

Of all the months of the year, it is the month of March that I think of the most in remembering my earliest, fondness memories of my Dad, my Mom...my brothers (4) and my sisters (5). My grateful immigrant parents who found a welcome and a new home in America from the fair Emerald Isle across the great Atlantic...Ireland.

Ireland is positioned proudly and beautifully as an Emerald of gleaming green off Europe's farthest western coast; Ireland has been and will always be an Isle of Welcome for the pilgrim, the stranger who is pilgrim and stranger no more. This mark, which in Gaelic is called the 'Ana Cara', 'Soul Friend', will always embed itself in the 'soul' of those who hunger and thirst to keep open 'the Door of Welcome'..... always unlocked, always open.

In coming to this ISLE called the BEAVER, I know now, as I write, that it was the 'joy' of my 'Ana Cara' being awakened and stirred up from within me, even as it was being made known to me that the doors of our homes and cars and churches on-the-Beaver remain 'unlocked'..always open. We indeed have a 'Spiritual Island here...'Spiritual' to our First Nations' Indians, 'Spiritual' to all come here...'Spiritual', especially to those of us who are privileged to find 'home' here... where the Spirit is given the chance to fly free with the strength of Eagle's Wings to lift us up through whatever comes our 'way' and the stranger...from within or from without... is 'STRANGER NO MORE'. We are 'Blessed' indeed.

All the above, and all that I remember about the magic of March is especially summed up in my experience of the St. Patrick's Day Parade every March 17th, down the painted green stripe of New York's Fifth Avenue. From my earliest of years as I was old enough to march, I was always thrilled to be a part of St. Patrick's March. Each year it remains more than 'special joy' for all of every nation who celebrate St. Patrick's joy, his vision, his strength...his unwavering faith against all odds.

Familiar to Beaver Island is the tricolour flag of the Republic of Ireland; its three equal stripes illustrate the Irish political landscape as accurately today as in 1848, the year the flag was first unfurled...GREEN –signifying Irish Catholics and the Republican cause, WHITE –representing the hope for peace between them, and ORANGE – signifying Irish Protestants in the Northern 6 counties where my Mom and Dad stem from, Co. Tyrone, close to the Donegal border of the Free State Republic.

The color ORANGE is associated with the Northern Irish Protestants because of William of Orange (William III), the King of England, Scotland and Ireland who in 1690 defeated the deposed King James II, a Roman Catholic, in a fateful Battle of the Boyne near Dublin...Boyne, the root of our Michigan's Boyne Mt/ Boyne City. William III's victory secured Protestant dominance over the island- country to the enormous benefit of the 17th –century colonizers of northern Ireland...always tenuous through the centuries with the up-surge of the Irish Republicans, even into our own 20th/21st centuries.

The GREEN as the color standing for the Irish Catholic nationalist south the six counties of the North; the wearing of the GREEN may have something to do with SHAMROCKS and the verdant landscapes, but more importantly, GREEN symbolizes 'revolution' in the surge for Ireland's island wholeness and unity as an island nation.

My good sister, Kathleen (the family's Irish Standard- Bearer, and 'herself,' the R.N. of the year at her Staten Island Hospital a gifted lover and healer) sent me Ireland's earlier, unofficial Irish Green flag. I have unfurled the 'Green Flag' on a cedar pole, cut and shaved by HIMSELF, Ron Wojan, between the Church and the Convent. The GREEN Flag served Ireland from 1798 until the early 20th, and still into the 21st century as a symbol of nationalism for a unified island nation. As the revolutionary James Connolly wrote, just weeks before he participated in the quixotic 'EASTER Rebellion of 1916' that led to his execution by firing squad: "For centuries the GREEN Flag of Ireland was a thing accursed by the English garrison in Ireland, as it is still in their inmost hearts...the GREEN flag of Ireland will be solemnly hoisted over Liberty Hall as a symbol of our faith in freedom, and as a token to all the world that the working class of Dublin stands for the cause of Ireland, and the cause of Ireland is the cause of a separate and distinct nationality".

A point of interest for history buffs...before independence, Irish athletes had to compete as part of the British team, but an episode which occurred in 1906 when Peter O'Connor won the long jump championship at the Olympic Games in Athens, he successfully objected to the raising of the Union Jack...in honor of his victory he succeeded in having a GREEN POPLIN HARP flag with the words in Gaelic: ERIN GO BRAGH (Ireland Forever) , which had been provided by his thoughtful supporters, hoisted instead."

Growing up, we carried both flags St. Patrick's Day down New York's Fifth Avenue...may Beaver Island learn , at least, from the familiar Irish tricolor striped flag and with what it means for us to 'GO, LOVE and to BRING NEW LIFE' where strangers, 'within or without', are no more.

Lek Le Shalom (in Hebrew: "May we always strive to journey towards HIS PEACE")

Fr. Jim Doherty.....Holy Cross.... on-the-Beaver