

BEGINNER'S PLUCK

Gwen Wilkinson

As a child Gwen was always out, boating.

"My parents had narrow boats and barges." Good at English, Gwen was devastated when she failed the subject in her Leaving Certificate. "I've always thought, whoever failed me, I'm going to show them."

During her college years, she met a man from South Africa, whose damaged boat was towed into Galway harbour.

"Afterwards, I sailed off with him. We were together for about six years. I sailed across the Atlantic twice, and from South Africa to South America. We lived on the boat for most of the time. It was a real adventure."

Returning home, she started work as a travel documentary photographer.

"I travelled to countries like Mongolia, but I wasn't comfortable. I felt I was invading people's privacy."

She turned to art photo-

graphy, and then became a prize-winning sculptor.

"I've been an artist for 15 years," she says.

Gwen made a canoe and paddled the Irish waterways in 2019 to 2020. "During the journey, I researched people along the way. I thought there was a story that needed to be told. I felt it unfolding."

Who is Gwen Wilkinson?

Date/ place of birth: Terryglass, on the River Shannon.

Education: Newtown boarding School in Co Waterford from aged eight; The University of Galway, Arts; Griffith College, Photography; National College of Art and Design, Fine Arts. College in Bristol, Qualification in Ecology.

Home: Co Carlow.

The day job: An artist.

In another life: "I'd go off sailing around the world at my own pace."

Favourite writers: Kathleen Jamie; Robert Macfarlane;

Cormac McCarthy; Barry Lopez; Tim Robinson.

Second book: "I have a few ideas."

Top tip: "To get a professional to critique and advise you on your first two chapters."

Website: gwenwilkinson.com

Instagram: @Gwen_Wilkinson.

The debut
The Waters and the Wild;
**Merrion Press, €16.99/
Kindle, €9.08**

This is so much more than an account of Gwen's canoe trip across Ireland's waterways; it's a fascinating exploration into nature, along with stories of the places, and characters associated with them, that she passes along the way.

The verdict: An utter joy. Luminous, poetic writing, and her own stunning illustrations of wildlife.



SUE LEONARD