The Blessing of Ancestor
'falling in love with Taylor'

Tony Cuckson

ANN FEENY has the blessing to live in a beautiful cottage.

It nestles high on the mountain road between Newbridge and Drumkeeran. On a clear day or night you can see the wind farms on the hills as they throw their sails wide in celebration to the fragrant air. This cottage is surrounded in part by the scarlet of Fuchsia bushes and sweet smell of honeysuckle. It is a place of stillness and tranquillity. This is unless there is a party.

The last party held in Ann's cottage was on the 12th July (2003). There were no lambeg drums banging out the sound of war. There was no remembrance of three hundred or more years of separation based on religion. There was only connectivity down the years to be remembered and celebrated. And what a great celebration. It was probably only one of a few parties ever to enter the annals of the Irish Times Newspaper.

Ancestry is important in this place where I live. People talk warmly and sometimes sadly about 'the homeplace.' This is a place of homecoming. For too many and for too long it was a place 'of the leaving'. This was a place of leaving never to return.

We are being blessed now that there is less need for this leave taking. There is no longer the likelihood that people will never return.

Ann's party was given to celebrate the return to Ireland of some distant cousins. These distant cousins are scattered throughout the world. They were returning to 'the homeplace' after twenty-five years. They were returning to remember the first time they had been to this Isle. They were returning to remember a time when it was easier 'to be'. They were returning to remember a time when it was easier to enter the world beyond time. They were returning to the threshold of Tír Na nÓg.

For all our ever more sophisticated communication we have lost the ability to commune. We communicate via technology leaving out our heart's connection to the simplicity of being. Our community sense is more fractured as is our connection to the extended family. Our sense of belonging to a home place is only a very distant memory. We are forever on the move to a new house and we lose our sense of ever coming home

Our 'home place' has become our house place. It is measured by the size and value it holds in the marketplace. The main connection we now have to our house place are the statistics that measure the increased paper value. Our young people find it harder and harder to begin setting up home for themselves. Our homes are increasingly bare of past connection. There is less and less connection to our ancestry.

All over my home is the connection to my family. This is sometimes in photographs. Mostly the deeper connection is via paintings. My father created these. They are the closest I ever got to knowing who he was. When I gaze deeply into these painting I see beyond the mask he wore to hide his innermost l ongings.

Life lives on in memory but not much. The past is brought alive by the thoughts and feelings of another time. Only these memories are now. When we experienced the event it was in the moment. When we remember the event it is in the moment. This is what it means to live an enlightened life. You live for the present. You live in the now. You are forever present to your life force.

I love to honour my ancestry. I do this via thankfulness for the part it played in giving me this life. This is the most extraordinary gift. To be able to feel connected to the one and all is delightful. To be able to look out on this morning and see the light of a new day is still a wonder.

Ann Feeny's party was a delight. There was music, storytelling and dance. It ended all too soon. I had fallen in love. I had held her close and we had made such sweet music together. I knew she was for me. She was from the USA and her name was Taylor. When she was leaving I kissed her long slender neck and she went back to the one who loved her more.

As we wound our way back over the mountain in the very early hours of another summer morning I was filled with a little sadness. I knew I would probably never play that Taylor guitar again.

HOMEPLACE
Bee Smith

I love the way Eugene Clancy says the words homeplace
This battle-scarred boxer lets the syllables roll
They reverberate in his throat – homeplace-
I envy the way he can say it so tenderly.
Just like John Joe up the mountain at Moneen, where all that is left
Of his family homeplace is a stone floor;
his father's name carved on the hearth,
A chimney and what was once his parent's bedroom.
He carved his name too when he left for forty years
Working away but always feeling the tug and dream like draw.
These words are an embrace, a welcome and a safety.
I know that there is no place that I can call home place
In the same way as Eugene or John Joe
With that sound so grounded and assured,
rooted on a square space where blood and earth mingle
It is my earth, too, but not a homeplace.