



A fun evening with Montreal Irish writers

Description

Federation of Irish Societies presents three Montreal-based Irish writers

By **Byron Toben**

Hurley's Irish Pub was the jolly scene of a presentation of three Montreal based Irish writers last Monday. The evening was arranged by the revived umbrella group, the Federation of Irish Societies (FIS). The three brought different genres to the fore. **Peter Kirby** specializes in crime thrillers. **Denis Sampson** churns out bios and poetry. **Alan Hustak** brings a journalistic background.

M.C. Paul Loftus welcomed the crowd and introduced the first two. Peter Kirby, an international law specialist, has written — shades of former CBC host Louise Penny — three gripping crime novels featuring Inspector Luc Vanier. (Ms. Penny's Chief Inspector Armand Gamache has been featured in 11 novels as both Quebec authors chase Kathy Reich's 18 books featuring forensic anthropologist Temperance Brennan). At this event, Mr. Kirby did not read passages from his books, announce works in progress or speculate on possible film adaptations. Rather, he delivered anecdotes on his odyssey from County Cork to Montreal.

First stop, at age 10, was to the tough Brixton district of London, UK. Hard to believe that even so recently, his parents encountered rental ads that read "No blacks, dogs or Irish need apply". Lots of fights for a basically shy youth with few admiring peers. He discovered that lingering long in the confession booth at church even without real sins, raised his popularity with his mates who were awed by the time so spent.

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A few years as a chef in New York led to a move to Montreal and a job slicing smoked meat at a popular deli. Acceptance as a mature student at Concordia was followed by admission to McGill law and a security to write novels late at night. His three entries, so far are *The Dead of Winter*, *Vigilante Season* and *Open Season*.

Denis Sampson, born in Limerick, graduated from University College Dublin, moved to Montreal and taught English for many years at Vanier. He has written for over 30 years, including a bio of Brian Moore. His first book



was a study of the works of John McGahern, followed by related articles and reviews culminating in the recent Young John McGahern: Becoming a Novelist. In addition to myriad personal essays, book reviews and broadcasts, he has just written A Migrant Heart, which is a memoir of his two worlds in Ireland and Montréal.

He read two selections from that book, involving his two best-loved women. The first was his mother, as described by infant Denis from his pram eye's view, the other was a tribute to his significant other. His next book will be The Found Voice: Writers' Beginnings which examines the start of such as Alive Munro and Mavis Gallant.

Alan Hustak, introduced by Lynn Doyle, was not born in Ireland nor of Irish ancestry. However, he is well liked in the Irish community and one might well consider him a de facto Irishman. Born in Saskatchewan and educated by the Jesuits, he moved to Montreal to work for both CTV and CBC and later, the Montreal Gazette.

Plunging himself into the French milieu, he amusingly related how he suggested to a Quebec colleague that they attend a mass together. This resulted in a puzzled silence "Mais vous êtes Anglais, voilà donc, un Protestant" followed later by "ou, vous êtes un Irlandais". Coupled with Mr. Hustak's commissioned History of St. Patrick's Basilica, that sealed his new image as an Irish writer.

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His best selling book was a history of the Titanic. He has penned many others, including a bio of Peter Lougheed. He presently is senior editor at The Metropolitan web site where, in addition to feature articles, he has emerged as a fine theatre critic.

The Federation of Irish Societies is presently guided by Paul Loftus (who founded the Canada Irish Chamber of Commerce), together with Victor Boyle (Ancient Order of Hibernians), Ronan Corbett (Gaelic Association) and Lynn Doyle (Cinegaele).

Seen in the crowd were Centaur board member Fergis Keyes, Pointe St-Charles community theatre promoter Peggie Hopkins and doyen of all events Irish, Margaret Healy, who was the first woman Grand Marshal of the St. Patrick's Parade in 2005.

Image: courtesy of Alan Hustak. From left to right: Peter Kirby, Margaret Healy, Alan Hustak and Denis Sampson.

Byron Toben is the immediate past-president of the Montreal Press Club.

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