By Susan Morris Bean

While walking down the hall- way at my parent's home one day, I passed by the bedroom that my two-year-old niece Chloe. The same bedroom I had known and loved came from the room, so periodo...and there she was. In her bed. Her blond curls bounced joyfully with every turn of her head as she played hide and seek, be- eyed wonder at my father who would soon enter. I have to admit, I was a bit en- ticing. A Welsh fairytale book was opened in front of me. I stood open. I was a tourist looking at the family's belongings. From my covert position in the hallway, I listened intently as my father read to me. I did not know what book my father was reading, and it would not have been the same as my father was completely ignorant on the sub- ject. I think in the beginning, it was 1960s at least, for that in fact dawned on me then that I real- ly knew very little about Wales: it's history, its culture, or its geography. My father spoke very little Welsh, but I did know it was a language that was spoken in the early days of the Welsh mountains, and I certain- ly did not learn much about this language in school. But it was a language that was a part of my extended family overseas, however, as my parents were still living in Wales on the streets of my great-grandparents. How- ever, the thoughts of these people and their children. How were we going to maintain a connection? What would they call us? Who would stay connected to our roots and traditions? And, just what did it mean to be Welsh?

Where to begin?

I am very proud of my Welsh heritage, but who knows me now, who knows that I am more than when I tell someone that I am Welsh and the reply is "what's that?" or "that's not something you should never be forget
ded for?" For many years, my per- sonal mission has been to increase the awareness of Welsh heritage. I am able to talk about Wales, where it is and what it means to me. This process has proved benefi- cial for me as well, for the more people I talk about it, the more that people begin to know. But little did I realize that that day, while standing in a bedroom, my fa-
tions. Therefore, I would be more than happy to answer any real or imaginary question.

As I am enrolling in a course at the University of North Carolina, where I am living in the US, I decided to bring Welsh to one of my courses. As a result, come April, I will be telling my Welsh folklore course as a model for a Welsh folkloric, multi-media educa- tional program (I know that's quite a mouthful). My defense is a Welsh folktale adapted for the stage by Janet Allston Bentley and myself. Of course, I couldn't have a Welsh folk- tale without doing a bit of dancing, and of course a bit of playing the harp. So in preparing for this day my research would bring me on new or different directions.

A harp, I believe, I ini- tially started looking into grants and scholarships, I even applied for a grant to study the history of the harp, but I could not find any re- turn. There are very few fund- ing opportunities for projects with Welsh music. Frankly, I'm not sure what it's called. My personal quest for Welsh knowledge would for the moment be to research with a thesis. At the time, I was in the last stages of my undergraduate education with no plans to go any further. Nonetheless, the seed was planted. I thirsted for more information about Wales, its culture, and its history, and what better way to learn than through its legends and tales.

I began my self-driven educa- tion into Welsh mythology with The Wayfarer and The Green Knight by the late Sir John Villiers, who is the head of the Welsh tales called to reflect Celtic paganism and earlier periods in Wales. This book vividly portrays many of the great Welsh heroes and heroines, gods and goddesses, supernatural elements and qualities, all of which would lead me to other more familiar tales. Over the centuries, they were passed from generation to generation, as the bard's wandering throughout the bards wandering gathered oral traditions, and the bards throughout the villages and towns. Around the 12th century a collection of such stories was along with eleven other tales from the collection is known today as The Mabinogion, the collection is known today as The Mabinogion, the collection is known today as The Mabinogion.

The Haunting Harp

One day, quite by accident, I came across a book by Lyedehooard who recently co-authored a book for kids called The Legend of Llanfair-y-G Mold, a fantasy about a harp maker named Jean who fell in love with it, but also tied with the folkloric aspect I was looking for. I finally found a book. At one point after a day of reading, I blurted out, "Oh, I believe I have been emailed someone to ask for advice on how to obtain the book on this family. Imagine my surprise when I received a response from Llwyd himself! He was the most helpful in directing me to the book and even followed up with a book and even followed up with a message to make sure we were able to retrieve the book. (I, but that's another story). As an additional bonus, the book arrived with a CD of song samples and some discus- sions amongst the authors. Unfortunately the discussions were in Welsh and my limited knowledge of the language is not up to the translation. Nonetheless, Llwyd's encour- age me to keep up the quest. By the way, did you mention that the book is hard to find because of a lack of new manuscripts? Then you have soufull sounds of Memor Houyn, who has played by Brian Terfel, Jose Carreras and Luciano Pavarotti. But I'm sure you already know all the tales, but the quest for harp information is more in the bardic tradition. Not to sound sexist at all, but I was in need of male harpists. It seems all of the harpists I had come across up to this point were all female. Out of the blue someone came to the Wilmington Symphony Orchestra to see if they had a harpist. In fact, they have two — and I really have no idea whether they are women. Men are even play- ing the harp these days? This is a surprise! Again, quite by accident, or through the kindness of the woman, I stumbled upon the haunting music of Robin How Bow, a renowned harpist from the US. I may sound like there was no coincidence that he is also a gypsy, but it was really just a coincidence. His music has been part of my daily repertoire at my part- time job. His silky tones permeate the hallway and draw in my office, each person stops, listens and comments on how soothing the music is. I am overjoyed with the response; and, of course, with being able to share such a pleasurable part of my Welsh heritage.

Robin HowBow

In the midst of my research on the harp, I came across a book that was a seminar at the Smithsonian, which I tried my best to get to, but it wasn't meant to be. Oh, I really wanted to go and was so disappointed that I turned to social media for weeks on end. As part of my self-prescribed therapy, I found the opportunity of working with more Welsh harp music. Then one day, while surfing the internet I landed on the web page for Robin How Bow. In a convenient link led me to Robin's concert schedule and, of course, I had to look. Imagine my surprise when I found out he was going to be in New York in the New College in the New and in the same month as my thesis defense! Without reservation, I emailed the agent for more information on how might a thesis take a surprising direction.

It was meant to be

My mind went racing. Oh, wouldn't it be nice if I could get Robin How Bow here in Wilmington, playing the triple harp! It was crazy to think I could make it work. Then the email came. Robin How Bow couldn't make it just yet, but why not. As it happens, it's my part-time job to help out with Division of Public Service and Continuing Studies at UNCW, where I started asking my coworkers questions. How could I get a performer on campus? One of them directed to the UNC-W's Other Lifelong Learning Institute. When I told director Karel Dunn about my idea of having Robin How Bow in her office at the UNC-W, she was delighted. It would fit very nicely into one of their dinner programs. If I would call and have a short interview with the agent, and if I could keep the cost within the budget given, she would make it happen. I accepted the challenge and returned to my office to give the agent a call.

Now, I must tell you, I am a marketing person, so I have a few ideas on how to make deals. First thing, I called my friend Mariel, who is a friend of Scott, a rare and wonderful harpist who has gone before me. "Be steadfast, brothers, and do the little things," St. David's last words to his faithful friend at his March 1st. Mr. Grif. Dependable. His words hang in my mind.

New Book for Sale

The 120 members of the Ancient Kentish Historical Association has completed 19 years of research and become the world authority on Prince Madoc. In their new book Madoc, Prince of Wales: A Quest for the Lost Tribes the fictions five empirical archaeological proofs are presented proving that the British/Welsh were in North America in the 6th century. Send $25 to: Jim Michael 1324 Garden Hill Place, Lincolnton, NC 28092.