

Hi Natasha (and Co),

Remember fakinghell.

Cheers

Kerry

Topic: **What's there to fear about the Green Beer?**

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Oiland Oi'll be havin' some o'that

Oi'll be done tellin' ya tha green beer

St Paddy's Day, the Oirish, the Green Beer and Me

by Kerry Cue

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It'd be St Paddy's Day soon and not just in Oiland. All over, like. Oi'll be turnin' meself into a cliché to get in ahead of the rest of yiz. You can drop the accent now. Keep it for Thursday 17th March, 2022. But why do the Irish celebrate St Patrick's Day globally by channelling Leprechauns, talking blarney, swilling green beer and slurring 'When Irish eyes are smiling ... da da dada' because no-one can remember the lyrics. So Happy St Clichés Day.

I have the Irish in me. What with the Meehans, the O'Donnells and the O'Mearas, Irishness has been layered in my soul like lines of sediment in a fossilised rock. I've inherited the fist fighting fury, the lilting poetry, the blarney and, *Holy Mother of Sweet Jesus*, bog Irish Catholicism. I'd have pure Irishness throbbing in my veins except for one grandmother, a Beardsell of English stock, sent among us, I suspect, to make the rest of us eat with the proper fork.

I'm fifth-generation Irish brought up as the family was losing its Irish heritage. I did Irish dancing in the fifties. This was long before River Dance sexed up the beat. I hated it. It was strict and boring. I wanted to be Scottish and do a highland fling, dancing over swords with one hand in the air. And we had to march,

properly with thumbs straight, to St Patrick's Cathedral in Melbourne on St Paddy's day wearing green, white and gold ribbons on our school uniforms. But no one explained why.

Every year into his 70s, my grandfather, Joseph Patrick O'Donnell, ran a St Patrick's Day concert at St Paul's, Bentleigh. Cardboard shamrocks and harps festooned the hall curtains. A be-suited Irish tenor called McCormick sang *The Wild Colonial Boy* and the big-bosomed soprano Mrs Garrity wobbled out *Mammy's Little Baby Loves Shortnin' Bread* for some inexplicable reason. The St Paul's Parish school choir sang *She's the daughter of Rosie O'Grady* and a local Irish dancing troop, paraded on stage, heads held high, in green plaid kilts and sporting tan berets with feathers atop. My grandfather always recited *The Cremation of Sam MacGee*. This tale terrified me. MacGee freezes to death but, during his cremation, he springs back to life. My grandfather recited it with a relish.

*There are strange things done in the midnight sun/
By the men who toil for gold;
The Arctic trails have their secret tales/
That would make your blood run cold;
The Northern Lights have seen queer sights,
But the queerest they ever did see
Was that night on the marge of Lake Lebarge/
I cremated Sam McGee.*

On St Patrick's Day in Aussie suburbia, my grandfather, who never had and never would set foot in Ireland, recited a poem about the Gold Rush in the Canadian Yukon in an Irish accent adopted for the day. No wonder we kids were more than a little confused. Then someone always sang *Danny Boy*. That brought a tear to many an eye. But my grandfather had a budgie call *Danny Boy*. And I couldn't quite work out why the pipes, the pipes were a callin' to a budgie.

But *Sweet Jesus Above in Heaven* I knew the Irishness of my family had all but drained out of us following the incident with the Infant Jesus. It happened in 1973. We inherited bog Irish Catholicism. It was a grim and harsh Catholicism run by stern priests and favoured by poor, large and uneducated families. It had little of the joy and none of the flexibility of the European Catholicism practised in Spain, Italy and France. We spent many hours with our bony knees on wooden kneelers at mass or confession or saying the Rosary. Then, in 1973 my Grandfather died.

I helped my mother clear out his house. I was 21 years old by then and I couldn't stop laughing. He had souvenir tea towels, paperweights and calendars of Ireland, the place he'd never been. He also kept all my mother's school rulers, 30 plus years of his St Kilda football club membership cards and all of his false teeth and thrown out the oak furniture of his parents. During the clean up my sister, who was 7 at the time, came skidding through the kitchen on one roller skate holding the 1 m high plaster statue of the Infant - child, really - Jesus with the scared heart and one hand raised in blessing. My sister, holding the Infant Jesus around the waste chortled 'Can I take it out the back and knock it's block off'. My mother gasped 'No'. This Jesus had stood on a pedestal in my grandparents bedroom looking down on their two single beds all of my childhood. He couldn't be beheaded. My mother wrapped him in a rug and took him home. He stood,

with a broken finger (My sister dropped him) in my mother's hall cupboard for 5 years and ended up on the local tip. Our bog Irishness was at an end.

When immigrants think of their heritage it often connects to home and hearth and, therefore, their mothers' cooking. The Irish missed out on that score. Their traditional food - now going through a renaissance- was God-awful. They cooked the beJesus out of everything including the potatoes. So an Irish heritage has nothing to do with food and everything to do with Guinness marketing, Broadway musicals, fake Irish pubs and other blarney. But they laugh alot. So go easy on the green beer this St Patricks Day or, as they say, *you'll be shiteing rings around ya-self.*