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Person to Person in Ireland

Gabrielle Leif
Linfield College, gleif@linfield.edu

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Field Notes From Abroad: Person to Person in Ireland

For this project I interviewed my Irish friend Gwen. She is in her 70's and very opinionated. We talked a lot about not only the differences between Irish and American culture but also about the cultural differences between our age groups. The main differences that we talked about were the relationship that the Irish have with drinking versus many Americans, and the differences in what is socially acceptable for women in current times as opposed to when Gwen was my age.

When it comes to alcohol, it is simply a huge staple in Irish life. Alcoholics anonymous is nearly non-existent and my friend Steven even casually mentioned how his mom used to give him a spoonful of tonic wine when he was a baby to make him stop crying (something that I think most Americans would be shocked and disturbed by). Not that I don't know people who drink heavily, however, most of the university students in Ireland drink every weeknight and then go home on the weekends to party with their friends there. When I first arrived in Ireland I was a little appalled...but then I realized that this is just the way the culture is. Alcohol is like the hub of the social life wheel for people my age. Gwen and I had a long conversation about how we both feel that the prevalence of alcohol has gotten out of hand, especially with young people.

The main thing that I learned from my interview with Gwen was how different life in Ireland was for young women when she was growing up. She said that her mother told her that she couldn't go out to a bar until she had a husband to bring her home, and it was clear that there were very clearly defined men's and women's spheres when she was my age. I always knew that women today had many more social freedoms than in the past, but to be able to talk with someone who experienced a time when women were more overtly restricted really put into perspective for me the fact that I am very lucky to live in the place and time that I do.

Interviewing Gwen taught me that, while the U.S. and Ireland are both part of Western society, there are subtle differences that make the cultures incredibly different. I've really enjoyed making little discoveries about these differences, and figuring out which differences I am drawn to and which ones I am culturally put off by.