



In Garrison, N.Y.: Gwendolyn Bounds talked with pub owner John Guinan and others for her memoir.  
By Todd Plitt, USA TODAY

### **One 'Little Chapel' beer changed author's life**

By Bob Minzesheimer, USA TODAY

GARRISON, N.Y. — The line to buy books and have the author sign them was longer than the line to buy beer, perhaps the ultimate literary compliment at an Irish pub.

The place is Guinan's, and Jim Guinan, the 79-year-old proprietor, lives upstairs. It's a hole-in-the-wall pub and general store, nestled between the Hudson River and the commuter railroad tracks 50 miles north of Manhattan.

The author is Gwendolyn (Wendy) Bounds, a 33-year-old reporter for *The Wall Street Journal*, by way of North Carolina.

The book is *Little Chapel on the River* (Morrow, \$23.95), a memoir about how one beer changed her life and a history of the place and the family who changed it.

The title comes from one of the pub's regulars who calls it his "riverside chapel," which Bounds finds fitting: "Coming to Guinan's was something of a religion, with its own customs, community and rites of passage. There was even a pastor of sorts — Jim — who on a good night could tell a story that might run as long as a Sunday sermon."

The book was published last week. On Saturday, the Guinans, all three generations who work there, and their customers staged the first annual Guinan Day celebration, a kind of St. Patrick's Day in July. A local bookstore sold 190 copies of the book, many to people who aren't even mentioned in it.

It's a story triggered by 9/11. Bounds was then living in a high-rise across the street from her office, within the shadows of the World Trade Center. As she puts it: "We were among the lucky ones, the ones only next to the towers and not inside them."

Her apartment and office were damaged. Three weeks later, she was still looking for a place to live in Manhattan when she visited friends with a home near Garrison.

They insisted on stopping for a beer at Guinan's.

The one beer led to others and a long, leisurely history lesson taught by Guinan, an Irish immigrant who has lived above the pub since 1959.

Ten days later, Bounds moved to Garrison and began a love affair with the pub, "the kind of place you don't find around much anymore, a spot where people wander in once and return for a lifetime." Six months later, she began to think about writing a book.

She had gotten to know Jim's children, Margaret, a police detective, and John, an auto worker turned arborist, who were basically running Guinan's for their father, who has diabetes. At work, Bounds recalls, "Enron was imploding, greed seemed to be overtaking corporate America, and then back here in Garrison, here were these two children basically giving up their personal lives to save their parents' legacy and keep their Dad in his home." (Their mother, Peg, died in 1988.)

"And for nothing. No money, no stock options, no glory, no promotions, nothing but love for and duty to their father. I wasn't sure I knew anyone who would do that. I wasn't sure that in their shoes, I would do the same thing for my own parents whom I loved very much."

At the same time, Bounds was writing to herself about flashbacks of her grandfather and the family's fishing camp in North Carolina.

Later, she realized, Guinan's was triggering those memories: "It reminded me so much of those days on North Carolina' rural coast, the smells, the neighbor's dogs that came to your door, a storm approaching on the water."

She took a three-month leave from her job to help at Guinan's and "figure out if there was even a story there and how it might be told."

She decided the book should "feel like the pace inside a bar where people are coming and going." Its stories are told by the Guinans and their colorful customers.

She also deals with Guinan's economic struggles. Bounds, who writes a column on small business, says the "Guinans of the world are up against a new breed of retail giant that fuels its profits from economies of scale, standardization and mass replication.

"But collectively, spots like Guinan's help hold together local economies. ... And they give towns character, which makes them more desirable places to live. ... I'm a tax-paying resident of Garrison because of Guinan's."

John Guinan hopes to quit his job trimming trees and take over for his father. He calls the book and his friendship with Bounds a "blessing," and hopes the book will attract a few customers "without overwhelming us."

One literary tourist already has arrived, book in hand.

"He asked, 'Is this the place?' " John Guinan says. " 'This is it,' we said. We told him the author wasn't here, but my dad and I signed his book. He had a beer and seemed pleased."

## **Revealing moment with Guinan**

Author Wendy Bounds describes Guinan's pub and store as an extension of the Guinans' home, where "you did not judge, name-call or make anyone feel unwelcome."

Bounds is gay, which is mentioned in her book, although it's not a major theme.

She notes that everyone knew about her girlfriend, Kathryn, except Jim Guinan, who assumed Kathryn was Bounds' sister.

Finally, Bounds decided to tell him, wondering, "What if he doesn't like me anymore?"

He replied, "She's not? Oh, I thought she was."

After a moment of hesitation, a dawning came across his face, and he said, "Well, she's a nice girl."

"Yes, she is," Bounds replied. And that was the end of it.

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