

Because of the acclaim they have received throughout Ireland, Gay Byrne invites Katie and Shane to appear on his television show. The musical guests are U2, a Byrne favorite. Shane and Katie's appearance is brokered through the University Communications' Department and its director, Sean Burke.

The Stories Are Told

Gabriel Mary Byrne, commonly known simply as "Gay" and by his friends as "Gaybo," is the most dynamic force in the history of Irish television and the most famous Irish broadcaster in history. He is often credited with having changed Irish culture by introducing topics that were previously taboo. Some of his most critical topics included the Roman Catholic Church, contraception, AIDS, unemployment, homosexuality, abortion, and divorce, topics that were previously considered taboo. Among his interviewees was the mother of the child fathered the Bishop of Galway, Eamon Casey. Casey had been the hero of millions of progressive Irish Catholics in Ireland and among the diaspora, as well as a personal hero of Katie O'Bierne. Other interviewees included the Presidents and Taoiseach's of Ireland, lower ranked politicians, and the Cardinal Archbishops of Armagh.

Gay Byrne was once read out from the altar by the then Bishop of Galway for asking a woman he was interviewing on his call-in radio program about her bedtime attire or lack of it on her wedding night. The Bishop was particularly abusive and finally Byrne demanded an apology in lieu of a defamation suit. The conflict played out in the press for a couple of weeks with the Bishop becoming embarrassed and the laughing stock of Ireland because he seemed to be very far removed from reality. Byrne finally proposed that his people would meet with the Bishop's people and settle the matter at a dinner meeting. The matter was easily settled over a few pints since neither party was interested in pursuing the matter. In the lore and legend of broadcasting worldwide, the episode is known as "The Story of the Bishop's Nightie."

With a lineup history like that it was understandable that Katie and Shane would be anxious about being guests on the show. The lead up advertising was both bombastic and hyperbolic. The interview as presented as the television event of the decade. The band, U2, had been previous guests and was extremely popular throughout the world. The timing was good. Byrne was rumored to be retiring at the end of the year and wanted his last shows to be big hits. Ireland was in desperate need of heroes and Katie and Shane were the personification of the very best of young Ireland.

Sean Hurley had assured Katie that Byrne was the consummate gentleman and would never embarrass a guest. He was also a comedian and consummate showman who could turn around any bad situation to his advantage.

Katie and Shane were well prepared for the show. Sean and his staff at the University role-played the probable questions so they would answer them in a skilled, yet spontaneous manner. They learned the art of the pregnant pause, how to feign excitement, and turn questions around from direct to indirect to gain better control of the interview.

The taping took place on Saturday evening before a large audience. The studio was in a large warehouse type building. The set occupied only a small area with about 500 seats around it.

Byrne graciously welcomed Shane and Katie who arrived without “handlers,” something that most celebrities would never do. He showed them around the set. Shane was at his best asking a number of technical questions related to the broadcast and responding to the levity being generated by their host.

They were introduced to the makeup artists. They were dressed in their Sunday best and that was deemed appropriate. Shane wore a dark blue pinstripe suit with a tie with glaring red and yellow slanted stripes, perfect for color television. Katie was wearing a colorful- print dress with red, white, and blue floral patterns, suitable for a semi-formal party and also perfect for the color television cameras.

Shane was shunted off to the makeup artists and Katie was taken to the hairdressers. The staff joked that Shane needed major makeup work while Katie was truly beautiful and didn't require nearly as much treatment.

Responding to their questions, Katie told them that she did not have much opportunity to fuss with her hair. While she did have to attend formal dinners as part of her responsibilities at the University, she was also with other women academics that did not have much opportunity fuss about their hair either. They gave her several photos of hair styles and asked her to pick out her favorite. She picked out three that she liked and the hairdressers conferred with her about which style would go well with the cut of her face.

A half hour later, she was presented to Shane, who wisely and simply said, “Wow.” Later when Katie remarked that he still had not commented on this new hairstyle, he responded, “There is no way to improve on God's good work, but that the hairdo emphasized her quizzically feminine side.” Katie did not quite understand that but accepted it as a compliment.

A page walked them to the Green Room where they met with the members of the U2 band. Katie tried her best not to gush like a teenager but she was in awe of the band. The band members were used to people trying hard to accept them as they are. They were actually very nice. They were introduced around as Bono, Edge, Adam, and Larry. Bono indicated that he had read about both incidents, was pleased to meet the people involved, that they did not look surly enough to be warriors, and was looking forward to their interview.

Bono was fascinated that Katie was Dr. O'Bierne. “We both use aliases,” he laughed. Actually everyone laughed. It was a great ice-breaker. He indicated that he was reading some of the ancient Irish legends to find material for songs. “That is interesting,” said Katie. “I'll send you some of my bibliography, it may help.”

Bono gave her his personal card for direct communication.

The entire group settled back to watch Byrne's monologue. He was quite funny. Katie felt very comfortable and looked forward to a great night with Shane, completely forgetting that about two million people were going to be looking in on them.

After the monologue, the page came to collect Katie and Shane. The boys wished them luck and indicated that they thought the interview should be great.

“Gay will introduce you and greet you with hugs when you come out. We expect resounding applause so he may just stand there between you for a minute before inviting you to take a seat.”

They stood by the doorway and heard Byrne raise his voice and say, “Ladies and gentlemen, you have been waiting for this for weeks. Please welcome Dr. Kathryn Bierne and Mr. Shane Ryan, the face of young Ireland.”

The crowd exploded with cheers, hoots, and whistles which the director allowed to go a little longer than usual. Byrne offered them their chairs, sat down at his own, and rustled his notes until the crowd settled.

“Thank you for coming,” Byrne said. “All of Ireland has been waiting to meet you, and I dare say they will not be disappointed.”

“Well, laughed Shane, “I have a pub in Rosseville that has an occasional empty seat. If all of Ireland is interested, I’m sure we can make room for the rest of the population.”

Everybody laughed. The ice was broken.

“Well both of you have quite a story to tell,” said Byrne. “Katie, may I call you Katie?”

“I’m Katie to everyone,” she said.

“How are you living with the term, Professor Wonder Woman.”

“It made for a great headline,” said Katie. My students and colleagues are having great sport with it. It is all a bit of an exaggeration though. It is Shane that is Superman.”

Again, laughter rocked the room.

“Well, Shane, Mr. Superman, tell us the story of the rescue of the Nina G crew.”

Shane went into the story of the rescue trip out to sea amidst giant waves and told of how fortunate they were to find the Nina G crew. “One of my crewmen saw a light when the waves parted. They were already in the water because their rescue dory had capsized. When we got to them, they were about ready to succumb to the exposure from very cold water. Fortunately we got to them on time. We got them on board, warmed them up and into dry clothes. That is when the fun really began. A huge rogue wave was behind us. I immediately swung the boat around into the wave and started riding to the crest at an angle. I kept watching to see if the wave would crest. I don’t think all of them do and I really never saw one before. The wave did crest and I swung the ship into the pipeline that it created and we rode it out until the wave was diminished.”

“That is an amazing story, said Byrne. “Did you know what to do? Are you trained for these things?”

“No to both questions,” said Shane. “I just operated on instinct. Everything went into slow motion, except my mind. What I did was the logical thing to do. At the height of the crisis, I looked around and the water was running slow. I looked into the eyes of my mates, saw their

fear, yet they did everything that was expected of them and more. They were marvelous and protective of our cargo of sailors. Drowning was not an acceptable option. Fortunately, we made the right choices and decisions and we were able to get home safely.”

Dead silence prevailed for a few seconds and then there was a thunderous burst of applause.

“Let’s see,” said Byrne, “we have a note from the Captain of the Nina G.”

“It was the most marvelous display of seamanship that I have ever seen. It just shows that a boat can do anything on the water if it is in capable hands.”

“I don’t know about that, said Shane. That night worked out by the grace of God. It could have very easily been a disaster. “The good Lord knew that Katie was waiting for me on the dock. He also knew that the wives and children of my crew were waiting there as well. He is the one who brought us home.”

“That sounds very mystical,” said Byrne.

“Yes, it does,” said Shane, “but if you are looking for explanations, there is no other.”

Again, there was more applause.

After the commercial, Byrne turned his attention to Katie.

“Well Katie, I understand that you are handy with a frying pan.”

“Well I can cook with one easily enough. I never used one like I did at my mother’s house. But again it was Shane who took out three of those thugs. I was just lucky enough to be at the right place at the right time with a frying pan in my hand.”

“Well I understand from the police report that the intruder had the advantage and was about to plunge the knife into Shane’s chest.”

“Yes, that was the situation,” said Katie. “I just reacted to the action of the moment. By the way, I am very conflicted by this. I kept the knife from going into Shane’s chest and I am very happy about that but that young man is in serious condition and I understand that he might have serious brain damage. I am not very happy about that. He may or may not have been the one who beat up my mother. They weren’t very kind to her either.”

“I understand that your mother is now living with you.”

“That is correct. Thank God, she is alright but you shouldn’t be frightened out of the home you lived in for almost forty years. My mom is resilient. She will be alright but no one should have to go through this experience.”

“Your mother sounds like she is a very strong woman.”

“Ah yes, she had to be to raise me. That was no easy task and I did turn out well if I do say so myself. A lot that of has to do with her parenting and example. I’m an only child but if I had ten

siblings, I would be known as the wild one. I always marched to a different drummer and believe, me, I had a grand time doing so.”

The audience laughed and clapped.

“In what ways did you express yourself, Katie.”

“Some examples..... I was an athlete before girls were encouraged to participate in sports. I was better at sports than most of the boys in my class. I always challenged my teachers in class. I always wanted to know more and why. I can’t tell you how many times I was sent to the priests for being a heretic and then telling them to reexamine their own positions because I was sure they were wrong. I was never bullied. Yea, though I walk in the valley of hostility, I fear no evil no evil, because I am the meanest and toughest girl in the valley. I like the excitement of being on the edge physically and intellectually. We are going to meet the Edge in a few minutes. Bono joked inside that we all have aliases. Dr. Kathryn isn’t always who she appears to be. My friends will tell you that because underneath it all, I am Katie O’Bierne. Also, it is probably the reason why I don’t have any enemies.”

“But Katie, you seem to be so sweet and I know that you are very close to the Church.”

“I am close to my two parishes and I love my two parish priests. I know that I am blessed by God and *She* doesn’t have to worry about me embarrassing *Her*.”

Laughter and applause again filled the air.

“I understand that that you and Shane are now engaged,” said Byrne.

“Wow...news travels fast. I’m glad I told my mother before she heard it on television.”

“And he proposed in Church?”

“I can’t even decently describe what a beautiful moment that was. We knelt down before the altar to say a prayer. He turned and proposed to me and I proposed back, both of us using the words of the marriage ritual. He slipped the ring on my finger. It was totally spontaneous. I knew we were going to become engaged but the moment was a complete and happy surprise. Many of my friends married relatively young. I waited for Superman with a romantic heart to show up and he is Shane Ryan, a man I couldn’t possibly love more. We have also been working with Fr. O’Malley to prepare for our marriage and I can’t tell you what an incredible experience that has been.”

Byrne said that by the end of the week there will be a thousand proposals in the churches of Ireland and there will be long lines outside the Rosseville Parish House to see Fr. O’Malley.

Ladies and gentlemen, all the people of Ireland..... the hopeful face of young Ireland, Shane Ryan and Katie O’Bierne.

The roar of applause was like the thunder in the Connemara Mountains. Shane and Katie bowed to the crowd and turned to shake hands with beaming Gay Byrne.

The show cut to a commercial.

Byrne was ecstatic. He could never even have dreamed that the show would go this well.

He walked Shane and Katie to the stage at the end of the set where U2 was waiting.

At the commercial's end, Byrne introduced U2. The curtain opened. Bono introduced the song, *Running to Stand Still*, a song about the problems springing from the new drug culture in Ireland, in tribute to the ordeal of Katie's mom.

At the end of their presentation, Bono took Katie's hand while Edge, Clayton, and Mullen continued to play, and they danced to the delight of the audience until the camera phased the scene out.

Gay Byrne couldn't believe what he had wrought that evening. He almost couldn't wait until the show aired on Monday.

To be continued

I appreciate all criticism and depend on it to become a better writer. Feel free to contact me at rdaumack@aol.com. I am grateful that you took the time to read my story.