

William Butler Yeats claimed, "Life is a long preparation for something that never happens." He obviously never attended the Rockaway St. Patrick's Day Parade. I never imagined being chosen as a Deputy Grand Marshal and I am thrilled to be so honored. My father was Deputy Grand Marshal in 1990 and I am very excited to carry on that legacy. I believe my Irish grandparents would be so proud, not only of me, but how our Irish culture is celebrated in our Rockaway community. Born in Rockaway, I remember the first parade started by James Conway Sullivan. Now, in its 42nd year, it is the second largest St. Patrick's parade in New York State.

Professionally, I am a Registered Nurse who works at The Scholars' Academy, as well as the Guild for Exceptional Children. I was fortunate enough to receive a Catholic education at St. Camillus before attending high school at St. Francis Prep. Currently, I am furthering my Catholic education at the College of New Rochelle, where I am completing a Bachelor of Science in Nursing. I also hold a Bachelor of Arts in art history with a minor in Irish studies from Queens College. I am a member of the Annual Queens County St. Patrick's Day Parade Committee as well as the Galway Association. I am an active parishioner at St. Camillus where I have been a Eucharistic Minister and lector for fourteen years.

My parents, James and Patricia Gibbons, are responsible for instilling the strong love I feel for my Irish heritage, taking me not only to Ireland but various Irish cultural events in New York throughout my lifetime. My brother, James, was a member of the Hibernians and played the bagpipes. He and his wife Cathy have three sons, James, Thomas and Sean. My nephews are being raised to embrace their Irish heritage and have had the good fortune to visit Ireland as young children. My paternal grandparents, Mary and John Gibbons, came from Galway and my grandfather arrived in America in the 1920s, coming through Ellis Island. My maternal grandparents, Mary and James Coyne, were first generation with their ancestors emigrating from Mayo. I have had the great fortune to have an extended family who honor their Irish customs, occasionally indulging in a pint of Guinness.

I have very fond memories of celebrating St. Patrick's Day as a child and going to the parade in the city, often marching with St. Camillus Band. Later, at a gathering hosted at my grandmother's house, I remember having corned beef and the best mashed potatoes in the history of the world. The very thought still floods me with happy memories. My Irish Grandmother, Mary Gibbons, loved Ireland but she would always say, "America has been very good to me." I sincerely believe she would beam with pride to see her only granddaughter being honored and the continued celebration of her Irish heritage. Who knows? Perhaps one of my nephews will one day be a Deputy or Grand Marshal in a St. Patrick's Day parade and if so, I hope they enjoy it as much as I will. I love being an Irish American woman, I love my faith and my family, and I love the Rockaway St. Patrick's Day Parade. Let's celebrate!