

THE MEANING OF IRISHNESS

by *George E. Ryan*

Being of Irish descent has formed many of the idiosyncrasies that particularize me as a human being.

I have visited Ireland perhaps 25 times and have been known to enter or exit such places as Rome, Tel Aviv, London, or Copenhagen by way of Dublin or Shannon Airport just to give Aer Lingus my business. The only dog I ever bought was an Irish Wolfhound which I imported from County Kildare by responding to an ad in *Ireland of the Welcomes*, one of but two magazines I've subscribed to for longer than a couple of years.

I took Patrick as my name at Confirmation, my wife and I spent our honeymoon touring Ireland in a car, half our children have Gaelic names (Patricia, Noreen, Colleen, and Caitlin), there's an Irish Hex Sign on my doghouse and my tool shed, and we once owned a Collie we called "Tara." "Pope John Paul II in Ireland" and Sean O Riada albums grace my record-stand. My stamp collection focuses on two areas only: Irish postage and U.S. stamps with any Celtic aspect at all.

Not much for politics of any sort, I could probably name— and may have met— more Irish politicians than American, and I'm deeply distressed by the conundrum of Northern Ireland. I could weep when I visualize a grandmother of mine standing at a dock in Galway or Cobh saying goodbye to her family and setting out, alone, to become a domestic or a cook in Massachusetts, just to give me my American birth.

My home library is divided into three parts, the largest section of which has to do with Ireland and the American-Irish.

My front door sports a brass knocker symbolizing the River Liffey, a cement St. Fiacre presides over my garden, I fly my own Republic of Eire flag on St. Patrick's Day and around Easter Sunday, and my office, kitchen, living room, den, workshop and sleeping quarters all have wall-hangings depicting Irish people, places, or things.

One painting shows the old Ryan neighborhood in Fermoy, County Cork, while a ceramic George Bernard Shaw looks down upon my typewriter— approvingly, I trust. Our state-occasions crystal is Waterford in the Tramore pattern, Belleek decorates our mantle and curio cabinet. Since my first trek to Ireland in 1957, my favorite jackets, sweaters, and hats are of Irish wool.

What does it mean to be Irish? American-Irish? It means that, unless you're careful, that identity, plus interest and great pride, can chart the course of your life.

The last time I painted my house, I instinctively chose green with a white trim and wanted to accent this combination with an orange door. When my wife reminded me that these were the colors of the Irish flag, I had to admit that maybe my Irishness ran a bit deeper than even I had been aware.

The door's yellow now and looks *foine*— er, fine, just fine.

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