

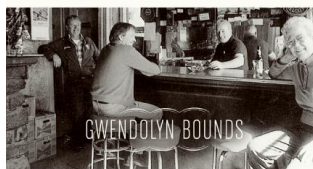


## Little Chapel on the River

By Gwendolyn Bounds  
ISBN: 9780060564070

### Introduction

Gwendolyn Bounds subtitles her story of self-transformation *A Pub, A Town, and the Search for What Matters Most*, and it is her personal discovery of what matters that makes this book reach readers' hearts. It's also the story of an undeniably special place and some special people, and the depth of human decency in challenging times.



Like so many others, Bounds's life was utterly and irrevocably changed on the morning of September 11, 2001. She was a successful New Yorker, writing for the *Wall Street Journal* and living across the street from the World Trade Center. Temporarily homeless, she began a journey that led her to Guinan's, a tiny bar in a general store in Garrison, New York, where old world values were still very much alive. Bounds finds herself more and more involved with the daily ebb and flow of the Irish family who runs the place, and is fully accepted by them in a way that offers her healing, roots, and a return

to an older and simpler version of home life. Bounds wants very much to help them keep the bar alive, against all odds, and so will any reader.

*Little Chapel On the River* is a story, that asks questions about the power of human decency and goodness, and gives reason upon reason for one to hope that such places as Guinan's will never completely disappear from the back roads of this country. Deeply moving, sad, and often hilariously funny, this is a tribute to kindness and bravery.

### Questions for Discussion

1. Bounds includes in the narrative memories of her own childhood and especially of her grandfather. Did you find this an effective technique? What is the connection between the past and the present for her?
2. After recounting her experience on September 11th, Bounds includes the first memory of her grandfather. What is it about such a huge crisis that might make her return to that memory?
3. Guinan's seems to be very much a man's world. How do the women there find ways to fit in? What does Bounds change about herself in order to be accepted there?
4. What do you think are some of the things that cause Bounds to fall in love with this little bar?
5. Even though the Guinan's are so quintessentially Irish, is this a particularly American story? Why or why not?
6. Bounds gets her title for the book from Jim Donnery, who explains that while some people call this a bar, he calls it his "riverside chapel." He goes on to say that he got this idea from a song called "Holy Ground," an Irish song about sailors homesick for a pub and their girlfriends. (Page 51) In what ways is Guinan's comparable to a chapel?
7. On page 55 Bounds writes, "At 8:30 P.M. I can't understand where the hours have gone. Later, I will come to believe that this place steals time, makes it impossible to be anywhere else punctually, because of some magic grip it holds over those inside." What are some of the elements of that magic grip?
8. What are some of your feelings about the Guinan family? In what ways are they different from other families, or the same?
9. How would you define the concept of human decency? In what ways does this book represent that idea?
10. Have you known places similar to Guinan's in your own life?

### About the Author

Gwendolyn Bounds is a columnist for the *Wall Street Journal*, where she has worked since 1993. A native of North Carolina, she now lives in New York's Hudson River Valley.