

*Notes for comments by Ian C. MacLeod at Clan MacLeod
(Greater Vancouver) Society AGM on November 6, 2011*

Gaelic “Profanity”, and my Dad

Back in the early 1970s, my Dad was a United Church in Vancouver. One Sunday afternoon, as part of the church’s usual visitation program, my Mom was visiting an elderly Scottish couple. Fortunately (for the purposes of this story) the old fellow was starting to lose his grip on reality.

When Mom introduced herself as “Elizabeth MacLeod” the old fellow asked her whether, with such a Scottish name, she “spoke the Gaelic”. Mom answered that she didn’t but that her husband did, Gaelic having been his first language in Cape Breton. The old fellow told her to say to Dad “pòg mo thòine” (pronounced pocma hoina), and then he broke into cackling laughter.

The old lady was mortified and told her husband “You can’t say that to Mrs. MacLeod. She’s our Minister’s wife”. He ignored her, and repeated the phrase and laughter a few more times during the visit, with much the same response from his wife.

When Mom got home she relayed that story to Dad. He broke out in laughter.

What the old gentlemen had told the Minister’s wife to say to his Minister was “kiss my ass”.

Dad and Mom laughed over that one for years after (even church ministers and their spouses can have a sense of humour!).

Not long after, I ended up spending an evening in the Blarney Stone (a Vancouver Irish pub), swilling beer with Jimmy Ferguson (1940-1997), the bass/baritone with the Irish Rovers (his voice may be best remembered for “Wasn’t that a Party”). He spoke the Irish Gaelic, which is quite similar to the Scottish Gaelic, so understood the story well. He even added a few non-repeatable Gaelic profanities to my vocabulary (which, of course, I have long since erased from my memory!).
