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Pinnacle Financial Group Scholarship Essay

Born in Ireland in the era of World War II, my grandparents shared countless stories of the joys and sorrows of the time. They lived in a time where people enjoyed the simple things in life. They shared stories of walking barefoot to school, milking cows, plucking chickens, picking potatoes, gathering blackberries, staying up all night when the pigs gave birth, and bottle feeding the third lamb of the ewe that always had triplets. They told stories of walking to school barefoot in the warmer months and not being able to go to school until the free government shoes arrived for the winter. They had no electricity or running water in their early years. I heard stories of the one room schoolhouses they attended, the uncomfortable hand me down bicycles they rode into town, and the worn-out secondhand clothes they wore. My grandfather lost both parents to tuberculosis by the time he was 8 years old, a common disease among the Irish at the time. My grandmother lost her sister to appendicitis at age 12, and her father died when my grandmother was 13. My grandparents were no strangers to adversity, but they had a determined nature and would not let adversity hold them back.

Having Irish grandparents required understanding terms that Irish people say. A cuppa referred to a cup of tea. Baby pigs were not known as piglets. They were bonhams (pronounced bonnivs). Sweaters were jumpers, cookies were biscuits, biscuits were scones, lumber was timber, the trunk of the car was the booth, the hood of the car was the bonnet, the list goes on.

Being Irish means knowing the value of a good strong cup of tea and understanding the value of teapots and tea cozies to keep your teapot warm. It also meant seeing potatoes as an essential part of dinner. My grandfather always said that a dinner without potatoes was not a real

dinner at all. The Irish are known for their Irish soda bread. Every Irish person will tell you that no two people make soda bread the same way. My great-aunt is known for her homemade prize-winning Irish soda bread. I have more of a knack for baking than the rest of the cousins in my generation, so the torch has been passed on to me to carry on baking the soda bread.

One thing the Irish take pride in is storytelling and their sense of humor. My grandmother always told stories of the banshees, fairies, and leprechauns. She recalled the many days as a young girl when she followed the rainbow in hopes of finding the leprechaun's pot of gold. It was much to her chagrin when she finally realized it was impossible to get to the end of the rainbow. My grandfather had a witty sense of humor. He would keep a straight face while his one-liners would have everyone in stitches. Finally, after the whole house was laughing, a smirk would grace his face.

Irish music and dance is another key part of the culture. My grandmother and mother both took Irish dancing classes as children and learned the reels, jigs, and set dancing known as ceili dancing. Ceili dancing requires eight people in a group and resembles square dancing but with fancy Irish dancing footwork. My grandfather loved listening to Fordham University's Irish radio station on Sundays where he would enjoy the music and the Irish news. As I listened to the radio show with him, I thought about how the Irish are known for their friendliness and great sense of humor while their music is filled with songs about death, loss, and grief. Much history can be learned from the Irish songs.

My grandparents took pride in Ireland being known as the land of saints and scholars. St. Patrick is the patron saint of Ireland and is known for bringing Christianity to this once pagan land. This year I was given the great honor of being named Irish Princess in the St. Patrick's Day parade in my hometown of Center Moriches. I wore a sash and led the parade right after the

Grand Marshall. I took great pride in being featured in our town's newspaper and being honored with proclamations and awards from local politicians.

For most Irish people, their Catholic faith is at the center of their lives. My grandparents believed in helping the less fortunate since their families were generous to those in need. They learned to give even in their own lack. This influenced me to become a volunteer for my church where I serve as a chef for the homeless, preparing five homecooked dinners at a time. I serve as a faith formation assistant and a vacation bible camp leader to serve as a positive role model for the children while developing their faith.

I live my life as an American who is proud of my Irish roots. Proud of my ability to value faith, Irish storytelling and humor, Irish history, music, dance, and food. Proud of my grandparents who married in Ireland set off for a new life in America with nothing more than their suitcases and the clothes on their back. My grandparents came to America in search of the American dream, the idea that everyone has the freedom and opportunity for a better life. They valued the importance of education, even though they never had the opportunity to pursue higher education themselves. As a result of my grandparents' decision to move to America, future generations were forever changed for the better. My mother became the first one in the family to have a college education. Now I am pursuing a doctoral degree in Pharmacy. My only regret is that my grandparents did not live long enough to see my acceptance into the doctoral Pharm.D. program at St. John's University. They would have been so very proud.