

Casting Call

Posted on Jul 14, Posted by [Lois Lowry](#) Category [Uncategorized](#)

I've been reading a charming mystery set in Wales, and am reminded (I should have remembered this from Dylan Thomas) how locals there are called by their profession, so that the butcher in this novel is James the Meat as opposed to the baker, James the Bread.

It started me thinking about the people in this small rural part of Maine, and those in particular who have become friends since I bought this place 4 years ago. Recently, in griping about the wild turkeys, I mentioned the backhoe artist Dave Bell, whom – in Welsh tradition – I should perhaps have called Dave the Machine. Then there would be Kevin the Stone, an artist with Maine granite, who rebuilt my walls so beautifully. Lucia the Garden, an artist with nature, who brought this place back from scorched, neglected earth into a series of verdant little pieces of paradise. Arthur the Wood, my 70+ year old carpenter who knows just how to rebuild the crumbling parts of a 240-year-old house in ways that respect its age and honor its history.

There is also Daryl the Roof, who has had to survive nature red in tooth and claw, as Shakespeare aptly put it. His only phobia, Daryl says, is snakes; and there was a big one in residence under the old shingles. While he dealt with the snake, he was continuously dive-bombed and scolded by the pair of red-tailed hawks who were raising babies in the peak of my barn and didn't want a human messing around.

I mustn't forget Mark the Iron. Mark is an artist as well, a welder who four years ago had to battle leukemia and the ordeal of a bone marrow transplant. He's fine now. But there was a time, Mark told me, when he was out of the hospital but still recovering, not yet able to go back to work, when he looked around his barn at all the odds and ends stored there—rusting pieces of scrap metal—and began to see things in them. He began to perceive that if he welded that old handlebar to that old pitchfork, or that length of chain to that shovel....well, he might, as Mark puts it, "get something." And so—by instinct and imagination—he has become a sculptor of found art, exhibited now in galleries. I have two of his pieces on the back terrace.

I realize I could go on and on...with the bookstore people, the potter, the plumber (Mike the Pipe, who found a way to activate an abandoned well and water my gardens from it), and so

many others, because a small town is made as much of its people as of its buildings (dilapidated, mostly) and its landscape (spectacular).

I am still working on the writing of a play, which has "Cast of Characters" on page 1, followed by a list. A novel doesn't have that...except for those Russian novels with unpronounceable lineages and family trees at the beginning....and so the reader meets them one by one (and so, sometimes, does the writer, as unplanned characters appear out of nowhere and want to be included).

I guess real life, and its cast, works the same way.

Tags: Untagged