

**Thinking on Tuam:
Folklore Legends and Myths**

**Oein DeBharduin,
inaugural recipient of the Thinking on Tuam residency
in conversation with filmmaker and folklorist Michael Fortune.**

Culture Night Friday 18 September 2020 at 7pm



Carolann Courtney, Creative Places Tuam Coordinator:

Hello and Welcome to Creative Places Tuam's first ever Culture Night event. A huge thank you to writer and activist Oein DeBharduin and film maker and folklorist Mick Fortune for working with us on this event.

We are here to celebrate and enjoy two things tonight:

The first is to welcome Oein as the inaugural recipient of our Thinking on Tuam residency, and the second is to listen to these two wonderful artists speak on folklore and stories.

Place making and storytelling go hand in hand, they give us a deeper understanding of our past whilst informing our future. So it is especially pertinent to have Oein and Mick with us at Creative Places Tuam to talk about the influence that folklore and stories have on us personally in our family history, locally on our communities and homelands and nationally in terms of our Irish Identity.



Oein DeBhairduin is a writer and creative soul with a passion for poetry, folk herbalism and preserving the beauty of Traveller tales, sayings, retellings and historic exchanges. He is the manager of an education centre and a long-time board member of several Mincéirí community groups, including having had the honour of being vice-chair of the Irish Traveller Movement and a council member of Mincéir Whidden. He seeks to pair community activism with cultural celebration, recalling old tales with fresh modern connections and, most of all, he wishes to rekindle the hearth fires of a shared kinship.

Michael Fortune has been a pioneer in the area of socially engaged work within Ireland over the past twenty years and his practice has widened the conversation regarding the intersection of traditional and contemporary cultures. His life, interests and practice are an intertwined and inseparable mix of the ancient, the contemporary, the private, the public and the intangible.

Both have huge expertise in the area, and you're going to have a great evening of listening to their stories.

Thank you

Mick What are we going to talk about Oein?

Oein In pre-recording we were talking about magpies and the origins of magpies and the folklore around it. I know everybody else hasn't had the beauty of that kind of exchange. But I'm still curious about the origins, because especially within folklore, it's more recent, you know the records. You were saying that someone whose field they landed on?

Mick Yeah because I noticed on the front cover of your new book you had a magpie, it was the lone magpie. I suppose I've got a relationship with the magpie too. I like them but there's a little bit of superstition because if you see one, you're looking for a second one. You're always blessing yourself or crossing yourself or whatever you do. There was no magpies in Wexford, no magpies in Ireland common or written accounts until the year 1660s or 1680s and they came in and they said, under a dozen from Wales under a bad wind, they blew into southeast Wexford and landed in a place, there was one woman called Liz Jefferson. They landed in a field near Lady's Island, she pointed out the field, and the kind of folklore has it was that



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they were the kind of English baronies of Wexford kind of the Anglo-Norman Baron, and the people of the north of the county took a dislike to them. Straight of the way they associated them as an English board, a foreign board and there was a man up and made called Billy Walker and he said there will never be peace in Ireland until the magpie left the country. And I was reading an account of a fellow called Solomon Richards and he wrote an account from the period of the arrival of the magpies, but he wrote the account and he said the natural Irish much detests them and said Ireland will never be at peace as long as the magpie remains. And 300 years later, almost word for word his saying survives. In country people there's a love hate relationship you know?

Oein I know where I'm from in Galway, one of the local names is soldiers, moving along further they're called the wee soldiers so I wonder is it associated with the occupation and the oppression from the English. And it would make sense they were seen as being so foreign and the idea that there wouldn't be peace if they remained. Yeah, but that's interesting now. We thought of them as little soldiers. You know the way they go around like a cartoon?

Mick Did you ever see the people saluting them? Hello Mister Magpie.

Oein Oh yeah, It always brings back again that kind of formal greeting and but growing up obviously we had the one for sorrow, two for joy, and all that but we would mostly associate them with one of Saint Anthony's animals, that and the pig. Especially my mother now, who claims to be not at all superstitious, she'd use it as a blessing rather than anything else.

Mick They were seen as a bird belonging to Saint Anthony, is that right?

Oein Yeah it was that idea of losing things and finding things and they were clever. There were some stories of Saint Anthony, the story of Saint Anthony and, aw God, Saint Anthony went to hell during a really deep winter and stole some of the fires from hell to keep people warm. And how he got it out was under the wing of a magpie. It's kind of amber to keep people going, it's one of those kind of folk tales and it would be associated



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with Saint Anthony which has always been my association of preference rather than walking around kind of straining myself to take a look for another one.

Mick Actually you see people and the things that people would do, you've seen it yourself grown up, spitting in their hand, crossing themselves. You know what I couldn't believe, there was a crowd of, a huge movement of people from Wexford, Waterford, the southeast, they were from Galway as well, most of the southeast counties went out to Newfoundland, ah, late-1700s. But they brought with them, it really struck me, they didn't have magpies out there, so they brought with them all the traditions of Saint Anthony, folklore of Saint Anthony and all that stuff, they didn't have the black and white magpie but they had an old crow. They basically went over and they transferred it. They could have given themselves a fresh start but they didn't come out they almost needed it, they wanted it, they wanted to see one black crow, two black crows.

Oein Familiarity, I know people say breeds contempt but it also brings a lot of comfort. The way the world around you makes a lot more sense again, especially if you've left Ireland to go to Newfoundland and the wilderness. You probably want the comfort of your own traditions with you.

Mick Saint Anthony is big over there as well, praying for Saint Anthony.

Oein Saint Anthony's loved, especially for charity. Especially around some of our own people, around Tuam. Most households have adapted their own saint, a saint of the house. There is no competition between which is the best saint, it almost seems like each household has its own saint, that's your saint. Very rarely would two people of the same house have the same saint. So, it's unusual the way we make peace for ourselves in the world.

Mick My mother's was Saint Martin, she adored Saint Martin.

Oein Did you do Saint Martin's feast day?



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Mick Yeah, we did yeah, that Saint Martin. I'm trying to figure out. There were two Saint Martins – Saint Martin de porres. Saint Martin's Eve and Saint Martin's Day was 11 November Where you would kill a cockrell, kill a fowl.

Oein Yeah that's the one I know, the more contemporary Saint Martin. That tradition as far as I know went on into the 1990s around our area and then quickly died out I think.

Mick Listeners won't know that Saint Martin's Eve is 11 November. The Dutch celebrate Saint Martin's Eve, the Germans do it, they kill a fowl, sometimes a goose or a duck as well.

Oein Yes and thinking, like Saint John's Eve. When I first moved to Dublin in exile about eight years ago I was looking forward to bonfire night and people hadn't a clue at bonfire night was. Where we are now in South Dublin, bonfire night seems to be Halloween while even now, we had a Facebook page for the middle of June and the bonfires alone there still kept, some people for different reasons I've progressed, it's just a way to clear out stuff, other people burn, is good for the land, good for people, good for look. Growing up sure we used always have tea and dodgy looking sandwiches and red lemonade. It was the time of the year when everybody got together. I'm glad that the tradition survives in some places but I always kind of wonder what happens when they die out so quickly because in around where we are, obviously growing up in Tuam, we did have Saint John's Eve or bonfire night and it's still huge now.

Mick I think, going back to Saint Martin's Eve again, there's pockets in the country where these things survive. We get general narratives coming out through our main media sources telling us where these things survive. But you have to go looking and digging and find that sometimes in general art it can be turned on its head very easily. Saint John's Eve, it got, it was staying here in Wexford and it was staying to the 1798 rising. Not to the rising but what happened afterwards. Again Saint John's Eve is the 23rd of June, it's not just an Irish thing, it's done in eastern bloc countries, it's done in northern Spain and the Basque country and they do it down in Astoria, Galicia. What happened here in Wexford was, the Battle of Vinegar Hill was June 21st, and for about 40 years afterwards, maybe 50 years



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afterwards, local loyalists and the local orange lodges would parade and they would burn the Tree of Liberty on that day. And they would put up triumphant arches and they would get Catholics to run through it and it was always a show of strength and all a show of who won. It always caused more trouble than it did good and it eventually faded away. That was one thing I could never understand because here we have the same thing on Saint Martin's Eve, we would have certain days that we wouldn't have in other parts of the country. But I couldn't understand how that was such a big principal date and how it faded from memory. Now you will find behind the hills here, you will find pockets of families who did Saint John's Eve bonfires. By and large I think the whole thing was, the after-effects of '98 had a huge impact here.

Oein In Tuam we were quite lucky because you know the way bonfire night doesn't always have to happen on the exact night? Sometimes you can go a couple of nights either side of it. The Sacking of Tuam in the early 1920s and the Black and Tans, the first place they sacked was Tuam Hall, most people in the outside of the town looked in before word got out to the men they thought it was just a bonfire, you know? In the years following this the people always had a little bit of hesitation burning on that night or the nights near it because of the memory of it.

Mick When was the sacking? Was it around the same time of the year again?

Oein Yeah the sacking was on the 20th of June 1922, if I'm not mistaken now, I can always check that. It was associated, and there are still stories told of how some people thought it was just a bonfire. Now they probably just heard about it, you know the way Tuam is very well spread. The years around us people were very hesitant around burning on those nights because it was associated, but eventually that just dropped off the radar and people just keep it as the night that it is.

Mick More families are doing this, there's loads of lovely, lovely things around us, even taking the cinders out of the fire to bring home to throw into the drills of spuds. The different things you would have done.



Oein Did the youngest person gather the person's and light it, which was a lovely tradition. And many years ago there one in Gilmartin, there was fierce competition, every year there'd be people out and they'd be burning them early, like near murders and you'd have them out stalking the grounds, like snipers on the trees keeping an eye on them. One of the largest bonfires we ever had was when Gilmartin came together with Tirboy and decided we were going to be the big one and a very large toy was tied to the top of the pole which ended up in the local newspaper because it looked an effigy of something we were burning live but in fact it was just a toy, you know? It wasn't associated with any family or movement, why did we ever tie that doll to the top? No one knows but at the time it was hilarious.

Mick There's still people in Brittany, up near Roscoff they have the bonfires as well and it's interesting to see the spread of that. Come here to me, do you remember back to 11 November, do you remember seeing a hen or a cock or anything being killed?

Oein No I remember goose and that might have been down to the taste of the family. Two houses up from us was a guy called Michael Loughlaun, we know him as Michael 'cut the lawn' because he was a gardener and he made sure to keep that tradition and he would go around and he would touch the gable of his house with it, you know? Back then we never really knew what it was about. You know the way nobody sits down and goes this is the exact reason. But it died out, it died out, I can't remember but it was around 1995. The same man would have had chickens about the place. They would be working chickens and we got eggs from them. I know the dominant tradition is chickens because even when it comes to Christmas he used to have geese for Christmas dinner, you know, so I always thought it might be just down to the taste, then the idea of something sacrificed.

Mick The same idea here was that the four corners of the house would be touched with the blood of the goose or the chicken.

Oein Often times that seems like so, people see it as so grotesque and are horrified by it. We've kind of lost the distance between where your food comes from, how you get it on the plate. The idea like people were well used to the culling of animals and the sight of blood would have been a



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regular thing in those generations.

Mick It would have been a cock most years here. I've got cocks and hens out in the back yard here and what happens is come the spring you have too many cocks and you want to get rid of them so one of them would have ended up in the pot. I remember a woman, God I remember a woman in Mayo and she shivered when she told me, she hadn't remembered it for maybe 50 or 60 years. She started talking to the woman beside her and said do you remember the killing of the cock years or the killing of the fowl? And then there was this spark in her head and she remembers her father getting the warm blood and rubbing it on her forehead and she said she'd feel the blood, you know the way your body would feel it? And it brought back memories. I recorded that, I knew it was done here. Once you start sniffing around you find things. You'll find that in life Oein as well.

Oein I think especially with older practices like even in our own community and stuff, the stuff that wouldn't be directly in line with just say Roman practices or sensitivities. What my grandmother would say just stick a Holy Mary on it and it wasn't even really just, just stick a Holy Mary on it. So long as you're doing a good thing, just stick a Holy Mary on it. One of the things I often see, I love wells. I love holy wells, I love the water and the people keep them in the well keepers and the whole history and story behind them. But I'll always find that when there's wells the Travellers have been to, I go, Travellers have been here, I don't know why, I don't know how I can tell. There are certain areas that people keep little subtle traditions. Sitting where I am now there's a well down the road and it's really well kept and there was a story it was half across there and the whole story is there were Travellers involved in it. There was a woman who was losing her sight at a very young age. They went in and they wanted to bless her in the water. She couldn't make it so they took the cross and blessed her with it and wasn't she cured and didn't want to give the cross back. So the local priest had to come down and ask for the cross and they were like, we don't really want to leave because it's working. So they agreed they took half the cross back behind her statue and when she passed, she's a mighty age now, at the other half the cross would come up and would be reunited. I just thought how people negotiated their way around things, such an open natural way. Years ago, they may not all be now, people had such a more openness to the idea of their own spirit and their own connection to it and their own where they worked with it. Yeah,



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I think there's loads of traditions now that are not so lost, they're just not spoken about.

Mick No matter where you go anywhere in the country the well tradition is big. Funny, granny was dying here in 2015 and she asked me to get her water from the well that she drank as a child. It was the one thing she wanted in the last week before she died. She was 103 and she was on the way out. She was strong, she was fighting, she kind of decided...but it was funny because she asked about the water in the wells, she wanted a drop with that and that's all she asked for you know? I know you hear loads of stories about people getting bottles of water and people asking for well water and then people filling it up from the tap and the sink and giving it to them and they won't know the difference and it's all about the belief, you know that's the kind of common thing you'll hear.

Oein I wouldn't do that now, believe it or not it is best to honour what someone wants, you know? If someone really wants it and even if you didn't believe in it, if that's what someone's heart calling for them, what harm are you going to do to give it?

Mick Do you know, come here to me, I've seen it here a lot, I've seen our travelling community here in Wexford doing it and loads of people, there's one really popular well called St Davids Well and I pulled into, was there about two weeks ago and I couldn't believe there was a constant, constant amount of people coming into it. Some of the traveling community here use the water, get the holy water, you've probably seen it yourself and put it anywhere in the car or the van where you draw drop of water.

Oein If you don't look like you've raised yourself out of the River Jordan drenched, you haven't got enough water on you! I know a few people from home and they put a drop of all the water in the mop bucket because if you're going to clean it you might clean up well, it's on the front door, at the back door the lock in the car, it might as well be a submarine by the time you're finished with it. Water is blessed, it washes away stuff, I know St Davids Well, one of the things is associated with washing away bad eye, its a fortified and protected one, different areas such as eyesight or burns our skin or certain ones we associated now with the idea have



a good spiritual clean. And that water now would go well, I almost feel, the hardest it is to get to the more people will appreciate it. It's like all the Irish people going to Medjugorje but not going to Knock. I need a real pilgrimage, I need to put an effort behind us, if you hear about a well in the middle of nowhere that takes about seven hours to walk to then that's a good well. It would be a blessing because it's hard to get to and also a sense of people haven't taken from it, it hasn't run dry, there's loads of it there. Not many people know about it so it hasn't been two tapped, you know?

Mick Come here, our wells are funny. The classic one, the 1st of May, you talk about taking, we have a thing, I have come across it in Tipperary and I'm sure you've come across that in Galway as well, I'm sure it is. Skimming the well, where you take a look and you get up on the 1st of May and you go down, I get pockets of or little snatches of this story around the country and you put them together. It was always like this, this woman would be at the well in the morning with a saucer in her hands and should be saying half for you and half for me and half for you and should be skimming the profits and be taking the good out of the well and taking your profit for the year.

Oein I know where we are there's loads of traditions around the country, especially the 1st of February and the 2nd of February, some of them also survived to the 1st of May, you know with the May dew, you wash yourself and you're gorgeous you know? Throw ourselves down the side mountains, you know, do as much as we can. There's a way to take the money and the grade out of someone's pockets. Get a bit of string and cross it through their grass in the morning and roll it up into your pocket, you take the money from the house. Leaving broken eggs by the back door and all this carry on that people used to torment each other with. I really find it fascinating how traditions seemed to survive different areas but they're not always based on the same date. The practice seemed to go on but it didn't actually have to actually happen in February and that might have been local areas where customs were different and micro pockets around the environment and you know there's always little differences.

Mick There's a lot of similarities in East Galway I also found as well. I'd still go out in the May morning and wash my face in the May dew and people



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would collect the May dew in a cloth and they'd keep it up for the first drop of rain that fell but it was usually the May dew. One thing I noticed is over in East Galway is even the May bush tradition which was predominantly a Leinster tradition stretched it didn't go West Galway, it was East Galway.

Oein My grandmother, one of my strong memories of my grandmother would be and she had a visiting garden, when people visited her they'd bring her something so all the plants in her garden came from someone. And she had this big red berry bush and she had loads of like little ribbons on it and there was egg-shells and the whole thing with egg shells was it wouldn't be your own egg shells, somebody would give you their egg shells. It would be a whole exchange you know. Blue and yellow is the main colour. I always kind of be able to seem to remember back then yellow ribbons but never remember blue ribbons but I know there was always blue fabric. God bless her she's a couple of years dead now, but our grand-aunt Bidy kept a tree, I keep it, mom does it...

Mick What was your May bush like Oein? Did you put down a May bush or did you decorate an ordinary bush in the yard?

Oein No, no, no. You wouldn't kill anything to bring life in? You have to find one. And either you have one in your garden or you go and find one somewhere else. Most people have something near them, maybe a favorite tree. And I know when I moved to Clondalkin originally I found one in the local park. They only last a couple of hours and I come back the next day I was nearly in tears because somebody thought I had vandalized this tree. It took a while to tidy it up. It was not a bad year because I went back and I minded it and I was thinking to myself going, is this a sight now of a bad year ahead of me?

Mick Well 95% of the people I'd say around the country would have May bushes traditionally you'd break a little bough off a tree to make a new one.

Oein There's a brough as well, the bundle of the plant and usually it might be furze, they have a lovely scent of coconut but you leave that by the front



door.

Mick I'm interested in the difference here because we put up the May bush in Wexford. People would traditionally put down a bit of whitethorn or maybe a bit of the gorse. Sometimes they were decorate one that was there, sometimes they would burn the tree, gorgeous tree. What did you decorate it with was it a little shrub or something was it?

Oein Usually you had a tree, around us, that's the one you decorate. Even now we wouldn't cut down white thorn or black thorn. You wouldn't cut one down at all, you know? You wouldn't kill something to mark it. But I do know people like when you make the furze, like the brough for the front door, what's the song? Oh, Flowers of the Fairest, which is more contemporary. As a young child I didn't remember it but it made its way in.

Mick Would the Traveller community in Wexford cut down May bushes because I don't know a lot of people here and this depends on where you were but there would be May bush processions...

Oein Daffodils are a big thing, even now people either pick them or plant new bulbs which is ridiculous because it's not the time of year for them. Most of them survive. You often see the older generation, I think especially when people, you know if someone is sick or in hospital, you bring them in daffodils?

Mick Bring in daffodils?

Oein Yeah, daffodils.

Mick For?

Oein No because if they couldn't go out and do the tree themselves, I think that happened to our Bidy. I have a lovely picture of her by the side of the



trailer very proud of herself, her little bush and all daffodils around it.

Mick We'd never bring the whitethorn into the house. You put the white thorn up in a place to keep the fairies away, sometimes the dung heap, sometimes propped over a gable of a house. Sometimes people would do a little procession with them a bush and ask people for a penny for the May bush, with ribbons and egg-shells hanging out of it. Part of here no, I know it's done a lot in Galway and Mayo, did you sprinkle the flowers on the thresholds to keep the fairies away?

Oein Yeah, by the front door yeah. I can't remember us doing the windows or anything but even my own mother and I'm saying this now in hesitation because I'm worried someone would take them. You know the large seashells would be kept near the front gardens? Her whole rationale if you asked her, it's like the ocean going up and down and it always balances itself out. I have my name on it, and in case any family members are watching this, they're mine. In many years to come when she has moved on - by the windows and by the front door. It's all about luck, and mind them and don't let anybody touch or break them and they must be about 30 years old now. But I think people have different ways in different areas to mark the places as being holy. Like even holy statues. Inside your house, all holy statues need to look in. Otherwise it's all about the idea of being kind of vain, not looking out. So there's virtue statues and there's protective statues. So Saint Michael, the Archangel has to look out because he is protective and all the other statues have to look in. And you can tell, I can usually tell very quickly passing homes because there are markers. Oh it's definitely Travellers because all the statues are looking inside. In other places, you often see them where people have statues on display looking out. So I always thought those kind of little differences, for myself anyway.

Mick Would you ever buy yourself a statue?

Oein No no, no, you would drop a hint which one you wanted. You dropped the hint really, really well. I'm sure you've been in people's homes, most Travellers have little altars, they wouldn't really know as altars, little areas. Especially if some people were living in very small kind of trailers and things like that. It's a real sacrifice of space, you'd never buy, you could buy



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someone a statue. Same thing with like pearls, you'd never buy pearls for yourself.

Mick A lot of that stuff like, just my grandmother's house at home, two up two down, farm laborers cottage as well. The bedroom was wall to wall and there was nothing just religious stuff in it. Downstairs was the

Oein Would you burn the Saint Bridget's crosses? Because we wouldn't, we'd keep them all forever.

Mick We would keep them all, I'd keep them up.

Oein I was really surprised people would burn them. I was always kind of going, you have them because your house didn't burn down. I was kind of like, year 10 of a safe home. But up here people burned them and I was kind of going I wouldn't burn them.

Mick Did you ever hear the old lads talking about when the statue's head would break...

Oein May the bad luck of the year go with it. The statue took the damage for you. You don't throw them out. You bring them into the church in the middle of the night and leave them in a corner. Or bring them to the well for somebody else to deal with them. And there's one well, I think there's a well in Kinvara. There must be like a hundred wells, a hundred statues. Looks like an army of zombies, they're all in bits. And I don't think anyone is ever going to get rid of them. Because it looks really nice....collection over the years. When a statue breaks now like, either, you know if the statue of an angel breaks? People say like it was being touched by that angel because it was really good luck so you would fix it up and keep it. The idea of an angel, if an angel recognises itself it will try to touch it. There's a whole kind of thing, people have like, angel statues all over the place with bits chipping out of them. And rather than being stuff that people throw out because of the idea of them looking not well, people will deliberately keep them.



Mick Burying things was the big thing with us. Ask some of the older Travellers, Well the burying thing was a big thing as well. Do you have to bury the statue, do you have to give it a proper burial?

Oein I haven't heard that now but we had to bring it to the church. Maybe it was easier I wouldn't know but you bring it to the church and God knows what happened to them. It wasn't in your hands, you bring it somewhere holy and whoever else had to deal with it, that's up to them to deal with whatever consequences. I'm surprised by the burying of the statues but it makes sense to me now, it makes sense.

Mick It's funny you were talking about the idea of dropping the hints for the statue that you want because that was the same, it was the same in a lot of settled communities as well. You know the classic Sacred Heart picture? They were always given as a wedding present, they were given us a wedding present. You'd never buy one.

Oein Although in saying now, I know a few houses, especially around Roscommon where the house caught fire and burned down and the statue was left or the image was left.

There's a series of houses burned down, and this statue, sorry this picture, is the only one that's alive and how like, it's a bit worrisome, a bit worrisome. But we had one ourselves growing up. We were extra fancy. We had a blue one, not a red one.

Mick Isn't it funny? I've heard that exact same story. That's the great thing about the traveling of stories and the movement of stories. That same story is here, I only recorded a neighbour telling me about the whole house burnt down and the only thing that was left was the Sacred Heart lamp, didn't burn, didn't burn she said. Isn't it funny the way stories like them are passed on, traditionally you know, I was talking to you. The only place I ever heard, we called the banshee 'the bough' here in Wexford. It's a gaelic name, right? But I only memory I heard it called a bough was a woman up in Mayo, a Traveller woman in Mayo and she obviously heard it from somewhere, another Traveller, and it travels like a spider's web. And the



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story traveled from Mayo and nowhere else, none of the settled people had ever heard her called the bow up there.

Oein Belief and customs around the banshee would be very strong, the history. It wasn't just one for us, there was loads of them. If you are ever in Tuam, the outside of Tuam, there's Knockma Hill, that's the fairy Fort of King Finvarra and his wife Una. He was the King of the fairies. Back in the day, she was one of nine sisters and there was a great battle and her eight sisters were slain. So she took to walking the roads of Tuam, crying for them. And many years ago we used to say, my grandmother would say they used to go ahead of the people that would move the camp to get the best spots. The whole tradition, like three families would be moving and you want to get the best place first, might be the best cover, the best trees. And Biddie used to bring an old comb and put it on the grass so that other families wouldn't take it. This went on for a while until eventually they got to a place now, oh I won't say because it would be controversial, within the family, they got there and it was someone else's comb! And they did not stay. There was no hope in hell that they were staying. And over the years this comb became a Golden comb. They took it very seriously, there she was thinking we got the best spot and it turned out she was going "that's not mine!".

Mick I was digging spuds or digging the garden here last week and there was a comb with broken teeth in it and I was saying how the fact did that get there. You don't want to believe it but still in the back of your mind the story is there.

Oein Even kind of growing up and there's people I was the same age but finding a comb on your path, you would go home. It's not even a debate. It's like "I'm going home". I'm not even going to discuss it. It's fine. It's not worth it for me to stay. And there's different combs obviously, you know the plastic that comb is the most notorious. That pops up everywhere. I know a man, he probably will be watching this, he's from Tuam. There was a morning when he was going off to ask, for this woman's, he's now married to her, hand in marriage. He saw the comb and decided not to. That night didn't a family member of hers did so it was the worst time to ask for someone. Eventually they did get married and he asked her. That was the story that was in all of us growing up. That was good timin,g because suddenly that



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day she agrees to marry him and later that evening there's a tragedy, you know because it was an accidental death. It wouldn't have gone down well. So the fact that he came across the comb, went home, it was a more protective thing, the comb rather than a horrible thing.

Mick I even found as welcome at the young ones here, I'd say a mixture of young Traveller girls and young lads that are going to school that are not from Traveller backgrounds. Even the modern version is the go-go? Did you ever pick the go-go? It's the same jazz, the next step up from the banshees home.

Oein You mean people cut the hair, the first here of a child, usually to burn it. The idea is the crows get it and they have migraine and they're building the nests and the worst thing is if robins got it. It was a sign that people would go mad and even back years ago they'd say if you've got pieces of hair you'd put it in a robin's nest, they'd say that clattering would drive someone mad. But yeah, even now I'd say most people would keep one or two curls in the general population, or their hair would be burned.

Mick And that would be common enough, even settled people still do it as well. You take the hair, like I'd be putting up stuff on folklore.ie on the page, the Facebook page and you get a really quick spread around the country of who did things. But yeah, taking the comb out of....and you'd always burn it. Always, always burn it.

Oein It usually affects boys and the stuff that goes on now we kind of forget why it happens. Things like, you never let a baby look into a mirror until it knows its name because it knows its name it wouldn't get lost and people are very stressful about that. Some people won't even have a mirror up, especially if it was a difficult pregnancy or something like that but the child isn't allowed to touch the ground physically, which means it's not really in the world touching the bare ground, until after the baptism. That's why you see all these photographs of them on the ground at the altar and the big lovely kind of wraparound blankets. But that's usually the first time that the child has ever touched the ground. And that is still maintained, nobody ever says to you don't put the child on the ground and people don't put the child on the ground.



Mick Even things like stepping over a child, if you step over a child the child wouldn't grow.

Oein It's also a sign of death, you step over it and there dead.

Mick The overlooking, that's still big within the traveling community?

Oein Or huge. I have been in the middle of near murders Mick, near murders when someone didn't say God bless them. God bless them now that has been short-handed. But you have to. Oh my God, you have to bless one, especially a child or baby are somebody who is sick or elderly. You kind of more or less are blessing everybody, you know? Overlooking now, people keep the chords and different familys do. My family does and even my father now who would be a staunch kind of logical man, he still wears it just in case, just in case, you know?

Mick Even though it's really strong in the traveling community, Travellers nearly seemed to take these things and retain them and bring them on to new levels. But in our own community, we are farm laboring background first up say a neighbor called to the house, God bless all here, all those things we're here but they kind of disappeared with us. Some people still do them.

Oein Going into a house, you go God bless the entire house, but you have to say God bless all who come and if you didn't finish it the blessing doesn't sit, because there has to be an exchange of blessing. Because otherwise it's just someone coming in saying something to you and there's a recognition of you have to say something back.

Mick One thing I notice with the old Facebook and you see it as well, you mentioned it there as well is the old GBH...

Oein At the end of everything it's honest, you know? People genuinely take a real offense and it's a real sincere offense, it's not something dramatic



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first up you're kind of like going life is hard, things are rough, let's chat. For the love of God, let's chat. And if anything happens, it's your fault. It's genuinely your fault. Any theory anyone has about you, it's your fault it's just better to say bless you and move on.

Mick I think we're getting a bit of a prompt to finish up here.

Oein We are being timed and it feels like seconds.

Mick I think we only started talking a few minutes ago. It was lovely talking to you I could talk to you for hours and listen to you for hours.

Oein It was a bit of craic.

Mick Sure c'mere, will we end this chat and sure listen thanks to Create and thanks to Carolann for having us.

Oein and if anything I hope our discussion revives other people's sense of their tradition as they go and see sometimes what's not lost but sometimes what's hidden.

Mick One of the things I keep saying, if we don't ask we won't find. That goes for everything. It Goes for Tuam, it could be from Longford, it could be anywhere in the country. We assume that things aren't there, we assume the whole time and until we start asking those questions ...

Oein And one of my favorite things is that when they come in conflict, if I leave my own household and my mother says subla and my father says sublic. There's no peace in, this is the hill they will die on. And rather than having to choose, kind of going, I say both are valid And I even think little areas , there's always going to be diversity in it, you're kind of going, both of them are interesting.



Mick There's no right or wrong in folklore, lads, that's the great thing about it.

Carolann That's a lovely phrase to end this fantastic conversation on. Listen, this has been fantastic. What a way to kind of introduce Oein on this thinking residency just about kind of all of the histories and the superstitions and the traditions that we have. I really enjoyed listening, I feel very privileged to have been the fly on the wall and hearing it in real time. I'd really like to thank Oein and Mick for their time today. And just a flag that Mick has a really fantastic website www.folklore.ie where you can hear many of these fantastic stories and his years of gathering them, together in one beautiful place. And Oein has a beautiful book that's available out now, Why the Moon Travels, And again it's another gathering of all these beautiful stories as well. So thank you so much for your time, it was wonderful to hear from you. Happy Culture Night to everybody.



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