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It's an Irish Lullaby: One Story of Hyphenated American Culture

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IT'S AN IRISH LULLABY: ONE STORY OF HYPHENATED AMERICAN CULTURE

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

MARY-ELLEN JONES
Master of Arts Degree, Virginia Commonwealth University, 2006
Bachelor of Arts Degree, The College of William and Mary, 2001
Associate of Arts, John Tyler Community College, 1998

Director: DR. ELIZABETH HODGES, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, ENGLISH DEPARTMENT

Virginia Commonwealth University
Richmond, Virginia
May 2006

Acknowledgement

Without the time, diligence and patience of so many others this text would never have come to be. There are, of course, those who are unaware of the impact they have had on me and my writing that deserve mention from James Joyce to Michael Flatley—people with the ability to push beyond their roots without ever letting go of them—or the awareness that it is the roots that nourish the plant and help it to prosper. A special nod must be given to poet, John Montague, who has successfully navigated the hyphens of ethnic culture and from whom I borrowed my chapter headings.

Thanks are due to Dr. Elizabeth Hodges for her tireless dedication to the task at hand and infinite faith in me. And also to Ms. Dyan Wright for reading from start to finish each and every draft. I am indebted to my family, my children: Jamie, Nicholas, Christopher, and Ian and above all my partner John Harris. Without his love and understanding I would have surrendered in frustration long ago. His love is my strength.

If I were to name those to whom this text is dedicated, I would have to say my grandmother Norah Reidy Walsh and my father Walter Walsh. Between them they offered me a world view and a sense of self with which I can live with pride. Because of them I can honor my ancestors and pass something precious on to my descendents.

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Abstract

IT'S AN IRISH LULLABY: ONE STORY OF HYPHENATED AMERICAN CULTURE

By Mary-Ellen Jones, MA

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2006

Major Director: Dr. Elizabeth Hodges, Associate Professor, English Department

The objective of this project was to come to a clear understanding of Irish-American culture—and how that culture expresses itself in individuals. The text considers the role of myth, religion, language, tradition, stereotypes and to a lesser degree gender in the molding of character. Although autobiographical in nature many of the themes are those that encompass the Irish-American experience as a whole. Questions asked throughout the process include, what makes one hyphenated? How is this culture passed from generation to generation? And is it multifaceted? Is there more than one way

to express being Irish-American. The text is presented is a narrative which is also part of the tradition it presents and makes the assertion that Irish-Americans have a unique culture within the larger American whole. It asserts, like Maxine Hong-Kingston and Richard Rodriguez that the tradition from whence we come shapes who we are.

Lost in our separate work

Writing is a process of discovery; one begins to write about one thing only to discover that the topic is really something completely different. Something one is compelled to explore. I began a simple story about my relationship with my grandmother—a story of a child's adoration—and realized that I was writing about an American sub-culture into which I was initiated at an early age—a subculture I was so deeply rooted in that I could not even see it. This project was begun as a genealogical hobby years ago. It was begun when I determined that I knew very little about this grandmother I loved so well. As we weave our way through life we learn that the fiber with which we weave is something handed down to us—whether we choose to accept that or not. We are the culmination of our ancestors for better or worse their culture is what shapes us.

My ancestors are Irish. They immigrated to the United States shortly after Oscar Wilde was imprisoned (though I doubt that influenced their choices), as William Butler Yeats and Lady Gregory were beginning to carve out what would come to be called the Celtic Revival or the Irish Literary Renaissance at the turn of the twentieth century; it was before John Millington Synge exposed a less savory side of Irish Catholic morality to the world in *The Playboy of The Western World* and created scandal in Ireland. It was after Parnell's politics, but before Eamon de Valera's. And it was decades before Michael

Collins was shot on a lonely road in County Cork. My ancestors came quietly and were welcomed into a tight-knit community in South Boston, Massachusetts where their arrival was expected and jobs had been arranged for them. They came on British passports claiming Irish nationalism. They came wanting to be Americans—without letting go of anything from their past—without letting go of their Irish identity.

They, like many other immigrants, left rural agrarian European societies. I'm sure they mourned the loss of their homeland, their family and friends, their innocence. These immigrants defined for future generations what it meant to be Irish or Greek or Jewish or any ethnicity in a new country—I can only speak of the Irish, because that is the tradition in which I was reared. But for all such immigrants, their conflicted emotions and national loyalties created in their communities a new breed of American: the hyphenated American.

These immigrants, my grandparents included, shaped generations with their unflinching courage and dreams of a better way of life. They were an inspiration and held tight to ideals that could, perhaps, not be lived up to, not for these people who were claiming a birthright—but rather people who didn't know *which* birthright to claim and so created one of their own. Around this community sprang up saints and sinners, heroes and villains, songs about an idealized homeland. The reality on one side of the ocean was disconnected from that on the other. Hyphenated Americans live within that disconnect, taking pieces from both, but nothing whole from either. That is at least how I see it.

For individuals in hyphenated communities, what is handed down can become convoluted: encapsulated in myth without any of the supporting history. They have been

given the idea of the rainbow and pots of gold—without ever hearing that there must also be rain. Often individuals who find their way out of such communities are balancing precariously on the hyphen *between* the two cultures: afraid to move too far in either direction, afraid to own or disown either side. When one discovers that it is not two cultures that are being balanced, but rather a third culture being created, one's insights become clearer. Such individuals are free to draw from wells on either side of the Atlantic and free to own it all without reservation—or feelings of isolation. One does not have to experience what John Montague did in *A Real Irishman.*

> On St. Patrick's Day, Billy Davidson cried,
> Big and blubbering, by the rock garden.
> The master had ordered him to play outside,
> Snapping 'You're not a real Irishman,
> You're a Protestant'. I slip out to comfort
> Big Billy, chance an arm around him.
> 'What does it matter, your religion—
> Some people still call me the American!—
> What counts most is, you're my friend.'
> Decades later, in a dark pub, after hours,
> A swirl of trouble with two off-duty U.D.R.
> Suddenly in the background a rough voice roars:
> "John Montague is my old friend and neighbour:
> Lay a hand on him and you deal with Billy Davidson."

Never in my life have I been Irish, nor am I American; I am Irish-American. Like many who came before me, I have loved and hated that identification. I have known many John Montagues and Billy Davidsons—on both sides of the Atlantic. I have lived with the myth of a better world—over there—even though my grandparents left seeking a better world—over here. I have tried to make sense of that contradiction. I have lived with the saints and sinners, the overachievers and the immobilized. In reading Alice

Carey and Pete Hamil and Madeleine Blais I have come to understand that for every Kennedy family there are a dozen or more Careys, or Hamils or Haydens or Reidys—Irish-American families filled with alcoholism, angst and chaos. For every Matthew Brady or Bing Crosby or Sandra Day O'Connor there have been thousands of nameless Walter Walshes who could not or *would not* chase a dream. In each text I have read I saw more of my family—more of myself—more of the reality I had built for myself in the hyphenated world in which I unknowingly existed.

This process—this writing project—was not begun in order to find the Irishness in me, nor the American-ness, but rather to come to understand the intersection of these nationalities and how I could come to own both of them comfortably. As Americans we really don't have the kind of cultural underpinning that other nations have to fall back on. So in many ways we borrow, a little here, a little there, constantly making other-cultural references.

Sasnoski? What sort of name is *that*? Where's your family from anyway? Dorchester or Dallas wouldn't be an answer. Poland or Czechoslovakia—those are answers to that question because none of us are from here. A professor in an Ancient Celtic lit course, taking roll on the first day of classes said to me, "Jones—good Welsh name." To which I quickly replied, "That's my ex-husband's name. Walsh is mine. I am Irish." Although "Walsh" means "man from Wales," no one would have dared to tell anyone in my family that—we were and are too connected to our Irish heritage.

As human beings we seek continuity. We seek depth—connectivity. Heritage goes beyond genetics. It is something abstract—something spiritual—something ancient.

In this antiquity we can ground ourselves. We can dream of far away places—beyond the mist—where we can wash away the ugly, the wars, the troubles, the poverty, and the death. We can create with our selectivity a nobility in it all. We make heroes far away and ignore villains that inhabit our villages here at home. We come to make mountains out of mole hills—or in this case rich green Irish hills.

It is human nature to categorize. 1. Irish. 2. American. 3. Irish-American. I, in my own family, have seen each definition personified. I am Irish—as in not American, or I am American and therefore not Irish. I have watched what that sort of denial of a part of who and what we are has done to people I have cared about. I watched my father and sisters and brothers cloister themselves in garrets—prisons of their own making. In the years before he died my father rarely left his apartment—and my siblings have followed this pattern. They remain isolated in their respective rooms. Some days they don't even get out of bed. I have watched my mother excel in the world—afraid to come home, afraid that others may break free of her maternal power over them. It appears that she wants to be remembered as the sainted Irish mother. I have watched them scatter—running away from their cultural heritage. I know what that sort of denial can do to people—it eats away at the soul. I have watched other Irish-Americans struggle with their identity and I have seen extremes on both ends of the spectrum. There are those who will remain in pubs or drinking hidden away in their rooms they will lose track of those who have reached out beyond the Irish-American culture. And those who move away will work to forget what they see as the closed culture they left behind. Each extreme will say that the other has abandoned something—something of themselves—something of their

heritage. I have come to the place in my own reality where I understand that I am Irish-American; I can not be one without the other. And so this is one story of a hyphenated American that started out believing that she was unique but has come to see that her story is representative of one heritage in American culture.

A Real Irishman

It was prophesied by the druid Cathbad that Deidre would be very beautiful and that she would be the cause of much suffering in Ireland—in Ulster in particular. As a result, at her birth there were some who wanted to kill her; but King Conchobar thought he could change Deirdre's fate by bringing her up himself and marrying her when she came of age. He took her as his possession and had her raised in his secluded hunting lodge by his nurse Leborcham.

Deidre did become the beautiful young woman that Cathbad had predicted and she was nearly ready to marry the king. One day, she saw a raven drinking blood spilled in the snow after a calf had been slaughtered and she asked Leborcham if all husbands were wrinkled and grey like Conchobar or if there were any with lips as red as blood, skin as white as snow and raven-black hair. Forgetful of the prophesy, Leborcham let slip that Naoise, son of Uisnech, had these qualities.

Deirdre immediately made up her mind that she must meet this Naoise son of Uisnech.

She contrived a meeting and the two fell in love at once. Naoise knew that Deirdre was betrothed to the king and so he was reluctant to take the relationship any further. But Deirdre threatened to expose Naoise to the king and compromise him and so, to preserve his honor, he enlisted the help of his brothers, Ardan and Ainnle, and the lovers eloped to Scotland.

Conchobar was furious when he found out and pursued them with an army. There was bitter fighting, but Conchobar was persuaded to call a truce. He sent three warriors, Fergus mac Roich, Dubthach Doeltenga and Cormac, to invite the fugitives to come home and to guarantee their safety. But as soon as they had returned to Ulster, Conchobar broke his word and got Eogan mac Durthacht to murder all three sons of Uisnech.

The great Irish warrior Fergus and his men, likewise great warriors, were enraged at this treachery for Conchobar had destroyed their word—their honor. They attacked Conchobar and killed three hundred of his men before deserting to the province of Connacht, Ulster's traditional enemy.

Cathbad's prophecy was fulfilled; Ulster was divided. Deirdre was inconsolable. She married Conchabar, but they were not happy. After a year, Conchobar asked her what were the two things she disliked most. Deirdre replied that she hated him most of all and, after him, Eogan mac Durthacht. The king decided that, having spent a year with him, she should spend the next with Eogan.

On her way to Eogan's court, Deirdre decided that she could not be owned or traded away. She took control of her destiny and flung herself from the carriage and died.

***

This is one race of people for whom psychoanalysis is of no use whatsoever.
Sigmund Freud (about the Irish)

Other people have a nationality. The Irish and the Jews have a psychosis.
Brendan Behan

Singing was the only thing Nana and Dad did together. I can still hear them singing "Danny Boy" in harmony as my brother Dan closed his eyes and drifted off to sleep. Dan always got the first lullaby; it was an advantage of being the youngest. Next, it would be my turn for a song. I would climb into Nana's lap and sleepily listen to her rich brogue as she recalled for me again, in songs and stories, her childhood on the west coast of Ireland in County Clare. I remember more stories than songs. There were tales of Abbeys, *all* founded by *Padriac*—the great saint that he was—and castles where my brother and sisters and I could—would be king and queens, at least in our imaginations. To my young mind, Ireland was rich and full and magic—I never heard any talk of poverty or despair or desperation. There were no stories of Nana's father and mother, or her brothers and sisters. It wasn't until I was much older that I found this peculiar, at least not until there was no one left to question.

"Have yer Da fetch me some *Tay,*" she'd say with a wink. Her piercing blue eyes carefully watched as I scurried off to bring her the tea that Dad prepared for her each night. She brushed her long silver hair back off of her forehead and with elegant slender

fingers braided one small piece underneath; with remarkable ease she used it to tie back the rest. Nana carefully readjusted her mother's ivory woolen shawl to protect both of us from the harsh New England cold that could cut through walls and seemed to mock modern heating. The shawl was all she had of her mother, all she had from home. It kept us warm. "There are magic places and ancient things—the great rock table, built by fairies, or was it giants? Oh 'tis no matter now, 'tis it? 'Tis the most amazing thing I ever did see. Have I told you of Maeve? A wonderful woman she was, part goddess no doubt! Herself, she ruled all Ireland, long before the English came. She was a *pure* queen, she was—strong minded, strong willed, told the king to leave she did! And himself—he left. An Irish queen she was. There was Conchobar and his wife Deirdre. Now she didn't want to be his wife, though a queen it surely made her. Her heart to another belonged and for that, Conchobar, he punished her. He killed her lover and gave her to another man. But she would have none of it. She killed herself, she did. That's surely one of the most sorrowful stories in all of Ireland. Be like Maeve little one. Never let any man control ya. Or be like Deidre. Die first."

"Don't be fillin' her with your tempestuous tales now Ma. *Jesus*, fairies and dyin'! She has a wild enough imagination. Won't do her any bloody good! Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. *Fairies!* The next thing ya know she'll be saunterin' off to find some non-existent pot of gold over a rainbow that's most likely just Depression glass reflecting the sun. This is Boston, not Miltown! *Boston*!" My father walked to the crystal decanter that held some curious Irish cure for regret. He didn't like the Irish stories. Nana said he loved

them as a child; but he believed he had outgrown fairy tales. Adults aren't supposed to believe in magic.

"Can't even get the name of it right, Miltown *Malbay*, son. Don't be so American that you're forgetin' where it is ya came from!" Nana winked to me again, "Tis off to bed with ya now, lass. Don't pay your Da no mind. Who knows what dreams tomorrow holds for ya." She glared at my dad, "If you don't believe in dreamin' anymore that's your own problem 'tisn't it? All your answers are there in that glass I 'spose? Whiskey is a powerful magic, yes it is. 'Tis indeed. The deeds done by its magic would shame all the demons in hell. Shame on you. You just leave this lass to me. Remember now," she turned back to me, "don't let anyone control ya!" She sang a chorus from another Irish song as I drifted to sleep, lost in her melody. I longed to *cross the foam* to that place I knew my spirit must call home.

***

""White, non-Hispanic." That was my designation on the year 2000 United States census form. Angrily, I penciled over the box (and the one marked "other") and wrote in: Irish, born in the United States, American citizen." Tom Hayden opens the prologue to his book *Irish on the Inside* with these words. That may not make sense to some readers. It may seem contradictory or unpatriotic, but I know how he feels. He knows how I feel. We're Irish-Americans; equally attached to and removed from our heritage on both sides of the Atlantic. We are children of a diaspora that scattered more Irish around the world than in their native land. The dispossessed Irish who carried with them ancient traditions, family dynamics, and a culture that refused to die, into every land in which they settled.

Although they came to be settled here in the United States, and came to be in many ways American, they did not surrender their past or their history—their *Irishness*. They changed the here and now of the economic, social and political landscape of this nation because they never forgot the tribe that fostered their passion. Perhaps there should be a category provided on the census for *ethnic*.

This probably wouldn't be appropriate for all ethnic groups, as it probably doesn't work for all Irish-Americans, but for those of us who grew up in insulated communities like South Boston or Chicago or New York or Royal Oak, Michigan, there is a sense of otherness, of somehow not being like other Americans. There is a sense of loss that cannot be named. For some, like me, this sense grows into a passion—an obsession to go back, to see, to know, to find home. For others, like most of my family, this sense of loss becomes a poison: a stagnant pool that harbors all of the darkest secrets of their heritage, disease, self-destruction and chaos. Stereotypes become realities and vice versa and the magic of what could have been is swallowed by the toxicity inherent in stereotypical behavior. For most Irish-Americans this sense of loss becomes a strange unconscious mix of all of the above: a blend of books and blarney, politics and poteen, laughter and lunacy. For many in ethno-centric Irish communities, life is a balancing act between ancient tribal, familial traditions and modern American life. In order to navigate successfully one must learn to balance the enchanting with the everyday—the magic with the mundane.

Certainly my family wasn't unique. Hundreds of thousands came from poverty stricken regions in Ireland in search of something better. The Irish could be pretenders

with greater ease than so many others who came from afar to find the American Dream. They at least spoke the language of their new country. Young Irish women immigrated. Almost 60% of those who came from Ireland were women. They arrived in the urban northeast and took positions as house-servants. Upper-middle class Americans prided themselves on their Irish maids—who were taking careful notes about what was white and therefore respectable in their new culture. How to set a table, what books to know about, what to wear, what to say to whom, when, and they passed their knowledge on to their children and grandchildren. These women studied carefully, searching for a way into a society from which they were excluded in Ireland.

Some, like members of the Native American tribes, try to deny their roots they try to assimilate into mainstream American culture—into the melting pot. Try to be something outside of the tribe. Outside of Irish, diluted into something else—detached from the rich past that is rightfully theirs. Ireland is historically made up of clans; tribe-like groups divided regionally; for many Irish, ethnicity is still in many ways tribal like it is for Native Americans, or African Americans. Irish-Americans, generally, don't fit into the mold of "White, non-Hispanic." I don't fit that mold. I am hyphenated.

The Living & the Dead

September 2005, Powhatan, Virginia

We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars.
Oscar Wilde.

CNN is on in the background advertising a Discovery Channel movie, *The Flight that Fought Back*—a September 11th reenactment. My stomach churns. The ads for it run over and over between the news shows that are dedicated entirely to hurricane Katrina. Mention is made, in passing, of the death of Supreme Court Chief Justice William Rehnquist. They buried him at Arlington—I wonder briefly if he was a veteran—I'm not curious enough to check. Twenty-five-thousand body bags have been requisitioned for New Orleans. I sit mesmerized then shift uncomfortably as the latest number of confirmed deaths in New Orleans is announced. Four hundred—then a musical theme, a pretty background. Sound bites. Extended coverage. Fewer commercials.

Flags at half mast?

Government failure?

National day of prayer?

Looting, vandalism, *lawlessness* in New Orleans?

Who is to blame?

No mention of the Middle East and those dying there. Not today.

Today the focus is on our country's internal chaos. Close to a thousand people died when a bridge collapsed in Baghdad the same day that the flooding began to drive the people from the shelters out of the city of New Orleans. The bridge never made top headlines; it was a side note—like the death of the highest judicial officer in the nation. Side notes. Marginalia. The importance of life is relative, some endings worth noting, others not. None apparently are worthy of celebration. All Americans have learned that this week, relativity. This is my home, and I can't watch anymore.

I turn on the stereo. Bob Dylan. "Things Have Changed."

People are crazy and times are strange
I'm locked in tight, I'm out of range
I used to care, but things have changed

Shit—no more answers just "blowin' in the wind," I guess, or so I think in the moment. I turn to the Internet news: The BBC (for clarity), CNN, FOX (for balance), *The Guardian*, and *The Sydney Morning Herald* both online. On the Internet the news is silent; not as—explicit, as graphic, as—*palpable*.

The headline on the *Irish Independent* is about a science fair—and The Republic of Ireland as a "knowledge-based economy." I like the idea of trafficking in thoughts—makes me think of Shaw and Wilde. I think about other Irish headlines I've read: *Highway project stopped in Kilkenny: discovery of rare, endangered snail*—not a family of them but one, rare, endangered snail, or *Highway rerouted to preserve ancient oaks*, or more recently, *Parents nationwide outraged over school bus rule three kids to a seat. Taoiseach calls for inquiry*. Life over there, across the foam, is precious, at least in the Republic of Ireland, or at least that's how it feels from here.

Someone told me that Fintan O'Toole, writing for *The Irish Times,* said the Katrina disaster revealed "the underlying nature of a troubled country. . . . When America looks at the huge expanse of filthy, fetid water that has drowned New Orleans, it becomes a mirror in which it finally sees the scars on its own face. The scars of poverty, of racism, of ideological zealotry, of public corruption and of environmental degradation, usually concealed by a cosmetic media, become visible." This is a member of my tribe talking about my home, and I am torn.

I change the music from a disillusioned Bob Dylan to the modern Irish folk-music band Hair of the Dog singing "Back Home in Derry," an American band from New York singing a song with words written by Irishman Bobby Sands and the music by Canadian Gordon Lightfoot:

> *Comrades' ghosts are behind me.*
> *A rebel I came and I'll die the same.*
> *On the cold winds of night you will find me*

There are always Irish ghosts. Growing up, I was told by my father and my grandmother that Ireland was home, my father, who never touched Irish soil, and my grandmother who left it behind. I am not the "green beer drunk goes to the parade claim your heritage only on St. Patrick's Day" sort of Irish—that's an American interpretation of Irish. St. Patrick's Day has always been a feast day, but it was originally a celebration in America—in Ireland, until recently, it was simply a Catholic holy day, not even a holy day of obligation.

Nor am I the Ancient Order of Hibernian sort of dandified Catholic, male, Irish. My Irishness is fixed in history, literature, mythology, goddesses and above all that

reality-infusing sense of Irish magic—something that transcends reality and connects a body to its spirit and everything around it. My Irishness trained me to look for nuances and things unsaid or seen in the world around me. A magic that almost rebelliously clings to roots and keeps me connected in spirit to those who went on before me.

I fumble through things on my desk: papers to grade, forms to fill out, and bills to pay, a special rock. Gas receipts. I cringe: $3.00 a gallon. I wipe the dust off of my grandmother's picture. As it always does when I move things on my desk, a silver-gray falcon feather falls from the desk and floats to the floor. It's a feather I brought back from my second trip to Ireland. That feather is my constant reminder of things bigger to be believed in—it carries me to a distant Irish mountaintop with perfect ancient monuments; a place that lives outside of time; beyond disasters and newscasts. I pick it up and begin to play with it; I twirl it, pretend it's a pen and form imaginary letters on an invisible page. I have, off and on, toyed with making it into a quill pen but thought better of it—why play with perfection? I have taken the cue from my tribe and learned that nature should be respected—admired—not manipulated.

I would like to say that I am the first born of the first born, back into the darkness of my family's long and proud history. But it's not so. My beginnings are buried in the middle somewhere. I am the third child of a third child. He is the third child of an eighth child who immigrated, penniless, to this country, once upon a time, from that magical place across the sea. To hear her tell it, my grandmother came from a small idyllic village east of Miltown Malbay and life was picture-perfect. To hear her tell it she came from an Ireland filled with myths and purity—other-worldliness—music and fairies; bedtime

stories. Nana never spoke of famine or poverty—just magic and poetry. And the two were inseparable. As long as you had one you lived with the expectation of the other—even from thousands of miles away. To hear my grandmother tell it, there was no real history attached, nothing concrete: just myth and legend. I was compelled to believe that the people themselves were either magic or insane. As a child I was left groping for something to cling to and call my own.

I was Hanora Riedy's fifth surviving grandchild—the fifth granddaughter. My father's brother, Uncle Johnny had two daughters before I was born and then one after. My brother Danny was the youngest, *the boy*. My oldest sister, Janet, was the smart one and Barbara, my next sister, was the pretty one. They all continue to live with my mother outside of Boston. I'm the one that left. I was the flighty one, the dreamer, the *Irish* one and the apple of my Nana's eye from the day I was born. I was the first, *the only*, redhead. We all look Irish enough—there is a familial resemblance that can be traced clearly through five generations on both sides of the Atlantic. Pale skin, freckles, button noses, pointy little chins, and peculiar long slender fingers—untainted Irish bloodlines. I have always assumed it was the hair that singled me out with Nana. She had auburn hair when she was young and her oldest son, William, was a redhead. Did I remind her of someone from her childhood? Someone now lost? Her mother? A sister? Herself? William, her long-dead son? Maybe it was the capriciousness or romantic in me, perhaps the rebel. I don't know the why of it. When she didn't offer information it somehow wasn't right to ask. It somehow just didn't feel right. No one I know ever dared to

question her past. No one asked her any questions either she offered information—or she didn't.

A Grafted Tongue

Weymouth Massachusetts, 1968.

Education is an admirable thing, but it is well to remember from time to time that nothing that is worth knowing can be taught.
Oscar Wilde.

Eamon de Valera is in the news in Ireland which means he is news in Southie which means he's news in Weymouth. He has opened a memorial park dedicated to John F. Kennedy in County Wexford. Twenty-one year old, Irish civil rights activist, Bernadette Devlin has just been elected as the youngest woman MP in history. The Troubles will officially begin in a few short months when Francis McCloskey, the first of the four thousand who will eventually die, is killed by a blow from an RUC baton in Dungiven, County Derry.

John Kerry has been assigned as an Ensign to the guided-missile frigate USS Gridley. After five-months aboard, he will return to San Diego to undergo training to command a Swift boat, used by the Navy for patrols in Vietnam. The Tet Offensive is underway; Lt. William Calley and his men attacked the village of My Lai killing five-hundred-four civilians. Hugh Thompson, Jr., is only able to save eleven of the Vietnamese by landing his helicopter between the civilians and the troops. Lists of dead soldiers' names scroll across the television screen every night on the six o'clock news. The U. S. dollar is no longer backed by gold. Martin Luther King has been laid to rest. George W. Bush makes the decision to join the National Guard. Bobby Kennedy's

passion will only excite the nation for a few months more. And I am in Sister Loyola's fourth grade class at St. Francis.

As the metal door closed, Sister Loyola tapped her pointer against her thigh to call us to order. Not a word was spoken. She unsettled the entire class just by entering the room. She ruled the fourth grade with an iron fist; well, actually it was a wooden pointer. She didn't work for the principal, Sister Mary Victor, or for Pope Paul VI. Sister Loyola worked for God, as Nana said it should be. She quietly entered every day through the back door, sneaking up on us. Her small, frail frame seemed overpowered—lost in the many folds of her black robe with its shiny wooden rosary gathered at her waist. Although her frame was small, she emanated order, intensity and discipline.

It was a fine spring day, and the scent of lilacs drifted in through the open windows. We were restless. Sister Loyola was teaching us about Job. Could we see a comparison to St. Patrick—*Padriac*, whom we had studied recently? Padriac braved the wilds of Ireland—lived a life of poverty and piety for God. He had driven the snakes away, discovered that shamrocks can teach religious ideologies. He had survived the harsh Irish landscape traveling the entire island converting the natives. He knew a better world was waiting—once he was with God—he gave this to the Irish—the idea of a better world to come. He had broken through a tribal pride of mythic proportion. Padriac had given to the Irish the story of Job—a story that would teach them humility in the face of oppression, patience in the face of poverty and starvation. Sister Loyola, at God's direction, was giving Padriac's wisdom to us. We were, after all the scattered remnants of that tribe.

Our families had endured great pain to see us have a better life in a new world; like the Israelites they came out of their oppression in Ireland to the land of milk and honey, ours in Boston. And here we sat just like children all over Ireland learning Catholicism in a distinctly Irish and not American way or so I thought. Periodically, Monsignor McShea checked on our progress, *And how is the fourth grade on this fine day? There's a good lass* (patting someone on the head) *and the tenth commandment do ya know what that 'tis? Well of course ya do! A good lass you are indeed.*

But not today.

Today, Mary-Ann Scanlon and Beth Ahern were writing notes about Paul Driscoll, who was pulling my hair. It was a pretty typical day in the fourth grade at St. Francis Xavier. There were neat rows of Irish-American children dressed identically; the girls in blue plaid jumpers and white blouses and the boys in navy trousers, white oxfords and maroon ties. We were all wishing we were somewhere else, all very sure we were somehow breaking the tenth commandment—coveting freedom.

We were bored, distracted. Paul sent a paper airplane note across the room while Sister Loyola, with her back to us, was writing our assignment on the board. She turned and slapped her pointer on Mary-Ann's desk, bringing us back to the task at hand. We snapped to attention in our seats. Paul cringed. All of Job's children had died—or something. Could we compare that to the potato famine victims? My mind wandered. I was more concerned that later that day in the school auditorium the sleeves of my sweater would again be pinned to my skirt as I tried to master the reel we were practicing for the

up-coming *feis*—Irish dance competition. Mrs. Flynn, my Irish dance teacher, reminded me of Sister Loyola—only meaner. Job's troubles seemed mild in comparison to my own.

The disruptive crackle of the intercom invaded Sister Loyola's lesson on virtues and Job. She glared at it: annoyed. Through the intercom we listened as Sister Mary Victor cleared her throat. She apologized for the interruption and then in an unusually crisp voice she announced, "Brian Murphy has passed away. He had Leukemia."

We all sat very still, somewhat confused. Old people die. Presidents die. Someone asked, *How old do you have to be before you don't just automatically go to Heaven?*

Is Heaven like Ireland? Mary-Ann might have asked.

No one said a word.

Would Brian go to Heaven? Paul wanted to know.

We were expecting a story about Jesus and the redemption of the soul. Sister Loyola would surely tell us that if Brian had behaved, he wouldn't be on his way to purgatory—or someplace worse now. If he had learned the lesson of the shamrock—or learned that he must drive the snakes of sin from his soul as Padriac had taught—perhaps he could be in a better place. For a heartbeat, no one breathed.

Sister Loyola dropped to the floor and buried her face in her hands, sobbing.

We gasped—stunned. Grown women don't cry, at least sober ones don't! And they certainly don't cry *in public*. I had never seen a woman cry except in the movies, and I'm sure I was immediately told how weak such women were. Women were the foundation upon which strong society was built; at least that's how it was in Irish America. All of the perceived Irish-Catholic-nun meanness disappeared into the endless

folds of black cloth. The class sat somewhat confused, not that he had died, but because Sister Loyola was so—well—human. We all felt helpless and lost and abandoned.

We somehow knew there would be no bible story to dry her tears. There would be no pithy anecdote that had been handed down through generations of wizened old Irish women with all the right soul-soothing comments and the moral to the story. We somehow knew that she would not be there to hold us up or carry us through this.

In the chill dread that fell on us, Sister Loyola slowly struggled to her feet. None of us moved—even to breathe. She raged at—no one that was there. *But he had such promise!* She slapped the pointer on the chalkboard. *Such a great mind!* The pointer slapped on the desk. *He was so creative! What's the* **point***?* She threw the pointer at her old bible. The pointer's clattering sound echoed as it rolled to the floor.

She waited.

No one answered.

I thought about Job and his lost children. I thought about Deidre and CùChulainn. Had Brian given up something magic? Is that what dying is—giving up the magic that lets you live?

Sister Loyola picked up and closed her bible without first placing its frayed lace bookmark into place. Several of us quickly checked chapter and verse so we could pick up where we left off later when she recovered from her grief. Sister Loyola discarded her bible carelessly onto someone's desk. She regained her composure and walked to the door. She paused, sighed, and walked out.

No assignments.

No moral to the story.

She left her students unattended for the first time in sixty years. We all knew that something besides Brian had died. The days passed and I missed her frail, but overpowering presence at the chalkboard, the crack of her pointer on her old scarred oak desk. The fiery intensity in her eyes as she shared her knowledge with us was fading away. In my mind's eye, I can still see her ancient hands clinging to the soft-worn leather-bound bible. I can hear the whisper of the onion-skin pages between her fingers, as though the author had deliberately punctuated his work with the turning page.

Brian's funeral was in the big church, upstairs. Sister Loyola's fourth grade class was there, with Sister Mary Margaret, who worked for Sister Mary Victor. Sister Mary Margaret didn't answer any of our questions. She didn't know God's reason for everything. Her teaching had no clarity, or magic. There were no rulers, no pointers, no wisdoms springing from care worn leather bound friends. Sister Loyola didn't teach us daily lessons so much as she taught us how to learn. She made dedicated students with her passion for teaching; she created in us a passion for learning. That's the sort of faith—magic—that held us together as a class. It faded away. What had kept us so tightly knit began to unravel for me that day in the big Church upstairs.

I was in the fifth grade the year my mother turned forty. Nana was dead. Sister Loyola was gone, I remember hearing that she died, and my family moved from our sheltered Irish Catholic community near Boston to a town on the coast near Cape Cod. I was suddenly in a world where everyone seemed to be strangers to each other. How could

I get to know them? My mother said she just needed a change. At eleven, awkward and shy, just barely adolescent, all I had ever known—everything—was gone. I wondered if she knew what she had done to me. Did she even care? My life was forever changed.

Then there by the sea, I found an abandoned old house with a haven of a garden behind it. The house itself was just—old. Broken windows and rickety staircases were testaments to the years of neglect it had suffered in silence. But the garden—was a magical place! It was, for the most part, over-grown and filled with weeds but in its center, refusing to die, was a massive oak tree that, in druid-like fashion, was immediately my best friend. Under its shady branches I was protected from this unknown world into which I had been thrust.

That was the year I discovered I was a *Being*, a Spirit unto myself, separate from the rest of my family and *The* Church—the ever present Irish-Catholic-Church. I could remove myself from whatever was happening at home and cut through the briar filled path behind my house to the abandoned overgrown property beyond. I could create a distance. I could walk through the broken cast iron gate and into a different world—one of my own creation. I could turn up the transistor radio that I always kept with me. I could listen to rock'n'roll without fear of reprisal or condemnation, and there was always plenty of both at home. I could imagine myself tanned, dark-haired, Protestant, playing with blue-jeaned public school children: American. It was a dangerous sin to lust for a different life—but that year I learned that in my imagination there was no sin. In my imagination I could be free of the oppression that the Catholic Church held over girls and young women. I could be dominant and assertive. I could be the type of person the

women in my family had trained me to be—without the passive-aggressive subtly that my mother and grandmother used. In my imagination no one had dreams of my becoming a nun. In my imagination I could explore the possibilities beyond the Church, beyond my family.

But my sense of freedom was short-lived; by the following fall, my family had returned to Weymouth, to the safety of family and Church. However, I had reached outside of that upbringing and felt passion in the music and world around me. I found myself in the words of songs I heard on the radio. I wasn't Irish—I was American. I had expanded; there was more to life than what I was being offered. Two lay-teachers, one a man, were teaching at St. Francis upon our return. The world, *my* world, was changing.

Massachusetts, 1970ish

Sean Dunphy sings "The Star Spangled Banner" to open his show. We, the whole family, cousins, sisters, brother, mom and dad sit quietly at our table in the small dinner theater. We, the kids, are not here by choice. After the first verse no one is singing along.

> *O thus be it ever when free-men shall stand*
> *Between their lov'd home and the war's desolation;*
> *Blest with vict'ry and peace, may the heav'n-rescued land*
> *Praise the Pow'r that hath made and preserv'd us a nation!*
> *Then conquer we must, when our cause it is just,*
> *And this be our motto: "In God is our trust!"*
> *And the star-spangled banner in triumph shall wave*
> *O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave!*

When Sean finishes, the family has a brief discussion about how bad the song is musically—how no one sings more than the first verse because it's damned near impossible to sing the rest of it. The lyrics don't quite fit the music and it's easy to

stumble over the words. Sean did ok but most of us are relieved it's over. Dad suggests that perhaps our anthem has outlived its usefulness and we should change it to "America the Beautiful." It is one of the few things about America we all agree on; we have a bad national anthem. We tactfully avoid discussions about Vietnam, abortion, *NORML* (the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws), or the continued racism we witness around us. Sean begins "Amhrán na bhFiann" the Irish National Anthem. Everyone in the dinner-theater stands up and sings along. The kids, me, my siblings and cousins hesitate—what did we need to stand for? Reluctantly we rise.

Soldiers are we
whose lives are pledged to Ireland;
Some have come
from a land beyond the wave.
Sworn to be free,
No more our ancient sireland
Shall shelter the despot or the slave.
Tonight we man the bhearna bhaoil
In Erin's cause, come woe or weal;
'Mid cannons' roar and rifles' peal,
We'll chant a soldier's song.

I watch Dad proudly singing and wonder if he knows about the Irish-Americans who supported slavery in this country. Probably not. His family—*my* family was still in Ireland in the nineteenth century. His parents vividly remembered despotism—and at least a form of slavery. For generations they were tenant farmers on their own land in County Clare. We, my cousins, siblings and I were born in Boston but our lives were pledged, by parents and grandparents, to Ireland at birth. We're members of an ancient tribe. Dad's rich voice echoes throughout the room. At the end of the anthem Sean invites Dad onto the stage to sing with him. Dad dedicates a song to his mother:

Over in Killarney, many years ago
Me mother sang a song to me in tones so sweet and low
Just a simple little ditty in her good old Irish way
And I'd give the world if she could sing that song to me today

In my mind I hear the story, myth really, that my grandmother used to tell about the Irish queen Deidre. I think my dad and I have very different pictures of this woman who gave to us our heritage. I don't think that Nana ever said anything that was simple. And I certainly cannot picture her singing *ditties*. Every song she sang and every story she told had some hidden Irish moral in it—and she wasn't going to tell you what that was. You were expected to figure it out. I remember her quoting Oscar Wilde and Dad quoting her, *The truth is rarely pure and never simple*. Did he really see her as the simple woman in the song?

Oft' in dreams I wander to that cot again
I feel her arms a-huggin' me as when she held me then.
And I hear her voice a-hummin' to me as in days of yore,
When she used to rock me fast asleep outside the cabin door

Or did he long for something just beyond his grasp. A world long ago and far away filled with hope, a world that was magic—or so he had been taught to believe. A world that existed *within* the surrounding tensions—suspended between here and there—taking freely from both worlds—enchanted.

Too ra loo ra loo ra, too-ra-loo-ra-li
Too-ra-loo-ra-loo-ra, that's an Irish lullaby.

I never knew my dad when he was a young man; he was thirty-nine when I was born. He was distant and detached. He sang and ballroom danced. No jigs or reels for him. Dad never told me any Irish fairy tales. He introduced me to the work of Joyce and Beckett, *realists* he called them, who knew that life is dismal, brutal, and not short

enough. It's important to be real. To survive he thought he had to get away from the old ways, from anything Irish. He didn't like Yeats; thought he was too much of a dreamer (although he could recite a dozen or more poems by him). Dad was stubborn and proud, inspiring and infuriating.

We moved from South Boston, Southie, to the suburbs to allow us to be "more American." The suburbs were a place where we would lose the Irish inflection in our voices and we could—would learn American slang. We could play in cul-de-sacs with all sorts of children from all sorts of backgrounds. Our first home was in an all-Irish neighborhood in Weymouth. From the time I was very small our house was outside the city, but all family gatherings, all the life, happened in Southie. All of our activity in the suburbs was focused around the church – with its Irish-Catholic priests and congregation. School, dance lessons—Irish dance of course—church, playmates were all deeply embedded with this all-consuming Irish tradition. No one rented property. Everyone owned their home. *Don't let anyone control ya—die first.*. Everyone voted. *'Tis a privilege, take advantage of it there's many that have been denied a voice in how they're governed.* They *used* the rights given to them here that they had been denied in Ireland. Education was valued above everything; know the language. Own it, and you own the world. *Indeed, they taught us their language and we've since taught them how it should be used.* I don't think I knew anyone that was *not* Irish, or Catholic, until I was fifteen and in the public high school. I was shocked to discover that there were people who rented homes and didn't own their own dictionary and know the cycles of the seasons. Catholics were a minority in the United States; this was a revelation. There were people

who didn't know the magic that tomorrow held and it's true that some of those people were Irish.

People like my Dad. Somehow he didn't know about or believe in or had perhaps forgotten about ancient magic. He didn't believe he would ever get to Ireland; it would have required that he get on an airplane and he was scared to death of flying or he would have to brave another tumultuous ride on a boat I don't think he liked boats either—so he had to make life here, in the States, work. He had to find a way to survive. So Dad drank. A lot. He was a frustrated dreamer. He started out wanting to play professional baseball. He thought for awhile about being a musician—he had a beautiful singing voice and played both guitar and drums. But my mother didn't want him hanging around in bars and so he ended up a cop. A drunken Irish cop. How cliché is that? He was the epitome of the stereotypical Irish-American despite his trying to escape it by moving, or drinking but my dad oozed Irishness despite his refusal to believe in any sort of Irish *magic*. He didn't believe that there was hope and that hope could carry you through anything. And what he refused to acknowledge consumed him. In many ways he was a typical Irish-American man feeling as though he had no authority or power over his reality. He surrendered to his alcoholism. He became the stereotype, haunted by what could have been, haunted by the magic he denied. On the one hand he was wistful—always telling stories—always instilling dreams. *There's nothing that you can't do. Look at the Kennedy boys, Maureen O'Hara, or James Curley.* On the other, he reinforced that nothing was ever good enough. *You know, an A-, that's more of a B really isn't it? If I'd have made more As I could've done more than be a cop.*

In the end, he saw his children as his dreams, perhaps his magic, and his hope for a brighter tomorrow. He saw them as the best, the *only*, thing he ever did. My father instilled in all four of his children a perfectionism that borders on neurosis. We never did enough. He pointed out every fault, every flaw and error in an effort to make us work to always be better. Conversations with Dad were like Irish dancing. Every error of judgment, every misstep noted. It was his effort to keep us from making the mistakes he had made (whatever he perceived them to be). I suppose in theory it's a good plan but without something else—something—extraordinary—being driven to perfectionism can be a poison. I know that my dad gave up a baseball contract with the New York Mets to stay at home and help his mom after his Da died. Dad dug graves, fought in a war, and then became a policeman. A mother's necessity—his mother's—forced him to give up one dream and he never found another.

As a young teen in the 1970s I started to keep a diary. At first, I was simply noting events: the US. invasion of Cambodia, Watergate, the Endangered Species Act, Native Americans seizing the trading post at Wounded Knee, the surrender of South Vietnam, the emerging second wave feminist movement. Then I began carefully recording the lyrics to my favorite songs. There were particular songwriters who seemed to somehow liberate my essence, Buffett, Parsons, Kristofferson, and Prine. There were bands that seemed to know what I needed to hear: the Eagles, Fleetwood Mac, Led Zeppelin, Jethro Tull. I anxiously awaited each new song that they recorded: "Witchy Woman," "Stairway to Heaven," "Rhiannon," "Song from the Wood," songs that all evoked an other worldliness—mysticism. As that long New England winter passed, I saw

myself drifting from their words into my own. The lyrics mingled with the desperation that I felt balancing between two cultures. These lyrics colored my world. I started to write poetry of my own. Through these songwriters, I traveled and explored the universe. Songs I heard sent me scurrying back to the library.

Can you direct me to books about Rhiannon? The Green Man? They are listed in The Book of Knowledge. The librarian scowled at me each week. I reached beyond Southie, beyond Weymouth, beyond my asphyxiating Irish surroundings into a world of fairies and imagination—into an Irishness that my father tried to keep at bay in our family. By 1972, the walls of the Church were closing in as the nuns and priests struggled to contain me there. I tried to walk their narrow line. But I admit I wasn't very convincing. It was the year I was confirmed. In the packed church Bishop Jeremiah somebody-or-other asked the gathering of teens about to be confirmed, *And who was Jeremiah?*

The church, filled almost to capacity, was silent. Feet shuffled. People shifted uncomfortably on the wooden pews. Eyes darted—the Virgin Mary, Stations of the Cross, the Crucifix, the floor. Silence. Everyone in the confirmation class knew the answer. We heard it regularly. I raised my hand and said what everyone was thinking: *Jeremiah was a bullfrog.*

Sister Mary Margaret, the school's new principal, and Monsignor McShea gasped. The entire student body burst into laughter. I, to the shame of my family, was escorted out of the church and had to go to confession before the church administrators would allow me to be confirmed.

"Blasphemy! You must repent! Go to confession. Ask God to forgive you for this sin." It became a continuous litany. *Don't look outside the box!—outside the Church.* They droned on correcting my faults—my stubborn curiosity and my determinism. My faults, outspokenness and a touch of rebelliousness, I had been raised to believe were part-and-parcel of my Irishness.

"What sin?" Why was I not good enough? The more I tried to explain that life was to be *experienced;* it was a wonderful adventure; the more Hail Marys they required of me. I thought often about Nana's stories.

Brigid, now there's a woman for ya! She had her own abbey, founded it she did. In Kildare. Herself she was a Bishop—even celebrated the Mass. Yes she did. She heard confessions, ordained priest. Brigid was a healer. She was a friend of Padriac's, yes she was. Padriac, now he has his day in March—and men celebrate, like men with whiskey and Guinness. Brigid she has a day dedicated to her as well, February the second, Candlemas, of course everyone knows it was Imbolc long before that; long before the day belonged to Brigid and it is the day God conceives spring. She's someone to try to be like now, indeed she is. Men need a woman to tell them what to be doin' on occasion. Later, of course, they tried to say she wasn't a bishop a'tall but we know the truth now don't we?

My diary remained empty lined pages reflecting the prison bars that I felt trapped behind. My rebellion turned to rage. There needed to be an escape for me. I took up my pen, but no words would come. Frustrated, I wandered in my mind to the image of an overgrown garden by the shore with a magical oak that refused to be consumed by the stagnation surrounding it. I would always be safe there with my oak: content. No critical eyes lived there. No priests in confessionals who wanted to know my deepest secrets. I searched for a new escape in books, theater, and art. I went to concerts, learned new songs; saw things I'd never seen before.

Finally, at fifteen, I found it, the perfect escape: a powdery white line carefully stretched out on a mirror that reflected a stranger's eyes back at me. I wouldn't get sucked into the dis-ease of my ancestors: alcoholism. Not American-me. Years passed into a blissful blindness. The druid-oak became a picturesque childhood memory as I was consumed by what I tried to escape.

The tribes merged into the hills

Quincy, Massachusetts, 1976

By eighteen, I was married and living on my own—away from my family and all of the traditions I had grown up with, or so I thought. But I had grown into the picture of the Irish or Irish-American woman. The household was *mine* and my husband was mostly absent. He wasn't even Irish—I made a point of avoiding Irish men. As long as he had beer or drug money he left the running of the household to me. I created the order, I paid the bills, and like my mother and grandmother and even Sister Loyola before me, in my space I set the tone. Control of the home and family is the domain of the Irish-American woman.

My house had become the hangout. Mostly we were a group of eclectic young not-Catholic-not-Irish-anymore songwriters. Maybe because I was so young and my home was a place with no rules, maybe because it was a place where we, my friends and I, thought that we could all be old enough to be beyond the reach of parents, priests or traditions. We would open a bottle of tequila (*not* whiskey) or perhaps pass the pipe and . . . *compose*, probably much in the same way the writers of the Irish Renaissance did in Dublin decades before—but we never would have considered that idea. But perhaps we were more like Joyce and Beckett—expatriates of sorts. We didn't have to leave our country to step away from the Irish culture. We simply moved into integrated

neighborhoods and absorbed popular American culture. On the surface we were reinvented in my traditional Irish-American-female-dominated home.

My sister-in-law, Michelle, was occasionally there, quiet and reserved in the background. She watched the world through storm-grey eyes that so perfectly reflected her mood. We wondered why she came at all; she was always on the outside, never really part of our group. None of us were surprised that cold September day she disappeared. The police questioned each of us in painful detail. Had we seen her? What was she wearing? Had she said anything? Where were we the night she disappeared? Did we know who she was with that night? Perhaps she was running away from something or, we hoped, to something to which she could feel connected. Maybe she was unaware that *none* of us felt connected to anything. We were working so hard on disconnecting.

The phone rang mid-afternoon disrupting the melody of an, as yet, unnamed song. It had been six weeks since Michelle had disappeared. I answered the phone.

We found Michelle over the guardrail at the rest stop on Route 3 in Kingston. She was stabbed forty-one times. The detective believed it had been a drug-related murder. We all knew who killed her—he had been bragging about it in a bar to a bunch of drunks—one of my sisters included. But bragging wasn't evidence. He couldn't be arrested or tried. It was all hearsay. I was stunned. In 1976, my world had seemed a safe place. Trouble was an ocean away. People *I* knew weren't murdered! At sixteen, Michelle was just two years younger than me, and she was no more.

I tried to sort out the profound sense of disillusionment I had felt, but I didn't return to the old ways. I didn't reach into my Irish-Catholic past to find answers.

Someone gave me a deck of Tarot cards to play with. And I read them. I read Aleister Crowley and Teilhard DeChardin. Jane Roberts and Joseph Heller, Richard Brautigan and Carlos Castaneda; books with broken spines and well worn pages lined my shelves. They were books about mysticism—and hard reality: books in the extreme. I retreated into an old, seemingly haunted New England farmhouse south of Boston beyond suburbia. I retreated like Yeats to Thoor Ballylee in search of some sort of spiritual reason—to find some purpose to the madness in the world around me. I retreated like the Irish composer O'Carolan into music. Like the mythical Irish hero CùChulainn into death knowing the fabric of his reality had been torn. I retreated like an Irish person—like thousands of millions before me who found the world out there too much to deal with and so sought a world in the mythology. Although I would have been loathe to admit that in the moment. Songs came and went. A succession of images translated into pictures of me parading through my tears and years. In my mind's eye the oak ritually bloomed, then shed its leaves. The shadows rose, and fell. Everything was rolling in perfect harmony, except me. Like the words of a John Prine song, "I was too young to be where I was and too old to go back again." Nana was gone and there was no one to fill me with fairytales and magic—no one to keep me in the timelessness of traditions. I was frightened.

The roses in my yard were in full bloom when I had recovered enough to venture into the world again. I went to see the movie *Star Wars* to be mindless for a little while. It had a strangely profound effect on me. Ben Obi-Wan Kenobi was perfect, a Soldier of the Light, alone in the Universe, the last of the Jedi knights. With his amazing focus he could see what others could not because he was part of the Force that connected us all together.

He reminded me of CùChulainn, Padriac, Brigid, Loyola, Nana. He annoyed me. I left the theater trembling. *It couldn't be this simple. It was only a movie!* Alright, so, the Force reminded me of the oneness I felt with the Druid Oak, Nana, and Mythical Ireland. The oneness that I had left behind with fairytales. That oneness that in many ways Sister Loyola had taught me to search for that . . . *Force* that drives the human spirit . . . I just couldn't do it. I left the theater, and once in my car I turned the radio on and started to relax thoughtlessly into the words . . .

You may say I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one, I hope someday you will join us . . .

I turned the station.

The answer my friend is blowing in the wind . . .

With a deep breath, my hand reached for the radio once again.

He said Lord, I wanna be a Christian Soldier, just like you and fight to build a new and better day . . .

Everything took on a surreality as I pulled off the road and waited in the shadows. I was sure the DJ's voice would be Nana's—or Sister Loyola's and she was going to say, "You are now tuned to W-G-O-D." It was a very bizarre day—my American self connected itself to my Irish self and I became for the first time connected to both. I realized that I couldn't be one without the other.

July 4, 1983 Austin, Texas.

We are all dependent on one another, every soul of us on earth.
George Bernard Shaw

Two-thousand people demonstrated against the Pro-life amendment—it will be two months before the referendum is made law in Dublin, Bushmills distillery in County Antrim is three hundred and fifty years old. Bushmills makes good whiskey. Gerry Adams has been elected MP of West Belfast. It will be almost a year until the American President addresses the Oireachtas, the National Parliament.

Ronald Reagan is president. The Iran-Contra Affair hasn't become front page news yet. Donald Rumsfeld won't shake hands with Saddam Hussein for another five months. The marines in Beirut are still safe—for four more months anyway. Reaganomics isn't a word yet. Category 3 Alicia is still six weeks away from the Texas coast—twenty-two people's hearts will beat for just another forty-five days. The World Trade Center will define the New York skyline for another eighteen years.

Willie Nelson is on stage with John Cash, Waylon Jennings, Kris Kristofferson and a dozen or so others. They are singing "Just a little old Fashioned Karma Coming Down." It could be "That Old Time Religion." It is 106 degrees by 11 am. By 2 pm, I'm sure that if I could take off my skin, I would. The woman dancing beside me has on star-shaped, tasseled pasties, daisy-dukes, and red white and blue cowboy boots. Everyone wants to dance with her, which suits me just fine. It is too damned hot to dance. It's too hot to breathe. I would rather be anywhere than here in Austin, Texas. But the show was too big to pass up. It was billed as a defining American moment—so I went.

By 4 pm, paramedics are making their way through the crowd with water, Gatorade and stretchers. Too much to drink, or smoke, or snort and not enough food or shade is taking its toll on the crowd. The enthusiastic dancing has become a sort of rhythmic group sway. People holding each other up. People falling down. People passing out from drunkenness and dehydration. A paramedic applies sun-screen to my pale, but burned, New England Irish skin.

At 11 pm, the sky lights up with fireworks and the crowd is revitalized. There is cause for celebration! Someone in a cowboy hat with a microphone shouts from the stage, *It's the Fourth of July! We're Americans! We are independent.* No further commentary necessary. Let's not look at any thing hard, or hurtful. Enjoy the moment. Surely, the recession will end soon. Someone fills Dixie cups with José Ceurvo and begins to pass them around. The woman beside me has lost her pasties, and boots. I know her shorts won't survive the finale. Someone hands me a joint. At the stroke of midnight Willie takes to the stage quietly. The crowd has dissolved into a euphoric sort of congregation. He begins to sing *a cappella.*

> *Amazing grace how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me*
> *I once was lost but now am found, was blind, but now, I see.*

Other musicians, singers and songwriters begin to wander on to the stage; Paul English, David Allan Coe, Dottie West and her daughter Shelly, Jessie Colter, her husband Waylon, Cash, Kristofferson. They hold hands. They fill the stage. The sound system is turned off. The crowd becomes silent.

> *T'was Grace that taught my heart to fear. And Grace, my fears relieved*
> *How precious did that Grace appear in the hour I first believed.*

Willie walks down from the stage to where I am standing beside the stairs at the edge of the crowd. He takes my hand.

Through many dangers, toils and snares we have already come.
T'was Grace that brought us safe thus far

I take the hand of the person beside me. The human chain begins to spread, slowly at first. Within seconds eighty-thousand people, eighty-thousand Americans are singing.

And Grace will lead us home.

There is something truly magical about holding hands with eighty thousand people—about being part of eighty-thousand people that leaves a person changed. It's sobering. Inspiring. It is distinctly an American moment. Patriotic. Distinctly divine. Filled with a hope that could be translated into other things later: Magical.

Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me
I once was lost but now am found I was blind, but now, I see.

Like Dolmans round my childhood

Real vision is the ability to see the invisible.
Jonathan Swift

The Cliffs of Moher rise seven hundred feet out of the Atlantic Ocean, on Ireland's west coast in County Clare. Looking at them, I'm never quite sure if the ocean shapes the rocks—or the rocks the ocean. Either way, the view cuts a deep impression into everyone who sees it. Imposing. Unapproachable. *Irish*. Daring invaders to try its strength, they have survived—intact, better than any ancient wall. I can imagine the Romans coming across the sea and stopping, seeing the Cliffs and deciding not to push forward, deciding that penetrating those walls wouldn't be possible. Hadrian would have been humbled.

The Roman Emperor Hadrian divided the landscape between England and Scotland, in 122 C.E., with a wall seventy-three miles long. It was his goal to keep the Scots outside of the confines of his well-ordered Empire. Parts of the wall have withered—*weathered* away, eaten by the wind and rain, or have become buried under brush and civilization. Parts have vanished. Some ancient Celtic sea-god—*Lir* perhaps, or maybe the goddess, *Domnu*, gods older than the Roman gods—designed the Cliffs of Moher to be a demonstration of defiance. Untamable. It doesn't matter that the Romans would have come across the Irish Channel from England and landed on the other coast, the east coast. It doesn't matter that they didn't come at all. I imagine the scene anyway. Imagination keeps tired feet moving forward on the road into an unknown tomorrow. I

keep a picture of the Cliffs on my desk, to remind me—I cannot be breached. I, like the Cliffs, am capable of standing against all odds and surviving. Untamable in my way, I suppose. That picture is situated beside the only picture I have of my grandmother.

When I saw the Cliffs of Moher for the first time, I thought about my father and the only story he ever told me about his service in World War II. I don't even know how much truth there really is to it, but he did tell it the same way every time. He was headed for the beach at Normandy, for D-day. The boat passed by the coast of Ireland. All of the American soldiers of Irish descent on board came up to the deck to gaze at the shamrock shores of—what they had always been told was—*home*. They had grown up in South Boston, Massachusetts—*Southie*, a little Ireland. Every man saluted. They were close enough to swim to shore, but didn't. Instead, they watched the coast in silence as it melted back into the mists of the Atlantic and the myths of their childhoods, out of their reach. No looking back. Instead, they saw the rest of Europe filtered through the adjustable-sight of an M1 Garand. They saved the world. Dad always said few of them ever saw Ireland again. It faded back into imagination and fairy tales, someplace remembered in a cultural consciousness, encoded in fiddle tunes and *feises*.

On my first flight over, in 2000, I looked out the plane's window at the lush, green Irish landscape that seemed to go on forever. It hid the scars of the Viking and British invasions and the sorrows that I knew the land had witnessed. Here and there lay ruins, remnants of harsher times, when the Irish had fought the Irish, but legend and the dew had made them softer and easier to view over the ages. I watched as the visions and dreams from my childhood—castles where queens could live and monuments with

writing no one could read—swept beneath me in valleys and glens. The open land had so little in common with the city where I spent my childhood. The tall, brick row houses in South Boston, now seemed a strange place for those who immigrated to American cities. I wondered how they adapted. Why had they wanted to? No one ever told me. All the talk was about going back to Ireland. Everyone in Southie remained a traveler of sorts, awaiting fairies to come and carry them back across the foam, back home.

I went to the Hill of Tara, stood at the seat of the ancient Irish kings, and looked out over the vastness of Eire's lush gardens, all a vibrant green, surreal. I went to Newgrange to see that holy place where the heroes of myths—Maeve, Conchobar, and CùChulainn had walked. The massive quartz passage tomb, Newgrange, is older than the pyramids, seemingly only moments younger than the land. I imagined CùChulainn, wounded and knowing he was dying, strapping himself to a tree so that he would not fall down while his enemies were still standing and could still see him.

On tip-toes, I looked over the hedge at Knockreagh and tried to imagine learning to read and write under such circumstances. I tried to imagine a land where education was legally available only to a specific religious and national group—neither of which was native to the land. I pictured small red-headed children listening intently on one side of the hedge to the Irish schoolmaster on the other, singing their lessons for them as he trimmed shrubbery, so they would not be denied an education, in spite of the English rules.

I crossed the Ha'penny Bridge in Dublin and thought about Yeats and his protest. He couldn't imagine the English would—*could*—charge a man a half-penny to *walk*. I

strolled through Merion Square and wondered what Oscar Wilde thought as he walked those same cobblestone streets. Did he worry about the oppression of his people? Did he think about revolutions beyond those of his own? Did he feel the magic that lived here? Did he too, carry a journal with him? How could the people who came from Ireland adapt in the States—how did that sort of culture translate? How did their passion for everything around them, for their home, their memory, their magic translate and allow them to acculturate?

Unlike my father, my first experience of the Cliffs was on Irish soil. I gazed out at the ocean from atop the Cliffs and imagined his *taibhse-long* that had so long ago passed by, with a hundred men saluting back at me, each of them filled with a sort of disenchanted longing. I talked to the Travelers, Irish gypsies, along the pathway to the top. I listened to their music and bought their hand-crafted wares, carved bowls, flutes, and sarongs. I walked along the Cliffs, not *too* close to the treacherous drop, and took in the view from several vantage points. I did walk beyond the *Danger* and *Hazard* signs. I approached the rickety fences along the land's edge, about three feet from the seven hundred foot drop. I had come to dare the wind. I had come to see the entire island from a thousand angles. I watched the people, on the other side of the fence, lying flat and hanging over the precipice —what could *they* possibly be looking for? What were they trying to see? I wanted to see—understand—my family—the family that had been silenced by the great span of water below. My ancestors, long dead, about whom I knew nothing, the family Nana had left behind and tucked away in her memory—never to be shared. I wanted to know the family that died with her so many years ago. I had come

armed with my grandmother's name, Norah Reidy, and the only town she ever mentioned to me, Miltown Malbay. I had come knowing I was coming home—whatever that would turn out to be. I had come looking for the magic that my grandmother had always claimed lived *over there.*

I photographed castles and cliffs, looked for clues—any insight into my haunting, any insight into the family that I know must have existed before my grandmother, my family about whom, beyond one uncle and three cousins, I knew nothing. I looked for something to tie me to these ancestors. I looked for clues into my Irishness. I looked for traces and connections. I sought to give voice to the silence that echoed through my family's history, a silence that reverberated throughout Irish history as facts melt into myth and no one mentions their pain. A silence perceptible only to those living within it. It is the silence of a people oppressed—denied even their language. It is a silence that taught a people how to survive in the culture grafted on to them: a silence that passed through generations and carried nothing but fairy tales forward. One has to search for clues in things half-stated and find the truth in myths. I moved through the ruins of the celestial passageways in the abbeys at Jerpoint, Cashel, and Quin. I imagined monks creating beautiful books in the dark ages and saving the world from illiteracy, Byzantium aside; somehow Thomas Cahill forgot all about the Byzantines and their empire that survived the dark ages intact. He found his own way to fill and justify the silence. The mists washed the hills as I traveled to places with broken round towers and weather-beaten high crosses, unique places whose stories were lost in the silencing of the native

Irish voices. Was there something here I could recapture? If so, how could I find it? How would I make it mine?

According to the family history centre in Ennis, the eighth child of James and Nora Reidy, my great-grandparents, was a baby girl baptized in August of 1878 with the Christian name Hanora—it's pronounced *honor* by the Irish. I never knew my grandmother as anything but Norah. James and his wife, Nora raised eleven children, two sons and nine daughters, in their three-room cottage in Glenletternafinney townland on the outskirts of Kilmaley, east of Miltown Malbay in County Clare. The family history centre's genealogist, Antoinette O'Brien explained that the property was still owned by the Reidy family, *my family*. Concrete. Evidence of a past. Something tangible. I took out my Irish roadmap and began my search. How hard could it be? I had an address: Glenletternafinney Townland, Kilmaley Parish.

I started in Ennis. I drove to where the map said the house *should be*, but there was nothing there. Empty fields and crumbling stone walls. I stopped and asked a man on a tractor, *could you direct me to Glenletternafinney townland? Do you know the Reidys that live there?* He couldn't and he didn't. He'd lived on the Ennis-Miltown road all his life and looked old. He'd never heard of it—or them. I drove all the way to Miltown Malbay, about twenty miles—*forever* on an Irish road. The man followed me on his tractor. In general, Irish roads are small, windy, and narrow and only the Irish locals go fast on them, as only the Irish are brave enough. Oncoming traffic can pose serious hazards and land you in the ditch. Ruins of castles appear on the roadside—almost *in* the

road—in the middle of curves—and sheep and cattle wander freely about. The Ennis-Miltown Malbay road is no exception. I wasn't hard to keep up with as I drove my rented vehicle on the wrong side of the car, on the wrong side of the road. He didn't want me getting lost on his watch.

Road maps in Ireland offer a general indication as to which way the roads *might* go. No guarantees. To know a road you must walk it. Only tourists use maps. The man on the tractor threw mine away. I don't think he believed that I was an American. I didn't dress like a tourist—and there was just enough of my grandmother's brogue-ish inflection in my speech to suggest otherwise. He scowled and mumbled something about kids these days, and crumpled it up. Though I was forty he made me feel small and childish. I wasn't exactly sure what a townland *was*, to be honest, never mind how to find one. And I was sure I couldn't ask him, he was so Obi-Wan-like. But being a tenacious sort I forged ahead without my map. The man told me I should talk to Mrs. Fahey—she was kin to Reidys. She owned a pub. *Of course she did.* My dad would be happy to know that our family in Ireland owned a pub. If he were still alive, surely he would come looking for a drink and a discount.

Mrs. Fahey was a short woman with deep-set dark eyes and weathered skin. She was dressed like it was 1965, in a housedress and pearls, and looked only slightly out of place in 2000. I guessed she was about sixty, but it's hard to judge age in Ireland—where all things become sort of timeless. Everything around me had a young sort of quality to it: a fairytale feel—old, but then young—innocent at the same time. Mrs. Fahey had me in for tea in her pub. Nana would be pleased. *Tea in a pub God bless you, dear.* She looked

at my paperwork from the family history centre and directed me to one Mrs. Tierney. She, Mrs. Tierney, was related to the *other* Reidys, not Mrs. Fahey's branch a'tall. The Tierneys lived at the crossroad known as The Hand.

And where might that be, I inquired. *Is there a sign?* Ireland, I would learn, wasn't big on road signs. There were lots of them, but they really didn't give a clear indication of any road or direction. The signs and maps go together and the only thing they are sure to do is get you lost.

"Oh, you'll see it, sure enough dear, can't be missed. Looks like a hand, it does. There'll be five houses there, one on each corner." She patted me on the shoulder, confident in the directions she'd given me, and aimed me back up the Ennis road. "I'll ring ahead and have them keep a sharp eye. Off you go now. God Bless." I was thinking perhaps I needed to learn a secret handshake, some secret sort of initiation into this profoundly confident way of looking at life. They, the tractor driver and Mrs. Fahey, expected me to simply *intuit* my way to my grandmother's home place, which I was beginning to think actually might *be* mythical. I was skeptical and could have given up at this point, simply returning to my hotel, defeated but I didn't. I would not let the incomprehensibility of the situation conquer me. People in the States don't do things this way—directions to a specific place are a finite sort of thing.

As I drove, I scanned the horizon for five houses on a road that looked like a hand whatever *that* meant—somewhere between Miltown Malbay and Ennis. And a family named Tierney lived there. Okay. So no one was going to make this mission easy. Maybe I should just give up and look for a McDonald's or a 7-Eleven. Maybe a mall with a Gap

or Borders. A Wal-Mart. This was hopeless. I feared losing my way on that winding road. I feared the shadow of my father overtaking me and the magic in my soul slowly dying. I feared getting lost in a tomorrow that knew no yesterdays.

Then, on a boggy hill I saw it: a dolman. It's a Breton word, *dolman,* two words compounded, meaning *stone table*. My grandmother's ancestors would have called it a Druid's Altar. She had simply called this one the rock table. It was a four-thousand-year-old work of art, a piece of sculpture, a grave that archeologists call *Leaba Dhiarmuid agus Gráinne*—Dermot and Gráinne's Bed—though Nana may not have known that growing up. It was huge! The idea that it had been built before the invention of the wheel made it all the more breathtaking as it stood atop a solitary hill. I stopped the car. This *had* to be Nana's rock table, built by the fairies, the fuel of my childhood dreams. I climbed the fence and made my way through the peat field. The fierce wind stole my breath. A rush of wonder known mostly to children came flooding through me. I touched the dolman. I waited to see Deirdre, Maeve or even CùChulainn manifest before me. I don't know how long I stood there before going back to my car and finally moving on. I stopped at the next house I came to; it was at a five-way intersection—with no stop signs. Five roads—like a hand. It was the Tierney home. Mrs. Tierney was waiting for me at the door—she was expecting me. I repeated my question to her; *Could you direct me to Glenletternafinney townland? Do you know the Reidys that live there?* Her mother-in-law called from the other room that she knew the Reidys of Glenletternafinney. It was either magic or insanity.

"Oh yes, lass. They don't call it that now, don't you know. Changed everything, tried to make it simpl'r. Glaun they call it now. Glaun, indeed! What the *divil* does that mean? All three of the Reidy families live there, yes indeed they do. Nora's granddaughter you say? Are ya kin to Michael, Peter, or John? Well now, I don't 'spose you *could* be Michael's relation. He never did marry. God bless him, a good Catholic boy. And Peter, Daniel's son that would be, I don't believe his children went to America. They went to Australia, they did. To find their kin that had been *transported.* Imagine tryin' to find people so distantly related—hundreds of years removed. Everyone went somewhere now didn't they? I can't say as I recall too much about John's family. Kept to themselves they did." She started to nod off as the turf-fire blazed and the sun began to set. The elder Mrs. Tierney made Mrs. Fahey look young. She stirred and turned to her daughter-in-law, "The lass needs to talk to David Dillon. Himself, he'll know how to direct her." I had stumbled by chance onto the townland of Glenletternafinney. A man on a tractor had sent me to, and followed me to, one old woman who directed me to another, who enabled a conversation with a third, who introduced me to David Dillon—who apparently knew my family.

The next morning I met David at the Bogdale House, a pub in Kilmaley, and he took me to my grandmother's house. I walked the length of a quiet overgrown drive to the white-washed cottage with a thatched roof that has been home to my family for over two hundred years. Two bedrooms, a loft and a great room, with a fireplace that stretched the width of the house; this had been the center of Hanora's world. It looked like a picture postcard with its hedges and thatched roof; it was something out of a St. Patrick's Day

Hallmark movie, someplace far away, unreachable. It was empty now, but not abandoned. The scent of burnt peat still lingered in the air around the cottage. There had been a turf fire here in recent days. The family history centre had told me that my great-grandfather, James, had inherited the property from his father, John, and had left it to his son, my grandfather, also named John. John's children each owned an equal share of the farm now. There's a barn near the cottage, and the ruins of an older stone shelter that the original John Reidy must have built. I touched it— scrutinizing my history.

"Here, take this now," David said as he slipped a piece of slate from the remnants of the older building into my hand. "You ne'er do know when you'll come home again now do ya? So, is it that you're related to the other Americans that came? Must be your cousins then? Come back 'bout a year or so ago. From Maryland. Looking for whatever it is that old stones hold. What was her name? Oh it's gone, now. No matter."

Cousins? Americans? *Maryland?—My* cousins were all still in Southie. Still in the same house, Nana's house. The house that I believed that my dad had grown up in. My sister was just there on St. Patrick's Day. *No matter?* I put the slate in my pocket; the mystical value of ancient rocks would have to wait. There are American Reidys in Maryland. And David Dillon wasn't the least surprised that I didn't know them, people get scattered when they leave home, but eventually people come home. I was taken aback—how do you lose parts of your immediate family?

"Well, then, I'll just be back to the house straight-away to get for you Rita's number. Herself, she lives in Cratloe—at her husband Pat's home place. The Maloney house. They used to make *poteen*, Irish moonshine. The Maloneys are famous for it. 'Tis

traditionally made with potatoes, don't you know. 'Tis said there's a still there to this day. Of course, I believe the cottage here belongs to Pat-Joe, being the eldest Reidy boy, don't you know, but he's all the way down in Kilrush. 'Tis Rita who tends to it now. Indeed, yes it is. But she's getting on in years too. James passed on, God rest his soul. His son lives in up in Ballyhanus—no time for old Irish houses he has a wife and children. I believe he's a teacher. John's off to England of course. He's been there since he was a young man. Mary-Anne, she married a Flanagan, lives in Dublin now. She is entirely too far, to come to be trimming the hedges, don't you think?"

I nodded feeling rather numb. *Cratloe*. I wondered if it would be an easier quest than Glenletternafinney. David explained that Cratloe was a townland, like Glenletternafinney. A townland, he said, was the smallest civil denomination of lands in Ireland; there were counties, parishes, villages and townlands. Glenletternafinney was about four-hundred acres. Four-hundred acres and three unrelated families with the same last name. I was trying to process in some sort of rational way. David lived in the same cottage that his great-great-great grandparents had. And here he was talking about my family as if I should know them all. And I had no idea who any of these people were or how we were related. I apparently didn't know my relatives in my own country. It was humbling. But David knew I was related to them. He said he could tell. We all had that look about us.

I played with the slate in my pocket and surveyed the landscape. As far as my eye could see out the windows of the cottage at Glenletternafinney, the houses are still owned by Reidys. I looked over the trees—beyond the glens and stone walls—one white-washed

cottage, then a second and a third. Barns and sheep all owned by the unrelated Reidys of Glenletternafinney filled the view. Local legend has it that *the brothers Reidy*, three brothers came from Tipperary and settled east of Miltown Malbay on the Ennis road in the townland of Glenletternafinney. But everyone in each of the *three* families will tell you that none of the familes are related. The Reidys to the east, to the west, to the north—coincidence—synchronicity—an unusual happenstance made them neighbors on land that originally belonged to one set of brothers. *No relation. Right, I believed that.* There is a silence that shrouds the glen. Something hidden and never discussed lurks there—like stories that Nana never told me at bedtime. Stories that Hanora Reidy probably didn't even know. I followed David up the driveway back to his house. Silent.

I left David armed with my cousin Rita's phone number. I went back to Ashgrove House, the bed and breakfast where I was staying, tucked behind Bunratty Castle. I looked at the papers from the Family History Centre. I walked down to the rope hammocks strung between the trees in front of the house. I stopped and admired the flowers. I pensively looked at paper in my hand with the six digit phone number scrawled in a foreign hand.

Sheila, the proprietress, approached, *Is there something wrong? Did ya not find your kin? I can't imagine the people at the Heritage Centre steering ya wrong.* She was concerned that I seemed distracted or what she perceived to be unhappy. I showed her the phone number. *Well, it's all right then. We'll go straight away and ring them up for you.*

I hesitated. Sheila waited, studying me carefully. *You've come a long way to go home without meetin' your kin, haven't you?*

Had I? Is that why I had com—to meet my kin? Or was it something else? *When it's right dear, you come to the kitchen and I'll ring them for you.* Sheila left me with my insecurities—my fears that my family on this side of the ocean, like most of those on the other, had traded passion for those poisons that can be so all-consuming. I thought about my family and all of the dreams lost or surrendered: baseball careers, music careers even acting careers.

I began to walk east up the narrow, walled, one-lane road. I looked at the castle in the distance, Bunratty, *Bun Ráite* translation: mouth of the river. It is the historical seat of the most powerful clan in Munster province, the O'Briens. The castle itself has been built, destroyed, and rebuilt several times throughout its long history. The first structure was constructed by the Vikings in 970 C.E.. The current structure was built by the MacNamara family in 1425. The last battle waged there was in 1646 when the castle was taken by Irish Confederates. A substantial concrete history; I ran my hand along the wall as I walked. It was a medieval folk-park-tourist-attraction today. I wondered how the O'Briens, MacNamaras and Irish Confederates would feel about that. I played with the stone in my pocket. Surely, by now Pat and Rita Maloney knew that I was here. David would have contacted them. It was the polite thing for him to do. I followed the music in the distance and arrived in the pub at Fitzpatrick's Hotel as the song ended and the musician's began a repartee.

"Well that was shite." There was no stage; the two men were sitting at a table filled with empty glasses, full ashtrays, tobacco pouches, rolling papers, a cell-phone, and an assortment of picks.

"Joe, you shouldn't be fuckin' talking that way in front of the paying guests. Excuse my friend here. He's no manners a'tall." He nodded an apology in my general direction.

"Oh, bloody hell Steve, and what kind of language is that? What makes ya think she's a bloody guest?" Joe sized me up. "Doesn't look very guesty to me."

"*Fuck's* an adjective—everyone knows that. And *guesty's* not a bloody word."

"Actually, the way you used *fuck* there, it wasn't an adjective—it was an adverb. And *guesty* can be a word if I want it to. All the guests are at the castle, now aren't they, or at Durty Nellie's."

"Now that's shite—adjective, adverb. It's all the same isn't it? Something that defines something else."

"Modifies."

"Fuck you. Can we play you a song dear? Some Alan Jackson or Brad Paisley maybe?"

"And ya used it as an imperative there. He did didn't he? Did ya just move to the area? Don't think I've seen ya here before. You're not a guest are ya?"

Well, I . . .

"Didn't I tell ya? She's not a fuckin' guest."

From across the room the bartender yelled, "You're not bein' paid to chat up the ladies, but to play music! How about some music?"

Steve and Joe looked indignant. "We're not bein' paid a'tall. We should try to work at Durty Nellie's—they'd surely appreciate our talents there. Guinness doesn't count as payment."

"The way you drink it, it bloody well could" the bartender retorted.

"Fuck you." The two musicians replied in unison.

"See, there it is as an imperative again. I believe it's an imperative: I command you to fuck! Might be a commandment 'thou shalt fuck.' 'Tis inverted is all." The two men laughed. "Is there a song you'd like to hear?" Steve picked up his guitar as he spoke and Joe, one of his many bodhráns, they looked at me expectantly. I was rather dumbfounded. Was there a specific song I wanted to hear? I couldn't think of one.

The bartender made his way across the large, mostly empty, room. "Sufferin' Jesus would just ya' listen to this? Leave it to two drunken Irishmen to discuss the grammatical and biblical qualities of the word fuck. Mary-mother-of-God! You'll both need to go to confession. Play at Durty Nellie's, my arse, you're not even a proper band, just a pick-up band. Can I get you a drink, love?" He emptied the all of the ashtrays into one larger one and headed back towards the bar.

Black Bush, a double, I replied. Steve and Joe nodded their approval and moved to make room for me at their table.

"And will ya be wanting that on ice? With water perhaps?" I arched an eyebrow in response. "Of course not, 'tis my job to ask though. One Black Bush, double, neat. You lads best be careful!"

As if that were their cue Steve and Joe began playing and singing, "The Fields of Athenry." Over the course of the evening, the pair was joined by other musicians playing a penny whistle, fiddle, and accordion. The pub filled with locals and tourists alike. They played every Irish song I knew, and then some, to a standing room only crowd. Everyone sang. At last call, a young woman began to sing.

Sonny don't go away, I'm here all alone.
Daddy's a sailor, he never comes home.
Nights are so long, silence goes on.
I'm feeling so tired, and not all that strong.

People shushed each other. The pub became silent, respectfully listening to the commanding, poignant voice sing a story it seem that they all knew too well.

Many years have rolled on, though he's barely a man.
There's not much to do, but he does what he can.
Sits by his window, in his room by the stair.
Watching the waves, drifting soft on the pier.

I had never heard the song before but a chill of recognition ran through me. I thought about my dad and L Street. I thought about the New York Mets and my widowed Nana. I ordered another double.

Many years have rolled on, Sonny's old and alone.
Daddy's a sailor, he never came home.
Sometimes he wonders how his life might have been.
Mother still in the grave, her voice haunts Sonny's dream.
Sonny don't go away, I'm here all alone. . .

I spent the next two days thinking about my father and his unrealized dreams—his alcoholism. As I walked paths alone by Dysert O'Deas, I thought about him, alone in his one bedroom apartment everyday, hiding emptied bottles from himself, looking up a new word in his ragged dictionary in the evening and watching Jeopardy—calling me six hundred miles away to tell me he'd gotten every answer right. Everyday wondering what his life might have been.

As I walked over the limestone landscape of the Burren to 'the hole of the sorrows,' *Poulnabrone* Dolman, I thought about my sisters and my brother. In my mind, I heard them telling me their latest scheme—dream to have the newest idea of a perfect life. I thought about them at home alone in their rooms at my mother's, doing none of it. I thought about them backing down from their dreams—stopping short. I thought about the immobilizing toxicity of their realities.

As I lay in my bed at Ashgrove House, after a third night of singing and drinking with Steve and Joe at Fitzpatrick's, I thought about Deidre and Maeve and Brigid. I thought about CùChulainn tied to a tree and facing his death without flinching. I thought about my grandmother crossing the ocean alone to chase her dream—and not surrendering. In the moonlight I studied the piece of slate that I imagine my great-great-great-grandfather studied before using it to build his cottage at Glenletternafinney after he walked with his brothers—probably right passed this spot in Bunratty—from Tipperary to Kilmaley to build his dreams.

When the sun rose I went to the kitchen to find Sheila.

Pat and Rita Maloney married late in life and have no children. They are retired and dote on each other. Pat had worked at the Shannon airport. Rita had worked for a while in Paris as a secretary and had retired from some sort of a secretarial a job in Dublin when she and Pat married. They live on a quiet back road on property owned by Pat's family; it appeared to be a middle-class community. Like many Irish households, their phone service charged by the minute, they didn't have cable TV, or cell-phones and neither of them had ever used a computer. They were very proud of their shower; it had recently been installed. Showers are still a strange phenomenon in Ireland. No one else in their small community had a shower. The gadget that diverts the water from the bath faucet to the showerhead is a technology that has apparently evaded the Irish. My cousin and her husband seemed pleased to have company. Rita had insisted that Pat take her to the store so that she could fix me a proper lunch. She didn't drive anymore. Rita had boxes of letters and old photographs that had come from the cottage at Glenletternafinney. Pat looked bored.

"Here's Aunt Nora, your grandmother. She always sent the best gifts from America, chocolates and treats. She was always sending letters, with pictures, to my father and Aunt Ellen." She showed me pictures of my father and uncles as young men. Pictures of people I knew well, pictures that I had never seen before. There were no copies back home. "And here's a picture of Annie—in every picture I ever saw she was all dressed in furs." She passes me the fragile-looking faded photographs. Rita has a story about each of my grandmother's sisters. But other than her own father and brothers, she knew nothing about the men in her family—they had simply faded away. "Maria, you

were named for her, married a Mungovan—from right here. From Kilmaley. Her grandchildren would be about your age, slightly older I think. Arlene came last year—found us the same way you did. Seems a pity you both paid for the same sort of report. I'll be sure you have her address before you return the Virginia. She lives in Maryland. That's close by isn't it?" She shifted as if there was more she wanted to say, but didn't. She picked up a photograph of a woman, who looked very much like my sister Barbara, wearing a high collared Victorian dress. "This is Ellen, an amazing woman she was. God rest her soul. She looks so young here." Rita tenderly ran her fingers over the photograph. To me, Ellen didn't look happy. "She took care of her father until the day he died. She took care of all of them."

Pat looked up as the clock on the mantle struck noon and poured me a Jameson's. "Poor woman." Rita left the room to fix tea. "Rita can get carried away about family stories. She feels particularly attached to Ellen, I think she may see some of herself there. You're looking as if you're tryin' to figure something out. What is it?" He held up the Jameson's bottle, "Another?"

"No thank you. I'd like copies of the pictures—I don't suppose you have access to a scanner?"

He looked puzzled.

"A computer?" I suggested, but without much hope.

"There's that place in Limerick—an internet café." Rita suggested from the other room. "They're everywhere, all the rage they are. You take her and the photos, Pat, while I fix supper. Off you go now!" Rita replied with some finality.

Off we go. I got into the small Irish car with my cousin's husband—a virtual stranger—and we headed to someplace I had never been before and certainly couldn't get home from on my own. "Oh 'tis easy! We'll just go straight through the roundabout and it's about ten kilometers due south beyond the flyover. We'll be there in no time."

I was busy trying to remember how many miles there were in a kilometer (60/100?) as Pat flew down the narrow road lined on either side with walls—thick, imposing castle walls. *Through the roundabout?* At this speed I hoped he wasn't speaking literally. I held on. *Flyover?*

The ride was more frightening than the Loch Ness Monster roller coaster at Busch Gardens and probably faster. And I then had to wrangle with the computer guru at the café.

"I can't be making CDs of pictures. How do I know they're your pictures? There's copyright to consider here. And I can't be promsin' such a CD would work on machines in the States," the clerk at the café snapped gruffly.

"I think media files are international," I replied perhaps a little too sharply.

"I'm sure I can handle this for ya, Mel. He'll understand it coming from a man," Pat interjected.

I bit my tongue—no one in Irish-America, where women ruled, would have dared such a comment. I came away exhausted, having spent thirty dollars—American—and had only half of the pictures on the CD. Pat came away with an email address and hailed the venture a success. I would have made CùChulainn proud; I had survived—on

my feet. When Pat offered me another Jameson's upon our return to his home in Cratloe I took it gratefully.

"Now, Pat, don't be giving her a wrong impression of how we live. I'm sure herself, she's just accepting the drinks to be polite. Nora always seemed so polite in her letters. God bless her."

"I don't hardly think so. You should have seen her handle that Limerick man. Didn't faze her a'tall all those high-technical words. Here's a woman who can hold her own."

Rita scowled, knowing it just couldn't be so. "We'll be going to Mass in the morning, with confession beforehand, at nine."

"Now who's pushing a way of life, Mrs. Maloney? Sure she has better things to be doing on her vacation than confessin' her sins! There'll be plenty of time for that when she gets home—and finishes committin' 'em."

"Patrick!"

"Rita! I'm sure there's plenty for her to do this evening and she'll be wantin' to sleep in tomorrow. Are you meetin' your friends at the pub later? Well of course you are. We'll take her to dinner in Ennis tomorrow on the way back from Glaun. You did want to see the house again, from the inside, yes?"

Old Mythologies

"We cannot live fully without the treasury our ancestors have left to us"
George McKay Brown

When Hanora lived in the cottage at Glenletternafinney, there was no electricity, no indoor plumbing. Not enough food. Not enough room. Not enough brothers to tend the fields. When Hanora lived there, she and her sisters played in the small walled rose garden behind the house before their studies. They learned Irish history, Irish stories, Irish language and religion, Irish pride. They learned to speak English, to read and write it, to own it and hate it. It was the law that they speak English. And they, like their ancestors before them, felt that power lived in language—and to know the language of their oppressor, to be able to use it better than their enemy—gave them power.

Each Sunday, the family walked the four miles to Kilmaley village to the church. Hanora's ancestors, my ancestors, are buried there next to Dillons, Tierneys, and Faheys, all Irish, all Catholic. Irish-Catholic—not to be confused with Roman Catholic; the Irish had blended their older traditions with Padriac's faith.

Catholicism wasn't the government sanctioned religion and they practiced their faith defiantly and in silence. There was no choir, no hymns, and no kiss of peace. It was subdued, subversive. They prayed for the demise of their oppressors, for revolution. After Mass they brought flowers to graves dating back four-hundred years behind the church. The old church burned down. Newer graves lay within the walls where pews used to hold

those now buried there. Fresh cut flowers were regularly brought for the graves in the ancient cemetery.

In Southie when I was younger, we walked from East Sixth St. to the Gate of Heaven Church on Sundays. We sang. There were guitars and an organ. We shook hands and kissed. It was no act of subversion. It was an act of submission. A surrender. We went to confession and communion. We didn't know the other traditions of our ancestors. In Weymouth we knew even less. We prayed for peace back home as the Troubles intensified—while American boys died another world away, in a conflict that seemed so foreign and unjust.

Music in Kilmaley was saved for Sunday afternoon gatherings, at the public house—or maybe the creamery, where Hanora played the fiddle or penny whistle. I've heard that she played both, but I never heard her play either. The families danced jigs and reels; they competed in *feises* and were proud of their heritage. Eyes straight ahead. Hands at the side. At one with the music. Invoke Brigid or Maeve or some other Celtic deity to help one focus. At one with their birthright.

If my math was right, Hanora left Ireland for Boston in 1899, at about twenty-one. She followed her sisters, Kate, Annie and Mariah, or perhaps they followed her. I don't know the order in which they left. They left one at a time. Their oldest sister, Ellen, had somehow made arrangements for them to work as domestic servants in exchange for their fares. According to Rita, Ellen traveled to Boston arranged work for her younger sisters, and returned home with their passage money and instructions. They were indentured I suppose. The boat probably left from *Cobh*, County Cork. It would have been

Queenstown then—Ireland was still under British rule. The Reidy sisters would have called it *Cobh*. They never saw themselves as British citizens: they were Irish. The girls would have had to walk from their cottage in Clare through Limerick, Tipperary, and Kerry, into Cork. If they were lucky their Da let them take a horse for their bags—if they even had a horse. I've driven that road—it must have taken days to walk. It took fortitude, conviction, defiance.

In *Cobh*, there's a church on the hill behind the harbor where families gathered before the ships departed. They had mock funerals for those leaving because those staying behind would never see them again. The priest performed a formal funeral mass. Novenas were pledged for the safety of the ship. Confessions made. Last goodbyes were said. They were going to a better place. Boston Harbor, three thousand miles away, was the destination.

Those who stayed behind would have walked back home past ancient castles and British fortresses, churches abandoned by disuse, illegal. The sisters probably stopped and paid their respects to St. Padriac at the Rock of Cashel. Perhaps, as they picked flowers on the roadside, they retold the story of Padriac talking to the Druid king about Christianity. Padriac baptized him, King Aenghus. It's said the saint accidentally stabbed the king in the foot with his staff as he was striking the ground with it to make a point. The Druid king bore the pain silently thinking it was a part of some Christian ritual, or initiation. The sisters would have agreed he had shown strength.

Surely, they cursed the British King John as they walked by his castle in Limerick. They would have passed Bunratty Castle and known its history. And they must

have sung the praises of Brian Buru, the only man to ever unite all of Ireland in one army, as they passed by Drumoland Castle—his castle, now a five-star hotel.

Before they arrived back at their father's farm they would have traveled north to Brigid's Well at Liscannor for a draught of its healing waters. Brigid's water could wash away sorrow. Did they pay homage to the ancient goddess? Did they, like their ancestors, refuse to call her saint? Brigid came from a faith far older than Christianity. She belonged to that notion of magic that was—is so deeply ingrained in all things Irish. Eventually, Ellen would walk back alone and not return to Cork, nor ever see her sisters again. She stayed to tend to her ailing father, a child's duty. Ellen surrendered her dreams and died younger than her sisters, alone on the family farm at Glenletternafinney.

Hanora carried her one suitcase and her Irishness onto the boat for the three week journey into the unknown, alone—a ritual—an initiation. Like her ancestors before her, who had survived Christianization, Vikings, famine, and the British, Hanora Reidy would survive—in America. She crossed the ocean and left poverty, disease, and any sense of family history behind. Silence prevailed, except in bedtime stories that subtly carried the ancient ways forward.

"'Tis not the land that makes ya Irish, sure. 'Tis the Irish that makes the land. 'Tisn't a nationality dear, 'tis a *spirit*, and one day the pipes will call ye home." That's what my grandmother said when ever she was feeling particularly annoyed with the way things were in the States, or with how my dad and uncle were behaving. Like Muslims to Mecca, many Irish-Americans return to the tiny island of their ancestry, an obligatory pilgrimage. They return to touch the passion and the poison that has infused their lives.

Like salmon swimming up-stream, the desire to reach the mystical isle—*to go home*—can be overpowering. Irish-Americans are a people caught betwixt and between. I am legally a citizen of both places, but not *quite* at home in either. I'm too Irish to be American—and too American to be Irish.

My grandfather, Walter, died before I was born. But I know the story of his death and a little bit about his life. He was from Kilkenny; he sorted wool for a living. He returned to Ireland in 1916 to make his stand against those whom he believed were trying to kill the Irish way of life—whatever that meant to him. He returned again in 1919 to make a stand, although whether it was with Michael Collins or the Republicans, no one ever said. He worked all the way through the Great Depression and Nana fed everyone in the neighborhood. She cooked lamb stews and baked soda bread. If there was a love story between them I will never know it. I never heard it.

What I know about my grandfather I picked up in snippets here and there and have pieced what I can of his story together. What's true and what isn't I have had to intuit. Nobody has more than one story about his life—and nobody has the *same* story. He was a powerful man. I've seen a picture of him and knew two of his three sons—both strong athletic men. This seems factual; he was physically powerful. He would take his sons down to the beach at L Street to play soccer with him, Irish football. They could never keep up once he got the ball. Both my dad and my uncle talked about these excursions to the waterfront, so I suppose there is at least a grain of truth in that. My grandfather swam in Boston harbor with the L Street Brownies every year on New Year's

Day, braving the below freezing temperatures and diving in head first. Having faced his enemy in the British troops in Ireland and seen them conquered, the icy Atlantic looked tame. He feared nothing and accepted nothing less than perfection—which, like his sons, he likely feared he lacked.

On the day he died the family dog ran into the street. He rushed after it, telling his youngest son, my dad, to wait on the curb. A black and yellow taxi ran him down. Hit and run. A model A—someone said. Head trauma. Like the ancient Fenian warriors in Irish mythology, he fought for his life for days before he finally surrendered. He died a hero for saving his son's dog. Or so one version of the story goes. The other is that he stumbled drunk off of the curb and that he and the dog both died. His death certificate simply says he died of a head trauma. As there's no one left to ask I choose to believe the former rather than the latter tale. The world needs heroes.

As I drove through Kilkenny, my grandfather's ancestral home, I had to stop several times. Sheep were in the road. It gave me pause; had my grandfather thought the car would stop for the dog? For him? He had been in Boston a long time, he'd arrived in 1908 and died in 1936, he must have known when he stepped into that road that he was risking his life in a way the sheep in Ireland never would. He had lived eighteen years beyond the expectancy for an Irishman who had immigrated to the States. Like many other immigrants from Ireland he drank and allowed my grandmother complete control over the household—so long as he had pub money.

My grandmother was a proud woman. We never knew her birthday—it was none of our business. Her sons didn't know. Her husband didn't know. Looking back, I'm not

sure that *she* knew. She refused to apply for American citizenship because it required supplying a birth date. Her husband applied and her citizenship was automatic when his became a reality, or so the story goes, but she never called herself an American. She was Irish. In her mind we were Irish as well.

When I applied for my official Irish citizenship I had to trace my grandmother's roots to prove a legal connection to my heritage. How hard could that be? After all, I would simply review legal documents, collect those necessary for my evidence and put them in order. Church records were not admissible. Each document had to show her full name and her age, to verify that indeed it was the same individual and that I was related to her. It would be a dull succession of birth, marriage and death certificates. In 1913, her marriage license stated that "Nora Reidy" was twenty-nine when she married Walter Walsh. On the 1920 census, done in January of that year, she was "Nora A." and was thirty-three years old. But when my dad was born, three months earlier, in October of 1919 Nana, as we called her, was just thirty-one and she used the name "Norah" with an "h." Her death certificate lists her name as "Nora Walsh" and her age in years as "old" and the cause of death is listed as "Cerebral arteriosclerosis (old age)." So, armed with these "facts" I went in search of her birth certificate in Ireland. I was looking for someone named Nora, or Norah Reidy, possibly born sometime in the 1880s, in County Clare, Ireland, probably near Milltown Malbay, but baptized at Kilmaley in August of 1878. Thankfully, the clerk at the courthouse in Ennis didn't balk when I made my request. "Happens all the time, love. We'll surely find her for you." It turns out that *Hanora* Reidy was *officially* born January 2, 1879. But the clerk informed me that she may well have

been born as long as six months to almost a year before that—her parents may have registered her birth late. The law allowed only a month to register a birth, so if parents didn't make it to the courthouse within that month, they simply lied. Common practice. The family home at Glenletternafinney was a long walk from the courthouse in Ennis. It is likely that the family didn't travel to the courthouse often. It is likely that she was born in August of 1878 – that's when the local church recorded her baptism on a document that had no legal value.

All legendary obstacles

August 2001, Dublin, Ireland.

A man cannot be comfortable without his own approval.
Mark Twain.

The others at the bus stop all averted their eyes and backed away from the scruffy looking man, though he didn't intimidate me. I stood and watched him as he approached, sizing up the small groups of people. They stood in clusters looking at guide books and maps. Small groups traveling together. I was standing slightly apart from them on the platform, alone with my rat-tailed blue-jeaned son, Ian Patrick. The man's baggy trousers were nondescript except for the shine about them. He wore an Aran sweater, tattered at the cuffs, and a wool tweed cap pulled slightly down to one side, undoubtedly for effect. He was an Irish gypsy: a *traveler*. His horse and brightly painted wagon were picturesquely situated on the side of the road, surrounded by deep green shrubbery, with his brothers sitting on the ground in front of it. Each one played a different musical instrument—a whistle, a guitar, and a bodhrán. As a band, they weren't bad; they were singing the sappy-sentimental Irish-American-folk classic, "Galway Bay."

If you ever go across the sea to Ireland,
Then maybe at the closin' of your day
You will sit and watch the moon rise over Claddagh
And see the sun go down on Galway Bay.

"You can wait there all day, yes ya can," the scruffy-looking traveler began as his brothers sang in softer tones providing a sort of background ambiance. "The buses come 'round every quart'r hour or so. Ya can look at the nicely polish'd passage tomb. Ya can see it, yes indeed, ya *can*. But there's them that wants to see Ir'land and them that wants to *know* her. Which are you, lass?" He paused in his banter; it seemed his piercing dark eyes looked directly into me.

For the breezes blowing o'er the seas from Ireland
Are perfumed by the heather as they blow
And the women in the uplands diggin' praties
Speak a language that the strangers do not know

Which was I?

For the strangers came and tried to teach us their way
They scorn'd us just for being what we are
But they might as well go chasing after moonbeams
Or light a penny candle from a star

"I'll be your guide if ya like. I'll show ya the places where the buses won't go and the draiocht—magic—still lives." He moved away from the rest of the people waiting for the bus and closer to me. "Places filled with troopin' fairies tendin' to trees and flowers," he continued almost in a whisper, "solitaries makin' mischief and the *Tuatha* ruling it all serenely. I doubt you'll be findin' any pots of gold, but I do promise ya, you'll be richer when we're done. You can pay me what ya think it's worth at the end, if ya have a mind to." As he finished speaking, his brothers began to sing slightly louder, and "Galway Bay's" last line seemed to echo.

I will ask my God to let me make my heaven.
In that dear land across the Irish sea.

The song ended and an acute silence hung in the air. The act was well rehearsed. The speaker tipped his hat and waited, "Aidan Grady, at your service, and of course my brothers," he made a sweeping gesture to the musicians behind him.

I shifted uneasily and studied the group of people waiting. They were mostly like me, middle-class Americans. Most of them were probably of some diluted Irish descent of sorts. They had come searching for their "roots"—whatever that means. Like soldiers, they all carried the same equipment: camera (usually digital, always automatic), camcorders, extra batteries, American cigarettes, sunglasses, and an umbrella. They wore good walking shoes, designer jeans, and some sort of green shirt covered by the obligatory Irish knit sweater. Each of them carried a Fodor's bible, the quintessential tourist guide, and were traveling to Newgrange because it was on the list of things to do on the east coast and qualified as a day trip from Dublin. The people waiting were a nameless, faceless blur. I wanted to go back to Newgrange because it was older than the pyramids—because it *felt* like no place else I have ever been. I wanted to go and sit quietly beside the iridescent quartz outer walls and feel connected to an ancient tribe whose monuments, like its people survived. My tribe. Somehow, spending hours with these people, these tourists, as we rode up the N1 at speeds I didn't want to think about, suddenly, didn't feel the least bit appealing.

Thinking about that moment at the bus depot, it was easy to see why Aidan had directed his sales pitch to me. I was standing somewhat apart from the others and wearing good old-fashioned red-tag Levis and a black oxford that was too big—ok it *was* Irish linen, but it was well-worn! My suede jacket was protected from the distinctly Irish and

unpredictable weather by a faded blue sarong-scarf that I had bought from a traveler on the Cliffs of Moher two years before. I carried my heavy old SLR Pentax, that I bought new in the 80s, in a leather backpack that I made as an art project in high school—lifetimes ago. I didn't look very touristy, as I hadn't looked guesty. I didn't own a Fodor's, but my journal was close at hand. I hadn't come searching for my roots—my roots were searching for me—vibrating through earth and stone—touching the core of my being.

"What's a passage tomb, mom?" the little boy in Irish wool asked.

"Well, it's a tomb with a passage, or—a passage with a tomb." She looked at her husband questioningly. It was a desperate sort of parent look; she didn't want her son to think she didn't know something that this gypsy did. I assumed that she didn't want to look bad. It seemed to be written all over her face. Her husband frantically paged through the guidebook in hopes of finding the answer for his son and saving the day.

"'Tis a *magical* place where CùChulainn and his kin went to meet—to commune as it were—with their gods—and goddesses," the guitarist offered as he put down his instrument and approached the boy. "'Tis a place where the *Tuatha Dé Danann* sang their songs and awoke the land to a magic that lives no where else. Irish magic." Aidan's brother arched one eyebrow for emphasis. "Magical, *pagan* rituals happened there. I 'spose ya could change tomb to *womb*, and ya could infer all sorts of things about ancient societies and fertility rites. We, of course, would have to take the Saint off of Brigid's name after all she did suckle— "

"Liam!" Aidan snapped. He winked at me and I had to struggle to hide my amusement.

"—a lamb." Liam finished with a triumphant smile. He walked back to the wagon and picked his guitar pleased with his victory—that had gone completely unnoticed by the parents of the small boy.

"Coo-*cullen*? Isn't that the statue at the Post Office?" asked the dad.

"In*deed* yes it is sir. I see you *know* your Irish mythology. You're Da's an intelligent man there, son. I'm sure he'll teach you a good deal 'bout yer history," Liam replied. He sat back down and began to play his guitar, "Yes indeed."

***

I'm troubled. I'm dissatisfied. I'm Irish.
Marianne Moore

My history. I have wondered exactly what that is. Is it Irish? American? Both? Can I separate them in my head? In my heart? In claiming a nationality we make our own the history of its people. We learn the songs, and know the stories and traditions. WE are defined by its borders. Which was I?

I don't feel right claiming an Irish-American history. My family didn't come over during the 1840s potato famine. They didn't deal with *No Irish Need Apply* signs. They weren't with the Molly Maguires, or the San Patricios. They weren't with the Fighting 69th. They didn't take over Tammany Hall in New York and make the Irish-American community a powerful political machine. It wasn't my Irish ancestors who objected to the

abolition of slavery out of fear of losing their tenuous place on the bottom rung of the ladder to the American dream. They were back in County Clare—or Kilkenny. I imagine they signed one of Daniel O'Connell's petitions to be sent to America—in support of abolition. Funny the difference an ocean makes; on one side of it a philosophical fight to free all people, while on the other a purely economic point of view: if the slaves are freed, the Irish immigrants will be unemployed.

But can I own American history? Can I by rights call it mine? Can any of us that weren't physically here? We're all immigrants. My ancestors didn't fight in the Revolution; not one of them was here in 1776. The Native American's Trail of Tears was something they would have only empathized with from a distance—if they knew about it at all. In 1838 there was a desperate fight against poverty in Ireland and the Poor Law Act was passed in an effort to save the impoverished native population, probably members of my family on the country's west coast. The American Civil War wasn't their problem though my mother's great-grandfather Daniel Denney was there. He was a Union drummer boy. And that's all anyone knows about him. No one knows how he lived or died. He did live. The family tree says that he was born in the 1840s, died in 1881. He married a woman named Mary and they had six children. Was he connected to his family in Derry? Family lore says his family owned a sausage factory in Derry (although there is no actual evidence of this that I have been able to find). Was he Irish—or did he let go of his green and become a white American? He didn't live in traditionally Irish Southie. Did his sense of magic, his Irishness, die with the Confederacy in battles fought across five Aprils or did it die somewhere else along the way?

But is it really fair for me to claim an Irish history at all? I can't grasp living in a place where all opportunity was denied to my family by law for hundreds of years. Where it wasn't legal for my people to live within the limits of an incorporated town. Where my ancestors lived—during the good times—at subsistence level. Where it was not legal for them to own land—based on their race and religion. Where education was a forbidden fruit. Where their *language* was prohibited. Can I, a twentieth century baby-boomer American by birth, connect with the starving Irish during the potato famine more than a century ago? I am but one generation removed from that—can I claim it as my own? I can't even pretend to comprehend that sort of subjugation living here in middle class white America in the twenty-first century. To which side of this hyphen do I fall? To which tradition do I belong?

That kind of oppression spawns a long tribal memory—creates a sort of insular society and perhaps that's the legacy of Irish-Americans. Perhaps that is the shadow I walk under. It creates a proud people who refuse to be dominated—who live politically impassioned. A people determined to overcome any odds, determined to create a society that they can call their own; a society that embraces tradition, education, language, community. A people whose home is neither here, nor there—hyphenated—caught in-between something believed and something lived. That's my legacy as I see it and feel it. As my grandmother did.

***

I look down at a stone on the ground in front of me. It's oval shaped and has a rainbow on it. A rainbow rock. The singing stops as I reach down for the stone and Aidan takes it from me. Liam had been singing "Spancil Hill"—

My mind being bent on rambling to Ireland I did fly
I stepped on board a vision and I followed with the wind

"A rainbow is it? You're one of us now—the gods have given ya a gift. They're surely invitin' ya to be part of the still sacred Ir'land." Aidan hands me the stone. "Take your stone and go back across the sea, love," he said. "Home for ya will be here now, no doubt."

"No doubt." His brothers echo. Where there's magic there can be no doubt—that's what my grandmother would say.

***

Nothing can cure the soul but the senses, just as nothing can cure the senses but the soul.
Oscar Wilde.

No pessimist ever discovered the secret of the stars or sailed an uncharted land, or opened a new doorway for the human spirit.
Helen Keller.

I watch two falcons from my high perch at Loughcrew until they disappear from view. The five-thousand-year-old hilltop shrine where I sit consists of a grass mound that houses the completely intact passage tomb. It is the main tomb at this site. Its interior walls are covered with intricately carved Celtic knots—and no graffiti. I wonder if there was a language there—some inner meaning lost to time—or are these knots just simply decoration. Four smaller craughs, or cairns—mound tombs covered by huge piles of

rocks—surround it. Thousands of years of wind and weather have left them marked, but in remarkable condition.

I stand on the grassy mound and in every direction I look I see a stone circle. Each is nestled far below me at the foot of what the Irish affectionately call a *mountain,* but most of the rest of the world would call a hill—not even a very large hill. The two-hour hike up the meandering spiral path to the ancient memorial is well worth my efforts. Turning slowly, I try to commit the entire landscape to memory. The stone circles, druid circles as my grandmother would have called them, are in what appears to be almost pristine condition. They're not tourist attractions; they're memories of a primeval, haunting time that commands my respect. They endure. My grandmother told me stories about the Irish monuments—the magic they evoked—the magic we could *touch* if we would only allow ourselves to be a part of the wholeness of the world around us; if we only allowed ourselves to believe. I share my grandmother's wisdom with Ian. Farmers meticulously trim around the stones leaving them as they found them, untouched, sacred and whole—belonging to a world known only in legend and imagination. Both pasture and property line make way for them. The white-washed cottages with their thatched roofs all stand at a respectful distance. Hedges and walls divide the land into neat plots veering from their paths only to go around the prehistoric sites.

I watch a herd of what appear to be thoroughbred horses as they come into view in the western field below. They arrive thundering over the field. A stallion rears, at this distance he seems—*feels*—black. He carries himself that way. Proud. Defiant. His nickering and neigh carry on the breeze; he's calling his herd home. The horses gallop

across the open field. Their raw power shakes the ground and yet, as if respectful, the herd parts and moves around the ancient site in the middle of their meadow, like water moving around stones on the shore, before rejoining on the other side without missing a step. A young colt falls behind and wanders into the stone enclosure.

The stallion screams. He rears and seems to turn mid-run before he abruptly stops.

All of the horses halt. They wait as the blue-roan mare walks back to collect her errant son. She stops at the circle's edge. She throws her black head back, calls to him, and then paws anxiously at the ground. The colt's feet falter as he makes his way out of the ring. He realizes he is standing in a place that his mother fears to go. He has dared the sacred ground and is walking away unscathed.

The stallion makes his way back and nudges the foal as he exits the ring. They both rear and neigh loudly before breaking proudly into a canter. The pair glides confidently across the field ahead of the others who appear to be watching some ancient ritual played out before them. As suddenly as they arrive, they all disappear over the hill and Ian and I are alone in this timeless expanse once again.

The cairn on the other side of the hilltop sanctuary comes into my line of vision and I watch two peregrine falcons come to land, only ten yards or so away, on one of the large piles of rocks that form a memorial to some distant king. The larger bird, the female, has a meadow pipit in her talons. The pair settles down in their eyrie to enjoy their catch. There is a soft, yet urgent, peeping sound rising from the rocks as the raptors feed their young. I sink silently to my knees, try to be invisible and not disturb them. I fear that neither my lens nor my pen is capable of capturing the moment. The smell of the

heather, the sounds on the breeze, the prehistoric presence—power—*magic* of the ancient monuments; I am left spellbound by the scene. I'm standing in a place that today can't reach and I pray tomorrow will never find.

***

"Don't the kids pick on y'all for your rat-tails?" Ian, my youngest child, asked the three young Irish boys at the craft fair outside of Slane. "I get picked on for mine."

"Listen to himself! Surely they're not picked on," their father Claidhbh retorted. "Their hair is a symbol of their courage and pride. 'Tis tradition. CùChulainn wore one, as did Finn and Connor and many a Fenian warrior. 'Tis the badge of a brave warrior. The longer the rat-tail, the braver the man. The prouder, more independent don't you know. The more he has survived. Call upon that past and claim it as your own." Claidhbh arched his brow. "You didn't know that? You see how Irish you are—your spirit follows the customs of your clan. 'Tis instinct. 'tis in your blood." Claidhbh picked up his chisel and began working on the piece of wood he would carve into the Green Man. A round flat piece of blond wood containing a man's bearded face surrounded by wild looking hair. He looked like the sun, a round face with fiery hair. Claidhbh told Ian and his own sons the story of the Green Man as he worked the piece of wood. "The Green Man was the guardian of the planet, a sort of earth father I 'spose. His power infuses all that lives, the flowers, the trees—you and me. 'Tis his energy that keeps us young—while ignoring him will make a man old before his time, emptied of all dreams."

Ian listened in awe as he allowed himself to be caught up in the ancient mythology which he now felt, by right, to be his own. Like CùChulainn he was now

unconquerable, connected to a dream that began before time, a dream that contains us all, the Irish and American: Aidan, Liam, CùChulainn, Claidhbh, the Green Man, Nana, Ian and me.

Stone

October 2005, Virginia.

It was that moment at Willie's picnic in Texas that would bring me to Philadelphia in July of 1985 for Live Aid and, in September of that year to Champaign, Illinois for Farm-Aid and New York's Battery Park in May of 1986 for Hands Across America. People thinking and being as one can make a difference. I had been to protest marches before—but these events were different—they weren't dissent; they were affirmation, celebrations of what life could be. Millions of people connecting to make a difference. Magic. An American sort of magic, like a Crosby, Still, Nash, and Young song "We can change the world, rearrange the world." In Ireland the magic connects to something abstract—something most of us here would equate to Mother Nature. It is shadowy, or hidden in the twilight; one must intuit what magic is and how it is to be used. In America the magic is about connecting to the people. It is about finding a common ground with the others around us. It is assertive—and in the sunlight. I hold on to that hope as I read the daily numbers around me:

> Current death toll from Katrina, one thousand seventy one, her sister Rita took approximately another one hundred. Twenty-three-thousand-eight-hundred-ninety-two people spared; this time; FEMA collects body bags for another disaster, another day.
>
> In Iraq, two-thousand-thirty-one soldiers dead, nineteen-hundred-thirty-six of them Americans. No Irish soldiers on the list. Britons, Bulgarians, Danes, Dutch, Estonians, Hungarian, Italians, Kazakh,

Latvian, Poles, Salvadoran, Slovaks, Spaniards, Thai and Ukrainians.

Fourteen-thousand-three-hundred-and-sixty American wounded.

No Irish. One Irishman *was* taken hostage, a reporter for the BBC, Rory Carroll, but upon finding out that Carroll was Irish and *not* British his disappointed captors set him free. Of course, there was the aid worker Margaret Hassan—who was technically Irish, but generally described as British: a casualty of the American-ness I try not to own as I struggle to balance what culture I can call my own.

March 2006, Virginia

According to the Boston Passenger Lists, 1820-1943 databases, Norah Reidy arrived in Boston Massachusetts in July 1900. She traveled from Queenstown (*Cobh*) Ireland aboard the Ivernia. She listed her sponsor as Eddie Pander, likely her employer—or perhaps a member of the family Kate married into properly, spelled *Pender*. Annie, who listed her place of origin as Glenletternafinney, County Clare, arrived in Boston aboard the Catalonia July 2, 1894 and listed Mary Reidy as her sponsor, although no record has been found as yet for her sister Mary Ellen. Patrick Mungovan, Mary Ellen's husband, arrived from County Clare aboard the Scythia in 1896. I exchange Christmas cards with their descendents who are scattered over three states. No record has been found for Kate. Norah's husband, Walter Walsh arrived aboard the Cymric on the twelfth of July 1907. He listed Kate Walsh as his sponsor, but whether that is a sister or not, I don't know I can only speculate.

The 1920 United States census lists Walter Walsh as the head of a household on Telegraph St in South Boston Massachusetts. Residents are listed as Nora, his wife, and William, John and Walter, his sons. They both listed themselves as bilingual, speaking English and Irish and able to read and write both. They list their country of origin as Saorstát Éireann: the Free State of Ireland. Walter had by then filed his first immigration papers. Nora had not, nor would she ever do so.

As I see her name recorded historically, I think about the woman who told me stories and sang me songs—the woman who taught me about magic and life's child-like simplicity—even in the most complex moments we experience. I wonder if there is enough magic left in simply singing and holding hands, for me, or for the world. There wasn't enough magic to be found in people for Sister Loyola. I wonder how to make sense of it all. I wonder where—*if* I fit in it all. Two very different cultures have blended to shape the person I am—as those cultures have shaped everyone in my family on both sides of the Atlantic. For even in Ireland there is a consciousness of American cousins and that must alter realities there as well. I turn to the piece of my reality that draws from both of my cultural wells equally; I turn the stereo on. I listen to that lonesome whistle of the one o'clock train blow as it passes by my home while the Dubliners sing "Molly Malone" on the stereo. I wonder if something magic dies with each piece of us that stops wondering about the world and our place in it. Perhaps, that is what dying is—giving up the magic that lets you live. But then, even in death CùChulainn surrendered nothing. I turn the music up. . . . *Alive, alive-O. . . Alive, alive-O* . . .

CùChulainn's Death (a story of courage and survival)

"You do your kindness unkindly, CùChulainn," said the Druid, as he fell. Then CùChulainn drove for the last time through the host, and Lugaid took the spear, and he said: "Who will fall by this spear, children of Calatin?" "A king will fall by it," said they. "I heard you saying that a king would fall by the spear Erc threw a while ago." "That is true," they said, "and the Grey of Macha fell by it, that was the king of the horses of Ireland".

Then Lugaid threw the spear, and it went through and through CùChulainn's body, and he knew he had got his deadly wound; and his bowels came out on the cushions of the chariot, and his only horse went away from him, the Black Sainglain, with half the harness hanging from his neck, and left his master, the king of the heroes of Ireland, to die upon the plain of Muirthemne.

Then CùChulainn said: "There is great desire on me to go to that lake beyond, and to get a drink from it."

"We will give you leave to do that," they said, "if you will come back to us after."

"I will bid you come for me if I am not able to come back myself," said CùChulainn.

Then he gathered up his bowels into his body, and he went down to the lake. He drank a drink and he washed himself, and he returned back again to his death, and he called to his enemies to come and meet him.

There was a pillar-stone west of the lake, and his eye lit on it, and he went to the pillar-stone, and he tied himself to it with his breast-belt, the way he would not meet his death lying down, but would meet it standing up. Then his enemies came round about him, but they were in dread of going close to him, for they were not sure but he might be still alive.

But the three times fifty queens that loved CùChulainn saw him appear in his Druid chariot, going through Emain Macha; and they could hear him singing the music of the Sidhe.

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APPENDIX A

Descendants of John REIDY

Generation No. 1

1. John[1] REIDY was born Abt. 1805, and died 28 Jun 1886 in Glenletternafinney (Glaun) Townland, Kilmaley Parish, Co. Clare Ireland. He married **Bridget WALL** 14 Mar 1829 in Parish of Ennistymon, Co. Clare, Ireland. She was born Abt. 1807 in Ennistymon, Co. Clare, Ireland, and died 20 Jul 1883 in Glenletternafinney (Glaun) Townland, Kilmaley Parish, Co. Clare Ireland.

Children of John REIDY and Bridget WALL are:

	2	i.	Bridget[2] REIDY, born Feb 1831 in Glenletternafinney (Glaun) Townland, Kilmaley Parish, Co. Clare Ireland.
	3	ii.	John REIDY, born Jan 1833 in Glenletternafinney (Glaun) Townland, Kilmaley Parish, Co. Clare Ireland.
	4	iii.	Catherine REIDY, born Nov 1834 in Glenletternafinney (Glaun) Townland, Kilmaley Parish, Co. Clare Ireland.
	5	iv.	Mary REIDY, born Oct 1837 in Glenletternafinney (Glaun) Townland, Kilmaley Parish, Co. Clare Ireland.
+	6	v.	James J. REIDY, born Abt. 1840 in Glenletternafinney (Glaun) Townland, Kilmaley Parish, Co. Clare Ireland.
	7	vi.	Michael REIDY, born Sep 1843 in Glenletternafinney (Glaun) Townland, Kilmaley Parish, Co. Clare Ireland.
	8	vii.	Thomas REIDY, born Apr 1846 in Glenletternafinney (Glaun) Townland, Kilmaley Parish, Co. Clare Ireland.

Generation No. 2

6. James J.[2] REIDY (John[1]) was born Abt. 1840 in Glenletternafinney (Glaun) Townland, Kilmaley Parish, Co. Clare Ireland. He married **Nora CORBETT**. She was born 1845 in Ireland, and died 20 Feb 1890 in Glenletternafinney (Glaun) Townland, Kilmaley Parish, Co. Clare Ireland.

Children of James REIDY and Nora CORBETT are:

	9	i.	Bridget[3] REIDY, born Apr 1864 in Glenletternafinney (Glaun) Townland, Kilmaley Parish, Co. Clare Ireland; died 20 Aug 1883 in Glenletternafinney (Glaun) Townland, Kilmaley Parish, Co. Clare Ireland.
	10	ii.	Ellen REIDY, born Feb 1866 in Glenletternafinney (Glaun) Townland, Kilmaley Parish, Co. Clare Ireland; died 1950 in Glenletternafinney (Glaun) Townland, Kilmaley Parish, Co. Clare Ireland.
+	11	iii.	Catherine REIDY, born Feb 1868 in Glenletternafinney (Glaun) Townland, Kilmaley Parish, Co. Clare Ireland.
+	12	iv.	Mary Ellen REIDY, born Feb 1870 in Glenletternafinney (Glaun) Townland, Kilmaley Parish, Co. Clare Ireland; died in Everett, Ma..

13 v. Hannah REIDY, born Jan 1872 in Glenletternafinney (Glaun) Townland, Kilmaley Parish, Co. Clare Ireland; died 14 Sep 1875 in Glenletternafinney (Glaun) Townland, Kilmaley Parish, Co. Clare Ireland.

\+ 14 vi. John REIDY, born May 1874 in Glenletternafinney (Glaun) Townland, Kilmaley Parish, Co. Clare Ireland.

15 vii. Alice REIDY, born Oct 1876 in Glenletternafinney (Glaun) Townland, Kilmaley Parish, Co. Clare Ireland.

\+ 16 viii. Hanora A. REIDY, born Aug 1878 in Glenletternafinney (Glaun) Townland, Kilmaley Parish, Co. Clare Ireland; died in Weymouth Ma. USA.

17 ix. Anne REIDY, born Abt. 1879 in Glenletternafinney (Glaun) Townland, Kilmaley Parish, Co. Clare Ireland; died in Roxbury, Ma..

18 x. James REIDY, born Mar 1881 in Glenletternafinney (Glaun) Townland, Kilmaley Parish, Co. Clare Ireland.

19 xi. Margaret REIDY, born Sep 1883 in Glenletternafinney (Glaun) Townland, Kilmaley Parish, Co. Clare Ireland; died 14 Oct 1884 in Glenletternafinney (Glaun) Townland, Kilmaley Parish, Co. Clare Ireland.

Generation No. 3

11. Catherine[3] REIDY (James J.[2], John[1]) was born Feb 1868 in Glenletternafinney (Glaun) Townland, Kilmaley Parish, Co. Clare Ireland. She married **James PENDER**.

Children of Catherine REIDY and James PENDER are:

20 i. James[4] PENDER.

21 ii. John PENDER.

22 iii. Mary Catherine PENDER.

23 iv. Maurine PENDER.

12. Mary Ellen[3] REIDY (James J.[2], John[1]) was born Feb 1870 in Glenletternafinney (Glaun) Townland, Kilmaley Parish, Co. Clare Ireland, and died in Everett, Ma. She married **Patrick James MUNGOVAN** 21 Jun 1905 in 1st Cecilia, Boston, Ma., son of Patrick MUNGOVAN and Bridget PHILIPS. He was born Abt. 1877 in Co. Clare, Ireland, and died 1929.

Children of Mary REIDY and Patrick MUNGOVAN are:

24 i. Philip Edward[4] MUNGOVAN, born in Boston, Ma.; died in Everett, Ma..

25 ii. Mary Christian MUNGOVAN, born 13 Jun 1908.

26 iii. Elsie Maude Marie MUNGOVAN, born in Everett, Ma.; died in Dallas, Texas, United States of America.

\+ 27 iv. Catherine Frances MUNGOVAN, born in Everett, Ma.

14. John[3] REIDY (James J.[2], John[1]) was born May 1874 in Glenletternafinney (Glaun) Townland, Kilmaley Parish, Co. Clare Ireland. He married **Margaret Reidy** 20 Feb 1917 in Kilmaley Parish, Co. Clare, Ireland, daughter of Patrick REIDY. She was born Abt. 1898, and died in Glenletternafinney (Glaun) Townland, Kilmaley Parish, Co. Clare Ireland.

Children of John REIDY and Margaret Reidy are:

28 i. Patrick Joseph[4] REIDY, born in Glenletternafinney (Glaun) Townland, Kilmaley Parish, Co. Clare Ireland; in Kilrush, Co. Clare, Ireland.

\+ 29 ii. Mary Anne REIDY, born in Glenletternafinney (Glaun) Townland, Kilmaley Parish, Co. Clare Ireland.

\+ 30 iii. James REIDY, born in Glenletternafinney (Glaun) Townland, Kilmaley Parish, Co. Clare Ireland.

\+ 31 iv. Francis REIDY, born in Glenletternafinney (Glaun) Townland, Kilmaley Parish, Co. Clare Ireland.

32 v. Margaret T. (Rita) REIDY, born in Glenletternafinney (Glaun) Townland, Kilmaley Parish, Co. Clare Ireland. She married Patrick Maloney.

16. Hanora A.[3] REIDY (James J.[2], John[1]) was born Aug 1878 in Glenletternafinney (Glaun) Townland, Kilmaley Parish, Co. Clare Ireland, and died in Weymouth Ma. USA. She married **Walter WALSH** 27 Nov 1913 in Boston, Ma., son of William WALSH and Anastatia Keefe. He was born 07 Aug 1881 in Licketstown, Mooncoin, Kilkenny Ireland, and died in Boston Ma..

Children of Hanora REIDY and Walter WALSH are:

33 i. William[4] WALSH, born in Boston Ma.; died in Boston Ma..
\+ 34 ii. John WALSH, born in Boston Ma.; died in Boston, Ma..
\+ 35 iii. Walter Francis WALSH, born in Boston Ma.; died in Weymouth, Ma..

Generation No. 4

27. Catherine Frances[4] MUNGOVAN (Mary Ellen[3] REIDY, James J.[2], John[1])

Children of Catherine MUNGOVAN and John Carey are:

\+ 36 i. Paul Cornelius Philip[5] Carey, in Everett, Ma..
\+ 37 ii. Barbara Ann Carey, born in Everett, Ma..
\+ 38 iii. Kathleen Joan Carey, born in Everett, Ma..
39 iv. Arlene Phyllis Carey, born. She married Robert Lissit.

29. Mary Anne[4] REIDY (John[3], James J.[2], John[1]) was born in Glenletternafinney (Glaun) Townland, Kilmaley Parish, Co. Clare Ireland. She married **Thomas Flannigan** .

Children of Mary REIDY and Thomas Flannigan are:

40 i. Martin[5] Flannigan .
41 ii. Brendon Flannigan .
\+ 42 iii. Baby Girl Flannigan .

30. James[4] REIDY (John[3], James J.[2], John[1]) was born in Glenletternafinney (Glaun) Townland, Kilmaley Parish, Co. Clare Ireland. He married **Sarah Kearns** 23 Sep 1961. She was born in Ireland.

Child of James REIDY and Sarah Kearns is:

\+ 43 i. James[5] REIDY, born in England.

31. Francis[4] REIDY (John[3], James J.[2], John[1]) was born in Glenletternafinney (Glaun) Townland, Kilmaley Parish, Co. Clare Ireland. He married **Mary Conroy**. She was born in Cobltoran, Co. Laois, Ireland.

Children of Francis REIDY and Mary Conroy are:

44 i. John[5] REIDY.
\+ 45 ii. Maureen REIDY.

34. John[4] WALSH (Hanora A.[3] REIDY, James J.[2], John[1]) was born in Boston Ma., and died in Boston, Ma.. He married **Alice HENDRICK** 11 Oct 1942 in Boston Ma., daughter of William HENDRICK and Rose MORANCY. She was born in Boston Ma., and in Boston Ma..

Children of John WALSH and Alice HENDRICK are:

+	46	i.	Alice[5] WALSH, born in Boston Ma..
	47	ii.	Kathleen WALSH, born in Boston Ma..
+	48	iii.	Donna WALSH, born in Boston Ma..

35. Walter Francis[4] WALSH (Hanora A.[3] REIDY, James J.[2], John[1]) was born in Boston Ma., and died in Weymouth, Ma.. He married **Emma GAUDREAU** in Boston Ma., daughter of Charles GAUDREAU and Emma ANDERSON. She was born in Boston Ma..

Children of Walter WALSH and Emma GAUDREAU are:

	49	i.	Geraldine[5] WALSH, born 01 Dec 1947 in Boston Ma.; died 01 Dec 1947 in Boston Ma..
	50	ii.	Brigid WALSH, born 10 Jun 1950 in Boston Ma.; died 10 Jun 1950 in Boston Ma..
+	51	iii.	Janet Theresa WALSH, born in Boston Ma..
	52	iv.	Barbara Ann WALSH, born in Boston Ma.. She married John SEAMANS 13 Jun 1982 in Quincy Ma.
+	53	v.	Mary-Ellen WALSH, born in Boston, Ma..
+	54	vi.	Daniel William WALSH, born in Boston Ma..

Generation No. 5

36. Paul Cornelius Philip[5] Carey (Catherine Frances[4] MUNGOVAN, Mary Ellen[3] REIDY, James J.[2], John[1]) was born in Everett, Ma.. He married **Lorelei Carol Lasik** 15 May 1972. She was born.

Child of Paul Carey and Lorelei Lasik is:

	55	i.	Suzanne Michelle[6] Carey.

37. Barbara Ann[5] Carey (Catherine Frances[4] MUNGOVAN, Mary Ellen[3] REIDY, James J.[2], John[1]) was born in Everett, Ma.. She married **Michael Martin Albert** 02 Jul 1967.

Children of Barbara Carey and Michael Albert are:

	56	i.	Cary Elizabeth[6] Albert.
	57	ii.	Christopher Martin Albert,.
	58	iii.	Kathleen Ann Albert.

38. Kathleen Joan[5] Carey (Catherine Frances[4] MUNGOVAN, Mary Ellen[3] REIDY, James J.[2], John[1]) was born in Everett, Ma.. She married **Richard W. Noble**.

Children of Kathleen Carey and Richard Noble are:

	59	i.	Stefanie[6] Noble.
	60	ii.	Blaire Noble.

42. Baby Girl[5] Flannigan (Mary Anne[4] REIDY, John[3], James J.[2], John[1]) She married **???? Madden**.

Child of Baby Flannigan and ???? Madden is:

	61	i.	Joanie[6] Madden.

43. James[5] REIDY (James[4], John[3], James J.[2], John[1]) was in England. He married **Mairead Quinn** 18 Jun 1993. She was born in Ireland.

Children of James REIDY and Mairead Quinn are:

62 i. James Finbar[6] REIDY, born in Ireland.
63 ii. Cormac Thomas REIDY, born in Ireland
64 iii. John RIchard REIDY, born in Ireland.

45. Maureen[5] REIDY (Francis[4], John[3], James J.[2], John[1]) She married **John Hill**.

Children of Maureen REIDY and John Hill are:

65 i. Daniel[6] Hill.
66 ii. Patrick Hill.

46. Alice[5] WALSH (John[4], Hanora A.[3] REIDY, James J.[2], John[1]) was born in Boston Ma.. She married **John HAGER** 30 Apr 1966 in Boston Ma., son of Jack HAGER and Mary ?????. He was born in Boston, Ma..

Children of Alice WALSH and John HAGER are:

\+ 67 i. Sharon[6] HAGER, born in Boston, Ma..
68 ii. Daniel HAGER, born in Boston, Ma..
69 iii. Jennifer HAGER, born in Boston, Ma..
70 iv. Mark HAGER, born in Boston, Ma..

48. Donna[5] WALSH (John[4], Hanora A.[3] REIDY, James J.[2], John[1]) was born in Boston Ma.. She married **Joseph HIGGINS** 25 Nov 1989 in Boston, Ma..

Children of Donna WALSH and Joseph HIGGINS are:

71 i. Connor[6] HIGGINS, born in Boston, Ma..
72 ii. Kayla HIGGINS, born in Boston, Ma..

51. Janet Theresa[5] WALSH (Walter Francis[4], Hanora A.[3] REIDY, James J.[2], John[1]) was born in Boston Ma.. She met **Richard MINTON**, son of Frank MINTON and Marion MINTON. He was born in Massachuesetts.

Child of Janet WALSH and Richard MINTON is:

73 i. Melissa Theresa[6] WALSH, born in Weymouth Ma..

53. Mary-Ellen[5] WALSH (Walter Francis[4], Hanora A.[3] REIDY, James J.[2], John[1]) was born in Weymouth Ma.. She married **Thomas Edmond JONES** 25 Jun 1977 in Weymouth Ma. @ St. Francis Xavier, son of Thomas JONES and Phyllis D'ENTREMONT. She met **(2) John Lindsay HARRIS, Jr.** 01 Apr 1990 in Clayville Va., son of John HARRIS and Mary ROBENS. He was born in Richmond, Va

Children of Mary-Ellen WALSH and Thomas JONES are:

\+ 74 i. Jamie[6] WALSH, born in Weymouth Ma..
75 ii. Nicholas Edward[6] JONES, born in Weymouth Ma.. He met Heidi Ruberra in Weymouth, Ma.
\+ 76 iii. Christopher Robert JONES, born in Brockton Ma..

Children of Mary-Ellen WALSH and John HARRIS are:

77 i. Ian Patrick HARRIS, born in Richmond, Va.

54. Daniel William[5] WALSH (Walter Francis[4], Hanora A.[3] REIDY, James J.[2], John[1]) was born in Boston Ma.. He married **Jennifer Lynn MOORE** 28 Jul 1991 in Weymouth Ma. @ St. Francis Xavier, daughter of William MOORE and Sandra BOXELL.

Child of Daniel WALSH and Jennifer MOORE is:
78 i. Corey Ann[6] WALSH, born in Weymouth Ma..

Generation No. 6

67. Sharon[6] HAGER (Alice[5] WALSH, John[4], Hanora A.[3] REIDY, James J.[2], John[1]) was born in Boston, Ma.. She married **John Joseph MARA**.

Children of Sharon HAGER and John MARA are:
79 i. John Joseph[7] MARA, Jr., born in Boston.
80 ii. Michael MARA, born in Boston.

75. Christopher Robert[6] JONES (Mary-Ellen[5] WALSH, Walter Francis[4], Hanora A.[3] REIDY, James J.[2], John[1]) was born in Brockton Ma.. He married **Loren Michelle Bryant**. She was born in Richmond V.A.

Child of Christopher JONES and Loren Bryant is:
81 i. Joshua Nicholas[7] JONES, born in Richmond, Va.

76. Jamie[6] WALSH (Mary-Ellen[5], Walter Francis[4], Hanora A.[3] REIDY, James J.[2], John[1]) was born in Weymouth Ma.. She met **Jason David RIDEOUT**, son of David RIDEOUT and Lillian DORTMUNDT. He was in Richmond, Va..

Child of Jamie WALSH and Jason RIDEOUT is:
82 i. Ryan Michael[7] WALSH, born in Richmond, Va.

VITA

Mary-Ellen Jones was born September 28, 1958 in Boston Massachusetts and currently resides outside of Richmond Virginia. She received an Associates of Arts from John Tyler Community College in 1996, graduating a member of Phi Beta Kappa, Magna Cum Laude. Ms. Jones transferred to The College of William and Mary to undertake a study of History and English. She graduated a member of Alpha Delta Gamma, the National Society for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, with a Bachelor of Arts in both English and History in 2001. She completed a Master of Arts in English at Virginia Commonwealth University in 2006. She completed both the Literature and Composition tracks. Before returning to school, Ms. Jones did extensive genealogical work for the Powhatan County Historical Society.