

Episode 27: Half and Half

Summary

Nick's friend Ciaron is half English and half Irish. In this conversation he talks about his family background and his experiences related to both countries and cultures.

Transcript

Nick: Today I'm talking my friend and colleague Ciaron about his background, umm, because, Ciaron, you're half English and half Irish.

Ciaron: Yes, officially.

Nick: So you can tell us a little bit about your family history, or how is it that that came about?

Ciaron: Umm, well, basically my two parents, umm, were both born in England but they had Irish grand ... Irish fathers, who actually went to school together, umm, which is another, a whole nother story¹. They both grew up in England but my Dad in particular grew up² in an Irish community in Leicester.

Nick: OK, so I thought it was going to be that one of your parents was English and one was Irish, but really they're sort of both English but sort of with these Irish ... with this Irish heritage.

Ciaron: Yeah, it's interesting how it was developed because for my Mum, her Dad kind of left ... or both my grandfathers left Ireland, umm, in their early 20s, umm, but for my Mum's family, it wasn't ... the Irishness wasn't particularly important. He married an English woman, they lived in Portsmouth in the south of England, so there was no community, really, for him, whereas³ my, umm, my Dad's father, umm, grew up in an Irish community. It gets confusing. My grandfather moved to an Irish community in Leicester, and married a woman who was half Irish.

Nick: That is confusing!

¹ a whole nother story: a different story that won't be told now. 'Nother' is not really correct (it's another, not a-nother, so it should just be 'a whole other story'), but this is still a very common phrase.

² grew up: spent his childhood

³ whereas: while on the other hand

Ciaron: So, like, in terms of my nationality, it's ... I have an Irish passport and an English passport, a British passport. Umm, but for my Dad's family, and for my Dad, the Irishness is important, umm, so when I was growing up, it was kind of pseudo⁴-important in that ... in terms of sport, particularly rugby. You know, we supported⁵ the Irish team. It was also Catholic, so my Dad supported, uhh, Celtic against, uhh, Rangers, in football. But at the time we were living in Hong Kong, which made it quite ridiculous in a way, umm, because home was - when we were living in Hong Kong; I lived in Hong Kong between the ages of three and 10 - umm, home was England, because that's what a lot of the community, as well, identified as home, even though, you know, some ... a lot of the children that I was friends with were either born in Hong Kong or, you know, were actually not from Britain at all, from Vietnam, from Pakistan, from Hong Kong, as well.

Nick: No, that's quite interesting, because you'd think ... yeah it's interesting that your mother's family and your father's family took this different path in England. You would think coming from Ireland to England there might not be the need for a separate community like your father's family. You'd think, 'OK, it's the same language, it's, you know, there's a lot of similarities, obviously it's not the same as moving from Korea to France or something like that.' Umm, but they'd, kind of chosen, or in some way got into this Irish community. And I guess that kept his Irishness alive and then passed it on to you.

Ciaron: I think it was partly⁶, you know, partly the Catholic Church, even though, from what I know of my grandfather, he wasn't particularly a church ... a religious man. He might have been a church-goer just out of the habit. Umm, but for me it meant that, you know, Ireland, you know, in terms of a destination to visit, like, umm, rugby, you know, it was an identity. Also my name, my name was a big factor as well. My full name is Ciaron Liam O'Brien, so it's very, very Irish. Umm, at school in Hong Kong it wasn't that different because there were lots of different nationalities. But when I ... when we went back to England when I was 10, then it became very, very different, because nobody could pronounce my name. Umm, my name is also spelt the ... it's officially spelt the Irish way, but it's not actually correct. That's a side story.

Nick: That's another story, OK!

Ciaron: That's another story.

⁴ pseudo: almost, but not actually

⁵ supported: cheered for, wanted to win

⁶ partly: in part; not completely or even mostly, but a bit

Nick: So, hang on, so it's C-I-A-R-O-N, and we had another colleague here, also Irish, also called Kieran, and he was K-E ... K-I-E-R-A-N, which is the more, I guess, standard spelling that I'm used to⁷.

Ciaron: Officially it's the Anglicised version of the name. The Irish version is C-I-A-R-A-accent-N, which comes out as *Ciaron*.

Nick: OK.

Ciaron: Which is where the spelling of my name comes from.

Nick: So it's really an old Irish language name.

Ciaron: Yep, yeah, yeah.

Nick: And so did you have any troubles then, as you were saying, at school and things like that, being a little bit different?

Ciaron: Yeah, the name marked me out⁸ as different, even though the accent wasn't different. Umm...

Nick: Right, because you don't have the Irish accent.

Ciaron: I don't have an Irish accent at all.

Nick: But your father does?

Ciaron: Nope, no, my father doesn't, my mother doesn't, umm, at all. So they ... my Dad's name is Shane as well, so he had a similar thing, but, I think where he grew up, it wasn't such an issue. Where I grew up in England at least, yeah, it was just different and it wasn't a big negative reaction but people called me Paddy at school and, you know, there was an association that at least my name was different, so school between the age of, umm, the younger years or the teenage years, anything that's different is a target. Umm, but it meant that I wanted to go to Ireland. Like, I first went there when I was 17, but then I felt, you know, 'I'm not Irish, because I don't, you know, this culture is not one that I understand fully, that I am even ... the lifestyle, the politics, whatever.' But then I lived in Ireland. When I was 25, I moved to Ireland and lived there for about eight years.

⁷ I'm used to: I'm familiar with. Note: there is another form of *used to* to describe past habits, but it does not have the conjugation of *to be* in front of it.

⁸ marked me out: identified me, brought attention to me

Nick: OK, so when you went there originally, you wanted to go to, sort of, find out your identity, and then you found that you didn't really fit in, and then after the eight years, how do you kind of sit now between the two?

Ciaron: Umm, it's kind of home. I like it when my friends there say, 'When are you coming home?' They kind of mean to their home, but it's also considered my home. I, umm, it's a place I understand, I think, now, for the positives and negatives. I have an Irish friend coming to visit me at the end of the month, and he's being very Irish about his arrangements. Everything is vague⁹, umm, and slightly frustrating. But it's ... when I have ... I've been back twice, only twice, since I left, managing to have kids in between, and I feel very comfortable there. It feels like somewhere that I enjoy being, that I understand the culture a lot more than I did when I was 17. You know, when you're 17, how much do you know? That's another thing.

Nick: And so what do you think are the main, kind of, differences that you've noticed between the two cultures? Because from an outside point of view, it would seem that they would be quite similar.

Ciaron: Umm, Irish people are much more ... they love Ireland. Like, English people in particular - I don't know much about Welsh or Scottish - they're proud to be English but they realise that England is not the best place in the world. Umm, Irish people - and they complain about England - whereas Irish people, they know that Ireland's not the centre of the universe, it's not the best place in the world, but it's home and they love it, and their family is important and their friends are important. Lots of people in Dublin, even, umm, people in their 20s, 30s, they would go home for the weekend if they weren't from Dublin originally. Like you, you know, you might do if you were a student, or they would do when they're a student, because home and family are much more important than, I think, than in England, where if I think about some of my school friends, they don't live where they went to school. They've moved, they've done different things. Umm, I just think the attitude to the country, to their identity as well, is different, yeah. Irish people will seek¹⁰ each other out, not always automatically, but when they're abroad.

Nick: Right, well the legacy of the Irish pub in every city in the world, basically...

Ciaron: It makes it easier to seek out other Irish people, I think. But, umm, that's a difference that I really noticed. People are a lot ... they like where they are, they're happy. And a lot of people, like, Irish people, do travel a lot, but a lot of them don't. They love being at home. My friends who are English teachers, a lot of them stay in Ireland because that's home, even though with our job, as you know Nick, we can travel.

⁹ vague: unclear

¹⁰ seek (or seek out): to look for

Nick: Alright, well thank you very much for the insight into Ireland and England.

Ciaran: You're very welcome.

Comprehension Questions

1. Why does Ciaron consider himself half Irish when both his parents were born in England?
2. How did Ciaron feel about Ireland when he first went there at age 17?
3. What did Ciaron mention as a big difference between Irish and English people?

Exercises

Use the words and expressions in the footnotes of the transcript to fill in the gaps.

1. We got lost on our way to our friend's house because the directions he gave were too _____.
2. Not as many people came to the event as expected, _____ because of the poor weather, but mostly because it wasn't marketed well enough.
3. I _____ in a village so I find big cities to be too noisy.
4. That was also the same night that I met my husband, but that's a _____.
5. When he was a kid he _____ the same football team as his father, but when he was a teenager he switched teams.
6. I grew up in Australia so _____ hot weather. It doesn't bother me at all.
7. My accent _____ as a foreigner when I moved to another country.
8. I didn't _____ romance, but that's what I found!
9. That book is _____ history. A lot of the 'facts' in it have been proven to be false.
10. The twins are quite different. For example, Elisa likes maths _____ Sarah is into science.

Discussion Questions

Discuss these questions with a partner or in the [English in 10 Minutes Listeners group on Facebook](#):

1. Have you ever been to Ireland? If so, what did you think of it? If not, would you like to go?
2. Do you have different nationalities in your family history like Ciaran? Which ones?
3. Do you have an Irish pub near where you live? If so, do you ever go there?

Answers

Comprehension Questions

1. Because his grandfathers on both sides of his family were Irish, and his father's family lived in an Irish community in England.
2. He felt that he didn't fit in and that he wasn't Irish.
3. He mentioned that Irish people love Ireland more than English people love England.

Exercises

1. vague
2. partly
3. grew up
4. a whole nother story
5. supported
6. I'm used to
7. marked me out
8. seek
9. pseudo
10. whereas