

What St. Patrick's Day Means to Me

By Mary Lauren Golden

In April of 1915, my great-grandmother Bridie arrived in New York on the last successful voyage of the Lusitania. A few years prior, my great-grandfather, William did the same, passing Lady Liberty and entering the doors of Ellis Island. My great-grandparents, like many other immigrants, were greeted by inspectors, doctors, and personnel waiting to determine how fit they were for the United States of America. I doubt my great-grandparents would have believed that one day, a great-granddaughter they would never meet, would write about what their story means. Their story is not rare, their story is not spectacular, their story is not even told that often, but to me, their story is everything.

My paternal grandfather, Papa to me, has kept the traditions and legacy of my great-grandparents alive for every member of our large and growing family. I am thankful that I know so much about the lives of my immigrant ancestors; and that my grandfather has educated me on what it means to celebrate my Irish heritage on Saint Patrick's Day and every day. The stories, recipes, photographs, beliefs, and religion of my great-grandparents has been passed down from my grandfather, allowing me to see the beauty and uniqueness of Irish culture. Saint Patrick's Day for

many is filled with green parties, leprechauns and beer. For me, the holiday is filled with personal traditions that are rooted in our Irish background.

Listening to my Papa's stories, going to church, and searching for shamrocks is what makes Saint Patrick's Day a special time for me to appreciate the power of where I come from and how it affects where I am going.

When my great-grandparents first arrived in New York, they were told to change their name in order to become "less Irish." Now, every Saint Patrick's Day, that same Irishness is celebrated throughout the world and throughout my family. Saint Patrick's Day gives me the time to reflect on the culture, tradition and sacrifices of our family's past. The sacrifices of my great-grandparents went unnoticed for a long time, so the meaning of St. Patrick's Day for me, is recognizing all their lives encompassed in order for me to write this. The reason these sacrifices mean more and more each year is because what they did more than 100 years ago allows me to be who I am today. Every Saint Patrick's Day I am able to reflect on how the courage of my great-grandparents still affects me even now. Throughout high school this meaning has grown even more powerful as my life changes each year. I have had opportunities my great-grandparents could only dream of, I will graduate from high school with an education they would never have expected, and soon I will attend the University of Georgia

to live out my dreams, much like they did so long ago. The hard work, blessings, and opportunities that have filled my life make me grateful for a heritage and ancestors like mine and help me to understand the importance in celebrating them every year.

Last summer, I visited my cousin in New York who was inspired by our great-grandparents to become an immigration attorney. While there I had the chance to visit Ellis Island for the second time. The first time I went, I was seven years old and did not pay attention to the incredible place I was in. Coming back as a 17-year-old, gave me the chance to not only appreciate the journey of my great grandparents, but of so many others. Many Irish experienced the same hardships of immigration and like me, their descendants' lives have been made better because of it. This appreciation gave me the ability to see Saint Patrick's day in a new light. I believe Saint Patrick's Day is not only about honoring the Irish customs of the past, but also in the future. This day is a time for me to reflect on all immigrants and their journeys, as well as understanding how essential immigration is. This is yet another meaning I have found Saint Patrick's Day to hold in my life and the lives of others.

Saint Patrick's Day is just another holiday to many, a party to some, but its meaning for me, is indescribable. Saint Patrick's Day gives me the chance to not only honor my heritage but reflect on its presence in my life

even today. This holiday is also a way for me to give my appreciation toward the struggles and obstacles faced by Irish for so long, as well as continue to respect the immigrants that travel like my great-grandparents did. Their heritage and their dreams altered the course of my life forever and have given me everything. I am incredibly thankful for a family with a story like mine and thankful for the ability to celebrate that every Saint Patrick's Day.