

Up front

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There's a wee bit o' Irish in all of us

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Ombuds Editor

Faith and begorra! The day for the wearing o' the green has indeed arrived.

Today Carolina students (along with most Americans) will undoubtedly scrounge through their wardrobes in search of something green to wear — many may even sport buttons that plead, "Kiss Me I'm Irish," or "Honorary Blarney Stone, Kiss Me," in the hopes of attracting a member of the opposite sex. Sundown will see an mass exodus of the Irish and the "Irish-for-a-day" to the local bars, restaurants and clubs searching for the best drink specials, corned-beef-and-cabbage-dinners and prizes offered for the most outrageous Irish costumes.

That's what St. Patrick's Day seems to be all about in this country. Whether or not they claim to have Irish ancestry, very few Americans care that the patron saint of Ireland wasn't Irish, but Welsh, that his real name was Succat, not Patrick, or that, at age 16, he was kidnapped by pirates from his home and sold into slavery. Or that he worked for an Irish chieftain where he tended sheep for six years on Slemish Mountain in northeast Ireland before escaping. Or that he returned to Ireland as a missionary 20 years later to become "The Voice of the Irish." What Americans do care about is having fun, and stereotypical, mischievous leprechauns with their pots o' gold, the colorful shamrocks and lucky four leaf clovers. The lively limericks and the Blarney Stone all fit together perfectly to create a holiday dedicated to the art of drinking, joking around and having a good time.

But while Americans are wearing green, organizing grand parades and drinking green beer, across the Atlantic on the Emerald Isle, the Irish are going about things a wee bit differently. Maura Mast, a second-year graduate student in mathematics from South Bend, Ind., who did her undergraduate work at Notre Dame University, has an Irish mother. She says that, unlike in

the United States, St. Patrick's Day is a religious holiday for the Catholics in Ireland, and it's a big day for children. "I know they get a day off from school, and our grandparents always sent us badges with the colors of Ireland (green, orange and white) that the Irish children wear," she said. "We always got real live shamrocks to plant and grow."

Mary Mast, Maura's mother, is a native of Dundalk, Ireland, which is about 15 miles south of the border between Northern and Southern Ireland. She moved to the United States in 1959, when she married an American, Cecil Mast, who is a mathematics professor at Notre Dame University.

She says she immediately noticed a distinct difference between the St. Patrick's Day celebrations in America as compared to Ireland. "I was amazed when I came to this country and saw the huge celebrations, especially once when I spent the day in Chicago. They actually paint a green line down the street, dye the river green. In New York City it's the same type of thing. The main difference is that it's a religious holiday in Ireland, a holy day of obligation — you must go to Mass. It's an Irish holiday equivalent to the American Labor Day or Memorial Day. At the Mass we sing various hymns to St. Patrick, and everyone wears shamrocks — *reathamrocks*. But, other than that, you don't see as much wearing green, except on the young people."

Mast says the celebrations in Ireland are not nearly as boisterous as the Americans'. "In Dublin there is the Industrial Parade — different companies all have floats, but it's rather low key as compared to the parades here in cities such as Chicago and New York. There are girls wearing Irish kilts, a group of step dancers, a group of bagpipe players and perhaps a group from the army."

"When I was young, the day started out with church in the morning and the singing of the St. Patrick hymns, then the afternoon parade, and then everyone would go to the horse races. This was in the '50s, mind you

— the whole country closed down, even the pubs were closed — this is a tragedy in Ireland! But, I'm sure this has changed — the licensing laws are different now."

Mast said that she and her husband celebrate St. Patrick's day by attending Mass at The Notre Dame Chapel said by a friend of theirs who is an Irish priest — and the mass is in Gaelic. "We usually have a party on or near the day with our family and a group of Irish friends and traditional Irish foods — we'd never eat corned beef and cabbage in Ireland on St. Patrick's Day," she says.

Mast says that corned beef was most popular just after the potato famine of 1846 because it was cheap. Because of the famine, thousands of Irish came to America, bringing with the popular dish with them. Corned beef is now more associated with Irish Americans than with the Irish.

Instead, she serves ham, a stuffed turkey, colcannon (a potato dish with cabbage and onions), turnips, homemade Irish sodabread and Irish (dried) peas. For dessert, there's trifle and flan. "Then we have Irish coffee with a toast (in Gaelic: 'Slainte Agus Saol Agat,' which means 'Health and Long Life to You,'" she says.

Maura says she is usually home for the holiday, but, because she is studying for her comprehensive exam, she will miss her parents' party. But she doesn't intend to go out and drink green beer tonight either. "I don't have any plans, although I might go to the Notre Dame (vs. SMU at the Dean Dome) game if I can get tickets. That'd be a good Irish thing to do."

Two Irish UNC graduate students, Fiona Doloughan and David Thompson, also have no plans for tonight. They are married, and both of them hail from different parts of Northern Ireland where there is little celebration of St. Patrick's Day.

Doloughan, who was born in Newtonards, Northern Ireland, says she never celebrated St. Patrick's Day when she was growing up — her school only got the day

off if the boys' rugby team won the championship game which was traditionally played on that day. Actually, she has only celebrated St. Patrick's Day in Ireland once — she went to Belfast after she had been at Warwick University in England. "I was disappointed, too, because there was really nothing going on," she said.

St. Patrick's day is recognized in Northern Ireland, but there are fewer celebrations. Ireland was divided in 1921, when Northern Ireland became a part of the United Kingdom. Doloughan says that although the shamrock represents Ireland as a whole, the color green is controversial — orange represents Protestant color of Ulster, the northern county.

"In Ireland, the celebration has many more political implications than would even occur to people in the States," Doloughan said. "It is much more a cultural, religious and political event."

This is the fifth time Doloughan will spend St. Patrick's Day in the United States, and she is not planning to do anything special. "I've never really celebrated it here," she says. "The Americans celebrate it here more than the Irish do — it's an American invention."

Thompson was born in Belfast, which is in the northeastern part of Ireland. "St. Patrick's Day is not celebrated in a big way at home," he says. "We always got the day off in school, and, as far as I know, it's a holiday for most people, but I was surprised at how big the celebration is here. Americans seem to do everything in a bigger way."

Because some of his students know he is Irish, he says, they often ask him about his plans for St. Patrick's Day and are surprised when he tells them he has no plans. "But I do think St. Patrick's Day in this country is nice — it's fun to see everyone going for it in a big way."

James Simmons, a poet who teaches Drama and Anglo-Irish literature at the New University of Ulster at Coleraine, is a native of Londonderry, Northern Ireland. He agrees with Thompson that there is not much public

celebration on St. Patrick's Day in Belfast. "Everyone may drink an extra beer at the pub, or wear a shamrock on his lapel."

Simmons says many of the Northern Irish, who are predominantly Protestant, are ambivalent about the start of Catholicism in Ireland. "I imagine the Church is a sort of negative influence on celebration, but I've never celebrated it in Dublin," he says. "I did drink green beer once in Philadelphia — it was awful!"

Simmons also shares Thompson's opinion about the American festivities. "It's sort of fun to see all these excesses — I suppose Americans make more of a fuss over here because there are probably more Irish-Americans in America than Irish in Ireland, and there's that tendency to be sentimental about the homeland."

Irish-American junior Neil Rourke remembers his family's sentimental celebrations: a special dinner of corned beef and cabbage and a green cake, and his aunt would put green food coloring in the milk. "I always wear a green shirt, and a couple of buttons, like, 'It's Hard to Be Humble When You're Irish.' I usually go uptown and drink and basically have a good time."

Other students adopt the "If you're not Irish, fake it," attitude, and they approach St. Patrick's Day with one thought in mind: PARTY.

Senior Jane Terrell admits that she doesn't really know much about St. Patrick's Day, but she is definitely planning to go out and celebrate tonight. "I know that you should wear green and it's a day for the Irish," Terrell says. "It's a great time to go out to the bars, so that's what I'm going to do — go out and drink green beer."

So, whether you're Irish or just wish you were, a St. Patrick's Day in America is meant to be a party — and anyone blessed with the luck of the Irish has at least a chance of someday catching that leprechaun and finding that pot o' gold.

