

“A lot of people don't like England here...”

Words by Colleen Considine

Carrigallen, Leitrim, Ireland

What is Ireland like? The Irish language? Religion? Common misconceptions from the eyes of a 17-year-old Irish girl.

Granny's house is stuck in a time warp. The walls even with a new splash of paint still manage to look as though they have been like that forever. The dark shabbiness of the kitchen cupboards. With a large dark grey range that has a silver kettle on top, the little trinkets all around the house.

The vibrant blue walls that blind your eyes from how bright the paint is. A strong cup of whiskey that hasn't been watered down greeting you as you step into the McIntyre family home. Coal that is thrown in front of the range to light the fire. Classic 1970s wardrobes, with an aerial photo of the house from the early 1990s in the hallway. Religious photos of the Pope all through the house. With rosary beads hanging from the dusty white light switch in the dirty pink bedroom. Photographs of family nestled together on the deep pink walls. With the small house feeling like a sauna from the heat provided by the stove in the living room.

The house is trapped in time. It's a perfect mess that doesn't need changing.

Ireland revolves around religion; it's the way people live their life. Their aim is for the pub and church. Church every day of the week, with a particular focus on Sunday morning mass the next day at 11:15.

Desolate lands, hardly any animals around. There are more cows than people. Little to do around the area. There is nothing to do around the area. Lacking a modern 21st century life, with a sense of abandonment and disconnection from the outside world. It feels as though the people living in the middle of the green country fields of Ireland are stuck in a strange version of Groundhog Day.

Take Marese, she is 17, born and raised in Ireland, Leitrim to be exact. What do young people actually do in Ireland? “Nothing really, it's quite boring. Not much to do” It's a strange environment to find yourself in.

There really isn't anything. However, the Irish people sure do know how to drink. “All Irish people do is drink; you don't realise it till you look around, but it is true.”

“Ireland's culture is built on drink and church, the only place you can go to is either the pub or mass”. Suppose that's why a lot of people are very religious. There are only two options, drink all your life, or stay sober and go to church. Well, they still get drunk on Saturday, they just beg for forgiveness on Sunday. Then they are back in the pub at 1:00pm.

There were people in and out of church and back into the pub straight after that day. It was unusual to see, not surprising, just unusual.

All young people in Ireland grow up religious. There are young people who aren't I'm sure, but every household is religious in some way. “You can't avoid it”, religion is Ireland, it is their past, present and future.

Marese's dad is a farmer, mother is a nurse, her grandparents and grandparents before them were all farmers. There is a sense of un-certainty in Ireland. You are meant to know what you want to do. However, not being shown any other option other than what you see doesn't help anyone. People seem lost, secluded away from excitement, far beyond the traffic of coming from the hustle and bustle of London. Just down the road from her house is the local town, Carrigallen.

There are only two main shops, and of course “there are more pubs”. A modern house, with a black door contrasts perfectly against the dull silent fields circling them. Just beside the house is a still lifeless church looming over. Down the road is a grey desolate police station, not exactly a lot of people to arrest.

Funny, having been to Ireland for twenty years, not once have I seen a policeman.

Everyone knows each other here. People

This Is



Ireland.

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provide narrow looks, newcomers, people they don't know. There are children rushing around doing a country run. Going through all the small lanes and narrow roads, beside the dull yellow houses. Past pink and blue walls and across from the rusty petrol station, stopping at the theatre.

The buildings in town all have washed-out animated colours. 1950s pastel vibrancy that have faded and become grungy. They are dark with an overarching look of sun. Washed out Barbie pink with blue brickwork on Joe Dolan's abandoned shop. There is a peculiarity here. A workshop that looks more deserted than Joe Dolan's abandoned shop, yet, it is fully functioning and open. Curious.

Signs notifying you of your direction all lead in Irish, English is second. However, for a country whose signs are in Irish you'd have thought they speak it every day. That's not the case. Irish is something taught from the day you come out of your mother. Seems rather pointless. However, it is "more of a cultural factor, no one is really interested in it." The Irish language I'm told is, "still important to have". Being "one of the only things" about the culture left. Although, there is "so much pressure surrounding grades to have, it's a bit unnecessary."

In terms of the history surrounding Ireland, "a lot of people don't like England here, it's a joke". Nice. Particularly surrounding the 1916 uprising. Specifically, the younger people, "not the English people, just the history". However, for second generation Irish immigrants who are born in England, there is a tension. When you are in England, you're told, you're Irish not English. Then, you go over to Ireland, they say, no you're English not Irish. Funny that.

On a day-to-day basis, "it's quite monotonous, it's the same thing" this is particularly obvious in "rural Ireland." A world away from the rush of town life, every corner is the painted the same way.

For a young 17-year-old teenager, all she wants to do is, "go shopping" the most

amount of shopping is for food each week. Good for walking, drinking or, praying (if you're religious).

Huge family gatherings with children flying up and down from the farm. Sneaking round lanes, hiding from drunk aunts and uncles. Cold and wet with deep green ivy climbing up the white walls. A cottage with uneven orange floors. A ceiling so low you can touch it, a large brown chair that hasn't moved for 14 years. Irish life "won't suit everyone but there is a real sense of community". Especially as children "there would be huge Irish family gatherings". Being away from technology and tall apartment complex buildings. Away from town life to have mischievous "fun on grandads farm, it was a great place to grow-up".

Everyone knows Ireland revolves around church. However, for a 17-year-old she has "just gone along with it."

She "believes" because "she thinks it is true". Not because she's been told to believe of course. No one questions religion in Ireland, it is there as it always has been. Because it is there for them it exists, no one questions or looks at the other possibilities. "I think it is important, especially here it is such a holy country." However, "it is people's choice if they want to go to mass, you can still be religious and not go to church."

However, in terms of the sexual abuse scandal, "I can't stand by the church in that way, they brushed it under the carpet". No one in Ireland discusses the church badly at all. There is a feeling that, 'it happened, we know so let's move on.' But a country can't simply continue on like nothing happened. People think that because you grow-up religious, when you turn against the church, you owe them something. Religion is a choice, not a way of life. The "ones who did it were paedophiles and had access to it but it's not all priests."

Sealed carefully in a small green envelope, 10 euros a payment for church. You have to



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pay to attend church. “If you have religion and believe in God, you shouldn’t have to give money.” Your religion shouldn’t come at a cost. But that is the case around church, “you shouldn’t have to give money” yet the church still requests it. In religion, “we will never know, you can’t be 100% or agree with everything that is said”. For many, it is a way to get through life. Especially if you’re in a country where one of the only support systems is church. There is the concept of not knowing and wanting to understand more.

So, they turn to religion for “spiritual reasons”. In one sense, “it’s something to reassure you.” Don’t speak out against religion in Ireland it is simply not worth it. People can be too ignorant to hear anything other than what they think is the truth.

Most people in Ireland attend church. If “you didn’t go people would be questioning why?” They feel like they have to, a routine part of the monotonous schedule. In one way, “the church is a social life for older people”. However, for the youth “it’s clearly fading.” They still ‘believe’, usually because they have to, they just don’t turn-up.

Just looking around in Ireland there feels a lack of help surrounding mental health. You don’t discuss feelings here. You’re left to life on your own. Alone with your thoughts. That’s where religion comes in, the only thing where there will be human life, the church.

There is a sense of reliance on religion to latch on to for mental health or just plain loneliness. There’s an ignorance surrounding religion, also arrogance. Arrogant to think people are strong enough to deal with things by themselves. Arrogant to think religion is the only thing people need. Close mindedness “won’t get you anywhere.”

There’s a constant move in culture and the church clearly has to move with that. People are religious because they are scared to die. “If you’re not religious and there is a God, then you’re just gone.” People “turn to

religion more so when they are dying, they suddenly turn to God.”

There are a lot of “I don’t know” answers surrounding religion, “even the most religious person can’t be sure, we don’t know, but I think there is something.” It’s about “being on the safe side” of religion. There’s a spiritual reason, a sense of connection to death and reliance on something you’re not sure exists. However, as a child you’re “born into” religion without a decision, “families influence their child for life, but it’s their choice if they want to continue it when they’re older.”

Religion “is confusing”, Ireland is confusing. A 17-year old doesn’t have the have the answers. Ireland is quiet, fuelled on religion, pubs, community and cows. There is a sense of boredom within Ireland, but that factor will never change. You can go all across America to the mid-west to get a sense of abandonment, but little do you know it’s only a 40-minute plane flight away.

Marese is still trying to figure things out, like everyone is. She has recently taken up photography, interested in really finding out what the world has to offer. Aiming to buy a film camera and really get shooting, photographing what’s around her. What the world beyond the Irish fields of Leitrim really is like. Like a lot of young people in Ireland they have to see the world for themselves.

Ireland is great.

