

## ***This Is Your Brain on Shamrocks***

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Like most minds, your thought process is guided by that inner voice that judges and assesses everyone and everything. In fact, that voice might have just asked, “what voice is he talking about?” Yup. It’s that voice.

But you’re an Irish American born to Irish parents, which means *your* inner voice has a brogue that sounds remarkably like your mother’s. It’s that “Celtic consciousness” that gets to work as you’re sitting on the back deck of your house reading the Sunday *New York Times* just as the last Mass of the day begins.

*Not going to church this morning, are we? Well, I’m sure the Lord Jesus Christ didn’t want to get up the day he died for yer sins! Yerra, I’m sure he would have had more fun doing the crossword puzzle on his back deck instead of hanging on the cross!*

On the motorcycle road trip of your life, that inner voice will be in the sidecar, offering color commentary on the scenery that whizzes by. If you find yourself putting the kickstand down in the parking lot of a tattoo parlor at the age of 44, for example, that voice will encourage you to stick to the bright light of the interstate.

*Is there a church nearby? While you’re in there marking up your arm so that it looks like a coloring book, I want to get a few decades of the rosary in. I will be praying to the Mother of God that ye’ll come to your senses. Not sure what ye are tryin’ to prove here. Are ye trying to set an example for my granddaughters? I’m sure they’re gonna wanna run off and get one of dem ‘tramp stamps’ above their rumps. Sure, that’ll be a marvelous look. But ye go ahead and do what ye want, luv. What do I know?*

You try to argue with that voice but there is no winning the battle. The voice always triumphs with a guilt-punch that lands below the belt and radiates pain throughout the body as you lay in a fetal position on the curb.

*Nine pushes. ‘Twas nine of the most agonizing pushes a mother ever had to suffer through to give birth to a child and if I could have known that the son I gave birth to would talk to his mother’s inner voice like that, sure, I wouldn’t have bothered pushing at all.*

Everyone needs a vacation and your inner voice is no exception. When and if you are able to shut it off, a new voice that sounds remarkably like Sister Rita slides into the sidecar next to your brain.

She was the servant of God who taught your sex-education course in the sixth grade. Like a rabbit under the shadow of a hawk swooping overhead, you can remember how your breathing became labored as the woman you affectionately

nicknamed “Fish Face” walked down the aisle of your classroom.

Her delight as she described Hell was palpable; the way the Earth periodically parted to burp out the stench of burning flesh, the cold gurgling sludge of eternal suffering, and the loss of the Lord’s light. How you got your ticket punched for a one-way trip to eternal damnation was the favorite part of her lecture. Sister Rita’s voice usually screeches in your ear whenever a hint of intimacy is in the air.

*Violating your body with pleasures of the flesh is a mortal sin, especially when you are alone. A mortal sin produces a macula that stains the soul and if it is not immediately repented in Confession, you will be eternally separated from God in Hell. If you die and a mortal sin like premarital canoodling is not confessed and repented for at the time of your death, it will result in an internal and agonizing damnation!*

You never thought you’d ever beg for your mother’s voice to make an encore performance inside your skull, but Sister Rita can do that to you. Sister Rita and the inner voice are partners in the shaping of your life: the fear of internal damnation and an Irish mother’s guilt allows you to stay in a narrow lane of good behavior.

You were raised at a time and culture where parents and teachers never encouraged their children to be anything they wanted to be. The world was painted as just a big blue ball orbiting the sun, it was never positioned as your oyster! They paid enough for your education, but all that was expected of you was to not embarrass them in front of the neighbors. If you became a priest or nun, your parents would die with a smile on their face. But if all you did was managed by some miracle to scale a few rungs higher on the socioeconomic ladder, fair play to you.

Indeed, the inner voice might mock you once your income bracket rises. It’s a cruel irony that your parents toiled in lower-middle class drudgery so that you could get a college degree and then hire lower-middle class people to do the menial jobs around the house that are no longer worth your time. Rest assured that your head never gets as big as your bank accounts, thanks to that voice inside your head.

*So, I guess we’re all high-fallutin’ now, are we? Too good to clean your own house and mow your own lawn? Yes, I know ye’ll tell yourself that ye have made enough money for ye to allow yer wife to stay home and raise the kids, and I’m glad for ye, luv. Really. Ye went a lot further in life than I ever thought ye would. But it wouldn’t kill yeh to clean the auld toilet once in a while. I never thought I’d have a son that would hire others to do the very same work his parents did to afford putting him through school! Had I known ye’d become one of those rich folks, I probably would have let yeh work off more of yer own education.*

Your parents never spent money on maids and landscapers. They tended their own house and saved every penny they could to provide for you and send what little money was left home to their parents in Ireland. If overtime wages and tips were good on any given year, they may have taken you over to see your

grandparents. Those childhood trips to Ballylanders and Athenry in the motherland are stitched into the fabric of your soul and Ireland calls you, her traveling child, to come home every few years.

The inner voice has a belly full of Irish pride on St. Patrick's Day, furious at the portrayal of our culture.

*Do they all think we are all eejits swillin' green beer and puking our guts out along the parade route?! Ye are handy with a pen---dash off a few words to the Hallmark Card Company and tell them that we'll burn a leprechaun card every day until they start printing greetings with St. Patrick instead of green beer!*

You thought that voice was stark raving mad all these years but now you won't hoist a pint before first stopping at church on March 17. It is there that you reflect on the saint who was captured and carried off as a slave to Ireland in his teens.

After remaining captive for six years as a herdsman in Ireland, Patrick's faith grew daily and when he escaped back to Roman Britain, he recalls a haunting vision. "I saw a man coming, as it were from Ireland," he wrote. "His name was Victorinus, and he carried many letters, and he gave me one of them. I read the heading: 'The Voice of the Irish.' As I began the letter, I imagined in that moment that I heard the voice of those very people who were near the wood of Foclut, which is beside the western sea—and they cried out, as with one voice: "we appeal to you, holy servant boy, to come and walk among us."

Is it any wonder that Patrick is the patron saint of Ireland and Irish Americans? His lesson is one that many here in the States can identify with: you may leave Ireland, but Ireland never leaves you.

*I like the way you ended this, luv. Fair play to yeh. Maybe I didn't do such a bad job raising yeh after all.*

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***Mike Farragher is a freelance columnist for the Irish Voice, IrishCentral.com, and other media outlets. A collection of light-hearted essays, This Is Your Brain on Shamrocks, is available now at [www.thisisyourbrainonshamrocks.com](http://www.thisisyourbrainonshamrocks.com).***