

## O'Foghludha Debunks the Blarney

# How Irish Is St. Patrick's Day?

Monday is St. Patrick's Day, and whether or not you've got any Irish blood in you, you may be wondering what all the hubbub is about.

Don't feel lonely. The Irish wonder the same thing all the time.

The annual St. Patrick's Day celebration is largely an American invention, according to Dr. Fergus O'Foghludha, professor of radiation physics at the medical center, a native Irishman and without doubt one of Duke's experts on the "Emerald Isle."

Oh, it's true that the Irish celebrate the holiday all right, but contrary to popular opinion, they don't make a big deal of it. And they find the American's craving for shamrocks and green clothing inexplicable.

Traditionally, O'Foghludha explained, St. Patrick's Day exempted Catholics from the rigors of their Lenten fast in the weeks between Ash Wednesday and Easter.

"It has always been a kind of 'station break' during the period of self-denial," the physicist said with a chuckle, "a time when people could get plastered without feeling guilty."

The strange thing is that there are only two days during the year in Ireland when one cannot legally buy a beverage with more punch than hot cocoa—Christmas and St. Patrick's Day.

The Irish, with their legendary thirst for "a little something to keep the blood circulating properly," have gotten around the annual prohibition nicely, however, O'Foghludha said that on St. Patrick's Day, everyone suddenly develops a great love for dogs. Conveniently, the Dublin Dog Show is held on that day, and it has been allowed to maintain a good bar—the only one in town which remains open.

"Almost everyone goes to the Dublin Dog Show," he said.

Getting back to St. Patrick himself, O'Foghludha admitted that the man who is reported to have introduced Christianity to Ireland and driven out the snakes and toads was actually an Englishman or a Welshman captured as a slave around 432 A.D.

"In Ireland, we don't stress that fact very much," he said.

Irishmen wear shamrocks on March 17 to honor their saint, but one never sees a shamrock for the rest of the year except in shops catering to American tourists who seem to want shamrocks. Ireland's symbol is not the shamrock, but rather the harp.

St. Patrick, who may be a composite figure of two men who lived at the time, eventually became bishop of Armagh in what is now Northern Ireland and

displaced the Druids, followers of an ancient Celtic religion.

It's unlikely that the holy man had much time for herpetology since he was so busy making converts to Christ. Furthermore, O'Foghludha said it's unlikely that there ever were any snakes in Ireland—outside of zoos—because the climate isn't the best for them and because the island has been separated from Europe by the Irish Sea and the English Channel since before snakes evolved in prehistoric times.

About other "Irish" customs and traditions, scientist said:

—"No self-respecting Irishman would be caught dead kissing the Blarney stone (reputed to give one the 'gift of the gab'). That's left for foreigners.

—"No one in Ireland says 'blarney' (meaning flattery or nonsense). They

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## "A Little Kindness Goes a Long Way," Stress Cancer Center Citizen Advisors

By William Erwin

When you have cancer, little acts of kindness mean a lot.

That's what several patients and doctors stressed here last week — each in his own way — at a meeting of the Comprehensive Cancer Center's Citizens Advisory Committee.

One member of the committee, Mrs. Edith Yellig of Tryon, N.C., said a single visit from a Duke doctor helped her rally against bone cancer.

She was a patient here in 1971 when a friend she called "Doctor X" dropped by her room.

"I had not expected it; he was not my doctor," she said. "Knowing that he, as chairman of his department, carried a terrific workload, I didn't believe he would bother."

The visit couldn't have come at a better time, Mrs. Yellig said. "I had completely lost my identity as a cancer patient," she said.

"This man with his sense of leisure

and caring rekindled a spark within me that had been gradually fading over these difficult months...He did not give me the impression that I would be cured, but somehow he made me feel I was worth curing," she said.

"I think that was what made the difference."

For another committee member, William Linkhaw of Lumberton, N.C., it was his doctors' sense of humor that helped him over the rough spots.

One Duke doctor was escorting him to the Radiology Department for therapy when the doctor told Linkhaw he had multiple myeloma. "That's cancer of the bone, isn't it?" Linkhaw asked.

The doctor said, "That's right."  
"What do you do about that?" Linkhaw wanted to know.

"Well, you're a farmer. We try to spray the tree and kill the bugs," said the physician.

Being kind to a cancer patient may

mean telling him the truth, but not the whole truth, about his disease, according to Dr. James H. Semans, professor of urology and a member of the Advisory Committee.

A man with advanced prostate cancer might have 10 more years of active life ahead.

If such a patient is elderly, Semans said. "I would like to see how he's going to respond to diethylstilbestrol...and if he has a dramatic response, feels better, turns up for breakfast at 7 a.m. every morning and takes a new lease on life, am I going to depress him by saying, 'Sorry, old boy — you have an incurable cancer'? No!"

Semans said doctors should think carefully about how to tailor bad news for each cancer patient without excluding death as something ahead for all of us.

"I'm a little bothered by the fact that, in a busy clinic, it's pretty often (the case) that the doctor feels an obligation to tell the patient — quote — the truth," he said.

"The doctor gets a fine night's sleep and the patient has to wrestle with all the inner strivings that will result from that piece of authenticated news," he said.

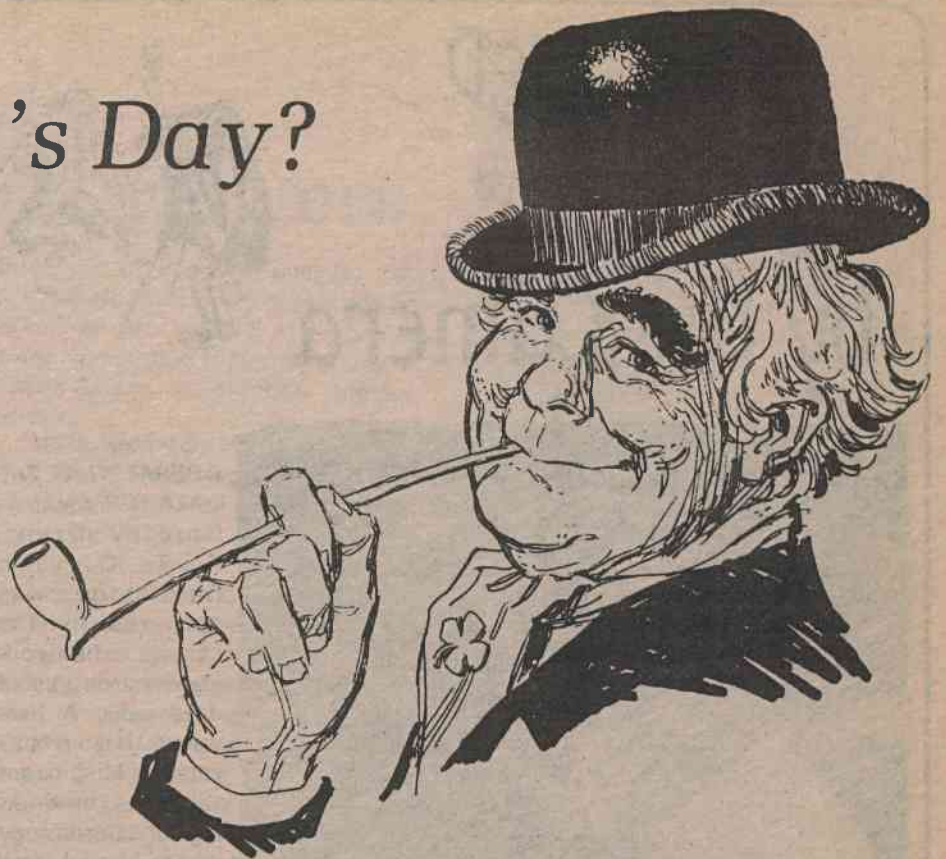
Semans added, "What the patient really wants to know more than anything else, no matter what he says, is 'How am I going to feel every day?'"

Washington journalist Mrs. Archibald Roosevelt, another Advisory Committee member, indicated she'd rather have the whole truth, should she ever develop cancer.

"I really do believe that doctors make a mistake in making cancer mysterious, (in acting as though) there's some great mystique about cancer," she said.

"Cancer is just something we all are going to have to come to grips with some way or other — either through

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LOOKING OVER A.L.I.F.—Dr. Dareil Bigner, associate professor of pathology, shows lay advisors to the Comprehensive Cancer Center how he and other researchers will handle cancer virus cultures in Duke's new Animal Laboratory and Isolation Facility. (Photo by Bill Erwin)