



St. Patrick's Day — Thought and Musings By Arthur Shapiro

I'm guessing that the first thing that crossed your mind reading the headline is, "What does this Jewish guy from NYC know about St. Patrick's Day."

I can tell you that my family name was originally O'Shapiro, but I doubt you would believe it. How about if I took my friend's name, Liam O'Rourke? Would you believe it? Probably not. Okay, how about this? I grew up in Brooklyn with friends and neighbors who were in the same melting pot as me and were only too happy to share their culture and history. Or this, "On St. Paddy's Day, everyone is Irish!"

Whatever, I have always loved this day of recognition of the Irish Saint who spread the Christian faith throughout Ireland. (The corned beef and cabbage, and, oh, that soda bread didn't hurt either. But I can do without the Guinness. Hand me a Smithwick's instead.)

So, if you'll permit me, I'd like to share some thoughts. (*From the internet, hey, I'm not that smart.*)

St Patrick Wasn't Irish.

St. Patrick was British, born to Roman parents in either Scotland or Wales (no one is exactly sure which). After being forced into slavery by Irish pirates, he turned to his Christian faith and became one of the first people to bring the religion to the country in the fifth century, around the year 432.

His birth name was Maewyn Succat.

This is according to Irish legend. He changed it to the Latin name Patricius after becoming a priest.

We should actually be wearing blue.

Historians say that St. Patrick's color was blue, not green. The use of green became common during the 1600s and 1700s when the clover became a symbol of nationalism, and wearing green on lapels became the norm.

It used to be a dry holiday.

Up until the 1970s, St. Patrick's Day was considered a religious holiday in Ireland, meaning all the pubs in the country were closed, thanks to a law written by Parliament

member James O'Mara. However, Ireland later realized they could attract many tourists for the holiday, and the (green) beer was suddenly free-flowing.

There are more Irish people in America than in Ireland.

According to recent census data, there are 39.6 million Americans who list their heritage as primarily or partially Irish, compared to 6.3 million people in Ireland.

A shamrock symbolizes hope, love, and life.

St. Patrick reportedly used shamrocks to explain the Holy Trinity, but later interpretations also said the three leaves are meant to symbolize hope, love, and faith. If there's a fourth leaf, it symbolizes luck, which is why we consider four-leaf clovers to be lucky.

The traditional meal isn't actually Irish.

Corned beef and cabbage have long been considered a special St. Patrick's Day dish, but it isn't traditionally Irish. Pork was the preferred meat of Ireland, but early Irish immigrants to America found that beef was much cheaper, and they could easily cook the beef and cabbage in one pot.

Boston hosts one of the biggest St. Patrick's Day parades in the U.S.

Boston is where many Irish immigrants settled once they arrived in America, and the Irish spirit is still alive and well in the city. It hosts one of the biggest celebrations in the U.S., drawing around a million people to the parade, which is usually about 3 miles. {For once, NYC came in second.}

Chicago dyes the river green every year for St. Patrick's Day.

Every year since 1962, the city dyes the river green using 40 pounds of powder, which reacts with the water to produce a green color. Don't worry; it's environmentally friendly!

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When I worked in the booze business with Irish Distillers and Chivas Regal Scotch, my Irish friends used to say: "The Irish taught the Scots three things. How to play bagpipes, how to make whisky, and how to wear Kilts. They just forgot to tell them that the last one was a joke!"

*May the winds of fortune sail you,
May you sail a gentle sea
May it always be the other guy
who says, "**this drink's on me.**"*

*May the sound of happy music,
Fill your heart with gladness,
And the lilt of Irish laughter,
That stays forever after.*

Sláinte