



Publisher's note: In Part One of this two-part story, writer Jackie M. Loring settles into the serenity of her writer's retreat at Boll Cottage, on Achill Island. Part Two will be published in the Fall issue of CapeWomenOnline magazine.

Awaiting My Muse: Reflections on an Artist Residency in Ireland

by Jackie M. Loring



The Heinrich Theodor Böll cottage on Achill Island, County Mayo, Ireland



Making myself at home at Böll's desk.

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8:30 am, Friday, March 12, 2010

Artist Residency

Heinrich Boll's Cottage

Doogort, Co. Mayo, Ireland

"My last full day on Achill and the sun greets me as I enter my work room, coffee in hand, to start my writing day at Heinrich's desk.

"The Ireland I've come to love, the west coast beyond Westport, Leenan, Renvyle Strand and Galway, is a blend of breath taking vistas of snow covered mountains that rise dramatically from the dark green/blue ocean (learn the shades of blue!), the smell of turf burning in grates and sheep bleating as they roam the roads, hills and the country side.

"Last night on the road from the Guilty's Pub I saw eight of them stop in midstep, fold their absurd, spindly legs and go to sleep, right there on the side of the road. Frightening, dangerous and so funny to find rounding a corner.

"Two rams with intricate horns spend their days in the fenced in pasture outside my work room. Around Achill Island the tide retreats further than Provincetown's but today the white caps wave to me from the blanket of high tide deep blue..."

From JML Achill journal - 2010

A month later, at home on the west coast of Cape Cod, I read this on the Friday morning of a day filled with work and other essential tasks, responsibilities and people to email.

Would I take the time to look out my window to see what the tide was doing?

The answer is simple, I can't see the Atlantic from my work room window but even if I could, would I? Do I even have the time for looking out?

Encouraged for four years by my friends poet Preston Hood and Irish short story writer Geraldine Mills, last August (2009) I applied for an Artist's Residency in Ireland at the Heinrich Theodor Böll cottage.

Boll (1917-1985) was an important German post World War II writer who won the Noble Prize for Literature in 1972. As a frequent visitor to Achill Island, he donated his cottage as a retreat for visiting writers and artists. In October 2009, I received an email telling me to pack.

In 2005, I was fortunate to receive a Ragdale Foundation Artist Residency in Forest Lake, Illinois, where I spent a month with eleven other artists. At Boll Cottage, the residency was mine alone.

Cottage is a confusing word for the home that waited for me in February 2010. The white house with its sharp roof out lined against the bright blue (that word again) sky and Slievemore Mountain reminded me of New Mexico.

Inside two large bedrooms, three workspaces, one of which is set up specifically for visual artists, allowed me to choose my comfort zone.

At Ragdale, there was a prairie but no ocean. The choice on Achill was simple. The U-shaped home provides an outdoor writing space, majestic views on all four sides, a large kitchen, dining, and living room with a 'grate' or fireplace and all the turf you can burn in a two-week stay.

The postman stopped by to see if I had mail. I understand that he would have stayed for tea had I known enough to offer.

On the first morning, I found myself alone with my blank canvas: four walls, Boll's desk, a window full of sunshine, sloping pastureland, receding and advancing tides and two weeks of twelve or more hour days and nights to create.

But what to write and how to begin?

For at least three years, I had given up writing poems to concentrate on plays and movie scripts. Poetry takes possession of my creative mind and spirit and gets cranky if I try to write prose.

On Achill, the muse was not only understanding, forgiving and inclusive but held a pencil and waited for me.

I divided the studio into sections from right to window. On the fireplace, I hung pictures of a Joyce Utting Schutter sculpture to which I needed to create a poem for the American Pen Women Shared Art Project (link to Creative W'n article appearing in this issue) due the week of my return to America.

On a second desk, I laid out newsprint on which to grid a new screenplay after I conceptualized it and wrote the treatment (ten single-spaced pages of prose). On the glass cabinet, I hung the art of Melissa Koleshis to which I aspired to write a children's story about fairies and trolls.

On Boll's desk, I set up my laptop, plugged the Irish adapter into the wall only to discover my laptop needed a three-way adapter. (An emergency phone call home and a priority package solved that set back a few days later. Good to get to know the postman, anyway.)

On Heinrich Böll's desk I opened my three ring binder into which I had placed a copy of every poem I have written in the hope that in my spare time I could edit work for a chap book. In front of the window, I spread out family photos to comfort me and several books of W. D. Yeats.

All this activity peeked the interest of a huge white cat that would walk each day between the legs of the rams while they aet from a trough in the pasture then jump up to the windowsill to watch me.

By ten o'clock that first morning, I was surrounded by my next two weeks and I humbly asked the Universe to provide for me. For fourteen days, I woke each morning with the expectation of pure magic and I was rewarded.

Part Two will be published in the Fall issue of CapeWomenOnline magazine



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

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

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

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

She facilitates the Cape Cod Screenwriter's Group, coordinates the Eventide Arts Full-length Playwriting Competition and Kaplan prize, is president of the Cape Cod Chapter of the National League of American Pen Women (<http://www.NLAPW.com>) and the past executive director of the Cape Cod Writers' Center (<http://www.capecodwriterscenter.com>).