



I'm grateful to you, a chara, for allowing me to share my Irish learning journey with you. Go raibh mile maith agat! Having your company is a comfort and I deeply appreciate it. I apologize in advance for mistakes I may make in Irish. I hope you will overlook them.

**Oíche Shamhna** is my favorite holiday. Always has been ever since I was little. This year is the first year in over 30 there are no decorations at my house. Kathleen and I are not dressing up, and we will not be handing out treats to children. I know it's all for the best at the moment but I'm still more than a little sad about it. My little story at the end of this newsletter, **Mo scéal ó 1953**, makes up for it.

#### **Bitesize Irish**

I have completed 7 out of 21 courses at Bitesize Irish and am "in progress" on 8 more. In practical terms, this means I've gone through 138 steps, taken 138 bitesize lessons. This is amazing to me. I try to do some course material at least every other day. I visit the Pobal section of Bitesize every day. This month, I made 8 new posts and replied to triple that number. I'm trying to be a good community member. I participated in my first live Zoom session: a scripted *Bitesize Beo* on how I became interested in Ireland and the Irish language. It went well. I'm encouraged to do it again. Each week there's a different conversation topic. I'm planning to attend the sessions that I feel qualified for. I don't want to try to get ahead of myself by trying to engage in conversations where I really don't know the vocabulary.

#### **Gaeilge Gan Stró**

I continue on schedule. I've completed Unit 4, *The House and Accommodations*. There is some overlap between the units of this book and what I've been doing on Bitesize and Duolingo. This makes studying the units even easier. In anticipation of finishing the book, I ordered the next book in the series, *Gaeilge gan Stró! - Lower Intermediate Level*. I ordered it from Ireland and expected it to take quite a while to arrive. To my surprise, the book was here in only two weeks. Well, at least I'm prepared for the future now! And speaking of the future: I try, in the beginning of things, to see the end of things. Beside my goal of saying prayers in the land of my ancestors in a language they would have known, I set my mind on being able to honestly wear a **Fáinne Airgid**. I wonder now where I will go after *Gaeilge gan Stró! - Lower Intermediate Level* in order to be able to achieve this.

#### **Duolingo**

Early on, I set my target level for daily accomplishment to the most intense available: score 50 points a day. I have exceeded this every day and did not miss a day's work in the whole month of October. I have finished, so far, the Basic level and

Level 1 in Irish. This amounts to about 90 little "lessons" and one has to successfully pass a quiz to move from the Basic level to Level 1. I am about to take the quiz to move from Level 1 to Level 2. I also make sure to go back and review sessions for all the course categories. I'm finding Duolingo to be a nice complement to both Bitesize and Gaeilge Gan Stró.

#### **Singing and Reciting**

I learned another song this past two weeks: **Bean Pháidín**. When I first heard the song, I thought "It's so fast!" and it sounded like it had a lot of words in it. Once I started learning it, though, I realized there was a lot of repetition and the song wasn't so hard to learn at all. This song is lively and, to my mind, hilarious. Every new song I learn becomes my favorite song! There's a wonderful cartoon treatment of the song. *John Beag Ó Flatharta - Bean Pháidín | Anam an Amhráin* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aqCaMWM2vMA> Anam An Amhráin is a series produced by Cartoon Saloon in conjunction with Sóna Productions for TG4 including 10 animated Gaelic songs. Also, because I don't hold back from learning things children learn, I picked up this children's rhyme/song about frogs:

**Froganna beaga glasa, froganna beaga buí;  
Froganna beaga glasa is a Mamaí ina suí;  
Daidí frog ina sheasamh maide ina lámh;  
Ag múineadh do na froganna cén chaoi le snámh**

Remembering this rhyme was helped immensely by this video: *Froganna Beaga Glasa - Gugalaí Gug Beo!* <https://youtu.be/PDspqpl072g> The video is from 2011 and the little girl has appeared as a regular on *Ros na Rún* since 2015.

#### **Walking in Ireland and Playing**

This past two weeks, I have been doing virtual walks in Galway. As I walk, I try to describe what I'm seeing as **Gaeilge**. It will often take me a few moments to come up with a description for what I just saw so my observations lag behind what I'm seeing in the video. But little by little, day by day, there will be improvement. One must just keep at it. A side effect of the virtual walks is I'm becoming somewhat familiar with the "touristy" areas of various locales and learning where I **don't** want to go should I be graced with visiting Ireland. Fair play to those who make a living from tourists but it's just not for me.

I've come up with a game I'm going to play to encourage myself to learn vocabulary. There's an app to help you exercise called *Walk to Mordor*. You keep track of your walking, running, cycling, etc., and gradually cover the whole distance Sam and Frodo did from the Shire to Mordor. Well, I'm going to plot out a long walk to each gaeltacht. I will start at the Meath gaeltacht, go south to Waterford, west to Cork, then Kerry, up to Galway, Mayo, and finish in Donegal. The distance is the better part of 1000 km. It will take me quite a while to walk it. I'll be walking daily through most of 4 months, if I calculate correctly (based on how much I usually walk every day). I will learn a new word or expression in Irish for every kilometer. It works out to about 2 words per mile. I think I can do that. I'll give a detailed update in the next newsletter.

### Reading

I ordered a couple of books from <http://www.books.ie/> One is Manchán Magan's newest, *Thirty-Two Words for Field: Lost Words of the Irish Landscape*, which just came out last month. I have been a fan of his for a while now and am really looking forward to seeing this. More about him at <http://www.manchan.com/>

I also ordered the newly published *Concise English/Irish Dictionary*, all 1800 pages and six pounds (2.8 kg) worth of it. One of my favorite things is to read the dictionary, flip through it, see what sticks. After the Second World War, my father became an English teacher. As a boy, I used to sit regularly and browse his big dictionary, letting my imagination be stirred by all the curious and useful words. I very much look forward to doing the same with this weighty tome. As it is now, I page through my *Foclóir Póca* and enjoy it just the same. Caoimhín De Barra's *Gaeilge, a Radical Revolution* is also on the way to me.

I'm not sure how long it will take for any of these books to arrive. The first two were sent **An Post** and so God alone knows. The third is expected to come in the second half of November. If nothing else, I am patient.

### In closing for October

The favorite word I learned recently is **smugairle róin** = jellyfish, which has a totally gross literal translation as a gob of spit mixed with nose snot from a seal. **Róin**, of course, means "seal". **Smugairle** is "thick spittle" and is related to the word **smugach**, mucus, snot. So "seal snot", "seal hawkers", "a seal loogie"...yeah, jellyfish. Not going to forget that one soon. My least favorite word I learned is **an coróinvíreas** or **an víreas corónach**, for obvious reasons.

**The tea challenge result:** After quite a few cups of both Lyons and Barry's, I find I prefer Barry's. No hurt intended to those who prefer Lyons but I think it's in my history. My grandmother had only three special remedies for whatever ailed me when I was a child. One of those remedies was toast and tea. Barry's tastes more like what she gave me than Lyons. (The other two were a hot water bottle and flat 7Up or flat ginger ale.) My grandmother was the soul of love so, to me, the tea tastes like love. End of story.

### The Story That Follows: Mo scéal ó 1953

Tá mé ag foghlaim na Gaeilge le cúpla mí anuas. For me, an important part of learning a language is trying to use the

language creatively as soon as possible. This means expressing something from my heart, something meaningful. I decided to experiment and tell you a little story from my childhood. I tell the story from the point of view of me as a child in three tiny chapters. I use only the present tense because I only know the present tense in Irish. But it is a narrative device as well: little children live in the present tense. I tried only to use words I've learned in the past few months from Bitesize Irish, Duolingo, Gaeilge gan Stró or one of the other "learn Irish" texts I have. In the end, I had to look up the following words the dictionary:

**pluiméir = plumber**

**cruach = steel**

**gual = coal**

**feadóig gaile = steam whistle**

**scannán uafáis = horror movie**

Gabh mo leithscéal. A few times I made guesses on how to say something in Irish. I made some mistakes. This is okay, though. Children also guess and make mistakes when they're learning, so why shouldn't I? I can't be afraid of it. I hope you will read the story (which is a true story).

*Go raibh maith agat, a Aisling ó Bitesize Irish for her corrections when I posted the story to Bitesize Pobal: I had an excess séimhiú, missed an urú, and put ar in one place it should have been ag. She also suggested one word change and rephrasing one sentence. I appreciate it so much!*

Here's a picture to accompany the story:

St. Brendan's church and elementary school and the steel mill on the other side. My grandfather's building is in the dark down to the right. This picture is from the 1970s, long after my story, and just before the collapse of the steel industry in the area.



Picture credit: Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, Darrell Sapp

Slán!

1 mo Scéaltaocht bheag fhéin

No. 3—31 Deireadh Fómhair—Séamus Ó Cianáin

No. 3—31 October 2020—Jim Keenan

## Mo scéal ó 1953

### Cuirim mé féin in aithne duit.

Is mise Séamaisín. Tá mé cúig bliana d’aois.  
Tá mé i mo chónaí i mBraddock. Is baile beag é i Pennsylvania.  
Pluiméir é mo sheanathair  
Tá foirgneamh i Braddock ag mo sheanathair.  
“Ascaill Braddock Uimhir 1”  
Is foirgneamh trí stór é.  
Tá siopa pluiméirí mo sheanathair ar an gcéad urlár.  
Tá mo sheanathair agus mo sheanmháthair ina gcónaí ar an dara hurlár.  
Tá cónaí ag m’athair agus mo mháthair ar an tríú hurlár.  
Tá mé i mo chónaí ar an tríú hurlár, freisin.  
Tá deartháir beag agam.  
Is báibín é. Tá sé aon bhliain d’aois.  
Tá dhá sheomra leapa ar an tríú hurlár.  
Codlaím i seomra leapa amháin.  
Codlaíonn mo dheartháir i leaba bheag i seomra leapa mo thuismitheora.  
San oíche, tá mé uile ina n-aonar. Tá an seomra an-dorcha.

### An monarcha agus na traenacha

Tá monarcha trasna na sráide ó fhoirgneamh mo sheanathair.  
Déanann an mhonarcha cruach.  
Tugann traenacha gual chuig an mhonarcha sa lá agus san oíche.  
Is féidir liom na traenacha a chloisteáil ó fhuinneog mo sheomra leapa.  
Tá feadóga gaile ar na traenacha.  
Is maith liom fuaim na bhfeadóg gaile.  
Luighim ar an mo leaba agus éistim. Táim sásta.  
Freastalaím ar scoil gach lá.  
Is é ainm na scoile Scoil Naomh Breandán.  
Tá mé i ngrád a haon.

### Mo lá scanrúil

Téim go dtí an phictiúrlann le mo mháthair. Is scannán uafáis é.  
Tá fear sa scannán. Tá an fear i dtrioblóid.  
Is fear é agus is mac tíre é freisin.  
Maraíonn an mac tíre daoine.  
Tá an-eagla orm.  
Luighim ar an mo leaba san oíche agus tá eagla orm roimh an scannán.  
Feicim an fear agus an mac tíre sa dorchadas.  
Níl a fhios agam cad atá le déanamh.  
Deirim paidir.  
“Sé do bheatha, a Mhuire, atá lán de grásta...”  
Feicim Muire Mathair. Tá sí go halainn. Rinne sí gáire orm  
Deir sí liom gan eagla a bheith orm. Deir sí liom go bhfuil gach rud ceart go leor.  
Níl fear ann agus níl mac tíre ann.  
Cloisim feadóg gaile traenach.  
Slán leis an eagla. Níl aon eagla orm. Tá athas orm.  
Tá mé ag titim i mo chodlach.