

9th September 2020

Competition

**“Thou shalt not covet; but tradition
Approves all forms of competition.”**

Arthur Hugh Clough, Pischiera

During a recent break in my hometown of Fort William, I posted a few photographs of the stunning scenery on the local *Facebook* page, and got several “likes” from people who obviously love the area as much as I do. It was especially poignant to read comments from as far afield as the USA and Australia, with people voicing how much they were missing “home”.

But one stuck out: “Hello Tom Gordon. I think we sang in the local Mod, roughly 1960. I came second. You came first. I never forgave you. (Joking of course ...)” The “local Mod” was a set of competitions for all things Gaelic in the Town Hall, and I won a cup for the “boys, under-11, unaccompanied, learner-Gaelic, solo singing”. I sang a Gaelic song, *Failte Rudha Bhatairnis*, “Welcome to Vaternish”, in praise of an area in the north of the Island of Skye. And I can still offer a passing rendition of the chorus.

I’ve been in touch with my *Facebook* correspondent and he genuinely doesn’t bear a grudge. But to be honest, I didn’t even realise there was anyone else in the competition. I just stood on the stage and sang my heart out. I might have been the only entrant, though all I can say now is I was “first in a field of two”. But the competition didn’t matter to me at all. I just enjoyed the singing and have happy memories of the day.

Competitions among young children are largely frowned upon these days. It never did me any harm – though it could have left the second-placed *Facebook* guy traumatised for life! But if competitions set young people challenges and goals, bring talent and skill to a higher level, and encourage children reach their full potential, don’t they have their place?

I was challenged to learn a Gaelic song when I couldn’t speak a word of Gaelic! A had a good, treble voice that was the better for me singing on a stage. I learned the confidence to give it my all. And I reached my full potential – at least for a boy, under-11, doing unaccompanied, Gaelic-learner, solo singing. And, sixty years on, I can still feel the pleasure of it.

A prayer for today

Creator God, in my uniqueness, challenge me to reach my full potential today. Amen.

An original reflection by © Tom Gordon

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