

Tim O'Brien, Talkin' Cavan

A while ago I chanced to roam to the place my great grandad called home
It wasn't that much I saw that day, but I learned I whole lot along the way
I was goin' to Ireland... retracing my family footsteps... diggin' up roots
You could call 'em tubers

The closer to the root of my family tree, the more people seemed to look like me
Saw a sign said Mollie O'Brien's bar, I knew right then I couldn't be that far
I went in there and asked for beer, he pours this black stuff, he says, 'cheers
'Guinness gives you strength, he said, I'll tell you friends it's like drinkin' bread
There's a loaf in every pint... I was feelin' strong... felt like I wanted to sing

My whistle was wet and my tongue was loose
When the barman asked how come I'd choose
To travel such a long, long way on such a cold and rainy day
I said, 'I'm goin' up to Kingscourt town. That's in County Cavan, to look around.
My great granddaddy came from there.
I want to see if the old home place is still there.
Well he shook his head up and down
And then side to side and then he turned around and said
'A Cavan man then... you know, a lot of people wouldn't admit to that

I figured I'd save a little hassle so I booked a room nearby in a fancy castle
Had a hard time gettin' my dinner there
It was full of these people with light blonde hair
Danish tourists...two big busloads of 'em
Now the owner of the place, his hair was black
When I talked to him, I didn't get much back
His people are what you call 'west Brits
They're the ones that treated my people like dirt
That's what lead to the Irish civil war, I didn't know I'd come back for a little bit more
His nose was way up in the air... but he took my money all the same

That night I dreamed I saw the ghost of the one I'd rather have as host
It was Tom O'Brien walkin' round the cabin, there in Kingscourt town in County Cavan
Then the very next day in the hardware store
I found a cousin ten times removed or more
But he was no apparition, he wasn't a haint - he was sellin' nuts and bolts and paint
I told him about our family connection, and he kinda stood there still, reflectin'
I could tell he wasn't that much impressed when he asked me with nary a trace of jest
He said, 'How exactly may I help you sir?
I just bought some nails and got the hell out of there

Then later that day after some detectin, I found the lane in the rural section
It matched the picture in my dad's scrap book
And my heart beat faster as I drove to look
The sun burst through the clouds just then as I gazed at the current residents
It was a little sheep dog and an old milk cow
Yeah the old home place is an old barn now
It's ashes to ashes... dust to dust... thatched roof to tin roof... and tin roof to rust