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The Secret's Out -  
Maureen Cashin Bolog & Actor's Craft

By D. Meagher

I was bit by the acting bug at a young age. It didn't matter if the actors were on television, on the big screen or onstage. I was enthralled with it all.

The love of acting in all its forms has never left me. And while I didn't pursue that path for my adult life, with the exception of involving myself in community theatre productions; it's refreshing to find someone who inspires and encourages people like me, those who have the passion, but need the encouragement to do something about that passion; whether it's to enhance skills already developed, to hone those skills or to give dreams the wings they need.

Maureen Cashin Bolog is such a person.

From the moment I met her, I felt her sincerity. She cared about me, not just as another student of her Acting Technique Class, but as a person. As the weeks unfolded, I learned a lot; about myself and about acting. Talking with her more in depth this past week; delving into her past, I find myself wanting to learn more from this amazingly gifted and faith-motivated woman.

Her list of credentials has increased since she portrayed a messenger in an elementary school play about Christopher Columbus and it's impressive.

Bolog has an M.A. in TV/Film from Northwestern University and a B.A. in Theater from Columbia College; she's trained in Los Angeles with "A-List" acting coaches including: Howard Fine, (Entertainment Tonight called him the #1 acting coach to the stars), Margie Haber (one of the top audition technique coaches in the country), Lawrence Parke, (Hollywood's foremost career maker/acting coaches guru), and Ivana Chubbuck (the top acting coach in Los Angeles – Halle Berry thanked her when she got her Oscar).

If that's not admirable enough, Bolog has also coached actors and non-actors for video, film and stage and has acted, directed and produced plays, videos and events-working in Los Angeles, Chicago and in Southeast Wisconsin; and the amazing thing is, she does it all without ego.

In 1992, years before Actor's Craft was started, Bolog became involved with the Irish American Heritage Center, (IAHC) Chicago. While she was producing a promotional video for IAHC in 1999, Academy of Irish Music teacher, Noel Rice, suggested to Bolog that IAHC start a Saturday morning Irish School for children. As she does so often, Bolog, who believes that 90% of life is just showing up for it, showed up for this unique experience.

She says with a flash of her Irish smile, "I accidentally started the first Irish school in the U.S. and I didn't know anything about teaching kids. There were Irish festivals, studies and academics, college lectures and opportunities for adults, but the Irish had never had an ongoing, ethnic class for kids on Saturday. Went looking for them, but couldn't find them."

(Think Greek school as depicted in *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*, only Irish.)

The IAHC housed their organization within an old renovated school. Bolog put together an Education Committee. They were given two neglected classrooms for the new program's purpose and worked hard to make the environment a safe one. When all was readied, she says, "We started the Irish

School for 6-11 year olds, and brought in a teacher/facilitator for the two classrooms. Their job was to make the information of the visiting educators, artists and craftsmen age-appropriate.”

For a good two hours each Saturday, there was an emphasis on fun, an opportunity to learn about Irish history, customs, literature, art, music and language. Driving these vital programs were drama, storytelling, arts, crafts, games and other activities. The combination of the first three, six-week sessions was a huge success.

“I put it together like I would produce a play or video. It was a really beautiful program,” Bolog says. “The second year we developed the Irish Arts Club for 12-14 year olds, which was project-based. Their first project was a video on the potato famine. They wrote the script, directed, acted, taped and edited it. *Potatoes Gone Bad*,” she says with a chuckle, “won first place for best narrative in the Chicago Instructional Technical Foundation’s (CITF) Youth Film and Video Festival. They even had an Oscar award winning-like evening for the kids at the Chicago Cultural Center. The award is still on display at the IAHC.”

Each subsequent year more was added to the program.

“Parents wanted more Irish language, so we added a separate Irish Language class our third year. In our fourth year, Irish Teen Theatre emerged. It was a labor of love!” Bolog says.

Being a woman who knows how to make things happen, yet finding herself nearing her limit as her growing family, three children under 5 years old, moved to Wisconsin, Bolog decided to step down from Irish school. In her final year, Maeve Callan came onboard and they became co-directors of the program. When they met, Bolog says, “We took to each other like a house on fire.”

“Irish School gave me the confidence I needed to start Actor’s Craft in March 2005,” Bolog says.

Bolog is passionate about investing in the individuals who take her classes, both adults and children. She isn’t just interested in teaching people how to act.

“You have to be careful or you can teach the natural ability right out of a child,” she says, “teaching them not to be real people. They end up stiff. Children have a natural sense of play and make-believe and we have to tap into that and keep that alive in their acting.” The same can be said for adults.

Bolog has studied and gained from Hollywood’s finest acting coaches and she is the only acting coach in the area to teach the award-winning Chubbuck Technique. She explains, “Chubbuck teaches us to win our objective; to build upon those techniques used in the past and use emotions not as an end result, but as a way to empower a goal.”

In 2005 Bolog discovered Chubbuck when searching for a text book for her adult students to read. “I loved *The Power of the Actor*. It was an easy yet passionate read.”

She took that affinity towards Chubbuck’s methods and in 2007, went to California to study with Chubbuck personally. A bit intimidated at first, Bolog says, “On my first day observing Ivana’s Master Class, I watched these great scenes and thought, ‘How do I make this better? Am I in the right field?’ Then I watched Ivana take these already great scenes and made them exceptional with her technique! Chubbuck trained actors to bring more to their role and scripts have even been rewritten for them, personally.”

Bolog brings what she considers the best of the best to her acting classes. She wants her actors to have an array of tools with which to develop their roles.

She uses Uta Hagen’s book, *A Challenge for the Actor*, because it teaches actors how to look to the richness of their own life in order to bring themselves to the role with authenticity. She loves Larry Parke’s script analysis which teaches actors to stay true to the playwright’s intent and connect to that intent on a primal, personal level. Margie Haber and Shurtleff inspire her Audition Technique classes. She coaches her actors in a variety of techniques and exercises that show them how to approach roles physically, intellectually, emotionally and spiritually – as fully developed character.

“When you pull from your own life, it creates more authenticity. Method acting gets a bad rap; because some people think it’s about wallowing in the muck; but you can’t spend time just being self-focused. The audience stops caring about the characters when they’re only involved with themselves,” Bolog says. “They lose interest in the pity party.”

“Winning your objective is greater if you have true obstacles. People want to go on the ride with you, even if you lose in the end. The Chubbuck Technique also teaches the actor how to win in their own life; not to spiral down into despair when up against an obstacle, but to win, go up, and while there’s an accepted time for mourning, you don’t stay there!”

Through Actor’s Craft, Bolog offers a variety of professional classes: Acting Technique, the foundation for all professional acting classes; Audition Technique, encouraging students to enjoy the challenge of the audition process instead of fearing it; Chubbuck Technique Scene Study, building upon past techniques to create a solid foundation that teaches actors how to win; Script Analysis, Private Coaching Sessions; Creative Drama including Music & Improv or Preschoolers; Stories and Improv for children ages 5-8, Improv for Kids, aimed at 9-12 year olds and Free Play Reading the second Saturday of each month. This summer, she will be offering Summer Acting Camps for teens and kids which will combine 1960s music with transformational theater and fairy tales.

Why does she feel so strongly about these classes?

“Everyone has their masks on,” she says. “These vary from person to person. It’s the way we self-protect. At our core we all have the same basic needs; love, food, approval, etc. People put on different masks to protect that core. Some use laughter, some anger, whatever; again it varies, in order for us to fit in or measure up, or combat whatever messages, even the subtle ones, that we received growing up.”

The stripping off process can be painful, but necessary if an actor is to be effective.

“Actors have to learn to some degree to strip away the masks, to raise the stakes. It is imperative that you have a very strong positive win to off-set the negative obstacles so you don’t spiral down into despair,” Bolog continues. “You have to let the obstacles affect you and then triumph over adversity! You have to allow yourself to be less than perfect.

As an example, Bolog says, “There’s a ‘pretty girl’ syndrome, where the person who seems to have it all; looks, poise, class is perceived as perfect, expected to be perfect. It can be very stressful to try so hard to be perfect all the time. But when a person allows themselves to be less than perfect and we see that, ‘wow, that person goes through the same crap I do,’ we can relate to that character. I believe in a quest for excellence which is why I’ve studied with top people in the industry, but perfection can create a fear of taking risks. It’s unattainable.”

“We need a healthy perspective in this industry. Too many actors rise and fall on the basis of their auditions. In class we can offer feedback, and if there are consistent issues that may hinder an actor from securing work, then we work to resolve those challenges. When an actor receives the absolute best training, if they’ve done their homework, they’re free to take risks in their audition and live authentically in the moment. If an actor knows they’ve done their best to nail the audition, then they can let it go and not worry about it. There are too many factors that go into casting to allow you to rise and fall emotionally with each audition.”

“When you go to LA or NY, you’re competing with some of the best actors in the country. So now your goal is to be exceptional. The A-List actors continue to study with the best acting coaches they can afford, in order to continue to excel. This should be an example for local actors who plan to make a living in this industry.”

“People tell me my Acting Technique class is life changing, and I believe them because I thought the same thing when I took Acting Technique with Howard Fine. Acting is recreating reality under imaginary circumstances. If we’re not living our own lives richly, how can we portray a character living

life richly? In order to be successful, my students have to take time to experience life on a more sensory level, instead of rushing through it. It makes their lives richer and I love being part of that.”

Bolog has been excited about the Wisconsin Film Incentive, and does not want them to be eliminated because they attract more attention to this third coast; and actors are meeting on location and referring others to her classes and those who are fortunate, no blessed, to connect with her will be the better because of it. Bolog, too, appreciates the fact that she can bring what she’s learned and continues to learn to those in and around this third coast. She says, “I love this Wisconsin lifestyle, my family, my community; and still being able to work in this industry.”

Though the process hasn’t been easy, it’s been rewarding in ways Bolog never dreamed it’d be. Through her own love and investment in her students, she’s received that love back and then some.

“I learned a valuable lesson from Ed McGrath when he hired me out of graduate school to work on *Slainte*, a one-hour video of Irish entertainment; you don’t need to know everything to make something happen, but you need to know who knows what you don’t. Then you empower people. When you give them ownership in a project, they’ll work harder.”

Bolog succeeds in mentoring her students in a place where vulnerability can be explored and nurtured in a safe and healthy environment. Her motivation?

“When you’re asking people to be vulnerable, you must come from a place of love and support. I pray for my students and ask God to give me wisdom to connect with them according to their need. When I started this business, I made a decision to serve God with it. Serving other people with our lives; makes our own life more rewarding. Acting from a place of service is more powerful and freeing than acting from a place of ego.”

With someone like Bolog, taking acting classes isn’t just about acting; it’s about going deeper, within yourself, within the lives of others and making a difference no matter where you are on this world’s stage. Through Actor’s Craft, Bolog is doing that and then some, and yes, it is powerful.

Although we may think of Kenosha as a small stage big things happen because of people like Maureen Cashin Bolog and it’s about time Milwaukee is in on the secret.

Let’s not keep this one, okay?

(For more information you can view Actor’s Craft current schedule at: [www.actorscraftwisconsin.com](http://www.actorscraftwisconsin.com). And, if you’d like to read more about Maureen Cashin Bolog, go to [exposekenosha.com](http://exposekenosha.com) and read the October 7, 2007 article, *Crafting the Actor*, by Philomena Sucharda and the January 19, 2009 article, *The Heart & Soul Behind Actor’s Craft: Maureen Cashin Bolog*, by Lisa Adamowicz Kless.)