



IT'S GOLDEN: 50 YEARS AND COUNTING!!!

By: *Kathy Ewart*

It's the first Sunday in March. Everyone anxiously waits for the clock to hit 2:00PM.

There they are, the bunting hanging outside the storefronts. People gathering along Main Street donning their green, whether they are Irish or not, and a little bundled up because of the slight chill in the air. However, the early afternoon sun eventually takes a bit of the chill away. Spring is just weeks away. There's the smell of the 'hot pretzels' shopping cart. Kids ride their bikes up and down Main Street. Some are even decorated! Souvenir carts make their way down the street overflowing with green and white 'Cat-In-The Hat' hats, plastic green derbies, horns, balloons, and lots more. (If you are willing to spend that kind of money!) It's the day that brings our community (East Islip, Islip, Islip Terrace and Great River) together for a few hours – A.O.H.'s Division 7, St. Patrick's Day Parade! We all have memories of this beloved parade. It doesn't matter if you live in the community a short time, lived here forever, have moved away or made it a point to be in town just to be at this parade. The memories are there and/or new ones will be made. This year, the tradition continues as our beloved St. Patrick Day Parade celebrates its 50th year – it's Golden Anniversary! Going down Memory Lane, what a 50 years it has been!

Every year, neighbors, friends and families meet at their "spot" to enjoy the parade as it kicks off from The First National Bank of East Islip/Bank of America. That "spot" is one of many place's: the Waldbaum's shopping center, the East Islip Junior High School/Belfran/East Islip Fitness, Country Village Pharmacy/Country Village Pizza/the Meat Market/Rudy's Card and Gift shop/Carvel/Karp's Liquor Store/Bernie's Deli/Caroline's Florist/King Kullen/Chapey's Funeral Home, Janel's/Concord Cleaners shopping center, A&P/Pudgie's, Barrington's/Shandon Court, Rita's Italian Ices/Villa Enzo/Meson Ole/Hometown Café, the infamous Collins Inn/Cactus Salon shopping center, Stanley's Bakery, Friendly's, Potters, the East Islip Fire Department, the corner of Carlton and Main – Woodland Diner and Bohack/Meat Farms/ CVS, Bernstein's, the Faculty Pub/Gang Plank, the American Legion Hall, the corner of William and Main – East Islip Paint and Wallpaper/East Islip Hardware and the Pool Hall across the street, in front of the many businesses that dotted East Islip's original Main Street (the furniture store, Rudy's Hair Salon, the religious store to name a few) up to the Viewing Stand where the old St. Mary's School stood, the Sand Castle/Oscar's Ale House and to the parade's ending at Irish Lane. Everyone has (or had) their favorite viewing spot. These days, folks even park their cars overnight in the various parking lots to ensure they have their various spot.

I could not even think of writing this without mentioning those 50 and 60 somethings that meet each year in the vicinity of the old Collins Inn and at Stanley's Bakery. My hat is off to you all! You always did (and still do!) know how to have a good time at this parade. Main Street turns into one big High School reunion! It doesn't matter what year you graduated East Islip High School. One can easily run into someone they haven't seen in years. It's all fun!

In recent years, during the parade, many businesses have reached out to the community by giving out things. One such business is Chapey's Funeral Home. At their parking lot, they fire up the barbecue and are kind enough to give out burgers, chips and soft drinks. It has become a nice tradition, which is appreciated by the community.

Since the parade's inception (and for many years after that), my family gathered at Collins Inn. For about twenty years, my father wore his white shirt and green tie as he worked the back bar (a makeshift bar put together with a piece of plywood placed on top of the pool table), which was in the corner by the kitchen door – the bar to go to for Irish Coffee lovers. As young as I was for the first St. Patrick's Day parade, I fondly remember Joe (a founding member of the A.O.H.) and Catherine Collins gearing up for the sure to be busy day. Just a short time later, Collins Inn was sold to Pete Bulfrin and Fintan Stapelton. Believe me, the first Sunday in March the party continued.

It was (and still is) exciting to hear the bagpipes and see the A.O.H. Division 7 Grand Marshal and members leading off the parade. I remember bystanders waving or yelling to their siblings, sons and/or daughters and/or neighbors (or maybe to one's latest crush) as the East Islip High School Marching Band and Flag and Pom-Pom girls marched on by. Who can forget St. Mary's band? Then there was the East Islip Fire Department volunteers, Ladies Auxiliary, Jr. Guzzlers (some of whom made up the East Islip Fire Department Band, which eventually became the Flamettes girls band) and fire trucks. Islip Terrace Fire Department marchers, Starfires girls band and fire trucks were not too far behind. More bagpipes from Babylon's A.O.H. and other Irish organization bands were heard throughout the parade. More fire trucks. For years, it was fun to watch the men who led the Bay Shore and Brentwood Fire Department Bands. They were characters, but fully enjoyed performing with their batons as the bands played behind them. The Central Islip High School Band was always phenomenal. Of course, kids were always on the lookout for the American Legion train to either gather up candy being thrown or to cover their ears as loud bangs erupted! As the Great River Fire Department Volunteers and trucks went by, one always knew the end of the parade was near. It was definitely the end of the parade when the Exchange Ambulance of the Islips Volunteers marched in front of their Cadillac ambulances and their children waved from the rear of the ambulances.

For many years Collins Inn and the Hibernian Hall were the places to go after the parade. Both places were standing room only. Eventually the East Islip Fire Department held an annual carnival for people to go to after the parade. When the Irish Coffee Pub opened it's doors others made it their tradition to venture there. Shandon Court has become another favorite post-parade destination. Still others keep with family/neighborhood tradition and gather back at their house for some good ol' corned beef and cabbage.

I remember a handful of these parades taking place in bad weather. We've been very lucky to have decent weather most of these first Sundays in March. Thank you, A.O.H. Division 7, for keeping the St. Patrick Day Parade tradition going. We're looking forward to Sunday, March 1! To mark the Golden Anniversary of the parade, all past Grand Marshals will be wearing their sashes as they march behind Fr. Hugh of St. Mary's. Be sure to give them all a big hand as they march past you to let them know how much we appreciate all they have done and do to continue the tradition.