

## Finding a bit of Ireland in Bangor, Maine

“I made it,” I thought to myself as I stepped off the plane in Dublin. I was tired — so very tired — but the day there had only just begun. I pushed away that feeling and reminded myself that I was finally in Ireland.

I can hazily recall making my way through the airport and hearing hearty Irish accents around



SHELBY HARTIN

me. I was greeted by a few people who ushered me into a cab. I sat silently as we rode down the left side of the narrow streets and the cabbie asked me and the others seated beside me where we were from and where we were going.

The hotel we stayed at was in Portmarnock, beside the Irish Sea. I walked along the rocky coast and picked a few wildflowers to press later on.

I dreamed of traveling to the country for years. There was something about it that drew me to it. I'm not sure if it was the history, the people or the landscape.

Whatever it was, I wasn't disappointed.

The seven-hour trip I took across the Atlantic in 2014 was my very first flight. At 21 years old, I found I was one of very few in the group of students studying abroad who had never been on a plane before.

I would study in Galway for two months for a summer semester. I elected to take a trip during the summer so I wouldn't be away from home for long — after all, it was my first time traveling such a great distance and staying in a foreign country for an extended period of time.

Little did I know I would leave wishing I had more time. Ireland taught me that home is a feeling, not a place.

I explored crumbling castles and ventured through a passage tomb older than the ancient pyramids. I learned about the country's history and current political climate. I stood on strikingly green cliffs overlooking the ocean and listened to people chatter away in Gaelic. The scent of smoky peat fires hung in the air as I entered buildings with thatched roofs and listened to music in tiny pubs and watched the locals dance. I went to horse races and drank a Guinness. I took a ferry to the Aran Islands and biked through Killarney National Park.

I was absolutely enchanted by the country — I felt like I had walked straight into a storybook.

When the time came to leave and I glided back into Logan Airport to be greeted by my mother and my boyfriend, Ryan, I was filled with a warring mixture of overwhelming happiness to see them and overwhelming sadness to have left Ireland behind.

Ryan took the brunt of my sadness during the rest of that summer and listened to my stories intently as I rambled on about places he had never seen and things he had never done. He recognized I was missing the feeling of the place, so he suggested we check out a some local spots that might remind me of the country I had come to love so much.

He brought me to Geaghan's Pub and Craft Brewery, where we sat down and had a meal. Though nothing could compare to Ireland itself, I found comfort in the place and its many signs in Gaelic that were hung throughout the space. Geaghan's Pub and Craft Brewery open in 1975, according to the restaurant and brewery's website. "Owners John and Arline Geaghan, opened the restaurant located near a local roundhouse (a place where trains were repaired and turned around on the tracks). See Hartin, Page C2



GABOR DEGRE | BDN

Robert Croul talks about antiques and writing the "What Is It?" column for the Bangor Daily News for more than 30 years on Tuesday at his home in Newburgh.

## The story behind 'What Is It?' Longtime BDN columnist talks as feature draws to an end

BY SHELBY HARTIN  
BDN STAFF

Tucked away in the woods of Newburgh there is a sturdy home that was built by hand. Years of toil went into constructing the residence and other buildings on the shady property. The inside is much like a time capsule — filled with antiques handed down through the generations. There's a 1910 Magic Chef stove and thick books carefully stored in bookcases. There are trinkets and furniture and artwork — all from years past.

The home was built by a back to the lander who moved to Maine from Detroit, Michigan, many years ago. He came to this state with little more than his own two hands, a van full of items he had started collecting when he was young and a desire to live off the land.

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His name is Robert Croul, and some may be surprised he lives his life this way. After all, the 67-year-old is an appraiser by trade and works for some of Maine's prominent summer residents — the ones on Mount Desert Island and Blue Hill Peninsula who require his services for their estates.

He also is the writer of a weekly column that has been in the Bangor Daily News since the early 1980s — 1983 is his best guess — called "What Is It?" It has been a popular piece that has drawn the eyes of Mainers since it began.

After over 30 years in the BDN weekend edition, "What Is It?" is coming to an end. The last installment of the feature will be published on July 30.

"It began as a weekly column on antiques," Croul said from the sun porch of

his Newburgh home. "It began in the early '80s, and Cheryl Olson was my editor at the time. We went along for a few years doing the column on antiques, and it seemed to be a little meaty for the readers, although it was very popular with a small group of people."

A new editor, Joan Smith, then came up with the idea to replace the column with a feature called "What Is It?"

"For years there was a magazine called Yankee Magazine, and they had a column called 'What's It?' It was very similar — people would send in photos of things they would want to have identified. And so we took the name and jiggered it around a little bit and came up with 'What Is It?' so as not to step on their toes," Croul said.

Croul, who has a master's degree in art See Croul, Page C2

## Retelling of 'Iliad' raises questions about war

BY JUDY HARRISON  
BDN STAFF

The best tales are the ones that can be retold across generations. Some ancient stories still resonate in the 21st century because they hold truths about humanity that transcend modern times and electronic devices.

Homer's epic poem, "The Iliad," is one such tale. The story of 55 days in the ninth year of the Trojan War has been retooled over the past decade as "An Iliad" by Lisa Peterson and Denis O'Hare, an actor best known for his role on the HBO television series "True Blood."

The one-act, one-person play being performed at the Stonington Opera House through Saturday is an homage to storytelling and an anti-war treatise. It succeeds much better at the former than the latter because of choices made by the playwrights. Despite being too preachy at times, "An Iliad" sends the audience home wondering if there ever can be an end to war but with a renewed appreciation for storytellers of all ilk.

Opera House Arts' production of "An Iliad" is a triumph for Boston-based actress Marianna Bassham and musician Anthony Colin Leva, whose use of the up-



MEG TAINTOR | OPERA HOUSE ARTS

Marianna Bassham retells an ancient tale of war in Opera House Arts' production of "An Iliad" at the Stonington Opera House recently.

right bass to score the play and create sound effects is amazing and effective. By reconfiguring the Opera House from a proscenium into a three-quarter round space, director Meg Taintor creates a town square atmosphere that works perfectly for this.

Bassham as the poet wanders

on stage carrying a suitcase and struggles to remember the tale. She almost reluctantly begins the story of the clash of mighty warriors Hector and Achilles calling on the muses to help her recall it all.

"An Iliad" is best when it uses the language of Robert Fagles' translation of "The Iliad," from which it was taken. Bassham's portrayal of how the gods toy with mortals on the earth, the making of Achilles' shield and the final battle are mesmerizing, in part because of the poetry of the language.

Leva not only makes joyful and mournful music on his instrument, he coaxes from the bass the sounds of war. Without the musician, the production's emotional impact would not have been as great. His contribution to "An Iliad" cannot be overstated.

For the most part, Taintor and Bassham are able to overcome the most didactic portions of the show, including a long list of American town names that replaces the ones in the ancient world from which soldiers came to fight beside Hector or Achilles and a seemingly endless naming of every conflict on the face of the earth that spilled a drop of blood.

Taintor's best decision was to gut the Opera House and make it a more intimate space so theater-

goers forget they're inside but feel as though it they're on the edge of the battlefield, observing it all firsthand as the storyteller did.

Most set designers who build a thrust into an audience paint it one color, usually black. Robin Vest's platform that uses more than two-thirds of the floor of the Opera House is unpainted. The different colored planks not only are beautiful, they help give texture to the tale. Depending on where Bassham is in her story, they could represent waves under the ships or rows of soldiers in different colored uniforms or the carnage left on the battlefield.

Natalie Robin's lighting design not only complements Vest's set but also seems somehow to be coordinated with Leva's score. The lighting plot is complementary but not invasive.

Taintor said in the director's notes in the program that she chose the play months ago to raise questions about rage and anger in theatergoers' personal lives.

"But as the summer has unfolded, the events in our world and our country have echoed through the play," she wrote. "How do we hold ourselves accountable and take the actions we need to take to move forward together, rather than locked in distrustful crouches?"

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