

# My Writing Life

July 2009

*Dear Friends,*

*It's July in New England, but we haven't seen much sun. Despite the weather, we still plan to head out to our hidden corner of paradise on Chappaquiddick Island, where we escape to a cottage with no electricity and no cable, reachable only by boat or over sand. I look forward to it every year as a place of tranquility and a time to focus on my writing.*

If you will be in Washington, DC, on July 15, please join me (and 499 other romance writers!) for a book signing to benefit literacy at the Marriott Wardman Park Hotel.

## A Day on the Road

The other side of the writing life

Getting out on the road is one of the realities of the writing life, and I'm happy to say it's an aspect that I enjoy immensely. Greeting old friends who are familiar with my books and making new ones who are dipping their toes in Harlequin waters for the first time energizes me. Being a storyteller, I never tire of the opportunity to open my mouth and weave a tale or two.

One trip that was especially meaningful for me this spring was a day-long journey through Connecticut and New York with several stops along the way. I combined an appearance at a Barnes & Noble in upstate New York with visits to sign books for old friends and reconnect with three of my aunts and their daughters. My first stop was Suffield Academy, where I had once worked in development and taught English. My friends there had supported me on my journey to publication and had celebrated with me when I made my first sale. Next along the way was lunch with my Aunt Cathy and cousin Lisa, a photographer who is researching both sides of her family's genealogy and delving into fascinating bits of history. Over the next year, you'll be seeing some of the photographs Lisa has discovered (including the one in this issue of my mother and her sisters sending the youngest sister off on her honeymoon). Aunt Cathy has been one of my "surrogate mothers" and a wonderful cheerleader who attends my events whenever she can. I left that warm welcome and comfort food (macaroni and cheese, chicken croquettes and salad) to venture through the countryside and make my way to the Hudson River. I got lost a few times (no GPS!) but recognized a few landmarks as I wended my way through Lake Carmel, New York, where my maternal grandmother lived when I was a girl (more about that in the next issue). I found the river, crossed it on the Beacon Bridge and headed out to Goshen, to visit my 100-year-old Aunt Clara. She is a lively centenarian, despite the arthritis that keeps her in a



*Aunt Beulah and I at Barnes & Noble*

wheelchair and prevents her once nimble fingers from the knitting and crocheting that are the dominant creative forms of expression in my mother's family. Four generations have wielded crochet hooks and knitting needles, starting with my grandmother, who crocheted a bedspread as a wedding present for each of her grandchildren. After my visit with Clara, I made my way back to the river, to Newburgh, where I had dinner with the baby of the family, my Aunt Beulah, her daughter Mari, and a bevy of women in red hats and purple dresses. We followed up a meal of antipasto and pasta and good wine with a reading at the local Barnes & Noble and a visit with yet another cousin, Clara's daughter Carol Ann. I recently came across a photo of her wedding, in which all of the cousins participated. It was my first experience as a bridesmaid and an adventure from start to finish for a day-dreaming sixteen-year-old.

At the end of the evening, I turned for home. It was a satisfying day, filled with the love, humor and memories that inspire my stories.

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Visit my website at [www.lindacardillo.com](http://www.lindacardillo.com)  
and my blog at <http://linda-cardillo.blogspot.com/>

## Across the Table

Honoring my mother and my aunts



*Lena (my mother), and four of her sisters—  
Kay, Beulah, Clara and Mella*

I'm excited to report that my fourth work of fiction, *ACROSS THE TABLE*, is in production, scheduled for release in June 2010. Many of you will recall its original title, *SALEM STREET*, which is the name of the street in Boston's North End where the Dante family's restaurant, *Paradiso*, is located. One of the "givens" of the writing life is that book titles often evolve over the course of bringing the work to the marketplace. I always assign a working title to what I'm writing—it often helps me to focus the theme. Once my editor has the manuscript, she assesses whether the working title will help to sell the book. If not, she comes back to me for

new suggestions. When she asked me for new ideas for this book, I went directly to Dante and read the entire *Paradiso*, Book III of *The Divine Comedy*, in one night, with the Italian verses on the left-hand pages and the English translation on the right. I found what I was looking for in Canto V. In *Paradiso*, Beatrice is leading Dante through the spheres of heaven. Early on, believing that she has shown him more than he can comprehend, she tells him "*sedere un poco a mensa.*" She wants him to sit awhile at her table and digest all that he has seen. Because food is a constant metaphor for love and change in my story, and the preparation or sharing of a meal is the foundation for key moments in the Dante family's life, it led me to the title *ACROSS THE TABLE*.

*ACROSS THE TABLE* is a celebration of family and a recognition of what is most valuable in our search for connection and happiness. It has its origins in the spirit and stories of my mother and her sisters and sisters-in-law—the aunts who helped to raise me and my cousins as we all sat around the tables of my childhood. They were the first generation of the family to be born in America; young women who saw their husbands and boyfriends and brothers go off to war; young mothers who faced the challenges of raising children in a culture and a time that was changing rapidly; and finally matriarchs who anchored their families with a mixture of humor, wisdom and love expressed through the bounty on their tables.

*ACROSS THE TABLE* is in many ways, an homage to those women who had such an influence on my life.

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## What I'm Writing Now

My current work-in-progress, a novel called *FIRST LIGHT*, is set at the isolated northern tip of Chappaquiddick Island where my family and I have enjoyed many summers. Unlike me, who embraced this special patch of seacoast the moment I set foot there, my heroine, Sophia Callahan, is initially undone by the loneliness and rigors of housekeeping in an aging home without electricity or neighbors that has been offered to her as a refuge by her best friend. She's come to the island as many women before her have—to pull her life together after a bitter divorce. Her children are spending the first part of the summer with their father and she is alone and on her own for the first time in her life.

While on the island, Sophia is researching material for a documentary on the native tribes of Massachusetts, among whom are the Chappaquiddick Wampanoag—the People of the First Light. Through her encounters with the Wampanoag tribal elders, her deepening

friendship with Caleb Monroe—a member of the tribe and a ranger on the wildlife refuge adjacent to her cottage—and her own experience of confronting the challenges she faces both physically and emotionally, Sophia comes to a new understanding of who she is and what she is capable of in her life. I'm looking forward to delving into the story this summer, and I hope it's one that will resonate with you.

