

Eye on Our Generation



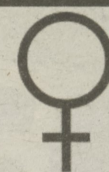
He Said

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Americans Killed St. Patrick

She Said

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I'm not Catholic, so I don't really celebrate the Saints' days in a religious manner. But that doesn't stop me from making a Valentine's Day card in February or wearing a green sweatshirt in March. A celebration is a celebration, after all!

But I'm not one to disparage religion. I wouldn't treat a holiday with disrespect if it were, in fact, treated as holy. When Easter comes around I don't think about bunnies and eggs. I go to church, I pray, and sometimes I glance over a few of the gospels. At Christmastime, I give out presents but I don't go crazy with commercialism, and I recognize the day for its true purpose--to celebrate the birth of Jesus (even if it is in the wrong season). That's my point: holidays deserve respect, but holidays (like Flag Day on June 14th--partay!) deserve basic, plain old revelry.

I am a little Irish, but only in blood. I don't celebrate my partial-Irishness to any degree whatsoever, so the closest I've ever come to my Irish brethren is wearing my Notre Dame t-shirt or scrubbing with Irish Spring bath soap. As you can understand, when it came to St. Patrick's Day knowledge, I just didn't have any. How could I ever discuss the nature of St. Patrick's Day without prior knowledge? Why, the internet, of course. It was pretty easy, really. The first paragraph of the first website I checked out stated that in Ireland, on March 17, families would hang the rules of Lent and celebrate by eating meat, drinking alcohol, and dancing.

"Are you kidding me," I thought to myself, "this is game over."

So, basically, what I've set out to prove here is that Americans haven't ruined the spirit of St. Patrick's Day as it was originally celebrated, with their gluttonous eating, drinking, and merriment. Ruin it?! They've mastered it! St. Patrick's Day isn't a holyday at all. More than anything, it seems to be a vacation from the holy period of sacrifice and dedication, in favor of a big party.



St. Patrick's Day: Harmless fun or holy day that has lost its meaning? (Photo by Karrie Bowen)

Did you know that the very thing for which St. Patrick is famous isn't true at all? His works and teachings are somewhat of a mystery historically, but we all think of St. Patrick as being the man who banished snakes from Ireland. Guess what? It's all a tall tale. What St. Patrick really did was missionary work, commissioned by the Catholic Church to go to the island of Ireland and convert the pagans. In my research, I never once saw "St. Patrick loved to get bagged up and party like a rock star."

And so begins my point. We, the American people, don't know ANYTHING about St. Patrick, the Catholic Saint who died in the fifth century. Historically, St. Patrick's Day is a holy day on the Catholic calendar, celebrated on March 17, as a religious feast day and the anniversary of the death of St. Patrick. The Irish have observed this day as a religious holiday for over a thousand years, with families attending church most of the morning and then with feasts and celebrations in the afternoon and evening. Since St. Patrick's Day falls during Lent, the prohibitions against the consumption of meat were waived for the day and everyone was allowed to party and make merry, eating corned beef or bacon and cabbage and drinking stout by the pint to the wee hours of the morning.

So who WOULDNT agree with this kind of party? Well, look to me to rain on the parade. Let me preface this by saying that I am not religious as a rule at all. And I am a HUGE fan of Guinness. But I am a cultural relativist, and I think what we, as Americans, have done to the religious holiday known as St. Patrick's Day is an injustice. It isn't that I am against St. Patrick's Day celebrations, but I am completely against American culture taking a day that is traditionally a holy day with a feast of merriment and forgetting the holy part and instead turning it into Amateur Night...or in the case of my friend Mike, Amateur Early Morning, Mid-Morning, Afternoon, Evening and Night.

Maybe what we ought to do as a culture is look a little bit more toward the traditions and workings of St. Patrick and add those into our own festivities and actually celebrate the man himself rather than use the day as a license to get hammered and act stupid. Is it too much to ask that as we celebrate St. Patrick's Day we might consider including church services and holy reverence? Like all the rest of the holy holidays on the calendar, tradition has escaped us, but it seems that this one is worse than the others. We keep the fundamentals of Christmas close and while the Easter Bunny comes for Easter or Whitman's makes heart shaped chocolates to celebrate love on St. Valentine's Day, Americans have looked at St. Patty's Day as "Let's drink like the Irish because those guys can put it AWAY." In short, St. Patrick's Day is not about celebrating the life of St. Patrick and what he gave to society; rather, it is a day to celebrate the fact that we all wish we could hold our liquor like Seamus O'Finnegan.

Talk In Public? NO WAY

Special to the Lion's Eye

Who among us has experienced anxiety prior to giving a speech/presentation? The answer to this is almost everyone. As a student and or professor you are required to give presentations at least a couple times a year.

As you read on you will find helpful tips to overcoming the anxiety and possibly have fun while presenting. If these pointers do not help, you may find benefit in accessing counseling for speaker's anxiety. Counseling is on campus for many other reasons also. PSU offers free counseling and it takes place in the Student Life Office in the Commons Building. All appointments are scheduled through Dale Soring at dgs13@psu.edu or 610-892-1270. Feel free to contact Stacey Shapiro, Personal Counselor, directly at slb38@psu.edu.

In the meantime, keep these tips in mind for a positive public speaking experience!

Prior to Presenting:

1) Ask yourself questions about the room and the culture of your class:
How many students will attend? How is the room set up? Do you need your laptop? What is the atmosphere of the class and your classmates? Are they easy going, laugh a lot or more conservative?

2) Take time to research:
Gain as much information as you can on the subject matter. This will help you feel more prepared and confident.

3) Put the presentation on paper:
This will help you focus and guide you if you lose track.

4) Outline your presentation to hand out to your classmates:
Rather than reading your presentation you can use the outline to prompt your memory about what you want to say. In addition, putting it in large bold type will make it easier to follow. It is more interesting to your audience if you are not reading from the paper. Also, your classmates will more easily follow along and they can write notes while you are speaking.

5) Make sure to staple and number your presentation in order!
In case the papers are scattered this will make it easier to get back on track

Ways to rehearse prior to presenting:

1) Picture yourself in front of the class:
If you can rehearse in the classroom when nobody is there, this is the best scenario. Otherwise picture yourself in front of the class presenting the material. Set a timer for the allotted time-frame and practice many times! Afterward, decide what you want to change verbally and non-verbally.

2) Videotape, audio record yourself or rehearse in front of your family or friends:
By doing this you can more easily decide what you want to keep in the presentation and what you do not.

3) Utilize self-talk:
Tell yourself what you are doing right and what you need to work on. Tell yourself you are going to be ok, and you are going to do the best you can.

Think ahead of time what may be useful to reduce your anxiety:

1) Nurture your mind and body:
Utilize breathing techniques prior and during the presentation, release your shoulder tension. Eat well, get enough sleep and do not abuse alcohol or drugs!

2) Decide your safe place in the room and try to move around:
Your safe place may be behind the table, in front of the table, behind the podium etc. Moving around releases the excess energy anxiety creates.

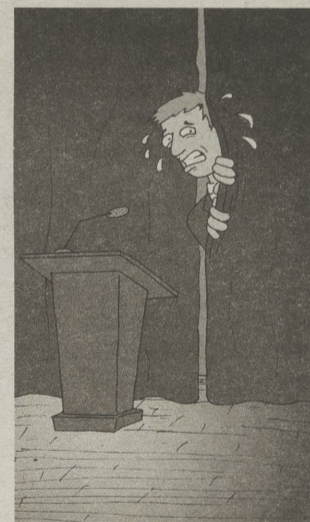
3) Bring something to use in order to release stress:
Hold a pen, a pointer, water or the outline.

4) Show up early and check the equipment ahead of time:
Make sure you know how to use the projector, overhead projector or the laptop.

During the presentation:

1) Make connections in the room:
Greet each person who comes in, make small talk and smile a lot this will take some of the pressure off!

Fear of speaking in front of a group is a common occurrence, but it is something that most of us have to do in both academics and out in the real world. (Photo courtesy toastmasters.com)



2) Look at your audience:
It will keep them interested and you less anxious. Tell yourself they are people like me who get nervous during this situation also.

3) Speak clearly and slowly:
This will also help engage the audience.

4) Allow for questions and answers:
This can be done during the presentation or at the end. The more interaction with your audience the less anxiety you will feel.

5) Do not worry if you forget something during the presentation:
Move on to the next topic. Most people will not even notice.

Afterwards:

1) Give yourself more nurturance:
Exercise, eat and relax.

2) Ask for feedback:
Your classmates and professors are willing participants in providing you feedback. Take advantage of this opportunity to grow. Look at the feedback as an opportunity rather than criticism.