

My Beautiful Unpleasant Thoughts on My Heritage

by Lorraine Nolan

Ici sont relatés les souvenirs de la grandmère et du père de l'auteure.

I've watched my father learn about her, knowing who she was and yet never really meeting her. He's often mentioned little things, finding her asleep on her knees, eyes puffed closed from weeping; her odd horror, her odd love of and for ... her belief, her devotion, her dream. And yet her burden. Forty years of questions can never be answered by a written word, and death has the habit of opening the gate to the question after pulling the answers away ... pushing the answers away....

She saw me in the possibility of my father's soul, I'm sure. She gave everything to make that possibility grow and I am here, my sisters are here; by being, we proclaim. Yet while growing, Dad had a broken mountain, his whole, his everything, always a touch away from being there. How could he understand the hollow in her heart. Her self she extracted, at the risk of her life, was not the whole she was meant to be. Dad loved her, knowing it was there. The love of a child is absolute.... I wonder.

He protected her, as only a child can, from the image horror of the memories on the backside of her lids, as much as he could, until she slept. Through that crystal-cracked humanity I have found nourishment, my feeble soul. Can you imagine leaving your body and soul in the fired word *home* and pull your shell away, fleeing for your existence, for that which you left behind, to find.

Fool, myself. I could not go through executing and recreating myself. I have left that for others to do for me.

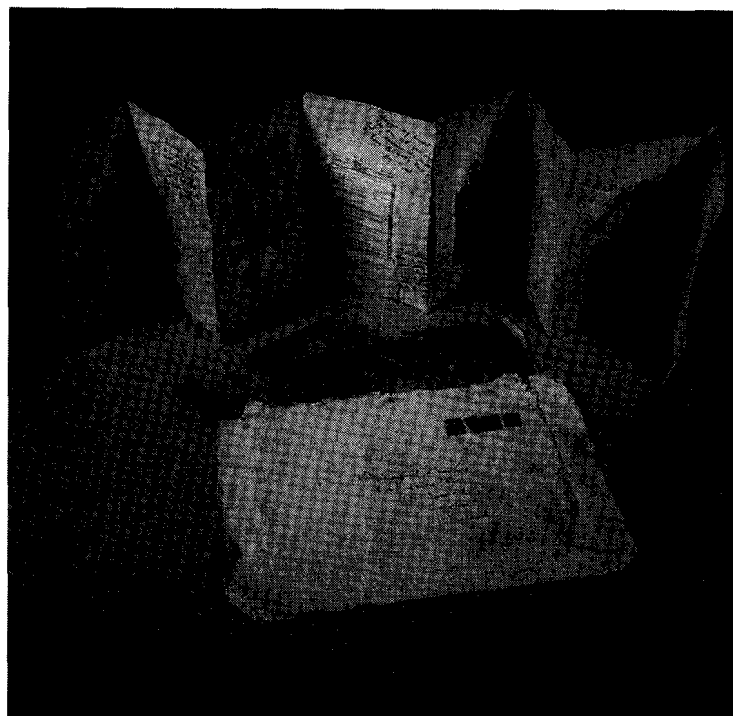
I am now the strength I see in being both Irish and woman, but until I knew the hell buried behind the lids I did not, could not know. I did not appreciate what had been given up for me to be.

I did not see my father, until one night, in Dublin, while he was asleep, eyes puffed from weeping, his odd horror,

his odd love of and for ... his belief, his devotion, his dream, his nightmare. He lost what he loved most, and what's worse, he found what he never had, too late. Is that the Irish curse? The sick sweet irony and the soothing sheets of fate. The curse of desertion and devotion, of lives broken and saved. I never knew my grandmother, but I sense her everyday. She is with me, as much as she is with my history. I did not know I had a grandfather here and in a sense a grandfather there ... or that I had an aunt who wasn't part of my circle ... none-

theless of me. Her curse, her secret, is a blanket upon which I soothe a wearied worried heart which frets for the breaking of my mountain, my father. Irish. What a wonderfully beautiful name.... I shall take that, at least. And carry that name with its history. Proud and beautiful past, despite the cracks on the shoulders of female Kathleen.

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Mary McCann, Lourdes Youth and Community Services Project, "Letters Unfolding," handmade paper/envelope, 71 x 115 cm, 1992. (From Unspoken Truths, Irish Museum of Modern Art, 1996) Photo: John Kellett