

# Confluence

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# Confluence

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*Confluence is a national, interdisciplinary journal published by the Association of Graduate Liberal Studies Programs that reflects the best scholarly and creative work of graduate liberal studies programs. Its broad scope will include scholarly essays and creative work such as short stories, poetry, creative nonfiction, and visual art. Contributors will be all those affiliated with such programs—students, alumni, faculty, and others. From this exchange of ideas and art, the association hopes to generate intellectual discussion, foster an understanding of the range of its multidisciplinary activities, and stimulate research and creative endeavors among its readers.*

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## Editor's Notes

The Association continues to celebrate the writing of graduate students through its annual awards for excellence in creative and interdisciplinary writing. The winners are toasted at the fall conference, where hearty applause is prelude to happy conversations with the writers over the course of two days and a good read sometime soon after. You will find this year's winning entrees in these pages alongside other fine nominees from AGLSP programs and pieces that have come to the journal as regular submissions.

In keeping with "The Crisis of the Book," the theme of this year's conference hosted by Reed College in Portland, Oregon, the issue's cover art has been taken from several centuries of the history of the book. You see a hand-written page in Latin with space left for the colorful capital letters that were inked in later; a hand-colored press-printed page from an early German plant guide; a decorative capital letter from that volume which under close scrutiny reveals the Biblical episode of Abraham preparing to slaughter his son Isaac while a ram looks on from the thicket; the cursor from the InDesign software used to prepare the cover of this book; and the bar code that allows a very contemporary on-demand book printer to keep track of online purchases. Inside the issue we honor the conference theme with "Use the Book," a poem by Julie Hanson. Hanson begins by celebrating the comforting richness of a particular book as a physical object, something perfect to take along on a not terribly serious fishing

adventure. Too good of a poet to be content with merely praising a pretty thing, Hanson has a surprise in store for readers before they and her volume's tea-toned pages part company.

The issue's other writers are full of surprises, too. What golden things will fall from the sky, what promises will be made and kept, what episodes will echo through the years, what betrayal will leave another breathless, and who will risk everything for a stranger? In memoirs, fiction, and essays, writers take us to India and to ancient Rome, to imagined landscapes as well as to real and emblematic ones; they tell us stories of family members who depart, who return, who refuse to let go; of communities that when beaten down rise up; and of urgent issues we have not yet mastered. They write with freshness, often ending dazzlingly with insightful sentences that mean all the more because of what has unfolded in earlier pages. All of the pieces in this issue will reward your careful scrutiny.

But be sure to save some time for the award winners: in creative writing, Wendy Ann Kamdin's memoir of her young married years in India and, in interdisciplinary writing, Peggy Ratcliffe Roe's investigation of Augustine's transformative relationship with his mother, Monica. They remind us of the AGLSP's dedication to excellence, to clear-headed inquiry, and to taking hold of many good ways of seeing the world. Congratulations to the writers, their guiding professors and collaborating fellow students, and the friends and family members who so often help make graduate study possible.—KS



## Carl Fredriksens Transport

### A Case Study of Norwegian Resistance in World War II

*Gerd Pettersen recalls months of quiet, life-saving heroism during the Nazi occupation of Norway.*

— DAN STURDEVANT —

In the early hours of April 9, 1940, Nazi Germany launched its offensive on Norway. German ships attacked Oslo and the port city of Narvik in a coordinated effort to capture strategic positions as quickly as possible. In Oslo, Norwegian coastal defenses sank the German heavy cruiser *Blücher*, delaying the German advance long enough to allow the royal family and key governmental officials to escape capture. Narvik, the main Norwegian port for the North Sea, proved a much easier engagement for the Germans. Ten German destroyers sank two Norwegian coastal defense vessels while landing their troops and occupying the important city.

Norway put up little military resistance for three reasons. First, the government had already declared its neutrality, as it had done previously in World War I. Second, the small country, with a population of about three million, did not have the manpower to fight the German invaders.<sup>1</sup> Third, Norway was sabotaged from within by the Nasjonal Samling party, led by Vidkun Quisling, and their pre-existing treaty with Adolf Hitler.<sup>2</sup>

A victim of its own geography, Norway was the bottleneck point of the British blockade of German shipping in the North Sea—a strategic position vital to German survival. Additionally, though a harsh and mountainous country, with an estimated 50,000 islands scattered along its long rugged coast,<sup>3</sup> Norway offered access to shipping lanes and air routes throughout the North Atlantic.<sup>4</sup>

More important than the geographical advantage was the absolute reliance of the German military on raw iron ore—tons of which was shipped out of the port of Narvik.<sup>5</sup> Norway offered vast natural resources: iron ore, petroleum, timber, and various precious and semi-precious metals.<sup>6</sup> Without the iron ore, the German Navy could not expand and the battle over the North Sea would be lost.<sup>7</sup>

Due to its immense value as a strategic shipping outpost and staging ground for the German Navy, Norway proved too tempting not to invade. The short-lived battle for Norway was relatively light in casualties, and on June 10 the Nazi occupation began. Allied forces, led by the British, attempted a counterattack but were ineffective; Neville Chamberlain was replaced as prime minister one month after the invasion began. When it became clear that capitulation was imminent, King Haakon VII abdicated his throne and fled to Britain. His absence was a sore spot for Norwegians, and his likeness became a popular symbol of resistance, often worn on clothing.

At the time of the invasion, Norwegian Gerd Pettersen<sup>8</sup> was a 25-year-old telegraph operator and was married to Alf Pettersen, a 28-year-old policeman in Oslo. On April 9, 1940, Gerd was home alone when she heard sirens wailing and guns firing from Fort Oscarborg, on the fjord in Oslo. The population of Oslo, so confident that they would not be pulled into a conflict of which they had no part,

believed the sirens and firing to be nothing more than a drill. Gerd Pettersen recalled,

I thought the [Norwegian] people must be totally mad because they were laughing and thinking it was another test, laughing on the streets outside the windows . . . only when the planes came the following day, then did they understand.<sup>19</sup>

The population of Norway had been caught completely by surprise.

Life for the Norwegian people during the Nazi occupation was hard. “There were rations on practically all foods,” Gerd said. “I had almost 3 kg worth of tokens for butter, but there was no butter to buy for the tokens.” The food that could be obtained was sub-par as well: “The flour was so bad and wet that putting bread in the oven and turning on the heat, you could hear it dripping—it was almost impossible to make a whole loaf out of it.”<sup>10</sup> There was rarely enough food to eat in Oslo, and many of the citizens were constantly in search of food.

Despite the hardship of occupation, the Norwegian population received widespread recognition and praise both during and after the war. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt himself said repeatedly to “look to Norway” as a source of encouragement for himself and the American people during the hard years of World War II.<sup>11</sup> Norwegians resisted in many ways, passively and actively.

One particularly popular method of resistance was joke telling. Defiantly witty, jokes and anecdotes became a common topic of conversation and an unstoppable method of communicating viewpoints and dissent. Jokes were aimed at Hitler, the Nazis, or Quisling, the Norwegian politician who became the head of the Nazi puppet government during the war. Jokes like these became commonplace: “Do you know what the difference is between a Nazi and a bucket of manure? The bucket,” or “I hear they’re releasing a new stamp bearing Quisling’s likeness, but distribution has been delayed because people don’t know which side to spit on!” The jokes were orally communicated and passed between friends, providing a balance of levity

and defiance toward their Nazi oppressors. Jokes were so important because the occupation force controlled all media outlets, and though there were underground publications, these were dangerous and not nearly as ubiquitous as jokes.<sup>12</sup>

However unified in defiance as Norway may have been—and according to many accounts was—there were thousands of collaborators who willingly assisted their Nazi occupiers. There was an unfortunately high response from Norwegian citizens to fight in the Nazi *Freikorps* or “free corps” on the Russian front. In fact, so overwhelming was the response that the number of Norwegians who died resisting occupation was fewer than the number who died fighting for the Nazis.<sup>13</sup>

Certainly, the best-known example of Norwegian collaboration is Vidkun Quisling—the occupation Minister-President of Norway. The Nazis wanted to maintain the appearance of Norwegian governance, and a cooperative government made occupation a far easier task. They chose to head their new government this well-known Norwegian politician, once referred to as “The Hitler of Norway.”<sup>14</sup> Vidkun Quisling was a career politician whose star had shone brightest in the 1930s as a cabinet official during the Social Democratization movement before the war, but soon dimmed as his ideals grew closer to those of Adolf Hitler.

Quisling made his start in Norwegian politics after returning from a brief tenure in the Soviet Union in the early 1930s. He rose through the ranks at an unbelievable rate, going from a political newcomer to a cabinet official in less than two years. Leaving behind the military and a position administering aid for the League of Nations, Quisling set his sights on his true ambition—the political rule of Norway, and eventually all Scandinavia.<sup>15</sup>

Quisling had a small following, and after his installation as Minister-President of Norway some of his followers began political parties in their hometowns; there was even one in Gerd’s neighborhood in Oslo.<sup>16</sup> Quisling believed that he was born to lead Norway and indeed all Nordic peoples from their current darkness into light. He saw it as an omen that he was born on July 18, the same date as the battle

of Havsford, (the battle that united Norway) and he communicated this to his followers. He was not a masterful politician and he refused to compromise or retreat an inch in any situation. His followers wrote that Norway was a nation, but Quisling would make Norway into a people.<sup>17</sup>

Upon Quisling’s installation as Minister-President, Norwegians had to pick sides; you could be either a Jossing or a Quisling. “Jossing” was derived from the incident in the Jossing fjord when the English ship *Cossack* attacked and defeated the German destroyer *Altmark*; a “Jossing” was a Norwegian patriot. “‘Quisling’ became a word of abuse,” and was associated with a sympathizer; to this day Quisling is synonymous with traitor in the European vernacular.<sup>18</sup>

Before the invasion, Gerd and Alf were a typical Norwegian couple. They were young professionals and lived a comfortable and secure life in Oslo. They, like the majority of the population, never imagined that Germany would invade Norway. After the invasion, Alf and Gerd were in a unique situation—a far cry from the typical couple in occupied Norway—and they faced a very difficult and dangerous decision.

Before the Nazi occupation, Gerd’s husband Alf was well known in the police community, and as a result had many contacts who were involved with Milorg (the “official” Norwegian resistance movement)<sup>19</sup> after the occupation began. In mid-1940, in the south of Norway, near Bergen, Milorg was targeted by the Gestapo and the members of the group were forced to flee. The only safe place to escape was to neighboring Sweden, to sneak across the border and hide out for the remainder of the war. Alf had grown up near rural Sweden and had many contacts and old friends between his current home in Oslo and the Swedish border: “There was something about Alf. He had a lot of connections everywhere, either family or someone that he knew from his younger days growing up.”<sup>20</sup> As a police officer, Alf had expanded his network of contacts until it stretched across the metropolitan areas of Norway—including Bergen.

Since Alf was known to have contacts across the country, when two of his police colleagues from Bergen were forced to flee, they contacted him to help. Alf had a difficult decision: “[He] believed in justice . . . he

could not say no, because he did not want to feel guilty if the people he did not help were killed.”<sup>21</sup> The choice ultimately fell to Gerd. Alf promised that he would not become involved if she did not want him to, but Gerd yielded to her conscience and encouraged Alf to help, and she assisted as well.

The policemen from Bergen were the first men Alf and Gerd agreed to help to safety in Sweden. By this point in the occupation, late 1940, Alf had been discharged from the police for refusing to perform the Heil Hitler salute in the presence of a Nazi officer. After his discharge, Alf went to work for a man named Larsen who owned a haulage company. Through his new job, Alf had a special license to drive a box truck in and out of Oslo. After hiding the policemen in their home for 24 hours—until about 9:00 the evening after they appealed to Alf for help—they began their trip to the Swedish border. Alf dropped them off about a mile and a half from the border and instructed them which way to walk through the woods, then made his way back to Oslo.<sup>22</sup>

The trip was a complete success, due in no small part to Alf’s meticulous planning; it had not only required Alf’s driving permit, but also a network of spotters and scouts stretching to and from the border. The scouts were people with whom Alf had grown up, and he trusted them fully. A warning system was soon devised for nights when Alf was driving to the border:

[The scouts] took care and passed the road . . . so when they understood the Germans were about to close the main road on the route, they would put a branch out into the road in a specific way so Alf and the others would know that the road had been closed down farther ahead so they were able to get off in time.<sup>23</sup>

These messages in the road were an untraceable system of warnings to inform Alf of all German patrols and checkpoints on the road ahead.

After the initial trip with the policemen from Bergen, it became clear how well Alf’s system worked, how loyal and dedicated his contacts were, and what a good cover story Larsen provided with his haulage company. Word began to spread—very quietly—among Alf’s fellow

police officers and members of Milorg that, if it became necessary, Alf could get you to Sweden. “When he knew someone who was in trouble, for example was condemned or sentenced to death . . . colleagues came to him and asked if he could get them over to Sweden.”<sup>24</sup> Soon Alf was making a couple of drives every week, trucking over members of the resistance whose cover had been blown, or important political figures who spoke out against the Nazi regime. Fortunately for Alf, Larsen—Alf’s new employer—was also willing to help others flee to Sweden. He even helped Alf with the driving and allowed his trucks to be used for the journey.

Alf was quickly becoming chauffeur to Hitler’s political enemies in Oslo. The mayor of Oslo “went over [to Sweden] with Alf,” as well as General Lieutenant Olav Bank of Milorg, and many fellow comrades from the police who had either become involved in Milorg or had become too vocal in their opposition to the Nazis. Alf’s services were so essential that it was soon necessary to bring on more drivers. Alf and Larsen were very cautious in selecting the new drivers—taking care that they were trustworthy and prepared for the dangers of the journey, willing to risk their lives driving others to safety. They tried to keep the numbers down as much as possible: “In the beginning there were a number of different [drivers], but later we used two drivers especially, [alternating] every other night,” thus minimizing the risk of betrayal and observation.<sup>25</sup>

Alf and Larsen eventually had to resort to monetary compensation. “We had to pay the drivers quite a lot, because it was a huge risk for them to take . . . about 1500 kroner for every trip (roughly \$226 US in 1942).”<sup>26</sup> The money to pay the drivers was raised by charging a small fee from those who could afford it when the journey was made. The trucks were large and could fit well over a dozen people, making the fee very reasonable for each person on the trip.

As the war went on and the Nazis began to round up Jews and other “undesirables,” Alf was introduced to a man named Garner Syversen who owned a greenhouse and knew Larsen through business dealings. Unbeknownst to his friends and neighbors, Syversen had been hiding four Jewish brothers in his greenhouse for several days.

The [Jews] knew Syversen and when they understood that their father had been captured, and that they would be captured soon as well, they were hiding in the greenhouse and Syversen did not know what to do.<sup>27</sup>

Syversen appealed to Alf to help him smuggle the four brothers to Sweden. This was to be Alf's first trip to the border with Jews on board, and it proved to be a turning point for the operation. The trip was a success, and soon word got out among Jews as well that Alf, Larsen, and now Syversen could get you to Sweden. As the war went on, the demand for their unique services only increased.

In late November of 1942, the need for transportation greatly increased when Quisling ordered the registration of all Norwegian Jews.<sup>28</sup> The need for greater organization became apparent—it was necessary to deal with the incredible volume of condemned Jews, and also to stay a step ahead of the Gestapo. The four members of the still-emerging organization, Gerd, Alf, Larsen, and Syversen, assumed the cover name Carl Fredriksens Transport for anything relating to their rescue operations.<sup>29</sup> They met at Syversen's greenhouse and used Larsen's box trucks to run to Sweden; if ever overheard, there was a very plausible cover story. The new organization, run by the four brave individuals, soon became what the Jewish Museum in Oslo designated “one of the biggest rescue operations of the war.”<sup>30</sup>

The number of Jews transported by Carl Fredriksens Transport is estimated between 500<sup>31</sup> and 800,<sup>32</sup> but as there were no records kept (for obvious reasons) the estimate covers a wide range. Amazingly, with those numbers, the operation ran on a large-scale basis for only six weeks, from late November 1942 until mid-January of 1943. In that time hundreds of Jews, otherwise condemned to Auschwitz, were smuggled to safety in Sweden, using only a greenhouse, a telephone, and two or three vehicles to outwit—and at times outrun—the Nazis.<sup>33</sup>

A comprehensive system of smuggling their condemned cargo from Oslo to Sweden emerged. When people needed transportation, they

would contact either Larsen or Syversen who would call Gerd and convey the important details. Gerd was the secretary of the organization; “I was so lucky to have a very good memory . . . I did not need to write anything down, so no one would be given away or revealed, by either name or telephone number, if we happened to be caught. . . . I was able to remember everything that I was told.” Upon receiving the information, Gerd would compile a mental list of names (usually false identities) and locations of refugees hiding in and around the city. Later, at the meetings she and Alf held at their home with Larsen and Syversen, she would share all of the information with the men who would be doing the actual driving.<sup>34</sup>

The driving began around 9:00 p.m. when Larsen—who had a personal car—and a cabdriver Larsen knew and trusted, would drive about Oslo and pick up the passengers for that evening and deposit them at Syversen's greenhouse, where they would load up the trucks and head to the border.

They had to first collect the people by car and then get them to the greenhouse, but then the rumors were spreading. There were too many cars coming to the greenhouse, so we had to stop using the site. It was too risky.<sup>35</sup>

The operations had gone well so far, but all members of the organization knew what grave danger they faced if they were caught. It became necessary to operate elsewhere.

Soon, Alf and Gerd were holding regular meetings for Carl Fredriksens in their home where they would disperse information about the refugees hiding around Oslo.<sup>36</sup> Larsen's personal car (nicknamed Lizzie) and Larsen's trucks were used to canvass the city and collect the passengers for the trip that evening.<sup>37</sup> These trips around the city were easily accomplished and were efficient, as they were able to use regular gasoline, unlike the trips to and from the border. Due to rationing, the trips with the refugees had to be made with knott fuel, a rough peat-based mixture that was far less efficient than gasoline.<sup>38</sup>

The use of knott fuel and the ever-present danger of Nazi patrols made for several close calls. One particularly snowy night, a message had been left in the road that there was a German patrol ahead. Alf steered the truck off the road and up a fairly steep hill that led to a farmstead. The road was icy and the truck was running on knott fuel; there was no chance to make it up the hill. They were in grave danger there on the side of the soon-to-be-patrolled road. The passengers were forced to get out and push the truck up the icy hill until they reached a side road that ran parallel to the main road for long enough to bypass the patrol. In another particularly close call with a German patrol, Alf had to pull the truck off of the road and cover it with spruce boughs he cut from the woods to avoid detection. The risks were high and the danger was constant during the trips to the border.

Owing to these great dangers, Alf always carried a revolver with him for both protection and persuasion. (Gerd also carried a revolver in her muff for the course of the operation.) Several times, over the course of the operation, drivers panicked when they were warned of a German patrol ahead and tried to get out of the truck. Each time Alf pulled out his revolver and gently persuaded the driver to get back in and keep driving. Despite the dangers, the drivers were paid well and the lives of the passengers depended upon getting them to Sweden.<sup>39</sup>

The entire operation now was being run by Alf, Gerd, Larsen, and Syversen, using both the greenhouse and the haulage business as covers for their movements about Oslo and along the Enebakk road—the main roadway Carl Fredriksens Transport used in the journey to the Swedish border and back. The greenhouse was Syversen's business and the most visible part of the operation, making him the most liable and exposed. He was the catalyst for the operation becoming as large as it was, and a very brave and upright man. Years later Gerd remembered him:

I have to say that Syversen might have been the most brave about it of them all. He was not the “head on” guy [that Alf was] if I can say so, [but] he was extremely kind and honest; he was goodhearted.<sup>40</sup>

Syversen was dedicated to the task at hand. He risked his livelihood and his life even more obviously than the others, determined to help those who otherwise would have been deported to Auschwitz.<sup>41</sup>

Despite his high risk of exposure, it was not Syversen who was first apprehended by the German occupiers. Reidar Larsen, the man who supplied the trucks for the operation, was brought in by the Germans for questioning in January 1943. Larsen was in charge of finding drivers and, after the first couple of missions, had found a pair of solid and trustworthy drivers who were used for the remainder of the operations. He was eventually betrayed by one of his early drivers who had made only one run to Sweden.

[The fellow] got drunk and became cocky, and started telling stories with names one night in a restaurant. This was overheard and most of the group knew they had to flee. . . . Reidar Larsen was caught by the Germans. He was caught, and came out again—I can't remember how long he was in for—but when he came out, his [finger]nails had been taken out and he had not given anything away, so they were not able to get him for anything.<sup>42</sup>

The damage was done, however. After the occupation, the driver who talked was put on trial as a result of his actions leading to the discovery of Carl Fredriksens Transport.<sup>43</sup> When Larsen was released on January 15, 1943, it was clear that the operation had to end. The decision was simple for Alf, Gerd, and Larsen: “When [Larsen] came out, Sweden was next.”<sup>44</sup>

Gerd was just back from an out-of-town shopping trip when Larsen was picked up. She was nearing her third trimester of pregnancy and there were no maternity clothes to be found in Oslo, so she had to look elsewhere. As she returned home, she received a call from Alf insisting that “[she] come downtown for a small trip.” Gerd refused, saying that she had far too much to do and had no time to go about the city with Alf that day. After some convincing, Gerd relented. When she met Alf at the train station, he broke the news that she could not go home again. Alf and Gerd did not see

their valuables or their family heirlooms ever again; the Gestapo raided and emptied their house after they fled. All that was saved were two photo albums hidden away by a friend of theirs who had been hired to drive the truck the Germans used to move the couple's things.<sup>45</sup>

Alf and Gerd went into hiding in the Frogner neighborhood of Oslo, waiting for Larsen to get out, and to observe the situation before they made their next move. It was there they heard who it was who had named not only Larsen, but the two of them as well. It was maddening for Alf and Gerd; they had been careful in their choices, and a driver used only once—and only because he was the only one available at the time—became the mistake that ended the operation.<sup>46</sup>

Once Larsen was released, he and Alf and Gerd loaded into Larsen's car for the trip to Sweden. There was no time to lose—the Germans had already been to Alf and Gerd's the day after Larsen was captured, and—they were wanted for questioning. Larsen's wife and children remained behind until the late spring as they were not in immediate danger, and Syversen would not leave Oslo or his also-very-pregnant wife. Fortunately, he had not been specifically named as the others had. Despite the obvious danger, Syversen continued to work with other organizations in Oslo to fight the occupation.<sup>47</sup> Tragically, he was arrested and promptly executed six months after the others fled for being caught in possession of illegal documents.<sup>48</sup>

For their escape to Sweden the three exposed members of Carl Fredriksens Transport were accompanied by the driver who had driven the most trips for them, and another man, an engineer, who was joining his Jewish wife, whom Alf and company had already gotten to Sweden. Their journey was a flight for their lives to the border:

We had just gotten notice that the Enebakk road was open and free from hindrance, compared to all the other roads [to the Swedish border] that were closed. And so we figured it would be best to get driving right away because the next day more roads might be closed off—[the Nazis] were aware that there was an organization

that had to get over the border, so then we agreed on driving the old Enebakk road.<sup>49</sup>

The Enebakk road was the same route that Alf usually took when transporting refugees to Sweden; it was rough going, but they knew it well. As an added bonus to the trip, Alf's system of contacts stretched along the route, providing additional security and peace of mind.

The trip began well, though a little slowly; it was in the dead of winter and snowing heavily, and at least part of the route was over an unplowed logging road.

We had to drive on one of the logging tracks . . . it was just wide enough for a sleigh to be pulled through. The snow on the road was not cleared away, only driven on so the rise went up and down through the woods; we all went crashing into the ceiling of the truck!

There were five of them in the vehicle, Alf, a very pregnant Gerd, Larsen, the driver, and the engineer. After they returned to the Enebakk road, they were struggling along in the snowy darkness when something appeared before them, blocking the road.<sup>50</sup>

The roadblock before them was a Nazi patrol, made up of two Germans and one Norwegian collaborator brandishing rifles, cocked and aimed at the truck and its passengers:

Suddenly they were there in front of us on the road waving for us to stop. One Norwegian and two Germans with rifles in the old Enebakk road . . . they started asking us where we were heading and who we were. . . . We had to show our car registration card, and they started messing a little with me. . . . Then Alf said, "If there is something you want, don't hassle my wife—talk to me!"

Alf and Larsen had not been expecting this patrol and they had to think quickly. Alf was out of the car at this point, speaking boldly and diverting their attention from Gerd. Once Alf had asserted himself,

Larsen too came out of the car, and while he and Alf began casually to brush snow off of the truck's windows, he explained to the patrol that he was the manager at the Askim rubber factory and if he was not there by six to take over the shift, the patrol would have to explain why in writing.<sup>51</sup> Askim is a large town near the border and the home of a large rubber manufacturer during the war, which was an important enough factory to the Nazi war effort that they built a massive watchtower to oversee the security of the factory against sabotage.<sup>52</sup>

The combination of their self-confidence and nonchalance put the patrol at ease, and after making a cursory check of their driving permit, the patrol let them on their way. Once through Askim, around 6 p.m., they crossed over the Glomma Bridge and on to Sweden singing, "Ja vi elsker," the Norwegian national song. Once across the border, the members of Carl Fredriksens Transport were welcomed by Swedish border guards who brought them up into their barracks and served them dinner.<sup>53</sup>

After the meal they turned on the radio and tuned it to a Norwegian station to hear the news and around 8 p.m. heard a bulletin:

The message was broadcast . . . a general call had been put out on the truck, and Alf and Larsen were mentioned by name. . . . We were now wanted by the Norwegian State Police.<sup>54</sup>

Only two hours after being stopped by the Nazi patrol, Alf and Gerd Pettersen were safely in Sweden, fugitives of the state in Norway. In the morning, the group presented themselves to the local chief of police, a Nazi sympathizer who attempted to persuade them to go back to Norway. He eventually relented and offered them refuge and a hotel room until they could meet with the Norwegian authorities in Sweden. They had received asylum.<sup>55</sup>

All in all, Carl Fredriksens Transport smuggled 600 to 1000 refugees to Sweden, 500 to 800 of whom were Jews. The organization was never very large—in fact it was never more than six or seven people at its largest—but its impact was astounding. Gerd could reasonably say that she knew of no Jews in Oslo or Bergen who were

without transportation when they were forced to flee. In operation for less than three years, the efforts of Carl Fredriksens Transport proved extremely fruitful.

In the years to come, Alf and Gerd had many opportunities to be honored, and Alf turned down almost every one of them. He did accept an invitation from the nation of Israel several years after the war for he and Gerd to be honored as Righteous Gentiles. They were given a tour of Israel with a private car and diplomatic escort for ten days, everywhere from the West Bank to Galilee, and throughout Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. While in Jerusalem, they were honored to plant a tree in their name along the Avenue of the Righteous in front of the Yad Vashem. They were two of the three Norwegians honored by Israel for their efforts on the Norwegian front.<sup>56</sup>

After the liberation of Norway, Alf and Gerd moved back to Oslo where Alf resumed his work with the police. Trials began as in many other countries. Those who collaborated were punished, though as Gerd describes, it became difficult to distinguish who was a Jossing and who had been a Quisling:

At the end of the war, a lot of people signed up [for Milorg] . . . when they understood it was over for the Germans and it would look bad for those who [collaborated] with the Germans.<sup>57</sup>

Following the occupation, Vidkun Quisling was executed as a traitor. His trial lasted only two short months, during which time he was evaluated for psychiatric health and ability to stand trial, pronounced fit, and convicted of offenses ranging from theft to destruction of Jews and high treason. He was executed by firing squad at 2:30 a.m. on October 24, 1945.<sup>58</sup>

The end of World War II brought the end of the occupation, yet the inspiration to be drawn from the heroic Carl Fredriksens Transport should never be forgotten. Their contribution to those whom they did not have to save is an amazing story of hope and defiance, of active resistance in a country torn by occupation. The integrity and nobility, the quiet heroism and bravery, of four ordinary citizens

trying to right a wrong highlights the choices Norwegians faced during the occupation. The story of Carl Fredriksens Transport is a significant contribution to the annals of the war.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Norway: *The Official Site in the United States*, accessed September 18, 2012, <http://www.norway.org/aboutnorway/society/people/population/>.

<sup>2</sup>Paul M. Hayes, *Quisling: The Career and political Ideals of Vidkun Quisling, 1887-1945* (Bloomington, Indiana: IU Press, 1972), 162.

<sup>3</sup>*The World Factbook*, comp. Central Intelligence Agency (Washington, DC: Continually updated), s.v. "Norway," accessed November 19, 2008, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/no.html>.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Patrick Salmon, "British Plans for Economic Warfare against Germany 1937-1939: The Problem of Swedish Iron Ore," *Journal of Contemporary History* 16, no. 1 (January 1981), 57, doi:10.1177/002200948101600104.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War: The Gathering Storm* (Cambridge, England: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1986), 489.

<sup>8</sup>This paper is the result of an interview with Gerd Pettersen in April 2006, conducted by the author and Ane Munkeby. Where applicable, Gerd's recollections have been supplemented with other sources, but the main narrative is based almost entirely upon her remembrances.

<sup>9</sup>Pettersen, interview.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, 226.

<sup>12</sup>Kathleen Stokker, "Heil Hitler—God Save the King: Jokes and the Norwegian Resistance 1940-1945," *Modern Folklore* 50 (April 1991), 172-73.

<sup>13</sup>Peter Calvocoressi and Guy Wint, *Total War: The Story of WWII* (NY: Pantheon, 1972), 282.

<sup>14</sup>Ben Arneson, "Democratized Socialism Makes Gains in Norway," *The American Political Science Review* 28 (February 1934), 109.

<sup>15</sup>Oddvar Karsten Hoidal, "Vidkun Quisling's Decline as a Political Figure in Prewar Norway, 1933-1937," *The Journal of Modern History* 43, no. 3 (September 1971), 440.

<sup>16</sup>Pettersen, interview.

<sup>17</sup>Paul M. Hayes, "Quisling's Political Ideals," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 1 (1966), 145-46.

<sup>18</sup>Pettersen, interview.

<sup>19</sup>Bob Moore, *Resistance in Western Europe* (Oxford, England: Berg, 2000), 225.

<sup>20</sup>Pettersen, interview.

<sup>21-27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Ralph Hewins, *Quisling: A Prophet Without Honor* (London: W.H. Allen, 1965), 326.

<sup>29</sup>Jewish Museum in Oslo, brochure for exhibit, courtesy of Ane Munkelby and Johannes Olsen, in possession of author.

<sup>30, 31</sup>Ibid.

<sup>32</sup>Pettersen, interview.

<sup>33</sup>Jewish Museum, brochure.

<sup>34</sup>Pettersen, interview.

<sup>35, 36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>Jewish Museum, brochure.

<sup>38</sup>Pettersen, interview.

<sup>39, 40</sup>Ibid.

<sup>41</sup>Jewish Museum, brochure.

<sup>42</sup>Pettersen, interview.

<sup>43-47</sup>Ibid.

<sup>48</sup>Jewish Museum, brochure.

<sup>49</sup>Pettersen, interview.

<sup>50, 51</sup>Ibid.

<sup>52</sup>Go Norway, [www.gonorway.com](http://www.gonorway.com).

<sup>53</sup>Pettersen, interview.

<sup>54-56</sup>Ibid.

<sup>57</sup>Mark M. Boatner III, *The Biographical Dictionary of World War II* (Novato, California: Presidio Press, 1996), 441-42.



## Use the Book

— JULIE HANSON —

I love this book, I was telling someone  
 the other day; it's as if the pages have been  
 rinsed with tea and dried in the sun, gentle  
 on the eye and wanting your touch. Old jacket,  
 favorite hat, pages so soft they whisper right on by.  
 Perfect for fishing, although the poems  
 have little or nothing to do with Nature.  
 Looking up from those surreal and strictly human  
 situations into all this, then, is such a surprise:  
 I thought I saw a muskrat there, just the other side  
 of the stream, standing near that clump  
 of darker grass . . . oh he's slipped into the water,  
 he's gone now, you've missed him completely.  
 Wait, see the head? He's making straight for our  
 stringer! Pull it up, pull it up! Well then, at least  
 hit him on the head with something. Take this.



## Roads Not Taken

— CHERYL TRAYLOR —

I was on the road again. It was Sunday, May 11, 2008. Mother's Day. I knew it was going to be a tough one for Mom. She, as well as the rest of our shrinking family, was still dazed from Reco's death last November. She was Mommy's favorite daughter. Wait. That's not exactly true. Not true, at least according to Mom. "I love you all the same. I don't play favorites. It's just that sometimes Reco needs me more than you," she explained to me many times. Their relationship was complicated, resembling Stockholm Syndrome. They held each other hostage by withholding forgiveness for past mistakes. Mom needed perfect daughters, and Reco needed a perfect Mom. Neither of their needs was met. Ever. But there was intense love and dedication between them, and each feared the other's abandonment. Since Reco's death, I have driven these winding lonely highways from Cary, North Carolina to Rupert, West Virginia several times a month. For long stretches, the roads were sparsely occupied. Often at night, my headlights provided the only light besides the moon's glow. Occasionally I drove in for the day, five hours there and five hours back, just to see Mom and to check on how she was coping. This time I would be visiting her in the hospital. Again. Seemed like she no sooner

got home than she was taken right back by ambulance. Her body was declining, maybe just to keep pace with her spirit.

Driving to West Virginia exhausts me physically and emotionally. Thoughts bounce around in my mind the entire 300 miles. And now that Reco was gone—as her mother-in-law, Elsie, stated bluntly in that life-changing, unexpected, November phone call, “Well, she’s gone”—I had to drive past the Roanoke, Virginia, signs and the barn-lined, curvy, country road that led to her white clapboard house, with Guilt and Regret gnawing at the base of my spine, their tiny teeth tearing at my flesh, piece by piece, taunting me and causing me to squirm in my time-worn, black leather Jeep seats. Never allowing me a moment of peace. Guilt over not speaking to her during her last week alive—I *have to protect myself; I’m going crazy with all of these family problems*, I ruminated obsessively, trying to reassure myself that I was doing the right thing; I had my own family, I was going to school, I had my own life. And Regret that I wasn’t there with Reco, watching over her, keeping her safe. So the three of us, Guilt, Regret, and I, continued on our way over the mountains and through the valleys. I wish I could say they got out after Roanoke. But they stayed, these two unwanted hitchhikers. Hell, they never left my side day or night, no matter where I was: in class, making dinner, trying to fall asleep. The gnawing just became a little more intense at certain times: the Roanoke signs, the phone that didn’t ring way too early or way too late, my empty mailbox—Reco *was* the Hallmark Queen. The non-existent laughter on the other end of the phone that didn’t ring.

After hitting 64W, the trip goes much faster. I could drive it in my sleep—back when I could actually sleep, that is. I once had a conversation with an old friend I ran into back home. I told him how happy I was and what a terrific marriage I had. He grinned slyly and said, “No wonder, you spend more time up here with your folks than you do with your husband.” And that was almost true. I spent a lot of our early marriage years back home in West Virginia. I missed my family, and Mom and Dad helped me with the two babies that arrived for us quickly. And here I am again, on 64W, just me, my uncompanionable companions, and my thoughts.

“I don’t have to worry about you so much, Elaine,” Mom said more than once, addressing me by my middle name. “I know you are always going to be just fine. You’re strong. Reco isn’t. And Chrissy needs me.” And *that* was the truth. My older sisters depended on Mom more than I did and more than I would ever *allow* myself to. I had declared my hardheaded independence at eighteen by quitting college, leaving home, and getting married. Abruptly. Very abruptly. I have the reputation in my family as the one who cuts off her nose to spite her face. *That* is also the truth.

I arrived in Greenbrier County at about 1:30 p.m. I made a quick stop at WalMart, which was off the same interstate exit as Humana hospital. I walked to the music section and ran my hands over the rows of CDs. Country-western. Mom had so many CDs, but even more old vinyls. She had Ferlin Husky, Ray Price, Porter Wagner, the Statler Brothers. I grew up listening to these old-timers at home and in the old maroon and white Ford F150 that Mom drove, the one with masking-tape-and-white-shoe-polish repair work—*Mom’s* repair work. Her all-time favorite was Willie Nelson. They say you can tell a lot about people by the music they listen to. It’s true. I always knew what kind of mood Mom was in by what she was listening to: Melancholic? Loretta Lynn. Depressed? George Jones. Pissed off at the world? Waylon Jennings. Pissed at herself? Willie Nelson. Mom’s most-listened-to song near the end of her life was Nelson’s “Nothing I Can Do About It Now.” She danced around her sunshine-colored kitchen in her short-shorts, bare feet shuffling along on the tired linoleum, proclaiming “I’ve got a wild and a restless spirit . . .” I knew she had it on an album, but I found it on a CD, with other oldies but goodies. I grabbed it, walked to the flower cooler and searched inside for the perfect bouquet—daisies, pure white daisies with a sunny center. Mom’s favorite flower. I looked around for a ribbon or something to make the flowers look a little more snazzy. Finally giving up, I walked towards the cashiers to pay for my purchases. On display by the registers, in preparation for Mother’s Day, were all kinds of gravesite memorial wreaths. They each had a ribbon with “Mother” written out in gold glitter cursive lettering, pinned from one side to the other.

I grabbed one of the wreaths. It had purple flowers, Reco's favorite. I would use the Mother ribbon to decorate Mom's cellophane-wrapped daisies and then I would take the wreath out to The End of the Trail, the cemetery where three-sixths of my family now resided. The End of the Trail—guess that is as apt a name as any.

I walked out of Wal-Mart, threw the receipt into a trashcan doubling as an ashtray, and sprinted towards my Jeep. The quicker I moved, the less chance I had to see someone I knew or someone who knew me. Some days I didn't mind being questioned: "Say, ain't you one of them Capaldo girls?" Today was not one of those days. But, yes, I am. I am one of those Capaldo girls.

"There is no escaping the past, it follows us to the present moment, and always, *always*, manifests in the future," I scribbled on the back of my checkbook in red ink while driving to the hospital. Thinking. *Always* thinking.

I parked in the hospital parking lot and made my way around the closely parked cars to the automatic glass doors at the entrance. I walked through the halls, feeling a little like I was walking a labyrinth. The corridors wound round and round at 90-degree angles until at last—Mom's room. The heavy door was barely cracked. I peeped in, but all I could see were two feet wearing those dusky blue non-slip hospital-issue socks. They were petite feet, just like everything else about Mom's body. I could also hear her grizzly bear snores. Her snores were not petite. I laid the gifts down on the visitor's chair and walked back out into the brightly lit hallway. Trays of half-eaten lunches and small piles of dirty towels lined the walls. The scent of Lysol and decay was in the air; I scrunched my nose up and kept walking to the nurses' station.

"How's she doing?" I asked.

The nurse looked up and recognized me immediately. "She's almost become a regular here," she chuckled. "But as long as we keep bringing her coffee—black, one cube of ice—she seems to do ok. Have you talked to the doctor? She was here a few minutes ago." I said that I had just arrived. "I'll send her in to talk to you if she's still on rounds," she said. I thanked her and decided to sneak back into Mom's room and see how she looked.

I slid sideways through the doorway and eased over to her bed. She was tiny. So tiny. Even smaller than she was two weeks ago. Her face had a grey tint and I noticed her eyebrows were bushy, not neatly groomed and filled in with a smudgy pencil. I took her small bird-like hand into mine. Her crepe-paper skin was cold. I bent down to kiss her hand and then I tucked it under the Cloroxed sheets. She snorted a breath in quickly, choked a little, and blinked her eyelids a few times. She strained to see and then she smiled. "Is that my baby?"

I whispered, "Yes, Mommy, it's me. I didn't mean to wake you." Then I practically shouted, "Happy Mother's Day! I brought you something. It's gonna make you wanna get up off that bed and bootscoot." I brought the cheery daisies up over her bed so that she could see them and then set the CD on top of the covers. Her hand wiggled out from under the covers and after what seemed such a long time, she grasped the CD and held it up to see.

"I don't have my glasses. Who is this?"

I started singing, "On the road again, just can't wait to get on the road again. Hmmm hmmm . . . Like a band of gypsies we go down the highway."

"Oh boy! My ole wild Willie," she whispered as enthusiastically as she could. Her ole' wild Willie and *our* traveling song.

We talked a bit and then I told her to try to go back to sleep. I sat in the chair at the foot of her bed and against the small room's off-white walls. I pulled the heavy grey privacy curtain shut, so no one walking by could see into the room. I glanced at my watch and flipped through an Oprah magazine while listening to Mom's wheezy, labored breath. The oxygen machine was humming, soft enough to make me drowsy, but way too loud to let me sleep.

Ten minutes later I hear, "Elaine," a name that Mom, and only Mom, has ever and always called me. "I'm afraid of dying."

Silence. Perfect silence.

We had never talked about dying before. She sounded so frightened, like a small child who has just watched a Halloween movie and then whines to his Dad, "Daddy, I'm afraid to sleep alone tonight." It was a sincere, somber statement: I'm afraid of dying. A tender, beautiful,

once-in-a-lifetime moment. I laughed a loud, nervous laugh and blurted out, “Mommy, you aren’t going to die! Why, you are going to live forever. Besides, heaven and hell are both afraid of you.” Silence. Perfect silence. And that was all.

I haven’t forgiven myself for that moment.

What I wish I had done was this: I wish I had taken her small hands into mine and held them to my cheek. I wish I had smoothed her hair and assured her that I would be with her to the end. That I would not leave her side and that she would not have to travel this highway by herself. That I, as always, would be on the road again with her and travel with her until I couldn’t go any further.



## Death of an Elephant

— WENDY ANN KAMDIN —

The blossom showers do their usual annual magic between March and April of 1994. Eight days after the first raindrops fall on the tightly rolled buds, dissolving their abscisic acid coating and setting the blossom sequence into motion, white flowers cover each branch of the old gnarled robusta bushes like snow. The air fills with the heady scent of coffee in full bloom. It smells nothing like coffee. Some say the scent is exquisite, alluring, akin to jasmine but stronger, the perfume of dreamland. Others find the scent overpowering, narcotic, disorienting, mind-altering, maddening even, a perfume for the Lotus Eaters.

I am on a coffee plantation in Coorg, not very far from the western edge of the Deccan plateau in southwest India. My husband is a Planter; he manages this coffee estate, having been transferred a year ago from a tea plantation in the Nilgiri Hills to this group of estates. I am a Planter's Wife. I manage our home—the manager's bungalow, the gardens, the retinue of servants—and our social obligations, hosting rounds of dinner parties, luncheons, tennis teas, picnics by the Cauvery River, and the occasional visiting family from distant plantations. I am also a mother. We have a six-year old daughter who attends the local convent school in Madikeri for a while, until I keep her at home.

The 2012 *Confluence* Award for Excellence in Creative Writing

I decide that impromptu and hodgepodge lessons at home are preferable to attending a school that seats sixty children to a classroom, three to a desk, and where she is beaten on the palm of her hand with a wooden ruler because she has been unable to finish her homework. She has been unable to finish her homework because the lights flicker and fail as the first drops of monsoon rain hit the electricity transformer grids. When the lights do not flicker and fail, the voltage that flows through the domestic lines is so low that the bulbs emit a light no brighter than candlelight. Unlike the other planters' children, she has not yet been sent away to boarding school in the Nilgiris, though we have registered her at Lawrence School, Lovedale. Lawrence School was the Lawrence Memorial Institute during the time of the British, where my maternal great-grandmother was sent at the age of ten, as an orphan, when both her parents died of cholera. The monsoons do not come in earnest until mid-June; we are not there yet, and these are memories and reminiscences of a year past.

On this morning, at the height of blossom season, with the air filled with the scent of coffee blossom, the cook brings my morning tea tray fully set: teapot, cup and saucer, spoon, tea strainer, sugar bowl, milk jug. There is milk in the jug, sugar in the bowl, and nothing but emptiness in the teapot. He looks bemused when I point this out, but we both know why he forgot the tea. He and I are similarly affected by the scent of coffee blossom. We lose threads of consciousness. Some planters' wives leave the district during blossom season; I have nowhere to go and so I stay, waking up each morning to another assault on my sense of smell and its connections with my brain. I endure because there are other things that compensate. Blossom season is also bee season. The bees in Coorg are wild and they build hives that hang in great big pendulous slabs from the high branches of the tallest trees in the jungle canopy that serves as shade cover for the coffee bushes. The towering trees are a mix of, among others, giant rosewood, banyan, and jackfruit. Walking out in the garden on a day filled with sunshine I am spattered with what feels like raindrops. There is not a cloud in the sky, but the hum of swarming bees fills the air. The spatter is bee shit, falling out of a sky filled with bees. I do not mind

being covered in bee shit because it smells like honey. There is probably very little difference between bee shit and honey. I look closely at my arm, and the little amber spots of bee shit are the same color as honey. Watching the bees, as some take a break from coffee blossoms and visit the flowers in the bungalow gardens, they look a little drunk. Between bee shit and coffee blossom, life is tolerable, if a little odd; it can also be very good. I wait for the jugs of honey that will soon come to the bungalow, gathered by intrepid Kodava tribesmen who climb the tall trees to harvest the honeycombs.

Blossom season comes and goes. It takes a second set of showers to set the fruit once the flowers have opened. The fruit has set and ripened into glowing bright red berries, or coffee cherries, in plantation parlance. Mandarin orange trees inter-planted amongst the coffee bushes also flowered on time, and the little oranges are ripening nicely. The jackfruit trees are laden with their enormous bulbous fruit, each hanging close to the tree trunks, strange looking thick-bumpy-green-skinned things, each weighing up to eighty pounds. I look forward to the first ripe jackfruit, which one of the servants will hack open with a large and very sharp aruval—the hand-forged carbon steel scimitar-shaped knife of a multitude of purposes. The knife will need to be wiped periodically with cooking oil to prevent the milky white sap from the jackfruit skin and pith from sticking to it. It is a messy process, but the rewards are great: masses of fragrant yellow pods, each three to four inches long and covered with a thin loose outer skin that must be first peeled away, are extricated from the innards of the big green carcass. To describe the taste to the uninitiated is impossible. Jackfruit tastes like jackfruit, chewy yet crisply yielding, sweet, yellow and strongly fragrant: it tastes like it smells. Inside each pod is an inch and a half long bean-shaped seed: the final prize. Collected and later roasted in the hot ashes of the old cast-iron woodstove in the kitchen, their crisp papery skins rubbed off between the hands, the seeds are a treat all on their own, floury, nutty, with a mild bite-back on the tongue.

The figs high up in the massive spreading banyan trees are also turning red and ripe, out of reach and inedible to all but the birds

and animals that favor them, most of all the flying fox, a fruit-eating bat with reddish brown fur, pointed ears, bright soulful round eyes and a face like a little dog or a fox. They taste good, cooked in a curry, the flying fox, I've heard it said.

This is a good time to go for a walk, this time of ripening, through the coffee fields under the jungle canopy, before the monsoon rains come in earnest in June and stay unabated well into September. And so I walk every morning after breakfast, when my husband has left for his rounds on the estate and our daughter has left for school. With me walks the dog, an old black Lab who was really my husband's dog, but who seems mostly to prefer my company now. She doesn't startle at the sound of a twig cracking underfoot as she used to, while looking constantly over her shoulder in alarm, almost ten years ago when I first married her master and took her out on our first walks through the tea fields in the Anamalais, and later through the jungles surrounding other tea fields in Manjolai, further down south on the Western Ghats. I wondered then why she was so timid, and it did not take me long to realize that it was her master who made her cower by the mere sound of his voice. She spent most of her time at the back of the house on the kitchen verandah with the servants then, on her bed of gunny-sacks, when we first met.

And so every morning we walk, the dog and I, first with my daughter Kate down the long driveway to the road where we wait for the little van that stops to pick her up and carry her to her long day at school. On the way back up the driveway we turn right onto a wide track that leads through the coffee fields and the jungle and loops back around, eventually bringing us back to the driveway up to the bungalow. The walk can take about an hour if I want it to, as I explore narrow side-paths that branch off and meander through the coffee. Occasionally I walk back over a small hill that is not planted with coffee, yet has a path that has been beaten through the tangled undergrowth, past large old trees and downhill under a loop of thick electric cables, eventually joining up with the main track. As I walk, I am immersed in the deep green tropical

tranquility of this place. Looking up into the jungle canopy as we walk under a familiar big banyan tree, I see the same flock of flying fox that roost there every day, hanging asleep in their daytime dormitories high up in the branches, their wings wrapped around them like blankets. The sounds of songbirds and chirping tree frogs fill the air.

It is a walk for thinking and reflecting, and wondering what went wrong and when and how and why it did, and what should or ought to be done next. This place is a paradise, but it comes with a heavy price, and it's a price I need to decide whether I can continue to pay. If I decide I can no longer continue to pay this price, there will be another price that must inevitably be paid. My marriage, difficult from day one, has become intolerable. When he walks into the house for lunch as he does every day, and in the evening when he returns from his duties on the plantation, my husband is accompanied by a palpably oppressive miasma that surrounds him and follows him like an aura which makes me flinch, and my eyes twitch. My husband, to summarize nine years of a mystifying marriage, is a master at the art of emotional and psychological abuse. And I, though I have tried every conceivable approach to reach him, to stop the abuse, to change the parts of myself that appear to displease, only to find there are always new ways I displease that bring on yet more verbal disparagement, I have found nothing has helped and nothing has changed. There is no way, I have come to realize, that I can rationally and logically communicate with this man. I must decide whether I can live with this, or whether I can live with myself, if I take my daughter away from her home, her father and everything that is familiar to her. This is the other inevitable price I will have to pay.

This morning on my walk, I see elephant dung at the side of the track a short way into the field. The elephant has been eating oranges and jackfruit, among the other things elephants eat—grass, leaves, shoots. There are jackfruit seeds and partially digested oranges visible in the dung. I imagine how the elephant must have reached up and pulled a ripe jackfruit down with its trunk, then crushed it underfoot and carefully picked out the fruit pods one by one with the delicate

pointed tip of its trunk. This I imagine from past observations of tame elephants, though I have never seen one eat a jackfruit in particular. I wonder where the elephant is, and continue on my walk, watchful. Though some estates, including this one, have had tame working elephants in the past, this estate does not, now. On the way back I take the path over the hill, walking under the low hanging overhead electric cables. Looking up at them, an idle and curious thought passes through my consciousness: I could probably reach and touch them if I stood on my toes and stretched out my arm. I do not do this, however, not with any aforethought as to whether I should or should not. The thought that passed through did not demand action. The cables, I reason to myself, since they're hanging so low must be benign, harmless, perhaps telephone cables. I walk on.

Getting back to the bungalow, I am advised by the estate watchman not to go to field number nine on my morning walk as there's a lone wild tusker in the area. I have just come from field number nine. I already know there's an elephant out there somewhere, having walked by its dung, but it has now developed a personality and a presence. It is a lone wild tusker, therefore a male. For it to be alone, it must be around fifteen years old, which is young for an elephant. He will have been forced to move away from the matriarchal group because he is now, like female elephants of the same age in his herd, sexually mature. He will get an opportunity to mate only when he is about thirty years old and capable of competing with other bulls for estrous females. Being in musth, and therefore sexually excitable, he will have tried anyway, and will have been banished after losing a mock-battle, fought while challenging the reigning bull elephant. Because he is in musth and unable to satisfy the sexual urges this brings upon him, he will be irritable and extremely dangerous. No one on the estate is alarmed, however. We all know he will eventually move on if left alone, and so news of the elephant's whereabouts travels around the estate as it generally does, by word of mouth. I decide to avoid field number nine on my walk the next day.

Morning dawns and another news report makes its way quickly around the estate, all the neighboring estates, and the village: the

young tusker is dead, electrocuted as he walked down that path on that hillock under those low-hanging cables which were, after all, not benign, but high-voltage transmission lines carrying a load of 1,500 volts between sub-stations. This is a major lapse of line maintenance procedures laid squarely on the shoulders of the State of Karnataka Electricity Board, and plantation management contacts them and informs them immediately. The Electricity Board sends a crew out to hoist the cables back to their proper height.

In a steady stream, people from the estates and the village come to look at the dead elephant. I do not go. I do not want to have the image of a dead young tusker unjustly felled in his prime imprinted on my brain. My brain holds pictures of most events, places, people, animals, birds, and insects in exquisite or excruciating detail, whether the former or the latter depends on the context. I am saddened by the news of the young tusker's death, and must find a new path to walk on, to avoid seeing his remains. Young tuskers walk with a certain panache, as they swish their tails from side to side, flap their ears, and sashay their way jauntily through the jungle. I prefer to picture him like this, sashaying through the jungle, stopping by a coffee plantation to eat jackfruit and oranges.

There is, however, the matter of the dead elephant that must be disposed of. The forest department has been informed and they come to remove and take possession of the tusks. Our estate workers dig a pit on the side of the hill just below the elephant and fill it with wood from old culled robusta coffee bushes. Coffee wood has a very high calorific value: it burns long, strong, and slow. We burn the same wood in the bungalow fireplaces to keep the rooms warm in the damp cold of the monsoons and to dry our clothes in front of. The pyre is lit and gravity eases the dead elephant onto it. Workers stand guard and tend the fire over the next week.

Standing on the patio at the side garden of the bungalow, I can see smoke rising and hanging in the air over the tops of the trees. Every now and then when the wind blows towards me, I catch a whiff of roasting elephant.

I take another path on my morning walk for the next week and think of another elephant, a little over nine years ago. On the afternoon of our

wedding day, after the wedding lunch at the Savoy Hotel in Ooty, a little hill station up in the Nilgiri Hills, my new husband and I drove down the steep Sigur Ghat road. We were headed for the village of Masinagudi at the border of the Mudumalai game reserve, for the wedding of a daughter of an old friend of his. Coming down off the mountains into the plains, entering the scrub jungle, my husband stopped the car on a small bridge over a culvert. "Have to take a piss," he said, as he shut off the engine, hopped out of the car and walked into the bushes by the side of the road. I sat in the car, admiring my wedding and engagement rings as the sun shone on them. It felt good to be wife: I had a husband, we were a family. I was thirty-three and had very recently lost my family, both parents having died two months apart a few short months before. My husband came sprinting back to the car, frantically zipping up his pants on the way. "Elephant!" he said, grinning, as he hopped back in the car, started up the engine, and drove quickly away from the bridge. Lone elephant in the scrub jungle by the side of the road: we did not see it. An elephant can hide in plain sight in the jungle—standing perfectly still it can look like a shadow of a bush or tree, or a rock. The rocks in some parts of these jungles are the same color and size as an elephant. We made it safely to Masinagudi.

What went wrong between us, between that elephant then, nine years ago, and this one now? There had been brief, fleeting incidents, harbingers of the trouble to come, of a sequence set. I had a slight taste of it that evening after dinner as we made our way to our guest room. He had been inexplicably rude; I brushed it off, cuddling tearfully up to him in bed. That memory is very vague, the night was dark, and he hugged me to him, saying, "there there, don't be silly, it'll be alright." The mystery had begun. I remember only the darkness and the sense of control he exuded.

The following day, the day after our own wedding, was jarringly strange and disturbing. We walked into the roomful of guests for his friend's daughter's wedding, and my husband stopped to greet a couple, old friends of his, the man a planter, and his wife. He exchanged jovial greetings, then said something derogatory about America or Americans, and with the next breath gestured towards me saying,

"meet my wife, she's an American." I, so taken aback at this strange introduction, do not remember what exactly he had said about Americans, only that it was unmistakably derogatory. The wife of the couple looked at me, one eyebrow raised, an unspoken invitation to defend myself. I smiled, not acknowledging the slight, saying nothing but "pleased to meet you," and kept on smiling. There it was, my fatal flaw: I was unable to stand up for myself, to defend myself, then as always. I did not realize this then, however. It takes too many years to learn this about myself, and by the time I do, it's too late. With my failure, then, to speak up for myself, I set the stage and the tone for the rest of my marriage. What would have happened had I not been prone to flight when a situation demanded a fight-or-flight response? Eager to please, too eager to avoid confrontation, I am always the first to concede defeat, to admit blame where there is none, to retreat.

Had I picked up the gauntlet, challenged him then, stood up for myself, would he have turned to me, as he did, a few steps further into the room, snarling in an undertone: "Why are you following me? Go on and introduce yourself to people," leaving me, his wife of one day, to find my own way, mystified, hurt and alone in a crowd of strangers? Yes, we all have our flaws, and my husband's were particularly harsh, but my flaws were fuel to the flames that destroyed our marriage.

This elephant now, nine years later, takes a week to burn. When I am sure there is nothing left but ashes, I walk for the first and last time to the funeral pyre and find it still smoldering, wisps of smoke rising into the jungle air. I stand there a while, mourning both the death of the elephant and of my marriage. I have made my decision.

The monsoon rains come, and in mid-July, one gloomy night during dinner, when he is as he often is, well fueled with rum, in the midst of a recurring tirade, the context of which never seems to have any bearing on reality, he says, unbidden, "I will destroy you before I let you go."

I have not yet told him I am leaving.



## Why Route 66?

### An Exploration of Memory, Place, and Identity

— DONNA R. BRADEN —

*Donna's Journal: My family and I had a few hours to kill in Albuquerque, New Mexico, one summer evening back in 2005. We had heard that Central Avenue, the main highway going through downtown, was an old stretch of Route 66. Curious, we went to check it out. As twilight turned to nighttime, mile after mile of old motels beckoned, with flashing neon arrows, colorful signs, and quaint adobe architecture. Some seemed well preserved, but most were run-down and neglected. Several were sadly boarded up. At one place, only the sign remained. How many motorists, we wondered, would have once traveled along this road to support this many motels? And what kind of driving experience must have existed to make this stretch of road seem like a welcome oasis? Like many before us, we became hooked that night—hooked on searching out the quirky and the quaint; the iconic and the odd; the often neglected, overgrown, and tumbledown features of old Route 66.*

U.S. Route 66 is probably the most famous road in America. It has been called “the Mother Road,” “the road of flight,” and the “Main Street of America.” More than 200 artists have recorded the 1946 Bobby Troup song, “Get Your Kicks on Route 66.” Foreign tourists, who flock to Route 66 every summer, consider it the place to see “the real

America.” Yet the road as a national highway does not exist anymore. In a postmodern age, Route 66 is now a cultural symbol rather than an actual highway. It provides a way for people to create a usable past, helping them come to terms with the world and their own lives.

In *Voices of Collective Remembering*, James V. Wertsch describes collective memory as “mediated action,” in which cultural tools distributed among “agents,” or individuals in a collective, are shared, mastered, and used to various ends.<sup>1</sup> Route 66 itself is collectively remembered through a four-part narrative, involving unique cultural tools, heroic narratives, and enduring symbols. While history, with its multiple perspectives and ambiguities, plays a role in these accounts, collective memory tends to triumph—simplifying and reducing place, people, and events to symbols and mythic archetypes.<sup>2</sup> According to sociologist Eviatar Zerubavel, the “plotline” of this particular narrative is a “zigzag in time,” a story of rise and fall that involves a tragic scenario and leads to a significant turning point.<sup>3</sup>

The first part of the Route 66 narrative is the story of its creation. In the early decades of the twentieth century, an increasing number of American motorists demanded smoother, faster, and more direct roads. Private, grass-roots efforts led to the creation of a confusing web of more than 250 individually marked and named cross-country highways. Finally, in 1926, the Federal government decided to assign a standardized numbering system to almost 100,000 miles of major highways crisscrossing the country. Route 66 was officially established at this time—spanning 2,448 miles through eight states from Chicago, Illinois to Los Angeles, California. In the beginning, Route 66 was little more than a “transcontinental rut that usually filled with water and mud on the least occasion of rain.”<sup>4</sup> But it gained fame as the best route across the western half of the country. Adapting romantic and idealized depictions of Native Americans, cowboys, and the “Wild West” from railroad promotional literature, Route 66 boosters promised motorists adventure, freedom, and authentic encounters with primitive cultures in an “untamed frontier.”

The Dust Bowl of the 1930s provides the backdrop for the second chapter of the Route 66 narrative. Route 66 became known as the

“road of flight,” as hundreds of thousands of “Okies” fled disastrous dust storms and headed west for a better life in California. In reality, “Okies” came from several states, not just Oklahoma. Many of them actually migrated east and north looking for jobs, not just west. They took routes other than 66, like 54 and 80. Moreover, most of them found no sanctuary in California and were forced to turn back. In fact, to locals, the “real” Oklahomans stayed home and toughed out the hard times. But, in the collective memory, Route 66 is forever linked to the plight of Dust Bowl migrants. It was immortalized in such cultural texts as John Steinbeck’s 1939 classic, *The Grapes of Wrath*, and by John Ford’s movie adaptation of that book the following year. As Steinbeck wrote:

Highway 66 is the main migrant road . . . 66 is the path of the people in flight, refugees from dust and shrinking land, from the thunder of tractors and shrinking ownership . . . 66 is the mother road, the road of flight.<sup>5</sup>

The third and most potent part of the Route 66 narrative picks up after World War II. With new optimism and postwar economic recovery, the road sprang back to life and turned into a heavily traveled tourist route. Millions of vacationers took to the road searching for adventure.

In 1946, Route 66 was immortalized in a new way when songwriter Bobby Troup penned the words to “Get Your Kicks on Route 66.” Singer Nat “King” Cole recorded the song that same year and this jazzy upbeat tune lived on as a “lyrical travelogue of the road.”<sup>6</sup> A virtual golden age followed. Route 66 came to symbolize car culture and 1950s optimism and exuberance, along with the enduring symbols of adventure, independence, and freedom. Despite more recent historical analysis recognizing the segregation and discrimination that African Americans encountered along the Route, these were the symbols that became etched in the collective memory.

The highly popular *Route 66* television show, on the air from 1960 to 1964, reinforced the existing popular symbolism. In the show, two

clean-cut highway adventurers drive a new Corvette across the West, doing good deeds and solving moral dilemmas for troubled people they meet along the way. Some critics claimed that the show represented the “last gasp” of wholesome American values at the very time that massive societal changes were eroding these values.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, this show gave the Route more exposure and national publicity than any previous time in its history.

The final chapter of the Route 66 narrative marks its demise. Its popularity had made it congested, slow, and treacherous. Between the passage of the Interstate Highway Act in 1956 and the late 1970s, five new interstate highways slowly replaced the Route. To most people, the interstates symbolized progress, promising motorists speed, convenience, and standardized amenities. In 1985, the Federal Highway Administration officially decommissioned U.S. Route 66, and most people considered it “dead.” It became a confusing jumble of local—sometimes dead-end—roads and a memory.

But the memory refused to die. After 30 years of living with interstates, some people now saw them as too efficient, regulated, and impersonal—lacking in adventure and variety. A growing number of motorists longed for a slower pace of travel. In retrospect, that motley assortment of local businesses running up and down Route 66 now seemed “quaint and humanizing.”<sup>8</sup> From the interests and activities of a few individuals and scattered organizations, a whole new movement of passionate enthusiasts sprang up.

When Route 66 became a symbol rather than a road, it became more popular than ever. To what do we owe the enduring appeal of Route 66? Many tend to attribute this appeal to nostalgia. Zerubavel defines nostalgia as people’s tragic vision of a glorious past lost forever, leading to a deep sentimental and highly romanticized attachment to “the good old days.”<sup>9</sup> In *Hip to the Trip: A Cultural History of Route 66*, cultural historian Peter B. Dedek calls the Route an “object of nostalgia,” since it represents tragic loss—former glory, faded youth, failed rebellion, and lost innocence.<sup>10</sup>

However, tourism researchers Kellee Caton and Carla Almeida Santos offer an alternative viewpoint. If Route 66 had become primarily

a figure of nostalgia, Caton and Santos argue, it would follow that its travelers would glorify the past, filter out negative historical elements, and choose to focus on a simplified, romantic version of place and history.<sup>11</sup> However, according to their findings, the Route 66 travelers they interviewed did not have a particularly “rosy” view of the past, did not view the past and present as mutually exclusive, and sought not familiarity, but challenge and personal growth.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, rather than being one-dimensional and passive, as nostalgia theory purports, their interviewees proved to be active agents in shaping their own experiences.<sup>13</sup>

Because nostalgia is not adequate to explain the enduring appeal of Route 66, then other forces must be at work. In positing his view of tourism as a “sacred journey,” anthropologist Nelson Graburn asserts that, when one embarks upon a journey, he leaves behind his mundane, ordinary state of existence and enters the realm of the sacred or extraordinary.<sup>14</sup> The sacred journey along Route 66 involves three key elements: sense of place, pilgrimage, and concretization of memories through picture-taking and souvenir-collecting.

*Donna’s Journal: We crossed the border from Kansas into northeastern Oklahoma on old Route 66. Kansas was green, grassy, and hilly. Oklahoma quickly became barren, flat, and windswept. We were heading as far as Commerce, about ten miles down the road. Upon reaching this little town, we followed our Route 66 Adventure Handbook to a tiny house on an anonymous street corner. Here, a placard on the front door confirmed what we were seeking. Baseball great Mickey Mantle had been born here. Over there across the yard, the guidebook told us, we would find indentations on the corrugated metal barn where Mantle had practiced hitting balls as a young boy. We went over to explore and touch each indentation. A lone little boy sat on a stoop across the street and surreptitiously eyed us trooping about and taking pictures. Behind the house where he sat, the town ended with abrupt finality and turned into flat nothingness again. There was little else out on the bleak landscape beyond the town to break the wind’s ceaseless wailing.*

Places are not only physical environments but also human and cultural landscapes. As such, they reveal individual and cultural tastes,

values, and aspirations in tangible, visible form.<sup>15</sup> According to historian of religion and American Studies scholar Rowland A. Sherrill, our sense of place involves a set of deeper perceptions and feelings that emerge from personal encounters with these environments.<sup>16</sup> Using religious analogy, Sherrill further asserts that a place exerts its greatest power when it is imbued with mythical, symbolic power and inspires a sort of holy awe.<sup>17</sup> It has entered the realm of the sacred.

Geographer David Lowenthal notes that we perceive and appreciate cultural landscapes through relics—that is, artifacts and physical traces believed to have endured from an earlier time.<sup>18</sup> Some of these are marked with signs, providing tangible reminders of and connections to the past. Others stand in a natural state or are protected, restored, or replicated. Still others are designated in maps and guidebooks so we can mentally affirm: “Yes, there it is. I recognize it, it is in the right place, it stands out from present-day things around it.”<sup>19</sup>

Since its beginning, Route 66 has evoked the sacred power of place for actual and would-be travelers. Reinforcing this notion, Caton and Santos’s study revealed that “experiencing the landscape in an intimate way” was a key element of Route 66 travelers’ journeys.<sup>20</sup> Travelers “doing” Route 66 spend much of their time following specially-made maps and guidebooks, looking to identify key iconic buildings and landscapes that still survive.

*Donna’s Journal: It took longer than we expected that evening, but we eventually made it. In the growing darkness, we searched until—there they were! We could just make out the criss-crossed poles at the tops of the teepees against the darkening sky. Our long-awaited pilgrimage to the famous Wigwam Village Motel, a Route 66 icon in Holbrook, Arizona, was finally at hand.*

A second element of the sacred journey is pilgrimage. Lowenthal claims that religious pilgrimages were generally undertaken as a purposeful escape from an unsatisfactory state or position.<sup>21</sup> Even today, he asserts, pilgrimages to historical “shrines” produce a mystical change in us, transforming us into a “better man or woman.”<sup>22</sup> Indeed, Caton and Santos’s study found that Route 66 “pilgrims” considered their trip a sort of odyssey, involving challenge, reflection, and person-

al growth. The journeys placed them in novel situations and led them to think about things differently.<sup>23</sup>

Much of the appeal of pilgrimages in general, and the Route 66 pilgrimage in particular, is the quest for authenticity or “life as lived.”<sup>24</sup> Along the Route, one can still travel actual stretches of the road and meet genuine Route 66 personalities, as well as stay in the same motels, eat in the same restaurants, and view the same scenery as the original travelers on the road. For Caton and Santos interviewees, authenticity played a significant role. One traveler commented, “There’s nothing fake here. There’s just real stuff.”<sup>25</sup>

*Donna’s Journal: Through most of eastern Missouri, it was hard to find any remnants of old 66, so we mostly headed west on I-44. About halfway across the state, our guidebook read, “West of the I-44 exit 176 is something you really should stop and see.” So we did. It was off on a dead-end road. We almost missed it. But when we finally found it, we had to get out and take a look around. The place was a long-abandoned ruin. A once-neat row of squat log cabins, now tumbling down. We had to laugh at the old rusted sign—John’s Modern Cabins.*

The existence of “ruins” heightens the emotional experience of the pilgrimage. According to Lowenthal, these “emanations from a previous age” directly connect with our senses and heighten our awareness of time.<sup>26</sup> Route 66 is, itself, a living ruin, with an eerie, vacant quality. One can truly “walk among the ruins” here, stopping at mile after mile of roadside businesses, historic structures, vestiges of landscape, and parts of the original road—many threatened, falling into ruins, and remote. Decay is part of its attractiveness.

In addition to sense of place and pilgrimage, a third element of the sacred journey is travelers’ need for tangible proof “that the trip was made, that the program was carried out, that fun was had.”<sup>27</sup> Picture-taking and souvenir-collecting concretize the trip, provide indisputable evidence that it was undertaken, and bestow identity, clarity, and definition upon the experience. These are both important parts of the Route 66 experience.

In addition to the sacred journey, the other compelling reason that I am positing for the enduring appeal of Route 66 is the construction

and shaping of identity. Identity construction fits within Wertsch's discussion of "distributed memory," in which a representation of the past is distributed among members of a collective.<sup>28</sup> Even though the individuals within a collective might interpret or remember an event or place differently, shared perceptions and the use of common cultural tools give rise to an overall collective framework about it.

In his 1990 *Traveler's Guide*, Tom Snyder claimed that, for the truly passionate traveler, Route 66 is about:

. . . finding something adventurous, daring, and even romantic in yourself. It's about expanding your perceptions along with the changing view just beyond the windshield.<sup>29</sup>

Caton and Santos found that the Route 66 travelers they interviewed did, indeed, define their trips as rich in providing raw materials for "active self-making." New encounters while doing the Route shaped their life narratives, as challenges, novelty, and serendipity created active involvement in creating the experience and led to personal reflection and growth. Such qualities as self-reliance, fulfillment, self-esteem, mystical change, and getting in touch with oneself emerged in the interviews as helping to construct and shape personal identity.<sup>30</sup>

How does an individual relate to or identify with the many layers of collective memory and cultural symbols of Route 66? Which symbol or symbols best fit an individual's sense of self? The answer is any or all of them. In our postmodern age, the many rich, complex, anachronistic symbols appeal precisely because of their plurality and fragmentation. They keep the road vital and alluring to the numerous individuals who find personal meaning here. They allow individuals to create their own usable past, to customize their own personal connections, to harness these to their own ends for self, group, and national identity. The quirky highway, quite simply, suits our post-modern mentality.

Along with self-identity, Route 66 also contributes to group identity. According to Wertsch's description of "textual communities," Route 66 inspires both "implicit communities"—enthusiasts from all

over the world who use a common set of cultural tools even though they may be unaware of it—and "imagined communities"—that is, active collectives that recognize their collectivity and share cultural tools to demarcate their community.<sup>31</sup> Route 66 "imagined communities" include local preservation and promotional organizations, statewide booster groups, subscribers to specialty publications, and organized tours. Also among these collectives are a growing number of foreign visitors, familiar with and enamored of the Route through a variety of images, ideas, and cultural tools, both real and imagined. Another kind of collective is formed as enthusiasts meet other like-minded individuals along with way, or meet locals that share their enthusiasm. Together, collective memory is reinforced out of this interaction with others.

Finally, for enthusiasts and non-enthusiasts alike, the collective memory of Route 66 is also deeply intertwined with American national identity. Just as the Route was on the verge of being decommissioned in the mid-1980s, journalist Thomas Pew, Jr., opined:

Route 66 isn't just a part of America, it is America. It is the ultimate symbol of the essence of a restless country that's never settled down, the migrant way of a restless folk who are more on the move than the most nomadic tribes of the world.<sup>32</sup>

Mobility, freedom, independence—these are enduring symbols of both Route 66 and the American character. Route 66 and America are indelibly linked, and the bonds remain strong.

When Route 66 ceased to be a national thoroughfare, it became a symbol that incorporated multiple layers of its own history and collective memory. Nostalgia has been identified as one explanation for its enduring appeal, but this seems inadequate. More powerful forces like sense of place, pilgrimage, and concretization of memories—all part of tourism's sacred journey—help to explain its popularity. Moreover, individual, group, and national identity play key roles. From the rich, complex, often anachronistic symbols formed by the layers of the Route's history and collective memory, people find

personal meaning and make their own connections. In today's post-modern age, people use Route 66 to create a usable past, ultimately helping them come to terms with their own lives and the world around them.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>James V. Wertsch, *Voices of Collective Remembering* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 11.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>3</sup>Eviator Zerubavel, *Time Maps: Collective Memory and the Social Shape of the Past* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 18-19.

<sup>4</sup>Tom Snyder, *The Route 66 Traveler's Guide and Roadside Companion* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), xvi.

<sup>5</sup>Quoted in Peter B. Dedek, *Hip to the Trip: A Cultural History of Route 66* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2007), 39.

<sup>6</sup>Dedek, *Hip to the Trip*, 49.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>9</sup>Zerubavel, *Time Maps*, 16.

<sup>10</sup>Dedek, *Hip to the Trip*, 66-67.

<sup>11</sup>Kellee Caton and Carla Almeida Santos, "Heritage Tourism on Route 66: Deconstructing Nostalgia," *Journal of Travel Research* 45, no. 4 (May 2007), 372.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, 380.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, 372-73.

<sup>14</sup>Nelson H. H. Graburn, "Tourism: The Sacred Journey," in *Hosts and Guests: The Anthropology of Tourism*, ed. Valene

L. Smith (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1977), 20.

<sup>15</sup>Pierce F. Lewis, "Axioms for Reading the Landscape: Some Guides to the American Scene," in *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographical Essays*, ed. D. W. Meinig (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 11-12.

<sup>16</sup>Rowland A. Sherrill, "American Sacred Space and the Contest of History," in *American Sacred Space*, ed. David Chidester and Edward T. Linenthal (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), 316.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, 313.

<sup>18</sup>David Lowenthal, "Age and Artifact: Dilemmas of Appreciation," in *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographical Essays*, ed. D. W. Meinig (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 108.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>20</sup>Caton and Santos, "Heritage Tourism on Route 66," 377.

<sup>21</sup>David Lowenthal, "Past Time, Present Place: Landscape and Memory," *Geographical Review* 65, no. 1 (January 1975), 14.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup>Caton and Santos, "Heritage Tourism on Route 66," 379.

<sup>24</sup>Susan Sessions Rugh, *Are We There Yet? The Golden Age of American Family*

*Vacations* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2008), 42.

<sup>25</sup>Caton and Santos, "Heritage Tourism on Route 66," 378.

<sup>26</sup>David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 152.

<sup>27</sup>Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977), 9.

<sup>28</sup>Wertsch, *Voices*, 21-22.

<sup>29</sup>Snyder, *The Route 66 Traveler's Guide*, xv.

<sup>30</sup>Caton and Santos, "Heritage Tourism on Route 66," 383.

<sup>31</sup>Wertsch, *Voices*, 63-64.

<sup>32</sup>Thomas W. Pew, Jr., "Goodbye to Main Street 66," *American West* 21, no. 5 (September-October 1984), 50.



## Two Stories

— JOAN EYLES JOHNSON —

### Flight

It was just a postcard, not a Hallmark three dollar birthday job with sparkles, and the writing was cramped but feminine on the back of the picture of flying seagulls, “Dear June, These gulls are bringing you love on your birthday. Mother.” On the bottom the printed words read, “The seagull’s flight in the blue heaven’s height.”

She turned it over and looked at the three winged creatures captured forever by an anonymous photographer, and thought that they were all dead by now while she had just this day turned twenty-three.

The meeting with Mr. Davis was scheduled for six-thirty and it was already that plus a few seconds. She arrived at the café to see him sitting outside in the graying light, looking like a ghost, an angular albino.

His thinning hair was pasted flat over a marble head wearing black-rimmed glasses. She immediately saw them both as a passer-by would see them, a prodigiously somber man and a vivacious

young woman wearing a red beret, a gift from her first grade students, and a red plaid coat.

He didn't rise to greet her but slouched further down into his black leather coat leaving a rim of white as if a setting moon were angry at the approaching daylight. His posture daunted her somewhat.

"You wanted to see me, Mr. Davis."

"You are late."

"I'm almost late. I'm sorry. It's my birthday and the kids . . ."

He was not listening, "Is that an excuse? Never let a problem become an excuse."

"I am here. I could be somewhere else. Celebrating, I mean."

He jerked forward almost tipping over his water glass, and she could see the swollen red rims of his nostrils and the blue threads running through his cheeks. He moved his thin dry lips as if they hurt.

"Why don't you go now then and let fate take its toll. I won't worry."

He unfolded his long legs like a crumpled spider and bumped her feet but did not apologize.

"I suppose you think it is going to be easier now with your mother coming home. Well it is going to be harder than ever for you. And her. Personally I am against these jailhouse lawyers."

Dark wispy clouds scudded across the sky, and leaves in the eucalyptus tree above them hissed like a dying fire. A dog howled in the distance beyond the cars that scraped along the street in front of the café. Wind filled the dusk with crispy noise.

"I've read the letter from the warden a hundred times, and I know, more or less, what to expect."

"You can never know what to expect, Girl. Do not say stupid things. Your mother has been out of the world for seventeen years. You don't even know her. She will have a hard time adjusting."

A waiter came to take their order. He said, without looking up, "Just coffee. I have already eaten." She said, imagining pity in the young waiter's eyes, "I'll have a bagel with cream cheese and a latte."

She noticed, between cars, a raggedy man sitting in a doorway across the street, his body curled inward, his eyes closed like a mole. She wondered if he was remembering his youth, a bike to a Saturday

matinee, salt water taffy at the beach, chocolate ice cream and . . . The parole officer interrupted her thoughts. "You will have to be vigilant, cautious. She has proven to be a violent person. You have instructions about calling for help."

Did that man in the doorway ever play bridge, go to a concert, and go out for recess? She hated Mr. Davis. "Is this all you have to tell me? What I already know?"

"Yes. But I cannot say it strongly enough. If you have any problems, inklings, fears, you are to call me at once, do you hear me clearly? I am responsible for her actions for the next five years. Personally, I don't believe in rehabilitation. Prisons are just warehouses for human refuse."

She thought of the clay pots her kids had begun today in the classroom. There is nothing wrong with being a clay pot. It's just that some of us can fall off the shelf, break, someone can push us accidentally. Any of us can be fired into porcelain. She decided not to share this thought with Mr. Davis.

"It's like pottery," she heard herself saying despite her nervousness, "My mom has been fired and didn't explode in the kiln or collapse or develop cracks that refuse to heal. She learned from the heat. Pots can be fixed."

Mr. Davis threw two dollars down on the table without waiting for his coffee and abruptly rose from the table. "I can see you are not going to be realistic about this. Your mother is not some school project you have volunteered to take on. She is a convicted criminal entrusted to my care. I expect total cooperation, but perhaps you are too young, one of those brainwashed individuals who thinks prisons are full of victims, downtrodden and poor and not deviants and dangerous . . ."

She interrupted him by rising, scraping her chair and startling the couple sitting behind them. "I have not been alone with my mom for most of my life. You do not even know my mom. I am a child of violence. My mom has explained herself to me a thousand times and I understand things. I will have no problems. You needn't worry. She has paid for her mistake. For her freedom."

He gave her one last icy look and tossed himself angrily through the table-strewn path, shouting over clinking trays, rattling dishes and chatter, "You have my number. Keep it close by at all times."

She stood shivering, crying, a perfect copy of her mother, as Mr. Davis flew stiffly like a creature from Halloween across the street while it was momentarily free of cars.

## The Glass Bead

It was dark. They sat all five of them, in a circle in the middle of the warm brown darkness, not too close, not too far apart. Leonhardt was later than usual and this fact tied a thick red rope of fear around them. Any kind of change in the routine brought with it this strangulation, this numbing silence.

"She may have fallen in the woods," said Donleavy, "She is getting old. Maybe it was her time today."

"Nonsense," sputtered Poma, chewing on a sweet white leaf, "Leonhardt is still bleeding regularly."

They took hold of each other's hands without anyone suggesting it, and began to chant the evening songs before food. Even though the meal was not forthcoming with its venerable purveyor, they calmed themselves with the soft hum of their gentle voices.

The whistling bugs inside the cave joined with those outside and soon the swelling noise drowned out the humans. Moonlight sailed in through the opening, and still they sat. No sign of food, and no one to welcome home with their weekly sustenance.

"We need sleep now," Poma said wearily. "It will be a long night of rumbling bellies. This has not happened for a long time and some of you do not know the meaning of hunger." She rose stiffly and went to the edge of the cave where she took some tightly rolled blankets and began to unfold them against the walls. Reluctantly the others rose and shuffled to their woolen beds. Soon all living creatures were asleep. Except for the sliver of moonlight that reached into the cave and probed for assurances of life with its thin fingers, all was darkness.

The next morning there was no sign of the food purveyor so they shuffled about in their long brown robes and filed down to the river to wash. They ran delicate long fingers through their wet hair until it was almost dry. They sang, each a private song, and when they felt satisfied and happy with the prospects of a new day, they sauntered off in different directions.

Donleavy, a young one still, ran up to Poma and fell into step with her. "Are we never to speak of Leonhardt again?"

Poma was tall and angular and had very long legs and even though she was not young, she could make it difficult for Donleavy to keep up with her, but she had no need to be unkind this morning, and besides, she had always been the missing one's best friend. "We may speak of her, but only with gratitude, never bitterness or disappointment."

"Who made up that rule?"

"Those who made up all our rules. The wise ones. The pioneers."

"May we try to break a rule?"

"It's been tried a thousand times over the years, and is just a waste of time. In the end you will see the wisdom of the ages is always tried and true."

Donleavy did not like that answer, but she followed her mentor in silence through the forest. Poma broke a long stick from a branch and began to peel the bark from it. Seeing the younger one looking at the stick with envy, she gave it to her and got another one, which she peeled in the same manner. Now the two of them sat cross-legged in the woods, stripping the bark from the sticks until they each had a long white smooth shiny instrument.

"I'm first, Poma said, "You'll do me after."

She pulled the robe from the young one's back and began to stroke ever so softly at first, but with each whip the force grew steadily until Donleavy's back was raw with stripes. She never cried out, or winced, but kept her eyes staring at one spot she had chosen at the start, without wavering. In fact, it is safe to say there was even a small spark of pleasure burning in the center of her eyes as the wind, whistling through the reed, whipped the air on its way to the tender target.

"Now, me. Poma pulled her own robe down around her strong calves.

Donleavy repaid her in kind. They fell on their backs wincing and laughing together. They rolled about playfully and then when Poma rose to run to the river to wash the blood from her body, Donleavy scurried along behind her.

Ramirez was sitting waist-deep at the edge of the river holding a glass bead up to the light and away from her face. She laughed when she saw them. "You just missed it, all the fun."

"I don't think so," Donleavy said, scooping water into her voluptuous mouth.

"I just saw somebody get killed."

The three of them drew closer together. "Yes," Ramirez continued as she swallowed the bead, "Leonhardt was running right there at the edge of the river, over there on that side and she tripped and the animal ground her into little pieces and ate her."

No one spoke. It was the custom to maintain a long silence when hearing bad news.

Later that day Poma called everyone to assembly. "It is time to elect a new food purveyor. Call everyone else in."

White Dahlia was the most likely candidate. It was her turn. She was just beginning to grow breasts and her legs were strong and lithe. Leonhardt had taught her everything about the land and she knew the safe trails and interiors of caves that lined the beach. She could find the small animals and could kill quietly.

The next evening they sat in a circle eating the meat White Dahlia brought them.



## The Pipe

— MARYEDITH BURRELL —

It was the spring of 1959, and the water was rising. It had been raining for days. That's why Sister Emerenciana let the children of St. Mary's go home at lunchtime. It wasn't coming down as bad as the Easter of '52 when the muddy waters of Miller Creek submerged Pina Tognetti's garden gate, but Police Chief Fortino didn't want to take any chances. Miller Creek had flooded before, so the kids who lived on Walnut Lane, Chestnut Street, and all along Murray Avenue were ordered home to moms frantically packing station wagons and dads loading dogs and TVs onto pickups. Everyone on Gilroy's east side was heading to Grandma's or the El Camino Motel in Morgan Hill. Even the local chapter of the National Guard was called to help with the evacuation, but safety was the last thing on Kate McCarey's mind.

Today was the day she was going to "Walk The Pipe." She was nine, and The Pipe had been suspended under the Miller Creek bridge as long as she could remember. Her father told her Fredo Hanna put it there before their subdivision even existed, when Walnut Lane was just miles of orchard and Fredo and his dad, Sando, irrigated their trees, draining the water away from IOOF Avenue. It was nice to know the pipe had a history. It was even nicer to know that if the Water Project

finally did something about Miller Creek, chances were they wouldn't touch the pipe. None of the kids who lived on Walnut Lane could imagine life without it, for they marked their passage from kid to cool with that old duct. "Walking The Pipe" was their Confirmation. If you made it, you were in. If you fell, you were out. It was that simple. No girl had ever "Walked The Pipe." Kate was determined to be the first, and it had to be today, because today in reading group Roy Malino double-dared her to do it in the rain. Kate couldn't back down because Roy was a bully, because he hated girls, didn't think they could do anything, and told everybody so. And, because, like Ward Bond said on Wagon Train, Roy Malino "needed whuppin'."

Fire trucks were already parked on the road, and Perry Construction was bringing in sandbags when Kate and her friends Nita and Matthew, and Matthew's little sister, Marci, slid down the muddy creek bed on their butts. Their school uniforms were drenched and dirty when they reached the bottom. Roy Malino was already there, yelling from the opposite bank.

"Hey, Kate Bait! Hurry up. Pipe's almost gone."

"I can still do it!" she yelled back.

"Not if you're chicken," Roy said.

"Takes one to know one!" shouted Kate through the driving rain.

She ripped off her raincoat and made a big show of stuffing it in Nita's arms. Just then, a police car drove slowly over the bridge, lights flashing. Roy ducked behind a bush. Kate, Nita, and Matthew crouched down and waited anxiously for the car to pass. It was all too much for Marci. She stood in the rain, tears welling in her eyes.

"Don't do it, Kate! You'll kill yourself and get arrested and go to hell!"

This gave Kate pause. Marci had a point. Suicide was a sin, and Kate hadn't even thought about the possibility of dying. Matthew, as always, was the voice of reason.

"Don't worry, kiddo," Matthew told his sister. "You know what Father Dwyer said in assembly."

"I don't remember," Marci whined, drying her eyes on her wet coat sleeve.

"Kate is making a sacrifice. If she kills herself and gets drowned it's not a sin like hari-kari or anything," Matthew said.

"How come?" Marci whimpered.

"Because it's like the Martyrs, stupid," said Nita. "Kate is St. Lucy."

"She's not getting eaten by a lion," Marci argued.

"That's Agnes. Lucy got her eyes gouged out, everybody knows that," sighed Nita, turning to Matthew. "I told you your stupid sister was too little to come."

"She's not stupid, she's scared," Matthew said, then turned to Marci. "Kate is St. Lucy only with eyes, and she's making a Noble Sacrifice against Roy Malino."

"Who is evil," said Nita.

"And a fat jerk," added Kate, eyeing Roy on the opposite bank, arms folded and smirking.

"You gonna talk or walk, Kate Bait?" he yelled.

"I'm walkin' better than you, Malino!" Kate removed her soaked sweater and let it drop in the mud.

Nita picked it up. "Your mother's going to kill you."

"If Kate falls in the creek and gets sucked under because she's fighting Roy Malino . . ."

"Who is the Devil," said Kate.

". . . it's not a sin. It's a noble sacrifice. She'll go straight to heaven and get her name in Butler's Lives of the Saints," Matthew concluded.

"Really? Oh, Kate, I'm so glad," smiled Marci.

"Good. Hold my shoes," Kate said, whipping off her oxfords and handing them over to the little girl. Kate liked the reward of heaven and the idea of her story being told in a gold-embossed encyclopedia, but right now all she could think about was climbing onto the big, slippery pipe.

She'd been preparing for this day for months. Walking the narrow top rails of the wooden fences that ran up and down her alley. Traversing miles of irrigation pipes in the garlic fields off Bolsa Road. Building a tree fort in the tallest live oak behind the Purla's shed. Balance, endurance, heights—sure, all of it helped, but now, looking out at that big wet pipe tied to the bottom of the old bridge, Kate

could feel a tingling in the back of her knees that only meant one thing—fear.

She knew the distance from the north side of the bridge to the south was sixty-one feet. She knew the pipe was two feet wide, had eight ties, and hung sixteen feet over the water. But today, in the pouring rain, with fleeing families rumbling above and water rising below, with Roy calling her “chicken girl” and Marci bawling, all of a sudden the Miller Creek bridge looked like the Golden Gate. Kate whispered a prayer, “Angel of God, my guardian dear, to whom God’s love commits me here, ever this day be at my side to light and guard, to rule and guide.”

She was six feet from the bank before she knew what she was doing. The rain was coming at her sideways; she could barely see. The rule was you could hold onto two ties if you needed to, but if you were really tough you’d go the distance “no hands.” Kate wasn’t sure how to proceed. As far as she knew she was the first kid, boy or girl, to walk the pipe in the rain. Maybe she could hang onto three ties. Who was she kidding? Roy Malino wouldn’t give her a break. She could see him in his yellow slicker and rain hat on the other side of the creek, just waiting for her to fail. He’d tell everybody in school all the gory details, too. She couldn’t let that happen. Kate scanned the opposite shore looking for something to fix her eyes upon like Mr. Renoff taught her to do in ballet class. Ballerinas always kept their eyes on a mark when they did *tour jetés*, and Kate needed to steady herself now. Her eye found something shining in the mud—an A1 Root Beer bottle. A1 was her favorite. This was a sign. Smiling, she put her bare feet in “ballet second,” extended her arms, and made a beeline for the bottle.

It was slippery as she inched along. Nita was yelling “Go Kate!” behind her, but she didn’t dare turn or wave. One foot in front of the other, Kate took it steady and slow. Nobody said anything about how fast you had to do it. So far, so good. No hands and no stumbles. Then she heard a car. It was getting closer. The bridge was starting to shake. Water hit her from above. Her right foot slipped. There was a tie up ahead, she reached for it just in time. It wasn’t a car, it was a

truck. The whole bridge rattled for an eternity. Kate swung on the tie like a tetherball. When the tremor passed, she dared to look down.

Miller Creek didn’t look like water. It looked like chocolate milk spilling fast down the sink. Walnut branches flew by, and boxes, and somebody’s rake. Kate had never seen water so brown, so churned up. For some reason it didn’t scare her. Maybe it was because the water was so close, just inches from her toes, and moving so impossibly fast, like a freeway. What was it about a flood that made everything rush? Made the rain come down in sheets instead of drops. Made the lawns swell like pregnant tummies, and the drains back up like Saturday turnstiles at Candlestick Park? What was everyone’s hurry? Why did they scramble to grab a teddy bear, a book, a lamp? Why did they make split-second decisions, toss everything in the car, and speed off to Grandma’s only to get there and worry about what they left behind? Why didn’t anybody stick around? Didn’t they want to see what the water would take? Kate wondered if floods didn’t happen so creeks could claim their favorite things—branches, boxes, rakes—and steal them away somewhere safe like Aromas or Santa Cruz.

Kate wanted to know where the creek would take her. She wanted to dive into the brown rapids and ride somewhere beautiful like San Francisco. She tipped slightly, shifting her center of gravity, mesmerized by the hypnotic water folding in upon itself like batter in a blender. Her brain told her she should be scared. Diving in would be stupid, she could die like the conquistadors in the Amazon Father Dwyer talked about. But her body didn’t care. It was hearing voices in the braided foam telling her to let go and swim like a dolphin all the way to China. Her fingers relaxed on the tie . . . then Nita screamed.

“Your mom’s coming! Hurry!” Kate faltered. Off center, she fell to her knees. She clutched the pipe like a bareback rider, ankles and thighs stinging and gripping the rusted metal. She grabbed for the tie again, holding onto it harder this time—to pull herself up, to break the creek’s spell, to get her balance back because her mother was coming and she was damned if she was going to let her mother ruin her Honorable Sacrifice. Kate straightened up, eyed the A1 bottle, and carried on, step by treacherous step, one

foot in front of the other, no hands, and no mistakes, all the way to the other side.

She leapt off the pipe with a flourish and sank knee-deep in the freezing mud. Nita waved Kate's raincoat, Marci wept for joy, and Matthew did the "Madison" as best he could in the sludge. But it was the sight of Roy Malino glowering under his rain hat as he slipped and slid his way up to the street that pleased Kate the most. She put her fingers to her lips and blew a fierce victory whistle. Then she heard her mother's voice calling her name.



## Augustine and Monica

### Looking Through a Window to the Soul

— PEGGY RATCLIFFE ROE —

The relationship of mother and son—the subject of Greek tragedies, a determinant in Russian history, and a touchstone of Freudian analysis—played a pivotal role in the shaping of Western religious thought when a woman named Monica and her son Augustine paused before a garden in Ostia to plumb the depth of their souls. Ostia, a fourth century Roman port on the Tiber River, has modest historical significance, but it provided the backdrop for a mystical experience that continues to perplex and inspire theologians, philosophers, and humanists today.

To understand this legacy, it is essential to look closely at the relationship that Augustine and his mother Monica shared. The patriarchal society into which Augustine was born elevated the status of male figures in the family and diminished the status of females; by taking the oath of marriage, a woman was declared to be a slave to her husband, a mere possession. Monica was a faithful wife to her husband Patricius and a dedicated mother to their three children. Patricius, on the other hand, was known to have adulterous relationships outside the marriage; through patience and perseverance, Monica eventually won him to Christ, a goal she also desired for her children. Looking back on his relationship with his father, Augustine describes him as

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someone who, by all outward appearances, seems to be an exemplary man, one who values his son's education so much that he is willing to make substantial financial sacrifices to ensure his erudition, "yet all the while this same father of mine was unconcerned about how I would grow up for you [God], and cared little that I should be chaste, provided I was intellectually cultivated."<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the example of infidelity set by his father caused Augustine a lifetime of regret about the way he conducted his own relationships with women, succumbing to lust at an early age and fathering a child by a concubine whom he actually loved but never married.

By contrast, Monica was a constant source of inspiration and guidance in the formation of Augustine's character. As Augustine relates, "So certain was she that you [God] . . . would grant what was still lacking [in me], that she told me very tranquilly and with full confidence that in Christ she believed she would see me a faithful Catholic before she departed from this life."<sup>2</sup> At this time, Augustine still had not been baptized, nor had he had the revelatory experience that would convert him to Christianity.

Having eschewed the Manichean religion, which freed his spirit, and having been instructed in the Platonists by Plotinus, which informed his intellect, Augustine's heart and mind were ripe for the momentous conversion he experienced in Milan.<sup>3</sup> Shortly thereafter, Monica's dream for her son finally materialized when he was baptized by Ambrose while still in Milan. Augustine resigned his position as a teacher of rhetoric and, with several followers, including his mother, set his sights on returning to Africa, where he would live a simple life. The party was detained in Ostia because of a blockade at the port, and it was here that Augustine and his mother experienced the mystical event that changed his life and influenced legions of critical thinkers who followed.

Among those critical thinkers was Augustine himself, who continued to write for forty years after he left Ostia. In his *Confessions*, Augustine reveals to God the experience he and his mother shared, acknowledging that God had willed that they should be together at this precise time. Finding themselves alone in the home of their host,

Augustine and Monica stood looking out a window over a small courtyard garden where they slowly begin to strip away the physical world around them and within them, leaving the past and present behind. They began to discuss the future in terms of "what the eternal life of the saints would be like."<sup>4</sup> Alluding frequently to scripture, Augustine describes himself and his mother as being like "the hart that panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God."<sup>5</sup> He and Monica continue to ascend into a rapturous state that moves them closer to *That Which Is*.<sup>6</sup> Step by step, they approach the peak of their intellectual abilities, and take one step further, brushing against the slightest fringe of Wisdom, much as Moses did when God allowed him to see his back, but not his face, on Mount Sinai.<sup>7</sup> As Augustine beautifully describes the moment, "And as we talked and panted for it, we just touched the edge of it by the utmost leap of our hearts; then, sighing and unsatisfied, we left the first-fruits of our spirit captive there, and returned to the noise of articulate speech, where a word has beginning and end."<sup>8</sup>

When Augustine later retells the shared moment from memory, "though not in this wise exactly, nor in these same words,"<sup>9</sup> he delivers what becomes a soliloquy of the senses in order to recreate the aura he and Monica experienced. He uses the word "silence" multiple times not only as an element to quiet the voice but also as one to quell the mind, which has a voice of its own. Perhaps Augustine is harking back to Psalm 46:10, "Be still and know that I am God," as a basis for this litany. The man of God wants to create an environment that dissipates sound so that a different kind of hearing can take place—a kind of hearing that does not require the cupped ear but rather the spiritual one. Likewise, the fleshy tongues not only of men but also of angels should be quieted so that other physical barriers to solitude can be removed—natural barriers to silence such as thunderclouds as well as mental barriers such as "riddling parable[s]."<sup>10</sup>

After dwelling intently on quieting the stimulants of hearing, Augustine imbues the next sense—the sense of touch—with an ethereal quality that grasps at Wisdom. This touch leaves no fingerprint but is rather a "flash of thought"<sup>11</sup> that barely lasts. Yet, the reward for this

moment is the relinquishment of lesser visions and the dénouement of deceptive sight that blinds the seeker and hides the truth. The mind's eye is opened to receive the rapture of the eternal and to hope for the resurrection. As Augustine alludes in the last phrase of his recitation, "And when, when will this be? / When we all rise again, but not all are changed?"<sup>12</sup> These lines refer to I Corinthians 15:51, but the verses that go before them are equally elucidating: "So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. . . . It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body. . . . But it is not the spiritual that is first, but the physical, and then the spiritual."<sup>13</sup> Augustine and Monica experience their own spiritual resurrection by eliminating as much awareness of their physical bodies and surroundings as possible, suppressing their active consciousness, and then freeing their souls to rise unfettered toward the skirt of Wisdom, of which they have a fleeting touch. A new sense of self is created in this moment—not a visceral sense, but an ethereal sense. In this shared moment, God can speak for himself, not through other media, and proffer a glance at Wisdom that only whets the appetite for more. Deeply moved by the moment, Monica predicts her own death, saying that all her earthly desires have been fulfilled since she has lived to see her son become a Catholic Christian. Nine days later, Monica dies, challenging Augustine's faith at a whole new level.

Before examining the effect of Monica's death on her son, it is prudent to look further into the full context of meaning surrounding the mystic moment that elevated Augustine and Monica to a profound new way of understanding their relationship with God. John Peter Kenney's book, *The Mysticism of St. Augustine*, provides an exhaustive look into what he regards as three mystical experiences that appear in the *Confessions*.<sup>14</sup> Besides the scene at the window, Kenney describes Augustine's search for meaning as related in Book Seven, which reveals his disillusionment with the Platonists and his ultimate discovery of *That Which Is*: "The ascension narratives exhibit a movement out of the self and a connection, fleeting and tenuous, with an external, divine wisdom. And the soul meets directly a divine other, not its true

self. . . . The Augustinian soul requires deliverance 'from the body of death,' something available only through the grace of Christ."<sup>15</sup>

The other instance of ascension occurs during Augustine's conversion to Christianity under a fig tree in Milan when he hears a child's voice saying, "Pick it up and read, pick it up and read."<sup>16</sup> Opening the Bible after some further intellectual struggles, Augustine stops at the first place where it falls open and reads the words from St. Paul advising a new lifestyle that avoids the temptations of the flesh, allowing followers of Christ—such as he—to lead a life that strives toward good and resists evil.<sup>17</sup> Augustine believes that God has directed him specifically to these verses, particularly because of his earlier lifestyle of corrupt morals and reckless behavior. Complementing that thought, Kenney indicates that the result of the child's psychic recommendation is Augustine's abandonment of the polytheistic, pagan gods of the Greeks that were a prominent part of the Platonist readings, and instead, the adoption of the monotheistic, spiritual God found in the gospels. With two major steps of self-examination and God's revelation in place, Augustine is prepared for baptism, and ultimately for the mystical experience in the garden in Ostia.

Augustinian scholar Gerald Bonner admires the definition of mysticism credited to E. R. Dodds: "Belief in the possibility of an intimate and direct union which constitutes at once a mode of existence and a mode of knowledge different from and superior to normal existence and knowledge."<sup>18</sup> This definition fits well with the experience that Augustine and his mother enjoy while looking out the window at Ostia. In phrases such as, "Higher still we mounted by inward thought and wondering discourse on your works, and we arrived at the summit of our own minds; and this too we transcended," Augustine describes the feeling of being lifted from one state of existence toward a higher one, with a brief moment of enlightenment (knowledge) following.<sup>19</sup> Even though Augustine might not have considered himself to be a mystic while at Ostia, or at the time of his conversion, his influence over Western mystical theology was considered to be great by subsequent readers. Despite these powers of the mind, recognized or not,

Augustine still reacts with human weakness when he experiences the death of his mother.

The scene in the window over the garden in Ostia contains more than one revelation, if one considers Monica's prediction of her own death. Now that her most fervently desired wish has come true with Augustine's full acceptance of God, Christ, and the Catholic religion, she feels that her work on earth is complete. Can a person will herself to death? Can she call upon God to release her soul from her body and die to Christ—and to the temporal world? Augustine hardly has the luxury of contemplating the answers to these questions, as his mother's death is sudden and unexpected. His reaction to her death is likewise unexpected. In his musings over the loss, he seems not to turn to God for comfort as one might think, but he processes his grief by controlling his emotions and suppressing his feelings, at least initially.

Part of this reaction could be explained by the fact that grief was not a new emotion to Augustine. As Brown observes, "Above all, Augustine will twice handle, with unique insight, the most complex of all emotions, grief and mourning. . . . Friends, in romantic fiction, were prepared to die together: 'But a mysterious feeling quite contrary to this obsessed me: my very loss of interest in living took the form of an oppressive fear of dying.'"<sup>20</sup> Augustine suffered a number of losses: the death of his childhood friend; the permanent separation from his beloved concubine; the death of a friend who was drawing near to God; the death of his faithful mother; and finally, the death of his precious son. Parallel with each loss, Augustine's spirituality was maturing, evolving from bitterness and weeping into sadness and solace. The loss of his first friend evoked bitterness and tears, admittedly caused by a visceral fear of God's reprisal at his own death. At the time of Monica's death, Augustine had just experienced a rapturous vision in which he and his mother felt that they had touched the edge of Wisdom, or God. Even though Monica was prescient about her impending death, Augustine felt a sharp sense of pain with her loss. As the death drew near, he and his brother were in a state of denial, fretting about where she was to be buried and not heeding her wishes to be buried anywhere, as long as they remembered her to God. "Nothing is far from

God,' she replied. 'There is no danger that at the end of the world he will not know where to find me and raise me up.'" <sup>21</sup>

Closing his dead mother's eyes, Augustine feels an overwhelming sense of sadness but refuses to release his swelling tears, claiming that he has to show his manhood by not weeping. Simultaneously, he tries to remember all the wonderful ways in which his mother had loved and supported him with affection and commendation. Even though Augustine allows the boy Evodius to cry, he continues to hold back his own tears and joins in the singing of a psalm while his mother's body is being prepared for burial. Showing no grief publicly, Augustine confides in God that he is disappointed in himself for feeling grief at such a human level. As he admits, "the woe I felt over my woe was yet another woe, and I was distressed by this double sadness."<sup>22</sup> Finally, Augustine decides to take a bath to try and ameliorate his sorrow, but it is not until he lies down to sleep that relief finally comes, and he sheds his tears of grief, sweetly calling them a "bed beneath my heart."<sup>23</sup> In what becomes an almost transcendent moment, Augustine not only releases his tormented feelings of grief to God's ears alone, but he also praises God for his mother's life and begs God's forgiveness of her sins. Recounting some of the most basic tenets of the Christian faith, the grieving son desires for his mother the reassurance of forgiveness, resurrection, and peace. It is almost as if, by writing these incantations in his *Confessions*, he is proving his own belief in God's infinite mercy and power and calling on him to prove them reciprocally. Augustine's great faith still suffers the angst of his own humanity; but when the strength he drew from his mother is withdrawn from him, he ultimately experiences the gift of mercy that can perhaps only be known through grief.

In emotions ranging from grief to elation, Augustine opens his heart, mind, and soul to his readers—and most important, to God, in the *Confessions*. His honesty and humility in laying out his flawed humanity in deliberate detail could sow disillusionment among other seekers if it were not for Augustine's constant striving to connect to his God in an intimate, revelatory way. One of the most striking features of the book is the central role that Monica

plays in Augustine's spiritual formation until the very moment of her death. In her, one sees the strength of a Biblical character such as Ruth, who, instead of returning to her home when widowed, pledges her loyalty to her widowed mother-in-law, Naomi, and goes with her to another land. Similarly, Monica never leaves Augustine's side no matter where he travels until she is separated from him by death. In Augustine, the reader—as well as Augustine himself—sees the Bible's prodigal son, who lives a flagrant life, then receives mercy when he humbles himself before his father—his heavenly father—and asks forgiveness for his sins. Though it is the father who grants forgiveness in the parable, it is the mother in Augustine's life who sees the inner beauty of his soul and will not rest until he finds redemption by becoming a Catholic Christian. That the moment of mysticism is shared by mother and son should seem perfectly natural: they are of one and the same spirit. For both current and ancient readers, the event that occurred in a window at Ostia between mother and son was both mystical and spiritual. It was a moment that changed the history of the mind and the future of faith forever.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Augustine, *The Confessions*, trans. Maria Boulding (New York: O.S.B., Vintage Spiritual Classics, 1998), 27.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 97.

<sup>3</sup>Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), 106.

<sup>4</sup>Augustine, *The Confessions*, IX.10, 23.

<sup>5</sup>Ps. 42:1.

<sup>6</sup>In Book VII, 17.23, Augustine introduces the concept of *That Which Is*, not unlike God's telling Moses "I AM THAT I AM" in Exod. 3:14 when he describes himself as God of the Israelites. As Augustine built unknowingly toward this first revelatory moment, he referred to several books by Platonists, searching for the truth that he hoped they would reveal to him. In them, though, he could not find mention of certain critical Biblical passages, such as those that appear in the gospel of John and describe God as the light of the world and Jesus as his son, whom he raised from the dead. When Augustine realizes that the answers to his questions lie in a realm above his own changeable being, he knows he is reaching for the unchangeable being of God. He states in reverent terms, "And then my mind attained to *That Which Is*, in the flash of a tremulous glance."

<sup>7</sup>Exod. 33:23

<sup>8</sup>Augustine, *The Confessions*, IX.24.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., IX.10, 26.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., IX.10, 25.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>1 Cor. 15:42-46.

<sup>14</sup>John Peter Kenney, *The Mysticism of Saint Augustine* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 71.

<sup>16</sup>Augustine, *The Confessions*, VIII.29.

<sup>17</sup>Rom. 13:13-14; Kenney, 73.

<sup>18</sup>Gerald Bonner, *God's Decree and Man's Destiny* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1987), 144.

<sup>19</sup>Augustine, *The Confessions*, IX.24.

<sup>20</sup>Brown, 165.

<sup>21</sup>Augustine, *The Confessions*, IX.11, 27.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., IX.31.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., IX.13, 33.



## Tent of Nations

— KATIE LAJINESS —

April 1946, The Zion Orphanage for Boys, Jerusalem

Many things awoke Maor in the middle of the night—that boy who sleepwalked, the ammonia-scented signal of a bed-wetter, the eager, muffled grunt of a masturbator, a random explosion, and occasionally, gunfire—but that night he awoke to Rabbi Schultz kicking the door to the sleeping quarters with the toe of his boots. The door flew open and slammed into the adjoining wall. Every one of the Rabbi's steps sounded like a knock at the door. A second set of footsteps trod softly, taking two steps for every one of the Rabbi's loping strides.

Usually, the Zion Orphanage for Boys ran like clockwork: meals were served at the seven, twelve, and five o'clock hours, classes were in session from eight to three, and each night, from seven to eight, the boys were required to scrub toilets, sweep floors, or peel potatoes, among other duties. By nine o'clock, Maor and the other eight- to ten-year-old boys were ordered to climb in between their itchy bed sheets, even if they weren't tired.

"Who's that?" one boy called out from his bed.

“He must be new,” replied a teenager with a voice as low and deep as the Kidron Valley. Maor lay flat on his back and stared up at the ceiling. He’d been dreaming, but now he couldn’t remember what fantastical images had been churning through his youthful, sleepy brain. Maor turned his head to watch the Rabbi’s emaciated silhouette pull back the blankets of the bed next to him. The smaller figure hesitated, rejecting the Rabbi’s extended arm.

“Get into bed, it’s a privilege that we agreed to take you in,” the Rabbi scolded. Maor quickly turned his gaze toward the dark, endless night stuck in the high-beamed ceiling. As soon as the Rabbi closed the door to the sleeping quarters behind him, random voices piped up from all corners of the room.

“Who are you?”

“What’s your name?”

The boy’s response came in a whispered Arabic prayer.

“What are you saying? I don’t understand.”

Maor scrunched his eyes, trying to see the boy better. His eyes gradually adjusted to the darkness. The figure’s contour slowly morphed into the shapes of hands, arms, legs, then an uneven hairline and long nose came into focus. A clammy hand wrapped around Maor’s upper arm, just below his sleeve. Maor sat up and scooted his body against the cool metal headboard.

“I . . . want . . . home,” the boy’s Hebrew came to life with the clumsy, jumbled pronunciation of a foreign speaker.

“Shhhh.” Maor held an index finger up to his lips. “Come sit on my bed.”

“Your name?”

“I’m Maor.”

“I’m Amir. I . . . I don’t like this place.” Amir stumbled over his words.

“I don’t like it here either, Amir, but boys come here when they have no home. A lot of them are from Europe, because of the war.” Maor couldn’t remember his first night in the orphanage, but he must have been afraid in his new surroundings. How many nights in bed had he listened to the muffled cries of the latest new boy to come to

Zion? He was tired of everyone having to fend for himself. While he’d never had a family, he imagined that family wouldn’t leave a little boy feeling so alone. Maor kicked back the bed covers. “You can sleep with me tonight.”

Amir hesitated, looking around to see if anyone was watching. Seeing no movement, he climbed into Maor’s bed. Maor lifted the top sheet over their heads to veil them from the outside world. Both boys lay down, the top sheet resting lightly over their bodies like the rare layer of snow that sometimes sprinkled the Jerusalem sidewalks. Maor cupped his hand and whispered in Amir’s ear.

“You know what I do whenever I want to escape from here? I imagine that I’m in a magical flying tent with everyone that I love. You can fly anywhere in the world. Where do you want to go?”

“Egypt.”

“Imagine you’re there right now,” Maor instructed. He lay perfectly still until Amir fell asleep with his mouth open, exhaling warm gusts onto his forehead. Maor wrinkled his nose. Amir’s breath smelled like onion soup.

Long, narrow tables lined the orphanage cafeteria. The boys crammed themselves onto each bench like a murder of crows perched on a telephone wire. Maor nibbled on a dry biscuit. Amir sat to his left, inhaling his second biscuit with one hand and reaching into a bowl full of biscuits with the other hand.

“So, you’re the new one. How does it feel to be unwanted?” a short, squat boy sneered as he lifted a sloppy spoonful of oatmeal up to his mouth.

“Who are you? We heard the Rabbi kicking the door. No boy has ever come in at night. He didn’t even introduce you to the group. . . . Where did you come from?” an older boy pressed Amir for answers.

“I’m Amir,” he said with his mouth full.

“He’s not a Jew,” one boy accused.

“He’s not from Europe, that’s for sure,” another said.

“I’m from Egypt. It’s better than this place,” Amir retorted. Silence hovered over the table like a heavy wet fog. Maor glanced at Rabbi

Schultz, whose bushy eyebrows scrunched together as he hunched over a book, as if oblivious to the struggles for independence occurring inside and outside the orphanage. The nurses and a few teachers also sat at the adult table, speaking quietly amongst themselves as though they were dining in the library.

“Just wait until we get outside,” the squat boy said, flicking a spoonful of oatmeal across the table. An oozing glob of goo landed just shy of Amir’s plate. Amir scooped it up and sucked it off of his fingers. “You’ll want to go back there when we’re done with you.”

At seven thirty, Rabbi Schultz stood up in front of the cafeteria, his *Siddur* in hand.

“Let us thank God for bringing us another child who we will welcome into the Zion Orphanage as our newest brother.” Maor bowed his head to pray. Mid-prayer, he peeked over at Amir who was using the time to shove a biscuit into the pocket of his trousers. After Rabbi Schultz dismissed the boys, Maor marched a few steps ahead of Amir. The hallway stretched into what felt like miles. Maor navigated through several verbal landmines that exploded from the mouths of the other boys.

“Someone saw him crawl into your bed!”

“You’re keeping all his secrets! Tell us!”

Maor quickened his pace; Amir appeared at his side.

“I’m not going to be here long,” Amir said, “someone’s going to adopt me.” Maor bit his lip. He’d heard a version of those words a hundred times before. There had been a time when he believed such silly things himself. Every boy believed that he was special, that the next visiting family would choose him over all of the other unwanted children. But as the years passed, Maor knew better than to pray that he would be rescued. God had bigger things to do.

“Are there Jews in Egypt?” Maor asked as they approached the classroom.

“I’m Muslim.”

“You’re Muslim!”

“Muslim? Who is Muslim?” The Hebrew teacher, Mr. Goldman, took up a large portion of the doorway to the classroom with his

massive belly. He held out a thick, hairy forearm to create a check-point between Amir and the classroom. Regret sunk like a heavy meal in Maor’s stomach. He had said “Muslim” too loud.

“Rabbi Schultz said there was a new boy whose parents were killed by stray gunfire.” The sausage fingers of Mr. Goldman’s free hand tangled themselves in the thick forest of his graying beard. “Students are required to wear a yarmulke,” Mr. Goldman said, pointing to the blue and yellow disk clipped atop his thin comb-over. “Did you receive one when you arrived?”

“No.” Amir crossed his arms across his chest defiantly.

“No as in you weren’t given a yarmulke? Or *no* as in you think you’re not going to wear one? This is a Jewish orphanage and all of the boys wear yarmulkes as a practice of the faith. Stand right there, I’ll be right back.” Mr. Goldman waddled out, leaving Amir standing in front of the class. Maor felt for his new friend, aware of how vulnerable he would be if left to stand on display in front of his peers.

“Write your name on the board,” one of the boys told Amir. Amir picked up a stubby piece of chalk and began to draw mysterious squiggly lines and dots. A few of the boys laughed and pointed at the board.

“You write like an Arab!” another boy cried out, holding his chest while he laughed. A very real part of Maor wanted to speak up, to tell the other boys that he liked Amir. Maybe Amir was just as scared as they’d been upon first arriving at Zion. He sensed that Amir had a short fuse hidden somewhere inside of him, one that might ignite at a moment when most people would back down from a fight.

“Why are you even here?” another boy called out, cupping his hands around his mouth like parentheses. That was a good question, one that has been circling around in Maor’s head since he’d met Amir the night before. How did an Egyptian boy end up at a Jewish orphanage in Palestine?

“My father was a trader,” Amir replied, hesitating before wrapping his mouth around every Hebrew word. For the briefest of moments, Maor saw a flash of grief come over Amir’s face. Yes, Amir must have been the son of an Egyptian trader who accompanied his parents to Jerusalem for business and had no one to go home to now that his

parents were dead. Perhaps the Palestinian orphanages were full or maybe Rabbi Shultz wanted another warm body to learn the Jewish faith. Regardless of why Amir was now at Zion, Maor wanted so badly to stand up, to defend his new friend from this onslaught of questions being slung at him from every direction. But Amir had to learn what life was like in the orphanage. There were the powerful boys and the weak ones.

“Why don’t you go back to wherever you came from?” shouted a boy in the front row. Maor watched Amir turn from the chalkboard, his hand shaped like a gun.

“Pew, pew, pew,” Amir fired invisible bullets at his classmates. A few of the boys shifted in their seats, others spewed out terrible words that one didn’t have to know to understand their meaning. When Mr. Goldman shuffled back in, a white yarmulke in hand, the classroom was in a state of chaos.

“We don’t write in Arabic in this school! We don’t shoot our classmates! Everyone calm down!” Mr. Goldman bellowed. He held Amir against the chalkboard with his massive girth, pinning the yarmulke to the boy’s head. Mr. Goldman then pointed Amir in the direction of an empty desk in the front of the room. A few of the boys snickered. Maor imagined himself inside his very own magical tent again, far away from Hebrew class. His mother was there, and she looked as beautiful as a Jerusalem tree with its bright yellow blossoms that stretched toward the sky. There was enough room for Amir’s family as well, and they were flying high above the cityscapes en route to Amir’s home in Egypt. Maor had never been to Egypt, and a flying tent seemed like the best mode of international travel. In his tent, no one cared about which God you prayed to or what country you were born in. Most of all, Amir didn’t have to wear a yarmulke or shove biscuits in his pockets. There was enough food for everyone.

After lunch, the boys spread out into the alley behind the orphanage. Maor sat next to Amir on two cement blocks, basking in a small patch of sunlight. Gunshots fired far off in the distance. He was used to

hearing the occasional gunfire or explosions from the Zionist movement attacks on the British.

“I heard you’re not even a Jew. . . . Look, he’s not even wearing his yarmulke anymore,” the squat boy from the breakfast table said, pointing a makeshift wooden sword at Amir. “You don’t say your prayers before you eat. You can’t even write in Hebrew.” Maor closed his eyes and covered his ears to block out the ensuing confrontation. In the days after the fight, rumor had it that Amir threw the first punch. All Maor knew was that by the time he looked up, a circle of bodies was gathered around Amir. Limbs flew out in every direction—legs kicking, arms entangled in a blur of body parts and yarmulkes flying through the air like an invasion of small flying saucers.

“That’s enough!” Rabbi Schultz’s voice echoed from the doorway. The crowd scattered, revealing Amir’s body lying on the ground, his clothing decorated with an abstract pattern of dirt and mud. Amir’s limbs pointed in every direction, forming a corporal Star of David. Maor’s lunch lurched up and out of his body, coating the cement block with a thin layer of vomit. He was relieved that in all of the commotion, no one seemed to notice the reappearance of his lunch in a decidedly more liquid form. Mr. Goldman appeared alongside the Rabbi and scooped Amir’s limp body up as though he weighed no more than a sack of potatoes. One of Amir’s ankles knocked against the doorpost as Mr. Goldman struggled to navigate his hefty frame back inside.

Rumors spread through the orphanage via hidden notes and wagging tongues. The next morning, disgusting stories of Amir’s condition punctuated every conversation with details of his supposed lobotomy, the patch he had to wear after one of the nurses was forced to remove his right eye, and an especially malicious story that Amir’s parents were found in Bethlehem after abandoning him at an outdoor marketplace. Amir’s reputation became that of legend—with every retelling of these tall tales, his status grew more fantastical and absurd. Maor tried his best to ignore the gossip; the gruesome details made his skin itch. The boys received their punishment in the form of extra schoolwork. In place of playtime was more prayer and study of the Jewish faith. The Rabbi and two nurses returned Amir to the dormitory four nights

later. This time, Maor wasn't sleeping. The Rabbi marched into the sleeping quarters with the quick-paced stride of someone who wasn't interested in playing nice. Maor's stomach clenched into an intricate series of knots. The room was just dark enough that Maor couldn't see if Amir was actually wearing an eye patch or missing an ear.

"Are you okay?" Maor asked as the Rabbi helped the boy into bed.

"Turn on the lights," the Rabbi instructed one of the nurses standing near the doorway. A blinding shot of light exploded throughout the room. Maor saw a rainbow of blues, purples, and yellows spread across Amir's face. His eyes were puffy but they were both very much intact. A deep gash ran the length of his cheek like a jagged river cutting through the terrain of his face. Their eyes met for the briefest of moments before Maor looked away.

"You all beat this poor boy to such a state that he was delirious for days. He told the nurses about his magic tent where he flies back to Egypt to see his dead parents. Haven't you all been through enough? Contrary to what you see and hear outside of these walls, violence doesn't solve anything. Look at his face!" The Rabbi's angry voice echoed through the room.

After the Rabbi closed the door to the sleeping quarters, Maor crawled out of bed and rested a hand on the bony plane of Amir's shoulder blade. He smelled like the special kind of soap that the nurses used in the infirmary. Amir settled into bed with the cautious consideration of an old man whose body had betrayed him. Maor blinked against the darkness. This was only the shell of the same boy who pointed a make-believe gun and later took on a small army of young Israeli soldiers.

"Was I in your tent with you?"

Amir shook his head.

"I'm sorry," Maor's words came out sticky and thick, as though he'd stuffed a handful of caramels into his mouth.

"Flying around the world in a magical tent, that's all a dream. But this," Amir pointed to his battered face, "is real."



## Water and the Cost of Cheap Food

— TIMOTHY S. BOYLAN —

Over the last century, the United States has transformed the way that it produces and delivers food to its people. Not only has this country been able to offer a breathtaking array of foods year-round, it has done so efficiently and, in comparison with other countries, inexpensively. The United States spends the lowest amount of money, measured as a percentage of per capita income, on food. And, since the turn of the twentieth century, it has witnessed a dramatic decrease in the percentage spent on food. In many ways, this has been a positive development, as an impressive variety of foods has become available in supermarkets, grocery stores, specialty markets, and restaurants. In addition, the high percentage of income not devoted to food can be used for other expenditures that make life better, fuller, and easier. Yet, many who have examined the American food system have come away with doubts and questions about the costs associated with these benefits. Has this relatively “free lunch” or, more accurately, “cheap lunch,” been an unqualified good?

One aspect of large scale food production, water, helps answer that question. By looking beyond the big numbers of per capita spending and the number of food products available for purchase, some troubling

facts and realities emerge: we are paying a much higher price for cheap food than we realize. The perceived benefits—mostly short- to medium-term—have highly problematic consequences and effects—mostly long-term.

### American Abundance

The Standard American Diet (in capitals because it is now part of the discourse in the “Food Movement”) is a popular topic these days and spills over into many discussions and debates over some of the most controversial and contentious issues of the day. One quick example: the battle over health care and health care coverage for all Americans. In a thought-provoking essay published in the *New York Times*, Michael Pollan, author of *Omnivore’s Dilemma* and *In Defense of Food*, wrote,

No one disputes that the \$2.3 trillion we devote to the health care industry is often spent unwisely, but the fact that the United States spends twice as much per person as most European countries on health care can be substantially explained . . . by our being fatter.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, three-quarters of health care spending now goes to treat “preventable chronic diseases.” Not all these diseases are linked to diet—there’s smoking, for instance—but many, if not most, of them are.

We’re spending \$147 billion to treat obesity, \$116 billion to treat diabetes, and hundreds of billions more to treat cardiovascular disease and the many types of cancer that have been linked to the so-called Western diet. One recent study estimated that 30 percent of the increase in health care spending over the past 20 years could be attributed to the soaring rate of obesity, a condition that now accounts for nearly a tenth of all spending on health care.

The American way of eating has become the elephant in the room in the debate over health care.<sup>1</sup>

Food—how it is grown, produced, altered, refined, packaged, and promoted—has slowly but surely entered public awareness, thanks to

writers like Michael Pollan. But while the health care debate is both salient and high profile, the issues surrounding food production and water usage (and to use more honest language, water exploitation) have gone largely unnoticed.

One key reason is that when we talk about water and its relationship to “cheap food,” we are mainly talking about raising animals for food. Other foods—vegetables, fruits, grains, seeds, nuts, legumes, and grasses—are, by comparison, usually neither problematic nor controversial. The beef, poultry, pork, and dairy industry, and the methods of intensive “factory farming” that processes more than 9.5 billion land animals each year for human consumption, is. The numbers alone should provide a clue. Factory farming on such a mammoth scale has alarming consequences on water and the entire surrounding ecosystem.

**1. Unchecked fresh water usage.** Over the past few decades there has been a vigorous debate over petroleum use, oil availability, and “peak oil”—the idea that most of the easy and most useable oil has already been extracted from the earth. Similarly, there are concerns about water usage in this country, such as the large claims made upon our largest aquifer (the Ogallala Aquifer,<sup>2</sup> which stretches across the entire Midwestern plains region), and whether we are in danger of reaching “peak water.”

Unfortunately, the *fact* of water consumption by the beef, pork, and poultry industries has been sidetracked by arguments over the exact amount used to create animal-based food. Many researchers and journalists quote a study that claims it takes 4500-5000 gallons of water to produce a pound of beef. However, that study makes some rather generous assumptions about how rainfall is diverted from other uses to cattle grazing. The more careful studies come in at somewhere between 440 and 1800 gallons of water per pound of beef, with the higher number based on the better and likely more accurate study. The numbers are lower for pork and lower still for poultry.

If one is concerned about water use, availability, and future prospects, factory farming may not be the most salient of issues. It certainly garners the most attention, as the 4500-5000 gallons per pound of beef statistic is so vivid, memorable, and so often quoted.

But vegetable production requires water, too. A pound of broccoli needs, on average, 230 gallons of water. A pound of mushrooms requires 330 gallons. That probably isn't that much less than what it takes to produce a pound of chicken. And, when you make calculations based on *calories produced* per gallon of water, it may be a wash.

No matter how it is calculated, it does take impressive amounts of water to create a pound of beef. With seasonal droughts becoming regular occurrences, any source of food production that lays claim to large quantities of fresh water will need to be assessed. For now, however, the lack of agreement on just how much water is needed to produce animal protein—beef especially—has diverted the discussion into one of research methodology and validity. If water usage numbers neither condemn nor acquit, is there still a case against factory farms?

**2. Pollution of fresh water.** The main reason for concern centers on the fact that animals raised for food on a large scale create profound amounts and varieties of water pollution. Here, the list of indictments against the food conglomerates is long, depressing, shocking, and uncontested. According to a 2006 expose,

Agriculture has long been a top source of water pollution in the U.S., but in the last two decades the scale of the problem has grown dramatically with the proliferation of large-scale pork, poultry, beef, and dairy facilities, known as concentrated animal feedlot operations (CAFOs). From 2002-2005, the CAFO industry in the U.S. expanded by about 22 percent—with substantially more animals per facility, and ever larger piles of their droppings.<sup>3</sup>

The amount of manure produced within this country's CAFOs is staggering: 1.4 billion tons each year.<sup>4</sup> Here we bump into the problem of large numbers. Like discussions about the federal debt, the accumulation of *billions* causes one's eyes to glaze over (not to mention the challenge of comprehending *trillions*). In the United States, beef cattle produce 86,000 pounds of manure per second, enough to cover the skyline of Denver every 24 hours. And, worldwide, beef cattle produce 130 times more excrement per year than the entire human population.

Further, large scale factory farming is geographically concentrated, so that much of this manure is contained in comparatively few locations. Massive amounts accumulate. The problem is that manure is mostly water. It is therefore very heavy and expensive to transport. As a result, most of the manure is held in vast lagoons and then deposited on the land surrounding the operation.

Even when the lagoons are well managed, this saturates the soil with nitrogen. When it rains, water percolates down through the soil and increases the nitrate content of the water table.<sup>5</sup> High nitrate concentrations in water have been linked to spontaneous abortions<sup>6</sup> and *methemoglobinemia*, or “blue baby syndrome,” which can kill infants.<sup>7</sup> And when it storms for days on end or when a hurricane hits, the chronic problem of manure management becomes a catastrophe.

The huge open-air waste lagoons, often as big as football fields, are prone to leaks and spills. When Hurricane Floyd hit North Carolina in 1999, at least five manure lagoons burst and another 47 were completely flooded. A few years earlier, an eight-acre hog-waste lagoon in North Carolina burst, spilling 25 million gallons of manure into the New River. The spill killed approximately 10 million fish and closed 364,000 acres of coastal wetlands to shell fishing.

Large-scale factory farms also deliver a package of pollutants. According to Melanie Joy at University of Massachusetts, Boston, “Animal agriculture is likely the world's largest source of water pollution. The main sources of the pollution are from antibiotics and hormones, chemicals from tanneries, animal wastes, sediments from eroded pastures, and fertilizers and pesticides used for feed crops.”<sup>8</sup> Estimates from the U.S. Geological Survey are that 40 percent of rivers, lakes, and coastal waters are so contaminated that they are unfit for humans to fish in, swim in, or drink. Industrial farms are one of the major sources of this pollution and most of the water pollution from industrial farms comes from the storage and disposal of animal waste.<sup>9</sup>

Water pollution is often preceded by the release of toxic substances into the air. Large hog farms emit hydrogen sulfide, a gas that causes flu-like symptoms in humans, and at high concentrations can lead to brain damage. In 1998, the National Institute of Health reported

that 19 people died as the result of hydrogen sulfide emissions from manure pits. These emissions can cause immediate damage from inhalation or return to the water table when captured by condensation and rainfall. Ammonia, a toxic form of nitrogen released in gas form during waste disposal, can be carried more than 300 miles through the air before being dumped back onto the ground or into the water, where it causes algal blooms and fish kills.

Toxins that do not become airborne are carried away to rivers, lakes, and oceans by rainfall or accidental spills. Runoff from chicken and hog waste from factory farms in Maryland and North Carolina is believed to have directly contributed to outbreaks of *Pfiesteria piscicida*, killing millions of fish and causing skin irritation, short-term memory loss, and other cognitive problems among the local people.

Concentrated animal operations consolidate effort and infrastructure, allowing the producers and purveyors of meat to deliver their products at affordable and competitive prices. Compared to other countries, our food prices are low. But when the big picture emerges, low prices come at high costs. A recent New York Times editorial concluded, “The point of factory farming is cheap meat, made possible by confining large numbers of animals in small spaces. Perhaps the greatest hidden cost is its potential effect on human health.”<sup>10</sup>

And many, if not most, of those ill effects involve the use and misuse of water.

**3. Connectedness to air quality, earth warming, global hunger, and human health.** An *environment* is not made up of compartments, nicely distinct and set apart from one another. What happens in one part of this earth’s ecosystem will almost always have serious and lasting influences on other parts. Two challenges, directly related to water use and pollution, highlight this fact.

*a) Climate change, water temperatures, and the methane footprint.* One measure of environmental impact that has gained popularity is considering the “carbon footprint,” an estimate of the amount of greenhouse gases produced by a particular activity or in the creation of a particular product. Environmental groups have called upon people to walk, bicycle, drive hybrid vehicles, buy locally, and recycle

packaging and spent products. All these activities are laudable. But, if a conscientious citizen finishes a day filled with the aforementioned activities and proceeds to consume a Porterhouse steak that evening, that person may well have negated all the rest of the day’s efforts. Why?

A landmark United Nations report entitled *Livestock’s Long Shadow* came to the conclusion that factory farmed animals—with cattle leading the way—conservatively account for 17 percent of all greenhouse gases emitted each year by human activity.<sup>11</sup> A follow-up study by *World Watch* nearly triples that number. The UN report notes three ways in which livestock contributes to climate change and air pollution:

- Emissions from the production of grain used for animal feed.
- Emissions from livestock rearing. (Note the production of methane from all forms of animal output, both manure and the delicately phrased *enteric fermentation*, or gases.)
- Emissions from livestock processing, refrigeration, and transport.

Methane is not just another form of CO<sub>2</sub>. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, thirty-seven percent of methane released into the air comes from livestock. Methane warms the atmosphere much more than CO<sub>2</sub>, as it is some 21 times stronger. The good news is its half-life in the atmosphere is only about eight years, versus at least 100 years for CO<sub>2</sub>. As a result, a significant reduction in livestock raised worldwide would reduce accumulated greenhouse gases relatively quickly compared to other proposed measures (i.e.: renewable energy sources and moves toward energy efficiency). The *World Watch* report concluded:

A substantial body of theory, beliefs, and even vested interests has been built up around the idea of slowing climate change through renewable energy and energy efficiency. However, after many years of international climate talks and practical efforts, only relatively modest amounts of renewable energy and energy efficiency have been developed (along with more nuclear- and fossil-energy

infrastructure). GHG emissions have *increased* since the Kyoto Protocol was signed in 1992, and climate change has accelerated. However desirable, even major progress in displacing nonrenewable energy would not obviate substantial action to reduce the huge amounts of livestock-related GHG emissions.<sup>12</sup>

There is a bright line connection from air to water. Climate change and global warming mean warming seas, and warming seas are having an immediate and serious impact on the marine food web. Warming seas reduce the oxygen dissolved in some critical areas of the ocean, including areas that are our richest fisheries. According to a study recently finished by the Scripps Institution in La Jolla, California, a 20 percent drop in oxygen would translate into a 63 percent drop in fish stocks. The highest impact of this change is on *mesopelagic* fish. There are 10 billion tons of mesopelagic fish globally—10 times the global commercial catch—and they are a vital food for other fish, and marine birds and mammals.<sup>13</sup> If global climate models are correct, 20 to 40 percent of the oxygen in these key deeper ocean areas will disappear over the next century due to warming. And that will bring about a drastic fall off of fish populations.

*b) As polluted rivers empty into the ocean: dead zones.* The world's attention was drawn to the Gulf of Mexico in 2010, when a British Petroleum oil platform, the Deepwater Horizon, exploded, killing 11 and injuring 17 workers. Over the next three months this crippled platform spilled 5 million gallons of oil into the Gulf. Media coverage delivered vivid images of endless oil slicks, black gooey beaches, and tar balls captured in fishermen's and shrimpers' nets.

A longer-term problem in the Gulf received some attention as well, as it "piggy-backed" on the disastrous oil spill. A massive dead zone, measuring 8000 square miles in size, has become a near permanent feature of the Gulf coastline. The renewed attention given to this phenomenon caused an additional stir among environmental groups and policy makers.

Dead zones are formed when foreign nutrients overload the water, leading to explosive algae growth that ultimately robs oxygen from the

marine life below—not a dramatically different effect than warming waters due to increased temperatures.

The primary culprit is nitrate-laced runoff from agricultural operations along the Mississippi River. One study found that 51 percent of the Mississippi's nitrogen load was from commercial fertilizer, livestock manure, human sewage, and runoff from other crops.<sup>14</sup> In this case, "agricultural operations" are largely grain production operations tied to the beef and pork industries, as 70 percent of corn and 80 percent of soybeans grown in the U.S. are fed to animals. "Commercial fertilizers" are mainly used to grow those grain crops. So it is the *entire factory farm chain* that contributes the majority of the chemicals, pesticides, and pollutants.

The Gulf area, one of the largest dead zones in the world, may be reaching a tipping point where the seasonal relief for these kinds of areas does not occur. Usually, fall weather brings cooling air and churning waters that dampen algae growth. However, the severity and extent of this dead zone may now be transitioning into a "legacy effect," where lingering decomposed organic matter continues to steal away oxygen from the water. This could mean that even if nitrate levels hold steady or decrease, the accumulation of past pollution could cause this dead zone to expand rather than contract.

### Is Food Political?

In 2004, the editors of *World Watch Magazine* concluded that the "seemingly small issue of individual consumption" of meat has now become central to discussions of sustainability. This is because, "as environmental science has advanced, it has become apparent that the human appetite for animal flesh is a driving force behind virtually every major category of environmental damage now threatening the human future—deforestation, erosion, fresh water scarcity, air and water pollution, climate change, biodiversity loss, social injustice, the destabilization of communities, and the spread of disease."<sup>15</sup>

We have become remarkably efficient as producers and processors of animal protein. As a result, the United States delivers a potent

caloric and protein “bang for the buck.” We have an abundance—even a super-abundance—of cheap food. But cheap food has come at a high cost. Among those costs are the claims upon and pollution of our fresh and ocean water.<sup>16</sup>

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Michael Pollan, “Big Food vs. Big Insurance,” *New York Times*, Sept. 10, 2009.

<sup>2</sup>According to the High Plains Water Conservation District No. 1, “The Ogallala aquifer . . . is one of the largest aquifer systems in the world. It stretches across all or portions of eight states generally from north to south to include South Dakota, Nebraska, Wyoming, Colorado, Kansas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and Texas and underlies about 174,000 square miles. . . . Approximately 95 percent of the water pumped from the Ogallala is for irrigation. The High Plains area represents 65 percent of the total irrigated acreage in the United States.” [http://www.hpwd.com/the\\_ogallala.asp](http://www.hpwd.com/the_ogallala.asp).

<sup>3</sup>Amanda Little, “Factory Farms Let Off the Hook for Water Pollution, Activists Say,” *Grist*, 2006, <http://grist.org/article/cafo-waste/>.

<sup>4</sup>Erik Marcus, *Meat Market: Animals, Ethics, and Money* (Ithaca, NY: Brio Press, 2005), 193.

<sup>5</sup>Marcus, *Meat Market*, 194.

<sup>6</sup>Center for Disease Control, “Spontaneous Abortions Possibly Related to Ingestion of Nitrate-Contaminated Well Water—LaGrange County, Indiana, 1991–1994,” *MMWR* (July 6, 1996) <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/00042839.htm>.

<sup>7</sup>Natural Resources Defense Council, “Facts About Pollution from Livestock Farms,” Revised report of January 13, 2011, <http://nrdc.org/water/pollution/ffarms.asp>.

<sup>8</sup>Melanie Joy, *Why We Love Dogs, Eat Pigs, and Wear Cows* (San Francisco: Conari Press, 2010), 86 and 144.

<sup>9</sup>“Water Pollution,” Grace Communications Foundation, <http://www.sustainabletable.org/issues/waterpollution/>.

<sup>10</sup>“The High Cost of Cheap Meat,” editorial, *New York Times*, June 2, 2011.

<sup>11</sup>Food And Agriculture Organization Of The United Nations, *Livestock’s Long Shadow: Environmental Issues And Options* (Rome: 2006), <http://www.fao.org/docrep/010/a0701e/a0701e00.HTM>.

<sup>12</sup>Robert Goodland and Jeff Anhang, “Livestock and Climate Change,” *World Watch* (November/December 2009), 15.

<sup>13</sup>Debora MacKenzie, *New Scientist* 14:1, September 8, 2011.

<sup>14</sup>Chris Kromm, “The Gulf of Mexico’s Dead Zone Is Among the World’s Largest—and Corn Is One of the Culprits,” *Independent Weekly*, UK (July 7, 2010), <http://www.indyweek.com/indyweek/the-gulf-of-mexicos-dead-zone-is-among-the-worlds-largestandmdashand-corn-is-one-of-the-culprits/Content?oid=1520017>.

<sup>15</sup>“Meat: Now It’s Not Personal,” editorial, *World Watch Magazine*, 17, no. 4 (July/August 2004), [www.worldwatch.org/pubs/mag/2004/174/](http://www.worldwatch.org/pubs/mag/2004/174/).

<sup>16</sup>A version of this paper was presented at the 2011 Association of Graduate Liberal Studies meeting in Saratoga Springs, NY.



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