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*Holiday Gift Guide, Celtic Thunder
Gillebride MacMillan, Celtic Tenors
Mary's Meals, Celts for Cancer*



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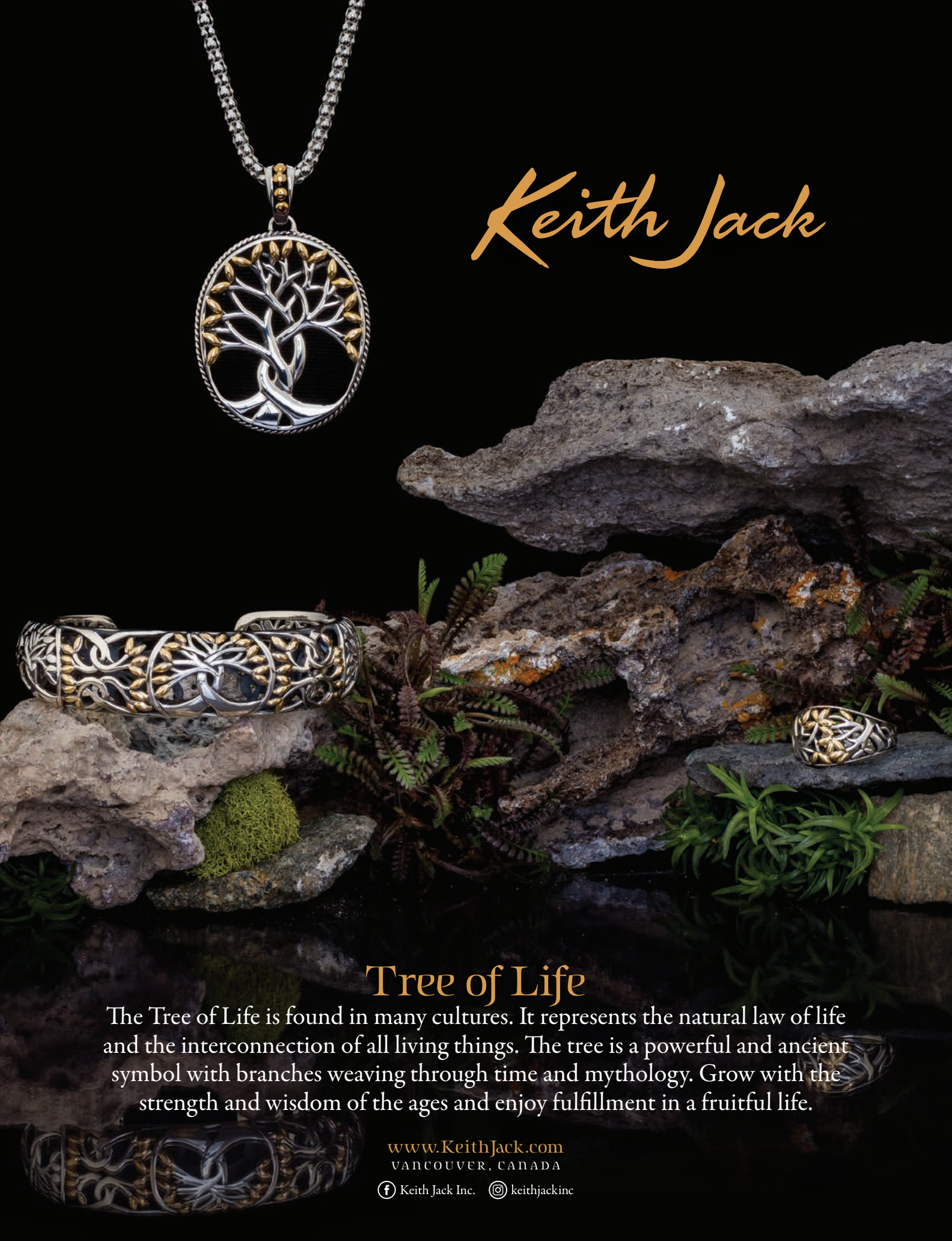
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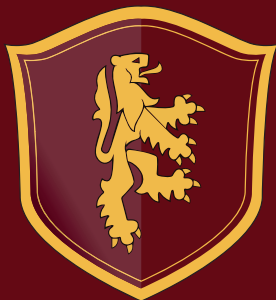
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Fáilte!

Welcome to our Holiday edition, and with it we invite you to share the sights, sounds, scents and spirit of the Christmas season.

While the Holidays may mean different things to different people, many of us share common experiences - Christmas Carols, Santa Claus, the Nativity scene, or the simple act of giving. In most cases, the joys of seasons past still permeate the present.

My own childhood memories of Christmas include the never-ending rehearsals for school concerts, decorating the tree, Midnight Mass, and the opening of gifts on Christmas morning. Even today, decades later, I can still recall the scent of my mother's cooking wafting through our home.

These are but a few highlights among many unforgettable - and magical - experiences.

One of my earliest recollections was an unexpected sleigh ride. In the 1950s, living in the country had its fair share of hardships. Following mid-winter blizzards, it often took days to clear the roads of snowdrifts. Such was the case one year, when a heavy snow fell on Christmas Eve. As attending Midnight Mass was a must, out came a long-retired sleigh for a trek through the winter wonderland. I vividly recall being tucked warmly between my parents, and marvelling in the delight of travelling by horse and sleigh. On leaving the church, we were greeted by rows of horses attached to sleighs, their breath a fog in the freezing air, each stomping at the bit in anticipation of the trip home. The sound of the bells jangling from their harnesses is a memory I will forever cherish.

Like most, music and song have been a part of our family's Christmas experience for generations. Two seasonal jewels that still resonate with me today are Christmas in Killarney - "with all of the folks at home" - rekindling happy memories of kin, friends, and a house filled with melodies. Silent Night reminds me that the Holidays are a time for heavenly peace and goodwill to others. That particular piece also brings to mind the WWI Christmas Eve tale of German and Allied troops crawling out of the trenches in "no man's land" to exchange gifts of cigarettes and food in a moment of harmony amidst a war that was to claim over 15 million lives. It is believed that the short truce began that night with the Allies singing Christmas Carols. When they sang Oh Come All Ye Faithful the Germans joined in with the Latin words *Adeste Fideles*. As they emerged from the trenches, soldiers from both sides put down their arms in a rare show of solidarity.

Sadly, today, war remains and poverty reigns. More than 3 billion people still live in poverty, with an estimated 387 million children bearing the brunt of this global atrocity.

Mother Theresa said that while not all of us can do great things, each of us can do small things with great love. She added that even if we cannot feed 100 people, we can still feed one. As such, we have a responsibility to abide by her words. Oxfam International is a global organization working to end the injustice of extreme poverty, and even a small donation will save lives; www.oxfam.org

From the management and staff of Celtic Life International, we would like to wish you and your family peace on earth, goodwill to others, and a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Enjoy and may God Bless!

Angus M. Macquarrie, Publisher



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Celts for Cancer

In the final installment of a six-part series to raise funding and awareness for cancer research, prevention, treatment and services, Celtic Life International gets Kilted to Kick Cancer...

So what's under the kilt?

It is a question that Justin Schorr and Jason Hoschouer hear all the time. Their reply, however, is not what you might expect - "a risk for prostate cancer."

Schorr and Hoschouer - a firefighter and policeman, respectively - live and work in the San Francisco Bay area. That is also where their grassroots initiative, Kilted to Kick Cancer (KTKC), was born.

"Kilted to Kick Cancer was conceived in a campsite at the Caledonian Club of San Francisco Highland Games," says Schorr. "We were swaying in the breeze in our new kilts and wondered how we could talk the wives into letting us wear them more often. The following month, October, we rallied as first responders to raise awareness about breast cancer. I received a small sky-blue ribbon pin from a follower out of state with the message 'Did you know more men will be killed by prostate cancer than women killed by breast cancer?' Having never been told my risk factors for prostate cancer, I had no idea that, at that time, 1 in 6 men were being diagnosed. I reached out to Jason and we got to work."

True to its humble roots, KTKC remains a small charity, run by a handful of volunteers.

"Our focus is getting money directly into the hands of professionals who actively research screening advancements or participate in groundbreaking research into curing prostate cancer. Jason and I are both on the board of the IRS 501c3, handle event planning, outreach, and run the online fundraising competition.

"Our members plan local events with their kilted friends, and we help them advertise it and support their efforts with local vendors to ensure that all monies collected in the name of the charity are actually collected."

Interestingly, no one told the pair how costly it would be to establish a charitable organization.



"Just getting started with the IRS cost us \$700 out of pocket. Then there is the website, the shirts, the events...it adds up. It is true that it costs money to make money - and breaking out of the small organizational plan we have now has proven tough; we are all volunteers, still work full time, and have growing families."

Still, notes Schorr, the rewards are well worth the investments.

"I love it when people stop us on a street corner to ask about the kilts - it opens the door to discussing a touchy subject. Our 'Kilted Army' wears kilts everywhere we go for the entire month of September. Each person who gives us a double-take gets a brief explanation of the risks of prostate cancer and how to get involved with KTKC."

Many men don't know the risks, don't understand their PSA test results, or simply refuse to talk about their "man parts."

"We approach them with no shame, no hesitation, and start a conversation no man wants to have. When we are done, they have the basics of their risk factors and how to learn more."

The organization gets its message out a number of ways; word of mouth, social media, advertising, and via local, regional and national media coverage.

"The biggest messaging," says Schorr,

"comes from simply going about our day-to-day business in a kilt."

Each year, the "Kilted Army" recruits a hundred or so men and women across 32 states. They even have a sister organization in the U.K., though KTKC is not considered an international charity. That said, the door is open to all.

"Those who wish to get involved can start at our website and learn more about us and our efforts. There, they can find links to get kilts, shirts, and other garments, as well as free downloadable cards and information to share with others. Then all they have to do is kilt-up and go about their day. Inevitably, curiosity will get the better of people and they will stop to ask 'so, what's under the kilt'..."

www.KiltedtoKickCancer.org



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one

Historic tram

A historic railway vehicle on the Isle of Man has been restored to its original condition to celebrate Manx Electric Railway's anniversary. Tram No. 14 arrived on the isle during the Victorian tourism boom roughly 120 years ago. It connected the towns of Douglas, Laxey and Ramsey until it stopped being used in the 1970s. It fell into disrepair thereafter. However, volunteers worked to restore the tram to working order for the eight days of festivities to mark Manx Electric Railway's 125th year. It may also be used for future events on the island.

two

Welsh pineapple

For the first time in a century, a pineapple has grown in Wales – with the help of a greenhouse, of course. Pineapple plants need two full years to grow and must be kept at minimum 15 degrees centigrade in order to flourish, so the UK is not an ideal environment. However, the Victorian pineapple house at Scolton Manor museum was recently restored, and the historic hothouse is being put to use once again. In the 1800s, members of the aristocracy would invest in these greenhouses or “pineries” as the demand for the exotic fruit was so high.

three

Frustrated dolphin

A beach in Brittany was temporarily closed to swimming after a dolphin named Zafar started getting a little too friendly with people. The trouble began when Zafar left his usual waters near the town of Plougastel-Daoulas for Landevennec as mating season rolled around. Apparently love-lorn, Zafar made unwelcome attempts to court humans – including one instance of lifting a woman using his snout. In late August, the town's mayor called for a swimming ban which was lifted when the dolphin moved on.

four

Seaview bathroom

A public washroom in Newlyn, Cornwall was put up for auction at a guide price of £15,000. What's the appeal? The building, which is 7.5 metres long and four metres wide, overlooks the Newlyn harbour. The bathroom's new owner may use it for commercial or residential needs, such as a shop or a micro home. It's the latest public bathroom to be closed by Cornwall council, which has been shutting down the toilets over the past few years and blaming it on budget cuts. Many residents are unhappy about the development.

five

Raised by wolves

A Galicia-based man claims to have been raised by wolves from the age of seven to 19. Marcos Rodríguez Pantoja – now in his early seventies – has had movies and documentaries made about him, but now lives a quiet life. As Pantoja tells it, he was abandoned in 1953 and lived in the Sierra Morena mountain range. He lived among wolves who he says protected and sheltered him. After he was found by police, Pantoja was brought to a convent in Madrid, where he received remedial education from nuns. He has lived in Galicia since the 1990s, when a retired police officer gave him a job and a place to live.

six

Irish -Canadian twins

Tatiana and Krista Hogan were not expected to live 24 hours. They've now been in the world for twelve years. Tatiana and Krista are conjoined twins, attached at the head. It's been said that twins have special, psychological connections – but these two girls share experiences as their thalami (part of the brain) are literally connected. For example, they can see through one another's eyes, taste what the other eats and know the other's thoughts. Despite this, the twins' mother says they have separate and distinct personalities. The Vancouver-based family was the subject of a CBC documentary which aired last year.

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

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Anna Cuinu

Design student Anna Cuinu has created a tartan specifically for people who are blind, colour blind or partially sighted. As part of her master course in knitwear at Heriot-Watt University in Edinburgh, Cuinu held focus groups with the Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB) to investigate how blind people experience fabrics. She also analysed consumer trends to solve the issues people with vision impairments often have with clothes. “My time volunteering has also been excellent, allowing me a deeper understanding of the difficulties that those with visual impairments can face due to poor design,” Cuinu told the Scottish Daily Record recently. “Accessible designs are often gimmicky or designed by larger companies to use as a marketing tool, where the innovative product is then not rolled out for use by those who would benefit from it.” In place of the colours and patterns of a traditional tartan, Cuinu crafted pieces with stitch structures that created a tactile pattern, allowing for the wearer to have a sensory experience without being able to see the fabric. She also included draw strings and tie fastenings rather than zippers. On top of that, Cuinu used a color identification system called Feelipa, which communicates colour through geometric shapes. Cuinu included those shapes on her design using wooden buttons. The hope is that Cuinu’s designs will influence the fashion industry at large if others follow her lead.


Limerick Suicide Watch

The city of Limerick has the highest suicide rate in Ireland, but a group of volunteers is aiming to change that. Limerick Suicide Watch, chaired by Colm O’Byrne, started off as a small crew patrolling the River Shannon out of the back of a car. These days, the team alternates shifts with another group called Corbett Suicide Prevention Limerick. This ensures the bridges along the river are monitored every night of the week. Limerick Suicide Watch is made up of about 60 people who have received training in suicide intervention, first aid, defibrillators, rescue throw-bags, walkie-talkie communication and river training. Volunteers do everything from simply talking to somebody to more physical interventions, such as talking people down from bridges or walls. In most cases, the volunteer is able to calm the person and call someone to take them home. Sometimes they have to call the police. The group estimates it has saved 180 lives since its inception in 2016. “It’s what happens to the people after we bring them away from the river, that’s where they are being let down,” volunteer Niamh Doyle recently told the Irish Times. “They are being brought to hospital and being discharged the same day. You could meet the same person three days in a row. Everybody joined this group for reasons specific to themselves. And being honest, I’d say we get a lot more out of it than we give. Us being out here, it’s like first aid. We are keeping them safe right now. We’ll keep doing this. We don’t mind.”


Sophie Congdon & Sew-Ho

Sophie Congdon, a student at University of Hertfordshire, is part of a team called Sew-Ho. The 21-year-old from Cardiff is one in a group of people who are sewing clothes for refugees in the so-called “Calais Jungle” - a refugee camp in Calais, France. The camp officially closed in 2016, but refugees who have yet to be resettled still live there, facing dire conditions. There have been allegations of aggressive evictions and claims that refugees’ belongings have been cut up by police, which Pas-de-Calais officials deny. “They do these things called clearances where they cordon off a section of the camp and then they make them hack up all their things – sometimes they’ll confiscate items,” Congdon told BBC. Congdon’s mother volunteers to teach refugees English, and hearing their stories inspired Congdon to step up to the plate as well. Sew-Ho receives old and damaged clothing items to a warehouse in Calais, where volunteers such as Congdon get to work. They create drawstring bags, as well as waterproof ponchos made from tents. Along with crafting these basic items, volunteers often alter wide-leg jeans to make them into a skinny cut. This allows the refugees to maintain their sense of identity and continue to express themselves, even while living in the cluttered conditions of the camp. According to Sew-Ho, 1,500 refugees are currently living in limbo in northern France. Two hundred of those people are unaccompanied children.

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Scottish Lion

The Scottish Lion roars into the future

It has only been a few months since David Glover took over e-commerce business Scottish Lion. However, the Nova Scotia-based entrepreneur is already looking ahead.

Glover intends to launch Scottish Lion Tours in the spring of 2019, helping clients explore their Scottish roots. To Glover, who was born in Glasgow, Scotland, and moved to Canada in 2003, it is a natural progression for him, both professionally and personally.

Scottish Lion sells products made in Scotland to customers all over the world, though the firm's core clientele is in North America. Glover has been privately hosting small-group Scottish tours for a while. He began by offering whisky tours, and now takes in iconic spots like the Islands of Mull, Orkney, Islay and Arran, and the Scottish Highlands.

"Next year's launch of the tours is really all about expanding the great Scottish Lion name and network to an already successful tour operation," he says. "Customers often mention how much they would love to visit Scotland. People are often drawn to the website because of their love for Scotland, so it seems only natural to offer the ultimate experience."

Scottish Lion was founded nearly four decades ago as a small retail outlet, evolving into a catalogue and retail operation with stores in the U.S. and Canada. Over the last 10 years, the business has become a fully integrated eTailer. Current best-sellers are tartan ties and scarves, with Scottish Highland wear and tartan fabric by-the-yard becoming increasingly popular.

Glover first got involved with Scottish Lion in 2006 when he was Manager of Business Development for Transcontinental Printing, which printed and distributed the company's catalogue. He helped the firm's previous owner during a busy time by answering inquiries and speaking to customers on the phone.

"I always found it fascinating how customers would very quickly start to ask questions about a particular clan or a castle, or an



area of Scotland or Ireland that perhaps their ancestors were from.

"By purchasing a product, these people were connecting with their heritage and bringing a piece of their ancestry into their homes."

"I am astounded by how grateful people are when the item, whether it is a kilt or a scarf, a tie or a tammy, arrives in their mailbox."

Glover took over at Scottish Lion this past June and now runs the company with his wife Selena from their base near Halifax.

Understanding the marketplace, he notes, has been the key to success so far.

"I believe we have a firm grasp on what the customers want in their relationship with our company; a combination of product, information, good customer service and a sense of humour. Most important is an understanding of why Scotland is important to them. Through our website and social media platforms, I believe that we are achieving that."

The biggest challenge he faces is logistics.

"With the business being entirely e-Commerce, customers' delivery expectations are influenced by some of the tech giants and internet retailers.

"With almost all our products coming in

from Scotland - and many custom-crafted - delivery times are governed by the type of item being made or supplied, and also by various international shipping requirements. Good communication with our customers is, therefore, very important."

Glover says the company is growing its presence in the schools, universities and pipe band circles.

"Tartan garments are becoming more popular in larger institutions, and the opportunity for clients to design and register their own business, corporate or family tartan has become very appealing."

He is fascinated by people's increasing interest in connecting with their Celtic roots.

"There is huge potential for everything Celtic right now, and that is being supported by a vibrant film and TV community, media, and of course, the internet, where interested parties can get access to practically anything that will help bring them closer to their family heritage."

With Scottish Lion's new tours, Glover - who is a past president of the Halifax Robert Burns Club, and also produced a documentary for the History Channel U.K. and National Geographic about the Battle of Bannockburn - is anxious to pass on his passion for his ancestral homeland.

"I am more excited than ever to share my knowledge of Scotland and take people on a fascinating journey through history."

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Childsplay

After 30 years of performing, Childsplay launches a final album and hits the road for a farewell tour

Led by violin maker Robert Childs, Childsplay is comprised of more than 20 musicians from around the world, each of whom plays a violin or a viola handmade by Childs. The ensemble includes a cast of 12 esteemed fiddlers, ranging from all-Ireland and national Scottish fiddle champions to members of the Boston Symphony, as well as nine all-star instrumentalists, singers and dancers.

For Childs, the group, the final recording and the farewell tour is a mixed-bag of emotions at the end of a long and satisfying run.

"I first got involved with the band in 1988," he remembers. "I was invited to perform with a group in Washington, D.C., only to discover that they were all playing instruments that I had constructed!"

"Something very special must have happened that night because here we are, going on our 30th anniversary tour. Many of those musicians have been with the group for the three decades."

Childs' love affair with an Irish fiddle almost cost him his college graduation some 47 years ago; he was playing guitar in a traditional band when a friend presented him with a fiddle and suggested he learn to play.

"I caught the bug so bad I almost didn't graduate because I was playing the damn thing day and night! I had first heard fiddle music when I was a kid in Indiana and loved the rhythmic elements of it right away, but never imagined I would actually ever play."

His interest later expanded to include the art of fiddle-making. He has more than 160 instruments to his credit, many of them

currently being played by some of the finest musicians in the world.

"To hear the music emerge from the instrument – partially the voice of the maker, and partially the voice of the player – is beyond gratifying."

For Childs, that satisfaction comes after hundreds of hours working alone in his shop, coaxing sound from the wood he shapes.

"It is a process of removing wood and, ultimately, freeing the sound that already exists within the raw materials. The art of shaping it into a final sound comes from years of experience and experimenting with various instruments."

Much of that experience came from playing his trade in a shop in Philadelphia, repairing instruments for members of a local orchestra.

"Hearing – up close, first-hand – what a Stradivarius or Guarneri or Amati violin sounds like, then seeing it apart and understanding the original approach taken by the master maker, all helps one develop an intuitive insight of how to approach making an instrument. Ultimately, you want the violin to sound like you made it."

While the construction of a violin can be solitary work, Childs loves fiddling because he finds it sociable in nature.

"An old fiddler from Maine, Otto Soper, once told me you will make all your great

friends playing music, and that music will take you places money cannot."

Childs' fiddles have been in great demand through the years – so much so that he had to make a point of fashioning a personal one for his own 50th birthday.

"I continue to play it 16 years later. One thing about a new violin is that it takes years for the sound to mature, so having an instrument of my own has given me a greater appreciation for that process."

The band's final recording, *The Bloom of Youth* – their seventh full-length release – features talented Irish folksinger Karan Casey.

"Having her involved with the band was like a gift from heaven. To have (world-renowned producer) Bob Ludwig master the album and find this place for Karan's voice right in the centre of the sound was just magical."

The decision to disband the project, he notes, was primarily financial.

"It is incredibly expensive to tour around with 21 musicians and a five-person production crew. I love what we are doing but it simply isn't sustainable unless we achieved stardom, which isn't easy to do if you are a fiddle band."

The band will kick off its final tour dates in the Pacific Northwest with shows in Washington and Oregon, before a farewell performance in Somerville, Massachusetts, at the end of November.

www.childsplay.org

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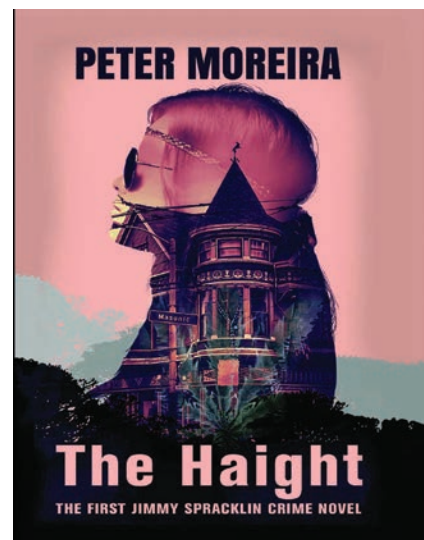
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Peter Moreira

Canadian author Peter Moreira trips through time with his first foray into fiction



Although he is not Celtic by birth, Canadian author Peter Moreira comes by his gift of storytelling honestly.

“Biologically, I am 25 per cent Portuguese and 75 per cent British,” he shares over fish ‘n’ chips at a downtown Halifax eatery. “But culturally, I am from Nova Scotia. I am also a member of the Presbyterian Church, attended St. Andrew’s College, attended Queen’s University (home of the Golden Gaels) - so there is a heavy, heavy Scottish influence there.”

A seasoned journalist with several books already under his belt, Moreira counts Ernest Hemingway, Michael Connelly, Wallace Stegner and Thomas Wolfe among his literary influences.

“I have learned a thing or two about writing over the years,” he smiles. “I have become more disciplined. I know that what you delete is as important as what you write, and that great writing means leaving out good writing.”

“In fiction, using plot to bring out the traits of a great character, and using the actions of your characters to drive a great plot is what makes a great book. There has to be the interplay between the two.

“Inspiration can give you lots of ideas, but most of them will get turfed out over time. Writing is a matter of grinding it out day after day.”

The author was inspired to pen his latest effort, *The Haight*, after consecutive trips to California.

“I hitchhiked to San Francisco twice in 1981 and fell in love with Haight-Ashbury. They didn’t have the hippie industry there at that time like they do now, but I never got the place out of my mind. Twenty years later, I was looking for something that pub-

lishers might be interested in, so I asked myself what I would like to read. The answer: a ‘whodunnit’ with hippies. So I set it in Haight-Ashbury.”

He admits that piecing the work together was not without its challenges.

“I had tried - with no success - to write literary novels for years, and so I thought that I might try my hand with something easy like pulp fiction. Huge mistake. Crime fiction is a highly disciplined and difficult genre, and you have to be at the top of your game to do it well. The greatest challenge was learning about the genre and creating a page-turner. I really learned to respect authors who do it well. The second most challenging aspect - which I learned from reading the books of my friend Pamela Callow - is the importance of the protagonist’s emotions, even in a hardboiled detective novel.

“Also, there was a significant amount of research involved. As I set the book in 1968, I had to get the time right. Then I had to get San Francisco in 1968 right. Then I had to learn about police procedure in the 1960s.”

Understandably, he was quite nervous when it finally went out the door.

“Whenever you finish a book you are blind to its flaws until someone - usually your spouse - points out the weaknesses. Then they are too obvious.”

Despite those concerns, the response has been beyond satisfying.

“Fantastic. I am getting great feedback on *The Haight*. All five-star reviews on Amazon so far. It’s nice to have worked so long on the book and finally produce fiction that people like.”

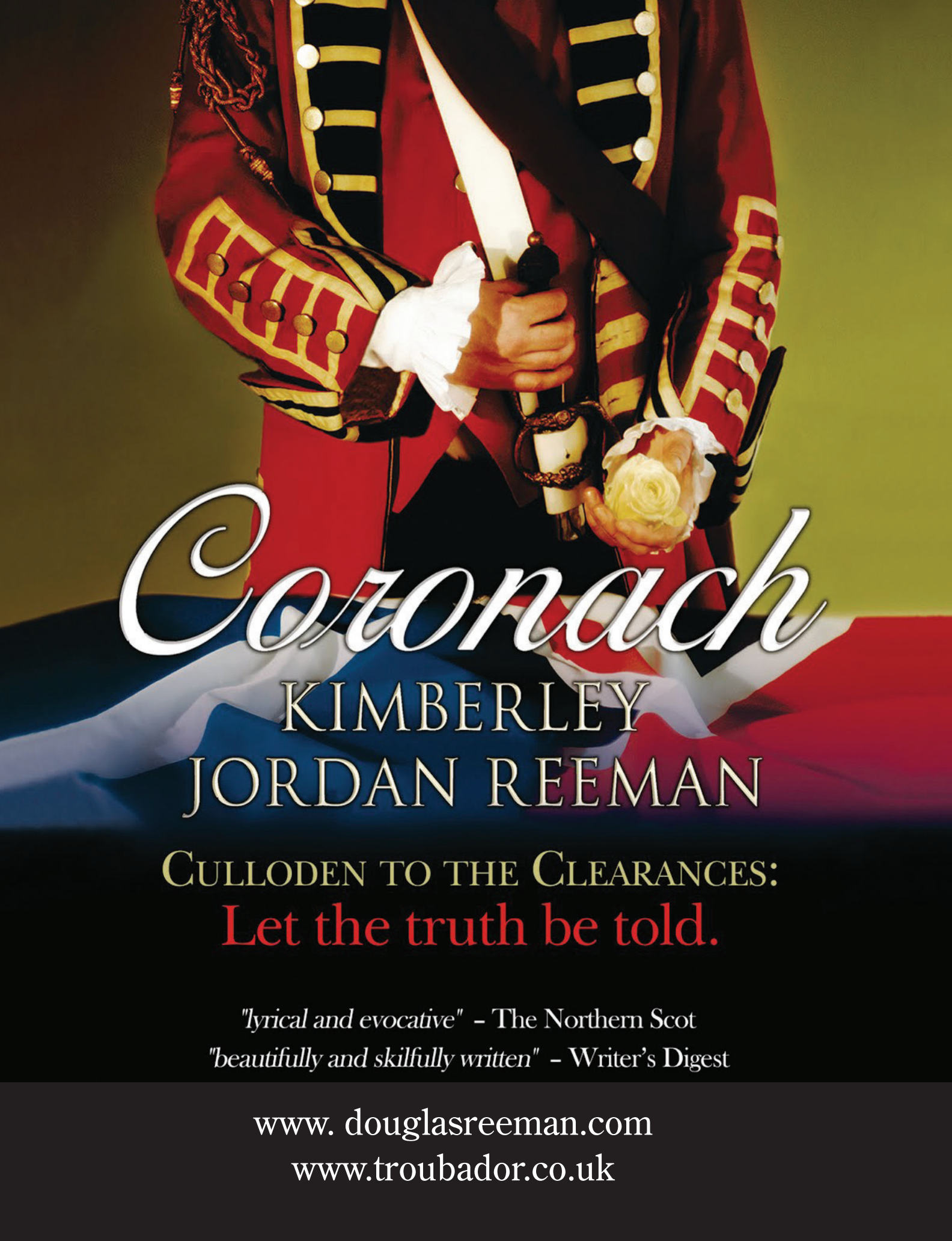
A sequel, he notes, is already in the works.

“I am now wrapping up the second draft. It will take place about three weeks after Book One ended against the setting of a rock concert on Hippie Hill in Golden Gate Park. And it will begin - surprise - with the body of one of the characters from *The Haight*.”

Book Two in *The Haight* series might be front and centre right now, but Moreira has other tales to tell down the road as well.

“I really want to write the history of my mother’s family. The MacKeens came to Nova Scotia in 1760 and there is a great story in their history. I have done about 80 per cent of the research already, however I must make the time to do the rest and tell their tale.”

www.petermoreira.com

A person in a red and gold military uniform, likely a British Grenadier Guard, is shown from the waist up. They are holding a sword with a white scabbard and a white rose. The background is a solid yellow-green color.

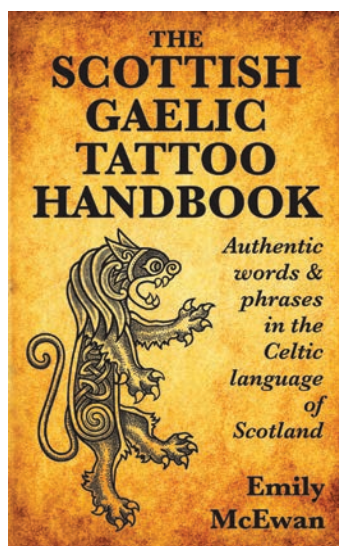
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Bradan Press is helping to keep Gaelic culture alive in Atlantic Canada and beyond

As a youngster, American-Canadian author, blogger, and scholar Dr. Emily McEwan-Fujita dreamed of working in the publishing industry.

"The very first time I got involved in publishing was actually in high school," she shares via email. "I had my own science fiction fanzine publishing company called Green Cheese Press, and I edited and published about four zine issues."

Following high school, the Chicago native - who boasts strong Celtic heritage - earned a PhD in Anthropology. However, over the years, the desire to work in publishing remained.

"I found my way back into it about three years ago when I decided to write a book. I self-published, which is not for everybody, but it turned out that I had exactly the interests and skill set for it. Very early in the process I received the opportunity to publish a friend's Gaelic poetry collection, so that changed the mandate."

Today, McEwan-Fujita is the president of Bradan Press, a Nova Scotia-based publishing company established in 2016, which focuses on preserving Gaelic language and culture.

"I wrote a post about bad Gaelic tattoos on my blog Gaelic.co," she explains. "It went viral, giving me the idea for my book, The Scottish Gaelic Tattoo Handbook. Bradan Press is an extension of the original concept behind my blog and that first book - to present Gaelic language and culture in an accessible and engaging way."

In addition to The Scottish Gaelic Tattoo Handbook, Bradan Press has published a number of works, including the Irish Tattoo

Handbook, two works of poetry - Lavender and Seasons for Seeking - and the children's book Fionn MacCool and the Salmon of Knowledge.

McEwan-Fujita says her work with Bradan Press has been "satisfying."

"Everything that we are able to do with, and in, Gaelic helps to support the community - both economically and aesthetically - making it stronger for future generations."

"This year we are becoming more integrated into the publishing community, both in Scotland and Nova Scotia," she adds. "In May, we joined the Atlantic Publishers Marketing Association. And our book, Fionn MacCool and the Salmon of Knowledge, has just been approved by the Nova Scotia Department of Education for use in the school system to help teach children about Gaelic language and culture."

Still, she admits, the vocation is not without its challenges.

"No one ever goes into Gaelic to get rich. There is also a constant struggle between serving two different reading audiences with conflicting needs. On the one hand, there are readers who don't know very much about Gaelic but want to learn more. On the other, there is the much smaller reading audience that is fluent in Gaelic already. Each group of readers is looking for something very different in a 'Gaelic book.'"

Despite those issues, McEwan-Fujita

remains committed to preserving and promoting Gaelic language and culture, both at home and abroad.

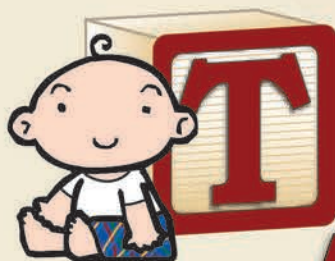
"The Gaelic language has been quite deliberately erased from the history books, both in Scotland and in Canada. It is an ongoing struggle to remind people that Gaelic-speaking people, like me, do, in fact, exist... and we have been here for quite a long time. We use our language and live in our culture every day, and Gaelic literature is an essential part of that. It is actually a tradition going back centuries in Scotland, and even here in Nova Scotia, where the first Gaelic book was published 180 years ago.

"It is, however, more of a challenge for us here in Nova Scotia than in Scotland. We are still rebuilding the language community, and place a higher emphasis on teaching speaking skills over reading and writing. In the past in Scotland, the Gaelic literary community was geared towards teaching fluent Gaelic to adults. I believe it is important to focus on people of all ages who are in the process of learning the language."

Bradan Press has a number of major projects lined up for the coming while, including Play It Like You Sing It: The Shears Collection - a two-volume book about the Great Highland bagpipe in Nova Scotia, written by Cape Breton piper Barry Shears.

"It is really an exciting time for us; the first two years were spent playing this mad game of catch-up. However, in the last six months we have finally been able to start planning our projects further ahead, and we have some really amazing things in store for 2019 and 2020."

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ENNIS SISTERS



KEEPING TIME



The Ennis Sisters keep it in the family

The Ennis Sisters - Teresa, Karen and Maureen - were born into a "musical family" in Newfoundland and Labrador.

"Dad was an excellent button accordion player, which is a traditional Newfoundland instrument, and mom played piano and guitar," shares Teresa, the youngest of the siblings. "They passed their love of music on to each of us."

She adds that the family's penchant for melody is likely rooted in their Irish heritage. "We traced our Irish roots back to 1796, when the first Ennis landed on the shores of Newfoundland."

It was eldest sister Maureen who was the first of the trio to be bitten by the music bug.

"She began taking piano, violin, guitar and voice lessons," says Teresa. "Karen and I eventually joined her in voice lessons and we learned how to harmonize. As pre-teens and early teenagers, our voice teacher entered us into a family music category at The Kiwanis Music Festival, where someone in the audience heard us and asked us to perform at a local fundraiser. From there, we were invited to perform at folk festivals around our home province."

All three sisters currently reside in the province's capital city of St. John's. Being in Newfoundland adds a few challenges to their musical career.

"Living on an island in the middle of the North Atlantic puts us at an immediate disadvantage," admits Karen. "Travelling on and off Newfoundland is not only expensive but adds a half day to most travel days."

She wouldn't change it for the world, however.

"Newfoundland is our home and we couldn't imagine living anywhere else."

"Not only are our roots firmly planted here, but we don't have to look too far to find inspiration for our music and stories. It is what makes us unique in the world."

The Ennis Sisters' first recording, *Red is the Rose*, was released in June of 1997. They have since released nine additional albums, including two Christmas-themed albums, a self-titled record, and their latest effort *Keeping Time*.

"When we first started playing together, we performed mostly traditional Newfoundland and Irish music," explains Karen. "We had a very raw talent and an organic sound. Since then we have explored many different musical paths, and Maureen has evolved into a talented and successful songwriter. We were signed to Warner Music in the early 2000s, and recorded more of a pop-country style. By 2008, we found our way back to our roots."

Teresa describes the Ennis Sisters' sound today as "original contemporary folk with Irish overtones."

As their confidence in performing grew, the group's stage presence evolved.

"Now, we incorporate stories, recitations, Irish dancing, comedy, as well as some very moving moments," shares Karen. "Our audiences often find themselves laughing one minute and crying the next. Our harmonies have gotten much tighter with the more complicated parts. We always try to push out of our comfort zone on each project."

Keeping Time gave the girls the opportunity to work with former Great Big Sea frontman Alan Doyle, who produced the album. It was both an exciting and emotional journey.

"We began writing this CD around the time of Karen's wedding," recalls Maureen. "The title track - *Keeping Time* - inspired the concept for the project. During this period, we watched our father lose his battle with Lewy body dementia and it definitely affected the tone of the album. We became very aware of how precious and fleeting time really is."

Working with Doyle meant "a lot of homework" for the siblings, but it paid off, allowing them to enter the studio fully prepared. As a result, they recorded the project in just three days.

"Alan helped us get the best out of every song," notes Maureen. "It was the first time we recorded our voices at the same time. In order to pull this off successfully, we had to know our parts inside and out."

The response to the album has been extremely positive, and the Ennis Sisters have already had the chance to showcase the new material both at home on "The Rock" and at festivals in Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and Ontario. Currently, they are preparing for five weeks of Christmas concerts leading up to the holidays.

"It is amazing to look back over the past 20-plus years of our musical journey and realize how far we've come personally and professionally, and exciting to think about what's yet to come," says Teresa. "I guess we have our parents to thank for all this."

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Celtic Thunder

With a stirring selection of songs and a stunning stage show, Celtic Thunder celebrates ten years of making Celtic music



Well into a 75-city North American tour, Irish supergroup Celtic Thunder is reveling in being back on the road.

"We are performing a little bit of everything this time through," shares vocalist Emmet Cahill, just hours before heading back onto the stage for a show in the eastern United States. "It's a nice mix of traditional and contemporary Irish songs, classic hits and love songs. So far, it is all going beautifully - the audiences have been brilliant."

The tour, which began in mid-September, winds up just in time for the five vocalists and their crew to make it home to Ireland for Christmas.

Producer Sharon Brown, the brainchild behind the Celtic Connections recording label and Celtic Woman, first brought Celtic Thunder together in 2007. Enlisting the legendary Phil Coulter as musical director, the pair produced a show that was big on music, drama and special effects, later filming it at the Helix Theatre in Dublin and launching it on United States public television early in 2008. It became an overnight sensation, with the group's self-titled first album going straight to the top of Billboard's World Music charts.

Those original dramatic elements, including a toast to Celtic mythology, are still the essential backbone of the two-hour show.

As the tour winds its way across the USA and Canada, the group members are stretching out sonically.

Cahill, who first joined Celtic Thunder in 2011, admits that he was a wee apprehensive about how the new musical mélange would go over with audiences.

"There is no question that we have gone all-out in different directions for this show. I was a little anxious for the early feedback, but it has been very positive and very generous, which has just increased our enjoyment in presenting it."

He notes that each musical number is a story, complete with set transformations, dramatic lighting, and a change of costumes. Along with Cahill, the dynamic vocal reach of fellow members Ryan Kelly, Neil Byrne, Damian McGinty, and Michael O'Dwyer gives the music an even wider range.

"While the show has been designed for a broad demographic, each song has been very carefully chosen to suit our individual voices," says Cahill.

By way of examples, he points to both Damian McGinty's tender version of Nat King Cole's L-O-V-E, and Ryan Kelly's rollicking rendition of The Devil Went Down to Georgia. The Monkees' I'm a Believer and Terry Jacks' Seasons in the Sun are also in the set, as is Neil Byrne's touching retooling of Bruno Mars' When I Was Your Man.

Cahill, now 28 and based in the small Irish midlands town of Mullingar, performs three solos, including the sinister Crow on the Cradle - a traditional tune adapted from Irish folklore.

"It is certainly dark and dramatic with the lighting and the set, but it is quite enjoyable to sing."

He also performs On the Street Where You Live from the musi-





For any band, a 10th anniversary is a milestone; a time to both reflect on the past and look to the future.

Over the past decade, Celtic Thunder has weathered the death of original member George Donaldson, as well as a serious head injury to Ryan Kelly. Others, such as Paul Byrom and Keith Harkin, left to pursue solo careers. A small handful of other vocalists, musicians and crew have come and gone as well.

Kelly, a chartered accountant by trade, auditioned for the first Celtic Thunder production on a whim. After getting the gig, he woke every morning of his first year with the show praying his good luck would continue. It is a sentiment that Cahill takes to heart.

"None of us can predict the future and we all know we are only as good as our last show. The challenge is always to grow as artists, and that is a big reason why we have been so attentive to audience feedback for the new show."

He adds that the pursuit of solo careers by the group's members help to keep things fresh when they reconvene in Celtic Thunder. Cahill's own shows feature classical Irish and folk music.

"Earlier this year I had the chance to perform at Carnegie Hall. It is the kind of opportunity you dream of - to be on the stage where some of the world's best have performed. It was absolutely wonderful."

Kelly - who hails from Co Tyrone - and Neil Byrne of Co Wicklow, also suggest that the gap between the small theatres they perform in as a duo and the massive halls that host Celtic Thunder is a healthy one.

"We love all the dramatics of Celtic Thunder," says Byrne, "but when we are on

the road, just the two of us, there is no big stage production. It is just us, sharing songs and stories with a smaller audience."

Cahill, who will be touring as a solo artist again in 2019, says the time apart gives each of the band members a fresh perspective on their collective work.

"When I am on the road alone I am often thinking of what we can do when we are all back together. When we are all out doing different things it keeps us energized and open to new possibilities for the band."

The extravaganza that is the current Celtic Thunder production is a far cry from his humble, musical roots of home.

"As a family we would perform at church ceremonies all over the country; my dad on piano, my brother on cello, my sister playing classical flute and singing, while I would sing and play violin."

"Then again, while the venues are bigger today, I still feel that connection. After a decade together, Celtic Thunder is family."

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Daryl Simpson



Daryl Simpson's belief in the power of song is stronger than ever as his ensemble, The Celtic Tenors, prepares for another world tour.

"We are savouring the last days at home but getting excited about going out on the road again," says Simpson over the phone from his home in Omagh, Northern Ireland.

Busy with career obligations - including early discussions about a new album and plans to perform with symphonies in Halifax and Winnipeg - he spent part of his day taking his two-year-old son to a doctor.

"He usually leaves a path of destruction behind him, but he is down with a fever and cold. This normally happens when I am away and my wife has to do the doctor run, so I was happy to be able to take him today."

Like his Celtic Tenors cohorts, James Nelson and Matthew Gilenan, Simpson finds comfort and clarity in daily life - especially as the past twelve months have been particularly busy, and quite emotional.

A few months ago, he was named to the Queen's New Years Honours list. And, more recently, he was awarded the British Empire Medal for services to community, peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland.

"It is a great honour, certainly, and it only reinforces my intentions to promote peace and reconciliation as a real and tangible entity."

Simpson was a 22-year-old graduate of Queen's University in Belfast at the time of the horrific Omagh Bombing in 1998; an IRA car bomb detonated on the town's busy Market Street, killing 29 people - including a woman pregnant with twins - and injuring 220 others. The deadliest single incident of The Troubles, it came 13 weeks after the Good Friday Agreement, just as hopes for a lasting peace were beginning to take root. The bombing occurred on a Saturday afternoon while many families were busy with back-to-school shopping, and the victims were both Protestants and Catholics of various ages, including three generations of one family and several tourists.

"It was a terrible, terrible time for us in Omagh," recalls Simpson with a deep sigh. "We were a town of shattered lives and dreams."

A newspaper report the following day quoted him as saying he became separated from his family after the bomb went off and spent the next two hours looking through rubble and battered bodies in a desperate search for them.

"All of our family - all 9 of us - stayed together in the one bedroom last night," he told the reporter.

Simpson had often wondered if music could promote unity amongst young people in his country.

"We were all - my generation as those before us - sent to separate schools, divided from our earliest days. I had always thought about that, and the tragedy spurred me to take action. I announced I was forming the Omagh Community Youth Choir, and - amazingly - four weeks after the bombing, it was up and running."

Creating an opportunity for high-school aged students to sing and perform together - regardless of religion or school system - he found strong supporters on both sides of the divide.

"I think it was when all those voices were raised in harmony that the darkness and sadness that had prevailed over Omagh since the bombing began to dissipate a little bit."

The choir continues today, with Simpson as director. This past summer the ensemble visited Nashville to perform in churches and halls, and toured both the Grand Ole Opry and The Country Music Hall of Fame.

"Travel is a big part of the program because we find that people really bond when



they are away from home. They discover that they are not very different at all, and that is a great blessing.”

The troupe, including members past and present, performed at a ceremony marking the 20th anniversary of the bombing this past August in Omagh.

“I had been asked to write a song for the event, which was a great honour and also a great responsibility. Performing there was very humbling, but our hope is that the music continues to be a source of comfort, healing and solace, as there is still great pain and hurt among families.”

The song calls for unity and love.

*“Come and join us at the water
Where our two rivers flow into one
Where peace and hope come together
And our hearts are filled with love for everyone...”*

He was encouraged by the experience.

“There were doctors and consultants and just a variety of great people who came to share our singing. They are strong and will carry on through the long process of reconciliation and peace.”

Although humble of his accomplishments, Simpson understands the healing qualities of music.

“I know from my own life the power of a particular song to get you through a bad day. With the Celtic Tenors, we see it every time we perform.”

He points to the emotional response many concert-goers have to Danny Boy.

“Now, if you had told me in my teens that I would be singing Danny Boy and feeling the emotion of it, I would have laughed! I thought it was old and tired, and it is a bit frowned upon by some, but I don’t

think of it that way anymore. It is a lovely piece that touches people deeply.”

Another song that elicits a strong response on Celtic Tenors’ tours is one of Simpson’s personal favourites, The Dutchman.

“You can see it as soon as Matthew begins to talk about the song. There are many people in the audience that are dealing with the tragedy of a dear relative whose memory is fading, and there are many more that will be dealing with it in time.”

Better and In My Daughter’s Eyes are other standouts.

“I used to think In My Daughter’s Eyes was a pretty song, and then I had a daughter. One night, as we were singing it, the real emotion of it hit me - I knew right then and there what it meant for many in the audience.”

The trio’s biggest assets, he believes, are the broad scope of music they perform, and their ability to harmonize and bring out the best in the melodies.

“There are worse labels than Celtic crossover, I suppose, but I am not much for labels in general. John McCormack and Enrico Caruso, the best-selling singers of their generation, sang anything they liked without having to fit into any genre.”

Though the tuxedoed tenors are all classically trained, have performed oratorio and concerts worldwide, and sung leading roles in top operas, they never take themselves too seriously.

“We love just hanging out, laughing, and meeting audiences after the shows. Most people are pleasantly surprised to see that we are just everyday lads from Ireland.”

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Gillebrìde MacMillan

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of the Gaelic Renaissance



Tell us about your heritage.

I am from South Uist in the Outer Hebrides of Scotland. Gaelic is my first, native language and I learned English in school. Gaelic was very much the language of the community and the family, and I learned the Gaelic traditions and customs growing up in such a rich cultural and linguistic environment.

Where do you currently reside, and how old are you now?

I am now 40 years old and I live in Glasgow. Although I go back to Uist a lot, I am working as a lecturer at The University of Glasgow where I teach Gaelic language, literature and song. I have, however, lived in various places that have influenced me, including Galway, Ireland, for 4 months while learning Irish, and Galicia, Spain, for 7 years. My wife is from Galicia.

When and why did you start playing music?

Song was a huge part of growing up in Uist. I was influenced by some of my singing teachers, such as the tradition-bearers Catriona Garbutt and Iseabail T. MacDonald. I used to compete at Gaelic singing competitions, and I won all the main prizes as a child. However, I did not really enjoy singing in front of an audience in my teenage years - I am quite shy - so I didn't sing again in public until I was 22. Then I sang in the adult competitions at the the National Mod and won, and I have just carried on singing from there. It wasn't really planned, but people kept asking me to sing and it has snowballed from there. I started writing songs about 10 years ago. At first, I just kept them to myself. I went to the Isle of Canna for a week and came back with 7 songs - an inspired week - and I thought that it would be good to share them. And so here I am now with an album of new Gaelic songs.

Are the reasons you first got into music the same reasons you remain involved?

Today, I really enjoy singing, and over the last number of years I have been very fortunate to have performed often in North America. My role as Gwyllyn the bard in Outlander has taken me to Fergus, On-

tario, New York, and New Jersey, amongst other places. I have also developed strong links with An Comunn Gàidhealach Aimeireaga (ACGA) - a group that teaches and promotes Gaelic language and culture in North America - and that has afforded me the opportunity to perform with them in Ohio, Pennsylvania, and North Carolina. I have seen first-hand the interest that people all over the world have in Gaelic culture, and it really is a wonderful thing for me to sing, create and teach songs to those who love the music. I have also performed at Pipes of Christmas in New York and New Jersey, and the Clan Currie has been very supportive of my artistic practice. In fact, a song on the new album is dedicated to that ancient bardic family.

How have you evolved as an artist over time?

I have always sung traditional Gaelic songs - some as old as 500 years - and I love these songs. However, it is important that Gaelic be seen as a language that is alive and vibrant, and one that deals with contemporary issues. As such, my new recording focuses on some of the social, political and cultural issues of our time.

What are the challenges involved with the vocation?

I have been a lot busier in terms of my singing over the last 4 years - mainly as a result of Outlander - so the main challenge has been balancing that with a young family, and other work commitments.

What are the rewards?

I have been so lucky to meet so many wonderful people from all over the world who are interested in Scottish culture and language. I have also been fortunate to work with some of the best musicians in the world, including Mhairi Hall, Rosa Cedron, Julie Fowles, and Natalie Haas. I also performed this year with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra.

How would you describe your sound today?

It is a contemporary sound, though firmly rooted in traditional Gaelic and Celtic music. It is important for me to have a modern sound, but it is also impossible not to be inspired by the wonderful songs, bards and instrumentation that came before.



What have been some career highlights?

Certainly singing in *Outlander* has been the greatest thing to happen in my career. As a result, I have gained much more exposure to the wider world than I might have otherwise. It is not that I have changed my style of music as such, only that more people are now aware of it. It was also a wonderful production to work on, and I have met so many people as a direct result. Diana Gabaldon has also been incredibly supportive of my music - she has even written a foreword for my new album.

Is your creative process more 'inspirational' or 'perspirational'?

My own songs are "inspirational." I won't write anything for a long period, but when I have time and stillness to think I might create a song in an hour or so. For me, there is no point in trying to compose a song if you are not in the right frame of mind to do it. So I need to take more time out to compose songs!

What makes a good song?

The words and the songs come at the same time for me. A line of a song comes with a melody line, and then I just add line after line with the melody. A good song in my opinion needs a strong melody, good lyrics and a great arrangement. Easy as that! But, in all seriousness, each of those three things are often difficult to do individually. I am delighted with all the arrangements on the new album. In fact, I am thrilled with the melodies and the lyrics too. Everything just seemed to align perfectly in terms of the sound and music.

Do you have a favourite track on *Freumhan Falaichte*?

It's funny - my favourite track changes every time I listen to the album. I love hearing from people about their favourite tracks. Some of the faster songs, such as *Baile nam bàrd* and *Duan an Fhògarraich* or *Santiago*, are great for tapping and dancing along to. Some are more contemplative. A couple - *Am bàl* and *Tha mi sgìth* - were composed for my parents. So my favourite changes all the time!

What has the response been like so far from those that have heard it?

Absolutely fantastic. I have had some wonderful feedback on social media and on the radio. People have been writing to me from Australia, the U.S.A., Canada, England, Scotland - all with beautiful messages about how they have enjoyed the music and the lyrics. Rona MacDonald, a bilingual poet from Uist, created English poems from the Gaelic originals so that people reading the lyrics in translation can better understand and appreciate how poetic Gaelic is.

What are your thoughts on the current state of the Celtic/Gaelic music scene?

It is all very positive at the moment. Julie Fowlis has a huge following all over the world, and there are many other great singers and bands as well, including *Dàimh*, which tours a lot in North America. Other great Gaelic songwriters include Whyte, Mary Ann Kennedy and Eilidh MacKenzie. I have been very lucky to sing Gaelic songs to thousands of people and it always amazes me just how passionate people are about Gaelic music.

Is enough being done to preserve and promote the Celtic/Gaelic culture generally?

Yes - some wonderful things are being done to promote and preserve Gaelic culture. We have thousands of pupils in Gaelic schools throughout Scotland, and there are a number of excellent archive projects here, including *Tobar an Dualchais* and *DASG*. All these help to preserve and promote the culture. It is so important that we inform future generations and help them to develop a greater appreciation of Gaelic.

How can this be improved?

I think normalization of the language is key. As people in the not-too-distant past were punished and beaten for speaking the language, there can be a reluctance to speak it in some situations. By making it a language of normal communication, we can change that mentality. Incorporating the language into modern music, or on TV shows like *Outlander*, proves that there is a value in the language. Speaking it needs to become a badge of pride.

What do you have on tap for the remainder of 2018, and going into 2019?

I am looking forward to having launch events for the album; I just performed at The Spree Festival in Paisley, and I will be singing at The Pipes of Christmas concerts in New York and New Jersey in December. In 2019, I will be even busier with various festivals and concerts planned. This really is a fantastic time to be a Gaelic singer, and I am honoured and grateful that I have the opportunity to perform my own songs - as well as those of my ancestors - to people all over the world.

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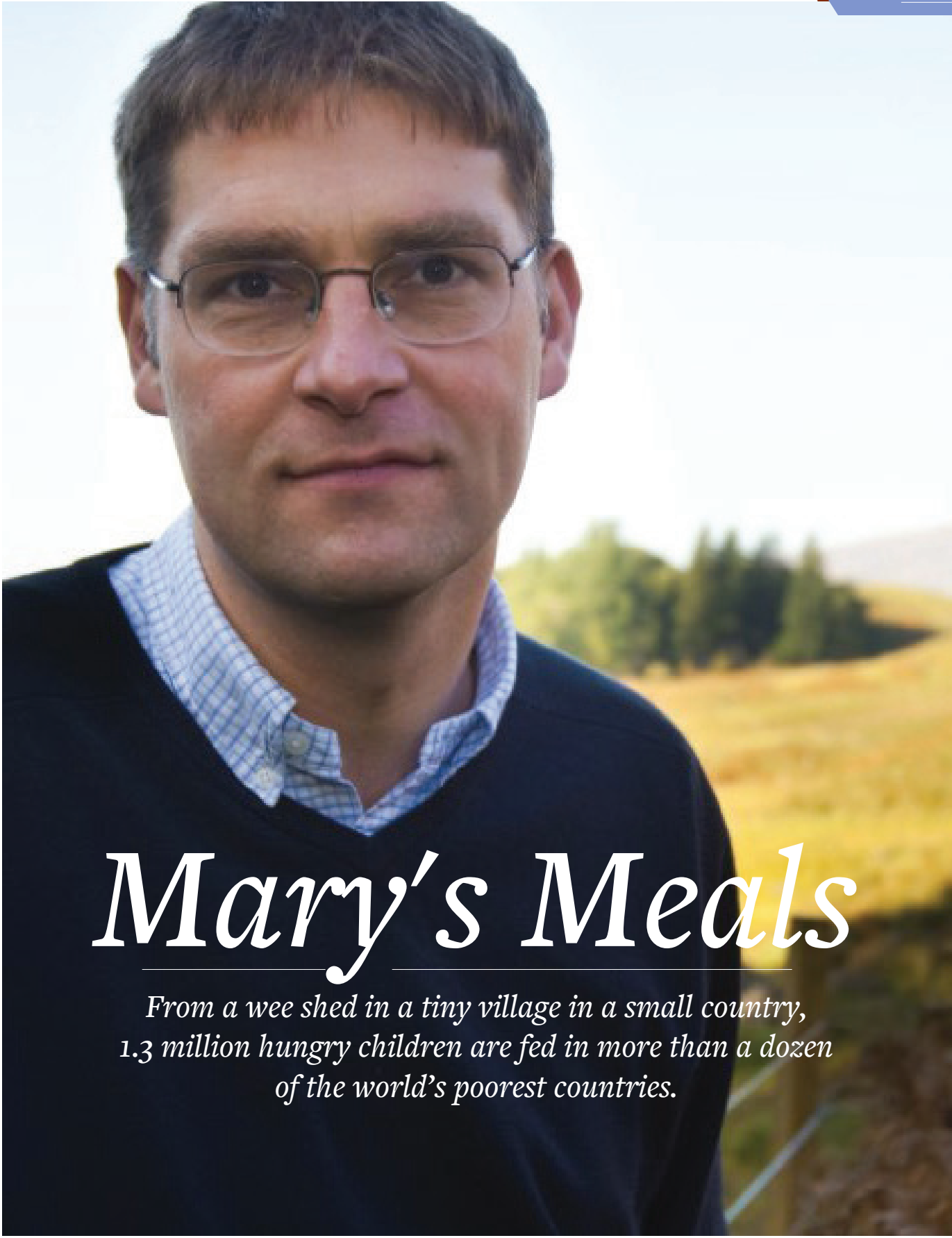
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Mary's Meals

*From a wee shed in a tiny village in a small country,
1.3 million hungry children are fed in more than a dozen
of the world's poorest countries.*



What was once a corrugated iron backyard storage shed is now the head office of an international charity called Mary's Meals.

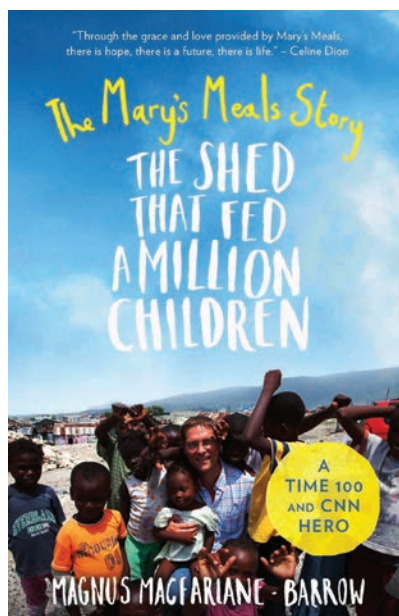
Located on the west coast of Scotland, the picturesque village of Dalmally (population 400) is an unlikely centre from which to launch a major humanitarian effort.

Founder Magnus MacFarlane-Barrow is an equally unlikely global chief executive officer.

"None of us are doing anything very spectacular, but through many small acts of love, hungry children are being fed," points out MacFarlane-Barrow, while on a recent speaking tour of North America.

Each school day, Mary's Meals provides a nourishing meal for children attending classes around the world: in Haiti, it is rice and beans; in South Sudan, there is sorghum and beans, and in Malawi students are served a vitamin-enriched maize and soya porridge. All food is prepared and distributed by community volunteers - 80,000 of them in Malawi alone - and, wherever possible, Mary's Meals purchases produce from local farmers.

"Our goal is that every hungry child should receive a meal in his or her place of education."



"As the program grows, I believe this vision is actually possible. To me it is baffling that children are dying of hunger in a world of plenty."

MacFarlane-Barrow - a devout Catholic father of seven children - is both a "CNN Hero" and has been named to Time Magazine's List of the 100 most influential people in the world. The laurels do not rest easy on

the shoulders of a man who insists he was painfully shy when he began working with relief organizations.

"There have been occasions when I have felt a bit like a fish out of water. I am uncomfortable being singled out, when Mary's Meals is the work of many people doing what we can. However, I am always grateful for an opportunity to tell our story."

The simplicity of Mary's Meals makes its effectiveness easy to gauge.

"After a short time we began to get reports from schools where we were serving meals showing that more children are coming to school and that daily attendance is better. Soon after, we received reports that academic progress was improving. It is not hard to understand that a child who is fed properly is going to do better at lessons."

He adds that children who remain in school and receive a basic education become employable.

"These are the children who will ultimately pull their nations out of poverty, and it will happen because they were fed."

In 1992 MacFarlane-Barrow and his brother, Fergus, met for a pint in a Dalmally pub after both had watched the horrors of war-torn Bosnia on television news.

"We decided to call for donations of supplies, and we would drive them to the people who needed them. It was the first time my



brother and I ever hatched a plan in a pub that actually happened.”

Donations poured in from friends, neighbours and beyond, and the brothers took time off work to drive the goods to relief agencies in Bosnia.

“I thought we had done our one good deed and that would be the end of it, but donations continued to pour in.”

MacFarlane-Barrow prayed for guidance before giving up his job and selling his home to drive relief supplies to Bosnia fulltime.

“I decided I would do this as long as supplies kept coming in. I thought it would be for a few months, but the Scottish people are very generous to those in need. The donations were so great we had to set up a registered charity.”

He made connections with a variety of local aid agencies, as well as with a young Scottish nurse who had also given up her job to bring aid to the Bosnians.

“I met my wife Julie driving a truck to Bosnia. If she didn’t share my passion for the work we’ve continued to do, none of it would have been possible.”



After a decade of bringing aid to suffering people in troubled countries, which has included opening a home for orphans and setting up primary health care clinics, MacFarlane-Barrow was moved to change the focus of the international charity, renaming it Mary’s Meals in 2002. While staying with a priest in Malawi, he visited a mother who was dying of AIDS with her six children gathered round her.

“I asked her son, Edward, about his hopes and dreams. He told me that he would like to have enough food to eat and to go to school one day.”

The encounter crystallized something MacFarlane-Barrow had witnessed throughout his aid efforts - children were staying out of school because of hunger.

“I began to see that with one simple act we could accomplish two things; we could meet the immediate need of a hungry child for food, and we could provide a much-needed basic education, which is the best tool for climbing out of poverty.”

From that first school to the thousands that have followed, community participation is an essential component.



“The school community must be willing to take responsibility for the operation of the program. We provide the funding, but it must operate locally. Fortunately - as can be seen from our growth - that has not been a problem.”

It was MacFarlane-Barrow’s strong Catholic faith that first piqued his interest in Bosnia back when it was a part of Yugoslavia. At 14, he was the youngest of a small group of teenagers to travel from Scotland to Medjugorje, following reports that the Blessed Virgin Mary was appearing in apparitions to teenagers.

“It was well before people began going there in large numbers to visit the Marian shrine. We stayed a week in a farming village and became very close to the people.”

When he and his siblings returned home, their parents were struck by the impression the trip had made on their children and followed up with a visit of their own.

“After returning home, they converted the small hotel they were running to a retreat house, Craig Lodge House of Family Prayer, which still operates and remains a great support to Mary’s Meals.”

More than 25 years into relief work, and dealing with millions of dollars in aid annually, MacFarlane-Barrow is still touched that the majority of donations are relatively small.

“We get a great many donations from young children who don’t prevaricate when they hear our message. They are shocked that, in a world of plenty, there are children who go all day without a meal - and they want to be a part of changing that.”

MacFarlane-Barrow’s book, *The Shed that Fed a Million*, is another way that he has spread awareness about Mary’s Meals. It has also served to ensure that the organization remains true to its founding values and ethos.

“I believe that our work has just begun. There are still 66 million children out of school around the world because of hunger.”

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KEANE

Our award-winning photojournalist Tom Langlands gets creative with Barga-based artist Keane



I first met the artist Keane quite by chance while enjoying a morning coffee at Aristodemo Casciani's bar - known as Aristo's - in Barga's Piazza Salvi. It is remarkable how slowly the world turns under a hot Tuscan sun and striking up conversations with strangers is part of what breathes life into these medieval streets. I explained to him that I wanted to discover Barga's history and its people. Keane sat back, took a sip of his coffee, and replied "Don't go looking for Barga; it will come to you." It did.

Aristo's is considered by many to be the cultural hub of Barga, and the theatre of life plays itself out here for those who watch. As Keane and I chatted there was a steady flow of pedestrians through the small piazza: greetings were exchanged, pleasantries passed, stories told, photographs taken, and memories made. English is spoken widely, but after a while you begin to understand moments of Italian conversation too. I was to discover that it is his acute awareness of a 'sense of place' that defines Keane's work.

Acknowledging that art transcends the

spoken word, we took a few steps across the Piazza to a newly opened gallery, OXO Collection. It was here that I saw my first Keane artwork. It was a large, wrinkled canvas with a painted green border framing a big, black, Billy-goat. It is an angry piece: the horns and rough brushstrokes creating an aggressive dynamic and, even without eyes, the black head stares menacingly out of the canvas. In each corner of the painting was an eyelet with a piece of cord attached. Keane grasped one of the cords. "This piece was never meant for a gallery. It was intended for suspending over an outdoor space that belongs in my past. The goat is King Billy (William of Orange) and the green border is Ireland. I created this when I was an angry young man and, although it is about Northern Ireland, it was painted in 1983 when I was a Labour party activist living in England. It reflects the frustration and anger I felt about the political climate of that time. I left the U.K. shortly after that and - except for a few infrequent visits - have never returned."

Keane was born in London in 1956; his parents hailed from Co. Kerry, Ireland. He left home at fifteen and, amongst other jobs, laboured on pig farms, chicken farms and wood yards across the south of England before managing a pub and restaurant outside Cambridge and, later, overseeing a Singer sewing machine shop in Redditch in the Midlands. After leaving Singer he enrolled in adult education classes studying pottery, ceramics, art, English literature and Sociology. He then attended Stourbridge College to complete a degree course in Fine Art. While studying art he explored the world of street theatre, learning the basic skills of fire eating, unicycling and escapology. After graduating, he returned to London, working briefly for a transport company before buying an old London ambulance and, along with five friends, converting it into a travelling theatre - Lord Lucan's Travelling Box. It was the early 1980s and the group drove to Fontainebleau, Paris, where they practiced their act for two weeks before taking it on the road across France and Spain. He fell in love in Aix-en-Provence where he stayed for a time breathing fire for a living before eventually returning alone to the U.K.

In 1985 he moved to Tuscany. "I found cheap accommodation not far from Barga and I had enough money to stay for one year. I painted local landscapes and held my first exhibition at the end of that year." He sold enough work to enable him to extend his stay another year - a pattern that would play itself out for the next seven years. In the village of Fosciandora he organized an art



exhibition promoting female artists whose work he felt was undervalued at the time. One of the artists became his wife. By the early 1990s, Barga was growing and the couple moved into a house in the historic part of town. At first Keane hated the sense of enclosure and desperately wanted to move back to a rural lifestyle. However, two years later he made the decision that it was 'Barga or me' and embraced the town.

"I changed overnight. I realized the extent to which I am a community artist. Once I immersed myself in the town and its people, the inspiration and the art flowed."

In another part of the gallery Keane addressed a large square canvas comprised of sixteen smaller canvases - each depicting a traditional glass filled with varying amounts of red wine.

"When I first came to Barga, Aristo's only served red wine in these glasses. Now it serves Aperol Spritz in fancy glasses to tourists. I painted this because none of these glasses are left here and we are losing part of our culture and identity. It used to be that you could identify a man's politics from the way he ordered his wine. If he asked for black wine he was a fascist and if he asked for red wine he was emphasising that he was not an outright fascist sympathiser and probably leaned towards socialism - either way he got the same red wine in the same glass!"

We left OXO Collection and walked the short distance to Keane's studio - a creative array of canvases, paints, brushes, objects and unfinished paintings.

It was a series of religious works incorporating plastic that caught my attention, however. Keane explained that these shrines and religious images were the result of a local man's death in a tragic motorcycle acci-



dent last year.

"I noticed the place of the accident was marked with plastic flowers and that made me realize that so many of our roadside shrines have become repositories for plastic - be it flowers, candles, or other items of religious iconography. The same is true in some churches. What does that say about how we value life, death and religion?" It did make me ponder the essence of being, how we attribute meaning to objects and what plastic signifies.

On the wall of the studio hung a collection of curved knives called pennati. These local pennati have their origins thousands of years ago as traditional weapons and agricultural tools. With modern equipment, and less people working the land, the pennati is becoming redundant. Keane is borrowing these from local families to record them and create artworks before another piece of history is lost. He showed me a similar project he undertook using local spades called vanghe. These were once vital for turning soil to grow crops and had been used since Roman times. Inspired by his medieval sur-

roundings, and the fact that Italy is regarded as the birthplace of Tarot, Keane recreated a series of oversized Tarot cards based upon the revered 'Tarot of Marseilles' deck dating to 1760. Painstakingly researched, these striking works were sold recently to a private collector.

Keane's work draws from the local community, strives to serve it, and also provides outreach through what he calls 'intelligent tourism'.

In 1996, he founded the highly successful Barga News - an arts-based website that aims to educate visitors and inform locals. It was the first online news site in Tuscany, and is a work of art in its own right. Ten years ago, he was instrumental in getting informative QR codes - 2D bar codes that can be scanned and read with a mobile phone - installed at various locations throughout Barga. It was the first installation of QR codes in a historic centre in Italy. His photography - focussing on the special relationship between Barga and Scotland - has appeared in exhibitions at the Glasgow Royal Concert Hall and the Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh. Also, when he isn't creating artworks he can be found playing the bodhrán in a local jazz/swing band called the Aristodemos.

And though Keane's work may be founded in Barga, its depth and resonance reaches far beyond the boundaries of this small and very beautiful town.

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St. Kilda

In the final installment of a three-part series on Scotland, Ken McGoogan routes through the roots of history



Unbelievable. Overwhelming. Voyagers who have visited the archipelago of St. Kilda more than a dozen times declared this The Best Visit Ever. If they had said anything else, the rest of us would not have believed them; bright sunshine, balmy temperatures, no wind - was there even a single cloud in the sky?

During the morning, after arriving in this vicinity aboard the Ocean Endeavour, the day had looked less promising. Most ships that reach St. Kilda never land a soul - the winds are too rough. Today, a serious swell caused people to doubt that we would make it ashore. But in an inspired bit of decision-

making, our Adventure Canada expedition leader turned the day upside down, switching early with late.

Instead of attempting a morning landing, we sailed directly to the bird cliffs of Stac Lee, home to the largest colony of gannets in the world. As the winds died and the sun came out, the captain showcased his navigational skills. Seventy or eighty metres in front of the towering black wall, he held ship steady. We found ourselves gazing almost straight up at a whirlwind of wheeling birds more than 400 metres above. I'm no birder, but this was impressive.

A back-deck barbecue kept us busy as we sailed to Hirta, the archipelago's main island. This is the remotest part of the British Isles, 66 kilometres west of Benbecula in the Outer Hebrides. I had landed here once before and knew enough to remain dubious. But on arriving, we found the swell had receded. We piled into zodiacs and zoomed ashore. Incredible!

St. Kilda is one of very few places with Dual World Heritage Status for both natural and cultural significance.



Bronze Age travellers appear to have visited 4000 to 5000 years ago, and Vikings landed here in the 800s. Written history reveals that a scattering of people (around 180 in 1700) rented land here from the Macleods of Dunvegan on the Isle of Skye. While living in a settlement (Village Bay) of stone-built, dome-shaped houses with thatched roofs, they developed a unique way of life, subsisting mostly on seabirds.

Gradually, as better ships enabled more contact with the outside world, residents began to rely more on importing food, fuel and building materials. They constructed better



houses. In 1852, 36 people immigrated to Australia, beginning a long and slow population decline. During the First World War, a naval detachment brought regular deliveries of food. When those ended after 1918, St. Kildans felt increasingly isolated. In 1930, the last 36 islanders were evacuated to the Scottish mainland.

During our recent visit, we strolled along the curved Village Street where these last holdouts had resided. Most passengers found time to climb the saddle between two high hills. After a rise in elevation of perhaps 150 metres, we came to a cliff edge. Gazing back over the vista in the sun - the Village Street, the scattered beehive cleits, the Ocean Endeavour in the harbour, the occasional zodiac, the distant mountains - a consensus emerged: unbelievable!

Beyond this, everyone had their personal highlights. I registered two. The first came when I found the beehive cleit that, today, stands on the foundations of what was once the home of Lady Grange. She was an articulate, headstrong woman who, in the 1730s, spent eight lonely years as a prisoner on this island. While living in high-society Edinburgh, she learned that her husband was having an affair in London. Infuriated, she had threatened to expose him as a treasonous Jacobite.

That gentleman - who was indeed conspiring with such powerful figures as Macdonald of Sleat, Fraser of Lovat, and Macleod of Dunvegan - responded by having his irrepressible wife kidnapped and bundled off, ultimately, to this almost inaccessible island. Here Lady Grange endured as the only educated, English-speaking mainlander on Hirta, except for the minister and his wife. Her house is long gone, but a ranger directed me to the hut that stands today on its foundations - it made me shiver to see it.

The second moment found me visiting Calum Mor's House, one of the oldest dwellings on the island. According to legend, young Calum built it in a single day to prove his worth. He had been passed over for the annual fowling expedition to Borera, a smaller island in the group that makes up St. Kilda. This happened a thousand years ago, and I found my imagination racing.

The September expedition to Borera, six kilometres away, was the one great adventure of the year. The strongest men would risk

their lives paddling through rough seas to harvest hefty birds - young gannets called gugas - that had to be killed at night while they slept on slippery ledges. Often, the men would stay a few days on Borera, sheltering in the stone cleits or storage houses they had previously erected.

In my mind's eye, I could see the aggrieved Calum Mor building furiously with these heavy stones, bent on showing those who had voted against him that they had been wrong, wrong, wrong.

I knew, of course, that the story was apocryphal. Anyone working alone could never erect such a structure in a week, never mind a single day. But the fleeting vision, the racing of the imagination - that is what I seek when I travel. And that, in conjunction with the Village Street and Lady Grange, is what Calum Mor delivered.

Ken McGoogan's books include *How the Scots Invented Canada* and *Celtic Lightning: How the Scots and the Irish Created a Canadian Nation*, Ken sails every year with adventurecanada.com





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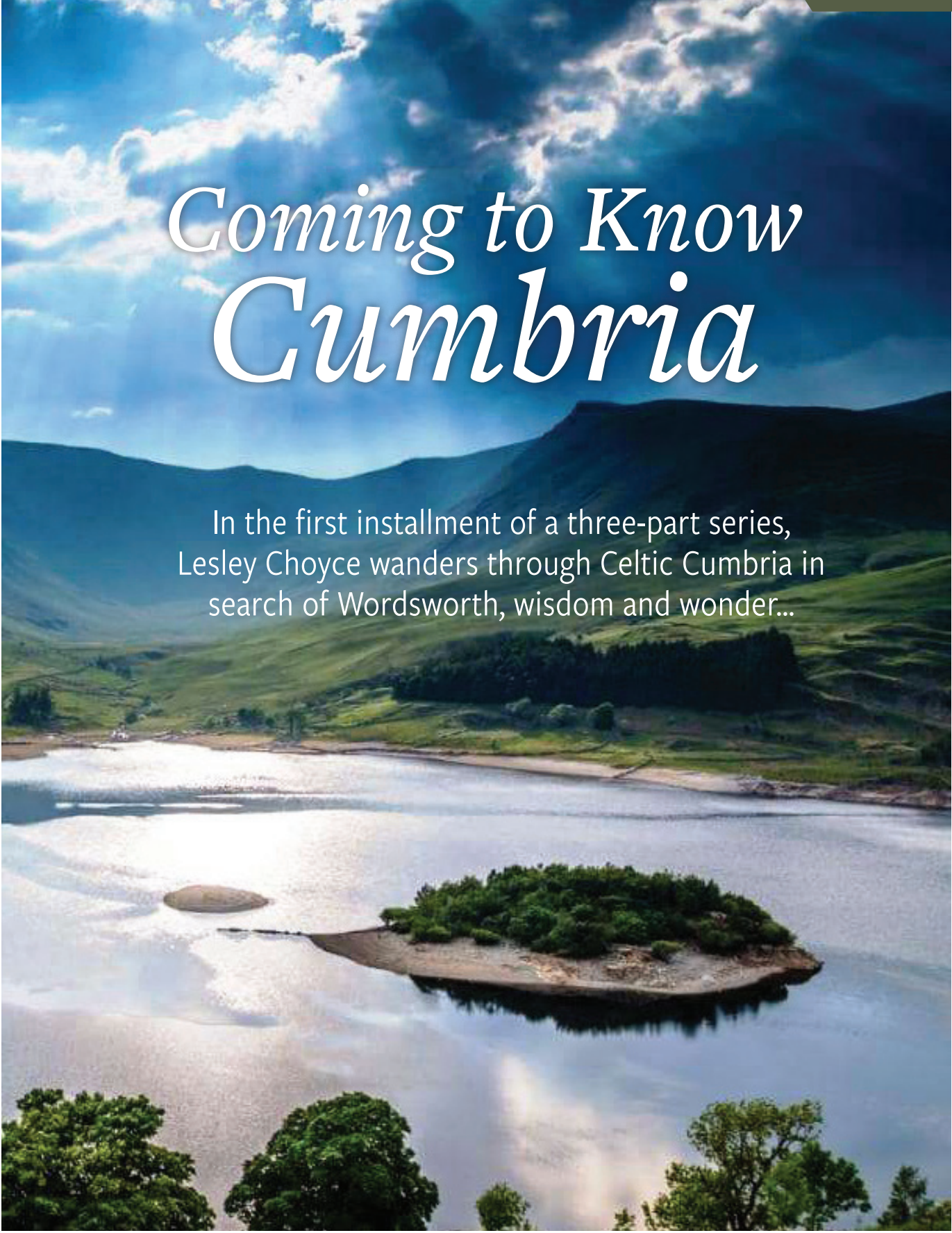
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Coming to Know Cumbria

In the first installment of a three-part series, Lesley Choyce wanders through Celtic Cumbria in search of Wordsworth, wisdom and wonder...



My wife Linda and I were not at all anxious to leave Scotland but we'd never visited the mountains, lakes and valleys of Cumbria to the south, so now we were headed in that direction from our Argyll cottage. Scotland had provided more mysteries and intrigue than expected and I wondered if we should skip England altogether and gear up for a true circumnavigation of Scotland with our dog in our upcoming trip for later that summer. After all, the Halifax to Glasgow flight was such an easy one.

But then I remembered we could not fly directly anywhere into the U.K. with Kelty in the cabin of the plane. And there was no way we'd allow him to fly the lowest class, which was in with the luggage. British dog lovers should really do something about that rule. Most of Europe allowed dogs in plane cabins if they were as small as our Westie. Why not Britain? "Well, we are an island," I could hear them say. "We do things our own way."

Somewhere in some British government bureaucracy was some idiot or group of idiots (they had to be men – men in suits with really clean fingernails) who had come up with the rule. It probably started out as "no animals in with passengers on incoming flights."

I do believe you can fly out of the U.K. with a dog in cabin if the airline allows – just not incoming. Okay, so I understand that some animals would be disagreeable on long plane trips. Chickens, in first class or coach, would be annoying, as would cows or other barnyard animals. One dog lover in Scotland, after sharing a story about the sadness of the death of his Yorkshire terrier, thought the ruling had something to do with Mad Cow disease, in fact.

So, yes, I would understand keeping cows out of planes. And snakes for that matter. And most other wild beasts. But rules are rules and stay that way (in the U.K. and elsewhere) until someone has the guts to change them. Perhaps when our travels were all over and I found a publisher for my book, I'd see if the Dogs Trust (formally the National Canine Defense League) might back me in my campaign to allow small dogs to sit at the feet of their owners while eating cardboard tasting wraps on incoming flights to Heathrow, Glasgow, and Stanstead.

Such are the reflections on an unexciting drive west and south from Greenock that would take us headlong to England and into the legendary Lake District. On the way down, we were on the lookout for Hadrian's Wall. During our previous stay in Yorkshire, we never found the wall. And now, outside Carlisle, we thought we could find it or some remnant of it. I could see the dotted line on the map, but it eluded us once again.

Publius Aelius Hadrianus Augustus was a Roman emperor who lived from the year 76 to 138 AD. When he came into power, the empire was vast and he decided to pull soldiers out of Mesopotamia but reinforce domination of other nations, including England. So a wall in the north of England to keep out the rowdy Scottish rascals seemed like a good idea at the time. Machiavelli considered Hadrian one of the "good emperors," but like so many other historical leaders, there could be a near endless debate as to whether the man was a hero or villain. Anyone could guess that Roman soldiers were not always kind to the folks they conquered, although they did build some pretty snazzy baths in places like Bath and elsewhere.

It may not have come up in most British history classes, but Hadrian was also gay and when one of his lovers drowned in the Nile he designated him a god. He was that kind of guy. His death, by the way, is a bit mysterious: accident, suicide, murder or sacrifice; the jury is still out.

Well, walls fall down, and so did much of Hadrian's, and that's probably a good thing.

Good walls make good neighbours, Robert Frost once said, but even he knew that each spring when the ground thawed, rocks would tumble and if you weren't vigilant, walls would turn to rubble soon enough without human intervention. Around Ireland and England, however, I'd noted that most roadside rock walls were amazingly intact along those narrow country roads that I both loved and loathed. Perhaps there just wasn't enough frost in the ground to do the job right. I'd lost a mirror or two to those stubborn piles of stone and had a grudge. Maybe that's why Hadrian's Wall was hiding.

In the news, Donald Trump, a president that most British citizens were currently trying to keep out of Britain, was promoting his own wall between the U.S. and Mexico, one he was asking the Mexican government to pay for. Such a wall would probably rule out Mexico from becoming the "Fifty-first state," and would cause endless grief to families with ties to the south, but it does suggest a link between Trump and Hadrian. However, if Machiavelli were alive today, I would bet good money that he would put Trump in the category of "bad emperor." The British government would eventually – and grudgingly – allow Mr. Trump into the country, but kept him well away from his legions of detractors in London. However, I did detect a certain look on the Queen's face when she shook his tiny hand? Or perhaps it was just the camera angle.

And so we were headed to the heart of Cumbria, once known as Rheged in ancient Celtic times.

We drove on through the gorgeously bleak, empty high ground and lush lowland forests of the legendary Lake District. Here was truly ancient legendary territory where the early Celts lived somewhat unmolested for 500 years or so until the Romans conquered them.

We rolled into the town of Windermere and needed groceries so I had stopped at the downtown Booth's store where I parked in the wrong parking lot - the bus station behind Booth's. I hung back outside while Linda went in to begin shopping. A soft-spoken man in an official uniform strolled over to tell me in the most polite manner that I was not in the store's lot but in a public space where I needed to pay five pounds if I wanted to stay parked.

He was obviously someone's kindly grandfather and knew I was an outsider from the road-weariness, slightly stunned look on my face. "I do apologize for the inconvenience and hope you don't mind," he said. Perhaps Donald Trump would get the same apology when he would try to visit London again and accept the fact he'd have to keep his ass well outside the capital if he wanted to visit.

In the U.S. my minor violation of plonking my rental car into the wrong parking lot would probably have led to a fine, getting my wheel booted or being towed away. As I watched the parking gentleman amble away, I realized the verb I had attached to his gait came from the fact that there was a nearby town called Ambleside which I assume meant, "This is the side of the lake where we do a lot of leisurely strolling," in Anglo-Saxon or Middle English.

The streets of Windermere were confusing and crowded as I tried to wend my way to the proper parking lot for Booth's supermarket where prim and proper men and women, all over sixty as far as I could tell, wheeled those unruly shopping carts filled with groceries and flowers to their cars.

Truth is, we rented the cottage in Windermere because I wanted to spend time in nearby Grasmere, home of William and Dorothy Wordsworth, but we couldn't find suitably affordable digs there.

Tomorrow we would spend some time in Grasmere and, as I waited in the appropriate parking lot for Linda to emerge with our supplies, I looked over some notes I had brought with me about our current locale. Wordsworth had visited Windermere often, possibly to stock up on groceries himself and have a peek at what folks in the more urbane world were up to. It is safe to say that he liked the lake. Everyone did and still does.

In fact, the lake gets a bit too much love. Lake Windermere stretches North to South like a long crooked finger, carved out of the land by glaciers well before the days of global warming. Towns and forests cling to the shores. Ferries shuttle tourists about and teenagers splash each other from the docks while listening to bad British rap music. Despite the noise, it is still a mighty fine lake.

Back during the Wordsworths' short tenure here on Earth William was opposed to the building of a railway to carry outsiders to Windermere. He thought it would bring too many tourists, leading to the wholesale ruination of the place.

Like Wordsworth, I'm generally in favour of keeping as much of contemporary civilization as far from my home roost as possible when I can get away with it.

I admit both he and I are a couple of somewhat smug, even selfish poets in our love of nature, and we both know how easy it is for crowds of humans to quickly ruin a fine patch of wilderness.

And of course, Mr. Intimations of Immortality was mostly correct about that damn railroad. It did bring legions of tourists and Windermere became a commercial hub of activity worth avoiding. But sitting there behind the wheel of our rental car, I vowed to overcome any prejudice Wordsworth had planted in my head and try to actually like the place. I was, after all, smack center in one of the most gorgeous lake and mountain locales on the planet.

Birthwaite Cottage was a short drive from downtown on a shady street near the shores of the lake on the outskirts of Windermere. It was located on the grounds of a large estate and we were in a very wealthy neighbourhood with houses worth a million pounds or more each. Wordsworth would probably not approve.

I don't know about you, but I read a fair bit when I am travelling and what I read sometimes shapes the way I experience things, the thoughts that go through my head and sometimes my dreams. In the evening at Birthwaite, I had two books on the go: *Man Seeks God* by Eric Weiner and *How the Scots Invented the Modern World* by Arthur Herman. Back in Scotland I had grown weary of reading about the religious stranglehold that Calvinism had on the population and how John Knox had preached so vehemently against Catholicism that he'd inspired followers to try to trash beautiful Rosslyn Chapel. So, instead, I turned to Weiner and his chapter about Sufism. This religion seemed appealing to me and a sharp contrast to Calvinism. My experiences in Scotland led me to believe that the Scots had mostly shed their uptight religious ways.

Certainly, contemporary Edinburgh appeared to me as a free spirited place of hen parties, buskers and impromptu musical performances that ended with a young man publicly urinating on a church wall. I wondered what cultural nerve or truth Calvin and Knox had hit upon to convince their followers that the flesh was evil, man was bad and, ipso facto, restraint is paramount and, where that fails, punishment was absolutely necessary.



Sufism on the other hand, according to Eric Weiner anyway, urges its followers to “practice pure love.” Followers claim to be in the world but not of the world and I liked the ring of that. One practitioner defines the religion as “an opening of the heart.” Take that John Knox. Weiner travelled to Istanbul to learn more about the Sufis but I was here in England, far from the spiritual origins of most religions. Some Sufis do all sorts of things to heighten their feeling of enlightenment or euphoria or to come close to experiencing God - including whirling. You have heard of whirling dervishes. I could understand whirling at length would get you high but I didn’t think it would get you high enough to experience God. But there, huddled in a cottage on a fine leafy estate in Cumbria, I vowed that if the right moment presented itself, possibly during a quiet moment in a garden or on a fairly flat top of a fell, I’d give it a whirl and see what happened. And as for religion, I reminded myself, we were in a sacred land. We were currently in the realm of poets and pantheists.

As I set the book aside and lay down to fall asleep, I worried that I had not made any tremendous spiritual connections so far on our pilgrimage. I thought about Wordsworth again and remembered one of my graduate professors labelling the poet, along with a few other Romantic poets, as “pantheists.”

Pantheists saw “God” or some version of spirit in nature. They worshipped nature much like their primitive Celtic counterparts who dug big chunks of granite out of the ground and set them upright in circles to praise the earth, the sun and the spirits all around.

As a graduate student of English Literature, pantheism seemed like such a workable religion that I probably considered myself a modern day pantheist, in league with Wordsworth and Keats and even the “diabolical” Shelley. My classes back in Manhattan were at the City University of New York Graduate Center, what I lovingly referred to as the University of Forty-Second Street, where it was located. I sopped up the Romantic poets like a sponge during three hour lectures and then set out upon the noisy New York streets to look at it all with the eyes of a pantheist.

Most everything I saw on the streets was nature in retreat. It was the least Wordsworthian place one could imagine. I was in a used bookstore near the graduate school one day looking for a copy of Thomas de Quincey’s Confessions of an English Opium Eater when the clerk was held up at gunpoint. The robber got some cash and ran and I barely knew that anything had happened. The young clerk called the cops and looked more than a little rattled, so I stayed there and tried to console him until the police came, which was a full half hour later.

When two of New York’s finest finally arrived, chewing gum and looking ever-so-nonchalant just like those New York cops in the movies, the young clerk freaked out. “What took you so long?” he screamed.

The stouter of the two uniformed men shrugged and said, “Hey, relax. It was only a robbery. We got our hands full around here, ya know.”

I had another hour to kill before my next class on the twelfth floor of the grad school, so I went to find solace in the only real green space nearby - Bryant Park, directly behind the famous downtown public library. It was there I sat on the park bench reading the dog-eared copy of Confessions of an English Opium Eater that the bookseller told me

to keep at no charge. A young, sad-sack looking man with long shaggy hair - well, not as long as mine, but a tad shaggier - sat down on the bench beside me while I was eating my cheese and bologna sandwich. He didn’t say a word but proceeded to take a small leather kit out of his coat pocket and prepare a needle of something that he then injected into his arm. It was all so matter-of-fact that I assumed he was diabetic. But when he slumped over on my shoulder I got worried and asked him if he was okay. In a dreamy, otherworldly voice that Dequincy would have automatically recognized, he answered, “Yeah, man. I’m real good. But thanks for asking.” I allowed him to lean on me like a lost heroin brother until I finished my sandwich and then, as I got up to leave, I gently lowered him onto the bench to finish off whatever opium dreams would come.

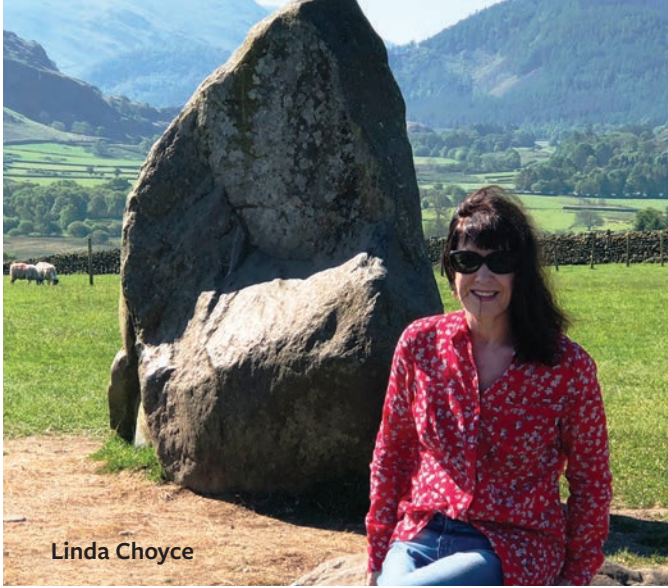
I hear the critics again as I write this. Lake District. Celts. England. Wordsworth. Aren’t we getting just a smidgeon off track?

Maybe yes, maybe no. My mind had drifted. The past was colliding with the present. There in my bed in Windermere, I was trying to connect with the spiritual element that had so far been missing in our travels. Perhaps a visit to Wordsworth’s home would set us on the path. That and a journey to the Castlerigg Stone Circle, created 3500 years ago by Celtic worshippers. Linda was already asleep as I finished reading and ruminating about the urban past and I eventually fell asleep thinking about long-gone family and friends.

I guess that’s why I had a dream about Stan Carew. Stan was a guitar player and singer in a band I had formed in the 1990s when I was in my forties called Lesley Choyce and the SurfPoets. Stan was a fine folk singer in his own right who had performed in many rural coffee houses in the U.K. He was a radio DJ by profession in the old days when real DJs gave long deep philosophic commentary between songs. While on air, he had famously protested by walking out of the station that was in the process of automating its broadcasting to do away with on-air human voices.

Anyway, Stan had died a few years back and that night he appeared in a dream to me at 4am as vivid as a Windermere sunrise. All I remember is me asking him, “How is it where you are?” and Stan, in his usual casual radio-announcer’s voice saying, “It’s like being in a video.” When I asked what he meant by that, he just splayed his hands out in the air and shrugged like the New York cop and said nothing more.





Linda Choyce

Semi-awake now in the cottage with the rest of the world still happily snoring, I closed my eyes again to find that 4am connection that Wayne Dyer says we all could have with angels or spirits or whoever is willing to communicate from whatever other dimension. As Stan faded from view, I asked the cosmos a follow up on the Sufi question that had been puzzling me: “What does pure love look like?”

I usually find that communication with spiritual beings is somewhat like having a really slow internet connection but not this time. Whichever angel was monitoring my semi-dream state promptly gave me an image, that of Ozzie, my daughter Pamela’s old American Staffordshire Terrier (also known as a pit bull) who had recently died from a disease passed into pond water by infected raccoons. Ozzie was a large black dog who had been found in the Ozarks of Arkansas as a puppy with a wooden stake driven into him and left to die. He had somehow been found, treated and shipped to, of all places, Nova Scotia to be adopted by my daughter and her small son, Aidan. Despite the fact that Ozzie was a breed of dog that was actually banned in some parts of Canada, he was the kindest, gentlest, most loving pet I had ever seen and helped Pamela and Aidan weather some difficult times.

And there was old Ozzie in my early morning Windermere vision - healthy, shiny, lying on his side in a warm pool of afternoon sunlight. Pure love. I only wish I could have taken a picture for you.

Yes, ole Bill Wordsworth grieved over the railway coming to the Lakes and the crowds that would follow. He wrote, “These tourists, heaven preserve us.” And I suppose that would include Linda and me, here to take in the lakes and mountains and ramble about as if we owned the place. It was still dark out as I lay awake and, from the bedroom on the second floor of our cottage, I listened to how ambitious the birds were, many of them joyous and cacophonous well before the sky lightened. William and Dorothy would have been out of bed well before now on a day like this and headed off for a hike of many, many miles.

Today was our day to head north to Keswick and then back down to Grasmere itself, ground zero for Wordsworthian connections.

I was giddy over the idea of simply being here, with my wife and my own intimations of immortality singing to me from every quarter.

Already I was remembering back to my readings of *The Prelude* in Manhattan and how much the archaic language of Wordsworth’s prose had resonated with me when he mused upon where his inspira-

tion came from. “Emotion recollected in tranquility,” he wrote makes for good poetry. My graduate school professor, who actually smoked a cigarette in a cigarette holder during classes, had taken the trouble to quote T. S. Eliot’s malignant view on this principle. Eliot had written, “Consequently, we must believe that ‘emotion recollected in tranquility’ is an inexact formula - for it is neither emotion, nor recollection, nor, without distortion of meaning, tranquility.” And I had thought, Screw you, frigging Prufrock. Don’t even dare to eat a peach, eh?

Thus there would be no pilgrimages to Mr. Eliot’s birthplace in East Coker. No, today was all about the Wordsworths and connecting with the deep past. I admitted to myself, though, how much tougher it had become these days to find that tranquility the poet spoke of and indulge in the luxurious license to recollect old emotion. But he was right, of course, and I needed to remember that. Once we were young and our emotions were explosive. Once the world really was “Apparelled in celestial light, The glory and the freshness of a dream.” And did we always eventually lose sight of that, each one of us?

*It is not now as it hath been of yore;—
Turn wheresoe’er I may,
By night or day.
The things which I have seen I now can see no more.*

But enough of that, I said to birds outside my window, as I got up to make us coffee.

We passed through Grasmere first and then north along another skinny glacially-formed finger lake known as Thirlmere with the heights of Great Dodd to the right and High Seat to the left. First stop was the stone circle called Castlerigg just shy of Keswick.

Rather than driving into Keswick and following well-positioned signs on a substantial road, I took a shortcut I saw on my map which turned out to be yet another single-track lane with stone walls on either side and no pull offs to speak of. I booted it down the road lest we encountered an advancing car and it blessedly spilled us out the other end into a well-marked parking area and a field of visitors snapping photos with absurdly long-lensed cameras.

Wordsworth took his druggie buddy Samuel Taylor Coleridge here in 1799 and the author of “Kublay Kahn” wrote that here was “...a Druidical circle...the mountains stand one behind the other, in orderly array as if evoked by and attentive to the assembly of white-vested wizards.” The two poets did note that some of the stones had been splashed with white paint by vandals or sloppy eighteenth century graffiti artists but that couldn’t quite diminish the full grandeur. On another occasion, Wordsworth and Dorothy visited Castlerigg only to discover that those damn tourists from the south who had come in on the Windermere train had found it out and it had completely lost its charm due to the crowds.

More recently, Lonely Planet described it this way. “Set on a hill-top a mile east of town, this jaw-dropping stone circle consists of 48 stones that are between 3000 and 4000 years old, surrounded by a dramatic ring of mountain peaks.” Jaw-dropping, I will admit, is not an exaggeration. And hey, it’s older than Stonehenge by a few thousand years and it has been determined the circle served some sort of astronomical purpose as well as a spiritual dimension because, even today, locals see strange lights coming from the stones at night.

I was just happy to be here, sidestepping sheep poop on such a generous morning and gloating over the fact that this ancient structure was less developed than Stonehenge and had a much grander view of the country around it as Coleridge had noted.



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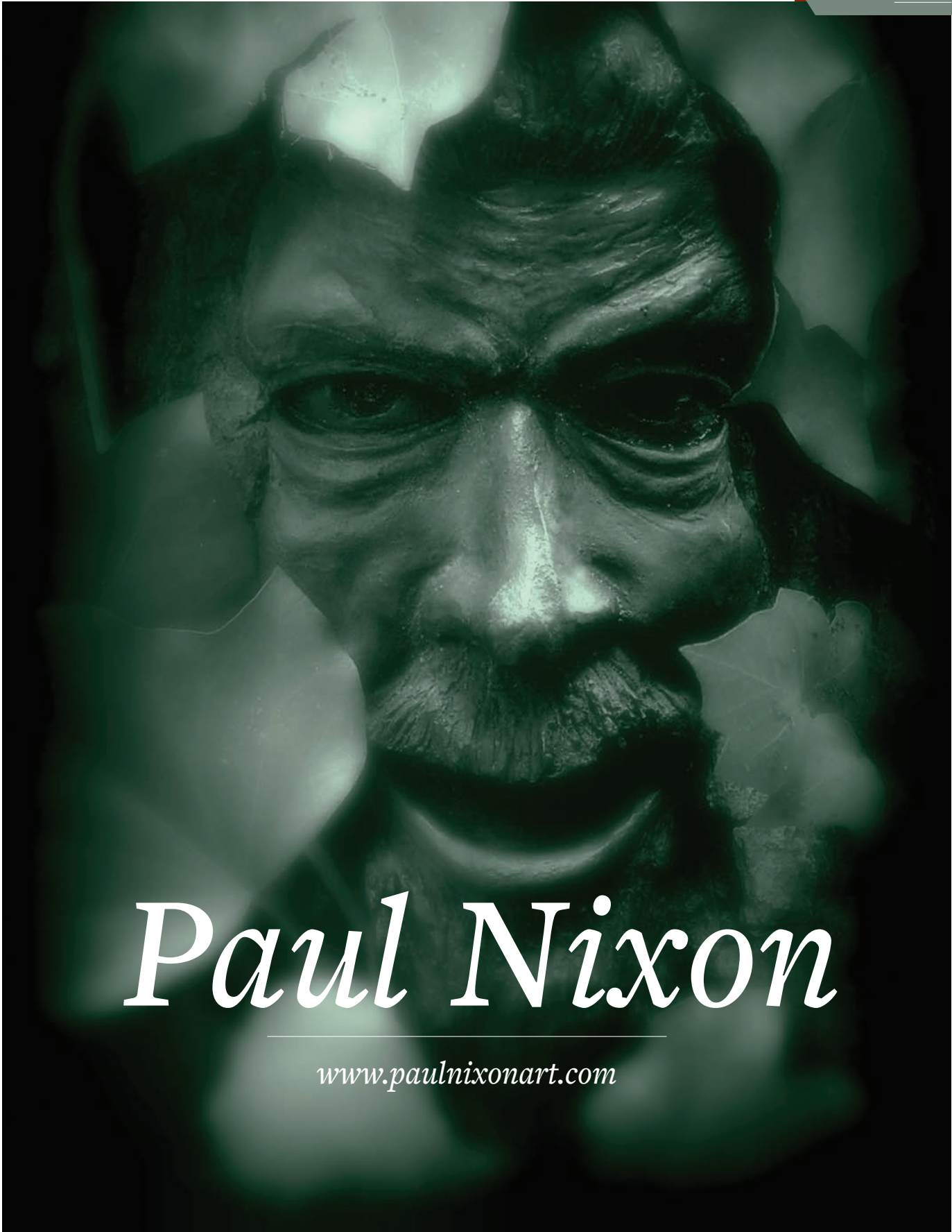
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Paul Nixon

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I am from Clondalkin, a suburb of County Dublin. I spent much of my childhood at my grandparents' home in Ballinrallick, County Sligo, and it was there that my Celtic Twilight imagery was inspired by my grandmother's folk tales and the works of WB Yeats.

I was always a problem solver when it came to mechanical or household issues. I would certainly have to thank my father for that, as he was a very fine cabinet maker. He was from a family line of fine furniture makers. I still bear the chisel scars from when he would teach me his trade as a young boy. For several years during my school holidays I was put to work learning many aspects of the construction business. Many of these skills were to pay off in later years when I immersed myself into art and sculpting.

I never considered, in any way, that I had artistic skills. In fact, I had an art teacher

many years ago who I felt had lost interest in me as she focused her attention on her more worthy potentials.

In 2000, in an effort to create a woodworking project for someone special, I discovered that I possessed the talent to sculpt wood. I pursued this new-found skill which, over time, opened me up to working in other mediums. I began to take on challenges I never dreamed of, particularly with public bronzes. My first bronze sculpture - a life-sized firefighter with two children - was a magnificent challenge where I learned to build small steps each day.

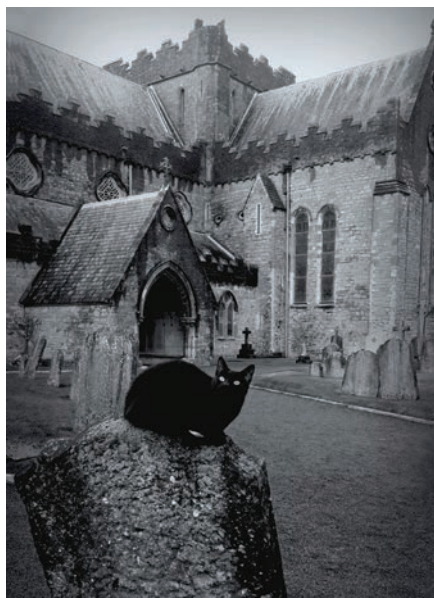
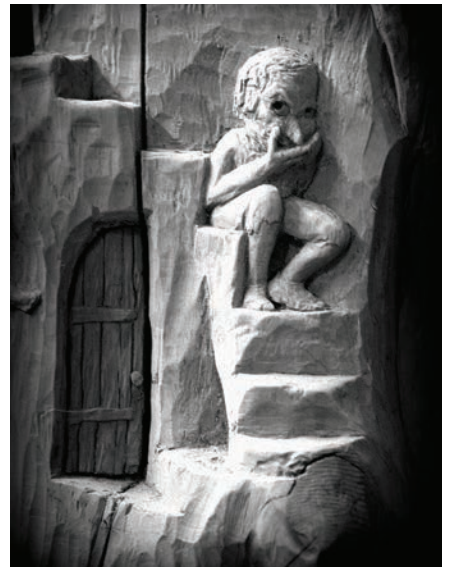
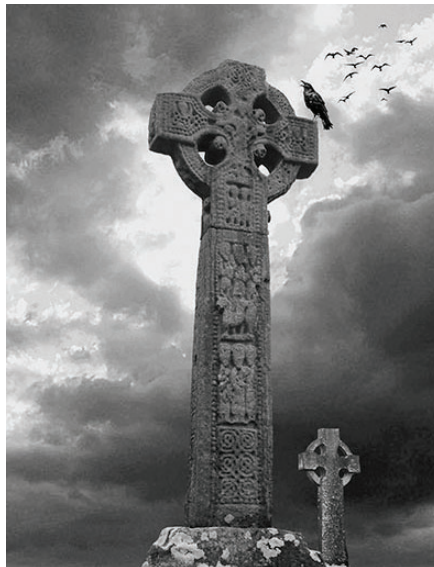
I kept expanding my knowledge and skills, and have adapted nicely to other mediums such as casting resins and cements, fabricating metal work, stained glass, painting and photography. I love it all. I feel like a kid that has found his passion in life.

The challenge is to respond to the demands

of art and to accept art's specific dictates faithfully. We are speaking not of moulding oneself, of forming one's own personality, but simply of actualizing one's productive capacities, giving aesthetic form to ideas conceived in the mind. Every work I take on has its challenges. What makes the work interesting is turning problems into solutions.

Never having any formal training I feel my own expressive artistic pursuit conforms to its own style and form. Sometimes I feel that I am in touch with some sort of spiritual power - almost like a magical connection that allows me to produce works that inspire and excite others.

I now have a way of expressing everything that I love about Ireland through my sculptures, paintings and photography. Even though I am far from home, I am always connected to my roots through my work.





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My father, Denis Mulhern, comes from a long line of hand-weavers. His passion has been to preserve and promote the ancient craft of our ancestors.

Ten years after the collapse of the local tweed industry, he started a small bespoke tweed company called Triona from the front room of our family home. The business is named after my sister, Catriona.

In 1992, we began to welcome visitors from across the world to showcase, first-hand, the skills involved in hand-weaving.

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-Kieran Mulhern







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A group of children, likely a choir, are shown from the chest up. They are wearing green and white robes with red stoles. Each child is holding a lit candle in a white holder. They are all looking forward with expressions of concentration and joy, as if singing. The background is dark and out of focus, suggesting an indoor setting with warm lighting.

Sounds of the Season

As Christmas evolves, so does its soundtrack. Celtic Life International senior writer Chris Muise tells us more...



Allison Johnson



Ellen MacIsaac



Heather Dale

For many, the Holidays bring with them a mixed-bag of emotions; one side of the heart is filled with peace, good will, and the joys of sharing with family and friends. On the other side, however, are the pressures of expectations, preparations, and the ever-expensive shopping sprees.

Our perspective on the seasonal soundtrack can be equally divided; some are touched by the warm and endearing sentiment of Christmas music, while others become irritated by the endless playing of classic Yuletide melodies.

To a certain degree, the griping is understandable; even if we love the festive musical canon, hearing the same songs over and over again can take the shine off their luster.

Christmas music, more than many sonic styles, is perhaps trapped by its own trap-pings; the most popular pieces are the ones we remember from our own childhood - ones that we know by heart, timelessly enshrined in our psyche. Even contemporary versions vary very little from the originals.

And while the Holiday season has evolved over the years, it seems that its sound has not.

Or has it?

Christmas music goes back a long way. Look back far enough and you can see how these songs originated, and how they have developed over time.

Interestingly, but perhaps not surprisingly, many of them have Celtic roots.

"A fairly large number of Christmas carols that we know today were actually collected in Cornwall, in the 1820s and 1830s," shares Ellen MacIsaac, a professional lecturer of modern languages at the University

of Ottawa, and an associate of the musical faculty at Carleton University.

MacIsaac explains that many of the traditional Christmas carols we enjoy (or bemoan) today find their roots as tools of biblical education, before church services were common.

"Particularly in Cornwall, this music was often used in what were called 'morality plays.' These songs and plays were a means by which people were educated about their religion. But as time went on, and a greater number of people became better educated, these things became more about identity - who you are and where you came from."

While morality plays slowly phased out in 1400s and 1500s, the music continued to be performed as folk songs, often sung during Christmas Eve services, or door-to-door in the tradition that we now call caroling. Many of these works are still with us thanks to efforts to collect folk music in the 18th and 19th centuries.

"There was a real push to collect folk songs, for nationalistic reasons," continues MacIsaac. "It was believed that folk songs held the key to identifying the soul of a nation."

Hark! the Herald Angels Sing, While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks, I Saw Three Ships, and The First Noel are examples of folk songs collected in Cornwall during that time. Scotland's Robert Burns - both poet and cultural curator - was responsible for both bringing Auld Lang Syne into the modern era, and revamping it to its current rendition.

These, along with other tunes, eventually found their way into church hymnbooks. The growth of the church in North America

during the 20th century, along with the wave of popular commercial Christmas music from the 1940s and 1950s, largely determined songs that are considered 'classics' today.

"Not all of them would have been appropriated like that, for wide use," MacIsaac adds. "It is rare to have modern musical artists dig up the more obscure tunes."

Rare, yes - but not unheard of. In fact, in recent years a slew of Celtic artists have been cleaning out their collective cultural closets, and dusting off the deep-cut Celtic Christmas tunes.

The Selkie Girls' recently released debut Christmas album, *Winter Lore*, is one example.



"There are a number of songs on the album that listeners will be familiar with, including Good King Wenceslas, and Oh Come Oh Come Emmanuel," says Allison Johnson, the Texas-based band's vocalist and rhythm guitarist. "And then there are some that you've probably never heard before, like

Gloomy Winter, which is this sort of strange-yet-darkly-beautiful tune - you can just picture yourself in the Scottish Highlands, with the wind blowing down the old, ancient mountains, begging for a sign of spring.

“We wanted to introduce our listeners to things that they may not have heard before.”

Toronto musician Heather Dale appreciates the sentiment; her rendition of Hunting the Wren, depicting the long-held custom of capturing a songbird on St. Stephen’s Day - the day after Christmas - is both old and new at once.

“The tradition is that children were sent out on the morning of December 26, as they were likely all hopped-up on sugar and still excited about Christmas toys,” she says. “I like to think that it was probably invented so that parents could get a chance to have a nice quiet cup of coffee while the kids were running rampant around the countryside. Their task for the morning was to flush out a bird of the bushes - a wren, one of the tiny little songbirds. Wrens are very hard to catch. If the kids were able to catch the bird, they would parade it

from door to door, trick-or-treat style.”

The tradition still lives on today, albeit with fake or taxidermied birds. However, unless you have spent the holidays in Cornwall, Ireland, or on the Isle of Man, it won’t likely be a familiar custom. Nonetheless, Dale took the opportunity to expand on traditional lyrics about the festivity, and weave them with her own experience as a modern-day Celt.

“There are a lot of exceedingly talented, well-researched traditional Celtic performers who are doing their best to keep these older customs alive. My goal has been to bring Celtic culture into the modern world. I am a Celt, and I am also a 21st century woman, living in Canada - a huge piece of the Celtic Diaspora. What can I say, through my music, about my own experience as a modern Celt?

“There’s no reason you can’t be a Celt and look forward as well as backwards...”

With her musical partner Ben Deschamps adding shreds of electric guitar, Hunting the Wren brings the past into the present.





Richard Popovic

“He just started riffing on this great, joyful melody with this grinding guitar - it was incongruous with the old folk traditions but, somehow, it worked, capturing a real sense of excitement and wild abandon. And we do this a lot - taking the emotion of an old song, but using whatever instruments and sonic palettes are available to bring it to new audiences.”

Other Celtic artists have pushed the envelope even further to celebrate Christmas.

Boston-based band The Dropkick Murphys released *The Season's Upon Us* in 2013. The bawdy ballad would likely make Bing Crosby and Nat King Cole blush. In the accompanying music video, vocalist Ken Casey complains about having to put up with worthless brothers-in-law and bratty nephews just because 'tis the season.

And then there is The Pogues' spirited *Fairytale of New York*, a raunchy Irish jig about spending Christmas night in the drunk-tank, wishing for a better life. Reportedly, singer Shane McGowan wrote the song based upon his own, memorable Yuletide experience in the Big Apple.

While unconventional, sometimes controversial, and often even blatantly offensive, MacIsaac notes that these songs have some historical merit

“At a certain point in history, Christmas had that sort of reputation. For hundreds of years, Christmas was a raucous night of drinking and debauchery for many who celebrated it. This was thanks in part to the Romans trying to appease Pagans, who welcomed the winter solstice in a rather liberated fashion.

“Then, the reformers - the Methodists, the hard-core Calvinists - came along and said, ‘This is terrible, you have lost the meaning of Christmas!’ Such things became outlawed. That is one of the reasons why New Years became a much bigger festival than Christmas in places like Scotland.”

During the 1950s, when America was flirting with a certain nostalgia for Irish culture, some of these party-hard holiday themes began to leak back into the collective festive consciousness. Christmas at Killarney, which recalls lively Christmas parties back home on the Emerald Isle, is tinged with racy innuendos. And novelty songs, such as Miss Fogarty's Christmas Cake, mocked the image of the ideal family gathering, though often with a light touch.

“These may not be idyllic depictions,” MacIsaac admits, “but

they are closer to today's reality than many of the more traditional tunes. A lot of contemporary Christmas music, and particularly the Celtic stuff, has drifted away from religious aspects, so it isn't surprising to hear modern Christmas Celtic artists coming out with these ‘here's what Christmas is like in our family’ kind of songs.”

“Let's be honest here; the coming together of people through shared experience at this time is no longer really about caroling in the snow or going to church.”

Richard Popovic, guitarist and lead singer for New York-based acoustic Celt rock band Shilelagh Law, wrote a Christmas song 17 years ago called *Christmas in New York*, drawing upon a not-so-festive holiday experience.

“My brother is a New York City policeman, and we have lots of friends and family members who are cops, firefighters, EMTs and first responders,” says Popovic, from his home in New Hampshire. “Obviously, when 9/11 hit, it impacted us greatly.”

Two of the band members, the McCarthy brothers - a firefighter and a police officer, respectively - were on the scene shortly after the towers fell. Popovic was hundreds of miles away, building ski condos in Vermont.

“I heard a few things start coming over the radio, but I was only half paying attention. Then, obviously, it became clearer that something serious was going down. I tried to make calls and contact people, but the phone lines were down - it was a time of great anxiety and uncertainty.”

“So there I was, hundreds of miles away from my family and friends, and I am feeling guilty, powerless - I want to help. I want to do something.”

Advised to stay away from Ground Zero due to the calamity and toxic dust, Popovic reached for his guitar.

“As we were approaching the holidays, I was thinking about how Christmas that year was going to be very different for the people of New York. I saw the resilience, the strength of people coming together in tragedy, and I thought that the best way I could help is by writing the best song I could to capture that feeling, that emotion. It really helped me feel like I did something and, apparently - over time - it helped a lot of other people also.”





The song resonated with folks from the Tri-State area and throughout America who had some connection to the tragedy. In particular, the song's last verse - "bless all the souls who left us this year/ you may be gone but you'll always be here" - is relatable to anyone who has endured the loss of a loved one around the holidays.

"We have had countless people come up to us and send us letters and emails just to say how much that song has become a part of their life, and how it helped them get through the hard times each September 11 or around Christmas. It has become a part of people's traditions.

"With the commercial packaging of Christmas, and the traditional way that everyone wants to view the holiday season, it can also be a time of great emotional difficulty for some people. For someone who has lost a loved one, that first Christmas can be really hard."

Christmas can be experienced in many ways, and not just in the stereotypical version that is often depicted in popular holiday music.

Eileen MacIsaac believes that it is through those different experiences that the holiday genre - Celtic music especially - is likely to evolve, and will become part of our future Christmas traditions.

"Not all of us necessarily share the same happy memories of home life during that time of the year. These days, the idyllic family scenario has been shattered somewhat; there are a lot of broken homes and broken people out there, and so maybe it is okay not to remember Christmas as fondly.

"As people look for music that better reflects their own, personal

experiences at that time of the year, we are going to start seeing more of those kinds of songs make their way into our collective cultural canon."

Thanks to new technologies, future generations may look back at the current times as a turning point.

"We are not going to see a massive pivot, however, just because music is so diverse and so atomized now," says MacIsaac. "There are so many ways in which a person can get their music out there, where it's on Bandcamp, Spotify, Soundcloud or YouTube. We no longer have a single window - three channels on the TV and one radio station - to really drive epic change. I suspect that it is going to be a more gradual shift.

"Still, there is so much out there now - and it will be interesting to see what is going to stick, what will resonate with people."

And while the classics that we have come to love (or hate) are unlikely to vanish in living memory - they have stood the test of time for a reason - the good news is that there are more options available today than ever before.

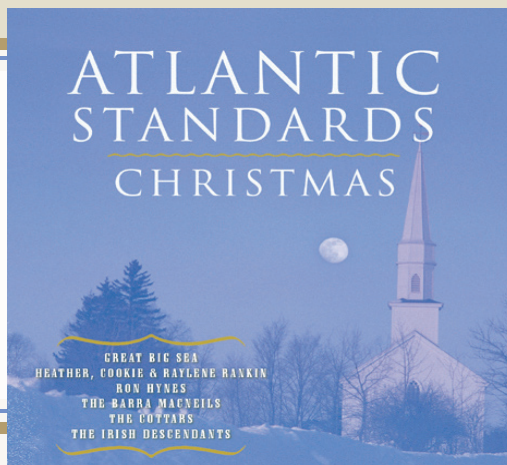
"I would be utterly delighted if my own personal Celtic experience was out there and still inspiring people 50 years from now," says Heather Dale.

"There will certainly be greater diversity," adds Richard Popovic. "It is going to be more about making our own traditions. That's what I hope to do with my family - a sort of blending of the two worlds."

Merry Christmas *from The East Coast*



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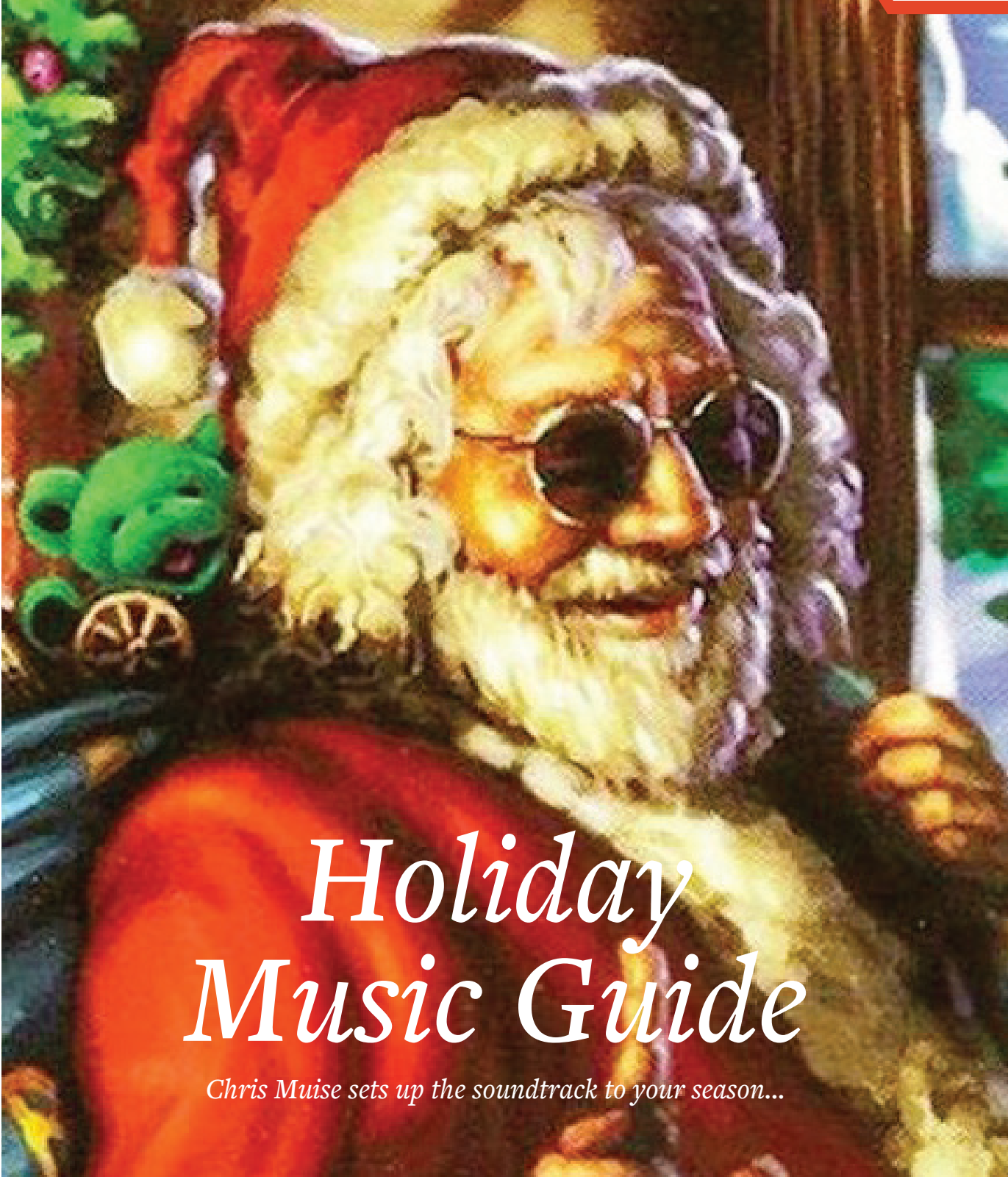
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Holiday Music Guide

Chris Muise sets up the soundtrack to your season...

If this month's cover story has put you in the mood for Christmas classics of Celtic origin, but with something new to digest, I don't blame you. After researching different genres of Celtic Christmas music, I was likewise hungry to see what else there was to listen to be-

sides the same holiday playlist I have worn out since the early 2000s.

Here are a few albums I came across that, I think, have something extra to offer this Christmas.



Winter Lore

The Selkie Girls

Winter Lore, the brand-new Christmas album by The Selkie Girls is a good place to start. The Texas-based group kicks off the album with something familiar - I Saw Three Ships - although it is a bit pluckier than the version you are likely to hear at Midnight Mass. Then, things take a quick left turn into less-trod territory, busting out the traditional Irish piece, The Wexford Carol. Other tracks on the album, like Imeanueil and Taladh Chriosda, take well-worn hymns and inject Scottish-Gaelic into the lyrics. Overall, this is a great record to pop on for a cozy, almost-ethereal evening listen.



Irish Rovers

Songs of Christmas

Looking to enjoy festive classics through the lens of a good old-school kitchen party? This holiday collection by The Irish Rovers won't steer you wrong. Even the more reverent tracks, like Silent Night and Away in a Manger, are a little more chipper than most renditions, but the real fun comes in the bouncier, toe-tapping tunes. Christmas in Killarney, in particular, will get everyone in the mood for some festive cheer with friends and kin, and the cheeky fun of Grandma Got Run Over By a Reindeer and (my new personal favourite) Miss Fogarty's Christmas Cake will give all a good laugh.



Reilly

Kick Ass Celtic Christmas

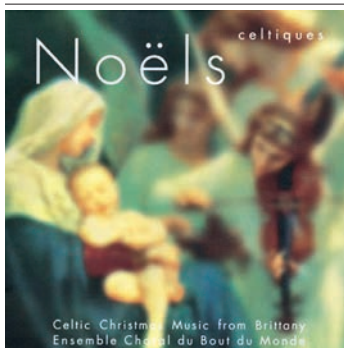
At some point this season, you will likely be full of wassail and feel a bit rowdy. Reilly's Kick Ass Celtic Christmas is a good album to rock all of that holiday revelry out of your system. A number of the tracks are typical Christmas fare, sifted through the rebellious sieve of the punk genre, but a few songs are original compositions, including the now-classic Dear Santa (I Can Explain) - a tune that attempts to justify all the singer's misdeeds over the year, and Father Christmas, a treatise for the poor kids of Christmas which asks Santa Claus to skip the toys and put some cold, hard cash under the tree. The holidays can be a stressful time, and Kick Ass Celtic Christmas is just aggressive enough to help work out those frustrated feelings, but not so aggressive as to ruin the holidays for the whole year, or forever.



Enya

And Winter Came...

It is hard to pigeonhole Irish singer Enya, even when she releases what is ostensibly a Christmas album. And she has released a few! Her new-age vibe is so exclusive and atmospheric that even renditions of classics like O Come All Ye Faithful won't likely elicit the exact sense of nostalgia you might be used to - there is something else there. But it is that uniqueness that makes Enya's And Winter Came...an album worth listening to. Her spectral vocal tones and captivating harmonies will have you hearing the familiar in fresh ways. Original pieces, including the album's title track, are no less transfixing, and listeners will be transported to an eerie winter realm.



Noels Celtiques: Celtic Christmas Music from Brittany

L'Ensemble Choral du Bout du Monde

Brittany, the Celtic region of France, holds a strong cultural connection with Arthurian lore, and - as a result - the Celtic nation's music can often bely a certain fairytale sense, even a medieval mysticism. Performed entirely by L'Ensemble Choral du Bout du Monde ("World's End Choir"), this rich and robust recording showcases the cultural offerings of the French province through traditional compositions, alongside a new piece written by choir director Christian Desbordes (Nedeleg war ar mor - "Christmas at sea"). If you can get your hands on this one, it is certainly worth a listen.

Loreena McKennitt

A Midwinter Night's Dream

Picture this; a quiet lodge in the countryside, a roaring fireplace, a favourite pair of slippers, and a cuppa' hot tea in your hand as you stare out the window, marvelling at a Christmas snowstorm. Celtic-Canadian songstress Loreena McKennitt put this album together for moments exactly like these. Her soaring vocals, and the plethora of dulcet tones on display - particularly on the tracks *In the Bleak Midwinter* and *The Holly and the Ivy* - will bring even greater warmth to your hearth and your heart during the holiday season.



The Trojans

Celtic Ska

To be fair, this isn't an exclusively-Christmas album, but then again good luck finding a Celtic Ska album that fits that exact criterion. This early 1990s collection by Gaz Mayal does feature enough recognizable Yuletide beats to keep you interested, however, including hints of *Jingle Bells* and an upbeat version of *Auld Lang Syne* that gets faster and wilder as the song goes on. The rest of the tracks are a smooth, reggae-Celtic mix that will keep any Christmas gathering relaxed and happy enough that no one will notice the non-holiday bits - especially if there's a wee dram of the good stuff going around.



The Chieftains

The Bells of Dublin

This one comes up on a lot of "Best Celtic Christmas Albums" lists I came across, and - having listened to it repeatedly - I can hear why. With a strong sampling of different offerings, this is a pretty good smorgasbord to pick from; jaunty jigs about wren hunting at one end, and soulful choir renditions of *O Holy Night* and *O Come All Ye Faithful* at the other. Plus, this collection boasts some noteworthy guest performances from the likes of Elvis Costello and Jackson Browne, and also features a haunting spoken-word segment by the late, great Burgess Meredith! This record won't just put you in the spirit - it will spirit you away on an acoustic journey.



Do You Hear...

Heather, Cookie & Raylene Rankin

In terms of sheer variety of genres, this 1998 LP from Atlantic Canada's first family of Celtic pop, the Rankins, is definitely a contender. Between their renditions of classics and original compositions, Heather, Cookie and Raylene flex their impressive range; you've got a jazz tune right off the top in *Rocking Around the Christmas Tree*, some country (*The Christmas Star* and *Jesus Christ, The Tree of Life* - both original songs), a hint of new age (*Taladh Chriosda*), a dash of cabaret (*Let It Snow*), and of course the Rankin's bread and butter, Celtic Pop (*I Wonder as I Wander*). Take your time and soak this one in, and see how many different sonic styles you can pick out. Oh yeah, Christmas Cookie - right?



Celtic Woman

A Christmas Celebration

As much as it is a breath of fresh air to have some variety among our canon of holiday music to choose from, when you get right down to it, it is hard not to appreciate the classics. Irish super-group Celtic Woman's 2006 holiday album, *A Christmas Celebration*, is a perfect Yuletide palette-cleanser. Each one of the core tracks on this collection draws from traditional tunes, all rendered beautifully in choir. A perceptive ear can still hear the hints of Celtic acoustic trappings, with woodwinds, harps, and fiddles woven into the mix. There are some bonus tracks on the Japanese, Spanish and Canadian editions. A DVD performance of this album was also released in 2007, showcasing the show-stopping visuals of a Celtic Woman performance. This is a great way to close-out a night, and a season, of festive musical exploration.



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Celtic Christmas Recipes

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

Ith do shàth!





Bretagne Bûche de Noël

For the Roulade Cake and Filling

14 tbsp. unsalted butter, softened, divided
8 oz. bittersweet chocolate, finely chopped
1 cup heavy cream
7 egg whites
8 tbsp. sugar, divided
2 tbsp. dark rum
4 oz. semisweet chocolate
3 egg yolks

For the Chocolate Ganache Icing and Decoration

12 oz. semisweet chocolate
8 tbsp. unsalted butter
2/3 cup heavy cream
Meringue Mushrooms
1/2 cup confectioners' sugar

Instructions

For the Cake: Preheat oven to 375°. Line a 16 1/2" x 12" heavy baking pan with buttered parchment paper, cut large enough to hang over sides of the pan by about 1". Put bittersweet chocolate in a large mixing bowl and set aside. Bring cream just to a boil in a saucepan over medium heat, then pour over bittersweet chocolate and whisk until smooth. Set aside to cool. Beat egg whites in the bowl of a standing mixer fitted with a whisk on medium speed until frothy; increase speed to medium-high and gradually add 2 tbsp. sugar, beating constantly, then increase speed to high and beat until stiff, glossy peaks form, 30-40 seconds more. (Don't over-beat.) Mix one-third of the whites into chocolate using a rubber spatula, then gently fold in remaining whites in two batches, taking care not to deflate batter. Spread in prepared pan and bake until a toothpick inserted in center comes out clean, 10-12 minutes. Set aside to cool in the pan.

For the Filling: Melt semisweet chocolate with 2 tbsp. water in the top of a double boiler set over simmering water over medium heat. Stir to combine, then set aside to cool. Combine 6 tbsp. sugar and 3 tbsp. water in a small heavy saucepan; cover and bring to a boil over medium heat, swirling pan several times until sugar has dissolved, about 1 minute. Uncover and continue to boil until syrup reaches the softball stage or 236° on a candy thermometer, about 5 minutes more. Meanwhile, beat egg yolks in the bowl of a standing mixer fitted with a whisk on high speed until thick and pale yellow, about 3 minutes. Reduce speed to medium and gradually pour in hot syrup. Beat constantly until mixture cools to room temperature, about 10 minutes. Beat 12 tbsp. butter into egg mixture 1 tbsp. at a time, waiting until completely incorporated before adding more; continue beating until thick and smooth, about 5 minutes total. Stir in cooled semisweet chocolate and set aside.

For the Icing: Melt chocolate and butter in the top of a double boiler set over simmering water over medium-low heat, whisking often. Remove from heat and gradually whisk in cream. Transfer to a medium bowl and set aside at room temperature, stirring occasionally, until icing thickens, about 4 hours. (Don't refrigerate; it makes icing hard to spread.)

To assemble the bûche: Transfer Cake with parchment to a clean work surface, sprinkle with rum, then spread Filling evenly over top using a metal spatula. Grab the long edge of the parchment paper with two hands and gently roll roulade onto itself, pulling off paper as you roll. To make stumps, diagonally cut a 2" length from each end of bûche; then, to make the stumps thinner than the bûche, partially unroll each piece, trim off flap, and discard. Set stumps aside.

Using two long metal spatulas, carefully transfer bûche to a serving platter lined with strips of waxed paper. "Glue" stumps onto bûche with some of the Icing. Melt 1/4 cup of Icing in a saucepan over low heat, then spoon it over stumps to coat completely. Spread remaining Icing on bûche, dragging spatula along Icing to simulate tree bark. Remove waxed-paper strips. Decorate with Meringue Mushrooms, then sift confectioners' sugar over mushrooms and bûche.



Welsh Plum Pudding

Ingredients

1 1/2 lb of raisins
1/2 lb of currants
1/2 lb of mixed peel
3/4 lb of bread crumbs
3/4 lb of suet
8 eggs
1 wine-glassful of brandy

Instructions

Stone and cut the raisins in halves, but do not chop them; wash, pick, and dry the currants, and mince the suet finely; cut the candied peel into thin slices, and grate down the bread into fine crumbs. When all these dry ingredients are prepared, mix them well together; then moisten the mixture with the eggs, which should be well beaten, and the brandy; stir well, that everything

may be very thoroughly blended, and press the pudding into a buttered mould; tie it down tightly with a floured cloth, and boil for 5 or 6 hours. It may be boiled in a cloth without a mould, and will require the same time allowed for cooking. As Christmas puddings are usually made a few days before they are required for table, when the pudding is taken out of the pot, hang it up immediately, and put a plate or saucer underneath to catch the water that may drain from it. The day it is to be eaten, plunge it into boiling water, and keep it boiling for at least 2 hours; then turn it out of the mould, and serve with brandy-sauce. On Christmas day a sprig of holly is usually placed in the middle of the pudding, and about a wineglassful of brandy poured round it, which, at the moment of serving, is lighted, and the pudding thus brought to table encircled in flame. Time: 5 or 6 hours the first time of boiling; 2 hours the day it is to be served. Serves 8 persons.



Christmas Cornish Hens

Ingredients

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

Instructions

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



Irish Roast Goose

The Goose

Prepare the stuffing first (see below). Allow at least 1lb (450g) uncooked weight per diner. Assuming the goose is already gutted, you just need to wash and dry it and cut away any excess fat around the neck cavity. Prick the skin all over and rub it with lemon and seasoning. Season the main cavity with salt and freshly ground pepper and fill it with the cooled stuffing. Place the goose in a roasting tin and roast in a very hot oven 240C (475F, gas 9) for ten minutes. Reduce the heat to 180C (350F, gas 4) and cook for 2 – 2 1/2 hours, but remove the bird from the oven three or four times to pour off excess fat. If you don't do this, your goose will taste very greasy. To test whether cooked, prick the bird at the thickest part. When the juices run clear, Christmas dinner's centre-piece is ready.

Apple & Potato Stuffing

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

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



Scottish Christmas Clapshot

Ingredients

1 small swede, roughly 500g
3 medium potatoes, roughly 500g
1 medium brown onion
Small bunch of chives
Butter
Salt and pepper
Nutmeg

Instructions

Prepare the turnip by removing the outer skin, then cut it into small and even cubes. Peel the potatoes and chop them into cubes. Boil both vegetables in salted water in separate pots. Meanwhile, peel and slice the onion as thin as you can, then fry it slowly in a pan with a little butter, or cooking oil, until well browned, sweet and crispy. When the turnip and potato are soft, when they can be pierced easily with a sharp knife, drain them and leave them to steam for 5 minutes to help get rid of any excess water. Mash the turnip and potato together in a pot over a low heat, this helps to remove any excess water, and to keep it hot. Add a generous knob of butter, a grating of nutmeg and grinding of black pepper. Stir half the onions through and save the rest for the top. Check for seasoning and serve sprinkled with the remaining onions and chives.



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A woman with long red hair, wearing a green velvet skirt, a red and white plaid shawl, and a red belt with a large silver buckle, stands in a snowy field. She is smiling and looking down. The background is a snowy landscape with trees and a soft glow.

Holiday Gift Guide!

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

Love's Chalice

Keith Jack

www.keithjack.com/portfolio-posts/ppx6242-3

Getting a special gift for that special someone will be easy this year thanks to Keith Jack, a Celtic jeweller based in Vancouver, British Columbia. A native of Scotland, Jack crafts beautifully detailed pieces, each drawing their inspiration from the lush landscapes of both Scotland and Ireland. As a frequent traveller to the Scottish coasts and the Emerald Isle, Jack ensures that every one of his pieces bring together his unique and modern design with the rich histories of the Celtic lands. The Love's Chalice necklace takes its inspiration from the popular story of the cup - or, in this case, the chalice - that never runs dry. Hanging from an 18" Spiga chain, this modest, yet striking pendant is made of sterling silver, 10k rose gold, and cubic zirconia. In addition, Keith Jack offers a variety of items, including everything from traditional necklaces, earrings, bracelets and rings, to cuff links and wedding bands. While most pieces are unisex, there are a number of items designed specifically with the Celtic man or woman in mind. Jack also creates upwards of 30 thematic collections, including their bestselling collections *Window to the Soul* and *Tree of Life*.



Whiskey Centurion

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www.whiskeycraft.ie/whiskey-centurion



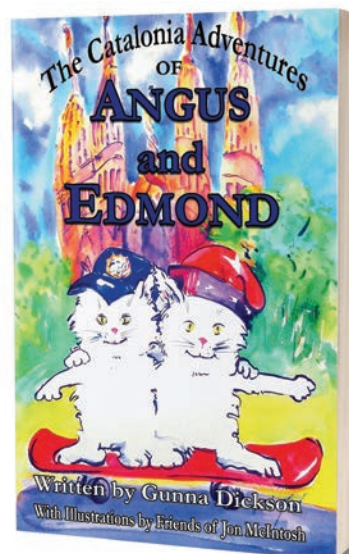
Every Irish family has a Whiskey lover - and every Whiskey lover has a Whiskey "soulmate." Hailing from Wexford, Ireland, Whiskey Craft is a small, online business that brings unique, high-quality pieces to Whiskey aficionados around the world. The company's eclectic inventory includes everything from casks and glassware, to Whiskey-inspired wall art and hanging clocks. Among their more popular items is their Whiskey Centurion, the ideal gift for those who covet a particularly prized bottle of the good stuff. Handcrafted from new French Sessile oak, and finished with the skill and craftsmanship of a third-generation cooperage, this stand-alone item is the perfect way to showcase and store that special bottle. Brass detailing accents the centurion's exterior, with durable bands at both the top and base, as well as a traditional closure clasp. The interior is detailed in fine red felt. Also included alongside the centurion are two snifter-styled glasses, which slide into spot on the inner-side of each door, as well as a matching 500 ml decanter.

The Catalonia Adventures of Angus and Edmond

Written by Gunna Dickson, with illustrations by friends of Jon McIntosh

www.angusandedmond.com

The dynamic feline duo Angus and Edmond are back this year with another adventure. Following previous trips to Scotland, Key West, and Italy - and as a way to prevent future water mishaps - the pair sign up for swimming lessons. It isn't long before Angus grows deeply fond of the activity, and gears up a team to swim in the upcoming Animal Olympics. Edmond, however, while supportive, finds that he would rather spend his time studying another language, and signs up for a Spanish course. Shortly after, the two are invited back to Key West, and assist in a post-hurricane cleanup. As a way to celebrate both their involvement and achievements, the duo decide to take yet another trip, this time to the beautiful city of Barcelona in Spain. Angus and Edmond are instantly swept up in the city's culture, enjoying everything from delicious food aboard a luxury yacht to the rich architecture of the famous Spanish architect Antoni Gaudi. Written by Gunna Dickson, and illustrated by friends of Jon McIntosh, this fourth book of lively cat tales will appeal to animal lovers and children of all ages.



Agate Jewellery

Black Dragon Crafts

www.blackdragon.co.uk

There are many different kinds of quartz, but agate is arguably the most fascinating and beautiful. It is sometimes known as the “Earth’s Rainbow” because its properties connect with the energy of the Earth and it comes in many colours. Agate is said to be a useful travelling companion. It may also bring good luck and be helpful in times of trauma, inspiring bravery, giving strength, and encouraging healing. Agate is threaded into earrings, bracelets and pendants; each piece is individually handmade and features Celtic beads crafted by the Black Dragon herself – beadsmith Annie Wealleans. No two agate beads are exactly alike, so this jewellery is guaranteed to be a unique gift. Based on your preference, you can choose between soft and bold colours - from pinks and purples to greens and sandy browns. Annie uses lead-free pewter, which she melts and pours into moulds in an ancient centrifugal casting machine at 350 degrees Celsius in her “Beadoir,” which she established on a green Welsh hillside in 1974. She then files, cleans, and individually hand-finishes each bead. Annie is passionate about her craft and weaves her Celtic beads into several other jewellery ranges, all of which are sensibly priced and beautifully packaged. *Diolch yn fawr!*



Heaven Help Us

Jo Macleod

www.jomacleod.com



Author Jo Macleod has shaped this fictional tale around her own life experiences. At the turn of the 20th century in a remote farmhouse in Ireland, a young boy mysteriously died. Some years later his foster sister vanished without trace, taking with her a dark and sinister secret. Rosemary McGinty couldn't see her dead son and foster daughter, but her mother's intuition convinced her they were still close by. Her instincts warned her about the secret, which she regretfully ignored during her lifetime. Rosemary pined daily for her lost children and when she died in 1940 and crossed over, she was shocked and horrified to see that her little ones were still trapped in the old farmhouse. Now, 100 years later, their story is being told. Rosemary searched frantically to find a way to reach from beyond the grave and connect with Sophie, a modern-day intuitive. Together they would join forces to expose the secret that held the children captive, for only then would their souls be released. A work that is both beautiful and evocative, this masterfully-woven tapestry of supernatural thread invites readers to suspend their disbelief and venture into the paranormal.

Signature Shoulder Bag

Scottish Creations

www.scottishcreations.com

The ultimate luxury: a shoulder handbag that is both sophisticated enough for any occasion and perfect for everyday use. Scottish Creations' tartan shoulder bags are lovingly hand-crafted in Scotland, using only the finest materials. The tartan is carefully chosen and precisely positioned to appear at its very best. Each bag takes several days to complete. The main body of the bag is luxurious black leather, smooth and soft to the touch, with a natural sheen. What makes this item even more special is that you choose the tartan you would like it to be made in - a wonderful way to celebrate one's unique family heritage. There is an adjustable leather strap with a maximum length of 50 inches, which allows the bag to be worn over the shoulder or across the body. For the suede lining you can choose a complimentary colour. There is a zip-pocket at the back and a pocket at the front - ideal for protecting mobile phones and keys, while keeping them apart and easy to find. This is the perfect gift for the Celtic lady on-the-go who wants to channel her roots in a stylish way.



The Haggis

Stahly Quality Food
www.thehaggis.com

While it was historically considered a gourmet meal to be enjoyed annually at ‘Burns Night’ events, haggis is now a dish savoured anytime, all over the world. An easy-to-prepare, no-nonsense recipe and sturdy shelf-life makes haggis the perfect quick meal for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, or as a simple and scrumptious hors d’oeuvre. Stahly Quality Foods of Glenrothes, Fife, Scotland (‘A Big Name in Quality Haggis’) makes the quintessential Scottish specialty available worldwide. Since 1994, the company has produced a variety of award-winning haggis, including everything from the traditional Scottish Haggis to a version suitable for both vegans and vegetarians. In addition, Stahly’s also cans a Scottish Venison haggis, a Drambuie and whisky haggis, and several other tasty varieties. In 2002, the business moved across the pond, much to the delight of American and Canadian haggis enthusiasts, and today two of their award-winning recipes - the Traditional Scottish and Vegetarian Haggis - are produced and canned in the United States. Stahly’s has come a long way since Fred Stahly Sr. and his wife first opened the small, mom-and-pop styled butcher shop in 1923, but the family-run firm has maintained its commitment to excellence for generations.



The Knotted Wreath Plaid Brooch

Nagle Forge and Foundry

www.nagleforge.com/products/knotted-wreath

Whoever said that “size doesn’t matter” has never laid eyes on Nagle Forge and Foundry’s Knotted Wreath Plaid Brooch! The California-based company’s website describes the piece as “massive, sculptural, and finely detailed - as unique as any man who wears it.” At 103 mm across, the Knotted Wreath is stately - without being showy - and stands as the family-run firm’s largest shoulder brooch to date, supporting nine yards of kilt - the weight of an oversized shawl. The outer ring of the brooch displays a series of knots and decorative details and surrounds a breastplate that features a traditional St. Andrew’s cross. As with every Nagle creation, the Knotted Wreath Plaid Brooch is handcrafted, and is composed of high-quality, lead-free pewter. To ensure durability, all Nagle brooches also contain a strong, hand-made, detachable nickel pin back that promises the piece will survive the wear-and-tear of daily use. As with all of their fine products, the item comes in a sturdy box with a lifetime guarantee card. Also included is a gift enclosure, making it an excellent present at Christmas or any time of the year.

Love Your Skin Travel Kit

Celtic Complexion

www.celticcomplexion.com/kits/love-your-skin-travel-kit

Travel doesn’t mean you need to sacrifice your skincare. Celtic Complexion - a small, family-run firm in Raleigh, North Carolina - has put together their Love Your Skin Travel Kit. The sample-sized starter package contains the company’s entire award-winning collection, including the Celtic Complexion Crème, the Tinted Moisturizer, all four serums - Youth Infusion Serum, 7 High Potency Serum, Vida Fleur Liquid Moisturizing Serum, and the Calming Serum - the Gentle Crème Exfoliant, and the Coconut Crème Cleanser. Unlike most skincare products on the market today, these items are designed specifically for women who suffer from dry, sensitive skin and rosacea. All are hand-crafted in the United States, and are free of chemicals, dyes, parabens, and synthetic fragrances. The products are also completely vegan and cruelty-free, and contain Aloe Vera, witch hazel, and green tea extract, which are all beneficial to arid, irritated skin, and help slow the process of aging. The Love Your Skin Travel Kit keeps things simple, with smart packaging that is safe for travel and quantities that will last up to 3 weeks. The product has received a number of rave reviews, including one happy customer calling it “magical.”



Skye Holiday Box

Skypeskyns

www.skypeskyns.co.uk

Skypeskyns is Scotland's only remaining traditional sheepskin tannery, producing beautiful soft sheepskins and associated products on the Isle of Skye. The Skye Holiday Box is a unique selection of traditional products, handcrafted on the island, and comprising a choice of one white or brown sheepskin, an Isle of Skye Candle (Winter Warmer or Winter Spruce), and a mug hand-thrown at Uig Pottery. The single-sized British sheepskins look gorgeous draped over a chair, thrown over the bed or underfoot on a hardwood floor. They add texture and warmth and are the perfect choice to snuggle up with, beside the wood-burner on a cold wintry day. The candles are made from 100 per cent natural soya wax and the finest oils, boasting a 45-hour burn time. The mug is both dishwasher and microwave safe, with decoration inspired by the potters' own stunning views of the area's sea, sky, wildlife and hills. Each of the sets is wrapped in natural paper, with raffia string, and presented in an elegant Skypeskyns gift box. Skypeskyns can hand-write a personal message from you, and the item can be shipped directly from the workshop to the recipient. For any lover of Skye or Scotland, this the perfect gift this holiday season.



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 eleven months 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 fastest-selling 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 and contemporary colour photographs, the work is a must-read for true music lovers and all with an interest in Irish history and culture.

Through A Darker Eye

George Douglas

www.amazon.com

It is 1746 in Scotland; the Jacobite Rebellion is over, Charles Stewart (Bonny Prince Charlie) is a fugitive, and British soldiers are over-running the West Highlands. Seventeen-year-old John Wallace, son of a prominent cattle-dealer, kills a British officer in self-defence. He is captured by Captain Frederick Scott, the officer's uncle, and narrowly escapes death. Furious at the murder of his nephew, Captain Scott takes brutal revenge on John's family. John is swept up in the Highland clearances and exiled to the American colonies, where he is cast up on Ile Royale (Cape Breton) and imprisoned by the British until he escapes into the wilderness, seeking a new beginning in Canada. Blamed for the death of his nephew, Captain Scott faces a career in ruins; he is ordered to Boston in disgrace and then posted to Annapolis Royal, a remote outpost recently captured from the French. Bitter at the injustices perpetrated on him by his superiors, and estranged from his fellow officers, he vents his frustrations on the Indigenous population. John Wallace and Captain Scott will meet again and the blood feud that began in the hills of Scotland will play out its final act in the heart of the Canadian wilderness. *Through a Darker Eye* is a stunning novel, with a stirring perspective on history.



Plaid Kilt Purse

La Wren's Nest

www.lawrensnest.com/shop

This adorable plaid kilt purse is ideal for any Scot (or Scot-at-heart) with a sense of style. The bag itself is made with wool and has a zippered pouch with satin lining. A small inside pocket on the side with a velcro closure makes an easy-to-reach spot for a cell phone, keys or change. A 38-inch adjustable shoulder strap attaches to the kilt purse with lanyards. A small sporran on the outside even mimicks the appearance of a real kilt! Available tartans include Royal Stewart, Black Stewart, MacCloud, Ramsey Blue, Heritage of Scotland, Pride of Scotland, and Black Watch. The purse is also available in black and grey plaid, as well as straight-up black or green. Other plaids may be available upon request. La Wren's Nest is a family-owned, Virginia-based purveyor of historically accurate clothing, accessories, arms and armour from Celtic to Viking. Their Celtic and Scottish lines of product are both excellent quality and culture appropriate. La Wren's is also known for its custom creations and can make something special just for you.



Claddagh Necklet with Crystals

Celtic Corner

www.celticcorner.net

Share your Emerald Isle roots with this Claddagh necklet in sterling silver, adorned with green crystals. The stunning piece is made in Ireland by Solvar Ltd., a family-owned Irish company established in 1941 and based in the heart of Dublin, and a leader in the design and manufacture of destination and heritage jewellery. All Solvar Irish-themed jewellery is individually designed, drawing inspiration from Ireland's rich past and unique icons. The world-renowned Claddagh is a perfect example: the hands symbolize friendship, the heart represents love, and the crown represents loyalty. The Claddagh shares its name with the fishing village in County Galway where the design originated. It is believed the Claddagh first appeared in the form of a ring in the 17th century, and its design has since appeared in many forms of art, including this gorgeous necklet. The symbol is often given as a token of love or marriage, but the beautiful image is also appropriate to give to a friend or family member.

Highland Title

Scottish Lands

www.scottishlands.com

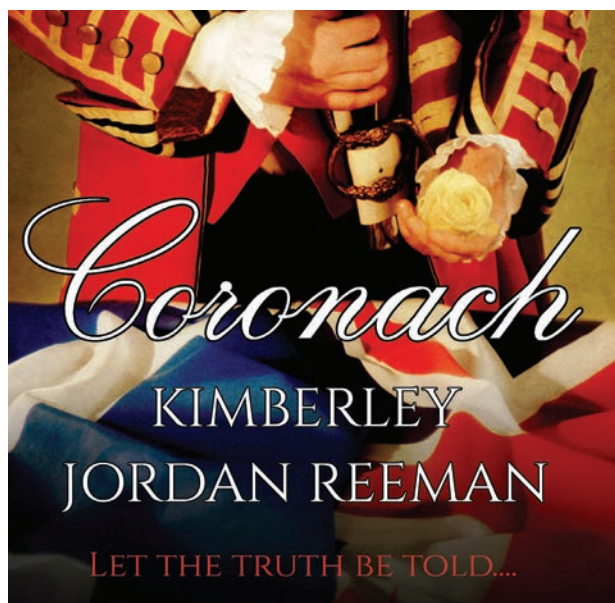
The ultimate gift for "the person who has everything": make them a Lord or Lady this Christmas! Scottish Lands offers a unique opportunity to purchase a plot of land in the Glencoe Wood in the Highlands of Scotland. Thanks to Scottish landowner laws, purchasing a Highland Estate gives you the legal right 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."



Holdalls

Luss General Store
www.lussgeneralstore.com

So often it is a striking accessory that catches the eye, accentuating a look with a touch of elegance. Fashionable and exclusive, Luss Fine Leather is masterfully crafted for, and only available from, Luss General Store, an artsy boutique that supports traditional Scottish crafts and artisans. Located in the picturesque village of Luss, by the Bonnie Banks of Loch Lomond, in the Scottish Highlands, the upscale shop has a strong selection of these items designed with both purpose and style in mind. The bags are a striking blend of soft, durable leather and resilient tweed, woven on the Isle of Islay where a woolen mill has operated continuously from the 1820s. The weave is dense and tight for lasting wear, and a finishing coat will be sure to deter moisture and staining. Both classic and contemporary at once, these roomy pieces are a nod to the historic clans that populate the Scottish Highlands. Luss is the ancestral home of Clan Colquhoun, whose tartan and tweed are proudly on display in their collections, as are the tartans and tweeds of their neighbours (and historic foes) the Clan MacGregor. Be sure to also browse through the lovely wools and cashmeres, as well as accessories and gifts for family, friends, pets and gardeners.



Coronach

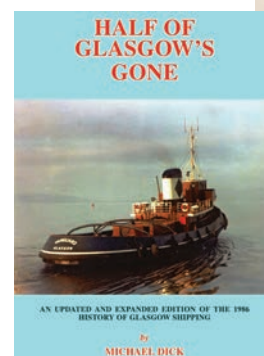
Kimberley Jordan Reeman
www.troubador.co.uk/bookshop/historical/coronach

The modern and wily Christmas shopper can forego wrapping this holiday season with the gift of *Coronach: Let the Truth Be Told*, a marvelous Celtic e-book by Kimberley Jordan Reeman. Set in 1746, amidst the tumultuous aftermath of the Battle of Culloden, the compelling novel is ideal for a quiet winter's night following the frenzy of Christmas. When the time is right, find a cozy chair, pour a wee dram of the good stuff, and toast your feet by a roaring fire while you are transported back to the Highlands where an army of occupation is ravaging the hills and glens, committing atrocities with consequences that will reverberate across generations. Against this dramatic backdrop a battle-hardened English officer saves an infant who will become his heiress and his obsession, and a Franco-Scottish laird gives shelter to a boy traumatized by the horrors he has witnessed. These four lives become intertwined in an epic story of love and war. Reviewers have called the work lyrical and haunting, and an unflinching look at a particularly bloody period in history. It is a story rich in historic and human detail, from the ferocity of battle to the culture and poetry of the lost Gaelic world, and the truth behind the legends.

Nautical Publications

Brown, Son & Ferguson Ltd.
www.skipper.co.uk

Books make great gifts anytime of the year, and a good read can make for a happy and relaxed holiday season. Two fine books from the nautical publishing company Brown, Son & Ferguson Ltd - *Gone* by Bill Cumming, and *Half of Glasgow's Gone* by Michael Dick - tell historic tales of a bustling port and cargo-carrying ships. Cumming, the great grandson of two master mariners employed by R & J Craig, delivers a stirring account of the origins of the four-masted iron sailing ships, which unexpectedly prolonged the usefulness of windjammers during the ascendancy of steam ships. He details the phenomenal success of the County of Peebles which convinced the company to build another 11 jute clippers to ply their trade routes. *Half of Glasgow is Gone* is an updated re-issue of the popular book Dick produced in 1986. It recalls Glasgow's days as a major European port and its significant contributions to the success of the Second World War. Most of the black and white photos have been enlarged, and there is a new colour photograph section, as well as a new chapter titled *Glasgow's Dockers*. This is the story of the port of Glasgow in its heyday, in decline, and its robust redevelopment.





The Bethlehem Midnight Star Pendant

Donegal Square

www.donegalsquare.com

Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, known to many as “The Christmas City,” was founded on Christmas Eve in 1741. To this day, Bethlehem is well-celebrated, especially so during the holiday season. Nestled on Main Street in historic Bethlehem is Donegal Square, a one-stop Celtic shop that was established in 1985. Donegal Square offers a range of experiences, from traditional Celtic dining to artisanal shops, all of which showcase “some of the best of Ireland and the British Isles.” In addition to their brick-and-mortar location, Donegal Square also operates an e-store, carrying clothes, baked goods, fragrances, jewelry and more. Recently, with the help of Dublin-based jeweler ShanOre, Donegal Square crafted a striking necklace called the Bethlehem Midnight Star Pendant, as a way to honour the city’s rich heritage. The pendant hangs from a stunning 18” sterling silver chain, leaving the pendant – a 1” Star of Bethlehem design, embellished with an assortment of Swarovski crystals – to rest just above the breastbone. The piece comes with a 2” extender, which is decorated with a fine Trinity Knot. This item is an exclusive to Donegal Square, with shipping available throughout the continental United States.

Celtic Tea Experience Gift Box

The Welsh Baker

www.welshbaker.com

Every family has at least one sweet tooth, and Denise Carbone - founder of the baked-goods company The Welsh Baker - has just the fix. Since its debut in early 2009, The Welsh Baker - a passion-project of Carbone and her husband - has quickly become the go-to shop for Welsh Cakes in America. The delectable dessert, renowned throughout the British Isles, is a mouth-watering blend of pancakes, cookies and scones. The Welsh Cake is available in a variety of flavors, including traditional currant, cinnamon, maple pecan, cherry almond, and more. The couple also serves up a wheat-free variety, as well as seasonal cakes, including both pumpkin and gingerbread, among others. As with all of the company’s products, the cakes are made from only natural ingredients and are void of preservatives. Along with the time-honored treat, the company offers up a number of other fine items, including preserves, teas and gift boxes. Their popular Celtic Tea Experience Box includes four hand-griddled cakes, real imported clotted cream, preserves and tea for two - all the fixings for a proper tea party. Each box comes in beautiful gold packaging, which is embossed with the company name and logo. Use coupon code “CELTICLIFE” for 15% off and free shipping anywhere in the USA.



A Wicklow Girl

Brian O'Dowd

www.awicklowgirl.com

Dublin-born, Toronto-based author Brian O'Dowd recently published his debut novel *A Wicklow Girl*, an intense love story set to the backdrop of his beautiful hometown. The tale follows a narrator named Brian, and explores the issue of emigration and, specifically, the challenges of going home. After living in Canada for several years, Brian returns to Dublin, moving into a house left to him by his late Aunt on Howth Head overlooking Dublin Bay. Soon after, he tries - and fails - to reconnect with a number of old friends. All the while he reminisces about a woman he met during a trip to Louisiana - Noreen O'Boyle, a green-eyed beauty born in County Wicklow, who longs to return to the Emerald Isle. Brian opts to wait for her, and after some time - and several shocking misadventures - Noreen comes home for one summer. The narrative has already received a number of positive reviews from readers, with many taking note of O'Dowd's distinct and powerful Irish voice. The book is currently available through Amazon and Indigo, in hardcover, paperback and as an e-book.

Embroidered Family Coats of Arms

Celtic Crests

www.celticcrests.com

Looking for a unique, one-of-a-kind gift? Something truly original? Celtic Crests offers beautifully embroidered family Coats of Arms on Cotton Throws, Pillow Covers, Tapestry Wall Hangings, Linen for Framing and Sportswear. The New Hampshire-based company crafts personalized throws for special occasions such as showers, weddings, christenings and anniversaries. Visit the firm's website to view a wide selection of high quality products, which are all hand-embroidered in the United States with a keen attention to detail. Great gifts for family, friends and, of course, ye'self.





Discovering Dingle

with *Andrew Ferguson*

By the mid-1970s, the Irish whiskey industry had hit rock bottom. In the 1700s there were hundreds of small distilleries operating in Ireland. By the late 1800s there were but a couple of dozen left, but their whiskeys were regarded as the finest in the world. Ireland's War of Independence, the Civil War, and the Great Depression brought the industry to its knees.

In 1966, John Power & Son, John Jameson & Son and the Cork Distilleries Company merged to form the Irish Distiller's Group. The industry was in crisis, and amalgamation was seen as its only hope. They agreed to close down their respective distilleries and consolidate production on the Cork site. When the new Midleton Distillery opened in Cork in 1975, it was the only operating distillery left in the Republic of Ireland. Including Bushmills in Northern Ireland, there were just two distilleries on the Emerald Isle.

The benefit of hitting rock bottom, however, is that it leaves nowhere to go but up.

It may come as a surprise to most, but for the longest time almost all of the Irish whiskeys came primarily from just one distillery. In 1989, the Cooley Distillery opened in a converted potato ethanol plant. It fought off a hostile takeover bid by Irish Distillers, who by this time also owned the Bushmills Distillery across the border. In 2007, Cooley reopened Kilbeggan - Ireland's oldest distillery - and it was then that things started to get

interesting. With global demand for whiskey surging, and craft distilleries opening all over the world, Irish entrepreneurs started looking for opportunities at home. Today there are 16 distilleries operating in the two Irelands, and another 15 in the planning stages.

One of the first Irish craft distilleries to emerge was Dingle in 2012. Located just to the southwest of Limerick, Dingle was opened in the old Fitzgerald Sawmill on the outskirts of the town it is named for. The distillery sits at the end of Dingle harbour, by the mountains. The facility was the brainchild of the late Oliver Hughes, as well as Liam LaHart and Peter Mosley - founders of the Portershouse Brewing Group - who are the present owners, and operate Ireland's largest independent brewer. The vision was to create an artisanal, craft distillery. They installed three pot stills for whiskey, along with a combined gin/vodka still for white spirits. They laid their first casks down on December 18, 2012, and bottled their first whiskey barely three years later on December 19, 2015.

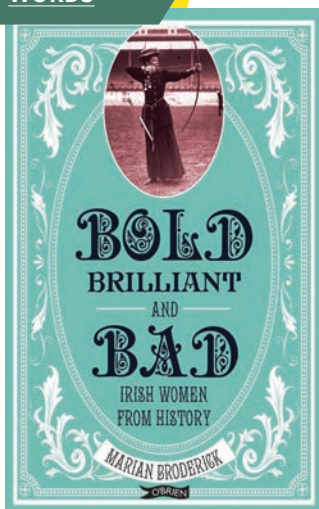
The distillery's gin and vodka were originally produced to help the distillery with its cash flow. Whiskey making is a slow game, and involves years of investment before a firm will start seeing any returns. Fortunately, the white spirits took off almost immediately, aided by early positioning in the firm's own network of bars and pubs. The white spirits are quadruple distilled, and produced from

wheat and barley grown on 50 nearby farms. The gin is built around 13 botanicals that can be found in the surrounding area. Dingle Gin has been a massive success for the company and accounts for 25% of all the gin sold in Ireland.

Dingle Vodka, Gin and Single Malt whiskey are all available in select markets around the world. The Dingle Vodka (\$55) is clean with a nice body. The Dingle Gin (\$55) is faintly sweet, with layers of soft floral tones. And though young, the Dingle Single Malt Whiskey Batch 2 (\$115) is lovely. Matured in both ex-bourbon and ex-sherry casks the whiskey is round, fruity and smooth with layers and complexity beyond its years. Dingle Single Malt Whiskey Batch 3 is due out shortly. Matured in ex-bourbon and ex-port casks, it retains the round, fruity tones of Batch 2 but with more prominent malt, chocolate and spice.

More than a few of my friends have been by the distillery and have raved about the experience. The surrounding area is also said to be very beautiful. But if you are not ready to make your own trip, might I suggest you give yourself a generous pour of Dingle, curl up on the couch, and binge watch Jack Taylor on Netflix. The gritty drama is set in nearby Galway, and the spirit of Dingle will transport you to the Emerald Isle.

www.kensingtonwinemarket.com



Bold, Brilliant and Bad

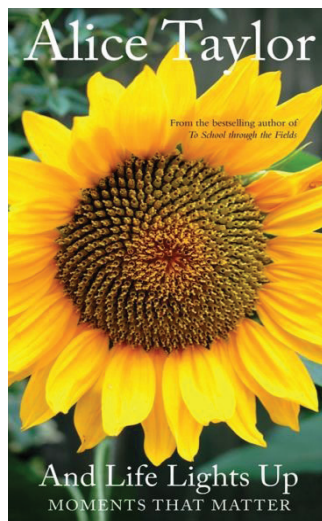
By Marian Broderick
O'Brien Press
304 pp / €16.99

Most know better than to mess with an Irish girl; their gentle veneer and charming disposition often guise the heart of a fierce warrior. That feisty spirit is showcased in spades with *Bold, Brilliant and Bad*. Subtitled *Irish Women from History*, this terrific tome shines the spotlight on over 120 of the Emerald Isle's finest fiery females, from artists and athletes to activists, politicians, religious figures and more. Peppered with photos and tidbits of trivia, the work is a visage of biographical threads, well-spun into a tapestry of social revolution. Author Marian Broderick does well to pick up where she left off with her previous effort, *Wild Irish Women: Extraordinary Lives from History*, making it another must-read for those with a passion for Eire's history. ~ SPC

Northern Heist

By Richard O'Rawe
Irish Academic Press
270 pp / €14.99

Although little good came from The Troubles in Northern Ireland, the 30-year conflict did leave vapour trails of creativity in its horrific wake, including brilliant music, powerful visual art, and a litany of excellent literature. Former IRA man Richard (Ricky) O'Rawe has enjoyed both critical and popular acclaim for his three previous works of non-fiction, including the bestselling *In the Name of the Son: the Gerry Conlon Story*. His debut novel, *Northern Heist*, is the stirring and surprising story of a Belfast bank robbery, and the desperate men who made it happen. Interestingly, with a deluge of detailed twists and turns, the narrative reads more like fact than fiction. Who better to tell the tale then, than someone who has been there and done that? ~ SPC



And Life Lights Up

By Alice Taylor
Brandon Press
208 pp / €19.99

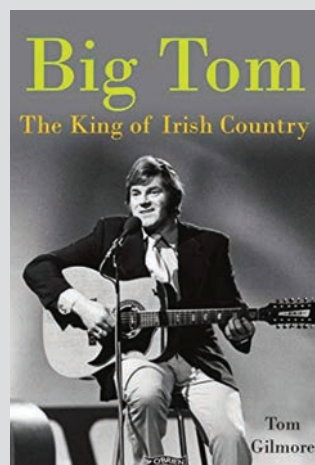
Bestselling author and Irish celebrity Alice Taylor stays close to home with this thoughtful treatise on mindfulness and gratitude. Through a series of personal observations taken from her daily life, the author invites readers to renew their perspectives on the people, places, and things that define who we are. These are not first-time lessons designed to awaken long-dormant thoughts and feelings, but rather gentle reminders on how to stay in the "here and now" to better develop a deeper appreciation of life. The work brings to mind the ages-old adage that "the past is history, the future a mystery, and today - well lived - is a gift, and that is why we call it the present." My mother is going to love this book! ~ SPC

Big Tom; the King of Irish Country

By Tom Gilmore
O'Brien Press
256 pp / €19.99

Often called "the Johnny Cash of Irish country music," Big Tom McBride entertained audiences at home on the Emerald Isle and abroad for more than 50 years. With over two-dozen live and studio recordings to his name, as well as several concert DVDs, many credit him with single-handedly bringing the twang to Eire. The Castleblaney, Co.

Monghan native - who passed this past April - finally gets his due with this entertaining and engaging biography. Drawn from interviews with the man himself, as well as with his family, friends, peers and musical luminaries, the work does well to paint a portrait of a talented, and sometimes troubled, artist who lived as he sang, with passion and purpose. An insightful look at one of Ireland's inspiring individuals. ~ SPC





Tannahill Weavers

Òrach

Arguably Scotland's finest folk band, the Tannahill Weavers commemorate 50 years of jigs, reels and strathspeys with this spirited and delightful 14-song selection. Showcasing players past and present - including Dougie MacLean, Alison Brown, Duncan Nicholson, Hudson Swan, Ross Kennedy and many more - the group returns to full-form with *Òrach*, a moving mélange of classic ballads, new compositions, and old Scottish poems set to music. Standout tracks here include Northern Lights, Christchurch Cathedral, Oh No! and the terrific title track. Kudos to the Paisley-based quartet; at an age when most of their contemporaries are repackaging their past, running on fumes, or have simply packed it in, the Weavers celebrate their Golden Anniversary with creativity and cojones. Raise a wee dram to another 50 years! ~ SPC

Celtic Woman

Ancient Land

The Emerald Isle's female fab-four are back with *Ancient Land*, a terrific 18-track tribute to their ancestral roots. Like Co. Donegal - the most ancient of Celtic lands - the collection is a blend of dark and light. From the opening moods of the title track to the closing chorus of Ballroom Romance, the quartet sings in shades; soft harmonies hover like a gentle mist over the orchestral landscape of guitar, fiddle, pipes and drums. Along with several re-workings of contemporary songs and a swath of traditional tunes, the current CWs - Mairéad Carlin, Éabha McMahon, Tara McNeill and newest member Megan Walsh - offer-up three impressive original compositions. Fans of Enya, Moya Brennan, and Clannad will want to wrap their ears around this one. ~ SPC



KT Tunstall

Wax

I get a lot of flak from readers for reviewing music that isn't necessarily considered "Celtic" per se. My usual response is...well, best left unsaid. That said, Scottish singer-songwriter KT Tunstall is fiercely proud of her roots, waving the Saltire wherever she wanders. With her sixth full-length release, the Edinburgh-born troubadour waxes poetic pop-rock through 11 catchy tracks, looking into the heart of love, lust, loss and more. Accompanied only by bare-bones guitar, bass, drums and a smattering of synth and strings, the work is a testament to her masterful song-smithery. And, if you listen closely enough, you can hear her heritage in *The River*, *Dark Side of Me*, *Backlash & Vinegar*, and *Tiny Cup*. Like Ireland's irresistible Imelda May, Tunstall is redefining "Celtic" music. ~ SPC

Silotar

Voyage

From busking in Dublin's bustling Temple Bar district to performing on grand festival stages across Europe and North America, talented Irish trio Silotar trip the tunes fantastic with their latest release, *Voyage*. The 11 songs on the band's fifth recording highlight the group's massive musical abilities, with one reviewer even going so far as to call them the Celtic equivalent to Canadian power-trio rockers Rush. While I won't go that far, I am nonetheless impressed by how much sound can come from a guitar, pipes and percussion. Natural abilities aside, the ensemble wisely scales it back on the new album, allowing songs like *Pigtown*, *Better Man*, *Tonight's the Night*, and *Kilmaly to breathe*, and reminding us that music exists in the space between the notes. ~ SPC



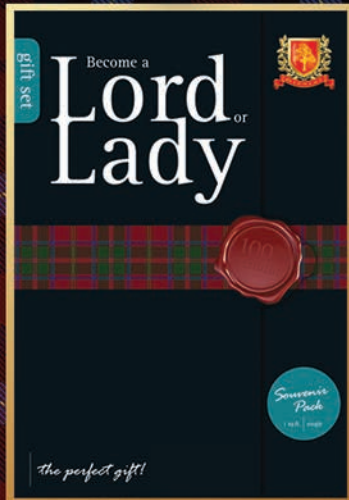


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Renaud Olgianti

Renaud Olgianti insists that he is the finest piper in Paraguay

“That is because I am very likely the only piper in Paraguay,” laughs Renaud (Ron) Olgianti. “It is, admittedly, a little lonely at times. Before Yahoo groups and Facebook, there was little possibility of any interaction with other pipers in this part of the world.”

Olgianti was born in “exile” in Paris and brought up in Quimper (Brittany) amongst his father’s family. He is quick to point out, however, that there is Scottish blood in his background.

“My mother’s two grandmothers were Scots from Orkney.”

He suspects that heritage is the reason why he was so taken with the sound of bagpipes as a youngster.

“The president of the Bagad Kemper - a long-established Breton pipe band - lived across the street from us. Almost every week, whenever the group had been performing away from Quimper, they would come and play under our windows when returning. I also recall enjoying the pipes during the Fete de Cornouailles Parade each July.”

Over half a century later, Olgianti is reflective on his humble beginnings.

“I started in Rennes, south of Quimper, in 1968,” he recalls. “I took piping classes that were offered by the An Ere pipe band of Jakez Pincet.”

On the advice of Pincet, and after he had been learning for a year on a practice chanter, he set out for Scotland in search of a good set of pipes.

“I rode my trusty BMW R50/2 from Brittany to Bishopbriggs, near Glasgow, to visit Bob Hardie. This worthy gentleman had a waiting list for his products but - given the circumstances - sold me one of his No 4 stands of pipes for the princely sum of £40.”

For another £4 Hardie threw in nickel-silver drone slides. Olgianti went away happy, later revisiting Scotland when his work sent him to Glasgow for several months.



“On returning, I visited the College of Piping on Otago Street and continued studying with Sheumas MacNeil and Duncan Johnstone. At the end of my stay I decided that I was going to continue piping for the rest of my life and splurged £350 on an ABW silver and ivory mounted stand.”

Recently, he came across an offer on Facebook from a man who, in the 1970s, had bought the same set of pipes but had never used them.

“Because there are severe restrictions on the transporting of ivory, I jumped on the opportunity to have something that I could take abroad,” he explains, adding the new-old set was \$400 well spent.

Over the years, Olgianti piped with the Paris Caledonian Society and the American Legion Post during his time in Paris. In his current home of Asunción he has played for an embassy ceremony marking the 90th birthday of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

Despite being the only seasoned piper in Paraguay, he has three piping students, two young Paraguayans and an older gentleman from Breton.

“Both my late wife and I knew Paraguay from earlier visits, and we adopted our two kids here. We decided to drop out of the rat race and find peace and quiet far away from the feverish activity of the First World. We loaded the car and trailer, drove to La Havre, hitched a ride on a container ship and 21 days later we landed in Buenos Aires. Two days of driving brought us to Asunción. That was just over 20 years ago.”

Being physically isolated from areas where piping is popular, he also has some difficulty getting pipe supplies.

“That has led me to develop my own... unique methodologies...as getting items from abroad takes a long time and costs a fortune in postage. I have had to do the same with moustache wax!”

He frequently plays at whisky events in area supermarkets, and for the Salvation Army during the Christmas season, where he enjoys the interest of spectators.

“I fear that Celtic culture, like many other things nowadays, is considered more like a spectator sport with fewer people interested in investing themselves in it.”

Still, he notes, that won’t stop him from pursuing his passion - even if it means doing it on his own, and on his own terms.

“And I’m still the finest piper in Paraguay,” he smiles, “even if I’m the only one!”

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Kevin Carr

A minor mishap during a magical trip to Ireland inspired Kevin Carr's love of music

40 years ago, with banjo and guitar in hand, Californian Kevin Carr wandered the land of his Irish ancestors for four months in search of roots, connection and culture.

"In an uncharacteristically bold move for a mostly shy young man, I went to Moran's Pub where the Tradition Folk Club was held in Dublin and asked to be a floor singer," he recalls via email. "The man running it, Kevin Conneff, later of Chieftains fame, could not have been more welcoming to an unknown musician off the street, and let me sing a couple of songs with my banjo."

The main act that night was a group of Sligo-based American players known as Pumpkinhead. Carr remembers their music as "revelatory," adding that they rivaled the renowned Irish band Planxty in popularity.

Carr recognized their guest fiddler Marty Somberg from his days busking on the streets of Santa Cruz, California. Somberg introduced him to the various band members, including Thom Moore.

"Thom generously invited me to visit if I ever got close to Sligo. At the time, however, I couldn't see myself ever taking him up on his offer."

As fate would have it, he was in Sligo only a month later and, when his Volkswagen van broke down, he stuck out a thumb and hitched a ride with someone who knew Moore. To his surprise, rather than finding a mechanic, Carr was installed in a guest room and rushed off to meet the renowned Irish fiddler Joe O'Dowd.

"The next night was a session, and the next was a visit with Rick Epping and Sandi Miller for more music. And finally, when I found a mechanic, of course it started without a hitch and never gave me a moment's trouble for the remaining months of my visit."

Carr was driving Somberg to Shannon airport when they stopped at a farewell gathering for accordionist Joe Cooley, who had spent his working years in the United States and had returned home to die.

"Many of the great players within four counties were there to honour Joe, including television producer Tony MacMahon, who filmed the long night of music."

For the young American, the wondrous experiences that arose from simple car troubles were almost mind-boggling.

"I felt like I had been dropped in the deep end of a pool of music and culture and wanted to stay in the rest of my life."

On returning to the States, Carr learned that his grandfather Dennis McGough had been a fiddler and a square-dance caller. It was enough to send him in search of a fiddle of his own. He then connected with fiddler Bill Jackson, who taught him his first Irish tunes.

"I continue to play today because traditional music connects me



to culture and emotion in a profound way. It is challenging, energizing and deeply satisfying to spend time in the vast pool of music which has nourished, and been nourished, by so many grand souls through the centuries."

Carr, who favours an old American fiddle of unknown origin given to him by a friend, considers himself to be a traditional player who incorporates elements from other players that he admires.

"I describe my style and sound as being rooted in Irish music, with a strong Quebecois influence on my bowing, and a hint of my grandfather's Pennsylvania touch. I never actually heard him play, so that element must be genetic."

A good tune, he notes, is marked by a memorable melody, a strong rhythmic sensibility, and emotional depth.

Carr's musical highlights over the years include being associated with the Festival of American Fiddle Tunes, playing in a traditional band from Galicia at the Kilkenny Irish Festival, joining Wake the Dead at the famous Fillmore West, and teaching at Alasdair Fraser's Sierra Fiddle Camp. His future plans include recording some favourites with family, playing Basque music, fiddling for dances and performing with Hillbillies from Mars. He also plays in a duo called Orujo, which explores links between medieval and modern Galician music.

"Crazy, isn't it?" he smiles. "To think that all that musical magic started in Sligo all those years ago when the damn van wouldn't start!"

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A trip to the Emerald Isle pushed Lucie Auburtin's passion for dance to the next level

Born in Provence, in the south of France, Lucie Auburtin was exposed to dance at an early age; her mother ran an annual junior folk dance festival.

"I have been dancing since the age of three," she shares via email. "When I was 15, we hosted an Irish dance school from Northern Ireland and I just fell in love with all of it - the dancing, the music, the rhythm..."

Her interest was further piqued when she discovered both Riverdance and Lord of the Dance on television.

As Irish dance schools did not exist in France at that time, she opted to go abroad at the age of 22 to improve her English skills, taking a position as an au pair in Ireland.

"It was my chance to learn Irish dancing. I soon met Pauline Fegan from Bray, County Wicklow. She was my first teacher, and I stayed in her school for two years, absolutely loving it because she was so wonderful."

By the time she moved back to France, she was able to find an Irish dance teacher in Paris.

"Sarah Clark is a beautiful dancer, the former lead of Lord of the Dance. She introduced me to the competitive world of Irish dance. I became her teaching assistant and stayed with her for eight years."

Although aware that most competitive dancers begin at a young age, Auburtin worked hard to catch up, and saw results immediately.

"The highlights of my career as a dancer were qualifying and competing at the Irish Dancing World Championships in both solo and teams."

As well, she has danced on some of France's premiere stages, including Stade de France and Bercy.

"I have also had the opportunity to perform with many of France's finest musicians, including Lunasa."

Relocating back to the south of France, Auburtin opened her own school of dance in Fayence, close to Cannes on the French Riviera.

"I felt it was time for me to fly on my own and pass on the precious skills and knowledge that I had learned from my teachers...it has been over four years since I opened the Azur Irish Dance Academy, and it just continues to grow every year."

Currently she has 80 students who range in age from two to 60.

"Nearly all my students are French. Some are learning for fun, while others are competitive dancers, but they all share a love of Irish dancing."

Each year, many of her pupils take part in both feisenna and Irish dance competitions, and frequently perform in local shows and regional festivals.

"I love the fact that our students get to experience 'the world' through dance by meeting dancers from different countries. Last year we went to Ireland, Belgium, Italy and Cyprus, and had amazing opportunities to share Irish culture."

She has learned that she can only keep what she has by giving it away.

"I am teaching but I am always learning. As I used to be a competitive dancer, I know there is tradition, but that there is also an ongoing evolution in the steps in competitions. The way I see Irish dance now is that it can be both traditional and modern at once."

Auburtin, whose parents were born in France and are of French, Italian, Polish and Vietnamese ancestry, is proud of her country's Celtic corners.

"There is Brittany, of course, and the Celts remain present in other French regions as well. Celtic culture may not be as strong here as it once was, but it is still here."

She does see a growing interest in Irish and Celtic music and dance, however.

"The issue has been that not a lot of people know about Irish dancing in France. When they get to know it, they absolutely love it. Thanks to productions like Lord of the Dance and Riverdance, that has changed greatly. We are also starting to see more Irish music sessions in pubs, and celebrating St. Patrick's Day has certainly become very fashionable here in recent years."

Along with teaching, Auburtin now oversees the annual St. Patrick's Day shows at Disneyland Paris.

"I really enjoy working with a big team of dancers and musicians, and having the opportunity to put together performances for large audiences. It has been so rewarding to take it to the next level."

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Dana Elizabeth Mearns; 1966-2018



"It will be so different without her," my father, a recent widower, said quietly to me. At first I thought he meant the Thanksgiving dinner we were driving to, but I quickly realized he had just meant life. On October 1, 2018, just one week prior, my mother's two-year battle with cancer came to an end.

Dana Elizabeth Mearns (née Marsh) was born August 26, 1966, to a family of Scottish, British and Welsh ancestry. She was a middle child - number four in a clan of six - and was known to her siblings as the cunning sister, as she frequently avoided trouble.

"She would always run into the closet when our father came angrily upstairs," my Aunt Denise told me the morning of my mother's death. "She would run into the closet and say 'I'm just looking for something to wear!' and the other person would take the heat for whatever we were doing wrong."

This was a part of my mother I didn't know. The mother I knew was a voracious reader, a practical jokester and, most importantly, a skilled storyteller. There were many nights when I would kick my poor father out of bed, and snuggle warmly beneath the comforter beside her. I would watch her profile, illuminated by the bedside lamp, as she told me bedtime stories. It was because of her that I developed my deep love of literature.

It was late September, 2016, when we received her diagnosis. She had stage-four colorectal cancer, and it had spread, covering the entirety of her liver and a portion of her lungs. We were told that it was an incurable form of cancer, but were comforted to know that it could be treated with radiation, chemotherapy and palliative care. The goals were both the extend her life as long as possible, while keeping her comfortable.

To say that this was a difficult time in my family's life would be an understatement. The first few days were a complete blur for all of us. Only small fragments of memory from that time are still etched in my mind, but one of the few things I do recall is my mother's unwavering bravery. Although she did shed her share of tears, her predominant disposition was of humour and warmth.

"You know what?" she said to me one day, about a year into her treatment. "I think I should bake some cookies, and freeze them, for you to serve at my funeral." My heart stopped; I didn't want to think about that day. But her sly smile and earnest voice forced me into a laugh. It was this humour that gave her strength - and it was her strength that put those around her at ease.

"Most times it was very difficult for me to feel the pain of Dana's illness, because she was so uplifting," my Aunt Linda explained during her eulogy at my mother's funeral. "Over the past two years, Dana became part of my everyday life. We cried some, but we laughed a lot. I am so happy to have shared these times with her."

During the final months of her life, I became my mother's primary caretaker. People often tell me how strong they think I am for doing that, for taking care of her. I believe that we are all stronger than we give ourselves credit for.

There were many moments of laughter near the end, but often it was quiet, and there was more time to reflect. I would frequently find myself sitting silently beside her, while I waited for her to ask something - anything - of me. Sometimes, if I was lucky, she would look at me with her trademarked side-smirk, but typically she just slept next to me.

We took her into the hospital on Saturday, September 29 - nearly two years after her initial diagnosis - and just over 48 hours later, she was finally at peace.

I learned so much from my mother in the past two years, but I believe the biggest teachings happened in those final hours. In those tired moments, she reminded me to dig deep within and find my strength, while also finding it in me to let her go.

I will never forget my mother. I believe that goes without saying. She will be in my every laugh, and I will find her in every story I read. But this world is on fire, and often we must let go - so I am going to keep her ashes close to my heart.

Still, it will be so different without her.

-Caitlyn Elizabeth Mearns

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