

THE PROMISED LAND OF THE SAINTS

An archaeology of belief

"So shall it always remain, without any shadow of night."

Saint Brendan, "Navigatio"



Written and produced by Chris Brookes for RTE Dublin
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Readings of the Navigatio Sancti Brendani abbatis are from the translation by John O'Meara

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Map of the world, 1225 A.D.

For millennia, the Atlantic ocean tantalised the European imagination with visions of what might lie on the other side.

According to ancient texts (*Navigatio Sancti Brendani abbatis*, 10th century), the earliest European to find out was the Irish monk Saint Brendan who sailed westward across the Atlantic in the 6th century. On his way he encountered magical islands, conversed with talking birds, saw floating pillars of crystal, and breakfasted on the back of a whale.

Finally he discovered the Isle of the Blest, which he reported would be eternally paradisaical.

Some scholars insist that the saint described a purely spiritual voyage. Others suggest he could have made a real journey across the Atlantic to North America.

The Promised Land of the Saints: real or imaginary?

This programme is a radio archaeology project, excavating the chronicle of Saint Brendan in the 21st century with the help of Marcel Proust and modern sound recording equipment.

SOUND: *Children's voices. A teacher asks "Are we all here?..."*

BROOKES: Its about as far west as you can get and still be in Europe. This small museum in County Clare is hosting a field trip from a local school.

TEACHER: Quiet! Alright, I'm going to tell you about the Brendan boat. Now, the reason this boat was built was because of a 9th century manuscript that told the story of how an Irish monk called St. Brendan sailed to what we now know as North America.

BROOKES: What the students are staring at is a 36-foot leather boat that the writer and adventurer Tim Severin sailed across the Atlantic in 1976. It was a real voyage, and he landed on the East coast of Newfoundland.

TEACHER: A man named Tim Severin became interested in this manuscript and in the journey. Because he himself did unusual journeys....

BROOKES: The boat is a replica of one sailed by the Irish monk St. Brendan in the 6th century in search of the Promised Land. And he found it. But whether he sailed to Newfoundland like Tim Severin we don't know. In fact we don't even know whether St. Brendan's voyage was real, or a voyage of the imagination.

MUSIC: *(Uilleann pipes: "The Brendan Voyage" by Shaun Davey)*

NARRATOR: The Promised Land of the Saints.

SOUND: *Seagulls, boat leaving wharf*

BROOKES: God. By the sound of this racket you wouldn't know but what this place is a seagull colony.

A VOICE: What are you at, Chris?

BROOKES IN BOAT: Getting a bit windy!

VOICE: I thought you were out fishing!

BROOKES IN BOAT: Ha. I might drift to Ireland!

BROOKES: Jack, back on the wharf. Retired from fishing ten years ago, but he still keeps it up... probably the most easterly wharf in North America. Right smack at the entrance to St. John's harbour. Newfoundland. Edge of the continent.

SOUND: *Rowing*

BROOKES: Probably the most easterly rowboat too, this one I'm in. Just heading out, to have a look. Past the longliners and the crabfishers tied up in the boat basin. The Atlantic Future, the Newfoundland Pride, the Ocean Bounty, the Atlantic Quest. Names like wishes.

SOUND: *Rowing*

BROOKES: I don't have to go very far. Just past the boat basin. I can ship the oars and just... stare out to sea.

SOUND: *Rowing stops*

BROOKES: It must always have been like this, on the edge of a continent. Like waiting for a photograph to develop. What will it be today? A dream? A memory? A mirror? Just over that horizon... the promised land.

PATRICK KELLY: It's only a little while ago I read about it in the St. Anne's book.

PATRICK'S MOTHER: Did you?

PATRICK: About St. Brendan the Navigator.

MOTHER: So you did, what?

PATRICK: Is it there now? On the day bed?

MOTHER: That one?

PATRICK: The... (*turning pages*) ...He... sailed across the Atlantic or whatever. And he had a boat made out of skins or leather or something. It was a miracle he made it over here, let alone go back again. But it didn't really say... I think it said something about he found some islands, but ah...

SOUND: *pages turning*

MUSIC: Uilleann pipes faintly

PATRICK: St. Brendan the Navigator! (*reading*) For almost a thousand years the story of St. Brendan's journey to the Promised Land was one of the most famous and enduring stories of Western Europe. He is one of the best known of the saints of Ireland. Yeah. Here, do you want to read this?

BROOKES: Yes, sure.

PATRICK: Okay. Its not a big article...

NARRATOR: Saint Brendan therefore, when 14 brothers out of his whole community had been chosen, spoke to them, saying "I have resolved in my heart to go in search of the Promised Land of the Saints. How does this seem to you?" They said, as if with one mouth "Abbot, your will is ours. So we are prepared to go along with you to death, or to life." Then Saint Brendan ordered his brothers in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, to enter the boat.

MUSIC: (*stops.*)

TIM SEVERIN: I'm Tim Severin, and what I believe in is that this whole question of voyaging and exploration depends in part only upon the technology available. In the case of the Irish monks and their voyages into the ocean, there's something else at play, and its a remarkable, really remarkable motivation. And that is that there is somewhere out there over the horizon in the ocean. It can be traced back into the early Irish, and indeed many Western European early cultures, of a land to the West, a promised land, the Elysian Fields.

MUSIC: Uilleann pipes faintly

This is very much part of early Irish folklore. That over the horizon God could reveal somewhere absolutely wonderful. And if you had this notion that there were places over the horizon which were a sort of demi-paradise or... maybe it was a state of mind. The spiritual aspect is highly important if you regard it as a real voyage from the point of view of providing the motivation. And, after all, I'm not saying "yes they definitely got there." That would be a rash thing to claim. What I'm saying is that they certainly were able to get there, and they had good reason to get there.

NARRATOR: Saint Brendan then embarked. The sail was spread, and they began to steer westward, into the summer solstice. They had a favourable wind, and apart from holding the sail, had no need to navigate.

BROOKES: Saint Brendan. Monk. Sixth century.
Fifteen centuries later...

SOUND: *Telephone dialing*

PHONE VOICE: Aliant directory assistance. For what locality?

BROOKES: Paradise.

PHONE VOICE: For what name?

BROOKES: The town council.

PHONE VOICE: Thank you. Please hold. An operator will search for that information.

OPERATOR: That's for the town council?

BROOKES: In Paradise.

OPERATOR: Okay. One moment please .

PHONE VOICE: The number is 782-1400

MUSIC: *guitar riff*

SOUND: *telephone ringing*

RECEPTIONIST: Town of Paradise. Glenda speaking.

BROOKES: Hi. I wonder if you could tell me how it got its name?

RECEPTIONIST: Who, what... Paradise?

BROOKES: Yeah.

RECEPTIONIST: Ohhhh...

MUSIC: *Vocalist sings "If dreams come true..."*

RECEPTIONIST: I do... well I can say I do know. I've read it. Its very lengthy. We have the town's history here. If you want to come by and pick up a copy of it.

BROOKES: Oh do you?

RECEPTIONIST: Yes. Do you want a copy of it, or...?

BROOKES: Sure.

RECEPTIONIST: Like... it lists in there how it got its name and how our flag and the crest was designed and all of that.

BROOKES: Alright.

RECEPTIONIST: Alright? We're open Monday to Friday 8.30 to 4.30. So if you wanted to stop in some day next week and pick up a copy.

BROOKES: Okay. Thanks very much.

RECEPTIONIST: You're welcome, bye bye.

BROOKES: Goodbye.

SOUND: *camera with motor drive.*

SCOTT WALDEN: This will advance the film to the first frame, and then...

SOUND: *Camera clicks three times*

BROOKES: Scott Walden, photographer. 21st century.

WALDEN: Ah... this is an excerpt from Proust:
"As soon as each hour of one's life has died, it embodies itself in some material object, as do the souls of the dead in certain folk stories, and hides there. There it remains captive, captive forever, unless we should happen on the object, recognize what lies within, call it by its name, and so set it free."

If you're familiar with Remembrance of Things Past, near the very beginning of it he bites into a tea-soaked madeleine. That brings back a flood of memories from his childhood. And I guess what Proust... this might be a bit of a stretch... but the direction in which he takes it is he likes to think of the memories as actually being embodied in the physical objects. And I'm interested in the idea of how something intangible that's been lost can be represented in the photographic medium.. I teach the philosophy of photography, and of course one of the central questions is how you can get photography to be non-literal. How it can come to be about more than what was in front of the camera at the moment of exposure.

NARRATOR: The Promised Land of Memory.

SOUND: *Car starting*

BROOKES: So tell me about Peter...

WALDEN IN CAR: Well it's good that we're able to get together with him. He he's not been feeling well lately. But it sounds like he's doing well this afternoon. And I think if we make a quick trip down there now, we'll be able to sit down with him for an hour or so.

SOUND: *Car sound fades*

WALDEN: I've met quite a few retired fishermen who are making, from memory, models of the now-resettled communities in which they were raised. So I'm making portraits of these fellows in relationship to their model. Now the models are ones that don't represent the communities in any objective way. It's not as though these fellows have gone back to old photographs and used those as a basis for getting the measurements right, and the orientation of one house to another, or one house to a flake or a stage or something like that. Instead what they've done is just relied on their memories, their subjective memories and built the models on that basis. So I'm photographing the model-makers in relation to their models hopefully in a way that suggests that the models are projections of the contents of their minds.

BROOKES: It's all about memory.

WALDEN: It's all about memory, exactly. The memory of subjectivity.

MUSIC: *Drone*

NARRATOR: After fifteen days the wind dropped. They set themselves to their oars until their strength failed. St. Brendan began to comfort them saying "Brothers, do not fear. God is our helper, sailor, and helmsman. Just leave the sail spread out and God will do as he wishes with his servants and their ship.

BROOKES: The Promised Land of Destination.

ON AIR RADIO HOST: ...Alex Ransby is sailing alone from England, and he's had a little bit of trouble lately. Right now he's got no autopilot, and he's got some damage to his sails and rigging. He's about 350 miles from St. John's, and pretty tired after six days sailing without the autopilot.

He's doing this voyage to raise awareness of childhood arthritis, aboard his boat called "Hipjoint." I called him on his satellite phone a few hours ago.

BROOKES: Alex Ransby. Sailor. 21st century.

RADIO HOST ON SATELLITE PHONE: Alex, what condition are you and your vessel in now?

RANSBY ON SATELLITE PHONE: Personally I'm all right. I'm in quite a lot of pain with my arthritis, but the boat... I got hit by a very big low six days ago and my autopilot failed which made her crash jibe. I lost the top of my mainsail and my last remaining jenny halyard...

ALEX RANSBY: I imagined, with the same arrogance of human beings throughout time, that I was going to go and conquer the ocean. And I didn't. It let me cross it out of the goodness of its heart. As big as the storms were, it was so obvious that they were a tiny percentage of what it could have thrown at me if it had wanted to.

RADIO HOST ON SATELLITE PHONE: ...Now, you have been offered help but you haven't asked for any help, have you?

RANSBY ON SATELLITE PHONE: No, I haven't...

ALEX RANSBY: I am not a particularly spiritual person. I'm not at all religious. But what I found I was faced with at sea... it is so truly spectacular and so enormous and so perfect that it can't possibly be a fluke. And the one thing that science says is that everything just happened, in a freak set of circumstances. And there is no way that everything around us that is so perfect could possibly have just come about that way. It's changed my outlook quite considerably.

RADIO HOST ON SATELLITE PHONE: ...Bye bye now. Happy sailing.

RANSBY ON SATELLITE PHONE: Take care.

NARRATOR: The wind dropped, and the sea coagulated. The Holy Father said "Ship the oars, and loosen the sail. Wherever God wants to direct the boat, let him direct it." The boat was carried around for twenty days, and afterward God raised a wind favourable to them again.

SOUND: *Camera shutter.*

WALDEN: Okay, and... look at me again?

SOUND: *Camera shutter.*

WALDEN: That's good. Do slide it down a bit, and put it on more of a tilt, if you would.

PETER PICCO: Say when.

WALDEN: That's good. Perfect. And have a look at me.

PETER PICCO: I'm looking in the camera.

WALDEN: That's where I want you to look. You don't want to look at me.

PETER PICCO: Okay. Sure, I'm probably as dirty and black as anything.

WALDEN: (laughs)

SOUND: *Camera shutter clicking*

WALDEN: And... I'm just going to change my focus here slightly...

PETER PICCO: Would you call it a three-dimensional model, I guess? Of the little fishing village of St. Joseph's, Placentia Bay. And this is where I was born.

SOUND: *Camera shutter clicks twice*

PETER PICCO: August 18th, 1948.

WALDEN: And I'm going to come in really close here...That's good. Can you point to which was your house? Was it one of the ones facing on the cliff there?

PETER PICCO: Yup. Right here.

WALDEN: And your room was...?

MUSIC: *Soft drones*

PETER PICCO: Back this way I think. Towards my grandmother's. My grandmother had a big potato garden over here. Yep.

NARRATOR: One day they saw an island a long distance way from them. Saint Brendan said "Do you see that island?" They replied: "We do."

PETER PICCO: My godfather lived out here. Going up this hill here behind our house, and ah...

SOUND: *Camera shutter.*

PETER PICCO: We had a big store up the road here was called 'Murphy's Grocery and Hardware' and my mother used to go down and buy me a dollar or a dollar twenty-five pipe. Because he used to smoke the pipe. And he'd bring me out a brand new two-dollar bill. Brand new!. You know, just like the day it came from the bank! The old, original two-dollar bills? And man, I was uh... what, thirteen, fourteen years old.

SOUND: *Camera shutter clicking*

PETER PICCO: Imagine what it was like then, to get a brand new two-dollar bill! And your mother after buying the pipe for you to bring out to him and....

NARRATOR: The man of God began to walk round the island.

PETER PICCO: And he lived... see those little houses right here? You can see them?

NARRATOR: It had a perfume like that of a house filled with pomegranates.

WALDEN: These were vibrant communities at one point. People lived their lives around these physical structures. They lived in the houses and they fished in the waters nearby, and they attended the church and they attended the school. So all these physical items were imbued with human significance. Now, as the communities got resettled and as people who once lived in the communities grow old and die, that significance gets lost to us. But if it's the significance that's being depicted in these models, which I think it is, then in a very different way these people are bringing back in some sense what it is that's been drained away. By taking physical matter and informing it with their memories, with their thoughts, they are rendering visible things that otherwise would not be directly apprehendable by my camera.

NARRATOR: He returned to his brothers, and said to them "Disembark, and refresh yourselves with the good fruits of the land that the Lord as shown us."

PETER PICCO: I can point to a section where I sat on the beach when I was six years old, five years old. I can tell you a story right here, where my brother... who passed away in '94... was standing out here on a rock, and we were catching what we call 'connors.' And my Dad had a dock here, and they were just coming in with a load of fresh fish. And we took the hearts out of the fish

and we put it on a fish hook. And my brother got out on this rock here... say right here somewhere... and he said "Now when I gets out on the rock, you throw me out the pole!" I tossed the pole out to him, the hook hooked in my finger, went right in around the bone, come out through here. My father come running because he see the heart hanging off the fish hook and thought it was my finger. Right? That's a memory that I'll never forget.

WALDEN: Right here?

PETER PICCO: Right there. The same day my first cousin.. right here... had flies in his cap. And he was swatting away the real flies. He had fishing flies in his cap that he made himself, for catching salmon and that. And he was swatting away the bugs. And he hooked one into his ear. And my father took him down here in his father's building, put him up against the door facing, and filed off the hook. And I can remember that because he said "Uncle Am! Uncle Am! The hook is getting hot and my ear is burning!" I can remember that, I was about six years old. "Well," he said "Your ear is going to burn until I get this hook filed off!" Ha! And he done the same to my finger! So that's two good memories right there...

WALDEN: How did it... how and when did it all happen? Well let's see, I gather that resettlement happened in three phases starting in the early 1950's. Small communities isolated along the coastline, so they would never have had roads put into them for example. All travel in and out would have been by boat. And the feeling on the part of first the provincial, and then later both the provincial and the federal governments... felt it would be better for them to move to what they called "centralised growth centres" where they could get access to more cosmopolitan amenities: schools and hospitals and so forth. The bulk of the resettlement happened in the 1960's, and that affected dramatically Placentia Bay and Trinity Bay and Fortune Bay. Those regions.

BROOKES: How many communities were... were disappeared?

WALDEN: Almost 300 were closed down, and just over 30,000 people according to official counts. It was a big program. I'd say, I mean, in terms of numbers it is I believe the largest in Canadian history. There's the expulsion of the Acadians, which I believe numbered approximately 17,000 individuals. Now of course it's hard to compare these. I'm just talking in sheer numerical terms. You know, there's different forms of coercion.

MUSIC: *(continues)*

BROOKES: When did this place disappear?

PETER PICCO: Ah... Probably in the late '60's. '66 is when Joey* done the resettlement I think, was it? 1966? Finish the drive in '65 and resettle it all in '66. That's what Joey done.

(note: "Joey" Smallwood was the politician who instigated resettlement)*

NARRATOR: When these days were over, Saint Brendan ordered his brothers to load the boat. When all was loaded into the boat, they raised the sail again and set off once more.

SOUND: *Telephone ring tone*

MUSIC: *Guitar riff*

RECEPTIONIST: Town of Paradise, Glenda speaking.

BROOKES: Hi. I called a little while ago...

RECEPTIONIST: Okay...

BROOKES: ...and I forgot to ask. How do I get to Paradise?

RECEPTIONIST: Okay, are you coming from St. John's, or...?

BROOKES: ...I guess so.

RECEPTIONIST: Let me see, from downtown St. John's... Um...

BROOKES: What's the easiest way to get to Paradise... I guess?

RECEPTIONIST: All right. Just one second now. *(Goes on hold)*

MUSIC: *Singer: "If dreams come true..."*

BROOKES: The Promised Land of Place-names.

MUSIC: *Singer: "...if dreams come true..."*

WRITER: Wayne Johnston, novelist. You know, how we see the place shapes the names that we give it. There are place names like Heart's Content and Heart's Desire and Little Heart's Ease. And then you'll see on the signpost of a house, you know, "The Golden Gates" or something. Everyone likes to feel like they have a little part of Paradise in their lives.

RECEPTIONIST: Hello?

BROOKES: Hello.

RECEPTIONIST: You know how to get on to the harbour arterial from downtown?

BROOKES: Yes.

RECEPTIONIST: Well, from the harbour arterial there's a ramp. Take that off-ramp. You're on Topsail Road then.

BROOKES: Am I in paradise yet?

RECEPTIONIST: Yep. You're in Paradise then. And we're just past Acan Windows.

BROOKES: Okay.

RECEPTIONIST: Alright?

BROOKES: Thank you very much.

RECEPTIONIST: You're welcome. *(hangs up)*

WRITER: You know, a place is found and it's unbuilt upon and unwalked upon. And then a place develops there. And initially all hopes are good. You know, people have kind of... utopian dreams for the place. And it partly had taken on even before they got here that mythic kind of dimension in their minds. And since they knew nothing about it, the best they could do was to draw parallels between this as-yet undiscovered place and this unreal... you know, in non-figurative terms... but real in the sense of the mind. So yeah, they compared it to places like Avalon and like Paradise. But I think also the name itself was meant to have a kind of magic to it. Almost as though the people who named it were hoping to make the place be what they named it, simply by naming it that. But those, you know, places of the imagination are probably more powerful than the real ones. You know Avalon, that's always fascinated me because my father's name is Arthur, Arthur Reginald. And he lived on the Avalon peninsula. And in the Arthurian legend Avalon was the place of legend, of the afterlife, place of reward. And that's sort of wishful thinking when it comes to what people wanted Newfoundland to be. But that never goes away. Language kind of makes things real.

MUSIC: *Singer: "...if dreams come true..."*

ON AIR RADIO HOST: Alex, where are you now?

RANSBY ON SATELLITE PHONE: My position is about 25 miles southeast of Cape Race.

ON AIR RADIO HOST: So would you say... are you making good progress now?

RANSBY ON SATELLITE PHONE: Ha! It's all relative I guess...

ALEX RANSBY: It's hardly paradise. No, it's the most inhospitable, frightening piece of coastline I've ever sailed off in my life! You've only got to get 100 yards offshore and it's freezing bloody cold and miserable. But if you look at the people who moved here, who sailed here... ever since Cabot in 1450 or something... if I was on a ship with the sort of navigation they had, and the sort of food that they had, then they must have been elated to get here. And so they could have arrived anywhere and it would have been Paradise. And as a result, you have something here which we don't have in England. You have a deep love of your country, or of your region. A connection with it. And I'm sure it's because that's how people came here. And as a result, everybody is grateful to be here. Because if it wasn't their father it was their grandfather, or their great-grandfather. And so none of it is very far away.

MUSIC: *drones*

NARRATOR: One day, when they had celebrated their masses, a pillar in the sea appeared to them. It was higher than the sky. It had the colour of silver, and was harder than marble. The pillar was of bright crystal.

ADVERTISING MAN: He's a matter of yards away from a 10,000-year-old iceberg, potentially calved from a Greenland glacier. They feel humbled in the face of it, right? It's just, this is way larger than I am. And that's what we want to convey here in these images.

SOUND: *Tourism advertisement starts, stops.*

AD MAN: I'm Des Ryan, senior copywriter with the Bristol Group.

BUREAUCRAT: I'm Andrea Peddle. I'm the manager of advertising and communications for the Department of Tourism, Culture and Recreation.

BROOKES: The Promised Land of Advertising..

SOUND: *Tourism advertisement voice:*
"...Beyond the shore, there's a place where nature only comes in one size. A place where whales and icebergs cross paths. Newfoundland and Labrador..")

BUREAUCRAT: Okay. Years ago when we first started seriously marketing Newfoundland and Labrador as a tourism destination, there was always this perception of Newfoundland being rural, small, desolate, alone, desperate maybe.... were some of the connotations. And so one of the things we wanted to do was to change and dispel those ideas and images and just actually talk to people about what we are. What is it that is unique, different and compelling in this destination that will drive people here? And one of the things is icebergs and whales, and they cross paths... that is then representative of the province as a whole. Those are the things that we're talking about. And we use these as icons. They're the U.S.P.... the Unique Selling Propositions, if you want to coin a marketing term... that we have here that makes this the only place that you can experience that.

SOUND: *Tourism ad voice:*
"...Here the land is still untamed, its beauty undiscovered, unexplored, and unimaginable..."

BROOKES: What is the promised land that you want tourists to find?

- AD MAN: I want you to see a place that's bigger than life, larger than life. Full of colour and vibrancy and... uh... it's just awe-inspiring. It's a big, beautiful encounter with nature and people that you're just not going to find anywhere else.
- BUREAUCRAT: It's bright. Lively. Vivacious. Active. Edgy. Enthusiastic. But charming, and simple.
- MUSIC: *Uilleann pipes*
- NARRATOR: They then sailed throughout the whole day near one side of the crystal pillar. Saint Brendan said "Our Lord Jesus Christ has shown us this wonder so that the wonder be manifested to many, in order that they may believe."
- SOUND: *Tourism ad music*
- ADMAN: It is a dream, it is a fantasy. There are thirty or forty words which takes about sixteen seconds to say, out of a thirty second ad. And there's an underwater shot of two whales coming up to the surface. Then we move into our... it's a helicopter shot of an iceberg. We go over top of that to establish the other icon. And then we come to an end scene that includes the kayaker, the whale, and the iceberg in that ad. It's quite stunning.
- SOUND: *Tourism ad voice*
"...the most easterly point of North America, Newfoundland and Labrador."
- BROOKES: So how successful is this image that you're making? Is it the Promised Land for tourists?
- BUREAUCRAT: We think it is. Of course it is. Well, all we can say right now is that visitation has grown substantially since 1997, and we are... our growth is outpacing many of our other competitors. So yes, I believe it's working.
- SOUND: *(Tourism commercial voice:)*
"...the coast of Newfoundland was once home to thousands of fishermen, who for centuries habitated a patchwork of tiny communities that clung to craggy rocks and nestled in the snug coves and bays that offered safe harbour and ready access to the cod stocks of the North Atlantic. Though seemingly frozen in time, time finally overtook this simple way of life in the 1960's. In an effort to consolidate public works and services, thousands of these tiny communities were resettled. Abandoned now, except for the seagulls and a few fishermen who return each summer, they remain alive in memories of another time, another way of life.

(Irish jig music in background)

...But others are returning too. Coming to explore the history and experience the culture and traditional way of life of the people who once called these communities home. Island Rendezvous makes it possible for you to visit and explore one of the most beautiful places in eastern Newfoundland..."
- SOUND: *Camera noise, shutter clicks.*
- PETER PICCO: And another memory I have of right here. It's flat on this model but actually it was a downgrade of about, say, I don't know, 45 or 50 degrees. And my brother was the only guy in this little community who had a bike. And he was driving out this road here one evening, and one of the sheep came out of the woods. And to keep from hitting the sheep... that's how important the animals were... he crashed his bike into a big old load of rocks and he skinned out his arms and his elbows and his back. I can remember that as plain as anything. He came running down to the house "Mom! Dad! Mom! Dad!", right? "What happened to you? What happened to you!" Blood running out of him and everything. "I almost ran into one of the sheep, so I had to crash the bike!" It was an old bike that my father had brought from Lunenburg or somewhere and patched up and, you know, that was the only one in the community.
- SOUND: *Camera shutter.*

WALDEN: Now I'll come in really close here.

PETER PICCO: I wish that... the government never had to resettle all those communities. Because we would have grew up in those communities and, I mean... I wish they didn't have, ah... I wish the resettlement didn't have to come round.

SOUND: *Pause. Camera shutter.*
(Tourism commercial voice:)
"...the scenic walk reveals prominent local landmarks, serene landscapes dotted with the ruins of once-prominent buildings and houses and glimpses of the beautiful coastline and the resettled communities which were once home to over 400 people...."

MUSIC: *Uilleann pipes.*

NARRATOR: As the evening drew on, a great fog enveloped them. The steward said to Saint Brendan "That fog encircles the island for which you have been searching for seven years."

SOUND: Ferry boat engine.

FERRYMAN: Good!

BROOKES: How long is the trip?

FERRYMAN: Fifty-five minutes.

BROOKES: The ferry takes fifty-five minutes to reach the island.

NARRATOR: And after the space of an hour, a mighty light shone all around them, and the boat rested on the shore.

MUSIC: *(cuts off)*

BROOKES: Saint Brendan's. Bonavista Bay. 21st century.

SOUND: *Cassette being put into ghetto blaster*

BROOKES: What is it called?

RESIDENT Saint Brendan's Island.

MUSIC: *(cassette plays song:)*
"...Saint Brendan's Island, I see you smiling.
You're the jewel of Bonavista Bay.
You taught me things as I grew up
About life and love and not to give up,
Your memories will stay with me until my dying day."

SOUND: *Ghetto blaster stop button, music shuts off.*

PATRICK KELLY: Yup. This could very well be the island that Saint Brendan probably found. Because he found some islands, and this one that we live on being the largest in Bonavista Bay, well then it's probably one of the easiest ones to find seeing as it's the largest. And we're open to the ocean, so. Once you goes past that island there, that island there, the next land then I guess is Europe.

BROOKES: So if you were coming over, it's quite likely that...

PATRICK: It's quite likely.

BROOKES: ...you could strike in there?

PATRICK: So it kind of gives a kind of support to that, that Saint Brendan probably did find these islands over here. Makes a lot of sense to me. I think it's as good a story as anybody's got.

BROOKES: What's so special about Saint Brendan's?

PATRICK: Well. I don't know. I guess you have to live here to realise it. Like, ah, you're kind of free, and you're independent. And I'm self-employed, I'm a fisherman. And you can go to bed at night without locking your door, and... you don't have to lock your car. You can know everybody. Everybody's your friend, everybody you see you speak to. You go in a city, it seems like people just look the other way when they see another person. They don't want to have anything to do with... We're not used to that kind of life.

MUSIC: *Uilleann pipes, soft.*

PATRICK: But maybe in a city, if you knocked on someone's door they probably wouldn't even ask you in for a glass of cold water.

NARRATOR: On disembarking from the boat, they saw a wide land full of trees bearing fruit. They took what fruit they wanted, and drank from the wells. And so they walked through the whole land, and could not find the end of it.

PATRICK: There was a fellow here a few years ago, and he interviewed us here.

BROOKES: Is that the... that's the article there?

PATRICK: That's the article here. This is me, look. Picture of me in my boat.
(reads) "Patrick Kelly, 25, is the only one of ten Kelly children who has chosen to follow in his father's footsteps and fish. 'If I won a million dollars I'd still be out there fishing in my boat next year' he says cheerfully."
And cheerfully I mean, because that is from the bottom of my heart. Money's good, but it's not everything in the world to me. I like to have a little bit of piece of mind too.

NARRATOR: A youth appeared to them and embraced them with great joy, saying to Saint Brendan "Behold, the Promised Land for which you have sought for a long time."

PATRICK: Yeah. It says here, look:
(reads) "People who want facilities like hockey arenas, movie theatres or gourmet restaur... restaurants won't appreciate Saint Brendan's. But for those who put a big priority on peace of mind and trust in their neighbour, it's a wonderful place to be. Although Saint Brendan's is very much a part of Canada, its singular way of life and history make it seem like another country."

Yeah. We got satellite dishes to know what's... to let us know what's going on in the outside world but most of it is bad news so... you can live with it, you can live without it. Yeah. Now this is it, look: "Many isolated Newfoundland communities relocated to where schools, roads and other services were more widely available. But whether through sheer Irish mule-headedness, tenacity or love of the land, many of the people of Saint Brendan's stayed. Now Saint Brendan's still survives. The island has electricity, gravel roads, a regular ferry service to Burnside on the mainland, a community centre, a clinic where a doctor visits every two weeks, a fire hall and a post office."

BROOKES: That's not too bad. That's what you need.

PATRICK: Yeah. We have the basic things we need to live. And I don't even know if they're basic. It's... sometimes that's enough. Yeah.

ON AIR RADIO HOST: It's been about five and a half weeks coming, and it's kind of miraculous in itself. Alex Ransby has finally made it into port, and here's what the welcoming sounded like:

SOUND: *Clapping, cheering, crowd sings "For he's a jolly good fellow..."*

NARRATOR: Return then to the land of your birth, bringing with you some of the fruit of this land, and as many of the precious stones as your boat can carry. And just as this land appears to you ripe with fruit, so shall it always remain without any shadow of night.

BROOKES: If you could never come back here again, you know, what would you carry with you?

PATRICK: Oh my god, I guess just... the freedom that's here. Or something. The peacefulness. I don't know, I can't put my finger on it just like that. But to go away and never come back? Oh my, it would be terrible.

SOUND: *(County Clare museum guide speaking to students:)*
"...Now that's it. Now on your way back, now I'll go first. We're going on the woodland walk. And on your left, hopefully if they're out, you'll see wild boar."

(Students:)
"Wild boar!..."

BROOKES: In the County Clare museum the lecture is over and it's time for the students to leave... clutching their notes about a leather boat, an Irish monk, and a dream of Paradise.

SOUND: *Telephone rings.*

RECEPTIONIST: Good morning. Town of Paradise. Robbie speaking.

BROOKES: Hi. I was going to come out and pick up your information about Paradise...

RECEPTIONIST: Oh yes, right.

BROOKES: ..and I'm not going to be able to make it out. I'm wondering if you could fax it to me or put it in the mail to me.

RECEPTIONIST: Okay, I'll put one in the mail for you.

BROOKES: Thanks very much. Goodbye.

RECEPTIONIST: Bye. *(Hangs up)*

MUSIC: *(Singing) "...if dreams...
If dreams...
If dreams come true..."*

END



Scott Walden's photograph of Peter Picco with his model