


Retiring to Ireland

A friend who had taught in the Harrisburg schools for thirty years, retired at 55. She then trained to be a massage therapist and moved to Arizona to live in a community of artists. Ten years would pass before I retired, but the seeds of retirement had been planted. There was more to life than being a lawyer. Time for writing and storytelling awaited me.

Dreams of retiring reached as far as Ireland. My great grandparents came from County Donegal, a land of rocky fields and dramatic seascapes. I had visited there several times, returning with Irish stories and fond memories of the relatives that still lived there. Ireland seemed the perfect place to write and tell stories.

In the fall of 1999, I traveled to Italy with a group of friends. Our tour started in Venice and ended in the Italian Alps. We stayed in a cottage with a fine view of the mountains. I took a morning to write a poem, inspired by the sight of the snow capped peaks. At the end of the two week trip, I parted with my friends and flew to Ireland. Renting a car, I drove to Galway, a walkable city that I had learned to love.

My hotel sat on the city square, across from a pub that had an open mic on Monday evenings. Monday afternoon, I polished my poem about the Alps, enjoying the phrases I had created. Suddenly I realized that my



turns of phrase might be totally lost on people who had grown up in Ireland. Language is culturally bound and the culture of modern Ireland was still foreign to me. That night, I recited my poem and received polite applause. Another man who read a poem talked of the changes he had experienced as Ireland moved into the twenty-first century. His conversation confirmed my belief that Irish culture was beyond my experience. If I hoped to be a writer, I needed an audience that shared the culture in which I had grown.

I returned from Ireland without the dream of retiring there. To my great delight I found a woman who was happy that I would be staying in this country. Nine months later we were wed, but that is another story.