



I have always been surrounded by all things Irish. At our annual family reunion in Buffalo, I often hear my great aunt's talk about our Irish heritage, showing us the McDonald crest, the family tree and telling stories of family history. Then, my Aunts, so proud to be Irish, make all the grandchildren and great grandchildren line up and parade around the park, carrying both the American and Irish flags while blowing noise makers and banging on pots and pans.. When the parade is finished, and song sheets are passed out, my Great Aunt Marnie (age 85) gets out her keyboard, Aunt Teresa (age 82) her fiddle, and I my bodhran. We play every Irish song there ever was. Each dancer (and there

are many) is expected to dance a reel or jig as the rest of the family claps along. We always finish with the family favorite, the song that that every self respecting McDonald over the age of three knows by heart... "Potatoes"!

I loved these family reunions when I was little - the games the stories, the music, and food were great. As I got a little older, I sometimes felt that my family was a little crazy. The way they carried on with all the music and dance felt strange. For a few years I remember feeling a little embarrassed to have to parade and dance around. Then I just kind of learned to except that that is just what my family does to celebrate who we are. In the last couple years I find myself first in line to be outfitted with my flags and noisemaker. I can't wait to show everyone how Irish I am and how proud I am to be a part of this remarkable Irish family.

I guess I really realized the gift my family was a few weeks ago when my Great Aunt Loretta Murphy died. She had been sick for awhile and had the opportunity to plan her entire funeral right down to what would be served at the after party. After her funeral mass we all gathered at the Irish center in South Buffalo. She had written a letter to all of us that was read by her eldest grandson. In her letter she told us that the time for tears was over, now it was time to celebrate. She asked that the dancers dance and that the instruments be played. She requested that a very special song be sung last...Potatoes!! It was during that celebration of her life that I realized her generation the generation that cherishes the gift of family, the value of traditions, and our Irish heritage would soon be gone.

Now I feel that it is my turn to continue their legacy. It is who I am. It is my heritage. I am blessed to have had these people in my life, their faith and their love for family will long be carried in my heart.