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Mysterious Shamrock

By MIKE WHELTON of Ballea Writers Club

Danny wore his shamrock with pride. His grandmother had sent a box of shamrocks to New York as she did every year. As an Irish-American Danny was proud of his heritage although he had never met anyone of his own generation actually born in Ireland. Ellen, Danny's mother had come to America by boat as a fourteen year-old. She'd often told Danny and his brother Sean about her voyage, the cramped



conditions in steerage and her brief time at Ellis Island. It became a goodnight story for the brothers as they grew up. Ellen had married Luke, another Irish emigrant. The boys found it difficult to understand how their extroverted red haired mother could have come from the same country as their introverted and somewhat dour father. Ellen was the livewire that jolted her husband when times were hard. She encouraged Luke to relax by playing his accordion at night. Danny and Sean were carried along by their parent's emotion for Ireland and accompanied their father in singing Irish rebel songs with gusto without understanding the content or context.

Danny could still recall the first time he saw his father cry. It was on one St Patrick's Day morning and during a rendition of the song 'Kevin Barry.' Ellen had held a finger to her lips to silence the boys while the tearful moment passed. Before they went to the parade Ellen told her sons that Kevin Barry was a young Irish medical student who was executed as a terrorist. The boys danced with their parents as the St Patrick's Day parade passed through New York and their hearts swelled with pride at the sight of so many people wearing shamrocks and the middle line on 5th Avenue painted green.

Danny wore his shamrock to school the following day and was bombarded with questions about it. 'Why do you wear that moss thing?' asked a classmate.

'It's not moss, it's a shamrock,' said Danny.

'Shamok, shamok,' mocked another classmate.

'What's a shamrock for?'

'It's the emblem of Ireland and its worn by us Irish on St Patrick's Day,' said Danny.

'But you're from Brooklyn not Ireland.'

'Yes, I'm Irish-American so I celebrate St Patrick's Day,' said Danny.

'But who's this St Patrick geezer anyway?'

'An important saint who converted Ireland to Christianity,' said Danny.

'But what's that got to do with the moss.'

Danny went quiet and blushed while he thought of an answer. 'It's like pizza is to the Italians,' he said.

'But the Italians don't wear Pizza.'

'Can you eat shamrock?'

The questions and teasing continued until Danny ran home from school and asked his mother about the shamrock.

'Mam what's the meaning of the shamrock?'

'St Patrick used it to explain the Holy Trinity. The shamrock showed that there could be three in one. St Patrick likened each leaf to the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost.'

As Danny grew older, he found the concept of the Trinity difficult to grasp and asked his mother more about it.

'It's a mystery, a matter of belief not understanding,' assured his mother.

Danny studied hard and went to Cornell University to read history but the matter of the Trinity still puzzled him. One day he read something that would have really upset his parents. He read that that the doctrine of the Trinity was promulgated by a council set up by the Roman Emperor of the East in the fourth century. Theodocius copper fastened the Holy Trinity as an item of faith and a later Emperor made non-acceptance of the doctrine a crime of heresy.

Danny never enlightened his parents on the more probable history of the Trinity, as his parents would have been shattered to learn that St Patrick almost certainly couldn't have used the shamrock to define the Trinity to the Irish.

But as a pragmatic New Yorker and a confirmed Irish-American, Danny still wears a shamrock on March 17th every year. He passed the tradition on to his own children and if they ever think to ask Danny what the shamrock means he'll tell them what his mother told him about St Patrick and the Trinity and tell them that it's a matter of belief not understanding.