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Field Notes from Abroad: Person to Person

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Face to Face in Ireland

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Field Notes from Abroad: Face to Face in Ireland

The interview I conducted was on a bus on the way to Dublin on January 21st. I ended up sitting next to Tony Tracy, a professor of the film school at my University (National University of Ireland in Galway). We spent close to the next three hours getting to know each other and I asked him many questions about Ireland and his lifestyle. Something that always seems to surprise me about the Irish lifestyle and habits is how open and friendly strangers are to you. Back in America, if you are on a bus or at a restaurant or something, strangers don't usually bring up conversation with you. The culture in the States is more closed off and reserved when it comes to being friendly to someone you don't know. It couldn't be more opposite in Ireland's culture. Irish people love to talk and they really enjoy a good conversation, even if it is with someone that they had never met before. I have seemed to notice it more in the older generation, but they actually care about getting to know you. There have been multiple times I have met complete strangers and they ask me all sorts of questions about my school and my experience in Ireland so far. When you encounter a stranger in America, they always seem hesitant to discuss their life with strangers and they tend to not trust them just because they don't know them. It is very refreshing to be surrounded by gregarious people who love to have a good chat.

When I interviewed Tony, I realized that there are many cultural differences between us. For him, growing up in Ireland was much different than my experience growing up in America. He told me that the majority of his generation, as soon as they graduated, they emigrated out of Ireland. It was just how it was. The job offers and future life in Ireland was very limited and it was a normal decision to immigrate to America to find work in the land of possibilities. The history of mass emigration from Ireland is a lot more prevalent than I had ever thought and it is such a different outlook on life after graduation that I have ever had. Even today, Tony explained how Irish college students often travel all the way to America for work and although the numbers of immigrants from Ireland is fewer than the past, many still dream about living or studying somewhere else other than Ireland. Another thing about Ireland's culture that Tony taught me was how aware they are about political issues within their country as well as in America. Tony and I discussed the recent recession and the economical outlook and how Ireland got to where it is today. Although, it is a difficult topic to grasp, the Irish find a way to make a joke about it and move on. Their humor seems to be somewhat of an outlet to find a positive in a difficult situation. The lifestyle in Ireland is also very different than that in America when it comes to stress. The Irish seem to go on their own time and you rarely see an Irish person in a high stress situation or freaking out about something. The culture is so much more laid back than in America and they are very calm about issues. Americans seem to run through their day according to time and efficiency where the Irish don't really rush through days. I am someone who is very punctual and tries to be efficient with my time. Tony seemed to just have an outlook of everything will work out on his own time.

The interview and discussion I had with Tony really made me appreciate the openness that the Irish have for people that are not from their country. Even though America may have a negative perception in other countries, to the Irish, it is still a representation of an opportunity for adventure or work they seem to think doesn't exist for them in Ireland. I guess the recent recession for them has increased this want for a greater opportunity. This interview gave me a different outlook about how people in Ireland perceive America and what it still represents in their eyes.

Interview: Tony Tracy, Professor of the Film School at the National University of Ireland in Galway, January 21st, 2011.