



## Awaiting My Muse: Part Two of an Artist Residency in Ireland

by Jackie M. Loring

*2010 Residency, Heinrich Theodor Böll cottage, Achill Island, Co. Mayo, west coast of Ireland.*

After my acceptance letter arrived from John McHugh, Boll Cottage Trustee, I called Geraldine Mills who I'd met in 2003 at a Provincetown Play Festival where her play was performed. I'm a travel coward, so I proposed to her that I would provide her a place to meet her muse if she would consent to drive me in Ireland.

I arrived at Shannon Airport without the dread of opposite-side-of-the-road-driving or the need to look at a map.

That first night in Doon West, I dined with Geraldine's extended family. The evening was to define my visit: a combination of welcoming, intimate gatherings, disconcerting and gleeful poem-inciting situations and people claiming me as a member of their clan.

Geraldine's brother-in-law, Bobby, assumed the role of my guardian, in a poetic sense, as I traveled among the worlds that pulled at me. His attention was a gift which I returned in Westport to honor Geraldine's family.

On Sunday morning, Geraldine and I meandered through Connemara, west towards the Killary Fjord at Leenane, along the Mayo Mountains to the Atlantic tidal flats at Westport to the bridge onto Achill Island.

When we arrived at the cottage, we gathered enough peat from the storeroom for a few fires, devoured the book titles on the shelves, unpacked, chose bedrooms and workrooms and settled in.



**Jackie and Geraldine in the courtyard at Böll Cottage, Achill**

That first night, my sister came to me, luminescent in a white robe. She didn't speak but nodded slightly off beyond my vision. The cottage sits at the crest of a hill that leads to an expanse of ocean but in this dream, it lolled in a turquoise sea. I woke enough to write on the pad by my bed, turned over and slept, comforted.

In the morning, ready to begin my adventure, I divided my workspace then stood at the threshold of Heinrich Böll's room, the plan for possible work in front of me, and felt a momentary panic. What if I could not step forward? What if I had lost the possibility of poetry?

The moment and the wonder passed, dream like, as I remembered the pad at my bed. In that blessed time before dawn, I'd written three words: "aunt clare," (Clare is my sister's name as well) and "ragman."

Hours later, I wrote the closing lines "in cold rivers like stones." The draft of my first Achill poem was on paper! I taped "Imprisoned" over its inspiration, Joyce Utting Schutter's sculpture, and marveled at my first morning's work.



**Jackie M. Loring finds her Muse in Ireland**

My writings were as free to roam as the bleating sheep outside the cottage door but I tried to begin each day by journaling letters to my granddaughters in Georgia. Hot coffee in hand, I'd then retrieve my bedside pad and begin my writing day in earnest.

For the following weeks, memories and visions flooded my sleep, left me words, sounds or images on my pad. Bobby and dinner haunted me. ReVohah, dear, dear ReVonah whispered her story in my mind's ear. Phrases, stanza, and last lines ebbed and flowed with the changing tide outside the window at my desk.

"After my sister died / I lost my keys / searched the places she would have looked / as her plane boarded / as our mother's Mass began / as her students watched their class time tick by..." or "frosting / dribbled his name," and "bland berry."

A grandson I never knew beyond his toddler hood visited me as a teenager. I might not have remembered that or why I woke with tears on my pillow except for the gift of 'choking game' on my pad.

I'd break each day around one for lunch. When I'm creating, I prefer silence. Geraldine and I agreed in Shannon to respect each other's work ethics and need for concentration and we were not insulted by nods or averted eyes.

The poetry fairy seldom visited past noon so, refreshed from lunch and a walk, I might grid the idea for a story, jot down thoughts in my notebook, edit or read back through old poems for inspiration. Some afternoons I read.

From the cupboard's glass panes, the fairy drawings watched, patiently. Very early one morning, late in my second week, ReVohah was born. Her story tumbled onto pages so fast I shifted to using my computer. I could smell dinner but characters can be insistent and the story doesn't wait. When ReVohah trudged back to her castle, I hung the paper pages along with the drawings to breathe till morning.

What caused this behavior, hanging words like trophies, I could not explain to Geraldine then nor to myself now, but I smile today at the sense of wonder that overtook me each morning when I opened the workroom door.

Dinner would magically appear in front of a burgeoning fire around seven. Well, not exactly by magic! Geraldine cooked every night, a debt I will repay someday.

Evenings we read or discussed our shared interest in W.D. Yeats and Maud Gonne, their political activism, and great love. We envisioned a story based on their relationship and by our last night, 'Closure' had blossomed into a movie script treatment.

We did leave the cottage on occasion. On our first Achill Friday, Geraldine and I traveled east by train across the Irish midlands from Westport to the historic city of Dublin, where she was a featured reader at the Dublin Book Festival.

The following Wednesday, I was honored to be hosted by Poetry Ireland at a reading in Westport along with poets Ger Reidy and Harry Clifton, who was just named Ireland's Secretary of Poetry.

Strangely enough, the time at the cottage lasted just enough time. My list of creative accomplishments seems impossible: a new chapbook, dozens of edits of old poems and poem beginnings, the Yeats' story overview, the first chapter of ReVohah's adventures and all the precious new poems.

I'd asked the Universe to provide for me and I'd been open to the adventure Ireland and Boll Cottage granted.

*Part One of this two-part story appeared in the [Summer Issue](#) of [CapeWomenOnline](#) magazine.*

In Doon West, Bobby watches me welcomed  
with shake of hands, pecks on the cheeks.

Ann's found a long lost bottle, Elderberry Wine  
of suspicious origins.

Tina serves cakes and tea but pours the thimble-sized glasses of the gift but Bobby refuses.

The sisters chat, wait for the blush of spirits.  
Bernadette's the first to laugh at the bland berry.

Geraldine suggest enhancing and a china cup  
while Bobby attends the wall sized, flat screen.

Ann offers a few drops from her organic lemons,  
Bernadette a spoon of sugar and Tina returns

from her kitchen with a tea strainer of cinnamon and clove.  
Geraldine stirs but still the zinger of alcohol is missing.

A soundless side show of family photos flash  
across the wall in back of our conversation.

Ann sips the new concoction, passes it to her sisters,  
Geraldine offers it to me but Bobby captures it,

holds it high. On the wall over Bobby's shoulder  
his parents smile at us, and in the crowd behind them

the face of my great grandmother,  
my grandmother and daughter.

Bobby sips the chalice and extends it to me.



Jacqueline M. Loring writes movie scripts, stage plays, and poetry. She compiled, edited and published both *Summer Home Review, Volumes I & II* and is the editor of over ten self-published books by poets and prose writers.

Her work is published in journals and anthologies including the *Scribner anthology, From Both Sides Now, A Sense of Place: An Anthology of Cape Women Writers* and *Cadence of Hooves*.

She received professional development grants from the Massachusetts Cultural Council, the Arts Foundation of Cape Cod and a Ragdale Foundation Artist Residency in Forest Lake, IL and the Heinrich Böll cottage, Achill, Co. Mayo, Ireland.

Her full-length play, *Reflections for a Warm Day*, was presented in 2007 at the Provincetown Theater/New Provincetown Players.

She facilitates the Cape Cod Screenwriter's Group, coordinates the Eventide Arts Full-length Playwriting Competition and Kaplan prize, is president of the Cape Cod Chapter of the [National League of American Pen Women](#) and the past executive director of the [Cape Cod Writers' Center](#).