

My Writing Life

October 2006

Dear Friends,

It's been another busy month, with many things percolating. Harlequin has invited me to be the featured author in the January issue of their newsletter, *Reader to Reader*, which goes to all their direct mail customers every month with their book shipments. In December, I'll be listed on Harlequin's website, www.eharlequin.com, with a profile page and a link to my own site. In addition, Amazon has listed *Dancing on Sunday Afternoons* for pre-orders, and I've set up a link from my website to Amazon.

If you would like to pre-order the book, please click through from my website, www.lindacardillo.com, as I get credit for the sale. The link appears on the page titled, "Dancing on Sunday Afternoons." Thanks!

Inspiration

I recently had dinner with a friend and we talked about the writing process, especially about what inspires me as a writer—where the ideas come from. I was reminded of a scene from *Out of Africa*, where Meryl Streep as Karen Blixen (the given name of the writer Isak Dinesen) weaves a story at the dinner table from the simple cue of a locket around her neck. I often find that the simplest objects or snippets of overheard conversation or fragments of prosaic information become the seeds from which stories emerge. At times, I don't know where I am heading with a particular thread, and it often astounds me where the journey takes me. As a small example, I looked around us in the restaurant and then pointed to our water glasses on the table. Although



we had both been drinking throughout the meal, the water in both glasses was at exactly the same level. "I would start with these water glasses," I said, "and explore the relationship between two people who are so in sync that everything they do is parallel. Maybe it begins to suffocate them, that they don't have an independent act or thought. Or maybe it binds them together in incomprehensible ways."

A scene that was ultimately cut from *Dancing* had its origins in a visit I made several years ago to a shrine in southern Italy. I was fascinated by a gallery outside the chapel that displayed hundreds of silver charms—arms, legs, automobiles. Each represented either a miracle sought by a supplicant or an expression of gratitude for prayers that had been answered. The image of those charms stayed with me, and became the inspiration for a woman who was desperate to bear a child and made a pilgrimage to a shrine bearing a sterling silver infant that had been fashioned by her jeweler husband.

Food

...for the soul as well as for the body. Many years ago, I was traveling—again in southern Italy. My sister had joined my husband and me and our children, and after doing the usual *turista* things around Naples (Pompeii and Herculaneum, Mt. Vesuvius, the azure grotto of Capri), we escaped the heat and the crowds by taking off for the hills of Campania and a mountain resort that normally had its busy season in the winter with skiers. It was summer, however, and the hotel was nearly empty, so the staff doted upon us in the dining room. They brought out the specialties of the region, and my sister and I closed our eyes and tasted the meals that had nourished us as children at the tables of our mother and grandmothers. Not the tomato-heavy dishes that most Americans associate with Italian food, but the subtle flavors of garlic and parsley mingled with artichokes, lightly breaded and sautéed chicken, broccoli rabe that had been dressed with an aromatic olive oil. That meal transported us to the oilcloth covered table under the grapevines in my grandmother's backyard. To bring you some of that evening, I share with you now my mother's recipe for stuffed artichokes.



Lena's Stuffed Artichokes

(For 4 servings)

4 large artichokes, with stems
2 cloves garlic, peeled and chopped fine
2 tablespoons chopped parsley
1 cup breadcrumbs
½ cup grated Parmeggiano cheese
Olive oil

With kitchen shears, trim the tip of each artichoke leaf straight across.

Slice off the stems of the artichokes close to the base so that artichokes stand upright.

Peel the stems and chop into 1/8" dice.

Mix the chopped stems with the breadcrumbs, parsley, garlic and cheese.

Add olive oil to hold the mixture together.

Spread open the top of the artichoke, forming a cavity, and stuff with the breadcrumb mixture. Add more stuffing between the leaves.

Arrange stuffed artichokes in a heavy pan. Drizzle with olive oil.

Fill the pan with about one inch of water

Cover the pan and bring water to a boil. Reduce heat to a simmer and cook for about 45 minutes, checking to make sure that water has not evaporated (add more if necessary).

Artichokes are done when a leaf can be pulled off easily.

Eat by pulling off one leaf at a time and scraping teeth along the inside of the leaf.

Keep spreading the word!

Dancing on Sunday Afternoons

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