

Buy The Horse A Guinness (& Other Wee Tales of Ireland)

The Introduction

I am an Irish storyteller – a seanchaí in the words of the Irish. I’ve told tales at Irish and Celtic festivals, Irish pubs, bookstores, libraries, and any other forum which would have me. I’ve performed throughout the United States and in Ireland. Perhaps I’ll expand into more countries soon.

The larger Irish clans had their own seanchaí who were called out for feasts and festivals. Often times, a seanchaí was a vagabond, traveling storyteller. He trekked from village to village telling stories – often for no more than food and shelter. I’ve been paid a few bucks for my storytelling -- barely enough to cover the costs of travel -- and provided a hotel room and some food. I am, indeed, a throw-back to the seanchaí of ancient Ireland.

Many folk have asked if I had a written collection of stories. Until now, I had to answer “No”. My stories were in my head, and I’ve lost track of how many are buried in there. I kept some notes to refresh my recollection and to avoid missing entire sections of a story. But I hadn’t previously written any of them down.

Writing these stories turned into a major challenge. I never told any of these the same way twice. I enjoy reacting to a vocal audience and taking the stories in different directions, depending upon the reaction and input of the crowd. For this book, I had to decide which version might read better on a written page, and made some significant changes to make each story an entertaining read. And I picked out eight of my favorites.

These are all originally oral stories – created to be told, not read. There is something about live storytelling which is inherently different from writing. A different energy is involved. Hand gestures, eye contact, tone of voice, dialect, pacing and pausing, all influence audience reaction to and understanding of an oral story. The audience cannot go back to re-read a prior page or paragraph, and the storyteller and the listener are constantly propelled forward. There is no rewind button. Perhaps this is why I have fallen in love with oral storytelling.

I added a postscript to each story, in case you’re interested in the source of the story and how it evolved.

I also added a pronunciation guide within each story to assist readers. Irish words can be baffling to English speakers (and Scottish Gaelic even more baffling). Don’t feel bad if you mispronounce any words. There are dozens of dialects within the small island of Ireland and many, many Irish words are pronounced multiple ways. My favorite example is the pronunciation of Ireland’s largest city – it’s often DUB-lin, almost as often DOO-blin, and sometimes with three syllables as DUB-ba-lin. Seanchaí, by the way, is pronounced SHAN-ah-key.

As the Irish might say, bain sult as (usually pronounced BAHN-suhl-tahs). The literal translation is “take pleasure in”, but the Irish use the phrase as the English would use the word “enjoy”.

I indeed hope you enjoy these stories and the wonderful world of Irish storytelling from an American seanchaí.

