

Generations

after Jane Wong's *Tenants*

I need to intuit new gods. Kids in the public schools
study Greek myths in 6th grade. We do not. Catholic education.

My mother, in the 50s & 60s, makes fruit Jello for my aunt, Sister Mary Jude
who, when she visits, likes Jello calls eating artichokes a waste of food.

Will the yellow box of Halloween candy arrive from our great aunt Lenore
in Detroit? Or will she & her beloved Don Wolfe visit in person?

Lenore and Don met in their twenties, but their families forbade a marriage ,
He – Catholic, she – Protestant. He moves away, back years later

writes a note to the school where she teaches “Are you my lost Lenore?”
She calls him, “Don, let’s get married on Saturday.”

Now in their sixties, they build their own home
a tiled fireplace states *To Thine own Self be True.*

Mom makes macaroni and cheese most Fridays, fish less frequently.
Children get a glass of wine at Christmas / Easter turkey or lamb & mint jelly.

No mention ever made of generations before than their grandparents
no tales from across the sea. No potato famine, no typhoid ships,
no starvation walks from Roscommon to Cork to board a ship.

Mom speaks of her grandparents in Chess Springs, PA; they farm.
Irish immigrants left New York for dangerous work on the railroad;

her family leaves railroad life for something better
she never says *More like what they left in County Cork.*

Dinner conversations. Mom & Dad rehashing Saturday bridge games on Sunday.
we girls listen unless involved asked how we enjoyed sled riding
or asked to address a question about a school grade (all A’s expected).

We may bring books to breakfast and lunch: dinner is for family talk.

I remember saying, "Please pass the milk," and Mom joking that her friends knew our house by the number of milk bottles on the porch

Mom sang lullabies for years we all loved the songs the span of baby ages
eight years from oldest to youngest. Even as teenagers, we still requested:

"Sing *East Side /West Side*" or *Tura Lura Lura* or *Winken, Blinken and Nod*.
Please." Mom always complied.

Shouting was only girl to girl, each sure she was right. Or tears when reading
Little Women. Another sister might hug the crying one. Adults were different.
No kissing seen, few arguments. That's for the bedroom.

Grampa, my mother's father, outlives two wives, dies when I'm nine.
Two other grandparents die before my parents' marry; and Mary McDermott Wolfe
dies when I'm six months old.

In 1961, I leave Our Mother of Sorrows Elementary. Enter Westmont Hilltop
where only teachers speak to me. At home I warble do homework and play

board games, pinochle, jacks and jump-rope with my three sisters.
My parents' home has wallpaper, a piano and sisters who bond

but *everything* should be a secret outside the family: uncles (secret drinkers)
or divorces (not discussed), two uncles married in then deserted my aunts.

Not 'til college do I flower go tripping discover parallel mysteries
my Irish heritage mysticism and synchronicity land held in common in the West
where Irish is the first language the Gaeltacht – I embrace all faiths.

Today, I take a spirit-bow aim at inhibitions / secrets
I tell forbidden family stories
I discover other gods.