

Mom

My mother, Sarah Celine Gaytan, was born in Kilcar, County Donegal, in 1941. She was the third of eleven children born to Brigid and Patrick Campbell of Chapel Gate.

She was determined from a young age to get out into the world. At 17, she joined the British Army and trained in Scotland. Two years later, she decided to leave Ireland again, this time for an even bigger adventure. At first, she planned to move to Australia, but her mother, my granny, begged her to go to America instead. Her brothers (my mom's uncles) Charlie, Frank, and Peter Boyle were already there. So she listened to her mother, and at 19, she boarded a ship and crossed the Atlantic to New York.

She loved that voyage and spoke fondly about those nine days at sea. She lived in Brooklyn for five years, in a boarding house with other young women, and worked at Marien Heim, a home for German seniors. She often talked about the elderly German and Austrian friends she made there. They even threw her a surprise 21st birthday party, and she kept some of the gifts they gave her for the rest of her life.

Eventually, she made her way to California, where her sisters Mary and Margaret and her uncles Frank and Peter were living. She settled in Santa Monica and worked in the rectory at St. Monica's Church. There she found another community and made a new group of friends, including Monsignor Raymond O'Flaherty, an Irish American priest whom my mom regarded as a dear and close friend. In fact, the first time I can remember seeing my mom cry was at a St. Patrick's Day Mass in 1988, when she learned that he had passed away.

While she was living in Santa Monica, she often visited her uncles and their families in Escondido, near San Diego. I too remember visiting them as a child and listening in awe as they all spoke Gaeilge together. My mom loved speaking Irish with my Uncles Frank and Peter. She was a proud Irish speaker from the **FEAR-Ghaeltacht of Donegal**, a distinction she was always quick to point out whenever she heard what she called the "book Irish" of other speakers (especially those from Dublin). She loved being surrounded by her many Boyle cousins, and I hope some of them will share a story or two later today about their time together.

Her life changed again when, at least the way she told it, she met my father at the Continental Club on a Friday the 13th, sometime in 1969. The details were never entirely clear, but I like to imagine that they danced the night away. She was there with her brother, my Uncle Pat, and their close friend Barney Farrell. My mom and

dad married on December 12, 1970, a date that held special meaning for both of them because it is the feast day of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

My mom was deeply committed to our family. She took wonderful care of Colleen and me when we were kids and made sure our home was always open to everyone. She drove us to soccer, volleyball, and basketball practices and games. Our weekends were full: backyard barbecues in the summer, warm roast dinners in the winter, and almost always family, neighbors, and friends around us.

Holidays were especially important. There were turkey and honey-ham dinners with loads of Bisto gravy, bruchene, and Brussels sprouts. At Christmas and Thanksgiving, we played round after round of the impossible Irish card game 25. My mom and my Uncle Pat loved playing 25, with all of its odd and complicated rules, but what they really seemed to enjoy was telling everyone else what they “should have done” with their cards, even when that person had just won the round. I’m looking at you, Aunt Nuala. Declan and Aunt Cene were formidable players too.

My mom and dad also made sure that Colleen and I knew both of their home countries. My mom relished her time in Chile, where she spent time with my abuela, my aunts, uncles, and cousins. She loved my dad’s village, El Tránsito, and felt at home there in the rural countryside, surrounded by intensely bright stars and the towering Andes Mountains.

We also traveled to Ireland, where she loved showing us Kilcar, Mockross, and Crove, the places where she had spent time as a child, usually surrounded by family. For many summers, we spent at least a week in the Mammoth Mountains, where she and Margie would get into all sorts of silly trouble. There was loads of laughter, and lots of time spent in the swimming pool and jacuzzi.

In more recent years, she and my dad joined Gwyn and me on all sorts of adventures: Santa Cruz, Guadalajara, Sevilla, Portugal, New Orleans, Oregon, Montana, and Maine. They also traveled to Rome, Vatican City, and Tuscany with Gwyn’s parents, Jen and John. She made her last visit to Ireland several years ago with my cousin, Fionnuala.

My mom was a great storyteller, a gardener, and a lover of animals. She adored our family pets: Gizmo, Atticus, MaxPancho, and of course her baby, Mallie, who adored her right back. Mallie followed her around the house and cuddled with her in bed every morning.

She read voraciously and loved watching the Sunday morning political shows. Every Sunday evening, she would tell me about the trip she had taken that week, meaning the country featured in the *Los Angeles Times* travel section. She was never afraid to speak her mind about politics. She had a fierce moral compass, and when she believed something was right or wrong, you knew it. More recently, she discovered the “like” button on Facebook, and eventually learned how to leave messages to old friends from Kilcar

She was also a proud Catholic. She went to church every week, and she made sure we did too. When Covid hit, she and my father started attending Mass online every Sunday morning. And she made sure to take Mallie to the blessing of the animals on the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi.

I used to joke that my mom held the record for the number of times one person could receive the last rites. By my last count, it was four. But in a way, that says something important about her. Her faith mattered deeply, and she wanted to be ready when it was time for her to make that final transition.

I imagine that when she passed, there was a rollicking welcome-home party waiting for her. I imagine my sister Colleen there, along with her parents, my uncles Anthony, Tom, and Pat, all of her aunts and uncles, my abuela, and her friends Salvador, Chavas, Joe, and BeBe.

And I know she’s here today with us too, happy and smiling, delighted to see so many of the people she loved gathered together in one place. I hope she knows that we carry her with us still, in the stories we tell, in the things she taught us, and in the love she gave so freely.