

## **The Power of Irish Wisdom** **By Renee' Gatz, Author**

Growing up my mother told me there are two kinds of people in the world—those that are Irish and those that wish they were. By the way, you are considered Irish if you have one drop of Irish blood.

As a young person, I understood this to mean that my mother was very proud of her heritage and that I should be too. But as I have grown and learned more about the Irish, I have come to understand that this expression goes beyond pride. It reflects the indomitable spirit of the Irish, who in spite of incredible obstacles are joyful, grateful and successful, which is why everyone wants to claim Irish ancestry.

Let's consider the history of the Irish. For centuries the British persecuted the Irish and tried to colonize Ireland and have the Irish break from their belief in Catholicism. To achieve this goal, they engaged in dehumanizing practices that included driving the Irish out of their communities and taking away their basic rights, all in an effort to turn them into paupers so England could control them. Much blood was shed, families and lives broken, hard-earned treasures gained and lost. Yet, there were moments when the Irish were able to rise up only to be brought down again in a repeating cycle. Through it all, the Irish never gave up and more importantly they never lost their joyful spirits and eventually won their independence.

This very painful history is a lesson for all about standing up for yourself in spite of opposition but not losing your joy in the process. In order to strike this balance, one must have wisdom to see not just the trouble that is in front you but also have the ability to appreciate and be grateful for the gifts that are yours today, even under the most insolent circumstances. It would be very easy for the Irish to become bitter and negative. However, the Irish found a way to remain cheerful, funny and optimistic and if that is not the living practice of wisdom, I don't know what is.

The history of this spirit was seen in the Irish immigrants that came to the United States in search of a better life. The Irish were not treated well in their homeland and were not well-received when they landed in the United States either. But deep inside themselves they knew their self-worth and were willing to face challenges, discrimination and hardships to build their dreams. No one can accomplish this through sheer force of will or hold on to it through luck. There must be an embedded core of faith and wisdom that one can fall back on to see you through your darkest days.

My grandmother embodied that sentiment. She came to the United States from Ireland alone at the age of 18. Upon arriving at Ellis Island, she took up work as a live-in maid and cook. She used her salary to bring over three brothers. One became homesick and returned home, another stayed and the third brother became ill. My grandmother took a room to care for him until his death. In order to provide a proper burial for him, she made arrangements with the local funeral director and worked to pay the debt in full. This was no small accomplishment for a single Irish woman at this time. Through all the

challenges, she relied on the wisdom she learned as a girl in Ireland. Expressions like, **“you come from good stock and you will be just fine”** to see her through.

My grandmother went on to marry and have seven children, one died in child birth. Three sons served in WWII and one died an early death not long after returning from service. My grandmother’s youngest child, my mother, endured a tragic car accident in which she almost lost her leg. Through all the trials and tribulations, my mother said you would never know my grandmother had a care in the world. She always had a kind word and a positive attitude. She was true to her Irish heritage. As a result of her courage and optimistic attitude, I have enjoyed a life of fewer struggles and more success. When I face challenges now, I remember my mother saying to me, **“it’s not the end of the world.”** Those simple words help keep life in perspective.

Maintaining faith and a positive attitude has served the Irish well. Since the days of European immigration, the Irish have gone on to be significant contributors to American success. They hold powerful roles in government, religion, and business. Proving what my mother has long told me, **“you can do anything you put your mind to.”** Knowing all along that it won’t be easy but **“the best things in life are worth working hard for.”**

Centuries of wise Irish men and women have lived a life of joy and gratitude in spite of tremendous challenges, proving that conflict does not dictate defeat or bitterness. So go forward in confidence, no matter your challenges, and remember to see the joy in life and to always **“count your blessings,”** for they are many.

Happy St. Patrick’s Day to all, because everyone is Irish on St. Patrick’s Day!

Renee’ Gatz, author of [Wise Words & Witty Expressions](#)