

Nan Thaidhg

Seán Ó Neachtain

Píos a bhí scríofa i bpáipéar áitiúil de chuid Stát Maine i Meiriceá faoi bhean as an Spidéal a chuir siar ar bhóithrín na smaointe mé. Ba í Nan Ní Choncheanainn, nó Nan Thaidhg mar a bhí aithne uirthi sa Spidéal, a bhí faoi chaibidil i n-eagrán den pháipéar *The Portland Evening Express* a foilsíodh i mí Eanáir 1956. Ba í mo chol seisear, Gerie Huppe, a chuir chugam gearrthán as páipéar. Bí gaol ag an mbeirt againn le Nan agus bhí an t-ábhar seo bailithe ag Gerie mar chuid den stór mór eolais a bhí curtha i dtoll a chéile aici ar chrann ginealaigh ár muintire.



*An muileann ar Abhainn an Chnoic (tógtha c.1850).
[Tógtha as an *Portland Evening Express*]*

Ba é mo ghéarchuimhne é Nan Thaidhg a fheiceáil ag tiomáint a cuid turcaithe síos bóithrín na seanchéibhe agus mé ag triall ar mo chéad laethanta scoile sa Spidéal. Ba mac le Nan, Tadhg Ó Concheanainn, a thug an t-eolas ar shaol a mháthar don pháipéar. Bhí Tadhg ag múineadh scoile i mBuiríos Uí Chéin i gContae Thiobraid Árann. Scríbhneoir cumasach a bhí ann agus ba mhinic saothair dá chuid i bpaiprí nuachta agus in irisí na linne.

Naoi mbliana is fiche a bhí Nan Ní Fhlaithearta as an Lochan Beag nuair a thug sí a haghaidh ar Mheiriceá sa bhliain 1899. Go Bostún a chuaigh sí ar dtús agus as sin ó thuaidh go Portland Maine áit a raibh daoine muinteartha léi ina gcónaí. Bhí pobal mór de mhuintir Chois Fharraige curtha fúthu i Portland Maine ag an am. Ba anseo a chas Nan le John Thaidhg “Leaice” Ó Concheanainn as sráidbhaile an Spidéil agus is ann a phósadar i séipéal Naomh Dominic sa bhliain 1903.

Ceithre phunt deich scillingeacha a chosain an phaisinéireacht go Meiriceá ar Nan. Rinne sí

stocaireacht mhór chun na pingineacha a chur i dtoll a chéile. Phioc sí faochain agus carraigín. Bhain sí feamainn chun na fataí a leasú agus shábháil sí an mhóin ar an bportach. Ní raibh drogall ar bith uirthi na sé mhíle dhéag bóthair go Gaillimh a chur di de shiúl a cos chun toradh a saothair a dhíol ar an margadh. Bhíodh ciseán uibheacha agus prionta ime ar iompar aici chomh maith le trí clocha fataí ar a droim. Don mhargadh amháin a bhíodh an t-im agus na huibheacha agus leis an airgead a fuair sí orthu a cheannaítí tae agus siúcra agus balcaisí éadaigh. Dá mbeadh cúpla scilling le spáráil, chuirte i leataobh iad don phaisinéireacht.

Fuair Nan obair mar chailín aimsire a thúisce a shroich sí Portland Maine. Bhí oifig fostaíochta ansin áit a dtagadh daoine gustalacha ag cuardach cailíní aimsire. Ba duine dhíobh sin, Mrs Leighton, a thug a céad phost do Nan. Carr capaill den déanamh nua-aimseartha a bhí aici chun Nan a thabhairt ar ais chuig a teach galánta. Dream saibhir a bhí i gclann Leighton mar théadh siad ar saoire chuig an gCape chuile shamhradh. Trí bliana a chaith Nan ag obair dóibh. Trí dollar sa tseachtain a bhí mar phá aici agus ba mhaith an luach saothair é sin ag an am, dár le Nan. Bhí an obair crua mar sin féin agus í i mbun oibre ó mhaidin go faoithin. Cupán tae agus canda aráin a bhíodh aici mar bhriceasta agus ní bhíodh deis aici fiú an méid sin féin a ithe ina suí ach á thabhairt léi ó dhualgas go dualgas ar fud an tí.

Dhéantaí níos níos na seachtaine chuile Dé Máirt. Bhíodh na héadaí ar an líne taobh amuigh á dtriomú roimh a cúig ar maidin. Obair láimhe ar fad a bhí sa níos níos. Ní dhéanfaí na héadaí a iarnáil ar chor ar bith ar fhaitíos go ndéanfadh a leithéide na héadaí a chaitheamh. Ba léargas é sin go raibh na daoine a raibh saibhreas acu tíomhasach agus spárlach. Dhéanfadh bairille plúir clann beag, fear, bean agus paiste ar feadh bliana. Fiú smeachóidí na gríosá, chuirte ar ais ar an tine iad go dtí go mbeadh an dé deireadh imithe astú. Ní chaithfí amach na seanbhalcasí éadaí fiú

ach bhainfí paisti astú chun caoi a chur ar chuid eile. Bhainfidís dhá bhliain as péire bróg.

Tharla cúpla eachtra barúil do Nan le linn dí a bheith ina cailín aimsire tigh Leighton. Ba ann a chonaic Nan fón den chéad uair. Bhí an gléas crochta ar bhalla an tí agus thóg Nan ina láimh é lá chun triall a bhaint as nuair nach raibh bean an tí in aice láimhe. "Hello Sir," a labhair sí isteach ann, "does this thing speak Irish?". Bhí mac óg an tí ag foghlaim le bheith ina dhochtúir agus bhí sé ag déanamh staidéir ar chnámharlach daonna a bhí i gcófra ina sheomra aige. Le teann diabhláochta, chuir an mac léinn an cual cnámh isteach faoin éadach ina leaba lá. Nuair a bhí Nan i mbun chóiriú na leapa tháinig sí ar an gcnámharlach agus ba bheag nár imigh an t-anam aisti leis an ngeit a baineadh aisti.

Ba bheag ama a bhí ag cailíní aimsire na linne sin dhóib féin. Mar a deir Nan, bhíodar á gcaitheamh thart ó dhualgas go dualgas mar a bheadh snaoisín ar thórramh. Ba é tráthnóna Dé Sathairn an t-aon am den tseachtain a mbíodh cead a gcinn acu ar feadh cúpla uair a chloig. Cosúil leis an mbaile, ba ar cuairt a rachaidís chuig a ndaoine muinteartha i Portland.

Bhíodh spraoi nó "time" in ait éicint chuile Shatharn. I nGaeilge ar fad a bhíodh an comhrá eatarthu. Rinne Nan cur síos ar an oíche mhór cheoil a bhíodh acu Oíche Féile Pádraig in Amharclann Jefferson. Cé go raibh cosc ar an ól ag an am, ní shin le rá nach raibh sé lé fáil mar bhí scil na stiléireachta tugtha leo go Meiriceá ag muintir Chois Fharraige agus bhí fuisce fairsing más i ngan fhios féin é. Nócha hocht cent a bhí ar ghalún den stuif crua ag an am. Théadh Nan chuig na hócáidí úd in éineacht lena cara Máire Ní Fheinneadha nó Máire Ned Mháire as an Tuar Beag. Ba col ceathrar í Máire leis an scannánaí cáiliúil, John Ford, nó "fear na bpictiúir" mar a thugadh Nan air. Ba mhinic í i dteach a mhuintire i bPortland in éineacht le Máire.

D'fhill Nan agus John Ó Concheanainn ar a bhfód dúchais thar éis roinnt blianta a

chaitheamh i Meiriceá agus chuir siad fúthu i dteach na muintire i sráidbhaile an Spidéil. Chuirte ceist uirthi go minic an raibh fonn uirthi filleadh ar na Stataí. "Ní bheadh fhios agat; bhféidir nuair a bheas lao ag an mbó, a mhac," an freagra a thabharfadh sí. Níor fhill sí riamh ar Mheiriceá ach chaith Nan saol fada sa Spidéal agus bhí aithne mhaith uirthi ag siúl na sráide ag fosaíocht a cuid turcaithe. Céard ba chionn tsiocair leis saol fada a fuair sí? "Braoinín fuisce, corrbhuidéal pórtair, obair chrua agus bia fholláin," an freagra a bhíodh ag Nan. ■

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Eire's Home, But Portland Is Not Forgotten

Galway Resident, 84, Recalls Life Here, As Immigrant In Early 1900's

Ed. note: This is the first of two stories about an 84-year-old Irish woman's memories of her years as an immigrant in Portland.

A drop of whiskey now and then or an occasional bottle of stout, a little snuff, hard work, wholesome food, no worry and a happy heart are the ingredients for a long and healthy life.

Altogether it's quite a palatable recipe for longevity that Mrs. Annie Concannon offers from the experience of her 84 years. Some might not go for the snuff, but then, some might not go for the hard work either.

Annie did. She worked hard here in Portland as an immigrant from Ireland back at the turn of the century. And she worked hard—perhaps harder—for years before that to scrape together enough money to get her here.

Those years show today in the deep wrinkles of her cheeks and brow, the gray of her hair and the bow in her back. But these years also show in the dance of her eyes—eyes which watch the turf blazing in the open hearth fire in her Irish home. Eyes that are again the events that made her life in America so wonderful.

She's proud of the fact she worked in the household of a man who was mayor of Portland—Adam P. Leighton. To be sure, he wasn't mayor when she was working for the family, but he came so later.

She remembers a host of good

to Boston in 1899. Annie slaved hard and long for the money. She picked periwinkles and carraheen moss, cut and carried seaweed to fertilize the potatoes, spread and saved the turf.

In winter she would walk the 16 miles to Galway, barefooted.

"The Leighton's son was going to be a doctor. One day I was sweeping his bedroom and what do you think I pulled out from under his bed but a big skeleton. I roared and nearly fell in a faint with the fright. Mrs. Leighton came up and told me the 'joke' was no harm."

"Dr. Adam P. Leighton Jr. recalls it a bit differently. He was not sure he could remember Annie until she was mentioned. He was studying medicine at that time and as he recollects the skeleton was not under the bed but in it.

"Annie was a small, thin, very nervous woman and I used to give her plenty of trouble. I'm afraid. I brought the skeleton home from Bowdoin Medical School. I planted it in the bed and she went screaming down the stairs when she found it. My mother gave me a first class howling out for it but father thought it was quite a 'joke' he said."

That was a memorable morning. But there were other equally embarrassing and memorable events for the young Irish woman working in Portland. They will be told in the second part of Annie Concannon's recollections in tomorrow's Evening Express.

Mrs. Annie Concannon, Spiddal, County Galway, Eire, as she looks today at 84.

carrying on her back "a basket containing a piece of egg, a pint of gutter and three stenas of potatoes."

"They didn't eat butter and eggs at home because 'rents and rates had to be paid, tea and sugar were needed, clothes were required and a shilling or two must be put aside every week for passage to America."

Annie was very fortunate in that she "was in Portland only a week when she was employed by Mrs. Leighton at three dollars a week, a quite reasonable sum then. Annie remembers that Mrs. Leighton arrived at the Registry Office (employment office) in a trap drawn by a white pony. Every summer, she said, they went to the Cape "where we lived in a cottage in Lovett's Field."

The three years she worked for the Leightons were not without moments of excitement for Annie, who recalls it like this:

"The cook in Leighton's was an Annie Shorne from Clifton in County Galway. Mrs. Annie

Tadgh Concannon, son of Mrs. Annie Concannon, who provided the information about his mother's

Leathanach as an Portland Evening Express, Eanáir, 1956 ag taispeáint cuid den phíosca a rinneadh faoi Nan i dtús na 1900í