

WAVES OF INSPIRATION

Jersey Shore Author Jill Ocone's Debut Novel, *Enduring the Waves*

by Laura Kerwin

Living in such close proximity to the coast, Jersey Shore locals become in tune with the signs of the changing seasons.

And writer Jill Ocone is no exception.

To Jill, winter at the Shore reveals itself in the shiny black wetsuits of diehard surfers, bobbing like seals in the freezing surf. When spring's warm breezes begin to kiss the shore, Jill walks the beach, looking for signs of summer's harbingers: migrating shorebirds, whose dances in the shorebreak foreshadow the swimmers to come.

After Memorial Day rolls around, however, Jill holds her breath; looking for signs that the crowded, blistering summer is nearing its end so she can finally exhale.

"Fall at the Shore is well worth the wait," Jill remarks. "Besides the picture-perfect weather and relaxed pace, something very magical happens: the annual migration of monarch butterflies." For Jill, these orange-and-black cloaked travelers bring with them more than just their beauty; they are, in fact, "signs."

Signs: Jill is always on the lookout for the universe's subtle hints to help guide her life and her writing. Sometimes they appear in nature.

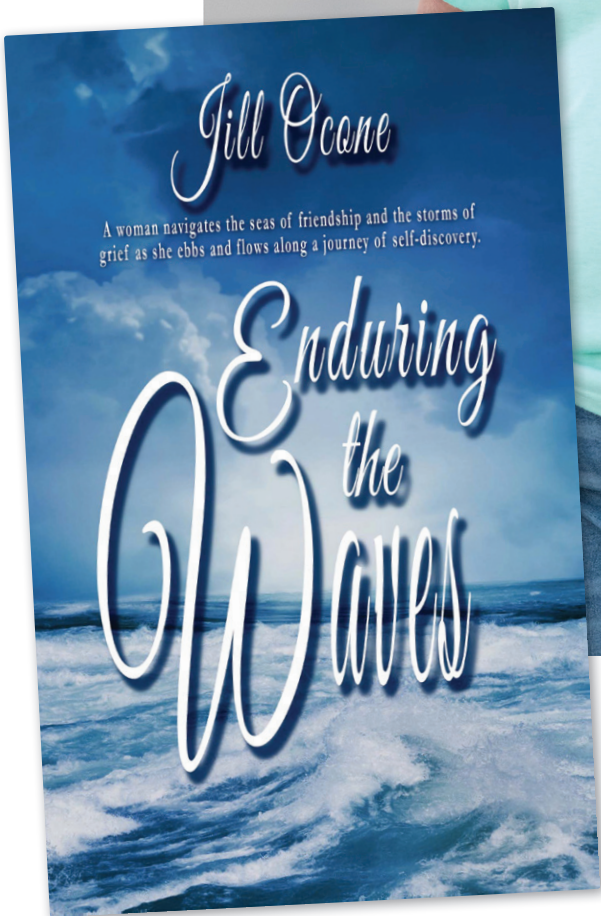
Other times, they can appear to her in a dream, a song, or an address. Most recently, a trail of signs led Jill on the most important journey in her life: the path to pen her debut fiction novel, *Enduring the Waves*.

If you are a regular reader of this magazine, you may recognize the name Jill Ocone as one of the publication's most prolific staff writers. Jill applies this gift to her debut, expertly expressing how her love of the sea transcends time and

location. *Enduring the Waves* takes readers from the seaside swells of Point Pleasant to the tranquil tides of Dublin, following the main character, Kelly Lynch, on her journey of self-discovery.

I sat down recently with Jill at her "happy place," the Manasquan Inlet, to find out more about *Enduring the Waves* and her passion for writing. Suddenly, a monarch butterfly alights on our bench.

continued on page 30



Author Jill Ocone and her debut novel, *Enduring the Waves* (Wild Rose Press).

Her blue eyes twinkle. “A sign,” she smiles.

I looked at her quizzically. The butterfly’s arrival had me reconsidering my plan: scrapping my interview notes, I began by asking Jill one simple question:

What do you think this butterfly is telling us right now?

Butterflies make cameo appearances throughout *Enduring the Waves*. They are symbols of transformation and positive change, and figure prominently in the main character’s journey. As a believer in signs, I don’t think it landing here was a coincidence at all!

You say the inspiration to write this novel came to you in a dream. What was this dream, and what signs appeared to you?

One night in late 2015, I was jolted awake after dreaming about an old woman who said to me, “Once you write CHAPTER ONE, everything will fall into place.” There was a symbol in my dream, one I had never seen before, and I scribbled a very rough replica of it. Turns out it was a Triskele/Triskelion. Its three spirals look like waves, which also influenced the title, *Enduring the Waves*. It is an ancient Celtic symbol that represents strength and progress and the ability to move forward in life, just

like Kelly Lynch does in the book.

Both the symbol and the words “Chapter One” would mysteriously appear in my life countless times from that point forward. The universe used many additional signs to guide me to three more jaunts to Dublin in the summers of 2016, 2017, and 2018. I had no idea what the hell I was doing there, but trusted I was being led to my purpose.

How did “Chapter One” evolve into *Enduring the Waves*?

I first titled my manuscript *Finding Shannon* then changed it to *Chapter One - A Novel*. The Wild Rose Press offered me a traditional publishing contract in February 2023, and after consulting with my editorial team, we agreed to change its title. The trials the main character, Kelly Lynch, endures make *Enduring the Waves* the perfect title for her compelling story. Kelly’s checkered past and unfulfilling status quo present her with many difficult challenges and truths she tries to escape. Once she stops running and, instead, rides out life’s small currents and violent breakers, she emerges awakened and finds her place in the world.

Let’s talk a little more about the setting of your book: your home base, the Jersey Shore, and Dublin. How did your love of these waterside places influence your writing?

I am a lifelong resident of the Jersey Shore and my love of the Manasquan Inlet definitely influenced the settings readers will encounter in the book. Same with Dublin, Ireland. I traveled there four times, and while I fictionalized the Jersey Shore locations in the novel, all the locations I included from Dublin are real and based upon my observations and experiences.



In 2016, author Jill Ocone visited the James Joyce Tower and Museum in Dublin, which ultimately inspired her to write the novel. Joyce spent six nights here in 1904, and the opening scenes of his 1922 novel Ulysses take place here (the Martello tower). The tower is a place of pilgrimage for Joyce enthusiasts.



A Triskele or Triskelion, an ancient Celtic symbol that represents strength and progress and the ability to move forward in life. It appeared to Jill in a dream and sent her on a quest to write her novel.

Synchronicity plays a huge role in your novel. Kelly Lynch interprets “signs” that lead her on a path of self-discovery. As a believer in the universe’s power to converse with you, can you explain the importance of this in *Enduring the Waves*?

Eight months after I lost a treasured friend, I traveled to Dublin. On three separate occasions, I swear I saw her face in the crowd (twice on Grafton Street and once near Trinity College). She was an avid James Joyce aficionado but had never been to Ireland despite being of Irish descent. Kelly Lynch encounters something similar in *Enduring the Waves* with signs that lead her to Dublin, which is where she finally realizes her true calling.

How did Ireland’s *Native Son*, James Joyce, influence your novel?

It’s funny, because before this journey, I didn’t care much for him other than teaching one of his short stories in my classroom. However, in honor of my treasured friend, I made a pilgrimage of sorts to Dublin, visiting the places he lived and frequented. In 2016, I planned to visit the James Joyce Centre and the James Joyce Tower and Museum, but I stumbled into innumerable additional for-

tuitous experiences and fell in love with Dublin more and more with each visit. Walking in his footsteps, literally, when I was in Dublin led me to discover so many things about myself and awaken my true being. Back home again, I then read *Ulysses*, *Dubliners*, and *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* with renewed interest and, similar to Kelly, learned more about myself as a result.

Did anyone in your life inspire *Enduring the Wave’s* main characters, Kelly Lynch and Shannon Moran?

While there are some very subtle similarities between Kelly Lynch and me, she is a product of my imagination. The same with Shannon Moran, who, as I mentioned, was loosely inspired by a treasured friend who left this world far too soon. *Enduring the Waves* is dedicated to this treasured friend and colleague, Tara Gardner (1974-2013) and to my former student and military hero, Nicholas Ott (1988-2011). Both Tara and Nick were incredible people and left an indelible imprint on my life, and I firmly believe they were behind many of the signs from the universe I experienced and still encounter to this day.

Can you tell me a little bit more about Kelly Lynch? If you could cast a movie adaptation, who would you pick to play her in the movie and why?

Kelly is complex yet simple, authentic, and perfectly flawed. By overcoming many challenges, she accepts what is and endures. Her new lenses of authenticity allow her to see the present moment not as ordinary but extraordinary and guide her to her true purpose. Kaley Cuoco’s quirky authenticity is absolutely perfect for an on-screen adaptation of Kelly Lynch.

What is your favorite line from your book?

I have several favorite lines, but the one that resonates the most with me is, “Real life is messy. The epiphanies we experience, when we’re suddenly hit in the face with an iron frying pan, especially the ones that hurt, the ones that dishearten and forever change us, that’s real life.” We’ve all been there, expecting life to go in one direction, then suddenly something happens and makes us do an about-face onto an unknown, unwanted, and untraveled route. The point is to keep on going, endure the challenges, and emerge on the other side wiser and stronger.

What did you learn when writing this book? What surprised you the most?

I learned to never give up on my dream. The novel that exists today is so different from the first version I completed in 2018. With every batch of rejections I received from agents and publishers came revision, and I amassed over 250 rejections in total. The last query I vowed ever to send for *Enduring the Waves* was the one that, to my surprise, landed me a traditional publishing contract.

Besides James Joyce, are there any other writers from whom you draw inspiration?

Yes. My writing influences also include Carrie Fisher, Lily King, Virginia Woolf, and Taylor Jenkins

continued on page 32

Reid. And I've read Dave Grohl's memoir *The Storyteller* countless times.

Read-alike time: If you love _____, you would love Jill Ocone! *Enduring the Waves* is a great fit for fans of which authors?

I think it's good for all types of readers, especially ones who like character-driven books with a side of adventure as well as books about the Shore and Ireland. But regarding authors, I think people who enjoy Virginia Woolf, Colm Toibin, and Lily King should definitely pick it up!

You are a journalism teacher and yearbook advisor at Manchester High School. You are also active both in writing for *Jersey Shore Magazine* and contributing stories and poems to anthologies. On top of this, you have a busy family life that includes a husband and many nieces and nephews. My question to you is: How on earth did you find the time to write this novel?

I get to school very early and write for about forty-five minutes each morning before I prepare for my daily lessons. My mind is sharper in the morning and early afternoon hours, and on weekends, I'll sometimes lose myself in writing for hours.

When did you first realize that you wanted to become a writer?

I "wrote" a book in second grade called "Greta and the Lemonade" that I tried to hock for twenty-five cents a copy to my classmates. My teacher, Mrs. Wilson, got wind of my scheme, and she graciously bought one and read it to the class.

What advice would you give to your younger self?

Like many others, I suffered from imposter syndrome, still do at times, and thought my writing was not "good" for far too long. I would encourage my younger self to stand up to the fear that kept my fingers from typing or my pen from flowing and let the words out. I would wholeheartedly believe in myself a lot earlier because I am, indeed, a writer.

What is your favorite part of being a writer?

Painting with words. It is what makes me come alive. The colors of my soul and the textures of my heart combine with my mind's words to create unique masterpieces on the blank pages that are my canvases.

Share some advice for aspiring authors.

There's an old adage that says you cannot edit a blank page. Writers write. That's what they do. Write even the simplest of sentences, scribble them if you have to, without worrying about form, continuity, grammar, or repetition. You can fix all of that when you edit, but if the words don't exist, you have nothing to edit. And don't beat yourself up, either, if you can't write every day. Just write when writing serves your "right now" self, and the rest will take care of itself.

Is there anything you would like people to take away from your novel?

I hope readers find a kernel of inspiration within the novel's pages and connect with Kelly's story. With so many books to choose from, I am very grateful for those who read *Enduring the Waves*.

What are you working on now?

I have two half-written novels that I hope to complete within the next year, and I just finished a non-fiction

book about a local Jersey Shore subject close to my heart...stay tuned for that one!

Finally: What's next for Jill Ocone?

I plan to continue writing and providing editorial content for *Jersey Shore Magazine* and *Jersey Shore Publications*, and I am guest editor for an upcoming poetry anthology titled *About Time* that will be published by Red Penguin books in 2024. After I retire from teaching, I hope to transition into the role of a full-time author/writer. But most importantly, I want to continue seeing new places and making memories with my two nieces and three nephews, who are the absolute light of my life. Each makes me a better person, and collectively, they've taught me the importance of LIVING.

As we are wrapping up our chat, Jill jumps up. "Look!" she points. Squinting, I read the name of a fishing vessel passing by us in the inlet: the *Shannon Rose*. And now I am convinced, too: there are no coincidences. ♦

Editor's Note: Enduring the Waves is available for pre-order on Amazon.com, BN.com, and Apple Books. Print and eBook versions will be available for purchase on November 20, 2023. Follow Jill Ocone at her website: JillOcone.com or on Linktree: linktr.ee/jillocone; as well as on Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter.

***Enduring the Waves* from the back cover...**

As Waterville High School's newest English teacher, Kelly Lynch befriends fellow educator and James Joyce enthusiast Shannon Moran. While Kelly grapples with deep scars from her past, she struggles to balance her active life as a teacher and her stagnant marriage to shiftless alcoholic Wayne Coopersmith. Shannon's encouragement resurrects Kelly's passion for writing, while Kelly inspires Shannon to pursue her lifelong dream of studying in Dublin, Ireland.

After two devastating events fracture Kelly's life, she searches for meaning in her grief by following a trail of mysterious clues that guide her from the New Jersey shore to Dublin. Sparks ignite her long-dormant creativity and a raging inferno in her heart while on the Emerald Isle as two unsuspecting Dubliners combine forces to hearten Kelly's awakening. She returns home to the Jersey Shore having endured the waves spurred by her past, present, and future and ready to pursue her true calling.

