

The Power of Irish Wisdom Reaffirmed by my Trip to Ireland By Renee Gatz, author of *Wise Words & Witty Expressions*

I began writing my column, “The Power of Irish Wisdom” for the Irish American Cultural Institute after publishing my first book, *Wise Words & Witty Expressions*, a collection of the expressions my Irish American mother said to me growing up to help to navigate life’s ups and downs. Like most children too young and inexperienced to know better, I showed no appreciation for the value of my mother’s wisdom. It was only after gaining more life experience that I began to appreciate and find comfort in the words she said and still says to me when I am met with a challenge or in need of guidance.

Like most Irish families, we did not have long conversations about life. When something came up, my mother would simply recall the appropriate expression for the occasion, state it with unequivocal conviction and we would get on with life. It seemed as if my mother was hard-wired with an expression for all of life’s occasions and those words were so powerful no further discussion was necessary. There was a calm that her words provided, reassuring me that everything would be alright *because I come from good stock and will be just fine*; that there was no sense worrying because *you don’t paint the devil on the door until he is already there* and to laugh at ignorance because *empty barrels make the most noise*.

Last month, I had the opportunity to visit Ireland for the second time. After writing my book and sharing my mother’s wisdom with others for over two years now, I was very excited to spend time in the country that birthed my grandmother’s spirit and the generational effect it had on her family in the United States. From the moment I prepared to land, the beautiful green patchwork of grass seen through the haze of transparent clouds told me that I had arrived in a mystical place that graciously welcomed me and promised to treat me to an experience that would sooth my soul.

The beauty of the country was a mere precursor to the amazing spirit of the Irish people. As I traveled from county to county learning about the history of Ireland, the struggles and triumphs, I remained in awe of the strength, positive nature and good sense of humor of Ireland's people in spite of the centuries of extreme hardships they faced.

That spirit was a replica of my grandmother and mother’s spirit, who are the inspirations for my book. Although I was only three when my grandmother died, my mother kept her memory alive for me and her spirit in the examples she set, and I recognized that same spirit in the many people I had the privilege of meeting.

When I arrived in County Mayo, the county my grandmother originally came from, our tour director said, "Welcome Home Renee." That greeting captured just how I felt, as if I was coming home for a visit to a place that was not new, rather a part of who I am.

While I was in Mayo, I was humbled to visit the same church my grandmother attended over 100 years ago, the Knock Shrine. While in the church and looking around, my eyes found a beautiful stained glass window alongside the pew I was kneeling in and in my eye's view was the name "Della." Della is the name my grandmother was known by in the United States and the name of the woman the stained glass window was dedicated to. I knew at that moment my grandmother was letting me know that she was there with me, making my visit even more extraordinary.

As my trip came to end, I reflected on my time in Ireland and considered myself most fortunate to have descended from people who understand that *life is sweet no matter what* and celebrate the best and most challenging moments in our lives with humility, hope, love and a healthy dose of sarcasm.

Until we speak again next month, "may the road rise up to meet you."