

EIBHLÍN BEAN UÍ CHUAIG (ELLY)

You are five minutes in the door and Elly is still holding your hand, smiling up at you, reminding you of your last visit. You stand there on the stone floor smiling back, annoyed at your own awkwardness with long handshakes, wanting to retrieve your hand. You watch her slow movements as she bends over the range to add a sod of turf or two for the guests. "Suí síos, suí síos," she demands in flowing Munster Irish.

Elly McCooke, or Eibhlín Bean Uí Chuaig, turned 81 in October. She is one of the last Irish speakers in Doorus, Kinvara, Co. Galway, an area that used to be regarded in the 1960s as something of a *breac Gaeltacht* (mixed Irish/English speaking district).

Though Irish was the language spoken at home, the songs Elly heard her mother singing about the house were all in English. Old love songs, such as *The Single Sailor*, rebel songs like *Slashing Jack Keogh*, songs about the Boer War, humorous songs, such as *Oh, My Wife She Died*. And the song her mother used to sing while making the beds, an older version of *Henry My Son - My True Love and Joy*, about a man who has been poisoned:

*And what will you leave your wife, my darling, son boy
What will you leave your wife, my true love and joy
I will leave her the gates of hell opened, mother make my bed soon
For I'm sick through the heart, I might faint, I'll lay down.*

*And what will you leave your mother, my darling, son boy
What will you leave your mother, my true love and joy
I will leave her my blessing for to make my bed soon
For I'm sick through the heart, I would faint, I'll lay down...*



Elly McCooke Photo: Veronica Nicholson



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