

Search now for free



[Premium Email @ireland.com](#)



[Find your ancestors](#)

- [« Prev](#)
- [Next »](#)

# IRISHTIMES.com

Monday, September 8, 2008

[13 °C Dublin »](#)

- [RSS Feeds](#)
- [Site Index](#)
- [News](#)
- [Sport](#)
- [Business](#)
- [Comment](#)
- [Life & Culture](#)
- [Shop](#)
- [Classified](#)

Search

- [Opinion & Analysis](#)
- [Letters](#)
- [Blogs](#)
- [Comment »](#)
- [Opinion & Analysis »](#)
- [Email to a friend](#)
- [Print](#)
- [RSS](#)
- Text Size:
- [»](#)

Friday, September 5, 2008

# My Alaskan soul sister is an empty vessel

## [In this section »](#)

- [Misplaced loyalty makes it difficult for whistleblowers](#)
- [Angola must commit itself to becoming a real democracy](#)
- [Where babies are concerned a man just cannot win](#)
- [Their bravery is a credit to our island of Ireland](#)
- [Absence of a national plan on ageing reflects leadership failure](#)
- [Bully for you Kaylene, hockey mom Sarah now paling into significance](#)

I'm an Alaskan mom living in Galway. I have a Down syndrome daughter. But hell no! I won't be voting for Sarah Palin, writes **Mary Mullin**

SARAH PALIN and I are soul sisters. Well, sort of. I was born and raised on a homestead in Alaska, and moved to the west of Ireland with intentions of writing the great Irish-Alaskan novel. I was 44 then - big things seem to happen to women at that tender age.

When I moved to Ireland, I brought my love of Alaska with me. It's something you never can leave behind, even if you didn't mean to pack it.

The mettle required to live there, the sun on the mountains where they crash into the sea, the rawness and charm of the characters who found their way north, the shimmer of salmon splashing into a net, and potlucks with friends who become family are all impossible to shake out of one's soul. Being an Alaskan is a permanent and lovely thing, like being Irish even though you live in Argentina or Anchorage.

I won't be voting for Sarah Palin, even though she makes John McCain look better than he looked without her. She is dead wrong on all the issues and is way, way, way too insular.

In addition to our almost nationalistic love for Alaska, Sarah Palin and I are both proud mothers of a child with Down syndrome.

My daughter Lily was born in Galway 10 years ago. It may be hard to believe, but the early childhood services in Ireland are better than they are in Alaska for people with Down syndrome.

When Sarah Palin gave birth to Trig, her son with Down syndrome, I hoped that she would beef up services for Alaska's disabled population. She could have done so overnight - but "social conservatives", especially tough super-moms like Sarah Palin, don't do that sort of thing.

It's the Democrats who care about single mothers and people with Down syndrome. It's the Democrats who designed community programmes for early intervention; it's the Democrats who instituted programmes for integration and it's the Democrats who fought for and passed the law that gives people with disabilities the right to a free and appropriate education in America's public schools.

And now, Sarah Palin and her darling baby, Trig, are being held in the bosom of right-wing Christian fundamentalists who are delighted with themselves. But they have done nothing for people with disabilities. Nothing.

And I am here to tell you, the Christian fundamentalists do not have the market cornered on the love, respect, dedication, frustrations, and courage it takes to raise a child with Down syndrome.

The social conservatives are committing a tremendous act of cynicism by holding up Sarah Palin as a champion of anything. How dare they?

Democratic administrations have welcomed our children into the world with sound public policies; policies which the Republicans have whittled away and weakened.

Alaska was a Democratic state until oil was discovered in 1959. The old Democratic leaders of Alaska, whom my 88-year-old mother knew well, would have been ashamed of Alaska now. (Many of Alaska's founding politicians were statesmen who would have made great presidents and vice-presidents: Governor Bill Egan, Congressman Nick Begich, and aptly-named Senator Ernest Gruening.)

Lily and I spent six weeks in Alaska this summer. My old mother, beautiful Lily and I marched for Obama in our hometown's annual summer parade. Us three generations of Mullen ladies stood tall with our Obama '08 placards and smiled real big at the conservatives who lined the footpaths.

Sarah Palin is not a famous reformer. She did oust Governor Frank Murkowski, and Alaska is better because of that. But it's the Federal Bureau of Investigation who took on and jailed corrupt politicians - all Republicans bar one - who accepted bribes from oil company types. She is far from being the Mother Teresa of anti-corruption.

Sarah Palin is a tremendously ambitious woman. She has been in the right place at the right time; her fairy-tale timing is remarkable. As mayor of Wasilla she ruled in a time when the sales taxes from all the ugly strip-malls in the commercial town gave her a big budget. She cut spending for the museum - God knows why - perhaps just to keep her socially conservative reputation intact.

Then she became governor of Alaska in more fairy-tale times - when a barrel of oil soared to a ridiculously high price, filling the state coffers with plenty. She could have replenished weakened social services programmes, but she didn't. She has promoted no social agenda in Alaska.

And speaking of oil, remember the Exxon Valdez oil spill? Remember how the conservative Supreme Court judges who were appointed by George Bush gave Exxon a tiny slap on the monetary wrist? No punitive damages were awarded, thereby sending a message to corporations that they can do what they damned well please.

Fie on the commercial fishers and Alaskan Natives whose lives were shattered by the smothering oil! By participating in the Republican Party with such gusto, Sarah Palin has turned her back on the 33,000 plaintiffs in the oil spill case.

Alaska has just recently held their primary election, which included ballot measure number four, an initiative to ban large metal mines from discharging large amounts of toxic chemicals into salmon streams and drinking water supplies. It failed. I can't help but wonder, had Sarah Palin used her popularity and political clout to help the measure pass . . . oh well, she's the one who is not convinced that pollution is a problem.

The part of Alaska that will be most adversely affected by mining pollution is Bristol Bay, home to the richest wild salmon run in the world, and home to Todd Palin's fishing site, and the place that inspired the name of their daughter, Bristol. God bless all the Bristols.

An e-mail from my niece in Anchorage sums up the feelings of those Alaskans who are not star-struck by Sarah. It reads: "The Palin stuff is BIZARRE! So, Sarah has a son going off to war, a daughter soon to parent as a child herself, Willow and Piper, and then wee Trig. Oh yeah, AND she's supposed to be our governor. Oh yeah, AND she was elected the mayor of Wasilla with 909 votes. AND she's so damn charismatic, I'm afraid our electorate will fall for the act. I am beginning to realise that she's probably the most ambitious person I'll ever know of. I hope America surprises me. God knows the world needs Obama."

A million years ago, I was the youngest delegate from Alaska to the Democratic Convention in Miami, in 1972.

The heady McGovern days. Political conventions are dazzling events for us Alaskan girls who are usually dazzled by the northern lights on a November night, grounded by the frosty cheeks of our loved ones, gazing up.

Her gumption and fairy-tale timing have brought her this far. I feel extremely connected to Sarah Palin because of my daughter, Lily, and her son, Trig. We belong to the same tribe. Even though she will set the sky ablaze, she is out of her depth. McCain's recklessness in tapping her shoulder was a cynical act which shows the world just how flimsy democracy can be.

Thank God for the seriousness and thoughtfulness of Obama and Biden. I hope America surprises us all and, as my niece says, won't fall for the gorgeous act. We must remember that Sarah Palin won Miss Congeniality in both of her beauty contests, but it takes a bit more than that to help run the most powerful nation in the world.

Like substance and sincerity and a world view.

A passport will also be needed. She had to scramble to get a passport when she went to visit Alaskan troops in Kuwait last year. Imagine, a woman aged 44 without a passport.

The good news is that history often repeats itself. In the 1984 Miss Alaska contest, Sarah Palin lost to Marilyne Blackburn, the first African-American Miss Alaska.

...

Mary Mullen was born and raised in Soldotna, a town on Alaska's Kenai Peninsula. She lives in Ballinderreen, Co Galway, where she writes poetry and non-fiction and teaches a memoir writing class. She prefers salmon to moose

© 2008 The Irish Times

This article appears in the print edition of the Irish Times

ADVERTISEMENT

## Latest »

- [16:53Three found guilty in British bomb plot](#)
- [16:47East End looks remote for Laudrup as Zola becomes central character](#)
- [16:38Sunderland chief executive resigns](#)
- [16:27The day the conquering Cats came to Crumlin](#)
- [16:17Russia 'agrees Georgia deadline' - Sarkozy](#)
- [16:12Outage cripples London Stock Exchange](#)
- [15:57Cowen optimistic wage deal can be agreed](#)
- [15:57Government has failed on class sizes - INTO](#)

## Popular Stories

- [Most Read](#)
- [Most Emailed](#)
- [1Awesome Kilkenny seize the day](#)
- [2This is greatness. This is Kilkenny now](#)

- [3Hamilton demoted as his aggression gets better of him](#)
- [4Hamilton stripped of Belgian win](#)
- [5Trapattoni happy he has situation well taped](#)
  
- [1This is greatness. This is Kilkenny now](#)
- [2Sudden death of Commissioner of Public Works](#)
- [3Awesome Kilkenny seize the day](#)
- [4Endangered bird shot dead weeks after release](#)
- [5My Alaskan soul sister is an empty vessel](#)

## Your Vote »

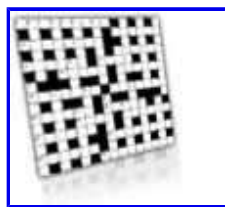
[« Yes](#)

[No »](#)

[Results](#)

HEAD TO HEAD: Would an Obama presidency be best for Ireland?

## Crossword Club »



[Today's Interactive Irish Times Crosaire and Simplex crosswords, plus 10 years of crossword archive.](#)

ADVERTISEMENT

**Ads by Google**

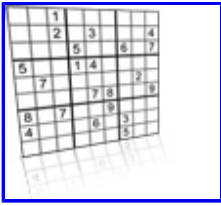
### [Alaska Yak Tours](#)

Hiking in the Alaskan Wilderness Yak Supported  
Adventures  
[www.AlpineAscents.com/Yak-Tours.asp](http://www.AlpineAscents.com/Yak-Tours.asp)

### [1 rule of a flat stomach:](#)

I cut down 4 lbs of stomach fat in 2 weeks by  
obeying this 1 old rule.  
[Wu-YiSource.com](http://Wu-YiSource.com)

## Sudoku »



[Download and print the daily Irish Times sudoku grid](#)



- [2008 All-Ireland SHC Final](#) GAA Correspondent Seán Moran gives his account of the final where Kilkenny totally dominated their neighbours Waterford



- [Price Watch](#) What is the etiquette of tipping?



- [Business Opinion](#) Bringing forward the Budget is fiscally pointless, writes John McManus



- [John McCain](#) Full audio recording of John McCain's speech at the Republican National Convention in St Paul, Minnesota.



- [Formula One championship](#) Hamilton demoted as his aggression gets better of him

- ADVERTISEMENT
- CLASSIFIED

**Homes**



[Teaguestown Wood, Dublin Road, Trim Price: €275,000](#)

[Bedrooms: 2See More »](#)

## Jobs

Select your categories

- Accountancy
- Architecture / Design
- Banking & Financial Services
- Construction
- Customer Service, Call Centres & Languages

[Next »](#)

## Cars



[Dubious benefits of the flexifuel engineaside, the Galaxy is a top choice](#)

[Find »](#)

## Dating

I am a  Looking for a  Located  Only with photos:

[Next »](#)

[© 2008 irishtimes.com](#)

- [Company information](#)
- [Privacy policy](#)
- [Help](#)
- [Contact us](#)
- [Advertise](#)
- [Terms & Conditions](#)