



Thank you again for being my friend. I'm grateful you allow me to share my journey with you. I apologize for the Irish language mistakes that I will surely make and I hope you'll overlook them.

Reflection on learning Irish in the time of COVID

I appreciate all of you who read this newsletter.

I write it for my future self. I will want to look back, see where I was and what I went through. I hope I will be reminded and encouraged. As of this edition, I have been mostly in isolation for eight months. I have not kept a Pepys-like plague diary for COVID-19; I have been recording my rigorous resolve to learn Irish since the beginning of September. Prior to September, I had not hit my stride in learning. I was in a "reaching out" stage. In July, I tried unsuccessfully to find people more local to me who knew Irish; I know they must be out there. I hoped to become friends with them. All my friends in Irish are online. Because of the Internet, even people who are far away seem close. I cherish these far-flung friends. And you, who are reading these words, I cherish you, too.

Bitesize Irish

I participated in the Bitesize Beo "live" session on November 17, talking about the weather. It was fun. I was completely prepared to talk about the weather. In fact, **bhí sé ag cur báistí an lá ar fad inniu!** On November 16, Aisling at Bitesize published the interview we did. Here's the link to their blog: <https://www.bitesize.irish/blog/member-interview-with-jim/> If you have a half hour to spare and the inclination to listen to me, I hope you will enjoy it. The whole Bitesize site continues to be a source of constant encouragement and support. I value all my friends and acquaintances on Pobal, the community portion of the site.

Gaeilge gan Stró

I was correct in my estimation I could do more than one lesson every two weeks. I'm not pushing it, though. I completed Unit Six: *Daily Life* and got started on Unit Seven: *Talents and Skills*. Part of Unit Six was being able to say what time it is. The lesson struck me a little strange because analog clock faces were used in the examples and, at least in the United States, people don't learn how to read analog clocks any more. Everyone has digital watches and wall clocks.

Duolingo

I have used Duolingo daily for 70 days straight. I've changed how I'm using it. Instead of charging ahead, I'm alternating between moving ahead and constant review of past lessons.

Duolingo helps you in this respect. If you haven't reviewed a section within a certain length of time, the badge for that section appears broken. My goal is never to have a badge show up as broken. Duolingo also reminds me how I need to practice spelling. One of my hardest to remember how to spell words: **comhghairdeas**, *congratulations*

Reading

I read *Gaeilge: a Radical Revolution* by Caoimhín De Barra. I found the book quite interesting, particularly in the way the author takes apart a number of myths related to Irish and Irish language learning. The real challenge of the book is what I see as a personal requirement for any individual to take a reasoned rather than an emotional position vis-à-vis the language. De Barra starts the book by examining what he considers two competing ideologies on Ireland, its culture and language: one which favors Ireland and all that goes with her; the other favoring England and whatever benefits accrue from that. Since I adopt the attitude that Irish is in me and I am simply revealing a language I somehow forgot, he would probably categorize me with the "Éire" group. I don't think things are that simple. All in all, I enjoyed this book.

Singing

I found the next song I will learn: **Casadh an tSugáin**. It took me a bit to locate a singer whose accent I want to imitate: Lasairfhiona Ní Chonaola from her album **An Raicín Álainn**. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZjhZIC7Jq2s>

I continue to practice the songs I've learned so far. When it comes to my voice, I'm working with a damaged instrument. I've already decided, if I can get my singing to anything better than abominable, I'll record myself and put it on YouTube. I cannot be less brave than Doireann Ní Fhoighil at three years old.

My Imaginary Long Walk

I started my *Imaginary Long Walk* in Drogheda. I was there briefly and then went to the Gaeltacht, Baile Ghib. I wrote my first poem in Irish while I was exploring Drogheda, walking along Donor's Green by the north side of the Boyne. At the moment, the poem is called **Cad a fheiceann sí?** (What does she see?) and it's still a draft. I'll post it on Bitesize Pobal before I put it into the newsletter.

I wrote it in memory of my sister, **Dubhain Eibhlín** (Duane Eileen). The poem is a bit sad but one has to write what one feels.

I learned what I could about the Baile Ghib area and started building my new vocabulary. Some new words I've learning are everyday use words. For example:

ard, *high, tall, advanced*
as in **fear ard**, *a tall man*
farráige ard, *rough sea*
ardrang, *senior class.*

And I picked up **sála arda**, *high heels*, while learning **ard**. I've also learned many words that compose the 10,000 to 20,000 which most people know or would recognize but might not use regularly in conversation, such as:

uaimh, *cave*
tobar, *well*
sceir, *reef*
comharchumann, *co-operative society*
GÉILL SLI, *Yield (traffic sign)*
líofa, *fluent*
cathaoirleach, *chairperson*
cisteoir, *treasurer*
coiste, *committee/jury*

I reached my goal of 50-100 new words in Baile Ghib and am ready to move on to the next Gaeltacht.

I got to have a good look at the **Plean Teanga Ghaeltacht na Mí**. It's a PDF, all in Irish except for a short summary at the end. If you haven't seen a plan like this before, you might like to have a glance.

https://e5e0ad18-aa75-4c42-b077-d5c7eccfd686.filesusr.com/ugd/aac749_0b48cb6f9af04e9e9ea208c42e1f17bc.pdf

On the (virtual) way to Baile Ghib, I learned An Uaimh as a name for Navan and the story of the Salmon of Knowledge, **An Bradán Feasa**. (I didn't include **bradán** in my list of less used words because I myself had just bought a few tins of salmon at the store.) This is one of the great legends of the Fianna and you may enjoy learning about it.

The Wolfe Tones GAA club covers the area of Baile Ghib. They published a survey – **An Ghaeilge sa chlub 2020** – to help provide for future language planning and provisioning. I looked at the survey and all its questions and answers. My first thought was they were taking for granted everyone had Irish because all the questions and answers were in Irish. Only after a long while of looking did I suddenly realize they had put the English translation of everything right next to the Irish! For instance, one of the questions was: **“Cé chomh minic is a labhraíonn tú Gaeilge? / How often do you speak Irish?”** I did not even notice there was English! I have experienced this

before. One can become so involved in a language it becomes all that one sees. It's as though a preference has been set in the brain and language that doesn't match that preference is blocked out. This is the first time I've really experienced this in Irish and it makes me very happy. **Gaeilge gach lá! Gaeilge gach lá ar fad!**

My favorite new word from Baile Ghib is one I'll never forget: **biongó** and it's just what you think it is. If you don't recognize it, remember the first “o” is only there to satisfy the “long with long and short with short” rule. In other words, it's silent. And the second “o” has a fada so it's a long “o”. If you still have trouble, try shouting it out like a winner!

My Self Evaluation at 90 Days

Looking at September, October, and November, I give myself good marks for effort but I rate my overall skill still low. I remind myself it's only a short time and I'm still at the beginning of the road. I'm primarily in the “passive acquisition phase.” I remind myself this is normal. A few things flow out unthinking but everything else still takes time and thought. Based on my previous learning experiences, I don't expect to be in the active production phase for at least 9 more months. “Active production phase” means to me that I can enter average conversation situations and be able both to follow the conversation and participate to some extent. I think my process of ten weeks of intense study followed by a couple of weeks of relaxed review and study has worked well for me. Generally, I note how easy it is to accumulate nouns. Verbs take more practice and I need to devote more time to them. I rate myself a diligent student. I am impatient to be better but this only drives me to work harder. I continue to try to be creative with what little Irish I have. I am working on stories and poems. Why would I try to write stories or poems when I know so little Irish? I write them now so I can look back and see how far I've come, like a parent saving the little crayon drawings done by a child. It's the emotion of the memory that matters. **Beidh áthas agus lúcháir orm.** I will rejoice and be glad.

Now on to the next 90 days.

Till next time,
Slán!