



Fáilte, a chairde! My wife, Kathleen, and I both got our first vaccination for COVID-19. We're scheduled to go back for the second one just after the end of the first week of April. I hope, wherever you are, you are safe and healthy and either vaccinated already or on your way to it. Maybe we'll all have a chance to meet in person yet! **Bí slán agus fan slán!**

Bitesize Irish, Accountability, and a new Irish dream

Bitesize Aisling is now leaving Bitesize Irish to take on another work challenge related to Údarás na Gaeltachta. I am very happy for her but it is a blow to me. When I started **I Mo Ghaeltacht Bheag Fhéin**, Aisling became an accountability partner for learning Irish. I will miss sending her the newsletter and interacting with her online. I suppose you can tell I'm feeling a little sad about the situation. However, the **Bitesize Pobal** members also get to see these newsletters twice a month and their positive reaction cheers me on. I value my Pobal membership and feel genuine joy to be with people who are working so hard to learn and improve their Irish.

Outside Bitesize, I have also gotten to know (virtually) quite a few people in Ireland. I have not hesitated to reach out those who I've discovered online and who might share interests with me. I have made acquaintances in Drogheda, Wexford, Cork, Limerick, and Galway. As an example of reaching out: My Long Imaginary Walk had me in Baile Bhuirne in February. February 11 is the Feast of St. Gobnaith, an important figure for the village. I sent email greetings on the day to the parish priest in Baile Bhuirne, wishing him the blessing of the feast. Even though I'm Bahá'í and not Catholic, I have a deep appreciation in general for how people show their spirituality.

I suppose I see now I've added an additional dream for visiting Ireland - that everywhere I go I will already know people and there will be people who already know me. Should I have the opportunity to visit Ireland after the pandemic, it will be more than just visiting the land; I will be seeing my friends!

Duolingo

I am continuing at a good pace and have no doubt I will get through the Irish tree according to my projected schedule. As of 15 March, I've done 175 days without missing a day. Doing those daily lessons has definitely become a habit. I haven't mentioned it before but there is a difference between doing Duolingo lessons as a mobile app and doing them as a desktop app. The mobile app lessons seem more user friendly to me than the desktop app. Perhaps the desktop app for Irish is still in development but it feels to me that it is lagging

behind the mobile one. A while back, I switched to only using the mobile app and I typically do the lessons on my cellphone.

Gaeilge gan Stró

I can report finishing Unit 15: *Making Arrangements*. That's it: all 15 units "done". I have gotten through the whole book. I have a feeling of accomplishment but, now that I look at it, I realize going through the book has taken me only a very short way along the road of Irish. When I started, it looked like a lot. When I've finished, it seems like very little. Before launching into the second book, I'm going to spend the next couple of weeks reviewing (again) all the units.

Now that I've completed it, I think I can say a few words of review: the book is beautifully done. At €35, it felt a bit pricey to me but every page is printed on high quality, glossy paper. It will take a beating. There are also 4 Cds accompanying it. A lot of subjects get introduced in such a way as to provide a basis for your own further study. (I think I was used to this because Bitesize covers a lot of territory.) My impression is that the book was meant more for classroom use than for individual study. I think it would have been nice if a vocabulary list had been included at the back of the book. As it is, you have to make your own or hope someone else has done it for you. (<https://app.memrise.com/course/80489/vocabulary-gaeilge-gan-stro-irish-teg-a1/>)

I think, after Bitesize Irish, if you're learning on your own, I would recommend this book as a companion piece. If you become a Grow member of Bitesize, you can use the two of them together to have a more complete learning experience.

FutureLearn Irish 102 and Irish 103

I completed Irish 102. Overall, it was easy because I already knew over 90% of the content. I put in a suggestion that it might be worthwhile to have a way to "test out" of some classes. I know this might not always work well but it might be worth a shot. For instance, when I graduated high school, and went to the University of Pittsburgh, I was given a placement test for Spanish. My Spanish was already good to the point that I tested into 3rd year college courses.

I started FutureLearn Irish 103. Because of the time difference between Massachusetts and Dublin, I could actually get a jump on the study. Technically, the course didn't start till 15 March but, at 8 p.m., Sunday, 14 March, in Massachusetts it turned midnight, Monday, 15 March, in Dublin for me! I got a day's head start. So far, the material is easy. To give you an idea, in the first lessons, one learns: **"Dia dhuit. Is mise Jim. Is fear mé agus is Meiriceánach mé. Is mac léinn mé."** Go hiontach ar fad! Except I could already say this six months ago. I know it will get better. I know it will. I'm just thinking of this as a kind of continuing "initiation."

Listening and Speaking

One of the happy accidents of reaching out to get to know other Irish language speakers was having one person talk to another and then the other getting in touch with me. Turns out there's a **gaelgeoir** who wants to learn modern Hebrew! We're going to try doing a language swap via Skype: Hebrew for Irish. We'll meet for the first time on Friday, March 19. Here's hoping it works out for both our sakes!

What was the story?

In the last issue of the nuachtlitir, I included a picture of my hand holding two small objects that had belonged to my great grandfather. My great grandfather on my grandmother's side was Frank Hughes. Besides being a regular human like us, he was also a historical figure. He worked with John L. Lewis organizing mine workers in the United States. In his time, labor organizing could end up including a lot of violence. My great grandfather would go to the mining camps and the bored miners wouldn't listen to him until he had provided the entertainment of fighting some of the tough guys in the camp. If he won the fight, the miners would listen. If he lost, he would keep coming back until they got tired of beating him and they'd listen. They were all hard men and it took a hard man to work with them. My great grandfather carried with him in his pocket two lead weights. When he fought, he would hold one in each fist to give his punches more power. His dear wife knew of this and once, when he came home from his organizing trips, she secretly took his fighting weights to the cobbler and had them encased in leather so they'd be more comfortable for him to hold while fighting. What a different world where the wife gives this kind of gift to the husband! As the martial artist in the family, I inherited them and that's what you see in the picture. (I also have a sawed off shillelagh that belonged to him. It was a thing easy to conceal in the long coats everyone wore at the time. **Is é sin scéal eile!**)

My Long Imaginary Walk

I continue my virtual walk through the Cork Gaeltacht by going to **Béal Átha** (Ballingeary). I've just come from Baile Bhuirne and Béal Átha is about 20 minutes south. From where you are in Baile Bhuirne, you go down the N22 and turn onto the L3405. This takes you practically the whole way there (about 11 miles - 18 km or so) and then you take a short jog

onto the R584 and you have arrived. There are other ways to get there, of course, but, since I'm coming from Baile Bhuirne, this is how I've gone.

As it happens, I was hungry at home when I first arrived and was pleased to see **An Trucailin Dubh**, a place to get takeout food (**ag teacht...ag imeacht...**). Since the word for "truck" is **trucail**, I'm guessing the name of the **tábhairne** is "The Little Black Truck". What a cute name! And here, on the instant of my visit, I have already learned a new word and an expression for "takeaway". An Trucailin Dubh seems to go by more than one name - Shorten's Bar (Seartan) - but I'm not worried about it. I wander down the street past St. Finbar's Church which, truth be told, is only a handful of steps from the pub. Now, technically, this is **Séipéal N. Fionnbarra & Rónán**. (New word: **séipéal** = church, chapel; new concept: **naomh** "saint" can be abbreviated **N.**) The church is small and quite pretty, lovely stained glass windows, but has no resident priest. The parish priest lives over in Macroom about half an hour away. There's a lovely looking statue in back of the church but I can't quite get to it. I'll have to keep looking to find a better picture online. I'm picking up new vocabulary on my way to the 50-100 I've promised myself for each place I visit.

ardán = terrace

an cúinne = the corner

tig = teach = house

Úsáid an bosca bruscair. = Use the trash can.

I see the sign for "Scoil Mhuire", an altogether lovely school taught all in Irish. Take a tour and enjoy it with me! <http://www.scoilmhuirebg.ie/>

Almost just opposite the entrance to the school driveway is a **pairc thionsclaíoch** = industrial park, which looks to be under the auspices of Údarás na Gaeltachta. Across the street, by a pedestrian entrance to the school, I see reserved spots for **Bus Scoile** painted on the ground.

As I stroll down the road, I am taken by a feeling I've come to know in a gaeltacht: I don't want to leave. I want to tarry a while, as they used to say. I'm grateful to myself for having made a decision not to rush my virtual gaeltacht visits. Each one is like having a banquet of exquisite dishes. They don't deserve to be wolfed down but to be savored. As a sample, take a look at this: **Béal Átha'n Ghaorthaidh 2020** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N2Yjoi57Mfl> and allow yourself the joy of the people. And learn a bunch of new words, too!

Slán!