

IN FOCUS



GRIFFIN McMAHON

OCCUPATION: Sophomore at Longmeadow High School in Longmeadow, Massachusetts, and Juilliard pre-college organ major in New York.

What are your Irish roots?

"Well, what's cool about my Irish roots is that I'm first generation Irish! My dad grew up in Ardee, Co. Louth, and graduated from University College Dublin. He met my mom, from Boston and they moved to western Massachusetts and started a family in 1978. I am the youngest of four – my sister Ryan and my two brothers Conor and Sean. My immediate Irish roots, the McMahons, are of the Co. Monaghan clan. Also, my granny's family is the Murphy clan of Co. Wexford. My granny is 88 years old and still lives in Ardee. She is incredibly active and has a great zest for life."

Have you ever been to Ireland?

"Yes. The last time was three years ago. We stayed with my granny in Co. Louth for a few days and spent a week on the beach in Co. Cork with tons of Irish cousins. I love everything about the country, the environment, the culture, the music and, most of all, the people."

Tell us about yourself?

"I am 15 years old and I am a sophomore at Longmeadow High School in Longmeadow, Massachusetts. I study the pipe organ, piano, conducting and cello. I sing tenor in my high school mixed select choir, Lyrics, and I play cello in the LHS Symphony Orchestra. I love the sense of community that the music program has here. The music teachers at LHS are outstanding! I also recently started studying organ and piano at the Juilliard pre-college program in New York."

What's Juilliard like?

"I love it! Classes began on Saturday, September 13 and I quickly found the place to be a very nurturing and exciting environment. My teachers are great and it is both incredibly humbling and stimulating to be surrounded by such talented and hardworking people."

When did you discover your love of the organ?

"I remember one day back in 2006, after playing in a cello recital, I suddenly heard thunderous chords being created by a man named Peter Beardsley, who was practicing the organ in the church. I knew right then and there that I had found my instrument! Soon after, I began taking lessons with him and I've been studying with him for nearly three years. Pete has been an incredible mentor for me."

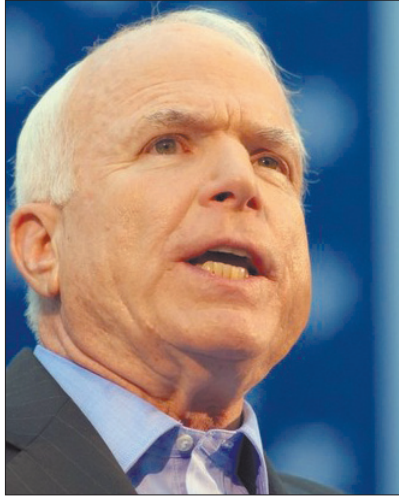
Any important life lessons?

"One of the most important things that my father has taught me is to have a passion for something and not to be afraid to express it. He is a huge Rory Gallagher fan (another Irish connection) – and having my dad blast his music in the house most Saturday mornings, since before I can even remember, has taught me just that! My parents are my heroes. They have done so much for me and they have always treated me with love and respect. I am thankful for my family and mentors. I see that same passion in the Irish people, and to call myself Irish makes me proud to be among them."

Interview by April Drew

McCain/ Obama Irish Battle

THE Barack Obama/John McCain battle for Irish American hearts and minds has certainly heated up.



Senator John McCain.

There appears to be a recognition on both sides that key states such as Ohio and Pennsylvania could come down to districts where Irish Americans are the swing voters.

McCain certainly has been putting in the time and energy, as his appearance at the Irish Presidential Forum in Scranton on Monday makes clear.

Prior to the forum he held a meeting with leading Irish Americans from the key states. Those present said he appeared very relaxed and at home with the questions on Ireland.

Senator Lindsey Graham of South Carolina accompanies McCain everywhere on the trail, and told some of the Irish Americans that he never saw McCain so relaxed as when he is around Irish American crowds.

Meanwhile, the Obama people have begun to plug into the Irish American audience. They offered vice presidential candidate Senator Joe Biden as a speaker for the presidential forum, but organizer John Dearie is hanging out for the candidate himself.

Also, Obama's top foreign policy advisor Denis McDonough has become involved in chasing down the Irish American vote and has had several conversations with key Irish figures in the past week.

The extra attention makes it clear that both parties are now zeroing in on key states. Pennsylvania is a must win for Obama, and the McCain people appear to believe it is their best chance to upset his hopes.

Certainly given the reception McCain received at the Irish forum, it is clear that he has great popularity among grass-

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roots Irish. It will be interesting to see how Obama would fare with a similar audience if he agrees to appear at the forum.

McCain Avoids Anti- Immigrant Candidate

IT was very interesting that McCain chose an Irish venue to reignite his support for comprehensive immigration reform – a big step. Obviously he had been under pressure from his own rank and file to take the low road on immigration reform, but he made clear in his comments that he was not going that route.

McCain had appeared at three separate rallies for the Irish Lobby for Immigration Reform over the past two years, and he was clearly comfortable staking out his pro-immigration stance before an Irish audience again.

It didn't seem to matter that the crowd in general was probably anti immigrant. They cheered McCain anyway as he spoke about the 50,000 Irish undocumented and the need to legalize them.

Noticeably absent at the event was the mayor of nearby Hazelton Louis Barletta, whose town passed some of the most anti-Hispanic immigrant legislation in the past few years and who is now running for Congress.

It appears McCain was making a statement that he personally had no time for such legislation. Barletta is in a very close race and will surely replace the retiring Tom Tancredo from Colorado as the major anti-immigrant voice if he is elected.

Obama Playing Catch Up

THE Obama camp have been utilizing their big guns, from Senator Pat Leahy to Friends of Ireland head Congressman Richie Neal, Maryland Governor Martin



Senator Barack Obama.

O'Malley and Congressman Joe Crowley in their efforts to solidify the Irish American support.

The joint phone call to Irish American media on the day of the Scranton Irish event featuring McCain was a clear attempt to steal the thunder.

Last week Neal was instrumental in getting a new statement from the campaign on the U.S. envoy to Ireland. The statement, however, said very little other than Obama was now committed to the envoy after previously wavering on the issue.

It may well be that the Irish pols that Obama has tapped as advisors are getting very little to work with. If Obama does not appear at the presidential forum it will be hard to explain to the Irish American activists that he is taking their concerns seriously after McCain became the first Republican to do so.

Who Will Win The Election?

SO what will the election come down to? A leading political strategist in New York says it will be a question of whether Obama's incredible new voter registration effort will counterbalance the soft racism of those who say they will vote for him, but actually will not.

This expert says that polls showing Obama ahead by a sliver mean very little, and



Governor Sarah Palin.

that until Election Day it will be very difficult to figure just who will turn out.

"Remember he turned out tens of thousands of new voters in states like Iowa which took everyone by surprise," said the operative. "If he does that on election night in states like North Carolina and Nevada we could all be in for a huge surprise."

On the other side, he says Alaska Governor Sarah Palin has given McCain a boost with the grassroots and may add a few percentage points. However he added, "McCain still has difficulty rallying his base. He will need a massive turnout too."