

THE IRELAND FUND OF MONACO RESIDENTIAL BURSARIES



The Ireland Fund of Monaco Residential Bursaries were established to enable writers born or living in Ireland to pursue a current project during a one-month residency at the Princess Grace Irish Library in Monaco. We are pleased to present this personal reflection of Tom Phelan, the Fall 2012 Writer-in-Residence, on his experience in Monaco.

About the Author

Tom Phelan was born and reared on a small farm in Mountmellick, County Laois, in the Irish midlands. Phelan had just turned fifty when his first novel, *In the Season of the Daisies*, was accepted for publication. Books Ireland's reviewer later wrote, "The most obvious question posed by a novelistic debut with as much resounding vigour as this is: Where has Mr. Phelan been?"

Since then, Tom Phelan has penned five other novels: *Nailer*, *The Canal Bridge*, *Iscariot*, *Derrycloney*, and the forthcoming *Lies*. He has also written for *Newsday*, the *Irish Echo*, *Independent.ie*, and the journal of the American Irish Historical Society. His first novel was chosen for Barnes and Noble's Discover Great New Writers series, and he is a 2008-2009 Fellow of the Christopher Isherwood Foundation. To learn more, please see www.tomphelan.net.

Monaco Revisited — by Tom Phelan

One night during the summer of 1963 three fellow students and I slept in a lay-by off a busy road somewhere east of Monaco. We were taking the Grand Tour in a yellow Vauxhall, which we'd strategically parked in the lay-by to prevent other vehicles from running over us in our sleeping bags. The Vauxhall's windshield had been shattered by a pebble north of Angoulême, and the nearest place to get a replacement was in Rome. With the aid of a flashlight and a dog-eared copy of Ian Fleming's *For Your Eyes Only* I lowered myself into a fitful sleep.

Nearly five decades later as our plane touched down in Nice airport, I switched off my Kindle, putting Alain Lesage's *Adventures of Gil Blas of Santillane* on hold. We were met at the gate by the Princess Grace Irish Library's administrator, Judith Gantley, bearing a bouquet of fresh flowers for my wife, Patricia. Soon we were whisked away in a luxury sedan, eventually arriving at our apartment in the Adagio Palais Josephine in Beausoleil by way of tiers of narrow roads held together with breathtaking hairpin bends.

All the anxiety associated with arrival in a foreign place was soon allayed by Judith; she showed us where to catch the *Autobus de Monaco* that would take us along the harbor and on to the Rock each morning; she escorted us on our first trip to the Library and pointed out the best places to shop and the

restaurants that would not charge us tourist prices. Even our bus passes, complete with photos, had been processed. On our first solo trip to the Library, we got lost. Don't ask.

In my office at the Library, I was surrounded by first editions of books written by some of the giants of Irish literature. At times as I struggled with a sentence that just would not submit, I could feel the giants looking over my shoulder muttering, What an eegit! But on I plodded, and being free from the everyday distractions of home allowed me to make good progress on *Working for John-Joe*, the memoir I am writing. One of the highlights of my residency was an afternoon spent with the polite and attentive students from the Lycée Albert I. Somehow, their French ears and my Irish accent made a good dancing couple, and we discussed everything from literature to Leinster to leprechauns.

At the PGIL I gave a talk of an evening on "Ireland's Forgotten Heroes"—its World War I soldiers. Afterward, I had the pleasure of meeting the many Ireland Fund supporters who came out for the event.

Patricia and I amassed a trove of memories during our stay in Monaco...Sitting beneath a cobalt sky on a warm September night, having dinner outdoors and listening to a small band of Irish musicians playing the plaintive melody of "The Coulin"...Stepping along the terraces of Beausoleil, studying the old buildings with their tiny flower gardens and the laundry fluttering on the balconies...Reading the poignant memorials to the village's Great War soldiers in the Eglise de Saint-Joseph...Hiking up the Mont des Mules and gazing down at the sparkling blue of the Mediterranean...Visiting the Menton seaside on the feast of Saint-Michel, where a proud brass band led in a flock of folk dancers and a statue of the archangel. "Vive Menton! Vive France!" the crowd called at the end of each somnolent speech. As we sat on a wall and watched, a couple approached, asked if we spoke English—they were from Donegal and Sligo.

At October's end, our Monaco adventure behind us, we arrived home in New York twenty-four hours before Hurricane Sandy came calling. When she departed with our car, heat, hot water, and electricity under her oxtail, I found myself once again reading by flashlight. At least I was not lying on the hard tarmac of a lay-by.