

Anthropology

My daughter is 80% Irish with a touch of French, red-haired and sassy and a capable woman. At her wedding, I gave her away and “allowed” her to leave our small, quiet, sober (in terms of demeanor, at least) Irish family and join a large, noisy, passionate, even crazy Italian family from Troy in upstate New York. She loves it.

Yesterday, I attended the pre-school graduation shindig for my oldest grand daughter. The multi-media presentations, dancing and singing, diplomas and assorted hoopla at the Childcare Center were easily more grandiose than my college graduation forty years ago. Afterward, our train of revelers streamed back to a large, noisy, passionate and even crazy Italian party in Troy.

I enjoyed myself there, it’s true, but my cranial nerves don’t have the stamina for this kind of festivity. I tried to make small talk, but I don’t do well when four people are talking into each other’s faces all at once and changing topics by the second. Trying to bend the subject away from why Aunt Domenica’s biscotti was too soft, I remarked that I had noticed something in the chorus line of 5-year-old boys strumming toy guitars back at the graduation. Three out of 11 were left handed, but I wasn’t able to correlate that fact with how their hair was parted because they all had brush

cuts. Well, that brought a momentary halt to the biscotti conversation, I can tell you.

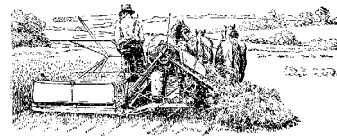
Taking a seat out on the deck, I looked around feeling a bit like Temple Grandin in the book, “An Anthropologist on Mars.” My son, who likes to play the anthropologist sometimes, also appeared uncomfortable. I explained to him that Italian family life, even at rest, is sort of like a party where someone has put speed in the punch. I knew, because I had grown up in an Italian neighborhood. He gave me that now-familiar look that says, “Why do you still feel the need to explain things to me when I’m forty years old?” Well, because I’m Irish, I guess. I suspect he believes there is Nytol in our family’s punch.

My son-in-law....who turned out to be more than a father-in-law could ask for...is neither noisy nor loud. And he is the best papa I’ve ever met. Far better than I was, I think. Watching him calmly grill the hot dogs while keeping an eye on his little girls, I drifted off into a peaceful state until Aunt Domenica came over to me and asked why I didn’t like her biscotti. Not enough red sauce, I said. That ended that conversation, I can tell you.

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