



Thank you so much for being my friend. You're brilliant and I'm glad we're companions on this road. I apologize for the Irish language mistakes that I will surely make and I hope you'll overlook them. But know how much I appreciate you for being there.

I am doing my best to create my own wee **gaeltacht**. In my mind and daily practice, I try to incorporate the idea that Irish is the "normal" thing and English the "exceptional" thing rather than the other way around. To accomplish my personal goals in Irish, I can't allow myself to have an arms-length relationship with the language. For my purposes, Irish can't be something "out there" that I'm learning. I think of it as "in here", in my heart, and I'm unveiling it. I try every way I can think of to have **Gaeilge gach lá ar fad**; Irish all day every day. I am not very accomplished yet in Irish but I'm determined.

People learn languages for as many different reasons as there are people. I think it's really important that everyone's learning path and accomplishments get full respect and admiration. To anyone who may read this, you should know I support you in whatever you're trying to do in Irish and to whatever degree you're doing it.

Once I saw a video of Robert Rodriguez, the film director, giving a class on film making. In response to a student hoping to become a film maker, Mr. Rodriguez said, if you are making any film at all, you are a film maker. You don't have wait to become one. I apply this same standard to being a **gaeilgeoir**. If you can say **Dia duit!** and respond to it, you are already more of a **gaeilgeoir** than over 7 billion people. And, if you can say **An bhfuil cead agam dul go dtí an leathras?**, you'll get past all those teachers who require you to ask in Irish before you go pee. That's a big win.

Here's to all **gaeilgeoirí** wherever we may be!

Learning and Revision

A problem with learning is: the more you learn, the more you have to review. Although I'm still moving forward, I decided that I would emphasize review during this past two week period. Not that I don't review all the time, I do, but I catch myself blanking on things I think I ought to remember. I heard **an bhean liath** and completely forgot what **liath** meant even though I had recently reviewed colors. I forgot **culaith** and **anraith** even after having gone over clothing and food. We all recognize there's a "forgetting curve". Without review, we're not going to remember much on **Dé hAoine** that we learned on **Dé Luain**. What I try to do is contextualize new words when I learn them as a help to cementing them in my long term memory. I use various "memory palaces" to help me.

[https://artofmemory.com/wiki/How to Build a Memory Palace](https://artofmemory.com/wiki/How_to_Build_a_Memory_Palace)

Thus far, my memory palaces have been built around my house, my own wee Gaeltacht. In a bit, I'll describe how— with maps, Google Earth, and Internet resources — I'm about to begin turning the Emerald Isle herself into my memory palace for Irish as I learn. Now all these things I'm writing, they're for me to remind myself. Different people have different ways of studying, reviewing, remembering and practicing. Each one of us has to find the ways that works best.

Bitesize Irish

I am still at 7 completed courses out of 21 at Bitesize Irish and 8 "in progress". Within the 8, though, I completed a further 20 "bites", bring my total to 158 completed lessons.

On November 10, I had a one-on-one Zoom meeting, a "member interview", with Aisling, the Bitesize Irish community manager. We talked about my relationship to Ireland and Irish, my background and attitude toward the language. Our conversation ended up ranging around quite a bit on family, the language and learning. The experience was inspiring and motivating for me. Aisling will post the video on the Internet sometime soon. Bitesize members will get to see it right away. If you're not a Bitesize member, I'll include the public link for you next time, if you're interested.

I'm planning on participating in the next Bitesize Beo on Tuesday the 17th. The **comhrá** will be about the weather. My approach with these **comhráite** is to print them out and try to practice and memorize them as if I'm preparing to be in a play.

Gaeilge Gan Stró

I continue on schedule. I've completed Unit 5, *The House and Accommodations*. My original plan was to complete one unit every two weeks. Because of the overlap between this book, Bitesize Irish and what I've been doing on Duolingo, I may be able to move at a faster pace, perhaps three units a month instead of two. We'll see.

Duolingo

On November 2, I successfully passed the quiz to enter Level 2 of Irish. It wasn't too hard because I'd been studying with great determination. Still, I was nervous before I attempted the quiz. I needn't have been. I also ended up at number one on the leaderboard for the week. Champion! (This weighty award, plus the price of a cup of tea, will get me a cup in my hand in Dublin should I find myself there.) For the current two

week period, I dropped my target level for daily Duolingo accomplishment to the lowest available score: 10 points a day. This has allowed me to relax and concentrate on revision. And it certainly hasn't prevented me from scoring more if I felt like it! At the same time, I continued to move ahead into new learning areas in Level 2.

Singing and Reciting

I wish I could sing better. My vocal cords were damaged when I was operated on in 2018. As a result, my voice is gravelly and I can no longer sing well. This is a comedown for someone who used to sing in a choir. My best (if you can call it that) at the moment is *Trasna na dTonnta*. I struggle with *Báidín Fheilimí* and *Bean Pháidín*. I will not give up. I am doing vocal and breath exercises to help myself.

Reading

I read the best book I have read since I can't remember when—*Thirty-Two Words for Field* by Manchán Magan. I am a voracious reader but it wasn't my intention to make book reviews a part of the record of my Irish learning journey. In this case, I have to make an exception. I want to remind myself when I see this note in the future that this book made me laugh, cry, and be transported in mind and spirit. You can only have a first-time experience once and I want to recall how magical it felt to me. The book, though not poetry, struck me in the same way as good poetry does. Normally, I would dip into a poetry book, appreciate a poem then leave, returning later when the glow wore off. I could not, however, leave this book even when my mind was telling me I was going on overload. I surrendered and allowed myself to leave my everyday reality and visit the Otherworld. I haven't done that so completely in a while. I'd forgotten how wonderful it was. If you are learning Irish, if you know Irish, this book is for you. The book is full of Irish and it helps if you know how to sound out words you aren't familiar with. If you are lucky, some of them will stick with you. That being said, this work is also for everyone. The book is personal and historical, metaphorical and spiritual. There is something enchanting on every page. Perhaps Manchán is humble. He recounts he had no success attracting the attention of the ethereal lady Clíodhna when he visited Carrig-Cleena. I say she was not only there for him but that an entire beneficent concourse of the unseen came to associate with him. I see their helping hands everywhere. Decide for yourself. Read his book and then read it again.

Here's the U.S. Amazon link:

<https://www.amazon.com/Thirty-Two-Words-Field-Irish-Landscape/dp/0717187977/>

For more about Manchán Magan, his web site is:

<http://www.manchan.com/>

Walking in Ireland and Playing

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 using

Internet resources to plot out an **Imaginary Long Walk** to each gaeltacht from east to south to west and north, ending in far away Donegal. My aim will be both to learn more about the geography of Ireland and to acquire 50 to 100 new words at each gaeltacht along the way. Each stop along the way will gradually build a *Memory Journey* for vocabulary, grammar and who knows what else.

For the sake of this journey, I'm going to imagine I have entered Ireland through the port of Droichead Átha (Drogheda) in Contae Lú (Louth) in the province of Cúige Laighean (Leinster).

"While Louth has the lowest percentage of people claiming to be able to speak Irish, it had the last Gaeltacht on the east coast, with Irish surviving as a spoken language in the Omeath area well into the twentieth century. The area even had an Irish language college, later relocated to Donegal."

<https://www.louthcoco.ie/en/services/heritage/what-is-heritage/cultural/irish-language/>

This seems poetic, starting this imaginary journey in a place where little Irish seems to be spoken. I, myself, for all my efforts still speak only a little Irish. Hopefully, by the time I finish the trip, I'll be speaking a lot more.

I'll take R163 to the Gaeltacht Baile Ghib, the more northern part of the gaeltacht in Contae na Mí (Meath) and stop at the Gibbstown Drive-In Bingo. After looking around the area, I'll continue on to Kells and then turn south to get to the southern part of the gaeltacht in Ráth Chairn and visit the Coláiste na bhFiann.

I'll spend at least two weeks in and around each area. If you don't know where I'm imaginary traveling, it might be fun to go to Google Earth and take a look around. Who knew there was such a thing as drive-in Bingo?

In closing: Notes to myself

Encouragement: Don't be bothered by the occasional odd down day learning Irish. It's going to happen from time to time. You can either push through it or you can ease off the accelerator, relax, do something else to distract yourself. Either way will work. Both will give the satisfaction of having gotten through it. When things have been going smoothly for a while, you can forget how well you've gotten through rough patches before.

History: I was born on Tuesday, December 7, 1948. Two weeks later, on Tuesday, December 21, 1948, the Republic of Ireland Act was signed into law.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Republic_of_Ireland_Act_1948

This makes it very easy for me to remember.

Till next time,

Slán!

1 mo ʒaeltacht bheas phéim

No. 4—15 Σαμῆαιν 2020—Σέamus Ó Cιανáin

No. 4—15 November 2020—Jim Keenan