

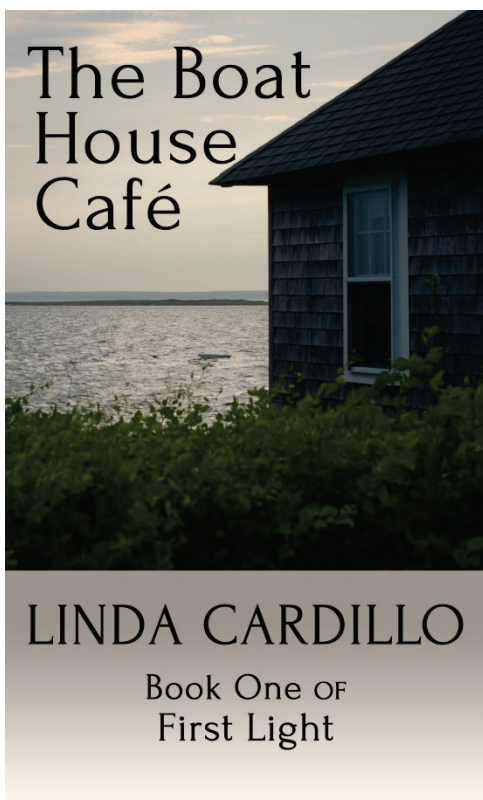
My Writing Life

October 2014

Dear Friends,

As a former teacher, the fall has always felt to me like the start of a new year, rather than the onset of the year's close. This fall, in particular, holds special meaning as a new beginning for two important events—the launch of my latest novel, *The Boat House Café*; and the introduction of my first international writing retreat. Details, descriptions, excerpts and more await you below.

As you carve your pumpkin, mull your cider and wrap yourself in a warm sweater, I hope you'll enjoy this latest update on my writing life!



Several years ago, sipping a cup of tea at a busy café on Circuit Avenue in Oak Bluffs, a bustling Martha's Vineyard seaside town, I overheard a woman confide in her companion, "You know what they say about this island. Some people come here to hide; others come to heal."

Later that day, I scribbled those words into my notebook. And now, they appear on the back cover of my latest novel, *The Boat House Café*. They were the seeds that inspired my story of Mae Keaney and Tobias Monroe—two lonely souls, each with their own secrets, who find the strength and compassion to heal.

The story of *The Boat House Café* has been many years in the making. Its setting, as important as any of the characters who inhabit it, is a remote corner of Chappaquiddick Island where my family and I spent a few glorious weeks every summer. The island's landscape and history are an integral part of *The Boat House Café*, and one of the real pleasures of writing this book was the help I received from individuals whose knowledge and experiences shed a special kind of light on my story.

Let me share with you one particular day in late summer, as I was tying up loose ends. I have always believed in the importance of the "telling detail" that gives specificity to the time and place of my stories, and I was on the hunt for a few missing pieces to anchor *The Boat House Café* in the Martha's Vineyard of the 1940s.

I turned first to my cousin Kathy's husband, Lance Garth, who had been a judge on the island. I asked him for an "insider's" description of the workings of the Dukes County courthouse, where a pivotal scene takes place. What began as a simple conversation about the building and the legal

process that my characters would experience soon evolved into an invitation to have a tour of the courthouse and a meeting with officers of the court. I jumped at the opportunity, and soon found myself with not only a full day of interviews but also a renewed immersion in the vistas, sunshine and sea air of a place I had come to love.

I spent the morning "behind-the-scenes" at the courthouse, the guest of Court Officer John Hanavan, who generously shared his notebook and his knowledge. I climbed the elegant curved staircase that leads into the courtroom; I passed through the justices' door to the back hallway and the court's library; I was led through a warren of corridors to the side exit where those who need protection can leave hidden from view. I stood in the records room, where books with faded, ancient bindings were stacked on shelves to the high ceiling, holding the history of every case heard in the courtroom above.



When I emerged into the sunshine, it was with a profound sense of the space that figures so importantly in my story.

Next stop was the Martha's Vineyard Museum and my appointment with Bow Van Riper, the library assistant. Awaiting me on a large wooden table, scarred from years of use, were a stack of folders filled with photographs and a bound copy of an entire year of the *Vineyard Gazette* from the 1940s. Bow had collected these items in preparation for my visit. While I sifted through old photos, Bow combed through the library's oral history records to find me the name of the seedy bar where Tobias gets into a fight that has life-changing consequences for him and Mae. The energy in the library was vibrant and engaging, as our search for images of the island and news accounts in years past helped to shape the world in which my characters existed.

My final interview was with Wampanoag tribal council member Margaret Oliviera, who met me for a cup of coffee at Espresso Love to answer my questions about Wampanoag culture and traditions. What I received from her, however, was an unexpected gift.

At the beginning of our meeting, Margaret asked me what my book was about. As I described in broad strokes the story of an independent Irish Catholic woman named Mae whose love for a Wampanoag man changes both their lives, Margaret became very quiet. When I finished, she said to me, "You are telling my story." And then she explained. Her grandmother, an Irish Catholic woman named Mae, had fallen in love with and married a Wampanoag. . . at the same time as the setting of *The Boat House Café*.

Margaret and I looked at each other, and acknowledged that we had both experienced the frisson of goosebumps at the confluence of her family's history and my imagination.

I have often felt that my characters speak to me, whispering in my ear that they want to go in a direction that I hadn't originally planned. But this was the first time that I experienced something "other" leading me to tell my story.

I hope this peek into the background of *The Boat House Café* will lead you to dip your toe in the waters of Cape Pogue Bay and feel the wind coming in over East Beach.

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