**Irish Times**

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**Transcript of Donal Óg Cusack's speech**

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Below is an edited transcript of Dónal Óg Cusack's speech given at the Foyle Pride Festival

It's an honour to be here this evening. I come from a small village in east Cork called Cloyne. How do I describe home? Well. If I decide to walk to the shop and back that's pretty much the gay pride parade done for the year. So if you guys think you have come a long way, for me being here tonight is like playing Radio City Music Hall.

Growing up in Cloyne we didn't have a gay scene. We didn't have any scene really but we especially didn't have a gay scene. So I've always been a little bit innocent in that way. I was thinking of that on the drive up here today, something that happened just a couple of years ago when I said to a straight friend of mine that I thought a man we both knew might be gay.

What makes you think that? he said.

Ah, he just used a word there yesterday that only gay people would know.

Really said my friend, what was that?

I looked around as if I was about to give away a state secret of the gay republic of cork. I practically whispered it.

GAYDAR!

About twenty minutes later when he'd stopped laughing at me he explained that there were fellas running the Taliban in downtown Kabul who would be making jokes about who had the best gaydar.

What about in the DUP? I said.

Time, Dónal Óg. All in time.

It's a long drive up here and I had plenty of time to think along the way ( that won't necessarily be reflected in this speech which is stuff I lifted from Wikipedia!). It struck me as an odd thing to be driving all this way to open this festival knowing that when I get here most of the audience will neither know nor care about who or what I am and knowing that back home there's a section of the world who would see me being here as the only thing that I am.

This county has given us Heaney and the Undertones and must also bear responsibility for Joe Brolly but it hasn't given us much by way of hurling, the worlds greatest sport. So to those of few who are curious I see myself as ticking a serious of boxes most of which would have got me kneecapped in various places at various times of my life.

Dónal Óg Cusack. An Irish name and the sum total of the Irish language that my parents have ever used. If I ever break down in certain parts I pretend to be my brother Victor. I'm a hurler. A goalkeeper. A GAA member. In Cork though I'd be kneecapped first for being a trouble maker who has organised a series of player strikes or for my short puc out strategy which in Cork is far more controversial than who I sleep with.

And I'm an out gay man. For me that's a small part of the deal. Half a chapter maybe in a lifetime's story. But if out of curiosity you come to see me play and can't pick me out because we all wear helmets I'll be the one just in front of the loudmouth on the terrace with the megaphone. He'll be singing

he's gay/he's bent/his ass is up for rent/ Dónal Óg/Dónal Óg.

People around him will be looking embarrassed and I'll be staring up the field.

Not giving a f\*\*k.

I thought of that today as I drove from Cork as the place names started ringing different bells with me. The villages around home where I grew up, then the places with hurling clubs I'd have played against regularly. The further I travelled the more peoples definition of me changed. Yet on every mile of the journey I remained just me. You all know that experience. People defining you in different ways and you realising that you are you and and always you.

Onwards through places I associate with different people I'd know and then as I crossed the border all the place names suddenly seemed to remind me of the troubles and the journey got to be about my own lazy definitions. I got to wondering if GAYDAR north of the border comes with more advanced settings than we have down south. If I grew up here and walked into a crowded room like this would I be saying to myself Gay Shinner at three o clock, orange order tranny marching in the hallway, free presbyterian pansexuals serving the snacks.

And when you travel down that road the whole business of labelling people and defining them and putting them into social ghettos gets to be almost as comical as it is dangerous.

This is a city that knows that too well. I'm conscious that standing here in this place and in this company and there's not much a person like me can tell you about rights. Whether you call it Derry, LondonDerry, Foyleside or Stroke City this town will always be synonymous with civil rights. You don't have to know a lot about history to know that in the summer of 1969 when gays and lesbians were engaged in the Stonewall riots in New York City the battle of the Bogside was happening here in Derry.

At first the comparisons between those two things seem remote and far fetched. As Eamon McCann has written, when the policemen came mobhanded down Lecky Road into the Bogside they sang

Hey, hey we're the monkees

and we're going to monkee around

till we see your blood flowing

all along the ground.

Who said Nazis have no sense of humour.

A few thousand miles away in Greenwich Village gays were facing down their own mob of police. IN New York though it was the protestors who were singing.

“ We are the stonewall girls/ we wear our hair in curls/ we wear no underwear/ we show our pubic hair/ we wear our dungarees/ above our nelly knees.”

The Bogside in 1969 wasn't the time or the place for eamon mccann or bernadette devlin to come up with a similar ditty, (though Nell McCafferty must surely have nelly knees), but the theme in both cities was the same. You colonise places and societies by getting one part of that society to think they have the right to police another section of society.

And hey presto once the people doing the abusing have somebody to demonise or something to be scared of they don't notice the poverty of their own lives.

That's why I never hear what goes down on the terrace behind me. I'm in the privileged position that the people who would try to police my life have no power , the guy with the megaphone or the big mouth has paid in to see me and to embarrass himself. No matter what happens I can't be the loser in the exchange.

I live in a world which isn't free of prejudice, far from it but which lets me especially close to home define myself in the way I want to be defined. By the time I came out I had long ceased making any sort of secret about my private life but what was funny was that people who were close to me never saw the wood for the trees. They just had certain assumptions.

I've told the story often of a team trip to Vietnam and me drifting off from a teammate in Ho Chi Minh city one night. I woke up in a strange bed in a strange city the next morning. That's what I'd hoped to do! And it took me quite a while to get back to the team hotel. Finally around noon I wandered in and was greeted with high good humour by the lads who just assumed I'd drunk myself silly and got lost.

When I did come out to them we had lots of deep conversations. And their loyalty to me then and since then has been one of the most moving and meaningful things in my life. It's been a great positive. So have all the encounters with young people thinking about coming out. All the meetings with people who took a bit of encouragement in taking big steps in their own lives.

I know I am lucky though. I know every journey in this room is different.

I know that the journey from 1969 to here has been different in this part of the world to practically anywhere else. Buried beneath a hundred other prejudices and hatreds there must be a secret history of gay men and women living out their lives in the deepest shadows.

We know only little pieces. Ian Paisley and his Save Ulster from Sodomy campaign launched at a time when things were so bad here that you'd have thought a little sodomy would have been a diversion. We know of the heroism of Jeff Dudgeon whose having been questioned about his personal life by the RUC brought his case against the United Kingdom to the European Court of Human rights and won. Fifteen years after male homosexual behaviour was decriminalised in England and Wales Jeff Dudgeon succeeded in having it decriminalised here. It took another eleven years for the twenty six counties to follow suit into the modern world. I say 'follow suit' I mean be dragged kicking and screaming by the same court citing the Jeff Dudgeon precedent.

It's victories like that which we celebrate. Landmark moments like Grainne Close and Shannon Sickles going to City Hall in Belfast and becoming the first couple in the UK to legally register a same sex partnership.

And though it seems like a small thing we must also welcome Gavin Robinson the DUP Lord Mayor of Belfast attending a gay pride event in that city a few weeks ago. Engaging in debate represents massive progress for a party who still have their Save Ulster from Sodomy Days at home. It's a huge step forward for the party of Edwin Poots or Iris Robinson.

It's a strange thing isn't it ( although we see it through history in lots of places) that here is a society where people are learning to live with each other with less fear and loathing yet surveys show a hardening of attitudes against gay and lesbian people. To see two religious faiths coming together to oppose gay marriage strengthens the theory that fear of gays and lesbians is “the last great prejudice of our times.”

That's why events like this are important. When I came out a few years ago I wasn't making any big statement about myself I was following up on a promise I made to myself when I was younger. I was at a gay club in cork and somebody recognised me as a hurler. I pretended not to be who I was and I felt sick afterwards. I promised I'd never pretend to be something that I wasn't.

That was my journey and as I say every journey is different but what has been important for me is demonstrating to people that who I sleep with is only a part of who I am.

I like what the late Gore Vidal said about there being no such thing as a homosexual person or a heterosexual person. The words are just adjectives describing natural sexual acts, not people. Some of us respond to our own sex, some to the opposite sex, some to both sexes, some to neither sex, some to different things at different times.

It wouldn't be worth worrying about if it wasn't the hysteria and prejudice of other people.

I came out to be myself. To be Donal Og Cusack. I'm lots of things. For forty to fifty hours a week I'm an electrical engineer. For far fewer hours in a week, sadly, even in a good week, I'm in bed with a man. I never get invited to Electrical Engineer Pride events though.

People want to define me a certain way. I didn't come out to play on an all gay hurling team though I'd take a bullet for anybody's right to do so if they want to and I enjoy ideas like the Ulster Titans rugby. I came out for the right to be me and to play for Cork as me and for everybody to accept that.

I say this not just because everybody's journey is different but because I think there is nothing so important to any of us on that journey as the title we put on events like these. PRIDE.

For me that's something more concrete to grasp than any other label we may give ourselves or any names others may give us. As campaigning groups we sometimes get so tied up with our organisations names and acronyms in an well meaning attempt to include every possible sort of orientation that we miss the point.

What unites us at the end of the day is pride in being who we are, pride in the totality of who we are as people. Pride in the fact that we refuse to just fit the label hung on us by prejudice.

We can't be limited in what we do in life and in law by our choice of who, if anybody, we sleep with or what god, if any, we worship. This city knows that better than anywhere. If we narrow the definition of a person to one aspect of their life, we create a ghetto and a platform for prejudice.

It's about pride. I'm proud to be Donal Og Cusack. Proud to be from Cloyne. To be a Corkman. To be the son of the parents I have. To be a hurler. To give my best. And proud of the decisions I've taken in my personal life.

I'm not just from Cloyne, not just from Cork, not just a hurler. Not just a gay man. Like everybody in this room I'm the sum total of many, many things and that's how I want to be judged. That to me is what pride is about.

The only way you can be JUST one thing, the only way you can limit the definition of yourself, the only way you can make the world smaller and darker is to be a bigot. JUST a bigot. A small scared man with a big megaphone.

So when we enjoy this festival and share our pride in who we are we just have to remember that. With pride, brothers and sisters, we will always prevail.

Thank you.

Regards,

Dónal Óg



CHARLIE TAYLOR

An inspirational speech given by Cork hurler Dónal Óg Cusack in which he speaks openly about his life as a gay sportsman has won widespread praise.

The speech, which was given at the opening of the Foyle Pride Festival in Co Derry on Wednesday evening, saw the hurler recounting what it was like to grow up gay in a small village and how he deals with homophobic abuse from some GAA supporters.

"I come from a small village in east Cork called Cloyne. How do I describe home? Well. If I decide to walk to the shop and back that’s pretty much the gay pride parade done for the year," he said.

In 2009, the three-time All-Ireland-winning goalkeeper became the first high-profile Irish sportsman to reveal he was gay.

In his speech he described how it was telling his teammates he was gay and how he had gained so much from coming out publicly.

"When I did come out to them (his teammates) we had lots of deep conversations. And their loyalty to me then and since then has been one of the most moving and meaningful things in my life. It’s been a great positive. So have all the encounters with young people thinking about coming out. All the meetings with people who took a bit of encouragement in taking big steps in their own lives."

He added: "When I came out a few years ago I wasn’t making any big statement about myself I was following up on a promise I made to myself when I was younger. I was at a gay club in cork and somebody recognised me as a hurler. I pretended not to be who I was and I felt sick afterwards. I promised I’d never pretend to be something that I wasn’t."

Cusack also discussed how he deals with homophobia both on and off the pitch.

"If out of curiosity you come to see me play and can’t pick me out because we all wear helmets I’ll be the one just in front of the loudmouth on the terrace with the megaphone. He’ll be singing he’s gay/he’s bent/his ass is up for rent/ Dónal Óg/Dónal Óg. People around him will be looking embarrassed and I’ll be staring up the field. Not giving a f\*\*k."

He went on to add that while he may be known as a gay man, that is just a small part of who he was.

"I’m not just from Cloyne, not just from Cork, not just a hurler. Not just a gay man. Like everybody in this room I’m the sum total of many, many things and that’s how I want to be judged. That to me is what pride is about," he said.

“What unites us at the end of the day is pride in being who we are, pride in the totality of who we are as people. Pride in the fact that we refuse to just fit the label hung on us by prejudice. We can’t be limited in what we do in life and in law by our choice of who, if anybody, we sleep with or what god, if any, we worship. This city knows that better than anywhere. If we narrow the definition of a person to one aspect of their life, we create a ghetto and a platform for prejudice,” he added.

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Bernadette Brady

The article quotes him as saying, in response to the loudmouth with the megaphone, that "I’ll be staring up the field. Not giving a f\*\*k." Whereas on the video, what he actually says is "I'll be staring up the field. Not giving any attention to the person." Is there any reason this is inaccurately quoted?

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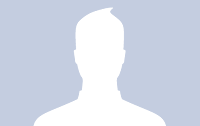
Damian Rogers

This really was a 'corker' of a speech by Dónal Óg and a great start to our Pride Festival here in Derry. Yesterday was our Pride Parade which was attended by record numbers. Next year is our City of Culture year and we're looking forward to bigger and better. @Tommy and @Francis - if you know anything about our history here in Derry you're well aware that the pursual of civil rights and liberties is woven into the very fabric of our culture. Of course Foyle Pride Festival is open! Come see for yourselves, you'd be very welcome. <http://foylepridefestival.com>

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Hugh Byrne

Good for the man. He has had it hard enough not because he is gay but because of ignorant prejudice that made him feel he had to hide his sexuality. I have a gay son and he found it difficult to tell me. I am ashamed of myself to this day that he felt unable to tell me. It says something about me not him.

Keith Banks likes this.

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James McDermott

"Óg Cusack also discussed"

Illiterate copy-editor. "Óg" is a part of his first name, not his surname.

EDIT this has now been fixed. Thanks, well-educated copy-editor!

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Tommy

"I’m not just from Cloyne, not just from Cork, not just a hurler. Not just a gay man. Like everybody in this room I’m the sum total of many, many things and that’s how I want to be judged. That to me is what pride is about," he said. “What unites us at the end of the day is pride in being who we are, pride in the totality of who we are as people. Pride in the fact that we refuse to just fit the label hung on us by prejudice. We can’t be limited in what we do in life and in law by our choice of who, if anybody, we sleep with or what god, if any, we worship. This city knows that better than anywhere. If we narrow the definition of a person to one aspect of their life, we create a ghetto and a platform for prejudice,” he added...................................................................................................... Seems a bit of a contradiction really then when this whole thing is about being gay. It's not about other aspects of life is it? Otherwise it would be an open festival and not restricted to gay people.

Francis Kforkennedy and http://a0.twimg.com/profile_images/1921173111/91549804894749019_4dKdqKSz_c_normal.jpgGW like this.

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Francis Kforkennedy

If it's an 'open' festival, can we assume that it's not being run by gay people? Are there openly heterosexual people on the organising committee as well as homosexuals? If so, well done. If not, then it's not an 'open festival'.

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Enda Jordan

In case you're not used to the comments boards on the IT. Tommy is always a complete bigot so don't get worked up about it.

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Ted Oakes

good work dónal óg!

Keith Banks and Fiachra Mac Cana like this.

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