

## NO PLAN?

By James Collins.

There were literally dozens of cousins in Ireland who wanted to come to America. There were no jobs in Ireland, little opportunity and no money. America, the land of opportunity had everything. Our family brought the first of the cousins out from Ireland, vouched for them, got them jobs and sent them to night school. After a few years, they had their own apartments and brought their brothers and sisters out to New York. The process worked, and it became a tradition. As each new immigrant came to New York, that day, he or she arrived at my mother's apartment for a welcoming party and a chance to meet all the other relatives. What was always interesting to us was that some of the rural Irish had never seen food we took for granted. This included peanuts, corn on the cob, pickles in jars and other exotic foods. They did not know quite what to do with the servings on their plate, but their brothers and sisters walked them through the new process. If they came in summer, the heat would devastate them. That morning, they boarded the plane in 65° weather and were dressed accordingly. Deplaning at Kennedy Airport in the 1950s had passengers walk down a mobile stairway on the tarmac when the temperature was 98°. You could see the immigrants staggering in the heat, trying to take off their heavy jackets. For them it was like stepping into an oven.

My mother always went out of her way to make them feel welcome. She prepared a fantastic dinner for the immediate family and the new arrival, asked all the questions about the relatives back in Ireland and went out of her way to put the new "green horn" at ease. Then friends and neighbors would arrive, accordions and violins would break out and a real Irish party would soon be in full swing.

On one memorable occasion, the new arrival was Vincent. Four of his brothers had preceded him and he was going to move in with them at their apartment. My mother welcomed him with hugs and kisses and sat him down to find out how her brother and the rest of the family were doing in Ireland. This was all prior to the big meal, which was still cooking in the kitchen. After about half an hour my mother asked, "Vincent, what is your plan now that you're here in America?"

"Why, Aunt Nell, I have no plan."

"What do you mean no plan?" Before he could answer, she said, "Come over here with me, right now" as she led him to the living room window, which overlooked our main thoroughfare. Cars lined both sides of the street.

A Sanitation Department employee, in uniform, with a garbage can on wheels was wielding a large broom and putting trash into the can.

"You see that man down there. He does not have a plan. He may be an immigrant or he may be a native born American. Either way, he does not have a plan. If you want to do that job, you do not need a plan. If you, as an immigrant, want to survive and prosper in America, you must have a plan. I expect you to be back here in three days, with your brothers, with a written plan telling me what you are going to do,

how you are going to do it and when it is going to happen. Everybody in this room has a plan. I had a plan; your uncle had a plan. All your brothers have had a plan and all your cousins have plans. As a member of this family, you will be successful and you will keep the family name, without stain. Now come in here, sit down, and have a marvelous dinner. Welcome to America.”

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