



A Carrier of Sounds – Róisín de Buitléar.

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The belly stove is throwing out a great heat in Donie's newly built kitchen. An upright couch sits alongside, balanced on spindly legs with three box accordions visible beneath. Sitting in a low armchair, he isn't showing his 82 years. Farming full-time alongside his nephew Dennis, running 300 sheep over 600 acres of this wild and isolated valley has kept him sharp and fit.

Donie hated learning Irish in school. He was beaten for not getting it right, felt a failure for it and says he doesn't speak Irish. Yet in his every day, Irish words tumble from his mouth as he sounds out the names of the valley: geological markers, farming practices, soil types, plants and trees, wind shelters, feeding places and water sources. He lists places for games and social activities: hedge schools, masses, places to gather fuel or thatching or where turf was stacked. All spoken in Irish with familiarity of the place and a fluency of sound. For each description there is a noun in Irish that describes the land or activity. In Donie's world these are signs, markers in the visual cartography that have mapped and guided him across his extensive lands in search of sheep, materials or solace. He speaks of nowhere else he would rather be than out on his hills.

He spoke of how, on Saint Bridget's Eve, his grandmother washed and dried a wheat sack and used the healing power of the fabric as bandages throughout the year. He spoke of animals they kept to eat; how they retained the fat from the pig for light, medicine and tallo; how they killed one in the spring and one in the winter. It was salted and hung in the shed along with Ling and Herring, bought from the fishmonger at the market on Friday's. They picked juicy *Frochan's – Bilberries* in summer, which his mother smashed in a bowl to spread on bread slathered with homemade butter. He loved collecting them, stuffing as many into his mouth as into the bowl.

We walked the hill with Donie and Denis to see some of the places he had named and to see the *Beitan* Moor grass which was used for thatching. He explained how he had reclaimed and reworked the land, walls he constructed, where everything fulfilled a purpose. As he pronounced the words in his rich munster accent I repeated them in my head, changing the pronunciation to my own Galway dialect. I'm not from a farming background and so this was also a language class for me. I was referencing a dictionary written in old Irish typography and spelling, a beautiful heirloom passed down from Douglas Hyde, the first President of Ireland, to my grandfather, a polyglot himself, and inherited by my father. Thanks to these word collectors, I hear and find many of Donie's place names. In explaining the meaning of the words, the colour and texture of place was reaffirmed: vocabulary to Donie, and vibrant cartography to me. I felt I was unlocking the landscape, giving meaning

to the words carried from ear to mouth through generations, as sounds that link to pinpoints on a map, and reaffirming for me a direct and deep connection to the past.