear designer Adrienne Vittadini, before returning to my native Cork in 1997 to take my current job as designer for Fisherman Out of Ireland.

As a child watching my mother knit outfits for my dolls. I loved playing with texture and colour and seeing how a piece of string could transform and become a garment.

It is very satisfying to create a piece of clothing that is both functional and aesthetically pleasing. I love having something physical to show for a day's work. The challenge I find when designing is to have restraint and to know when to hold back from the temptation to over design and put too many ideas into one garment. Most creative people tend to be perfectionists and work can become all consuming.

While there are many great Irish knitwear brands, what sets us apart is the successful combination of affordable luxury in contemporary, Irish design and our attention to detail.

Irish design brands have really come into their own in the last two decades. This is really noticeable when we exhibit at Showcase Ireland in Dublin each year. It is wonderful to see so many budding new designers and brands emerging. Ireland is a small market which is very reliant on exports so it would be great to see more Irish people also appreciating and supporting homegrown brands.

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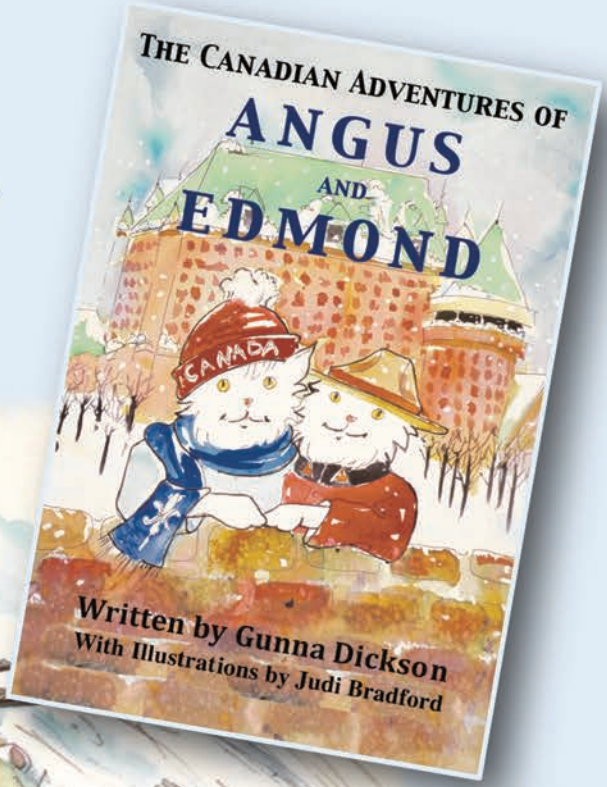
Oh, Canada!

The well-traveled Angora-mix brothers set out to visit their neighbor to the North and find themselves in a different world.



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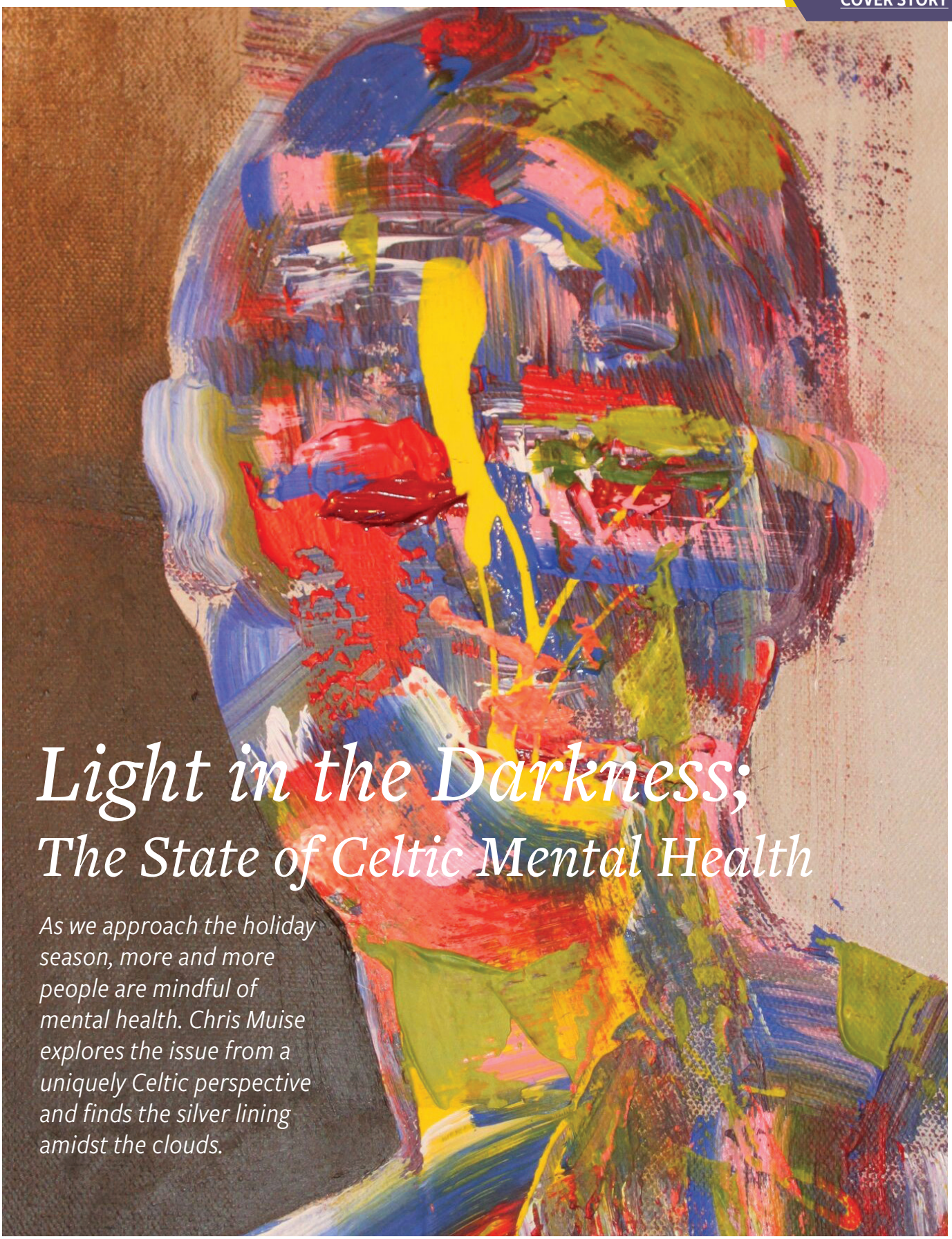


Light in the Darkness;
The State of Celtic Mental Health

As we approach the holiday season, more and more people are mindful of mental health. Chris Muise explores the issue from a uniquely Celtic perspective and finds the silver lining amidst the clouds.

Hey there, you. Yes, you, the one reading this – how're you doing? In all my years writing for this publication, I have hardly asked you, the reader, how things are going in your life. With the last two years of lockdowns and pandemics and social turmoil I thought it might be a good time to check in and see how you are making out.

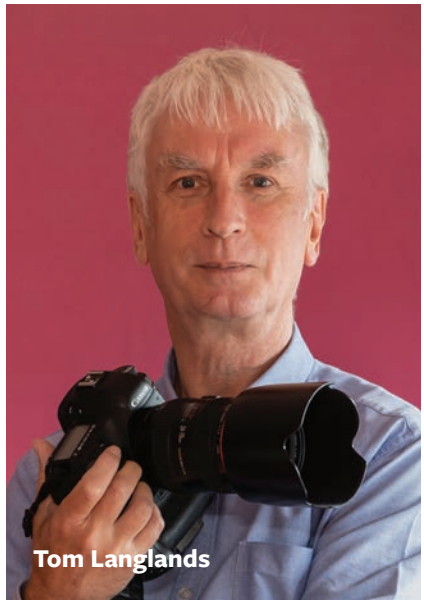
Given how tough things have been lately, the topic of mental health has been on our minds here at Celtic Life International. We hear it a lot from those we interview: that COVID-19 has been a trying influence on their careers and personal lives. We have also heard it from our readers, and our colleagues, friends, and family. It is affecting everyone.

On the one hand, this is an unprecedented number of people who are struggling with a shared mental health crisis - the Lockdown Blues, if you will. However, we live in an age where the mental health struggles of our neighbours are less mystified and more empathized with than ever. In many ways, we are lucky to be dealing with this enormous bummer today, together, all around the world.

Because mental health - including in the Celtic world - has not always been as understood as it is today.

For millennia - indeed, for much of our recorded history - mental illness was a

Tom McEneaney


Tom Langlands

mostly misunderstood malaise of the human condition. In the worst cases, people who may well have suffered from illnesses we understand today - schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, borderline personality disorder, etc. - might have been hunted as werewolves, or burned at the stake as witches.

Even as we became less superstitious and more scientific in our approach to medicine, we were still largely groping around in the dark, especially when it came to the mysteries of the mind. In the 18th century, for example, ailments were believed to all derive from one of the four humours - black bile, yellow bile, phlegm, and blood - and depression in particular was believed to be caused by black bile. (Literally, the word melancholy comes from the Latin words for "black" and "bile.")

As for treatment, options ranged from flim-flammery propositioned by non-medical laypeople in many cases, to what - for the time - counted as genuine medical best practices of heroic therapeutics;

Ennis Lunatic Asylum, Co. Clare, Ireland

"evacuations, blood-letting, cathartics, purgatives, emetics, blistering agents, camphor, opium, warm and cold bathing, mercury, anti-spasmodics, belladonna, and digitalis," according to Therapies for Mental Ailments in Eighteenth-Century Scotland, a study published by the University of St. Andrews in 1998.

Though one of the most prevalent and pernicious solutions to mental health problems in the Celtic nations - as well as much of the rest of the world - which lasted well into living memory was the use of lunatic asylums. "Out of sight, out of mind," as they say.

One of Celtic Life International's own long-time correspondents, Tom Langlands, shares some of his own family history with the asylum system.

"I do a lot of genealogy, and I discovered, when I dug back through the centuries, people in my family, historically, have been admitted to what were called 'lunatic asylums,'" Langlands explains in a Zoom call from Dundee.

"It possibly has nothing to do with mental health - it was simply the way people were treated back then."

Tom McEneaney became certified to practice mental health care in Belfast at the age of 24. Now 65, he has over four decades of experience in the mental healthcare system of Northern Ireland. He remembers the asylums.

"When I started training, the stigma associated with mental illness was massive," he explains. "We had all these big mental health institutions which were on the edge of big cities, with 1,500-1,600 beds in them. Most of those institutions now are almost all closed."

Much improvement was made in the medical understanding of mental illness in the 20th and so far in the 21st centuries, of course. We now know that unusual and self-destructive behaviour is not caused by demonic possession or an accumulation of phlegm - instead, the roots are often in the balance of neurotransmitters, and the existence of past traumas.

Despite this awareness, the biggest hurdle to battling mental illness in the modern era is the stigma that McEneaney hinted at. Folks still just don't like to talk about their feelings.

And in places like Northern Ireland, or Scotland - Celtic cultures, that value the stoic, strong, and self-sufficient - that stigma was especially daunting.

Tony McLaren is the national coordinator of Breathing Space, a Scottish mental health support line that works with people in moments of dire need.

"We will get people who are on a bridge, wanting to take their own life," shares McLaren, who explains that Breathing Space opened its doors in 2004 to provide an after-hours line of support for Scots in crisis, largely in response to a startling statistic

about Scottish men. "At that time, 75 per cent of our suicides in Scotland were male. That statistic has not changed, insofar as we still have around 70-75 per cent of those people taking their own lives - completing suicide - being male.

"That gets you wondering, what is it about Scottish men?" he ponders. "What is it about our Celtic nature? Is it alcohol? Is it emotional intelligence? The inability to speak about our emotions and our feelings? Because we're tough Scotsmen, y'know?"

It is a similar story in Northern Ireland, says McEneaney.

"In Northern Ireland, we are one of the highest instances of mental health concerns across the whole of the U.K.," he posits. "We are probably a 25 per cent higher rate of mental health conditions, and depression is the most common health issue across the isles. We have also had, the last six years, the highest rate of anti-depression prescribing in the U.K. And that is across all age ranges."

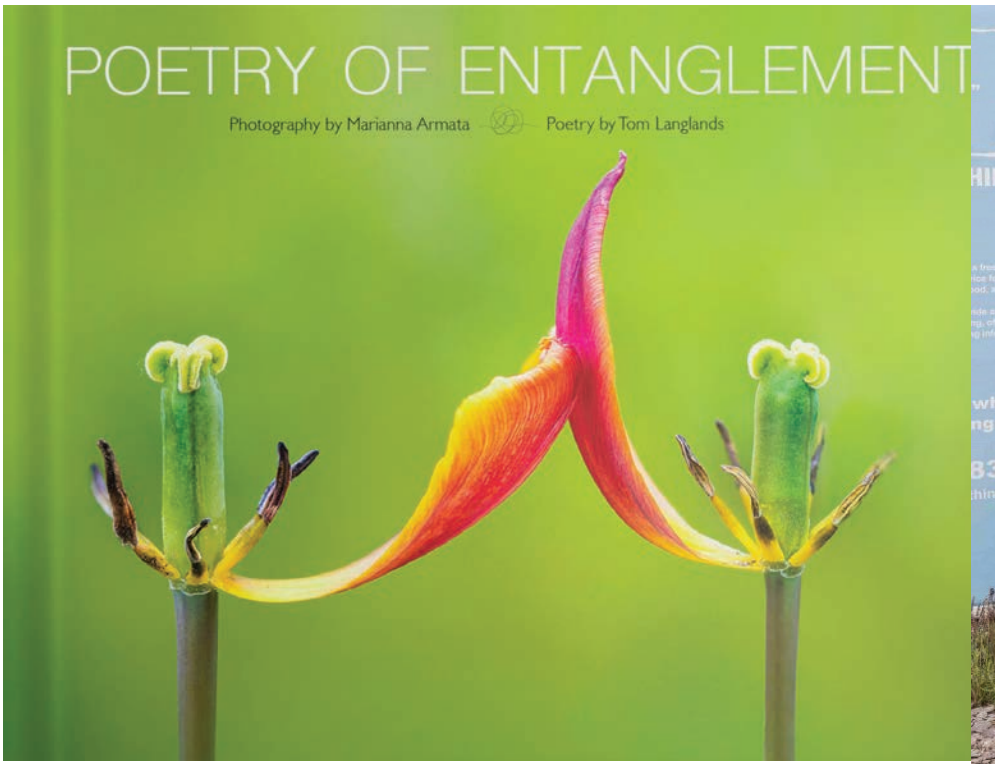
That's perhaps not surprising, given Northern Ireland's violent political history. A 2002 study, Mental health in Northern Ireland: have 'the Troubles' made it worse? By D. O'Reilly and M. Stevenson, suggests that the nation should expect to see a wave of mental illness in the ensuing decades.

"Violence, accompanied by greater delinquency, may also result in increased social disorganisation, a growing mistrust and an erosion of social capital in communities that will further predispose people to psychological stress," the paper reads. "There is some evidence that this has happened in Northern Ireland as it is now an extremely polarised society where more than two thirds of the population live in areas with more than 80% of one religion. Spatially segregated societies like this tend to have a disrupted psychology of place and this can cause a sense of alienation and eventually anger and resentment, leading to confrontational interaction and further violence.

"It will be interesting to see if the higher levels of psychiatric morbidity in Northern Ireland fall with time and an improving political situation."

Today, McEneaney doesn't deny the impact of the Troubles, but stresses that the reality is more complicated than that.

"Coming out of the Troubles, and the trauma associated with the Troubles, is a factor. But it is not the only factor," he explains. "A lot of it would be to do with lifestyle – there is a lot of low mood and depression in young people. There is a high suicide rate especially in young men in Northern Ireland. Alcohol and drugs play a role. Also, the pressures that people feel now,



and may not have felt in the past. Maybe working conditions and unemployment. High levels of social deprivation."

McEneaney currently serves as the head of business development and support services for Aware NI, a Northern Ireland charity for those suffering depression and bipolar disorder. Aware NI has 25 cognitive behavioural therapy-based support groups across the region, most of which are face-to-face; a decade ago, 80 per cent of those who showed up to support groups were women. That figure has changed in recent years, however.

"What we have found out, last year alone, was that 52 per cent were female, and 48 per cent were men," says McEneaney. "There's a big swing of men seeking help. That can only be good."

Why the change? The likely answer is simply that the stigma around mental health is beginning to fade.

Langlands recently published a book of poetry, called Poetry of Entanglement. Teaming up with his Canadian friend and collaborator Marianna Armata - who contributed complimentary photography - the pair intend to split their profits 50/50 between the Canadian Mental Health Association and the Scottish Association for Mental Health (SAMH).

"I have had several friends who have suffered from mental health issues and received treatment for them; I had one particularly good friend during the midst of COVID-19 who actually ended up in a bit of trouble with mental health and needed to seek help. But I have noticed, in recent years, a very comforting shift to people being able to talk about it much more than they ever did before. If I go back to my childhood, you never spoke about it. It got brushed under the carpet. Over the last year or two, the people I know who are struggling - people who wouldn't have spoken about it in the past - are opening up more."

That change could be thanks, certainly in part, to organizations like Aware NI and Breathing Space, being public-facing organizations who have been advocating for mental health awareness for years or even decades.

"It is to give them fertile ground, so they can feel safe," says McLaren. "I have had many men tell me, 'I've never spoken about this to anybody.'

> *"Given the right environment, men will talk about their thoughts and feelings."*

In addition, the proliferation of technology - especially communications tech - has allowed treatment to occur over vast distances, and in the privacy of one's home, if one prefers. The access to mental health support has grown exponentially in the last few decades. That makes a difference

Tony McLaren

in awareness, which in turn dissipates the taboo.

"I never thought technology would be as important as today," McLaren admits. "I have had to churn up my skills around using Zoom and Microsoft Teams and web chat in order to engage with people. I work with footballers who are playing for Ross County, Inverness, Aberdeen, and Dundee. I would never really have seen them as it was too far away. Now they can exchange and have therapy over Microsoft Teams."

Having worked to get tablets and Breathing Space-connected phones in places like prisons and holding cells across Scotland, McLaren says that technology is bound to continue to evolve alongside our understanding and treatment of mental illness.

"There was something in therapy around, 'we have to see one another; we have to shake somebody's hand; we have to be in the same room,'" he explains. "That has been a change just over the last two years. Some psychodynamic services are saying, 'we don't agree with it.' Well, get on board, because this is what's going to happen."

Much of this technological growth in the last two years has been exacerbated and propelled by the sudden onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. This is a trauma the whole world is going through, and much like the shared trauma of the Troubles in Northern Ireland, this pandemic is sure to send ripples through mental health in the coming years.

"The COVID-19 pandemic is a global health emergency, the scale, speed and nature of which is beyond anything most of us have experienced in our lifetimes," reads a 2020 study, Mental health impacts of COVID-19 in Ireland and the need for a secondary care mental health service response, by Karen O'Connor, Margo Wrigley, Rhona Jennings, Michele Hill and Amir Niazi.

> *"The mental health burden associated with this pandemic is also likely to surpass anything we have previously experienced."*

The paper continues, "This pandemic will be associated with an increase in people presenting for the very first time with significant mental health difficulties. Several groups are likely to be particularly vulnerable," such as COVID-19 survivors, people bereaved during the pandemic, frontline workers, and those with fewer social and economic resources. "People with established mental illness are likely to be particularly vulnerable to relapse, exacerbation of symptoms and impaired functioning in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic."

The study urges that the need for ring-fencing a budget both for mental health services, and for COVID-19 mental health research to prepare for the coming wave of mental health issues on the horizon. However, since we are all experiencing it, there should also be a huge increase in empathy related to mental health struggles.

"Our own health minister said he expects a 'tsunami' of mental health issues after the pandemic," says McEneaney. "The good thing about the pandemic is, it's got people talking about mental health. When people talk about mental health, it reduces the stigma. There is a big attitudinal change now, that it is okay not to be okay, and it is okay to talk about it."

McLaren, who earlier pontificated on what makes the Scottish man susceptible to mental illness, also figures that the Scots' tendency towards being a good and hospitable neighbour will shine after the pandemic.

"I think COVID-19 brought that out, as well - how we are actually kind in our communities today. The family across the road and the old lady next door. I might be biased, though - I am Scottish through and through. With young people I see with my colleagues - maybe it is the environment I work in, that is where the bias comes in - that people want the best for their neighbour."

"I suppose it is like anything - once people open up about it, others will then help and assist them getting the support that they need," adds Langlands. "That is what I am finding happening with some of my friends. It was something of a taboo 10-20 years ago, but now it is far less of a problem to talk about it. That's the silver lining."

If you are struggling with mental health issues, there are many good resources available online. Reach out.

Scotland: ***www.breathingspace.scot***
Northern Ireland: ***www.aware-ni.org***
Ireland: ***www.mentalhealthireland.ie***
Wales: ***www.mentalhealthwales.net***
Cornwall: ***www.cornwallmind.org***
Isle of Man: ***www.manxminds.com***
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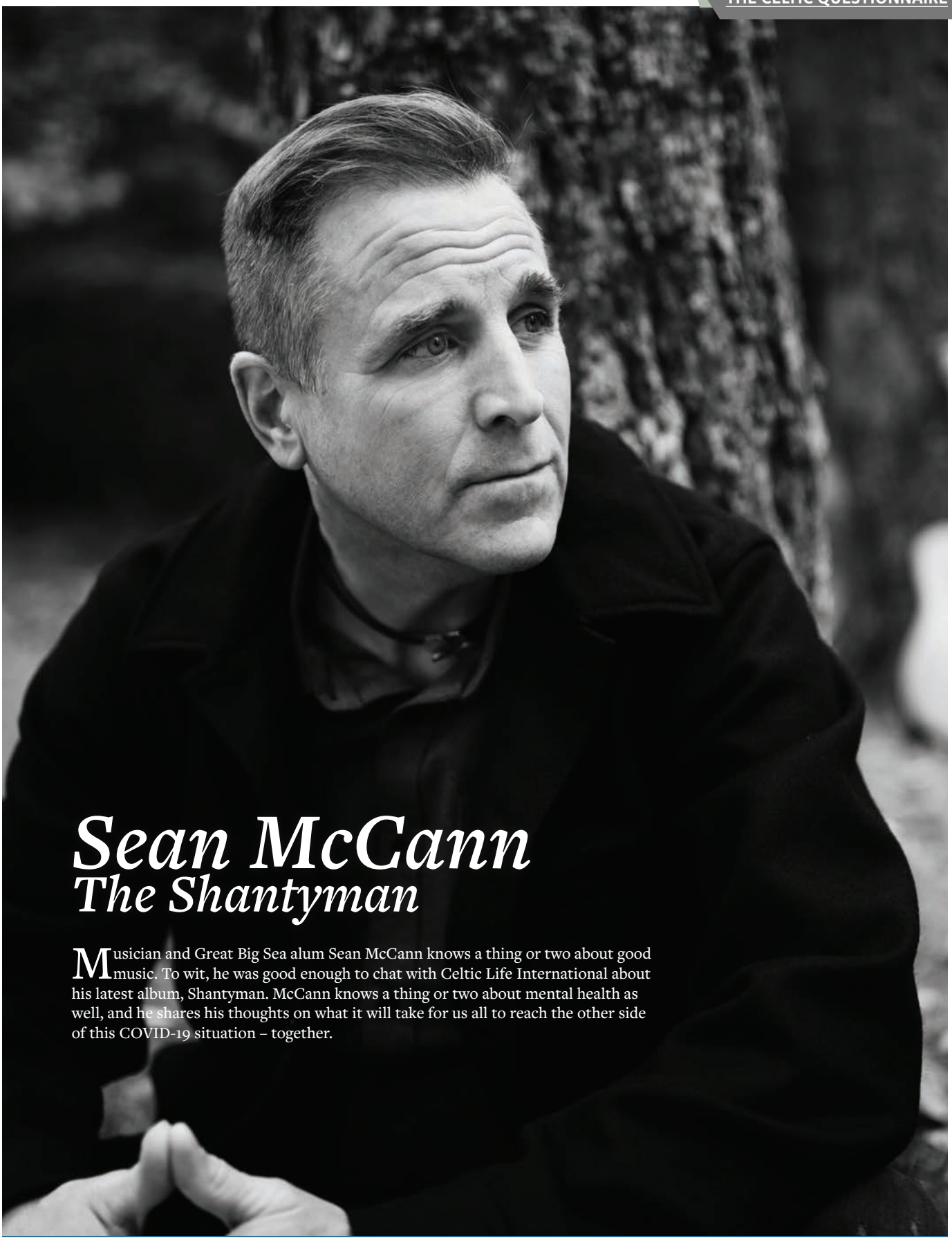

Sean McCann
The Shantyman

Musician and Great Big Sea alum Sean McCann knows a thing or two about good music. To wit, he was good enough to chat with Celtic Life International about his latest album, Shantyman. McCann knows a thing or two about mental health as well, and he shares his thoughts on what it will take for us all to reach the other side of this COVID-19 situation – together.

What are your own roots and where do you currently reside?

I am Sean McCann, the Shantyman from Newfoundland! I grew up on the Rock, and I currently reside in Manotick, Ontario - just outside of Ottawa. My people, the McCann clan, are from Co. Armagh in Northern Ireland. We are the 7th generation out of Ireland; my people settled in a little place called Gull Island, NL, and started fishing. We have been there ever since. I am always drawn back home, and I just literally came back from there. It was good to get by the ocean again, and to see my people, my parents. We have a saying in Newfoundland; when my grandfather met someone he didn't know, he would ask them, 'where do you belong?' It was a deep question. It meant something a little deeper than your location of birth.

When and why did you get into music?

I grew up with song in my community. Everyone was always in some band or another. But I was a bit of a late bloomer; I focused on hockey when I was in high school. I was always a fan of the music, but I wasn't of the music. I wasn't doing it. Newfoundland had Ryan's Fancy and Figgy Duff - just great bands. And I got to meet these people. I would see these bands in little, small clubs. Given that I had a desire to see where I belonged to, where I came from, I went to Ireland when I was 19, spent some time driving around the country, and a lot of time in Co. Clare. I was blown away by the music, honestly, and for the respect that people had for music. It just enchanted me. My first public appearance - the first time I sang a song for an audience - was in O'Donovan's in Dublin, where the Dubliners were known to frequent. I sang a song called Bachelor's Morning, and people got really quiet, and they paid attention. They accepted me into their community, and the next thing I know, I am back the next night with the band, learning how to play the bodhrán. I came back from that a changed man with a sense of purpose. I wanted to do this.

Tell us about your work in music today, and your new album, Shantyman.

Well, we are all under duress, we are all challenged - musicians in particular, both financially and emotionally. I mean, music is what we do for a living, and that has been taken away. But it is also what we do for life. I am 54, and I have lived through a lot. I have overcome a lot of challenges – I have been sober for 10 years, and in recovery. I have gotten through a lot of things and toughened up quite a bit. I am confident that I will get through this; I will work through it. And what I do is work. I never stop working. Life, to me, and work are the same thing. I am lucky that way. So, we didn't pause - we put out a book, One Good Reason. Pandemic or not, we still do what we do. I am a singer, and I am a folklorist. So, we can't do it live? We can't do it in a studio? We learned how to do it by ourselves. It was a learning curve for me, but I recorded this entire record myself first, in my studio, with the intention of releasing it as my personal pandemic project. But it was just good enough to catch my ear. I have made a lot of records - this is my 16th. I took a week away from it, came back, and I heard a record. I wanted to bring it to its potential, and I knew I couldn't do that myself. But we have the technology to tap my friends; Hawksley Workman, J.P. Cormier, and 'Big Sugar' Gordie Johnson. It was a lot of time and effort from everyone involved, but we just didn't give up. It never even occurred to me once not to do it.

Do you have any favourite tracks?

I like Rolling Sea quite a bit. I am a child of the '80s and a reggae fan. I do a lot of kayaking, and that song just reminded me of being on the ocean in Newfoundland, riding 10-foot swells. I believe folk music is not static, it must be dynamic and evolve. Hopefully, this was an evolution.

And what about your work in mental health? How are music and mental health connected?

Music rises above hard times. When musicians are under duress, that is when they write their best. That is when I write my best. When I am compelled to say something important, that's a better song. Always is. That is why I have such faith in our ability to recover from all this.

How has the importance of the awareness and advocacy of mental health issues changed during COVID-19? This has been a challenging time for us all.

It's super important. These are difficult times. The success of my own recovery was based on my ability to finally accept the truth, the reality of the situation. And right now, we don't have much choice. A lot of people - myself included - spend their lives avoiding the hard choice. We are afraid. Truth is hard. Work is hard. We will do just about anything to avoid it if we can. But we are all in the same position, and there has to be work done. The last thing we can afford to do now is lose faith or pretend that it's not happening. There is going to be fallout from this ongoing pandemic, and it is going to be mental health related. We are going to need to use the tools that are at our disposal. One of those tools is music. Music does no harm, helps us feel good, and helps spirits. I have seen it happen, and it is something we can all access. The sea shanty, historically, was a song designed specifically to help people overcome difficult challenges by working together in unison. It literally kept the time while sailors pulled heavy ropes aboard ships, hauling in nets full of fish. But they were able to do it, not solo, but together. This is why music is so important now. It is what binds us. It is what we can do together to get it done. The only way we will conquer COVID-19 is if we work together. And that is what the world needs, really. We need to be together right now.

What more can be done to treat and to support those facing mental illness, coming out of COVID-19?

I think that leaders especially, instead of trying to spin victories out of failures, need to acknowledge them when they have them. And not to dwell on them, but to be honest with people. A lot of the problem with the pandemic is the emotional back and forth. There has been a lot of saying one thing, and then going back on that. That just stresses people out. We are all in the same boat - just tell us the truth. Because it has gone on so long, there is going to be a mental health price to pay. And the front line is where we are going to feel it first. Nurses are quitting in record numbers, and that is something that we can ill-afford. And they are quitting because they are overworked, and it has gone on too long, and so we need more nurses. We need more doctors that are focused on wellbeing - mental wellness, as opposed to just arms and legs. But I am optimistic. We humans have done some pretty stupid stuff, but we have survived in spite of it. We just need to be smart and acknowledge truth and practice resilience. This challenge we are all facing - I don't think it will be the end of us, it will make us stronger.

What is on your agenda for the remainder of 2021, and for 2022?

I foresee myself doing a lot of work with music in the mental health field - wherever I can, wherever I am allowed to. I do a lot of virtual work, but it works best face-to-face. But I think we are getting close to that. I think there is going to be a lot of work for me to do, and I am happy to do it. Also, I have kids – two teenage boys. I want to make sure that they come out of this more resilient. As parents, we must keep an eye on that, and on each other. I always look for my sense of purpose, and I need to be in that conversation, with my guitar. So, my job is going to be what it always has been - walk there, with the truth in one hand, and my guitar in the other.

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Old Friends Genealogy - *www.oldfriendsgenealogy.com*

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

Books by Briana Corr Scott

Nimbus Publishing - *www.nimbus.ca*

These three beautiful books from author/illustrator Briana Corr Scott make lovely gifts at Christmas or anytime of the year. Wildflower is a stunning, modern reimagining of Thumbelina that is perfect for new mothers and mothers-to-be, recent graduates, and anyone with a love and appreciation for nature. She Dreams of Sable Island is a wonderful bedtime read-aloud that includes a paper doll and accessories. The Book of Selkie explores the legend of "seal folk" who take on human form and hide their coats away until they get restless and are called to the sea. The book includes a paper doll, clothes, and seal. All are available via the company's website.

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Memories are a gift that last a lifetime, and what better gift to give this holiday season than a memorable travel experience? With vacation itineraries planned in Ireland, Scotland, England and Wales, Sheenco Travel offers an experience like no other. The company's popular ***Irish and Scottish Castle Tours*** takes participants to a variety of incredible historical sites, combining classic Celtic culture with modern-day comforts. Unique and luxurious, the tours include teachings on history and heritage, along with showcasing local culinary delights and authentic castle accommodations. In Ireland these include Ashford Castle in Co. Mayo and Dromoland Castle in Co. Clare while in Scotland you will stay in Inverlochy Castle in the Highlands and Crossbasket Castle on the outskirts of Glasgow. Customized trips are also available, both independent or with your own private driver/guide. All bookings can be made with confidence thanks to the Sheenco Travel flexible Coronavirus Travel Policy.

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4K Design Tees - *www.4kDesign-Tees.com*

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Kilted Jumper Dress

Heather Knight Clothing & Gifts - *www.heatherknight.ca*

Heather Knight has been handcrafting clothing in rural Nova Scotia since 1992. The influence of both Celtic and Atlantic Canadian culture is apparent in everything she makes. Follow her on social media, where she showcases custom pieces as they are created - bespoke items that are proving wildly popular with those who appreciate original clothing. Her children's line - including special occasion outfits, rough and tumble wear, baby gifts and more - feature unique designs that will keep the wee ones in style. Perennial favourite, Heather's Kilted Jumper Dress, with pewter Celtic buttons, looks like a kilt with its fringed apron and kilt pin but - instead of pleats - a gathered skirt makes it easy to wear and care for.

Celtic Journals & Ancient Irish Maps

O'Brien Celtic Gifts - *www.obriencelticgifts.com*

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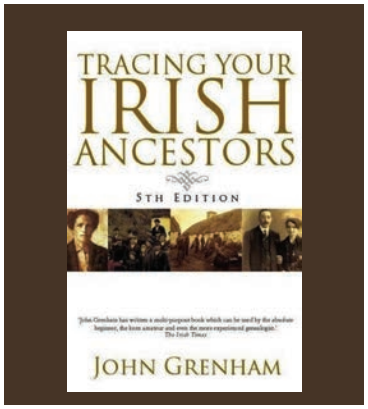
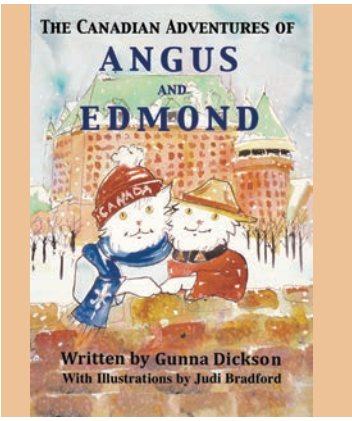
Tracing Your Irish Ancestors

Genealogical.com - *www.genealogical.com*



Tracing Your Irish Ancestors, written by John Grenham and published by the American ancestry-based publisher Genealogical.com, is the perfect present for persons with a passion for the past. With a deep focus on Irish culture and heritage, the terrific tome provides a detailed step-by-step guide to exploring one's roots on the Emerald Isle, including helpful tips and tricks for the novice researcher. An indispensable roadmap to family history, Tracing Your Irish Ancestors is available via the company's website alongside a comprehensive treasure trove of other genealogy books on Celtic ancestry in Ireland, Scotland, and Wales.



The Canadian Adventures of Angus and Edmond

Gunna Dickson and Judi Bradford - *www.amazon.com / www.ingramspark.com*

In their sixth adventure, NYC-based adopted Angora-mix brothers Angus and Edmond take off for a quick visit to their neighbor to the North - and land in another world. The hospitality of scenic pre-Christmas Montreal, the most European city in North America, warms them as they visit the majestic 17th Century Notre Dame Basilica and go skating in the shadow of La Grande Roue in the historic Old Port. The dynamic duo succumbs to the wintry wonderland charms of snow-clad Quebec City, where making memories is easy on a leisurely calèche ride and thrilling toboggan run on the banks of the ice-clogged St. Lawrence River. They eat poutine and maple sugar treats, frolic on the Plains of Abraham and look ahead to Carnival festivities. Angus is in his element in the French-speaking province of Quebec and Edmond finds his voice in a most unusual way. The brothers even contemplate a career with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

Winter Workshop

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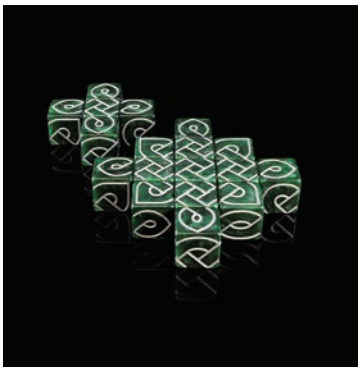
- *www.balmoralschoolofpiping.org/winter-workshop*

America's leader in bagpiping and drumming instruction, Balmoral's mission is to raise the standard and promote the appreciation of bagpipe music in the USA by providing world-class instruction, cultivating excellence in youth, presenting innovative musical events, and fostering tradition. Students study on one of several beautiful American campuses, or via online schools, receiving instruction from some of the world's finest pipers and pipe band drummers in small classes - at levels from beginning to advanced - on the Great Highland pipes, small pipes, and the Scottish snare drum. Along with enjoying workshops, music sessions, and presentations on piping and drumming topics, students will make friendships that last a lifetime. The non-profit organization hosts the Balmoral Classic in Pittsburgh each autumn, featuring the U.S. Junior Solo Piping & Drumming Championships and a concert featuring an internationally recognized Celtic ensemble. The school's 2022 Winter Workshop will be held online, February 4-6.

Bewley's Coffee Lover Survival Basket

Bewley Irish Imports - *www.bewleyusaretail.com*

Bewley Irish Imports brings the tastes of Ireland to North America with a variety of high-quality food and beverage products. Those looking for the perfect gift for the coffee lover in their lives need to look no further than the company's Bewley's Coffee Lover Survival Basket! Included are Bewley's Fairtrade Certified coffees and espresso beans, which directly support a better life for farming families in the developing world through fair prices, community development, and environmental stewardship. Also included in the basket are Bewley's Gold Roast, Rich Roast, and Decaf instant coffees, and six individually wrapped, delicious, caramelized biscuits. Other tasty gift baskets are available as well.



Celtic Knot Dice

Black Oak Games - *www.blackoakgames.com*

For anyone and everyone who loves Celtic art, Knot Dice is the perfect gift! As an art piece, puzzle, and game, these beautiful dice look at home on a desk, a bookshelf, a coffee table, or a bar. Each die face is a distinct part of a Celtic knot, and they can be arranged in countless ways to form traditional and original designs. Inspired by centuries of mesmerizing Celtic knotwork, these dice put art in your hands. Smooth and solid, they feel soothing and satisfying to hold and roll. On your own, create patterns or challenge yourself with some of the included puzzles. Or enjoy the many included games with your friends and family. There's something for everyone to love with Knot Dice – fun for the whole family!

Celtic Love Knot Gold Vermeil Pendant

Faith & Begorra - *www.faithandbegorra.com*

14k solid Gold Vermeil is a nickel-free sterling silver with a rich and robust layer of 14k solid Gold. As part of Shanore's stunning new collection, this unique piece has been designed both to look beautiful and to last for years. The Celtic Love Knot pendant is encrusted with exquisite CZ set in prongs around the rounded edges and includes an 18" chain & a 2" extender. Also included are matching stud earrings, and each item is boxed for gift giving. An ideal present for women of any age. In addition, use the promo code CelticLife2021 at checkout and receive a gift valued at $60, as well as free shipping, until December 25, 2021.

Celtic Knot Bookmarks

Holy Heck - *www.holyheckusa.com*

Surprise your favorite book lover this holiday season and let them mark their spot in style! These beautiful Celtic leather bookmarks are individually handmade and finished with a deerskin lace tassel. Crafted in the Holy Heck leather shop in Southern Alabama, each bookmark is cut from the hide, hand stamped, hand dyed, and assembled on site. Gorgeous and durable, these bookmarks are ready for many reading adventures and are available in red, yellow, blue, and green from the company's website. Holy Heck is a small family business that travels to many Scottish and Celtic festivals in the United States. Utilizing raw materials from American companies, they specialize in making leather kilt accessories, festival gear and Celtic themed gifts for the Celtic market.

The Lewis Chess Set - 'Scotland's Hidden Secret'

Scottish Creations - *www.scottishcreations.com*

The romance of the mystery of its discovery on a remote beach, perhaps near Uig on the Isle of Lewis some time before 11 April 1831, is loved by Scots and further adds to this land of mist, myths and legend. Is it true that they were found in a sandbank by a farmer who mistook the pieces for elves and promptly fled, then returning to retrieve them only due to his wife's urging? Historians believe the pieces were probably made in Norway about AD 1150-1200. The belief is that the pieces were buried for safe keeping on route to be traded in Ireland. The plot thickens...the skilled craftsmen at Berkeley Chess have interpreted the iconic chess pieces to produce magnificent chess sets which exemplify the majesty of the original sculptures. Pieces are available in ivory & red, ivory & brown.

Dragon Torc Bangle

Keith Jack Jewelry - *www.keithjackjewelry.com*

Scotland-born, Vancouver-based artist and designer Keith Jack remains world-renowned as a master craftsman of Celtic jewelry. After the birth of his children, Jack was inspired to create lasting, legacy pieces - of modern design and ancient meaning - which could be passed on for generations, creating new family traditions while retaining Celtic and Norse legend. Each of Keith's collections starts from an inspiration; something unique he has seen in a hidden mountain loch, ancient Norse coin, or dragonfly skimming over a pond. One of his new masterworks is the handmade Dragon Torc Bangle; an intricately woven, flexible sterling silver bangle that can be wrapped and worn in multiple ways. Wear this bracelet to ignite your soul with strength and wisdom - breathe passion into the lives around you. This unisex piece is the perfect gift for that special someone this holiday season.

14K Gold Vermeil Claddagh Necklace

Irish Treasures - *www.irishtreasureslp.com*

Featuring the most romantic symbol of love, this 14K Gold Vermeil Claddagh Necklace is a stunning piece of Irish Jewelry. The Irish Claddagh features two hands, holding a delicate crowned heart. The hands represent friendship, the heart speaks to love, and the crown symbolizes loyalty. Blending the best of precious metals into precious design, the necklace features a genuine 925 Sterling Silver base with a dense coat of 14K Gold. The hands, heart, and crown create a beautiful 15″ by 16″ pendant, which sits on a beautiful and delicate chain (18″ + 2″ extension) making it possible to adjust the length according to the wearer's desire. This beautiful piece makes an ideal gift of love at Christmas, on birthdays, on Valentine's Day, for graduations, or anytime of the year.

Pict Warriors Hunting Beast Cuff

Scoti Creations - *www.scoticreations.com*

Step back into the world of Celts, Picts, and Vikings with Scoti Creation's extensive array of handcrafted artisan jewelry designed to connect you with your heritage. Metal Smith Marilyn Scott combines precious metals and ancient forming techniques to give each piece a unique, antiquated look. The Pict Warriors Hunting Beast cuff is a repoussé piece in brass that opens a door to the past - specifically, Picts hunting for food. Other timeless and beautifully crafted gift items are available via the company's website, just in time for the holiday season.

Leslie's Field Guide to Ireland

Lee Studio - *www.leestudiotc.com*

If a trip to Ireland is on your bucket list, then Leslie's Field Guide to Ireland is a must-have. This pocket-sized compendium is packed with information that will enrich your stay–the early origins of the people, a historic timeline, mythology; the significance of the Celts, Vikings, Normans, Scots-Irish and English; chief Irish festivals, ancient laws, and the Ogham Alphabet. A practical section includes translations of Irish place names, help to pronounce modern Irish, travel packing lists, driving tips, and travel times. Regional maps accompany lists of places to explore. With pages available to insert your own itinerary, calendar, family tree, and notes, you will consult it often throughout the trip, and once home again, it will be a treasured memento of your travels. Other gift options are available via the company's website as well.

Scottish Hairy Highland Coo

Silver Stag of Scotland - *www.silverstag.scot*

Make someone's holiday season extra special this year with an adopted, limited-edition plush Scottish Highland Coo. The Coo is guaranteed Scottish in origin and will be lovingly transported from its home in the Scottish Highlands with an official, personalized adoption certificate. Each certificate details the provenance, authenticity, and distinct character trait of the Coo, and includes the new owner's details, giving them full responsibility for the nurturing and upbringing of their adopted pet. Lovingly known as the "Highland Coo" or "Hairy Coos", they have been grazing on mainland Scotland, and the isles, since the sixth century - the oldest registered cow in the world! Long ago, they were often brought into the home to increase warmth and to protect them from theft. Adopting Hamish or one of his adorable siblings allows you to experience their fluffy, comical, and cute nature in the comfort of your own home.

Skye Hygge Gift Bundle

Skyeskyns - *www.skyeskyns.co.uk*

Gift the gift of cozy this Christmas season with a wee hamper to bring the art of relaxation (or Hygge) to a family member, friend, or a significant other. Skyeskyns - tanners and suppliers of sheepskins on the Isle of Skye in Scotland since 1983 - have assembled The Skye Hygge Gift Bundle, ideal for warm moments by the fireside on a cold winter's night. Featuring a hand-selected sheepskin in natural brown tones (from caramel to dark chocolate), winter fragrance candles made from 100 percent natural soya wax and fine oils, a ceramics hand-thrown mug inspired by the colours of the Misty Isle, each set is packaged in a Skyeskyns jute bag with ribbon and raffia string and complemented by a personalized gift card. Bliss in a bag!

Scottish Luxury Tours

Sleepy Sporran Tours - *www.sleepysporran.co.uk*

Sleepy Sporran specialize in luxury, personal itinerary tours of Scotland, where personal wish lists and interests are crafted into each day's itinerary. The company's history and knowledge of Scotland promises a rich and engaging schedule of secret places, scenic back road routes, cultural treats and privileged access to places, making each tour totally exclusive and memorable. Personable and professional service includes itinerary planning, luxury transport, driver, additional guide, lunch, on board refreshments, attraction visit fees, and a tour information pack. A wonderful, unique and thoughtful gift to share with family and friends at Christmas or any time of the year.

The Viking Wayfinder Pocket Knife

Viking Celt Trading Company - *www.vikingcelt.com*

This elegant artist-etched knife features the ancient Viking Wayfinder symbol for protection and safe travel. Exploring the crossroads of Celtic and Viking history, award winning artist and designer Bob Heiney has developed a unique and outstanding collection of items that celebrate the relationship between these two distinct, ancient cultures. Among the collection is this Viking Wayfinder Pocket Knife, crafted in titanium-coated Stainless Steel. With its fine Celtic detailing, it is both eye-catching and practical - a trusted and true companion that makes an ideal every-day carry blade. A thoughtful, practical gift for family and friends this holiday season or anytime of year.

The Wolfe Tones Phenomenon

Alex Fell - *www.choicepublishing.ie | www.amazon.com*

The Wolfe Tones are widely acknowledged as the leading Irish Nationalist band, as well as traditionally-trained folk music exponents. They have influenced many younger bands, as well as established artists like Rod Stewart - whose version of "Grace" followed a visit to Glasgow Celtic Football Club, where longtime fans of the band are renowned for singing The Wolfe Tones' songs at matches. The band is going into its 56th year of continuous touring with the same line-up - a music industry record - and still spend time each year in North America and wherever else the Irish Diaspora is found. Alex Fell recaps all the highlights with this terrific tome, including the band's twenty-two "Top 20" hits, the fastestselling single ever on the Emerald Isle, the "best single ever" as voted in the BBC World Service poll, the double-platinum and gold albums, the civic awards of keys to both New York and Los Angeles, and the numerous proclamations attesting to their devotion to the ideal of a peaceful and united Ireland. With a soaring narrative arc, a recorded repertoire of the band, and peppered with historical facts and contemporary colour photographs, the work is a must-read for true music lovers and all with an interest in Irish history and culture. Watch for Alex Fell's second edition of her popular reference book - The Irish Draught Horse - coming soon!

Iain of New Scotland, foreword by Diana Gabaldon

Bradan Press - *www.bradanpress.com*

Thirteen-year-old Iain is homesick for the Highlands of Scotland. It's September 1773, and he has just arrived in Nova Scotia with his parents and little sister after the long, disastrous, Atlantic voyage of the ship Hector. They wanted a new life in New Scotland, but the land agent lied to them. With no money, no food, no shelter, and winter fast approaching, how will they survive? Author Margaret MacKay of Pictou County, Nova Scotia, draws on the Scottish Gaelic culture and experiences of her ancestors to weave a tale of the first Highlanders to settle in Nova Scotia. With a foreword by Diana Gabaldon, author of the Outlander book series. Suitable for Grades 5 and up, and YA and historical fiction lovers of all ages.

Balfour Of Ilk

Just Kilt Me - *www.justkiltme.com*

The Balfours were the most prominent family in Fife, eventually expanding to 30 clan branches across Scotland, Ireland, Wales, England, and continental Europe. Many clan members served Scottish Monarchs and held important positions in law and the Scottish Kirk. Originally designed by the Chief Elect of Clan Balfour, and worn by numerous associated families - including Bethunes, Beaton, and more - the Balfour Tartan is both bold and beautiful. With over 100 unique tartan designs on offer, Just Kilt Me showcases Scotland's historic tradition through a wide range of kilts, tweed Argyle Jackets, vests, sporrans, and many other accessories. All items are custom made to order, and free worldwide shipping is available with large purchases. E-gift cards are also available via the company's website and make for an ideal gift this holiday season.

Ingles Buchan Tartan Throw

Northern Watters Knitwear - *www.nwknitwear.com*

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

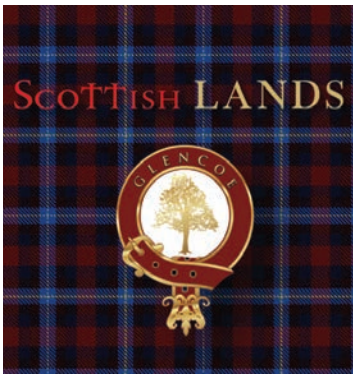
Tartan Christmas Stockings

ScotlandShop - *www.scotlandshop.com*

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

Highland Title

Scottish Lands - *www.scottishlands.com*



The ultimate gift for "the person who has everything": make them a Lord or Lady this Christmas! Scottish Lands offers a unique opportunity to purchase a plot of land in the Glencoe Wood in the Highlands of Scotland. Thanks to Scottish landowner laws, purchasing a Highland Estate gives you the legal right to call yourself a Laird, Lord or Lady. Scottish Lands offer estates of various sizes and prices. The document pack comes with a legal Certificate of Sale, information and directions to enable you to locate and visit your land, and a Master Title Deed to comply with the legalities of changing your name on your driving license and credit cards. The purchase also helps preserve the environment; as the company states on its website, "by splitting the woodland into the ownership of hundreds of different people it ensures that no developer can ever acquire it and use it for their own gain, to the detriment of the area...the woodland is home to many species of Scottish flora and fauna, and it can be enjoyed by people as an area of peace, quiet, and tranquillity."

Classic Tartan Wool Products

Patrick King Woollen Company - *www.patrickkingwoollencompany.com*

With offices in both Port Hope, Ontario, and Edinburgh, Scotland, Patrick King Woollen Company produces beautiful and unique Lambswool and Merino Wool blankets, scarves, capes, bags and purses. Tartan is timeless and compliments any wardrobe, home, or cottage, so be sure to style yourself and your surroundings in one of these exclusive designs. Patrick King is a member of the Scottish Tartan Authority, and all of their tartans are registered by the Scottish Tartan Registry. Use promo code "celtic life" to apply a 20 percent discount off your first purchase (sale ends December 1, 2021).

9ct Gold Raindrops Pendant

Rhiannon - *www.rhiannon.co.uk*

This gorgeous knotwork design is one of a series inspired by traditional Welsh folk-tunes and the dances which accompanied them - intricate patterns woven by a dozen or more dancers in repeating, unending cycles. The design is named after the song Titrwm Tatrwm which, in Welsh, doesn't mean anything but sounds like rain falling. The pendant is also available in both silver and 18ct gold, and as earrings as well. A stunning handcrafted item of the highest quality, this piece will make a timeless and treasured gift for loved ones this holiday season.

Scottish Clan & Family Encyclopaedia

St. Kilda - *www.stkildastore.com*

The Scottish Clan & Family Encyclopaedia was compiled and edited by George Way of Plean, Falkland Pursuivant Extraordinary and the late Romilly Squire, and is endorsed by the Lord Lyon. In addition to their own extensive knowledge and research, they have overseen the work of a team of renowned specialists in Scottish history. As such, the third edition has been completely revised and expanded to reflect the many changes that have occurred over the twenty years since the publication of the second edition. The new tome includes histories and badges for 346 clans and families - with nearly 200 additional Crest designs and hundreds of new images - updated research by the original authors aided by leading academics in Scottish history, a fresh layout of over 500 pages, and both new and revamped scholarly articles.

Celtic Throws & Scarves

Calzeat - *www.calzeat.com*

Based in the stunning lowlands of Scotland, Calzeat has over 50 years of experience in designing and weaving gorgeous, high-quality fabric accessories. With a direct link to Scotland's mystical past, the company finds inspiration for their beautifully crafted items in the many amazing artefacts left by our Celtic and Viking ancestors. If you are looking for the perfect Celtic gift this holiday season, you will find many uniquely crafted options for family and friends on Calzeat's website, including colourful scarves and luxurious Celtic throws with elegant fringing - ideal for cozy nights by the fire.

Crystal Christmas Ornaments

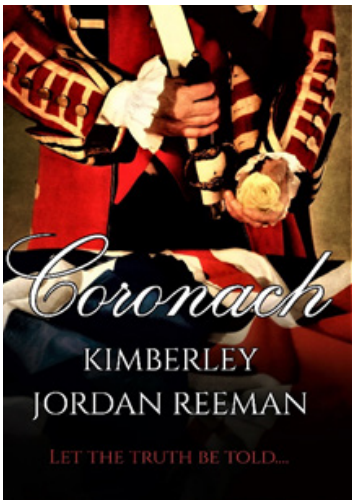
The Celtic Jewelry Studio - *www.TheCelticJewelryStudio.com*

Add a touch of Celtic sparkle to your Christmas celebrations this year with these unique, high-quality crystal ornaments. Handcrafted with a dazzling 20mm fully faceted crystal globe, a 10mm octagon crystal drop, and detailed with a silver Celtic symbol, this lovely item comes beautifully gift boxed with a Celtic Christmas Blessing that reads "May you be blessed with the Spirit of the season-Peace, The Gift of the season-Hope, and the Heart of the season-Love. Nollaig Shona!" Designs include Celtic Cross, Heart, Round Knot, Trinity, TriHeart, Thistle, Triskele and Shamrock. Special Offer! Now thru December 15, purchase any 3 ornaments and receive a 4th one free - use the promo code CLMGiftG21 at checkout. And be sure to explore all the company's Celtic jewelry collections online. Free shipping and gift wrapping available.

The Well of Healing Necklace

Celtic Knot Works - *www.celticknotworks.com*

Inspired by history, The Well of Healing Necklace celebrates mystical Celtic culture in fine, hand-cast American pewter. Inspired by the famed Chalice well in Glastonbury, this pendant reminds us that everything is interconnected. The Chalice Well is a natural spring that has been a sacred site since ancient times - a symbol of life, wisdom, and healing. This beautiful piece is part of the Symbols and Sigils Collection from Celtic Knot Works, featuring award-winning original creations influenced by Iron Age Celtic art and the beauty of the natural world. Other styles available include Moon, Star, Labyrinth, and more. With a luxurious Stainless-Steel chain included with each pendant, it makes the perfect gift for loved ones.



Coronach

Kimberley Jordan Reeman - *www.douglasreeman.com*

Hailed by readers and critics alike as "soaring, sweeping, epic", "enthralling", "a powerful saga", and "dramatic, unexpected, very highly recommended", Kimberley Jordan Reeman's Coronach is a haunting story of love and loss in the aftermath of the Jacobite rebellion of 1745. In the Scottish Highlands, an army of occupation commits atrocities with consequences that will reverberate for generations. From this bloody cataclysm, a battle-hardened English officer saves an infant who will become his heiress and his obsession, and a traumatized Franco-Scottish laird offers refuge to a boy damaged by unspeakable horror. These four lives, bound by fate, unfold against the turbulence of the 18th century, in a magnificent, uncompromising novel of the human cost of war. Sure to be appreciated by those with a passion for history, this unforgettable tale will keep readers engaged and entertained throughout the holiday season.

Ladies Gold Claddagh Ring

CladdaghRings.com - *www.claddaghrings.com*

Over the years, this classic ladies Claddagh ring has always been CladdaghRings.com's most enduring and popular piece. Measuring 11mm from the top of the crown to the tip of the heart, with a 2.3mm wide band, this gorgeous item weighs approximately 2.6 grams and is perfectly proportioned all round. To celebrate 25 years online, the company is offering this handcrafted ring at half price for a limited time. Available in hallmarked 10K yellow or white gold, with free shipping from Dublin, Ireland, it makes a gorgeous gift for a loved one at Christmas or any time of the year.

Hike the Highlands of Scotland with E.A. Channon

E.A. Channon - *www.eachannon.com*

Memories mean more with each passing day, and there may be no better way to create new and lasting memories with family and friends than with a fun and exciting hiking travel experience in Scotland led by renowned author, musician and historian E.A. Channon. Walk in the remote glens of the Clan's of old, take a cruise across Loch Katrine in a 19th century steamship enjoyed by Queen Victoria, and visit historic sites - including Glencoe and Glennfinnan - as you venture into the past, all the while staying in charming and cozy B&Bs along the gorgeous West Highland Way. E.A. Channon draws upon his unique insight to guide you through the history, heritage, and the sheer beauty of the Scottish Highlands. A memorable gift for the holiday season!

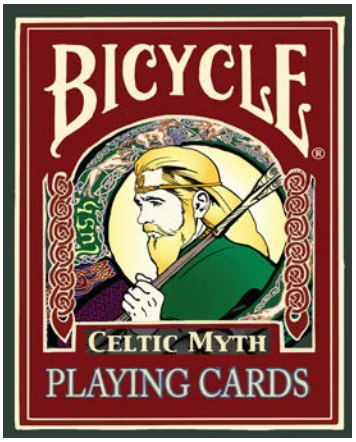
The Celtic Virtual Visitor

Ray Pearson - *www.celticvirtualvisitor.com*

"Page turner" accurately describes this lavishly illustrated collection of fascinating articles about each of the Celtic regions, stretching from Scotland to Spain. Readers will delight in the diversity of subjects including mythology, lighthouses, standing stones, engineering marvels, military history, food, drink, music, and many more. Each article begins with "Today I am ..." and virtually takes readers to worlds of fantasy, pop culture, and history. Visits are factual, easy-to-read, and always informative. For instance, why is there skull and crossbones on a city flag in Galicia? Why is Welsh sea salt so white? How did an isolated island become Scotland's "Island of Death"? Why were Cornish land pirates called "wreckers"? What is the Celtic origin of the phrases "graveyard shift", "saved by the bell", and "raining cats and dogs"? or what is the connection between a modern-day princess and Scottish collectables called tartanware? This amazing anthology makes an ideal gift for lovers of robust Celtic culture.

Celtic Myth Playing Cards

Acken Studios LLC - *www.ackenstudios.com*



This deck of unique, poker-style playing cards is a beautiful reimagining of significant figures from Celtic mythology. Working from original Old Irish descriptions of famous figures - including Balor, Lugh, Brighid, and the Mórríoghan - the artist has remained faithful to the full tradition of art and storytelling with elements drawn from Iron Age artefacts, medieval manuscripts such as the Book of Kells, and the modern Celtic renaissance. This deck makes an ideal gift for anyone interested in Celtic culture or gaming, particularly as the deck effectively comes with an original game based on early Celtic culture. Called Ard Rí - or "High King" - the game is available for download, free of charge, from any store where the decks are available.

Bewley IRISH IMPORTS

Tasty Gift Baskets For Any Occasion!

Bewley's Coffee Lover Survival Basket

The ultimate gift basket for the coffee lover in your life!

Bewley's Tea Lover Survival Basket

The ultimate gift basket for the tea lover in your life!

Mix & Match Coffee or Tea Boxes

Gluten Free Gift Basket

NEW PRODUCTS AVAILABLE NOW!

Oriel Sea Salts - Kiln Dried, Roe & Co Whiskey, Guinness, Teeling® Whiskey

Flahavan's Irish Multi Seed Porridge Oats and Oat Drinks

And More!

PLUS - Free Shipping on orders over $50 to the Continental U.S.

BewleyUSARetail.com

THE CELTIC CHEF
with Gary Maclean

Burnt Cream

Burnt cream - aka crème brulée - has always intrigued me, and - as a chef - I call this dish Burnt Cream on menus. I was once told that the French and the Scots have argued the origins of this dish for centuries, but Cambridge University might have an even stronger claim than anyone. One thing is for sure - this dish has been very popular in Scotland for centuries. I have included two methods for this, one is cooked in the pan the whole way, while the other is oven baked.

Ingredients

565ml / 1-pint double cream
100g / 3.5 oz caster sugar
½ orange peel
Pinch cinnamon
1 oz vanilla extract
6 egg yolks

Instructions 1

Pre heat oven to 150°C / 300˚F. Place the cream, vanilla extract, orange peel, and a pinch of cinnamon into a thick bottomed pot and slowly heat up. Whisk egg yolks and sugar together until the yolks lighten. Remove the orange peel from the cream. Add half the warm cream to the egg yolk mix, then pour this mixture into the rest of the cream. Place in ramekins/dishes into a shallow tray. Carefully fill the tray with water. Place the tray into the oven for 30-40 minutes until they have set - they should have a little wobble but once cooled completely they will set. Once cool, place into the fridge until needed. To create the crunchy caramel topping, sprinkle a thin layer of castor sugar on top of the set cream. There are a couple of options on how to melt - I use a blow torch, but you can also use a Brulee iron if you have one or under a very hot grill/broiler.

Instructions 2

Place the cream, vanilla extract and a pinch of cinnamon into a thick bottomed pot and slowly heat up. Whisk egg yolks and sugar together until the yolks lighten. Remove the orange peel. As the cream comes to a boil add half the boiling cream to the egg yolk mix then pour this mixture into the rest of the cream and put back onto the stove. Carefully stir the mix until it starts to thicken - it should start to resemble thin custard. Once it coats the back of the spoon pour the mixture into a large jug or bowl. This instantly stops the cooking. Pour this mixture into your ramekins/dish, and once cool place into the fridge to set.

Slàinte! Gary
www.garymacchef.com

25 Days of Dram Fine Whisky is Back!

The KWM Whisky Calendar is back for the 8th straight year. This year's calendar includes 24 50ml premium whiskies, a custom logo Glencairn glass and a 100ml Scotch Malt Whisky Society whisky for Christmas Day. Participants can follow along on social media and the KWM Blog, as well as the five 5 Day Recap Virtual Tastings over the month of December. We like to call it 25 days of dram fine whisky! $435+gst.

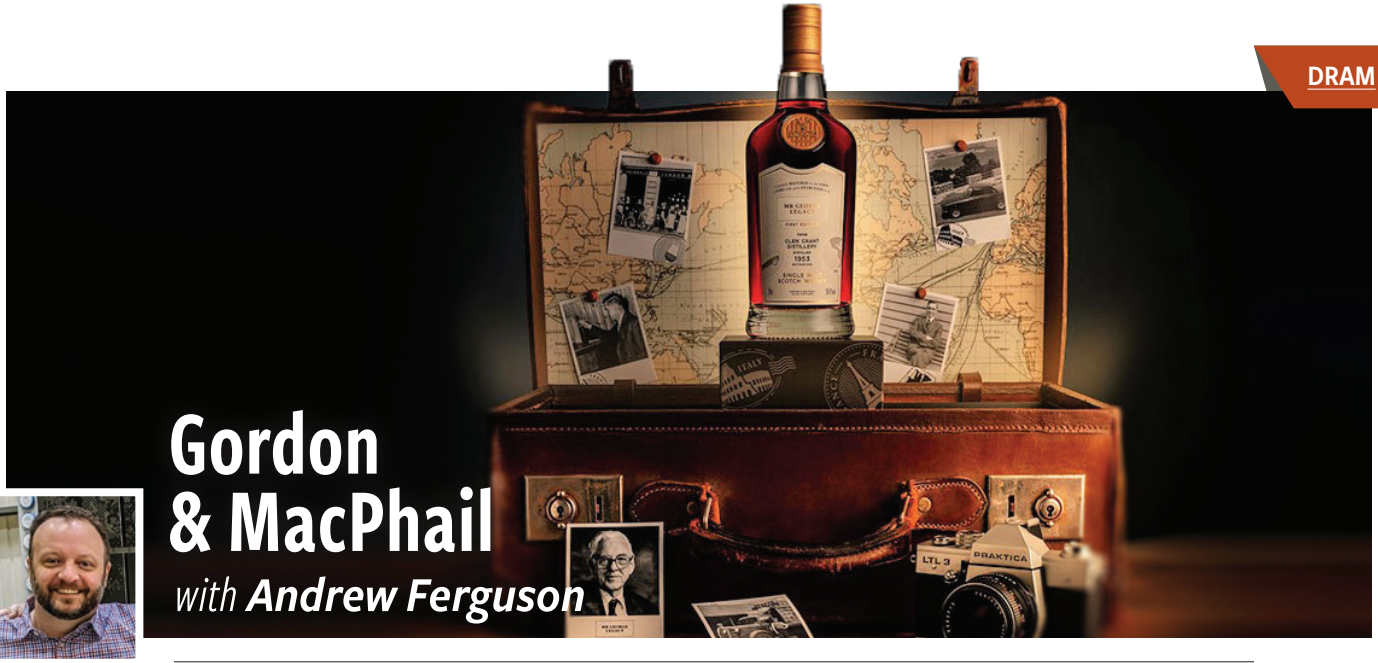
KENSINGTON WINE MARKET

ESTABLISHED 1992

kensingtonwinemarket.com

Instagram/Twitter: *@KensingtonWM*

STAHLY'S SCOTTISH AND VEGETARIAN HAGGIS IS DISTRIBUTED THROUGHOUT THE USA BY CAMWRAP BRITISH IMPORTS OF MOBILE, ALABAMA. TO VIEW A BEAUTIFULLY ILLUSTRATED TRIBUTE TO THE VERSATILITY OF HAGGIS, CAMWRAP RECOMMENDS THE STAHLY HAGGIS RECIPE BOOK AVAILABLE AS A FREE DOWNLOAD AT WWW.THEHAGGIS.COM



Gordon & MacPhail

with ***Andrew Ferguson***

In 1895, James Gordon and John Alexander MacPhail opened a grocery business in the City of Elgin, the heart of Scotland's Speyside whisky region. The business sold groceries, tea, coffee, and wines from all over the world. Over a hundred and twenty years later, Gordon & MacPhail still operates the grocery business in Elgin, but its real enterprise is as an independent bottler and distiller of Scotch whisky.

In the early years of the business Gordon and MacPhail brought in a young John Urquhart as apprentice. Urquhart had a knack for selecting and blending whiskies from local distilleries. He also began brokering casks and independently bottling single malt from famous distilleries like Glenlivet, Mortlach, and Glen Grant. The practice of filling casks of new-make whisky, rather than simply purchasing mature casks, began at this time. This is something which sets Gordon & MacPhail apart from almost all other independent bottlers to this day, and it gave them a leg up through leaner years. In 1915, John Urquhart was made senior partner, and though the firm would keep its name, from this point on it would remain privately owned by the Urquhart family.

In 1933, George Urquhart - aka "Mr. George" - joined his father in the business. He was heavily involved in the firm's whisky business, travelling widely to showcase Gordon & MacPhail whiskies. G&M's business thrived during and after World War II. Having had the foresight to lay down large numbers of casks in the 1930s and early 1940s, they were in a strong position to meet demand, especially in America. This was a difficult time for most of the industry with barley rationing dramatically reducing distilling.

In 1968, under George Urquhart's leadership, Gordon & MacPhail launched the Connoisseurs Choice range. At a time when few distilleries were bottling their own whisky as single malt (rather producing it for use in Blended Scotch whiskies), Gordon & MacPhail began marketing single malts from distilleries across Scotland. The range is still being bottled today.

The third generation began entering the business with George's son Ian Urquhart in 1967. He was joined by David Urquhart in 1972, as well as Michael Urquhart and Rosemary Rankin in 1981. The family firm continued to thrive even during the industry downturn of the 1980s and early 1990s, emerging as the undisputed preeminent independent bottler of Scotch whisky. In the 2010s the torch was passed to the fourth generation, with at least five of John Urquhart's descendants now involved in the business.

> *It had always been John Urquhart's vision for the family to own a distillery of its own.*

The dream was finally realized in 1993 with the acquisition of the closed Benromach Distillery in the nearby town of Forres. The distillery was in rough shape, and it took nearly five years to get it up and running. HRH Prince Charles was on hand in 1998 for its official reopening. Never content to rest on their laurels, the firm announced plans in 2019 to open a brand-new distillery in the Cairngorms National Park. The Cairn Distillery is scheduled to open in 2022.

One of the most remarkable things about Gordon & MacPhail is the vision it had to mature whiskies to great ages. Few other whisky firms, whether distilleries or independent bottlers, have ever had the foresight to mature casks for more than 30 or 40 years. In 2010, G&M bottled the Generations Mortlach 70 Years Old, which was the oldest whisky ever bottled at the time. They followed up on that milestone by bottling 70-year-old Glenlivet in both 2011 and 2012. And then, in 2015, they once again raised the bar by bottling the Generations Mortlach 75 Year. Of the 10 oldest whiskies ever bottled, all but two have been bottled by G&M.

It is almost certain that Gordon MacPhail will one day bottle the first ever one hundred-year-old whisky, but that may still be a couple of decades away. Their oldest maturing stocks are from the late 1930s and early 1940s. A number of these casks, 15 First Fill Sherry Butts to be precise, were filled for Gordon & MacPhail at the Glenlivet Distillery on February 3rd, 1940. Most of these casks have been bottled over the decades, but G&M dipped into another of these casks this year to bottle another whisky. The Generations Glenlivet 80 Year is once more the oldest bottle of Scotch Whisky ever bottled. It isn't inexpensive, but I can vouch for it in one regard - it doesn't disappoint!

Gordon & MacPhail whiskies can be found all over the world with whiskies ranging from under $100 to $100,000 or more. Their grocery shop in Elgin is the brand's spiritual home, with a section dedicated to Scotch Whisky that showcases more than 1000 bottles. Prior to Covid-19, the shop offered both tastings and in-store sampling, as does their nearby Benromach Distillery in Forres, one of the smallest and most traditional distilleries in the Speyside.

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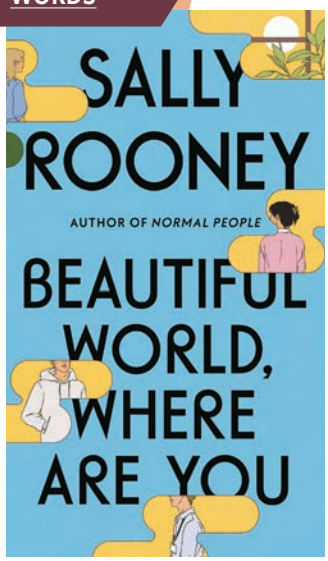


Beautiful World, Where Are You

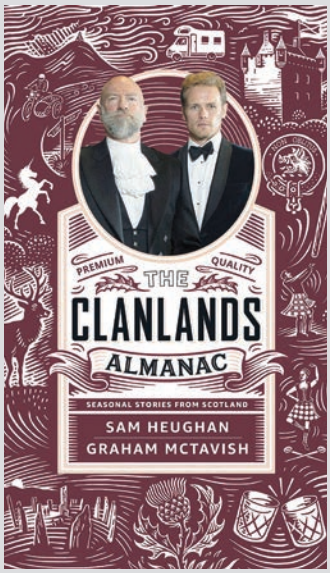
By Sally Rooney
Farrar, Straus and Giroux
368pp / $28

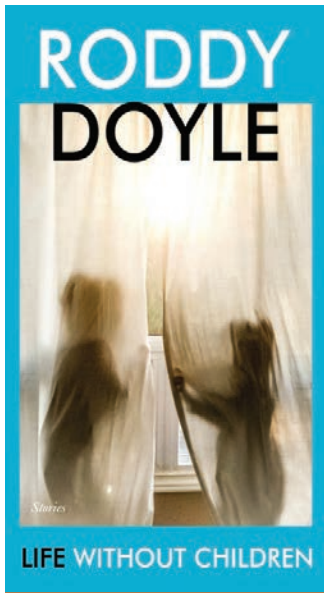
After the outrageous success of her 2018 blockbuster novel - and subsequent award-winning television series - Normal People, the pressure was on Co. Mayo scribe Sally Rooney to produce another bestseller. With advance sales and pre-orders at record breaking highs, big things were expected for Beautiful World, Where Are You. In addition, the author's decision to reject an offer from an Israeli publisher in support of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement only served to stir the suspense even more. Thankfully, the tender and tough tale of four friends/ lovers lives up to the hype. Awash with themes of romance, loyalty, betrayal, sexuality, and social caste systems, and adrift in an undercurrent of uncertainty, the new narrative is telling testament to the Irish gift for storytelling.
~ SPC

The Clanlands Almanac

By Sam Heughan and Graham McTavish / Mobius
320pp / $25

One of the perks (or perils!) of receiving advanced reading copies of new novels is that reviewers can't wait to spill the beans to family, friends, the public, etc. So, that said, I'm not going to. Instead, I can report that The Clanlands Almanac is more than a companion piece to the wildly popular television series Men in Kilts (aka Clanlands). Instead, the 320-page tome is a devilishly detailed, blow-by-blow account of two best friends crossing Scotland in an old camper van, stopping along the way for a history lesson or a wee dram of whisky (or often both). I can also report that the book is better than the series, and that both long time and newbie fans of Outlander will not be disappointed.
~ SPC





Life Without Children

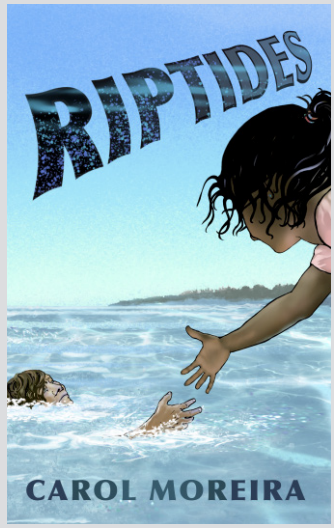
By Roddy Doyle
Penguin Books / 192pp / £14.99

Dublin novelist, dramatist, short story writer, screenwriter, and teacher Roddy Doyle may be best known for The Commitments (1987), but it isn't his best work. Life Without Children is. An assortment of ten tiny tales set during the COVID-19 pandemic, the new collection sees the scribe trading in his telescope for a microscope, scouring for the simplest of human emotions - joy, sorrow, happiness, hurt - amidst the most minute details of everyday life. Pieced together like a puzzle, and touching on themes of love, marriage, family, and death, Doyle masterfully crafts meaning one line at a time. The result is a rich tapestry woven with words that leaves ample room for readers to fill in the empty spaces with their own threads of experience.
~ SPC

Riptides

By Carol Moreira
Moose House Publications
196pp / $16.95

Nova Scotia author, journalist - and Celtic Life contributor and copy editor - Carol Moreira successfully navigates the difficult life and times of a 13-year-old boy in this engaging and entertaining coming-of-age novel for young adults. Set along the province's picturesque coastline, Riptides explores the complex emotions of a teenager coming to terms with an absent father, a family financial crisis, a first crush, and the fending-off of the town bully. In addition, the book's protagonist must deal with danger lurking in the cold waters of the Atlantic Ocean. Having raised two children of her own, Moreira does well to draw upon her own experience as a parent for insight and inspiration. A warm and wonderful read that will connect with readers of all ages.
~ SPC



CHVRCHES
Screen Violence

Synth-Pop was never really my thing. Sure, there have been a number of fantastic and influential bands of that genre over the years (Joy Division, Ultravox, OMD, Eurythmics, etc.), however there were too many others that struck me as simple, superficial, and sonically subpar. That said, I believe it was Bruce Springsteen who noted that if a tune can stand on its own with just a voice and a single instrument then it will likely stand the test of time. That seems to be the case with Screen Violence; buried beneath a boisterous barrage of synthesizers, drum machines, vocoders, and a myriad of other electronic instruments, are ten architecturally and artistically sound pieces that might be better served stripped down to their skin and bones. ~ SPC

Celtic Woman
Postcards From Ireland

Showcasing the lovely lilt of the newest member of Celtic Woman, Muirgen O'Mahony, Postcards From Ireland is a return to roots for the Irish supergroup. From the opening acapella of The Dawning of the Day to the closing chorus of Black is the Colour, the uber-talented quartet (and their equally gifted band) transports listeners back in time through the mists and myths of the Emerald Isle. Similarly, Bonny Portmore, Mise Eire, The Calm of the Day, and Angel, will surely bring a tear to the eyes of ex-pats everywhere. While some won't find the formulaic approach to writing, recording, and performing to their taste, there is simply no arguing or understating the importance of albums like this towards the promotion and preservation of Celtic culture. ~ SPC

Celtic Kitchen Party
Last Call

Here in Nova Scotia, kitchen parties can spring-up spontaneously anytime, anywhere, and for any reason. All that is required are a few core ingredients; neighbours (or strangers!), a circle of chairs, musical instruments (fiddle, guitar, piano, accordion, bodhrán, spoons), and - of course - a shot or two (or six) of the sweet stuff. All those elements, and more, are on the table with Celtic Kitchen Party's third full-length recording Last Call. From classic trad (Dirty Old Town, Whisky in the Jar) to more contemporary tunes (Covid-19 Shanty, The Immigrant), the Ontario-based sextet will have listeners rollicking and rolling until the wee hours of the morning. Amidst these darkest of days, there is something to be said for the light of old-school, good time music. ~ SPC

Karen Myatt
Femoir

Canadian songstress Karen Myatt explores the feminine spirit with her stunning sophomore recording Femoir. Soulful, smart, spirited, sexy, and sassy, the album's 14 terrific tracks assess the art of the anima with an array of astonishingly original songs and smooth standards. With the vocalist's vital and vibrant melodies shading both strong and soft atop a moody melange of guitars, keys, horns, bass, and percussion, the release has already drawn great acclaim from critics, listeners, and industry insiders; Cassandra Wilson calls the new disc "Absolutely stunning! Mesmerizing..." and Arts East says "this is the finest and most important recording to emerge from Canada in years..." Indeed - bold and beautiful, Femoir is a masterful and meaningful work of melodic art and Myatt is a musical tour-de-force. ~ SPC

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Wayne Francis

One man plays the pipes with warmth and wisdom

Piper Wayne Francis' family heritage is steeped with an assortment of ancestries.

"My DNA reveals the presence of genes from Ireland, the United Kingdom, Germany and the Nordic region," he shares via email from his home in Baltimore County, Maryland, where the Francis family has lived for over 300 years. "The last name itself - Francis - means one from France. As we know now, the Vikings had a nasty habit of raiding the coasts of France, Ireland and England."

Th 67-year-old first began playing the bagpipes in his late 20s.

"I remember watching old black and white movies on TV. The piper always carried themselves nobly."

However, it was the live broadcast of President John F. Kennedy's funeral in late 1963 that really stirred Francis' soul.

"I saw that a piper at a funeral was a special event. I was 10 at the time and remember the great honor that the piper brought to the day. At that time, every American boy and girl wanted to play the guitar. I have spent a long time playing the guitar - however, it never felt fluid or natural."

Interestingly, it was a budding friendship with a Scotsman that pushed him over the piping edge.

"He and I began exchanging Christmas presents and he sent me a cassette of The Strathclyde Police Pipe Band. I loved the sound - it spoke to my soul. Around the same time, I learned of a pipe band in nearby Towson (Maryland) that was offering free lessons as a way of bolstering their roster and so I started studying with The John F. Nicoll Pipe Band. For whatever reason, I found it quite natural to play the practice chanter."

These days, Francis performs exclusively at funerals. In fact, he is known as the Funeral Bagpiper and is often seen at "solemn gatherings."

> *"I had a moment of inspiration early on whilst learning to play that said, 'This is something you can offer to those who are experiencing loss and in grief.'"*

"There is a sense of satisfaction when the instrument and the performance come off without a hitch," he continues. "I remember an older Scottish piper telling me that every time I play for an occasion it is really just another opportunity to practice, which is very true. I do not seek reviews as I think that what I do - and the privacy of the suffering family - is sacrosanct."

Francis recalls many notable highlights over his piping career, including a particularly fond memory that took place at Fells Point in Baltimore.

"A local celebrity bartender had passed on and wanted a piper and a funeral band from New Orleans for the procession. I let the band lead the way and I brought up the rear as the lone piper. That made it into the local paper."

He feels positive about the future of piping and notes the impact that young people today play in keeping the musical tradition alive.

"When I was in solo competition years ago, the young ones really rocked the scene. Starting out young is never a bad thing, if you are under the tutorship of someone who knows what they are doing. Piping really enriched my life in so many ways. I think that so long as pipe bands and universities promote the instrument with outreach, it can only improve. Tutorship is a great way for someone to learn. In addition, over the last 20 years or more there has been a rebirth of Celtic music, crafts and spirituality, and piping has been a vital part of that renewal."

For the immediate future Francis plans to further diversify his music portfolio.

"Currently I play the Scottish bagpipe and the whistle. This year I am learning to play Ireland's little-known bagpipe, the Uilleann pipe. It is quieter and sweeter than its highland cousin. I am gearing up to offer this instrument for funerals and memorials- for the Irish heart."

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Shane Cook

Shane Cook jokes he was 'doomed' to play the fiddle

"There is a long line of fiddlers in our family," fiddler Shane Cook shares via email from his home in London, Ontario, where he lives with his wife and son. "My great uncles played, my dad plays, and my brother plays. I first picked a fiddle up when I was seven and I am pleased to say it has been a part of my life every day since then."

Cook's ancestors settled in the Stratford area of Ontario in the 1800s, and he has Scottish, Irish and German roots. Though still young, he pokes fun when asked about his age, "Let's just say that I am ready to play 'old-timer' hockey this year. And, as the pandemic drags on, I am not feeling any younger."

He is quick to credit his teachers and mentors for his lifelong love of fiddling.

"First and foremost, Gerald Hamilton would set aside Tuesday nights every week to jam and chat with my brother and I for hours on end. Gerald was extremely generous with his time. I must also shout-out to my friends and fellow fiddlers - Ian Hamilton, Denis Lanctot, Mark O'Connor, Jerry Holland, Liz Carroll and Ray Legere."

Describing himself as a "trad" player, Cook performs most of his tunes on a John Silakowski fiddle, rotating through several types of bows depending on the sound and style that he is hoping to achieve.

As a professional musician, he has shared the stage with the likes of bluegrass artist Claire Lynch, The StepCrew music and dance group, and Canadian musical ensemble Bowfire.

"Touring with Bowfire took me everywhere from New York's Beacon Theatre to Taipei's National Concert Hall to Canada's Governor General Awards. We even shot a PBS special and played The Today Show."

Recently, he filmed an online concert in collaboration with The International Symphony Chamber Orchestra to promote music from his own band, Shane Cook & The Woodchippers. The band also teamed up with youth fiddle groups across Canada for the show, including players from Nunavut, Nova Scotia, Manitoba and more.

"I am particularly proud of our virtual collaboration with young fiddlers from across Canada for this online concert. There is a unique phenomenon of youth fiddle groups here at home, many of which I have been fortunate to have worked with in workshop settings over the years.

> *"Getting people together and jamming is what the fiddle is all about, and what I have been hearing is that kids across the country are itching to get together and play."*

The virtual concert is now available online, as is the group's debut album, Been Here For A While.

"Joining me as The Woodchippers are three of my favourite people and musicians on the planet - Emily Flack (piano, vocals and dance), Joe Phillips (double bass and guitar) and Kyle Waymouth (guitar and dance). Each player had a voice when it came to arranging the record and I think that collaborative approach brought everyone to fully invest in the music.

"Be Here for a While was several years from concept to completion," Cook continues. "I was fortunate to have received a financial grant to assist with both the creation of the music and to help to get it out into the world."

The recording appears to be resonating with people already.

"I have sent early copies out to many of my closest friends and musical heroes, and I have been stunned to receive word back that the music has moved so many people. I am proud of what this band has put together."

Although creating the online concert was a positive experience, Cook hopes that he will be able to get back to playing live music once 2022 rolls around.

"I am working on plans that will see us tour the new record across Canada and the U.S. and perform at several festivals in the U.K. and Ireland."

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Mara Cernat

One woman brings Irish dance to the Balkans

It is not uncommon for Irish dance to take place outside of Ireland. Over the years, Celtic Life International has profiled many Irish dance studios based in Canada, the United States, and throughout parts of western Europe. However, the reach of the ancient and beloved Celtic art goes even further than that.

Nestled in Bucharest, Romania, dancer Mara Cernat has been bringing Irish dance to the Balkans for over a decade.

Her love of Celtic culture began in 2005, with the release of Irish folk-rock band The Corrs' album Home.

"I was smitten, and I decided that there needed to be a way to dance to that music," shares the 32-year-old via email. "This was before YouTube was a thing, so I had scarce access to Irish dance videos. I did, however, find an Irish dancer's blog with a written description of how to do Jump 23s, Skip 23s, and sidestep. That was all the Irish dance information I could get my hands on at the time."

Cernat spent the next four years studying the steps thoroughly before fully committing to a dancing career. Today, she focuses much of her energy on teaching dance at her studio, the STEYsha School of Irish Dance, which she founded in 2011.

"I passed my TCRG (World Irish Dance Association) exam in 2014 and I have been teaching continuously ever since. There was no Irish dance in Romania when I discovered it. I had to wait for four more years before someone started organizing a once/twice-a-year workshop with a non-resident teacher. There was a handful of us who would keep training in between workshops, but, without proper instruction, we picked up a few bad habits.

> *"When I opened my school, I took it upon myself to help grow future generations of Irish dancers in Romania."*

"I dance to shape others," she continues. "I keep learning new things so that I can teach my students how to dance and to educate people here on the richness and uniqueness of our dance style. Irish dance is really a niche art form in this part of the world. We have created our own world within STEYsha and we all dance to share this identity with each other. I dance to keep fit and to stay on top of my game, but I always tell my dancers that because they dance more than me, their minimal target should be to be at least a bit better than I am."

Currently, STEYsha is the only Irish dance school in Romania. They offer a variety of classes, from traditional to more modern styles.

"There is a big modern movement in Irish dancing nowadays and I try and follow along. But there are certain modern movements that don't fit well with Irish dance. I pick only what I feel flows well with my own personal style. Usually, my students get good marks in the traditional set dance competitions, however, so there is definitely a traditional influence in our school style that shines through."

Although rewarding, Cernat admits that her work is not without its share of challenges.

"I am the only Irish dance teacher in the whole of Romania, and I don't see this changing for another few years at least. This seems like a real business advantage, but I don't need the whole country on my shoulders. There is a lot of work to be done to make Irish dancing more visible here and I am the only ambassador of our art form. Even with online tools I still feel quite isolated at times, and I truly wish I had an on-site peer to share the experience and the workload with."

Cernat continues to think positively, focusing on ways that she can improve for her students. Going into 2022, she plans to work on growing STEYsha at a local level.

"We will do as we did last year: strengthening the already existing community within the school with closed-circuit celebrations during class time. I am not worried about not having any projects, as they always pop up. I am, however, aiming at increasing our visibility locally and nationally in any way that I can."

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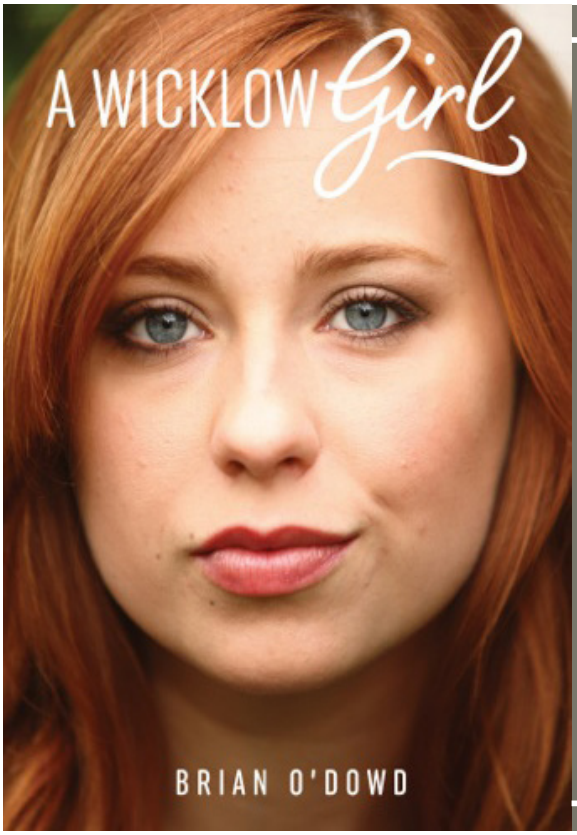

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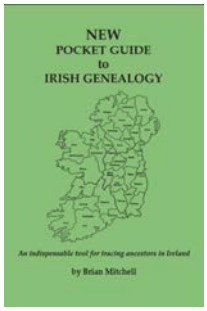

Pocket Guide is a bit of misnomer, for in fact this 7"x 10" publication is one of the most complete and informative books on genealogical research in Ireland ever written. Brian Mitchell has completely updated the previous edition of his guide to direct readers to the most current websites and resources. His original premise, however, remains the same: that the examination of seven major records will throw detailed light on most peoples' Irish ancestry. By skillfully blending Irish history, record sources, case studies, maps, charts, and his own mastery of the subject, Mitchell has put together a masterful handbook to Irish genealogical research.

122 pp., paper. 2020. ISBN 9780806359083. 25.00 USD. 20 GBP. 22 EUR.

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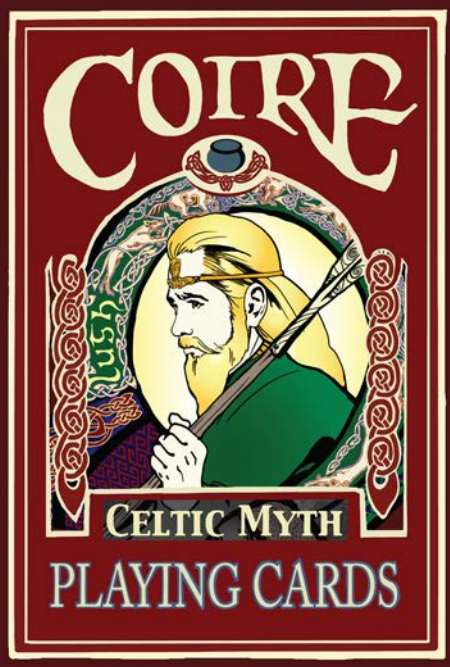

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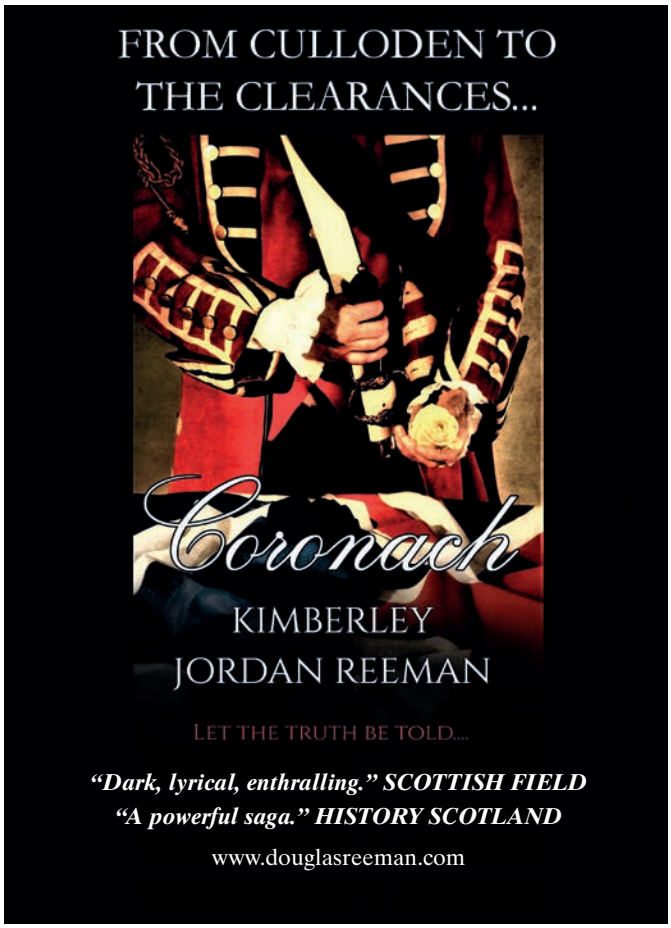
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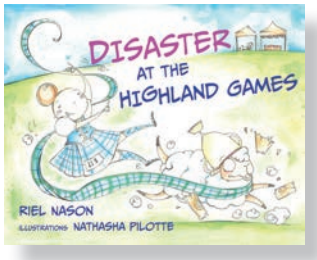

Kate doesn't really need to practice her dancing, does she?

Everything will be all right on the day of the Highland Games, won't it?

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Patricia Hume; 1938-2021

Patricia Hume (widely known as Pat) passed away on September 2. The news broke just a little more than a year after her husband's death: Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) leader and Nobel Prize winner John Hume died on August 3, 2020. Pat was a source of support for John, who is credited for his dedication to peace in Northern Ireland. Although she never sought the limelight, Pat herself was also a champion for justice in the nation.

The Humes were both born and raised in Derry (a.k.a Londonderry), Northern Ireland. Pat was born to Patrick and Mary Hone in 1938. As a girl, she attended Thornhill College and later went to Belfast to study at St Mary's Training College. She returned to her hometown to work and, over 25 years, she taught in several primary schools. "I don't think it is any exaggeration to say 95 per cent of the children in Pat's class lived in poverty," Anne Donnelly, a former student of Pat, told The Guardian. "In class, however, Pat told us we could be anything we wanted to be. She also encouraged children to work hard, study and get on."

Pat met John - also a teacher at the time - in 1958 and the couple wed two years later. John became involved in community-based politics and likewise did Pat. She worked alongside John during the civil rights movement in Derry, and in 1969 - the year the Troubles began - John was elected as an Independent Nationalist member of the Parliament of Northern Ireland. Pat eventually said goodbye to her career in teaching so she could manage John's SDLP constituency office. The couple had their fair share of challenges during the Troubles, including several attacks on their family home. Even their car was tampered with. Still, they pressed on in their advocacy, and Pat did everything she could not to let the violence and threats affect her kids. She made their home a welcoming place to politicians and journalists alike while also caring for the family. In fact, people are quick to remember her warmth and diplomacy. As conflict died down in the '90s, Pat even extended the hand of friendship to the families of unionist politicians. In 2018, she was given an Irish Red Cross Lifetime Achievement award.

Together, John and Pat had five children: Thérèse, Áine, Aidan, John and Mo. Aidan spoke at Pat's funeral, saying,

> *"Human connection was fundamental to Mum's existence – she had an incredible ability to establish a special connection."*

Aidan spoke of his parents' relationship: "Mum was at his right hand throughout his entire life - his best friend, his closest confidante, his loving wife, his trusted adviser, his political antenna." He also joked that "the only person who could beat John Hume in an election was Pat." But Pat seemingly had no interest in running during her lifetime.

After John stepped down from his seat in Parliament in 2004, some members of the SDLP looked to her to carry the torch. However, she was more concerned with looking after John, who had been diagnosed with Alzheimer's. She cared for her ailing husband for more than two decades.

Current SDLP leader Colum Eastwood issued a statement following the news of Pat's death, lauding her strength and compassion. "Without Pat Hume, there would have been no peace process in Ireland, that's the simple truth. Pat holds a special place in the hearts of the people of this city (Derry). She would have done anything for them and in return, they loved her. Our city is in mourning tonight for a woman who showed us unconditional compassion and support every day of her life. We all live in an Ireland that she nurtured, at peace with itself and free to set its own destiny. It is an incredible legacy that will never be forgotten."

The legacy lives on in part through the John and Pat Hume Foundation: an organization founded in November 2020. "The Foundation recognises that the most effective change-makers are often quiet leaders - those who may not have an official role in their local power structure or who may not regard themselves as leaders. We seek to partner with such leaders - shining a light on their work, standing in solidarity, rewarding their courage and contributing to their long-term resilience," reads the foundation's website.

"John and Pat Hume's work has changed the lives of people in myriad ways."

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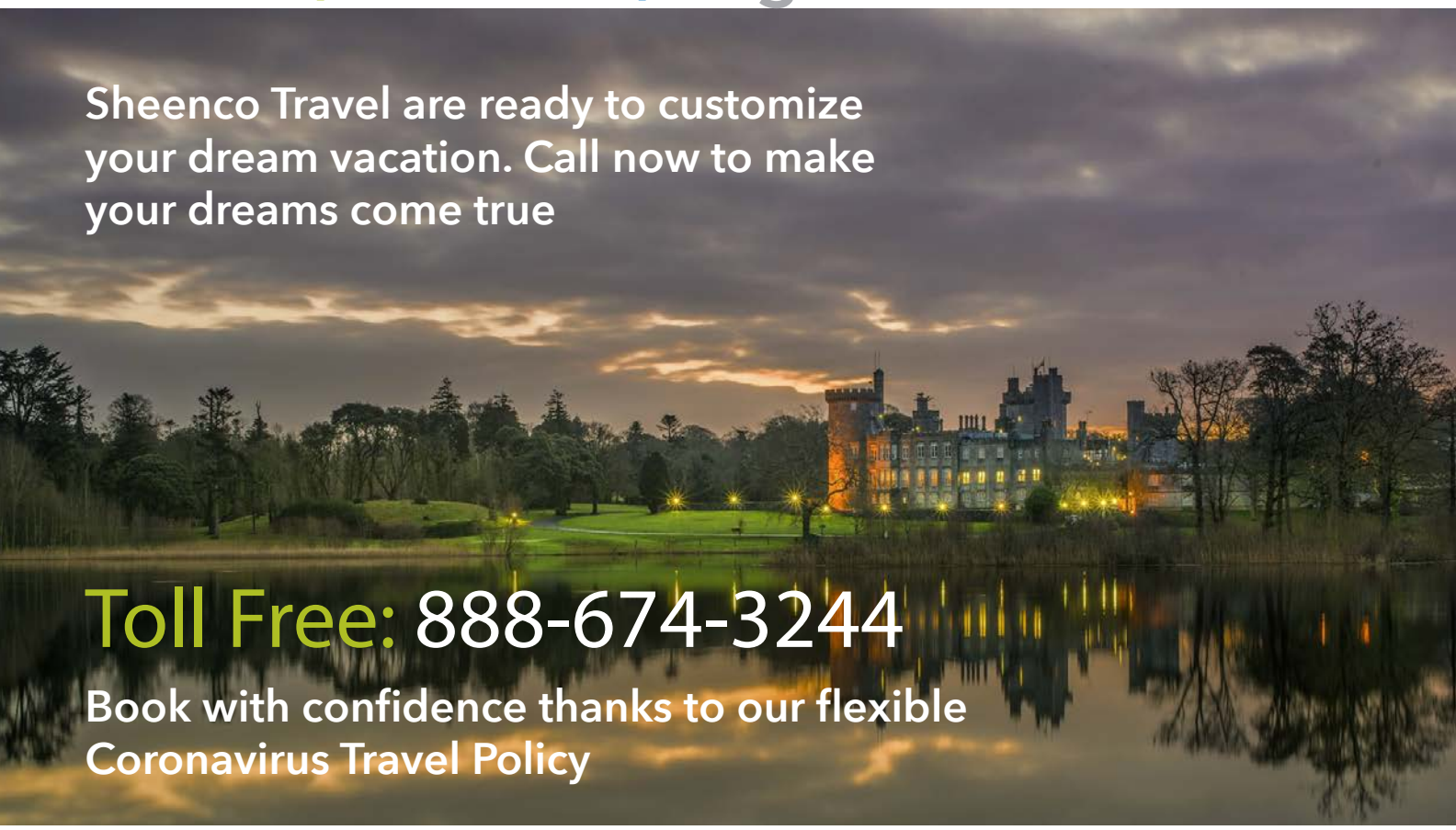

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