

# ABOUT ME

## The Basics

I am an Irishman conceived in Paris by Irish parents, born in Munich, taken from Ireland at age 2, educated in the US and have lived or traveled over most of the world. I am a true child of the Irish Diaspora and have now returned home to live permanently in Ireland.

Some prodigies are late bloomers. I hit my stride as an artist in my late fifties and now, at sixty-eight, I am creating more than I did in my fertile twenties and I no longer have time for modesty or coy self-deprecation. Nor am I a fabulist. The following random list is simply a sample list of facts that inform the art that I now create in the studio and at my desk.

- - Deck hand on a Norwegian freighter along the West African coast.
- - Taught American Lit. at the University of La Laguna, Tenerife, Spain.
- - Knew and turned on with Allen Ginsberg.
- - Independent bookseller with over 500 titles of poetry and small presses.
- - Served tea and loaned money to Joseph Brodsky in the middle of the night, early in his exile from Russia.
- - Rare books and manuscripts librarian for fourteen years.
- - Buddhist chaplain at Syracuse University, Tully Hill Treatment Center, Sheppard Pratt Rehab (Baltimore) and Johns Hopkins Hospital.
- - Curator of Albert Schweitzer, Industrial Design, Continuing Education (world's largest collection) and Harlem Renaissance archives at Syracuse University.
- - Popular and esteemed lecturer on the history of ideas through the history of books, using everything from cuneiform tablets to early illuminated manuscripts, to Galileo's Dialogues and modern first editions and artist's books for hands-on experiential learning.
- - An expert in printing techniques, typography, and the history of the applied science of human information storage and retrieval.
- - As member of the Board of Directors of the Inter-Religious Council of Central New York, worked with Iroquois Elders and local clergy to stop violence around land claims issues.
- - Climbed the highest mountain in Spain.
- - Consultant for UNESCO.
- - Experienced wilderness canoeist.
- - Co-creator of ALADIN (Adult Learning and Documentation Information Network) an online database for the third world that is still running after nearly twenty years.
- - Studied with pioneers of Rinzai Zen in the West.
- - Ordained a Zen Buddhist monk in 1994, aged 47.
- - Member of a rock band (singer/song-writer), The Sea of Trees, that received a contract from UNI Records.

- - My art was called “edgy” and “beautiful” by Doreen Bolger, Director of the Baltimore Museum of Art, home of the great Cone Collection of Matisse.
- - Juried a major traveling exhibition on “Art and Addiction” with C. Everett Koop, former Surgeon General of the US.

**Credentials:** BA, Hamilton College; MLS, Syracuse University.

- *Independent* bookseller and teacher.
- Special Collections Librarian (rare books and manuscripts) Syracuse University, full Librarian rank, equivalent to full professorship.
- *Ordained* Rinzai Zen Buddhist priest, 1994, by Venerable Roko Shinge Roshi, Abbot, Zen Center of Syracuse Hoen-ji, and trained under the Venerable Eido T. Shimano Roshi, then Abbot, Dai Bosatsu Zendo Kongo-ji.
- *Unconventional* artist with work in regional galleries and private collections.
- *Author* of eleven books.

## **As An Artist**

I have always painted and maintained a studio. Though my father started his career as a grocer, I grew up with art. My grandfather was Peter Keenan, an Irish artist and surrealist (1930s and '40s). I was often in his studio. When I asked him once (at about age 4) why he painted, he said, “Art is a way to talk to God.” He was not a conventionally religious man and I have always taken that, I now see, from a Buddhist perspective, one that has informed all my work: a way to utter the *really* real. I’ve studied under James Penny, Amy Bucholz and others. I provided art for covers and/or illustrations for the following of my published books: *Where My Feet Meet My Footsteps*, *Herbal*, *St. Nadie In Winter* and, most recently, *If Our Lives Be Spared*, as well as a new series of books through my website: one series involving poems meditating on Buddhist texts from a postmodern skeptical perspective, and the other the first three in a series of illustrated children’s books I have also written. My newly completed novel, *Master of Nothing*, will be an e-book with over 20 illustrations. In the past couple of years I have received commissions and placed work in several private collections. I have been given, by rare invitation, a mini-website on MutualArt.com, the international art information service affecting 400,000 art collectors, curators, and other arts professionals. I am now a member of the Lavit Gallery in Cork City and part of the Mizen Artists Group in West Cork, represented by the Blue House Gallery in Schull.

## **Books and Writing**

When I was sixteen I read these words by the young James Joyce: “Welcome, O Life! I go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated consciousness of my race.” Regardless of its youthful romanticism, it has remained with me and I have been writing ever since. I was an independent bookseller, specializing in small presses and new writing. I trained as a rare books and manuscripts librarian. Books have always been with me. I have had poems in many little magazines but my first book wasn’t published until 1979 -- a daybook of poems based on daily readings in the *I Ching*, called *Cambios*, a book of change, chance, and the river of moments that make up our lives. Since then

there have been ten more. See the *Writer* section of my website for details. I have given many readings and workshops over the years. Most successfully, while I was a librarian, I delivered annually 70 detailed two to three hour lectures or seminars on books and the book arts and the history of ideas through the history of the book as well as 6 to 10 public presentations and readings annually in and outside of Syracuse University. These were in-depth lectures, using original rare editions and documents from Special Collections (from cuneiform tablets to illuminated manuscripts and early printed books to modern artist's books) on a wide range of subjects in seminars for undergraduate, graduate, faculty and adult groups: subjects including the history of science; the history and art of books; 17th, 18th, 19th and 20th century English, American and French literature; geography; biology; religious history; William Blake (with the original *Songs of Innocence*; William Morris; Rudyard Kipling; Lewis Carroll; Albert Schweitzer; modern publishing; ethnicity; history of philosophy, and more; not mere library lectures on materials use and research skills, but an annual part of the regular curriculum for faculty in all these disciplines to bring a depth and actuality to their subjects. This experience provided skills I needed for my research for *If Our Lives Be Spared*, a history published by an important academic press, but radical in its novelistic approach and in its Buddhist perspective.

But most of my writing has been poetry and, as Thomas Merton has written, poetry is a door to that place about which nothing can be said. My recent efforts have been a series of poems and paintings turned into a chapbook called *The Buji Variations*, the closing section of my just finished novel, *Master of Nothing*, which ends in Ireland, my home; the first three of a series of illustrated children's books called *Tom the Hat and the Yuletide Sparrow*, and *Tom the Hat and the Blue Tomatoes* and *Tom the Hat and the Big Bad Wolf*; and I have completed a new illustrated version of *The Ten Oxherding Pictures*, which puts aside the traditional child-like woodcuts and verses and uses my own paintings and poetry in a radical modern approach to a traditional subject. Both the *Buji Variations* and the *Ten Oxherding Pictures* have been highly praised by leaders in the Zen community.

## **Practice As A Monk**

I found a home in Buddhism. When I asked to be ordained I was married with a necessary day job and two growing children. I had to split my training between the monastery Dai Bosatsu Zendo Kongo-ji and the Zen Center of Syracuse Hoen-ji, a largely lay teaching practice. I was worked hard in my training.

Briefly-- five years president of the Board of Trustees of the Zen Center of Syracuse.

- Later, head monk and master of ritual.
- Buddhist chaplain for Hendricks Chapel at Syracuse University.
- Member Board of Trustees of the Inter-Religious Council of Central New York and - Secretary to their Executive Committee. Especially important to me was my service on the Native American Task Force For Peace which developed Peace Dialogue Circles to mitigate the violence in Native American land claims in the region.
- Pastoral Care Buddhist chaplain at area hospitals and meditation chaplain at Tully Hill Treatment Center, a residential substance abuse rehab.

- Buddhist chaplain at Johns Hopkins Hospital (particularly in the oncology unit in aid of the desperate and the dying) in Baltimore and meditation chaplain at Sheppard-Pratt's "Partners In Recovery" outpatient rehab in Towson, Maryland, US.
- In Ireland I teach meditation and have perform wedding services.

My art and my writing are one with my Zen practice. There is a Japanese term *unsui* that is used for a monk in training. It means "cloud-water", that is, homeless, trackless, powerless, no beginning or end. I will always be an *unsui*.

(from *Cambios*)

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To be active or passive  
is never by design.  
The day seems perfectly joined,  
future tense beginning  
before the present has been exhausted.  
We are entangled by surprise.  
It is time to abandon the effort.  
It is not true that divinity befell us;  
nothing happened, nothing at all.  
There was a wind and its absence.  
Experience, like the mark of nations,  
evokes no change.  
The decision of days vanishes  
in a swarm of numbers and dust.  
There was just a wind  
and its just absence.

Ta Chuang (power of the great)



## **CONTACT INFORMATION**

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